**Scar Tissue**

by dustandroses

Summary

Using his past Dom/sub relationship with Miguel Alvarez as a lure, Chris Keller mounts a campaign to seduce Ryan O'Reily into continuing their partnership after they've completed their 'fandango'. O'Reily is aware that things are never simple with Keller around, but as careful as he is, he's slowly drawn into Keller's trap. Caught between the two, and knowing that he can't count on Keller, Alvarez begins to hope he can find a friend in O'Reily.

Notes

*Scar Tissue* is a follow-up piece to my series *Alvarez Gets Blindsided*. However, it is not necessary to have read that series to read this story.

**Betas:** Blackchaps and Trillingstar, my other heroes and shit.

**Spoilers:** Through Season Five, Episode Four: *Next Stop: Valhalla.*

**Spanish Advisor:** Muchas gracias to RogueMarch.

**Art:** Check out the excellent art made for *Scar Tissue* by Beechercreature and Neevebrody.
Chapter 1

Chris Keller studied the board with a frown, not at all happy with O'Reily's most recent move. He was going to have to sacrifice a knight to keep his queen safe, and that pissed him off. That slick bastard was good at strategy - he always thought far ahead and had contingency plans for everything. It was hard to throw him, which made him a good partner, and a difficult opponent.

With Querns gone, and McManus back in charge of Em City, the original reason for their partnership was gone. Chris had to decide what to do with Ryan O'Reily. It couldn't hurt to have him watching Chris' back, but he didn't trust the man at Toby's back, and that made him a dangerous ally at best. Was it worth the trouble of keeping him on Chris' side?

Then again, the best way to keep an eye on him was to keep him close. Maybe what he needed was a distraction. Something to keep O'Reily's mind off Toby's...indiscretions. It couldn't hurt Chris' chess game, either. He made his move.

"Well, she's alright, if you put a bag over her head, O'Reily, but - damn!" Chris shook his head, like he was trying to get rid of the image his thoughts had conjured. He had to admit, sucking face with Claire Howell wasn't on top of his list of things to do before he died. Well, maybe if he was really, really bored.

But it wouldn't be that much of an inconvenience. A nice warm pussy to slide into - if he could get her to keep her mouth shut, it might not be too bad. He exaggerated a shudder for O'Reily's benefit. Distraction was the word of the day, here.

O'Reily shrugged and moved his bishop to block Chris' rook. Damn, he'd been hoping O'Reily wouldn't notice that one quite yet.

"Yeah, I know. She's got a face like a horse. But hey - it don't matter what she looks like when your balls are slapping on her chin, right?" The smirk on O'Reily's face annoyed the hell out of Chris - he couldn't decide if it was aimed at Chris or at Howell, and that just annoyed him all the more.

He ignored it and tipped his head to the side in acknowledgment of O'Reily's logic. "Good point. And if you fuck her from behind, who the hell cares what she looks like. I am impressed." He wasn't getting anywhere with his current plan - maybe what he needed was to step up his offensive. He took a bold step onto the playing field and put his queen at risk, if O'Reily was willing to place his own at a serious disadvantage.

"Who started it?"

O'Reily scowled at the board, and Chris laughed. Score! Looks like that one hit a sore point. He gloated - loudly. "I knew it. She picked you up, huh? Just shoved you in the ladies bathroom and sat on your cock."

O'Reily struggled to come back from his disadvantage. "She might have shoved me in the room, but she got down on her knees and sucked my cock like a pro, and I fucked her up against the bathroom wall. I came like gang-busters, man."

His hand hovered over the board, and Chris stepped up the distraction while he could tell O'Reily was wavering. "I bet you did. It's just been you and your trusty right hand for a while now. I'm surprised you lasted long enough to even get close to her cunt."

"Like you'd do any better after four years of celibacy."
"Four years? Damn, O'Reily. You mean you never got it on with your sweet little Latina? I thought for sure you and Nathan..."

There was a glitter of ice in O'Reily's narrowed gaze, the chess board forgotten as he stared into Chris' eyes. His voice was soft, but Chris felt O'Reily's anger like a knife blade at his throat. "You will never mention her name again. Is that clear?"

Chris raised his hands in surrender - backing away from that subject quickly. He got the point. Gloria Nathan may not have been back to Oz since her husband's death, but clearly, Ryan O'Reily had not forgotten her.

O'Reily moved a pawn almost randomly, and Chris hid his smile as he saw his plan move a step closer to fruition. "How many months has it been since you and Beecher last fucked? Talk to me in four years, K-Boy, and we'll see how fast you go off."

"Sorry O'Reily, but I don't do celibacy. Never have, never will." He made sure that sounded as arrogant as possible as he casually moved another piece into place, capturing O'Reily's pawn. Well, it was true, after all. What Toby didn't know wouldn't hurt him, right? Besides, Toby had no room to talk.

O'Reily looked up from his perusal of the chess board, his eyes narrow. "Bullshit. The way you act about Beecher fucking around? You're telling me you aren't faithful to Beecher, either?"

"Not while we were together - I don't cheat. But during the lulls in our...relationship, I've had my share of ass." Chris smirked at the look of discomfort that crossed O'Reily's face. He's been in Oz four years, and he still wasn't used to the idea of two men fucking? What a fucking pussy.

O'Reily moved his focus back to the board, and Chris frowned. It wouldn't do to allow him to spend too much time focusing on that. Chris made a sacrifice of his own, knowing that he and O'Reily shared too many secrets for O'Reily to let this one get away from him. O'Reily would never tell, and he was hedging his bets. It wasn't worth telling just to keep him distracted from a fucking chess game, but if this worked out right, it might keep O'Reily distracted from Toby long enough for O'Reily to forgive, if not forget, about his loose tongue.

"You gotta keep your hand in, you know? You wanna know the sweetest ass I ever fucked aside from Beecher's?" His smile spread as he remembered - no need to fake this one. "Miguel Alvarez."

O'Reily's head jerked up, and Chris fought hard to keep the triumph from his eyes. "No fucking way. You never touched Alvarez. I don't believe you."

"I did. I seduced him and turned him into my own fuck slave. He knelt at my feet, and sucked my cock. I tied him up and fucked that hot ass. He bent over my knee, and I heated up his ass with my hand, and then he rimmed my asshole until his tongue ached." O'Reily was squirming in his seat by this point, and it was all Chris could do not to laugh in his face.

He was trying to make it seem like he was disturbed by Chris' words, but Chris knew better. Ryan O'Reily was turned on listening to Chris talk about sex with another man. Was it Chris' words or the thought of Miguel Alvarez doing those things that was causing him to react? Maybe it was both. But his reaction was more than Chris could have wished. This was perfect. His plan to distract O'Reily was going to work just the way he wanted.

Ryan was not in a good mood. If he could find a way to hit something a few dozen times it might make him feel better, but Cyril was asleep, and he didn't want to wake him, so he just fumed,
pacing the pod. That fucking bitch Howell had sent him to the Hole, just so she could get her rocks off, and that pissed Ryan off. His mind had kept circling back to the thought that while he was there he had no access to Cyril. He'd just had to hope that he'd be okay while Ryan was gone. Thank Christ it had turned out to be only for the day.

He'd been all pissed off at Keller for bringing Gloria up - he hadn't been able to get her off his mind since their conversation the day before. It had been two years since he'd last seen her, and there were sometimes weeks at a time now when he only thought of her occasionally and fondly when he did. When he got her stuck in his mind like this, though, he'd circle over and over through all the things they'd done together and how it could have gone differently. He still wanted her, after all this time.

But in the end, Gloria was the only thing that helped him get through that session with Howell. Fucking her had not been easy. He was daydreaming about Gloria while lying on the floor in the Hole - the way she'd been during his cancer - holding his hand, saying his name softly in her sweet voice, looking into his eyes as she promised him she'd be there with him every step of the way. It was the first time he felt relaxed and comfortable in days.

He thought Howell was just pissed at being transferred out of Em City, and that's why she was taking it out on him. So when she walked through the door, Ryan's first thought was to protect his privates, because that bitch was ugly when she was angry. He figured it out when she started mauling him, and he got so angry that it took everything he had not to punch her in the gut. But if he wanted to get out of the Hole, he had to go along with her, and get it over with, or he'd end up there forever. She could be vindictive when crossed.

Ryan was worried when he couldn't seem to get it up for Howell; he just wasn't focused or anything. But then he got a flash of Gloria kissing his face, her breasts pressed into his hands the way Howell's were right then, and finally his cock started to get back with the program. He hated using Gloria like that; it felt like a betrayal to fuck Howell while he was thinking of her, but he'd done it before when it was the only thing that got him up to peak performance standards. So he substituted Howell's face for Gloria's and finally got down to business.

He glanced back at Cyril's bunk, checking to see if he was still asleep. He didn't let Cyril take naps during the day very often - it made it impossible to get him back to sleep again after lights out. But he was exceptionally cranky when Ryan came back from the Hole, so once Ryan got him calmed down, he agreed to let Cyril nap just to give himself some time to think.

He slipped outside the pod and grabbed a chair sitting by the rails of his second floor pod, close enough that he could check on Cyril from where he sat. Ryan's eyes scanned the quad, keeping track of everyone; survival in Oz demanded it. His eyes lit on Beecher, sitting in front of the TV screens. It looked like Up Your Ante was on. Ryan knew that Beecher was a wild card. No matter what Keller said, he knew Beecher could turn on them at any moment.

At one point, back when Ryan was keeping Beecher in tits, things had been different between them. Both of them new to Oz, and totally without any one to talk to or even feel slightly friendly towards - it was good to know that there was someone he could let down his guard with, even just slightly. Not like he trusted Beecher, really. Schillinger had too much of a hold on him, and by the time Ryan was through with him, heroin had him wrapped around its finger - and there's no trusting an addict. Ryan knew that.

Still, he liked Beecher. And he made exceptions for the man that he'd never made for anyone else since. After he went off on Schillinger, Beecher had changed. When he got out of the Hole, he was a tougher, angrier man - one that Ryan had been glad to have at his back when things went to hell
during the riot. But by the time Keller was through fucking with his head and his heart - and his arms and legs - Beecher was hardly recognizable.

These days, he stayed away from Beecher when he could. The man could go off like gunpowder, and there was no telling what would happen if the fuse were lit. When Beecher had hinted that he and Keller might have had something to do with the recent deaths in Em City, Ryan had gone on high alert. He'd been ready to take him out with only a twinge or two of regret. But the last thing Ryan needed was Keller as an enemy, so as long as he behaved himself, Beecher was safe. For now. He just better watch his step, because Ryan O'Reily sure as hell was.

He glanced back into the pod again, checking on Cyril. He hadn't moved. Maybe Ryan would take a chance and head into the Computer Room. He'd had something picking at his mind since Keller and he had talked last. Ryan had never played the games, but he knew what domination and submission was all about, and he had the strong feeling that Keller was playing with his mind. The idea of Miguel Alvarez as Keller's 'fuck slave' was a piece of crap. Alvarez wouldn't touch another man's cock with a ten foot pole. Keller had to be on some serious crack to think he'd believe that shit.

But the thought of domination was stuck in his head now, and despite his lack of experience, he'd always been attracted to the idea. It made sense in its own way, especially after spending so much time in Oz. The weak knelt at the feet of the strong - that was just the way of the world, and that was set in stone even more firmly here than in the outside world.

The thing that threw him was that in domination, the ones doing the kneeling seemed happy there, and that didn't make any sense to him. So Ryan decided that he'd do some searching on the net and see if he couldn't come up with a site or two that gave him some insight into the whole thing. Scanning the quad again before he left, he noticed Keller leaning against the rails outside his pod, his eyes focused on Ryan. He turned his back, and headed downstairs to the computer room.

O'Reily was watching Toby again, and it made Chris nervous. He was focused - watching Toby with that single minded determination he got just before bodies started to show up. O'Reily hadn't mentioned it since that time when Chris had made it clear where his priorities lay, but it had only been a couple of weeks since Toby had practically announced on camera that Chris and O'Reily had their hands in the deaths of Brown and Shemin, and O'Reily had a long memory.

It didn't help any that Toby was doing just as much watching lately as O'Reily. Maybe it was more aimed at Chris than O'Reily, but that hadn't stopped the Mick from obsessing over it. But Chris knew what was going on in Toby's mind, even if O'Reily didn't. He would never squeal on Chris, and O'Reily was safe by association with him. Toby had just been trying to get a rise out of Chris. It was practically impossible to convince O'Reily of that, though. It looked like it might be time for another installment of Operation Distraction.

When O'Reily realized Chris was watching him, he turned his back and went down to the computer lab. Chris gave him a minute or two, until the hack hanging around outside left, then he followed. It was a perfect place for a little one on one conversation. O'Reily glanced at him when he sat down at the next computer, then went back to his reading. When he got a look at O'Reily's computer screen, it was practically impossible not to smirk, so Chris let it out just a bit. Things were coming together nicely.

He turned on his computer, then leaned over to speak into O'Reily's ear, his voice low and seductive. "The Psychology of Domination, O'Reily? Why didn't you just ask me? I'd be happy to tell you all about it. It's the same, no matter who you're trying to influence. You're a master manipulator, you know how that works. Whether you're trying to influence an individual or a
group, the key is in the seduction. You find the thing they want - the thing they're willing to believe in, willing to take a chance on - and you've found the key. Once you've got your hands on their trigger, you're in. It's as easy as that."

O'Reily turned to face him - their faces only inches apart. Chris could practically feel the heat of the flush in O'Reily's cheeks, but he spoke with defiance and there was a challenge in his voice that was unmistakable.

"So what's Beecher's trigger?"

"That's none of your business." Chris' voice was sharper than he'd intended, and he consciously relaxed it as he continued. "But I can tell you Alvarez', if you're curious."

O'Reily rolled his eyes. "You're really going to regret it when Alvarez finally gets out of Solitary, because I'm holding you to all the crap you've been feeding me about him. I'm going to enjoy watching him kick your ass the first time you try something."

"I can't wait until Alvarez gets out of Solitary. He's got such a tight ass - I can't wait to drive into him again." Chris' hand went down to his cock, and he massaged it with his palm. "I'm getting hard just thinking about it."

O'Reily swallowed as his eyes automatically followed Chris' hand. He moved away slightly and went back to his monitor, focusing his eyes on the text. "Do that somewhere else, K-Boy, I don't need to see it, and neither do the hacks."

Chris settled himself in his chair and brought his hands back up to his computer, as it finally brought up its main screen. "Officer Murphy, good to see you."

Murphy eyed the two of them from the door of the computer room. "You gabbing or using the computer, Keller?"

He smiled at the hack and motioned to the screen. "Just passing time while the computer boots up. These things take their time, don't they?" He typed in the address of his email site and spent the next few minutes reading about what was up with Bonnie. Eventually Murphy moved away and Chris relaxed slightly.

"My ex just got herself a dog." His tone was conversational, but O'Reily looked at him suspiciously. He had good cause to; nothing was ever as simple as that in Oz. "Too bad we can't have dogs here, I miss that kind of thing, you know?" Chris grinned seductively. "But that's alright. When Glynn lets Alvarez out of Solitary, I'll have him at my feet, and that will be just as good. He'll kneel there, head bowed, waiting for my command."

Chris sprawled out, spreading his legs even wider, and caressed his growing hard-on. "Mmmm, I love it when he rests his cheek right here on my thigh and looks up at me with those puppy dog eyes, begging me to let him suck my cock. He won't move until I tell him to, though. I've got him well trained. He's a natural born cocksucker - took to it like a baby takes to a nipple."

O'Reily shifted in his chair, his eyes trained on the screen before him, but Chris knew he was listening to every word. His sly glance told him the picture he was painting was having its intended effect. O'Reily was getting hard. Perfect.

"If he's been good, I might stick out my leg and let him hump me while he sucks me off. He likes that - rubbing his junk up against my boot while he's busy with my cock, moaning and panting like a bitch in heat. The vibrations travel through my cock like a buzzing vibrator." He squeezed the tip
of his cock through the cloth and gasped at the sensation, sliding down in his chair slightly to give his cock a bit more breathing room.

He moved his hands back up to the keyboard when another hack wandered into the room, and started typing a reply to Bonnie. The hack watched them quietly for a few minutes as O'Reily read, and Chris typed. Bonnie loved to turn him on in her emails, and if he weren't already hard as nails, this email would have done it. So he spun her a tale about how he'd jerk off to thoughts of her in his pod later, and smiled. She'd be all hot and bothered when she got this one. Thinking of Alvarez had inspired him.

O'Reily's hand was trembling as he scrolled down the page. Nice. As soon as the hack left, he asked the question Chris had been leading him to, and Chris' smirk grew - oh yeah. He had this fish hooked. O'Reily's voice might have been casual, but Chris knew what an effort that had to be - he'd been squirming in his seat for ten minutes now.

"So? What is Alvarez' trigger, if you know it so well?"

Chris leaned close, and whispered in O'Reily's ear. "Pain and humiliation." O'Reily's head snapped to the left, and he stared into Chris' eyes in surprise.

"You've got to be shitting me. No fucking way. Look at the guy - the way he's treated by his hermanos, the abuse he gets from the hacks. You're telling me that he gets off on that shit? I don't fucking believe you." He turned his head back to his monitor. "I knew you were lying through your teeth."

"No, it's true. It's different than it is in real life. In a sexual situation, he loves it. Begs for it. Rolls over on his back and bares his vulnerable belly to me, asking me to hurt him. Then he comes crawling back for more.

"I think it's got something to do with that gang mentality, you know? That macho thing they all have going. You've got to prove to your betters that you can take it - whatever they throw at you. You get your balls busted often enough and you start to crave it, right? At least then, you know they're not ignoring you. They know you're alive. And the more you can take, the more they admire you. They praise your ability to take their shit.

"And they demand your unwavering loyalty. It's what machismo is all about, isn't it? Let me see you grovel at my feet, and I want to see you happy about it, too." Chris eyed O'Reily speculatively. "You telling me that's not how it worked in your gang? The one you and Cyril used to lead. The members of your gang didn't kowtow to you? You said jump and they asked how high. But then you had Cyril to do all the enforcement, so maybe you never got that thirst - the one that wants to see them groveling at your feet, sucking your cock, offering their asses up for your approval."

"I never fucked anyone in my gang, man. That's sick shit you're talking. You don't fuck with your subordinates like that, playing with their heads. That will get you killed quicker than anything."

Chris could hear the disgust in O'Reily's voice, dismissing his words out of hand. He shook his head. "I'm not saying you should fuck your gang, man. I'm just saying, that if you kept your gang in hand the way you should, there were probably a few that would have gone ass up for you. If you ever showed the interest, I mean. It's natural - you see it in wildlife shows all the time. It's the pecking order, O'Reily. The alpha dog gets all the bitches he wants, and if he fucks the odd occasional male, just to put him in his place, nobody thinks twice about it. It's just the way things are.

"It's the way things happen in here, too. And you know it. There ain't no women in here, O'Reily."
So unless you get lucky and bag the occasional female hack, your choices are limited, aren't they?" Chris held up two fingers - one for each choice. "You fuck your own trusty right hand, or you make your own bitch, and make sure he keeps his place. It's just that some people are natural bitches.

"Alvarez is like that. He may strut around like he's cock of the walk, but we know better - it's all a show. He can't show his needs in front of El Norte, they'd see it as a weakness and he'd be dead in days. But he can show it to you, if you prove to him that you can take it from him without endangering his face.

"See, that's why you have to be careful. No one can ever know that he's willing to take it up the ass in exchange for a little pain and a little approval. Cause that's what he wants. It's what he needs. And it helps keep him sane and able to deal with the assholes, because he knows his secret is safe - he has a place he can let go and stop fighting. A place he can show you what he can take, and that helps him survive life in this hellhole. He needs you to help him survive."

"You. He needs you. Not me." O'Reily turned back to face Chris. "I don't fuck guys, Keller. Got that?"

"Oh, right. You've got Howell. You happy sucking her cock, O'Reily? Cause I know it ain't you wearing the pants in that relationship." Chris smirked as O'Reily got up, storming out of the room, cursing Chris loudly.

He paused in the doorway. "I'm not a faggot like you, Keller. I'm the one with the cock, here. And I know where it belongs. I like pussy, got that? Pussy."

Chris went back to his email with a smile on his face. Yes, things were moving along perfectly. He reached down and ran his fingers along his hard cock. This was almost as much fun as fucking. He glanced around, then unzipped his fly, slipping his hand inside as he scrolled down to reread what Bonnie had written. He slicked his hand with his own precome and started jerking off, fast and hard. Bonnie always did have a way with words.
"Earth to Keller. Where the fuck are you, man?"

Chris swiped at the hand O'Reily had stuck in front of his face, fingers snapping to get his attention. Okay, so his mind wasn't on their chess game, no wonder. Of all the fucking luck. Ronnie Barlog would end up as Beecher's pod mate, wouldn't he? That was a disaster waiting to happen. He looked down at the board.

"Shit." While he wasn't looking, O'Reily had put his queen in jeopardy.

"Yeah, well that's what happens when you aren't paying attention." O'Reily stretched his long legs out to the side of the table, hands locked behind his head in a picture of relaxation. Chris knew better, he could see the tension in O'Reily's eyes. "Maybe you need to focus, man."

"Maybe I need to quit while I'm behind." He glanced over towards Toby's pod. "I need to talk to my pal Ronnie, anyway."

O'Reily shook his head. "Yeah, well that ain't gonna happen right now. While you were staring into space, Murphy took him up to McManus' office. He'll be there for a while yet."

"Shit."

"Yeah, you said that already." O'Reily sat up and flicked his eyes around the immediate area as if to make sure no one could overhear their conversation. They usually took a table away from any possible listening ears, but Chris understood his caution - there was always a chance someone would slip in while they weren't looking. Once he knew they were alone, O'Reily leaned over the table, his eyes narrowed in concentration. "What's up? Anything we've got to worry about? This guy a snitch?"

"A snitch? What makes you say that?"

"Well, he's bunking with Beecher. What if Beecher says something to him? Is he a talker? Do we need to keep an eye on him?" Chris frowned. O'Reily had a fucking one track mind.

"How many times do I have to tell you this?" Chris struggled to keep his voice down, his manner casual. Going off on O'Reily here would achieve nothing, and would probably hurt. He needed to stay calm, despite the anger roiling in his gut. "Beecher is not going to say anything to anyone about what we did. There's nothing for him to tell, even if he wanted to - it's all just guesswork and suspicion. But it doesn't matter. He's not going to say anything, so just stop with that crap, alright?"

But O'Reily wouldn't let up. "Even if you're right and he wouldn't say anything to hurt you - this Barlog guy is your pal. He might think it was okay to let something slip."

"Yeah, well Barlog was like my kid brother. There's no way he'd give me up, so don't even think about it. He ain't saying nothing, got it?"

O'Reily sat back in his chair, hands raised as if to placate him. "If you say so. I just don't like having so many players knowing my business, is all. It makes me nervous."
"Nobody knows anything, O'Reily. You've got absolutely nothing to worry about." Fucking O'Reily. He just wasn't going to let this go. It looked like it was time for another slice of distraction.

"So did you finish that article? The one on domination and submission?" O'Reily shrugged his shoulders, as if he wasn't interested, but Chris knew better. "Just what I was telling you, right? He craves submission, as much as you crave to dominate him. Put him in his place." O'Reily frowned, as if he was about to remind Chris again that he didn't do guys, but Chris kept going, not giving him a chance to talk.

"The thing about it is that it's not about the strong forcing the weak. What good do the weak do for someone who's already got the power? The charge comes from dominating someone who's not weak. Someone who can stand up to everything you throw at him, and still come back for more."

"So you don't think Alvarez is weak?" Despite himself, O'Reily was drawn into the conversation. Chris hid his grin.

"Hell, no. Look at what he's been through. Look at what he's survived. El Cid is dead, so's Ricardo. And what about that hack he blinded? He's not around. Alvarez is still here after all the attempts on his life. It took them six months to track him down and bring him back to Oz. He's a survivor, man. He's strong."

"And that's what attracts you to him? That's what made you choose him?"

Chris shook his head. "Well, it ain't always that simple. The first time, it was just convenience and timing, and I was in a really nasty mood. He came swaggering down the hall with that attitude of his, but I knew better. El Cid was kicking his ass all over Em City. He was a mess. And there he was, doing that cock of the walk thing he does so well, you know the one."

"Yeah. Always makes me want to take him down a peg or two."

"Exactly. There was no one around, so I grabbed him, shoved him in a storage room and threw him up against the door - you know, just roughing him up a bit. That's when it hit me. The look in his eyes, how hard his cock felt against my thigh - he was getting off on the whole thing - panicked and hating his reactions, but he couldn't stop the way he felt. That was all it took. He was mine. I knew it right then. It took me a while to convince him of that, but I knew. And it wasn't long before he knew, too."

It was Chris' turn to settle back in his chair, relaxed and confident. "I had him down on his knees sucking my cock in no time. I tied him up and fucked his ass, and he begged me for it, disappointed if I didn't bring my belt with me. He wanted that sense of freedom - wanted to know that he wasn't responsible for his actions, because I had the control."

"You tied him up? You stuck him in a storage room and tied him up?" O'Reily was squirming in his chair again, but he was hooked. He sat back, trying to act like he wasn't as fascinated as he obviously was, picking up a chess piece and fiddling with it. "Did you have to gag him?"

Chris shrugged. "It depended on the day, on whether he needed it to keep quiet. He may be a quiet man, but a good orgasm is enough to make even the most silent of men shout out loud. My favorite gag was my jockey shorts."

Oh, that one got O'Reily's attention. Chris smirked. "There's nothing like seeing a guy tied up with his own belt, his mouth stuffed with your underwear. I came close to breaking my cock, I had to come so bad." He shrugged. "That was the last time I was with him."
"Why? What happened?"

"I ended up in the hole for shanking Schillinger. And when I got out, he was already back in Solitary for killing Ricardo and stabbing Guerra. Then me and Beecher got back together and there was no place for diversions anymore, even if he'd still been around. When he escaped, I wished him the best. I was really sorry to hear he'd been recaptured. Stuck back in this shithole, after being out for six months? That's got to suck."

"Yeah, I hear that one." O'Reily set the pawn he'd been fiddling with down and started to speak again, but Murphy's voice sounded clear across the quad, one word stretched across four or five syllables.

"Count!"

"Damn." It looked like Chris wasn't going to get a chance to talk to Barlog until tomorrow. He left O'Reily to gather up the chess pieces. Toby had Barlog all to himself for the rest of the night. Chris had a bad feeling about this.

Ryan sat on the edge of the chair in front of Sister Pete's desk, his knee bouncing frantically, despite his efforts to calm down. It wouldn't do him any good if he blew up in front of the Sister - he needed her help in this. He really couldn't think of another alternative, and she'd been his staunchest supporter when it came to helping him with Cyril.

She sighed and took off her glasses, letting them drop onto the chain around her neck. "So I'm assuming this is about Cyril's latest outburst?"

"Sister, you gotta believe me, he was totally innocent. That fucking biker just got in his face and shoved him around. You know how he hates that shit."

"I know, I know...I've already talked to the guards, and they agreed. Cyril was calmly talking on the phone one minute, and the next thing they knew he was beating the crap out of Akins. He's got two broken ribs and a fractured jaw, by the way."

"But he was pushing Cyril around. That's not his fault. Leon said he was calling Cyril a 'tard, and he disconnected the phone while Cyril was still talking to Aunt Brenda. Akins got what he fucking deserved."

Sister Pete gave him a nasty look. "Don't curse, Ryan." He threw his hands up and rolled his eyes, but she didn't give him a chance to interrupt. "I understand that Akins was out of line, there's no disputing that. But that doesn't change the fact that Cyril lost control in there, and had to be sedated before he calmed down. It took four guards to subdue him, and one of them now has a broken nose to show for it."

He sat up at that. "Yeah? Who'd he get?"

She gave him that eye again. "That's not important. The point is, we either have to figure out a way to keep him under control, or I'm going to lose this battle, and he's going to end up going to the Connolly Institute."

Ryan jumped up at that. "The what? That's the nuthouse, right - for the...the criminally insane? If they put him in there, he'll lose it for sure. He needs me - I'm the only one who can keep him under control."

"Well, that didn't work today, did it? Sit down." He resisted for a minute, but he needed Sister
Pete's support, so finally he sat down again, still tense, but firmly back under control. "Where were you when all this was happening, anyway?"

"I was sitting at a table; I wasn't far away at all. I got him set up on the phone, and sat down to play a game of cards with a few guys. I was taking a break while he talked to Aunt Brenda, that's all. I can't follow him around all the time." He scooted his chair closer to her desk; it was important that she give him a chance on this, so he looked her in the eye and gave it to her straight.

"Listen, Sister Pete, I got an idea - something that may get us both out of your hair. I've been hearing about that new experimental program they've got going. You know, the one with the aging pill?"

Sister Pete interrupted his spiel before he could get any further into it. "That won't work, Ryan. You're both in here for life; you're not eligible for that program."

"I know, I know. But with Cyril, he's a special case, right? Because of the brain damage and all. Maybe they'd make an exception, and let us on the program, for his sake. Once he's out of Oz, he'll calm down - I know he will. It's just that in here, there's always a threat, you know? He'll never be safe, and I can't always be there for him. I was only 100 feet away when this happened, Sister. I can't protect him like he needs while we're trapped in here."

She sighed. "I could talk to Dr. Anderson, and see if he could pull some strings - it's possible that they might make an exception for Cyril. But there's really no way I could get you approved, Ryan."

"But that won't do any good, Sister. If Cyril leaves Oz without me, he'll be out on his own, and he can't survive on his own. We've got no one out there. There's no one to take care of him but me!"

"What about your Aunt Brenda? Cyril talks highly of her."

"Yeah, well, she's good for a visit once a month, and a box of chocolates, but she's disabled, she can't keep up with Cyril. And you know my dad would be worthless..."

She shook her head. "No, I know, Ryan. I wouldn't think of setting Cyril up with him. Maybe a group home of some sort..."

"Sister - please! He needs me. I'm the reason he got hurt in the first place, and I'm the reason he's here. I need to take care of him. It's up to me. I need to do this."

Sister Pete picked up her glasses and slipped them on, pulling over a notepad and a pen, signaling that the interview was over. "I'm sorry, Ryan. But it just won't work. I'll talk to Anderson about Cyril, if you want, but there's nothing else I can do."

Back in Em City, Ryan fumed. If he hadn't been out listening to gossip, he'd have been closer to Cyril and maybe have been able to stop this. But he needed to keep his eyes and ears open here - there was no way to keep either of them safe if he didn't work the lines of communication and stay on top of what was happening in Oz.

He was too restless to stay in his pod, so Ryan decided to take a walk around Em City, just to stretch his legs. Besides, he didn't have to worry about where Cyril was for the moment, so now was a good time to get out there and see what was happening. Maybe make a few deals, chat up a few guys, keep on top of things. He stepped out, and just followed the perimeter of the quad, watching the pods around the edges as well as the tables in the center. You never knew where danger would come from in Oz.

He had to decide if it was better to try and get Cyril into this program without him, and hope the
Sister could find a place he could live safely on his own, or keep him here in Oz where Ryan could at least keep an eye on him. He didn't like the idea of putting Cyril in the State's care like that. He'd grown up with wards of the state, and that always seemed to end up badly.

But there was no way he could totally keep Cyril safe in Oz, even in Em City there were dangers that they couldn't avoid. He'd made himself a promise, way back when Cyril first came to Oz. He wouldn't let Cyril down again. He'd be the big brother he should have been all along. What he needed was to get out of Oz. If he could get on this program, he could take Cyril out with him, and they could be together - he could protect Cyril the way he needed to.

Ryan fantasized for a few minutes about escaping from Oz - and taking Cyril with him. If he'd come across Busmalis' tunnel before the hacks had, he'd have found a way to stay free. He wouldn't have ended up back in Oz again. He could have done it, he knew he could have. And Cyril would have been safe at last.

Just then, there was a ruckus at the gate and Ryan crossed the quad to see what all the fuss was. When he saw Alvarez being led inside, his anger boiled over. All his frustrations over caring for Cyril, and his hopes of ever getting out of this hellhole alive just ate at his gut, and he sneered at Alvarez as he passed by.

"You got busted going into Mexico? What, are you stupid, or what, Alvarez?"

All around him, guys were taking out their jealousy and disappointment on Alvarez, laughing at him and calling him names. He just ducked his head and kept walking, and Ryan just wanted to hit something. As long as Alvarez had been out and free, everyone here had been able to keep their own dreams going - imaging that it was them outside, that they were the one that had made it free and clear.

But now that he was back, everyone hated him. Hated that he'd been caught, that he had let them take him alive and bring him back to this place. He represented all their crushed hopes and worst disappointments, and they'd never forgive him for that.

At least one good thing was coming out of this - he'd be able to find out if Keller really was taking him for a ride. After that last conversation with Keller, Ryan been half convinced he was telling the truth, but it just seemed so far fetched. Alvarez had just never seemed the type to roll over and take it, despite the fact that he obviously had done so with El Cid. But with Keller? He found it hard to believe. He'd have to watch the two carefully. This could prove very interesting.

Chris watched O'Reily pacing in his cell, relieved that O'Reily had his hands full with Cyril's latest freak out - punching that biker and being taken to the Infirmary strapped to a gurney. Chris had his hands full with Toby and Barlog right now. He didn't have time to keep an eye on O'Reily, too.

He hated that Toby had gotten to Barlog first, and the jealousy he felt made his gut roil. He growled deep in his chest and smirked as he noticed the guy in the next chair scooting away from him. Just the thought of Toby on his knees, his hands touching Barlog's thighs as he sucked the bastard's cock - it was too much to take. It had to end. And it would, one way or the other. Chris would do what he had to do. Whatever it took.

He felt unsettled - itchy, like something was burning a hole right between his shoulder blades. He stretched casually in his chair at the back of the crowd surrounding the TVs, twisting his body to the left and the right, like he was trying to pop his spine back into place. His eyes scanned the nearby tables and caught Alvarez sitting with Rebadow and Busmalis, a handful of forgotten cards fanned out before him. He was watching Chris like Chris usually watched Toby, eyes intense -
Talk about bad fucking timing. He wanted to take some time and play with Alvarez’ head; it was so easy to do, and gave Chris so much pleasure. And Alvarez was just ripe for it, too. He’d seen him talking to Hernandez earlier, his head down, speaking softly, his posture showing his submissive attitude to anyone who had sense enough to know what they were looking at. Made Chris’ cock hard just looking at him. But instead he was stuck here waiting for Barlog to show up. He needed to get him away from Toby, before Toby had a chance to take things any further.

He had a plan that would stop Toby short, and he knew it would work. Barlog had always had a soft spot for Chris - he’d believe anything Chris told him. Chris smiled as he watched Barlog walk through the gate with his work detail, and he headed over to the wall to intercept him before he reached his pod. This was going to be a breeze.

That night, as he lowered his jockeys to shine his ass at Toby, he realized someone else was watching him from the sidelines. Toby turned to his bunk, and was lost in the shadows, but Chris stayed there and stared back at Alvarez, who was standing in the dim light, his eyes burning into Chris’ with an intensity that took his breath away for a moment.

He wondered if Toby had noticed Alvarez’ fixation yet, and what he would do when he did. Would he be jealous of Alvarez, or would he even care? Should Chris play this up? Encourage it? He liked being the center of attention, who the hell didn't? And he knew that in his own way, Toby was as fixated on Chris as Chris was on him. Why else would he be acting this way?

He'd have to tread softly, though, for now. With Barlog muddying the waters, it was hard to guess what Toby might do. He couldn't take a chance on losing what small part of Toby he had right now. He'd fight to keep Toby focused on him, no matter how he got that attention. He'd hold Alvarez in reserve, in case things went south with Barlog.

If he could get Barlog transferred out of Em City it would be easier all around. He'd have less contact with Toby, and he'd be out of Chris' way. And Chris would still have a bit on the side whenever he wanted with Barlog, and a backup in the wings. That made a lot of sense. He'd have to see what he could do to arrange that. With one last glance at Toby's pod, he turned his back on Alvarez and went to bed.

Chapter End Notes

Some quotes borrowed or paraphrased from *Revenge is Sweet* - Season Four, Episode Eleven of HBO's *Oz*. 
Chapter 3

O'Reily flopped down into a chair and immediately started talking; his words running together as he spoke at what seemed like the speed of light. Chris shook his head, fighting to make sense of O'Reily's obvious mania. He had no idea what had him hopping like that, but if they sold it in bottles, Chris could make a fortune.

"What the fuck, O'Reily? You mainlining the coffee these days? Chill out, alright, and say that again. This time in English."

O'Reily rolled his eyes and spoke with deliberate slowness, despite his overly bright eyes and the leg that wouldn't stop moving, knocking his knee into Chris' on every second or third bounce. "So, has Alvarez even noticed you're alive, yet?" O'Reily nodded over to where Alvarez was sitting by himself at one table, shoulders hunched, spinning a checker on its end, staring at the moving bit of plastic with utter fascination.

"You should have been around yesterday. He was staring at me so hard I felt it from across the room, like a laser beam right between my shoulder blades." Chris shrugged his shoulders to try and rid himself of the memory of that intense gaze.

"Oh, yeah. Right. I just happened to miss it. You are so full of shit, Keller. I'm looking forward to his knocking you into next week when he finds out what shit you've been shoveling."

"You think so?" Well, he was on his own for now. Murphy had taken Barlog out 15 minutes ago; he'd said something about 'official business.' He didn't know what that was about, but things like that usually took some time, he wouldn't be back for a while yet. And Toby was on his bunk; sound asleep over his open book. It was time for another episode of Operation Distraction - time to show O'Reily who was in charge. He smiled, slowly and seductively, this was going to be fun.

"You just keep your eyes and ears open, boy. Watch how a real man gets things done."

As soon as he stood, Alvarez glanced up at him - almost too quick to see. But O'Reily noticed it, he could tell by the narrowed eyes. Chris stretched languidly, and stalked over toward the wall on a path that just happened to cross behind Alvarez' chair. As he passed by, he trailed his fingers across the back of Alvarez' neck, and felt Alvarez shudder under his hand. Chris kept walking, knowing that Alvarez was watching him, and that O'Reily was watching Alvarez.

He passed by the stairs and kept going, into the hall that led to a storage room he'd used several times before. It was a hard lock to crack, you had to have a special touch - and it was dangerous to use it too often, the hacks checked it randomly. It wasn't a risk Chris took too often, but several hacks were out with inmates, and several more were concentrated on the group of homeboys shouting and carrying on up on the second floor, so he took the chance and popped the lock, then waited by the door.

It didn't take long. Alvarez walked casually down the hall, as if he wasn't stalking Chris, and as he passed by, Chris grabbed his arm and pulled him into the room, locking the door behind them before pushing Alvarez up against it.

"Damn, Keller. What the fuck? You think you can just summon me like that, out in front of God and everybody?"

Chris pressed his body up against Alvarez' and smiled at the hard-on he felt pressed against his
thigh, just before he bit Alvarez' neck, right below his ear. Alvarez gasped, and his head fell back against the door. "It worked, didn't it? You're here, and soon you're going to be on your knees, sucking my cock."

Alvarez shuddered in his grasp, and tried to wrench free, but Chris held him tightly, and all his jerking around did was make Chris harder.

"Fuck you! I don't do that shit anymore."

Chris laughed. "Yes you do. You'll do exactly what I tell you to, because I'm the one who knows what you need." He reached between them and put his hand on Alvarez' swollen cock, squeezing lightly. "See how hard you are for me, Alvarez? Your cock knows what it wants, and what it wants is me." He slowly tightened his fist, and Alvarez cursed, his hips thrusting into Chris' grip.

"That's right. Your cock remembers me, doesn't it?" Chris let go, and Alvarez gasped for breath, just before Chris closed in on him, his thigh forcing its way between Alvarez' legs, pressing up against his balls as his tongue pushed its way into his mouth. Alvarez moaned into the kiss and Chris felt it - the moment Alvarez surrendered to him. He had his hands wrapped around Alvarez' head, Chris' tongue fucking his mouth, and he felt Alvarez' hands come up and wrap around his arms.

He pulled back suddenly and Alvarez gasped, his hands letting go of Chris' arms as he remembered the rules about touching. "Sorry! I'm sorry. I just forgot. It's been a while, you know? It won't happen again." He stared down at the floor, afraid to look into Chris' eyes, and that suited Chris just fine.

"But you figured it out with just a little reminder. That's a good boy." He ran a finger down Alvarez' jaw to his chin, then up to his lips, tracing them roughly with his nail. Alvarez opened his mouth without prompting and Chris smiled and slipped his finger inside, the wet heat of Alvarez' mouth making him moan. He fucked his finger in and out of that hot mouth as Alvarez sucked, his tongue rubbing across Chris' finger.

Chris slowly pulled his finger out of Alvarez' mouth, trailing the wet digit down to his neck. "Oh, yeah. I love your mouth, Alvarez. I want to feel it on my cock." He turned the two of them around, so that Chris was the one leaning against the door, and grinned as Alvarez swallowed nervously.

"I haven't done this in a while."

He tipped Alvarez' chin up, so that he could see his eyes. "You didn't touch a man when you were out? Didn't suck cock to buy food or a place to sleep?" He was skeptical; he had expected Alvarez to use his new talents to help keep himself free.

Alvarez pulled away from Chris' hand, turning his head and mumbling. "No soy una puta."

He was obviously angry, but he didn't try to get away - that was good. Chris put a little steel into his voice. "What was that?"

"I'm not a whore. I don't fuck for money. I stole what I needed, or I went hungry. I don't do this for - for just anyone."

Chris smiled and pulled his head back, running his thumb over his boy's jaw, pride and satisfaction in his eyes and voice. "That's my boy." He kissed Alvarez again, quick and hard, and left him breathless, his eyes dazed. That was more like it. Chris ran his fingers along the white scar on Alvarez' cheek, smirking at the way he blushed and turned away. Alvarez was so sensitive about
that scar. It always worked well as a way to remind him of his place. "Now get on your knees and suck my cock."

Alvarez took a shaky breath and slid down Chris' body, his hands trembling as he reached up to grab the waist of Chris' work pants, sliding the button out and pulling the zipper down. Then he pulled Chris' pants and jockeys down together, revealing his hard cock. Alvarez reached out and touched the tip with his finger, smearing a drop of precome around the head, murmuring something softly in Spanish that Chris couldn't make out.

Chris watched him carefully. He was convinced Alvarez was still his, but he knew Alvarez had a loose screw or two, Chris wasn't gonna let down his defenses around him, no matter what Alvarez said. But Alvarez merely brought his finger to his own mouth, stuck out his tongue and licked the precome right off it. When his eyes closed at the taste, Chris smiled. "That's my boy."

Alvarez' head came up and looked into Chris' eyes, searching for something that Chris couldn't identify. "Am I? Is that what I am? Your boy?"

Chris nodded. "That's exactly what you are, Alvarez. Now be a good boy, and suck my cock."

Alvarez looked back down at Chris' heavy cock, leaned forward and licked across the tip. Chris sucked in a deep breath. When Chris' cock swung with his movements, Alvarez took it in his hand, and held it still while he licked it again. Then he opened his mouth and took the head inside, and started to suck. Chris' hips twitched and more of his cock slid into Alvarez' hot mouth. Chris moaned at the sensations rushing through him. It felt so fucking good.

Chris' reaction seemed to energize Alvarez, and he started to move faster, his head bobbing as he took more and more in. Chris laughed as his hands came up and ran through Alvarez' black hair, loving the way the short strands felt against the palms of his hands. He reached one hand down and curled it around the fist Alvarez was holding his cock with, reminding him to jerk the bottom half while he sucked on the top.

The boy caught on quick. He always had been a fast learner. He'd been gone for six months, and it felt like just last week Alvarez had been here at his boots, sucking him off and begging Chris to fuck him. Too bad he didn't have more time; he'd love to get his cock inside that tight ass. But not today. Maybe tomorrow.

He felt Alvarez tentatively touch his balls, running his fingertips over his sack. It looked like he could use a little encouragement. "Oh yeah, that's good, Alvarez. Roll them in your palm, and squeeze them - just a little. That's good. Keep that up." He had to pause for breath - god, Alvarez was good at this. So enthusiastic, once you got him started. But Chris needed more.

He stiffened his legs, resting his back firmly against the door to free up his hips, then took Alvarez' head in both hands, and started directing him, showing him how he wanted him to move. He pushed further into Alvarez' mouth with every thrust, until Alvarez just held on, his one hand settled on the base of Chris' cock to keep it from slipping entirely into his mouth. He wanted to tell Alvarez to move it, but he didn't think he was quite ready for deep throating, just yet. So Chris decided to let it be for now, and taught him a lesson on getting his face fucked.

"Relax your neck, Alvarez. Let me do the work. Don't fight me, just push your tongue down, and let me in. I'm gonna fuck your mouth, now." And he did. He pushed his way in, and fucked him hard. He felt Alvarez grab onto his thigh to keep his balance, and he laughed at that as his balls slapped against Alvarez' chin and throat. Chris would remind him of the rules about touching without permission when Alvarez didn't have his mouth full of cock. He could hear Alvarez struggle for breath, breathing frantically through his nose, not even trying to keep the suction
going.

But that was okay, Chris didn't need it at this point. He was getting close now, breathing harshly as he pushed and pulled, thrusting into Alvarez' mouth the way he wanted to be fucking his ass. Next time, he promised himself. But now he needed to come.

He felt that tingle - the one that spread all through him, and he gasped for breath. "That's it. That's it!" He froze, his cock buried as far into Alvarez' mouth as he could get and came, harsh shocks running through him as his body jolted with each pulse of come that flooded Alvarez' mouth. He felt his boy swallowing as fast as he could, and he jerked into his mouth one last time, just for the pleasure of it.

When he finally let go, and reached down to pull up his pants, Alvarez fell back onto his ass, his eyes wild and come running down his chin and dripping onto his shirt. Goddamn if he didn't look hotter than hell like that. Chris pulled his zipper up, then fell to his knees, pushing Alvarez down onto the floor and kneeling over him, one knee on each side of his hips. He dove into Alvarez' mouth, kissing and sucking; pulling his own come into his mouth. God he loved that. When he pulled back, the wild look had calmed down a bit - that was more like it.

Chris smirked at Alvarez, sitting down on Alvarez' hard cock and crushing it under his weight. He covered Alvarez' mouth with his hand when he cried out, then rolled his hips, Chris' ass grinding Alvarez' swollen cock down into his hard belly. His fingers had come on them from slapping his hand over Alvarez' face, so he stuck them in Alvarez' mouth, and he willingly sucked them clean. Chris pulled them out and wiped them dry on Alvarez' shirt, then pulled Alvarez' head up so he was looking into Chris' eyes.

"You wanna come, boy?"

Alvarez stared up at him in shock. Chris wasn't sure if he was surprised at the question, or if he was too far gone to even understand, so he repeated himself. "Tell me, do you want to come?"

This time he got an answer. "God, yes! Please, let me come."

"Then let me feel you." He slapped Alvarez' thigh. "Move."

Alvarez thrust his hips up, and Chris ground his ass into Alvarez' groin. "That's more like it." It had to hurt, but if there was one thing he had learned about Alvarez it was that pain was an aphrodisiac, so when he groaned and pushed up into Chris' ass, Chris laughed and settled his weight more firmly. He pushed back harshly, and Alvarez moaned, his hands balled into fists at his sides as he gasped and tried to roll his hips.

Chris lunged forward suddenly, ripped Alvarez' t-shirt away from his neck and latched onto Alvarez' nipple, biting and chewing. Alvarez' body arched under his, and Chris felt Alvarez' cock pulse beneath him as he came. He cried out before Chris covered his mouth again, muffling his words. Alvarez lay there, panting harshly, his breath hot on Chris' fingers until he sat up and pulled his hand away.

He stood and stepped around Alvarez, who stayed where he was, his hands trembling slightly where they lay on his heaving belly. Chris straightened his clothes, checking to make sure he didn't have any come on anything, then stepped over to the door. His smile was wicked as he looked Alvarez over, Chris' come smeared on his face, his own come spreading a wet stain on his pants, his eyes still a little wild.

"Welcome back, Alvarez."
O'Reily was leaning on the wall opposite the door, a big grin on his face, and a rather noticeable bulge in his pants. Chris raised one eyebrow and O'Reily laughed, shaking his head. "Okay, Keller. I concede this one. I am very impressed."

"And horny as hell, looks like to me."

O'Reily just rolled his eyes and muttered, "Whatever."

Chris crossed the hall to stand in front of him, his back to the store room door. "I guess you heard that, huh?"

O'Reily snorted. "How could I not hear it? Jesus, is he always that loud? I thought you said you used gags and shit?"

"Yeah, well, my jockeys were busy, so it was kind of difficult to find a suitable gag. I should have used his shirt, but hell, I had my hands full at the time."

"Yeah, I bet you did..." Chris had intentionally been facing away from the door to see O'Reily's face when Alvarez stepped outside, but the look of shock on the man's face exceeded his expectations. Chris turned and grinned at the sight before him. Alvarez was frozen in the doorway, his torn shirt hanging off his shoulder, baring his injured nipple. He held his hands in front of him, hiding the stain on his pants that the shirt wasn't quite long enough to cover completely. He'd gotten the come off his face, at least - looked like he'd wiped it on his already dirty shirt, but the shirt didn't hide the angry welts of Chris' teeth marks ringing the brown flesh of his nipple - red and inflamed and obviously new.

Alvarez flushed and avoided Chris' and O'Reily's eyes, but his spine stiffened as they stared at him. He stepped out, closing the door behind him.

"Holy Mother of God. Alvarez, you look like shit, man. I hope you're not planning on going out there looking like that."

Chris shrugged and turned his back, headed back down the hallway toward the quad. "What the fuck else is he gonna do?"

O'Reily grabbed Chris' arm, his voice full of outrage. "You can't let him walk out there like that."

Chris pulled his arm out of O'Reily's grip. "He's a big boy. He'll figure out something." He loved it when a plan fell together like this. It was a good thing he had so many years of experience behind him, it was really hard to keep the smirk off his face.

"You are such an asshole, Keller. Look at him. If he walks out there like that, his reputation is shot."

Alvarez' laugh was dark and full of self-contempt. "I ain't got a rep anymore, O'Reily. Haven't you figured that out by now?"

Chris watched O'Reily's eyes travel between the two of them, his expression one of disgust. "Yeah, well, you walk into the quad like that and you'll be sucking cock for a living in a week, Alvarez. You'll never live it down." Alvarez glared at him, but O'Reily's aggressive stare obviously cowed him, and he looked back down at the floor. "At least take that shirt off. You can throw it over your shoulder and cover up that...bite, okay? You don't want people seeing that shit."

Alvarez looked down at his shirt and swiped at the wet spots. "It's the only shirt I've got at the
moment, O'Reily. What the fuck you want me to do?"

"Take it off, Alvarez. You'll look less suspicious than you do right now. Jesus."

Alvarez shrugged. "I can't take it off."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I can't take it off!" His voice was full of self-contempt, and that seemed to make O'Reily even more confused.

Chris stepped up behind him, and spoke into O'Reily's ear. "He came in his pants, O'Reily. He needs the shirt to cover it up."

Alvarez was blushing again, and O'Reily rolled his eyes at him. "Jesus Christ." He pointed his finger at Chris, who had settled casually against the wall his smirk showing. "This is your fault, Keller. Give him your shirt."

"Fuck off. It's not my fault he can't control himself. I didn't force him to come in his pants - that was his decision."

Chris really hadn't thought Alvarez could get any redder, but watching him stare at the ground, as he shuffled from foot to foot, he realized he was wrong about that. It looked good on him, almost as good as Chris' come had looked spattered all over Alvarez' face.

But O'Reily wasn't satisfied. "Oh yeah, like you had nothing to do with it? He gave his choices over to you when he walked through that door, man. This is your responsibility. If you let him walk out there like this, you're no better than Schillinger."

Chris's anger boiled over and he took a step forward before he managed to rein it in. He was so close to his goal, he couldn't let his temper ruin it all now. O'Reily had taken a step back, looking tense and ready for anything, but he wasn't backing down.

Alvarez was looking from one to the other, his dark eyes unreadable. "What the fuck do you care, O'Reily?"

That question stopped him for a second, as he stared at Alvarez. "I don't. Not really. It's just..." He focused back on Chris. "If we're partners here, Keller, I need to know you won't hang me out to dry. If you can treat your responsibilities like this, then I can't trust you at my back."

Alvarez had obviously had enough. "Fuck you both. I can take care of myself." He took a step down the hall, but Chris' hand came out and stopped him.

"You're not going anywhere. You stay right there." Alvarez froze, and Chris sighed. He ought to get an Oscar for this performance. "My shirt is going to be too big for him; it will be way too obvious. Give him your undershirt, it will fit him better. He can give it back to you later, okay?"

O'Reily sighed and pulled off his shirt, throwing it at Chris. "Hold this." He skimmed out of his wifebeater as Alvarez pulled his own shirt off and tucked it into his pants pocket. O'Reily tossed his wifebeater to Alvarez, and put his other shirt back on. "You wash it before you give it back, got it?"

Alvarez ducked his head as he donned the shirt, not saying anything. Chris pulled back the side of the wifebeater, revealing Alvarez' bruised nipple, unable to keep the sly grin off his face when Alvarez flinched slightly.
O'Reily cringed. "Damn. That has got to hurt."

He shrugged, refusing to look up at either of them. Chris pinched the swollen flesh, making Alvarez catch his breath, closing his eyes in an obvious mixture of pain and pleasure. Chris grinned as O'Reily winced sympathetically. "Don't worry, O'Reily, he likes it. Let's go." He turned around and snapped his order at Alvarez, who pulled the shirt back into place and hurried along behind him, avoiding O'Reily's eyes.


Ryan dropped his magazine onto his bunk and stared at the back of Cyril's head. He threw the bright green tennis ball up against the Plexiglas wall of the pod where it bounced to the floor and back into Cyril's hand.


He sighed. To think he'd been so glad when Cyril had been released from the Infirmary this morning. He sighed again.


"Hey! Look, it's Bob!" Cyril ran up to the Plexiglas wall, and waved frantically, yelling "Hi Bob!" at the door. Rebadow changed directions and headed toward the pod, waving back, and this time, Ryan's sigh was one of relief. With any luck, Rebadow could keep Cyril entertained for a while, and give Ryan at least a few minutes of quiet.

Bob stuck his head in the door and grinned at Ryan. "Can Cyril come out to play? I think I owe him a game of checkers."

Ryan hid his laugh and pretended to think about it, screwing his face up in an exaggerated scowl. Cyril crossed over to the bunks, bouncing on his toes. "Please, Ryan? Can I? I'll be good, promise. I'll just sit there and play checkers with Bob, okay?"

"Well...I don't know..."

"Please?" Cyril held out his tennis ball in offering. "I'll give you my ball if you let me. Please?"

Ryan chortled inside where Cyril couldn't hear him. Yes! "Well, all right." He grabbed the ball from Cyril's outstretched hand, and Cyril bounced over to Rebadow.

"I can! I can!" Rebadow's eyes opened wide in surprise.

"He's a bit on the hyper side tonight, Rebadow. If he gets too anxious, just bring him back to me, okay?"

Rebadow smiled. "I'm sure we'll be fine."

Just then Ryan saw Alvarez headed their way with a white shirt rolled up in his clenched hand. Perfect timing, he didn't really want to talk to Alvarez with Cyril in the room. This was going to be awkward enough already. He jumped down off his bunk and reached the door just as Rebadow and Cyril were leaving, and Cyril stopped in front of him and pointed his finger at Alvarez.

"I remember you. You're a boxer. I watched you box."

Alvarez shrugged. "Yeah. I'm a boxer. Not so much any more, I guess. I haven't boxed in a long
time."

"Not much time for that outside, huh?" Rebadow asked.

Alvarez ducked his head. "Too busy trying to stay alive, you know?"

Rebadow nodded, like he knew exactly what Alvarez was talking about. "Well, I can't say as I'm happy to see you back, but..."

"Yeah. You and me both." Ryan watched as Alvarez avoided even Rebadow's eyes, realizing exactly how far he'd fallen. Gone was the cocky attitude, holding his head high despite how poorly he was treated by those around him. It was like he was trying to disappear into the walls - no, like he was trying to imitate the clear walls of Em City, and just disappear totally from view. Like if he didn't move, maybe people wouldn't notice he was there.

He realized with a start, that despite the way Alvarez' old attitude had irked him sometimes, he preferred that to this one. That Alvarez had been a fighter, a survivor. He wasn't sure that this one still was.

"Maybe you can practice with me! Ryan doesn't like it when I spar with him, 'cause he says I hit too hard, but that's what you're supposed to do, right? That's what my coach always said."

"Yeah well, then you can use that killer right hook on your coach. I'll just sit on the sidelines and watch, okay?"

"He's not here, Ryan. You know that. But you'll box with me, won't you?" Cyril looked at Alvarez with that wide eyed look that five year olds use to get the last cookie in the jar - the look Cyril had managed to perfect since his accident, and Ryan watched Alvarez crumble.

"Sure, Cyril. If it's okay with your brother. I could do that." He looked apprehensively at Ryan, who just laughed.

"Sure, I could do with a few dozen less bruises."

Ryan froze as soon as he realized what he'd said, but Alvarez just grinned sheepishly - for the first time that Ryan had noticed since he'd gotten back and said, "You get used to it after a while." He slipped his hand under the edge of his shirt, running it across his abdomen in an unconscious gesture Ryan had grown used to seeing when he'd first met Alvarez. He hadn't seen much of it lately, but then he realized, between Solitary and his escape, he hadn't really seen much of Alvarez in a while.

Cyril and Rebadow headed for a nearby table for checkers, and Ryan stepped aside and let Alvarez inside the pod. He was surprised by that last bit of self-conscious humor. Maybe there was a bit of the old Alvarez left in there after all.
out gets himself caught, and ends up right back in this hellhole again."

Alvarez grinned again, and Ryan got the feeling he was laughing at himself so he wouldn't end up crying. "Not half as disappointed as I was, man."

"Yeah, I can understand that."

Alvarez shrugged. "So here's your shirt." He held it out, and as Ryan took it, he looked Ryan in the eye for the first time. "Thanks. For lending it to me. And for standing up for me. I mean - The things you did...I appreciate that. Thanks."

"That's cool man - it was wrong for him to do that to you, you know? Keller - he was setting me up for something, I just don't know what, yet."

"But why would he want you to feel sorry for me? That don't make any sense. Besides, he used to do things like this before," he rubbed at his nipple self-consciously. "He likes to bite me where I can't hide it. He did it all the time."

Ryan thought about that for a second. "Nothing this obvious, though, right? I mean, he ripped your shirt up, bit your nipple so bad it bled, made it impossible to cover everything up, then expected you to walk out in public like that. No, this was for my benefit; I just have to figure out why."

Alvarez shrugged, his eyes on the ground. "I'm sorry I got you in the middle of this. It's me he's using, not you."

"Hey, this isn't your fault. Me and Keller have an arrangement, but I knew better than to totally trust the guy. I just got taken by surprise that what he'd told me about you was actually true."

Alvarez looked up at him in surprise. It obviously hadn't occurred to him that Ryan had known that Keller was fucking Alvarez before that night. He blushed bright red, making the white scar on his cheek stand out harshly in contrast, his eyes dropping to the floor. The whole time Keller had been spouting all his crap, Ryan had wanted to ask Alvarez exactly how much of his talk had been real and how much was bullshit. But now that he had the opportunity to ask, he felt too sorry for the poor bastard to say a word. Besides, he wasn't sure he could deal with the answers, especially now that he was going to have to spend time with the guy, even if it was just in the gym. The best thing for Ryan to do right now was try and pretend that whole night had never happened. A sudden flash of the smirk on Keller's face when Ryan first caught sight of Alvarez coming out of that storage room brought out the anger in him. No one was going to get the best of Ryan O'Reily.

"I let Keller fool me, man, that's my lookout, not yours." He paused, not sure if he should say this, but he was positive that Keller was using Alvarez just as much as he was manipulating Ryan, and he deserved the heads up.

"I'm just warning you to keep your eyes open, okay? Cause once I figure out what he's doing, I'm gonna have to do something about it, and if you're in the way, you might get hurt."

Alvarez nodded. "I get that. You've got to protect yourself and your brother. Thanks for the warning."

Ryan nodded, but before he could say anything else, Alvarez turned and was gone, the door swinging closed behind him. Ryan watched him walk away, then grabbed that damned tennis ball and hid it at the bottom of his trunk before placing his shirt on top with a grin.
Once he'd double checked to see if Cyril was okay, he jumped up onto his bunk again, but instead of going back to his magazine, Ryan found himself thinking about Miguel Alvarez and wondering how he managed to get himself into these kinds of situations. Alvarez was going to be sparing with Cyril. That meant he'd be spending more time with the man than he really felt comfortable with right now.

The image of Alvarez standing in that hallway, a look of pleasure mixed with pain on his face as Keller played with his abused nipple pushed its way into his brain and he cursed. Damn that Keller. He hadn't recognized it at the time, but Ryan had stepped right into his trap, although he still wasn't sure what the bastard intended to get out of it. He'd have to watch Keller even closer than usual for now.

Ryan opened up his travel magazine and thought of all the places he could be rather than here in Oz. One article in particular caught his attention. The Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean - "one of the world's most beautiful talcum powder beaches, swaying palm trees and lush tropical forest, the Seychelles provide a rare taste of paradise." Nice. He lost himself in the article, and forgot about Oz for a few rare moments of peace.

The hacks packed the last of Barlog's belongings into a bag, and Toby sat on the top bunk watching them work. From Chris' spot at a table in the quad, he could see how tense Toby was, but wasn't sure if that was from the fact that there were hacks in his pod, or something else. He was probably feeling guilty over Barlog's death, but that hadn't been his fault. Barlog was the one who'd crawled into bed with the Feds. He'd carved his own gravestone, Toby wasn't to blame for that.

The fact that Toby came to him about Barlog's betrayal had changed things, though. Chris could see major cracks in the ice that surrounded Toby's attitude toward Chris. There was definitely a thaw going on, and if he kept at it, he could be back in Toby's good graces within a week or two. It was too early at the moment, but he was eyeing that bunk under Toby's. It would be his again soon, he'd see to that. Things were definitely looking up.

But that meant he needed to move things along with O'Reily. He'd seen some major strides in Operation Distraction just the day before, but he couldn't take a chance on Toby ferreting out anything about him and Alvarez. He needed to get Alvarez established firmly at O'Reily's feet before he could relax about that situation. He didn't think that would take too long, though. He'd seen the way Alvarez had glanced at O'Reily when he'd handed him his shirt. He'd been grateful for more than just the loan of a fucking wifebeater. O'Reily had stood up for him, and that gratitude played into Chris' hands perfectly.

He hadn't been sure if O'Reily would take the bait. O'Reily was far too concerned about face - thinking that the least little fault in his mask would eventually condemn him to pragdom. But they lived in a prison, for Christ's sake - a place where sex was one of the few options for escape from the boredom of their lives. O'Reily would have figured it out eventually, but Chris didn't have time for him to do that. He was going to have to teach O'Reily a few facts of life, and he had the perfect tool for the job.

And if he managed this right, Chris would still have access to Alvarez, just in case he needed a little relief himself. His and Toby's relationship had never been the most stable one. They both had fiery tempers, and were good at holding grudges. There was always the chance they'd be on the outs again at some point - it was wise to have a back-up plan in place. Once he got Alvarez sucking O'Reily's cock, he had a feeling O'Reily would be grateful enough to lend him the use of the boy from time to time, if he needed him. He'd never cheat on Toby, but if they weren't together, what he did on his own time was his own business, right? After all, it wasn't like it was love - it
was just fucking.
Chapter 4

Chris slipped inside the storage room, looking around curiously. O'Reily was leaning up against the end of an aisle of paper goods, one foot bouncing nervously against the floor. He didn't wait long to break the silence.

"Well? I'm here, K-Boy. So are you. What do you want? I got things to do - I haven't got all day."

Chris shrugged, moving around the room, making sure the space would work for what he had in mind. "So you're sure this room is safe? It seems really well-stocked to be as deserted as you say."

"Yeah, well, you're gonna have to trust me on this one. No one uses this room on Thursdays; we're safe here as long as we don't mess with things. We screw around with the supplies - they get a guard to check up when the cleaners aren't around. So keep your hands off the product, and we'll be fine."

Chris smirked. "Don't worry; paper towels don't do a thing for me, so that's not likely to be a problem." O'Reily crossed the room to stand in front of Chris.

"So what is it that's so urgent? I got no interest in spending any more time with you than I have to."

Chris raised one eyebrow at O'Reily's stance. He was looking for trouble with that attitude and Chris had to rein himself in to avoid pushing the tension up another notch by crowding O'Reily back. But he needed to get this done quickly, the timing was important. So he stepped back, remaining as unfrontational as possible, his hands raised to show he wasn't going to fight.

"You're still upset about the other day?"

O'Reily frowned at him, "Why shouldn't I be? You set me up for that one. You planned that from the beginning, and I don't like being manipulated."

Chris narrowed his eyes at O'Reily. "Who does? But you should know all about that, shouldn't you, being a master at manipulation yourself. I didn't plan what happened. Well, not from the beginning, anyway. Remember, you're the one that started the ball rolling."

O'Reily looked disgusted, but Chris was pretty sure he was disgusted with himself, not Chris. "What I can't figure out is why. You wanted me to step in and defend Alvarez. What the hell was that all about? Does it have something to do with Barlog turning up dead yesterday?"

Chris shook his head, turning away abruptly. "Barlog got in over his head. That has nothing to do with you, or Beecher."

"Oh come on. He got in between you and Beecher, and now he's dead. You need to be more careful about that; Beecher's sure to make that connection, just like he made the last two."

"Yeah, well that's not a problem you need to worry about. Ronnie...well, he got in bed with the wrong people. That was his own mistake, and he paid the price."

Chris could see the moment when O'Reily made his own connection to something; his eyes narrowed shrewdly, and he grinned. "He was making a deal with the Feds, wasn't he? Damn. I thought he was like a brother to you or something. Bad break, man. Bad break."

"Now where did you get an idea like that?" Damn. That man was dangerous, sometimes. His mind
just never quit.

"Howell cornered me in the kitchen yesterday. But she took me someplace different this time. Said she didn't feel comfortable fucking in the visitor's bathroom with the feds in the next room over."

Chris had to laugh at that. "Jesus, O'Reily. You're a perceptive motherfucker, you know that?"

O'Reily shrugged. "You've gotta stay on your toes in a place like this, ya know?"

"So you're still fucking Howell, huh? I thought that was over." This might affect his plans, Chris didn't like it when things got complicated.

O'Reily started pacing, his nervous energy beginning to make sense to Chris; he was worried about more than the incident with Alvarez. "Yeah, tell me about it. Bitch won't leave me alone. She keeps threatening Cyril. Fucking cunt."

"She threatened Cyril? What, is she gonna put him in the Hole if you don't put out or something?"

"Nah, worse than that. She said if I don't fuck her, she'll have to find someone else, and that Cyril was next on her list. She kept asking about him yesterday. Does he like brunettes? Did he have a girlfriend before his accident? Shit like that. It was creepy." He went off into a string of muttered curses that Chris ignored. Damn. She was one twisted bitch. He had to admire her methods, and Chris' luck was in, because she was pushing O'Reily right into his hands. O'Reily would never give up his brother to her. He was trapped, and he hated that.

He whistled. "What a twisted fuck! There's just something wrong with that woman."

"There is. And I have to admit, she's not that good a fuck. I mean she's got a pussy, so I'm not complaining. Well, okay, I am, but you know what I mean. I've had better - let's leave it at that, alright?"

There was a flurry of knocks at the door: three, then two, then three again. Damn. Alvarez was early. He moved to the door, shaking his head at O'Reily. "It's okay. It's Alvarez."

"What?" O'Reily did not sound happy.

Alvarez slipped inside the door, stopping with surprise when he saw O'Reily. He glanced back at Chris, mouth open to speak. Chris raised his eyebrow in warning and Alvarez dropped his gaze to the tile floor, standing quietly by the door.

"What the fuck is he doing here?" O'Reily kept his voice low, practically hissing in his anger.

Alvarez tensed, but didn't move, his eyes darting around the room, not looking either of them in the face. "I can go."

Chris put his hand out, holding the door closed. "You're not going anywhere. We've got things to discuss." He turned to O'Reily. "Chill the fuck out. I need to talk to both of you."

"I don't trust you, Keller, especially not after the other day. You were playing both of us. I know you have something in mind, and I'm not buying it, whatever it is. Got it?"

Chris shrugged. "I'm not selling anything. I think we could have an arrangement that would benefit us all. All I want is for you to think about it."
O'Reily's eyes flicked back and forth between Chris and Alvarez. "What possible arrangement could the three of us have that would benefit me?"

"Look, right now we all are at a disadvantage. Schillinger is up to something with this whole interaction bullshit, and until I figure it out I could use a couple extra sets of eyes to help me keep Beecher safe. Alvarez is having trouble with Hernandez and the Warden is breathing down his neck. And you - well, let's just say you could use some help keeping a certain hack off both yours and Cyril's asses."

O'Reily glared at him, but Chris looked back blandly, not wanting to antagonize him at this point. He crossed into the center of the room, closer to O'Reily, trying to seem as sincere as possible.

"Think about it O'Reily. If Howell gets her mitts on Cyril, he'll be fucked up for a long time. I know you don't want that."

"Shut the fuck up."

Alvarez spoke up, obviously surprised into speaking, despite Chris' orders. "Howell is going after Cyril? What the fuck for?"

O'Reily looked disgusted. "She's a sick bitch, what else would you expect from her? Fucking cunt. I can handle her, I don't need you two."

"Yes you do, O'Reily. You can't be everywhere. Look what happened just this week in the phone room. Cyril was minding his own business, and that biker fucked with him. You need help to take care of Cyril. We're your best bet. If the three of us can keep an eye on each other's backs, we're all better off."

O'Reily paused, and Chris could tell he was tempted. He could use the back up, especially with this new threat from Howell. He'd say yes, Chris was sure of it.

Chris turned his back on O'Reily, crossing to the door, and standing in front of Alvarez, who looked directly into his eyes as if searching for something - the first trace of hope Chris had seen in Alvarez since he'd gotten out of Solitary. He put his hand on Alvarez' neck, cupping his palm around Alvarez' nape and squeezing, causing him to take a deep breath, his eyes falling half-closed. It was easy to get Alvarez to fall into this behavior, but he'd never done it with someone else in the room, so Chris was pleased with Alvarez' response.

Chris smiled. "Just the three of us." He rubbed his thumb under Alvarez' ear, and grinned as he leaned into the caress, his eyes closing the rest of the way. "And with Alvarez around, we'll never be lonely." Alvarez' eyes flew open at that, and Chris motioned with his head to O'Reily, who stood staring at the two of them with his mouth open.

"I know you're not talking about sex, Keller, because I don't do that shit, and you know it."

Chris turned to face him, dragging Alvarez around in front of him. He pressed his chest against Alvarez' back, his hand under Alvarez' sweatshirt, rubbing across his abdomen, the other holding tight across his chest. Chris scraped his teeth across the nape of Alvarez' neck and he gasped, arching into Chris' hands. O'Reily's eyes jerked down to follow Chris' hand as he rubbed across Alvarez' belly, so he slid his fingers under the waistline of Alvarez' pants, then looked up at O'Reily with a smirk.

"Oh, that's right. You've got Howell, don't you? I'm sure she'll take good care of you. I can't wait until the first time she fucks you with that billy club of hers. I'm sure you'll just love that."
"Go to hell. I'm the one doing the fucking, not her."

"For now. How long before she starts to get as bored with you as you are with her? She's a sick bitch. How much you want to bet you end up taking the thick end of that club before she's done with you? Damn. I'd pay good money to see that."

O'Reily's eyes smoldered as he stepped up to Chris, stopping only a foot away from Alvarez. Alvarez moved as if he wanted to get away, but Chris held him tightly, whispering into his ear. "You're not going anywhere. You've got a job to do." Alvarez stopped moving, but his body stayed tensed, as if for a fight, his breathing harsh and fast.

"At least with Alvarez, you know you'll be the one doing the fucking. And let me tell you, O'Reily, he gives one hell of an enthusiastic blow job. You can fuck his mouth as hard as you want, and he won't complain. He'll just suck you in and hold on for the ride." He reached down, his hand sliding under Alvarez' pants to squeeze his cock hard, making him groan as his head fell back onto Chris' shoulder.

O'Reily took a step back, his anger transforming into shock and horrified fascination as he watched what Chris was doing. Alvarez was panting now, his head rolling across Chris' shoulder as he moaned "Please, please..." Chris didn't know if he was pleading for more, or for Chris to stop, but he had no intention of stopping at this point. He was so close to getting what he wanted.

He bit hard at Alvarez' neck, sucking the blood to the surface and making Alvarez moan and arch his back, his hips pumping his cock into Chris' hand. Chris raised his head, grinning, then pushed his knee into the back of Alvarez'. When his knee gave way to the pressure of Chris', Alvarez collapsed to the floor, his face directly in front of O'Reily's fly, which even Chris could tell was distended with his hard-on. He ran his hands through Alvarez' hair. "That's it, boy. Suck his cock."

O'Reily stood woodenly, his face pale with shock, but Chris smiled when he didn't step back from Alvarez' hands, as he ran them up O'Reily's thighs to fumble with the button and zipper. Alvarez was obviously uncertain, his hands trembling as they pulled O'Reily's pants so that they slid down to his feet, but he didn't stop, boxers falling down next, and O'Reily stood there, his breath harsh, his half-hard cock pointing at Alvarez' face.

He blinked suddenly and took a step back when Alvarez tried to pull him closer, and Chris laughed cruelly. "What? You're afraid of a blow job? Oh, this is classic. Ryan O'Reily doesn't know what to do when he's got a pair of lips pointed at his cock. I knew it. You don't know what to do when you're not the one doing the sucking. What a fucking pussy."

O'Reily stepped forward threateningly, his fist coming up as if to punch Chris in the face, but before he could do anything, Alvarez took O'Reily's cock into his mouth, and he froze as Alvarez started to suck.

"Oh, fuck!" The look of surprise on O'Reily's face melted into pleasure, and Chris smiled, seeing another piece of his plan slip into place. He wrapped his hands around Alvarez' neck and jaw, so he could feel the movements of Alvarez' throat as he swallowed, the way his tongue moved as he swirled it around the cock head, his cheeks stretching as he tried to take in more of O'Reily's cock.

"That's right, Alvarez. Good boy. Pump your fist, yeah, that's right." Chris watched as O'Reily's eyes slid half-way shut. He fought his smirk when O'Reily widened his stance, giving Alvarez more room to rub his balls, squeezing them and running his fingers over them. O'Reily's hands came up and wrapped around Alvarez' skull, holding on as Alvarez started bobbing his head and sucking. O'Reily's low moan made Chris' cock ache, but he knew that he needed to move carefully. If he stepped in now, he might upset the balance. O'Reily was too skittish over the whole sex with a
man thing and he wasn't ready for more just yet.

So Chris stepped back, leaned against the door and watched as Alvarez showed O'Reily what he'd been taught. O'Reily's suspicious eyes never left Chris', and Chris had to admit that was pretty damned impressive. Alvarez might not be that experienced at giving head yet, but he was very enthusiastic. It had to be difficult to concentrate like that with those lips wrapped around your cock head. Chris trailed one hand down his chest while he watched, licking his lips and pressing his other palm against his cock, and O'Reily's eyes followed. Chris smirked. This whole thing was running so smoothly and so closely to his plan - like a well oiled machine.

O'Reily's fingers clenched tighter around Alvarez' skull, and his hips pumped once, experimentally. Chris watched carefully. Alvarez had only been face fucked once; Chris wasn't sure how well he'd remember his lessons. "That's right, O'Reily. Fuck his face. He can't deep throat you yet, but he knows what to do if you start thrusting. Do it. Fuck his mouth!"

O'Reily grunted, hesitantly thrusting his hips forward a couple of times, but Alvarez caught on right away. He gripped O'Reily's hip with the hand that wasn't wrapped around the bottom of O'Reily's cock and when O'Reily pumped his hips again, he pulled him forward, encouraging his thrust. O'Reily's eyes widened, and he gasped.

"Fuck!"

Chris laughed softly and squeezed his cock through his pants as he watched. O'Reily started pumping steadily into Alvarez' mouth, talking as he got more and more caught up.

"Yeah. Yeah. Fuck, that's good!" He lowered his head, his eyes on Alvarez now. Chris thought he might be checking his breathing, making sure Alvarez wasn't choking or something. Of course, Alvarez was breathing heavily through his nose by now, but that wasn't important. As long as he wasn't fighting O'Reily, Chris didn't see what the problem was.

But Alvarez seemed to be keeping up with O'Reily's thrusts. O'Reily had switched to grinding his hips like he was pushing his way into a pussy, moaning low in his throat. Chris was getting horny as hell; O'Reily knew how to move that ass of his. Too bad he had plans that didn't involve Ryan O'Reily. He eased around a little and watched from the side. It was a better view than from the back of Alvarez' head.

O'Reily gripped Alvarez' face with both hands, his fingers stretching from his jaw to his temples. He spoke again, his voice low and kind of seductive, and a little breathy from his efforts. "God, his mouth is so hot. Suck on it. Yeah, like that. Use your tongue. Good. Good." Chris nodded, pleased with the way O'Reily naturally took Alvarez in hand, and the way Alvarez responded to him. Of course, none of this would have been possible without Chris softening them both up beforehand, but still, it was very encouraging.

While he'd watched, O'Reily's thrusts had taken on a sense of urgency, his face contorting. Chris squeezed his cock harshly to bring himself back into the moment. He had to watch his timing, or O'Reily would slip away from him before the finale. O'Reily's breath was harsh, and his grip on Alvarez' face was fierce, his fingers whitened with his intensity. Alvarez hung in his grip, letting O'Reily take control, exactly the way Keller had taught him. What a good boy he was.

He could hear the sounds Alvarez was making in the back of his throat, grunting softly with each thrust, but Chris could tell his cock was hard enough that it was practically ripping the zipper right out of his pants, so Chris knew he was fine. He hoped Alvarez had remembered Chris' instructions, or he was going to be hurting in a few minutes, but it would be his own fault if he did. He'd been warned.
O'Reily was about to blow his load from the noises he was making - harsh puffs of air and strangled groans that made Keller's cock twinge. Soon, now. He thrust once more and held Alvarez there, freezing with a gasp. He closed his eyes before his muffled shout let Chris know it was time to move.

Chris was unzipped and had his cock out before O'Reily was even through, slipping the condom out of his pocket where he'd had it ready for just this moment, and rolling it on his cock. As soon as O'Reily's hands loosened and Alvarez pulled back, letting O'Reily's cock slip from his mouth, Chris was on him. He pulled Alvarez to his feet, still gasping and shuddering and trying to catch his breath. He pulled Alvarez around, face first into the door, and had him unzipped and his pants down around his knees before O'Reily had a chance to open his eyes.

Alvarez had followed Chris' orders perfectly. He wasn't wearing underwear, and when Chris kicked his feet apart and shoved his cock into Alvarez with absolutely no warning, he was very pleased to note the slick feel of a well lubed asshole surrounding his cock. Alvarez grunted heavily, his hands pushing back against the door, his stance widening as he tried to adjust to Chris' thrusts. Chris was in heaven. He would never have admitted this to O'Reily, but it had been months since he'd fucked another man, and Alvarez was tight and hot and everything he could have wanted.

He glanced to the side to see O'Reily staring them, his mouth open in shock. Oh yeah, two times today he'd put that look on O'Reily's face. He wasn't going to last long with all this stimulation, Chris loved an audience. Alvarez was grasping at the door, his fingers white from the pressure, and he pushed back against Chris' thrusts, driving him closer to the edge. He finally realized Alvarez was begging him, "Please, please, please..." over and over, so he reached around to cover his mouth, and then gave Alvarez permission.

He spoke loudly enough that O'Reily could hear. "Come!" Then he tilted his head to the side and bit into the back of Alvarez' neck, sinking his teeth in far enough to break the skin. He tasted the sharp copper tang of blood as Alvarez stiffened and jerked against the door, and Chris pushed farther into him, stroking fiercely through Alvarez' orgasm, before shuddering into his own.

When he felt strong enough to move, he took a step back, slipping out of Alvarez' heat, and Alvarez let his knees buckle and collapsed onto the floor, leaning against the door frame. It was completely silent in the room, except for their breathing, and Chris smiled when he realized that he and Alvarez were not the only ones still breathing heavily. O'Reily had found a case stack of floor cleaner and sat on it, staring at him as Chris calmly tucked himself in, unable to hide the smirk on his face.

He turned back to Alvarez, who seemed to have fared better this time around. Of course, Chris had fucked Alvarez' face much more harshly than O'Reily had, there were only a few drops of come on Alvarez' shirt, this time. He glanced at the door and back at Alvarez.

"Clean up your mess."

Alvarez struggled up to his knees and started licking his come off the door and Chris nodded his approval. He dropped the used condom in the trash and walked over to stand in front of O'Reily, making sure he didn't block the man's view of Alvarez' clean up efforts. "I told you, O'Reily." O'Reily jerked his eyes away from Alvarez, blinking up at Chris before standing, obviously not wanting to be at that kind of height disadvantage. "We make a good team."

Chris smoothed his shirt down, making sure he was clean and neat before crossing to Alvarez and crouching down next to him. He ran his thumb along Alvarez' lower lip. "You did good today, Alvarez. I'm proud of you." He smiled as Alvarez blushed and looked down, not able to meet his
eyes. Then he stood, opened the door and walked out, leaving the two alone in his wake. Oh yes. He was very pleased with how things had gone today. He wasn't going to be needed for much longer. And then, he could finally relax and stop worrying about Ryan O'Reily's misplaced interest in Toby.

Alvarez struggled with his pants. One leg had slipped off and the rubber on the sole of his sneaker was catching at the cloth as he cursed at it under his breath, pulling and tugging. Ryan hadn't realized he'd been staring until Alvarez glanced up at him, his eyes flicking back to the floor immediately, his face flushed with embarrassment. He reached for the doorknob, and Ryan realized he'd have to say something if he wanted Alvarez to stay in the room. Well, maybe wanted was too strong a word, but they needed to talk, so he spoke up before Alvarez could escape.

"Wait, Alvarez."

He hesitated, his hand on the knob. "I got nothing to say to you right now, O'Reily." His voice was low, and full of emotion.

"Well, I think you're wrong about that. We need to talk about Keller. And now's as good a time as any. Besides...you can't go out there like that. Your neck's bleeding."

Alvarez reached up gingerly to touch the wound, cursing when his fingers came away bloody. "Fucking Keller. He likes to see me struggle to find a way to cover up his marks."

Ryan laughed as he crossed over to the sink. "Like some dog, marking his territory." He turned around with paper towels in his hand, quick to derail that train of thought. "Not that I think you're his... I mean...you don't belong to him..." His sentence trailed away at the end as Alvarez looked up at him.

"I don't? You sure about that? He sure seems to think so." He grabbed the towels from Ryan's hand, pressing them up against the back of his neck, where the wound was bleeding sluggishly. "He didn't ask me if I wanted to suck your cock, did he? He just passed me around like a bottle of cheap wine." Ryan could hear the bitterness in Alvarez' voice. He turned back to the sink again, wetting some towels with cool water.

"And what do you think? Do you want to belong to Keller?" Ryan swallowed harshly. He couldn't imagine why anyone would want to be treated the way he'd seen Keller treat Alvarez, but Ryan had to admit, he kept coming back for more. He turned back to face Alvarez, who was staring at him with a puzzled frown. "Do you like the way he treats you?"

"What the fuck do you care how he treats me, as long as you get what you want? I do what I have to do, to get what I need. Whether I like it or not don't matter in the long run. I do what I have to do, and that's all there is to it."

Alvarez was rubbing fiercely at the bite, his hand shaking, and Ryan stepped up to him, pulling his hand away. "Here, you're smearing it all over the place. Let me." Alvarez watched him suspiciously as he cleaned up the blood. When Ryan moved to wipe the dried come off his chin, Alvarez jerked back, but Ryan held his face still and wiped it clean.

"Why you being so nice to me? I ain't Cyril."

Ryan laughed. "Yeah, I think I kind of figured that one out." He had no clue why he was acting the way he was, he just knew it felt right, but since he wasn't about to say that to Alvarez, he joked, nervously. "Well, since I'm the one that messed your face up, I should probably be the one to clean
"It off, right?"

"If you say so."

"I say so." He took one last look at the teeth marks on Alvarez' neck. They weren't that bad, once the blood was gone. It didn't look nearly as painful as that bite around his nipple had the other day. He stepped back, tossing the towels in the trash. "I guess that's not so bad. It's mostly in the hairline. If you wear that bandanna you usually have on, chances are no one will notice it."

"I'll do that."

Ryan stepped back to the case stack he'd been sitting on before, when he'd watched Keller fuck Alvarez into the door. He shook his head to clear it of that image, and sat down, his eyes focused on Alvarez. "We have to decide what to do about Keller."

Alvarez narrowed his eyes, the suspicion from earlier back full force. "What do you mean by that? You don't want to work with him? Is that what you're saying? You don't trust him, do you?"

Ryan laughed. "Of course not. And neither should you. If he'd treat you the way he did the other day, throwing you to the wolves like that...those bastards in El Norte are ruthless. They'll take you down at the least sign of weakness. If he could do that, he's not trustworthy, and you know it."

"But he only did that to get your attention. You told me that yourself. He wanted you to come to my defense, and now we know why. He was setting us up for this whole thing - this arrangement he's got in mind. He wanted you to feel sorry for me, right? So you'd agree to work with us."

Alvarez was pacing back and forth across the floor, as he thought his way through the tangle of Keller's actions. What amazed O'Reily was that Alvarez was defending Keller, even after the way the bastard treated him. Was Alvarez blind enough to believe that Keller would do right by him, even if it interfered with his plans?

"Yeah, but what if I hadn't bit? What if I hadn't been there waiting for you to come out? Or if I'd let you go out there just the way you were. He was playing the odds, and he won. But do you think he'd have stopped you if I hadn't said anything? Or would he have just watched you go, sent you to the wolves with a smile on his face?"

Alvarez stood frozen in the middle of the floor, his face pale and disturbed. "He wouldn't - he wouldn't do that. Would he?"

Ryan shrugged. "You know him better than me. All I'm saying is stay on your toes, man. Don't let him blind you to who and what he is. His number one concern is not you, and it never will be."

Alvarez crossed to the wall, sliding down to the floor in a dejected heap. "I know. Beecher. It's always been Beecher, and it always will be. I've know that from the start."

O'Reily nodded. "He'll do whatever it takes to get back together with Beecher, and if you're in the way, he'll toss you aside like yesterday's trash. You play whatever games you want with Keller, but if you're smart you'll remember that you can't trust him any farther than you can throw him."

"That goes for you, too, though, don't it? I can't trust you, either. So why the hell should I go along with this arrangement, then? If I can't trust either of you?"

"You're already committed to Keller. He'll watch your back, as long as it doesn't interfere with his goals, and so will I. I can keep an eye on Keller for you, and you can do the same for me. It's not perfect, I know. But still, it's better than what we've got right now, which is pretty much nothing."
"But I thought you had an agreement with Keller, too - I mean before now. That's the idea I got from him."

Ryan got up and crossed to the sink, bent over and splashed some water on his face before answering. "Yeah, well. That was a temporary thing." He used some towels to wipe his face before turning back to Alvarez, tossing the towels under the sink. "We worked together, and we got some stuff done, but that was it, and I think we've be feeling our way through, trying to figure out what to do now. This is different; it has nothing to do with that."

"So he obviously wants to keep you around, and that's good. Cause you said it yourself, he's one mean motherfucker. Having him on your side can't hurt, right? That's what this has all been about, then. Trying to convince you to partner up with him again."

Ryan looked up at that, surprised. "He wants us both, not just me."

Alvarez shook his head, and looked back down at his hands, playing with a fold in his pants. "No. I'm just the icing on the cake. He don't think of me that way. I'm just here to lure you in, a warm hole to fuck." The bitterness in Alvarez' voice surprised Ryan. He'd thought that was what Alvarez wanted to be, but obviously not.

Still, the idea that Keller wanted Ryan to fuck Alvarez pissed him off, and he spoke sharply. "I told you before. I don't fuck guys."

Miguel looked up then, his eyes dark and unreadable, but he stared back defiantly. "You fucked my mouth just fine, O'Reily."

Ryan looked down at the floor, unable to meet Alvarez' eyes. He had fucked Alvarez' face, and he was right, he'd liked it. What did that make him, he wondered. When he finally spoke again, Alvarez' voice was lighter, like he was fine with the place Keller had in mind for him, despite the fact that Ryan was now convinced it was a lie. "But that's cool. I'll do whatever you want me to."

"Whatever Keller wants you to." Ryan couldn't let that slip by him.

"Yeah well, at least he thinks I'm good for something." Alvarez couldn't hide the self-contempt in his voice.

He crossed over and crouched down in front of Alvarez, willing him to believe what Ryan had to say. "You're wrong about that." It was important that he believe this. "He thinks you're strong. He told me so himself."

"Bullshit."

"No, it's true." He got up and started pacing in front of Alvarez. "We talked about it before, about how important it was for him to have someone who was strong beneath him - that there's no big deal in dominating someone who's weak. What turned him on was dominating someone whose strength he respected."

Alvarez looked up at Ryan, shocked. "He said that?"

"That's why I was so pissed off about the whole thing. He said he respected you, but he was treating you like you were disposable. If he could do that with you, how could I trust him at my back?"
Alvarez looked confused. "But he had a plan."

"Yeah, I know." Ryan went down onto one knee to make sure Alvarez was looking at him for this. "But I'll feel better with you watching both of us, okay? That's what I need you for. If I'm going to do this - I need you at my back, too."

Alvarez was cautious, but he looked directly into Ryan's face when he asked. "You trust me at your back?"

"Yeah, I do." Ryan held out his hand to Alvarez. "All right?"

Alvarez slowly extended his own until they clasped hands and shook. "Yeah. All right."

Ryan awoke, startled and disoriented - with the clear memory of his last dream and the way Alvarez's hot mouth surrounded his cock as Ryan fucked his face. He stared at the ceiling of his pod, the dim light that never went away making everything shadowy and unsettling. Jesus. He was hard as a fucking rock.

He palmed his cock through his boxers and tried to concentrate on Shanon's mouth on him, or maybe that blond chick who liked to hang out under the bleachers at the basketball games back in high school. She gave great head. He'd always wanted to fuck her, but she refused to give up her pussy, although she was willing to suck Ryan off in exchange for a couple of joints. He couldn't think of her name, and when he tried to think of how she'd sucked him dry, all he could think of was Alvarez' mouth.

Thinking of Howell didn't help any. She may like to brag about her talents, but sucking cock wasn't one of them. Hell, she was better than no mouth at all, that was true, but when he compared her to Alvarez, she was sadly lacking. Maybe not in experience, but Alvarez made up for that in enthusiasm. Howell did it as a means to an end, but Alvarez - damn, he put his heart and soul into it. Like it was important to him that Ryan get as much pleasure as possible before he came. And he saw when Keller pushed Alvarez' pants down, right before the bastard fucked him up against the door; he'd been as hard as Ryan was right now. Alvarez got hard sucking Ryan's cock, and that fact just blew Ryan the fuck away.

He realized he was thinking about Alvarez again, so finally he just gave up and focused on the heat of his mouth, and the way he clutched Ryan's thighs when he fucked Alvarez' face. Ryan's cock surged under his palm, and he reached into his boxers and pulled himself out. He sighed. Looked like he wasn't getting back to sleep any time soon. So he spit in his hand and started stroking his cock, remembering how Alvarez' tongue circled the head, and licked into the slit before sucking him in deep. He'd moaned as Ryan ground into his mouth and demanded that Miguel suck harder; moaned as if he liked it when Ryan held onto his head so tightly his fingers had turned white in Alvarez' black hair.

Ryan bit his lip when he came, not wanting to wake up Cyril. He couldn't deal with Cyril right now. Ryan wiped his hands off on his sheet, and turned over, keeping his mind carefully blank. A mouth was a mouth - it didn't matter who it was attached to, right?
Chapter 5

Ryan heard the sound of someone working the lock on his storage room door, and cursed silently. He quickly turned off the light and stepped behind the door, pissed off at whoever was stopping him from taking his badly needed yank break. When the shadowed figure slipped inside, Ryan pushed the door closed behind him, startling Alvarez into a flurry of Spanish curses, at least a few of which Ryan actually recognized.

"¡Qué chingados te pasa?! ¡Maldita sea! ¡Hijo de puta!"

Ryan snapped the light on, laughing quietly at the shocked look on Alvarez' face, his finger to his lips to remind him to keep quiet. "I'm not a motherfucker, Alvarez, so shut the fuck up. What the hell are you doing here, anyway? Aren't you supposed to be on work detail right now?"

"Yeah, well, I needed a little peace and quiet, man - I got problems to work out. I thought this place would be deserted this time of the day." It was easy to tell he was upset, Alvarez' face was pale and his hands shook as he grabbed for the door handle. "I'll just find someplace else, okay?"

Ryan held the door closed, "Whoa. Something's wrong. What's up?"

Alvarez sighed, taking a step into the room, looking around almost wistfully. Ryan knew why he'd come here. Keller had told him about this room. It was the room Keller and Alvarez had spent most of their time in, the room Keller had seduced Alvarez in, before Keller and Beecher got back together. That was why Ryan was here, too. Keller had told him it was usually empty at this time of the day.

Alvarez turned back to Ryan, his hands stuffed in his pockets. "I'm in trouble, O'Reily. Glynn wants me to snitch on El Norte, and I told him I would, because I couldn't sit in that fucking cell any longer, you know? Not after being out. So I went to Hernandez and asked to get back in, and he said yeah, but only if I airholed Redding."

"Oh shit." Ryan slid down to the floor and settled up against the door. "He set you up, man. If you do that, you'll be back in Solitary or you'll be dead. You can't do that, Alvarez."

"I know that. I know. But Glynn called me into his office just now, and I told him what I could, but he said that I wasn't telling him anything he didn't already know, and that if I don't have something new for him by next Monday, he's putting me back in Solitary." He was pacing in the small amount of free space available, his movements jerky and uncoordinated. "I can't go back to Solitary, O'Reily. I'll go loco in there. What am I gonna do?"

The next time his pacing brought him close to Ryan, he grabbed that stupid shirt Alvarez had hanging out of his back pocket and pulled him to a stop, grabbing his arm and pulling him down to sit on the cool tile floor. "Hey. Don't panic now. We'll figure something out, okay? You got me and Keller on your side now, right? It's only Tuesday - we got a week, we'll think of something."

"I thought about going to Hernandez, telling him I'd be like a double agent for him or something - you know, feed Glynn false information and shit?"

Ryan shook his head. "Don't go there, man. If he'd set you up like this, he'd feed you to Glynn just as soon as look at you." Alvarez frowned, but Ryan looked him in the eye and promised him. "We'll take care of this. Give me some time, I'll think of something. You don't do anything yet, okay?" He took in Alvarez' closed off face. "Okay? Tell me you won't do anything until I've had a
chance to think things through."

Alvarez nodded. "Alright. I'll wait until Sunday. If we can't come up with something by then..."

Ryan interrupted him. "Yeah, well, don't worry. We'll figure something out."

Alvarez sighed heavily, and nodded. "Okay."

"Now you go on back to work, I got things I have to take care of."

"I can't go back, they'll know I was skipping out. I was going to just wait here until time to go back to Em City. I'll just sit here, O'Reily, I won't be in the way or nothing."

Ryan sighed. "Shit. It's not that easy, man."

"Why? What's going on?"

"I fucked up."

"What happened?"

"Howell pulled me out of Em City, just before I was supposed to leave for supper detail, you know?"

Alvarez grinned, "Oh yeah? So you got yourself a piece of ass, huh?"

Ryan rolled his eyes. "If only it was that easy."

"Why the fuck not? Is she still going on about Cyril?"

"That's exactly what happened. Now it was Ryan who couldn't sit still. He stood up and paced, his anger and frustration building. "We're kissing and she's feeling me up, getting me all hot and bothered, then just as I'm slipping inside her the fucking bitch starts going on and on about Cyril, and how she loves 'em all tall and buff, and how she'd be good to him, that I should trust her not to treat him wrong. I was so pissed off, Alvarez. She just wouldn't let it drop, you know? I finally just lost my temper. And I might have accidentally... Shit. I called her a freak."

At the sound of muffled laughter, Ryan spun around, staring wild eyed at Alvarez, who was lying on the floor, snorting his laughter into his hand. The sight was just so strange, and at such odds with the way Alvarez had been acting since he'd been back in Em City, that it shocked Ryan right out of his anger, and he rolled his eyes, leaning back against the metal side of a shelving unit, grinning at the man rolling in laughter on the floor.

"Oh yeah. Laugh at the man with blue balls, here. Thanks Alvarez. That's just what I need."

Alvarez opened teary eyes, and grinned up at him. "I'm sorry man. I just can't help it. That's the funniest thing I've heard in a long time." He sighed and wiped his eyes. "Shit, I needed that, man."

"Yeah, well, I guess it might be funny, if I weren't so worried about Cyril. I don't know what she's going to do now, but after the way fucking Schillinger raped him, I don't think he's going to take too kindly to rough treatment, you know? He still has nightmares over that. He'll freak out, and when he does that, he starts punching. I had enough trouble keeping him out of Connolly the last time, I'm not sure I can keep this up much longer."

Alvarez rolled up onto his knees, and reached out to grab Ryan's arm. "Hey, we'll take care of him, right? We'll just make sure one of us is always with him. When you have business to do, you let me
know, and I'll watch him. We'll take care of it - just like you're going to take care of me. We got an arrangement, remember? We'll take care of it together."

"Yeah. Cool. Thanks, man."

"That's alright. That's what we do, right?" Alvarez knee walked a step closer to Ryan and ran his hand down his arm. "That's why you're in here, huh?" Alvarez slid his hands over Ryan's thighs, rubbing up and down the tight muscles. "You were looking for a place to get rid of that boner you've got there, weren't you?"

Ryan's breath caught as he realized what Alvarez was doing, and he reached down to stop his hand's movement. "Hey, you don't have to do that, Alvarez. That's not part of my agreement."

Alvarez shrugged. "I don't mind, man."

Ryan moved across the room, putting his back to the door to get away from Alvarez' warm hands. "But I do, Alvarez. I don't do that shit, remember? I'm not a fag." He flushed then, remembering the way he'd clung to Alvarez' head while he fucked his face just two days ago. Then he realized what he was saying and glanced at Alvarez, who knelt there with his back to Ryan, not moving. "Sorry. I didn't mean it like it came out, okay? I just...I don't see how you can do that with another guy. Just the thought of it creeps me out."

"Yeah, I know." Alvarez turned around and sat on the floor, the shelf at his back, his eyes on the floor. "I was the same way at first. That first time Keller grabbed me and pushed me up against that door behind you and made me come in my pants for the first time ever in my life, I was totally freaked out. I couldn't deal with the fact that he'd made me come harder than I ever remembered coming, just by pushing me around and giving me a little pain."

He shrugged, and grinned shamed-faced, obviously embarrassed to be admitting this. "I like the pain. I know that sounds crazy, but I always have, as far back as I can remember. The thrill of danger, the charge of pissing off someone bigger than you and knowing that this is going to be intense...it just does something to me. It makes me feel...alive. When Keller took me in his hand and gave me that pain - it was the first thing I'd felt in a long time that wasn't despair or anger, and I could almost feel it changing me inside."

Ryan felt a little uncomfortable listening to this, but at the same time he was intrigued. When he thought about such things, which he'd been doing more and more of, since Keller had brought the whole thing up, he realized that having that kind of power over someone turned him on, more than he thought it should. The look he'd seen on Alvarez' face right before he'd sucked Ryan's cock had been fascinating mix of surrender and lust.

"But it was more than just the pain. He'd order me to kneel at his feet and I'd fight him. But he always won because inside, I wanted him to win. Inside, I needed to feel that there was someone stronger than me, that I could give up to, and let him carry all the anger and the responsibility. Let him be in charge for a while. I know that sounds crazy. I feel weak when I say things like that. Sometimes I think I really am loco, you know?"

Ryan interrupted, "No, that makes perfect sense. I read about that. Domination and submission. It's like you carry all the burdens inside you. You have to be the strong one, the one in charge. And sometimes that's too much for you, and you need somewhere you can let go of all that for a while, before you pick it back up again and keep going."

"Yeah! That's it. That's the way I feel. It's like I can't breathe with all that crushing down on me, and if I can set it down for a while, I can rest and get stronger so I can keep going. I grew up being
'jefe de la familia' - you know...the man of the house, 'cause both my papa and my grandpapa were here in Oz almost my whole life. I had to be strong and take care of things, and keep my family safe. I never had someone I could count on like that - someone who could be the strong one for a while, and let me rest.

"I know that there are women that do that same thing. I always looked for girls who were tough, who could throw a punch, or maybe even make me bleed, but it's hard to find a girl like that, at least one that doesn't want to get paid for it, and that just seemed wrong to me.

"When I escaped, there was this one woman, her name was Jessie. She picked me up on the highway, all alone - and she wasn't afraid of me or nothing. She took me to a motel, got me a hot shower and some food, then tied me to her bed and fucked my brains out for three whole days. She really liked that I was into the pain. I was covered with welts and bruises and every muscle in my body was so sore it ached. She was everything I ever thought I'd wanted."

Ryan whistled. "Damn, Alvarez." He thought he should be disturbed by what Alvarez was telling him, but the twinge in his cock told him otherwise. He resisted grabbing his cock and squeezing it, promising himself he'd take care of that soon. As soon as he could get rid of Alvarez.

"But even then..." Alvarez got up and moved around the room, like he couldn't stand to say this while he was facing Ryan. "I'd be flat on my back, and she'd be riding me like a bronco buster, and all I could think was that it would be better if she was heavier, so I could feel her weight pushing me down. I'd be eating her out and she'd be pulling at my hair and I'd wish her hands were bigger and stronger so she could force me just that much further.

"Then I came back and Keller trapped me in that room, and pushed me down onto my knees, and it hit me. I realized that was what I was missing. I need it to be a man. I need that extra tug in my stomach that says it's not just the pain; it's dropping all the bullshit at a man's feet that makes it work for me. So I don't know. I guess I am a puto - a fag. Whatever you want to call me. The names don't matter to me."

Alvarez shook his head. "Not like I'm gonna tell the vatos in El Norte that I like to suck cock or anything. That would be the last stupid thing I ever did." He turned back to face Ryan. "But I'm not going to fight it, either, when I have a chance to do something that brings me pleasure."

He crossed to where Ryan was leaning against the door and went back down on his knees. Ryan took a step back and ran into the door. Shit.

"I don't know why it makes a difference to you. A mouth is just a mouth, right? What the fuck do you care if it's a man's lips on your balls or a woman's? Maybe the hands wrapped around your cock are bigger than usual, but damn, O'Reily. You're in here for life. Are you telling me you're never going to let anyone touch you ever again, except maybe Howell? That's going to be a lonely life."

Alvarez ran his hands up O'Reily's thighs, rubbing the muscles and sliding his thumbs along the inside seams of his pants. He felt his thighs trembling under Alvarez' hands, but he couldn't move. Or maybe it was just that he really didn't want to. "And it ain't like you're the queer, man. You're not sucking anyone's cock. That's all on me."

Ryan took a deep breath and held it - not sure if he could say no to this. Not sure he wanted to. It was just hands, and a mouth. Lips. What did it matter? He wasn't a fag. He was just taking advantage of the resources available to him, right?

"Besides, you're hard already, and I'm right here, and I'm willing. You gonna make me leave, so
you can jerk off all by yourself? Let me do this for you. Let me take your mind off your problems. Take my mind off my problems, too. I can do this for both of us." He ran one hand along the bulge in Ryan's pants, and Ryan let out his breath in a wheezing gasp as Alvarez palmed the hard cock under his hand. "Besides, I got to practice, you know?"

"Practice?" Ryan's voice came out half-strangled, and Alvarez looked up at him with a wicked smile.

"Yeah, Keller wants me to learn how to deep throat, and I always heard it takes lots of practice before you can do it right." He flicked the button at Ryan's waistband and then his hands were on Ryan's zipper, slipping it down with a quick ratcheting sound. Ryan let go of his fear as his pants slipped off his narrow hips and down his legs - it was just lips, right? It didn't matter whose. His boxers followed before Ryan got his voice back.

"Deep throating? God. I love that shit."

"Yeah, I always did, too." Alvarez had Ryan's cock in his hands, running his fingers up and down the sides, teasing him, making him catch his breath. Jesus but that felt good. "I knew this one girl, she had real talent. She could suck you in and swallow you whole without even blinking." Alvarez continued to talk to him as he explored Ryan's stiff cock, running his fingers around the head, sliding a finger tip across the slit and making Ryan shiver with anticipation.

The matter of fact sound of Alvarez' voice, combined with the smooth feel of his fingers running across his cock and balls had Ryan gasping - it was such a strange combination, and it was doing all sorts of crazy things to his cock. He forced himself to talk, in an effort to keep himself distracted. The way things were going, he was going to pop before Alvarez' mouth even touched him.

"Yeah - um...Shannon tried it a few times. She never got that good at it. She - she had to lie on her back with her head off the edge of the bed or something. It was kind of weird, but it felt good, anyway."

Alvarez glanced up at him with laughter in his eyes. "Yeah, well, I doubt very much Keller is going to let me do that, so I'm just going to have to figure it out the hard way, right?" He moved in closer, so Ryan could feel his hot breath on his cock. "Just don't expect too much the first time, okay? This is just practice."

"Don't worry." Ryan gasped as he felt Alvarez' tongue flicker over the head of his cock. "I have a feeling you're going to be a natural at this."

When he felt O'Reily's hands on his head, Miguel's cock surged in his pants. He loved that feeling - big, strong hands holding him in place, showing him were he belonged. They weren't as heavy or as powerful as Keller's were, and they didn't provoke that surge of panic he sometimes got that maybe this time he would disappoint Keller. Because you never wanted to disappoint Keller - the fucker was loco and totally unpredictable, and that could be fucking dangerous.

But this was good, too, because he still wanted to please O'Reily. It was important that he make O'Reily happy, because when Keller left him again, O'Reily was all he was going to have left. And he didn't think he could do it on his own anymore. He used to think he didn't need anyone, but he'd just been fooling himself. He'd been so alone on the road.

He hated to admit it, but when they'd recaptured him, he'd even felt a tiny bit of relief that he wasn't alone anymore. Then they'd put him back in Solitary, and it had all come crashing down on him.
again. He couldn't go back there. He didn't think he could take that again. So it was important that O'Reily want him. He'd do whatever he had to do. Whatever it took. He pushed those thoughts aside and just concentrated on O'Reily.

He licked underneath the head of O'Reily's cock and flicked the bundle of nerves with the tip of his tongue - back and forth until O'Reily's head fell back against the door with a thud, and he cursed under his breath. Miguel took the head in his mouth and sucked hard and O'Reily's hands tightened in his hair until it hurt. He sighed with the pleasure of it. ¡Tan bueno! That was so good.

Miguel took in more of his cock and closed his lips around it, moving his head up and down, taking just a bit more in each time until he went down until he could feel the tip of O'Reily's cock bumping up against the back of his throat. He just kept it there for a while, not going any deeper. He felt himself try to gag around it, his neck muscles tensing up and fighting him as he breathed heavily through his nose.

He'd done this before, gotten this far with Keller, but with his body trying to kick Keller's cock back out of his throat, he'd never been able to keep it going. Just as he thought he'd have to move back and give up, he felt one of O'Reily's hands move down and cup around the back of his neck, rubbing at the muscles, while the other one started stroking the side of his throat. "That's good, Miguel. Just stay there a minute. Relax your throat, don't fight it. Good. That's right." O'Reily's voice was soothing. He let it wash over him and calm him and then his throat contracted and he swallowed and O'Reily cursed and jumped, pushing his cock into Miguel's throat. Miguel tried to pull back in panic, but O'Reily held his head there, his pubes tickling Miguel's throat as he swallowed convulsively around O'Reily's nose.

"Oh, God!" O'Reily's voice was full of shock and pleasure mixed together.

¡Puta madre! He was doing it! He grabbed onto O'Reily's thighs and held on tight. He felt like he was choking; with O'Reily's cock in his throat, he couldn't get any air into his lungs. He could feel O'Reily's cock surging and he swallowed again and again. O'Reily shouted suddenly and froze; pushed in as far as he could and he held on so tightly to the back of Miguel's head that he could feel the individual hairs as O'Reily's tight grip pulled them out.

Miguel felt the precome pulse out of his own heavy cock. He could almost come from just this: black spots in front of his eyes and dizzy with the intensity of it all. But just then O'Reily let go of him, pushing him back, and he fell on his ass, gasping and wheezing as he drew in huge gulps of air, the taste of O'Reily's come on his tongue. O'Reily was right there on his knees, pushing him back onto the floor when he started to list to one side. "Are you alright? Jesus, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to grab you like that. It just felt so fucking good, I couldn't let go."

Miguel was laughing through his coughs and gasps - he grabbed O'Reily's arm and shook his head, tears running down his cheeks. "No. It's - it's okay. I did it. Didn't I?"

O'Reily sat back on his heels and blinked at him. "What?"

"I had you down my throat, didn't I? It was wild as shit, and I was choking like anything, but I did it."

O'Reily's grin slowly overcame his earlier panicked look. "You did, didn't you? I came right down your throat. Boom! Just like that. And you were swallowing around my cock. It felt fantastic. It was great." He stood up then, flushing as he tucked himself back into his pants, and Miguel
grinned as he realized O'Reily had just noticed his cock was still hanging out.

Miguel let his eyes fall shut and just lay there taking deep breaths, his hand moving idly across his belly. He wondered what the hell he was going to do about his hard-on. He didn't want to draw attention to it - knowing how O'Reily felt about other men's cocks, but he was so hard he hurt, and he didn't think he could get up right now, let alone walk back to Em City without taking care of his hard-on first.

"Jesus Christ on a crutch!"

He opened his eyes and leaned up on his elbows to see that his 'problem' wasn't so much of a secret after all. O'Reily was standing above him, staring down at his aching cock, which was clearly outlined in his pants - a wet spot the size of a quarter surrounding the tip. "Shit." He fell back to the floor and sighed. "Maybe you could give me a few minutes. This won't take long."

O'Reily laughed. "Yeah, doesn't look like it would take long at all. You got that turned on from what we did? I thought it would freak you out - not being able to breathe like that."

"Yeah, it did, but I was already turned on, so it just got me pumping, you know? But it hurts, man. I mean it aches. I need - I really need to do something about this right now, okay?"

O'Reily nodded. "I can see that." But then he just stood there, staring down at Miguel, O'Reily's sharp eyes running up to his face, and back down again to rest on his hard cock where it was practically poking right through his pants.

Miguel was starting to get a little uncomfortable with that stare; it was like O'Reily was looking right through him - calculating and hard. "What?" He knew he sounded defensive, but he didn't know what else to do. He went back up onto his elbows and pulled his legs together to try and drag his ass up off the floor.

O'Reily just grinned wickedly and stepped between Miguel's legs, kicking at his knees until he spread his legs wide, leaving him feeling vulnerable and open. He felt a surge in his cock again, and realized that sense of danger that he often felt with Keller was running up his spine. He drew in a shaky breath, unsure what was going to happen.

"Don't move." O'Reily's voice was strong and forceful, and Miguel couldn't have moved if he'd wanted to, he was frozen by the stare in O'Reily's eyes. His heart pounded in his chest and his cock grew impossibly harder.

O'Reily picked up his foot, set his shoe down carefully on the tip of Miguel's cock and twisted, grinding the sole into Miguel's hard flesh, right through his pants. Miguel came - just like that. Bolts of fire ran through his body; pain and unbearable pleasure competing against each other to take him higher as his back arched and his hips jolted up against that hard sole over and over. He collapsed down again after what seemed like hours, and laid there, eyes closed, gasping until his chest hurt, his throat sore from his shouts and desperate gasps for air.

When he opened his eyes again, O'Reily was leaning up against the door with a smug smirk on his face, his eyes bright with laughter. "Come on, we need to get back to Em City. Tie that shirt you got sticking out of your pants pocket around your waist, 'cause there is no way your t-shirt can cover that, man."

Miguel cursed at O'Reily as he struggled to his feet and went over to the sink to clean himself up as best he could, his hands still shaking. "You been taking lessons from Keller, haven't you? ¡Hijos de puta! Both of you. Crazy-assed shits." He pulled his long-sleeved shirt from out of his back pocket.
where it had been hanging, and tied it around his waist, glad he'd started carrying around a second shirt, just in case this kind of thing happened again. He'd thought it would be Keller causing the problem, though, not O'Reily.

O'Reily nodded his approval. "That'll do until you can get a clean pair of pants." He crossed over and wiped at the corner of Miguel's mouth, his thumb coming away with a smear of come. Miguel grabbed his wrist and pulled Ryan's thumb into his mouth, licking and sucking the tip to get all of Ryan's come before letting it go again.

Ryan blinked and Miguel ducked his head and turned away, suddenly embarrassed after all they'd done. He held the door open for Ryan to walk through, and they walked down the hall together in silence.

Ryan chopped green peppers furiously, trying to concentrate on anything that didn't include Miguel Alvarez's tongue licking come off Ryan's thumb. Or his mouth surrounding Ryan's cock, or the look on Alvarez' face when his cock had exploded under the sole of Ryan's shoe. Jesus Christ that had been fucking amazing.

He'd just been staring down at Alvarez' cock, totally surprised at how hard he'd gotten by Ryan shoving his cock down the man's throat, when Keller's words had come back to him, about how Alvarez loved to hump Keller's boot while he was sucking him off. He hadn't thought twice about it, just kicked his way between Alvarez' legs and put his sneaker down with as much force as he thought Alvarez could bear. The results had been extraordinary. It was the first time he'd seen Alvarez come, and the look on his face had been very revealing.

He'd always thought that orgasm and extreme pain caused very similar expressions on a woman's face, but he'd never seen it played out on a man's face before. And never this vividly on anyone. He'd never been responsible for that much intensity before and it was a powerful feeling. He thought he'd known what Alvarez had been talking about yesterday when he'd told Ryan about how much he loved the pain, but until he saw it first hand like that, he hadn't really understood.

The fact that he could have that much control over another person was heady. All night he'd found himself thinking of new ways to bring that look back onto Alvarez' face. It had taken a concerted effort, and he had to admit, a frantic jerk-off session, to calm himself down enough to get to sleep. He was hard right now, just from the thought of it. Damn it. He was hard right now, just from the thought of it. Damn it. No matter how he tried, his thoughts just kept circling back to Miguel Alvarez.

When he felt a firm hand squeeze his ass, he whipped around without thought, the big butcher's knife in his hand pointing directly at Howell, who jumped back, her hands up in a defensive gesture to deflect his movements if needed.

"Whoa!"

"Jesus fuck!" Ryan stepped back, running into the stainless steel table behind him. "Don't do that shit! I could have cut you or something." Ryan threw the knife on the table where it scattered chunks of green pepper across the surface. He put his hands on his knees and took a few deep breaths, his heart pumping furiously.

Howell smirked at him. "Awww...worried about little old me? That's so sweet, Ryan."

"No. I just don't feel like spending time in the hole for slicing up a hack. What do you want?" He asked suspiciously. After the things he'd called Howell yesterday, he had no illusions she was just interested in friendly conversation. From the smug look on her face, he thought he would probably
have been better off if he had stabbed her.

Howell shrugged, "Well, we kind of left things unfinished yesterday - so I'm back to get a little...satisfaction...if you know what I mean." She wiggled her eyebrows at him, grinning.

"What? After yesterday, you want me..."

She cut him off. "Look, I was a little pissed off yesterday, but after I thought about it, I realized no man likes to know the woman he's fucking is thinking about some other guy. I understand that. No hard feelings, okay? Now let's go. I was so horny last night I wore out my God damned vibrator. I need a good hard fuck, and you're just the man to give it to me."

Pancamo was not happy to see him go, but Howell gave him no choice in the matter, and in no time Ryan found himself back in that same women's bathroom with his cock stuck up Howell's cunt. He was happy that she didn't seem bent on vengeance after all, but that wasn't helping his current problem: he was having trouble keeping it up. It would have been easier if he couldn't see her face, but she'd insisted on being on top, so he was flat on his back on the hard, cold bathroom tiles while she sat on his cock.

He tried to pull out the old trusty visions of Gloria that usually kept him going, but that had done nothing for him with Howell's ugly mug staring in his face. He tried playing with her tits, hoping that would keep his hands above his head and block out her face, but she had tiny tits for a woman her size, and there was not really that much to play with. They were almost like a guy's, except that the nipples were bigger. That didn't help much. All that brought to mind was Miguel, and that bite Keller had given him.

It hit him that Miguel really had liked that, after all. For all Keller's talk of how much Miguel loved that kind of pain, Ryan hadn't really accepted it. It had looked painful as fuck. He wondered if it still hurt. If he'd twisted it yesterday when he stepped on Miguel's cock, would he have come even harder? Could he have come even harder? Ryan had trouble imagining that. There was probably a threshold of some sort after which all the pain kind of blurred together.

He tightened his grip on Howell's hips and thrust up inside her with renewed force. Maybe next time he could try playing with Miguel's nipples for a while. He could get a couple of those clothes pins from the laundry and just let them sit there while Miguel sucked Ryan's cock. Oh, wait. He could get Miguel out on his back, the way Ryan was now, and sit on his face. He and Shannon had tried it like that once; she'd been able to keep Ryan's cock in her throat for longer than ever that time. Then he could twist those pins while he was forcing his cock down Miguel's throat.

He'd liked that, hadn't he? Being held in place and forced to take Ryan's cock like he had no choice in the matter. And if he was on his back, he'd feel helpless to stop Ryan. Too bad there wasn't a bed he could tie Miguel to before he started. God. Just the thought of that was so intense. He could feel his cock swell and suddenly he needed more control.

He grabbed Howell's legs and without warning, flipped them over, so he was on top and could push himself further into her - pounding her harder than ever. She cried out with shock when they went over and struggled for a second or two, but when he started thrusting into her, grinding his hips and pushing in farther and harder, she just wrapped her legs around his waist and held on for the ride. He could hear her shouting something, but it wasn't important so he just ignored her.

In his mind's eye, he saw Miguel laid out before him, arms bound above his head as Ryan hammered into him. The look on Miguel's face was one of complete surrender, and the rush of power that surged through him took him over the top. Ryan arched his back, his arms trembling with his weight as his hips stuttered and his cock released its load.
His arms gave way and he collapsed, and it was only when Howell shoved him off her that he remembered where he was. He rolled over onto his back, gasping for breath, trying to focus on the room. What he'd done hit him like a freight train. He'd just had one of the most intense orgasms of his life while fantasizing about fucking Miguel Alvarez. He sat up sputtering, shocked; like a bucket of ice water had been tipped over him.

"Oh, shit!"

Howell was straightening out her pants and slipping them on. "I said that already." She shook her head, grinning widely. "We need to have fights more often, if that's what the make-up sex is like."

He looked at her in shock. "What?"

She snapped her gun belt back on. "Hurry up and get dressed. I've got to get you back to the kitchen before Pancamo has a hissy fit."

He flushed the condom and put his clothes on blindly. Make-up sex? She thought this was make-up sex. The thought of his actually being in enough of a relationship with Howell that could ever demand anything remotely like make-up sex chilled Ryan's blood. No fucking way. But what was the alternative, here in Oz? Miguel Alvarez? The things he'd imagined today were impossible. Yeah, he liked the idea of being powerful and in charge. Who the hell didn't? But that didn't change the facts.

He was not a fag. He did not fuck men. He just didn't do that shit. He'd been letting the heady sense of control get to him. Letting Miguel suck him off had been a bad mistake. One he wouldn't make again. Ryan was willing to have a business arrangement with Keller and Alvarez because it made sense to do so. But that was it. No sex involved. He needed to keep his priorities straight. Straight?

He laughed at his own joke.

"You ready to go, hot stuff?" Howell held the door open and as he stepped out, she smacked him on the ass. Fucking bitch. The things he put up with. But it seemed she may have figured out that Cyril was off limits. If he could keep her happy, she wouldn't need to look elsewhere, and Cyril would be safe. From Howell, at least. Jesus. He hated when things got complicated.
Miguel paced his pod, wishing he had space to walk. He knew the irony of coming out of Solitary and still thinking he needed more space, but he couldn't help it. He'd gotten used to walking when he'd escaped. It was the freest he'd felt the whole time he was out. You could get somewhere faster hitching a ride, but the less people you talked to, the less chance someone would turn you in - the less chance they would want to know more about you, want you to answer their questions, want you to lie to them to make them feel safe. No, when you walked, you were free.

He liked to walk. If he could, he would take off and just keep walking and walking south until he hit Tierra del Fuego, and this time he wouldn't let anything or anyone stop him. He'd walk until he found the end of the earth. The end of everything. No more hacks, no more warden, no more Oz, no more nothing. No more confusion and pain and aching loneliness. Well, maybe he'd still have the loneliness. It's probably pretty lonely at the end of the Earth.

But at least this worry and fear would be gone. He wouldn't have the ache in his gut that said Keller was leaving him. Wouldn't have the constant fear that he wouldn't be enough for Ryan O'Reily - that he'd get left behind. Left to rot in a tiny cell with gray walls and no way to breathe in the stagnant air as the walls slowly closed in on him. All his ancestors coming back to cluck and shake their fingers and tell him what a disappointment he was. He couldn't deal with that again.

Sometimes he wished he'd been faster with that scalpel - the day he plucked out Rivera's eyes. That when he'd said goodbye to Father Mukada in his office, he'd been fast enough to cut his fucking throat before the hacks had taken him away and beaten him senseless, and starved him and made him drink his own piss. He understood why they'd hated him. He'd blinded one of their own. What else were they supposed to do?

But he couldn't go through that again. This time, if they sent him back to Solitary, if Ryan couldn't save him, he'd have to kill himself right off. Not let things get as bad as they had before. If he went crazy, he might not be able to do it this time. He'd fucked it up the last time, hadn't he? Trying to hang himself with his sheet? Maybe this time he could save up his pills, and take them all at once. That might work better. He scoffed at himself. He couldn't even fucking kill himself right. If only he'd been just a little faster with that scalpel.

It was all up to Ryan, now. He hated relying on someone else for his salvation, but he'd done all he could, hadn't he? He'd shown Ryan how important he was, how much Miguel relied on him, how much he needed him. Keller, well, there would never be anyone like Keller. But that was fine. Keller was another kind of insanity, and although Miguel would never forget him, he knew he was better off without that kind of madness. He laughed, a short bark of sound that surprised him with its suddenness. He had enough insanity all by himself; he didn't need Keller's too.

But Ryan, now he was different. He had his own kind of crazy, but he was more than that. He was wily and determined and willing to do whatever he needed to keep himself and Cyril safe. And if Miguel could convince him that it was in his best interests to keep Miguel close, then he'd take care of Miguel, when he couldn't manage on his own. And Miguel held no more illusions. He couldn't manage it on his own. He'd tried, and failed. He wasn't too proud to take help anymore. He was weak, and he needed Ryan's strength.

And it was nice to have someone to touch again. Keller, he only wanted his mouth, or his ass. He didn't like it when Miguel touched him; he always trapped Miguel' hands, or tied them, or ordered him to keep them at his sides. And Miguel liked to touch. Running his hands up and down Ryan's thighs, even through the cloth had been wonderful. The warmth and the strength he could feel in
Ryan's flesh was water to Miguel's dry desert, and the sense of power he got when he felt Ryan's muscles tremble under his hands had made his heart sing and his cock hard.

He wanted that contact. Needed it to make him feel again. Not just bright splashes of sensation like when Keller made him come almost against his will, but human contact that made him feel solid, like he belonged in the real world, like there was actually a real world out there for him to belong in. He could be real with Ryan, if he could just convince Ryan that he was worth the effort of saving. Miguel's hand went involuntarily to his cheek, tracing the scar that ran along it. Every morning, standing in front of the mirror, he faced the shame of it, reminding him of his sins and his failures. He didn't know if he really was worth that effort, but if O'Reily gave him a chance, maybe he could find a way to change that.

Knocking broke him out of his thoughts, and he turned, startled, to face the door. He was surprised to see Father Mukada there, and a sudden dread twisted in his stomach. But then he realized Mukada couldn't know what he was thinking, which was a good thing, since none of his thoughts lately would be approved by the Catholic Church. He crossed to the door and opened it, unsure of just what to say.

"Hello, Miguel."

"Father. I haven't seen you around..." He let the sentence dangle, not sure how to finish it.

"No, I've been on a retreat. I just got back today. I was visiting someone else and I saw you here. I must admit, I was surprised to see you. I had heard you...were back, but I just assumed you'd be in Solitary. I was planning on visiting you this week. But you're here. That's great." Mukada fumbled over his words as if he felt awkward and uncertain of his welcome. "Can I come in? Maybe we can talk?"

Miguel shrugged. "Sure, why not. I got nothing else to do." He took the bunk and left Mukada the chair. It seemed like the right thing to do. But Mukada seemed very uncomfortable, looking about the pod uneasily.

"You afraid of me, Padre? You think I'm gonna jump you or something?"

Mukada looked at him, startled. "What? No. Of course not. I'm merely unsure of what to say. I want to say it's good to see you again, but of course, I don't want to insinuate that it's good that you're back because I know you must have been glad to be out. But then again, I'm glad that you're safe, and who knows what could have happened to you out there."

"Yeah, well, bad things can happen to you in here, too, you know." Miguel had to turn away from the sincerity in Mukada's gaze.

"I know. You've had your share. I saw you pacing in here, Miguel; you looked so angry and lost. This must be a hard adjustment for you, being locked up again. I wish there was something I could do to make it easier, but I know there's not." He paused for a moment, then looked up into his eyes. "I'm sorry for that, Miguel. I understand how that feels."

Mukada shrugged self-consciously. "I was gone for two months, and when I came back, so much had changed. Half of my flock - gone - to the Reverend Cloutier. It's a shock to the system, isn't it? How rapidly things can go from bad to worse? I'm quite thrown by it all. I can imagine how you must feel."

"Can you? I don't know." It was taking too much effort to keep still, so he got back up, and started pacing again. It just seemed easier to think when he was moving. "It's not just being back. It's the
pressure that starts up as soon as you walk through the gate, from the Warden, and El Norte, and everything else. There's so much going on, and I'm trying to figure it all out and keep my head above the waters that are flooding in on me. They want me in Solitary, or they want me dead. They want me the fuck out of their hair or they want me down," he took a breath, the image of Keller's smirk clear in his mind, "down on my knees. It's too much. It's too hard to keep track of, and I don't know how much longer I can keep doing it."

"I know what you must be going through, Miguel, but..."

Miguel turned on him, standing over Mukada, anger in his face. "You do, do you? What the fuck do you know, Padre? You never lived with this kind of fear..."

"You're wrong." Mukada stood up and poked his finger at Miguel's chest and pushing him back a step. "You're wrong about that. I may not live with it every day, Miguel, but I was here, right here in Emerald City when the riot broke out three years ago, and I know what it's like to think you'll be dead before the day is out. I know what it's like to spend every minute praying that you'll live to see the next. So don't tell me I can't understand you." He ran his hand through his hair, shaking his head sadly. "No, I don't live with it day in and day out, but I understand that terror. It's a fear I'll never forget for as long as I live."

Miguel collapsed onto his bed, his elbows resting on his knees, hands clenched tightly, staring at the floor. "I don't know that I can live with it any longer, Father. I don't know that I have the energy to fight any more."

"Oh, Miguel." Father Mukada sat beside him and put his hand on Miguel's slumped shoulder. "I wish I could take it from you. I really wish I could." He was silent for a moment, then let his hand slip down off Miguel's shoulder. "Tell me about your day. Tell me everything. There has to be something that makes it worth the struggle. There has to be something to bring you happiness sometime. Even a - a little bit of joy."

Miguel laughed bitterly. "It's not going to be anything you'd approve of."

"But there is something?" He paused, then asked hesitantly. "It's not drugs, is it? You know they won't help you in the long run."

"I don't do that shit. I mean, it's okay to play around with when you're with friends, having fun. But since the riot, since then, I don't touch that shit. I see what it does to people. I don't want that. I got enough problems already."

Mukada sighed quietly, "Good. I'm glad."

Miguel stood up and walked to the wall, staring out across the quad at the prisoners sitting around the TV, lusting after Miss Sally as she bounced her boobs across the screen. "I don't know what it's like for you, how you survive living a life of celibacy. But for me, it's so important to have contact; physical contact. I need touch."

He paused, trying to focus his thoughts without revealing too much. "Even out here, away from the gray walls of Solitary, sometimes you can go months at a time without a single touch that's not in anger or disgust. Sometimes, if you go long enough without, you'll settle for the anger, just because it reminds you that you're still alive."

"I'm gong to spend the rest of my life in Oz, Father. If the Warden has his way, I'll spend most of that time in Solitary. Is it wrong to take a little comfort where you can get it? To have a moment or two that let you remember that you're not alone, that someone else is there and needs you as much as you need them? I know the church says it's a sin, but sometimes it's all you have. Is that so wrong?"
"Miguel." He hadn't heard Mukada move, but he was right behind him now. Mukada placed his hand on Miguel's shoulder as though he would hold him in place if he could, and stop Miguel from spinning away into space, like an anchor. "I'm not going to tell you it's right, but I don't have the right to tell you to stop, either. I know what the church says, and I understand why they say it. But I chose my celibacy. I knew when I became a priest what I was giving up, and it was my decision.

"I can tell you that all you need is God, and that he will make you strong enough to handle the solitude, but those are empty words in a place like this, unless your faith is strong enough to sustain you through the temptations of the flesh. If you wanted to give up...that comfort, I'd be with you every day to help you resist, but right now, I know you need everything you can get to hold you back from that edge, and I'm not going to ask you to give up the one thing that gives you a moment's peace.

"But I am going to beg you to be careful with your heart and your body. There are so many dangers out there, so many men with callous hearts and jaded, beaten souls. They'll treat you poorly, go out of their way to hurt you. You can't let them have your heart, and you can't trust them with your life. Choose wisely, and be very, very careful, because both of those things are precious: to me, and to God, no matter what you think of either of us right now."

There were tears in Miguel's eyes, and he refused to show them to anyone, so he kept his back to Mukada, nodding his head to show that he understood.

"I'll leave you for now, Miguel, but I'll check on you later in the week, okay? And remember, you can come to me any time you need to talk. You'll come to me if you need to?"

He nodded again and forced out a word or two. "Thanks, Father."

"Bless you, Miguel."

He stayed where he was until he heard the door close and he could see Mukada walking away toward the gate.

"What are you doing with Alvarez?"

The question came out of nowhere, and Chris blinked at the suddenness of it. He should have been expecting something like that, but his mind had been elsewhere, a mistake in a place like this, especially with an opponent as sharp as O'Reily. Chris knew better than to let his guard down, even if all they were doing was playing a game of chess.

He tipped his head to one side, his most winning smile on his face and one he knew O'Reily wouldn't trust. He was wise not to. "More than the usual, you mean?"

"Cut the crap, Keller. You've got something in mind for him, now that you and Beecher are getting all buddy-buddy again."

"Buddy-buddy. I like that." Chris' smile was more sincere this time. He couldn't help it - just the thought of Toby made him smile. He shrugged. "What do you think I should do with him? Know anyone looking to take on one slightly-used submissive?"

O'Reily frowned. "Submissive. It sounds so much...cleaner, somehow than 'prag'."

Chris raised one eyebrow in surprise. "That's an ugly word - and not quite accurate under the circumstances."
It was O'Reily's turn to be surprised. "Not quite accurate? What the hell else would you call him? It's the same thing, no matter what name you give it. That's not the point, though. What I want to know is what you plan to do, now that you and Beecher are easing your way back into things again. I can't see you taking a chance on his finding out about Alvarez, so you must have something planned. I want to know what that something is, before we start relying on him. That's all."

"Relying on him for what? To clean your pipes? That was sort of the idea of inviting him into our arrangement in the first place."

O'Reily glanced around the room nervously, and lowered his voice, despite the fact that there was no one around. "See that's the problem. I don't want him sucking my cock." He ignored Chris' look of doubt and kept on talking. "I'm just not sure of the advantages of having him working with us. If we take him into our confidence, then you and Beecher get back together and you want to get rid of him, what happens then?"

Chris shrugged. "Well, I'm sure we can find something for him to do. Just because I might not be fucking him anymore, doesn't mean we can't keep him around. He's useful. If nothing else, he can keep track of your brother for you, and free you up for other things. He's worth hanging onto."

"So you have a back up when Beecher kicks you out of bed again? I'm just wondering if it's worth our effort to keep him out of Solitary. If he's in Solitary, you don't have to worry about keeping him out of Beecher's hair."

"Yeah, that's true. But he knows better than to mess with Beecher. And when I say it's over, he's not going to fight it. He'll accept it, because he's always known Beecher comes first. But he'll stay loyal to us, because who the hell else does he have? No one. If he feels like a part of our arrangement, he'll fight to the death for us. And he's not a bad fighter to have on our side."

O'Reily had been scanning the quad, but at that he looked back at Chris, pinning him with his gaze. "Are you setting him up for a fall?"

Chris opened his mouth in automatic denial, and then paused to think it through. Shrugging, he went with the honest approach. "Not directly. But if we needed a fall guy, he would be available for the price of a push."

"So you don't expect us to treat him as an equal, then." O'Reily's eyes were narrowed and calculating.

"He doesn't need to know everything that's going on. For now, we keep him around as a babysitter for Cyril, and for - entertainment purposes." Chris smiled wickedly, because he knew it flustered O'Reily when he talked about sex with another man. It didn't work this time, though. O'Reily was too focused on his point.

"I'm not convinced that he'll trust you once you've kicked him to the curb. He already thinks all you want him for is sex. If you stop fucking him, he's going to think you have no reason to keep him around. Maybe you need to let him know that you think he has more to contribute than just his willingness to bend over for you. That way he won't leave us high and dry when the time comes."

When you need him to baby sit, you mean? Chris thought. "I'm not worried about it, O'Reily."

"Well I am. Show him you think he's more than just a prag, Keller. Give him a little belief in himself. Let him keep some self-respect. Otherwise, I don't think he will be there when we need him."
"You think he needs to be reminded of his worth, is that what you're saying? What the fuck, O'Reily?" This was getting interesting. So he pushed it a bit, trying to get more of a rise out of O'Reily, wondering if he could get a clue as to what was going on in his mind. "He's sucking your cock, it's not like you're getting married or something. You can respect him in the morning if you want, I'll respect the way he rims me out before I blow my wad up his ass."

"Christ, Keller." O'Reily looked fascinated and vaguely disgusted at the same time.

"Hey, he's a full-service submissive." Chris leered at O'Reily, just because he loved the look O'Reily got on his face when he did. "Tell you what. Next time we get him alone, I'll have him show you exactly how well he can rim an asshole. It's an art, after all, and I've trained him well."

O'Reily shook his head, like he was trying to get the image of Alvarez with his tongue up Keller's ass out of his mind. "Not me. I don't want him touching me again, Keller. I mean it. I don't want any part of that. Got it?"

Chris frowned, this attitude O'Reily kept throwing up was getting really old. "What the hell is wrong with you, O'Reily? He's a natural bottom. It's in his nature. You can show him all the respect you want, that doesn't mean he's not still going to want you to fuck him up the ass. If he likes it, what's the big deal? Let him enjoy it, for Christ's sake. Besides, if you were fucking him too, we wouldn't have to worry about what he did when I stopped fucking him."

Chris saw the moment when all the pieces fell into place for O'Reily. He cursed his own big mouth and O'Reily's sharp mind equally - the cat was out of the bag, now. Hopefully he could repair this slip-up, and at least keep his goal in sight, despite the setback.

"That's what this has all been about, hasn't it? From the very beginning. You've been trying to set me up to take over Alvarez for you, to free you up for Beecher."

Chris struggled to keep the relief off his face, O'Reily had come up with part of the plan, but as long as he didn't realize everything, Chris thought he could still smooth this over. If it came down to it, they'd just let Glynn send Alvarez back to Solitary.

That didn't suit his plans to distract O'Reily from Toby, but Alvarez had served as a distraction for long enough for things to shift with Toby. He may have wrung all the good he could get from Alvarez. He'd hate to say goodbye to that sweet, tight ass of his, but he wasn't about to endanger his relationship with Toby or his association with O'Reily for a piece of ass, no matter how sweetly Alvarez begged.

"Not from the beginning, no. But after things changed with me and Beecher, it did occur to me that if you were to keep him, it would make my life easier all around. I'd have Beecher, you'd have a babysitter, we'd both have a faithful errand boy for whatever we needed him for, and Alvarez would have a helping hand with his Glynn problem as well as someone to fuck him into next week. It would work out for everyone involved, don't you think?"

O'Reily leaned over the table angrily, pushing his finger into Chris' chest. "Get this through your head, Keller. I'm not fucking Miguel Alvarez. Ever. I'm not a fag, and I don't want you to shove that shit onto me ever again. Leave it alone." He sat back down, glancing around to make sure no one had been close enough to hear his outburst.

O'Reily ran his fingers through his hair thoughtfully. "If we decide he's trustworthy enough for errands and watching Cyril, then we'll keep him around. If not, we send him back to Solitary. In the meantime, you keep me out of your fucking games, is that clear?"
Chris smirked at O'Reily's heterosexual panic. He'd obviously pushed too hard this time, so he backed away as gracefully as he could. "Perfectly clear."

O'Reily got up and left the table, and Chris stared after him. He still wasn't convinced that O'Reily had no interest in topping Alvarez. After watching the two together, and O'Reily's strange declarations about giving Alvarez respect, he found that hard to believe. But he was willing to let it rest for now. Now that the cat was at least partially out of the bag, he'd just have to keep his eyes wide open and move with the changing tide.

Ryan was adding potatoes to the huge vat of soup he was working on when he heard Howell's loud mouth blaring all over the cafeteria. He looked up to find Pancamo staring at him, and he shrugged and turned his back like he didn't care what the bastard wanted - and truth be told he really didn't. But he was sick and tired of Howell, and it had only been twenty-four hours since he'd decided he was better off placating her to keep Cyril safe. He had to figure some other way out of this mess, because he wasn't going to be able to keep her happy for long at this rate.

When he added in the whole Keller pushing Alvarez on him plan, his day was seriously in the crapper. He'd been stewing about that all afternoon, and not keeping his mind on his other business, and now he didn't have a plan for keeping Howell's greedy hands off either his ass, or Cyril's. Great, just what he needed. At least he was looking right at her when she came for him this time, so he had a chance to stave off her grab for his ass. Jesus, but this was getting old.

He sidestepped her hands, pointing with his huge stirring spoon at Pancamo, who was standing at the other end of a row of prep tables, staring at them, arms crossed menacingly. Not that Ryan was impressed with his menace, but hopefully it would slow down Howell.

"Hey! I thought we covered the whole grabby hands in public thing weeks ago. No touching the merchandise when the kitchen crew boss is staring right at you, okay? Jesus. It's like you're trying to get caught or something." Not that he cared. He'd actually be happy if she did. If he thought Pancamo could actually do something about it, he'd encourage it, but he had a feeling it wasn't worth the bastard's effort to get on the wrong side of the hacks. He'd just continue to harass Ryan about it, which was another thing that was getting old.

Howell just moved in again, blocking Pancamo's view before grabbing Ryan again - hard. Damn! He was going to have a permanent bruise there if she didn't stop that shit. "Who gives a fuck if he does see us? What's he going to do, go tattle to Mommy? The C.O.s aren't going to do anything about it. We take care of our own, right? So come on, it's time for you to play plumber. I've got a drain in serious need of plunging. Think you can handle that?"

"I don't think that's a good idea. Pancamo just finished yelling at me about leaving them short handed twice this week already. He thinks I'm using you to get out of my work, and he threatened to get me kicked out of the kitchen if I don't stop. He may not be able to hurt you, but he can fuck with me a lot."

"So who cares what it is you do? If you don't work here, they'll put you to work someplace else. Who gives a fuck?"

"I give a fuck! I can't afford to get kicked out of the kitchen. This job is perfect for me and Cyril. I need to stay here. We just need to work out another time and place, okay? He was on the verge of losing his temper with her. He had to think of something to get her out of his hair, and soon.

Howell moved in on him, pushing him up against the prep table, her finger poking his chest. "Or maybe you're just trying to avoid me, is that it? Am I too much woman for you, O'Reily? Is that it?
Maybe I should find you some nice little fag to fuck instead. Would you like that, queer boy?"

Ryan was pissed off now. How many people did he have to tell this to today? "Fuck off, Howell. I am not a faggot. Now get the hell out of my face."

"O'Reily!" Pancamo's voice cut through the noise of the kitchen, and Howell spun away in his direction. Ryan sighed in relief. If Howell hadn't gotten out of his face just then, he might have done something he'd regret. Pancamo was striding their way, with Cyril in tow, tears running down his cheeks, his hair net tangled in a ball in his long hair, hanging over his shoulder. "Take care of this, will you? And then get back to work. If that soup isn't ready on time because you're too busy playing with your girlfriend, you'll be out of my kitchen by morning. Understood?"

"Yeah, yeah, I gotcha." Howell stared at Pancamo with her evil eye, but it just seemed to bounce right off that thick skull of his. He turned his back on her and stalked away. Ryan grit his teeth to avoid saying anything nasty to Cyril - he really wanted to strike out at someone right now, and Howell was out of the question. But he knew that ignoring Howell would really piss her off, so he took a deep breath and grabbed Cyril's shoulder, pulling him a few feet away from Howell. "Okay, buddy. Let's take a look at this."

The cover's elastic band was tangled, hopelessly fouled in a huge knot of Cyril's hair. It looked like he'd tried to pull it out himself, which got things more messed up than normal. "Whoa, Cyril, you did a number on this one. How'd you manage this mess, huh?" Ryan pulled a stool over for Cyril to sit on, then grabbed some paper towels from a nearby sink. "Here, wipe up your tears, then blow your nose on that while I work on this rat's nest, okay?"

Ryan grabbed the big butcher's knife sitting on his prep table and carefully sliced through the rubber band and Cyril's paper hair net, to make it easier to get to the knot. Fortunately he'd finished with the prep work, and didn't need the knife anymore, or Pancamo would have a fit over the hair all over the table and his knife. Ryan kept his back to Howell, aware of her baleful glare but refusing to acknowledge her.

Cyril finished blowing his nose and threw the paper towels in the garbage can under the table, trying not to move while Ryan worked. "It was itchy, Ryan, and I scratched it, but it got all tangled up. And Ramon said he could fix it for me, but he kept pulling and pulling and it hurt! I'm sorry I cried, but he wouldn't stop pulling until I hit him."

"You hit him? Damn it, Cyril, you know you're not supposed to do that. Did you hurt him?" He ended up cutting a hunk of tangled hair out with the unwieldy butcher knife, but he really didn't have a choice, there was no way to save it.

"I didn't hit him hard, Ryan. Just like we do when we spar and you tell me to take it easy on you. It was just to make him stop - he wouldn't stop!"

"Okay, buddy, just so long as he's okay." He patted Cyril's shoulder, relieved that for once it seemed Cyril hadn't managed to put anyone in the hospital. Besides, if he'd done any real harm, Cyril would be on his way to the infirmary or the cage, not sitting in the kitchen with Ryan, pouting. "Where's your comb, Cyril?"

Cyril grabbed his comb out of his pocket and handed it over, so Ryan could get what was left of the tangles out before he put a new rubber band in. "Do I need to talk to Ramon for you? Is he going to be mad at you, now?" Cyril shook his head, and Ryan cursed softly until he stopped moving, then went back to the tangles.

"Nah, he said he was real sorry 'bout ten times before he took me to Mr. Pancamo. I really didn't
hurt him Ryan, I promise."

"Well, don't forget to thank him for trying to help you, and you tell him you're sorry for hitting him, even if it didn't hurt him. And next time, just come to me right off, don't ask anyone else for help, okay?"

"Okay, Ryan. I promise."

"Good."

Ryan handed Cyril back his comb before slipping a rubber band around his hair. He clapped Cyril on the shoulders. "Okay. Now go grab another hair net and get back to work. And don't forget to say you're sorry to Ramon. Think you can do all that?"

Cyril popped up, smiling. "I can do it, Ryan. Thanks." He ran off toward the uniform store room where they kept the hair covers, and Ryan sighed. He'd need to speak to Ramon. He was a nice kid, and he was good with Cyril for the most part. They made a nice team on the dishwashers. He kept a close eye out for Cyril, and told him stories that kept him occupied and out of Ryan's hair while he was trying to work. Ryan didn't want to mess that up, so he'd be sure Ramon was okay and understood what was going on. Cyril panicked sometimes, and it was better to pass him over to Ryan to take care of rather than to try and solve the problem.

"Awww...that's so sweet." Howell's voice grated on his very last nerve, and he ground his teeth trying not to say anything that he'd regret later. He turned to her, trying his best to keep his face neutral.

"Here all this time, I thought you were jealous of my interest in Cyril, but I had it figured wrong. You want to keep me away from your little love bunny, so you can have him all to yourself."

"What?" Ryan was totally blown away by this one. It looked like Howell had definitely gone off her rocker this time. "What the fuck are you talking about?"

She stepped up close, pushing him back against the prep table again. "I watched you braiding his hair like you two were girlfriends or something. You don't want me to fuck him because you want to fuck him yourself. You really are a faggot, aren't you?"

Ryan exploded, shoving her back away from him. "He's my little brother, and he's brain damaged! Of course I don't want you fucking him! He doesn't understand that shit anymore, and it would be like sexually abusing a five year old! What don't you get about this, you fucking pervert?"

"O'Reily!" Pancamo's voice broke them apart, and Howell spun away and left the kitchen, pushing past Pancamo, shoving him aside as he walked their direction. "You and your girlfriend fight on your own time. I want that soup ready to go in ten minutes." The ugly bastard walked away without giving Ryan a chance to respond, but that was okay, he was too busy seething to say anything coherent.

The look on Howell's face had been one of pure rage. The chances were good that he'd gone too far this time. But he was so tired of having to defend his heterosexuality, especially to the woman he'd been banging for months now. He'd fucked her through the bathroom tiles just yesterday, and today she was calling him a fag. Fucking bitch. And to suggest that he was fucking Cyril! He knew it was a game she was playing to piss him off, but still. Cyril was his brother, for Christ's sake! Where he grew up, that bond meant something. He took care of his brother; he'd never take advantage of him like that.
Ryan was going to have to come up with another solution to keep Cyril safe, and make sure it was one that kept Howell as far away from both of them as possible. Preferably in another state, but if he couldn't manage that, at least not in Oz. He wondered if he could find a way to get her fired without getting into trouble himself. The last thing he needed was trouble with the other hacks, and Cyril was always going to be an easy target for anyone with a beef with Ryan. That meant whatever he did needed to be untraceable. He turned back to that fucking vat of soup, while he sorted this problem out in his mind. He'd figure something out; he always did.
Chapter 7

Keller stood next to Beecher as they got closer to the head of the serving line. He nudged Beecher's shoulder as he bent his head to say something, and Miguel watched as Beecher leaned in toward him, their heads almost touching as they spoke. Things had changed a lot since the first day he'd come back from Solitary. Beecher and Keller had kept a cold, harsh distance between them those first couple of days.

Something had happened the day after Keller took Miguel in that storage closet, though - the night he almost bit right through Miguel's tit. He brought his hand up absentmindedly and rubbed around his nipple, pressing on the still sore bruise to remind him of that day only a week ago. Whatever had changed had something to do with that Barlog guy who had been Beecher's roommate until he'd gotten his neck broken in the library storage room.

Miguel shuddered. That room always brought a tumble of thoughts to his mind. Keller heating up Miguel's ass with his hand as he leaned over the copier; Miguel on his knees rimming Keller and finger fucking him between the aisles of staplers and copier paper; lying on the floor with Keller's underwear shoved in his mouth while Keller rode his cock, his hands above his head, tied with his own belt. That was the first and only time he'd ever fucked Keller, and even then, Keller had been the one in charge. Keller always had to be in control. That was just the way Keller was.

He sighed. Things were so different now. He doubted he'd have even the small part of Keller he had now for much longer, the way Beecher looked at him earlier tonight. Miguel hated that. He knew Keller in ways Beecher never would. Miguel had knelt at Keller's feet and took his cruelty, his whims and his stubborn need for absolute control, and he'd handed over everything he was to the dangerous creature that stood above him. That should count for something, right? But Keller had taken him and used him, and when he was through, he'd been dropped on the wayside without a second's thought.

When he came back from Solitary, Miguel intentionally steeled himself against even thinking of Keller. He knew it was over. And that was the way it should have stayed. But still, he found his eyes following Keller as he walked across the room, or as he sat in a chair in the quad. And Keller drew him in once again with just a few well placed stares, and his fingertips running across the nape of Miguel's neck. That was all it took. But he could see the point coming when Miguel became more of a liability to Keller than an asset, and when that time came, he knew that he'd be tossed aside again.

Miguel was prepared for it this time, though. This time, he had a back up plan. This time, he had Ryan O'Reily. It wouldn't be the same. The two were nothing alike in most ways. But there was something in Ryan's eyes that reminded him of Keller - that single minded purpose, that need to be in charge of the things around him, the need to control. He understood that need, and he could supply Ryan with the means to that end. Miguel could offer himself to Ryan, and help him keep his balance in a world that was often outside his reach.

He'd have to be careful. Ryan was slippery, and not easy to pin down, and he wouldn't like it if he realized that Miguel had plans for him. Ryan needed to be the seducer not the seduced - otherwise he'd balk at the thought that someone else was manipulating him. So Miguel had to be careful. He thought he might have been pushing too hard the other day, when they'd met in the storage room. But at the end, Ryan stepped up and showed that he was in control, even when Miguel thought he was the one making the moves.

That had been intense. That was the moment he had realized that he wanted to belong to Ryan. Not
just because he needed someone, but because Ryan was exactly who he needed. It wasn't perfect. Cyril was always going to be Ryan's first priority. But then Miguel was used to being low man on the totem pole. And it wasn't like Cyril could provide for Ryan what Miguel could. As a matter of fact, if he could help Ryan with Cyril, then he could show him that Miguel could be a benefit in more ways than just from his knees.

He'd like that. He'd like to be more than just the person Ryan O'Reily fucked. What he wanted more than anything was someone he could count on. Someone who knew him well enough to trust him. Because if he had that, it would be worth the effort to try and be worthy of that trust.

Miguel grabbed his tray and moved down the line, getting closer to where Ryan was shoveling runny mashed potatoes onto everyone's plates. He saw Cyril standing behind Ryan, at one of the stainless steel prep tables, stacking trays onto a cart to take to the wards that didn't come to the cafeteria. When Howell stepped up behind Cyril and started talking to him, Miguel tried to get Ryan's attention, but he was arguing with the guy in front of Miguel in line, and didn't even notice him.

"O'Reily!" Damn. It was like he was purposely ignoring Miguel. Cyril moved away from Howell, but she just moved up again so she was standing right next to him, talking into his ear. ¡Chingada madre!

"What the fuck, O'Reily?"

At least that got his attention. Ryan glanced over at Miguel with a frown, but then followed Miguel's frantic look back over his shoulder. He threw his serving spoon down with a shout and ran over to Cyril, just in time to stop him from slamming a tray into Howell's face. Cyril was yelling, "You can't do that to me. Get off me, get off me!" at the top of his lungs, and in just seconds there were hacks everywhere, pulling Cyril out of Ryan's arms, and all around him the other inmates were shouting and throwing their food at the hacks.

Miguel backed away, watching as the hacks dragged both Ryan and his brother out of the kitchen. Ryan was shouting "Pervert!" and "Fucking cunt, keep your hands off my brother!" Poor Cyril was screaming and fighting the hacks. Howell just followed along behind, shouting and waving her billyclub at anyone who got in her way.

He was stunned. Despite Ryan's concerns, Miguel had thought she was just using Cyril to keep Ryan's attentions focused on her. If she couldn't keep him any other way, she'd blackmail him to get what she wanted. He hadn't honestly thought she'd go through with sexually harassing a child, even if he was living in a man's body.

He turned and walked away from the crowd at the serving tables, his stomach in knots - not sure he could eat anything. He needed to sit down for a while. He scanned the tables for a spot away from El Norte and anyone else that might cause him trouble. He saw Keller sitting with Beecher, Rebadow and Busmalis, but kept on going, knowing Keller wouldn't be happy if he sat too close. He'd done that once - been stupid enough to think he could get Keller's attention by flirting with Beecher. That had been a stupid move. He'd learned his lesson - he stayed as far away from Beecher as he could, these days.

But Busmalis was waving him over, and Rebadow and Beecher were both looking at him like they expected him to join them. He wasn't sure what to do until Keller caught his eye and looked pointedly down at the empty seat opposite him, so Miguel took a deep breath and sat down nervously.

Busmalis was bursting with curiosity. "What happened over there? Did you see? I tried to go see
what was happening, but Bob wouldn't let me." He scowled at Rebadow. "Scaredy cat."

"Yeah, I saw it." He kept his head down, staring at his tray.

"Well, what happened? Who was it? Somebody said two guys got carted off, but he didn't say who."

Miguel glanced up at Keller, but he couldn't hold his gaze, and quickly glanced back down before answering Busmalis' question. "It was O'Reily - well, both of them."

Rebadow looked up from his tray, concern in his voice. "Both of them? Did you see what happened?"

"Probably Cyril just lost control again. He does that a lot."

Rebadow shook his head. "Not without provocation, Agamemnon. He gets stubborn like any child, but for the most part he's usually very calm unless he's provoked."

"He was provoked, alright." Miguel finally looked up, but kept his eyes on Busmalis and Rebadow sitting next to him, that seemed safest. "I saw the whole thing. That hack Howell, she kept getting up close to him, and he kept scooting away from her. But she wouldn't leave him alone."

"Where the hell was O'Reily during all this?"

Miguel shrugged at Busmalis' question. "He was on the serving line, with his back to Cyril. He couldn't see what was going on."

"So, what happened? Did Cyril hit her or something?" Busmalis was getting far too much enjoyment out of this whole thing. Miguel knew the power of distraction here in Oz, but it was a little disturbing how excited he was about this.

"No, I pointed it out to O'Reily about the same time she started playing with Cyril's ass. He barely got to Cyril in time to keep him from taking Howell out with a tray to the face."

"Oh, man! That is just so wrong. I mean, I know he's a man, but he's brain damaged, for Christ's sake. He's like a child!" Beecher was pissed off - that was a father for you, thinking of the innocent one.

Rebadow tisked, "Poor Cyril. After the way Schillinger treated him when he first got here, that must have terrified him. How could she?"

"Like she gives a fuck, as long as she gets her rocks off. O'Riley should have let Cyril smash her face in." Keller grinned, "I would have paid good money to see that."

"Yeah, but that wouldn't have solved anything in the long run, Chris. Just put Cyril in the hole, and got all the hacks mad at him. That's the last thing he needs."

"True, Beecher, true." Busmalis took an experimental bite of the mystery meat on his plate, then put his fork down in disgust. "They do tend to protect their own, no matter how despicable they may be."

Rebadow sighed and shook his head. "Poor O'Reily. He must hate feeling so helpless."

Keller laughed. "O'Reily? Helpless?" Miguel tended to agree. Ryan O'Reily was about as helpless as a rattlesnake.
"No, I know what you mean, Rebadow," Beecher agreed. "He can't watch Cyril twenty-four hours a day. There are just too many dangers here in Oz - people with grudges, or for that matter, people just too cruel to treat a brain-damaged man with any type of restraint."

"Exactly. O'Reily is all Cyril has - all that stands between him and the rest of Oz. That's a big responsibility for any man." Rebadow smiled at Miguel. "Thank goodness you saw what was happening, Alvarez."

He shrugged. "Well, I couldn't just watch her do that, you know? It didn't seem right." He glanced up, right into Keller's eyes. It was like they were staring right into him, burning him up from the inside. After a moment, Keller nodded.

"Good thing you were there, Alvarez. He's a very lucky man." It seemed like there were all sorts of depths in what Keller said, but he couldn't figure them all out. He ducked his head and studied his plate for a while, listening to Busmalis natter on about Norma, and the wedding that was back on again, now that the Warden had let him out of Solitary.

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Toby pointed O'Reily out to Chris as he crossed the quad on the way to the stairs up to the second floor. His body was tense and his movements jerky, like he was having trouble keeping his anger inside. Chris couldn't blame him for that. He called O'Reily over to the table where he and Toby were playing gin, but before he could even sit down, Toby started in with his questions.

"Where's Cyril? Is he okay? Did you get to see him?"

O'Reily shrugged, and sat on the edge of his chair, his leg bouncing nervously. "Yeah, I saw him. They've got him all doped up, so they're keeping him in the Infirmary over night."

Chris fiddled with the deck of cards sitting between them - just to keep his hand in - as he spoke, "Well, they obviously aren't keeping you, so I guess that means you didn't get any hits in, huh?"

"Yeah, well, I was kinda busy trying to keep Cyril from braining Howell, Keller, so I didn't really have much opportunity for any of that shit. He was a mess. Did you hear what happened? Howell was groping Cyril right there in the kitchen in front of God and everybody. Obviously she went too far even for the hacks this time, because Glynn told me a hack was backing up my story. He didn't say who, but there were half a dozen there in less than a minute, so there may have been more than one that saw what happened."

Toby threw his cards down on the table in disgust. "Some things just cross the line, O'Reily, even hacks have to see that. Listen, Rebadow and I were talking. If we can help you keep an eye on Cyril some time, just let us know. We know how hard it has to be, trying to watch him constantly. And now, I'm sure you're going to want to be even more careful. We'll help when we can."

O'Reily eyed Toby with distrust, but before he could say anything, Beecher kept going. "I know you and I've kind of been at odds with each other for a while, but, well, this is different, O'Reily. Cyril doesn't deserve this. He's not to blame here."

O'Reily held his breath. This could very well go a good ways towards his own goal of keeping O'Reily off Toby's ass. Hit him where he'll feel it. Offer him a chance to protect his own interests, and he just might start to see Toby in a different light. O'Reily didn't give much away, he had his stone face on, and it was hard to read him, but finally he nodded.

"Thanks, Beecher. I'll keep that in mind. Cyril can be a handful at times, it would be nice to have a break every once in a while."
Toby smiled then, relieved that O'Reily had taken his peace offering. "Yeah, he can be a bundle of energy, can't he? Who knows, you might even get Alvarez to lend a hand."

O'Reily tensed up then, and glanced at Chris, but Chris had no idea what that was about, so he just shrugged. "Alvarez?"

Beecher had picked up his cards, and was frowning at them. It was obvious he'd missed that whole exchange. "Yeah, you should have seen the look on his face when he told us what had happened. He was obviously disturbed by the whole thing." He glanced over at O'Reily again. "You're very fortunate he happened to be in line just then. If he hadn't pointed out what was happening, Cyril could be in the hole right now."

"Looks like you owe Alvarez a debt of gratitude, O'Reily." Chris looked back down at his cards, casually, well pleased with how this conversation had gone. He might as well have written the script, but he hadn't had to do a thing. He loved it when things fell together like this.

"Yeah, I guess I do owe him something, don't I?" O'Reily got up and headed up the stairs toward his pod, and Chris watched him go, puzzled. He was giving Alvarez props for his save; O'Reily should appreciate that. Keller shook his head and brought his attention back to Toby. He set his cards down on the table.

"Gin."

"What?" Toby looked up in surprise.

"You heard me. Gin."

Toby looked at him suspiciously. "You cheated."

"Did not!"

"Did too, you were no where near Gin when O'Reily showed up."

"Shows what you know. I just waited until you'd finished talking, because I knew you had things to say, that's all. I'm very considerate that way, you know."

"Yeah, right. You cheated while I was distracted. I know you."

"Now come on, Beecher, would I do something like that?"

"Of course you would."

Chris gave him an innocent 'who me?' look, but Toby just rolled his eyes. "Give me your cards."

Chris handed his cards to Toby with a bright smile, and Beecher sighed and started shuffling. Of course he'd cheated. But he wasn't about to admit it. What Toby didn't know, wouldn't hurt him, now would it?

Miguel slipped into the shower room, cursing when he realized there were men in there already. He'd waited until the slowest time of the day, hoping he'd have the shower to himself. The bite marks Keller had left on his nipple were healing slowly and were still rather noticeable, so he tried to take his showers when there was less chance of them being seen by anyone that mattered.

This was one thing he wouldn't miss when he lost Keller. He didn't mind the dangers of being discovered having sex nearly as much as he hated these marks that couldn't be explained away.
Being caught having sex with a man was admittedly bad, especially in the circles he usually traveled in, but these outward signs of ownership that didn't identify the 'owner' really bothered him.

If Miguel had to take the chance of being found out, then Keller should be taking the same chances. But it didn't work that way, did it? He should know that by now, but it just seemed unbalanced like this. It made him feel less centered in his own mind, and he didn't need that shit. He had enough trouble as it was. He hoped that Ryan wouldn't be the same.

Miguel wasn't sure what was up with him, though. He'd been acting strange in line the day before, when Howell pulled her stunt. He felt the familiar fear clench in his stomach. If his plans didn't work out, if Ryan didn't want him after all, he wasn't sure what he'd do. He was counting on Ryan to come up with a plan to keep him out of Solitary. He couldn't go back there. He just couldn't. If he did end up in Solitary again, he knew he wouldn't be sane if he ever came back out.

While he brushed his teeth, Miguel watched the two homeboys in the showers. When they turned off the water and grabbed their towels, he sighed with relief. If he could get in and out quickly, he might be able to get away without anyone else interrupting him. He'd just have to be quick.

As soon as they left, he hurried over, stripping out of his sweats and shirt and leaving his towel on the half-wall that divided the showers from the sinks. The hot water felt wonderful on his skin, and he took just a moment to let it soak into him, letting it hit his neck and back while he carefully scanned the area to make sure no one could see him.

He turned back around again - fucking Keller. He knew he didn't regret the things they did together, they were the only things that made him feel alive these days, and the constant reminders that the bruises and bites gave him sent charges through his body all day long. But when he had to avoid taking a shower all together some days to make sure no one saw the bites on his chest, or the bruises on his hips, it made life a bit more complicated than he could take sometimes.

"Well, well. Look who we have here. No. Don't turn around." Keller's low, commanding voice sent heat rushing through his body, and he had no choice but to do exactly as the man said. He just couldn't imagine doing anything else. How the hell did he sneak in like that? Miguel thought he'd been paying attention to his surroundings, but obviously not.

He continued to soap himself up as Keller crossed to a showerhead three down from the one Alvarez was using. "I'm glad I caught you here. Alvarez." He licked his lips, staring at Miguel's cock, which was hardening even more with the attention Keller was giving it. He wanted to look over, to make sure they were still alone. There was a half wall between them and the Plexiglas wall near the sinks, but still, if anyone wanted to look closely enough, they could tell something was going on. The thrill of the possibility of being caught was churning his stomach into pieces, but his cock just kept getting harder.
"Jerk off for me. I want to watch you jerk off with all of Em City in the very next room. I want to hear you whisper my name when you come." Miguel stood there in shock. This was what he'd wanted, wasn't it? Keller being just as exposed as him. Taking the same chances he did? His cock was so hard it ached, and he hadn't even touched himself yet.

"We don't have all day. I won't tell you again." He heard the impatience in Keller's voice, and realized he still hadn't moved. He took a deep breath and grabbed his cock, squeezing it firmly in his hand, shuddering as a rush of pleasure surged through him. Keller was turned sideways, so he could keep an eye on the door. He let Keller take all the worry and just started jerking off, fast and hard, biting his lip to keep from moaning loudly.

"That's more like it. You look good like that, Alvarez, the water streaming down your chest and legs, running over your face. I wish I could walk over there and run my finger down the crack of your ass. I want to be fucking you right now. I want to feel the heat of your body warmed by the water, cooling as it runs down between us. Running over the place my cock joins our bodies together."

He turned back toward the wall then, and Miguel realized Keller was jerking his own cock now, his hand moving fast, his slick cock sliding in and out of his fist. Miguel's cock surged in his hand as he watched. "I'd fuck you so hard you'd feel me for days. Every time you sat down, every time you bent over, you'd think of my cock stretching your ass, reminding you that your ass belongs to me."

Keller glanced over his shoulder as a group of biker's walked by the shower room entrance, laughing loudly at something one of them had said. As soon as they had passed, he ordered Miguel: "Get down on your knees."

He fell immediately, without thought. He winced at the pain of the hard slatted boards of the floor against his knees, but he didn't complain, just waited for Keller's next order, his cock grasped tightly in his hand. Keller took two quick steps to stand over Miguel, fisting his cock until it exploded all over Miguel's face and chest in three strong bursts of come. ¡Dios Mio! The moment the first drops landed on his face, Miguel came, his orgasm unexpected and blinding in its intensity. He arched his back, gasping and biting his lip until he tasted blood, knowing he couldn't make any noise that could give them away.

His eyes had closed at some point as he fought to remain quiet and control his movements, but they popped open again as he heard the noise of someone entering the shower room, a group of men's voices laughing and joking together. He stumbled shakily to his feet, sticking his face under the shower head, but not until he'd licked his lips to get the taste of Keller on his tongue.

He heard Keller's voice behind him, "Evening, ladies." He turned his head to see Keller striding away in a towel and those damned work boots of his, the ones that would have given Miguel a hard on, if he hadn't just emptied his cock on the shower's floor. Keller smiled at the few openly gay men that were residents of Em City, Fiona, Tony Masters, Kiki, Pinkerton, Miguel didn't know the names of the other two. He guessed they all showered together. Smart move, there's safety in numbers.

He took a deep breath and turned back to the shower head, wiping his chest off with shaky hands, glancing at the floor, to make sure all the come had washed away and wouldn't let everyone know exactly what they'd been doing. When his breathing had calmed to something respectable again, he turned to grab his towel from the wall, briskly rubbing his head to get the water out as he heard Masters telling some silly joke over at the sinks that had them all laughing.

He heard a quiet gasp, and glanced up. Kiki was standing on the other side of the wall, staring at
the bite around his nipple. Miguel's face flushed as one thin eyebrow arched delicately in speculation. "Eso tiene que doler."

He shrugged, and said with a pride that surprised him: "Si te quedas el suficiente tiempo aquí, te acostumbras al dolor, ¿verdad?"

Kiki smiled at him, tracing his fingers along the complicated design of the sunburst tattoo on his thin chest. "¿Quién sabe?, hasta podría llegar a gustarte."

That hit too close to home for Miguel, and he ducked his head and grabbed his clothes, pulling his shirt over his still wet body, struggling into it anyway. Kiki turned away and joined the party at the sinks. Fiona was explaining the proper way to apply some sort of makeup, and Miguel tuned them out as he learned his lesson and dried off his legs before trying to put his sweat pants on. He grabbed his towel and left the shower room in a hurry, glancing back just in time to see Kiki look up and wink at him with a sly smile. He turned his back and hurried to his pod, his heart still pounding.

"That's got to hurt."

"You stay here long enough, you get used to the pain, don't you?"

"Who knows, you might even learn to like it."
Chapter 8

Chris took the stairs up to O'Reily's pod two at a time. He saw Cyril sitting with Rebadow, playing checkers. Good. He needed to talk to O'Reily, and he didn't want to have to deal with getting Cyril out of the way first. They had trouble coming their way, and they needed to figure out a way to end it before everything exploded wide open.

When Chris saw Supreme Allah walking back through the gates of Em City, staring hard at Chris as he walked by, he knew something was wrong. He had a suspicion that Allah knew Chris and O'Reily had set him up to take the rap for the deaths of Shemin and Browne, but he didn't have any proof of it until he overhead Allah's conversation with Redding in the library.

Allah told Redding he was innocent of those murders, and looked directly at Chris when he said there were others who needed to pay for those crimes. Chris hadn't reacted, hadn't looked up from his book, as if he hadn't heard a word of their conversation. But he recognized a threat when he heard one, and Allah made it plain to Redding, and to Chris, that he was perfectly capable of taking care of anything that got in his way. Allah knew, and it was obvious that he was out for revenge. It looked like it might be time for a little preventative medicine. They needed to take out Supreme Allah before Allah took out them.

When he got to O'Reily's pod, O'Reily was staring into space, his chair tipped back on two feet, one of his travel magazines forgotten across his lap. Chris stepped inside the room, rolling his eyes at O'Reily's escapism. But everyone had something they did to keep back the mind-numbing routine of this hellhole, so he guessed he could understand that.

He thought O'Reily would appreciate his life here a bit more, though, if he'd just get over his ridiculous fear of faggotry and fuck the daylights out of Alvarez, like Chris knew they both wanted him to. He'd leave that for another time. There were more important things to deal with right now. Hell, looked like they had enough distractions on their hands for the moment, anyway.

When Miguel heard Howell's voice in the guard station outside the main gate to Emerald City, he wondered what she was doing there. She worked out of Unit J now, the cop unit, so seeing her here so soon after the episode in the kitchen seemed strange to him. He got an odd feeling in the pit of his stomach when he thought about her messing with Cyril. It wasn't only that he was Ryan's brother, either. It felt wrong to mess with someone who couldn't understand what was going on.

She was laughing at something D'Agnasti was saying - five or six hacks all standing around joking and talking. It raised his hackles, so he got up and crossed over to the wall beside the gate where they couldn't see him and leaned casually against it. If anyone asked what he was doing there, he could say he was waiting for someone. They weren't saying much of anything at first but he stuck with it, and eventually they got around to the subject of yesterday and the kitchen.

"They were late bringing the trays around, so I went down to see what was up. Cyril was putting our trays on a cart, so of course he was the one I was talking to. My hand barely grazed his ass as I turned around to check on the serving line and he freaked out."

"So you didn't grab his ass? I heard even some of the C.O.s saw it."

"Who? Do you have one eyewitness? Not someone who says someone else saw it. I want to know who said that. Besides Ryan O'Reily, that is. That prick only wants to cause me trouble."
"Yeah, but if Glynn is on the warpath I'd keep my distance, if I were you."

"Like I have a choice in the matter! The Warden banned me from going within fifty feet of either one of them."

"You're kidding me."

"What, I'm going to start carrying a measuring tape with me, now? Oh, sorry, Ryan O'Reily is in that riot, I can't help you with that...gotta keep 50 feet away at all times!"

"That's crazy shit."

"Yeah, tell me about it. But you know, there are other people around without that restriction. I don't have to be anywhere near the guy when he falls down and goes boom, right? And let me tell you, I'd be mighty grateful to whoever happened to put O'Reily out of commission. I might even be willing to make it worth their while."

"Oh yeah? What you got in mind?"

"Why? Are you interested?"

"Ya never know."

"When's the last time you had your cock sucked, D'Agnasti?"

Everyone was talking at once and laughing, so he couldn't hear what she said next, but when the noise quieted down Howell was talking again. "...it's not like I would ever ask anyone to...kill him or anything. I only want to make it clear that I don't appreciate him telling lies, is all. A little reminder that he shouldn't mess with the C.O.s, if you know what I mean. If he gets away with this, who's he going to be telling stories about next time?"

"Alvarez! What the hell are you doing over there?" Miguel jumped at the sound of Murphy's voice. He'd gotten so involved in what they were saying that he'd forgotten to keep his eyes peeled for trouble.

He shrugged, "Shit man, I'm just waiting for somebody. That's not a crime is it?"

Murphy stopped in front of him, motioning towards the tables with his head. "Well, go wait for somebody over there by the tables, alright?"

"I didn't do nothing!"

"Maybe not, but you're making me nervous, so get away from the gate, alright?"

Miguel rolled his eyes and walked away, glancing back to see Murphy walk over and get let out of the gate to stand with the group of hacks gathered by the guard station. He needed to see Ryan about this. It sounded like Howell was out to cause trouble.

Ryan threw his magazine against the wall, tired as hell of all the bullshit he'd had to deal with in the last couple of days. He'd just about had it with everyone and everything. He was going down to find out what Supreme Allah knew, and once he'd cleared up that mess, Ryan wasn't going to have anything to do with Chris Keller or Miguel Alvarez ever again.

He knew he was simplifying things a great deal; that Howell wasn't Keller's fault, but lately it seemed all Keller did was make everything worse, and he'd about had it up to here with everyone.
FUCK THEM ALL, he'd take care of Cyril himself, and the rest of the world could go to hell. He'd barely gotten the door open before he saw Miguel at the top of the stairs, heading his direction. Fuck. This day just got better and better.

"I got to talk to you, man. It's really important." Miguel hung back, as if he was uncertain of his welcome, but the look of urgency in his eyes was disturbing.

Ryan refused to be swayed, he didn't need anything from Miguel, and that was the end of that. "Go to hell, Alvarez, I got things to do that don't include you."

Miguel grabbed his arm as he pushed his way past, "This is urgent, man. You need to know what's happening down there. Howell..."

Ryan interrupted him, pulling out his grip. "I don't need anything from you, man. You go back to your Master and tell him all about it, okay? And stay the fuck away from me. Maybe you and Keller have decided I'd make you a fine sugar daddy, but I'm here to tell you I am not a faggot, I never have been a faggot and I never will be.

"I don't want you to ever touch me again, is that clear?" He laughed. "Wait. What am I thinking? You're going back to Solitary in a couple of days, anyway, aren't you? Good. Because we'll all be better off without you around. Keller doesn't want you anymore, I never did want you, and neither does anyone else. So enjoy the rest of your life, Alvarez. I know I will, because I'm never going to have to see your face again."

Ryan turned and headed down the stairs, fast - not wanting to give Miguel the chance to catch him. He had things to do, and they didn't involve Keller's prag, or submissive or whatever he wanted to call Miguel. He didn't need that shit; he had his own problems to deal with.

Miguel paced his cell, angry and hurt and afraid. Without Ryan's help, he'd never stay out of Solitary. ¡Estaba perdido! He was lost! He'd go crazy in Solitary, he knew that. He could feel his mind flying apart already, from thinking about it. He needed to calm down, and think this through rationally, but it was so hard. All of the calm he'd managed to keep hold of this last week was due to his belief in Ryan. Ryan had promised he'd take care of Miguel, and he'd believed him. He'd built his hopes on Ryan, and now he had nothing left.

He'd wondered, since that first time he'd sucked Ryan off, if this was what Keller had in mind. If he thought he could push Miguel off onto Ryan to get him out of Keller's hair. But he wasn't sure why he would bother, because Miguel knew the deal. He knew that as soon as Beecher waved his lily-white ass at Keller, Miguel would get tossed away like a dirty rag. He was prepared for that. But obviously Keller had a plan that he'd not bothered to tell to Miguel.

Why should he, after all? Miguel was disposable waste, meant to be used and discarded. He didn't need to know Keller's plans. But when Keller had involved Miguel in his and Ryan's agreement, he'd thought that maybe there might be a way to earn back the kind of respect he had been used to at one time. A chance to show he was worthy. Ryan had given him that chance. He'd told Miguel that Keller respected him - told him that he was worth more than merely a piece of ass, or a convenient mouth to fuck.

Ryan had given him hope. He'd built a dream on that hope, and for a week he'd felt like he could do anything if Ryan would believe in him. Now that dream had crumbled to the ground. Ryan must have had a fight with Keller. Maybe Keller told him he wanted to give Miguel to him - who knew. But whatever it was, Ryan was upset with Keller, and Miguel as well. Ryan didn't like having someone else try and run his future, Miguel had known that from the start. He'd never intended to
tell Ryan his own plans, but then Keller probably hadn't either. It seemed he was just as guilty of trying to use Ryan as Keller was.

Ryan had been so good to him, and look how he'd treated him. It seemed he owed Ryan something. He'd make sure Ryan knew what was going on with Howell, even if he didn't help Miguel with Warden Glynn. He had to at least try.

He stepped out of his room and looked over the quad floor, but Keller was busy talking to Beecher, their heads tilted together in concentration as they talked about something they were watching on the news. He hadn't seen Ryan since he blew up at Miguel half an hour ago. It looked like Cyril was in their pod though, so maybe he could ask Cyril where his brother was, and try to talk to him again.

He knocked on the door to Cyril's pod, worried about surprising him or something, but Cyril waved and went back to coloring. He had a big coloring book on the floor; crayons spread out all over the place and he was lying on his belly, his feet waving in the air. When Miguel entered the room he smiled broadly.

"Hey! When are we going to box, together? Ryan said we were going to box together, remember?"

Miguel nodded, a spear of pain in his chest. That had been the beginnings of his hope, and he hated to think of it now. "Yeah, well - you'll have to ask your brother about that. It's all up to him, now."

Cyril nodded and went back to the crayon in his hand, coloring black on a cow's back, leaving splotches of white free all over the hide. Miguel sat down on the floor, crossing his legs to get closer to Cyril's level. "Where is O'Reily right now, Cyril? Do you know?" He was kind of surprised that he'd left Cyril alone after how worried he'd been about Howell. Whatever it was that had Ryan so upset must be rather important.

Cyril nodded without looking up from his coloring book. "Officer Murphy took him to the Infirmary."

"The Infirmary?" ¡Puta madre! Was he already too late to protect Ryan? "What happened?"

"Ryan hit the cement wall again. His knuckles were all bloody and he was saying bad words." Cyril looked up at Miguel seriously. "You're not supposed to hit the wall, because it hurts you worse than it does the wall, every time. Ryan knows that, but sometimes he forgets."

Relief flooded Miguel when he heard that it wasn't a beat down by a hack. He might still be in time to protect Ryan after all. "Murphy took him?" Murphy hadn't been there when Howell had offered to blow whoever put Ryan in the Infirmary, so he might be okay for now. But in case he was still mad, and wouldn't listen to Miguel when he got back, it couldn't hurt to reinforce the message.

"Listen, Cyril, can you remember to tell Ryan something for me? It's very important. Will you remember if I tell you something important?"

"I'll try. I don't always 'member things so good."

"But this one is very, very important. So you'll try really hard, right?"

Cyril looked back up at Alvarez. "Yeah, I'll try."

"Good. Tell him he should watch his back with the hacks - that they want to hurt him. Tell him that he can't trust the hacks."

Cyril was obviously surprised. "But we're supposed to trust the hacks. Ryan says that if he's not
around and I'm afraid, that I'm supposed to go to the hacks 'cause they'll protect me."

Miguel cursed. Well that made perfect sense for Cyril, but it didn't help Ryan right now. "Yeah, that's right. That's usually the case, but right now there's a hack that wants to hurt Ryan, and he has to be very careful. Tell him that, alright?"

"He can go with Murphy. Murphy is black and Irish like us, so we can always trust Murphy. I'm supposed to go to Murphy before anyone else if there's trouble, 'cause he'll protect me, 'cause we have the same skin."

"Murphy's like you? Irish, I guess, but what does that mean, black like you? You're not black." ¡Dios Mío! Talking to Cyril was giving him a headache.

"Not on the outside, but inside we are. Ryan said so." Cyril went back to his cow, and Miguel stared at him, hoping that Ryan was right and he could trust Murphy.

"Don't forget to tell him what I said, okay, Cyril? You won't forget, will you?"

Cyril shook his head, "I won't forget. I promise."

Miguel sighed. That would have to be good enough. He got up. "Okay then, Cyril. Thanks."

Cyril waved at him as he left and he waved back through the Plexiglas of the door as it swung shut. He wasn't sure what to do next. He checked over the rail, but Keller was watching Up Your Ante with Beecher and they were surrounded by other men, there was no way to get his attention without pissing Keller off. Then Murphy walked through the gate without Ryan. Shit. That put Ryan in the Infirmary with hacks he didn't trust.

He wondered if Ryan really did trust Murphy, or if he just told that to Cyril. He always seemed okay for a hack. If it was true, maybe Murphy would protect Ryan. He could talk to Murphy for a minute or two, see what he said. Feel him out, and see if he should say anything to him. He was getting desperate right now. He headed down the stairs, trying to catch Murphy before he got back to the guard station. The last thing he needed was for the other hacks to know he wanted to talk about Ryan O'Reily.

He caught Murphy right before he started up the stairs. "Can I talk to you?"

Murphy stopped, his hand on the rail. "About what?"

Miguel shrugged. "It's kind of important. Can we talk in private? For a minute?" He didn't really want to be seen with Murphy, with any hack for that matter, so the sooner they got away from the center of the quad, the better. Murphy hesitated, watching him. "Please?"

Murphy turned away from the stairs and headed toward the nearby classrooms, and Miguel followed behind him. That was better; at least they couldn't be heard, even if they could be seen through the Plexiglas walls.

He really wasn't sure he should be doing this. If Ryan got pissed that he'd told a hack his business, he'd never forgive Miguel. But he'd promised himself he'd do everything he could to help Ryan, and the chances were good that D'Agnasti, or whatever hack decided to do the deed, would take out Ryan soon, while it was still fresh in the prisoners minds what had happened. How else could they be sure everyone knew it was a lesson in not messing with a hack?

He was taking a chance, but if Ryan really thought they had the same skin, then he might trust Murphy. He obviously trusted him with Cyril, and that was a big deal in Miguel's book. If it saved
Ryan's life, he could be as pissed as he wanted to be. Miguel would still end up back in Solitary, but he was headed there anyway, so he'd do this, and hope that Ryan understood why he'd been willing to take that chance.

Murphy opened the classroom door and watched Miguel as he entered, then shut the door behind them both and leaned up against it with his arms crossed, staring at Miguel questioningly. "You've got five minutes. Start talking."

Suddenly, Miguel had no idea where to start. So he went with what had been puzzling him from the moment Cyril had said it. "Cyril says you and the O'Reily's have got the same blood in you. Black and Irish. What the hell does that mean?"

Murphy looked surprised. "This is what was so urgent? Black Irish blood?"

Miguel shrugged and shoved his hands in his pockets, "Yeah, sort of. What does that mean? Black Irish? You don't look black to me."

"Black Irish means we've got Spanish blood in our veins, mixed in with the Irish. Does that mean he can trust you? More than the other hacks, I mean."

"Well, I'm not going to let him get away with anything. If O'Reily told you I would, he's full of shit. But I wouldn't hurt him without cause. I wouldn't hurt any of you without cause." Murphy said that so plainly, like it was something he didn't really feel the need to push. Like he knew it was a fact, and who knew, maybe he thought it was. That didn't mean anyone else believed it, though.

"He told Cyril to come to you, if he was in trouble and couldn't find O'Reily, did you know that?"

"He did?" Murphy nodded his head. "Well, that's probably a good idea. He knows I respect that O'Reily wants to protect his brother. I have brothers myself, I understand that. I can't know what the other C.O.s think of Cyril, but I know I take care of him as best I can. Does this have to do with anything, Alvarez? What is this all about?"

Miguel took the chance. He didn't think he really had a choice, now. He started to pace the space between the aisles of chairs. It was only a few feet in either direction, but it gave him a sense of movement, like he was doing something. "You and O'Reily, you've got the same skin. Does that mean you'd protect him, even if it was hacks that wanted him hurt?"

"Wait a minute." Murphy stepped up to him and put a hand out to stop his pacing. Miguel stopped short of his hand, not wanting to get that close. Ryan may trust him, that didn't mean Miguel did. "This has something to do with this afternoon, when you were hanging out around the gate, doesn't it? What did you hear? Someone wants O'Reily dead?"

"Or maybe just hurt real bad. I'm not sure. But whatever it is, it's going to leave him out of the picture for a while, and that's not good for Cyril. So it would be a lot better for both of them if it never happened, right?"
"Why tell me? Why not tell O'Reily? Do you think he's going to like it if he finds out you went behind his back to a C.O.? Even if it is me."

Miguel turned away from him, his face flushing. "I can't talk to him. I tried, he won't listen to me. He don't trust me. I don't know what else to do."

"Then why try and protect him, if he doesn't trust you? Is this about Cyril? You're trying to protect Cyril?"

"Some, maybe. I like Cyril, and he don't understand all this. He can't watch out for himself, can he?" He paused, looking Murphy in the eye. "And maybe I owe O'Reily something, okay?"

Murphy stared at him a long time, like he was trying to decide what to believe. Finally, he nodded. "Okay. I'll keep an eye on him. And I'll talk to him."

"You don't have to tell him it came from me. I mean, he wouldn't like it that I spoke to you about this."

"Don't worry; I'll keep your secret." Murphy nodded out into the quad where several prisoners stood around, watching their conversation, mostly curious, but some looking strangely intent. "But I can't guarantee that anyone else will."

Miguel cursed. "Yeah, well, I guess I'll have to take my chances with that, right?"

Murphy nodded. "Right. Don't worry, Alvarez, I'll take care of O'Reily."

Miguel nodded tensely, watching a couple of Latinos walking back and forth outside the Plexiglas wall. Miguel didn't know them; they'd landed after he was sent to Solitary, or maybe while he was out wandering in the real world. But he got the idea they could be trouble. Murphy left the room but stood by the wall for a couple of minutes until they left, wandering off to the TV area. Then he headed up the stairs to the guard station, leaving Miguel behind.

Miguel watched Murphy walk up to the guard station before he left the classroom, but as soon as soon as the door closed behind him, there was Vasquez, right in his face. Miguel froze. ¡Maldita sea! This cabrón had it out for Miguel. He and Chico Guerra had been friends for a long time, and he'd picked up Chico's hatred of Miguel from way back.

"No tengo broncas contigo, Vasquez. I got no gripe with you. Just leave me alone, alright?" Miguel tried to push around him, to get away from this corner to where more people could see what was happening.

"The hell with that." Vasquez stepped up to him threateningly. "You been telling secrets, Alvarez? That what you've been doing talking with that hack?"

Miguel wanted to step back out of his way, but he refused to back down. If he did, he'd never be safe from Vasquez. "Secrets? What kind of secrets would I have to tell? Morales won't let me back in El Norte, where the hell would I get secrets, even if I wanted to tell them? What are you, loco?"

He thought quickly. "Murphy thought I was involved in some deal, so he was threatening to send me back to Solitary if I screwed up. I didn't say anything to him."

"Yeah, well your mouth was sure moving a lot for someone that wasn't saying nothing."

"You get a hack up your ass and you'd talk too, man. Tell him everything he wants to hear about how good you've been and how you're not messing with nothing. You talk a lot. It don't mean you say anything important."
Vasquez stepped back away from him finally. "Yeah, well you better not, because we got our eyes on you, motherfucker. You got to be leal a tu gente, man, no matter what."

Alvarez was tired of being pushed around by people who should have been on his side. He laughed bitterly. "¿Mi gente? Loyal to my people? Who the fuck do you think are the ones who've been screwing me over since I got to this joint? My people. My people have stabbed me in the back a dozen times. My people don't deserve my loyalty. They don't deserve me."

"Well then we'll take care of that, right now." Vasquez pulled out a shank, the kind they call a Gillette bayonet, all sharp blade down one side, and took a step forward. He grinned at Miguel. "Chico wanted to be here when we slit your throat, but he'll be glad to know I was the one to do it, you son of a bitch."

He lunged at Miguel, who stepped out of his way, trying to avoid the shank, but Vasquez grabbed onto his arm and pulled him around, trying to get the blade up to Miguel's throat. "I'm gonna kill you, cabrón. I'm never going to stop until you're dead. You deserve to rot in hell, joto."

Miguel felt the blade slice across his throat, but barely touch the skin. It didn't matter, though, because he'd already exploded inside. He'd had enough of people who hated him, who were willing to watch him rot in Solitary, to rot in hell. He couldn't let another one go. He'd had enough. He grabbed the hand with the shank and pulled the blade out of his grasp, dragging Vasquez up in front of him chest to back.

Vasquez struggled, but Miguel held him with one arm across his chest, the shank at his throat, and he pulled - the blade slicing cleanly through flesh and bone, the hot arterial blood spraying over his hand and across the room. He dropped Vasquez' body as the bastard bled out across the floor. Solo vaya - good riddance.

Miguel got his back to the wall, his blade arm extended and moving back and forth as three or four hacks approach him cautiously. They moved around, trying to get close to him on the sides, and he tried to follow their movement, a blur of sound and color that barely registered on his mind. Inside his brain, he was howling in despair. ¡Perdido! Lost! He was alone, forgotten by everyone - hated by everyone. He was going to rot in that hell forever. But he didn't think he could take that loneliness again, didn't know if he was strong enough to take that kind of anguish. ¡Madre de Dios!

He knew what he had to do. He knew it was wrong, but he couldn't take any more. He felt a pang of sorrow for Mukada, he'd be hurt by this, but he had no choice. No more choices. He slashed out at a hack who was trying to get close on his left, but pulled back before Murphy could get to him on his right. They closed in on him, but before the hacks could pull the shank out of his hand, he put the blade up and slashed it across his own throat.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ryan hopped down from the examination table, his bandaged hand held up to keep the throbbing pain down as much as possible. The handcuffs around his wrists were extra tight for some reason, and he would have complained about them, if there weren't other things on his mind, like why they were leaving the Infirmary through the wrong door.

"So what's all the noise about, D'Agnasti? Something I should know about?" Ryan tried to slow down a bit, to see if he could tell what was going on, but D'Agnasti shoved him out the door, letting it slam behind him.

"Keep your trap shut and keep moving, O'Reily; we've got things to do."

"Like what? Hey, you know, this isn't the way back to Em City, man. We're going the wrong way."

D'Agnasti grabbed his arm and roughly pulled him along. "We're taking the long way around; we don't want to get in the way of the emergency, do we?"

'Yeah, but even I know that we have to go left here, this way goes to Unit B and the Hole." Ryan tried to pull away, but D'Agnasti had a good grip on his arm, and kept moving him along. "We're not going to the Hole are we?"

"No. Not yet anyway."

"What the fuck, man? Is this about all the noise back there? What happened? Who've they got in the Infirmary? It's not my brother, is it? Is Cyril okay?" His head was suddenly full of visions of Cyril lying in a pool of blood.

"Shut up, O'Reily. No, it's not your brother. No one has touched your precious brother." D'Agnasti shoved Ryan into a short hallway close to Unit B, pushing him back against the wall with a dark laugh. "If I were you, I'd be less worried about Cyril, and more worried about you." He punched Ryan hard in the stomach, and Ryan bent over with a gasp of expelled air. He pulled Ryan's head back up and looked into his eyes.

"You did something stupid, O'Reily, you wanna guess what it was?"

"Not really," Ryan wheezed. "Why don't you tell me about it and get it over with, okay?" His gut ached like hell; D'Agnasti had one hell of a right.

He banged Ryan's head back against the concrete blocks of the wall. It made a meaty sound that would have worried Ryan, if his ears hadn't been ringing so loudly. Damn, that hurt like a son of a bitch. When his head hit for the second time, he saw stars and the pain seemed to encompass his entire head. That couldn't be good.

"Now listen carefully, O'Reily." Another bang against the concrete wasn't helping with his concentration, but he wasn't about to tell D'Agnasti that. "You don't fuck around with the C.O.s. Is that clear?" This time he emphasized each word with a solid whack of Ryan's skull against the wall. "Don't. Fuck. With. The. Hacks."

As he lost consciousness, Ryan told himself that was advice he could have used the moment
Howell pushed him in the ladies bathroom and shoved her tongue down his throat. But it was a little late now.

"...and if I ever catch you even looking at one of the O'Reily brothers from across the cafeteria, I'll have you in the Warden's office within minutes. I don't know why I'm not firing you and putting you up on charges right now, but as long as I don't ever see you in Em City again, I won't say anything about this.

"Now get the hell out of here. I'll let personnel know you're taking the weekend off, and Monday when you come back, your transfer will be official. Don't ever cross me again, D'Agnasti, or you won't like the results. Is that clear?"

There was no answer, but Ryan could hear the footsteps as someone walked away. His head was still ringing, and he couldn't manage to get his eyes open, but at least he was alive. He was lying on his side on the floor, and he was pretty sure that was Murphy beside him, pressing something up against his aching skull.

"Ow!" He opened his eyes, but the light was too bright, and it left sparkles across the insides of his lids when he closed them again. "Oh fuck, that hurts."

Murphy laughed. "Well, I guess that means you're not hurt too badly. You're cursing like a sailor, so everything must be normal."

"Yeah, except for my cracked skull. I've got a concussion, I think. The light is really bright and my stomach is queasy."

"You think you can walk to the infirmary? Or do I need to get a stretcher for you?"

"Can you give me a minute? Just let me lie here for a bit and maybe I can sit up. Oh, shit! Cyril. You need to check on Cyril. If Ho- I mean if someone wanted to mess with me, Cyril would be the main way to do it."

"Cyril is okay. I checked on him before I left. He was coloring in his pod with Rebadow and Beecher, and your buddy Keller was outside the door. I don't think anyone could get to him."

"Thank Christ. I thought I was a gonner, man. I thought he was going to kill me." Ryan opened his eyes a bit. They watered, but he could handle it. He blinked for a minute and his vision started to settle. "I think I'm okay. Can you help me sit up?"

Murphy put a shoulder under his arm and slowly pulled him up into a sitting position against the wall. The room spun for a second or two, then his stomach settled again. Ryan sighed with relief.

Murphy pulled what looked like Ryan's t-shirt away from his head, and examined his injury. "The bleeding has pretty much stopped; it wasn't bad for a head wound. I think you'll be okay here for a minute."

Ryan glanced down and realized with dismay that that his shirt was missing. "Is that my t-shirt? Damn, I've only got a few of those."

"Shut up. It was already ruined, anyway." Murphy grabbed Ryan's unbandaged hand and put it on his bloody shirt. "Hold this here." He settled down on the floor, sitting against the wall opposite Ryan. "We need to talk before you go back to the Infirmary."

"If this is about Howell and Cyril, I told the truth. For once I told the absolute truth, and no one
"No, I believe you. I think the Warden does too, and that's what's got Howell so upset. She's panicking and trying to get the other hacks to back her because she's a C.O."

"I know. Hacks look out for hacks. I understand that. But what can I do? I can't protect Cyril if she's around. She's trying to convince me to let her fuck him, and I can't do that."

"She asked you to let her fuck Cyril?" The shock was evident in his voice.

Ryan glanced up sharply, and his head spun. "Shit." He needed to be careful with what he said; he couldn't afford to slip like that. "You can't tell anyone that, Murphy. That would only make things worse and you know it."

Murphy nodded his acknowledgment. "There's more to this than I thought there was, isn't there? Have you been messing around with Howell?"

Ryan squinted his eyes in Murphy's direction. "Do you really want me to answer that?"

"Jesus fuck! No. Don't say anything. I don't need to hear it." Murphy slapped his hand against the tile floor, and Ryan winced in pain at the noise it made. "Damn it. How stupid is that, O'Reily? You saw how she ran roughshod over McManus. Did you think you'd have better luck? For Christ's sake."

"Well what the fuck was I supposed to do? Say no? If you hadn't had sex in four years and some woman threw you up against the wall and examined your tonsils with her tongue, what would you do? If I'd said no, I'd still be in the same boat I'm in now. I was fucked from the moment she looked at me."

Murphy sighed. "Literally."

Ryan snorted, then complained at the pounding that grew in his skull when he laughed. "Ow."

Murphy sighed and stood up, then reached down a hand to help Ryan to his feet. "We need to get you back to the Infirmary. Things should have calmed down some by now. I hope to Christ that Alvarez is still alive. He did a number on his throat."

Ryan's head spun as he looked up at Murphy with alarm. He dropped the bloody shirt and grabbed Murphy's hand, pulling Murphy down, where he knelt awkwardly. "What happened to Alvarez? Somebody slit his throat?"

Murphy frowned. "He slit it himself."

Ryan felt the blood drain out of his head, and was glad he was sitting when he suddenly felt dizzy. "What? How do you know he did it himself? He has a lot of enemies in El Norte; any one of them could have done it."

"I watched him do it, myself; I pulled the damn shank out of his hand. I don't know if I was in time, though, there was a lot of blood." Murphy sighed. "He came to me, wanted to talk about you. I promised him I wouldn't tell you, but I think things have changed now."

"He wanted to talk about me?"

"He told me you weren't safe from the C.O.s. Said he'd overheard them talking about taking you out of commission. He came to me because Cyril told him you trusted me, and he hoped I'd help
"Shit." He put his forehead down on one knee, closing his eyes to try and control the way his entire head throbbed with his pulse. "Even after I told him to fuck off. I told him... He still went to you to try and keep me safe. Why the hell did he do that?"

"He said something about maybe he owed you something."

"He saved my life."

"I don't know that D'Agnasti would have killed you. I think he only wanted to give you a warning."

"Well it felt like he wanted to kill me, trust me on that. I really fucked up with Alvarez." Ryan watched as Murphy stood up, dusting off his knee. "He was still alive when you saw him? What the hell happened?"

"I think some Latinos saw him talking to me, and thought he was trying to sell them out. They came at him as soon as I left him alone. I headed right back down when I saw what was happening. But he grabbed the shank right out of Vasquez' hand and slit the bastard's throat with it. Then it looked like he realized what he'd done, and panicked. He was surrounded by C.O.s and he looked so lost. Then he reached up and tried to slice his throat open."

Ryan slumped down, his head hanging, feeling it pound through his whole body. Sick to his soul, he heard Murphy's words repeat in his head. 'He looked so lost.' "That's my fault. My fault. I was mad, not even really mad at him, but he was in the way, and I wouldn't listen to him. I took my anger out on him, and it's my fault."

"Yeah well, that may be. But we need to get you back to the infirmary."

Ryan considered shaking his head, but changed his mind. "I think it would hurt me more than you at this point. Unless you died laughing at me rolling on the floor in agony. But Alvarez..."

Murphy took Ryan's arm and steadied him as they walked down the hall. "We can find out how he's doing when we get there. If he survives this, I guess you've got a hell of a lot of apologizing to do."

"Miguel?" A soft, gentle hand on his face. Not like his mama's or his grandmama's hands though, their hands were always rough from cleaning and cooking and hard work. These hands stroked his face like an angel's hands should feel. "Miguel? Can you hear me? ¿Miguel, puedes oírme?"

Her voice was soft and lilting, and it made him sigh - it reminded him of someone, but he couldn't remember who. Soft voice, soft hands...maybe he was in heaven. He sure wasn't in Oz. Oz...it all started to come back to him in flashes - talking to Murphy, Vasquez pulling a knife on him, hot blood splashing on his hand as the shank sliced deep into Vasquez' artery, the blur of blue uniforms and pale skin as the hacks rushed him, pulling his hand away from his own neck.

"Miguel?"

He struggled to open his eyes, and saw a vision he hadn't thought of in years. Miguel moved his
lips to ask if he was in heaven, but nothing came out. His lips were dry and cracked, and his throat hurt like a motherfucker. The vision smiled faintly, her hand sliding off his cheek, to the bandage on his neck.

"You're at Benchley Memorial Hospital, Miguel. I'm Dr. Nathan, do you remember me?"

Miguel closed his eyes as despair crashed over him. He was still alive. He'd promised himself he wouldn't live through this again, but he was still here. He was never going to escape Oz. Or maybe he was dead. Maybe this was his hell. He'd live like this forever - always the hint of hope, the promise of a way out, before he crashed back into the torment of Solitary again. And it would never end. Forever and ever, amén. His sorrow overwhelmed him, swirling around his heart and taking him down into blackness.

Miguel woke to the sound of softly spoken words; a prayer for the sick and wounded. He wanted to laugh at the irony of a priest praying for a man who was already in hell, but he'd learned the hard way that trying to use his voice was painful enough to bring tears to his eyes, so he did nothing, didn't even move. He recognized Father Mukada's voice. He'd been here several times since Miguel had woken up that first time, but it was easier to pretend to be asleep than to listen to Mukada talk, because inevitably it turned around to his finding comfort in God, and he knew he wouldn't find God here in hell.

"Oh, excuse me Father; I didn't realize there was someone in here."

"Gloria?"

"Ray! Oh my God. It's so good to see you." From the rustle of clothing, they must have been hugging. Miguel didn't look, though; he kept his eyes tightly shut. Mukada may have been distracted by Dr. Nathan, but if Miguel let him know he was awake, the Father would never leave.

"I thought you'd moved away. I had no idea you were here at Benchley."

"I did move, but only briefly. My family is all here, and I missed their support. I apologize for not letting someone at Oz know I was back, I just wasn't ready to face anyone yet. I hope you understand."

"Of course I do. And if you'd rather they not know, I won't say a word about seeing you."

"No, it's been two years now. I'm finally moving on with my life. Getting over everything. It's not been easy, but I'm doing okay. There are still times when it hits me, and I struggle with it all over again, but I think I'm going to be alright."

"I'm so glad for you. You've had a lot to deal with. It's good that you've had the support of your family. That's very important."

"It is." Dr. Nathan laughed briefly. "You don't know what a shock it was when I first saw Alvarez here. My heart started pounding and my hands shook. But Miguel was never anything but kind to me. Besides, he's a patient that needs my care, and that's all that matters in the end, right?"

"How is he doing? I've asked the nurses, but they say the same things over and over."

"He's not doing well, Ray. He should have improved more by now. There's no infection, the cuts to his vocal cords are healing, although slowly, but... I have to ask. Were these wounds self-inflicted?"
"They were. He was attacked by another inmate, and they struggled. He slit Vasquez' throat, then tried to slice his own. If Sean Murphy hadn't stopped him, he'd be dead now."

"I thought as much. You remember when he tried to hang himself in his cell? When he was in Solitary and that idiot from the Weigart Corporation took him off his meds? When he first woke last week, I was here, and the look he gave me was the same as then. Back then, he told us we should have let him die. I know that's the way he feels now. He's not getting better because he wants to die."

"Yes. I can see it in his eyes, every time he sees me, every time he turns his face away when I walk through the curtain. I don't know what to do, though, except keep praying. I keep coming, even though he doesn't want to see me."

"Don't give up on him, Ray. He'll thank you some day."

"I hope so."

"Listen, I could use a cup of coffee. Would you join me?"

"I'd love to."

A hand touched his arm, and Mukada's voice whispered to him. "Remember Miguel, God loves you. I'll be back soon."

Miguel heard them leave him, and a tear slipped out from under one eyelid. He ignored it as it slid down his cheek. God doesn't love me, he thought. He's just looking for another piece of my ass.

Chapter End Notes

Some quotes borrowed or paraphrased from *God's Chillun" - Season One, Episode Three of HBO's Oz.*
Chapter 10

Ryan pushed his cart full of lunch trays down the hall, trailed by the ever-present hack. He occasionally wiped a hand on his kitchen whites to rid himself of his sweaty palms - he couldn't remember being this nervous about talking to someone since high school. He'd been waiting for this for three weeks, now - bugging Murphy for information so often that he now had a standard reply whenever Ryan came near. "No, O'Reily, I haven't heard anything new about when Alvarez will be released from Benchley Memorial. But as soon as I do, I promise you'll be the first to know."

With Keller in Massachusetts, on trial for hiring a hit man to take out Schillinger's son, suddenly Beecher had far too much time on his hands. He was doing everything with Cyril, to keep himself occupied, and while it made Ryan's life easier, it also left him more on his own than he'd been in ages, and he found himself missing Cyril's presence in the pod. Hell, at this point, he'd almost be happy to see Keller again, if only to give him something to do with his time. He'd always been good for a game of chess, if nothing else. But instead, Ryan's days had developed a sense of monotony that irritated the hell out of him.

Yesterday was the first time there'd been a change in his routine - they'd shipped Alvarez out in the afternoon, and today there was a lunch order for the Infirmary for fluids and soft foods with Miguel's name on it. He'd switched jobs with that asshole Gordon for lunch, and here he was on his way to the Infirmary to talk to Miguel. And his palms were sweaty. But he hid his discomfort as he entered the patient's ward and steeled himself for the confrontation. He didn't think it was going to be pretty.

Fortunately, Gordon was right, as soon as they stepped onto the ward, Haskins headed for the closest guard stationed in the room and started up a conversation, so chances were good that if he were careful, he'd have a few minutes to talk to Miguel. The problem was Miguel wasn't in the ward. He'd searched carefully, as he went down the row, and there was no Miguel on either side of the big room.

He was down to the last tray and wasn't sure what to do. He saw Father Mukada coming out of one of the few private rooms in the back of the ward and called his name, keeping an eye on Haskins the whole time.

"Hey, Father! You wouldn't have been visiting Miguel Alvarez in there, would you?"

Mukada looked slightly surprised, but nodded, looking back at the closed door. "How did you know?"

Ryan sighed in relief. "I've got a tray with his name on it, but he's not in the ward anywhere. I'll take it in to him, then."

Father Mukada stopped Ryan with a hand on his arm. "Why don't you let me take it? Maybe I can help him with it."

"Oh, no, that's alright. I'll take care of it." He tried to brush by, but the Father stepped in front of him.

"O'Reily, I'd like to do this for him."

Ryan practically growled with frustration. He glanced over, but the hack's back was to them, so he
took a chance. He lowered his voice so that only Mukada could hear him. "Look, Father. I need to speak to Alvarez. It's really important. I'll be quick, okay? Then you can help him all you want."

Mukada frowned at him, "You know he can't speak, don't you? The doctors won't even approve his trying for another week or two. He's still very weak and he doesn't need any upsets right now. I don't think it's a good idea for you to..."

"Father. This is really important. I'll be doing all the talking; you don't need to worry about that. And I won't upset him, I promise. It's just...I need to talk to him. Please. I've been waiting for him to come back all this time, and I don't know when I can talk Gordon into switching jobs with me again. I may not get another chance for a while. It's important. Please."

Mukada sighed. "Only if I can stay in the room the whole time. And if he gets upset, you have to leave immediately. Do you understand me?"

Ryan hesitated. "Can you consider this confidential? What you hear, I mean? You can't tell anyone. Like it's a confession or something okay? And it is, in a way. It's important that no one else know about what I say to him. Very important."

Father Mukada stared at him for a moment, as if trying to look into his soul. Then he nodded. "Alright. You've got five minutes."

Relief flooded Ryan, "Thanks Father, you won't regret this, I promise."

"I'd better not."

"O'Reily!" They both turned startled by the hack headed their way. "Aren't you done yet? Let's go!"

Father Mukada stepped in smoothly. "Haskins. Would it be possible for you to wait a few minutes more? I need to speak to O'Reily; it's very important. I'll only be five minutes at the most."

Haskins shrugged. "Whatever, Father. I'll be right over here if you need me. Okay?"

"Thank you. I'll take him into the hallway here, so we can speak in private and not disturb the patients, alright?"

"Sure." He glared at O'Reily. "I got my eye on you, O'Reily."

Ryan tried to look offended. "Hey, he's my priest, I'm not gonna mess with him."

Haskins rolled his eyes. "Yeah, whatever." He turned his back and returned to the hack in the corner.

Mukada took the tray from Ryan, "Come on. Grab that rack. We'll set it outside the door, so he knows where we are."

Ryan followed the Father into Miguel's room, leaving the empty tray rack outside the door. The curtain was stretched around the bed, and Mukada pulled it back and set the tray on the bedside table before pushing it out of the way.

Ryan was surprised at Miguel's condition. It had been three weeks since the fight, but Miguel still looked pale and the bandages on his neck were bulky and awkward looking. He was still attached to IVs and had one of those things wrapped around his head to hold oxygen tubes to his nose. His face was turned away, but he could tell that Miguel was thin and drawn, his cheeks sunk in like he hadn't eaten in weeks. It hit Ryan that he'd slit his own throat - he probably hadn't eaten in a while,
Mukada's voice was soft when he spoke. "Miguel? Miguel, I've brought you a visitor."

Ryan cleared his throat. "Hey, Alvarez."

Miguel turned his head slowly, surprise obvious in his eyes as he sought out Ryan's face.

"Miguel, Ryan has asked to speak to you. Is that all right?"

Miguel nodded, taking care to not move his head much. Ryan thought he could probably understand why. The Father nodded to Ryan, "You've got five minutes."

"Thanks, Father." He stepped up, to make it easier for Miguel to see him, and started talking before he lost his nerve. "Listen, Alvarez, I know you can't talk, but that's okay, because you don't have to say a thing. I'll talk, and if you want me to shut up or leave, all you have to do is wave your hand. Is that okay with you?"

Miguel nodded again, his lips pressed tightly together. He lowered his eyes and Ryan stepped up a little closer. "No. Look at me, please? It's important that you believe me when I say this, because it's likely to be the only time you ever hear it, okay?"

He reached out and tipped Miguel's chin up slightly with his fingers, and finally, Miguel looked back up to meet Ryan's eyes. Ryan pulled his hand back, awkwardly dropping it to the bed. "I gotta be fast, so I'm gonna say it right out."

He took a deep breath. "I fucked up. Big time. I was pissed off at Keller trying to manipulate me, and at me for falling for it, and you got the blow out. I figured out afterwards that you didn't know what he was planning anymore than I did, but I took it out on you and that wasn't right. I made a promise to you and I broke it, and I feel really bad about that. If I'd stayed and listened to you, you wouldn't have had to go to Murphy to try and keep me safe, and Vasquez wouldn't have attacked you, and none of this would have ever happened."

Miguel' eyebrows were up at his hairline by this point, and Ryan realized he'd blown Murphy's secret. "Murphy told me you were the one that clued him in about the hack's being after me. You may have saved my life. He might not have killed me, but I'm not sure he would have been careful enough to make sure I was still breathing by the time he was finished with me. So you saved my life, even after I acted like an asshole, and... Well, you're a better man than I am."

Ryan shrugged, "You don't have to forgive me or anything, but I felt you needed to know. I'm sorry." He couldn't look any Miguel's face anymore, so he looked back down at his own hand on the bed. When Miguel's fingers brushed across his he looked up again, and Miguel was smiling at him. Not much. But a little. Enough.

He let go of his breath with a whoosh and grabbed Miguel's fingers for a second before letting go again, glancing back nervously at the Father, who was smiling at both of them. Ryan looked away before Mukada could catch his eyes; he wasn't ready to face that.

"Thanks, man. And listen, I don't know what I can do at this point, but I'll try to figure out a way to keep you out of Solitary, okay? "Cause we had a deal, and I broke it, but I don't like breaking my promises, so if I can figure out a way to fix this one, I will. You're going to be here for a while, anyway, from what Murphy said, 'cause you still need nurses and therapy and stuff, so I have a little time to work on it, right?"

That got another smile, this one maybe bigger than before. It was such a relief to know that Miguel
wasn't going to hold a grudge. Not because he worried about what Miguel would do to him when he got better, either. Because it was important that Miguel understand that he regretted what he'd done. Ryan refused to think about why that was important, it just was.

"This is Gordon's regular run. He said he might consider switching with me maybe once every week or two, but not more than that. So I'll come back next week, if I can, and maybe I can sneak you something good on your tray in the meantime, alright?

"I saw that you're on liquids and soft foods, so you tell me what you like, and..." Ryan laughed at himself. "What am I thinking? Right. Let's try it this way, instead." He pulled the food tray over and lifted the cover off. "Today you got chicken broth and apple juice and Jell-O and applesauce and butterscotch pudding. Are those okay? Anything you want extra of?"

Miguel was frowning heavily. "What? Something wrong with chicken broth?" Miguel shook his head, that wasn't the problem. "It's not the pudding, right? No? Applesauce?" Bingo. "You don't like applesauce? How can you not like applesauce?" Miguel stuck his tongue out and Ryan had to laugh. "Okay, okay, no more applesauce. Right. Any particular favorite flavors of Jell-O? Red, or purple, or orange, or green - right, no green Jell-O, gotcha. Hey, ice cream?" He got a nod on that one. "Cool. Ice cream. We only get two kinds, chocolate and vanilla. You okay with both of them?" That got a nod and a smile. "Right. Ice cream it is."

"O'Reily!" He heard Haskins voice in the hallway.

"Oh, shit. I've got to go." Miguel nodded to show he understood. "I'll be back as soon as I can, okay?"


Mukada was at the door. "Ryan, we need to go now."

Ryan grinned at Miguel one last time. "See ya later."

He walked out into the hall and grabbed his cart, pushing it before him. Father Mukada was there ahead of him, talking to the hack, but he didn't pay much attention as the Father thanked him for giving them time to speak.

"Ryan." He stopped and turned back to Mukada. "Let me know the next time you're going to take this run. I'll be sure to be here, alright?"

He grinned at Mukada. "Thanks, Father. I appreciate that."

Haskins growled in his direction, "Let's go, O'Reily, I've got things to do today."

"Yeah, yeah...alright already." He grouched at Haskins as they headed for the kitchen, but it was just a formality. Nothing could stop his good mood now.

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Miguel opened his eyes when he heard the bedside table move and saw Father Mukada pulling it into position over the bed. "Can I help you with your meal, Miguel?"

Miguel nodded and reached for the side controls to shift the bed into a better position, and the Father rushed to help. Miguel worked in the Infirmary for a while, and he always loved to sneak into the private rooms and play with the beds with the controls. This was the first time he'd ever actually needed them himself though, despite being in the Infirmary a number of times. The Father
adjusted a pillow behind Miguel's back and Miguel nodded again to indicate that it was good.

He stared at the tray, wondering if he even had the strength to pull the cover off, but Mukada did it for him and quickly turned the plate around so that the applesauce was farthest away. He gave the Father an eye at that, and Mukada shrugged apologetically.

"I listened in on your conversation, but Ryan O'Reily isn't known for his bedside manner, so the only way I'd agree to his visit was if I stayed in the room."

Miguel hadn't realized that Mukada had been in the room the whole time; he'd obviously been close enough to hear Ryan speaking. He found it very surprising that Ryan would speak as openly as he had in front of anyone, whether they wore a priest's collar or not. His surprise must have shown on his face, because Mukada laughed.

"He made me promise to treat anything I heard as if we were in a confessional, but I'm not sure why, since I didn't hear anything but an apology and a very sincere one at that."

Miguel nodded, eyebrows raised for emphasis, regretting his lack of voice for about the millionth time in the last three weeks.

Mukada got his point. "Oh, I see. Not Ryan's style to admit he's made a mistake, huh?" Miguel nodded again. "Well, don't worry, my lips are sealed."

Miguel tapped his chest with one hand, dragging his IV with him. "Yours too, I guess." Mukada smiled. "But not for too much longer, Miguel. This is the first time I've seen you agree to eat in the last two weeks. The nurses at the hospital were beginning to despair. I'd say that's a good sign that you're feeling better. And if you start eating food again, you'll gain weight, and you'll heal even faster."

Miguel shrugged. He was hungry for the first time in weeks, but he wasn't sure if he shouldn't try and stretch out his Infirmary stay as long as possible. He sure as hell didn't want to go back to Solitary. But Ryan had said he was going to do what he could to help keep him out, and that was good. He had to admit, he wasn't sure he could really trust Ryan, but it felt good to have even a hint of hope again, so he pushed the doubt away. He really was hungry. He could eat a little, at least.

He reached for his spoon, but Mukada grabbed it out of his shaky hand. "Oh, no you don't. I'll keep the spoon, unless you intend to wear that chicken broth?" Miguel watched his hand tremble and frowned at it, willing it to still, but to no avail. He sighed discouragedly, his head falling back against the pillows behind him.

"It's okay, Miguel. I really don't mind helping, honestly." He paused and bit his lip before continuing. "You know, I can treat this the same way I treated Ryan's conversation earlier. No one will ever know you needed my help, okay? It's better for me to do it than some orderly, right? And this will help. If you keep eating, you'll be strong enough to do this on your own soon. Now, sit back up, and have some broth."

He wasn't happy about it, but he had to agree with the Father's logic, if he didn't want people to see his weakness, he had to get strong enough to take care of himself. Miguel'd been so discouraged when he'd woken up in the hospital again. It seemed like as hard as he tried he couldn't manage to even do that one thing right. He was such a perdedor - a loser.

Mukada came to see him as soon as the doctors allowed, and he told Miguel in that very first visit that there was a reason his attempts to take his own life kept failing. He said that God had a
purpose for Miguel here on earth, but Miguel hadn't believed him. What did he have to live for? Solitary confinement didn't offer many opportunities for redeeming your life, or even for living what was left of it in any kind of dignity. He'd felt he was doomed to die like his grandfather, alone and crazy, and why the hell would God need him to do that?

But maybe, if Ryan were back on his side, he could escape Solitary, and then he might believe that there was a purpose out there for him. Ryan was a hard puzzle to work out. Miguel wasn't actually sure if Ryan thought he was worth saving, or if he was part of some new scheme Ryan came up with. But it didn't matter, not in the long run. He was going to take advantage of what Ryan offered him, for as long as he offered it, because he needed to believe there was some purpose for him out there, somewhere.

He was surprised when he realized that he was too full to eat anything else. He eyed the pudding they hadn't gotten to with longing, but he thought he'd be sick if he ate it now. When the door opened, Mukada put the spoon down quickly, as if worried someone would see him helping Miguel, and that almost made Miguel smile. The Father could be so naïve, sometimes, like a child caught in the cookie jar with that look on his face that said, "Who, me?"

Dr. Anderson walked into the room, and Mukada stood up from the edge of the bed where he'd sat while he was feeding Miguel. Anderson looked at Miguel's tray and nodded approvingly. Miguel worked for Anderson in the Infirmary for a while, and he had a tentative respect for the man. He was tall and skinny as a rail, but surprised Miguel with his strength when he'd helped hold down a struggling patient. He had a very strange sense of humor, and not much really surprised him, and Miguel liked that. He wasn't at all like Dr. Nathan, whom he'd replaced, but in Oz it was dangerous to be that sweet and caring.

"You're eating better than the doctors at Benchley gave you credit for, Alvarez. That's good."

Mukada stepped in. "It's the first time I've seen him eat in two weeks, so I think the move was good for him." A quick glance at Miguel made him realize that Mukada knew his improved appetite wasn't due to being back in Oz, but Miguel was relieved to see that he didn't plan to spread that around.

"It must be the gracious accommodations and our excellent bedside manner," Anderson joked in his deadpan delivery. Miguel raised one eyebrow, and Anderson winked at him. "I'll see if I can't get them to leave this tray, maybe you can eat more later. If you haven't been eating for a while, small meals are better every few hours. Besides, if you don't want that butterscotch pudding, I'll be glad to help you out with it."

Miguel narrowed his eyes and frowned threateningly at him and Anderson sighed. "Damn. It's all yours, then, Alvarez. Father, do you mind if I spend a few minutes with him, or should I come back later?"

Mukada smiled and shook his head. "Oh, no. That's fine. I have a few appointments this afternoon to prepare for in any event." He looked back at Miguel. "I'll try to get back today, but if not, maybe I can come by around the same time tomorrow. Would that be okay, Miguel?"

Miguel nodded his thanks, and watched the Father leave. Mukada was a good man, and Miguel was glad he was on his side. It was nice to know someone thought he was worthwhile, even if he didn't believe it himself.

Dr. Anderson rubbed his hands together with a wicked smile, and bent down over him, reaching for the bandages on his neck. "Now, let's see what's under these bandages. You know, you really need to be more careful, Alvarez. Shaving your face shouldn't be quite this dangerous..."
Miguel rolled his eyes and sighed. Some things never changed.

"So Vahue passes the ball to Busmallis, and he's fumbling with it and McManus is all over him, right? So he squeaks like some little mouse or something and throws the ball back to Vahue. But his throw goes wild, and Brass knocks it out of bounds..."

When the door opened, Ryan looked over, prepared to put up an argument if this was Murphy come to take him back to Em City. Dr. Anderson and Mukada had talked McManus into agreeing that he could come by after lunch and visit Miguel for 15 minutes twice a week, as long as Mukada stayed in the room. They still had at least five minutes worth of time left, so if they were kicking him out early he wasn't leaving without a fight.

Not like it was that big of a deal, right? It was just a nice break to do something different, especially with Cyril in Protective Custody, now. It gave Ryan something to do. Besides, Anderson, Mukada and Sister Pete had told McManus that Ryan was making a difference in Miguel's recovery and rubbing that in McManus' face was extremely satisfying. It gave him an inner glow every time McManus scowled at him. He always made sure to give him a bright, cheery smile back. Fucking bastard, he knew McManus was the one pushing to get Cyril admitted to the Connolly Institute. Cyril was not insane, he was slow, there was a big difference.

Anderson walked into the room with a worried look. "Father Mukada, thank God you're still here. That patient we were discussing, who might need the Anointing of the Sick - he's fading fast, I think you need to come right now."

Mukada stood up immediately, "Ryan, I think you need to go..."

But Ryan interrupted, "Hey, I've still got five minutes! I'll stay right here; I won't do anything but talk."

Miguel's voice was low and scratchy, but his request was clear enough. "Please, Father?"

Anderson solved the dilemma for them all. "Right. O'Reily, if anything happens while he's gone, there won't be another chance. There will be no more visits, period. Got it?"

"Got it! I'll be right here. Okay?" The Father hurried from the room, and Miguel watched the door close and then sighed.

"Okay, Ryan. Tell me what's wrong?"

"What?"

"There's something you're not telling me, I can see it in your eyes." Miguel swallowed, wincing. "Don't make me keep talking man, you know it hurts. Tell me."

Ryan dropped his gaze down to Miguel's neck - to the ragged red scar that always reminded him how badly he'd failed Miguel the last time he'd trusted Ryan. He decided to take a chance on telling him the truth - or at least some of it, anyway.

"Okay, listen. I can't tell you exactly what's happening, but maybe you can help me figure something out. You know I told you about my mom turning herself in, and Cyril putting Kenmin in a coma. McManus wants to send him to that insane asylum, you know - the Connolly Institute? So I could lose him, too. On top of all that, someone jabbered to the Warden about that guy Keenan. Did you hear about him? The guy who raped Gloria Nathan about a year after she left Oz? He was convicted not too long after you escaped."
"The one that got his head bashed in, in the gym? You had something to do with that, didn't you?"

"That doesn't matter, what's important is that someone has fingered me for the job. If I get convicted, I'll end up on Death Row. Everything is falling apart, Miguel, and the only thing I keep thinking of is what my mom said before she left, that a life without meaning is no life at all."

Miguel's eyes opened wide at that, but Ryan had no time to stop and ask what that was about, he had to get this out to someone, and Miguel was his only choice.

"So I met someone with a plan. He wants to do something big - something that will make a difference. But now I'm worried. There's the chance that this something big could hurt people. It could hurt innocent people, and I don't think that's something my mom would be proud of. And now I don't know what to do."

"You'll do what's best for the people that are important to you. Your family. What you know is right for them. I'm not going to say that you've always done the right thing for Cyril." Ryan opened his mouth to object, but Miguel brought up his hand. "Don't argue with me, 'cause we both know it's true. But this is your chance to change that. Do what's right for you and Cyril and your mom, because they're the ones that count. Do it for the people that are important to you."

Miguel stopped and dropped his eyes, fumbling for his water glass on the table next to him. His hand was shaking slightly, and Ryan could see he was upset about something, but he couldn't figure out what that was. He started to ask, but then the door opened again and Murphy was there. Damn. Their time was up.

"Where's the Father, O'Reily?" Murphy looked around suspiciously.

Ryan shrugged. "Some guy was croaking, and he had to give him the Last Rites or whatever that shit's called these days." Murphy frowned at him. "Don't look at me like that. I stayed right here and talked to Alvarez like a good boy. I didn't do a damn thing wrong, okay? Gimme a break."

"Well say goodbye to your buddy, there, we have to go. It looks like they're letting Cyril out of PC today, and you need to be there when he comes back or he'll have a fit. You know how he is."

Ryan jumped up from his seat at the bottom of Miguel's bed. "Cyril's coming back to Em City? That's great news. I gotta go, Alvarez. I'll see you later this week, right?"

Miguel smiled, glad for Ryan's good news. "Say hi to Cyril for me."

Ryan grinned back at him. "I will. And thanks. For the advice, I mean. I appreciate that."

Miguel nodded. "Sure." He took another drink of water and cleared his throat. "See you next time."

Later when Ryan stood at the gate waiting for Cyril to show up, he thought about what Miguel had said. Was that what he was doing with Padraig? Doing what was right for the people he cared for? It was admittedly a small group. There was Cyril, and Ryan's mom, and maybe in a small way even Murphy. He took care of Cyril when Ryan couldn't, and that had to count for something.

He didn't want to hurt some of the people in Em City; there were a few of them that had been good to Cyril, like Rebadow and even Beecher, and Sister Pete, Father Mukada and Anderson had all tried hard to keep Cyril out of that insane asylum. It would hurt Cyril if anything happened to them. Jesus, this taking care of people had its drawbacks, didn't it?

Of course, the bomb was only supposed to take out Em City, which should be empty, except for maybe a few hacks, with everyone at Rec Hour over in the gym. But how could he be sure the blast
wouldn't spread? What if there was some sort of chain reaction, and other parts of the prison were affected?

If the blast hit the gym, he wouldn't care for himself. But if he were gone, who would take care of Cyril? He had a responsibility to Cyril, to be there for him. Like Miguel said, to take better care of him than he had in the past. Now, Cyril would be in the gym with them, not way over in Protective Custody like he'd planned. And what about the Infirmary? There were oxygen canisters and shit there that could explode and spread the fire that would result from the explosion.

Miguel was in the Infirmary. He was getting over his slit throat, the last thing Miguel needed was smoke damage in his lungs, or maybe third degree burns. And if Ryan was dead, who would keep Miguel out of Solitary? He wondered to himself when he'd decided that Miguel was someone he cared for, not just someone he'd wronged, and owed something to. But he was. He needed to take care of Miguel, too.

That's when it occurred to him why Miguel had gotten upset when he'd talked about taking care of those that were important. Miguel didn't think he was important enough to Ryan to be taken into consideration. He thought that Ryan thought of him as disposable, like Keller had. Sure, he'd come and spend time with him, and made sure he got his favorite food on his tray, but that was because he owed Miguel. He'd told him often enough that he did. He thought Ryan was merely paying back his debt. Miguel didn't trust Ryan to take care of him.

And should he? Was Ryan someone that Miguel could trust to be there for him? He hadn't been in the past. He'd used Miguel the same way Keller had; a means to an end. Then he'd broken his word, and brushed Miguel aside. He'd started to repair that betrayal in the last few weeks, but he still had a ways to go. Like with Cyril, Ryan needed to make a decision. Was he going to step up and do what was right for those he cared for?

The buzzer went off, and Ryan stepped back from the gate as it moved aside to reveal his kid brother, who threw his bag to the floor with a shout.

"Ryan!" He was caught up in a bear hug that practically lifted him off the ground. He felt a swell of love for his brother, and Ryan realized he already was part of something that mattered. He couldn't take a chance that might destroy that. He'd talk to Padraig and stop this nonsense before it was too late.

Miguel was asleep when the world exploded. He was knocked from his mattress in the blast as even the air he breathed roared into sound and fire and heat. He was trapped by the bed that tumbled on top of him, and he struggled to get free. But when he realized that the large chunks he could see hitting the floor around him were actually the cinderblocks that belonged in the walls of his room, he decided under the bed might be the safest place for him for now.

Smaller explosions ripped through the air, a continuous percussive push of hot air Miguel could feel, even protected as he was by the heavy mattress and steel frame of his bed. When he heard the first screams and cries for help, he thought the worst might be over, and began to move again, trying to push his way out from underneath his trap and refuge. Another large explosion ripped through the air, and he felt the shudders of aftershocks through the floor as he held onto his mattress in fear. ¡Dulce Madre de Dios!

The strange crackling noise didn't register at first under all the shouting, but then the scent of burning cloth and wood and the horribly sick smell of burning flesh hit his nose and Miguel finally began to panic. His shouts were harsh and they ripped at his throat, hurting almost as much as the smoke he was pulling into his lungs, but he kept shouting until his voice gave out, and all he could
do was cough as he heard the fire grow closer.

He could almost feel despair pulling at him, reminding him once again that he should never get too comfortable with hope, that in the end he would always belong in hell. His tears stung his eyes, or maybe that was the smoke. It didn't matter because it was just hell coming for him once again. Miguel struggled for breath, the coughing making him light-headed and dizzy as he felt himself spinning out of control. He could feel the smothering heat grow closer as blackness overwhelmed him.
Miguel stared out the window, hungrily sucking up the sights it was impossible to find in Oz outside of a TV screen. Farmlands and pastures with cows and horses, a stream with a dog splashing through it, children playing on bikes in front of old-timey grocery stores - things a kid from the barrio had no access to except in childhood dreams. He sighed deeply. He needed to store these memories in his mind for the future. There would come a time when they were all he had left of the real world outside of his Solitary cell.

He had no doubt that Solitary was where he was headed. Now that they'd rebuilt Oz from the explosion that had ripped a huge hole out of the kitchen, and most of the surrounding areas, they were shipping back all the people they'd cleared out of Oz while they rebuilt. Miguel couldn't help but feel lucky that he'd escaped even if for only four short months. He'd needed that time to try and recover from Ryan's betrayal.

The word 'betrayal' made it seem like such a big thing, but in reality, it hadn't been. At least not for Ryan, obviously, since he'd made his big gesture, even with Miguel in the Infirmary right across the hall. Ryan hadn't cared that Miguel might be close enough to be in danger, and that made it perfectly clear that once again, he was disposable goods. For Miguel, though, it had been the end of his hopes. The final strike. God had made it clear that no matter what he did, he was doomed. He belonged in hell, and now they were sending him back to it once again.

The Connolly Institute hadn't been so bad, despite his loneliness. There were things to do that didn't involve fighting for his life, and people to talk to that actually wanted to hear what he'd had to say. He obviously hadn't said the right things, though, because they hadn't wanted to keep him. Miguel knew they'd kept some of the people from Oz, but obviously he wasn't crazy enough to make the list. Give him a year in Solitary and he'd be back, although he probably wouldn't appreciate the place as much once he was totally bugs.

His sharp bark of bitter laughter was loud and the guard frowned at him before letting his eyes drift over the rest of the motley assortment of prisoners. Peter Schibetta looked back at him from his seat two rows in front of Miguel on the other side of the bus, dropping his eyes quickly to avoid confrontation when Miguel stared back at him. He guessed being raped by a monster like Adebisi didn't rate a permanent bed in Connolly, either. Now that they'd rebuilt the Infirmary, they could move the Infirmary patients out of the Psych Ward, and there was room for all the crazies to go back to Oz again.

He'd never been in the Psych Ward at Oz. He doubted it was as good as Connolly was. Hell was hell, no matter what name they gave it. Besides, he wasn't going to the Psych Ward, so it didn't matter. He was on his way back to Solitary; Warden Glynn would make sure of that. There was no other place for him now.

Maybe they wouldn't keep him on suicide watch, and he could save up his pills, or they'd let him keep his belt or something. It wasn't like the hacks cared if he lived or died, anyway. One less crazy Chicano wouldn't make a difference to them, right? But in the back of his mind, he knew he wouldn't die. He kept forgetting he was already in hell. There would be no reprieves for Miguel.

Ryan walked down the hall shaking his head at Cyril's excitement. He knew Cyril was hoping to
talk to Miguel because he really wanted a new sparing partner. Ryan shrugged, hey; he couldn't help it if he wasn't good at boxing. He had other talents; talents he'd have to put to use soon. He'd heard about Miguel's run-in with Guerra in the showers this morning; the bastard hadn't wasted any time.

Miguel had been gone for four months and he'd barely walked through the gates to Em City before he'd been set on by three members of El Norte. He would have to have a talk with Morales, and he had an idea that talk was not going to be fun. But it didn't matter; what was important was that Miguel was safe.

They walked into the gym, and the hack who'd escorted them walked over to join another hack as Ryan and Cyril headed for the weight lifting equipment. Ryan spotted Miguel first, and had to contain his smile. Dammit. He'd been looking forward to seeing Miguel, but he hadn't expected the butterflies in the gut thing he suddenly had going. Four months at Connolly Institute was a long time, he really wasn't sure how Miguel was going to react to him. But he'd made himself a promise to stick by Miguel, and he wasn't backing down now.

When Morales got up and crossed over to Miguel, getting up in his face, Ryan grabbed Cyril and started over, hoping to get there before any trouble could start. "Listen, Cyril. I need you to play enforcer for me."

Cyril looked so disappointed. "Now? But it's gym time, and I want to play with Miguel!"

"Yeah, I know buddy, but Morales over there is not happy with Miguel, and you know how I said we have to protect him too, now? So we're gonna go stand by Miguel, and you play enforcer while I tell Morales to leave him alone, okay? Strong and silent, right?"

Cyril nodded, "Strong and silent. I got it."

Miguel hadn't seen them yet, so when Morales told him "You won't survive solo," Ryan could tell he was surprised to hear Ryan's voice from behind him as he stepped up to Miguel's shoulder, and Cyril stepped to the other one, arms crossed over his chest.

"Yeah, but you see, Morales, he's not alone." Miguel glanced his direction, but otherwise he didn't react to the statement, just looked back at Morales, who was frowning at Ryan.

"What the fuck you talking about, O'Reily? I'm talking to a hermano here."

"No, you and El Norte abandoned him a long time ago. But he's not on his own anymore. Alvarez and I have an arrangement. He watches my back, and I watch his."

Ryan kept his eyes on the group of four Latinos closing in on them. Guerra stood to Morales' right, on the opposite side of Ryan. He knew Morales always had backup on hand, but he was betting on the fact that Morales wouldn't let them loose over something like this. They might be able to take the Latinos, but it would be five of them to his three, and Ryan had no idea how it would come out if it came down to a fight. He glanced over at Miguel, who was looking slightly confused, but was keeping it under control. Ryan took a dose of cool, and kept talking.

"Now you and me, we have an arrangement, too. And I have no problems keeping both, but if you threaten Alvarez, then that will break our agreement, and you know neither of us wants that. So either you keep your men away from all three of us, or you can go elsewhere for information, because I won't tolerate people who go behind my back."

Morales was annoyed, but he didn't look too pissed off, so Ryan thought he might have a chance to
pull this one off. He'd gone out of his way to try and make himself indispensable to the Latinos for this reason; he knew there'd be trouble as soon as Miguel came back. Besides, it kept both he and Cyril safe from El Norte, so it worked in his favor in any event. But its primary purpose was to keep Miguel safe, and it looked like it might work.

"You're not the only source of information around, O'Reily. We could get by without you."
Morales voice was tight, but it looked like he really didn't want to get into anything here, so Ryan relaxed slightly.

"Yeah, you could. But our arrangement works well for both of us. And this way, you don't have to worry about Miguel, and we don't have to worry about Guerra, so I think it works out best for all of us, don't you?"
Morales looked like he'd bitten into something sour, but he nodded. "Yeah, alright. We keep our deal. You keep yours."

Now that he knew he had them, Ryan pressed the point, because Guerra was looking pretty pissed off. He chose his target carefully and struck where it would do the most good; if he questioned Morales ability to lead his people, it would make him more determined to make sure they followed his word.

"You make sure Guerra pays attention to you this time, because the last time you told him to lay off, he still tried to get Alvarez killed."

Guerra stepped forward, and Morales put his arm out to hold him back. Before Morales could respond, Ryan continued. "Of course he ended up in the hospital, and Alvarez was perfectly safe the whole time, but the point is, he's not a good listener when it comes to Alvarez's life, and I'd hate to have to put him down to protect Alvarez. Understood?"

Morales had to grab Guerra by the arm, until a couple of other hermanos took him and held him back. "Don't worry. Guerra won't touch Alvarez as long as you two are allied."

"I'm never going to welcome you back to El Norte. But what I will do, is guarantee that we'll leave you be."

Guerra started to say something, but Morales cut him off with a hand. "All scores are settled. Is that clear, Guerra?" Guerra broke away from the guys holding him and walked away.

Morales gave Miguel a half-respectful stare. "This was a smart move on your part, vato. Maybe you've got more brains than I gave you credit for."

Morales motioned his people off to one side with a tilt of his head, and Ryan pulled Miguel to another. Miguel was stiff, and he still looked pissed off, but at least he went with them. Ryan found an empty stretch of floor where they could have some privacy, and put Cyril to work on some crunches so he and Miguel could talk.

Miguel's face was full of confusion and anger. "What kind of game are you playing, O'Reily? You don't really want an alliance with me, so what the fuck was that about?"

Ryan was confused by that. "Of course I do. What are you talking about? Hey, I apologized for my screw-up, and I'm trying to live up to our agreement now. What makes you think I don't want you to protect my back? With Keller stuck in Massachusetts on that conspiracy to murder rap, I need you more than ever."

"But you blew up the kitchen, with me right there across the hall in the infirmary."
"Whoa! Where did you get that nonsense? I didn't blow up the kitchen. Who told you that?"

"But you said..." Miguel paused, confused. "...you wanted to do something big, something important..."

"Oh, that. That wasn't the kitchen, man. I was working with this guy; he wanted to blow up Em City. But I changed my mind. I tried to stop him, there was too much chance it could hurt people that mattered - to me, or to Cyril. And with all the equipment and oxygen lines in the Infirmary, it was too dangerous, so I blew the whistle on the bomb."

"But I thought...you didn't blow up the kitchen?" Miguel was looking more and more confused all the time, and Ryan wanted to laugh, but he kept his face straight with an effort.

"Nah, that wasn't me." Well, not just me, Ryan thought. But the less people who know about that, the better, so he didn't try to explain. Pancamo would have gotten as much blame as Ryan, since he knew about it and hadn't turned the gas off either, so they both kept their mouths shut, and no one was the wiser.

Miguel shook his head as if to clear it. "So you didn't leave me to get blown up?"

"What? Of course not." Shit. All this time, Miguel thought he'd abandoned him again. No wonder he was so pissed off.

"This whole time, I thought you didn't give a shit. That it didn't matter to you if I was dead in that explosion. Lying there in that hospital bed, I thought you didn't fucking care if I lived or died." Ryan was surprised by the emotion in Miguel's eyes, even though it was hard to sort out what was what. But the most prominent one was relief. He hadn't wanted to think Ryan would turn his back on him, but he'd believed it none the less.

"Well you were wrong. You don't know how glad I was to find out you survived. When they sent you off to the Connolly Institute with everyone from the Psych Ward, I was so pissed off. It was a relief to hear you guys were coming back. I was afraid they might leave you there."

"Are you kidding?" Miguel grinned for the first time today, and Ryan breathed a sigh of relief. "They were so glad to see the back of us. They kicked us to the curb with a 'don't let the door hit you on the way out' laugh. I just don't know why Glynn put me back here instead of Solitary."

"All the guys from Solitary are out now. They're doing something to the air ducts or some shit like that."

"Well that makes sense. Glynn warned me that if I was good he'd let me stay out, but that if I fucked up I'd be back in Solitary in a month. I didn't think it was a good idea to ask why a month, so I agreed with him, you know?"

"Well, you're out now. And with us working together, we can keep you out. Remember, I'll be watching your back."

Miguel nodded. "And I'll watch yours." Ryan grinned, and stuck his hand out. Miguel smiled that crooked smile of his that always made Ryan wonder what it was he was thinking, and they shook hands on it. Finally, things were going right for Ryan again.

Cyril jumped up and landed right in front of the two of them. "Can we go spar now, Ryan? I've been waiting and waiting and waiting..."

Ryan laughed. "What do you say, Alvarez? You up to sparring with Cyril today?"
"Are you kidding?" Miguel laughed and did that thing he did sometimes, where he ran his hand under his shirt and across his stomach. Ryan followed his hand until he realized what he was doing, then jerked his eyes back up to Miguel's face. "I've got all this pent up energy inside, I could use some exercise."

"All right!" Cyril bounced over to the mats, and Ryan and Miguel followed him.

Miguel curled in on himself in the darkness, his arms wrapped tight around his legs, the cold of the tile floor seeping into his flesh, the cement blocks of the storage room's wall hard against his back. He swallowed, the muscles in his throat squeezing tight like a band around the place where the blade had sliced through his neck. It did that sometimes when he got upset - the emotions got all caught up in his throat and it just ached.

He'd been waiting for Ryan for a while, but he'd pretty much decided that he wasn't coming if he hadn't gotten there by now. It didn't mean anything. It happened all the time. You never knew when a hack would refuse to take you somewhere, saying it wasn't on their schedule, or they didn't have time. Or maybe despite his efforts, Ryan couldn't sneak away. Maybe he was having trouble with Cyril, or had been in a fight and was in the cage in the center of Em City, or in the Hole.

Lots of things could happen in Oz on a moment's notice. He knew that, but still, he couldn't help the feelings that came back to him from his time in the Connolly Institute. The helpless, lost feeling - ¡Perdido! - the despair he'd felt every time he'd realized that he was on his own. He'd worked hard to create the new Alvarez; a bit loco, someone people didn't want to cross, because he was unpredictable, he could change in an instant, like quicksilver. He liked that idea; quicksilver moved like liquid, but it was a metal, and it was poison, deadly if you drank it.

But it was only an act, a way to keep the danger and loneliness at bay, a trick to try and keep himself safe. With Ryan on his side again, his chances of surviving were greatly increased. He wasn't alone, he had an ally. He hadn't realized how important that was until it was ripped from him when he'd woken in the hospital with second degree burns and smoke damage in his lungs from the fucking Infirmary collapsing on him.

Despite the fact that he'd half-way expected it, it hurt like hell to know he'd been abandoned by Ryan O'Reily. Miguel told Ryan he knew he'd do what was best for himself and the people that were important to him, and he'd been show conclusively that he wasn't part of that group. It had been a relief to go to the nuthouse instead of back to Oz after that. He hadn't had to face Ryan, because to face him knowing that he didn't matter would have been too much to bear. Miguel had almost been ready to go back into Solitary, to avoid him, and wasn't that the craziest thing he'd ever heard.

When Ryan told him he hadn't wanted him hurt, had changed his mind in part because Miguel would be in danger, it broke something open inside him, a flood of relief that almost overwhelmed his mind. But now, he'd been waiting for so long, and maybe it was merely an hour, but to Alvarez it was like a million years, and all that despair, all the pain and loneliness were rushing back, running over him again, drowning him. He wasn't important enough, not good enough, just not enough. He wasn't what O'Reily wanted, and he'd never be what he needed. He was small and insignificant, and he wasn't sure he could keep doing this...

"Alvarez?" Miguel's head shot up, and Ryan was right there, crouching in front of him, his hand hovering above his arm, as if he was afraid to touch Miguel. That was probably a good idea, since Miguel felt like he might fly apart at the first touch. Relief made him light-headed, and he sighed heavily, his head falling back against the concrete.
His throat hurt, but he forced the words out anyway. "Where the hell you been? I've been waiting here forever."

"Yeah, I know. The Warden spent the whole afternoon interrogating me. It was a real bitch. Are you alright? Are you sick or something? You were making this noise when I came in; I wasn't sure what was wrong."

Miguel took a deep breath and shook his head. "Nah, I'm okay. I'll be okay." He pushed back the flood with a conscious effort, the waters receding now that Ryan was here and he was no longer alone. He finally took in what Ryan said. "What the hell was the Warden doing with you?"

Ryan sat down on the floor, across from him, legs in front of him, with his arms wrapped around them loosely. "It's that same stupid thing with Keenan that he can't seem to get past. He's got some witness that says I killed him, but even though they won't testify, he's sure it's me, and he keeps asking me the same fucking questions over and over. Like I'm gonna suddenly blurt out: Oh, that Keenan! I thought you were talking about the other Keenan. Yeah, sure, I killed him!"

Miguel grinned. "If he's got no one willing to testify, he's got no case, man. What the fuck does he think this shit is going to prove?"

"I don't know." Ryan collapsed onto his back in disgust and stared at the ceiling, long legs sprawled. "But it's getting old. If I could figure out who it is that jabbered on me, I could do something about it, but as it is, I'm totally helpless."

Miguel rolled his eyes. "O'Reily, if the guy shows up dead, that would be pretty obvious, you know?"

Ryan rolled his head in Miguel's direction. "He doesn't have to die, all he has to do is change his story. If I knew who he was, I know I could convince him to change his mind about this."

"You need to discredit him somehow...make it hard to believe his words. But without knowing who it is..."

Ryan sat up, "Oh, that's it, Alvarez, that's exactly what I need to do. It won't matter who he is if I can confuse the issue. That's perfect." He grinned at Miguel. "Thanks, I know what to do, now."

"You do?" Miguel wasn't sure how he'd helped, but was glad Ryan had thought of something. "What are you going to do?"

"How better to confuse things, than to have two people admit they saw the man die, but at two different people's hands? I need to find someone who's willing to go to the Warden and say they saw Keenan die. And I need to find someone to pin the murder on, too. I'll need to do some thinking about this."

"I wish I could do it for you, but I wasn't even in Oz at the time."

"No, it's better if you don't have anything to do with it anyway. After that talk in the gym with Morales, you and me are too closely associated. It needs to be someone with no connection to me. Don't worry, I'll figure it out. Now that I know what needs to be done, I can take it from here."

Miguel shrugged. "Whatever man, you're the brains of this operation, anyway. I'm just the muscle." He was glad to get the subject over with, to be honest. Every time they talked about the man who had raped Gloria Nathan, he felt guilty for not telling Ryan he'd seen her at Benchley Memorial. But she'd been good to him both times he'd been there, and she'd asked him not to tell anyone here. Miguel knew that more than anyone else, that meant Ryan O'Reily.
Ryan leaned back against a case stack of paper towels, eying Miguel with a frown. "So what was that when I first came in? You were freaking out over something."

"Nothing. There's nothing wrong. It's just... Never mind." Miguel tried to get up, but Ryan leaned forward and grabbed his arm, holding him where he was.

"Oh, no you don't. I told you about my shitty day, now it's your turn. What happened? Did Guerra do something? I need to know what's going on, or I can't take care of it, right?" He sounded like he was talking to Cyril when said that, and Miguel smiled faintly, a warm feeling in his chest.

"There's nothing you can do about this, Ryan, it's all in my head, okay?"

Ryan squeezed Miguel's arm and the heat seeping from his hand into Miguel's cold skin made him shiver. "Miguel. You've got to trust me. I want to help."

Miguel sighed, nodding. "Yeah, alright." He paused, knowing Ryan was going to think he was bugs. But he'd asked, hadn't he? Even though he might not realize what he'd gotten into when he hooked up with Miguel. "It's the way I get sometimes. There are times when I feel so...lost and alone. When I was at the nuthouse, there were people all around me, but no one I could trust.

"I felt..." he struggled for the right word, "perdido...lost. Abandoned. I thought you'd deserted me. I didn't think there was anyone who would ever really know me; know who I was, ever again. Sometimes I got lost, swallowed up in it, like I'd drown in the loneliness." Miguel dropped his eyes, not wanting to see pity in Ryan's gaze, or even worse, disgust at his weakness. He wrapped his arms more securely around his legs and stared at his knees.

"And you were waiting for me, but I didn't show up. You thought I'd abandoned you again, didn't you?" Ryan let go of his arm and used his hand to smack Miguel on the side of the head.

"Hey!" Miguel stared at him indignantly, but Ryan pointed his finger at him, frowning.

"You know better than that. Shit happens here that we can't control, you know that. If I tell you I'll be here, you need to know that I will, unless I have no choice in the matter. I won't abandon you again. I promised you, remember?"

Miguel smiled sheepishly. "I didn't say it was a rational thing, did I? I knew that. I did. It's just that sometimes, it's hard to remember I'm not alone anymore."

"It'll get easier, now that you're back here with me and Cyril." Ryan's voice was confident and intent and it made Miguel want to believe him. "You have to trust me. Got it?"

Miguel nodded, still not willing to look up and face Ryan's confidence. It wasn't that easy, but he'd try.

Ryan spread out his long legs in front of him, crossed at the ankles. He nudged Miguel's feet with one knee. "What was it like there? At Connolly? You said there were other people around, so you weren't in Solitary?"

Miguel leaned back against the wall again, relaxing slightly, but kept his feet up close, very conscious of Ryan's sprawling body a foot from his own. "If you behaved, you got to spend a lot of time out of your cell; there was rec time, art and music therapy, gym time, TV time, and even meditation classes and shit."

Ryan laughed. "Sounds like fucking Club Med."
"Yeah, compared to this place it was heaven. If I could have convinced them that 'suicidal ideations' were enough to make me bugs, I'd still be there. But I was still lonely." He paused, thinking of the things that helped make it tolerable there. "I slept a lot - dreaming made it easier, you know?"

"Yeah? Dreaming? Or day dreaming?"

Miguel shrugged. "Sometimes it was hard to tell one from the other. I'd wake up from a good dream, and keep dreaming, trying to make it last as long as I could. Try to keep the fantasies going. It made it easier to bear the loneliness."

Ryan grinned. "Fantasies, huh? You dream about that chick you met when you escaped? The one that tied you to the bed?"

"Jessie. Una mujer loca." He grinned at Ryan. "A wild woman. Hell yeah, I dreamed about her; her hot mouth and her hot cunt swallowing me whole. She was..." He shook his head and sucked in air through his teeth. It was hard to describe the way she'd made him feel.

"Who else?" Ryan paused for a moment, his eyes shuttered. "You dream about Keller?"

"Sometimes. Yeah. I did. But I didn't want to."

"What do you mean? You liked what he did, right? You said you did." Ryan sat up, obviously interested in what Miguel was saying, despite his casual attitude.

"No, I did, I do. But not all of it. I liked the way he ordered me around, and I liked knowing that he had all the power. It turned me on when he told me what to do." He wasn't sure what to say, afraid Ryan would insist that he couldn't have one without the other, but he wanted to be honest, and explain what he felt. It wasn't like it mattered anyway, Ryan didn't want him. Not that way. He took a deep breath.

"Sometimes... Well, there were times when he made me feel small and worthless, and I didn't like that. I put up with it, because it was what I had to do to get what I wanted from him, but if I could have found a way to stop that part of it, I would have." His voice sounded small and childlike even to himself, but Ryan was nodding like he understood what Miguel was saying.

"I told Keller he was wrong about you. He told me you liked the humiliation as much as you liked the pain, but I knew better." He smirked. "He didn't believe me, but I was right. Just because you like being told what to do, doesn't mean you want to be disrespected and shamed. You've got your pride, and he never understood that."

Miguel raised his head, for once seeking out Ryan's face. "But you do?"

Ryan nodded solemnly. "Yeah. I think I do."

Miguel sighed, staring back at his knees again. "Well, it's too bad you're not interested, 'cause I got the idea you could be pretty good at...all of it."

"I like telling people what to do. It's a gift." Miguel could hear the laughter in Ryan's voice, but he couldn't lift his eyes, they were burning and he didn't think he could face Ryan.

"I guess so."

O'Reily got up, and started to pace the small space, looking suddenly awkward and uncomfortable. "So. Um...did you dream about me?" He cleared his throat, and hurried on, "I mean, I know you
"Yeah. I dreamed about you." He spoke softly and wasn't sure Ryan would hear him, but Ryan stopped moving, standing still in the middle of the floor staring at Miguel as he spoke. "I dreamed about your shoe on my cock. About how hard I came while you stood over me and watched me like that; the look in your eyes." He shuddered, then looked over at Ryan apologetically. "Sorry. It still makes me shiver when I think about it." He dropped his eyes. "Don't worry. I understand you're not interested in that. That's... That's cool."

"Yeah." Ryan stopped to clear his throat. "About that." He crossed to the wall and fell back against the cinder blocks, his shoulders taking his weight. For once it was Ryan who was avoiding Miguel's eyes, glancing around the room, looking everywhere but at Miguel. "I've been thinking. We're partners now. We need to be careful, 'cause we can't afford to make any mistakes with outsiders. I think - well, maybe we should keep things inside our partnership."

"What do you mean? What things?"

"Messing with Howell caused me more trouble than it was worth. It almost cost me Cyril. I can't do something that stupid again. And if anyone knew about you and your...submissive streak..." Ryan shrugged. "Well, it might make it hard for them to respect you the way they should, the way you deserve, since most people don't understand it the way we do, you know? So maybe we should take care of each other." Ryan kind of rushed through that last part, and Miguel tried to think through that, not quite sure what he meant.

"Take care of each other? What does that mean?" Miguel fought the excitement that rushed through him. He needed to be careful. He wasn't going to go through that again. He couldn't bear it if Ryan turned his back on him again. The surge of anger that rushed through him surprised him, and made his words harsh. "I thought you didn't fuck guys? Are you saying you've changed your mind? After all that, you've changed your mind?"

Ryan raised his voice defensively. "Hey, it's what you want, isn't it?" He stepped away from the wall, his finger pointing at Miguel again. "Don't you get all pissy with me." After a pause, he started pacing again. "It took me some time to think my way through this, but, well shit, Miguel. Do you want someone else instead? Is that what you're saying?"

"No!" Miguel stood up and reached out to Ryan, not quite touching him as he passed by. "No, I didn't mean that. I want you. I, well I don't want you to go changing your mind again, and freaking out over me sucking your cock or something. I mean, I don't think I could stand that. If that's what's going to happen, I think we're better off not doing anything at all, you know? I couldn't take that again."

Ryan stopped in front of him, searching out his eyes. "That's not going to happen. I mean, it might take me some time to get used to...things, but it's what I need. I think it's what we both need. Okay?"

Miguel bit his lip, he wanted to trust Ryan, but he'd tried that before, and it hadn't worked. He wanted this badly, but he'd have to be careful, in case it didn't last. He was going to take the padre's advice, and not trust his heart to soon. "Okay."

Ryan let out a lungful of air that Miguel hadn't noticed he was holding. He obviously was nervous about this too. He leaned back against the wall again, and he studied Miguel, watching him, making him nervous. His gaze was suddenly too much, and Miguel looked down to avoid his stare.

"Come here." Ryan's voice seemed lower, more seductive than it had moments earlier, and
suddenly the air seemed charged with electricity that hadn't been there before. Miguel glanced up, and Ryan raised his eyebrow, as if he was expecting something, and it hit Miguel. Ryan had given him an order, and he expected to be obeyed. His cock started to thicken and he took a deep breath as he walked slowly toward Ryan, stopping a few feet away, unsure what he wanted from Miguel.

"Closer." Bolder now, Miguel took a large step, bringing him up close to Ryan, despite the butterflies in his nervous stomach. Ryan reached out, cupping his hand around the back of Miguel's neck, drawing him closer still, until they were almost touching. Ryan's hand on the back of his neck made him shiver and he felt himself falling, the same way he fell when Keller touched him there; as if inside, he were dropping to his knees, even if on the outside he was still standing.

Ryan ran his other hand down Miguel's shoulder and arm to his wrist. He pulled Miguel's hand over, until it touched Ryan's cock through his work pants, and traced the outline with Miguel's fingers. He pressed Miguel's palm against his cock, pushing and rubbing up and down the length until Miguel felt a twinge as it jumped in his palm.

Miguel closed his fingers over Ryan's cock as he rubbed, squeezing and kneading, and Ryan leaned his shoulders back against the wall again, pushing his hips out to increase the contact. Miguel glanced up into Ryan's eyes, and saw heat, passion and a fierce determination. Miguel's breath caught, his stomach in knots. He wanted this so badly, but he was so afraid, he didn't want to fuck this up.

Miguel's eyes dropped to his hand, covered by Ryan's, as he guided Miguel's actions, and he realized all he had to do was let go and let Ryan take control. Miguel let out a breath, relaxing and closing his eyes, his body swaying closer to Ryan's heat. It was Ryan's show; Ryan was in charge, now.

"You want this as much as I do, don't you?" Ryan's voice was soft, and he spoke as if he knew what was going on inside Miguel's head. But this time, he was wrong.

"Oh no." Miguel shook his head, opening his eyes to Ryan's look of surprise. "I want it even more."

Ryan smirked at him. "Good. Unzip my pants and take me out. I want to feel your hand on my cock."

Miguel obeyed eagerly. He wanted to fall to his knees and take Ryan's cock in his mouth, but he hadn't told Miguel to do that, so he stayed on his feet, moving even closer as he pulled Ryan's cock out of his pants. He felt a burst of pride when he felt it jump in his hand and his own cock stiffened even more, pressing against his zipper. God, he was so hard, already.

He ran his finger around the head of Ryan's cock, then glanced up, making sure this was okay. Ryan nodded his head. "That feels good, Miguel. Go on. Touch me. Show me how much you want me."

He pressed against that bundle of nerves under the head of Ryan's cock, rubbing his fingers across it, and Ryan hummed his appreciation, his head falling back against the wall. Miguel wrapped his hand around the girth of Ryan's fat cock and squeezed as he tugged, loving the way it seemed to grow in his hand. It was so sensitive, even his slow movement back and forth made Ryan's hips jerk forward as he caught his breath.

This was what he wanted; the chance to touch, and maybe be touched in return. He loved the feel of Ryan's cock, soft and hard at the same time, solid and heavy even as it grew in his hand. Miguel pushed Ryan's pants further down with his other hand, reaching in until he could hold Ryan's balls, rolling them as the curly hairs tickled his palm.
Ryan's breath was faster and hot against his skin when Miguel moved closer so he could feel Ryan's thigh pressed against his zipper. He struggled not to gasp at the sensation, he didn't want to freak Ryan out or anything, but the pressure felt good and kept him more aware of his movements, his skin felt so sensitive. Ryan was thrusting into his hand and murmuring, a running commentary of how good this felt, how good Miguel was making him feel.

Ryan's praise was almost too much, his hips pushed forward into Ryan's thigh, and Ryan's eyes opened wide in surprise. Miguel looked up, worried that he'd gone too far when he was pushed back a step. He lost his balance and let go of Ryan's balls but Ryan was fumbling with Miguel's pants even as he urged Miguel to keep going.

"Don't stop. I just want to see..." He shoved Miguel's pants down and pulled his boxers open enough to see Miguel's hard cock, the tip red and swollen from the pressure of his zipper. He kept his hand moving on Ryan's cock, because he'd been told to do so, but he worried about what Ryan wanted to see. Would he be upset that Miguel was so turned on by touching him? Would he freak out again? But Ryan pushed his boxers off Miguel's hips and watched fascinated as a drop of precome formed at the slit of his cock. He reached out with one finger to take the drop before it could slide down Miguel's cock.

He reached up and rubbed the drop onto Miguel's bottom lip, and Miguel automatically licked it off. Ryan's eyes were full of heat as he repeated Miguel's motion, his tongue wetting his own dry lips as he swallowed. Miguel thought he might want him on his knees sucking Ryan's cock, but before he could ask, Ryan reached down and ran the tip of his finger along the top of Miguel's cock. Miguel trembled as he held back his hip's automatic thrust, controlling his body by sheer will power, clenching his fist around Ryan's cock as he gasped in pleasure.

Ryan smiled slyly and in a sudden gesture, grabbed Miguel's cock and started stroking it. ¡Carajo! "Fuck!" Miguel felt his knees start to buckle, but he put his free hand on the wall to steady himself, and fought his response. He'd never expected this. Even when he'd dreamed, lying in bed in Connolly, imagining what it would be like if Ryan would fuck him, he'd never imagined he'd touch Miguel's body like this.

Ryan laughed huskily, then switched hands, pulling Miguel closer with an arm around his waist before reaching out again for Miguel's cock. "Be careful, don't fall, I don't want you taking my cock with you when you land on the ground. I like it fine where it is."

Miguel realized that he had stopped stroking Ryan's cock, and was clenching it tightly in his hand while he tried to recover from the shock of Ryan jerking him off. He blushed and started pumping him again. "Sorry. I didn't think you would..."


Ryan was pumping Miguel harder now, and he could feel the heat of friction building up in his cock. He liked it, but wondered if maybe he should bring lotion with him next time, because Ryan might like that better. But he couldn't really concentrate on that right now because his legs were trembling and he pushed half a step closer to Ryan, pushing up as close as he could get so he could wrap his arm around Ryan's waist, too. It felt so good to be held like this, to be close to another person, to feel the heat Ryan put out warming his skin.

¡Tan perfecto! It was so perfect, but it was hard not to push his way even closer and rut up against Ryan and come all over his belly. He dropped his forehead onto Ryan's shoulder, gasping, when Ryan put a twist into his wrist as his hand neared the head of Miguel's cock. "¡Dios mío!"
His arm clenched compulsively around Ryan's waist as Ryan told him, "Faster!" and he pushed himself to concentrate on Ryan's cock, ignoring the fist working his own. He tried the twisting thing and Ryan gasped, pushing his cock through Miguel's hand, his head thumping back on the cement blocks. "God! That's it. That's it! Fuck, fuck, fuck!" His body spasmed as he came, his fist tightening down almost painfully on the head of Miguel's cock, causing Miguel to gasp as he pumped frantically, pulling Ryan's orgasm out of him.

Miguel slowed his fist as Ryan calmed and his shoulders dropped back against the wall. Finally, he pulled his hand away, trying to pull as much of Ryan's come off his cock as he could. Then he lifted his hand to his mouth, and licked it off, one finger at a time. He grunted as he felt O'Reily squeeze his cock again, and glanced up to see that Ryan hadn't even noticed what he'd done. His eyes were fastened on Miguel's tongue as he licked the palm and the back of his hand, getting the last of Ryan's come, not wanting to lose any of it. He'd earned it, after all.

Ryan swallowed, then seemed to realize that he still had Miguel's hard cock in his hand, so he pulled Miguel back against him again, and started to pump his cock, squeezing tightly, making Miguel moan and drop his head back onto Ryan's shoulder again. While he'd been concentrating on Ryan's hard on, he'd forgotten all about his own, as crazy as that seemed. But now that Ryan was pushing him harder and faster, it felt like he was suddenly so close that he would explode at any second.

His free hand was clenching and unclenching in the air, and he needed to do something with it, so he finally slid it up Ryan's arm to his shoulder, hoping it was okay to hold on, because he needed Ryan's strength. Ryan moved his grip on Miguel's cock then and twisted his cock head tightly in his hand. Miguel's muffled his shout into Ryan's neck, panting and thrusting his hips uncontrollably, the musky scent of Ryan's sweat overpowering him and sending him over the edge as he gave Miguel's cock one more hard twist and he came, gasping into Ryan's skin.

He could hear Ryan's breath, almost as harsh as his own, and when he licked his lips his tongue tasted Ryan's salty flesh and made them both shiver as they held on tightly to each other. Finally the sound of Ryan's voice broke the softening pants for breath.

"Look at me." He didn't hesitate; he lifted his head and looked into Ryan's eyes. He looked sated, and well-pleased with himself, and he smirked as he looked at his hand, which was dripping with fat droplets of Miguel's come. Miguel opened his mouth automatically, and Ryan nodded. He fed Miguel his own come and murmured "Good boy," as he licked Ryan's hand clean.

They slowly untangled themselves, straightening and pulling up clothes, and Ryan crossed to the sink to wash his hand and splash water over his face. Miguel joined him, and they checked each other's clothes and faces, not saying much, but not nearly as awkward as Miguel thought they could have been.

"We need to get back. Are you okay?" Ryan reached out and smoothed his hand over Miguel's shoulder, and Miguel nodded.

"I'm okay. Don't I look it?"

Ryan shrugged. "You look a little pale, still."

"I'm okay."

Ryan nodded, "All right, then. I'll go first. Give me a few minutes, then you can follow me." It seemed like he might say something else, but then he walked away. With his hand on the door knob, he turned back and saw a few splashes of come on the floor. "Shit. Clean that up before you
Miguel looked at him surprised, then dropped his eyes to the floor. He guessed there were still some sacrifices he'd have to make, to get the things he wanted most. He walked over and fell to his knees, leaning over to lick them up, his stomach knotting the way it did when Keller insisted he do the same thing.

He felt a hand pull him back, and looked up to find Ryan's angry face only inches from his own. He dropped his eyes again. When the handful of paper towels appeared under his nose, he looked back up startled.

"Use these, stupid. It'll be easier, and a lot more sanitary."

Miguel blushed. "I thought you..."

"Yeah, I know what you thought. But I'm not Keller. Got it?"

Miguel grinned sheepishly up at Ryan. "Sorry. Habit, I guess."

"I know." Ryan ran his hand through Miguel's hair once. "It's okay. Just think next time. I'm not that asshole. I won't ask you to do shit like that. Remember that."

Miguel smiled up at Ryan. "I'll remember."

Ryan nodded. "See you at supper." Then he was gone. Miguel shook his head, rolling his eyes at his own stupidity. "Idiota." Then he used the towels and cleaned up their mess.

Chapter End Notes

Some quotes borrowed or paraphrased from *Visitation* - Season Five, Episode One & *Dream a Little Dream* - Season Five, Episode Three of HBO's *Oz.*
Chapter 12

Miguel watched Ryan as he worked the room, spending a few minutes at each table he visited. A couple of hands of poker here, a game of checkers there, a few minutes at the TVs talking softly in the back row. The man never quit. Always moving, always gathering information, thinking, planning, creating mischief. It made Miguel smile. He was a schemer, a smooth talker, and if he wanted your secrets there were few that could stand up to him; he almost always got what he wanted.

He suppressed a shiver and looked away. It wouldn't do to get caught staring. Miguel admired Ryan's ability to manipulate a person without even trying, the smile never leaving his face. His eyes were disturbing sometimes; they were so clear and seemed so bright and innocent when he was pleased about something. But those same eyes could turn you to stone if you displeased him, and he was deadly. As deadly as Keller in his own way, but fortunately, much, much saner.

That was part of the thrill, though, that danger that lurked under Ryan's smile and behind his laughing eyes. When he was plotting death and destruction, it made Miguel hard. He'd watched Ryan as he'd planned with that guy Meany, lining his ducks up in a row, setting up Stanton to take the fall for the death of the man who'd raped Gloria Nathan. And then, when his "witness" had tried to squeeze Ryan for more money, he'd calmly plotted to take Montgomery out of the picture too, turning Stanton into his tool as easily as he'd turned Montgomery to betray Stanton.

Miguel laughed at the symmetry of it all. It was a brilliant piece of work. Ryan not only got Stanton away from Cyril, but he cleared himself of the suspicion of murder. Then he'd wiped away Montgomery with a wave of his hand, getting rid of the only witness to his complicity in setting up Stanton, and ridding himself of a blackmailer at the same time.

When Meany had questioned why Miguel was hanging around so much lately, and why he was listening in on their plans, Ryan had been quick to state that Miguel was Ryan's partner and deserved Meany's respect. Miguel wasn't sure about the respect part. You had to earn respect; it didn't come automatically, because you hung out with someone who already had it. But he thought that with Ryan's help, he might be able to finally gain back some of the respect he once held. Back when men thought he was dangerous, too.

Miguel glanced around the room, checking his surroundings, a habit that had never gone away, despite spending all that time in the hospital and the more comfortable setting of Connolly. He missed the relative security of Connolly. Admittedly, it was still a maximum security institution, with all the dangers that existed anywhere criminals were held in captivity, but he'd have stayed there if he could have. Of course that was before Miguel knew Ryan hadn't left him to be killed in the explosion in the kitchen.

He wasn't disposable, he knew that now. He was important to Ryan O'Reily, and that made all the trouble of life in Oz worth the struggle; worth the constant need to watch your own back, or have someone else you could trust watch it for you. He checked for Guerra, who was sitting with several of his hermanos at a table not far from his own. The last time he'd noticed, they were in the middle of a card game, but now the cards sat stacked on the table, and all three of them were watching him.

Guerra's stare was full of hate, no disguises there or tricks, he knew Guerra wanted him dead. But at least it was honest. He preferred that to the ones that smiled and laughed, and kept their hatred hidden under masks that seldom slipped. At least this way he knew what to expect. Miguel acknowledged the double standard. He was careful to keep his own mask up now as a way of
protecting himself from others. If people thought of him as unpredictable and wild, then they'd be less likely to risk crossing him and he'd stay alive longer.

He realized that he hadn't managed to keep that mask up around Ryan. It hadn't taken long before he'd seen right through his deception and called him on it. But that was probably because he was so good at it himself. If Ryan O'Reily didn't want you to know what he was thinking, you'd never know. And in Ryan, he found that attractive. More double standard.

But then that probably had something to do with the fact that Ryan let him see what was going on inside his head. The eyes were the windows to the soul. He didn't know where he'd heard that, but it was true. And that meant Ryan had let him see his soul. Miguel spent a lot of time watching people's eyes these days. Ever since he'd taken Rivera's, he'd found himself fascinated by people's eyes - by how much you could tell about a man from his eyes. Guerra's eyes were ugly and mean, and that stupid droopy eyelid made him look like a fool.

As if he knew what Alvarez was thinking, Guerra stood and started toward his table, but then O'Reily plopped down into the chair next to Miguel and Guerra turned his back and walked the other way, his hermanos following behind like a couple of hungry puppies trailing after their mama.

"He still giving you trouble?"

Miguel shrugged. "Nothing I can't handle. Mostly ugly looks from across the quad. But then he can't help that, he's ugly no matter what kind of looks he's giving me."

"Yeah, well as long as he does what he's told, we'll be alright. But the moment you think he might try something, you talk to me. I can't keep you safe if I don't know what's going on. If he causes trouble, we'll take care of him, no matter what it takes."

Miguel watched Ryan's stare as he focused on Guerra from across the quad, his eyes narrowed in concentration. He had to grin. "I like it when you start thinking like that. Reminds me how dangerous you are." Ryan looked over at him, his eyes keeping their concentrated stare, aiming it at Miguel now. He couldn't help it; Miguel shivered slightly under that gaze.

Slowly, Ryan's look of concentration turned to a smirk as he realized what Miguel was thinking, and Miguel blushed, his eyes falling to the table in front of him. "You like that, don't you?" Ryan glanced quickly around the room to make sure no one was within hearing distance before leaning in towards Miguel. "You're turned on by the fact that I'm thinking about ways to kill a man."

Miguel closed his eyes, not sure what to say, or if he could even explain what was going on in his head. "Damn, Alvarez, you're one sick fuck."

He said it without any disgust or dismay, but Miguel opened his eyes, worried that he would see rejection in Ryan's eyes. But all he saw was surprise, humor and the dark-eyed look he'd begun to associate with Ryan fighting his urges. A look that meant that he found the discussion arousing, but didn't want to admit it. Miguel was worried that he didn't understand, so he tried to explain.

"No, it's not that. Or well, at least not only that.." He paused, unsure of what to say, how to make what he thought clear.

Ryan's voice was deeper and more commanding than it usually was in public, and Miguel shivered again when he heard it. "Tell me." Two words, but they demanded he speak, and he did.

"It's the thought that you could kill without a second's hesitation, but that you don't even need to do that. Like you're a spider at the center of a web, and you pull one strand and sit there and watch as
everything falls into place, just the way you want it. Like you're the fucking king of everything you see."

Miguel looked around warily, pulling his head closer to Ryan's, then spoke in a whisper, his harsh voice rasping as he spoke. "You nod your head and Harry Stanton takes the fall, and when it suits you Montgomery falls right after him, and neither ever knows that you're the one that put them where they lie. It's like you have all the power, and these idiotas, they never even know what hit them."

Ryan's eyes widened, like he saw it all becoming clearer, coming into focus before him. "It's the power, isn't it? For you, it's always about the power."

Miguel pulled back in surprise. "What?"

"I have the power. I have the power, and that turns you the fuck on, doesn't it?" Ryan leaned back in his chair, smirking again - totally and completely in control of his world, and Miguel felt his cock harden in his pants.

"I want you to go to the storage room you met Keller in that first time, in the back hallway. Can you get the door open?"

Miguel swallowed the lump in his throat. "Yeah. I can get in."

"When I get there, I want you on your knees, waiting for my cock. Now go."

¡Ay, Jesús! Miguel wasn't sure if his legs would hold him up, but he struggled to his feet anyway. There was no way he was disobeying that command. He walked away stiff-legged, struggling to keep his head about him, and make sure no one was paying him any attention. The last thing he needed right now was a guard watching him while he broke into a storage room.

He wasn't sure how he got there without attracting attention, but by the time he got inside the room, he'd had to wipe his palms half a dozen times. He held his breath, hoping no one else was there; it did get some traffic, although not too many knew how to jostle the door the right way to get inside. But the room was empty, and he breathed a sigh of relief. He swallowed again, his palm pressing against the hardness in his pants, and got on his knees, his stomach twisting into knots of anxiety and arousal in equal parts.

His eyes popped open when he heard the door open, and he dropped his eyes in embarrassment when Ryan raised one eyebrow at his boldness. When he saw Ryan stuff a doorstop under the door, he almost laughed out loud, wondering if he learned that move from Keller, or if Keller got it from Ryan. He was glad to see it in any event, there was less chance of interruptions at a critical moment, that way.

He watched Ryan's sneakers as he crossed to Miguel, and he sighed when he felt Ryan's hand run through his hair, his eyes closing in pleasure. He heard Ryan unzip his pants and swallowed, anticipation making his mouth water.

"Head up."

Miguel did as he was told, and he came face to face with Ryan's hard cock. He opened his mouth, and Ryan rubbed the slick tip of his cock across Miguel's bottom lip. He licked it automatically, and his tongue touched the slit bringing the salty, metallic taste back into his mouth. Ryan gasped and thrust his cock forward enough for Miguel to suck the head into his mouth. That was all it took, and without any warning, Ryan was fucking his mouth. Not wildly, but with enough force to make Miguel moan across the head, one hand coming up to rub his balls, rolling them in his hand.
"Jesus fucking Christ! Your mouth feels so good, Miguel. Hot and wet. Suck it. Yeah. So good." Ryan tightened his strong hands around Miguel's skull, and it made his cock ache for attention. His hips thrust forward, searching for contact, and Ryan shifted his feet to keep his balance, getting one foot between Miguel's knees. He pressed forward, finally finding something to rub against, and his free hand came up behind Ryan's calf, urging him closer.

Suddenly Ryan stepped back, holding Miguel's head away from Ryan's body. His cock popped out of Miguel's mouth with a wet, sucking sound, and Miguel looked up at Ryan, puzzled at the sudden move. His cock was sticking out of his pants, slick with Miguel's saliva, and it looked obscene and utterly appealing, and Miguel head surged forward toward it again. Ryan held him still with his hands on Miguel's head.

"Oh, no. Not yet. I felt you humping my leg like a dog in heat." He picked up his foot, rubbing the toe of his sneaker over the extended lump in Miguel's pants. Miguel's hips thrust forward again, and he bit back the moan that threatened to erupt from his throat.

"Please." He reached for Ryan's hips, but stopped when Ryan told him to stop. He let go of Miguel's head, taking another step back, grabbing onto his own cock, and stroking it while he watched Miguel pant in frustration. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take your clothes off."

"All of them?" Miguel was surprised, but turned on at the same time.

"Yes. Do it quickly, we don't have that much time."

He did as he was told; stripping fast, leaving his clothes in a pile to the side. Ryan watched avidly, staring at Miguel's cock as it was revealed. "Back on your knees, now." Ryan still had his cock out, but was otherwise clothed and as he walked around Miguel, examining him from every angle, Miguel had never felt so exposed. He stopped in front of Miguel again, lifting one foot to rub his shoe along the bottom of his cock, up the length of it, to the very tip. He smiled at Miguel. "Jerk off for me. I want to watch you."

¡Puta madre! The man got better and better at this all the time. Miguel knew it was an instinctive thing with Ryan, but he didn't know how he knew what turned Miguel on the most. He seemed to know what would work best, knew how to make him harder than ever, with only a few words. Miguel reached for his cock, and started stroking, his eyes focused on Ryan's hungry gaze. He only realized he'd been subconsciously following Ryan's rhythm when he stopped abruptly, and stood there, watching Miguel.

When he started talking, it startled Miguel, but his low, sexy tone felt like velvet on his skin. "You like me watching you, don't you? You like being the center of my attention." Ryan began to move, circling Alvarez in a slowly shrinking ring. "I may have the power, but when I'm focused on you, you can feel every bit of that power, can't you? Feel the way I control you, the way you willingly surrender that control to me."

Miguel's knees were shaking with the effort to keep upright. It took a lot of concentration to not collapse back onto his heels, because his legs felt very weak and shaky with all the sensations running through him. Ryan was behind him when he swayed. He caught himself before he listed too far to the side, but immediately, Ryan was right there, his arm wrapped around Miguel's waist. Miguel felt Ryan's cock slide along the crack of his ass and they both moaned as Ryan's hips bucked up, searching for more contact.

Ryan pulled Miguel back against his chest, and he felt the smooth fabric of Ryan's t-shirt rub
against his skin. Miguel hadn't realized he'd stopped stroking his cock until he felt Ryan's hand wrap around his own, picking up the rhythm, holding him tighter, and moving slightly faster. Oh God that felt so good! Miguel let his head fall back onto Ryan's shoulder, his head spinning with the powerful sensations that threatened to overwhelm him. Ryan held Miguel's cock tightly, and Ryan's cock slid between his cheeks with every move he made. Miguel couldn't decide if he was in heaven or in hell. He wanted more, and he wanted this to last forever, and all the time, his climax grew closer and closer, and he was having trouble remembering how to breathe.

Ryan's breath was hot against the back of his neck, harsh, short puffs of air that showed how difficult it was for him to control himself, and that made Miguel's heart soar. He could bring Ryan O'Reily to this, make him tremble as he tried to contain his passion. He did this. Ryan's cock bumped against his ass cheeks and left streaks of moisture across his lower back as Ryan thrust wildly, and Miguel started thrusting back, loving the feel of Ryan's cock against Miguel's bare skin, slick and powerful, pushing against his ass. Every time Ryan slid between his cheeks Miguel held his breath.

He did want more. But he'd settle for this for now. He let his hand slip out from under Ryan's, leaving Ryan jerking him off, squeezing him tighter and moving faster on his cock. Miguel reached back with both hands, and grabbed onto Ryan's thighs, pulling him up tighter against his body, shuddering as every hot breath hit his neck. "Please. Please." Not sure exactly what he was asking for, but needing it just the same. He was so close, so hard he couldn't stand it, squirming and pushing back, wanting and begging and needing more of everything.

Miguel felt Ryan's teeth graze across his nape and he bent his neck to give Ryan better access, pushing up into the slight pain. Ryan must have realized what he wanted, because suddenly the scrape of dull teeth became the sharper sting of a true bite and Miguel came, igniting into flames as quickly as flash paper, burning up from the inside as he spasmed in Ryan's grip.

Ryan pulled him closer, thrusting more quickly now, his cock sliding over Miguel's ass and slipping unexpectedly between Miguel's legs, bumping into his balls and making Miguel shudder in sudden aftershocks. He quickly pulled his legs together, giving Ryan something to push through, to create a little friction to help him along and Ryan's thrusts became more intense, gathering speed and power as he gasped into Miguel's ear. He moved his hand to wrap more firmly around Miguel's waist, his still slick fingers sliding on Miguel's skin, wet with come.

With one final push he came, muffling his shout into Miguel's bruised neck, and Miguel wondered why he was panting as harshly as Ryan. As their breathing slowed, Ryan fell back onto his heels, pulling Miguel with him, and they collapsed into a heap on the cold tile floor, gasping into each other's necks as they lay there, their hearts still pounding in their ears.

Finally Ryan broke the silence. "Holy Mother of God. That was intense!" Miguel started chuckling, unable to control himself. Ryan joined him after a moment, and they lay there laughing at themselves as the results of their combined orgasms cooled on Miguel's thighs.

"Ma!" Cyril ran across the cafeteria and jumped up onto the stage, grabbing Ryan's mom to him in a bear hug. She laughed brightly, and Ryan smiled as he jogged up the steps to the stage. He leaned against the piano as Cyril rattled on about the new slapping game Miguel had shown him, how much fun it was to have Miguel around to play with. Ryan smirked at that. Yeah, he could agree with that, it was fun having Miguel around.

Ryan hugged Suzanne then sat and watched as Cyril showed her the game Miguel had taught him...all finger snaps and clapping and hand jive movements that Ryan hadn't tried to keep straight. That was the kind of shit he'd seen the girls doing back in elementary school as a kid. But despite
the fact that it kept Cyril occupied when they were locked in the pod before lights out, it kind of annoyed him that Miguel was teaching Cyril that shit.

"Cyril, don't bother her with that crap. That's for girls, not guys like you.' Ryan spoke harshly, surprised at his own attitude. He wasn't sure why he felt so cranky, but that shit was bothering him for some reason.

Suzanne was on the mat on the floor, sitting crossed legged across from Cyril as he tried to show her his new game. She smiled up at Ryan where he slouched against the piano. "No, Ryan, this is good for him. It will teach him coordination, improve his reflexes and his memory because the pattern is always changing. Children play these games for a reason, you know. I'll ask Miguel to show me more in our next lesson."

She laughed at something Cyril did, "No wait...show me that again?"

Ryan decided maybe he needed to change the subject. "Yeah? How's that going? His lessons? I asked him, but he didn't say much about them."

"Well, we've only had a few so far, but I think they'll be good for him. He speaks so softly to begin with, and his vocal cords still haven't recovered from..." she hesitated for a moment, trying to find a nice way to say it, "...his accident. He needs to exercise them, like any other muscles that have been damaged, in order to get full use of them again."

Cyril cried out, "Oh no! I messed it up. Do it again, do it again!" They started up again, Cyril biting his lip in concentration.

Suzanne glanced back over to Ryan. "He's very sweet, I like him a lot."

"Yeah? I guess he's a pretty good guy."

"I'm glad he's got you for a friend, I think you're good for him. He needs someone like you in his life."

Ryan felt his hackles rise. What had Miguel said about him? "What do you mean? Someone like me?" He didn't want his mom to be getting any ideas about him and Miguel. If Miguel had been talking about what the two of them did in private... He felt his face flush as he thought about their last time together. He'd wrapped himself around Miguel's back and rutted up against him. Ryan had been so close to fucking him. He'd wanted to fuck Miguel, and that filled him with horror. He'd come so close. Would he have done it? If Miguel had asked Ryan to fuck him, could he have fucked another man?

His mother's words broke through Ryan's tumultuous thoughts. "I mean that he's been such a loner all his life, despite having such a large family. They were all women; grandmothers and aunts and sisters and cousins and nieces. He's had very few real friends in his life, especially male friends. And in a place like this, he can use all the friends he can get. You both can. It's scary out there, isn't it, Cyril?"

Cyril's face grew solemn, as he grabbed Suzanne's hands and held onto them tightly. "Oh yeah. It's very scary sometimes. I'm glad you don't have to live here with us, Ma, 'cause sometimes, there are mean people in Oz."

Suzanne pulled one hand away from his grip, and placed it on Cyril's cheek. "I know, honey. I wish I could take you away from this place, and find somewhere safe for you."

Ryan frowned at her. He knew what she was talking about, despite the fact that she didn't come out
and say it. Miguel told him he'd spoken to Suzanne about the Connolly Institute, and now she was convinced that Cyril should be transferred there. So what if they had more resources for a brain damaged man than they did here in Oz? Here, Ryan could take care of him. He'd be alone there, and Ryan wouldn't let that happen.

Ryan started to pace, his anger growing. "Don't even start, Ma. You know that's not going to happen." This was all Miguel's fault. If he hadn't told her about Connolly she never would have fixed on it as a safe haven for Cyril. Ryan was beginning to regret that he'd ever told her about Miguel. She'd been adamant that he should take lessons from her, that she could help his damaged voice recover. Miguel had been hesitant until Ryan had told him that he'd feel better knowing that one more person was watching her back, then he'd reluctantly agreed.

But now, he'd filled Suzanne's head with ideas about that fucking nuthouse. She'd gone hunting on the internet, and spoken to the parole officer in charge of her case, and she was convinced that Cyril would be better off separated from Ryan. Okay, that's not what she meant, she really thought he'd be safer there, and could have a better quality of life, but dammit, he wasn't losing Cyril. He didn't give a fuck if they were only half brothers or not. He and Cyril were brothers, and he would take care of him until the day one of the two of them died. And that was that.

Suzanne stepped into the path of Ryan's pacing and pulled him to a stop. "Hey." She pulled him to her and held him, and he slowly relaxed into her arms. After a moment, he slowly pulled away.

"I'm sorry, ma. I can't lose him. He's all I've got left, now."

She punched him in the shoulder. "What does that make me? Chopped liver?"

He grinned, despite himself. "Ma, you know what I mean."

"I know. But you'll never lose him. Even if you do agree to this someday, you'll still have your brother. I'll be your go between. I'll visit him; I'll bring you letters from him, and bring him yours. Sister Pete says that maybe they might even be able to arrange telephone calls, under the circumstances. He'll always be your brother, just as I'll always be your mom. But I won't push it. I'm sorry I upset you. It's forgotten, okay?"

"Okay. Thanks."

Cyril was suddenly right there beside the two of them, his face animated with excitement. "Are we gonna sing now? Miguel taught me a new lullaby, but it's in Spanish, so I don't know what it says. I like it though. It reminds me of the song my mom used to sing to me a long time ago. The Tool Rally song."

Suzanne's puzzled look made Ryan grin. "Tool Rally?"

Ryan laughed as Cyril started to sing in his badly off tune voice, and although he refused to sing, Ryan did step in to remind Cyril when he forgot the words.

"Over in Killarney
Many years ago
Me mother sang a song to me
In tones so sweet and low
Just a simple little ditty
In her sweet old Irish way
And I'd give the world if she could sing
That song to me this day
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, too-ra-loo-ra-lie
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, hush, now don't you cry
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, too-ra-loo-ra-lie
Too-ra-loo-ra-loo-ral, that's an Irish lullaby."

Later, when his ma and Cyril were sitting at the piano, Ryan thought about his anger at Miguel, and finally admitted to himself why he felt so upset with Miguel. He knew it wasn't really Miguel that was the problem. Well, it was, but it wasn't his fault at all. The problem was the time they'd spent together last week in that damned storage room, and the way he'd felt about it. He thought he'd conquered his freak outs over Miguel and sex, and for the most part he had. But it seemed there were still some lingering doubts that he could deal with what was happening. Or maybe the doubt was, did he want to deal with them?

If he fucked Miguel, that would be another bridge burned. One more step he couldn't take back. He'd managed to ignore the fact that he'd had his hands all over another man's cock not that long ago. That was mutual comfort and release. It happened in the army all the time, when men were trapped behind enemy lines, or on base with no women to help them relieve their sexual frustrations. But last week, he'd wrapped his arms around Miguel's naked body, and slid his cock between the cheeks of Miguel's ass. There was no taking back the fact that that was sex.

Real sex - not comfort, or releasing tension. He'd breathed in the scent of Miguel's sweat and musk and tasted the salt on his skin, and he'd wanted more. More touch, more intensity, more of everything. And he knew even then that he was going to have him. It was just a matter of when it was going to happen. So he'd avoided being alone with Miguel. Avoided touching him, as much as possible. He didn't think Miguel had noticed, because he'd been very careful not to let him know. It was easy to avoid being alone in Em City - there were times it was impossible to find time for that kind of thing, so it wasn't that surprising that they'd spend days apart.

But he was only putting off the inevitable. He knew it was going to happen, and he might as well stop fighting it. Not that he was going to encourage it, or anything. He'd let it happen when it happened. He was a man, dammit. He wasn't afraid of anything, let alone a little gay sex. He cringed. Okay, maybe he was, but he wasn't going to let that defeat him. He'd talk to Miguel tonight, hopefully they could meet tomorrow.
"She called you a sweet boy."

Miguel leaned back against the wall of their storage room and stared up at Ryan in shock. "I'm a what?"

Ryan snickered. "Yeah, I know." He kicked the toe of Miguel's old high tops, "Stop laughing. Hey, if she's old enough to be my mother, she's definitely old enough to call you a boy."

Miguel didn't look like he was going to stop laughing any time soon. "As long as she doesn't call me her boy, I guess I can deal with that. It's the sweet part I'm having trouble with."

Ryan sat down across from him, his legs stretched out to the side. "What's wrong with being her boy?" he asked in mock affront.

"Oh, nothing, I guess, but it would make what we do together kind of awkward, don't you think?" Miguel dropped his gaze suddenly, and Ryan realized he was probably nervous about bringing up their personal relationship, since Ryan had been acting like such an ass about it for the last week.

"Yeah. About that. I think maybe..." God this was hard work, he was never good at talking about shit like this, but he knew it needed to be done. "Look. I think I was kind of pissed off about you telling ma about Connolly and shit, you know? I've been taking it out on you, instead of her, and that's not fair. She's the one that's so obsessed with it, not you."

"Yeah, but I did kind of paint a rosy picture. I didn't mean her to think nothing bad ever happens there or anything. You get a bunch of convicts all locked up together, and you're gonna have problems. But compared to here, it's like a walk in the park, you know? Stuff to keep you busy, keep you from thinking all the time. Therapy stuff, too. Not just talking. There was painting and cutting out pictures and talking about what you've done with them and music and this one guy, he took a whole group of us into this big ass room down in the basement, and let us yell and jump up and down and scream at the walls. He said it was therapeutic."

"Did it help?"

"Yeah, it did. I felt a lot better getting it outside of me, where it couldn't crush me down." He paused, as if to decide whether to continue, but eventually he kept going. "I liked it there. Connolly would be a good place for Cyril, Ryan, except for the fact that you wouldn't be there to keep him company."

"You were lonely, there. I don't want that to happen to Cyril. He shouldn't have to be alone."

"No, I know. He'd miss you something awful. But he'd make friends. There were others there like him. Grown up men that acted like kids. I don't know if they were brain damaged like Cyril, or if that was part of being crazy for them, but he'd have people like himself to play with, and the nurses and therapists would love him."

He shifted uncomfortably, then finally stretched out along the base of the wall, turned on his back so he wasn't face to face with Ryan, but was still close. "I kind of made my own loneliness, Ryan. I was so lost when I went there. I thought I was on my own; that nobody really cared if I lived or died." His laugh was abrupt and full of bitterness. "And it pissed me off that even if they didn't really care, they still wouldn't let me."
"Wouldn't let you what?" Ryan felt a clenching in his gut when he realized what Miguel meant. He folded his legs up and scooted closer to where Miguel was lying, staring up at the ceiling, blinking rapidly. "Let you die, you mean?"

Miguel shrugged. "I didn't want to come back here and end up in Solitary again. I knew I'd never come out again if that happened. Not sane at least."

Ryan reached out, and ran a finger along the red scar that ran a stuttered course across Miguel's neck. He felt the shiver Miguel tried to suppress through the tip of his finger. If Murphy had been a little slower, Miguel would have hit his artery, instead of nicking it and skipping over to dig into his voice box. If the blade of that shank had sliced into that artery, Miguel would have bled out before they could have gotten the medics to him. "You tried to kill yourself again?"

"Well, I didn't get very far. I was saving up my pills, you know? Just in case. They were really good at making sure you took them, so I didn't have that many. They found them when they did a room sweep, and they put me on 'suicide watch.'" He laughed again, a harsh, painful sound. "After that there were guards and nurses in my room every fifteen minutes checking to see if I'd managed to off myself yet. It's weird how you can be lonely even when you're not alone"

Ryan pulled his finger back, feeling awkward and unsure of what to say. "I'm glad they kept you company. You'd never have known that I didn't plan that explosion if you hadn't come back here. We wouldn't be here now. I'm glad you're here."

Alvarez looked at him then. "Are you? Really? 'Cause I thought maybe that was part of the reason you were staying away from me this last week. That you had changed your mind about us. You know..." He waved his finger between the two of them.

"Okay, well, maybe that had something to do with it," Ryan said with a shrug. "I might have had a minor freak out over the whole skin on skin thing we had going last week." Miguel stared at him. "A minor one. I told you I wasn't totally over the whole concept, yet. I'll get there, though. I just need to take my time with it."

"Okay. We can take it slow. I got no problem with that."

"Yeah, well." Ryan let his frustration and self-doubt show with those words.

"Well what?"

"Well maybe I have a problem with that." He moved his hand back, running the fingers lightly around Miguel's throat, sliding across his skin so his hand covered the scar, his thumb running along the sharp edge of Miguel's jaw line. "I like touching you. I want to do more of it. I think about it all the time."

"You do?" Miguel looked up into Ryan's eyes, searching for something, and Ryan's breath caught.

"Sometimes I think about it so much that I can't breathe."

Miguel laughed, and Ryan smiled at the way it vibrated his palm where he rested it over Miguel's scar. "Well, we can't have that. Breathing is good for you. Remember what Suzanne says. Take deep breaths and..."

"Support your diaphragm. I know. I know."

He skimmed his hand down Miguel's chest to his abs, laying his palm on Miguel's flat belly in an imitation of his Ma. "Let me feel you breathe!"
Miguel's breath was kind of shaky. "It ain't easy with your hand right there."

Ryan's grin was wicked. He slipped his hand under Miguel's shirt, sliding it across the bare skin. "Is this any better?" He asked innocently.

"I don't think so." Ryan started to pull his hand out, but Miguel grabbed it. "But don't stop. Please?"

It was the please that got to him. Miguel begged so sweetly. His ma was right. Miguel really was a sweet boy. "All right." Miguel's skin was warm against his palm. Ryan's hand skimmed that spot under his ribs, the one Miguel always unconsciously stroked. He always found his eyes following Miguel's hand when he did that. Suddenly feeling wasn't enough, so he tugged at the shirt. "Take this off." He needed to see him, too.

Ryan stood up and crossed to the sink, rooting around in the junk until he found the door stop he left there for that reason. No one used this storage room at this time of the day - that was why they were there in the first place, but it never hurt to be careful.

When he returned to Miguel, he was stretched out; his legs crossed at the ankles, his arms crossed under his head, making his ribs stand out sharply. Ryan sat back down next to him, smiling at Miguel's quick, uncertain glances. He was trying to look so sure and confident, but Ryan could tell he was still nervous. He had a lot of work to do to erase that insecurity from Miguel's face. No more running hot and cold, Ryan told himself. Or at least, no more taking his problems out on Miguel.

"Relax. I don't want your muscles all tensed up like that. You feel better under my hand when you're relaxed."

Miguel swallowed. "I'm relaxed."

Ryan shook his head, reaching up and closing Miguel's eyes with his fingertips. "Don't move." Miguel's fleeting smile disappeared when Ryan began tracing the lines and planes of his face: his brow, his nose, the line of his jaw. He ran one finger across the faded scar on his cheek, white and pale against his skin, then along his ear and under his chin. The scar there was much more vivid and red, still puffy, and looked tender. Miguel swallowed as Ryan circled the jagged scar that had damaged his vocal cords.

"Does this hurt?" He pressed on it lightly, and the red faded out to white where his finger touched the skin.

"No, not really. Well, sometimes, but not right now."

He moved his finger, running it along the gap between the two scars, where Murphy had pulled the shank far enough away from his skin to leave it unbroken before Miguel had yanked it back, out of Murphy's grasp. Miguel arched his neck into Ryan's hand, and he smiled at the image of Miguel as a cat, arching into a petting hand. He followed the line of his collarbone around to his right shoulder, pausing over the thick star-shaped scar in the muscle under his arm. It, too, was older, paler against his skin, but raised slightly.

"What's this one? Is that from a bullet?"

Miguel shivered, clearing his throat before he spoke. "Yeah. The riot. When the SORT team attacked, remember?"

"Oh yeah." He traced the scar lightly as he spoke. "I knew you'd been shot. I only found out
afterwards, though. I spent the whole time in Solitary. I missed everything, even Beecher biting off the end of Robson's cock." He laughed. "Wish I'd been around for that. That would have been worth paying for."

Miguel grinned. "Yeah, he was a mess the first couple of days, man. They kept him sedated for the most part, but he had the most bizarre hallucinations." He'd opened his eyes when he started talking about Robson, but closed them again quickly at Ryan's glare.

"So did you see it? His headless cock?"

"No way, man." Miguel shuddered. "No way I was looking at that shit. It still makes my balls wanna crawl back inside my body every time I think about it."

Ryan shuddered in sympathy. "Yeah, I hear that."

His fingertips trailed over Miguel's nipple on his way over to the next scar, and Miguel hummed his approval, his chest pushing into the touch, but Ryan kept moving. The scar on his lower chest, to the right of the sternum, was small and thin. "This where that blade went in your first day in Oz?"

"Yeah. Missed my heart, nicked my lung instead. He had bad aim, man."

"Lucky for you. Did you know him? The one that stuck you?"

"Nah. He was just a punk. I guess he figured he'd make his name right off, kill some guy his first day in Oz, beef up his jizz." He shrugged, "Didn't work, though. I heard he got pragged by some homeboy in Unit B his first week here. I didn't try and get revenge or nothing, I figured he'd already got what was coming to him, right?"

Ryan laughed. "I guess so." His fingers trailed over the scar again and again, making Miguel shiver.

"You remind me of Donald Groves."

"What?" Ryan's hand came to a stop, his palm pressed over the jagged knife wound. "That whacko that ate his parents? What makes you say that?"

"He was fascinated by all my scars. I wouldn't let him touch them, though. They're private."

"But you don't mind me touching them?"

"It's different with you. You already know my shame."

"Your shame? You think these are your shame? What have you got to be ashamed of?"

"I told God I'd stop bragging and thinking so much of myself if he would let my baby live." Miguel pulled one hand out from under his head and traced the scar on his face, his eyes opening as he explained his thoughts to Ryan. "I put this scar of my face, to remind me of my sins. Not only pride. All my sins. The man I beat up, that got me put here in Oz? I slashed his face in this same spot." He put his hand back behind his head again, staring up at the ceiling, "But God didn't listen to me. He didn't trust my deal. This is my shame. Not being good enough for God to believe."

"God doesn't listen to us, Miguel. If he did, he would have killed my father long before Cyril and I were old enough to defend ourselves from his fists," Ryan's fingers went back to the scar on his cheek. "This isn't a shame. This is your survival. You survived that kid your first day here. You
survived the hack that shot you. You survived losing your baby. You survived Giles stabbing you in the back. How many times have you survived some fucker who tried to kill you? Vasquez tried, Guerra and Ricardo tried..."

"Martinez..."

"That's right, Martinez tried. You've survived them all. You're still here. And most of them aren't. That's a mark of pride in my book, man. You're a survivor. I like your scars."

Miguel held out his left hand, palm up, showing the scar left when he'd stabbed himself right before he cut his face. Ryan studied the mark that sliced across Miguel's lifeline with a thick band of scar tissue. He traced the mark, then looked up to find Alvarez' anxious eyes on him. "You're alive. And that's what's important to me."

Ryan found himself uncomfortable with the silence that stretched between them, unsure of what to do. He cleared his throat, and looked down, breaking their eye contact. "Take those pants off." He heard Miguel's chuckle and raised his eyebrow imperiously, saying in his best schoolteacher voice, "I won't tell you again."

Miguel scrabbled with the button and zipper on his pants, still smiling, but eager to move on. "Okay, okay..." He lifted his ass to slide the pants and his underwear down together, kicking them off with his shoes, tangling them all in a pile near his feet. He lay back down, shivering slightly, his nipples crinkling tightly, his cock already hardening and Ryan nodded, satisfied with that picture.

"That's more like it." He made sure Miguel was looking directly at him before he spoke again. "Now, here's the game. You don't move. No matter what I do. Understand?"

Miguel glanced down nervously again, but this time, Ryan could see arousal there as well. He swallowed, and nodded his head. Ryan smirked. This was going to be fun.

He kept up the gentle movement of fingertips across skin that he'd had going before, tickling across Miguel's belly button, running his fingers through the hair that led down to his cock, ghosting across his hipbones. His legs spread eagerly when Ryan tugged on one thigh, and he skirted around Miguel's cock to run his fingers down the seam between his leg and thigh, then down the outside of the leg to run rings around his kneecap. The soft skin behind Miguel's knee proved to be very sensitive, and Ryan was amazed to see Miguel's cock jerk when he concentrated his efforts there.

By the time he got back up to Miguel's cock again, it was standing up proudly, and there was a drop of precome trembling on the tip, about to fall. Miguel's body was vibrating with the tension of not reacting to Ryan's teasing strokes. Ryan was pleased with how well he'd done getting Miguel turned on like this, but at the same time, he was dealing with some residual fag panic that was making it difficult for him to think too hard about touching Miguel's actual genitals. He wasn't sure why, he'd done that before. The fact that Ryan was hard too didn't help any. He was hard, and Miguel hadn't even touched him.

He concentrated for a moment on the feelings he remembered from the times Miguel had touched him, and how good it had felt, and how much he wanted to make Miguel feel that way, and finally shoved those negative thoughts away into a dingy corner of his mind with all his other dark secrets, and reminded himself that today was supposed to be about building up Miguel's confidence and his belief in O'Reily. He'd deal with that shit later.

He took a deep breath and touched one finger to the tip of Miguel's cock, smearing the precome
gathered there around the spongy head, running it around the edge to the sensitive nub underneath and rubbing his fingers across it. Miguel's back arched, and he moaned softly before he got himself back under control and settled down. Ryan smiled. He didn't tell Miguel this, but there were times when losing the game was as good as winning it, and every time he got a reaction out of Miguel, his own cock surged with excitement, which meant Miguel was winning, too.

Suddenly, he was tired of the game, and he reached in his back pocket for the small tube of lube he'd stolen from the Infirmary. He quickly slicked up his hand, wrapped it around Miguel's cock and started pumping. Miguel's shout and the abrupt jerk as his body reacted to the cool gel and the sudden movement made Ryan laugh out loud. He stopped his hand and gave Miguel his patented schoolteacher's raised eyebrow look.

"Looks like someone lost the game, huh?"

"Pendejo." Miguel's hips sought that lost movement, pushing his cock into Ryan's fist. He let go of Miguel's cock, pulling his hand away.

"Ah ah ah! We'll have none of that." He waited until Miguel settled again, ignoring his frustrated glare. "Now, since I won, that means I should get a prize. Hmm...I wonder what kind of prize I should get..."

"I'll give you whatever you want. Anything." The sincerity in his voice shocked Ryan, and he looked back up into Miguel's dark eyes. "Anything." The depth of emotion he saw in Miguel stirred Ryan, and made him want to be worthy of that kind of devotion.

After a moment, Ryan took a deep breath and replied. "I know." His cock ached in its confinement, and he suddenly needed to free it. He reached for the waist of his pants, stopping abruptly when he realized his right hand was covered with lube. He knelt up, scrabbling with one hand at the button.

"Help me with this." Miguel sat up and opened his pants, pushing them down to Ryan's knees, his boxer's following quickly after. He leaned over, aiming for a taste of Ryan's cock which was stiff and aching, but Ryan pushed him back. "No, lie back down." Miguel looked disappointed, but he did as Ryan said. Ryan stretched out next to him on his side, and he pulled on Miguel until they were lying on the floor facing each other, one arm each under their own heads.

"Give me your hand." Miguel held out his left hand, and Ryan traced that scar again with slick fingers before smearing the lube in his own hand all over Miguel's with a grin. He reached back down and grabbed Miguel's hard on and wiggled his eyebrows at him. "Now show me what you've got."

Miguel caught on quickly, and soon they were jerking each other off, each thrusting into the other's hands, panting with the intensity of it all. Miguel squirmed around, trying to get closer, and their cocks briefly slid against each other, causing Ryan to shout and Miguel to jump in surprise. They both froze.

Miguel licked his lips, and Ryan's eyes followed the movement. "Can I..." He looked hesitant, as if he was afraid to say anything, although it was obvious that he wanted to.

"Show me," Ryan urged.

He nodded, then moved closer, so that they were touching along their thighs. Then he adjusted his position and let his cock slide along Ryan's before grasping them both in his hand and stroking them together.
Ryan was gasping at the sensations, slick and hard and yielding all at the same time and he moaned, grabbing Miguel's hip, pulling him even closer with gel-slick fingers. "Jesus!" He thrust into Miguel's grasp, but it wasn't tight enough, he needed more, so he moved his own hand down, and the two of them stroked together, hips moving against each other, their feet tangling.

Miguel's eyes fell shut, and Ryan studied his face for a moment. The mix of concentration and ecstasy was intoxicating; he'd done that. He put that look on another man's face. He closed his own eyes and rode on the wave of those amazing sensations. Christ. And he's been worried about coming all over Miguel's ass. This was so much more intense, and it made him want even more. He could feel Miguel's breath against his face, his sweaty skin rubbing against Ryan's cheek, the drag of Miguel's open lips across his neck.

He pulled his head back in surprise when he felt Miguel's tongue slide across the line of his jaw. Miguel opened his eyes, his voice an anxious whisper. "Sorry...I..." He bit his bottom lip and dropped his eyes, as if unsure what to say or do.

Ryan realized what he really wanted, and shook his head. Dammit, he wasn't going to let other people's rules and expectations run his life anymore. If he wanted to kiss Miguel, he'd do it.

Ryan leaned forward. "Miguel." When he looked up, Ryan brought their lips together, pushing his way into Miguel's mouth, moaning as their tongues slid against each other. Fuck yeah. This was what he'd been missing, and hadn't even realized it; the taste of Miguel's mouth, the slick slide of tongues and the clash of teeth, hot and wet and so fucking good. Ryan sucked on Miguel's tongue, pulling it into his mouth as he explored it with his own, then pushing back into Miguel's mouth to explore his teeth and gums and searching out any spots he'd managed to miss the first time around.

He wasn't sure when it happened, but at some point, they let go of each other's cocks, and had their arms wrapped around each other, pulling themselves closer until they lay touching all up and down their bodies. Miguel was squirming and thrusting his hips up against Ryan's and he reveled in how good it felt to have that much hot, sweaty skin rubbing up against his own. But it wasn't enough. He needed more.

Ryan pushed Miguel over onto his back, rolling on top of him, his knees spreading Miguel's thighs wide as he found what he was looking for, his weight on his elbows above Miguel to angle his body and help increase the friction. With their cocks lined up together, he began a steady rhythm, pushing and grinding his slick cock against Miguel's, who was panting a steady stream of Spanish words at him, his hands wrapped around Ryan's arms, clenching tightly. He hooked his feet around Ryan's thighs, pulling them even more closely together, biting his bottom lip again, and Ryan had a sense memory of how soft and appealing that lip was on his cock and needed to have another taste.

Ducking his head down, he drew that lip into his mouth, sucking on it, biting it, and Miguel's hands came up and pulled them together into another hot, wet kiss. He couldn't get enough of Miguel's mouth, thrusting his tongue into it over and over in the same rhythm he was using with his hips, fucking his mouth the way he wanted to fuck his ass. Oh, Jesus. The thought of that was enough to set him off, and he came without warning, frozen above Miguel, his hot come spurting onto Miguel's belly.

Miguel cried into Ryan's mouth, his hips still thrusting against Ryan's frantically, Ryan's slick come making it harder to get the friction he needed. But as dazed as he was by a fantastic orgasm, Ryan still was aware enough to realize what Miguel needed. He ducked his head, and bit down onto Miguel's nipple, tugging it in his teeth and tightening the grip of his jaws as he dragged his head back. Miguel shouted loudly and Ryan could actually feel his cock swell between them before letting go its load, mixing his come with Ryan's on Miguel's belly.
When Miguel finally let go of Ryan and let his body slump back against the tile floor, Ryan rolled off him and dropped to the floor with an exhausted sigh.

"Holy crap!" It was all he could manage, and Miguel's half-hearted snort echoed his sentiments. "We gotta do that again!"

"What?" Miguel's incredulous voice made him realize he might need to clarify that statement.

"Not now. I mean...damn. That was good. That was fucking good."

Miguel grinned at him. "Yeah, it was alright."

"Alright? Alright? That was fucking fantastic, and you know it." He rolled over onto his side, and laughed as he stared at Miguel's come covered body. "God, you are a mess."

Miguel lifted himself onto one elbow and frowned down at his body, "¡Mierda! Don't laugh; you're not that much better."

Ryan ran his hand through the come smeared on his stomach, then reached over and smeared come over Miguel's belly. Miguel jerked, "Hey!"

"Don't move." Miguel stilled at his serious tone, staring down at his body in confusion as Ryan rubbed their come into Miguel's skin.

"I saw this National Geographic special one time that talked all about scent marking." Ryan's hand moved hypnotically as he spoke, his voice soft but firm, daring Miguel to oppose him in this. "You know what that is?" Miguel shook his head. "Like when a dog pisses on a tree to show the other dogs that tree is part of his territory. It works with come, too."

"You know that no one is going to be able to tell what you're doing, don't you? Our poor human noses can't smell that shit."

Ryan shrugged. "I know that. But you'll know it's there. Every time you bend over, or sit down, and you feel the tightness on your skin where my come dried on your belly, you'll know you belong to me." His hand swept up Miguel's chest to catch the drops there, smoothing them into the skin. "And even after you shower tomorrow, I want you to remember this. Every time you rub your belly, you know, the way you do sometimes? When you run your fingers over your abs like this?"

Miguel shivered as Ryan's fingers skimmed across the skin of his abdomen, still tacky with come. "Every time you do that, you'll remember that you belong to me. Won't you? You won't ever forget."

Miguel shook his head slowly. His dark eyes shone as he whispered, "I won't forget."
"Hey, Alvarez. Your family is Cuban, right?" Miguel leaned backwards from his seat on the floor, tilting his head back as far as he could in order to see Ryan, who stuck his head over the edge of the top bunk. He was upside down from that perspective - it was a little disconcerting.

"Yeah, we're from Cuba. Why?"

"Well, in this book I'm reading about South America, there was this famous historian guy who wrote about these old Incan ruins called Machu Picchu in the Andes Mountains in Peru. His guide was this eleven year old boy called Pablito Alvarez. So I was wondering if any of your family came from Peru, 'cause wouldn't it be cool if that was like your cousin or something?"

"My cousin?" He grinned at Ryan from upside down, and Ryan laughed at him.

"Well, he'd have to be a few generations back I guess, since this was in 1911 or something like that. But that's kind of cool, right? Reading something about your family name in a book."

"Alvarez is a pretty popular name, I guess." He shrugged. "There are lots of people with Spanish heritage in South America."

Cyril, who'd been lying on his stomach, drawing in a coloring book, chose that moment to remind them that Miguel had been teaching him Spanish.

"Rojo is red." Cyril said it like an American would, and Miguel sat up and repeated it, rolling the r to show him how it was pronounced in Spanish.

"Rojo. Say Rojo."

"Rojo." He rolled his r dramatically, and Miguel and Ryan both laughed. "That's good, Cyril. You're getting it."

"Rojo is red, and blue is azul." He finished the red jacket on the fireman he'd been drawing, and started in on the blue pants. "How do you say blue jeans, Miguel? My boMbero is wearing blue jeans."

Miguel laughed. Hey, that's good. A boMbero is a fireman! You remembered. Blue jeans, huh? Well, for the most part we say blue jeans, but I guess you could say "jeans azules" if you really wanted to. I think I like blue jeans better, don't you?"

Cyril nodded. "It's easier to say." Cyril jumped up at the knock on the pod door. "Bob! Bob, is it time for Miss Sally now?"

Rebadow smiled at Cyril and nodded. "Almost, Cyril. Are you ready to go down to the TVs?" He smiled at Miguel who was picking up Cyril's crayons and putting them in back in their box, then up at Ryan who nodded at him.

"Rebadow."

Cyril looked behind Rebadow. "Where's Toby? Is he already down there? Is he saving us a seat in
"No, Toby's not watching with us today. But Agemenon is downstairs. It's Miss Sally's last show; you know he'll be there to watch with us."

"What's up with Beecher? Hey Cyril, throw me the Crayola azul." Cyril looked down to see the blue crayon clutched in his hand and tossed it to Miguel, who caught it laughing.

"Didn't you hear?" Rebadow crossed to the chair by the wall and sat, patting Cyril on the arm as he sighed, anxious to go see Miss Sally. "The Feds caught the hitman who killed Schillinger's son Hank. The guy fingered Pancamo."

That got Ryan's attention. He sat up on his bunk, swinging his legs over the side. "So that's why the big fight in the gym? I heard the Aryans and the Sicilians went at it."

Bob filled them in. "Pancamo is in the Infirmary, and Schillinger's in the Hole."

"So it was Pancamo that set up the kid to get killed, huh?"

Ryan had his 'thoughtful' voice going and Miguel wondered what he was thinking. He wasn't seeing the connection. "What's that got to do with Beecher?"

"If Pancamo hired the hitman, then Keller didn't have a thing to do with Hank Schillinger's death..." Rebadow let the sentence trail off, but Ryan put the two together and came up with the big news of the day.

"Keller's coming back to Oz."

"Exactly."

Cyril tugged on Rebadow's arm. "Can we go now, Bob? It's almost time for Miss Sally!"

He smiled indulgently as he stood. "Okay, Cyril. Let's go."

"Bye Ryan, bye Miguel."

The pod door slipped shut, and Ryan sat on the edge of his bunk, staring out at the quad. Miguel swallowed nervously and put the last of the crayons in the box, shoving it and the coloring book under Cyril's bunk. He was a little unsettled by this news. He wasn't sure how he should take it. Keller back in Oz. Back in Em City, more than likely. He had no idea how this was going to affect him; he was nervous and unwilling to look up at O'Reily. He found himself wishing for the casual laughter of five minutes ago, because suddenly the air seemed charged with emotion and he wasn't sure what he should be doing about it.

He needed to know how this would affect him and Ryan. Would Ryan be upset, would he begin to feel pressured by Keller's presence, reminding him that Keller had gone behind his back to try and arrange their involvement? Would he back off again, thinking that Miguel would want Keller more than he wanted Ryan? He needed to make sure that Ryan knew how he felt, even though he wasn't sure exactly what he needed to say. The silence dragged on and on, and finally Miguel had to do something. He got up and faced Ryan - he had to see Ryan's face when he asked his questions.

"What are you going to do..."

"Are you going to..."
They looked at each other, and Miguel felt a tiny grin in the corner of his mouth, despite Ryan's frown.

Ryan cleared his throat, his eyes meeting Miguel's in challenge. "What are you going to do about Keller?"

"Me? What are you going to do about Keller? Are you going to honor your agreement?"

"My agreement?"

"To watch each other's backs."

Ryan's eyebrows went up at that. "I hadn't even thought about that." He shrugged. "It depends, I guess. On what happens between you and Keller."

"What do you want to happen between me and Keller? Do you want me to help you watch his back?"

Ryan snorted, and jumped off his bunk, pacing the small space available to him. "I'd be happier if he stayed in Massachusetts, but that doesn't look like an option, so no. I don't want you to watch his back. I want you to stay as far away from him as possible." Miguel felt relief flood him, Ryan still wanted him around.

"Okay."

"Okay? That's it?" Ryan paused, looking surprised at Miguel's easy agreement. Miguel nodded. "You won't go near him?"

He held Ryan's eyes, trying to make clear everything he felt. "Not unless you tell me to."

Ryan laughed, but the sound was completely devoid of humor. "That's never going to happen."

"Okay."

Ryan leaned against the pod wall and stared at Miguel for a moment before asking, "What about what you said. That he could make you feel like you'd never felt with anyone before? You said that no one could take his place."

Miguel sat on the bottom bunk, and looked up into Ryan's eyes. "That doesn't mean I want him back. He was the one who showed me what I wanted. Who let me know it was okay to want it. But the things I had to do to get what I needed from him - the price was too high. I don't want that anymore. He's not what I want."

"What do you want?"

"I want you." Ryan stared at Miguel as if he could see into his soul and dig out the truth. Miguel felt the need to drop his eyes before the intensity of that stare, but he refused to do so. What he was saying was too important, and he needed to make sure Ryan understood him.

Ryan shook his head finally, turning away and staring out across the pod. "You say that now, but once he comes back... He'll catch you alone, and put his hands on you..."

"I won't let him. It's as simple as that." He got up and crossed to Ryan and touched his arm to pull him around. Ryan shrugged off his hand, so Miguel spoke to Ryan's back instead. "He doesn't want me. I was a play thing for him. A toy to pass the time until Beecher wanted him again. I'm not
willing to accept that any more, even if he did still want me. But he doesn't. He's got Beecher again, remember?"

"And the first time Beecher kicks him out of bed...

"He'll have to find some other poor fool to seduce, because I don't belong to him." He spoke fiercely, determined that Ryan would believe him.

Finally, Ryan turned back around, "No, you don't, do you?"

"I never did. And it's too late now, even if he decides he wants to play again, because he can't have me. I belong to you."

"You don't want the things he can offer you that I can't?" Ryan searched Miguel's face, as if looking for the slightest hesitation, but Miguel didn't hesitate, because he knew what he wanted now.

"No. Because you gave me something he never could, even if he wanted to."

"What's that?"

"You gave me back my pride."

Ryan watched Miguel through the Plexiglas, standing motionless in his pod, staring back at Ryan. Lights out had been an hour ago, but Ryan hadn't been able to sleep. He'd gotten up and paced the pod for a while, but when Cyril had started to stir, he'd quit moving around. The last thing he needed right now was to have to deal with Cyril. He had enough on his mind already.

He'd stared out into the dim half-light of a sleeping Em City, not focused on anything in the quad, just thinking. Ten or fifteen minutes later, Miguel had gotten out of his own bunk, and after a few moments, he'd mirrored Ryan's pose from across the quad, looking pale and thin in nothing but his boxers. He was still too skinny, he'd never put back all the weight he'd lost while in the hospital. He'd said he hadn't felt like eating. He seemed to eat better these days, though; he guessed it would take time.

Ryan's brain was spinning today, and it was all Miguel Alvarez' fault, so it seemed fitting that Miguel couldn't sleep either. Today Miguel said that Ryan had given him back his pride. That seemed odd considering the games they tended to play, and the role Miguel took in them, but when he'd thought about it, he understood what Miguel was saying.

A couple of days ago in the gym, Ryan had been lifting weights with Cyril, and he'd glanced over at Miguel on the mats with that Latino kid Valez. He was showing Valez some boxing moves, skipping and jumping around him as they sparred, as light as Ali used to be, all "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee." O'Reily'd smiled at his antics as Miguel dodged and spun around the boy, reminding Ryan of the Miguel he'd known back that first year they'd spent in Em City. Back when Miguel'd been strong and stood tall.

It actually made Ryan a bit jealous as he watched them. He wanted Miguel's laughter for his own. He didn't like the way Miguel touched the kid on the shoulder as they took off their gloves, making fun of some Aryan who was punching a bag in the corner. When he found his eyes following Miguel's hand as it traced a line across his abs, following along that stretch of well-defined muscle under his ribs, he glanced back up to Miguel's face. His eyes were focused on Ryan, showing him that he remembered, he knew who he belonged to.
Ryan sat down suddenly, to keep it from being too apparent that his cock had come to full attention without a single touch. Miguel smirked and turned away, his attention back on Velez again as the boy told him something, leaning in close with his hand on Miguel's shoulder. He wasn't jealous of that boy anymore. Miguel knew who he belonged to, and so did Ryan.

Ryan felt his own sense of pride for helping Miguel to take back that pride. He really hadn't given Miguel anything; he'd just helped remind him that it was still there, waiting for him, now that he was ready to take it in hand again. And the stronger and more capable Miguel felt, the better partner he became, the more capable he was of watching Ryan's back, and helping him with Cyril. In the long run, he guessed it was a self-serving achievement, but he was glad it made Miguel feel better about himself.

He didn't look that confident now, though - staring out over the heads of the guards sitting in their chairs at the guard station, across the dark quad to Ryan's pod. He was looking a little shell shocked, actually, but then why should he feel better than Ryan. They'd both been punched in the gut by the news they'd received today.

After the bombshell of learning Keller was coming back to Oz, Miguel had shared his own earth-shaking news. He knew where Gloria Nathan worked - had seen her, and even spoken to her while he was in Benchley Memorial Hospital. All this time, he'd known, and not told Ryan anything. He'd agonized over not telling him, but Gloria had asked Miguel not to let anyone know where she was and he had agreed.

Ryan felt betrayed at first, although he wasn't sure why. It wasn't like Miguel had trusted him either time he was in Benchley, he'd had no reason to trust Ryan then. Even worse, Ryan understood why Gloria hadn't wanted him to know. He'd torn her world apart when he'd gotten Cyril to kill her husband. It didn't matter that she and her husband had been separated at the time. In the long run, every time she saw Ryan, she'd be reminded that her comfort and care for a convicted criminal had gotten a man murdered. And not just any man - a man she'd loved enough at one point to want to spend the rest of her life with.

Whether she'd still loved him or not, she didn't deserve to be forced to live with that, but Ryan hadn't given her a choice, had he? The last thing she needed in her life was to face the man who'd caused her that kind of pain - for Ryan to push himself on her like that. He understood. Gloria was better off without Ryan. It didn't make it any easier, but he did understand.

He asked Miguel if she was happy, and he said he thought she was. She'd obviously spoken to the padre about some doctor she was seeing there at Benchley and she sounded happy to Miguel's ears. He hoped she was. He wanted her to be happy, even if that meant she was without Ryan. It was for the best.

He still loved her. He would always love her, but that didn't matter, their lives were a million miles apart, even if they lived within a few miles of each other. He wasn't sure what kind of life he could have in a crap heap like Oz, but he'd found something he could live with. He had his brother, and his mom - and he had Miguel. Miguel was his and he wouldn't give that up for anything.

He knew that Miguel thought he might, now that he knew where Gloria was and could find a way to contact her. But that part of his life was over. He'd found something here that was more suitable for who he was and where he lived. He may not love Miguel, but he already cared more for him than he did anyone in his life except his mom and Cyril.

Gloria wasn't a part of his life anymore. And that was the way it should be. He had made his choices and he'd screwed up in the past, but he had something new now that he intended to hang on to. He needed to tell that to Miguel, though, because he could feel the tension radiating off his body.
from all the way across the quad. Well, maybe Ryan couldn't tell him in words, but there was something he could do to reassure Miguel.

He moved slightly, making sure Miguel's eyes followed his movements. Then he slowly slid his hand across his bare stomach, caressing his skin as if it were Miguel's. He was rewarded with a broad grin. Miguel returned the gesture and Ryan shiver at the though of those fingers touching his skin. Ryan nodded, turned and went back to his bunk.

Once he was in bed, he turned back toward Miguel' pod. Miguel was still there, and while Ryan watched he put his hand flat onto the glass - pressing it in enough to make his palm turn white with the pressure. Then he turned away and returned to his own bunk. Ryan grinned, thinking about the things he could do the next time they got together to show how pleased he was with Miguel. He'd have to think of something special.

Miguel leaned on the rail outside his pod, staring down into the quad at Guerra and Velez talking over a game of cards. There were two other vatos at the table, but the conversation was between Velez and Guerra, that much was obvious. He wasn't close enough to hear what they were saying, but neither of them looked particularly tense or upset. Hopefully that meant Velez had taken Miguel's advice to steer clear of the hostilities between himself and Guerra.

Velez was a member of El Norte, and despite the fact that Morales hadn't discouraged him from spending time with Miguel, he knew that in a brotherhood that tight, there were always secrets to be kept, and the less time he spent with Miguel, the safer the kid would be. Especially as long as Guerra continued to hold his grudge, and he was showing no signs of letting up on that, despite the fact that Morales had sat him down several times in the last couple of weeks to remind him that he needed to leave Miguel alone.

Miguel felt bad about encouraging their friendship, worrying that Guerra might take out his frustrations on Velez, but Ryan told him that he needed to know how things were moving in El Norte, that Velez was his best bet for keeping track of the shifting relationships in the gang, and he understood that. He hoped Velez could stay out of any conflicts that might get stirred up due to Miguel.

They owed Velez already. He was the one who'd overheard Jia Kenmin hiring Shupe to set up Ryan. The bastard had wanted to provoke Ryan into attacking Li Chien, in an effort to kill both Ryan and Cyril. Due to Velez' warning, Miguel had been able to stop the fiasco in time, and now Ryan knew for a fact that Kenmin couldn't be trusted. Ryan was still playing the fool for Kenmin, though - he thought it wise to not let on that he knew what was happening.

Now both Miguel and Ryan had someone gunning for them. Well, what else was new? It wouldn't be Oz if someone wasn't trying to kill you, now would it? Velez left the table and found a seat in front of the TVs. Some stupid teenage drama was showing, and Miguel rolled his eyes. But then again, Velez was only 19 - he was still a teen - impetuous, angry and eager to make his mark. He reminded Miguel of himself at that age, maybe that was why he worried about him. He knew how well he'd handled the pressure, and he hoped Velez could handle it better. Ryan told him to not get too involved, that a kid like him wouldn't last too long in Oz. He was probably right, but that didn't mean he couldn't hope for better. Maybe he'd go sit with Velez for a few minutes, just to say hi.

Miguel was halfway down the stairs when Guerra and his hermanos got up from their table and headed his way. He checked the room as he came down, in case Guerra was stupid enough to try anything with Morales on the other side of the room playing checkers. Wouldn't be the first time the bastard was that stupid though, would it?
He put on his Loco mask, since he didn't see Ryan anywhere, and it looked like he was on his own for now. He could handle this without Ryan anyway, he thought nervously. Whether Guerra knew it or not, he was still dangerous, and he could prove it if he needed to. He saw Rebadaw headed toward his pod, but fortunately he turned aside and went the long way around. The man had lived in Oz for a long time; he recognized trouble when he saw it and he knew to stay out of the way.

Guerra stepped in front of him as he reached the floor, sneering at Miguel. "Hey dead man. All by yourself tonight, huh? Where's your watchdog? Off sniffing at some other bitch's ass?"

Miguel laughed, but there was no mirth in the sound. "I think you're confused there, perrita. You're the one with the scroungy mutts sniffing your butt. What's the matter? You can't keep them happy, so they're looking for a replacement? Sorry, I'm not interested."

He tried to move around them but Guerra stepped into Miguel's path again, and reached for his back pants pocket. Miguel tensed, but one of the men with Guerra grabbed his arm and pointed out Morales, who was standing up at his table, watching them. Guerra shrugged off the arm, but stepped back, pointing a finger at Miguel. "I'm keeping an eye on you."

Miguel grinned at him. "Truer words never been spoke man."

Guerra frowned at Miguel, "The hell's that mean?"

"Being that you only got one good eye. Droopy eyed motherfucker." He spoke dismissively, as if he couldn't be bothered to even care that he'd insulted the man, but he watched him closely. He may pretend to be crazy, but he knew better than to turn his back on this maldito comemierda. Fucking shiteater. He expected Guerra to try and jump him then, despite the fact that Morales was watching them closely, but Guerra stepped back as Miguel heard Ryan's laughter behind him. "Better watch out, Guerra. Miguel knows what to do with eyes he's not happy with. You and your droopy eye could be next in line if you get in the fucking way. Understand?" Ryan stopped on the step behind him, but he didn't need to see him to know that tone of voice meant business. Guerra and his cronies took the hint finally and stepped away, but Ryan didn't move until he'd seen Morales intercept them, speaking angrily. Guerra argued back, obviously not happy with Morales words. Ryan leaned up against the wall where he could watch them as they spoke. "That bastard's not going to let up, is he?"

Miguel shook his head. "No, he's never been good at letting things go. Like a bitch with a bone, man. He'll keep gnawing at it forever." He felt a bit of regret at that. At one time he and Chico Guerra had been friends. But those days were past, he knew that.

Ryan nodded. "All right. We'll figure something out. We can't have him gunning for you every time my back is turned. I was hoping Morales could keep him under control, but it looks like that's not going to happen. We'll have to come up with another way to take care him. A more permanent way."

Miguel lowered his voice and leaned in to speak softly, careful that no one else was around. "The trouble is, if we whack Guerra, you lose your arrangement with Morales, and then none of us is safe."

"Not if he knows we're protecting you from Guerra's attack. But Guerra's got enough of El Norte on his side that he's not the only problem we'd have if we kill him outright. We'll have to try something else."
Miguel grinned and Ryan caught his intent and shook his head. "Oh no you don't. We don't have time for that, it's almost time for lock down, and I am not going to sit around for five hours with a hard on, just because it turns you on when I'm all in charge and shit."

Miguel slipped his hand under the edge of his shirt, lifting it up slightly so that O'Reily could see a slice of skin as he ran his fingers along his abs. He smirked as Ryan's eyes followed his hand greedily. "You're a predator, like a shark, or maybe a barracuda, all sleek and deadly. I can't help it if I think that's sexy."

Murphy's shout cut Ryan's reply off before he could even say it. "Count!" It seemed like that word got stretched out longer and longer every time a hack shouted it.

Ryan made sure there was no one around before he quickly adjusted himself. He spoke softly as they headed back up the stairs. "Now you've done it. You wait until I get you alone tomorrow. You're not going to be able to sit for the rest of the day."

Miguel laughed, enjoying the rush Ryan's words sent coursing through him. "I'm counting on it, Barracuda."

Chapter End Notes

Some quotes borrowed or paraphrased from *Laws of Gravity* - Season Five, Episode Two of HBO's Oz.
Chapter 15

Ryan could tell Miguel had something on his mind as soon as he slipped though the storage room door. He practically vibrated he was so intense and full of energy.

"Hey, Barracuda." Ryan grinned at Miguel's new nickname for him, and shook his head. Miguel started talking as soon as he saw him, and Ryan sat up from his slouch against a stack of cases of paper goods, watching as Miguel paced. "Listen, I was talking to Rebadow today while I was doing my laundry, you know? And he was talking about how when he was growing up, he didn't have so many choices, not like we have today. 'Cause everyone knew what they were going to do, they went to war, and charged the beaches and took the blow."

"Took the blow, huh?" Ryan wasn't sure where this was headed, but he got the idea he wasn't going to like it.

"Faced it head on. You did what you had to do to get by, right? So I was thinking about Guerra, about what he needs to get over this. He needs to give me that blow, be the one to get a hit in, to get his revenge. But I'm thinking that maybe there's a way he could do that, where I don't die, that might satisfy his need for revenge."

"So you want him to do what? Hit you? Beat you up?"

He finally stopped pacing and turned directly to Ryan, "I want him to stab me, in the shoulder."

"What?" Ryan didn't actually remember standing up, but there he was standing directly in front of Miguel, yelling at him. "Are you fucking crazy?"

Miguel acted like he'd expected that reaction, and kept talking - not backing down. "That way, he gets in his blow, and I still live. He can get over all this shit and I don't have to worry about him riding my ass all the time. Right? I think it would work, Ryan."

"Oh yeah, it would work great if you want to end up dead." Ryan poked Miguel hard, right over the heart as he said the word 'dead.'

Miguel shook his head, rubbing the spot Ryan had hit. "No, see, he'd know that if I ended up dead, he'd have to deal with you and Morales, so there's no way he'd actually kill me."

"He's not going to get the chance, Miguel. You are not doing this."

"But Ryan, it would solve everything..."

Ryan advanced on him, forcing Miguel back against the door as he punctuated his words with shoves to Miguel's shoulder. "The only thing it would do is get you killed, and I refuse to see that happen. So, no. Let me repeat that. Hell No! You forget about it right now." Now that he had Miguel trapped against the door, he lightened up a bit, using his hand to soothe away the blows. "Miguel, I'll figure something out. You stay away from Guerra until I do. Is that clear?"

"Ryan, there..."

"No. You will not take that kind of chance. So shut up about it. Okay?"

"Okay, okay." Miguel broke eye contact then, sighing. Ryan grabbed his chin and brought him back around so they were still face to face.
"Hey. You said it yourself. I'm the brains of this organization, right?"

"Right."

"There's a reason for that. And the fact that we're even having this discussion points that out quite clearly. You'll do what I say on this, promise me that."

"All right. You're the brains. I'll forget about it." Ryan stepped back at Miguel's push and watched as he crossed to the sink, splashing water on his face.

"Miguel, I know it's not easy having a knife at your back like this, you know I understand that. I'll figure something out. You have my word. Something that won't involve you getting stuck again. You'll see. We'll work something out."

Miguel threw his paper towel at the trash, then leaned back against the metal sink. "It's so frustrating, Ryan. Not just me and Guerra. You have Kenmin and Chien gunning for you and Cyril, too. I wish we could wave our hands and be rid of them all." His eyes got that bright glow again, and he was back to pacing, his hands wild as he waved them in the air. "You know what would be perfect? If you could work it out for them to take care of each other, like you did with Stanton and Montgomery, you know? You don't know how much I admired that. It was so smooth; you set them all up, and knocked them all down, one right after the other. That was pretty, Cuda."

Ryan smirked. "Yeah, that did work out well, didn't it? Shit!" Ryan slapped his forehead. "Why didn't I think of that before? Kenmin's got a grudge against Morales, and Guerra is his Lieutenant...what if Kenmin came after Guerra, to clear the path to Morales..."

Miguel's grin was wicked and it gave Ryan a charge in the pit of his stomach. "Then they could kill each other off, and you wouldn't even have to lift a finger..."

Ryan bounced on his toes, laughing. "You're a genius, Miguel!"

Miguel grinned, blushing a little. "Nah, I'm not the genius, but I might manage to inspire him from time to time."

"Oh you do, man. You totally do. As long as you're not spouting nonsense like that taking the blow shit. The last thing you want to do with your mortal enemy is hand him a knife and tell him to go at it. Shit. If you even mention anything like that ever again, I will take you over my knee. Got it?"

Miguel's smile was sultry and he practically oozed sensuality as he stalked over to Ryan, who shivered at the intensity in Miguel's eyes. "You keep saying that man, but you have yet to follow through on the threat. I'm gonna start thinking you're some kind of cock tease or something..."

Ryan licked his lips - how had they gotten so dry? "You mean really like that shit? You like being spanked?"

"Well," Miguel murmured, as he slid down Ryan's body, "I've only had it the one time, but by the time he was through, I was hard as a fucking rock."

_He_. It was like a bucket of cold water. "Keller." He said the name like it was a piece of slime on the bottom of his shoe. Ryan stepped back away from Miguel, pulling away from the hands that were trying to unbutton his pants.

Miguel sighed and twisted to sit with his back against the wall. "Well, yeah. Who the hell else would I let get away with that shit?"
"You'd let me."

"Yeah, I would. But it looks like you're not interested at the moment. What's wrong? I mean, you knew about me and Keller before we ever got together. And you know I don't want him."

Ryan leaned against the wall next to Miguel and slid down to sit close enough that their arms and legs touched. "It's that...well, it seems that whatever we do, Keller's been there first, you know?"

"Yeah, I guess so. But he's the one who taught me everything I know about sex with a man, so it only makes sense... I guess that doesn't help any, huh?"

Ryan sighed. He knew Miguel didn't want Keller, but it didn't stop him from obsessing over it. At least with Keller in Protective Custody, he didn't have to see the man every day. He wasn't sure he'd be able to keep his frustrations inside if he did.

"You know, there are some things I never did with him. Last time. Us rubbing up against each other, and jerking us both off at once? I never did that with Keller. I learned that at the nut house."

"Connelly?" Ryan was pissed now. Miguel had lied to him. "You said you didn't fuck anyone at Connelly."

"I didn't. Jesus. Chill out, Cuda. I only watched it, okay?"

"Patients?"

"Nah, they were staff. I was looking for a place to get away for a while, you know? It was TV time, but they were all watching some bullshit daytime talk show and everyone on the show was yelling at each other, and the guys in the room were yelling at the TV. I needed to have some silence for a while in a place that wasn't my room. So I found this space in the big laundry room downstairs, but this guard and this male nurse came in and were all over each other. It was hot as hell, man. When they left, I barely got my pants down before I came all over the place."

"Yeah? You liked it that much, huh?"

"I kept wishing it was you and me."

"You did not."

"I did. I wished all the time that you hadn't let me get blown up, that you'd come and find me and get me out, or you'd get transferred to Connolly and we'd fuck all over the place. Every single room I went in, I thought of places we could fuck."

"You're bullshitting me."

"No, it's true." He slid his hand onto Ryan's thigh, and Ryan felt the heat right through his pants, felt it heat him up from inside. "I wanted you for a long time, Ryan. I knew if I had you, you'd figure out a way to keep me safe."

Oh, Jesus. He believed that. He knew Miguel meant every word he was saying. "Miguel..." Ryan shifted, and pulled Miguel's face to his, so they could kiss. It wasn't one of the hot steamy kisses they'd shared last time they were here, the ones that had sent him flying. This kiss grounded him; it made him feel stronger and more real, and capable of achieving anything, because Miguel believed in him.

When they parted, Miguel smiled. "Now there's something I never did with Keller."
Ryan pulled back. "Wait a minute. You never kissed Keller?"

Miguel shook his head. "No, we kissed. But they were never like that one. That kiss wasn't a sex kiss. Not that it wasn't sexy, man, don't get me wrong. But there was more to that than sex, you know? That kiss meant something."

"Yeah?" That pleased him. Keller didn't have anything on him.

"Keller never meant nothing. Not like that."

"Good." This was more like it. Miguel licked his lower lip, and Ryan's eyes followed the movement, thinking he wanted to do that, too. Lick Miguel's lower lip, and suck it into his mouth...

"But Ryan..."

"What?" He was thoroughly distracted by Miguel's mouth, and not paying much attention to what he was saying.

"Does that mean we can't do any of the things I did with Keller? 'Cause I really want you to fuck me."

"Oh, shit, Miguel." Ryan grabbed his cock. "Don't say stuff like that without warning me first, okay?"

"Sorry." His grin was totally unrepentant. "So that means you want it, too?"

"Jesus, Miguel, of course I do. I just don't get it, you know? I watched you, when Keller fucked you, remember? And I could tell that you liked it. But shit. It doesn't hurt or anything? It looks like it would hurt."

"Well, it depends on how used to it you are. And how ready you are for it. That time you watched us, Keller told me to get ready beforehand, so I was already stretched out and I used a lot of lube before I got there, 'cause I didn't know what he had in mind."

"Christ. So you thought you were coming to get fucked up the ass, and there I am when you show up. I'll bet you were totally freaked out."

"Yeah, I was, but it worked out pretty well in the long run, huh? 'Cause I wouldn't be here with you if all that shit hadn't happened." Miguel paused for a moment, as if he wasn't sure what to say. "Can I...can I do something for you?"

"What?"

"Let me show you how I can make you feel."

"You're not..."

"I want to use my tongue on you. On your ass."

Ryan had a sudden vision of Keller sitting at a table in the quad talking about how talented Miguel's tongue was. He had to clear this throat before he could speak. "Fucking Christ. I love getting rimmed."

"Can I do that for you? Please?"

He loved it when Miguel begged him. His cock was already surging in his pants. He took a deep
breath and shrugged nonchalantly. "Yeah, alright."

From the look on Miguel's face, he wasn't fooled at all. He stood up, grabbing Ryan's hand and pulling him up as well. When Miguel reached for his pants, though, Ryan stopped him.

"Wait. If your tongue is going to be busy for a while, maybe we'd better get this out of the way first, okay?" Miguel was obviously confused, at least until Ryan pulled their bodies together and slid his hand along Miguel's cheek. He ran his fingers along the scar there and Miguel closed his eyes and turned his face into Ryan's hand. Ryan slid his other hand around the back of Miguel's neck and he shuddered as Ryan pulled him close and kissed him. He moaned into the kiss, and clung tightly to Ryan as they moved, their bodies pressed tightly together. Miguel was shorter than Ryan, but there was no chance of Ryan's confusing him for a woman, their bodies fit together, hard muscle against hard muscle; Miguel's strong hands holding on to his arms and running into his hair.

He liked the strength in Miguel, he felt comfortable holding him tighter and pushing his body against that solid strength, knowing he wasn't pushing too hard, that he didn't need to hold back. Miguel gave as good as he got, too. It was almost a challenge to strain into that body and be the one to push back and force your own will on that of another. Before he knew it, Miguel was backed against the door and Ryan was thrusting his hard cock against Miguel's own.

He finally broke away, taking a deep breath, his face flushed with heat. "Jesus. This isn't going to take long at this rate."

Miguel had Ryan's zipper down and his pants and boxers around his knees in a moment. He laughed. "Yeah, well, I got skills. You'll see."

He slipped out from between the door and Ryan, pushing Ryan's chest against the door, so that he was leaning forward slightly. Then he got down on his knees behind him, and started to lick. At first all Ryan could feel were tiny little cat like moves of Miguel's tongue, all around the crack, but not actually touching it. Then Miguel pulled the cheeks of his ass apart, and ran his tongue from the base of Ryan's balls to the top of his crack in one swipe, and Ryan moaned into the door.

"Oh god, yeah."

Miguel pulled his head back far enough to remind him to be quiet, "Shhhhh." That made Ryan buck as the air hit his wet skin. He cursed quietly, biting his tongue. Shit. If he could have moved, he might have suggested relocating, but he wasn't sure he was capable of that right now, so he reminded himself that he'd have to try spanking next, because Miguel deserved it for torturing him by putting him in this position.

After that, Miguel got right to work, licking around the hole and flicking his tongue against the pucker but never giving it more attention than that. Ryan fought the need to grab his cock and start jerking off, because if he did, this would be over in no time. The first time he felt Miguel's lips around his asshole, he wasn't sure what he was doing, until he felt the pressure as Miguel sucked on the pucker, pulling it into his mouth slightly before letting it go and doing it again. Holy fucking shit.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine what they must look like, he'd love to be able to see this, Miguel with his face between the cheeks of Ryan's ass, licking and sucking and - yes! Finally, he felt Miguel's tongue, probing his hole, and he couldn't stop himself, he thrust back, pushing his ass at Miguel's face, chanting under his breath.

"Do it. C'mon, do it! Fuck my asshole, Miguel, fuck my ass with your tongue."
Miguel's tongue went in deeper with each push, moving faster as Ryan shoved back onto him with each stroke. He felt Miguel's fingers on the edges of his asshole, and realized that Miguel was holding his hole open with his fingers so he could get more of his tongue up Ryan's ass, and he could tell there was a lot of it in there. He wasn't even backing out all the way, keeping his tongue in as deep as he could, and Ryan was definitely impressed. Well, when he could think about it he was. For the most part, he was too blissed out to notice.

That was why he didn't realize at first when Miguel pushed one finger deeper in his hole. He had barely enough time to notice something was different when this powerful charge of pleasure pulsed through him, and he shouted, muffling his voice by biting into his own forearm.

"Fucking shit!" He gasped, trying to figure out what Miguel had done to create that sensation, and that's when he realized that Miguel had one of his fingers in his ass. He immediately knew what Miguel had done. He'd known this girl who'd insisted he'd get the best orgasm ever if he'd let her play with his prostate while she gave him head. And she'd been right. It had been a fantastic orgasm, but he'd never let her do it again. It felt too weird to let anyone play with his ass like that.

There was no way he was going to stop Miguel now, though, because if he didn't come soon, he was going to explode all over this fucking store room, and to hell with the hacks who would hear him, because there would be nothing left for them to stick in the cage, unless they scooped him up into a bucket. So he kept pushing back onto Miguel's tongue, biting his arm until it was red and bruised to keep from shouting out loud.

Miguel was sucking again, and the sounds he made when his fingers went into Ryan's ass were incredible, moaning into Ryan's body and setting up vibrations that traveled right into his cock and balls. Ryan clenched the door frame with one hand, trying hard to figure out a way to keep himself from falling, get a hand on his cock and keep his mouth gagged with his arm all at the same time. And wait a minute, when had Miguel added a second finger to the one already rubbing up against his prostate?

Fuck, that felt good. "Harder. Give me more." And Miguel obeyed, pushing in and out, using his tongue at the same time, and then he reached around and grabbed Ryan's cock and Ryan almost passed out from the overpowering sensation as he orgasmed, spattering the door with his come as his body spasmed in Miguel's arms.

He slid down the door, his knees hitting the tile hard. "Shit!" He flipped over, his bare ass smacking the floor, but at the moment, he didn't give a fuck. "Holy shit. Miguel..."

When his eyes finally focused, he realized Miguel had his cock in his hand, jerking frantically, a look of determination on his face. Ryan knew Miguel was close, but there was nothing he could do to help...he couldn't manage to move at the moment. But he could still talk.

"Miguel, come for me." And Miguel did, his back arching, his face fixed in ecstasy, crying out Ryan's name. He flopped back on his ass, his feet tangling with Ryan's, their pants trapping them together around their ankles, and Ryan started to laugh.

"Damn. Well that was...that was something else."

"You liked that?"

"Oh yeah. I might even let you do that again sometime."

Miguel smiled serenely at him. "Just think what it would feel like with a cock up there. Now you know why I like it."
"Oh, shit." Ryan realized with a start, that he probably did understand, now.

Ryan checked the time again, biting his lip in frustration. This play had to be perfectly timed, and he didn't like trusting key moves to players that didn't even know they were in the game. But there was nothing he could do about that. There was no way he was letting Jaime Velez know what he had planned. Ryan knew, and Miguel knew, and that was all that mattered. Ryan hoped for Miguel's sake that Velez would listen carefully to what Miguel told him. Miguel was worried that he'd get in the middle, and try to stop the throw down between Kenmin and Guerra, but if Velez did what he was supposed to do, then he'd be in another part of the prison when the two clashed.

It wasn't like Ryan wanted Velez in the way, anyway. The kid had told Miguel about Kenmin's plan to get Ryan and Cyril killed, and he knew he owed Velez for saving their lives. But there was no one else they could use for this. It had to be done when Morales was out of Em City, because Morales was capable of stopping Guerra from running wild and attacking Kenmin when he found out about his supposed plot to shank Guerra in the Library. And it had to be someone Guerra would listen to, and the only one that would trust Miguel or Ryan enough to believe their story was Velez.

He checked his watch again. Time to go. Time to take care of his half of the play. He checked in on Rebadow's pod on his way, making sure Cyril was tied up in his game. Beecher, Rebadow and Cyril were in the middle of a game of UNO; he'd given the game to Cyril especially for the occasion. He and Cyril had played it as kids, and Cyril had asked for a deck of UNO cards months ago. He'd had them for a while, but he'd hung onto them for the right moment. If UNO couldn't keep Cyril occupied, nothing could.

He'd timed this perfectly. Jia was coming in the gate with his work detail. Ryan waited until he walked by, then stepped into motion. "Hey, Jia - Jia! Hey, man, I need to talk to you."

Kenmin motioned for Li Chien to wait for him and let O'Reily lead him to one side. "Listen, you're supposed to be in the library today at three, right? I just found out that Guerra is planning to ambush you there, man. If I were you, I'd be careful, he's bringing a couple of his hermanos, and they're gonna shank you two and make it look like you guys started the fight."

Jia looked wary, "Where did you hear that?"

"That kid Velez. He's a friend of Alvarez', and he knew that you and me were buds now. He's trying to get in good with me, so he told me what Guerra had planned. He wants me to give him a job when Morales kicks him out, 'cause he's been on Morales' shit list for a while now, you know?"

"Yeah? I wondered what that was all about. You and Morales are on the outs now?"

"Well, you know how it goes. In and out. It's all business. Morales could rot in hell for all I care, but as long as we're working together, it gives me some breathing space. Velez knows I picked up Alvarez when Morales kicked him out of El Norte, so he wants the same protection I offer Alvarez. I think the kid would be too much trouble in the long run, though. Besides with Alvarez watching my back, I don't need anyone else, right? But he's good for shit like this, so I keep him around, for now."

Kenmin looked a little more worried, so Ryan was pretty sure he had the bastard snowed. Pretending he still trusted Kenmin after that stunt he'd played with Li Chien had been difficult, but it was paying off now, and if this worked, he could say good bye to all three of the bastards messing with his and Miguel's lives in one fell swoop.

"Morales isn't even in Em City right now, so the timing is perfect. He tells Guerra to take you out,
then plans it for a time that Morales is on work detail. If things go south, Guerra will take the blame. It's a sweet arrangement."

"Morales is a spineless bastard."

"You'll get no argument from me, man. But Guerra ain't that much better. He told Velez that you and Li Chien were cowards who would run as soon as you saw him coming."

Kenmin was stone-faced now, a good sign that he was close to blowing his stack. Ryan wished he could be there when it all went down, but it was better if he and Miguel were nowhere in the neighborhood. They'd be playing UNO in Rebadow's pod, far away from the whole fucking thing. He delivered the final blow as he turned to leave.

"Hey, you didn't really piss your pants when the Feds popped you, did you?"

"What?" Oh, that got a reaction.

"Yeah, I didn't think so. That Guerra. He's got some fucking nerve, right? You be careful in the library, man."

Ryan kept his face safely neutral until he was up the stairs and in his pod. Then he burst out laughing, muffling his voice in his pillow. The look on Kenmin's face had been priceless. Man, Miguel was gonna be so sorry he hadn't see that.

After pacing his pod for a while, Ryan finally stepped outside to lean on the rail and keep an eye on the quad. He could see Kenmin and Li Chen talking in their pod, their movements stiff and angry looking. He wished he could hear what they were saying, but he knew better than to get too close right now. They needed time to ramp themselves up before the big fight, and he'd be a distraction.

There wasn't that much going on in Em City. Half of the inmates were still on work detail at this time of the day, and the other half had gotten back and were doing their own thing - laundry, the gym, the library, the computer room. There were a handful of people around the TVs, and a couple of tables full of bikers playing poker, but that was pretty much it. Ryan sighed. He hated the waiting around part. The ball was in play, now, and all he could do was sit here and scratch his balls. He ought to go down and play UNO with Cyril, but he was too antsy for that. He'd hang out here a bit longer.

When Ryan saw Guerra coming through the gate with three or four members of El Norte following close behind him, he froze. Oh shit, this was bad, bad news. Kinmen and Chien must have seen them at the same time as Ryan, because before he could even react, they were both headed down the stairs. That's when Ryan noticed Miguel and Velez trailing through the gate with the rest of the Em City crowd from the gym. Something must have happened in the gym, some kind of fight or something that had them all coming back early, and with Kenmin and Chien headed their way, it looked like the face-off was about to happen right there and then.

Miguel was talking rapidly to Velez, holding onto his arm and trying to pull him back from the crowd that looked like it was about to meet head on right in the middle of the fucking quad. He wasn't having much luck. Ryan knew Velez' type. He wanted to be in the middle of it all, and he was dragging Miguel right after him. Ryan took off for the stairs, he had to get Miguel to safety, then they could do whatever the hell they wanted. Let them kill each other right in front of the guards, the hell if he cared; but not while Miguel was down there.

By the time he got onto the floor, there were already more than a dozen people fighting, Latinos
and Asians and a bunch of bikers who'd gotten caught in the middle and had joined in for the hell of it. The sound of the alarms buzzing was harsh and painful to his ears, but the shouting was even louder. Velez was in the thick of it all, but Miguel had backed away, thank God, and was making his way around the edges of the fight toward Ryan as the hacks moved in and tried to restore order. He couldn't see Guerra, but Kenmin was surrounded by Latinos and was definitely looking the worse for the wear, despite his martial arts training.

When he heard Miguel call his name across the crowd, Ryan wasted precious moments looking for him before he realized what Miguel was trying to tell him. He turned around to see Cyril holding back Chien, who was trying to get in close enough to Ryan to stick him with the blade in his hand. Ryan stepped towards Chien, hoping to distract him before he could use that knife on Cyril.

Rebadow stood just outside his pod, holding the door open - calling for Cyril to get inside the room. Chien managed to pull away from Cyril, so Beecher tried to distract him by throwing a chair in the guy's direction. It worked long enough for Ryan to reach Chien, and he punched the son of a bitch in the gut as hard as he could. When Chien doubled over, he caught him under the chin with his knee and he stumbled backwards, blood dripping from his mouth.

Chien's shank went flying, but the bastard was tougher than he looked, and he came back with a roundhouse blow that knocked Ryan into a table. He went down hard, caught in the legs of a couple of chairs. Chien turned quickly, searching for the shank.

Beecher grabbed Cyril's arm and tried to pull him back into Rebadow's pod, but Cyril was too strong for him. He broke away and grabbed the shank, running for Chien, as Miguel stepped between the two. Ryan struggled to his feet as Miguel cried out, the shank in Cyril's hand buried to the hilt in Miguel's stomach.

Cyril pulled the blade out as Miguel fell and he flung it away, falling to his knees crying Miguel's name. The bloody shank landed at the feet of Chien, and he snatched it up and started toward Ryan, who backed up a step, tripping over a chair lying on its side. By the time he caught his balance, Velez was face to face with Chien, slashing at him with his own shank and the two went down in a tumble of arms and legs and cries of pain. Ryan stumbled over to Miguel. Cyril was crying and shouting while Beecher tried to pull him back out of the way, into Rebadow's room.

Rebadow ran out of his pod and threw a towel at Ryan. He snatched it up, holding it to the hole in Miguel's gut, while the SORT team piled in, taking everyone down one at a time as they went through the crowd. Rebadow shouted for a medic from his pod, and Beecher held Cyril as he cried, his blood-stained hands smearing Miguel's blood over Beecher's shirt.

Ryan held the quickly blood-soaked towel tight to Miguel's stomach, telling him over and over that he was okay, he'd be alright, that everything would be fine. Inside, he was panicking. This couldn't be happening. Not now. Not again. Miguel gasped with pain, holding tight to Ryan's arm until the SORT team dragged them apart, and they took Miguel to the Infirmary.
Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Miguel was getting tired of waking up in the hospital. Everything was white, the beeping noise was annoying, the stupid oxygen thing made his nose all dry and itchy, and there were IVs taped on both arms. Besides all that, his gut hurt like someone had stabbed him. ¡Mierda! Someone *had* stabbed him!

"Cyril!" He struggled to sit up, but he got nowhere, too weak to even do that, the pain in his gut making him moan. A hand came out of nowhere, and pushed him back to the pillows before a head appeared to the side of his bed. Father Mukada? What the hell was he doing here?

"What the fuck?" His throat was scratchy and dry. The Father pushed the call button on the side of the bed and leaned over Miguel, his hand on Miguel's chest.

"How are you feeling, Miguel?"

"Like shit. Oh, sorry Father." He tried to clear his throat, but his mouth was painfully dry, and it turned out to be more effort than he'd expected.

Mukada smiled, then disappeared, reappearing with a glass with a bent straw. "Here, have a sip."

The water was so good, cool running down his throat. He was disappointed when the Father pulled it away. "That's probably enough for now. We'll try some more later, after Dr. Anderson sees you, okay?"

"Cyril?" He kept seeing the look of horror on Cyril's face as he pulled the shank out of Miguel's gut. He was probably pretty torn up about all this. "What happened to Ryan, is he okay?"

"They're both fine, Miguel. Cyril was distraught over stabbing you, they had to sedate him. But he went back to Em City this morning."

Miguel struggled to get the Father to understand. "He was trying to protect Ryan, and I got in the way. He wasn't trying to hurt me..." Mukada's words finally registered. "Wait. He went back to Em City?"

"Yes. It was obvious that he hadn't intentionally stabbed you. Rebadow and Beecher both saw what happened, as did one of the C.O.s. Besides, the Hole and Solitary are full of Bikers and Latinos, there's no room for him there even if they hadn't believed his story."

"Hey Father, no raising my patient's blood pressure with tales of Oz, that's my job!"

Anderson appeared over the Father's shoulder, and Mukada stepped back. "Wait! What else happened? Was anyone else hurt?" He needed to know if Velez was alright. And what about Guerra, Kenmin and Chien? But the doctor frowned at him and shook his head.

"If you're good and do everything I tell you to do, Father Mukada can stick around and talk to you after I'm through. But until then, answer my questions and behave, or I'll stick you in isolation and you won't know what happened for a month. Got it?"

Miguel sighed. "But..."
"I need to leave for the moment, Miguel. But I'll be back in about twenty minutes. Is that okay, Doctor?"

"That would be fine, Father, as long as Alvarez here behaves in the meantime."

Not like he had a choice in the matter. He nodded and Dr. Anderson smiled. "That's better. Now, let's have a look at this pretty little stab wound of yours."

Miguel grit his teeth. This was going to hurt.

Later Miguel lay there and stared at the ceiling, waiting for Mukada to come back. He was pissed as hell at Anderson for refusing to talk about the fight in Em City, even after he'd pronounced Miguel 'fit as a fiddle, for someone with a hole in their gut." That bastard had a strange sense of humor. He had no idea how long the doctor had been gone, but he knew it had been well over twenty minutes. He hoped Mukada hadn't forgotten him. He sighed and closed his eyes. The bright light was giving him a headache.

"Miguel?"

He opened his eyes to see Ryan peering down at him worriedly. He couldn't help the smile that spread over his face. "Ryan! You're here! How did you get here?"

Ryan tilted his head back, and Miguel followed his motion back to Father Mukada, who was leaning up against the wall, smiling at him. "The padre came and got me. How you feeling? You okay?"

"I'm okay." He shrugged. "The doc says I'll live. How's Cyril?"

"He's alright. He was a mess yesterday, so they gave him a sedative, and kept him overnight. But he came home this morning." He sat on the edge of the bed next to Miguel's hip. "Is this okay? Am I hurting you any?" He moved his hand over Miguel's fingers where they were hidden by his body. "I can move."

"No. Stay there, it's easier to see you without straining my neck."

"Cool." He squeezed Miguel's fingers, and Miguel smiled.

"You left Cyril with Beecher?"

"Yeah, Beecher and Rebadow are with him, watching reruns of Miss Sally's Schoolyard. They're running a marathon today, and Cyril and Busmalis have been glued to the TV all day. Thank Christ the padre came and got me, or I was about to bug out. I mean, she's got an excellent pair of tits, but I was getting whiplash from all the bouncing, you know?" He jiggled his head like one of those wobble-necked dogs, and Miguel tried to laugh, but it hurt too much.

"No fair. No making me laugh when it hurts."

"Sorry." He didn't look all that sorry, with the grin and all, but he squeezed Miguel's fingers again, and then sighed. "They want to send Cyril to Connolly again, and I don't think I'm gonna fight them this time."

"Ryan!"

"I know. But he's in danger here, more than he would be there, you said it yourself. They have more things there to keep him occupied and keep him active. They know how to take care of him.
And there will be people like him, for him to be friends with. There's nothing here for him but me, and I just get him into more and more trouble. He's better off without me."

"That's not true."

"Yeah it is. But that's okay. I've known it all along. Its time I faced the facts. I asked them to let him stay until you come back to Em City; give him a chance to see you're alright. Two weeks. Two more weeks, then they'll transfer him. But Ma is going to visit him every week and bring me back stories and pictures and shit. And I can give her letters she can read to Cyril. Sister Pete says that she thinks she can get approval for me to talk to him once a week from her office, or Father Mukada's - so long as I'm not in the Hole or anything."

"You'll have to make sure that you behave, so you can talk to him, right?"

"I can do that. I never misbehave."

Miguel smiled. "I forgot, Cuda. You're a model prisoner. What was I thinking?"

"That's right. Anyway, I heard you'll be out of here in a week. You bled like crazy, man. Scared the hell out of me, but you're gonna be fine."

"What happened? Velez and the others..." He glanced over to Father Mukada, who wasn't making any bones about listening in on their conversation.

"Oh, right." He glanced to the Father, then back to Miguel, obviously uncomfortable. "Well, it looks like Guerra and Kenmin started the fight. Kenmin took Guerra down in no time, he's dead. Kenmin is in intensive care at Benchley Memorial, but they don't expect him to live. Even if he does, he'll be going on trial for the murder of Guerra."

Miguel nodded. "I saw Guerra go down and a bunch of guys kind of piled on Kenmin. I guess he couldn't use those martial art skills of his buried under a pile of bodies, huh?"

"I guess not. He's got multiple stab wounds, there's no telling how many guys got him."

"What about Jaime?"

Ryan looked down at the bed, avoiding Miguel's gaze, and he knew then that Jaime was dead. "No."

"I'm sorry, man. He must have seen Chien coming after us, because he was right there in the bastard's face after Chien grabbed up the shank Cyril dropped. He took Chien with him when he went, though. He saved my life."

"Again."

"Yeah." There was a long pause, and Ryan squeezed Miguel's fingers. "C'mon, Miguel, you knew the guy. He'd have been in the middle of it, no matter what. He was out to prove himself, determined to make a mark. Even if he hadn't been trying to help us he would have gone down, man. You know it, too."

"We didn't help any, though, did we?" His throat was tight, but he refused to give into the pain.

"No. No, we didn't help. I'm sorry, man."

Miguel had Ryan's hand in his, holding tight. As if Ryan could hold him down, and keep him from
being carried away in a flood of grief. One more. One more he'd had his hand in the death of. Ryan reached around, and held Miguel's hand in both of his own, not even caring if Mukada saw him. Just holding onto him, keeping him safe.

After a few minutes, Father Mukada cleared his throat. "Ryan, I'll need to take you back in a few minutes. But maybe we can arrange for you to come by tomorrow, after lunch?"

Ryan took a deep breath. "Okay. Thanks, Padre. Yeah, that would be great." Slowly, he let go of Miguel's hand, and Miguel relaxed slightly. He knew Ryan would be back; Ryan would always be there for him.

His hand hovered over Miguel's bandaged abdomen. "So, you're gonna have a new scar, huh? Right here? About the size of a shank?"

Miguel rolled his eyes. "Yeah. They had to cut me open some more to make sure there was no bleeding inside though, the doctor showed me. So they made the cut bigger."

"Yeah? So you'll have a big scar?" He wiggled his eyebrows salaciously, and Miguel blushed. Damn, he hadn't realized he could still do that, it had been so long since anything embarrassed him. Ryan could still make him blush, though.

Ryan's hand ghosted across his abs, and Miguel dropped his eyes as he realized what Ryan was doing. He was reminding Miguel who he belonged to. Miguel felt his face grow hot; he must be bright red, by now. He refused to look over at the Father; he must know something was going on.

Ryan smiled. "Nice. I'll have to take a closer look once you come back to Em City." Ryan looked over at Mukada. "Hey Padre, can you give us one minute alone?"

"Oh, I don't know, Ryan." Mukada was obviously not happy about that.

"C'mon, one minute, I won't do anything wrong, I promise. I mean, what could I do?"

Mukada looked over at the door of the room and back, then over to Miguel, who'd managed to look at him by this time, his stomach twisted in knots, hoping...

"Just a minute, Father?" He knew his voice was weak, and he bit his lip, afraid of what Mukada would think of him.

"I'll turn my back, that's the best you'll get. You've got one minute." He crossed to the doorway, turning his back to them and effectively blocking the window with his body. Ryan smiled and Miguel agreed. The man knew exactly what was going on.

Ryan reached down, cupping Miguel's face, and kissed him gently, a touch of lips on lips. Miguel sought more contact, and they deepened the kiss briefly, letting each other know that everything was going to be alright. When they heard Mukada clearing his throat, they parted, Ryan pulling back and wiping his lips with the hand that wasn't still holding onto Miguel's.

"Right. I'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay. Tomorrow."

He watched Ryan leave, then closed his eyes with a smile, running his hand across his abs absently.

He didn't even notice Mukada coming back in the room until he sat on the edge of the bed where
Ryan had sat.

"Father?"

"You want to talk about it?"

He looked at Mukada suspiciously. "About what?"

Mukada shrugged, looking at him intently. "About whatever it is you need to talk about."

"You regretting bringing him here, now?"

"No. Someone had to tell you about Jaime, I'm just glad it wasn't me."

"You're not upset at what you saw?"

"Of course not. After what we talked about last year, and the way Ryan has hovered over you the last two times you've been in the Infirmary, you think I haven't figured out it was him you were talking about? I told you what I thought then, I haven't changed my mind. Just be careful, Miguel. He's a dangerous man to be around."

Miguel shrugged. "And I'm not? How many people have I hurt or killed since I've been here? Or gotten killed?" He heard the bitterness in his voice. He knew the father would figure it out, if he hadn't already.

"You think you got Jaime killed." It wasn't a question.

"I did get him killed."

"So you put the shank in his hand, and you forced him to jump into the middle of that fight? You forced him to stab Li Chien? You insisted that he save Ryan's life by giving up his own?"

"Of course not."

"You're not to blame for his actions, Miguel. He made his own decisions. He chose to do what he did."

"But what if something I did led him in that direction? You told me once, that God kept me alive for a reason. But I'm not seeing that. Since I got back, I've been going left and right, trying to prove to everyone that I'm no pussy. Trying to keep myself alive - keep Ryan and Cyril alive. But it seems like the more I do, the worse things get. Okay, maybe I know that Jaime was no innocent. He got to Oz on his own, I know that. But if he hadn't been my friend, he might still be alive today."

"Miguel, you can't take responsibility for some else's actions. You are only responsible for your own. You and I have had a long and battered relationship, but I continue to believe that you have a good soul, and that you'll find a way to right whatever wrongs you've committed."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you really are a pussy." Mukada patted Miguel's hand and stood. "I'll be back tomorrow, okay? Try to get some rest."

Ryan watched fascinated as Miguel prepared himself, his strong fingers moving in and out of his ass, stretching and scissoring and turning Ryan on so badly that his balls ached. He'd intentionally
left his clothes on for this, thinking the less time he was actually exposed to the air, the less chance of stimulation and the longer he would last. But his cock felt like it was about to break, and he didn't know how Miguel could keep that up for so long. Ryan had had those fingers inside him, and he knew how that felt.

"Do you think you're ready, yet?" He asked, his strained voice making Miguel laugh.

He flipped over onto his back and spread his legs, his eyes even darker than usual and his face flushed. "C'mon, Cuda. Come here and fuck me."

"God dammit, Miguel," O'Reily doubled over, his balls spasming. "Don't say shit like that. I'm barely hanging on as it is." He watched Miguel grin at him, his look one of lust and barely contained need. He ghosted one hand across his abdomen, lingering on the scar on his right side, still red and puckered, but definitely on the mend. A reminder, letting Ryan know he remembered who he belonged to, and Ryan practically ripped his pants off, fumbling with the condom with shaking fingers, afraid he'd drop the damned thing.

"Oh, shit."

Miguel leaned up on one elbow. "You need some help with that?"

"Are you kidding me? If you touch me, I'm gone."

"Slow down then, Ryan. Think of something else for a bit. I want this to last."

"Think of what? The only thing I can think of right now is fucking you."

"What did Cyril say to you when he left today?"

Ryan sat back on his heels. Fuck. Well, that took care of his urgency. He took a deep breath. "Oh, shit Miguel. He was so upset. He cried the whole time. They were afraid they were going to have to sedate him. But finally we got him calmed down enough to get him on the bus. I..." He didn't know what to say. His emotions were such a mess.

"You miss him already. I know. You made the right choice, Ryan. You know you did. It will take him a while, but he'll be okay. Suzanne said they're going to let her volunteer in the music therapy program, so she'll see Cyril even more than we thought. He'll be happy there, Ryan. You'll see."

Miguel got on his hands and knees and did a panther crawl up the blanket Ryan had managed to sneak into the supply room, until he stopped right in front of Ryan. They kissed, letting the passion grow slowly, until Ryan pushed Miguel back onto the blanket, grabbing the lube and slathering it over his cock.

Miguel settled himself, opening his arms and Ryan knelt over him, worried about Miguel's healing injury, but knowing that they both needed this, had needed it for some time now. As Ryan settled between Miguel's legs, he thought back on this whole long trip, and marveled at the changes they'd both been through. They were together now, though, and that was what was important.

Ryan used his hand to line himself up, and slowly eased into Miguel, shocked at the tightness and the heat. He had to stop halfway in, just to breathe. It felt so strange, and so right at the same time. He looked down into Miguel's dark eyes, surprised at the depth of the emotion in them. Miguel took his face in his hands and kissed him.

"Don't worry, Cuda, I won't break." He pushed his hips up suddenly, and Ryan was totally inside, his hips thrusting forward of their own accord.
"Holy fuck!"

Miguel laughed and moved again, urging Ryan on. He'd planned to move slowly, to draw this first time out and make it last, but it looked like his body was leaving his mind behind in the dust, as his thrusts came more and more powerfully, pushing them on and making them both gasp in excitement. Miguel had his hands wrapped around his shoulders, and was speaking rapidly in a strange mix of Spanish and English that was difficult to follow, even if it was being spoken right into his ear.

"You feel so good inside me, Cuda. Amante. ¡Tan bueno! Más, Ryan - more. Querido amante..."

He heard one word repeated more than once, though, and he repeated it back to Miguel breathlessly. "Amante. What does that mean?"

Miguel bit his bottom lip, as if hesitant to tell him. Ryan adjusted his knees, spreading Miguel's legs further apart and finally managed to find his prostate, if Miguel's shout and wide eyes were any sign.

"Oh yeah, found it, huh? You like that, Miguel?"

Miguel wrapped his legs around Ryan's thighs, pulling him even closer. "Fuck yes! Harder!"

"Tell me, then. What's it mean? Amante?"

He pounded into Miguel a few times, making him clutch at Ryan's arms and start babbling again. "Tell me, or I'll come without you. Is that what you want?"

"You wouldn't!"

"You know I would. Tell me."

"¡Pendejo!"

Miguel's head fell back against the blanket, and Ryan flinched at the thought of the thin blanket being all the protection he had from the hard floor beneath. He kissed Miguel hard, shifting his hips and grinding into his prostate again and again. He pulled back, gasping for breath. "Tell me."

"Lover." Miguel was panting, thrusting back against Ryan, holding onto him desperately. "It means lover."

"God." Ryan doubled his efforts then, pushing and grinding, driving them both harder and higher until finally, Ryan felt Miguel clench down on his cock, shocking him with the suddenness of it, shouting out with him as Miguel came, wringing Ryan's orgasm out of him moments later.

He'd done his best to keep his weight off Miguel's wound, but he felt his strength deserting him, so he slipped over to the left, and collapsed onto Miguel's other side, Ryan's softening cock sliding out without fanfare; the strange end to a monumental fuck. He reached down and pulled off the condom, tying it quickly, and tossing it to the side with the last of his energy. He shifted one leg, so it was lying across both of Miguel's and sighed.

"Holy shit. Remind me why we haven't been doing this all along?"

Miguel laughed, wiping the come off his belly with the edge of the blanket. "I don't know...seems like one of us was kind of squeamish on the subject..."
"Alright, alright...I know. You can tell me you told me so later, okay?"

Miguel's hand brushed over his shoulder in a soothing pattern. "Okay. Much later."

Ryan leaned up on one elbow. "How are you feeling?" His hand went to the red, puckered scar tissue on Miguel's abdomen, tracing over it lightly.

"It's fine. Don't worry." Miguel smiled up at him blissfully. "I'm in absolutely no pain, I promise you."

"Good." Ryan reached down and swiped at this cock, getting a bit of come off that hadn't left with the condom. He wiped it across Miguel's abdomen, across that spot under his ribs that he often stroked, rubbing his come into Miguel's skin.

Miguel smiled. "Yes, I know who I belong to, Cuda. There's no way I could forget it after that."

"Just making sure." He paused for a moment. But if Miguel could say it, then so could he. "Amante."

He felt the breath catch in Miguel's lungs and Ryan lifted his head, pulling himself up so they could kiss.

When they parted, Miguel smiled at him again. "Mi amante."

He sighed, knowing they couldn't linger any longer, and dragged himself up. "Come on, I have to get back to work. Can you take this blanket back with you when you go back to Em City?"

Miguel took the hand Ryan offered him and pulled himself up, padding over to the sink to clean up. "Are you kidding? You're the one who's so worried about people finding out we're fucking that you refuse to let us do anything in our own pod. But you want me to take the blanket you left with, back into Em City? Who do you think that will be fooling?"

"Hey, it's for your own good." Ryan ranted as he pulled his clothes on. "I don't want anyone thinking you're some prag. No one gets to mess with you. As soon as they realized we're together, they'd start to think of you differently. And I won't have that. For both of our safety, everyone has to see you as the tough son of a bitch I first met five years ago. Right?"

Miguel crossed to where Ryan was slipping on his shirt. "Right. I'll be the tough son of a bitch for everyone else. But I can be your prag."

"No," Ryan corrected Miguel. "You'll be mi amante."

Miguel's smile lit up his face, and Ryan couldn't help but return it. They kissed again, but Ryan kept it short. He really did have to hurry before Pancamo had another hissy fit. He looked around the room. "Hey, you see my other sneaker?"

Miguel picked up his pants to reveal the shoe, and tossed it to Ryan. "When the Guide Dog shows up, you'll have to take better care of your things. Dogs like to chew on shit like that, and you throw your crap all over the pod."

Ryan sat on the floor and tugged his sneakers on, thinking about the puppy he and Cyril had had as children before their dad had made them get rid of it. "That mutt had better not chew on my shoes; I've only got one pair, you know."

"You want it to chew on your foot instead?" Miguel zipped up his pants, grinning at Ryan.
"I just want to have a pair of shoes left when it leaves. When do you get it?"

"Tomorrow."

"Are you sure you want to do this? A dog is a big responsibility, especially in a place like Oz."

Ryan saw the determination in Miguel's eyes. "I have to do this, Ryan. It's important to me. I told you how Mukada insists that I can find a way to redeem myself, if I try. I think this is a start; a way to free myself from the wrongs I've done. I need to do this." Ryan's could almost hear Miguel pleading with him to understand.

He sighed and walked to the door. "Yeah, well if it turns out to be a drug sniffing dog, I'm warning you right now, I'm gonna make you regret it, all the way from the fucking Hole."

"Oh yeah?" Miguel strolled up to him, all sex and laughter, practically begging Ryan to take him in hand. "What are you gonna do? Spank me? You've threatened that one before, Cuda. I'm still waiting."

"Oh, you'll see. You won't be sitting down for a week."

"Is that a threat?"

Ryan grabbed him and spun him around, pushing him against the wall, kissing him breathless. When he finally pulled back, Miguel was looking a little less smug, and a bit dazed.

"That's a promise."

Ryan slipped out the door before Miguel could reply, the memory of Miguel's body pressed tightly against his warming him all the way to the kitchen.

The End

Chapter End Notes

Some quotes borrowed or paraphrased from Next Stop: Valhalla - Season Five, Episode Four of HBO's Oz.

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