

TRUE

The flashing lights flickered throughout the cabin while Vishous eyed the rear view and the large figure walking slowly towards them....

"This is nuts. The first time we decide to take out your shiny new car and we get pulled over. I told you this kind of car gets unwanted attention," Rhage ranted as he looked over his shoulder, out the back window. "And we look like fucking gangsters. Fuck! Next time I'm popping my ass outside and you can drive around alone and get your stupid self arrested."

The large figure knocked firmly on the glass; V moved to press the button.

"V, just wipe him, come up with something good and let's skedaddle, the sun isn't gunna wait for us."

"Cool it Hollywood" V lowered the windshield. "Problem officer?"

"Hell yeah there's a problem," There was a flash of badge then the cop's face came into view. The dirty street lamp illuminating only a slither of his face, but a couple of things were loud and clear. Strong jaw, intense hazel eyes and a nose that had seen the unfriendly side of a fist a few too many times. The broad shoulders covered in a rumbled tee that had probably been slept in, a slight bulge in the man's coat indicated that he was armed. He held himself with the type of confidence that came from plenty of time hitting the pavement and dealing with the shit of society. Experienced. The arms dropped at the guy's side gave him relaxed air, but V knew it was to keep his hands free to grab the 40 mill he was probably packing. It was easy to tell the tensing of his leg muscles in the worn jeans. This cop was ready to go at moment's notice.

"What kind of shit do ya think you were pulling back there?" The cop leaned back to take in the car, a subtle assessment. This guy was a clear veteran. "And what the fuck 'r you doin' down here anyways, with ya fancy ass cah?"

The cop's voice was deep, gruff, his Boston accent coming out thick and strong. V felt a lick of heat. All thoughts of wiping his mind were lost as a small grin crept onto V's face. He would love to play with him a little longer. It had been a while since anybody had taken his interest. And this guy looked like he would play, and play hard.

V shifted his ass lower in the seat, and narrowed his eyes. "Got lost, peaches. How 'bout you?"

"That's it smart ass, get out. Now!"

The cop stepped back and V could feel the anger rolling off him in dangerous waves. It electrified his blood. He was still riding high from round two with a group of lessers, but this was even better. This was like plateauing on a high so you could ride it for all its worth. Vishous eyed the cop up and down, not bothering to hide the obvious. Cop didn't appreciate that either because V swore he heard a growl.

Opening the door and sliding out of the Escalade in one fluid movement, V heard Rhage hiss, "What the hell are you doing?"

V turned back before closing the door. "Enjoying myself. What's it look like?"

The cop was right behind him, voice more gravely and definitely surlier than before. "What the fuck did you say to me?" he barked.

"Nothing officer." V moved slowly, keeping even his eye movements under tight control. No need freaking out this fine, upstanding citizen just yet.

"Not a fuckin' officer. Detective, jackass. Now, up against the cah."

He really should behave, scrub the guy, get back in the "cah" and get his ass home. Too bad he sucked royally at behaving.

"Oh, well," Vishous crossed his arms and leaned back, knowing he was asking for trouble and about to welcome it with a big shit eatin' grin, "Should I apologize now or after I serve your ass to ya on a plattah?"

V saw the hit coming and did nothing to stop him. The cop punched him, right across the jaw, hard enough to knock a man out. Luckily, he wasn't

a man. He recoiled from the punch and grinned. That's when he was turned and shoved face first against the car as Rhage jumped out.

"Get your ass back in. I got it!" he yelled. The last thing he needed was Rhage losing his shit on a relatively innocent bystander or for the cop to get trigger happy because he was out numbered. This was supposed to be a distraction, that's it. He shouldn't be pulling this shit with Rhage along for the ride, but ... fuck him, he couldn't help it.

"Hands on the fuckin' cah," the cop growled.

"V," Rhage was growling from inside. "Wipe him and let's go! What the fuck!?"

Vishous glared at him, his eyes glowing enough so that he could see them reflected in the window.

"You need to chill," he warned Rhage. "Isn't this police brutality? And if you're gonna search me, cop, mind the pockets."

The hard ass slammed him harder against the Escalade, "I'll search ya however I damn well please. Now shut your hole and face forward."

Rhage muttered to himself from within the safety of the car. Something that sounded like "cop" and "death wish."

"Fine," V relented and relaxed. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

The cop's hands patted over him in a strictly professional manner. V still had to grit his teeth to bare it. It's not that he was a walking hard on, but this guy was packing, and he wasn't referring to his gun. V knew someone who didn't give a fuck when he saw it. Took one to know one. Normally those types weren't on the right side of the law either. But here was Johnny Law Enforcement, oozing pent up aggression, a fuck you attitude, and healthy dose of self loathing. Most people wouldn't know that much so quickly, but to V? Cop might as well be wearing a neon sign.

"Ahhh, what have we here?" his hands ran across V's dagger holster. Oh, this was gonna be good. "You got a good reason to be packin' this shit?"

V shifted his feet. "Yeah. You wanna see?"

The cop snorted a laugh, actually fucking laughed! "Yeah, I don't see shit. Spread 'em."

He couldn't fight the smile, so wide his fangs probably showed, so he tucked his head. Spread 'em was right. That cop kept working his hands like that and he'd find a lot more than daggers and a Sig Sauer, that was for damn sure.

"What gang?" he asked. "And don't lie. Why are you trollin' my side of town?"

The cop kept it up until he found the daggers strapped across his chest, a gun in his thigh holster, switchblade in his pocket, and another gun near his boot.

"Jesus Christ," the cop breathed. "What's with the fucking arsenal? I'm thinking it ain't for a night of bowling."

V shook his head, keeping it down. "Nah. Just drinking and sex," he said to his boots.

"Yeah right. My ass," the cop snorted again.

"You offering?" V grinned over his shoulder.

He had to hand it to the guy. He didn't flinch or back off like most heteros would if they thought a guy was macking on them. Apparently Mr. Cop thought it was just a ploy for distraction.

If he only knew.

V was spun around and slammed hard against the side of his Escalade. The cop reached back, then slapped the cuffs on hard enough to bruise. V knew what he and Rhage must look like, out here in a dark SUV, speeding and all over the road on the wrong side of town, late at night. Two big ass bastards with bad attitudes, fleeing an old warehouse. The cop hadn't backed down once. Hadn't even called for back up. He wasn't stupid, he was just fucking crazy. Hell yes, Vishous thought and looked down at the metal encircling his wrists. About a million and one images flooded his mind and body at once. He so could not go there right now.

"Name!" the cop ordered.

"V."

"Real name, ass wipe."

"Vishous. And yours?"

"This ain't a tea party ... peaches." The cop mocked him.

Holy fuck, V thought. He could do this all night and go to bed a happy male.

"Uhhm," he scratched his head with his cuffed hands instead. "I'm pretty sure you have to identify yourself before arresting me. I'll need your name and badge number, officer."

"Detective Brian O'Neal. Oh-four-four-two-nine. That good enough for you or should I tattoo 'em on your fuckin' arm since you dig the ink so damn much?"

"There's some space on my ass."

"Yeah, I bet there is." Once again the cop took the provoking comment in his stride; hazel eyes tinged with amusement like he found V's distraction as transparent as a hooker's panties.

V leaned back against the Escalade, watching the cop make a quick note in his tattered notebook before slipping it into the back pocket of his jeans. He would have to put his glo-stick hand to that page ... once he was done playing. "So you're arresting me?"

Hardass crossed his arms over his chest. V tried to keep his appreciation of the cop's chest stretching the worn shirt on the DL, but the problem was the fucker was too damn observant. The cop visibly bristled.

"You catch on quick, asshole."

"On what charges?" V knew that it would piss him off, playing the stupid card. But he just wanted the man to keep talking. Maybe bring out the deeper edge to his voice that he'd heard earlier.

It worked, the man didn't like stupid. V could empathize with the

sentiment. The cop squared his shoulders and moved forward, shoving V hard in the chest. "You're fuckin' with me right? How about running that red light, speeding, wreckless endangerment, carrying concealed weapons, plural?" The man moved closer, getting up in his face. "I'd bet my badge you don't have a license for them either." Hardass tugged hard on the shoulder holster, bringing V's face closer, noses almost touching. "And if you keep pissin' me off, I'll steamroll your ass and make it look like an accident, ya got it?"

V felt a smirk pull at the corner of his mouth. This was getting addictive. The cop wasn't afraid of him. Fuck, he wasn't afraid of anything. And most people that saw V did a one-eighty in the opposite direction. His face being this close to V's was doing a number to his self control, which wasn't that good to begin with. The man had a fucking decent mouth. Those lips would feel hard. Hard and unrelenting as the rest of him. V moved his focus back to the man's eyes. "Wreckless endangerment? You're like a real cop or something?"

The cops muscles started tensing, as Rhage stuck his head out the window. "V! You done playing yet? Or do we have to take this game down to the station?"

The cop didn't move, but his eyes flicked briefly in Rhage's direction, as if calculating how much of what he said would cause a problem.

Time to go. V hesitated, before bringing his cuffed hands down on the cop's head. Hardass didn't even see it coming, no human would, and the man dropped heavily to the road.

Rolling him onto his back, V watched for the slow rising and falling of his chest before letting out a breath. Why he gave a damn about a human, he had no fucking idea. He patted down the front pockets before locating the keys, handing them to Rhage through the open window to uncuff him.

"Right. Now fucking wipe him and let's head. " Rhage sat back into his seat and V could hear him let out a long suffering sigh. "Seriously man, we gotta get you a hobby."

V went back to the cop, slipping the keys in his pocket and extracting the page from his notebook. It had his name, the make, model and license number of his car, written in a lazy scrawl. With the ungloved use of his hand, the paper went up in quick flames.

V then looped his arms under the cop's shoulders and hoisted him over his shoulder. The mofo was heavier than he looked, even though it wasn't an issue. With a hand pressed firmly over Hardass's solid thighs, V carried him over to the unmarked car and placed him in the driver's seat. The cop's face took on a completely different look when out cold; the lines smooth, the firm set of his jaw relaxed. Probably how he looked when he was sleeping; that is if he slept much.

As V belted him in, the cop let out a soft groan. He would be coming round soon. V's fingers moved to his carotid, it was strong and regular, he'd be alright. Instead of removing his fingers, V slid them up to move along the cop's jaw, the shadow rough against his fingertips. At that moment he knew he should wipe everything, make him believe he had passed out in the car or some shit. But V couldn't wipe himself from his memory, didn't like the thought of the bastard forgetting him. So without a second thought, V wiped all memories of Rhage and the car, leaving their heated encounter firmly in place. It would make the next time they met all the more interesting.

V quickly moved back to the Escalade and hopped back into the driver seat, shifting into gear. Ignoring Rhage's protests, he allowed a small grin to creep onto his face. "Detective Brian O'Neal," V said under his breath as he burned out of the street.

He was drifting weightlessly, happily, through a heavy fog...

Until his head fell against the cold glass of the car window.

Detective Brian O'Neal, Butch, grumbled a curse and rubbed his head until he came fully awake.

"What the hell?," he mumbled to no one. Now that he'd come to, he felt like dog shit. He ran a hand through his hair until he found the lump. That fucker had knocked him out cold. Oh he'd pay for that, but right now Butch was too busy nursing his injured pride to worry about pretty boy too much.

He must be losing his touch. No one ever got the upper hand on him like that and the cocky son of a bitch oughta be in jail right now. Instead he was out, probably cracking up at how he'd knocked out a cop. And how had he managed to do that? Because said cop was being a dumbass and cuffed the guy hands front. That's something a rookie pulled. Butch didn't

want to investigate the whys of doing it either because he might find out he had exactly the death wish that his partner accused him of. Any cop with two brain cells to rub together would've cuffed that big and obviously bad mother fucker behind his back ... and maybe hog tied his ass too.

But why had Butch even been talking to him? The sour taste in his mouth meant it hadn't been a friendly chat. He vaguely remembered questioning the guy, but about what? Had he stopped him on a violation? And if so, why? He wasn't running beat anymore; he was a detective. What was the guy driving? Man, his short term memory was for shit.

"Shit," Butch moaned and leaned his head back against the worn leather of his car. He must've gotten hit harder than he thought. At least that much he remembered. He'd been toe to toe with one of the cockiest assholes he'd met in awhile and then - Goodnight O'Neal. Lights out, but thanks for playing. This was going to stick in his crawl for awhile.

He remembered the guy looked ... off. All inked up like a local gang rite, but he wasn't the bruiser type. He looked foreign, a little too lah-tee-dah for the southside of Caldwell. If it weren't for the lack of accent, Butch might think Russian mob, but the guy spoke perfect English. He'd given him a name, but fuck, why couldn't he remember anything else? He was a goddamn cop for crying out loud! His life was noticing shit other people didn't and now he couldn't recall squat.

Had to be the hit. Maybe a shot of coffee and a shower would clear his head. Butch called in to the station and carefully drove his Crown Vic downtown.

~*~

"Damn O'Neal, you look like shit," Jose de la Cruz added insult to injury with a smack on the back, making Butch's head feel like it was rattling in his skull.

"Thanks, Cruz. Likewise," he grumbled to the other detective and plopped down at his desk. He still felt like shit too. It might take two cups of coffee to knock off the cobwebs.

Butch took out his notepad, already knowing it held no information. He jotted down what he could remember. Tall, maybe 6'6"? Dark hair, light eyes. Like really light. Freakishly so, which meant it had to be contacts.

Guys just didn't have pretty eyes like that. Tat on his face. That had to hurt like a bitch too. What was it with gangsters and prison dogs and their face ink? What else ... what else? Seemed like he had a goatee, but Butch was watching for the guy's next move more than anything.

So that's all he knew? Big with dark hair and ink. Great! That narrowed it down a lot. Maybe only several hundred thousand criminals in the state that matched that description.

"Shit." He shoved his notebook away.

There was something else. Something important that he couldn't grasp. Actually lots of things, so what was his malfunction? The guy had a funny way of speaking - that much he remembered. It was street slang, but the accent was upper crust. The guy didn't look or sound like a banger, yet he walked the walk and talked the talk. It made no sense.

Butch jotted that down.

He remembered the cocksucker had tried to front like he was hitting on him too. A ploy so played out that it no longer worked. Butch couldn't count on both hands the number of times some asshole had blown him kisses or made remarks about him being their bitch as he cuffed him. What did they think it would buy them? A shocked cop? A ride in the front seat? Like anyone on the force gave a shit.

Butch slapped his pen back down and looked at the page. That's all he had. A few scribbled lines to help him find the guy that sucker punched him.

Good. Fucking. Luck.

"You 'bout finished, man?" Cruz asked from his desk. "Wanna grab some grub on the way home?"

"Nah," Butch shook his head. "I'm gonna be awhile. You go on."

He grabbed another cup of coffee and walked the floor. His pacing took him by the books of mug shots and his hand lingered over one of the bindings. What were the chances he could find the guy in there? No doubt he was a known offender, so-

"Damn O'Neal, get a grip," Butch said to himself and jerked his hand away. Looking for that punk in mugshots would be like finding a needle in a stack of needles. Why was he so riled up about it anyway? Sure, there was the fact the guy had cold cocked him and then apparently tucked him into his car like the fucking Tooth Fairy, but it wasn't like the guy had insulted his mother or gone after his partner. He ought to just let it go.

The fact of the matter was, the guy had gotten one over on him and until he saw his ass again, the score was tattooed freak: one. Butch O'Neal: fuck all.

Butch didn't like losing. Especially not to uppity smart asses that liked to beat down on cops. He grabbed his coat and rubbed his head again. The best thing to do now was go back to his crappy little apartment in his sketchy neighborhood, have a hot shower, and forget about the night he couldn't remember anyway. Besides, cocky criminals were like cockroaches.

They always came back.

~*~

Vishous leaned back in his chair and eyeballed one of the monitors of his Four Toys. State of the art computers, they were the furthest thing from toys, but he still loved to play with them. He sat forward again and read the downloading list quickly.

Boston
Some town in Bum-fuck-nowhere
Boston again
Now Upstate New York

Detective O'Neal couldn't stay in one place, but then, he didn't stray far either. So far he'd been in Caldwell the longest. Maybe he'd put down roots. Had a family. Little wife and kids.

"Fat fucking chance," V smirked.

He knew a family man when he saw one. Caught enough glimpses of Tohr and the like around the mansion. Brian O'Neal wasn't the type. Oh, he

probably thought he wanted it one day because that's what good little Catholic boys from Boston were supposed to want, but the cop had too much of a death wish to have anything worth living for now.

V moved back to the first toy, flicking through the results. His search engine had pulled up a few things related to the cop. Brian O'Neil, born in 1972. Joined the academy at 18, worked his way up to homicide detective. Worked some time in Vice, Gangs and intel, but was settled in Homicide for the past 5 years. V leaned back and began rolling a new smoke. Running a hand over his goatee, he hit enter on his second search and took a long draw.

He knew what was doing with his interest; understood it for exactly what it was. Lust. Pure and simple. V had wanted to fuck him as soon as the cop marched up to the window, squared his broad shoulders, opened his trap and started with his heavily accented verbal beat down. But of course, as with everything in his screwed up life, it was never pure or simple for Vishous.

First, the detective was a human. Humans were a no-go of the tallest order. There were a few things the cop was sure to notice about V and none of them spoke of normal, everyday human. Second, while Wrath's 'all humans are evil' policy had lessened since he married his shellan, Darius's half blood daughter, the King still remained adamant on keeping security tight and humans in the dark. And the person who kept the King's security tight was V. How fucking ironic was that?

V stubbed the handrolled in the ash tray, watching the tendrils of smoke cast off the dying embers. He should just forget about the cop. Lust was lust. He could sate lust. Call one of his subs, arrange a meeting at his penthouse, get off on the control. But that was the difference. He couldn't remember wanting someone like this in a long time. Try hundreds of years long time. While his subs got him off very well, something about the detective left him burning. The cop was completely unafraid of him, had met his eyes as he attempted to verbally strip him raw. Going toe to toe with him in the street, the verbal sparring, the power struggle and the way the cop wouldn't back down...

This was something else entirely. The guy had walked right in and taken his brain hostage. The thought both freaked him out and intrigued him beyond measure.

V had gone home after placing the cop in his car and retreated to the Pit. Rhage had offered to keep him company and pass out on his couch, but V had wanted to be alone. Alone with his toys and alone to think. He had stripped out of his leathers and hopped into a boiling shower and thought about the cop. Palming his erection as the hot water ran down his chest, he thought about fierce hazel eyes and a strong, stubbled jaw. Thought about his sexy as fuck Boston accent, voice gravelly and low. Thought about how he got in his face, pushing him roughly against the car. He couldn't know that V enjoyed that kind of handling way more than he should. No one treated him that way and, perverted fuck that he was, he loved it. He thought about grappling with the cop, fighting hard and fast before pinning him against a wall. The cop thrusting his back hard against his chest, V running his teeth down his neck. Pulling those worn jeans down, rubbing himself against that fuckable ass. The cop turning to wrap a large hand around his cock, shoulders and forearms tensing as he worked him...

V had come quickly, moaning with his head thrown back, tattooed hand steadying himself against the tiled wall as he spilled out in the shower.

The flashing of his computer brought him back to earth. He had successfully hacked into the police mainframe, searching specifically for the cases Detective Hardass O'Neal was working. He had a warrant pending for a search and the search itself that night if the warrant came through. V could be there for it, it would be dark enough and those places were always crawling with people. Busy, distracted people. He could possibly get him aside.

Fuck! This was not only a stupid move, there was also the matter of V assaulting the guy. Not scrubbing the cop was coming back to bite him in the ass now. V turning up there with the cop in a slap happy mood would not end well. Proof positive that Vishous needed to let it go because it was making him stupid, but he knew that wasn't going to happen. V never let go of anything he wanted. Another head to head with O'Neal would give him enough material for quite a few showers and maybe something more. Damn long shot, but still. He should come bearing gifts so maybe the cop wouldn't shoot him on sight.

V scrubbed a hand over his face and settled deep in his chair. He started searching for other info on the cop's open cases. It might help. If it didn't, at least he'd get to see the fucker one last time.

Vishous stepped out from behind the brownstone and took in the scene around him. The conspicuous yellow tape was everywhere, but there was no sign of Detective O'Neal. He was the whole point. What did V care about some human being offed in a shitty part of town? Not one iota. When he'd showed up at the search and a uni said O'Neal wasn't there but at a murder scene ... well, V had materialized to the exact location that he'd ganked from the police scanner. Maybe he should feel bad about the unfair advantage of mhst and hacker genius. He didn't.

"Over here O'Neal!" one of the crime scene techs yelled.

V saw him stand from a crouched position and move right, closer to a dumpster. Now how in the hell was he going to talk to the guy with all these- and then O'Neal saw him. Like some kind of freaking sixth sense, the cop pinned him with a glare hard enough to show through the night. Vishous backed up into the shadows as the cop came straight towards him. Within seconds he was propelled back against brick with a loaded Glock pointed at his head.

"Whoa!" V threw his hands wide to show he had no weapons in them. Well, not counting his hand itself. "Easy there, big fella. I'm not here to get shot."

"Shut the fuck up!" the hard ass cop yanked and slammed him again. "If I want you to talk, I'll tell ya."

He patted V down again quickly, gun still pointed at his head. Of course he found the daggers. They were V's version of Amex. Never leave home without 'em.

"If I'd known you wanted to pat me down again, I'd have worn more weapons."

"Jesus, you guys are all the same. Stupid as fuck and cocky as a crackhead. If I'd known you were asking for hurtin', I'd have just sucker punched you first. 'Specially since that seems to be your specialty. What are you doing here, waiting round two? "

V raised an eyebrow, keeping tight control of the smile that threatened his face. "You want me to talk now?"

He just pressed the gun harder against his cheek. "Lesson one smartass,

don't piss off the man with the gun in your face. Now answer the fuckin question."

Jerking his face away from the gun, V straightened as much as he could. "I didn't come here looking for trouble if that's what you're worried about."

"You sucker punched me, asshole. All you're gonna get is trouble."

"Technically, I knocked you upside your head, but-"

The cop punched him in the stomach with his free hand. "Why are you here?"

"Same reason you are," V wheezed, taking a chance.

"I'm here to solve a crime. You are crime, dickhead. We ain't on the same side."

Once he caught his breath, V lifted his nose to the air. "Yeah. You're here to solve a murder, right? But you won't solve much here, because it didn't happen here."

The cop's eyes narrowed on him suspiciously. That wasn't really the direction V wanted to go. He wanted to calm the guy, let him know he was here to help. Some red smoke would be good right now, but he didn't carry the stuff on him.

"Don't look at me like that cop, I didn't kill whoever the fuck you got over there, but I know that whoever did - did not do it here."

"Oh yeah, Einstein. How you figure?"

V shook his head. "Could you not point that gun at my face? You're wrecking my concentration."

The cop lowered the barrel and pointed it towards his chest, right at his heart. V had to grin and give the guy props.

"Fair enough," he said. Vishous raised his face to the breeze once more. "What I'm trying to tell you, is you won't find much here. There's not enough blood for the huma- person to have been stabbed here. The body

must've been dumped."

"How do you know the vic was stabbed?" The cop's keen eyes sparkled.

"I saw."

"You saw that from way over here, hot shot?" He made a sound of disbelief.

V leveled his gaze dead at him. "Yes. I did."

The cop shook his head. "Your crew do this?"

He had to laugh. "Ahhh, no. I might not be a saint, but I can promise you I had nothing to do with some druggie getting slashed."

Hardass stepped away but kept the gun on him, studying him with enough intensity to make most people nervous. "You're not with a gang are ya?" he finally asked. "Not One-Niners, Russians, or even one of the Irish gangs."

"Nope." V shook his head.

"You Fed? ATF?"

He was about to answer an automatic 'no', but then he recognized an opening when he saw it.

"Can't really say either way now can I, detective? I get disoriented very easily anyway. Confused." He grinned.

Detective Hardass backed away further, keeping his weapon pointed at him. "You stay right there for two seconds."

Once out of range, he turned to hurry back to the scene. Part of Vishous wanted to hang around. Stand back and watch the hardass do his cop thing because he could think of nothing sexier. Maybe a few things sexier, but nothing that could be done in public. However, reason said to get the hell out of Dodge, let the guy see that V was legit in his help, and make himself seen another time. Pity. He wanted to stay.

Vishous dematerialized back to Escalade about eight blocks away. "Hell,"

he muttered. It'd be two or three days before forensics came back. He'd have to wait that long to reappear. In the meantime, it was hello cop fixating and multiple shower taking.

~*~

Butch took a swig of his scotch before placing it back down on the table. He had spread out his papers at a corner booth of a shitty bar that had become a bit of a regular. But when you live in a dump and have no one at home to give a shit about you, there really wasn't much competition.

The crime scene report had confirmed Butch's assessment. Young male, dumped in the alleyway, stabbed five times in the chest with a short end blade. No I.D, not that the guy had ever carried a wallet in his short life. Dentals confirmed identification - Frequent flyer, long history, a few lockups. It looked drug related, so not one of his cases. He would pass over the case to DA in the morning, but not now, someone may as well get some sleep.

It wasn't the fact that Butch was coming up dry on his serial killer case, or the fact that he would have to pass it over to people that hated Det's like the plague. It was the fact that the fucker had been right.

That tall tattooed bastard, that had marched into his scene as cocky as ever and had announced that the murder had taken place somewhere else. He had been right about the body dump, and he had only a brief glance from a distance to base it on. Butch had enough years on the job to have something fondly known as a sixth sense, but even he knew when to bring the squints in.

And that is where it started to mess with Butch's mind. Who was the guy? If he was involved in some kind of undercover, then why was he getting himself involved? Flying under the radar was kinda the point. Mind you he fit the part, the leathers, the tats, even the go-fuck-yourself attitude. All made for a very convincing package. He had to be with gang detail. He was all decked out in the gear. Shit kickers, leather jacket, leather pants - like it was a friggin' biker gang. And what was with the glove? It wasn't exactly inconspicuous to wear just one. Was it some fucked up fashion statement? Or maybe hiding something like a prosthetic hand. Nah, the guy had used that hand too well for it to be damaged. Maybe Butch could pull some favours and start nosing around about the guy's identity. See what his deal was, but he doubted he'd get anywhere. Those feds were

clammed up tighter than a nun's knees, especially about their precious UC agents. Asking would just be a red brick to the forehead.

So where did that leave him? He couldn't arrest the guy if he was UC. But if he was the real deal and was some lowlife trying to get police intel, he couldn't just sit on his ass. But Butch didn't get the impression that he was the latter, he had to be one of them. He had just remained cool and calm under Butch's scrutiny, with a narrowing of those intense and probably fake light eyes, even with Butch pressing his Glock into his chest. The most veteraned criminals usually weakened at some point. Butch wasn't called Hardass for nothing. Tattoo man.....V -something, had delivered his info and disappeared into the night without so much as a knock to the head or a kiss my ass. Maybe next time he could find out from the man himself, pull a little police interrogation on him.

Then he could find where the guy fit into all this and maybe then Butch could get the man outta his mind.

It smelled. But Butch was grateful the body was a fresh dump. It was the ones found after 2 weeks, melted into furniture, that stayed with you. Back in his pavement hitting days, attending to house calls for the granny that wouldn't answer the phone implanted the smell permanently into his brain. It was sad really. His memory bank was a catalogue of death and destruction like some twisted library. But if you didn't give a fuck, it didn't really matter.

He tugged the coat tighter, hands not quite able to make use of the dismally small pockets. If he smoked he might have appreciated the warmth. A scotch wouldn't go astray, but Butch was determined not to complete the washed up and disillusioned cop look just yet. Plus his liver needed a break from the other night.

Waiting for crime scene to turn up was always a bitch. They seemed to take the longest when it was cold enough to freeze your balls off. Alright for them; they didn't have to mind the crime scene like some cranky, frozen guard dog.

Butch dared a glance at his watch before shoving his hand back into his pocket. Thirty minutes. What the hell were they doing. Naming and polishing their nancy boy tools? Fuck!

He backed himself against a tree and rested his head against the trunk, the breeze picking up the yellow tape, flapping it in the wind.

There was a snap and Butch had his hand on his gun in an instant. He recognized the tall figure stepping from the shadows.

"You still leading with shoot first, ask questions later?"

"I haven't shot you yet."

The tall bastard grinned, eyes slightly crinkled beneath the cap he was wearing. Which.....well fuck. Red Sox. Well worn, obviously an old favorite from the way it sat, the brim moulded into place. His mysterious, violent stranger was a Red Sox fan. Well that was just someone upstairs having a good laugh at his expense.

The guy stepped closer, copying Butch's stance of hands in pockets, back arched, shoulders rolled forward, conserving warmth and trying to look less intimidating than he actually was.

"I was right, true?"

Butch hadn't released his hand on his gun, but he relaxed his arm, resting his hand there, reassuring. He did, however, shift his weight to his feet, the ready position that every green cop was taught. "You were." Butch kept him within sight. The guy still radiated an aura of danger that bristled his cop radar, but he wanted to find out who the hell he was and that meant playing nice. For now anyways. "How'd you know?"

The man stared at the yellow tape. "Seen enough of them to know. The smell was different."

Well that was new. The murder didn't happen there because it 'smelled' wrong? ...And he thought the crime psychics on TV were stone cold crazy.

The man turned his head back to face him. "So, why haven't you searched me yet, Detective?" He smirked, the corner of his mouth turning up.

"Do I need to?" He already knew the man was packing. He could understand that frame of mind, Butch felt naked without the comforting weight of his Glock forty.

The tattooed man chuckled, low and warm, like he genuinely enjoyed the banter. "I'm armed."

Butch snorted. "I figured. You and the knives. Well, you keep your pointy bits to yourself and I think we'll be fine."

The grin was devilish. "I'll try my damndest, detective."

"And quit calling me that. Starting to piss me off. More."

The guy crossed his arms and looked at him from beneath the low bill of his Sox cap. "Then what should I call you? Brian?"

Butch winced. "Fuck no. O'Neal. Just ... O'Neal."

"O'Neal."

The name rolled off his tongue like some fancy ass French word or something.

"Nah, it's just O'Neal," Butch grouched and the guy laughed at him.

"Alright then. So who you freezing your nuts off for, O'Neal?"

"Crime Scene techs. I called it in, so..."

The guy nodded in understanding and looked around the scene, but didn't move closer. Butch wondered what the hell he was doing for the second time that night. Why wasn't he beating the shit out of this guy? He might've been right on the case, but he was still the asshole that knocked him out. Never mind the fact that no civilians were allowed near a scene. His gut knew this guy was no civilian, just the same, he wasn't a known CI or agent, so he did not belong on Butch's scene.

"Look, man," he muttered, surprisingly reluctant. "I don't know who you are or how you knew about ... whatever. You can't be here though, so you're gonna need to get yourself gone. Pronto."

Vicadin or whatever the hell his name was just looked at him.

"Now this guy," the guy nodded towards the vic, ignoring Butch's request to get lost. "This guy was killed here, but it wasn't recently, like you're thinking."

"How the hell do you know what I'm think-"

"Hunch. Call it a good guess. Whatever. It wasn't recent."

"That's what CSI is for, genius. Now vamos."

"I'm telling you, wait all you want for the techies, but there won't be a hot trail because that guy's stink is at least twenty four hours if not more."

"He don't stink." Butch was bristling at his know-it-all tone.

"He does to me. So chew on the fact that this murder is at least a day old, maybe more, yet somebody just now called it in? Out here where it sure as hell ain't hidden? Rather than worrying about the hows of it, the why is probably more important. Why you think no one's reported it yet?"

"How'd you know it was just called in."

"Any yahoo with a scanner would know that shit."

"Y'know the attitude is getting old. I didn't ask for your help and the help is starting to piss me off. You think you're God's gift to fighting crime, then why the hell don't you man up and join the force rather than pissing all over my investigation?"

"I'm not pissing, O'Neal. I'm helping your ass. Seems you don't know the difference. And I sure as hell am no gift from God. I can guarantee you that."

Butch looked at the guy, the way his brow furrowed beneath the cap because he was getting pissed off too. Apparently he didn't like anyone questioning him. Good! Then Butch would be sure to question him further.

"So who you with? Vice? Gang detail? Feds?"

"I freelance," the guy deadpanned.

"And your specialty is sucker punching cops and then trying to help them afterward for shits and giggles?"

Butch could swear the guys eyes almost glowed as he smirked. "You're my first. Must be that sparkling personality of yours."

"I still have my hand on my gun, smart ass. The only thing that's stopping you from getting shot is that I wouldn't wanna get blood spatter on your cap."

The guy's eyes widened slightly. "You a Sox fan?"

"Is the Pope Catholic?"

"I'll take that as a yes."

"Take that as a hell yeah," Butch nodded with a big grin, then caught himself. "What'd you say your name was again? Vishnu? Vicadin?"

The guy gave him a go-to-hell look. "Vishous. V for short if that's too hard for you to pronounce. You know, you calling me a smart ass is a bit of kettle, you're black, dontcha think?"

Butch laughed again and then cursed under his breath. He was not going to think this guy was funny or get along with him. Sox fan or not. Hell no.

"Okay, V. So you're not the law, but you're sure a shit not a banger or you wouldn't be out here in plain sight talking to my ass. What gives?"

~*~

V studied the cop before answering. Detective Brian O'Neal. Just plain O'Neal now, huh? The guy could be funny, even if always edgy. It didn't help curb his interest in the man.

"Don't worry 'bout the details of me right now ... O'Neal. You just wait and see if I'm right about the vic. If so, then maybe we'll talk."

The cop looked at him funny. "What do you mean we'll talk? You thinking this is a regular gig?"

He must be ape-shit crazy pulling this stunt. Was his life really so boring that he had to go out looking for some fucked up drama to throw in the mix? Because this was sure as shit going to be bad. He could feel it in his bones. Hell, that was his thing. Premonitions. But he also knew he couldn't leave the guy alone. Something kept calling him back, and it wasn't just the cop's fine ass either. He needed to help the guy and

somehow, somewhere, some day - that cop was going to return the favor. He just knew it.

V smiled, wickedly. He could think of lots of ways to return favors. Unfortunately that wasn't exactly what his gut was referring to. It was the parts a bit further south from his gut that saw the cop as ... favorable. Whatever it was that was drawing him to this particular human, it would reveal itself soon. It always did. V had long ago given up on fighting his instinct.

The lights of the crime techs came into view, V watched as the cop straightened up and moved to step in front of him as the lights flickered across the lawn. "You better head, civies aren't supposed to be here and you don't exactly fit the part." O'Neil threw over his shoulder, his eyes not leaving the men in the blue overalls.

V nodded. The cop had moved to shield him from view. He didn't know whether it was to protect his own ass, V's, or both. But the protective streak struck a cord.

"Right. I'm gone. I'll see if I can get you some info. Even though this is probably dead dry, I might be able to pull something from those cameras further up."

The cop's shoulders tightened, he turned his face and V could see him working his jaw tight. He obviously didn't like someone bossing him around in his territory. "I don't need your charity so don't strain anything vital. This is my case, so I decide what happens with it." He turned his face back to the approaching investigators. "Now get going before I have to arrest your ass, which I might do yet for being such a friggen know-it-all."

V chuckled and moved forward, standing almost behind him. He liked this view almost as much as the front. The shoulders were broad and his ass looked mighty fine in those standard issue detective pants. He smiled, if the cop knew what thoughts were running through his mind, he'd shoot him on principal alone. Forget arresting him. He dropped his voice, talking to the short brown hair. "Don't tempt me."

Before the cop could respond to the obvious shot, V had backed away and dematerialized back to the mansion. All these interactions were playing havoc on his libido. Taking his cap off and running a hand through his

hair, V repositioned the cap low over his eyes. So his cop was a Red Sox fan too? If he had it, he'd give his right nut to see O'Neal in a cap, maybe a whole lot more to see him in just a Sox cap. V grinned at the thought as he pulled open the door to the Pit.

Butch let out a long breath as he leaned against the car, the cool steel filtering through his jacket. It had been a long fucking day, he had served a warrant that morning and that had been a helluva waste of time. Just before knock off he had been called to another scene, it was of course gang related, try telling that the the fuckers who avoided paperwork. By the time that shit had been sorted his supervisor had asked him to do a double, which he was already halfway through anyhow. Shit, it's not like he had any kinda life besides work and corpses.

Just like the cliché, they had pulled up at a Dunkin' Doughnuts, Jose being the wonderful housewife he was, went to get them something to eat. He liked working with Jose, after pulling a double he was more than willing to point Butch in the direction of what needed doin'.

He scrubbed a hand over his face, pausing on his jaw, five o'clock shadow scratching his hand. He couldn't skip a day of shaving or he looked like he had a full beard, so by dusk he was already getting bristly. They said shiftwork aged you, and currently he felt close to ninety, with a much older liver.

"O'Neal."

Butch blinked and wondered when he'd been snuck up on. He really must be getting old. As if he had read his thoughts, V smirked beneath the Sox cap. "Bit slow on the uptake tonight? You let another bad guy get the beat down on you?" He turned his face toward the car, breathing in deeply through his nose. "You working with someone tonight?"

Shit! Jose. Wouldn't they look a pretty damn sight. Butch conversing with some tall mofo with ink, leather coat, that damned glove, and an aura of fuck you a mile wide. Butch grabbed V by the upper arm, walking him backwards to a narrow alley. The muscle was hard beneath the leather, the guy obviously stacked and even stronger than he looked, but V just watched as he allowed himself to be dragged along. Butch pushed him against the brick. There wasn't a whole lot of room and the man was nowhere near petite. Butch tried to back up a bit as it was getting a little crowded. It didn't make much difference, it would have seemed crowded had they been in the middle of a field. It didn't help that V obviously found

something funny, his eerily light eyes crinkled with amusement.

"What the fuck are you meetin' me here for? Jose's inside."

V's eyebrow lifted into his cap. "Jose?"

"Jose. My partner." Butch glanced back towards the car; Cruz hadn't reappeared yet.

"I got some info you might be interested in, cop. Far be it from me to ever hold out on the law."

Like Butch was supposed to buy that. Along with a beach front condo in Wyoming. But V had been dead right about the two dead bodies.

"Listen, I get off in a couple of hours, you can talk shit then." Butch reached into his coat and pulled out a card. "Call me on that, I know a place."

V glanced at the card for a moment before taking it between two long fingers. He looked down and grinned. "Like a date or something..."

Butch took a few steps back, which wasn't far before he bumped the other wall. They really needed to make these alleys bigger and the guy needed to let up on that attitude. The whole macking on the cop thing was now obviously to take the piss, but it still was unnerving. "Yeah, sure smart ass. Whatever. Just call the damn number." Butch turned and headed for the car, leaving him in the alley.

Good timing; Jose emerged with coffee and something reasonably edible. Butch took the coffee, taking a long sip before opening the door. "Fucking excellent. You'd make someone a good housewife someday Jose."

Jose laughed before hopping in the passenger seat. "Yeah, just don't tell my wife that."

"I'm sure she already knows," Butch shifted into gear, sparing a quick glance into the alley before moving off. He could only see blackness.

~*~

Vishous arrived at the address the cop had given him over the phone. He was a few minutes early to some dive bar on the west side of town. It was a bad idea to be here. He wasn't on duty tonight, but that wouldn't matter to Wrath or the rest of the Brotherhood. He'd out and out lied about what he was doing; said he was going to his penthouse because he knew no one would prod any further once that topic came up. His brothers knew what was up at his private pad, and since all of them were as confused and awkward as a three legged cat when it came to Doms and subs, they never said a word about it other than "okay". Even the King, who normally had no problems with handing out orders, agreed with a simple nod and a "see ya tomorrow then." If they knew he was out at a human bar, meeting a human cop, getting way too involved in his case as a ruse to just be around the guy - they'd have his ass in a sling.

Oh well.

The dive was as dark as a tomb, but V pulled down the cap anyway. He'd tried to dress "normal", whatever the hell that meant. He owned mostly work out pants and leathers, but he wore one of his two pairs of jeans again. They'd seen more action in the last week than the last twelve months combined. He hitched them up a little further because they kept sliding low on his hips. He wasn't trying to go for the thug look.

V saw him as soon as the bar came into view and they nodded at each other in silent welcome. He certainly did clean up well, V thought. The shadow beard was gone and O'Neal was fresh scrubbed in his jeans and t-shirt. It wouldn't do to stand there ogling the man, but he'd be damned if he could help it. O'Neal had arrived even earlier than V. So the cop was punctual, why was he not surprised?

"I could open up with a 'So you come here often?' but that's a little played out, dontcha think?" V slid onto the stool next to him.

"Next you'll wanna know my sign."

V smirked and ordered a Goose, neat. "What are you drinking?" he asked the cop.

"Lagavulin," he said, turning his tumbler.

Impressive. "Only the best for O'Neal, huh? I feel ya." He ordered

another, on him.

"This ain't a date. I don't need you buying me drinks. Now what've you got that was important enough to corner me at the fucking doughnut shop?"

He turned slightly on his stool. "If I remember correctly, I merely walked up to you. It was you that did the cornering."

"Semantics," O'Neal muttered, but with a grin. "You still came at me, so what gives? What's the what?"

"I got the video from near your scene the other night. Only one car in and out of there and it was a '97 Buick. Couldn't see a driver, but I got a tag and ran the numbers."

The drinks arrived and V noticed that the cop didn't argue about accepting that second Lag after all.

"You going to tell me how you get all this shit or are we still playing co-vert ops for now?"

Vishous stifled a laugh with his Goose. It wasn't lost on him that he laughed and did his version of smiling more around this cop than he ever had in his long, twisted life.

"For the sake of argument and intrigue, let's keep playing co-vert ops for now, true?"

"Whatever," the cop took a long draw on his scotch.

They each pondered their drinks in silence, V wondering what the guy was thinking and what the hell he was doing in such a public place, when the scent hit him.

O'Neal had leaned back, adjusting himself on the hard as hell stool. V caught the clean smell of good cologne lingering on the more potent and unmistakable scent of male. The combination tightened his groin.

How was it possible for a man to smell that good? How did the cop even afford nice cologne? And fuckin' shots of Lagavulin to boot? Regardless, O'Neal wasn't wearing cheap musky piss water. The smell was crisp like

fall apples, warm like a winter fire, and the scent of the man himself was spicy sweet, like both combined. The effect was doing some seriously freaky shit to his brain. Evidently Detective O'Neal didn't clean up like this for time on the job. It was a good fucking thing too or V would've been even more tempted to jump him that first night.

"So?" O'Neal was saying.

"What?" V shook his head.

"I said, are you gonna let your glass run dry?"

V looked down at his empty tumbler and ordered another; He most definitely needed another.

"You see the game the other night?" he asked the cop, trying to get his mind off the smell of the man next to him and on to something less tempting.

"Yeah, Youkilis is a fucking animal on first."

"Tell me about it. A god with that arm."

"Ever been?" the cop asked taking the easy topic and running with it.

Vishous had to laugh at that one. Baseball games at seven o'clock in the summer time. "Ahh, no. Never been. You?"

"Yeah, a couple of times when I worked up there. People would score tickets and give 'em to us, like earning a get outta jail free card or something." He laughed, "Hell, I took the tickets though. There is nothing like being there, the smell of the field, the crack of the bat, the Green Monster. And the crowd! It's so..." O'Neal hesitated as if he was giving away too much of himself. "So, yeah, you oughta go sometime."

V smiled. Unless they started playing night games in winter, there was no chance in hell of that happening. Maybe if he were willing to catch only the last three innings.

"Maybe one day," he said anyway. "I'd love to see Beckett, for real."

"He looks solid, yeah."

V pulled out a hand rolled and gave O'Neal the "do you mind?" look. Oddly, he'd never given two shits before if anyone minded. The cop was cool with it and the conversation continued to flow naturally; from baseball to the news break that flashed across the mounted television, to the state of crime in upstate New York versus the city. The next time V looked at the clock, two hours had passed.

He had to give the cop props, they had been drinking steadily for a couple of hours and he wasn't anywhere near gone. But the relaxed roll to his shoulders and the ease of his smile showed that the Lag was having some effect. V took a sip of his Goose.

O'Neal moved on his stool, looking at V as he rested his head on his hand, a good natured grin crawling onto his face. "So, the whole co-vert ops bit, this info you got me ... you keep giving me serious deets on these cases - are you like my Deep Throat or somethin'?"

V inhaled quick, which wasn't smart while drinking vodka. His eyes stung as the potent liquid hit his nose and he blinked as he attempted to respond.

"What?" he managed, throat hoarse in-between coughs.

The cop looked confused, his hand halfway raised before deciding that patting him on the back was....unmanly? Inappropriate? Instead he moved V's vodka further away.

"You know. Deep Throat. The Nixon informant? Watergate scandal. They called him Deep Throat." V's coughing had subsided, he took another sip of his drink. The cop was dangerous, smelling like that and blurting out sexually laced comments, and worse, being completely unaware of it. With delicious images swirling in his brain, V attempted to keep his gaze normal and tried not to look like he could pounce O'Neal and press him against the nearest wall. Gruff accent, busted nose, scotch breath and all.

"You gonna make it?" O'Neal joked. He relaxed, sitting back in his seat. "As I was saying, before I thought you were gonna need the Heimlich, you're sorta my informant. My Deep Throat. Get it?"

V couldn't help the grin that split his face. He was sure his face would hurt tomorrow. He hadn't done so much grinning in ... well ever in his life. He

certainly wouldn't mind being this guy's Deep Throat, which surprised him because he always took, never gave. As with everything, he kept sex on the surface and didn't give a damn about emotions. Didn't want to run the risk of getting caught up in anything deeper. But he found that he didn't care how he had this man. Just that he'd have him. With his eyes, that were sure to be glowing, V aimed the smirk at the cop and lowered his voice. "I get it. And I don't mind being your Deep Throat. Not a bit."

O'Neal's smile wavered and he blinked, starting to look slightly confused, like it had started off a joke, but why the hell wasn't it funny? "Sure ... great." He swirled his drink, the ice clinking. "So..." he hastily changed the subject. "Besides the freelancing, what do you do? I can't imagine that brings in anything to live on, but you don't look like you're hurtin' for cash."

V was caught off guard for a second. What would work?

I'm a warrior that kills these undead pricks that want to exterminate my race and I'm pledged to protect my King and his Queen. Plus I'm a vampire, hovering at the 300 year mark, that runs the security for the Brotherhood's compound. Oh and lemme tell you about my hand!

Fuck. Yeah that would go down a treat.

"I'm in IT."

The cop raised an eyebrow as he slowly ran his eyes over V's body. Calculating. "Yeah. Sure. And I'm a fuckin' ballerina." He placed his drink down and turned to face him. "You don't look or act like someone who spends all his time writing code. Geek Squad? I'm not buyin' it."

"What makes you say that?"

"The way you look. Move. Hold yourself. It doesn't take a genius to notice that you do more than just the weekly work out. Plus you're like me, scanning the corners even when there's nothing going on." O'Neal signaled the bartender. "You don't wanna spill, that's fine, but don't try and bullshit me."

Observant fucker. It would be easier if his cop was stupid because V really had to watch what he was putting off, especially since this hardass also managed to put him at ease. Dangerous ground. He took the reports and

photos in the envelope he had stuck in the back of his pants and put it on the bar. "I'm not bullshitting you O'Neal, just keeping it covert. I got your IT right here and I'm going to get back to you tomorrow on a few other deets."

V felt a vibration in his pocket. "Just a sec," he said and quickly checked the message.

*You're covering Phury's shifts. At Havers. He's OK.
W.*

V clutched his glass, downed the rest of his Goose and laid a couple of bills on the bar. Phury, despite the hair and threads, was a tough bastard. But it didn't matter, his brother was hurt, V was lying about his whereabouts, and now destiny called. The whole thing was a heavy weight on V's chest.

"I gotta go."

The cop touched V's forearm. The sensation of someone not afraid of touching him was new. The fear, in reality, was probably the safer and smarter option. The tats, the attitude, the premonitions and the killer hand all came together to make the perfect avoidance package. But this guy didn't seem to care. That coupled with the fact that he was too close and his addictive scent still lingered was all bad news. Their encounters were getting more irresistible instead of growing old. V had counted on it getting old.

It was more than that though and V knew it. He felt warm inside and not because of the drinks or poorly ventilated hole-in-the-wall bar. He'd actually just sat and talked to someone for hours ... and laughed. Not all work and bullshit. Normal behaviour for most, but for him, brand new territory

O'Neal sighed. "Listen... I didn't mean to get up all in your biz. If you want to play the sneaky ninja then, whatever, but thanks for this."
He touched the envelope and managed a small lopsided smile.

V felt it down to his bones and almost smiled back. Since when had things like the guy's scent and smile and twisted humor mattered?

"True. I'll catch ya," he said. And O'Neal let him go.

He headed to one of the side streets and dematerialized home. He headed up to the main house, set on finding the King. Instead he was met in the foyer by one very pissed off Zsadist.

V walked right up to his Brother, Zsadist, both with scowling stares firmly in place.

"Glad you could make it," Z said flatly.

"You miss me?" V replied. He didn't take Z's shit anymore than Z took his.

The Brother studied him for a moment before he spoke again. "Where the hell were you?"

V crossed his arms, mimicking Z's stance. "I was off duty. That's where."

"Rhage went by your place. You weren't there, even when you said you were. Now, not that I give a rat's ass what you do, who you do, or where you do it, but when it starts messing up my schedule and it's Phury on the gurney--"

"I was in route, Z. Prior to that is noneofya. You feel me?"

Z made a derisive snort and adjusted his holster. "Yeah I feel you're full of shit, but whatever. As long as you're here and you pull your weight while Phury's on the mend."

He turned away from V and walked towards the door.

Like V had ever not pulled his weight. Fuck Z and his bad attitude. Seemed Bella hadn't made that much of an impact on his sparkling personality; not that V was Mr. Social Graces. Never the less, these next few days of patrolling with Baldie Sunshine were gonna bite the big one.

~*~

"Yeah, copy that. I'll catch ya tomorrow, Cruz." Butch turned off the police radio, way past the point of ready to be off duty. It'd been a shit day. No wait, make that a shit week. Sure, it was only Tuesday, but that didn't make it any less true. His new CI or informant or ... buddy or whatever the hell you wanted to call him, V, had come through with some seriously on the mark intel. How the guy knew all that, Butch wasn't sure he

wanted to know. Truth was, they were damn close to breaking the case, thanks in no small part to his mysterious, tattooed drinking partner.

A drink sounded pretty good at the moment, Butch thought. He was off for the next forty eight, but he'd worked his fingers to the bone for the last three days. He tried to chalk it all up to commitment to the job, but he also knew he was like a dog with a bone. He got a good whiff of the bad guys and he wouldn't stop hunting. There was also the minor detail of his golden egg laying informant going MIA for the last three days. No random V drive bys at crime scenes, no Red Sox cap wearin' pop-ins, no phone calls, no nothing. Part of Butch knew the scary looking mofo could take care of himself, but another part worried that maybe V's avenue to intelligence had caught on that he was snitching. Had he been offed for helping the police? Had he been killed just doing ... whatever it was he did? Was the fucker mad at Butch for something?

Oh that was just grand! What would it matter if some banger or, at the very least, undercover banger, was pissed off at him? Butch wasn't some girl that should worry because V had disappeared for a few days. He was loathe to admit that he'd grown accustomed to V's visits. It wasn't that the guy was such great company, either. Okay, maybe he was a little more than tolerable. It was just that he could talk shit with a guy like V and not worry that he'd get his boxers in a twist. Butch had tried to make friends outside the force before. Yeah that went over like a terd in the punch bowl. First mention of a shoot out, meth labs, blood spatter, or gang initiations, and people suddenly needed to rush home. Butch couldn't talk about the office, so that left him with little to talk about. He knew his job, his Sox, the news, women, and booze. That's it. Luckily, V knew the same. They didn't have to work at it or edit anything.

Plus ... the jack ass could be really funny.

"Where you at, asshole?" Butch asked himself before heading to his favorite watering hole.

~*~

V glanced across the alley, watching Z stalk the left. The back of the shortly shaven head was black against the pale metal fencing, thick neck craning down each cross street. Three days with the guy and he was still as warm as a snow bank. There hadn't been any action to keep them busy and V was starting to get antsy. Balling his long fingers into fists, he

followed Z's stride. He'd been Brotherhood bound for days but his mind wasn't anywhere near the compound. Hell, it wasn't even here on patrol. Anything at this point would be a welcome distraction. This was his last shift covering for Phury and dawn couldn't come fast enough. He'd had about enough of the pleasure of working with Z; all the warm and fuzzy was just more than male could handle.

V felt the weight of his smokes in his pocket and was itching to light up. They stayed there. He never lit up on patrol, it blocked out the smell. And the smell was what they'd been chasing all night. Z stopped suddenly, arm still hanging by his side, his large hand spread out in a signal of warning. V watched, moving quickly up ahead, crouching down to get a read out of the street, when the smell hit him. Lessers.

V got a good look, group of five across a side street, and going by the smell not a group of hardcore veterans. One of them did however have the unmistakable light hair. But they were crowded up so V couldn't assess them much more than that. And that is when he got a vibration in his pocket.

He flicked the razor open. Blue light illuminating a missed call. It was from the cop and no voice mail had been left. V grinned. He could imagine his hardass now, calling, then hearing the voice mail and snapping the phone shut, maybe letting off a few choice words. O'Neal wouldn't be the leave-a-message type. V noted the time ... two in the morning. The cop probably just got in. Maybe sitting on his couch in his work clothes, top buttons undone, scotch in one hand and a scowl on his face. V chuckled as he shut the phone. What would he be calling for? Work? Maybe just to check in...

His thoughts were severed when V was hit with a series of small stones to the head. When he looked in the direction of fire, he saw a very pissed off Z. Bristled, his eyes black and that stone cold aura whipping off him in waves. He made a very stern point at him, and then silently directed V to go round the back. While he indicated he would go up front. When he was in position, Z nodded at him before slipping silently down the street. He ran low and fast, knives drawn in both hands, face hard.

Vast difference from working with Rhage, his normal partner. Rhage loved the attention, a true Hollywood. Completely aware he was their best fighter and soaking it up, he would saunter into a pack of lessers spouting

crap at them, and V would pick them off one by one 'til they were obliterated. Unless Hollywood's alter ego decided it wanted a spin and V would smartly stand back and wait till a quivering mass of Rhage was all that was left. Then it was all about getting Showboat to his Mary, while V set his hand to clean up.

Z was different. Z was all business, and it made a dull night drag out even more. At least with Rhage there wasn't much time for thought. The non-stop talking, while on occasion having the power to cause V's brain to dribble out his ears, did manage to keep him from thinking too much. Especially when most thoughts these days were focused on one particular thing.

V snuck in from the side, sidling up to the lesser standing to the back. He waited until he got a visual on Z before introducing blondie's ass to the ground, dropping him before twisting his neck to a satisfying crack. Piss easy. Actually the entire three shifts were worse than a two day system check. Painful and entirely pointless. All he wanted was to scratch in a couple of lesser jar notches so he could get back to moonlighting as the informant.

He was a complete and utter sad fuck.

He had let the human male get under his skin like a freshly rolled Turkish. Under the skin and taking a long draw while thinking of rolling yet another. He had even asked Fritz to buy some Lag just to sit on the Pit's counter, occasionally opening it just to take in the smell. The smell wasn't quite the same as the man himself. It certainly didn't curse as much.

Complete and utter sad fuck.

He didn't feel the slice to his upper arm, rather the force of the movement knocking him off balance. Sliding his blade from his harness, V spun on his heel to slam it hilt deep in the lesser's chest. Sweet stinking black blood splattering onto his face.

The shining edge of another blade sticking out from the centre of the pale chest surprised him. Looking up he found Z's face curled into a snarl, scar distorted, glaring at him over the lesser's shoulder.

"Where the fuck is your brain?" Z leaned into the blade before sharply pulling it out. V did the same; both watched the lesser drop to the ground.

V glanced down at his jacket, jagged slice through the leather, feeling the warmth of his blood trickling down his arm. He would have to sew that bitch up. And he'd fore go the Lignocaine just to feel the burn.

Z wiped the blade on the lesser's trousers before sliding it back into place. "Next time I let him carve your stupid ass up."

Next time came sooner than they expected.

"Shit," V yelled, just as five more of the baby powdered bastards rushed them from a blind corner.

Butch spilt some of his coffee when two hundred and sixty pounds of big man plopped down in the booth across from him.

"Jesus H. Christ!" he caught the cup before the steaming hot liquid could hit his crotch.

"Easy there cop," V deadpanned. "Did I scare ya?"

Butch was not in the mood. This joker showed up from out of nowhere, hadn't seen hide nor hair of him for three days, and then he almost lays waste to a perfectly good cup of joe. Oh hell no.

"No," he snapped. "You didn't scare me, but a little fucking respect for the caffeine would be nice."

V's eyes widened at his sharp tone. Good.

"Damn, who shit in your corn flakes? I'll buy you another cup."

"I don't want you buying me jack, besides," Butch finished wiping up the mess, "refills are free."

They both sat in a stoney silence for God only knows how long. Butch knew his foul mood was showing, but the pissy temper was rolling off V too. What the hell did he have to be so irritable about? He wasn't the one left hanging for days. He wasn't the one that called and got not so much as a fuck off as a reply. Ah hell, now he sounded like a harping woman.

"So ..." Butch broke the silence first. Anything to keep from going down the road of Sir Nags A lot. He looked at the scowling, sinister fuck sitting

across from him. Too bad he wasn't going to heed the warning signs that V wore stamped on his face on a daily basis.

"Nice arm decor you got there," he indicated V's wrapped right arm. "Did you piss somebody off with that mouth of yours?"

V just looked at him. "Nice hat, asshole," he said finally.

Butch touched the bill of his cap. It was his old Sox cap. Identical to the one V had worn days ago. "Just so you know, I've had this cap for years."

"Mmmm hmmm."

"God you're fucking irritating sometimes. I ain't biting though. What happened to your arm?"

V answered with a silent stare that managed to piss him off more.

"Seriously, how old is the silent treatment? I think I did that shit when I was ten. Nice job leaving me hanging by the way. Not that I needed your help, but normally when someone says 'I'll get back to you with more details' that means they'll actually get back to you."

He thought he saw a gleam in V's eyes before the big bastard leaned forward in the booth. "And I'm irritating sometimes? I'm not your go fetch it boy, but I'll answer the question if you'd ever just shut up and listen; give a brother two seconds to get a word in."

Butch glared back at him. "One ... two," he counted.

"I got stabbed. Satisfied now?"

Butch sat back a little, eyeballing the bandage again. "Stabbed? For real?"

V cocked an eyebrow at him. "Nah, for shits and giggles. Yes, for real."

Shaking his head, he laughed dryly. "Yeah and you're in IT, my ass. What, did you piss off a keyboard? Laptop get tired of your smart ass mouth? I can sympathize."

He saw V's face crack at that. "I know,"

Butch kept on, keen on the idea of getting past the pissing contest, "Cause see, that's where most crime comes from. Nerdy tech gangs. Fucking IT guys getting all bent outta shape over solitaire and minesweeper. Causing riots and geek on geek violence."

V actually laughed then, deep and full, dark head tilted back, hand across his stomach. The guy's entire face changed to something Butch hadn't known he possessed. The menacing glare was gone, as was the crease he always wore between his eyebrows. His light eyes were closed, crinkling up at the corners. His mouth tugged wide within the dark goatee, white teeth flashing in the tan skin. He looked ... well, not bad ... for a guy. Less evil and more ... whatever. Wiping at his eyes, a grin spread across V's face. A grin that was still a little dark but completely real. He didn't wear it long though, so even when Butch thought something might be wrong with his teeth - he couldn't say for sure.

Regardless, the tension had broken, V settling back into the seat with a relaxed roll of his shoulders.

"So ... can I see it?"

V motioned for coffee from the passing waitress. "See what?"

"The keyboard marks on your ass. Whaddya think I mean?" Butch said, indicating to the bandage on V's arm.

The big guy looked a little confused as a cup of the diner's finest was set in front of him. "You wanna see? How much coffee you had?" V joked, but he obviously agreed, pulling up the sleeve of his black tee and unwrapping the crepe.

~*~

V watched as the cop leaned over the small and slightly unsteady table, eyes on the dressing on his upper bicep. Peeling back the bandage, O'Neal winced at the jagged line. It wasn't a clean cut; V's own fucking fault. He had been caught off guard and had moved back as the serrated blade had sliced his arm.

Bad move really.

It'd taken him longer than planned to get around to mending it too, since

more lessers decided to join the party and give him and Z an interesting fight.

The deep cut started just under the curve of his deltoid and curved across his bicep and was nice and dirty by the time he got back to the Pit. Annoyed at himself for getting it, V had sat in his bath and sewn it himself. It was about as expertly done as an eight year old with a cross stitch because no matter his skill with a needle, sewing yourself up one handed did not work. He didn't numb it either, each sharp burn reminding him that he was a complete fuckwit. When he wasn't with the cop he was thinking about him, and he couldn't afford to keep getting sliced. He had to learn to pull the shades down while on the job. The other Brothers did it. It was just a completely different experience for V. He had never had someone on his mind before.

"Wow, that's pretty decent. Eleven stitches." O'Neal then eyed him with that look that meant he was being assessed. "You stitched it yourself."

The voice was low and gravelly, it wasn't a question but it was probing for something. V nodded before reaching for the bandage. But something solid and warm held his arm in place.

O'Neal had scooped a hand behind V's arm bringing it forward, the other hand touching around the wound. His hands were large and warm, a newly healing scar over his knuckles, the pads of his fingers rough as they prodded. V inhaled sharply, but not from pain.

The cop looked up at V from beneath his cap, the scowl gone, the warm hazel eyes softened. "Still sore?"

V nodded, not taking his eyes from O'Neal's. "Yeah ... you could say that."

He shifted on the bench, feeling like maybe the cop was reading him better than he'd thought. But if he did, he didn't show it. The guy settled back, hanging his arm comfortably across the back of the booth, sinking his ass lower into the red worn seat.

"So are you gunna tell me what you really do?" V smiled, re-wrapping his arm and mirroring the cop's position as he got himself comfortable.

"Give it up already, O'Neal. It's Freelance and lets just leave it at that."

Butch tilted his head, raising his other hand up to hold his chin like he was in serious thought. The smile in his eyes gave him away. "Freelance, huh? Right then. Whaddya charge?"

The cop's face was trying to keep like he was serious, but he was failing miserably. Fuck he had missed this. "S'cuse me?"

"Well you're freelance ain't ya? For hire. What's your fee? I got a neighbor with a cat that howls all night. Annoys the ever-living shit outta me. Think I could hire you? Y'know, take care of this problem for me." O'Neal leaned forward onto the table, now grinning unabashedly. "How much to off a cat?"

V, for the second time that night, laughed. It felt good; he could get used to it. "I'm not a hit man," He leaned forward on the table too. "... and I'm not killing pussy for you."

That cracked the cop up. O'Neal banged the table with his fist as he laughed hard. V laughed along with him; hard not to. The cop was wiping at his eyes when the waitress set his meal in front of him. Some kinda greasy shit. He opened his burger and reached for the sauce.

"That stuff'll kill you," V winkled his nose, because Fritz's homemade angus, it was not.

"Then prepare to die. Order somethin', I'm buying you dinner."

V chuckled. "I can pay."

O'Neal shook his head as he hailed the waitress over, ordering another of what he was having. "I guessed after seein' your car. But you bought all the drinks the other night. Plus your info was a big help. So, thanks. This one's on me."

V nodded. So his cop had a thing about balance and people being "too nice". It was an admirable quality really. Something only someone with a big helping of shit in their past would understand.

"If we're gunna start datin' cop, we gotta start talking about better places."

Butch chuckled as he popped a chip into his mouth. "Figures you'd be high

maintenance."

~*~

The next day Butch pulled his Crown Vic into the station's parking lot just as his phone started going off. He struggled to lean back enough to slip it from his back pocket and ended up laying down on the horn in the process.

"Damn it!" He certainly got a frown from the crime techs crossing in front of him. Damn squints and their delicate sensibilities.

Finally managing to pull the phone from his jeans, he flicked the phone open and barked into the receiver. He didn't recognize the number, but it seemed everyone wanted a piece of Detective O'Neal today.

"O'Neal." He knew he was bitin' someone's head off, but he didn't give a shit.

"Daaaamn. You not get enough coffee this morning?"

Okay. He hadn't expected a call from V. He could almost hear the smirk in the other man's voice.

"Oh. Nah, I didn't recognize the number." Butch opened the car door planting one foot outside as he sat back in the seat. "Thought you might be selling insurance or a holiday retreat to the middle of don't give a fuck."

Butch heard a snort into the phone. "Yeah that's me alright, cheap suit and a slick sales pitch."

The guy had probably never known the meaning of the word cheap. "So, what's up?" Butch ran a hand up the leather of the steering wheel. "I'm at a scene so don't have much time for a chat."

A low chuckle. "Hold on Detective O'Neal. Don't go getting your badge in a bunch." There was an exhale, the guy was probably smoking one of those expensive hand rolled he carried. "You're the one that doesn't want to be left hangin'. I'm calling to let you know that I can't get any feed from that other security camera. Not like last time. The damn thing cuts off at just the right time. I'd maybe consider looking at an insider."

"Yeah?" Butch was surprised on two counts. One, that someone on the inside could be involved. Two, that V somehow managed to call him Detective O'Neal while sounding respectful and taunting at the same time.

"No kidding, huh? Sounds like more than a lucky coincidence."

"No kidding." V exhaled into the phone again and for some reason the imagery was relaxing, even though Butch hadn't smoked in double digit years.

"So, you working on that case now or something new?"

Butch smiled to himself. "Hey, you know where I can find a nosey bastard to step in on my case file? I'm looking for someone reeeeeeal pushy. Preferably an arrogant SOB too."

"Fuck you, cop," V said, but Butch could hear the humor. "You asked for my help or does your memory fail?"

"Yeah, yeah. My memory is just fine lately and don't remind me that I asked you in. I bet shaking you is like getting rid of a bad case of--"

"Easy. I don't need in on your shady sex life, true?"

Butch had to laugh, considering his total lack of a sex life. "I hear ya. Bet you'd be all up in my biz about that too."

"If I was interested, O'Neal, believe me - you'd know it. Guaran-damn-teed."

Well. What did one say to that, exactly? Or how was one even supposed to take th-

"When do you want me to drop off what I've got?" V asked just as someone started yelling for Butch to 'check this out'.

"Look it, I'm being summoned by the Lords of CSI. I'll call you when I get off. If I get off."

"K. Later O'Neal."

Then the line went dead. Butch stared at the phone for a moment, not sure how he felt about V's call or how he was supposed to feel ... or if he was supposed to feel anything. After all, it was just a fucking phone call, but Butch slid his phone back into his pocket with that same feeling he got after most interactions with V. Like there was an inside joke between them, but he hadn't quite gotten the punchline.

Rather than rack his brain on the missing link, he strode up to the fresh faced and eager uni that was paired with a more weathered veteran that looked way beyond 'over it'.

"Gimme the scoop."

The young uni was more than ready to download all he knew. "We came on the scene first and I set up a parameter because that's what was needed first and foremost. Then--"

"Two words, detective," the senioredd uni jumped in. "Dead. Hooker."

"So nothing new under the sun?"

"Well ... not quite." The man waved Butch over to a body lying beneath a sheet. "She's mid thirties. Brunette. Too pretty, so maybe a high end call girl? Still clothed and no sex crime suspected, but..." He lifted the sheet. "She was bound hand and foot with rope burns on her wrists where it looks like she'd tried to escape. The side of her neck is slit and while there's a shitload of blood here, it still ain't enough. It looks like ... well, she's so pale. It looks like she was bled out."

"Fuck." Butch ran a hand through his hair, his brain calculating all he saw and heard. It wasn't a simple calculation, except to say this day was for sure going to be shit.

Vishous had gotten about four hours sleep, then spent the day buried in research for the Brotherhood like it was some kind of penance. He subconsciously started glancing at his phone a few hours before dusk.

If I was interested O'Neal, believe me, you'd know it.

You'd know it, my ass, he thought. Oh he was interested alright, but the cop didn't know it. Didn't have a fucking clue. Which was all for the best. His wiser half told him this was the perfect time to cut and run. He'd gotten himself knifed, but hooked the cop up with some decent intel to

probably solve the case. The guy wasn't asking too many questions - yet. At least now he had a connection on the inside if ever the Brotherhood needed some help.

Oh who the hell was he kidding? Since when had the Brotherhood ever needed help from a human? That's right. Just this side of never in your life. He needed to step off from Brian O'Neal, like yesterday.

The sound of the door to the Pit being opened alerted him. Only one person ever just waltzed in.

"Hey, V?" Rhage shouted from the door. "What's doing?"

He was trying to sound casual enough, but V could tell it was forced. Rhage was here with a purpose and he was not in the mood to watch him fail at playing it cool. The brother was about as inconspicuous a barge load of pink flamingoes and he was currently wearing his "I really gotta talk to you about something" face.

"Not much," V played along and waved him in. "What's got you so antsy? You get into Fritz's eclairs again?"

Rhage laughed, but even that was a little forced. "I'm not antsy."

V gave him a look.

"Okay, yeah, too much sugar I guess. You know I gotta lay off and stick to the healthy stuff Mary stashes for me. I mean, some of it's good, but you know how I like my sweets."

V clicked a few keys before looking up with a highly arched brow. "Okay man. Out with it. You did not come down here to talk menus with me and you beat around the bush about as gracefully as your beast at the dinner table - so spill. What're you doing here and what do you want?"

Rhage made for the sofa and parked his two hundred and seventy five pounds in the middle of it. "Fair enough. I suck at subtle, so why bother, right? I'm here about your extra curricular activities."

V abandoned the Toys to roll up a fresh Turkish. He needed something to do with his hands if Rhage was hell bent on having a pow-wow.

"What activities?" he asked casually.

"Man, if I suck at playing shit off, then you suck royally at the clueless routine. You know exactly what activities. The ones that keep you so busy on your nights off. The ones that keep you gone from the mansion when normally you're hold up here in the Pit. The ones that you felt the need to lie about the night Phury got hurt when you said you were at your penthouse."

"What about 'em?" V lit up and blew the smoke in Rhage's direction, knowing he didn't like it.

Rhage waved the air before giving him some creative hand gestures. "I don't know, so that's why I'm asking. You tell me what's up. All I know is you haven't been here on any of your nights off, more than once I came by to shoot the shit and lo and behold, no V. No one else knows where you are, so my powerful skills of deduction--"

"You went to check up on me?" V interrupted.

"Eeeeeasy. I didn't put out APBs if that's what you're thinking. I just listened to see if anyone mentioned it and I asked Fritz if he'd seen you. Chill, I didn't go tattlin' on you, but that right there tells me something ain't kosher. I know you like to think I'm some goofy pain in the ass, and fair enough, I have my moments. But I'm also one observant pain in the ass. You've been stepping out and you've been doing an awful lot of poking into police cases." He nodded towards the Four Toys.

"You nosey sonuva--"

"Hey, you're the one that left papers laying around where anyone with preternatural eyesight could see 'em. Point that gloved hand elsewhere. I know you. You don't do favors for humans. So for the sake of argument, let's say I'm just asking 'cause I care about your well being. What's doing, V? You got some woman you're scoping on the police force? You go and get a jones for Cagney or Lacey, because let me tell you brother, the shit will eventually hit the fan. Just like it did with me and Mary. I see you doing the same crap I did and I know what's up. Wrath won't care that I've already paved the way and took a beating for it. He's still gonna rip you--"

V held up a hand to stop him. "I am not hooking up with some woman,

Rhage. So you can drop it right now."

Rhage crossed his arms in his classic way. "Fine. Keep your secrets. Just don't be counting on your brothers not noticing shit. If I noticed then...

"How is it anyone's biz what I do on my time?"

"Oh come off it, man. You're the smartest guy I know so don't gimme that. You ought to know how this shit plays out. It'll be the King's business if it starts crowding your patrols and..." Rhage took a break to breathe and fish for a lollipop. "Z had something to say about it too. He wasn't thrilled about the other night and how you handled yourself."

That Z could said anything about anyone else's issues jumped all over him.

"Z needs to sort out his damn problems with me, with me."

"Cool down or you'll pop a vein. I'm just saying the guy was a bit pissed."

"How is that news? He's always pissed."

Rhage nodded to the healing scar on V's arm. "You don't get slashed, V. Ever."

"I was unlucky this time 's all."

"Exactly," Rhage lifted his large frame off the couch to stick the lolli wrapper in the back pocket of his jeans. "You happen to remember the last time I got all jacked up?"

V looked at him for a moment, knowing exactly where this was headed, but refusing the pave the way. "Six, maybe seven months. What's your point?"

"That's when I first met Mary. Couldn't get her off my mind and it fucked with my head because I wasn't coming out with it. I was hiding it from myself ... and my family. You follow?"

V did follow. Completely. But he didn't like where Rhage was leading.

"I told you, I am not stepping out for some woman. If you don't believe

me, that's not really my problem, but I'd appreciate it if you'd kindly butt the fuck out."

Rhage twirled his tootsie pop then pulled it out to point at V. "You always get pissy when I try to look out for your ass. I'm just checking on you, brother mine. So chill out before I have to ... sit on you or something. Got it?"

V smirked at the six foot seven inches, two hundred seventy plus pounds of threat. They both knew that V had the number on just about everyone with his hand, but they also knew he'd never use it on Rhage. If it came down to brute strength, Rhage could grapple, win, and sit on V until he laughed himself silly. And he would absolutely laugh himself silly about it. No doubt.

"Fine. I'm chillin'. You buttin' out now?"

Rhage nodded. "So long as you know I ain't blind, nor will I come down with a sudden case of the dumb. You watch yourself and don't come back cut up anymore, then it's all good. You're nocturnal activities will remain your biz."

Don't get hurt and don't act a fool. If he could do that, Rhage would drop it. Well, V couldn't ask for much more than that.

"Deal," he said, smirking and sticking out his gloved hand for Rhage to shake. Rhage took it in a firm grip. "You know you can't intimidate me, V. Not even with that hand. You know I'm too hard headed to be run off."

"Yeah, I know. That's why you're the perpetual pain in my ass. But it's cool."

"Alright my brother," Rhage flashed a grin. "I'm off."

As he headed to the door, V felt the vibration in his pocket just before his phone started chirping. "O'Neal" flashed across the screen. Every intention of answering it, he felt eyes on him and looked up to see Rhage studying him, hard.

"You mind?"

Rhage gave him one more of his category of looks, this one the "Uh huh. I

thought so" look, before he left.

V flicked his phone open before the door even closed behind the Brother.
"Hey."

Butch's voice was different. Low and mumbled. "V," he said, sounding like he was well past just a few drinks.

V straightened, knowing the difference between the sound of a happy buzz and someone who was trying to drown something or themselves.
"What's up cop?"

Butch must've shuffled around because there was a cacophony of noises on the other end. "I'm at the bar."

Vishous knew that tone and slight slur for what it was. Been there, done that. So been there. "Shit day, cop?"

He heard the clinking of glass on the other end. "You know it."

It was all he could do not to pop off with something lame like "Need some company?" or "Want a drinkin' partner?" V was anything but lame, but he'd be a piss poor liar if he said he didn't want to bolt out the door and meet with O'Neal right that second. Problem was, he was not going to insinuate himself into the guy's life. He might be completely guilty of being a pushy SOB and damn sure he wanted to get ... closer, but inviting himself to share drinks with the guy was just plain desperate.

"So look it," Butch said, suddenly sounding like he was chomping on some peanuts. "You thirsty or what?"

Bingo.

"Sure enough." V actually managed to sound casual.

"Well I'm not leavin' this stool any time soon. Just sayin'."

"Gotcha. It'll be about ten or fifteen."

"S cool. See ya then." And with that, the call dropped. V looked at the

door to the Pit. The door that Rhage had just walked out, reminding him not to let personal shit get in the way of Brotherhood business. The door that V had stared at all the times he'd promised himself that work was priority and Irish cops were somewhere way on down the list. He needed some space and time away from O'Neal because proximity to the male was directly proportional to V getting cases of stupidity. He'd be wise to finish working on the security proposal for the clinic and let the cop wrestle his own demons. Right. Sit his happy ass at home, focus on business, and leave Butch O'Neal the hell alone.

V slid his cell phone into his pocket, picked up his lighter and tapped it against the desk in thought.

"Ah fuck it." He tossed his lighter in his other pocket and was out the door in less than ten seconds.

Pushing the dingy doors open, V recognized him sitting at the bar. Broad shoulders hunched over, elbows resting on the scratched wood. Faded coat sitting next to a tumbler of scotch.

The cop looked beat. A whole different side. O'Neal was such a mix of don't-fuck-with-me and steel balls that V couldn't picture the man looking as exhausted as he did at that moment. And the sad thing was, V didn't care.

V moved to stand near him, side brushing his arm, the scent of the cop was clean soap and male, mixed with a little Lag on the side. "I can see you're way ahead of me."

Butch raised his face to look at V, letting out a sigh and a nod. And then came that smile, as tired as it was, it was still the same. Hazel eyes warm, lines crinkling at the corners, slightly lopsided, hint of a dimple. That's right, V the pussy knew about the dimple.

Butch handed V a tumbler. Goose. Neat and cold, just like he liked it. He picked up his coat and moved for a corner booth. Serious biz if it meant the corner. It was tucked away, dark, and made to have *those* kinds of talks. Butch sat down with a thump, leaning his head back against the worn fake leather, taking a big breath in before meeting V's gaze. Intense and searching.

V waited, seated across from him. He wasn't about to get pushy about the whole thing, even though the cop was taking his sweet fucking time telling

him what was what.

Butch leaned forward on his forearms, looking down at his Lag before looking up at V. "I've got a case."

"The one with the security cameras that I-"

"No. 'Nother one."

He could tell from his tone alone that this was different. Didn't even need to ask.

"You need some recon and I'm there. No need to ask. Got any leads?"

"Got fuck all right now." O'Neal ran a hand through his ruffled hair. Looked like it'd been about the nintieth time he'd done it too. "Dead female. Hooker, but ... shit V..."

Butch let the sentence trail off. His face alone said everything his words couldn't.

"She was tied up before he ... hell, they? I dunno. She was bound hand and foot before they hurt her. It's like ... they just wanted her to bleed. Nothing came back on the rape kit. She still had a wad of cash on her. They ... they just wanted her to hurt. No other motive to speak of. I've never seen anything like it ... and I've been out there awhile."

"Yeah." Vishous nodded, imagining that no matter how long you worked a street, there were always dark corners that could freeze your soul. He'd been a Brother for over two hundred years and there was still shit that shocked him. He remained silent a few beats and when it became obvious that the cop wasn't interested in spilling any more deets, V thought he might do some sharing of his own. Highly out of character, but then, wasn't that his new creed?

"I know what you mean," he began. "I thought I'd seen it all when one night, a good few years ago, I came up on this male. A fucking kid actually. Looked like at least five lesse- ...*gang* members had worked him over. Beaten to death. Literally. The young was scrawny too, pre-trans, uh, preteen, and ... shit. Totally un-fucking-necessary. No other reason than to hurt someone. Couldn't identify him by looks, you feel me?"

The cop nodded into his glass, his expression one of absolute knowing, of seeing exactly the same kind of shit on a regular. It wasn't appropriate to be thinking kindred spirits and all that bullshit at the moment, but damn.

"S fucked up," O'Neal said between swallows.

V ordered another round. He got the need to drink away sorrows. It wasn't the healthiest habit - if you were human - but damned if it didn't work. The drinks came and V placed a hand over O'Neal's, uncurling his warm fingers from the empty glass and placing a fresh one into his large palm.

The cop just looked at him intensely, eyes not even seeing the scotch.

He had to keep the touching to a minimum. "You been home yet?"

~*~

Butch shook his head. Slowly, no need for the whole bar to start spinnin'

He'd come.

But did Butch really think he wouldn't?

He'd been sitting at the bar for a good half an hour before his hands reached for his phone. Flicking it open and closed a few times before calling.

Most cases Butch could keep from seeping in. Being a cop meant you developed a tank armour, letting the shit and brutality slide off. Washing off the crap like washing blood off in the shower. It was just this was one he had found an opening.

Butch hadn't even thought to ask Cruz. Sure he was his partner, but he had never been able to do this with him. Cruz, while he had been a cop and in homicide for nearly as long as he had, didn't have the darkness that Butch sometimes felt down to his soul.

V had it. He got it. It was one of those things you recognised in other people. It went past the scary ass tattoos or the armored van aura. Butch could talk about the darkest things and V wouldn't flinch. It felt good to

have someone that got it.

"How long you been doing ... whatever th' hell it is you do?" Butch asked, tilting his glass. He'd actually slowed down on the drinking lately, for some reason more aware of how booze made you soft in the middle, but tonight he was tying it on like it was his job.

V swirled his Goose before taking a swallow. He could've sworn the guy actually grinned. It was a rare sight and Butch again got the impression he was missing out on an inside joke.

"Awhile, cop. Longer than you could imagine."

"Must've started right out of school then."

"Yeah. Guess you could say I was born to it. You?"

Butch nodded. "Oh yeah. Never wanted to do anything else. Protect and serve. That's me. Kinda messed up I guess. Considering."

"Considering what?"

"Ah ... nothing. Look, thanks for the drink." He sloopily clinked his amber filled glass against V's clear.

"Not a problem, O'Neal."

Butch polished off the last quarter inch of his Lag and set the glass down with a thud. "Hey, V?"

Vishous set his glass down too, lightly, and rolled it between his hands. "Yeah man?"

"Officially, the name's O'Neal. Brian O'Neal. Says it right there on my business card," he pointed to his jacket, rumpled in the booth. "But the guys on the squad, they call me Butch. I mean, that's my name. Butch. I don't even know who the fuck Brian O'Neal is anymore so ... y'know, you can - just call me Butch, alright?"

V looked like he was taking this bit of information in and processing it like a blueprint for a nuclear station. "Butch."

Butch raised his hand in a mock salute. "Tha's me."

The guy grinned then, second time that night, and said his name again. It wasn't that cool of a nickname, but whatever.

"Okay then, Butch. Let me ask you this? How do you propose we get your bleary eyed ass home tonight? Because now that we're on a nickname level, I can't let you drive in this condition."

Butch snorted with laughter. "Easy Vicodin. We ain't datin'. I can drive home just fine."

"Bullshit. Either I drive and drop you off or you're taking a cab. No sense in arguing with me either, Butch. 'Cause you're going no place with no keys."

"No- ah fuck me." Butch spied his keys dangling from V's fingers. Slick bastard must've taken them from his jacket pocket. How did he not notice? Possibly he was further gone than he thought. "Alright, alright," he threw his hands up in defeat. "Now I regret tellin' you to call me Butch, but somethin' tells me I'll regret arguing with ya mule head even more. Y' can drop me off after just one more for the road."

~*~

"Come on cop, where's your keys?" V adjusted his grip on O'Neal - no, make that Butch, to keep him from sliding onto the floor outside his apartment door. The guy was heavier than he looked and built solid, if not as hard packed as V.

Butch. Cop known as Butch. His buddy, Butch. He wasn't sure why it mattered, but for some reason the name seemed familiar. It opened up a door and made it feel like they'd known each other a lot longer than they had. The name had meaning.

"Hmmm?" Butch mumbled from his resting place on V's shoulder.

"Your key, man. Where is it?"

"Umm....dunno. Thought you had 'em." He lifted his head slightly. "We

'ome already?"

"You are home. And unless I find your damn key, you're gonna be camping at your front door. None of these keys work the lock."

Butch's head flopped back down. "Oh, *that* key. The key, the key. Always you with th' keys. Back pocket."

V felt his eyebrow shoot up. "Unless you want me feeling around your ass, you're gonna want to get it." Promising as the idea sounded.

His head rolled on V's shoulder as he mumbled, inches away from scotch oblivion. "Don't care ... but we still ain't datin', s' don't get too excited."

Butch laughed at his own joke while V leaned him up against the wall. He couldn't help but smile a little at his cop. Butch had every right to be sloppy drunk after a shit day. He got the feeling that Butch never let himself go this far, but by Fade, he'd earned it honest. V knew exactly the kind of thing that made you want to get black out drunk and none of it was pretty. Butch had never said exactly why the case had gotten to him so bad, but he had the feeling the truth would out. It always did.

"Okay, work with me buddy," V tried to encourage when Butch wouldn't lean off the wall enough for him to reach any pockets. With one arm wrapped around the guy to hold him upright and the other arm around him to feel inside his back pocket for a key, it wasn't exactly as sexy as V had anticipated. It was more an awkward exercise. Still, the fact that his cop had a nice, sculpted ass had never been lost on him and sure as hell wasn't lost now.

V managed to pull him tight to one side while unlocking the door, getting them in, and closing the door to the small apartment. In truth, he could pick up a guy the size of Butch and fireman carry his ass to Boston and back without much effort, but no matter how drunk the guy was he'd still notice preternatural strength. And how did you explain that one?

Ah, it's cool. I do a lot of steriods, take supplements, and drink nutritional shakes. That'd be looooooots of steriods in the form of thousand year old warrior blood line and my nutrition happens to be female vampire blood, but y'know. It's all good.

Yeah. Right.

"Where's your bedroom?" V asked, walking in with Butch beside him.

"Quit flirtin'." He popped off, snickering against V's shoulder.

Definitely drunk, because only drunks 'snickered' like that and a sober Butch wouldn't even touch the issue of flirting if he knew what was wise. As it was though, V could probably say a lot worse and Butch would never remember.

"At least I bought you a drink before trying to go home with you."

"Yeah, yeah." Butch snorted and pointed without opening his eyes.
"Bedroom 's thatta way."

V followed the line of his hand to the kitchen. "Ah ... I don't think so cop."

Butch straightened against V's side, squinting his eyes open. "Oh ... right ... kitchen. Umm" And with that he slipped out of V's hold and clung to the wall, attempting to walk down the hallway. Slumping against the wall after a few steps.

V was at his side, slipping a strong arm around his waist, Butch was warm pressed against him and resting his head back against V's shoulder.

"Thanks V ... the bedroom's ... ah ... in the house somewhere." Butch mumbled into V's neck, sending the vibrations of his low gravelly voice through V's chest. He tightened his grasp on Butch's waist, resisting the urge to press his face into the cop's hair.

Fuck it. The cop had to quit being so damned attractive. It was taking all of V's reserve to not take him in close and breath him in. Press his lips against his, before sinking deep into that loud, wise-cracking mouth, tasting scotch and male and ... Butch. Instead V maneuvered the cop into the bedroom, dropping him onto the unmade bed with a bounce. "I'm glad I drove you home cop," V reached for one of Butch's shoes, pulling it off. "Even though you're turning out to be a demanding date, you are what I like to call dick in the dirt drunk."

Butch chuckled from his prone position on the bed, fingers fumbling for the edge of his T-shirt. "Sure, you might'a bought most of the drinks ... and no question, I'm drunk..." The cop attempted to pull the shirt over his

head, getting it stuck halfway. "... But I don't put out on a first date."

V grinned as he helped pull the shirt over his head. So Butch's accent thickened when he was pissed off and when he was drunk. Good to know.

Butch fell back onto the bed with a thump, his eyes drifting closed, mouth slightly ajar. His chest was bare, dusted with a smattering of dark hair. His large hand slung over his stomach, jeans sitting low on his hips. His hair was completely ruffled and a five o'clock shadow was dark on his jaw. V worked off the other shoe and left them both neatly at the foot of the bed.

"Butch?" he leaned over the sleeping man who was now out cold. V shook his head and smirked. Well no one could call the cop a light weight. In any sense of the word.

V took the opportunity to study him. Taking in the gentle rise and fall of his chest and the way his face looked much younger and more vulnerable in repose, dark lashes against his cheek. Butch O'Neal wasn't a man that'd you'd call beautiful, but he was still perfect. Running a finger down the side of his face, V traced his too many times broken nose, the line of his strong jaw, the high and flat Irish cheekbones. Running fingers over the parted lips, he felt the squeeze of his heart and V cursed himself under his breath.

He immediately popped home leaving his cop sprawled and dead to the world, strangely content at having taken care of him. Discontent at what it did to him.

~*~

It felt like a jackhammer was pulling over time against his skull. Plus, when the ass hat in the car behind him blew his horn, Butch felt like his eye balls were going to burst out of his head and roll across the dashboard.

How much had he drunk last night?

Oh that's right. A whole fucking lot. And there he was, thinking he'd cut

back. He intended to, but seeing that dead girl, hooker or no, cut him right down to the bone. It was too close, too familiar, and the best way he knew to heal was to kill the pain with booze. Make that, the only way he knew to heal. Too bad he hadn't discovered it until he was seventeen. There had seven years of guilt and punishment, self-imposed and dished out from dear old dad, piled onto a kid that had no escape or any way to dull the pain and hatred.

Butch gripped the steering wheel until the pain in his knuckles took some pressure off his brain. The jackass behind him blew his horn again. Like the wreck up ahead would get out of the way faster if he kept honking.

"I swear to God," he grumbled to himself, "one more time and I'm getting outta the car and kicking somebody's ass."

Thirty minutes later and fifteen minutes late, he finally got to the station.

"You look like hell," Jose greeted.

"Likewise."

Luckily someone had made a fresh pot of coffee and Butch clung to his mug like a lifeline while Jose settled a file on his desk.

"Call just came in. Thought I'd wait on you."

Sickened, Butch already knew it, but asked anyway. "What've we got?"

"Another body. Riley Park. Looks like the same deal, but..."

"What?"

"Unies said this one is younger ... and cut up. Worse job. If that's possible."

"Shit." Butch ran a hand over his face, realizing he'd forgotten to shave that morning. Fuck it. He did not need another dead girl.

Rhage thought his nose might seriously be on the blink when he charged down the dark alley, his dagger already pulled. It was all a bit Lethal Weapon, but without the humor. Especially when his eyes focused on the body and he got an eyeful of the top-grade crap the world liked to serve up.

"Oh. Hell." He came to a stop, obviously too abrupt for Phury and his leg because Rhage felt the warm, solid, Phury-sized weight bump into his back. And then the sharp intake of breath

"Scribe Virgin..." Phury breathed, holstering his weapon.

V was the last to catch up and if it wasn't all as somber as a funeral, Rhage might have considered giving him crap about being old and worn out.

There was nothing worn out about the way V's mouth let loose with a string of curses. He stopped mid-course and moved to stand near Rhage. His eyes flicked to the body before running his gloved hand through his hair, the leather making the ends stick up.

She looked too small to contain that much blood. Limbs white in a mass of dark red, hair clumped in strings. Rhage wasn't sure who he had to punish for this, just that it had to be done.

"She's human." Phury was already kneeling, eyes analyzing the body. Rhage was glad. His brother was gentle enough to be trusted with the job. Right now he felt too tight in the chest to be of any use and gentle was the last thing on his mind. She was human and someone had broken her. Mary was human. Enough said.

"Human. So she's none of our biz," V said. "How 'bout we get gone before someone makes it our biz?" His voice was harsh, but Rhage knew the guy too well. They'd been working together for a long damn time. His brother might front like he didn't care, but the way his shoulders tensed and he kept balling his gloved hand, it let Rhage know plenty. This bothered V just as much as it did him and he was itching to let loose with the Glo-stick, incinerating hand action.

"Just a second..." Phury ran a finger along the ground. "This is probably what you smelled, Rhage." The finger was coated with a black sticky substance. Black blood.

That was why it was so damn confusing. One minute they're heading for checkpoint before splitting up, next Rhage gets hit with the smell of blood and lesser. Still, the human girl and the lessers didn't make a whole lot of sense. Rhage bent at the middle to take a big whiff. "Yep. I know the sick

smell of those fuckers anywhere."

Phury wiped the blood on a handkerchief; he straightened and began dusting his leathers. "This wasn't a purely human crime."

V had begun nervously playing with his lighter, flicking the flame on and off, the light bouncing off the graphite filled walls. "A dead prostitute? Why would lessers be interested in killing some poor street girl?"

"I couldn't be sure. But you see all the blood? The shallow cuts?"

Rhage did, and he wished he could scrub his own brain. "It's a fuckin' mess."

Phury nodded. "They didn't kill her straight away, the binding of the feet and hands...It's almost like they wanted her to bleed."

"Sick fucks!" This was an all time low for the bastards. The Brotherhood could usually count on being the main course for lessers, but bringing humans into this was a whole different level of twisted.

Phury already had the cell out. "We need to call this in and find out what it means."

That's when Rhage noticed V hadn't said much when normally he was bursting full of opinions. Actually he hadn't been doing much of anything. He glanced over at his brother, intelligent white eyes narrowed at the corpse, face as serious as a heart attack.

"What d' you think, V?"

When V didn't respond, Rhage punched at his solid shoulder. "V!"

V's gaze quickly flicked over to Rhage before looking back at the girl. He looked like he did when he was looking for answers on his Toys. All up in his head and shit; lost to the world around him. "What?"

Rhage waved a hand in front of his face, as Phury moved to the side, neck bent with the cell. "You with us man?"

"I'm standing right here, ain't I?"

Rhage would be willing to bet that V was putting their convo on auto pilot while dealing with some kind of deep calculation in that big brain. He did that a lot and you could always tell because he didn't look right at you; just sort of through you.

"Well? Thoughts? I know you got a take on this."

V shook his head. "Uh, yeah. Lessers. My gut says definitely from our world."

"Shit!" And it truly was. There was enough crap to deal with, without bringing in humans for the sick ride.

V finally focused on Rhage, a strange look on his face. "Rhage ... look ... I ... I gotta go."

Phury had the appropriate reaction of what-the-fuck written on his face before the dispatch started talking on the other end, taking away his attention. "Uhm, yes I need to report a homicide..."

Rhage, however, maintained the look. "You gotta go?! Go where?"

V had already started looking around, as antsy as fuck, like he couldn't get away fast enough. "Yeah. I'll uh ... I'll call you in a few."

Rhage couldn't contain the pissed off in his voice, he laid a hard hand on V's bicep. "You're bailin'? What the hell V? You're on patrol. There is no 'gotta go'."

"Rhage." V's face was sincere and full of something even Rhage had never seen. Fear. "My brother. I have to. Just ... just cover for me? Half an hour, maybe less. I have something I have to do. And it's a must, you feel me?"

Rhage got it. Whatever it was, it was real and V had to do it. V had changed in the last few weeks; something was definitely going down in the guy's life. But V? V didn't get all uptight for nothing.

"Fine. Thirty minutes. No more." He patted V on the arm, letting him know he was off the hook, no interrogation required. "Damn. You owe me big time for this."

V had already started down the alleyway. "Put it on my tab, true?"

~*~

The buzzer rang when Butch had just started soaping up his hair. He cursed, nearly slipping against the glass screen. Pain lanced through his head as he hit the wall.

"Fuck me. Cruz!" he spat, quickly washing the dregs of the soap from his hair and eyes. His partner had started with the bossy shit because Butch had come to work with a hangover. The same hangover he was still nursing. The last body they'd found was mutilated. So he'd fixed those swirling images with Lag straight from the bottle.

Reaching for a towel, he patted his face before tying it loosely around his waist. Butch didn't play house that well and the towel might have once been white, but had taken on that old gray look. At least it wasn't one of the more worn and holey ones, but it had definitely seen better days.

He tried not to slide on the wooden floor, leaving wet footprints as he marched towards the front door. Buzzer still firing like a ice pick to the skull.

"What the hell Jose? ... Quit motherin' me," he yelled, approaching the door mid-slide.

He yanked the door open to find V filling the door frame, his arm extended to press the button yet again. It stilled in mid air. Actually V stopped moving completely. He just looked at him.

Butch's hands went to his towel. Yep, it was still on. Then what was with the stunned mullet look?

"V, what the hell are you doing? Aren't we meeting tomorrow night? And for the love of God, give it a rest with the buzzer!"

V cleared his throat, eyes focusing again. "Ah ... yeah that was the plan, but ... something came up."

Butch could see that. In place of the jeans, tee and cap, he was wearing

the gear from the first couple of times they'd met. Black leather pants. Black fitted T-shirt. Shoulder harness strapped with lethal daggers not that well hidden by a leather coat. He looked like walking violence ... dark and something else ... a change from the funny bastard that cussed about baseball and liked his Goose neat.

Butch stood back and allowed V to come inside. He closed the door, turning and moving further into the room.

"What's so important that you gotta pull me from my shower?"

And what was with the defensive shit? V was currently looking at the floor, thick arms folded over his knives.

"I got a beat on what's with that latest case of yours."

"The prostitutes?"

V nodded, eyes still on the floor. "It's crossed over ... into my job. Into, uhm ... a case we -I've been working on for awhile. I need you to cool it on this one."

"You gotta be shittin me!" Butch exploded before he even realized he was yelling.

"I shit you not. I need you to step off. Like, yesterday."

"I'm not cooling nothing until you give me a better reason than that."

V didn't respond, but the air around him seemed to change. Butch started to feel goosebumps on his arms. He should go and get some clothes on, but being pissed off was a fairly good way to warm up.

"You don't understand. I'm not asking you," V finally looked up at him. "I'm telling you. This shit is way deeper than you can handle. So step. Off."

Whatever the reason V was riding him, it didn't matter. No one told Butch O'Neal how to be a cop. No matter how fucking scary he was or thought he was.

Butch hiked up the towel, moved forward, pressed a hand against V's

chest and pushed. "You're telling me? Fuck. You. I was on this one first. This is my job. I solve crime and catch bastards who deserve a lot worse than what they get. I don't know what your deal is, 'cause you wanna keep it "covert", but my deal is shit just like this." As Butch moved closer again, V's breath hitched. "So I am not stepping off of shit. You feel me?"

That's when V pinned him with a stare, fucking intense with a flare of those eyes. He straightened himself up to his full height. He was hitting 6'7" in his shitkickers, forcing Butch to look up. He watched as V slowly glanced down at his own chest, where he was being pushed, and ran his gaze up the length of Butch's arm, up his chest, and finally to his face. He didn't know whether it was the outfit, the radiating attitude or what, but Butch felt a whole lot more naked than he really was. And he felt that look right down his spine.

Then the guy wrapped a strong hand around Butch's, tightening it just to the point of pain before removing it from his chest. He let out a breath and looked to the side, crossing his arms over the harness once again. The strong angle of his face was tense as he worked his jaw. Something was seriously bugging the man, he had been fucking twitchy from the get go.

Butch tried a different strategy. "I'm not even supposed to talk about cases, so don't try telling me what not to work on. You wouldn't even know about this case if not for my big ass mouth."

"I've helped you with your cases."

"Yeah. Well," Butch crossed his arms, mimicking V's stance exactly, "that ends now."

"Fuck that," V flared up at him. "I am not trying to strong arm you. I'm just saying back off. At least until I know more."

"Why?! So you can break the case?" Butch made a disgusted sound at the very idea of it. "Not fucking likely."

"You are unbelievable. I do not want credit for you stupid case load. I don't want you to get..." V let the sentence drift.

"What?!"

"This isn't your normal mugger, Butch. This is ... something else entirely. You could get hurt."

"I know it isn't a mugger! I'm not a dipshit. And you see this asshole?" Butch leaned forward and jabbed his finger towards his abdomen. "This is where I took a bullet back in '02. And this," he held up his elbow, showing a long skinny scar that ran down the center, "is where I had surgery on my elbow after tackling some shitbag on the run and fracturing it in the process. And I'm sure you noticed the schnoz has been broken more than once and won't win me any modeling contests. So I've gotten hurt before. Load'sa times. I'm no fucking China doll, so thanks for the concern but I don't need it. I don't quit this case. Ever."

V stared at the distorted star-like scar near Butch's stomach. Yeah, he had a star-like scar on his chest, but for a totally different reason and he wasn't in threat of dying when he got it either. All the hardass's little show and tell did was remind V of just how mortal the cop was. Mortal, vulnerable, so very breakable. V let loose with a string of curses that hardly made sense to him, never mind the cop. He was pretty sure some of the Old Language crept in, along with some choice Russian, but he really didn't give a fuck. O'Neal had to back off this one. End of story. Maybe appealing to the guy's logic would work.

"I haven't been wrong yet, Butch. All I'm asking is for a little trust."

"Nice of you to ask for trust when I don't even know who the fuck you are." O'Neal's hard voice has lost some of its edge, but the eyes remained the same. Deep, hazel, assessing. It was always this way with the cop. His brutal honesty, backed with a fearless and unrelenting core, made V feel like he was flayed and pressed against a wall. And his deep laugh always made him feel warmth beneath the scar beaten into his chest.

He hadn't spilled about his deal for this very reason. Why he'd materialized from the scene to this shitty apartment at 3am. Left Rhage cursing him, while Phury cleaned up the pieces. Banged on the detective's door still sporting his fighting gear, blood still drying on his knives. Because the images of what they had done to those humans had made even V's head spin.

Fear. Fear for someone else and fear about what it meant.

It royally pissed him off.

"You know who I am. I'm V. Your deep throat. The fucker who's been helping your ass." The mention of the nickname caused the corners of O'Neal's mouth to tug up despite his defensive stance, dimples forming as if he was trying not to smile.

"I swear to you, Butch O'Neal, I am not trying to steal your case or gank your credit. Just give me until tomorrow night. I'll have something solid then." He moved forward, wanting to touch him, hating the pleading tone, hating that he was reduced to bartering rather than just commanding. Instead he flexed his hands, cracking knuckles. "Just cool it for like twenty four hours, true?"

Just don't get your stupid ass killed.

O'Neal regarded him for a few moments, V could almost see the push and pull going on in that head. He'd try anything to get the cop to lay off, even if for just a day, but he really didn't want to resort to knocking him out again. Finally, Butch ran a hand through his damp hair, flattening it even more against his scalp, letting out a long breath. "Fine. Twenty four hours, but that's all you're getting. 'Sides, I'm off tomorrow anyways, but Thursday it's back in the trenches." His shoulders started to relax, the rest of the tension leaving his face. "You're a real pain in my ass V ... and you do fuck all to help a hang over."

V smirked, despite the heavy feeling deep inside. Butch gestured to his chest. V could tell he was trying to lighten the mood again, as always, and had never appreciated it more than he did now. He could kiss the cop for it, if he didn't think he'd get punched for the gesture.

"You always wear the blades? Or just forget how to take the damn things off?" Butch snorted at his own jest.

V was more than willing to play along this time. Anything to get Butch's mind off the damn case. "At least I'm wearin' somethin' cop. Not everyone would appreciate seeing you half naked."

"I'd rather be wearing the towel than looking like some sexed up cross between a banger and The Village People."

"Maybe you could get it added to the standard police uniform."

That brought Butch's grin back, and it was damn near blinding. And sexed up, huh? Maybe the cop was feeling his vibe more than he thought.

He moved closer, maintaining the grin on his face to keep the man relaxed. It wasn't that he hadn't noticed wet and warm cop as soon as Butch opened the door; it was just that thoughts of lessers, the Omega, and Butch O'Neal all in the same world did not sit well with V. At all. Now that the cop was giving him a hard time - well that sat just fine. V couldn't keep the husky tone from his voice.

"You're frontin', cop. I know you dig the leathers. It's why you slammed me against my car and started with the pat down the first time we met."

"No, I slammed and searched you because you were a walking ammunition store with no respect for authority." Butch was still grinning, with no idea what the unintentional flirting was doing to V.

He was close now. V could see the drops of water drying on the cop's skin and refused to think about just how vulnerable that skin was. He'd take care of him. Somehow. He couldn't let anything happen to Butch. Logic didn't really explain it. Somewhere inside, V knew that this cop meant something. He meant something on a very personal level, but it was more than that too. Butch O'Neal was important. V had learned long ago not to question his gut feelings, but just roll with them. Everything within him screamed to protect Butch at all costs ... and that's exactly what he'd do.

"What? No snappy come back. Don't hurt yourself thinking." Butch laughed, probably at the lines of concentration etched in V's brow. Those lines had nothing to do snappy comebacks, but V couldn't let the guy think he had him stumped.

Vishous unfolded his arms and stepped closer, just enough to unbalance Butch. "You got me, cop. Maybe I am a walking ammunition store with no respect, but I'll let you make the call on whether or not I need patting down."

Something clicked in O'Neal's eyes, the grin losing its intensity. He obviously didn't completely get it, because V was still standing, but he looked confused while trying to make it seem like he wasn't. He backed up, giving V a manly smack to the upper arm.

"Well, you always deserve an ass kicking. Now get goin' before I change my mind about the twenty four hours."

No way was there going to be any mind changing there. Reluctantly, V turned for the door, pausing on his way out. "I'll be in touch, cop." He left the shabby apartment and headed down the stairs. Pausing in a shadowed alcove, V attempted to clear his mind. His head was still full of mortal man and he wanted it to be filled with flirting and wet skin. Maybe once he got back to the mansion.

Better make that, once he got home and after Rhage interrogated him for leaving them at the scene. V materialized home with a curse.

~*~

Butch felt weird. His heart was pounding and he felt hot. He better not be coming down with something. Wouldn't be the first time he'd caught something from being out on the job. He didn't get paid enough for this shit. He couldn't be bothered to get back in the shower either, so Butch padded to his small bedroom and pulled out some boxers.

He hadn't seen V in that get up since their first meeting, and it stirred up more than a few memories. Did he really even know the guy? He knew he was dangerous, that much was plain. He didn't hide it well, especially not in that gear. Then he'd tried to tell Butch what to do. No one ever told Butch what to do. V just acted like it was no BFD to boss him around.

And what was it about that outfit and the guy being such a smart ass? Actually, correction. He was a smart ass all the time. A surprisingly funny smart ass who seemed to know everything, who was somehow honorable, yet capable of being intimidating as fuck - to most people. Butch wasn't most people.

Maybe there was something with the black leather that made him come off as larger than life...

Regardless. It still rubbed him the wrong way to be told what to do. Being in a position of power for this long, directing his own cases, calling the shots - it'd spoiled him. Butch did it his way and fuck the consequences. Ends justify the means and all that shit. But he couldn't ever recall

someone who wasn't afraid of him. He wasn't called Hardass for nothing. And Butch's interrogation history with the the world's scummiest was long and colorful.

Butch laughed to himself. He'd actually pushed him. No, shoved V. Hard. If Jose had seen him trying to pick a fight with a guy like V... Well, he really would go into full mother hen mode.

Hand pressed against hard chest and the mofo hadn't batted an eyelid. V had just grabbed his hand and applied pressure, the kind that Butch knew had the strength and control to snap wrists. Then he stood up, to his full height, an intimidating figure covered in black and daggers, and had stared at him with a challenging intensity that burned.

It had been such a fucking rush to go head to head with someone that he didn't have to hold back with. Not tonight, not ever. No censoring of what they talked about, no holding back when they got in each other's face. Butch could be the abrasive hardass that he truly was and black leathered V only seemed to get him more. He'd come close to punching the guy a few times, but he knew that V could take it. Sometimes he had to wonder if he wouldn't invite it. Times like tonight, he got the feeling V would welcome it. He'd felt it in the goose flesh when V had stared him down and 'told' him to drop the case and Butch had refused. The challenge. He didn't know why V had eventually backed down, when he was certain for a moment there it was going to come to blows. And even though Butch was sure he'd probably get his ass handed to him, it wouldn't happen without V earning a few bruises in the process.

Butch shook his head with a grin and reached for the towel, when he noticed something.

A big something.

He looked down. "What the...?"

He was hard. Not just "kinda" either. Pushing against the towel, he couldn't for the life of him understand why. He'd only been thinking about his head snapped up, staring straight ahead. Fuck no. Not even going there.

It had just been a while. A long while. Too long. He needed to get out more. Get laid. He was way over worked and over tired.

Butch glanced down once more before dropping the towel and roughly pulling on his boxers.

"Fuck ... I need a drink." Scrubbing a hand over his face he headed for his den, flat out ignoring whatever the hell was up with his dick. He wasn't above drinking by himself and it certainly wasn't the first time. He popped the cork on his scotch, pouring a decent slather into a mug and thought about how he hadn't been drinking by himself. Not lately. Nope, now he had a regular drinking buddy.

He downed the lot, a comforting burn sliding down his throat but not erasing the name. Hell, he couldn't even drink in peace.

He couldn't believe he'd caved. He never caved. Seemed V's cop had him breaking all kinds of rules, but if a twenty four hour truce for "research" would keep Butch off the trail of something he couldn't possibly comprehend, then so be it. Problem was - there was no more researching to be done. V knew exactly what was up with the dead hookers. He'd done the run down with the Brotherhood, they'd all had the usual pow-wow in Wrath's office, and everyone knew the deal. Lessers were using humans as vamp bait. The sick bastards. It seemed that so far, the human law had intervened before any vamps fell on the trap. Thank God for human law; thank the Scribe Virgin for clever vampires.

So how to keep Butch O'Neal and his broken nose out of vampire biz?

The Brotherhood had little experience crossing over into police department territory. For the most part, the war between lessers and vampires was fought on a different field. Leave it to those pale faced fuckers to bring a new storm to their back door. And now what? The rub was, how to get Butch to back off without him thinking that it was some kind of challenge to his duty as a super cop or his rights as a male of worth?

Male of worth.

Vishous scrubbed his hands over his face, hard. He was definitely in over his head if he was thinking of a human in those terms. He nudged his keyboard out of the way and settled his elbows on his desk, trying to come up with a solution. There was the old adage that you won more flies with honey than vinegar. Was there a way to sweet talk Butch into letting this case go?

That'd be a "not on your damn life." The cop was way too into justice to let anything like this go.

The only way to make it go away was ... to make it go away. Stop the lessers and this new game of theirs so there'd be no case for the police to get involved in. Ought to be simple enough. Stopping lessers was one of the many things V did best. It'd mean pulling over time and explaining to the King why he was so dedicated after weeks of being MIA. He'd push for more patrol time at their next meeting. At least he'd try to play by the rules.

As for tonight, the best he could do was hang with his cop and make sure he stayed away from the trouble. Or, more like, trouble stayed away from him.

~*~

The cop was in his standard issue casual wear. If it wasn't a plain black snoop suit, it was jeans and a t-shirt. V wasn't sure which look he liked more.

He waved Butch over to the booth, noticing that this must be a new place for him. In typical fashion, he was scanning the pool hall, taking in everyone and everybody, suspicious of everything. The place was cool, V had already checked it, but if it made the guy feel better to give it a once over, who was he to throw stones? The point of the evening was to keep Butch occupied and relaxed. Mind off the case and safely distracted with games of pool and a few rounds, because if the cop was anything like him, he might say he'd give it rest - but he really wasn't resting a damn thing.

V wasn't surprised when, earlier, Butch had coughed into the phone and stumbled over agreeing to meet him out. First of all, V was pretty sure that he'd never asked the cop to meet him anywhere. Second of all, this had nothing to do with work. There was no excuse like working a case or sharing a bit of intel. This was just the two of them, hanging out for hanging out's sake. Some might call it a date. Not the cop, of course.

"This your kinda place?" Butch asked, sliding into the booth, slightly winded. "A little crowded. I had to park all the way around back near the dumpsters."

V cocked an eyebrow. "You're making that one too easy, I'ma let you slide. Get yourself a drink before I start giving you shit about parking next to the trash."

"Yeah, yeah," Butch flagged down a passing waitress with more than her pony tail bouncing.

"So what's the occasion?" he finally asked, unsubtle as always. "You bring me here to finally confess that you're Black Ops? Taliban? MI-5?"

"Yeah sure," V laughed, "and my mission is to harass a smart ass detective, get him blind drunk, and kick his ass at pool."

"Kick my ass at pool?" the cop snorted with laughter too. "Then you better be the best at what you do because no one kicks my ass at pool." He took a swig of his newly arrived drink with pure confidence.

The waitress, who looked just this side of legal, hung around while trying not to be obvious. "Can I get you anything else?" she asked Butch.

Being polite, he told her no thanks before going back to giving V the challenging stink eye. Vishous didn't miss her disappointed frown. Apparently the cop was oblivious to his own fuckability or he just wasn't interested. Either way worked.

"Alright then, cop. Let's see if you're all talk."

Butch had already started sliding out of the booth with that infectious grin. "Bring it on big guy! I am so gonna love schooling your ass."

V tried half heartedly to hide his own shit eating grin as he slid out too. "Just not on the first date, yeah?" he slapped Butch on the shoulder. "At least not until you buy me a few drinks. I'm not that easy."

His cop laughed off the joke, probably because he was used to the comments by now. Or maybe he didn't mind them. Could prove interesting. Butch went about making a big production of getting the rack and balls from the bar and then selecting his stick. You would've thought it was Olympic try outs.

"Are you waiting on divine inspiration or what? Just pick a damn stick," V

taunted.

Cop had to give him a death glare before choosing his stick and then making a show of chalking it up. V already had his stick and let loose with a groan.

"See, this is why I kick ass at pool," Butch insisted. "It's not just physics. It's an art form and you are not appreciating the art form."

"It's a pool stick, cop, not Impressionism. You gonna break before the next century?"

The newly and thoroughly chalked stick was pointed at V. "Do not rush the art."

V cracked with a laugh. "Alright then, whenever you're ready," he swept a hand towards the table.

Butch set up the balls, totally in the moment like a pro game, arranging them just so. He shifted the rack a few times and lifted it off dramatically. Leaning over the table he gave the set up a critical eye and Vishous one hell of a nice view. Maybe pool could be an art form after all. It took him breaking with a loud crack to shake V out of it. Whatever. Butch definitely had something worth staring at.

"I'm solids," he said with pride after sinking a few of them on the break. He gave V a superior grin before rounding the table to stand directly in front of him. If the damned cop wasn't so entertaining, he might want to kick his ass.

V could've followed the polite rules of billiards and moved out of his personal space, but ... where was the fun in that?

"You mind?" Butch asked, in a light mood but with his serious game face on.

"Oh. Don't let me interfere with the artiste," V put his hands up and side stepped away. Slowly.

The cop sunk a few more before finally missing a shot. It was quite a show and V watched the table and Butch intently, about a million thoughts running through his mind and none of them having to do with playing

pool.

"You gonna take your shot or should I just keep going?" he asked.

V gave him a look that was meant to be just a "keep it up wise ass" kind of thing. When Butch looked at him kind of funny, V realized he might have miscalculated the intensity of his thoughts. He blinked a few times, hoping his eyes weren't on high beam. "I'll take my shot now."

He lined it up and sunk the first one, being no schmuck at pool himself. Still, it didn't take a genius to see that Butch was the stronger player. Few people were better than V at most things and, oddly, the cop being the better player didn't really bother him. V hated to lose, but somehow, the cop's superiority was sexy as hell. And speaking of sexy, the cop chose that moment to position himself low for a difficult shot.

"Green ball, corner pocket," he said, just before he made it.

V cleared his throat and tried to clear his head. "You're good."

"Yeah, well when you're at the academy, living and breathing all things police and policy - pool is a nice distraction."

He tried for his next shot, this time proving too difficult. Butch nodded towards V before grabbing his scotch. "How 'bout you?"

V ran a hand over the back of his neck, thinking the button up shirt was a bad idea. He never wore this kind of shit, so why start on the night when he had watch his cop moving all around and looking entirely too edible?

"My brother, he's just this side of ADD, needs something to keep him entertained or he causes me grief. I whip his ass at pool on a regular and it keeps him humble."

V moved towards the other side of the table, brushing against Butch's back for a second too long before getting to the other side.

"Side pocket," he said.

"Hold up. You've got a brother?"

V focused on the shot and sank it. "Uhm. Yes. I have a brother."

"Really?" the cop sounded doubtful. "Older or younger?"

V got ready for the next shot, trying not to be distracted by Butch or his questions. "Younger. And he's definitely younger on the maturity scale."

"You two close?"

V missed his shot and glared up at Butch. "I guess we're kind of close. Why?"

Butch joined him on his side of the table. "No reason, it's just ... you haven't ever mentioned family before, so..."

V gave him the once over, taking in a lot more information from that one comment that he'd probably intended. "We at the sharing and caring phase of our relationship now, cop?"

"Nah," Butch laughed, a little off kilter. "I'm just saying-"

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?" V asked.

Butch turned to face the table. A cold "no," was the only response he got.

The swift change in mood did not go unnoticed, but V could tell it wasn't a subject for prying. He had another question ready anyway.

"So ... my turn for Q and A detective," V smirked. "Inquiring minds wanna know - do you always answer your door half naked and cussing at the person on the other side? Or is that just for special occasions?"

"Huh?" it took a second for Butch to catch on. "Oh. No," he shook his head. "See, Jose - my partner - he's been such a nagging woman lately and I thought it was him. If his wife sends him to work with another take-better-care-of-yourself casserole, I swear I'll-"

"You and Jose been partners long?"

"Long enough that me coming to the door cussing ain't a big shock for him."

The waitress from earlier suddenly slid up to the table and picked up

Butch's empty glass. "Can I get you another?"

"You need a refill, V?" he asked.

V downed the rest of his Goose and handed it over, recognizing the wary look as she took in his height, shape, and the tats.

"We'll have another round, thanks," Butch nodded to the girl with a smile. She beamed at his attention, probably thrilled down to her toes. V could understand the sentiment. She made her way back to the bar with that hip swinging walk that screams "I'm into you!"

Butch was oblivious, paying attention only to the game and his opponent. "V, buddy," he said, shaking his head, the mood from moments ago now lifted. "It don't look good for you. I think I know who'll be buying the next round and it won't be me."

"I'm just getting warmed up, 's all."

"Well you better get there soon, because I'm about to hand you your ass on a platter."

Butch sank the last two and lined up for the eight ball. "Mmmm, victory is so sweet."

"You're not the victor just yet."

He nailed the last shot, the eight ball going down with a clunk-clunk. "Like I said, victory is soooooooooo sweet."

The waitress showed up, having double timed it back to them with drinks in hand. She handed V his while looking around him, but never in the eye. Butch she hit with a mega watt smile. "The bartender made it a double."

Butch grinned good naturedly. "Well that's good since he's buying," he nodded at V. "Go ahead and pay the nice girl, V."

The waitress struggled with him not getting her hints. "Uhm, I'll just put two singles on the tab," she said before swishing off.

V laughed into his glass.

"What? You are buying. Don't reign on a bet."

"I'll pay up, don't worry, but it ain't that cop. It's that if the saying goes to the victor go the spoils, then that girl was trying her damndest to ... ah, spoil you. But you're too wrapped up in your gloating to even notice."

Butch's eyes trailed after the waitress. "Oh yeah? You think she was into me?"

V gave him a look.

"She's a little young," Butch sounded disapproving. "Not exactly my type." He went back to rack up for the next round and said nothing else.

"You have a type, cop? Oh, this oughta be good." V crossed his arms and settled back against the table beside them. "Let's hear it."

He took his time, thinking as he situated the balls. "Sure. I mean, I guess I do. Not her. She looks like she's seventeen? No thanks on the jail bait. What about you? You got a type?"

V looked around the pool hall, taking in the crowd and it's menagerie of people. Men and women from all races and backgrounds. Every one of them human, except for him of course, and the only human he had any interest in whatsoever was standing a few feet away, asking him who he'd like to have. The irony was not amusing.

~*~

When V didn't answer back with a dry remark, Butch looked up, smart-assed comment already on his tongue. V was deep in thought though and Butch got a good look at his new ... friend?

Seriously distinct side profile, thick arms crossed over his pool stick, dark brows lowered in thought. For the first time that night, but certainly not the first time ever, Butch appreciated just how different V really was. He didn't fit in at this shabby establishment, didn't look like anyone else in the place. Hell - he didn't look like anyone else in Caldie.

Butch followed V's line of sight to a group of three women sitting at the

bar. They all sure as hell noticed V looking in their direction. Obvious invitations all round. And who would blame them? He imagined V had game just about everywhere he went, so that picking up women wasn't exactly a challenge. He studied V again. Yeah, the man was hard to fuckin' ignore, with an intensity that went through you like a sawed off to the chest. Obliterating everything and leaving an enormous hole in its wake. Butch felt the full impact of that gaze when V turned and caught him staring. It was as though there was nothing between them. No massive wooden table, no game of pool, no ten feet of space ... no clothes ... no skin ... nothing.

"I have a type, cop. I don't see it over there in that crowd though."

There was a beat, as V looked at him and Butch stood stock still, gripping the stick and letting the waves of that stare hit like a motherfucker. There was a charge going off like he was on the business end of jumper cables rather than a cheap wooden pool stick. V pushed his big body off the table and crossed to stand close, taking up his fair share of personal space, and Butch's brain still couldn't whir back to life. He just stood there, frozen like a little punk-ass. He had no idea what V was thinking, what the hell he meant by that comment, what he was going to do, or how he would respond to V doing ... whatever.

V looked at the table and Butch felt like maybe he could breathe again if those eyes weren't on him. He looked back at Butch and waited another beat, obviously not the type to be put off by silence. "Winner gets to break, right?" He indicated the table with a smirk. "Set 'em up cop; let's do it again."

V turned towards the table and, shaking his head, Butch took a few steps back, placing his Lag down. Massaging his temples, he put the thumping in his head down to too much scotch, the heat flushing down his neck to the shitty air conditioner. He'd felt this way the other night too. In his apartment. He wouldn't let his mind go back to that because, well, he just wouldn't.

Pool. Right. He could do pool. He focused on racking up and kept his eyes on the table as he spoke to V. "That eager to get your ass whapped again?" And giving people shit. That he could do, no problem.

V scoffed. "That was pure luck. Shut it and let's do this."

Butch saw as V rubbed the stick back and forth between his palms. He appreciated the opportunity to give the guy shit, forcing that confusing vibe back into its hole where it all made sense again. "Y'know ... for a man that uses his hands a lot, you have the coordination of my grandmother. I don't get how you have a chance in hell of winnin' when all you do is knock the balls all over the green."

"Is this a trash talkin' competition or are we gonna shoot pool?"

Butch kept up with the crap, thinking anything was better than delving into whatever the fuck was going on between them a couple of seconds ago, or the fact that in the few short moments it took for V to stand in front of him, Butch had forgotten to breathe. He didn't give a flying fuck that this was deflecting 101. Humor was so something he could deal with. "It ain't trash talking when I'm running circles 'round ya."

V flipped him off, making Butch laugh. "Awww don't be sore because I'm better than you. I bet you hate to lose, huh? Maybe I'll go easy on ya this time."

V leaned over on his pool stick. "Bite me."

Butch went on to win the next round too - and it was a good thing. It was easier to focus all his energy on the table than whatever was going on around him. "Damn I'm good. I'm glad you let me know about this place, V. Too bad we aren't betting."

"Okay then, Color of Money. Care to make it interesting? Want to put a little wager behind that mouth of yours? You talk a good game, but I haven't seen anything yet that I can't top."

Butch doubted that. He hadn't lost a game yet. "Are you sure? I don't wanna beat you and steal your money."

"Who said anything about money?"

Well he wasn't about to start betting matchsticks. "... well ..."

V kept on, like he had already sunk him and won. "Money you won't miss."

The cop pushed his hip against the table. "What'd you have in mind then?"

V ran his gloved hand over his goatee like he hadn't thought through all the logistics yet - which was unlikely. "Stakes are, you win? You get to name the wager. I win? I get to name mine. You wanna name 'em now?"

Butch was willing to bet V already had it all planned out. Truth was, he already had something he wanted to know. "Okay ...". And despite wanting to keep the mood light, there was just no playing with this one. "I win...." Butch moved forward instinctively, V's eyes watching him, calculating"... you tell me what you really do. No covert ops. No bullshit. Just lay it out straight."

Butch couldn't explain why it was so important that he know who V was. It just was.

They stood there, just looking at each other. V's face relatively blank, save the slight frown creasing his forehead.

"Okay," V agreed. "If I win, then you invite me to your place. You cook me something to eat in that shithole kitchen of yours and you provide all the Goose I need to get good and sideways. AND you can even babysit my ass the way I did yours the other night."

Butch's drink hung in mid air, stopped just where he'd started before he'd been gobsmacked by V's wager. "You want ... to come to my place?"

V lifted an eyebrow and waited.

Butch's brain was looking for a way to stop shorting out and hit back with a reasonable verbal response when V pressed on.

"A good dinner too; no take out dinner cop out. I know you cook. I want some of that homemade spaghetti you whipped up the other day."

"How do you know I-"

"I smelled it on you. Comfort food. Hearty. Bring it on," he said with a smirk.

Butch looked at his drink, still hanging mid-air, and decided he didn't need any more. He placed his glass on the edge of the pool table. The shit load of thoughts running through his head was making it hard to pick one to go with. He stared at his hand still clutching on the the drink, wet with the

condensation.

"What?" V asked. "The bet too steep for you?" It was accompanied by a laugh, but it sounded forced. Butch had spent enough time with the guy to know when it was genuine, mostly because the guy's laugh was still a rarity.

Butch cleared his throat, then cleared it again. It still came out as hoarse as a 3am call out. "Umm, no ... that's not ... I mean, how's this a fair bet? Plus I don't know what you've been smelling cause it ain't me cooking." Which was kind of true, Butch didn't take time for cooking because most nights he just let sleep and scotch round out the evening. On the odd occasion though, when he was feeling energetic, he actually cleaned the damn kitchen and tried to make something edible. Something warm that reminded him of home and family, and a time before everything was a black gaping hole of fucked-up.

V snorted and grabbed onto the pool cue Butch was still holding, making his eyes snap up to V's. "Bullshit. Look me in the eye and tell me you don't make marinara. My nose never lies."

That's pretty specific smelling right there. Butch blinked a few times before the words came out. "Okay, yeah. I make Italian about once a week, but-"

"And how is that not a fair bet?" V butted in, he was keeping on like he didn't want Butch to get a word in edgewise, and that big hand of his shook the pool cue as if to emphasize. "If I lose then it means I gotta lose my covert ops routine, and I happen to LIKE my covert ops."

"Well it's not that ..." Well what was it then? He was just betting a fucking dinner, not a naked run through Quincy's Market or his last bottle of Lag. The guy had to win first and that hadn't happened yet.

Butch straighten and plastered on his best grin. "Fine, you crazy fucker. If that's what's on the table." He pointed at V before stretching out his hand to shake on it. "But you have to win first."

V let go of the pool cue to grip Butch's hand firmly. "I can taste that homemade sauce already." The grin that crept onto his face was devilish and Butch hoped like hell he hadn't been sand bagging.

Still unsettled and feeling just a bit like he had been hit with a four by two, Butch focused on racking up the balls. Really focused.

"Cop, you done shuffling around or what?"

He had to get his head back in the game. This was important.

"Its called a game plan ... look it up. Make that *definitely* look it up with your track record."

V just leaned back against the table as Butch started chalking up.
"Mmmmmm hmmm."

When V started pretending to nod off and start snoring, Butch hit him with his newly chalked stick, moving him out of the road as he took aim.

"Careful with the violence cop, or I might have to press charges."

"Press charges?" Butch snorted as he sunk the ball and looked at V.
"That's rich, coming from you. You got any more illegally concealed weapons I should know about?"

"You want me to answer that?" V's arms folded over his chest, the corners of his eyes crinkling attractively.

"Actually. No." Butch shook his head, wondering how much fucking scotch it took to start noticing shit like his eyes and the rolling feeling that accompanied them.

V raised an eyebrow at him at the change in tone, but Butch couldn't get it together enough to start joking again. Instead he inspected his next shot like it was trace evidence.

"Just shoot the damn ball, Butch."

Butch didn't make eye contact, just kept looking at the layout as if it held all the answers to his swirling brain. "Don't rush me."

"I'm not. I'm just saying, if we're gonna be here till next winter, I'll need my muff."

When he looked up, V was frowning. "You know you're about to lose in,

oh," pointed at the table, counting a quick tally. "Four to five shots, tops. Think you can hold out for that long?"

"You say that, but I have a feeling the luck of the Irish is up."

"Yeah, yeah." Butch leaned back down, lining up his next shot. Golden fucking opportunity laying in front of him to sink two, which he went for. Something he'd sink, no sweat. Trouble was luck was so not on his side. He watched as the white missed his aim just slightly, missed his other solids and knocked the black heavily into the back pocket. Game fucking over.

"Fuck," Butch exhaled.

He glanced up long enough to see the slow victorious grin spread across V's face.

"Wait, I-

"Mmmmmmmmm, you smell garlic? I smell garlic and contrary to popular belief, I fucking LOVE garlic."

Butch was gripping onto the pool cue, staring at the table in disbelief. Not quite catching that last comment. "Popular belief?"

V shook his head. "Never mind, so what's a good night for you cop?" He leaned in close, hip pressed against the table as he stretched out to pluck a stray ball from the group by the tips of his fingers. Rolling the smooth ball back and forth along the green, he waited. Somewhere during the night he had rolled his sleeves up exposing the length of his forearms, veined and strong.

It made Butch bristle. No way was he going down like this. Not with the stupid fucking dinner and not with noticing stupid hands. "Double or Nothing."

V smirked. "Heeeell no. A bet is a bet. Listen, you need me to bring anything? Dessert? Red checkered table cloth? Silver service?"

Butch never lost. He let out a breath, muttering. "Damn. I so had it."

"What was that?"

Fuck this.

"I am not cooking you dinner." Butch made a move for the pool cues, setting them back against the wall.

V leaned over the table. "Fuck that, cop. We shook on it and YOU lost."

Butch made a grab for the triangle. "I almost had it."

"Almost in one hand, shit in the other, O'Neal. All I had to do was sit back and let you bury yourself with that cop cocky confidence."

He glared over at V as he dropped the triangle. To his credit, he didn't even waver.

V pointed at him. "Don't get mad at me because YOU lost."

Butch started slamming the balls together as he packed up with just a tad too much gusto. He didn't notice V until a warm hand gripped his forearm, steadying him. "Hey. It's just a bet," V said, sounding calmer. "I know about the classic Irish temper, but this is a tad ridiculous."

Butch pulled his arm away. "Yeah well. I'm a hot head." He turned back to what he was doing, feeling V's eyes on him as the intuitive mofo studied him way too closely. Standing too close. Taking up far too much of his personal space with his stupid big body. And why was this such a BFD? Why get so bent out of the frame about a stupid bet and dinner? He'd eaten with the guy before. So no big, right? But this was his shit-hole apartment they were talking about and the last time the guy was there... And this was him cooking. He didn't cook for other people or have them over. Ever. He only let the guy in that time because he was drunk and then that other time 'cause he thought it was Jose. It was too fucking intimate. A guy like V didn't come over for dinner and just hang around. There was way too much of him, too much of that intensity to just sit there, chewing bread sticks, watching Butch in his element and - What the FUCK!?

"I need some air." Butch dropped the shit on the pool table and pushed his way through the crowd.

~*~

He jammed his hands in the pockets of his worn jacket, shoulders hunched against the cold as he watched his breath curl into the air.

He really need to chill out and out in the cold seemed like the best place. Plus, trying to clear your head around V was about as easy as tap-racking a frozen chamber with hands dipped in grease. Outside was better. Behind the crowded pool hall there was more space. More room to breathe.

It didn't last. Moments later the back door creaked open as V walked out. Silent, except for the fall of his boots on the pavement. He stood next to Butch, mirroring his stance against the cold, not saying a word and looking dead ahead. There was a deep breath and then, "Look man ... never mind about the bet. You obviously got something going on and ... I get it. I'm pretty fucking weird about my personal space too, you feel me? No big. I just thought it'd be funny, but I get it."

He didn't look at Butch once the entire time he spoke. Maybe he somehow knew those eyes made people uncomfortable. No, not uncomfortable. Vulnerable. Stripped bare, like they could hide nothing and it wouldn't do them any good to try. Even without those eyes on him, Butch still felt as worthy as dog shit. V had met him out, been a good sport, totally decent about being whipped at pool and listening to Butch gloat over winning, and then he goes and whelches on a bet. First of all, a man never whelches. Second, he'd probably offended the guy in the process because V didn't seem the type to reign - no matter what. While he looked like he couldn't give a crap either way, something told Butch the truth was a different matter.

"No. No, you're right. A bet is a bet and I'm being a big puss-"

"Hey!" V grabbed him by the back of the neck, giving him a good-natured shake, like a mother with her pup. "I said, don't worry about it. End of. Besides," he half grinned, "you need to take it easy, cop. It wasn't my goal to ruin your night. Don't you know too much stress causes coronaries?"

Butch tried to laugh, the sound weak from exhaustion and brain erosion. "I hear ya."

V shook him once more, gently this time. "Good. Don't get bent out of shape on my account, true?"

He sighed, knowing V was right. What was he getting so worked up for anyway? The warm hand on his neck moved, patting him, urging him to relax. He wanted to, he really did. Butch felt his shoulders sag in release. No one should be this keyed up on their day off.

"I'm gonna head on home," V said, his hand still on Butch's neck. "You?"

"Yeah," Butch sighed, and made to dig for his keys. "I need too."

"Cool," V didn't move, his gaze remaining on Butch's face and his large hand a heavy, comfortable weight. V's thumb brushed against the nape of his neck, skimming his hairline, while his fingers just barely touched his jugular. It was hypnotic, that touch. Made him feel all mellowed out, like taking a Vicadin or some other feel good drug.

"I'll call you later, alright cop?"

Butch nodded, the movement making V's finger just touch the back of his ear. It should be awkward as fuck, but it wasn't. It was more like a sleepy warmth, the solid feel of V's hand spanning his nape.

He glanced up at V, the oddly light eyes trained on his face. He searched V's expression, his hard look flickering from Butch's eyes to the slow drift of his fingers. V kept up the soothing movements, long fingers occasionally brushing against his hair. "Yeah. Later. Sure."

"Okay. That's better," V said and released him.

"I'll uh ... I'll catch you later," Butch said, refusing to miss the warmth as he left.

~*~

He didn't really remember the walk to his Crown Vic, but somehow he ended up there and got in. Amazingly, there was no need to crank up the heat like normal, even though the mellow mood from moments ago was quickly ebbing. In fact, with V gone, he wasn't at ease at all. It was cramped and stuffy in the big Vic and Butch rolled down the window,

wanting more cool air. He slumped down in his seat, completely perplexed at one fucked up night.

But really, it wasn't that fucked up. It was just a game of pool. Right? Just hanging out. The whole weird vibe deal was something in Butch's head. Not normally the healthiest of places anyway, it had somehow taken a turn into Bizzareville with no U-turns.

He ran a hand against the back of his neck, just where V had gripped him, warm and reassuring, telling him not to worry about the bet after all. Big, stupid, warm hands. If that were the extent of it though, it'd be no BFD. And he knew it. Butch rubbed his face. He needed to get more sleep. That was the issue. Sleep deprivation did freaky things to a person. There were studies that showed this. Lack of sleep probably made him think crazy shit that wasn't really happening. Had him reacting to things that weren't there, things he should never react to in the first place.

"Fuck." Starting the car and flipping on his police com, Butch made a resolution to get at least six or seven hours of sleep a night. Without fail. Starting tomorrow.

V was not touching him either. Well, he was. But not like that. If it were like that, then it would've freaked him out, not made him feel calm. It would've been way out of bounds and grounds for an ass whooping, not something that he would miss once gone.

Okay, he so needed to think about something else right now. Like, right now.

There was the typical churn on the police radio. Dispatch requesting a run on some plates, mentions of bringing people in, then...

Disturbance call at corner of North and Spring. Request a car to check it out. Repeat, disturbance call at-

Bingo! Something else.

"Detective O'Neal," he barked into his com. "I'm in the area. Can I get a repeat of the cross streets?"

The dispatch rattled off the address and Butch knew exactly where it was. Not a nice side of town.

"Right, copy that. I'll check it out. Over."

He edged the big car out of the parking lot and towards Spring Street, eager to have something to do to straighten out his whacked out mind.

Still a block away from the location, he parked the Vic to take the rest on foot. Checking his weapon and grabbing a flashlight from the back seat, he prayed for a confrontation. Something that would not only take all his attention, but also every bit of his adrenaline and spend it on something other than big ass motherfuckers that wears leather for no apparent reason and-

There was some banging in the alley that sure as shit wasn't a cat.

He turned down a side street just in time to see a group of five young men kicking the shit out of someone. Glock already drawn, he edged closer before announcing his arrival. The extra seconds gave him a chance to see that this someone was a kid, no older than maybe sixteen. His vision went red as he thanked God for the mother of all adrenaline releases.

"Hands up and step away from the kid!" he yelled at the group, leveling the Glock center mass on the biggest fucker.

The crowd looked at him in unison, one almost sighing. Confusing. Almost as confusing as how pale they all were.

"I said away from the kid. Now!"

As a group, they took a small step back and he glanced quickly at the victim. Bruised and a bit bloody, but still with it enough to scramble away from the mob and behind the man with the gun.

"You okay, kid?" he asked, getting a hoarse "yeah" in return.

"Good. Then get gone."

Butch might need the kid later if he was going to press charges, but right now the odds were five on one and he needed to get the vic safe and out of the way.

Apparently the mob didn't like him taking away their punching bag, because the biggest guy stepped forward.

"I can guarantee this isn't your business and you don't want it to be. I suggest you leave."

"And I suggest you go fuck yourself," Butch replied.

The elected leader of the group took another step forward. "Oh do you now?"

"Keep coming closer, buddy and I guarantee you that I'm gonna help you do it, too."

The pale fucker kept coming. Butch had learned long ago, when you're out numbered, you take the big one down first, so that's exactly what he did. Screw waiting on the perp to advance further. He met the bastard half way, so fast the guy couldn't catch it, and pistol whipped him as soon as he could reach him.

That's when his other powder pale groupies decided to grow balls - and rushed him.

Butch fired the first shot into the chest of the closest one, wondering why it didn't stop him and since when had albinos started their own street gang.

The wailing screech of tires drew the lessers' attention. V spun the big, black SUV in sideways and was out of the driver's seat with the damn thing barely in park.

Butch was still firing at the lesser advancing on him, finally slowing him down. Another plowed in from the side, hoping to catch the cop off guard. Instead he met with the pointy end of V's dagger.

"Fuck. That," V exhaled, dragging the dagger up before pulling out.

The bullet filled lesser finally hit the ground with a thud and he spun to see a third headed for them.

"What the-?" Butch asked, but was cut off when their fallen leader got up from his pistol whipping.

There was no time for V to explain their resilience or the fact that they were basically the undead. V made neat work of the third, burying his dagger deep into his chest. That sick pop was like a choir of angels to his ears.

The fourth and fifth lesser jumped him at once, and V thought for a moment that it was never like the movies. In Hollywood, the guys came at you one at the time and they stayed down. Not these stinky bastards. Unless you stabbed them in the heart, they were like fucking Energizer bunnies. V launched one against the concrete building before pivoting to stab the other groupie. He slid the knife cleanly from his chest and went to give Butch a hand.

The cop was struggling with their leader while simultaneously firing at the lesser V had tossed against the wall. He had to hand it to him, Butch fought like a true warrior. But he wasn't. Butch wasn't a Brother and he sure as shit wasn't immortal. V wasn't willing to let him work it out on his own. He shoved Butch out of the way and finished the job on the advancing lesser.

"What the FUCK!" Butch yelled, sounding disgusted as much as pissed.

V looked right behind him, just for a second, to find Butch swiping at his shirt, sprayed with black blood. A second was all it took for the lead lesser to get out of range. He grabbed Butch and started hauling him towards the Escalade.

"What the fuck, V? Lemme-" he shoved uselessly at V's grip. "He's getting away. The head guy! We can get him. We're not finished."

"You are finished." The lessers' leader was such for a reason. Work smarter not harder. He'd taken off down the dark street, saving his ass to come back for more another night.

"He's not far," Butch argued. "I can catch him. We sure as hell can't question the others. Look at this shit. Let go of me, dammit!"

Of course the cop wanted to go chasing after him; like the thing was human, like he could catch him and enact some justice. Bring him in for questioning. That lesser was long gone. Too far gone for even V to catch him, pissier than usual, and now wondering what ties a human cop had with the Brotherhood. Fuckin' A.

"V!" Butch yelled, shoving at his arm. "Let me go."

V slid his hand from Butch's bicep to under his arm and essentially threw him into the Escalade, cop cursing a blue streak the whole way. Doubtful that the cop was used to being man handled. He climbed into the driver's side, shoved her into reverse and hit the pedal so hard Butch had to grab the dash board to keep from banging his head off it.

"In the name of-"

V floored it into drive, shoving Butch back against the seat.

"Buckle up, cop."

Butch looked at him, wide eyed. "What the hell?"

V didn't answer, just drove like a bat outta hell, disregarding every traffic law known to man. Butch held on for dear life, but didn't stop his ranting.

"What the hell was that, V? Hey! I'm talking to you, you crazy son of a bitch! You just ... you. With the knives and ... What the fuck?!"

Butch didn't sound so concerned about what they'd been fighting, but what the hell V was doing. Sounded pissed about it too.

"I was doing my damn job," Butch continued to rail. "I don't know what that shit was you just pulled, but it sure wasn't undercover work or FBI or DEA or any other fucking law enforcement acronym. Now I got fuck all. Buncha dead albinos." He kicked the glove compartment.

Oh yeah, and he was pissed that V had stopped him from doing his cop biz. Typical.

He knew Butch wouldn't understand it, didn't expect him too, but there was no other option. When V had followed him at a distance, then seen him slyly slip down an alley - of course he'd followed. Stubborn ass cop could get himself killed. He did not expect to do a drive by and see Butch, in full view, surrounded by his sworn enemy. His stomach had fallen into his boots.

Right about now that protective male thing that he'd seen from Wrath and

Rhage - yeah, it was no fucking party to be on the working end of that. It made you bat shit crazy. All the co-vert stuff went right out the window. Weeks of being incognito, see ya. All V knew was he had to destroy the threat and get Butch out of there. If he saw too much, well, they'd just have to deal with that later.

"Stop the car," Butch said, turning in his seat to stare V down.

V kept driving, the highway his destination. His jaw felt so tight it might shatter.

"Stop the fucking car!" cop insisted.

Wasn't happening, not until his brain stopped whirring and his hands could do something other than death grip the steering wheel.

Butch must've thought louder was better. "Stop the car right now asshole!" he yelled. "I'm not playing with you, man." He grabbed the wheel.

V wrapped his hand over Butch's and removed it from the wheel, probably with force just this side of bone breaking.

"Shit!" Butch rubbed it. "What aren't you telling me V?! I swear to God, this silence shit of yours? Not gonna work. You're only gonna piss me off more if that's possible and STOP THE GODDAMN CAR!" Butch punched him in the arm. Once. Twice. Three times.

V jerked the wheel off a lonely exit, spun the Escalade down a frontage road and banked her on a high shoulder in the middle of who the fuck knows where. His breathing wouldn't steady and he didn't even look at Butch as he got out of the car. He had to compose himself enough to think. That's what he did all the time - Fucking think! Butch and lessers was not what was supposed to happen tonight.

Right. Supposed to in one hand.

"Shit in the other," V swiped his hands through his hair. How did the night get so FUBAR so fast?

He heard Butch fling open the passenger door and stomp around the front of the car to meet him. V kept his back turned, knowing his eyes were

probably glowing and not in that good way either. His hand was itching to get lose too. Burn something to the ground because he was so fucking frustrated that there was nothing else he could do. Not now anyway. He'd find the one remaining lesser though. Smoke him - maybe even before he could say the words "cop" to any of his buddies. Then, what about Butch? What was he supposed to tell him about what he just saw?

Butch shoved at his back. "You're gonna answer me V. I don't care how much it might piss you off. What the hell was that back there? You my personal body guard now? Or were those crazy fuckers after you? You know 'em. Don't you?"

V turned on him. "Stop pushing me."

"I'll stop pushing when you start being honest. You knew them, didn't you? Seen 'em before."

V just looked at his cop, wishing he'd let it go, but knowing he wouldn't.

Butch exhaled. "Sonuvabitch. They're the ones killing prostitutes. Aren't they? That's how you know them."

He was way too clever for his own good. Great skills for a cop, sucked if you were trying to hide something from him.

"You've handled them before, that much is obvious. But you ain't no fucking cop, V. And you sure as hell aren't FBI - unless the feds now slice and dice instead of arrest and process. What the hell is going on?"

V looked to the sky, trying to breathe.

"They're the ones you've been after. They're your ongoing case, aren't they? Say it! The ones killing the women. They're the ones that killed those hookers. Tell me!"

He looked Butch in the eye, knowing in his gut, in that unholy precognitive way of his, that the cop already knew. He could spend all night denying and making up bullshit stories, but Butch O'Neal was no idiot. He knew the deal already and nothing V could say would convince him otherwise.

"They're the ones doing it."

Butch let loose with string of words that would've made the most jaded sailor proud. V was sure he'd start kicking the Escalade's headlights or punching something any minute now. It was all just bad. Bad, bad, bad. Butch was grilling him for answers and V needed about an hour to come out of the zone where all things were reflex. Fight or flight. And flight wasn't in V's vocabulary.

"Why the hell did you stop me then?" he asked, circling V like a shark. "Why didn't you let me finish them. Why didn't YOU? You sure didn't have questioning on your mind. You had them down and wounded. I could've gotten something out of that last one, but you fucked it all up. What the fuck?! You trying to help them or something?"

V turned on Butch so fast, the cop had to take a step back to keep from banging into him.

"You did not just ask me that," V said, his voice sounding as deadly calm as he felt. "Help them. Help them?" He started towards Butch so that he had to back up until he hit the grill of the Escalade. The cop was pissed, but he wasn't stupid. Right now was the time to get the hell out of V's way. "You have no fucking clue what you're talking about. I've been trying to stop them for longer than you can imagine. So don't you ever, EVER, question where my loyalties lie. You feel me?"

Butch just stared at him, wide eyed.

"I said, do you feel me? Don't just stand there, O'Neal. Answer me. You aren't the only one that deserves a goddamn answer."

~*~

Butch wasn't shocked. He was awe struck. Standing before him wasn't just intimidation, but six foot six of curled up, ready to strike, wrath of god type shit. He knew instinctively that this was V. The other part that made the whole. He didn't get mad like a feral animal, fly all over the place, or even slice and dice like Butch had accused him. It was all calculated to pin point precision death. No mess, no fuss - just fatal. With that otherworldly look in his eyes, Butch got the feeling he wasn't even quite human. Something more than. Walking death. The fourth horseman. No wonder his name was Vishous.

Regardless of being backed against the hood of the car, Butch had never been one for backing down. "Yeah. I feel ya." He stood up straighter. No way could V make him stop talking, no matter how bad ass he was. "It doesn't change the fact that those bastards got away and some poor woman is gonna get her throat slashed for her trouble. You had no right to shove me aside; call shots on my case."

V didn't move, but stared at him like those eyes were about to light a fire. "This isn't your fight cop, so this is where your involvement ends." He turned away, all end of conversation.

"Like hell it does," Butch grabbed his arm and pulled him back around. V shrugged him off like he was a light weight, which only succeeded in setting him off completely. He jerked V around as hard as he could.

"Butch. Now is not the time. I'd back the fuck up if I were you."

He didn't let go, only squeezed harder. "Well you ain't me. Thank fuck for that. I would've stopped the main guy from killing more women."

V twisted his arm loose and shoved Butch away, just like in the alley, this time with a little too much gusto. V turned his back and it was just dismissive enough to light the terminally short fuse.

"Oh heeeeeeeell no." Butch charged him so hard that they fell and ended up on the dusty ground, grappling.

V rolled him and tried to pin Butch like he didn't want to hurt him. Angry, but not punishingly so. Butch wasn't playing. He swung up and got in a lucky shot.

"Cop! I swear to-" V blocked his other punch and hit him in the stomach just hard enough to stop his swinging. "Stop it, O'Neal," he warned. "I'm not the one killing those humans - hookers - so don't take this - Ow! - out on me."

Butch was nowhere near being rational about this. Somewhere tucked behind the anger, he knew it, but the combination of the last few weeks and the intensity of his latest interactions with V had left him with zero reason and a helluva lot of pent up pissed off. He got in a few more shots

before he was moving. Fast.

He was thrown against the front of the car, slightly bent over the grill. The ease with which he was hauled from the ground did nothing to calm him down. He certainly wasn't the type to allow himself to be manhandled. Using his shoulder, he dug in V's arm, trying to get him to loosen his grip.

"Butch - ah - Butch! Stop it. Those girls are not my fault." The black metal hood of the Escalade was suddenly cold against his cheek, the rough grip of V's hand behind his neck pushing him down over the hood. V was using the entire solid and packed length of his body to hold him there.

V's voice had dropped low and cool, that ice edge of rationale and deliberate calm he had when they argued coming in puffs of warm air against his ear. "Come on cop. Let's just ... calm down. Talk to me."

Butch dropped a string of curses across the surface of the car. Being strung over the hood of a car was not doing his ego any favors. He wasn't the one ever in this position; he put people in this position. "You let me up and we'll talk."

The grip at the back of his neck didn't loosen. "I let you up and you gotta promise to be reasonable. No tackling and no sucker punching me. You got it?"

"Fine."

And as easy as that, V released him.

Butch's T-shirt was overstretched and dusty. He took the time to straighten himself up, mostly because he was still pissed and his pride was still bruised. V had backed up a few steps, crossing his arms over his chest, blood spatter from the gangers still drying on his hands. There was dark blood on V's collarbone and his button up had not gotten a good deal out of the fight. The top few buttons had popped off. Which fight was responsible for that was anyone's guess.

"That shit in the alley was NOT my fault and you know it," V said. "And I didn't kill that last bastard because a) I knew I couldn't catch him and b) there would've been a lot more where he came from. My priority was getting you the hell out of Dodge." V's eyebrows were drawn, the light eyes locked to his. "Me and my ... mine - let's just say ... we have an

ongoing investigation involving these ... things. I'm sure you can relate. So while I can empathize with your plight, you gotta trust me that I know how to handle this. I do not help them and you know, in your gut, it's true. Now, I trusted you to stay away for 24 hours, true or false?"

The anger trailed off as a slight twinge of guilt set in. V had trusted him and he had really done shit all to earn it, calling in regularly at the station for updates. "Yeah, I guess."

"So tell me what the hell is up with you, man? How you gonna say it's my fault? What's really going on here?"

That was the meat of it, wasn't it? He knew that V wasn't on the side of the "bad guys". No matter how dark and dangerous the guy might look, he wasn't ... evil. Somehow he know they were on the same side, even if it was miles apart. This was about what those bastards had done. He'd known it when he found them surrounding that kid. They were out for blood and they were the ones killing the prostitutes. This was about his sister, Janie, and the sick fuck of a world that let that happen to a young girl. So much of this twisted case was fucking with his mind.

Blaming V would be so easy because he knew he'd be able to take it. The guy had obviously dealt with this and probably much worse. V would be his punching bag, both literal and figurative, but it didn't make it right.

"Nothing." Butch let out a sigh and squared his shoulders. "It's just ... I'm sorry. But ... you should've let me finish it."

V nodded, uncrossing his arms. Butch knew he understood. Civilians didn't get the need to finish shit like this. Closure.

"I know. I know you wanted to ... but you're a cop. They ain't worth your badge. Trust me on this, man. Trust me."

They stood in silence for countless moments, Butch studying his dusty boots while his heart rate finally shifted out of high gear. V didn't move the entire time. Just stood there, like he was waiting for Butch to do or say something. Like he'd stand there for an eternity if that's what was needed.

"I do, y'know?" Butch finally looked up. "Trust you, I mean." He laughed with more than a little self deprecation. "Fuck if I know why, but I do. But

I know one thing, and you can drop the bullshit. You ain't in IT. And ... I'm not moving 'til you tell me what the hell it is you do."

He couldn't lie convincingly at this point, even if he wanted to. He didn't. Something about Butch and the point to which they'd come, didn't leave much room for bullshit. Oh who was he kidding? It wasn't some obscure something. Vishous knew exactly what it was - and it made it impossible to lie. Then there was the undeniable fact that his cop read people far too well.

V didn't fight like a guy that spent all his time in IT and he was so over feeding Butch the same line when they both know it was b.s. He didn't want this tension between them. He wanted to lay it all out, the full truth, but that was impossible. Seeing Butch within the same five mile radius as a group of lessers had sent him over the edge and reminded him just how dangerous it was for the cop to be hanging out with a Brother.

But now, standing in the dust on some stretch of long and abandoned road, all V wanted to do was get closer. It didn't even matter that Butch was currently coming down off the mother of all pissed off, V still wanted to stand near his solid and stupidly stubborn self. For once in his life he wanted to be totally honest about everything that was going on in his head, press his arm against the curve of the cop's broad shoulder, touch his warm neck again and breathe in his scent. Listen to the deep rumble of his voice, rougher still after inhaling second hand pub smoke and scotch. Instead, V studied the night air just over Butch's shoulder and balled his hands into tight fists.

"So?" Butch finally spoke. "You gonna tell me what it is you-"

"Cop," V stopped him. "I won't. I really can't."

"Bullshit. If you start up with that IT and covert ops crap again, I'm kickin' your ass. Again. It's just not gonna cut it this time."

V fought off a smirk; he couldn't help it. He'd just grappled with the guy, and won because he had a good five inches and forty pounds on him, plus the whole ancient warrior genetics and training, but Butch was still as fearless as the moment he'd met him. Hard ass enough to threaten to kick his ass and mean it, even though the odds were way stacked against him. It made V want to either laugh at him, kiss him, or just fucking take him up on the threat. If he couldn't have the man, then hell, grappling with him wasn't a bad alternative.

"I'm not IT, Butch. Obviously. Yeah, I'm a techno whiz, geek, whatever - I guess - but ah, that's not all."

"No shit."

"The covert bit ain't a lie though. I promise you. My job? The very definition of the word covert."

Butch stared him down, processing this claim. He shifted his weight around. "Like what kind of definition?"

Figured his cop wouldn't make this easy. Hard-assed bastard. He'd love to tell Butch the truth because it sucked to lie to him. V had never had anyone he had to lie to - or cared enough about to even give a shit if he was lying. This was all new and weird as hell. Rhage had told him what it was like, lying to Mary, even wiping her memories. Hollywood actually hadn't exaggerated on the suckage factor. Even though V would try to be as honest as possible, he was still going to lie by omission. And he hated it.

"Like ... so covert you shouldn't even know I exist. To say that my ass is on the line if it's found out that you know is not an overstatement."

"Hmph. Like the government or some shit?"

"Quit fishing cop. I'm not giving specifics. I can't and I won't and it's not just for my best interest."

"Oh, so you're keeping me in the dark for my protection? Gee, thanks." The sarcasm dripped from his words, but V could tell he would accept this line of reasoning over being flat out fed a line of crap. "Then if it's such trouble for me to know or for me even knowing you exist - why come around at all? I wouldn't know shit about you otherwise. Why risk it?"

V was struck silent. Of course Butch would pick something reasonable and question V's logic. Dammit. How was it that Butch O'Neal was the one person who could leave him fumbling for answers? "Uhm," he swiped at his face. "It's ... complicated."

"It's because whatever you're working on crossed over into my job. Am I right?"

V thanked the Scribe Virgin for what might be the first time in his life. Thanked her for clever cops that made up excuses for him when he was too damn stupid to come up with his own. The cop would not appreciate nor understand all the reasons he risked everything just to be around him. "Yeah," V exhaled. "But you weren't supposed to know I was infiltrating. Guess I should've been sneakier about my covert ... ness."

"And now the brainiac is just making up words," Butch smirked at his own joke. "So it's no good, asking what branch of military or government or if you're a mercenary or-"

"No good, cop. Just let it go."

"You could tell me, but then you'd have to kill me?"

V had to work not to smile back. Butch's words weren't far from the truth. It wouldn't surprise him one bit if the King asked for exactly that if he ever found out, but V knew he'd never off him. Hell no, not in his long lifetime. He'd figure something out, but he wouldn't let the Brotherhood or anyone else punish Butch for his own crime. Damn if his cop wasn't one of a kind; with his street smarts and dry remarks, and that infectious, crooked smirk he always wore when he was being a smart ass.

"Yeah, something like that."

Butch laughed as the tension visibly left his shoulders. "Look it, V - or whatever the hell your real name is, I-"

"My name really is V, cop. That you can bank on."

Butch studied him a second, then nodded. "Yeah. I know. Look V, I'm not stupid. And I know you know I'm not stupid, but I also know there's a boat load of deets you ain't telling me and ... that's cool. I mean, it gets in my crawl because I'm a detective, but ... I respect your point because, in my gut, I know you're one of us. I mean, I know you're one of the good guys - for lack of a better word. Wasn't so sure the first time I met you, but now? Well, what I'm trying to say is I know we're on the same side. Maybe miles apart, but still on the same side, true?"

"Absolutely true," V nodded. "That much I can confirm."

His cop chuckled warmly and suddenly the need to be near him was too much. V took the few steps to stand beside him and leaned against the cooling grill. His arm pressed against Butch's shoulder and V thought about how he wasn't uncomfortable with V in his personal space. Most people would take one look and not want him within three feet, but Butch had let him touch and sooth and he hadn't jerked away as he ran his fingers over the soft hairs at his nape. It was part of the reason he'd made that stupid bet, part of the reason he risked so much by being around him. It wasn't just that V wanted into the cop's life, but he wanted Butch to be inside of his. It was insanity and he knew it, but the desire to have him there grew stronger every time they were together and each time it felt more ... right. V knew more about destiny than most and, even though he'd had no clear dreams about him, he knew Butch had to be a part of his.

V looked at his profile, arms still crossed, the shirt stretched tight across his shoulders. Butch nodded slowly, to himself, as if a lot of little pieces were falling into place. "All those cases you helped me on, that just your way to get me on side?"

"Damn Butch, what's with the interrogation? You a cop or something?"

"Fuck you," Butch laughed and V smiled with him.

"Maybe I wanted to make sure you'd work with me."

"Oh yeah? Who says I'm working with you now, wise ass?" he turned to him with a scowl but the dimple near his chin was showing. The one that came out whenever he was trying not to smile.

"Well if this is what you call dating cop, I gotta say I'm not impressed."

Butch cut him a look. "Not impressed with my skills then?"

V couldn't believe he was actually going to be the one to change the subject, but it was either that or end up pressing himself full against Butch because of the night they'd had, the blood still pumping through his veins, the dimple, and for the simple fact that he was standing right there.

"How's the stomach?" Instead he asked about where he'd punched him.

Butch rubbed his abs. "Fine. How's the arm, asshole?"

"Perfect. You hit like a girl."

"Fuck you. Again."

V hid his grin and looked away for a second.

"And nice shirt you got going there," Butch poked at the blood splatter now dried on his button up. "It's a good look for ya."

V looked down at the ridiculous dress shirt he'd worn to ... what? Try to be impressive?

"I don't think I've ever seen you in a collar, V. Surprised you actually own one. Wonders never cease. You must've thought you were gonna pick up some play at the bar tonight, huh?" Butch made a tscking noise with his teeth. "Strike."

"Thanks for the ego boost, cop. Y'know, NOW I remember why I risk coming around you, getting in your business. It's because of how much you build up my self confidence."

"Yeah, yeah," Butch nudged him roughly with an elbow and pushed himself off the Escalade.

V reached for his arm before he could get too far away.

"So, truce?" he asked, realizing that the cop's answer mattered a lot more than it should.

Butch turned back to look at him and waited a beat before he answered. "I guess so. Yeah, truce, you shady sonuvabitch," the corner of his mouth quirked, "but we still ain't datin'."

~*~

It wasn't for lack of trying, but along with any higher motor functions, any creative input was shot to hell.

Butch groaned as he let his forehead slump against the dull grey tiles. The water edging towards lukewarm as he stood there and attempted to get

off. It's not like he could really blame his body for being pissed off with him. Living off 3hrs sleep, working his brain and body beyond what was reasonable, and still expecting it to leap to life was asking a bit much. But after stumbling in, body still aching, peeling off the dust and blood splattered clothes, and washing away the all the shit of the previous night, all he wanted was a little release before collapsing into bed.

Pushing his forehead off the wall, laying a large palm against the tiles, Butch curled his chin to his chest, feeling the water plaster his hair to his scalp. Small rivulets of water running down his face. The other hand gripped himself tighter, edging towards pain as he stroked harder, slick with the soap of the shower gel.

It was just not happening.

Lifting his head into the spray and letting the water running down his chest, Butch was contemplating using a Cherry visual or one of his other occasional one nighters when he flinched back with a hiss. The water and soap hit a cut across his lower stomach. A cut that was the result of being pinned against a fucking truck of an Escalade. By a fucking truck of a guy.

Butch had seen the other side of V and, even though he already knew the intimidation was the real deal, being on the receiving end of that was no damn party. Pin point lethal precision. Cold and calculated fury. He hadn't wasted any time toasting those gangers . Moving quicker than seemed possible for a guy of his weight and size. Taking one down at a time by the quickest means possible. A fucking dance of blood and knives.

Yet Butch had thought it a great idea to piss off that fury and tackle him to the ground for a fighting match of their own. He had to admit his temper had a habit of landing him in an act-first-think-later pile of shit.

But it had felt fucking amazing. He knew with V he didn't have to hold back. And he hadn't. Getting in shots, countering his moves, strength against strength. V completely out weighed him, and yeah, he could begrudgingly admit he outclassed him. But V hadn't come out of it clean. Butch had left him with some rough edges that would be sore tonight. The O'Neal motto of going down swingin'.

He'd eventually end on the up. Some way, some how. It was the competitive streak in him. He had managed his fair share of crim's, many of them a lot bigger than his 6'1 and all with a cunning streak a mile wide.

It wasn't impossible for him to best V if given the right opportunity. He could spin the tables, get V in that same position he'd held him. Slam him against the car. Ass bent over the grill, face hood-planted, big body pinned, arms pulled back. Lock a foot round his ankle, watch for tell-tale muscle twitches. All that power at his mercy, someone he knew who could truly take him, utterly locked down. V would give him shit for it too, guaran-damn-teed. Those light eyes looking back at him over a broad shoulder, perfect eyebrow arched.

"You sure you got a good enough hold there, cop?"

Butch came with a force that sent him reeling.

It was entirely and completely from out of left field. He hadn't even noticed that he'd gained speed and momentum. His only warning was the tightening of his balls sending a shock up his spine that left him shuddering, gripping the wall with a moan. The warm jets spilling into his hand leaving him panting to catch his breath.

He looked down at his dick in utter confusion, as if he could interrogate it to figure out exactly what the hell had just happened.

"Holy. Shit."

Butch drove because driving was at least some sort of distraction. His sleep hadn't been at all long or peaceful. Jose was quiet next to him in the Vic, jotting down who knew what in his notebook, before slipping it back into the chest pocket of his coat. He eye balled Butch for what felt like the fiftieth time. Couldn't blame the guy really. Butch knew he'd seen better days.

"You wanna grab something?" Jose asked. "Bite to eat? Some coffee?"

Some sanity? Some sense of reason? "Ah, yeah. I guess."

The radio buzzed to life. *"Call out to Caldwell nine-five-three. Repeat, Caldwell nine-five-three."*

Jose picked up the receiver. "This is nine five three, over."

"Request for presence at crime scene. Warehouse on Wilkins near the river."

Butch threw a quick look at Jose, that sinking feeling in his gut. There was fuck all on Wilkins anymore; abandoned buildings and overgrowth, not even any drug dens to speak of. It probably meant one thing. Body dump. He hit the lights and siren.

"Well shit," Jose muttered.

Yep, that pretty much summed it up.

~*~

He couldn't believe he was back here. Not just back at the scene, hours after the squints had packed it in and the poor girl had been shipped off to the morgue, but back here. Back to the place, frozen in his mind, where all roads led. Or rather, where all roads began.

The scene of the crime was an abandoned warehouse, corrugated tin walls covered in peeling graffiti, yellow crime tape still whipping in the chilly air.

How had anyone even found her body here?

Butch stood in the darkness, just outside the wash of his Crown Vic's headlights. He was only inches from where the teenage girl had been brutally assaulted and killed, but inside he was hundreds of miles and decades away. The peeling warehouse could've easily been an old, dingy dugout. The graffiti something left by teenage kids from the neighborhood. The yellow tape was the same. It was always the same, whether flying in the late winter air or drooping in Boston's mid-summer heat. The thirty seven year old hardened cop was that same wirey ten year old kid, staring at the police department tape like it could fix all that went wrong.

Butch was still in his work clothes, worse for the wear, but may as well have been wearing sneakers and a size small kiddies Red Sox t-shirt for as tough as he felt. After leaving the scene, returning to the station and typing up the fact sheet, he'd driven around and around, not even remembering getting in the damn car. That driving had landed him right back down this shitty street, the cold morning leaving a grimy film of dew on the warehouse's tin walls.

The silence of it all got to him the worse.

Suddenly it was too hot, clothes too tight. He yanked at his tie to loosen it even more. It was scenes like this that left him screaming inside, sometimes making him wonder if he was right for the job. She was just a girl. Not some girl from the streets either. By the looks of it she was someone's daughter, well taken care of, loved. So how the fuck did she end up here? He itched to dish out some much needed justice for this girl, but there was no piece of deserving shit within swinging distance. He'd done all he could on the detective side. For now.

He didn't realize he was playing with his cell phone in his pocket until it flipped shut on his finger. Then his thoughts were on V. He'd managed not to think about V at all, but now he wanted to call. No. Needed to. Even just to hear him, cool and steady. Tell him about what happened here and how fucked up it was because a guy like Vishous would listen and not be freaked out by how sick the world could be. Hell, he'd probably want to go get the bastards and enact a little non-FBI, secret non-military, glinting dagger punishment on someone.

Either way, he'd get it. Get why Butch was standing at a crime scene at three o'clock in the morning. He'd probably even understand all the whys of it, if Butch was crazy enough to tell him. The profound and heavy weight of a twenty seven year old guilt crushed his chest, that ache that burned struck at the base of his skull. He wanted to offload it. Something he could never bring himself to do in fear of having someone make him right.

Butch ran a rough hand through his hair, dragging it down his twelve o'clock shadow before dialing. Why bother even putting more thought into it?

V answered on the second ring.

"Cop?" The now familiar voice was warm, the steady rhythm of typing in the background.

"V...." Whatever reasonable excuse he'd had fled his brain. Oh right, he hadn't even thought up one.

The typing stopped. "Where are you?"

The ache lessened. Somehow V knew. Didn't matter how, just that he did.
"Old warehouse on Wilkins. It's down by the river near-"

"I know the area. I'll be there in ten."

Who knows what he did in the just under ten minutes it took V to get there, but Butch heard the Escalade before he saw it. V killed the lights as he approached and pulled up just beside the Crown Vic. He got out, ever aware, eyes scanning everything like he was ready to strike.

"Nah, it's okay V. All that's left is me and the river rats," Butch tried to joke but couldn't.

None of the tension left V's shoulders as he came closer.

"What happened, cop? You okay?" he studied the area again, taking in the scene, breathing the air.

"I wouldn't go that far, but there's no immediate danger. Relax."

It didn't look like he relaxed until he'd decided for himself that there was no danger. Typical. Butch gave him a look.

"Okay, cop. I hear ya. I'm cool. So what's doin'?"

~*~

Butch looked away as soon as V asked the question. If V knew his cop, and he'd bet his Four Toys he did, something was way off. The tone in his voice when he'd called wasn't one of emergency, but it still had V driving the Escalade so fast he may as well have materialized to the scene.

Butch looked at him and then back at the yellow tape, taking a hand out of his trench and running it through his hair. "Crime scene. As you can see. We got called up here 'cause the MO was close to our prostitute/ganger case. Turns out it's not one of ours."

V nodded, waiting for Butch to go on. Trouble was he was just itching to close the distance and calm him. He looked like he had been pulled through an emotional grater, his face tired and pale, and the fucking

defeated roll to his shoulders. But V didn't. He just watched his cop drop his hand from his messed up hair and begin pacing.

"She was young, this one. Well looked after. She's somebody's kid, V. And because she's not one of my cases I've had to offload her to someone who probably doesn't give a rat's ass. Where her fucking case will be at the bottom of some pile for God knows how long."

"What do you need me to do?" It was simple. He'd help Butch fix this however he saw fit. Whatever it took, he'd get ass deep into kicking something into next week, anything to get that look off his cop's face. But V also knew that wasn't what this was all about.

Butch stopped pacing and for the first time actually met his eyes. His face softened as he shook his head. "It's not ... She's not mine now anyway. This is not really.... it's not about that." He let out a frustrated sigh before moving back to lean against the car. He glanced down at his shoes for a few moments before looking straight ahead. The blank look on his face hit V like a slug to the chest.

"My sister was sixteen..."

The ice dropped into V's stomach, the dead tone to his cop's normally warm voice warned him, whatever was coming next, it wasn't going to be pretty.

"When they raped and killed her."

As the bomb dropped, V attempted to not respond, keep neutral, but it didn't matter. Butch wasn't seeing anything at this point. "When who raped and killed her?" he asked.

"Some guys from the neighborhood. They knew her. Us. ...I was ten."

Even as Butch stared into nothing, the firm set to his jaw and the glint in his eyes.... his cop was back there. Reliving it. And fuck did he know about that. So he just let him go on. Three hundred years gave you enough sense to know that this wasn't the time for interrupting.

"I fucking watched her get into that car. Watched her leave with them and I KNEW. Somehow I just knew ... I should've stopped her ..." He stopped, turned his face from view before continuing. "They found her the next day

behind the dugout ... beaten and bloody. Shit. She was so young, so small. I should've done something."

"You were ten." It was true, but he doubted twenty something years worth of guilt would be alleviated by fucking pleasantries or pure truth.

"I could've ran and told someone. Screamed out. Hell, ran out in front of the car."

"She knew them?"

Butch nodded, the air of sadness hung so thick around him that it made V ache. "Never would've gotten in the car with them otherwise. She thought she was safe. But ... I don't know. I knew. Somehow I knew it was bad. That she shouldn't be leaving with them. When the police came to our house... shit. I remember the look on my mother's face. My father wouldn't look at me. See, they knew that I'd seen and my father, shit head that he was, he blamed me. He always blamed me."

"Seriously?"

"Dead serious. But shit," his hands waved off the thought. "What a son of a bitch my old man was isn't the point. I'm just sayin-"

"A childhood of guilt and shit from your old man didn't help you settle matters in your head."

"Right."

"But you don't need me to tell you it wasn't your fault."

V watched Butch dig at the concrete with the heel of his shoe before he spoke. "I guess I know that. I mean, I do. I know that. Still, there's knowing the reality of something, V, and then there's fucking believing it. In my heart, I could've prevented it. I should've. No matter how little I was or that they would've probably beaten the shit out of me. Still. They got fuck all for punishment. Juvey. Hell, I know for a fact some of them are still in the system. Worthless pieces of shit. They better be glad they never come up on Caldie's radar. I swear to God-"

"That's why you joined the force."

V wasn't asking; just speaking the facts out loud. He knew Butch wouldn't deny it though. It was as plain as day now, even though he'd constantly wondered why and how his cop became a cop. It made perfect sense. Butch was all things loyal and protective. He had his own brand of honor and justice, and he probably had from the time he was just a ten year old kid. It knotted up V's insides to think about how much of who Butch was - was decided so long ago.

Butch just nodded and let his head fall forward with a groan.

"They can't get away with this, V."

They sure as hell couldn't. If Butch couldn't fix the wrong done to his sister, the least that could be done was to fix it for this poor girl now. Whether she was human or not didn't matter. V shouldn't get involved, and normally he wouldn't, but this was his fucking cop.

"They won't."

Suddenly Butch was right in front of him, in his face, with a look that pinned him to the car.

"I mean it. No more. This shit ends right here. I am not gonna get another call about some innocent girl who's been assaulted and killed in Caldwell. Not on top of whatever the hell is attacking those prostitutes. Not with that crazy shit from last night. I swear to God-"

V grabbed him by the shoulders to make him listen. "I know. Look at me, Butch. I swear to you, you are not going to find another girl like you did tonight."

Butch wasn't looking at him, but through him.

"Do you hear me, cop? You can count on it. Whoever did this - they won't do it again. Ever. You feel me?"

It took a moment for Butch's eyes to finally meet his. The warm hazel rimmed in red. Not from tears, because V could guarantee that Butch O'Neal never cried, but red from the stress. The weight of the death of a loved one that he carried around as though he'd killed her himself. Perhaps it didn't haunt the man every day of his life, but it was the reason he was who he was. What made him a cop and a damned good one. Also

gave him the death wish that allowed him no fear. When you've got nothing to lose, what does it matter?

V knew the feeling.

They were as different as night and day, so it should startle him to know just how much they had in common. Shit head father, anyone? Violent past that you never, ever talk about? Your life's path decided before you were even self aware enough to agree?

He still held Butch's shoulders in a vice grip, but he wasn't going to let go until he knew they were clear. "Answer me, cop," he said, softly.

Butch nodded, blinking his eyes slowly. "I know, V. I feel ya. I knew you'd get it. Guess that's part of why I called you."

"Yeah?" V felt like the word came out on an exhale that started somewhere near his feet. "I'm glad you did."

Butch didn't move, just kept looking at him with those bottomless pools of green flecked with brown. So normal, so human. Nothing like V's otherworldly white eyes. And he loved that about him. Just normal eyes, and a normal busted up nose, a chipped tooth, and hair that stood on it's ends when he got worked up and kept running his hands through it. It was all so human ... so mundane and mortal, but somehow extraordinary. There was something about Butch O'Neal that screamed to be something else. Like he was trapped in this form, but meant for so much more.

"I'm glad you called me," V said again, knowing he was repeating himself. He ought to let go of his shoulders too, but he couldn't. Didn't know if he'd ever be able to.

"What's the other part?" he managed to ask, realizing that he was holding his breath except for when he spoke.

"I ...," Butch's eyes flicked around V's face in a motion so minute that no human eye would've ever caught it. He was trying to understand. V could see him trying to grasp ahold of exactly what it was there between them that made V the one person he wanted with him at a time like this. What made V the person he would open up to about his past.

"I don't know," Butch whispered.

And oh, how V wished he did. He wished Butch knew his own mind as well as V knew his own, because then maybe this all wouldn't hurt so beautifully. V felt his fingers soften and change their grip, seemingly of their own volition. It was as though he could see himself from the outside, his body preparing for something that he was powerless against.

"S okay, cop. I do."

He gently bit at the inside of his lips before pressing them against Butch.

He felt his cop tense against his fingers, hands still holding the trench covered shoulders, but that was it. Butch didn't move, didn't break, just kept his hands where they were, locked in-between their bodies, fingers balled in fists, no doubt in shock. V had expected a reaction, a violent one mostly, but there was nothing.

It was closed mouthed, lips deliberately soft against Butch's unmoving ones. Gentle, simple. As he moved them slowly over that mouth, their noses brushed. It was because of their position; Butch hadn't moved and V was towering over him. It was awkward and felt exactly like taking a running dive off a roof, but it was Butch. It was his smell, it was the warm brush of his nose, it was those lips, that mouth that could dish it out or bark out a laugh. The way he was looking at him, with such aching need for ... something. And he was in pain, the kind of pain V had sampled many times during his long and crappy life. He hadn't thought before leaning in and acting. It was innate, un-fucking-stoppable. His instinct to soothe him, protect him, had taken over. All he wanted was to stop the devastated calm that had taken over his normally unshakable cop.

And just when V started to process the fact that this was a monumentally fucked up idea, it changed. It was small, but V felt it as Butch slowly tilted his face upwards. The tensing of his shoulders lessened and the hands that were held tight between them began to loosen, eventually resting against V's stomach. And then V's insides were spinning out of control.

Butch's mouth softened against his, a slight parting of the lips as the rest of his body relaxed. With better access to his mouth, V tentatively nudged them apart with his own, pulling Butch's bottom lip into his mouth before moving on to the top. The whole thing began to landslide. They were in a place where V had no control. He hadn't thought this far ahead, didn't think he'd ever be in this position. Butch leaned up, fingers curling and

holding his leather jacket and V's mind left him completely.

Butch was ... kissing him back.

That fact alone had V's hands moving from his shoulders into the mused hair and slanting his mouth over his cop's. It wasn't tentative anymore, and V wasn't thinking. He was all instinct. It wasn't a kiss. It was a fucking intense meeting of mouths. It was desperate, Butch's hands gripping his jacket and the world was narrowed down to one fucking thing. This man. V slicked his tongue over Butch's lips before delving deep, sucking and pulling at his mouth, Butch taking in quick breaths of air where he could. It was everything. It was his cop and he could taste him. He tasted masculine and like coffee, the scratch of his shadow harsh against his face, his mouth taking all he was giving and more.

V slid a hand down to the short hairs of Butch's nape, getting a firm grip and pulling him infinitely closer ... and Butch jolted. Lips ripped from V's with a strangled gasp.

Butch moved against V and it took him a moment to realize his cop was struggling. V released him like he was on fire. Like he was fire. But it only took one look into those eyes for him to know it was all going to nuclear waste. Fast. No words were needed, but then, this was Butch. Words were definitely coming. V just didn't count on the pain.

~*~

Butch looked at V for what felt like the first time. It wasn't of course. Far from it. To acknowledge that took reason though, and he was far from being reasonable.

"What the fuck?!" he threw at V, but the bastard just looked back at him before closing his eerily lit eyes.

"What the fuck was that?!"

V didn't answer. Instead it looked like he was trying to get himself under control. He better fucking try harder. Butch wanted to hit something and since V was the only one here...

"What, now you're gonna ignore me!?" Butch shoved him, hard, making V bump against the Crown Vic before opening his eyes.

He looked like he was biting at his lips, keeping them closed, avoiding the answer. Butch could just hear it in his head anyway. *That was us, kissing. Me kissing you and you kissing me back.*

Fuck. That.

That was so not what just happened. How could it? It couldn't. Plain and simple.

"Is that what this is?!" Butch yelled at him. "What all this has been about?"

He wanted to grab the guy. Shake the shit out of him. Something. V did this. Made it happen and now he wasn't saying a damn word.

"For fuck's sake," Butch swiped at his mouth and began pacing because he couldn't think of anything else to do. His hands clenched into fists, but that just made him think about how he'd curled them into V's jacket. Held on to him while they'd-

"I thought we were friends. Goddamn it!"

"I am your friend." When V finally spoke and it was quiet and calm. It only served to infuriate him further.

"Fuck that. I oughta whip your ass."

"You could try," he muttered.

"What'd you say?" Butch was right back in his face again, knowing he ought to think this through, but he was pissed. Pissed and hurt and confused and God only knew what else. He couldn't think about it. If he thought about it, he might end up putting a name to it.

"You force yourself on all your friends?" he hissed at him and saw the words sting V.

He didn't say anything at first; just narrowed those eyes to two pinpricks of light that Butch swore could see through anything. He felt them drill

down to the bone, revealing a boat load of stuff that Butch couldn't even see for himself.

"You just keep telling yourself that, cop."

"You need to get the fuck away from me. Now," he threatened V. Who knew if he meant it? He sure as hell didn't.

V slid away from the car slowly, only looking at him as if he held all the answers and Butch was the one that'd lost the plot. Butch turned his back on him then, anything just to avoid that look.

"I swear to God, I'll-"

He heard the door to the Escalade slam shut and the engine turn over. V was leaving without a word. No explanation. No apology. No answers.

Of course, he hadn't really given him much room for talking.

"Fuck!" Butch yelled as the big SUV drove away. Since it was all that was left, he punched the hood of his car.

Seventy two hours and if he wasn't fighting lessers, he was trying to track down a couple of worthless human rapists and killers. If he wasn't doing that, he was working out to the point of exhaustion. If he wasn't working out or fighting, he was banging away on the Toys. What he wasn't doing was sleeping. To hell with sleeping. Everytime he closed his eyes he saw one thing.

Cop.

No, make that two things.

Cop and the look on his face when he'd pulled away.

"Fucking humans," V grumbled, and took a jab at the punching bag.

The look on the cop's face and the feel of the man were two completely different things. V wasn't an idiot and their kiss had not been one sided. But the realization that dawned over Butch's face, the shock and reproach, it was unmistakable. It was enough to drive a sane vampire batshit crazy - and no one ever accused anybody in the Brotherhood of being totally sane.

Understandable enough that the cop was a little freaked. Okay, more than a little. That was normal. Maybe his attraction to V shocked him or maybe it was V's attraction. Or maybe it was both? Although V couldn't imagine that his attraction was news. It wasn't like he'd been all that coy about feeling the cop. He wasn't overt or flirtatious because he knew it would've freaked Butch out, but he wasn't exactly super incognito either. Perhaps he should've been more stereotypical and waited until they were both well hydrated on Goose and Lag. Or maybe kissed him after they'd fought - because Fade knew he'd wanted it so bad it made him ache. But there was no way he could've *not* kissed him the other night. His cop, standing there, looking empty, in need. They'd shared more in the last few weeks than they'd probably ever shared with anyone. Didn't Butch get it? Was he blind?

No, of course not. Butch was keenly intelligent and street smart. It wasn't that he didn't "get it". Didn't matter though. Butch had freaked out anyway.

That wasn't what got to V though. He could've handled a furious and babbling, freaked out, even punch swinging O'Neal. No problem. He'd handled that before and wouldn't mind dealing with that kind of O'Neal for the rest of his life. But to throw out ruthless accusations, with every intention of lashing out to *hurt*, just because Butch couldn't handle what was doing? In O'Neal's own words, fuck that.

Butch couldn't have known about V's past or that to accuse him of forcing himself on anyone was a low blow. Didn't matter - it still turned his soul cold. If that's really how the cop saw things, then so be it. V would be damned if he ever forced himself on anyone, ever again. Besides, he should've never let himself lose control. He'd been fine until he'd felt the cop touch him. Lean into it and curl those big, bruising hands into his jacket.

What was he supposed to do?

He wasn't the icy statue that most people thought. Let anyone else be in the position of having the one they desire most pressed up against them, their sweet mouth willing and ready, and see just how they respond. The result wouldn't be any different. Except ... maybe that last part with the cursing and the fury.

"Damn it," V threw upper cuts at the bag until he was winded.

"You *still* here, man?" A voice eventually interrupted from the gym's double doors.

V didn't answer. Knew he didn't have to, because whether he responded or not, Rhage would keep talking and come right on in.

"What is up with you?" The big warrior approached. "You been pulping that bag for almost an hour. I think you won this round, Tyson."

V cut his eyes at him and swung again, even harder.

"Whoa. You and your girlfriend have a fight? Take it easy. Between you and Zsadist we're gonna be buying new bags every week and-"

"Don't you know when to shut up?"

"Don't you know that if daggers really came outta the death glares you've been giving lately, we'd all be casualties of war? What the hell is up you, V?"

Vishous stopped the swaying bag with both hands. "Nothing."

"Riiiiight. So you think maybe you could tone the doom down a notch or two? You're rubbing everyone the wrong way, including Boo."

V cocked an eyebrow and refused to so much as smirk. "Fuck off, Rhage. Not now."

Rhage looped his thumbs in his track pants and rocked back on his heels. "I'ma take that as no, then?"

~*~

Butch dumped the crim's belongings on the desk, giving the officer a quick nod before leaving the booking room. He was halfway through a shift that had not been distracting enough. It had made him more ruthless and a little desperate for action. Which a basic lock up did jack shit to help.

Heading back to his office, Butch's fingers felt for his cell as he jammed

his hands into the too small pockets of his trench. He didn't bother checking it, it'd be the same as it had been five minutes ago. V wasn't calling.

And while the entire thing was as weird as fuck, it'd been almost a week and not one fucking word. But then, what would that word be exactly?

After he'd kissed the guy.

That night, after he'd cooled down and driven the Vic home in a way he was damn positive it was not designed for, he'd basically drunk and slept. And when the anger and the blurriness lifted, Butch felt like shit.

Mostly because each time he allowed himself to think about that night, he was reminded of the look on V's face. And then the guilt set in. A feeling Butch was turning into an art form. *He'd* been the one who had called him, at some un-godly hour. And V had come. Dropped whatever the hell secret business he did on a regular basis and drove over to see him, just because he'd asked. Hell. He hadn't even had to ask. The guy knew that Butch needed him there.

And then ... *that* happened. And while the logistics of it all was all a bit blurry, one thing was certain: As he'd ran his mouth at V, he'd hurt him. He'd bet his badge that that was a hard thing to accomplish. V didn't look like the type to give a crap about what people thought or said or, hell he probably didn't a crap about people in general.

But Butch couldn't shake the look in V's eye as he accused him. It was small, but the flash of hurt was there. It was obvious because Butch had never seen anything like it cross V's face. Undeniable. It made Butch feel like a giant-sized douche bag of a bully, which was really pretty fucking ridiculous since V was one of the biggest, most intimidating fuckers he'd ever met. Nevertheless...

Butch plonked down in his chair, it squeaking in protest, and dropped his head in his hands, leaning over on his scuffed desk.

Another thing that had been bothering him, was his ... okay, how about calling it a lack of initial protest? Butch hadn't exactly pushed him away as soon as V had layed one on him. Better yet, tossed a "Whoa there buddy!" as soon as the air between them changed. Butch wasn't some school yard virgin, clueless as to what was up when the air started crackling. He

should've thrown up the stop sign as soon as the whole night's vibe started taking a turn into way out in left field. He tried to peg it down to being over tired and as emotionally raw as a T-bone in butcher's paper, but he couldn't play it that stupid. Try as he might.

He was never *that* tired. Never that raw. There was the time he and Jose had worked a sting on some particularly enthusiastic street "ladies" that weren't all ladies and he'd had no problem letting them know that Detective O'Neal was not on the appetizer menu. Nicely of course.

Then there was the fact that this week, Butch's mind had decided to start fuckin' with him.

For example, it was obvious that V was attractive. No one would look at the guy and think *Gee, there goes some poor, ugly mother fucker*. But did noticing that mean Butch was jonesing for other guys and was secretly a closet homo? No way. Butch noticed because he wasn't blind, but more than that, he noticed women. All of them. All the time. He loved women. All sorts and shapes and sizes and it had always been women that lit his fire. Women and women alone made the air crackle and tingle. Except ... there was definite air sparkage the other night. At the very least there was static.

And then things got weirder.

It wasn't like the station was any different from others where he'd worked. The guys shared a big locker and showers and he sure as hell hadn't been eyeing out their 'goods'. He shuddered at the thought of Reynolds from Vice being in any state of undress. But he'd started using comparisons, like ... Jenkins was popular with the ladies, but Butch had always thought of him as a bit of a sissy - but a dude - and that was a complete stomach turner. And Hart over at HQ was big and tall and good-looking like V, but it wasn't like Butch had ever scoped him out or anything. Picturing popular actors he could understand the looks and charisma that held true for both women and men alike. But they didn't have that same overwhelming, space absorbing, turn your head kinda thing that V seemed to tote around like it was no BFD. The whole deal that was both scary and sexy and violence in spades and-

Oh God. He needed to go home and bleach his brain - and bang his head on the way out for ever pondering his team in that way - because he did not think of V as scary and sexy. That was just ... ridiculous.

He was quickly jump-started back to the present by an heavy thump as an internal manilla folder landed on his desk. Butch looked up only to see the back of the mail guy's head as he headed to the next room. Prick!

Sliding a thumb underneath the tab, he ripped it open and layed it out on his desk.

Photos. And old reports, parole releases, camera shots of cars, license plates, a shot of the car pulling a pump-and-run at a gas station near the dumping ground.

Butch sat back in his chair, making it squeak even louder.

This was about the young girl. It was solid stuff. Butch hadn't actually handed over the case yet. Couldn't bring himself to do it and if he did hand it over with this detail worked in, he could guarren-fuckin-tee that these pieces of shit would be nailed. Any detective worth his salt would pick up a sure thing and run with it.

No note, but he recognized the work. It was complete and organized. Thorough to the point of OCD.

V.

"Look at me, Butch. I swear to you, you are not going to find another girl like you did tonight ... you hear me, cop? Whoever did this - they won't do it again. Ever. You feel me?"

He had come through. Again. Even though Butch had cursed him and treated him like scum. He had still made good on his promise. Shit! He had to call him, sort this out and stop fucking around. Make it right again. So that they could go back to how they were.

He pulled out his cell and flipped it open. He got as far as V's number up on the screen before he snapped it shut, throwing the damn thing down with frustration.

He couldn't. Not here, surrounded by ... everything and everyone.

Maybe later.

~*~

He'd been fiddling with his phone for half an hour. Spin it on the arm of the couch, flip it open, flip it closed, spin it again. Even he knew it was pathetic.

"For fuck's sake, O'Neal."

Great. Now he was talking to himself. This stalling had to stop. He'd put it off for a full twenty four hours after getting the anonymous file. What was he waiting for? Think Nike. *Just do it.*

Butch muted the television and dialed. He swore his heart was beating up in his throat as the phone rang. What was he, a sixteen year old boy calling up a girl to ask her out for prom? Wait. Scratch that thought all together.

And then the phone wasn't ringing any more. There wasn't a dial tone either. He would've thought the line was dead, except he knew V was on the other end. Didn't know how he knew - he just did. V was there alright. Just sitting in silence, waiting for him to do or say something.

"Hey. V?" Butch tried.

There were a few beats of more silence and then, "Yeah."

"Hey man." Butch rolled his eyes at himself. Hadn't he already said hey?

"Hey," V replied, making him feel even stupider.

And why was he the one feeling stupid? He wasn't the one that had grabbed the guy and kissed him. Sucked on his mouth until it felt like the earth was going to swallow him whole-*oh jeez* he really needed to stop thinking about it.

"Uhhmm..." Butch made an effort to fill the awkward silence. "Look, about the other night - heh - that sounds so fucking hokey," he muttered. "Uhm, yeah. I just wanted to ... I didn't mean, y'know, all that. I mean I did. But, I was kind of an ass about it and that was uncalled for and I know the file is from you so ... yeah. I'm sorry."

Silent as a tomb on the other end.

"Hello?" Butch was wondering if he'd hung up.

"Yeah, I'm here," V said as he exhaled.

Butch could imagine him sitting there, wherever the hell it was he sat, smoking one of those hand rolled cigarettes, looking relaxed, regal, and bored yet somehow intelligent and pensive at the same time. Bastard.

"Well. Say something," he urged.

"Something," V responded dryly.

"Shit. Look ... I'm apologizing, or trying to, when it was you that ... shit. Can't we just..."

"Just what exactly?" V zinged back quickly.

"You're pissed," Butch stated the obvious, "and ... I'm not sure I get why, but I know you are. Well, I guess I do, know that is. But hell, I was pissed too! People say a lot of shit when they're pissed."

"Was pissed?" V picked up on the past tense. Observant fucker.

Butch sat in silence for a moment, shifting his phone over to the other ear. "Yeah. I was pissed. I'm not totally done with it now, but I'm not, like, spitting mad anymore and ... look, I'm the first to say I don't think when I'm mad. I just ... do. And I run my mouth too damn much and ... you know I do! I still shouldn't have said all that, but ... goddamn, V. You kinda shocked the shit out of me! I think I deserve a little slack for weirdest moment of my life ever! I don't know if this is news or not, but no guy has ever ... laid one on me before."

He couldn't seem to say the k-word out loud, no matter how much he'd thought it. "So ... I think I get a bye for not handling it with grace and ... I don't know ... an ounce of fucking tact because I was more than a little freaked out, okay?!"

V was quiet, but then he heard a distinct noise. Butch knew that noise. It was that huffing, kind of laugh thing that V did whenever he was amused by Butch being a smart ass. Which was a lot, obviously.

"It's cool, cop."

And that was it. That's all he said.

Butch crinkled his eyebrows in the ensuing silence. "It is?"

"Yeah."

It's cool. And that meant ... what exactly? That they were okay now and things would go back to the way they were? Yeah, not likely. Cool as in what's done is done and now they'll never hang out again, but V didn't hate him enough to track him down and break his knee caps?

"So that means..."

"It means, I accept the apology," V exhaled again. "And I'm offering you one too. I know I shocked the shit out of you and no, it's not a news flash that you'd never had a male - man - kiss you. It was out of line for me to do that, but I couldn't-" V stopped. "I ... *shouldn't* have and ... it won't ever happen again."

Butch switched the phone back to his other ear and said the only thing he could think of. "Okay."

V's phone broke up like it was beeping and he exhaled one last time. "Look, I gotta go, cop. I'll see you around."

"Okay," Butch muttered as the line went dead.

He sat there feeling weirder than he had before calling V. V had neither denied nor confirmed that he was the missing link in solving that girl's case. Not that it mattered, because Butch knew all that. The point was, the call was supposed to fix things. Right whatever went wrong a week ago. But now things felt... Butch shook his head. He didn't know exactly, but it sure as shit wasn't "right".

It won't ever happen again.

Butch reminded himself of this and that it should fix things. It meant things could go back to the way they were before. And that's when it struck him.

Won't ever happen again.

Maybe that was the problem.

V pulled up, a few houses down so as to not draw unnecessary attention, and killed the lights. He was absolutely *not* here to see Butch O'Neal. The plan had been to check up on him and to go unnoticed. V liked the logic of plans, and this was no different. Butch wasn't about to spin around and start making eternity bracelets with him. Sure he'd kissed back, but V wasn't about to force the issue. Kissing Butch had been illogical and stupid as fuck. Which is why V hated going about anything without his head fully locked in. It had been purely instinctual and V wasn't stupid enough *not* to realize the implications of that ... but he could sure as hell ignore it.

Which brought him back to the single fact that they really couldn't go back. There was no way V could slip back into being his buddy. His clear visceral response to Butch would end with him being attached to someone who wasn't interested or simply couldn't allow himself to go there. So the logical thing was to back off. Check on his cop for peace of mind and then slowly un-tangle himself from his life.

It hurt. Fuck it hurt. It was muscle deep and raw. Totally different from the pain of combat. V healed from cuts, scrapes, gun shot wounds - hell, partial castration! But this? This wasn't a pain he was used to. He'd do it though, because the cop meant more to him than he'd care to admit. Hadn't started out that way. It began as pure lust, plain and simple. See. Want. *That* he was used to - and even more accustomed to getting what he wanted. Then it'd all gone arse ways because he just had to meet the guy. Play getting to know you. Sonuvabitch, he'd known it was going to be bad news and sure enough...

He'd wound up feeling something for the cop that was completely alien - yet happened so naturally. He didn't even notice it happening and V noticed *everything*. Had his messed up insight and premonitions helped him see this outcome? Hell no. He was never wrong. Ever. Until now. So the best thing he could do was make sure the cop didn't get his dumb ass killed, go through some kind of O'Neal detox, and nurse his wounds with fighting and Goose - at least 'til he moved on.

And these thoughts, this plan of action, was completely crystallized in his mind ... until he recognized the broad shoulders of Detective Brian O'Neal.

He watched as Butch walked casually over to one of the crime techs cars, obviously talking to one of them through the drivers window. There was a short bark of the cop's laugh before he reached out a hand and banged the roof good-naturedly, watching the car drive off. He was in that end-of-shift mode. Tie loosened, top button undone, trench flapping in the wind. His face was tired, covered already in that twelve o'clock shadow.

One thing V *had* picked up this entire time watching Butch move about the crime scene was the press of a broad hand against his forehead. It hadn't moved. And as Butch walked over to his car, shrugging off his trench and reaching into the boot, V saw the blood trickle down over his bugged nose before a grimy shirt was quickly pressed into place. When Butch winced, logic got royally fucked over by instinct and V's hand was on the handle before he'd even had a chance to realized he was screwed. Plan? What plan?

V moved quickly over to the Crown Vic, the dull sheen shaded in the cover of broad branched trees. The only illumination was the dash board as Butch sat himself in the drivers seat, door open and both feet planted on the tarmac. Elbows on knees and his head pressing into his shirt covered hand.

"What've you done to yourself, cop?" V asked with no inflection.

Butch still jumped about six inches off the seat. "Sonuva-" he shouted, hand on his Glock before he realized who'd asked him the question. "Dammit," he sighed a laugh at himself.

"Didn't mean to scare you, but I say again, what've you done to yourself?"

"You didn't *scare* me, V. I just ... didn't know you were there 'sall."

V nodded and crossed his arms. "And the headdress you got kickin'?"

"Oh." Butch pulled the shirt off his head and slid out of the car. "Uhm. It's nothing. Just ... got dinged up a bit."

V could see the gash from where he stood. It wasn't a ding. Someone had laid the cop open, probably with an elbow to the head. Now why the hell would Butch let someone get that kind of lick in?

"A ding," V replied, not bothering to hide the sarcasm. "Right. Well, FYI,

that *ding* won't heal with a nasty t-shirt compress and you're gonna have a nice looking scar there."

Butch winced at the shirt he'd evidently once used to wipe down the Crown Vic or some shit. "It's all I got," he grouched and put it back on his head. "But thanks for making me feel better about my new beauty mark."

V turned toward his Escalade. "Follow me," he said, not bothering to look back and see if the cop actually did.

Once he reached the SUV though, Butch was right behind him. "You gonna finish off the job or ...?"

V jerked open the passenger door with enough force to damn near rip it off the hinges. He pointed to the seat. "Park it. I'm gonna patch you up. *If* that's okay with you?"

He stood there and waited, eyes neutral while he let Butch decide. He could do a hell of a lot better job than Butch with his nasty t-shirt and probably stitch him up well enough that there'd only be a faint, if any, scar. But he was *not* going to get all up in the guy's space unless he was cool with it. This wasn't about being close or even edging back into the cop's life. This was a favor, an apology of sorts, and a way to keep Butch from looking busted up weeks from now. If he didn't want the help, V wasn't going to *force* it on it him.

Butch never really agreed verbally or even so much as nodded. He just slid into the seat sideways and pulled the t-shirt away.

V got his med bag out of the back, along with a clean cloth. He laid the bag on the floor board beside Butch and poured some cholrhex on the cloth.

"Just so you know, this is gonna hurt like a bitch," he warned, seconds before pressing it against the open wound.

~*~

Butch hissed at the sting. "Ya think?! Damn!"

Butch wondered if V realized he was the king of understatements, even when he overstated things. It felt like someone had poured pure alcohol

and salted lemon juice into the mother of all paper cuts. "Hurt like a bitch" didn't quite cover it. This was no paper cut either. He'd gotten his head laid open while grappling with some rowdy gang member. It was not something that normally happened, but then again, Butch's mind hadn't really been in the game. He could kick himself for getting splayed and now, insult to injury, V had to see him with a gash down his forehead and blood trickling down his neck.

"Told you," V deadpanned and blotted at the wound. "Here," he took Butch's hand and placed it over the clean compress. "Pressure on the wound."

Instructions given, he went back to digging around in his big, black medical bag. Who the hell carried around an emergency kit like that? Was he a doctor in addition to being a secret non-military whateverthehell? Maybe just some med-vac or field training? It made his head hurt even worse to ponder the mysteries of V right now. And the guy was definitely a damn mystery.

Butch was almost certain he'd never see the guy again unless he called him up and pleaded to meet with him. It'd been eight days - yes, he'd counted - since that night at the warehouse and they'd had exactly one five minute conversation that had left things more vague than before. Because, let's be honest, a kiss like that was not vague. Now though? Vague as a hobo's story on a park bench at who-the-fuck-knows in the morning. Yet here was V, right on the scene to patch Humpty Dumpty O'Neal back together again and successfully make him feel like an even bigger douche bag.

All that being said, it was still damn good to see him.

It shouldn't be and it ought to be uncomfortable for Butch and down right miserable, but the only discomfoting thing was how un-V-like V was acting. There was no snarky comments or digs at Butch for getting his dumb ass injured. No back and forth banter or blade sharp one liners. This was just V, doing a job with absolutely no emotion. There was no gleam in those normally bright eyes.

It pretty much sucked.

V was good at his work though. No doubt about that. He'd laid out what looked like a sterile pack, another length of gauze, some thread, a - holy

fuck curved needle - more stinging salty lemon juice solution from hell, and dressing to wrap him up all nice and tidy.

"Let me see," V said now, moving his hand to check the bleeding. "More pressure," he instructed, pressing on his hand before he picked up a wad of cotton to douse it with the salty lemon juice.

V began to wipe up the blood that was now drying in place where it'd trickled down Butch's nose and over his cheek. All business, the intelligent eyes focused on what he was doing, the jaw firmly locked in concentration. He'd probably sew him up better than a surgeon, being extra careful that everything was in place and that it wouldn't hurt any more than absolutely necessary. Butch bet he was the kind of guy that didn't miss a spot either; careful to get the areas that most people might miss and...

Butch let the line of thinking go. It just seemed out of place.

V wet another swab and tilted Butch's chin to the side before wiping at the trail of blood that was evidently all down his neck. Butch wanted to flinch at first because the last time V had held him...

But he didn't. He didn't want V to think he was thinking about the other night.

"Heh. Made a mess of myself, huh?" he joked, trying to change the mood.

"Mmm," V replied, very non-committal and too focused on his work.

"You, uhm, do this often- I mean, a lot?" Butch tried again. Anything to make the guy talk. Talking was better because the heavy silence and V rubbing on his neck was just too close to- *Dammit*.

"I'm not going to fuck up the stitching job if that's what you're worried about," V said.

With one last, long swipe at his neck, V tugged at Butch's collar. Butch knew he squeezed his eyes shut, even if only for a nanosecond, and his free hand had curled into the SUV's leather upholstery. He didn't know if he was expecting the guy to deck him or kiss him, but he was pretty sure it was the latter.

"You got blood on the collar of your shirt," V said instead, and deposited the used swaps into a plastic bag.

V moved back to inspect his head before replacing the wadding, pushing against Butch's hand to indicate more pressure, a small frown tugging at his mouth. "Fuckin head wounds" Butch heard him mutter. Unwrapping the blue package, V spread it out on the floor of the passenger seat, before bending back up with a -

"Fuck. No!"

V's face indicated this was non-negotiable, the syringe drawing up the last from the vial. "I'm not gunna have you flinching and fucking up my stitches. Now keep still"

He placed a large hand on the side of his face, eyes narrowing in concentration. There was a sharp sting and then there was just massive pressure, hell, it wasn't the first time Butch had needed sewing up, but most of the time he had been under. Any nervousness of having V all up in his face was blessedly distracted by the fucking needle in his head.

With the top of his head starting to feel numb, V moved quickly, tools and that curved bitch in hand. And then V nudged apart his knees further and situated himself firmly between them. Butch's brain felt like it had maybe soaked up that numbing needle and short-circuited his brain.

"K, tilt your head up and don't move" And with that V worked, long fingers as comfortable holding the tools as his knives, hands moving in a smooth and easy dance. Move, pull, spin, cut. Next.

Up this close Butch got to take in his face, focused, eyes glued to his forehead. No tongue sticking out, no lip biting. Just solid and steady. V's MO. And his inner thighs tingled from V pressing there.

V leaned back, giving a quick nod as he laid down his tools. He placed a hand under his chin tilting his head back further, wiping at the stitches with more of that stinging lemon stuff.

"Done."

Butch was pretty damn sure he didn't want to be walking around with a bandage on his head, looking for all the world like some mended up

Frankenstein, but at this point he wasn't going to argue. V placed the last piece of tape into place.

"By the way," Butch said, even though V wasn't looking him in the eye, "thanks again for the file. I know that shit didn't come easy and-"

"Not a problem, cop," V stopped him, eyes steady on Butch's forehead. "Wasn't easy for you to tell me about your sister either so ... it's cool."

Even now that his work was done, V's face hadn't relaxed. No it hadn't been easy for him to open up about Janie, but it was more than cool what V had done. Especially after being on the receiving end of pissin' mad O'Neal. But it was plain that V had designated the whole thing as not up for discussion. He was too busy studying his handi-work like it was going to be graded. Butch knew exactly who did the grading too.

V.

Come to think of it, the only time V ever looked "relaxed" was when he was laughing at some crack or remark that Butch had made or after a few rounds of Goose and the topic slipped off to something like the Sox or idiots in the news. When it came to real deal stuff, V was the ultimate professional. No bullshit. He did what he did, didn't ask for permission, and carried himself in a way that said, "Yes, I know I'm damn good." That's pretty much exactly how the guy-

Butch swallowed hard.

Kissed.

It seemed maybe that much wasn't so mysterious about V. Over the last week Butch had thought about how the guy had made several remarks that, sure, taken in a certain context were pretty blatant in their meaning. Maybe it was just that Butch chose not to go there in his mind. V may be many things, but he wasn't a bullshitter. Perhaps Butch was just too blind to see or chose to wear the blinders? Such a fast friendship with a stranger and would be enemy? Hell, he never made buddy-buddy that fast with any guys on the force. It'd taken him and Jose over a year to bond and that only happened because Jose's wife was a helluva good cook. But he and V were suddenly BFFs after just a few weeks?

Damn. Was it possible he was a complete idiot and didn't see this coming?

The thoughts had reeked havoc on him these last few days. Was he *that* in the dark about anything that wasn't square? Well - hell no. He wasn't super square, it was just ... surprising. That's all. And never mind the fact that a guy like V could have anyone. Any guy - if that was his thing and ... evidently it was. So why the hell had he kissed Butch? Plain ole, beat up Butch?

He touched at the bandage on his head, suddenly conscientious of all his faults.

V stopped his packing. "Don't be messing with it either," he told him and pressed gently on the tape. "I know you're going to want to peek at it when you get home, but just leave it. You can have a look in a couple of days, but just ... try and trust me, okay? Leave it be for now."

Butch looked at the hard lines of that stern face. The crinkle that appeared between his eyebrows whenever V was thinking hard or meaning he'd kick your ass if you didn't listen, the way the dark brows drew down, hooding his thoughts. The way the hair and the goatee were a little incongruous with the face itself. The hair fell against his temple no matter how many times V shoved it back and the goatee, he suspected, was something V had grown to keep himself from being too pretty boy handsome. That and the tattoos made him harsh looking, because without them he could've stepped out of some magazine ad.

The weird thing about the goatee though, was that right now it looked prickly and rough. But really, it wasn't. It was soft like the hair on his head. Now Butch's shadow - that's what was prickly as a mother. Probably burned like hell when they'd kissed too.

He let his head drop as he thought about it. *Why* was he back to that? Couldn't he just stop thinking about it? It couldn't be that *hard*.

"Hey," V's head once again shot up from where he was packing his bag and he moved back between Butch's open legs to check the dressing. "You okay?" he asked, the first bit of emotion finally showing on his face.

Butch was confused for a second before he realized V must've thought he'd gotten dizzy or something, what with all the head flopping.

"Look at me," V stated, holding up a finger in front of his face. He swept his hand from left to right across Butch's line of vision.

"Nah. I'm okay, that's not what-"

"You aren't following," V told him.

"I don't have a concuss-"

"Butch," V reprimanded.

"Damn," Butch gave up and followed his finger back and forth, easily able to focus. Focusing on V was not the fucking problem. "I *don't* have a concussion," he repeated.

V rubbed his goatee. "I don't think I have a light," he said to himself, obviously paying no attention to any claims Butch made. "Oh," he leaned over and popped open the glove box to pull out a small pen light.

"Here," he held Butch's chin and started with the outside vision and moved in.

"You're gonna - dammit V, I'm fine - you're gonna blind me," Butch groused but didn't twist out of his hold.

V clicked off the light instantly - shocking Butch that he didn't argue and press his point. Instead he stood there, studying him critically, trying to discern for himself just how fine Butch really was.

V's eyes narrowed and Butch realized that within those eyes were years of experience that even a weathered cop didn't have. Those eyes that could crinkle up with laughter when V covered his mouth and allowed himself to laugh big. Butch hated that he covered his mouth to laugh because the smile was nice. Butch looked at his mouth now. There was no smile there and he hated that too. His full lips were drawn tight and that was a shame. V had lips that were honestly, as pretty as any woman's. Evenly full on the top and bottom and - *why the hell* was he thinking this?

Why couldn't he STOP thinking this?

Maybe it was because V had totally fucked with his head? That was it! V had gotten in and done a scrambled egg job on his brain, making him think of guy lips and shit like his eyes and his scowl. He'd actually made Butch wonder and that was just messed up! What if? What. The. Fuck. If?

It was definitely a fluke. A one time thing that had made the air crackle and spark between them and had made his legs feel wobbly. Because he could admit that much now. His legs had definitely felt weird and he'd definitely leaned into the guy and he'd definitely let himself be kissed if not actively kissing back. And just fuck him because it was all just too goddamn weird. Too alien to want it again right now just to see if it really was all that it'd seemed. Because that just didn't happen. Old school Irish Catholic boy Butch did not go around kissing guys. Especially not this guy with the ink and the still stern scowl and the extraordinary eyes and the soft hair and full lips and-

"Ah hell."

Butch leaned up and kissed him.

And one thing was certain. The fluke theory got shot to hell as soon as he met with the soft feel of V's lips. Sure it wasn't as intense as at the warehouse - V had actually been involved, *fully* involved there - rather than standing like a statue between Butch's legs, letting him do the work. That tingle in his spine was back though, along with that spark that made the air heavy and thick.

Butch felt awkward, his hands pushing on the seat so he could lift his face up to where V's was, neck slightly strained, the brush of V's thick thighs against his knees. Now that he was aware enough, he could take in just how fucking different it felt. V was no woman, he wasn't even one of those men that you had to look at twice to decide. Nope, not even in the same ballpark. V was overwhelming and powerful and completely, without a doubt, a male.

And tall.

Now it's not like Butch was a shorty or something, but he was definitely leaning up, even in the high seat of the Escalade and that was new. V didn't smell of perfume or fruity shampoo either. His scent was dark and spicy, like those Turkish he always carried around. And yep, those lips that could rival a fucking woman's for softness, those were definitely surrounded by the silken brush of his goatee.

And as definite as the realization that this thing between them wasn't any fluke - So was the fact that V wasn't kissing him back.

He wasn't leaning away, wasn't tense or gearing for a fight. Just passive, lips soft, jaw lax. Butch knew the difference too because he'd been on the receiving end of a fully engaged V and that just didn't *slip* your memory. He never thought that the word 'passive' and V would end up in the same sentence. Butch even got the feeling that if he reached up and secured a hand behind his neck to pull him closer, V would let him. He thought about it, V wasn't bending down and it made it difficult for the kiss to either continue or deepen. He just stood there, wedged firmly between his legs, strong and capable hands still holding the penlight.

V wasn't pulling away, but Butch ended it. Sat back in the seat, eyes immediately on V's face. There was little information there. No anger, no response. Nothing. Just a blank look and a burning tinge to his light eyes.

It was uncomfortably silent. V staring at him and Butch wondering what on earth to say. *Hey, sorry 'bout that. I just needed to see if it was my imagination and, if not, how gay I was for you.*

A fair amount apparently because as soon as V shifted, tasting his lips and taking a step back, all Butch could think about was, *There's more. What had happened to the V that kisses like he did at the warehouse?*

Maybe he was still pissed, even though he said it was 'fine'. But Butch thought he'd at least have responded, it wasn't like he was the one that had started all this. V had kissed him, really fucking kissed him. Now there wasn't so much as boo in response.

Or maybe he had missed his shot, one bullet only and a moving target made of Swiss cheese. V was a smart guy. Okay, understatement. Maybe he'd realized what a basket-case of worn out and bugged Butch was, took one look at that pile of baggage and decided to cut his losses.

And even though the prospect meant that Butch didn't have to deal with this terrifying new thing they had, he really didn't want this to be *it*.

Suddenly, very mindful that he had been one step away from being rejected, Butch let out a breath and looked at his shoes. He felt the brush of V as he started packing up and chucking his shit in the back. Butch slid off the seat, feeling for his keys, brushing another reassuring hand over the bandage.

Then there was a slam down of the back door and V kept his hand on the

roof of the car as he looked over. Butch took a few steps in his direction, leaning back on his heels. "I'm ... gunna head. Court tommorrow."

V nodded.

Feeling even more like a fuckwit, Butch let out a small 'seeya' before walking past to get back to his car. And hopefully back to his sanity.

There was a sharp tug at his jacket.

V's hand was on his bicep, his other reached for his hand, depositing a small plastic bag in it. "Change of bandages. Leave it off after a week, but until then don't get it wet." V let him go and headed for the driver's side of the Escalade.

Butch shoved the packet in his pocket and headed for the car. Hopping in and sitting in the darkness, watching the lights of the SUV pull out and away. He didn't drive home straight away. Just sat in the dark like a schmuck, rubbing a hand over his tingling lips.

Was it seriously already time for first meal?

V rolled over and looked at the clock on his night stand. He'd maybe gotten four hours sleep, but as Rhage would say, it was already time to wakey wakey, eggs and bakey. The guy was way too much of a "morning person" even though in his case it was neither morning nor was he a "person".

His ears must've been burning, because V's cell phone went off with the sounds of Biggie's "Big Poppa" - Rhage's personally chosen ring tone.

"Yeah," V laid the phone over his ear.

"You coming to first meal or what? We gotta go check out that safe house and I wanna get back before last meal. That work for you? Think you can shake a leg?"

He could hear Rhage chewing between questions.

"I gotta take care of something first but I can swing back by to pick you up by eleven."

Rhage sighed his sigh that meant he was being inconvenienced.

"What? We'll be back before three, what's the big damn d-"

"I got plans with my Mary tonight, man. We gotta be back by at least two so I can prep. It's important. You feel me?"

V rolled his eyes, but then he thought about catching up with his cop. For the first time in his life he knew what it meant to want to make time for someone - because he was definitely going to carve out a few minutes for Butch tonight. They needed to talk or ... something.

"I hear ya. I'll pick you up at ten then, that good enough for you?"

Rhage was quiet except for the chewing. "Wow. That was a lot easier than expected."

"Don't push it Hollywood. Ten or nothing."

"Yeah, no. That works. But I'm driving. See ya then." The smug SOB hung up before V could respond.

V tossed his phone on the night stand and rolled over on his back to stare up at his ceiling. Once again, his mind ran over the last week. It was enough to make his brain sputter and skip and he was a male that could normally compute anything. He didn't want to obsess over it, but how could he not? It was driven by pure instinct and gut reaction. His instinct wanted Butch, whether the cop wanted him back or not.

Against all rationale, Butch O'Neal had kissed him yesterday. Not the other way around. No matter how many times he reviewed it or looked at it from different angles - that didn't change. Awkward and tentative though it may have been, the cop had definitely kissed him.

A smile crept across V's lips and he sat up to shake it off.

Yes it was a kiss. Yes, it was a good one - okay, based upon the who involved it was fucking awesome - but everything else was mind boggling. For a male who never had his fucking mind boggled!

It had to have taken brass ones for Butch to do it. It sure took some big ones for V to finally kiss him the other night. V didn't do kissing. He couldn't remember when he'd kissed anyone, male or female. But then he

hadn't, had he? Ever. Sex was one thing and his kind of sex didn't require intimacy. Lips and tongue though?

And V was a fucking walking warning sign! For hundreds of years no one in his race would see the markings on his skin and think "Oh I gotta get me some of that!" Not unless they were more twisted in the head than him. Believe it or not he'd found them over the years too. Those willing to give him what he needed, but kissing them? Hell no.

Even with all that considered, he hadn't hesitated in kissing Butch. In that moment, it just *was*. It had to happen. It'd gone ass-ways almost as soon as it'd begun, but then there was his cop last night - leaning up to kiss him firmly on the lips.

Mind. Boggling.

But how could he know Butch wasn't just testing the waters? What if he was just confused? How could he know the guy wouldn't freak out again and go running for the hills? Short answer - he didn't. There was no way to predict where this was going or for how long. V didn't exactly want to be an experiment.

His options were simple. One, go with this opportunity and see what happened, risking whatever pain and doubt and trouble might come with it. Two, end it and extract himself from Butch's life and cut the losses now.

Yeah. Right.

So that meant there was really only one option and V knew he'd explore it. No point in trying to kid himself it was otherwise. He wasn't walking away from Butch O'Neal unless the hardass chased him away. And even then it might still be up for debate.

Maybe a few months ago there would've been a viable out option; back when it was mostly physical. From the first, the cop had thrown V's I-want-o'-meter into overdrive and V had been hell bent on getting, ASAFP. Yet with only wanting there was no real risk involved, no promise of permanent damage. Now the "I want" morphed into "I need" and it was scary as fuck. V didn't do the receiving end of scary very well, so this whole option one thing could get really damn interesting.

Then so be it, he thought, throwing his long, naked legs over the side of the bed. Interesting was always a hell of a lot better than boring.

~*~

Butch drummed his fingers against the wheel impatiently. Seriously, how long did it take Jose to get coffee? He'd called all "I'll be there in ten, just gonna swing by the Java Hut. Want one?"

Dumb question. But it seemed like it'd been ten minutes already and Butch was ready to get on with the night. Work meant less time to think and thinking was bad. Really bad for about the last twenty four hours. He realized his fingers were inches from touching his lips as he thought back, so he quickly scratched his chin.

"C'mon Jose. Hurry it up," he said to himself.

Then he saw the headlights pull up behind him. Way too high to be de la Cruz's Taurus, but the perfect height for a big, black SUV.

"Son of a-," Butch exhaled as he watched V slide out of the Escalade and cross behind the Vic, headed towards the passenger side.

"You cannot be here," Butch muttered lowly.

Tap, tap.

Butch unlocked the car anyway. Shit. On second thought, take your time Jose, no rush.

V folded himself into the car pretty gracefully for such a big guy and waved a Styrofoam cup with a pink and orange logo towards Butch. "Look what I happened to pass just up the street," he held it towards him.

"You know I was dying for some coffee?" Butch asked, thankful for the simple topic of caffeine as ice breaker.

"You're a cop aren't you. Sorry, but the stereotype is just that for a reason."

V peeled back the lid on his cup and took a sip. "Plus Dunkin's stuff is addictive. You can't pass by and ignore that little ninety nine cent sign

flashing."

Butch took a sip too, burning his lip, but he didn't care. "Hell yeah it's addictive ... big spender." He really couldn't resist giving the guy hell or the lure of falling back into their normal banter - even though now they might be far from "normal".

"Well I know cops don't get paid shit so you can pay me back in five cent increments over the next five months if that won't break the bank." V didn't miss a beat as he kept sipping his coffee.

Butch just enjoyed the moment, until he remembered Jose.

"Crap. Uhm, FYI, and I'm not rushing you, but my partner'll be here soon. Unless you want a meet n greet-"

"What? We not gonna stake out some baddies together?" V shifted forward in his seat. "Get some doughnuts, talk shit about other departments, smoke cigarettes,-"

"Smart ass."

"Ah c'mon. I'll be Starsky and you can be Hutch."

The guy was actually joking with him and being ... a pretty damn happy version of V.

"Okay first of all, it ain't like on tv," Butch joined in. "Secondly, fuck that. You know I am so Starsky and you couldn't be more Hutch."

V actually laughed a little then. "So relax Starsky, I'm not here to hang out. Not really keen on meeting Jose, no offense, but I wanted to check on," he made a motion towards Butch's forehead as he took one last sip of coffee.

Oh right. The stitch job.

V like his normal - okay normal for V - self, quick comebacks to Butch's snark, smirk firmly in place even while sipping coffee, all business when it came to checking his patch work. The air wasn't all heavy and weird. Damn, Butch had missed this.

"So?" V shifted his weight and turned to face him. "You mind?"

"Uh, no. Sure." He set his cup down in the holder and turned so V could check his work.

Butch lowered his head and let V peel the tape back. He worked so smoothly, you'd never know he was checking a fresh head wound.

"Looks good. You're not messin' with it."

"You said leave it be. I can follow directions y'know."

"Alright. Don't get all bent outta the frame. I'm just proud of you for not picking at it." V huffed a laugh to himself. "How'd you explain this to the boy's at the station anyway?"

"I fell down some stairs?"

"They might actually buy that since it's you."

"Ha, ha. Nah, they all know the deal because Jose gossips like a woman. They all wanted to know if I stitched myself up though or if I had some hot nurse do it for m- ... never mind."

V said nothing as he fixed the bandage back in place. When Butch was finally brave enough to look up, V was studying more than just his wound.

"And what'd you tell them?" V asked, and Butch could swear the guy kept looking at his mouth.

"Uhm ..." Okay scratch that. The air was definitely heavy now. Heavy and weighted and... "I, uh ... uhmm."

V smirked again. "Articulate."

"Asshole," Butch's mouth began to turn up on the end.

That is, until V's hand slipped from the bandage to touch the side of his face. "This okay?"

There were a few seconds where he thought about it, a few more when he swore he was saying "yes", but nothing came out. Finally, "Yeah."

V's fingers brushed against his temple and then drifted to his jaw, doing some seriously freaky shit to his insides. "We still cool?" V asked. "After the other night?"

Butch just nodded because it seemed a lot easier than forming actual words.

V studied his face like he was trying to find answers there, even though Butch had said yes. Okay, not said, but indicated. V was perfectly still except for the touch of his fingers.

"You know I didn't mind what you did the other night, right?"

He didn't? Then why had he just stood there? Why had he ... oh. A guy like V wasn't the type to make the same mistake twice, now was he? Once bitten...

"Honestly? I wasn't sure," Butch said, "but ... okay."

V blinked once, slowly, his face smoothing over as though resigned. "You could do it again."

Butch laughed nervously. "I ... don't know if I can. N-not because I don't want-well, y'know, but-"

V saved him from babbling. "Take it easy, cop. I think I know what you mean."

"You do?"

V laughed softly. "Well I'm pretty sure I do, but ... I have no doubt you'll let me know if I'm way off base."

Butch remained stone still as V leaned in.

"This okay, too?"

Butch nodded as best he could. Sure V was taller than him, but really - how was it that the guy seemed to suddenly take up so much space? He was pretty sure what was coming, but he held his breath anyway, frozen with expectation and anxiety.

V's lips brushed against Butch so gently he could barely feel it. Afraid to move, he just let V lead. Twice more those lips danced across his before applying just enough pressure so that Butch could taste the sweet coffee and smell the Turkish spice. He pressed back, the feel exhilarating and such an odd relief.

When V sat back, his eyes were trained on Butch's face like he was dealing with a cornered animal. And then, maybe he was. Butch didn't even know anymore. Seemed there was no predicting his own behavior since just over a week ago, but now, the anger didn't come. In fact, it was ... nice.

"No freaking out?" V asked after a moment.

Butch shook his head and exhaled slowly. "No freaking out," he finally said.

"Good," V's mouth turned up at the side. "I better go, cop. Mind those stairs okay?"

Butch was a little dazed, but came too as V opened the car door, washing the car with interior light. "Wait," he called after him, having no idea why.

That was it?

V looked back at him expectantly. Hadn't he said he wasn't freaking out? So that meant he got just a touch of lips that barely constituted a peck? How was he supposed to clarify anything from that?

"Jose. Remember?" The corner of V's mouth edged up as he casually grabbed his coffee.

"Oh ... right. Thanks for..." Butch touched the bandage on his head.

"Not a problem. We'll ah ... talk more tomorrow?"

"Yeah, sure." Butch's heart beat double time as V got out of his car and into the SUV.

V pulled out of sight just as Jose pulled in behind him and Butch thanked God for great timing as his partner slid into the car.

"Damn Butch," Jose exclaimed, making Butch want to check his reflection, see if somehow what he'd done was written on his face.

"You couldn't wait ten minutes for coffee? I said I was coming."

Oh that. Butch exhaled.

"It was a damn sight longer than ten, J. Here," Butch took one of the coffees he had in his hands just to shut him up. "One can never have enough caffeine anyway."

"You heading to work or ... an operation or whatever?" Butch opened the car door, leaning in to dump his shit on the passenger seat before turning back, arm slung over the open door. The coffee cups from yesterday were still in the holders; the entire car smelled of coffee. Butch was headed home when he'd found V leaning against his Vic, long legs spread out.

V nodded, moving to stand opposite him, mirroring his movements, hand drumming on the roof of Butch's Vic. "Something like that."

He was close, no closer than he usually stood, it was just now Butch really noticed. It was dark as pitch where he always parked, but he could still make out V clear enough. He was in his fighting gear, leather jacket zipped up, bulge under his arm that indicated he was packing. Butch thought he'd never get used to seeing him in this get up, but he supposed he could really ... appreciate it?

"Gotcha knives?"

V raised his eyebrow at him, like he'd been asked if he had his pants on. He unzipped his jacket, holster tight across his chest, knives glinting. "Didn't wanna freak out any of your cop buddies so I'm keeping it on the DL."

Butch laughed. One look at V and they would freak out, not necessarily a bad thing, so there was no such thing as V and keeping it on the down low. V was freakin' intimidating and that was that.

"No worries. Shift change was an hour ago; I just work late. I always park way the hell out here, away from the parking lot anyway."

"Yeah, I noticed." V's eyebrow was still up in question. "Why's that?"

Butch shrugged. "To be risky? Guess I kinda hope some mugger will try to jump me out here in the boonies. Give me something to do instead of going home," he laughed. "Nah ... if you park in the lot you gotta hang out. Hang out and shoot the shit after shift, talk about families and kids and bullshit and ... I dunno. The guys are great and all, but after twelve hours I'm not really interested in small talk. Just never felt like we had much in common except for work, y'know?"

"Yeah, actually. I do know."

And Butch was certain he did.

V's eyes moved to the bandage still on his head. "You could probably take that off tomorrow, let it breathe. I can take 'em out in a couple of days." Those lips quirked. "You still getting shit about it?"

"Well the secretary treats me like I'm a war hero and brings me coffee, looking at me like I've lost an arm in battle or somethin'. It has its perks."

V laughed at that, a quick dip of his head to hide his mouth like he always did.

Which brought him to his current constant thought. V's mouth. Incredibly soft lips. Or namely the fact those soft lips could kiss a guy as if life itself depended on it. They may feel soft, but they didn't have to kiss soft. That's just what V had done lately ... for whatever reason. He found that now, he wanted V to kiss him again. For real this time. The last two times had served to shoot down the 'fluke theory', but he wanted to know if it was the mind-blowing, off the Richter scale, waiting for the earth to spin outta control kind of experience that he remembered. V was holding back a lot lately; either that or the overwhelming bastard at the warehouse had been an elaborate figure of his imagination. Butch knew he wasn't *that* imaginative.

He stood there floundering for a few seconds, the whole sensation of attraction to someone that wasn't curvy and soft, smelling of flowers, and *female* being way weird. Yet there it was. It was attraction, big time. Wondering how exactly one asked for something like an earth tilting kiss was new too. Then Butch remembered that he didn't have to *ask*. He was a fucking guy too and God knows he'd manned up and done it once before.

So before he had too much time to contemplate the whole kissing of another guy thing - this freakishly attractive guy that for some twilight-zone of a reason had the hots for a busted up cop - Butch found himself stepping in, leaning up and pressing his lips to V's.

He pulled back long enough to see that he must be doing something right.

V's smile vanished and his lips parted. His normally controlled exterior looked a little ruffled and those eyes were locked onto his, analyzing the shit out of him as usual, lit as though from the inside. Butch looked down to V's waist, sliding a hand into the open jacket to telegraph that he planned on doing it again so look out! Damn, he'd done this before for God's sake. Since when did the whole process feel like he was dismantling a bomb?

He leaned up again and this time it wasn't a press of lips. It was the O'Neal special - damn it! He tilted his head for better access, slanting his mouth over V's to lick at those soft lips. One way or another, V was going to respond more than the brick wall routine he'd been pulling lately. Butch tightened his hand on that hard waist, tugging at him.

"You wanna get with the program? Didn't think I'd be doing all the heavy lifting..."

V's tongue darted out to taste his lips, eyes quickly scanning the area. "Yeah, but not exactly private..."

Butch could tell he'd basically shocked the shit out of the guy and why was that so much fun?

So he went with it, urging V to the side and pressing him against the side of the car. It felt as weird as fuck, being up against something that was as solid as a concrete block and wearing a hidden arsenal that could take down a small town. But he was getting more bent out of the frame at the fact that the guy was still distracted. And not "O'Neal distracted" like he should have been.

Butch kissed him again.

"....*Cop*.." The voice was insistent, but this time there was a hell of a strain to it. It sounded like he was holding back a tide.

Butch pulled back, not bothering to hide the scowl on his face. He did not want V holding back. "It's a ghost town out here right now and we're behind a cement wall. So no, I'm not worried about anybody seeing us. I'm more worried that the guy that laid one on me a coupla weeks ago is being a total Nancy about it, when *I'm* the one that oughta be all about the paranoia and hesitation. What the hell V?"

V stopped scanning and suddenly looked down at him, eyes alight. "Right. Got it."

Then V's eyes twinkled, really fucking twinkled, in flirtatious amusement. He pulled Butch forward so that all his weight was now pressing down on him and the car. He dropped his head, forehead brushing against Butch's, like he was giving him free reign.

Which Butch completely took. Nudging V's lips apart, he tasted and sucked at his mouth, pulling at those lips in soft languid tugs. He could tell V wasn't totally warehouse V yet, but it was sure as shit doing crazy enough things to his insides. It was slow and unhurried, like a small lit fire pooling in his stomach. Then he felt that firm hand at his upper arm move to slip around his waist, settling a large and warm hand on his lower back, dipping beneath his shirt and well ... slow and unhurried was dropped like a drunk at an ice rink.

With V's head lower, Butch clamped a hand at the back of his neck and pulled him down, hard. No more with the slow sipping and sucking. In for an inch, might as well be in for a fucking mile. He devoured that smirking mouth, urging the real V forward, feeling the brush of tongue as he tasted deep. His mouth warm and pliant sending Butch's stomach into his boots, the hand at his back rubbing lazy circles, skimming the waist of his pants. The air was thickening, heavy and electric, both of them clinging to control. And suddenly skin seemed like a very good idea.

With his hand on the back of V's neck moving to thread through that soft hair, he slid his other to the front. The back of his hand tentatively brushing up and down the hard plane of V's chest and stomach. He moved it down, his fingers touching the exposed skin above V's belt, delving underneath the black T-shirt. The skin of his stomach was soft and smooth, actually a lot of the guy was smooth, even the deft hands at his spine which should be as gun calloused as Butch's considering what he did for a living. And he was more than just warm to the touch.

"You're hot," Butch said.

V chuckled against his mouth, leaning back a little. "Why thank you," the grin devilish within the silken goatee.

Butch felt his face flush, not one for getting embarrassed but his mind had not exactly been connected to his mouth. "No, I mean - well yeah, but I meant your skin. It's hot."

It was probably better if he just shut up and with V smirking like that... He pressed a soft kiss against V's lips even as he kept talking.

"Oh yeah. That ... happens. You think I'd be cold, but that's just a myth."

Cold? Myth? Butch cocked his head sideways. "Why would I think you'd be cold?"

There was a flash of something in those eyes, but before Butch could even process it he was spun quickly and pressed hard against the car. Brain function forgotten as the full solid length of V pushed against him. The hot kiss, the hard span of his stomach and hips, and something about the pressure felt *really* fucking good. He couldn't have stopped the noise that came out of him.

Had he seriously just *moaned*?

~*~

That *noise*, V thought. Fuuuck.

His stupid slip up was forgotten because obviously Butch did not want him holding back. If that little noise was any indication, this is exactly what Butch had been looking for. Fully loaded V. And shit that was tricky. He needed to keep the full blooded male thing in check or freaking Butch out would be the least of his worries. Fully loaded V wanted Butch up against the car in this dark corner, his throbbing erection touching his cop in some way, any way. He wanted to taste him, possible passers by be damned. Anything to find some relief. And damn he wanted to give Butch that same relief too and giving wasn't something he *ever* thought about. He

wanted it all plus the unmistakable urge to mark his cop.

Damn it! He needed to get a fucking grip.

Oh man, but he wanted more of that noise Butch made. Not so little and not so quiet this time, thank you very much.

So much for just seeing where things might lead in a sort of casual manner. This shit wasn't headed anywhere casual.

He pushed his thigh between those legs covered in cheap cop suit and cupped Butch's face as he kissed him, hard. Where had his cop found the balls for this? Not that he was complaining. No, sweet Fade, he wanted this. This was precisely what he'd needed. For months now. Butch there, giving just as good as he got and with any luck at all, not changing his mind half way. Don't let the cop get cold feet now. Sure as hell didn't feel like he was getting cold anything. And *damn* but his cop could kiss!

One hand was now gripping V's jacket and the other was touching bare skin; brushing against the muscles of his stomach, feeling like it was burning him alive - not the other way around. He kept alternating between the tips of his fingers and the back of his hand, investigating, curious because there was no doubt V felt far different than the many females Butch had touched.

"Cop..." V was breathing heavy, "we keep going like this and ... I can guarantee this won't stay PG-13. You feel me?"

Butch pulled back a little, looking at V's lips like he didn't really want to stop, but he knew wise words when he heard them.

"I'm just sayin'." It was only fair to warn the guy, but if Butch didn't want to stop he sure as hell wouldn't argue.

"Right. We gotta stop," Butch said, sounding like he needed convincing.

"Yes. It'd probably be ... a good idea," V agreed. "For now," he was sure to throw in.

Neither of them moved.

"Uhm," Butch looked like he was actually blushing a little. "You've kinda

got me pinned."

"Oh," V stepped back a little, giving each some breathing room and making Butch smile.

V ran a hand through his tousled hair and tried to be cool and collected. Normally it wasn't a problem but ... well to be honest, if this is what guns blazin' O'Neal was going to be like, then he was a lot smarter and in a lot more trouble than he originally thought. This hadn't just been receptive and clinging Butch - this was grabbing and pressing and, dare he say it, *alpha* Butch. V's plan had been slow and tentative so as to not freak out the life time hetero, but ... maybe it worked to make someone with Butch's personality just pissy and eager enough to make a move. The mere thought had him hiding a shit eatin' grin.

"What's so funny?" Butch asked, smirking also.

V gave him a look. "Nothing is funny cop. *Believe* me. I was just thinking I have hella good taste, that's all."

Butch's eyes sparked a little then, but this time in a good way. He looked down for a second, probably doing his damndest not to color further.

"Yeah, yeah," he rubbed at his face trying to hide it. "You're a fucking genius."

It was disarming how edible his cop could look. Especially when grinning like that, his face flushed with color. It was all he could do not to grab him again and press him lengthwise against the car. Over the car, hell, in the car.

"I gotta go to work," V announced quickly, knowing it was in everyone's best interest if they went a *little* slower than the images currently flashing through his mind.

"Don't let me keep you," Butch flashed him a look and V wondered if he realized just how cocky and sexy it was. Did his cop have even the slightest clue how much he oozed sex appeal?

"I'll call you later?" V didn't mean for it to come out a question, but he ought to be given props for even being able to stand straight at this point. All that was circulating through his body right now was need and cop.

Lips, skin ... that fucking noise.

Butch nodded, looking at his shoes, doing that slightly awkward thing he did. "You wanna meet up tomorrow then? I mean for drinks ... like after work and shit, not ... If you're not working that is. I'm not sayin' like a *date*, just meet up."

He was feeling too generous to let him keep filling up the silence with his Butch verbal train gone off the tracks kind of way. "How 'bout I meet you at that hole in the wall of yours at the end of night shift tomorrow?"

His cop pushed off the car where he was leaning, shoving a hand into his pocket. "Yeah ... I was thinking of checking out some place else. I can let ya know where."

V nodded and watched as Butch made a step towards him before holding back. He smiled lopsidedly, "I'll ... catch you later then." He dipped his head before climbing into his car.

V watched him drive off, just absorbing the moment for a second, and the fact that Butch's non-date actually made him feel all tingly inside. Oh man, here he was getting all chicked out about a "non-date". Tingly? What the hell? And Butch would definitely punch him if V ever accused him of being anywhere near endearing in his way of handling something so far outside his norm. Thing was, for Butch, the big issue was V was a guy. A man. That had to be weird as fuck for a straight man, but there was no denying what lay between them. Didn't mean Butch was gay, but he was definitely feeling V. It was a good thing because V was more than feeling him. V didn't kid himself that there weren't going to be issues. Kissing would be the easy part - relatively speaking.

But he wanted more. So much more.

Good thing V was who he was. Control and a dominant personality weren't just good for being a Brother. He'd work this out, because no way in hell was he going to lose Butch over fear of the unknown.

Then there was the whole *other* pink elephant in the room. The invisible one.

Butch had no idea that V wasn't a man. He was male. Vampire. That little tid bit probably wouldn't just break the cop's brain - more importantly the

info would put him in jeopardy. To hell with that! He just couldn't know. V hated the lie, but humans with that knowledge ... well look at what went down with Mary. No way could the Brotherhood know either. Not right now anyway.

So yeah, he had a whole lotta balls to keep in the air if he wanted to keep Butch. Life had dealt him one difficult hand, but damned if he wasn't going to play it. He'd nearly killed himself for less and this was ... this was *his cop*. There was no explaining it, but this was right. It's how it should be.

Besides, since when had life ever been easy for Vishous, son of the fucking Bloodletter?

"That'd be never," V said with a wry smile, digging for a hand rolled.

Butch moved closer to the middle of the bar, in direct sight of the door. He took a sip of his Lag; another glass filled with Goose sat next to him on the bar. He drummed his fingers against the glass. Butch figured that buying a guy a drink didn't equate to it being a date. He bought his buddies drinks all the damn time...

Of course, he didn't make out with them against his car.

He recognized the dark hair, easily head and shoulders above everyone else, as soon as V entered. V moved in that unmistakable way that made the casual jeans and black t-shirt seem out of place. It was like his second skin was those fighting leathers and anything else was just in the way. How the man managed to remain stealthy in whatever-the-hell job he did was a damn mystery. He didn't exactly blend in, and the few un-intoxicated eyes that followed him showed it.

"Find it okay?"

V moved in close, close enough for his chest to brush against Butch as he leaned around him to retrieve the Goose. While V had never been one for personal space where Butch was concerned, he was close enough now for Butch to smell that V scent. It sent his heart rate careening into his throat at the memories that suddenly took up far too much brain space.

V pressing him against his car, pinning him there with his thigh between his legs, kissing him like it was the end of the fucking world.

Butch shook his head and took another so-help-me-god gulp of Lag.

Then V pulled back and looked at him. Eyes not wavering as he took a long sip, looking for all the world like he'd heard Butch's heart rate jump. Bastard was doing it on purpose. "Yeah. It's not bad, better than that other bar of yours."

Butch nodded, the other place had been a dump. "It was a little-

V licked his lips clear of Goose. "...yeah a little."

He had to stop staring at V's mouth. "Wanna get a booth?"

V smirked, light eyes flashing in amusement, voice lowered. "I haven't been here *five* minutes cop." The smirk grew as Butch felt his face heat up. Bastard.

"You can see the screens better, genius." He turned on his heels, moving for the back.

"Oh yeah. Screens. Cool." V was right behind him. "Who's playing?"

He had to laugh. "Hell if I know."

V laughed a bit too. "I'm guessing basketball, right? Getting near play offs."

"Sounds about right. Never was my sport to be honest."

"Nor mine," V slid into the booth facing the front door, back to the big screen. "A br- buddy of mine is into it though. He's going ape-shit because in a few weeks it'll be March Madness."

Butch took the seat opposite, facing the television. "You have buddies?" He didn't mean to sound so shocked, but he couldn't picture V paling around with a big group of people.

V responded with an eat shit look. "Yes smart ass, I have a few buddies."

"I believe you, man. Just saying you don't seem the type to be into the whole social circle thing."

"I'm not. You got me pegged there. But ... I have one or two people I can

stand to be around." V threw him a look over the top of his glass as he took a sip.

Butch coughed a little and swallowed hard. He checked out the television like he knew who the hell was playing. Fact was, he wanted to know more about this guy that was - well how would he label him? His kiss-against-the-car buddy?

"So these one or two people are your secret work buddies?" he tried.

"One of them," V arched a perfect brow.

"Well, it's not like I have a whole lotta friends outside of work either. Jose invites me around when his wife thinks I'm living off too much take out and drowning in scotch. They're good people."

V nodded. "And I suppose family get togethers are out of the question."

"Understatement. Though ... I heard my other sister had another baby. Trying to decide if I want to go to the christening."

"I'd rather get my ass kicked," V announced; his sentiments matching Butch's exactly.

"Amen to that." He laughed a little and felt the brush of V's warm leg underneath the table. He barked with laughter then. "Did you just footsie me?"

V looked nonplussed. "I'm tall."

"Riiight." Butch went back to studying his drink, surprised that he was so amused by V's actions and not really bothered by it at all. Then he thought about the night before. He'd pretty much rubbed himself all over this guy, not just his leg, less than twenty four hours ago. This guy! Could his life get any more fucking weird?

"Look," V said suddenly, sitting forward and planting his elbows on the table in serious business mode. "I'm not one for talks - sure that's no big shock - but let's just get this out of the way, true? I know this has got to be weird as hell for you. I get that. And I want you know, it's cool. Whatever happens or doesn't happen - happens. As fucked up as I look, I'm not down with the whole high pressure bit or intimidating you into shit

you aren't ready for. You feel me?"

Butch nodded, feeling it completely.

"And this," V motioned between them, "with the hanging out and shooting the shit and all the other stuff we did the last couple of months - it doesn't have to change or get weird just because..." He let the sentence drop and tried again. "It doesn't mean that this is any different."

"It doesn't?"

"Well I don't want it to be."

"I don't either," Butch assured him.

"Cool." V took a long drink and leaned back in the booth. "Just wanted to put that out there. Now, if it's all the same to you, can we just shoot the shit now. That's more deep talkin' than I've done in years."

Butch laughed outright at V's smirk. "Absolutely. And tell your buddy," he nodded towards the screen, "sorry, but college basketball has fuck all on the MLB."

V clinked his glass in agreement.

~*~

They finished their drinks and the conversation stayed light, V thankful that he didn't have to give any more speeches. Speeches were the King's area, but that convo had to be had. They were about to order another round and some food when the cop's phone went off.

Butch groused, but answered by the second ring. V could tell by the combination of "yeahs" and "uh huhs" and a litany of "shits" that it was police business. He caught the where and who that was calling and knew immediately it was another hooker. Another hooker meant another lesser.

Butch stuffed his phone in his pocket. "Sorry man. I gotta jet."

V didn't ask what was up. He didn't need to.

"You're off duty. And you've been drinking." Like he ever gave two shits about rules, but he did not want his cop going on this call.

"It's my case and one drink. Don't even try the boy scout routine with me," Butch gave him a look.

Fair enough. So there was only one way this was going down.

"I'm coming too," V announced, ass already half out of the booth.

Butch was still seated with his jaw slack. "Like *hell* you are."

V stood, arranging his jacket, thinking he had all his gear plus some in the Escalade. He just looked at Butch thinking there was really no reason for them to waste their breath on this. He was going. End of.

"How exactly am I supposed to introduce you other cops?" Butch kept on, but threw down a twenty and got out of the booth. "So this is V," he mimicked. "Yeah, I'm not sure what he does either because it's all top secret and shit, but he's here to help. Swear. Don't mind the tats or the fact that he looks like he'd eat your dog for breakfast. He's cool. Scout's honor."

V's eyebrow raised into his hairline. How was it that the cop was the one person that could make him question his sanity? "I do not look like I'd eat someone's dog. Do you think I look like I'd eat someone's dog?"

Butch headed for the door so that V had to follow. "I don't think you do, but c'mon. Someone that doesn't know you? One look. Dog eater."

"Thanks a lot, cop. I'll remember that."

He laughed up ahead. "You gotta know how you come across, V. I'm a fucking cop, but you're still a lot to ... *absorb*." Butch's voice got warm on that last word. The way his cop sounded when he was getting flustered. That would never get old.

"You say the nicest things," V smirked. "But I'm still coming with to this scene."

Butch stopped so suddenly that V almost ran up on him, turning with a

look of disbelief.

"Butch, there's fuck all you can do to stop me so why waste your breath? Besides, you don't have to do intros at all. They'll never know I'm there. Hell, *you* won't know I'm there."

He ran a hand through his hair, it spiking up at the back. "This is a monumentally bad idea."

"And that's stopped you since when?"

Butch shoved open the front door, waving V through ahead of him. "No comment."

~*~

V watched as Butch shrugged on a bullet proof vest over his grey tee. He loaded a mag into his Glock before sliding it into a newly applied thigh holster. Seemed his cop wasn't one for messing around with the 'albino' gang again.

Once bitten.

A small team of around five or six highly decked out cops were setting up their gear, someone with 'MASON' written across his back handed Butch a shotgun. The team leader started with positions and sweeps and V could sense that he was mostly thinking the place was cold. The disturbance call that had placed a group of young guys beating the shit out of another young guy had been vague at best.

He watched from his vantage point on the roof, shifting on his heels as he watched Butch tap the leader indicating he would go round the back. Surprisingly enough, the guy didn't argue the one man operation. It seemed Butch's reputation preceded him.

Once the humans had moved on, V walked the length of roof following Butch down the alley. He could relax ... for now. His baby powder scent meter was barely ticking over. As the alley darkened, V dropped down.

"Jesus!" Butch spun around with the shotgun butt pressed into his shoulder. He lowered it when V moved into view and let out a long breath. "Fuck V! Don't sneak up on me like that!" He straightened, stretching his arm from holding the heavy gun. "Anyways, you're supposed to be on watching duty *only*."

"I am watching." He moved on ahead and it wasn't until they rounded the second shitty corner that V could smell it. "He's over here."

"What're you, like some kinda blood hound?" Butch followed, almost matching his pace. V grinned at his cop's indignant tone.

"Sure ... why not?" He sped up to a jog when the smell of blood hit him in a wave. The human male was tied to a rough metal piling, sagging against the rope, obviously too badly beaten to fight against it. It seemed the lessers had upped their ante as the cuts were only made near big veins. He'd been there a while, the blood dripping down his arms was congealed in places, but something told him not too long.

V's knife was out and cutting him down, a quick press to his neck had him nodding. A pulse, fucking barely. "He's still here. Call the paramedics." He tied the cut ropes quickly around the kid's biceps.

Butch was already in motion, cell phone out, but he moved to argue as V stood up, sliding out another knife and looking down the alley, searching.

"Where do you think you're goin-

V was already down the alley. "CALL 'EM!" he ordered.

V knew this trail was dry, the smell old. He did a run around the circuit, following that faint scent until it ended, opening up to vacant parking lot. Processing all this was making his head spin with the implications. He didn't want another dead human, but if the guy made it and talked ...
Shit!

The King was so not going to like this turn of events. And it wasn't like V had any viable excuse for being first on the scene. He spied the camera at the far end, making a mental note of the location before he headed back. At least something good might be pulled out of this shit.

~*~

Butch could sense he was there. Where however, he had no fucking clue. It was like having a stealth bomber locked onto you, only worse. You could feel the power and the presence, but with no idea where it lurked in the sky. Hanging back, feigning he'd parked his car elsewhere, Butch watched as the last of the police circus took off. Only when it was dark did he feel him.

"It's clean, couldn't find anything." And V was suddenly at his side, not looking at all worn for having sprinted off down some shady alley.

He coolly slid his knives back into place as they started walking back to where they'd parked. It wasn't until Butch shrugged out of his vest that he was stunned at how in sync they'd become. He'd handed the shotgun off to V so he could get out of the vest and he was already unloading it as Butch tugged and fanned at his t-shirt. Butch made for the trunk of his Vic, popping it open as V laid the shotgun in the gun compartment. Shoving the vest inside, Butch lifted his leg to rest his foot against the open trunk to undo the thigh holster, aware that V's eyes were there as well.

"It doesn't look too good for this new one." Butch commented. He pulled out the Glock, holding it out to V's already outstretched hand. "Male prostitutes now in just as much danger as the women." Butch felt for the latch around his thigh and thought anyone that didn't know better would think they'd been partners for years. He shook off the thought. "The para's were working on him as they left. I don't think I'll be interviewing him any time soon."

V's sure hands released the magazine and checked the chamber. Eyes moving back to Butch's fingers. "We know who's doing this already, no need."

Butch chucked the holster into the trunk a little too hard and slammed it shut with a bang. "There *is* a fucking need because I *need* evidence if I'm gonna nail these bastards." Butch reached for his Glock from V, sliding it into the waist of his pants, the magazine shoved hastily into his pocket. "I just can't go all vigilante on their asses like you. There's a book I gotta go by."

Speaking of book, he had to go and start on the paperwork. *Fuck*, the paperwork! The thought of heading back to the station now to stare at a computer screen was not appealing. He ran a frustrated hand through his hair.

V moved into his space and looked down at him. "It won't help. But if that's what you gotta do...

"It is."

He knew V wasn't all for Butch sticking to this case, but he'd certainly had his back tonight. He was under no obligations really, except the fact that he'd wanted to. "But it was handy having someone back me up. Thanks."

And when he looked up he was met with that V intensity and that ghost of a smile. "Don't thank me. I gotta head, cop. Time to ... check in." V nodded towards his car but made no move to go.

Butch stepped forward before stopping himself. He wanted to kiss him; had ever since V smart mouthed him at the bar. But kissing goodbye? That was a little too much like dating and something about that and V just seemed out of place.

V didn't move, but the intensity of his gaze charged the air as the corner of his mouth tugged into his patented smirk. "You want to kiss me." His voice was low and amused, but again laced with something that had Butch's lungs struggling for air.

Well Butch was never one for backing down from anything. He got a grip on V's holster and tugged him down for a quick peck. "I'll catcha later." He let go of the leather strap and headed for his car, only to be tugged back by the back of his tee.

"Hooold on there, detective." V's laugh was liquid and deep, and sexy as hell. He circled Butch to get right in his space, placing his hands on Butch's biceps, the warmth of those large palms burning into his skin. "I might not see you tomorrow."

"Why?" Butch mentally slapped himself for sounding anything like a sixteen year old schoolgirl.

"Cause life's an unfair bitch." The smirk faded as V brought a hand up to

run along his jaw.

Butch felt the smooth skin scratch along his stubble as his long fingers found his chin. Holding him there, V leaned down to kiss him firmly. It was simple and controlled, but the heat of V's mouth pressed hard against his, a quick lick and taste of tongue and the overwhelming smell of him. Definitely enough to keep his mind fucking occupied for the next twenty four.

As V straighten back up, Butch blinked a few times to focus.

"Now I'll catcha later."

Butch had to grin, watching the guy look all too pleased with himself as he turned and headed toward his SUV. "Cocky bastard," he grinned as he lowered himself into the Vic.

V covered the Escalade in *mhist* and burned it back to the Pit. He should've just dematerialized but he never left his wheels abandoned, especially not in that part of town. But damn, he was cutting it close. Dawn was maybe an hour away, the sky lightening by the second. His dumb ass knew better than to cut it that close, but it's not like he could leave Butch unattended. Unprotected.

How was he going to explain this latest event in the war with the lessers to Wrath? What was his reason for "happening" upon a scene like that? How to gently introduce the news that the young human might make it and be able to talk? That now they could have dead human men as well as women to worry about. Obviously the lesser in charge of doing this wasn't getting all his instructions from the big bad Omega or he'd know not to leave loose ends. Especially not human loose ends. He'd bet it was some rogue lesser wanting to impress and with something to prove. Sloppy. Very sloppy.

Oh yeah, the shit was going to hit the fan soon.

The tires screeched in protest as V almost two wheeled it in to park behind the Pit. He was inside well before shutters down. Too bad it didn't matter. His cell phone went off with a chirp before he even passed the Foosball table.

"You think the stunt car driving makes up for being this late?" the King asked, not bothering with a greeting.

"I did think it added a certain sense of urgency, my lord."

He could tell the King wasn't amused even without seeing his face. "Mmm, hmm. Then urgently get your ass up to my office. Now."

The call ended without a pleasant salutation either.

Well ... damn, V thought. Looked like the brown stuff was hitting sooner rather than later.

The King was already pacing when V reached his office. Never a good sign.

"Sit," Wrath pointed.

"I think I'd rather stand."

Wrath gave him a look that said *I wasn't really asking*. V always found it interesting how a male that wore sunglasses all the time still managed to be that expressive. Had to be the eyebrows and the widow's peak.

"Y'know? I think I will sit. Mind if I get a drink first?"

The King made a motion for him to help himself, then took his place behind his ridiculously dainty desk. V poured a healthy two fingers worth of Goose. He had a feeling where this was going and he'd need the hydration.

"Why are you so late getting in?" Wrath cut right to the chase.

"Ironic you should ask," V settled on the upholstered couch. "I was working."

"Working on what, exactly?" Two suspicious eyebrows shot up.

"The lessers that are picking off Caldie's hookers. There was another hit."

"Shit. You catch them?"

"No. Long gone before I got there, but ..." V rolled the glass in his hands.

"Spill it, V."

"Two things, my lord. This one was a young man - so now we got us some equal opportunity assholes - and this one wasn't dead."

"What?!"

"EMS took him to Caldie General."

"Shit!" the King repeated. "Don't mistake me; I don't want another dead human, but do you think he'll remember anything?"

Wrath's views on the value of human life had changed dramatically after Beth, but V knew his priority would always be their race. If anything threatened it; it had to be dealt with.

"Doubt it," V answered honestly. "If he even makes it. Kid didn't look too good."

"Stay on it," the King ordered. "If he comes around and you think he can talk, wipe him. I want us to double up patrols in the areas near the river too. This shit has got to stop. You and Rhage partner up. Three nights on, two off."

Perfect. Three partnered nights on meant three days without seeing Butch, *unless* he could slip Rhage.

"Roger that," V agreed, knowing he had little choice. He downed the last swallow of Goose and got up to stretch his legs.

"We aren't finished yet, V. Don't think I haven't noticed your recent ... absenteeism. I'm not going to bust your balls for having a life. Virgin knows you need one. You hold up in that Pit more than what's natural. However, I need to know what kind of life you're having."

"No offense, my lord, but I don't see how that's any of your damn business."

The King laughed, but it was sharp and deadly. "Everything you do is my business, brother, especially if it takes you away from our business. And no offense taken, as if you really give a damn. I'll tell you this much, you don't want me to really be in your biz, so don't let this "life" keep you

from doing Brotherhood biz. We clear? If I need you in five minutes, I want your ass here in five minutes and do not come wheeling in here less than an hour before shutters down again."

"Won't happen again," V promised.

"Good. Then we're done," the King nodded.

Next time he cut things this close, V thought, his ass would just go to his place at the Commodore. Last thing he needed was the King on his back.

~*~

V stood outside the sketchy apartment building, thinking what a far cry it was from the Commodore and thinking how much he didn't give a flying fuck. It could've been a hovel and he'd still be overwhelmed. Because this was Butch's home. Where he'd invited him. For dinner.

V took a deep breath, relishing the moment and the smell of garlic and marinara that made its way from the open second story window.

Sure, his cop had no idea what it meant to cook for a vampire, a male vampire. How the hell would he? But he'd had his own reasons which meant enough.

"Look," he'd said, when he called V up the day before. "I've been thinking about how I welshed on our bet from shooting pool. Still sticks in my craw because a man never renigns on a bet. Plus, all things considered, I think I can fix you spaghetti without it being an issue."

V hadn't needed any further invitation, especially since it'd been three days since he'd seen Butch. With Rhage as his part time baby sitter (no matter how much Hollywood swore it wasn't so), he'd had to be on his best behavior. That meant no drop-bys outside the police station, no eavesdropping on dispatch, no catching up with that familiar Crown Vic, no face time with Butch.

Good thing it was his night off tonight because he was getting a major cop jones.

With that thought in mind, he gripped the neck of the newly bought Chianti bottle and took the steps two at a time up to Butch's door. He could hear *Boston* playing through the door so he knocked loudly. Butch answered it barefoot, in a dark t-shirt and worn jeans, looking like a million bucks.

"Sounded like the damn cavalry at the door," he joked over the music.

"Well you've got the music cranked up loud enough. The neighbors might call the cops."

"Yeah," Butch let him inside and went to turn down the stereo. "Knowing my neighbors, that's unlikely. They don't pop outta their holes, ever. I could probably target practice in here and they wouldn't say shit."

V went straight to the kitchen and set the bottle of Chianti on the counter. "Thought I'd contribute to the cause even though it isn't your regular stuff."

Butch pulled the '97 bottle out of the bag. "Proper," he said. "I don't do red much, but with Italian," he shrugged.

V pulled up a stool and settled on the other side of the counter so he could watch his cop cook.

"Looks like you at least cleaned a little since the last time I was here."

"Don't start," Butch quickly pointed a stirring spoon at him. "Domestic duty ain't my thing," he banged around in a drawer and eventually tossed a wine bottle opener over. "And let's not forget I wasn't expecting company last time."

True enough, V thought, remembering the last time as he worked on the bottle. Butch's apartment was small, the kitchen cramped even without the entirety of cop's cooking utensils and every ingredient he owned spread out all over the counter. It fit the man though. V imagined this is how Butch did everything. Just throw it all out there, not caring about how it looks or if it's messy. The outcome was the point and he'd worry about the clean up later. V, on the other hand, was all minimalist simplicity and control of resources. Do things in order and keep it tight as you go. It should prove interesting for their current situation.

"C'mere and taste this," Butch called, interrupting his thoughts.

It took V a moment to realize what he was saying.

Butch stood in front of the oven, a spoon full of sauce waving in mid air. "I think it needs more salt, but my taste buds can't be trusted on salt since I eat diner food on the regular."

V knew his cop had no idea what he was doing. Not really. It was significant enough for him to willingly cook for V and that thought had been on his mind all day. But to feed him from his own hand? That was some level of intimacy that V had never experienced. Butch was standing there, in his ruffled casual clothes, hair still slightly damp from his shower, waving around a spoon like it was something they did all the time. And V was fucking floored.

"Hellooo? V. I need some feedback here."

It felt like he was moving under water, but V managed to get up and close the gap between them to stand right in front of Butch. He looked down at him as he dipped the spoon back in the sauce, giving it a quick stir before raising it between them.

"It won't bite," Butch insisted when V just stood there. "Try it and tell me if it's alright." He waved the spoon around again.

V wrapped a hand around Butch's wrist to still it before bringing the spoon to his lips. His eyes met Butch's as he tasted it, the hazel eyes narrowed at him, clearly confused at V's response. He didn't look at the food, but at the man, his cop, wishing he could explain what this meant to him ... and why. The respect and the honor of it. This was what males did with the females they wanted, the ones they mated. He kept his hand on Butch's as he cleared the spoon and licked his lips clean.

"Maybe some more oregano?" his cop asked innocently. "Something. Seems like it needs something."

V just stroked his wrist, lost in the moment. Fingers brushing the warm and solid feel of his wrist as Butch's face scrunched up, confused.

"What man? I know it doesn't taste like shit. I don't make shit spaghetti."

The look on his cop's face and the defensive note to his voice had V breaking out a small smile. He removed the spoon from the rough fingers and laid it on the bench, holding Butch's wrist, fingers still stroking the smooth inner skin. "It's not that, cop. It's ... it's perfect as is."

~*~

Butch raised an eyebrow, not entirely sure the guy was still talking about spaghetti. "Right. Good."

V kept stroking.

"Ah ... pass us the bread there would ya?" Butch reached for the garlic butter he'd been working on earlier. The small kitchen suddenly seemed a shit load smaller, V and his laser beam level intensity making the room move inwards, collapsing in on itself. But then V could make standing in an empty parking lot crowded. Butch needed some space for his brain to kick into gear.

V let go of his wrist, stretching out his arm but not moving an inch, and placed the bread down none too subtly on the counter. Butch turned and started buttering, his mind miles away from garlic bread. The entire world had shrunk down to V and the fact that he was standing very, very close behind him. That presence where space doesn't mean jack and those eyes are stripping you naked.

Then the presence turned into a brush of V's warm hands moving firmly on his shoulders. Strong fingers massaging the tight muscles, enough pressure to make it hurt, but also making it feel damn good. The man obviously knew what to do with his hands...

Then Butch realized he was buttering his own fingers.

"Smells good." The voice was low and right behind him, breath brushing against his ear. It sent ridiculous bolts of electricity down his spine.

"Well it ain't much, but I can make some mean Italian." He huffed out a laugh, wincing at how stupidly nervous it sounded. Any green cop could have read him like he had it written on his fucking forehead.

"Oh yeah ... the food smells good too." The voice was replaced by a brush of his nose, lips hovering near the shell of his ear. The hands started to work his shoulders again. "Damn cop, you're tense."

At this point, Butch decided it was pointless to pretend to continue working. His hands gripped the counter bracing himself, butter knife greasy between his fingers. "If that weren't so true, it'd sound like a line."

The rubbing slowed, fingers slipping beneath the stretched tee, soft warm hands moving across the heated skin of his shoulders. The lips were now pressed against his ear, voice deep, crystal controlled depth. "What ... like I'm trying to come onto you?"

Butch might've been new to this whole man-on-man thing, but he sure wasn't clueless to the tone of V's voice or what was doing. He wasn't exactly starting with the training wheels. V was like duct taping yourself to a *Ducati* and attaching rockets to your back. He wanted this, he fucking surprised himself with how much, but that didn't mean he wasn't equally and rightly nervous. "Ah. Yeah." Butch managed another half laugh.

V chuckled, the sound reassuring, moving closer until he felt the warm brush of V's chest pressed against his back. Then the warmth of V's mouth started kissing the naked skin between his hairline and the worn collar of his shirt. And that's when the electrical storm moving about in his body started sending all interest south. A whole lotta interest.

"Mmm, you caught me cop. I am in fact," V spoke between kisses "coming onto you."

"...it's uhm ... the keen detecting skills." Butch lost anything else smart he'd planned to say when strong hands slid down his back, one resting on his hip, the other snaked around to rest on his abs. The kissing and sucking at his neck continued, causing his libido move from first to fifth, while the hand on his stomach pulled him back, flush against V's body. He found himself molding against V further, head moving to rest against his shoulder as V sucked at his skin. The evidence of what this did to V was very obvious in the long hard ridge now pressing against his ass. The thought completely threw him, but it wasn't like he was finding his jeans all that fucking comfy at the moment. The whole neck fetish thing did it for him. Who knew? And that hand, firm against his stomach and fingers rubbing against the exposed skin of his stomach, if he moved his hands just a little further south, V would know exactly what it was doing. A huge

fucking part of him was aching for V to do exactly that. But then what?

The metal clang of the knife hit them like a jump start; the butter knife clanging as it fell out of his nervous, slippery hands and into the sink. Butch jerked upright, then cursed himself for doing so. V loosened his hold, letting him go, but Butch wasn't sure that's what he really wanted. Well, that was a lie. Butch knew what he wanted, but he was, in fact, scared. He hated that fucking word, so instead of looking at V he fumbled around for the knife, feeling his face flame up.

"Hey," V reached for the knife as well, taking it out of his hands and turning Butch to face him. Butch met his gaze and was relieved to see him smile ever so slightly and gently. V kissed him again, just at the corner of his mouth. "This is all that has to happen right now, cop. Regardless of-" he looked down pointedly, "Well I can't stop *that*, but I can control it, true?" He smirked.

Butch grinned despite himself.

"Plus I really want the dinner you prepared for me. It's ... important. So, just this." V took his face in his hands and kissed him again, fully, taking his time. He moved back in until he had Butch pressed against the counter. There was no doubt that he felt the length of Butch's arousal digging into his hip when he leaned back to grin at him. "For now anyway."

Butch tried to give him the evil eye, but knew it was less effective when all clouded by being horny. "Y'know, you're an arrogant son of a bitch."

V laughed before burying his nose against Butch's neck one last time. "Yeah. That isn't news, cop."

Butch just let him do - whatever it was he was doing - while he stood there and tried not to implode. He was pretty sure V was smelling him while kissing him, but it seemed different. Maybe he was also trying to figure out the faint sent of spice and sweet that had mixed in with the potent tang of garlic. Whatever. Butch was pretty sure he'd lost his fucking mind a couple of weeks ago, so smells that made no sense were no BFD at this point.

V groaned once and pushed himself away. "I really need to eat something."

Butch shook off the strange feeling that had taken over and focused on the food. "Yeah, uhm, me too. I'm starving."

He shoved the bread in the oven, then served up the plates up as fast as his shakey hands allowed. V would reek havoc on his shooting practice if this was any indication - so a good note to self would be don't make out with him before working on marksmanship. Moving over to the table with the food, he realized V had already poured two glasses of wine so he took a long swallow from the one at his place.

"Easy. It's not a shot. You're supposed to savor it."

Butch looked at his half drained glass. Yeah well, he'd savor the rest. Right now he needed to chill. Luckily, V was feeling talkative which, oddly enough, always relaxed him.

"This looks very good," V fanned out a napkin. "Thank you," he said, suddenly way too serious for something like spaghetti. He must have realized it threw Butch because he immediately sat back with a faint smile. "Who knew an Irish boy from Southie could cook Italian, huh?" He helped himself to a mouthful and made a noise of approval. "Cook damn good Italian too."

"It's about the only thing I cook, so I've had lots of practice. What about you?" Butch dug into his plate.

"I don't cook. I mean, I can, but I don't. Never seem to have the time."

"I hear ya there. I'm usually eating in the car or on breaks and I'm the first to admit it's shit food. Not like I'm taking time out for the fancy new French restaurant in the city. And I'm damn sure escargot wouldn't-"

"Be your thing? Ahh, you'd be surprised. It's not bad if it's-"

"Fixed properly? I *knew* you were gonna try that excuse. You've eaten escargot?" Butch knew he sounded doubtful.

"Yes, I have and I happen to know an excellent cook. Makes all the difference. In fact, I'll bring you some sometime."

"Ha! Save it! This Boston boy ain't eatin' snail."

"You might love it. You won't know you'll like it until you try it," V said.

The question was about fucking snails, but to Butch it could've been about just plain fucking. The same sentiment was probably true either way. He dipped his head to keep from letting his thoughts show.

"So I checked on the guy from the other night," V graciously changed the subject.

Butch's head shot up. "The victim?"

V nodded. "He's going to be okay, I think. Weird though, he doesn't remember a thing."

"How'd you get in to see him? He has police protection."

V just gave him a look.

"Okay, so maybe that seems like a dumb question to you since you are super sneaky V, but-"

V barked with laughter. "Super sneaky V?"

Butch just shook his head.

"What? What's eatin' at you cop?"

He chewed on his food, thinking how best to express his frustration with the job. "It's just ... okay, so we got him in protective custody and you just waltz right in? Sorry, but it galls me that you can do whatever the hell you like and I - let's just say sometimes, as cops, we got more rules than common sense. It just so happens that I would like to talk to the vic, get to the bottom of this shit, but I gotta fill out two mountains of paperwork while some numb nuts in our department does the Q and A. And why? Not because I'm the lesser cop, but because I just happen to piss the boss off on a regular. So, I go to the station to fill out the goddamn paperwork, but do you think I can sort it out in peace? Hell no! I got the chief yapping in my ear. Do I think the vic will make it? If so will he talk? And I'm thinkin' Jesus, Mary, and Jospheh! Like I'm a fuckin' mind reader! Just get-"

"Off my back," V nodded. "Yeah I know what you mean."

Butch knew he was totally venting, but the shit irritated him to no end. He loved the job, but he hated the bureaucratic bullshit.

"How can you possibly know what I mean, V? Seems to me like you get to do whatever the hell you want. Answer to no one."

V actually laughed at him then. "Don't assume anything cop. I gotta answer for plenty, just a bit different from you, 'sall. Matter of fact, checking on the vic was a direct order so-"

"Seriously? *You* got ordered to do something?"

"All the time, cop. All the fucking time."

Butch erupted into laughter.

"I'm so glad this amuses you."

"Yeah, I'd love to see the guy that orders *you* around."

"No you wouldn't," V deadpanned.

V's phone went off a second before Butch's. They both checked the numbers and looked at each other across the table. It was as though the powers that be had their ears, then their asses, on fire.

Butch took his call at the table, while V stepped over to the window for privacy.

"Shit. I gotta go," V said after slapping his phone shut and jamming it in his pocket. He looked disappointed, but more than that, he looked hella pissed off. It didn't matter though, because Butch had to leave too.

"Me too, actually."

V looked up at him. "Seriously?"

"Duty calls - on my night off of course."

"Is it-"

"Nah, nothing doing with the albinos. You?"

V shook his head. "No, but ... shit, I wanted," he motioned towards the table. "Your kitchen is trashed too. I can give you a hand if-"

"Maid Vishous?" Butch cocked an eyebrow. "No, it's cool. I'll be late if I don't head now and *this* isn't trashed. You should see it when I bake cakes."

V laughed, which was exactly what Butch wanted. The guy looked damned miserable at being called away and the truth was, Butch wasn't thrilled either. It wasn't just about what might happen after dinner either. Okay, so some of it was. Well ... half of it. At least. But it was also that he felt like he was actually getting to know the guy. V had a boss. Or something like it. Someone that actually gave him orders and V followed. V liked escargot and knew someone that cooked the slimey fuckers. V liked to make out in the kitchen and he was damn good at giving a back rub and pretty much anything else involving his hands. This was all good to know and it meant something to know it. He wanted to know more. Although, he should probably stop thinking about it for now or he'd never get out the door.

"Yeah I gotta go, like, five minutes ago," he announced, making big strides to his room to put on his holster, grab his weapon and jacket and put some space in between them.

When he reemerged, V was waiting by the door, jaw tight, face serious, looking like he wanted to kill someone for interrupting their meal.

Butch opened the door in silence, letting V follow him out. He locked up, not a clue what to say, instinctively knowing that V was not in the mood for chit chat. He turned to start down the hall when he was hauled forward by his holster, then shoved back against his door.

"Hey man-"

His words were cut off by V's mouth crashing against his. It wasn't the same sort of slow, controlled, take your time kissing like in the kitchen. This was driven by emotion, raw and angry. Butch wasn't complaining. The inside of his mouth hurt from the rough pressure, but it'd serve as a reminder later tonight. He'd bet that was part of V's point. Point taken.

Butch held on and kissed him back just as hard, just as rough, finally biting at V's bottom lip because it simply felt right. He could've sworn he heard V growl.

"Fuck, cop." V pulled back, his head lowered as his fist hit the door. It was only hard enough to make noise, but Butch knew he could put his hand through it he really wanted to. He kept his head down as he spoke. "Yeah, I gotta follow orders too. I'm not always good at it though. Times like tonight I fucking know why. Keep your phone on you," he said and stalked off down the hall before Butch could respond.

And again, there was that smell.

It was his night off, so V could do whatever the hell he liked without making up an excuse for Rhage. Since the night before he had to leave Butch's apartment in a hellfire hurry, he knew exactly how he wanted to spend tonight's free time.

Unfortunately, it was not the cop's night off - as was obvious in the scene V watched play out from his spot in the Escalade.

Some might call it spying. Others might call it stalking. Vishous didn't give a damn what anyone called it; he just liked watching his cop work. It killed him to simply watch and not rush in to help, but he knew there was no call for his assistance unless shit got life threatening. Right now it was far more comical than life versus death. Butch and his partner, Jose, had gotten a call to a house in the less than affluent part of town. How did V know this? Because he had a scanner just like any good snoop would. The comical part was that apparently there was fuck all going down in the house, but as the two cops stepped back outside, dodging a yard full of tires and various land mines of dog crap - two would-be petty drug dealers were setting down a deal right outside the house.

He couldn't help but laugh at the look on Butch's face when he realized what was going on mere feet from his Crown Vic. V rolled down the window a few inches just to hear what his smart mouth had to say on the matter.

"Hell," Jose muttered. "You'd think they could at least wait 'til we'd taken off."

Butch nodded for him to go around the car to take the other side as he begrudgingly went for his badge. Typical cop and so obviously not

interested in getting involved in something that would probably shape up to be a complete waste of time.

"You ladies swappin' baseball cards or do we have to get involved?," Butch quipped as he approached.

The boys started to take off, just as Jose grabbed one and Butch shoved the other against the hood of the car.

"Really?" he asked, sarcastically. "You want me to chase you so as to piss me off more? Wise up, kid."

"We weren't doin' nothin'," the kid complained.

"Yeah, yeah," Butch blew him off, while checking his pockets to find what probably amounted to a dime bag of crank. "And I'm Santa Claus. We'll just take a ride downtown so we can palm you off to some elves at the precinct."

Jose and Butch tucked the guys into the back of the car, collectively rolling their eyes.

"I'll stay with 'em when we get there," Jose offered, "so you can head out. I know you got stuck going in last night, so it's no problem."

V couldn't help but smile at that. *Take the offer*, he thought. He had some interesting news for Butch and he wanted enough time for business and pleasure. If the cop pulled overtime it would put a serious cramp in the latter.

"Sounds good man," Butch agreed and looked in V's direction as he slid into the driver's side.

V followed at a distance and waited around the corner from the station. It wasn't twenty minutes before there was a loud rapping on the back of the Escalade.

He lowered the window. "You trying to sneak up on me cop?"

Butch grinned at him. "What-the-hell-ever man. I saw you jump from outside the car. *Try my ass.*"

V nodded. "Get in, I got something that might interest you."

Butch choked on his laughter.

"Get your mind out of the gutter and your ass in the car, cop. *Work stuff* that might interest you."

He was still grinning as he climbed in and V had to fight to keep from doing the same.

"I found some surveillance from that warehouse, the site where we found the male prostitute," he got right to it. "I took a look at and got nothing, but since your lack of leverage on the case was making you twitchy - I thought you might want to check it out too." V knew there was nothing doing with lessers on the footage, he'd checked it at length, but letting Butch have a look served a two fold purpose. First, the cop in Butch lived off stuff like this and it might give him something more to go on, a head up over the team investigating it. Secondly, V knew they'd have to view said footage somewhere and he figured his place at the Commodore was as good as any.

"*Might* wanna check it out? Hell yeah I do! You got it on you?"

"No. I know a place near here we can watch it."

His place.

Fuck, he'd never brought a male there. This wasn't just any male, either. He ought to be drawn and quartered for this level of stupidity, but the penthouse was his and his alone. Private. It was bare except for his high tech set up, a kitchen, bathroom, and a bedroom. The rest of his entertainment he'd locked away with the intention of having Butch there at some point. Nothing screamed hospitality like leather and chains, right? So yeah, he'd thought he might be a tad more subtle in his decor and put away the toys. Besides, he used them on the females that used to visit, to fill a void that rarely included sex. To have that same stuff near Butch ... it didn't fit. Didn't mean he hadn't thought about tying the cop up once or fifty times - he just didn't feel the need to inflict that kind of pain. He

knew without asking that it wouldn't be Butch's thing either and more than anything, he wanted whatever they did to mutually mindblowing.

"You cool with that?" V asked, trying to ignore how anxious he was about the answer.

"Yeah," Butch agreed with his usual casualness. "You'll drop me back here after?"

"Absolutely."

~*~

Butch followed V into the elevator, not saying a word. A *place*. A place his Irish ass. This was a friggin' *palace*! He knew the Commodore, by rep alone of course. Not like him or any of his cop buddies knew anyone that actually lived here.

The elevator finally stopped on the top floor, and Butch got off, determined to keep his jaw off the floor.

"I know a *place*?" he snorted, unable to keep it in any longer. "I was expecting one of those metal rent-a-trailer things, V. For fuck's sake! Is this *your place*?"

"Kinda," V unlocked the door and let him in.

Butch let out a low whistle. This is how V lived? Yeah he wasn't buying that V was into anything legitimate or legal. Military and government sorts didn't make the green to live like this. Guns for hire? Mercenaries? Private agencies? Sure.

V sat down at a desk that sat near the middle of the room, facing an open space the held only one black leather couch, a coffee table, and what looked like some television set up from NASA. He clicked around on a laptop doing whatever it was techno whizzes did and Butch couldn't resist the urge to wander and investigate.

"You mind?" he asked, hoping he didn't because he fully intended to snoop.

"Nah, feel free," V waved him off.

There wasn't a whole lot to see, but Butch made the most of it anyway. V lived sparsely. Not exactly the type of guy to keep pictures and personal items laying about, but a cop could dream. He wouldn't even attempt to work the remote or anything related to the electronic set up against the wall, so he tried the kitchen. The kitchen was open air as well, with lots of space for cooking. V's fridge, however, held one half empty bottle of Goose, a bag from Taco Bell, butter, and some packets of ketchup. Nice. It bared an eerie resemblance to his fridge.

Butch gave up on the snooping and returned to the den to spy over V's shoulder. The guy was hard at work, clicking away on some code. Most of it meant fuck all to Butch.

"Just so you know," Butch said, settling his hands on the back of the desk chair, "I knew you were there tonight."

V didn't look up. "Not until much later, you didn't."

"Fuck that, I did too. I could sense you and your sneaky self from the start and if it were anybody else, I'd say it was stalking." He resisted the urge to move his hands from the chair to V's shoulders the way he'd done just the night before. Instead he focused on V's fingers as they danced across the keys. Their natural grace was a turn on.

Then V leaned back, trapping his fingers between his shoulders and the chair before glancing up at him. "You liked that I was watching you. Admit it."

Butch swallowed hard.

"You thirsty or something?" V asked returning to his laptop.

"Smartass," Butch muttered. "No, I'm cool. Vodka isn't really my-"

V held up a hand as he got up and went to the kitchen. "Ye of little faith," he said, opening the nearest cabinet and pulling down a bottle to show him.

It was a brand new bottle of Lagavulin.

"One of these days you're gonna realize I am *always* prepared, true?"

Butch smiled. "And humble. Let's not forget humble."

V gave him a look as he poured one glass of the clear stuff and one glass of amber. He handed Butch his glass and nodded to the couch. "Have a seat and I'll show you what we've got." He brought over the laptop and sat down next to Butch, sliding it over onto his knees.

"Here. Just click here when you're ready," he indicated.

Butch clicked and a grainy image of the darkened warehouse corner came to life. In truth, there wasn't a whole lot to it, but you could see several figures round the corner with one of them struggling. It was clear enough that Butch could get a head count and he knew it was that same gang by the way they moved. They group never reappeared though. At least he had proof it was that same gang. Whether or not he could convince anyone else was another story.

"Think it'll help?" V asked, leaning in to see the screen.

"Helps me," Butch answered honestly, "but it doesn't look like it'll do much more good than that." He took a drink of his Lag and kept watching anyway, even as he felt V's arm unfold to rest behind him on the couch.

"Well that's something. Not really interested in helping anyone else."

Butch couldn't help but grin as he felt the solid warmth of V's gloved hand against his neck, rubbing slightly before his fingers touched the hair at the base of his scalp.

"You puttin' the moves on me, V?" he asked, eyes never leaving the computer. "Is that why you brought me here?"

V didn't answer at first, just threaded those fingers through his hair and then kneaded the muscles at the base of his neck. "You complaining?"

Butch smiled into his glass as he took another sip. "Nope."

Setting his glass on the arm of the couch, he let his eyes drift closed and his head lean into it. There wasn't shit on the rest of the surveillance

anyway, so he might as well enjoy the magic of those hands. He didn't know how long V worked on him before he felt a bare hand cup his jaw and turn his face just before V's lips met his.

He let V lead, in fact, *needed* him to. The kiss was warm, soft and somehow strong in V's way of his. The awkwardness that he was a male now faded, but it wasn't like Butch knew what the hell he should do. He'd never been this nervous with any woman, even as a teenager.

"Just relax," V whispered as if he knew.

V's mouth moved down his jaw, lips soft against his five o'clock shadow.

Butch let his head drop back against the couch, instinctively giving V more access. Feeling the weight of the laptop go and the clatter of it being placed on the coffee table. "Says the scary what-ever-the-hell with a cop on his couch." He tried to joke.

Butch felt the weight of V's hand rest on his abs, as sure fingers slid through the gaps of his button up. The heat scorching where they did small circles, V's mouth stopping to suck at the junction of his neck and shoulder. Butch felt his body melt further into the couch. "Sorry 'bout dinner."

V chuckled against his skin, his fingers tugging the shirt from his worn cop-suit pants. "It happens. When the big wigs say jump..."

"You say how high and fuck you very much." The fingers had undone most of his lower buttons and were tracing patterns across his stomach, occasionally brushing his belt and very fucking effectively sending all interest lower. "If you had more than Taco bell and Vodka in the fridge, I'd give it another go."

Butch knew he was carrying on, his habit of going off at the mouth extended to situations where he was shit nervous and way outta his depth. But so it seemed V found the whole thing amusing, the spark to his light eyes was evident when he raised his mouth from his neck. "I'm not here much. And when I am, I got *other* things on my mind."

And that? Well *that* was the end of all comfort in his pants. The voice coupled with the way V was looking at him like he was a cold beer on a hot day, well, everything had singled down to his pants and that V's

fingers were about 2 inches away.

Almost like V read his mind, the fingers stopped against the belt of his pants, eyes locked onto his in question.

"V...."

With a quick nod, deft fingers had him unbuckled and unzipped before his head could even follow. The skillful fingers now were back, applying pressure to the cotton of his boxers. But V didn't go back to sucking at his skin, his eyes were locked onto his lower half, as serious as a heart attack. And it was just unbelievably hot.

The pressure was sending his brain into orbit. Now Butch O'Neal wasn't new to a quick handjob in the front seat of a car. But with someone like V looking at him like he could devour him whole, Butch found his hips unconsciously lifting into the pressure.

Almost like he wanted to distract him, V's lips were back at his neck, as his fingers outlined his cock in the cotton boxers. Fingers finding the root, following it up to the tip and tracing lazy circles to the dampness there. It was maddening, so controlled. It was so V. No half measures, no area untouched, unhurried and expertly carried out. Butch was nearly losing his mind and V hadn't even really touched him. His lasting time was *not* going to be impressive.

V traced a elegant finger along the edge of his boxers before delving a finger underneath, warmth and strength brushing past his erection before quickly moving away. "Fuuuuuck. V. You tryin' to kill me?" He'd noticed his voice was already strained and as rough as gravel, and far too desperate.

"Not what I had planned, no." And with that V lifted his finger to his mouth and sucked. The hand that had just brushed past his cock and subsequent dampness in his pants.

And Butch forgot to breath.

Unable to do much than stare, V inserted his second finger and then the third. Slicking each one carefully before moving onto the next, ending with a pink swipe down the middle of his palm. Each measured and each without diverting his gaze.

Without skipping a beat, V had him out of his boxers and his warm slick hand wrapped around him. The pleasure and the intensity and the *at last*, had Butch dropping his head back over the back of the couch and his mouth slack. The pressure stayed, the steady slide, a slow stroke from bottom to top and a swipe of his thumb over the head. Biting back a moan, Butch had himself lifting his hips into V's hand in time with the strokes. He heard a low groan before there was warm breath at his ear and a firm hand at his stomach pressing him into the couch.

"Trust me cop. It's okay, just *trust* me."

He did. He absolutely did. He'd been out of his mind nervous and was now out of his mind horny. But he trusted V like little else he trusted in this fucked up world. He trusted his gun and the inevitable shit the world served up. But now? He trusted this huge, scary, overwhelming and sexy sonvabitch who was his friend, there was none that had fit that bill in a long fucking time, if ever.

Butch let himself sink back into the couch and let the warmth and pleasure roll over him in waves as V would speed up, bringing him to the brink before easing off. Squeezing at the right times, a small twist at the aching head and his gloved hand moving to brush over his balls, that were as sensitive as fuck. That time a hoarse moan did escape him and he cohelp it, pistoning his hips forward. His breathing now erratic and sweat forming at his temples.

V didn't hold back. Maintaining sure movements, the slide across the head, increasing the pressure and the finish line was near. And then it suddenly seemed important to let V know he was gunna blow. He didn't know the male handjob etiquette and he couldn't for the life of him form words. Instead, his hand found V's thigh and gripped, fingers digging into the hard muscle.

"Its *okay*, cop. Come."

At V's low liquid voice, Butch felt the pressure explode, energy racing up from his balls, up his spine and out his cock. The light flashed behind his eyes as the sensations washed over him, V pumping him through the aftershocks. He felt the warm wet as it ran off V's fingers, slicking him up further as he came down off the fucking moon. He opened his eyes to see V watching him, eyes on his face, cool expression slightly rattled, mouth

parted as Butch blinked back into focus. His eyes darted to the current tent V was sporting in his pants and that slight anxiety of the unknown washed over him. What now? What did he expect?

But before Butch could begin to contemplate all that, V was up. Bending over to give him a hard quick kiss and he was off. Butch watched the broad back move gracefully into the bathroom, coming out with a hand towel, wet at one end.

"Here." He handed him the towel and stood at the edge of the couch. Picking up both of their glasses, he asked, "You wanna refill?"

Butch wiped at his stomach before tucking himself back in. Buttoning up his collared but keeping his tie loosened. "....Yeah."

There was clinking from the kitchen and he was back, holding out an amber filled tumbler. "Lag." He took the towel away and was back, plonking himself into the soft leather and reaching for the remote. "You wanna watch a game?"

"Game? Seasons over man." He couldn't stop the amused tone to his voice. Seemed he wasn't the only one with his brain in recovery mode and therefore stupid.

V gave him a look. "C'mon. I got the classics Tivo-ed. Give a brother some credit." He pointed the remote forward and then backwards at the computer. The lightshow that followed was fucking impressive.

"Holy shit." The screen was clear, sound crisp and the red and white moved in what seemed to be last season's semi's.

V's grin was clear, he settled his shoulders, obviously proud of the setup and down with showing it off to Butch. "I know, right?"

"Where you get this shit?"

V looked offended. "Get? *Get*?! I hooked this up my damn self." He clicked a few more buttons, a subscreen popped up with last season stats. "Get" The guy muttered, but his eyes crinkled in amusement when Butch groaned at V turning up the sound.

"Its like I'm fucking there..."

"Which would be the point."

Butch had to grin. Seemed the guy was protective over his technology.
"Smart ass."

And it wasn't until they were well into the finale, settled deep into the couch, glasses very near drained, that Butch realized that he had been too damn distracted by the set up and the game and hanging out, to focus on the fact that he'd just been given a mind blowing orgasm ... *by a man*. He was more than aware that V did everything on purpose, including this. Which meant he had thought all of this out. *I am always prepared*. V would kick his ass if he said it, but the fact that he'd switched right over into "ain't no big deal" mode was amazingly considerate. Butch didn't need a lot of hand holding and wet kisses right after the fact. In truth, it probably would've freaked him the fuck out - even though he was guilty for being what you might call a snuggler. This time though, he'd needed it to be no BFD.

He looked over at V, ass sunk into the leather, long legs spread out and feet propped up on the coffee table next to his. Large hand wrapped around the massive remote, elegant fingers drumming against the buttons, the other holding his empty tumbler on his broad chest, black fabric of his T-shirt stretched by the definition there. The guy hadn't even asked for anything in return. He was obviously turned on and as full blooded man as Butch, but no ... he'd gotten up, fetched them drinks and distracted the hell out of him.

Butch moved on instinct, hand on V's hard thigh and the other cupping his neck, bringing his lips to his. It was soft and deep ... and a thank you. Butch ended it, giving V a pat on the thigh before stealing away his glass to refill them both in the kitchen. V's eyes narrowed as they followed him, mouth pulled into an amused smirk.

"I was wondering when your ass was gonna get up for refill. What's a male gotta do to get a drink?"

Butch barked out a laugh, grinning as he brought back both bottles, slapping the Goose into V's hand "Yeah, yeah. Just change the game techno-whiz and quit bitchin."

"Could you not blow into my ear?"

"I am not blowing in your ear. I'm looking over your shoulder because you won't get your big ass outta the way and I happen to be breathing while doin' it."

Vishous stood up straight and turned to face Rhage. "*My* big ass? Who ate *three* three egg omelets for First Meal? Because it sure wasn't me."

Rhage waved him off, "I need my protein. Now if you'd kindly move, I could tell you, definitively, if that's some dried up sludge blood or just, I don't know, motor oil."

With a roll of his eyes, V moved. In truth though, Rhage could easily tell the difference no matter if blood was weeks old. That nose of his was freaky.

"Yep, some lesser definitely bled, but it was awhile back. I don't think there's shit here, V. If this was their hole, they've long since crawled off to another one."

"I want to check the basement again."

"Ah hell, man," Rhage grimaced. "There is nothing down there and the stairwell is tighter than you and your money. I barely fit."

"Probably about as empty as your head too, but I wanna check it."

Rhage made a huge show of mock laughter as he slid his knives back into place. "Ah you're friggin' hilarious, but I'm tellin' you it's a bust. And no offense, but I'd rather be with my Mary than standing around here being all OCD with you."

V sighed, he knew he was being anal, hell that was his middle name ... then some. But he was sick of this lesser deal with the killings hanging over his head. He wanted this done. He ran a hand through his hair. "Fine. Gitcha ass home."

Rhage looked up from his holster. "You sure? I mean there's jack all going down here, but you wanna check out someplace else and I got your back." He had that voice, sincere as hell, but his mind was completely *Mary Mary Mary Mary...*

"Yeah, go. I'll catch you back at base."

Rhage grinned and clapped him on the shoulder before popping back, barely disturbing the dust on the crummy wooden floor.

It didn't take V ten minutes to reassure himself that there was nothing to be found in the basement. Still, his sixth sense was tingling and it always irked the shit out of him when he didn't know why. He was slipping out the back when he heard a car pull up out front. Ducking down in stealth mode, he made his way around the side of the house just in time to see a very familiar form getting out of a dark Crown Vic.

"You gotta be fucking kidding me," he muttered.

He really shouldn't be surprised though. Butch was an excellent detective, so if he'd gotten the slightest whiff that something here might lead to a lead on the "albino gang" - he'd be in it, neck deep.

"So, you come here often?" he asked from the bushes.

Butch had his weapon drawn and on him just as recognition of the voice showed on his face.

"Damn, V. You are seriously itching to get shot."

"And I think you just like pulling your weapon on me. What is that, the fifth time?"

Butch grinned as he approached. "It'll happen again too; anytime you're lurking in the shrubbery at a crime scene."

"I am not lurking, cop. I'm investigating, same as you."

Butch's eyebrows drew together at that.

"I'm guessing you got a tip, just like me," V explained. "Hate to disappoint, but there ain't shit in there anymore."

"Our boys flew the coop?"

"For now anyway." V took the few steps up to the front porch and Butch followed.

"What do you mean for now?"

"I don't know ... but something isn't kosher."

Butch nodded to the house. "Well I'm going to check it out anyway, as I'm sure you could've predicted. Maybe I'll pick up on something. You're welcome to come with."

V actually hoped the cop could find something. He could use a second set of eyes like Butch's. Not that Rhage wasn't stellar at the detecting, but tonight he was insistent that there was nothing here and the Brother was nothing if not single minded. It was hard to ignore the fact as well, that with a human like Butch on the case, the Brotherhood would need to step up their game. Cop would have the damn thing near solved and find himself trying to collar a bunch of the undead guys if he kept on this path.

"Yeah, some fresh eyes might help," V made a welcoming gesture to the abandoned wreck of a house. "Welcome to Shangri-la."

They made the rounds, again with no results or warm leads. This particular group of rogue lessers made even less sense than most. More proof that they weren't taking directives from the top or from anyone with any logic. Then again, maybe their lack of reason was keeping them safe. So far they'd managed to dodge the Brotherhood and the Caldie PD, but they wouldn't keep that up forever.

"I'm thinking I'd still like to keep an eye on this place, in case they come back," Butch suggested.

V had actually been thinking the exact same thing all along, but no way in hell he wanted Butch staking out the joint.

"Your boss gonna use up a couple of guys to sit outside an empty house? With the crime rate in this town?"

Butch made a face.

"Didn't think so. Look it, I'll try to keep an eye on this shit hole, at least once every night, and if something comes up--"

"You'll let me know?"

"Yep."

V meant it too. He wouldn't let Butch in on everything, but he found he couldn't keep him in the dark either. Teaming up with the guy just seemed natural, which was just weird as hell considering he was human. Then again, Butch wasn't just any human. They'd surpassed just anything a long time ago.

"Cool," Butch agreed. "Because the chief would have a coronary if I even suggested pulling some guys to sit here for twelve hours. I'm already on his shit list. That wouldn't help."

"Why are you on his shit list?" V asked as they made their way to the door.

"I've never been his favorite," Butch answered with a shake of his head. "Long story."

"Lucky for you, I've got the rest of the night for you to tell it," V clapped him on the back. Just then they heard two car doors slam from behind the house.

"Shit," Butch drew his weapon. "You expecting someone?"

V felt his body tense, preparing to strike. "No," he hissed, knowing in his ever-correct way exactly who had shown up. Shit was right. Just this once he'd love to prove his instincts wrong.

They both ducked down and hid in the corners of the run down kitchen at the back of the house. No such luck on the faulty instincts though. Three slim figures stalked into the kitchen, their pale skin practically glowing against the dark of night. V caught the gleam of a gun off two of them.

"Caldwell Police Department. Hold it right there," Butch ordered, going all by-the-book cop on them.

V, on the other hand, not so informative.

He grabbed the closest lesser from behind, surprising him so that he got out only a yelp before V slit his throat. The body flopped to the floor and that's where he finished him, dagger straight into the chest where his heart ought to be.

The cop was going ape shit about it, but he'd find a way to explain. Fuck a bunch of talk when these guys were no doubt armed and he and Butch were outnumbered. When they got whittled down to one, then Butch could be cop - even though the result would be the same. The lesser wouldn't talk and V would kill him regardless.

"Fuck," Butch yelled just as one got off a shot that struck just over the cop's shoulder. Butch opened up on him then. Three shots, all center mass.

The third lesser was all asshole and elbows towards the door, but V tackled him on the way out. They fell awkwardly, V's forearm landing on something sharp.

The cunning piece of shit was obviously old hat, as he got in a few shots and knocked the knife out of V's hand. Unlucky for him, V carried more than one. He plunged the knife in hilt deep hearing the comforting pop, which was cut short by the shot-up lesser making an attempt at V's turned back.

He turned his head quick at an "Oh the *fuck* you don't!!!"

The lesser had made a valiant effort at getting up and rushing V. He didn't get very far before Butch tackled him to the ground. Sure the lesser had one up on Butch with speed and strength, but the cop was fueled by experience and clear anger. He was pissed.

V pulled himself to his feet, hand gripping the slash on his forearm and warm blood dripping between his fingers, and watched his cop fight it out. Butch was pissed and that anger made him a more effective fighter. He had V's back just as much as V had his. He was currently wailing on the lesser with impressive results and all V could think was *MINE*. The pull in his chest, the possessiveness in his blood, it was overwhelming. It was as compelling as the need for blood and as real as the pain in his arm. Cop was his, no doubt, but he wanted to mark him and make it so.

Butch got in a few more shots, breaking a nose and pushing off him and against a wall. When the cop straightened, wiping a thread of blood from his lip, V was both turned on and protective as hell. He picked up the dagger next to him and launched it at the lesser's chest. It sunk deep, but no dice. V solved that with his foot, moving quick and kicking it in the few

more inches needed.

Butch just stared at him, then at the mess around him. This time he wasn't slack jawed about any of it though.

"I'm not even gonna ask," he panted, out of breath from the fight. He gestured around to encompass the whole mess that was the kitchen. "But we are so discussin' this shit later."

V nodded, seeing that the determination in his cop's eyes.

"Now though," Butch rubbed his mouth with the back of his fist, "we're getting the hell outta dodge."

Not one for sticking around a hot zone, V reached for his daggers and followed Butch out of the room. Running out of the house and for their cars, Butch made eye contact, pointing at V and then at the Vic before leaping in. V was in the Escalade and following him to who knew where. He rolled his shoulders, searching for any other injuries as he followed Butch out of the neighborhood. A few miles and they were already on the outskirts. He watched the Vic's headlights dim as Butch jumped out.

Cop rapped on the window as V slid out. They were both still breathing heavy, no longer from exertion, but from the intensity of a fight they had not been expecting. There was always a high from it later. Butch shuffled on his feet as he ran a hand through his hair, trying to come down from the mother of all adrenaline rushes.

His eyes finally met V's, but they fell to the blood dripping off V's arm. "Fuck V!" He moved quick, reaching for his forearm.

"I got it."

V ripped off his bloodied black t-shirt, tearing a strip to make a field tourniquet for his gashed forearm. He got it tight enough to match the pain of the gash itself before he used the rest of his shirt to wrap around the wound. Once in place, he immediately reached for Butch.

"Lemme look," he tugged at his cop's bloody button up.

"I'm not hit, V. This is your blood."

V wasn't convinced and kept tugging until the shirt was free of his pants.

"V! There's nothing there. Trust me, I've been stabbed enough to know."

"Humor me," V barked, running a hand over his stomach until he was reassured.

He heard his cop laugh quietly. "If you need an excuse, just say so. I got some blood on my pants. You wanna check there too?"

V's eyes met his. "I think we're passed needing an excuse, don't you? And if the situation was reversed, you'd be all up in my space making sure I wasn't bleeding."

"You did. And I am."

V felt his eyes on him. On his arm, wrapped up nicely in a makeshift bandage, then on his chest, blessedly free of a bullet or knife wound. Shit was too close tonight. Way too close for Butch to be with him. But damn, watching the man fight. He was a true warrior and it was never clearer than at times like tonight. V wanted to laugh at the ridiculous pride he felt, but why shouldn't he be proud? That's how you felt when someone belonged with you. *Mine*, he thought again.

"That shit was close," Butch said, reflecting his exact feelings on the subject.

"Yeah."

"You fight like ... like nothing I've ever seen," he added, with a touch of awe in those hazel eyes.

"You too, cop."

And for the first time that night, they were silent. The heavy breathing settling down to a steady rhythm, eyes not pulling away. Butch looked thoroughly worked over, dirt smeared on his cheeks, on his shirt. The white sleeve was torn away at one shoulder, showing dirty, tanned skin underneath. The hair on his forearms were caked with black blood and dirt, knuckles red and used. Butch's eyes were on his chest, traveling down his abs, tongue darting out to lick at the corner of his mouth at the

cut there, blood still drying.

V's hand moved to cup his jaw, thumb wiping away at the blood. Butch's eyes darkened as they snapped back to V's, parting his lips as V wiped, then moved the thumb over the firm bottom lip, slick from where he had licked. The palm of his hand grating against the five o'clock shadow as Butch pushed into it.

There was a rough and warm brush of Butch's fingers against his bare skin, light and delicate over his stomach, coming to rest at his waist. "You got hurt." It was stating the obvious, but V knew that wasn't what cop was getting at.

The fingers kept brushing. "I know ... you can handle yourself..." It was there. Unspoken. *But I was worried.*

When his gaze lifted, the hazel was tinged with a kind of raw desperation. The hand on his waist tightened, the other hand moved to grip where V cupped his face, stroking, the rough callouses burning and pressing V's hand.

V pulled his face close, fingers digging into his jaw and crushing Butch's ear as he closed the distance and kissed him. Hard.

Butch kissed back with equal strength. Pulling at his purchase on V's skin and bringing them closer together. Opening and sucking at his mouth like he couldn't breathe. The desperation was back and it leaked into the slide of Butch's tongue against his. He pulled back just enough to see V's reaction. The feeling was mutual.

It was that feeling you get when shit gets too close. The come down from the adrenaline high and you're so damn thankful to be in one piece at the other end. The high you're still riding after it, when your lover is staring at you with that look, the same look you know you've got plastered all over your face. You both know what you need and it sure as hell ain't a conversation.

V was backed up with such force that it actually hurt when his ass hit the car door. The handle dug into his flesh, but he didn't give a good goddamn. This was *exactly* what he wanted, where he wanted to be. Dirty and worked up and alone with Butch. Butch's mouth was hot against his and the cop's hand was already headed south, exactly where he needed it.

Butch cupped him through the leather, his touch a little awkward at first, but it didn't stop either of them from shuddering at the contact.

V knew it was obvious what was doing in his pants though, so even a novice wouldn't have to work that hard.

"You like the way I kiss," Butch wasn't able to hide his proud tone as he stated the obvious.

"I like ... a lot of things you do." V bucked his hips against the curious hand, wanting more friction.

He pulled his cop closer, wishing Butch had on less clothing, wanting that same friction all over.

V rolled his hips again, needing the pressure. Needing skin against skin, but realizing what that might reveal. He worried that maybe it was all too strong a come-on when Butch's hands fumbled for his fly. V couldn't believe it himself when he asked, "You sure?"

Butch just gave him a look that was a good bit stronger than "Fuck yeah I'm sure!"

V knew he was far from perfect down there, but he might be able to make it so Butch didn't notice at all. This time.

He felt the cool air against his heated skin as he sprang free. Butch touched him gently before a rough laugh escaped him. V held his breath, but quickly realized that the cop had noted, for the first time, that Vishous went commando.

"I should've guessed," Butch looked up at him, hazel eyes dancing. "All that money, but your clothes are just the bare necessities."

V felt his face warm for what was the probably the first time ever. Not in embarrassment though, but in Butch's reaction. He seemed nonplussed about his hand around V's dick, but amused at the lack of underwear. Cop never ceased to amaze him.

V kissed him then, desperate for the taste of him, feeling himself fall into that warm look that he wanted to carry with him until the end of time.

Butch wrapped a tentative hand around his length, determined to continue, and V pressed his own hand over it. If he led, then his cop wouldn't get too curious and find out just how damaged he really was. No way in hell V was backing out though, so leading was the only option.

He let Butch choose the speed though, and holy shit was he good at it. The cop's capable hand slid over him while the other grabbed onto V's neck, demanding more of his mouth. So much for leading completely, V thought. All these years he'd underestimated the virtues of another alpha male and now he didn't think it'd ever be an issue. Butch's hands were not smooth, which was absolutely perfect. He thought about what he'd watched those hands do the lessers just awhile ago. How Butch had gone after the one that thought to attack V. How he fought with his fists just as well as he fought with a gun.

The scent hit his nose just as he thought of the cop as *his* ... again. Butch would soon reek of V's marking. The thought couldn't have made V happier, except for if Butch knew what it all meant.

"Ah ... cop," V had to let his head fall back against the SUV so he could breathe. He was heating up too fast because it all felt way too good. He tried thinking of injured puppies or anything to make it last a little longer, but this was Butch touching him. Butch pleasuring him and smiling while he did it. He couldn't let go of that thought, which only sent things into overdrive.

"Butch ... I'm gonna-"

His cop's free hand dug hard into V's nape. Butch drug his face down and kissed him as he came, never letting go.

As his body shuddered and slumped against the SUV, V knew two things. One, he was probably a total mess. Not a problem he thought, yanking off the torn t-shirt tourniquet to roughly wipe at Butch's hand and then himself. Two, they were *not* finished.

Butch had the glazed over look of a hungry male that wanted more. Also, not a problem V thought. He jerked opened the back door of the Escalade and nodded over to him. "Get in."

~*~

Butch had been privy to a lot of V's facial expressions, but this was one he hadn't been on the receiving end of yet.

Stalking prey.

V tucked himself back in, eyes never wavering as he was literally backed and corralled into the car. Butch crawled into the back seat of the Escalade as V climbed in after him, pulling the door shut. He didn't say anything, just reached over for the seat lever and lowered it flat. Butch watched him move, stomach nearly jumping with the anticipation as he mumbled nonsense to fill the silence. "Rearranging the car?"

He was cut off as V laid a hand on Butch's chest, forcefully pushing him down flat, the other hand reaching for his belt. Then V was on top of him, steadying himself with his forearm near Butch's head. He felt the breath casting over his face as V watched him. Light eyes taking in his face as he pulled the belt from its loop ... pulled the pin from its hole, loosened it. Watching him.

And for once in a hell of a long time, Butch was speechless. V's face was hardened with determination and control ... and WANT. He slowly freed Butch from his suit pants and Butch wanted to roll his eyes at the fact that he'd worn the 'new' boxers like some chick picking out her best underwear. But when the long fingers slipped inside to rub against the hardness there and V took his mouth roughly, all thought processes died.

The desperation was back, the mind numbing kissing that barely left enough space for breath. V sucked and licked into his mouth as he hands moved into the boxers and gripped him tight. Butch moaned into his mouth at the pressure. Pressure, but nothing else. He started bucking into V's hands, desperate for friction. V stopped his movement easily, pinning him down with his hips. "I'm not finished with you yet cop."

And with that, V slid down, scooping his hands around Butch's ass and pulling down his pants and boxers with them. His eyes were on him again, sliding down Butch's chest and taking in his erection bobbing between them. And then he met his eyes, one hand moving to grip him, the other to hold his hips. The light eyes burned bright in the dim light just before he bent down and took Butch into his mouth.

"Oh ...*God.*" The warmth and the pressure ... and the intensity with which V looked at him. Butch's head pushed back into the seat, looking at the ceiling before managing to take another look down at the dark head moving between his legs.

Butch had many blow jobs in the back seats of cars, some of them were actually good. This was thousands of miles away from good. This not only made it so that he couldn't speak, but he couldn't even say his name if asked. V's mouth worked him like he worked everything else in life. No hesitation, no messing around, no bullshit. The grip on the base of his cock loosened as V took more of him in, pulling back to suck pressure on the tip before licking down his length. It took every muscle in Butch's body not to thrust hard into that warm, wet mouth. Instead, his hand sought out the car handle, gripping it tight to stop himself from ejecting clear out of the car. If he ripped the damn handle clean off, well he'd just owe V a new one. His other hand gripped at V's back, fingers digging hard into even harder muscles, knowing the man could take it.

Butch choked on his moan as V took in his whole length. His hips lifted off the seat and he was quickly slammed back down, a steel cable of an arm thrown over his lower abdomen, locking his hips down. Then vibrations were sent along his dick as V growled at him fighting against the arm, seeking to move his hips, aching to finish.

A shock of arousal shot through Butch at the realization. He was fucking *turned on* at being man handled in such a rough way. Fighting against the lock down, he moved the hand against V's back to his head but was met with an iron wall, V wasn't giving in, intent on finishing this *his* way. Which only pushed Butch further over the edge until stars began to sparkle on the back of his eyelids. "V.....I.....ungh."

He moaned again as V's gloved hand came up to rub gently over his balls before gripping the base again. Frantic to let V know that sparkly stars meant he was going to go, but he was too far gone to speak, Butch pulled at his hair. He watched as that beautiful face just continued with the same intensity. There was flash of light and Butch strained against the arm as he let go. Hot beads of fire ran down his spine and into his cock, the warmth spreading and turning his body liquid before everything blacked out completely.

When his mind slowly started up again, Butch glanced down to see V's head resting against his stomach and found that his fingers had moved

unconsciously to thread through the dark hair. He knew he was grinning like a fucking idiot and was currently petting a man that looked like he could eat you alive, while his pants lay in a pool at his feet. But V was there, so nothing else really mattered. Still breathing heavy against him, his warm breath and the silken brush of his goatee casting over Butch's skin.

He couldn't help the small laugh that came out of him.

V raised his head and his eyebrow. "Are you seriously laughing?"

Butch stopped grinning as he shook his head. "Hell no. I mean, not about this," he indicated the two of them. "But I was just thinking ... when I was a rookie cop, I think I arrested someone for doing exactly this." He waved his hand around the car before moving it back to thread through V's hair.

V lowered his head and chuckled. The vibrations from it moving through his chest. "How the virtuous have fallen?"

Butch barked out a laugh at that. So loose-limbed and content, with V still cracking jokes even as he lay across him half naked. "Fuck. I'm alotta things V, but virtuous ain't ever been one of them."

"I can see that."

Butch closed his eyes, holding V's head as he reminded himself not to fall asleep in the back of a suspicious car with his pants on the floor. The thought held out for at least a couple of minutes.

~*~

V knew he was dreaming. Knew this because he had come home and fallen on the bed, not even bothering to shower. He was content to have his bonding scent still fresh in the air, cop's smell on his skin, and his taste in his mouth.

Butch was there in the dream too, so vivid that V could reach out and touch him. In fact, he did. But the cop didn't react. He was completely and totally absorbed in someone. V looked over his shoulder. It was Beth, Wrath's *shellan*. His queen. Butch wanted to take her somewhere, but she wouldn't go.

The room went dark, but Butch was still there. Alone. No, that wasn't true. Wrath was there. Blood was dripping down the cop's pale skin and V felt his body tense. The King had attacked Butch for approaching Beth? But V was there and he'd never let that happen. Butch was suddenly on his hands and knees. Naked and shivering in the cold, looking up at a dark wall, trying desperately to see. V wanted to reach out to him and he tried.

Then he was the one that was cold. Warm again, even though he was naked. He looked around only to see Butch behind him. His cop smiled at him in a way he couldn't understand, displaying a ferocious set of fangs just before sinking them into his jugular.

V woke up screaming.

Butch stomped up the stairs to his apartment, barely resisting the temptation to put his fist through the wall. No need to rouse the neighbors just because he'd had the shittiest of all shit days. Figured. What else would come on the heels of the fantastic night he'd spent with V, but one of the worst days of his career?

"Shit," he grouched to himself as he reached his floor.

He'd been doing his damn job. Sure, he was technically not "on the case" anymore, but what could it hurt for him to question the male prostitute that was attacked? Nothing! The guy was going to be discharged tomorrow and had anyone else thought to ask the right questions? No! Evidently he was the only detective with half a lick of sense. Unfortunately, the chief didn't see it that way. Not. At. All.

"What the hell do you think you're doing busting into that hospital?" the chief had asked.

Well he hadn't exactly busted in, he'd just taken about a half hour to ask a few questions.

"I took you off that case, O'Neal. I specifically told you to get your ass busy doing this," he'd jabbed his finger at some low profile robberies that had plagued a neighborhood. "And you just say to yourself, Fuck the chief. I'm gonna keep investigating anyway!"

"No sir, not exactly," Butch had answered. "I might've said 'to hell with the Chief, but not fuck.'" He couldn't resist adding that last bit. Smart mouth always had gotten him into trouble and this time was no different.

For his troubles he'd gotten a week's "paid vacation", but in cop speak it was punishment for getting too big for his badge. A week's vacation was the cop's decision. When the chief told you he didn't want to see your ass for at least seven days or he'd do some creative things with a desk drawer ... *that* was punishment.

"Ah, fuck him." Butch slammed his apartment door closed, hard enough to reverberate through the walls.

That wasn't all that was bothering him either.

The condescending looks from some of the other guys at the station - like who the hell did they think they were? He was twice the cop they'd ever be and they knew it. They never could stand it that he wasn't a yes man or agreed to play the bullshit bureaucratic games. He'd gotten in trouble for it one too many times and they fucking loved it. Well fuck them too.

No telling what kind of looks they'd give him if they knew he was screwing a guy. Okay ... so not screwing. Technically. But he was still getting it on with another man. So to add the big pile of complicated shit that was currently his life - he'd gone and decided to be a fag. Oh yeah. The fellas would *love* that.

God, he felt like such a little shit for even thinking *that* F word. He'd never been a homophobe and he just couldn't relate any derogatory words to V or himself - not in any way. Butch grinned just thinking about V and someone calling him a name he didn't like. Now that he'd love to see!

But what in the hell was he doing with a guy? This *man*. It still blew his fucking mind that he was in this. *Really* in this. And if he stayed in it, he *would* end up fucking another man. Or however that worked. He wasn't even sure he knew.

"What the fuck?" he cursed himself and flung open a cabinet, desperate for some Lagavulin.

But if he was honest, even current work situation considered, his life was about one hundred percent less shitty since the whole thing with V started. He wasn't angry every morning when his feet hit the floor. He was only angry when dumb asses pissed him off. He laughed about twice as much as before and he was damned near bordering on happy most of the time. It was pretty hard to believe.

There was no scotch to be found in his cabinet after all and the liquor stores had all closed up hours ago. Evidently, the universe was conspiring against him.

"Fine then. I give up," Butch sighed and then shook his head for carrying on a full conversation with himself. Hello men in little white coats.

Just as he was about to sit down and try to numb his brain on some really bad reality television, someone knocked on his door. No way it was a neighbor complaining. No one ever said anything to anyone in his complex. So who the hell could it-

"If you're in there you better open up or I'm kicking in the damn door."

V.

Butch opened up before V could make good on his word.

"I'm here. Damn," he said, taking in the scowling mass that was currently shoving his way into the apartment.

"Why the hell aren't you answering your phone?" V barked at him.

"Oh," Butch looked down at his pocket, remembering.

"Yeah. Oh," V gave him a look.

"I turned the damn thing off so no one from work could reach me. Fuckers. I wasn't thinking. Too pissed off to- anyway, I'm ... I'm all good. Just mad as hell."

V took a deep breath as if to compose himself and then got front and center into Butch's biz.

"Don't ever do that again, you feel me? We got shot at last night, so what do you think ran through my mind. What would you think?"

Butch finally thought about where V was coming from and felt bad for being flippant about it.

"Shit, man. Sorry. Seriously. I didn't think about ... that. I was mad and I

don't always think when I'm mad. I was going to call you anyway. Figured you might be interested in hearing me bitch."

The big guy grinned a little a that.

"Well," he rubbed his face, "About ten seconds ago I was interested in kicking your ass for having me haul mine over here, but let's hear what's got you riled up. I can always kick your ass later."

Butch cut to the chase. "I was made to take a leave of absence today. For a week."

"What?" V looked genuinely surprised.

"Yeah, chief told me to stay gone for seven days, paid leave. Like it was some kind of fucking gift."

"Okay. Let's hear it. I know there's more to this and you know you want to raise hell about it," V moved the few steps to the sofa and settled himself. "So hit me with it."

And Butch did. Spilled his guts and raised holy hell about what had gone down with the chief. It felt good to rant, but it felt even better to rant to someone that listened intently, nodding the whole time, but never once interrupting with his two cents.

When he was finally finished, V leaned forward on the sofa, very calm and completely straight faced. "You want me to go kick his ass?"

Butch cracked up at that; not just at the look on V's face, but because he might actually do it if Butch said yes. He knew V was kidding though.

"Yeah, would ya?" he laughed.

V pulled one of his daggers from its holster and flipped it before sliding it back into place. "Sure. I'll get him to meet me in a parking lot. What did you say his name was again?"

Butch grinned even harder, amazed that somehow V's sick sense of humor was making it all better.

"Look, I don't blame you for being pissed," V said. "I'd be just as fired up

about it. But the truth is, just because you can't officially use your badge doesn't mean you stop being a cop, right? I know you and I don't see you sitting home on your ass just because your boss said so. You weren't officially on the case anymore anyway, but ah, that didn't really stop you from showing up at the house last night now did it?"

Butch just looked at him. V was right. He was absolutely fucking right. He was on leave, but that didn't mean jack. Like he followed the rules anyway. His pride was a bit bruised and that was it. Nothing else had changed. Not really. It just took V to point that out. Obviously, it took V to make a lot of things clear.

And Butch didn't really give a damn if it made him a queer to feel this way about him. It felt right. So fuck 'em if they couldn't deal with it.

"You know what? You're right," Butch nodded, his mind made up. "Guess I just needed a bitching session to get it outta my system."

"Not a problem," V said, leaning back on the couch.

Butch's eyes narrowed a bit and V definitely noticed. "What?" he asked, suddenly suspicious.

"Just because I'm getting over being pissed, don't think I've forgotten about last night."

V smirked at him.

"Not *that*. I'm talking about what happened at the house. The slice and dice, again."

V scrubbed a hand over his face and made a groaning sound.

"Hey, you're the one that brought up the house, hot shot. You *are* going to explain."

"He had a gun on you, cop. I wasn't willing to wait around for a Q and A session."

Butch lowered his eyebrows at him, giving him his best doubting cop look. "I get that, but that ain't it and you know it."

V stared at the ceiling in thought for a moment and then looked right at him. "Their kind doesn't talk. Trust me. We surprised them by being there and they don't give a shit about the whys or any kind of code of law and order. All they're trained to do is kill, not think."

"Mmm hmm," Butch muttered.

"I didn't see you pulling a lot of cop procedure when that one was on me, ready to make with the killing."

Butch considered this for a second. "Okay, fair enough. But are you interested in solving this thing or not?"

V sat forward, his face all business. "Honestly? No. Not really. I just want it to stop. I don't need any more proof of their motive."

"And I want to solve it," Butch said, shaking his head. "So are we gonna be at cross purposes here or what?"

V studied him intently. "What, like we're partners?"

"Well..." Butch let the answer hang between them with only a *don't be a dumb ass* look on his face.

"You are a persistent pain in the ass, aren't you?"

"Pretty much, yeah. You were the one that said just because I was on leave didn't mean I stopped being a cop. Now answer the question."

"Fine! Damn. Look, I won't stop you from doing the cop thing. But if it's your life or mine on the line - I'm killing the pasty bastards, I don't care how much it pisses you off. You feel me?"

"Yeah, I feel ya," Butch agreed.

"Not like you'd ever sit your nosey ass at home anyway," V continued to grouse. "Even if you were pissed at me, I don't think you could ever stop snooping. But you know what?" He mocked a horrified gasp. "Now you'll have to be sneaky and of questionable intentions like me; just outside the law. How will you do it? What will they say?"

Butch slugged him the arm, just hard enough for him to feel it, but V

grabbed that arm and pulled him in on top on him. Knee between V's spread out thighs so he had to use his hands to steady himself on the back of the couch, either side of V's head.

"How about we just forget about the asshats for now?" V asked.

Butch took a deep breath in and let it out slowly. "That'd be nice." Feeling himself lean into the warm hard body, knees sinking into the lame ass couch that had definitely seen better days.

"I bet I can make you forget." V's hand went to the back of his neck, rubbing circles that made him instantly go liquid.

Butch chuckled, leaning into the hand. "Is this where I say, I bet you can?"

V laughed, head ducked like he always did. "Something like that."

Butch cupped V's chin, tilting it up as he lowered himself into a kiss, shifting forward until his knee was pressed into V's groin, V's very interested groin. V paused mid-kiss as if the pressure was both unexpected and distracting, both of which Butch was going for.

It gave Butch enough time to ease V outta his leather jacket and start fiddling with his holster, unbuckling the straps and sliding it off V's arms. He leaned over and lowered in on the ground with a thunk.

"Damn," Butch grunted. "That shit is heavier than the GD's belt. I thought I'd never get used to running with that thing strapped to my hip."

"Mmmhmm," V leaned his head back on the couch. "I bet you looked hot as hell wearing it though." His hands rested lightly on Butch's hips as Butch's hands delved underneath the typical black Tee that V always seemed to wear. Butch imagined that if he ever got to snoop in the guy's closet, there'd be a line up of black tee's hanging there, one for every day, leather pants and knives. Sorted by day and size, all anal and shit.

Feeling the hard muscles underneath, Butch wanted the entire damn t-shirt off. Even though that night in his car had been dark as hell, there was no forgetting what the man looked like without a shirt on. He was fucking impressive. All muscle and sinew strength, cut up like out of a magazine, tan and hairless. Butch started pushing up the tee and going

for the fly of those leathers when V's hands stopped him.

"It's okay," Butch found himself actually reassuring V. He wanted to do this and didn't want him thinking he felt pressured.

"Not really, it isn't," V insisted, drawing his hand back up and trapping it on his chest. "There's something I need to explain to you first. I'm not exactly ... I'm not what you'd call one hundred percent down there," his eyes darted to his crotch. "I just think you ought to know before ... you know."

Butch shook his head, his eyebrows drawing together. "What do you mean, not one hundred percent? I've already touched you, remem-

"I've been partially castrated, cop," V blurted it out.

Butch felt himself flinch. "Partially cas- you mean?"

V just nodded.

"How? I mean, what happened?"

V was already shaking his head. "It was a long time ago. A very long time ago and it's not important who or why, I wanted you to know so you wouldn't be shocked. Or rather, any more shocked than you are now. I just ... I wanted you to know."

Butch heard alarm bells go off in his head. The same alarms that went off whenever his detective senses picked up that there was way more to something than what people tried to show on the surface.

"What do you mean *who*? As in someone did it to you? It wasn't just an accident?"

"Shit," V's head fell back against the sofa. "I keep forgetting you're a pushy and perceptive bastard."

"I don't know how you can forget that, but the question remains, who the fuck-

V's head shot up. "You aren't the only one with a son of a bitch for a father, okay cop?"

Butch went completely silent and still, taking in this new bit of information. "Fuck," he exhaled finally.

"Fortunately, I still can," V grinned.

"Don't joke right now, I'm too busy wanting to kill someone," Butch stared at him hard.

V gave his hand a squeeze before moving his gloved palm up Butch's arm. "I appreciate the sentiment, but someone already beat you to it, a long time ago. I didn't tell you so we could stroll down my dark assed memory lane though. You just deserve to know."

"Did you-"

"No, cop. I didn't kill him. But not because I didn't want to. I was too little to get the job done at the time and by the time I could've, well ... someone else beat me to it."

"So you were just a kid when-"

"Butch," V interrupted loudly to get his attention. "What's done is done and now you know. So unless it freaks you out, I'd really rather not keep talking about it so we can get back to what we were doing."

Butch shook his head. "You are nothing if not compartmentalized."

"No, I'm a realist, cop. Can't do shit about the past now, but *this*," he rolled his hips forward so that Butch could feel the disturbing conversation hadn't dampened his appetite. "This is real and I don't doubt it for a second."

And V was right. Again. There was no doubt in Butch's mind anymore either. He never would've guessed it, but now he was in it neck deep. He cared about V in a way that he'd never cared about anyone else. He kept learning stuff about the guy, some reassuring, some disturbing as hell - but it made no difference. He just ended up feeling bound closer; like soon they'd be so intertwined that there would be no unraveling it. The thought really ought to scare him to death. Strangely, it didn't.

"It doesn't freak me out," Butch said, answering both V's question and the

one he posed to himself. He slid his hand down to cup V through his pants, making that razor sharp jaw clench. "That doesn't matter to me. God knows I'm beat all to hell but it didn't stop you from being all up in my grill."

His tactic worked as V's eyes opened to slits, a salacious grin pulling at his lips.

"Was I up in your grill, cop?" V asked, his voice just a raspy whisper as Butch felt the erection in his hand grow harder.

"I'd say yeah ... and then some." He moved his hand down the length of V and back up to tug at the button and zipper.

"I think you liked me being all in your biz." V shifted a little to help him out.

"Just like you liked me throwing you around the place and almost shooting you."

V laughed a little at that, then sucked in a breath when Butch's hand touched bare skin.

"So we gonna play who's the bigger bad ass now or what?" Butch asked, stroking him before his hand dipped down to find what V said was absolutely true. He watched V's perfect hands dig into the arm and the cushion of the couch as his head fell back. Butch took the opportunity to look at V. Really look at him.

Yes, he'd been horribly scarred, and yes, Butch wanted to do more than scar someone for laying a hand against him - but it did nothing to take away from the man himself. It didn't make him any less of ... anything. In fact, it really only made him more. A lot of guys would probably feel like they had something to prove, but Butch knew V didn't see it that way. It wasn't so much that he was self conscious - just wanted Butch to know about it. It was about opening up and letting someone in, hoping you wouldn't see revulsion in response. Butch totally got that.

He cleared his throat so that V looked at him. Butch held his gaze as he touched him, collecting the wet warmth at the head to spread it further down and hold V in his hand. Then he gave him a crooked smile. "I can honestly say ... you've got nothin' to worry about. You're uhm, impressive

... to say the least."

V looked like he was trying to smile, but couldn't quite make that work. Butch leaned forward to kiss him once on the mouth, before making a wet path to his ear. His hand moved a little faster, until he noted the change in V's breathing.

"Is this right?" he spoke into V's ear. "I mean, am I doing it-"

V turned his head to kiss him harder. "You've got nothing ... to worry about either cop."

They kissed messily for a few beats, broken up by V's broken breathing until Butch pulled back to shove V's shirt up further. He placed a kiss at V's collarbone, bellybutton, the cut of his hip. Shifting down, he knelt between V's legs until he felt his knees hit the floor. He scooped the pants down with him until he was left with the expanse of V's legs on either side of him and the weight of V's gaze on him like white fire. This entire thing was new and Butch felt completely out of his depth. Kind of like having the theme park nearby, but never taking a ride. You knew what to do in principle, but the reality was like being doused with petrol and launched out of a canon.

But the way V was looking at him, mouth slight parted, fingers clutched into the cushion, there was no way in hell Butch was stopping now. Smoothing a hand up V's thigh, Butch wrapped a hand around the length of him, hot and silken, gripping him tight at the base like he knew *he himself* liked. He then wriggled himself forward, breath casting over the inner of V's thighs, breathing in the dark, spicy scent of him, before lowering his mouth to run his tongue over the head.

The reaction was instantaneous. V's breathing hitched, the thick thighs tensed, long fingers dug further into the couch. And being the cause of V's reactions was thoroughly addictive. The taste was heady and dark, just like the man himself. Butch lowered his mouth, licking again before taking just the head in and swirling his tongue. He glanced up to watch as V tensed, abs tightening where the tee had ridden up, but he let his head drop down on the couch. Butch took that as permission to explore, so he did. Taking the head back in, running his tongue down and over the vein running underneath. He didn't have a rhythm, just moved about him slowly, tasting, using his tongue to cause V to start to twitch. It was

surprising, the extreme power he felt when he'd never seen the giver in this position as the one with the upper hand. It was like the world's best kept secret. The head rush of strength you got, making someone like V tremble, could be addicting.

It wasn't until he took V in further than he had previously, sucking down before releasing, that Butch felt a hand touch his head. He released V and looked up to find him looking down. Breathing heavy and dazed like he was falling apart. It was hot as hell and one of the best fucking things Butch had ever seen.

He moved his hand back to pump at him while he watched V watch him. Watch as his light eyes became hot like a furnace when he moved his thumb over the head, brushing over the slit to gather more moisture, his mouth parted as he sucked in a breath.

"You like that?" He was surprised by the depth and rough aroused quality to his own voice, but then by the state of his own pants, it wasn't that damn surprising.

"You know what else I'd like?" And with that Butch was yanked up and laid on his back lengthwise on the couch with V pressing him into it, bruising his mouth as he kissed him like it was his next breath. V's hands were on Butch's pants and he manhandled him out of them until they were in a pile on the floor. V straddled him and pressed his hips and erection against his.

"Fuuuck," Butch hissed. The pressure and friction was fucking incredible, V hot and hard against him. It didn't last long before V had his large hand wrapped around them both, stroking them fast and smooth. Butch moaned, head pressing back before V dragged a hand up his neck, pulling him to his mouth. Kissing him hard, hands burning into his dick as he pressed them both together, the feel of V and the expert movement of his hand sending his mind to somewhere currently beyond the ceiling. And he didn't stop, didn't wait for Butch to catch up, just moved them forward, stroking hard and strong. Butch's hand moved to grip at V's back, the other latched onto the side of his head, bracketing V's face as he fused their mouths closer.

The pleasure was shooting through him, bouncing in his insides like a pinball machine. He felt his hips start to piston in time with the movements of V's hands, as he off broke the kiss, pressing his forehead

against V's. He clamped a hand behind V's neck, holding them together as he felt his orgasm build, like a charge in his chest. He was about to let out with a warning that he was close when he felt V's hips move quickly in succession and heard noise on the exhale of a strangled breath, feeling the warmth spill over his dick. The new extra slickness and the increase in speed, and the way V sounded as he came...

Butch careened over the edge, spilling warm into V's hand. A moan on his lips as he pushed their lips back together, riding the aftermath.

Panting into his mouth as he shuddered one last time, Butch let his head fall back so he could look at V. The sculpted cheekbones were flushed with colour and the soft lips were parted in the goatee, his eyes currently closed as his head hung loose off his shoulders. Butch was a fucking idiot for ever thinking that they guy wasn't earth shatteringly beautiful.

The eyes opened to look at him, the corners crinkling slightly in affection but making no attempt to move. His hand was now resting on his hip, stroking the skin.

"Thanks for letting me bitch to you. Should've tried this method sooner, huh?" Butch laughed out, stroking the back of V's neck.

V laughed with him. "Any-fucking-time."

V looked over at what he guessed you'd call his new partner. Virgin in the Fade, Wrath would have his ass if he knew. Luckily, V had been so well behaved as of late that he'd lost his six foot eight, beast in a pretty package, baby sitter. Nothing against Rhage; if V had to have a tag along then the Brother was about as good as he could hope for, but V liked his alone time when he wasn't on assigned patrol. Good thing Rhage had backed off too. The cop had been on leave so they'd been spending more time together. It would've put a serious crimp in V's style if he'd had to make up stories for Rhage on just why he had to go the hell away. Now, because he was also investigating with Butch, he was essentially pulling double duty. Without complaint of course. All in all, not a bad deal.

"What do you think the likelihood is that this is the right place?" Butch asked from the passenger side of the Escalade.

V studied his profile while Butch studied the house across the street. Butch's jaw was tight as he narrowed his eyes, taking in the whole scene.

V had that same dream about the cop this morning. First time was after they'd fought the lessers and once again this morning meant it wasn't just a dream. He was having visions about the cop now. He had no idea what it all meant, but in it Butch was hurting. He couldn't let that happen.

"Hello? Earth to V."

"I'd say slim," V answered, shaking off the thought. "But we have nothing else to go on for now, so we wait. I thought you cops were used to waiting."

Butch cut his eyes over at him. "We are, but if we're gonna wait I require better company than the silent and broody routine you're currently pulling. It's putting me to sleep."

"Oh really?" V turned in his seat. "Excuse the hell out of me. Should I be telling jokes or-"

"You actually know any jokes?"

"Have I told you the one about the Irish cop who-"

"Holy shit!" Butch interrupted, nodding towards the road and sliding down further in the seat.

V saw it too. A dark car pulling up the house. This house was not at all a dive like the last one. It was decent, in a nice neighborhood, with lots of neighbors. There'd be no way to do anything without attracting tons of attention, but then again, V hadn't actually expected anyone to show up. The Brotherhood had gotten word that the lesser that was leading this current crime spree was hold up here. Looked like in addition to being sloppy, he was arrogant enough to demand posh digs. There hadn't been any other attacks this week, but since he and Butch had taken out three of them the other night, that wasn't too surprising. What was surprising was that their lead guy seemed to be traveling alone.

A lesser got out of the car and entered the house alone.

"We'll I'll be damned," Butch muttered.

"My thoughts exactly."

"So we goin' in?" Cop's hand was already on the door.

V put a hand out over Butch's chest. "How about you slow your roll for a second? I don't buy that he's in that house alone and we can't exactly have a shoot out in the middle of this nice neighborhood."

"I wasn't planning on shooting," Butch argued. "I just thought we'd talk."

V gave him a look.

"Okay so maybe it'd end up with shooting."

"And you'd explain that to the Caldie PD how?"

"Same way I didn't have to explain the other night."

"The other night that house was in BFE. We're in a nice neighborhood that has security systems and cameras," V pointed out.

Butch slumped back. "Damn it. Y'know, I hate it when you're right. Really pisses me off that you insist on being logical."

V couldn't help but smile. "Sometimes I hate it too. Look, neither one of us is supposed to be here, but this is good."

Butch looked at him like he'd lost his mind. "Good? How is this good? He is right there and we can't do anything about it."

"Now we know where he lives," V told him. "We tip him off now and all he's going to do is run. He has no idea that we know so that gives us the upper hand. I guarantee you this is where he and his cronies are holding up. So ... we need a plan for either handling this here or waiting until they leave. Then we make our move." And by "we", V meant the Brotherhood. He hated to steal the thunder from Butch because this was damned important to the cop - but this was first, foremost, and forevermore Brotherhood business. V would tell Wrath and they'd come back to settle this tomorrow night.

"Let's leave it be for now, cop. We come up with a plan and we'll come back."

~*~

It was all bullshit really. The amount of red tape Butch had to deal with. It made doing the job way more difficult than it needed to be. He knew where the pale shits were holed up, had a decent clue as to the leader being there, but no dice.

Butch sunk himself lower into V's soft leather couch, bare feet crossed on the coffee table, tumbler of Lag sitting next to them neatly on a coaster.

V was right though. As much as Butch wanted to go in there and start interrogating - and by interrogating he meant swinging - the guy was right. The bastards played a pretty good game of shoot first, ask questions later and neither of them wanted to risk that. Plus, Butch just wanted to bring the fuckers in.

He heard the water stop down the hall. V was out of the shower. The guy had made a beeline for the bathroom as soon as they had arrived, leaving Butch to grumble to himself about fucking protocol.

He leaned down and took a good long pull from the glass, the familiar burn down the back of his throat. He slammed the glass back down and rested his elbows on his knees, digging his palms into his eyes. There was a high pitched tap, three clinks and the sound of water. V must be shaving. Butch rubbed a hand over his face, rough against his hand. Screw his five o'clock shadow, there was no point until the morning.

A warrant would be good, he thought, mind back on the case. He had an eye witness accounts of what they looked like, shady and hazy video footage. Problem being, the eye witness was him. But he couldn't exactly lug up to the Judge and say, "Yeah, so I was off duty, hanging in the car with a friend that I'm also sorta fucking, and we see the baddies we're looking for, all while I'm supposed to be benched with a leave of absence. I'm hoping that's cool, your honor". Yeah. That would go over like a lead balloon. He needed someone else to be a witness. Someone else to make at least a call.

Bingo!

V could ring up, anonymous tip and all, stating he'd seen some suspicious looking guys in his neighborhood and they were heading into a house that he knew wasn't theirs. Butch would be back on duty in few days, get the warrant for arrest, take them in for questioning...

"V!" Butch jumped to his feet. "Hey man, you done?" he yelled. He quick stepped it into the bedroom, moving to the open door. Light streamed from the bathroom, making him blink twice.

Suddenly, Butch felt like he'd been slammed in the chest by a sledge hammer.

V was out of the shower. The steam was clearing and all he could see was gleaming skin. Rivulets of water ran down V's back from his still wet hair. It looked like he'd just finished up shaving and was now trimming his goatee, leaning over the sink to get in close. The steam on the mirrors had been wiped in a awkward oval as V squinted at his own reflection.

And he was as naked as the day he was born.

Now Butch had seen V in a cliff notes version of undressed. But this was ... this was all together something different. And police work? Well, it wasn't like anyone at the station was going to solve the case without him. It would hold.

The broad shoulders were hunched slightly as V leaned over. Broad meant they took up well over half of the mirror; rippling underneath smooth skin, hairless, golden and fucking perfect. The breadth tapered down a well muscled back that was mirrored by an equally muscled chest. Nipples flat and dark, one circular tattoo that looked like it was beaten into his left pec. Stomach flat, smoothing down to the sharp cut of his hip, hard abs moving beneath the golden skin as he shuffled on his feet. His hands were large, but artistic, the gloved one gripping the sink to steady himself, the other hanging in the air as he trimmed. The biceps flexed with the movement, the cut of the muscle obvious as he moved. And then there was his ass. High, tight and curved, sticking out as he leaned in, holding him up with those killer quads and hamstrings.

The whole thing made his mouth go dry. Who would've thought it from a lifetime hetero? But the sight was fucking amazing, and it was as plain as day that V was totally unaware of his beauty. Not that he wasn't confident, because V could write the book on confidence and then shove it down your throat. But he never held himself in a way that screamed "I'm beautiful, so fuck you." And as Butch attempted to moisten his dry mouth, he realized two things.

One: That the mountain of a man, golden and perfect ... was his. Two: He could go and take all he wanted.

Butch felt the Cheshire cat grin tug at his lips.

V spotted him in the mirror as he moved into the bathroom. Smiling back at him in the reflection, he ran a hand down over his finished goatee. "Hey cop. What's so funny?" He turned, tapping the scissors against his hand as he leaned against the counter.

The view from the front was just as distracting as the one from the back, but something else caught Butch's eye immediately. He didn't know how he'd missed them, even in the dimness of his apartment. Maybe he'd been too busy in the moment at hand to take note, but he couldn't miss it now. V had a tattoo that spread from both his thighs towards his groin. An intricate design with a shit load of characters Butch didn't even attempt to understand, but it was the same design as on his temple.

He couldn't help but wonder now if the ink had been V's idea ... or something else that was done to him.

...Shit.

But when he looked up to see if there was any indication in V's eyes, all he saw was heat. The marks on his skin was the *last* thing on V's mind.

Butch moved until he was right in V's space, bare feet either side of V's as he took the scissors out of his hand, placing it on the counter. V's eyes crinkled in amusement, confused, but with a small smirk pulling at his mouth. "You got something on your mind cop?"

Butch placed a hand over the hard muscles of V's chest, smoothing them down the cut planes of his pecs, over the scar, down the flat ripples of his abs. The skin was warm and clean and still slightly damp, and those large hands moved to rest on Butch's waist.

Butch moved them back to their original spot, pressing them firmly into the cool marble in a silent order to keep them there. He wanted V spread out and his to explore. He wanted V just like he'd watched him. He wanted to see V fall apart.

He pressed an open mouthed kiss into the dip of his collarbone, sucking at

the skin before moving down his sternum. V didn't move his hands again. Instead he grew passive, evidently content to let Butch do whatever he had planned. And why was that turning him on even more?

He sucked and kissed and bit at the skin, pulling the flat nipples into his mouth, running hands over the round shoulders and down the thick arms. He felt V twitch as he ran a tongue over his nipple, but he didn't move. Just watched him move about his body, doing as he wished, craving more of this body and overwhelmed by that need.

He felt the hardness of V's erection dig into his stomach as he sucked on his neck. Hand moving to wrap around it, giving a long leisureed stroke before realizing he wanted more. He wanted to make V feel the things he'd felt the other night. He wanted to taste him, see and feel him break apart and know he was the one doing it without having to stop.

Kissing as he moved down the body, he gripped at V's sides as he lowered himself. He glanced up to look at him as he moved. The light eyes were burning, mouth open, knuckles white as they gripped the counter. The sight sent a surge into Butch's pants.

"Do you know what you look like right now?" he asked into V's skin as he made his way down, breath brushing the cut of his hip, knees moving to the ground.

V just kept watching him without speaking.

"Do you? You gonna answer me?" He knew his breath was now blowing right across V's cock, hard and full, twitching with interest, muscles in his thigh tensing with restraint. He moved and licked just the head, a small swipe along the underside. V swayed a little, a sharp intake of breath, long fingers now clutching the bench hard.

The voice came out low and strained. "... cop."

Butch imagined what they must look like right now. Him still in his street clothes, tie gone and collar undone, but still fully dressed right down to his knock off leather shoes. V finally somewhat vulnerable, as he didn't even have so much as a towel within reach. Butch resisted a smile at the thought of having someone like V vulnerable, taking him into his mouth instead. When he tried taking him in deeper, V's hand came up off of the

counter in a jerk. Butch let his eyes do the talking and V reluctantly slapped his hand back down in response.

"Fuck," he growled beneath his breath.

Butch knew exactly what he meant, never mind the fact that he got off on making V feel the same amazing frustration that he'd felt the other night. He shifted on his knees, shuffling forward, sliding his hands along the backs of V's thighs, solid and smooth, tensing underneath his fingers. He stroked the muscle, moving up to massage his ass. It might be a sacrilege to think so too, but V had an ass smoother than any woman's he'd ever touched. The guy was literally smooth and hairless everywhere except his face. It wasn't like a shaving thing either and all that soft skin over hard muscle just demanded to be touched. Slowing his movements, Butch pulled back to suck at the tip, knowing full well that it'd be torture.

There was a slight thrust as V moved his hips, seeking more than he was currently getting, before he stopped himself. V was, as always, the master of control, stopping himself from moving, no moans, just clutching at the bench like it was the only thing between passivity and throwing Butch against the wall. Difference being, Butch wanted V as mindless and falling apart as he'd made him.

He moved to grip V at the base while he ran a tongue around the top, a precursor to sucking him down with increased vigor. And there it was, a strangled sound, a small moan on the exhale of a shaky breath. Butch looked up to see the long line of V's neck, head lolled back, the muscles of his arm strained as he held himself back. He tried to recall all the 'moves' V had laid on him as he'd blown his mind in the back seat of the Escalade. But all he could recall was being manhandled while simultaneously being strapped to a comet.

He took one hand and pinned V's hip against the sink, using the other to guide him into his mouth. Thinking he could take more of V in - not the whole lot mind you ... cause *fuck* - Butch felt V hit the back of his throat before easing him out, repeating the movement. He didn't attempt anything spectacular because this was his second blow job ever and he wasn't double jointed. His lack of experience however didn't seem to lessen the intensity for V.

V slammed his fist back against the bench as he muttered something in a harsh language that Butch couldn't place. Still, you didn't have to be a

fucking interpreter to know he was swearing. The tone of his voice, low and rough, Butch could guess that V was hanging on by his fingertips.

The hands moved quick, sliding to the back of Butch's neck, reaching to pull him up. Butch gripped them and pushed them back as he sucked V deeper. Then V growled, actually fucking growled as his hands took back their position. V wasn't a male easily swayed and Butch doubted he'd ever relinquished control like this.

V's breathing had skyrocketed, solid chest panting with the exertion. His hips started moving occasionally, thrusting into Butch's throat and each time stopping immediately, as if V's consciousness was waving in and out to stop himself from fucking Butch's throat. Butch spread his forearm across the hard abdomen, pressing V into the marble. V's movements became erratic, hips fighting against moving, white-knuckled hands changing their position, head tossed back toward the fogged glass before leaning forward to stare down at him. Butch could tell he was being watched, the whole fucking concept of V taking it as Butch pulled him apart, the thought of V watching him do so...

"Butch ... cop ... *fuck*." V let out a moan, clutching at Butch's head as he came, hot and warm pulses into his mouth.

V's knees were giving way as Butch stood up to push a leg between them to steady him as he spat into the sink. He remembered V swallowing him down in the car, but Butch wasn't quite there yet. One fucking step at a time.

V was boneless against him, head hanging off his shoulders before he rested it on Butch's shoulder. His breathing was so deep and he didn't speak for a long stretch of time. Butch wondered if he'd fallen asleep, but finally he moved. Turning his head into Butch's neck, V inhaled deeply. He felt the long fingers touch his hair before digging in as if to hold him in place. V just stayed like that for a moment, not kissing him, not licking him, but it was the strangest sensation. Butch couldn't shake the feeling that V was struggling with ... something. And for some reason Butch felt like V needed more from him.

"V? You o-"

The fingers tightened to the point of pain and Butch literally felt him hiss against his neck. He remained perfectly still, knowing that he simply

shouldn't move. He felt his heart rate increase and a rush of adrenaline, but he had no explanation for it. Finally, V's hold on him loosened.

"I need a minute cop. You mind?"

The words were polite, but the tone was forced.

"Ah, yeah ... sure." Butch backed out of the bathroom, seeing V with his head back to hanging low and it looked as if his body was shaking.

He couldn't doubt that V enjoyed what he'd done. That was pretty damn obvious and he was not going to second guess himself, even if he was a novice. No, it wasn't that. Something was up though and it was just outside his senses. It itched at his brain like the spot you get on your back that you can't quite scratch. V was holding himself back from something, something that he wanted from Butch - so why didn't he just say it? Or better yet, take it? Maybe V wanted to go all the way, but knew that Butch wasn't ready for that? No, that wasn't it either. V was the kind of guy to just throw that out on the table, so what was the deal.

The bathroom door suddenly swung open, V standing there with a pristine white towel slung low across his hips. He gave Butch a heated look that seared him to the bone. Yeah, there was no doubt V had fucking loved what he'd done. He took two steps and kissed Butch so hard that he had to grab onto V's arms to keep balanced. V took his time kissing him too, exploring every inch of his mouth.

"I like the taste of you," he finally said. "Especially with me there."

Butch grinned. "Yeah. Sorry I couldn't ... I'm not ready to-"

"Shhh," V hushed him. "I'm not worried about that cop. You don't get to apologize for making my fucking year."

Butch looked up at him then, his capable hands sliding down the sides of Butch's face to rest at the juncture between his shoulders and his neck. The bright eyes were clear, but dilated almost like V was drunk.

"You okay, man? Back there you seemed a little ... strung out."

V nodded slightly. "I'm fine. Don't worry about me. I'm just weird as hell sometimes. You know that."

This was true, but something was still niggling at Butch's brain. "You sure?"

V released him, a grin on his face that might fool most people, but not Butch. "I'm sure, cop. I just had a fantasy come true when all I thought to do was shave. I'm allowed to be a little keyed up, right?"

Butch smirked at him. "Fantasy, huh?"

"Oh hell, I shouldn't have said anything."

Butch let V pad by him in his bare feet and watched him make a B line for his Goose. He'd let the issue go for now, on the premise that he'd rocked V's world. He imagined that he had. V had certainly rocked his. But that wasn't all there was to what just happened and if V thought Butch O'Neal was the kind of man to just ignore the mysteries of his lover - well then the genius still had a hell of a lot to learn.

Butch woke with start. He came fully awake, knowing his sixth sense had never failed him before. The clock glared at him from beside the bed with an angry, red three a.m. There was also a not-so-stealthy light coming from underneath his bathroom door in the hall. He pulled on his boxers and grabbed his Glock, even though something told him exactly who was crashing in his toilet in the wee hours of the morning. Point of fact, burglars rarely came in to use the john - even the crazy ones.

He eased the door open with one hand, gun held down in the other. Sure enough, there was V, his large frame parked on the side of Butch's tub. He leaned to one side and peeled off his holster, his eyes never looking up before he spoke.

"I was in the neighborhood."

Butch couldn't help but smile. "That line might've worked if I'd been drinking."

He padded into the bathroom and V finally looked at him. His gaze softened a little and Butch smiled in return, until he saw why V had sequestered himself to the bathroom.

"What the fuck, V?!"

The black tee, that normally looked like a dream on the guy, was sticky and currently welded to V's side with blood. When he held the side of the tub to re-situate himself and wince, Butch saw the ungloved hand was also smeared with blood.

"Jesus," Butch hissed.

He was in front of him in two steps, kneeling down to help him lift the t-shirt up over his head so he could assess the damage. He spotted the slash across his ribs about the same time V groaned at the fabric pulling away from the half dried wound.

"Classic end to a shitty night, that's all cop."

Butch tossed the shirt into the tub. "Sure looks it. You got your magic bag of tricks?"

V nodded over towards the back of the toilet. "Never leave home with out it either."

He grabbed the bag and set it on the tub next to V before running some hot water over a clean hand towel. Returning to his spot on the rug in front of him, Butch started wiping the blood off his lover's chest and stomach. Kind of fucking odd thinking that. *Lover's chest*. And that the chest just so happened to be pumped to bits and a damn sight broader and harder than his. Again, he can't help but think that if anyone had told him a year ago...

Then again, before V, he'd been pretty sure he wouldn't even reach forty. Either the job or his way of living would kill him, but now? He wasn't so sure.

"You're pretty good at the assist, cop. Appreciate it."

Butch did the best he could and then rinsed out the towel in the sink. He turned around to see V laying another towel across his lap and pulling out that bottle of beta-dine or some kind of dine that stung like hell. "You want to do the honors?" V held it out towards him. "Fair is fair, right?"

"I guess so," Butch took the bottle and poured half of it down V's ribs.

"Holy fucking hell!" V yelled. "Damn it, cop!" Eyes squeezed tight, he

hissed a little more and cringed a lot more. Finally he opened his eyes to glare at Butch.

"Better?" Butch asked with a grin.

V looked down at the wound and nodded. "Yeah. Better. But fuck what I said about your assisting."

Butch laughed and settled himself on the closed toilet lid. "Fair is fair. Burns like a bitch too. So ... you gonna need stitches?"

V rambled around in his bag and pulled out some gauze to hold to the wound. "No, a few butterflies ought to do it. 'S not that deep. I'll have to take it easy on the housework though," he smirked. "Might need help taking off my boots too."

"Fuck the housework," Butch shook his head. "Do I look like Martha Stewart over here? I will help you undress though."

~*~

V studied Butch sitting across from him in the tiny bathroom, *his cop*, who kept fucking surprising him with these moments of being damn cheeky for one so new to ... all of this. He should've know that the guy would never lose that blatant openness and slightly charming cockiness, no matter what. It's who he was, one of the many things that V... admired about the man. He watched as Butch leaned back, legs spread, an amused look spreading across his face, just this side of smirking. He must have taken the intensity of V's gaze to mean something else. Going by the now full blown grin, V knew full well what that something was.

Scratch slightly, make that *overwhelming* charming cockiness.

He moved his concentration back down, pressing hard with the gauze before lifting to take a better look. It wasn't deep and would probably close with minimal assist. The latest recon on the *lesser* leader's house had been a bust, and sitting with Rhage, Phury and Zhadist in the car had been a fucking blast. Rhage had insisted on 'man'ing' the music, while Zhadist had buried daggers into the back of the blonde's head at the very off-key singing. V was glad at Phury's suggestion to do a drive around,

even the perfectly manicured multicoloured hair was starting to get ruffled. They didn't have to go very far before Rhage went silent, turned the music down and lowering the window to flat. One sniff and he was reaching for his seat belt.

"You have to do this a lot huh?" Butch's rough voice drew him back, still thick with sleep. It wasn't a question, but the concern in the hazel didn't demand elaboration.

V bent over to reach for the butterflies, holding the gauze still to his side almost groaning from the movement. Yeah ... bending hurt. "Sometimes yeah."

A long but comfortable silence filled the bathroom, V pulled the sides of the wound together before applying a quick dressing, Butch shuffled from his position before leaning over to rest his forearms on his knees. There was more fiddling, cop pulling at some loose strand on his boxers, his voice a quiet rumble when he finally spoke. "So V? Why don't you have the scars from it?"

V looked up and met Butch's assessing gaze. His cop was waiting patiently on an answer.

He had no answer. He couldn't fob it off to 'good healing' or 'I'm a fucking decent stitch'. Cop was too damn observant and smart for that.

Butch noted his silence and kept on in his typical style. "Other than the ones you told me about, you don't even have a mark. Anywhere. The other night you got cut on your arm and now there's nothing. And that was no small scratch either."

That need bloomed in V's chest again. A longing far greater than the need for blood or even sex. V ached to just lay it out, tell Butch everything. Have Butch accept him for all that he is, take him away from all the crap and make him his. But the rational side of his brain - which was a fair part of it - told him that he couldn't. And it was killing him.

"...V -" Butch pressed.

V let out a deep sigh, trying to relieve the pressure around his heart. He looked down trying to find the words. "I'm not ... *normal*, Butch."

"No shit."

V looked up quickly, but found no disgust in his face. Butch had his dog-with-a-bone, serious business, detective face on, the effect slightly lessened by his sleep-mused dark hair sticking out in all directions and the fading pillow creases on his shadowed cheek. "Cop - "

Butch ran a hand through his hair. "I'm not an idiot."

"I know you're not."

His cop pressed on without pausing for a breath. "... and I *know* you know it. I also know that you're not ready to tell me what the hell is up with-

V made to respond but Butch raised a hand, stopping him flat. "I don't know if it's some kind of super performance drugs, or genetic ... whatever-the-hell the government cooked up for you ..."

"It's not-

"Let me finish." Butch raised his voice, face earnest. "What I'm saying is - it doesn't matter. I don't know lots of shit about you and ... it doesn't matter. I know enough. Yeah I'm curious as fuck but I ...I dunno, I feel like I will know. Someday. I just ...had to let you know that I do *know*. I'm not blind. But I also know that you can't or won't spill ...not yet ... and really what am I gonna do? Stop talking to you?" Butch's face pulled into a crooked grin as he continued. "Refuse to see you until you pour out your soul? No. I just want you to know that I'm no fucking chump, you feel me?"

Butch's complete acceptance of him, without even knowing a quarter of the bizarre shit that made up V's life, floored him. Apparently Butch had seen enough to decide that V was worthy, and it made his heart tighten painfully. Here was a man that had let V into his life, shared the darkest parts of his soul, had let him touch him and had deemed that was enough to satisfy him. V's voice cracked. "I know that cop. You are ... in fact, amazing."

"Damn right I am." Butch looked smug, eyes shinning with humour.

"I wish I could tell you. I really do. It's ..." V shook his head, hanging loosely off his neck, feeling the dam breaking and almost saying to hell

with everything and just spilling. He changed the subject instead, attempting to get up without tugging on his side too much. "It's late cop. Don't you have work tomorrow?"

"Yeah" Butch moved to help him up, steadying hands warm on his waist. His cop looked up and he watched his eyes dart down to his lips. V couldn't help but lean down to kiss him gently on the mouth, fingers moving to curl in the short hairs at his nape. Butch relaxed into it, head tilting back, warm calloused hand brushing up V's spine. He released his lips, pulling back to look down at Butch's, face starting to get that flush to it, the shadow now well past twelve o'clock status, leaving a burn against V's mouth. "You staying?"

He wanted to, so bad it hurt, but the thought of explaining to Butch why all the curtains had to be drawn and why he couldn't leave the house was just not an option. "For a bit."

Butch looked pleased enough at that. Hitting the lights, he moved his shoulder to push underneath V's armpit and helped him walk over to the bed, lowering him gently before his hands went for his belt. The leathers pulled off easily and Butch tugged the sheets from where they were underneath V, dragging them up to cover him before moving around to the other side. "Just don't take up the whole bed with your freakishly large ass."

V chuckled as he felt the bed dip with the weight, and Butch shuffling underneath the sheets. "Oh so we're actually sleeping?"

Butch moved closer and situated himself close, moving about to get comfortable. "Well ...yeah."

The moving about continued until Butch rolled over and settled on his stomach, long muscled back turned slightly towards him. The solid warmth of Butch laying close, V realized he had never actually 'slept' with anyone before. Beside that time they had passed out together in the Escalade. It'd always been just him, the sex was as far removed from touching as could be. So the intimacy of having Butch next to him, breathing softly, hand brushing V's thigh. The *smell* of Butch and the feel of him against his side like it was all no BFD to be lying next to a male, sharing his bed.... And rather than scaring the crap outta him, it just made his lower half more than interested.

V leaned over and hooked an arm underneath his cop, pulling and flipping him over before rolling on top of him. Hissing slightly from the movement before sliding a knee between his cop's legs, bracing his hands either side of his head and pressing him deep into the mattress.

"You'll rip open your fucking stitches, genius," Butch protested. "And I now have..." he moved around beneath V to see the clock, hips pushing into his very interested groin, "less than three hours before I gotta get up."

Butch was resisting him, albeit half heartedly and half assedly, but it was enough to make the need to *take* that much more potent. He gripped the back of his cop's head and pulled the complaining mouth to his. Hot, hard, and unrelenting. Butch's shadow beard burned against his jaw, but the taste of him burned even more.

"But I'm up now," V spoke against his lips, pushing his hips against him to prove it.

Butch accepted his kiss for just a moment before giving just as good as he was getting. He pulled his head away just long enough to smile, "You're one dirty bastard, you know that?"

"You have no idea," V murmured, before kissing his way down Butch's neck, nipping gently at the tender place at his collar bone.

"I have to work tomorrow," Butch said again.

"Then you'll be working on," V looked at the clock to do the math, "less than two hours sleep." He flashed a grin at Butch in the dark.

"Oh really?" Butch challenged him.

"Yeah, really." V enjoyed a challenged, but would enjoy winning over Butch even more.

V took more from his mouth, sliding his tongue deep into the silk before moving across the stubbled jaw, breathing against his temple and sucking his lobe into his mouth. He felt Butch lift his hips at the sensation, grounding against V's hipbone as his hand moved to press down at the growing erection in the cop's boxers. His cop groaned and cupped V's face, lifting his head off the bed, muscles in his neck straining as he kissed

him again, urgent and breathless, feeling him moan into his mouth while V continued stroking.

It didn't take long before his cop's head fell back on the pillow with a thump, inhaling deep through his nose, and murmuring, "You smell like ... leather and ... burnt something. Gun powder residue?"

It didn't sound like he was complaining either.

"Sounds like you're kinda feeling it cop. Maybe I'm not the only dirty bastard in the room."

He could see Butch roll his eyes at him, even in the dark. Then his hands slid up V's thighs to knead the muscle there. "Blah blah blah," he teased. "Weren't you in the middle of something or..."

V smiled again, even though Butch couldn't see. "You submitting that easily, cop? A little leather and gun powder is all it takes?"

Butch laughed then. "Fuck you, V. Although ... does make me sound pretty kinky, huh?"

V leaned forward rather than answer Butch's rhetorical question. They both knew if anyone was freaky in their duo, it was V. He didn't have the desire to hurt Butch though. That was something he'd always craved *instead* of sex. With his cop, he most definitely wanted sex. That didn't mean the urge to dominate him a little just disappeared like rings of Turkish smoke.

Oh *hell* no.

V slid a hand up Butch's sternum to hold him in place, using the other one to tug the boxers down past his knees.

"You wanna be careful with those stitch-"

V cupped him and kneaded him gently until Butch's hips arched in response. "Sometimes you talk too damn much, cop," he grinned. "You should be quiet until I'm done, you feel me?"

Butch tried to raise up to look at him, but V held him firmly in place. He grunted in protest, but the sound was pretty fucking weak. "Says who?"

he groused.

V slid his hand up the length of Butch's erection, lowering himself to barely swipe the head with his tongue. "Says me," he answered before blowing cool air against it.

He caught his breath for a moment, then, "Oh so ... this is pay back?" Butch kept chattering.

"You suck at taking directions." V nipped him a little less gently on the inside of his thigh.

"Shiiiiit," Butch's body tightened in response.

V lifted himself and roughly pulled the boxers from Butch's legs. He kneed his legs further apart letting one rest across his thigh.

"What are you-?"

V flashed him a look that said not only was he not answering, but Butch should just trust him and go with it.

He stroked his cop's legs before kissing his way back up his chest, his neck, to whisper in his ear. "I bet you talk shit even in your sleep, cop," he sucked the sensitive flesh into his mouth. "I bet there's no way you can keep quiet until I'm finished."

Butch opened his mouth to protest and then realized that would end the bet right there. He narrowed his eyes at V and smirked, accepting the challenge.

V made his way back down Butch's body, alternately kissing and licking, even nipping at his skin, eliciting all sorts of noises but not any words. It was really something to watch. His cop wanted to say something so badly. When V took him in his hands, the hard length of him covered in soft skin, Butch's body wriggled and his hips bucked. He wanted more, right now, but V went slow.

Butch bit at his lower lip to keep from saying something. Instead he pumped his hips into V's hand.

"That's my job," V told him.

Butch let loose with a low groan in protest.

V took his gloved hand and cupped Butch once again. He let his fingers wander until he found the sensitive bridge of flesh just underneath his balls. Butch's eyes went a little wide.

"Trust me, cop. Just a touch, true?"

His eyes went back to liquid as soon as V began to rub in small circles. With one hand stroking him and the other hand massaging, it was seconds before that strong neck was stretched back, the corded muscles of Butch's shoulders straining.

"Ah," he began to breathe in rapid rhythm.

V used his forefinger to press a little harder, in time with gripping Butch tight in his hands.

"Oh fuck!" Butch yelled in a matter of seconds. His hands shoved into the mattress and his legs almost wrapped around V as he came.

V never stopped stroking, never stopped massaging every drop from him. Even as Butch got the shakes as he came down off the orgasm, he didn't speak.

V gently placed his legs back together and settled himself on top of his cop. Butch didn't protest, not once. He was too busy soaking up that afterglow with this dilated eyes look and pure contentment on his face. V used his hand and the friction of Butch's thighs to bring himself to climax. Butch realized what he was doing and held him as he came, placing warm kisses against his face and puffs of his breath against his skin.

"Can I talk now?" he finally whispered in V's ear, the pleasure and humor evident in his voice. It made V quiver with a laugh.

"Yes. You may talk. Gotta say I'm impressed you held out so long." V let his legs slip to one side of Butch and he used the sheet to clean them up as best he could. He stretched out beside, skin never leaving skin.

"Sorry, patience at holding my tongue isn't one of my virtues."

"Why are you whispering?" V asked.

"Oh," Butch laughed then and V could feel it in his chest. "I don't know. But ... damn! That was ... damn!"

"Yes it was," V agreed, feeling like he never wanted to leave this bed again. "So you have virtues now?" V pushed himself up on one elbow to look down at Butch.

"Sure," Butch actually looked a little embarrassed. "Y'know. Honesty. Loyalty. I'm extremely loyal. Uhm..."

"Courage," V added for him.

Butch's eyes met his and in the silence V knew all his cards were showing. There was no way his cop couldn't know what he did to him, what he meant to him. Even if he couldn't say it or tell him all the things that he deserved to know, he knew Butch knew. As cop said, he wasn't stupid.

"Careful," Butch nudged him with a soul warming grin. "Might sound like we're datin'."

V kissed him to keep him from seeing how his eyes could probably light the room at the moment. "You should be so lucky," he spoke against his lips without lifting his face.

"Ha, humility definitely isn't one of your virtues," Butch teased him, accepting the kiss and turning his body in until they were flush against one another.

V let Butch lower his head to his shoulder and rest it there, knowing that now not only was he probably sleep deprived and tired, but also riding the feel good hormones of great sex.

"You should sleep, cop. You've only got a couple of hours."

"I'm not complaining though, am I?" Butch's breath was still warm on his chest, the heat between them enough to lure V into staying all night. Problem was, night only had about two more hours and this apartment didn't come with steel shutters. Still, he didn't move a muscle until his cop was sound asleep beside him. Soft little sleep noises the only sound in the room.

V slid from the bed and put his pants and boots on silently. His shirt was fucked, so he just put his harness on over his chest and zipped up his jacket. As he slipped out of the room he heard a sleep muffled voice behind him.

"You goin'?"

V nodded, unable to stop his feet from taking him back to the side of the bed. "Yeah. I ... I have to."

Butch pushed himself up, half sitting, the sheet falling to his waist as he waved V down. Evidently a total sucker for all things O'Neal, V bent down over his cop.

Butch slid a hand to the back of his neck, pulling him lower for a slow meeting of mouths. The way the man kissed was one of the best things about him and the biggest paradox. Big, bruising hands and a street fighter's face, but soft and gentle fingers massaged his nape and the kisses felt like silk. Butch hid nothing in his kisses either. All the honesty and emotion of whatever he felt at that very moment went into it. Right now it felt like affection and a warm, intimate trust. It had the power to undo V completely. And it did.

Butch released him.

"I'll see ya tomorrow," he said and laid back down. It was no longer a question. They both knew that no matter what kind of shit the world had in store tomorrow, they'd find a way to steal at least a moment.

"See ya cop," V murmured as he left, Butch already half way to dream land.

Butch watched the condensation slide down V's glass of Goose, figuring he knew how it felt. He towelled off his hair, letting the water slip down his back as he stretched out on V's bed. It felt good, the cool air against his damp skin. He'd taken his shower about ten degrees too hot, but it was heaven on the muscles. Off the beat for a week, but he swore he'd done more work in the past few days than he ever did on shift. Maybe because when you partnered with V, there was no desk work. No hours of paper shuffling. It was all run here and hurry there, check this out, wait for that - with your eye peeled in the wee hours of the morning.

They hadn't done much tonight though. V had insisted they come back to

his place, aka palace, and chill. Chill meant drink a few shorts and crack up at rerun episodes of The Office. Butch had a feeling they'd been tivo'd for him because while V did crack a smile a few times, Butch had laughed until he thought he'd break something.

V came into the room silently, a cloud of clean soap smell and spicy pine in his wake. Butch knew he'd used the same body wash fancy shit that was in the shower, but he didn't smell half as good. He thought about making a comment, but his current state of semi-consciousness felt too good to interrupt.

Until he felt V crawl onto the bed with him.

V's mouth was wet and hot as he kissed his way up Butch's spine. He reached the back of Butch's neck, the goatee a soft scrape against him.

"Did you know I wanted you from the moment I lowered my car window and you started yelling at me?"

Butch tucked his head forward further wanting more with whatever the hell V was doing to his neck. "Never woulda guessed," he mumbled into the pillow.

"Well you should've ... detective," V taunted.

"For the record," Butch turned his head to try and peer back at V, "I was not yelling. You were being a sketchy bastard; looking the way you do and driving like the getaway for a gang of bank robbers."

V breathed a laugh against his skin. "You were yelling and you hit me. ...And what do you mean, looking the way I do?"

Butch shifted underneath him to get a better look, appreciating the way it made V suck in a breath. "You know exactly what I mean. Leather pants, leather jacket, jacked to hell and covered in weapons. What was I supposed to think? And don't forget you also hit me. Hard."

V placed a hand against his shoulder, making him roll back on his stomach before he settled his weight down so Butch could feel exactly what was hard. "Oh, right. I thought I'd apologized for that."

Butch shook his head with a smile. "Believe me, I'd remember if you apologized. I just remember you being a belligerent asshole that night." He could feel V moving around on top of him and felt it when his towel disappeared.

"Uhm," Butch hesitated, but then V was kissing his way back down his spine.

"I'm always belligerent, cop," he said in between kisses. "So I'm not apologizing for that. I do regret," another kiss, "knocking you out though. Mostly because ... you were being so damned entertaining."

Butch's toes began to curl once V reached the small of his back. "I'll ... uhm, consider forgiveness then."

V laughed against his skin. The feeling was hot, but sent shivers across his skin. He kissed a line over the top of Butch's ass and even though he felt his heart rate speed up, all he could do was lay there with his toes curled and his dick getting harder beneath him.

"V?"

"Shhh," V reassured him between kisses. "You'll like this." He ran his fingers along the curves, kneading and stroking. How could something so relaxing also be so intense?

When V ran his tongue down the seam, Butch tensed up, but not because it felt bad. Quite the opposite he thought. He shuddered at the feelings, the tickle on his nerve endings. He made a small noise before he could stop himself and he just knew, even without looking, that V was smirking behind him.

The massaging of his cheeks continued, strong hands moving down his thighs before moving up to part him open and-

"Whoa. Uhm, what are you doing?" He lifted himself onto his elbows, attempting to look over his shoulder. Butch felt V slide his chest against his back, essentially pushing him down and kissing the back of his neck before leaning in close to his ear.

"I'm not gonna fuck you, cop. If that's what you're worried about." The voice was low, the rumble in his chest causing a vibration down Butch's

spine, almost as much as the words did. The heavy press of V's body, pushing him into the mattress had Butch thinking that V could if he wanted to. He could just take and there wouldn't be a lot he could do to stop it. He also knew that V would never do that. "But when I do," V rested more of his weight against him, "I promise you, you'll be begging for it."

Butch felt the air leave his lungs in a rush as V bit at his ear. He moved his weight down slowly and Butch knew he was right. There was little doubt that when the time came, and he should just face facts - it would eventually come - it would be because he couldn't stand not doing it. V had made it perfectly clear he'd never pressure or intimidate, so that left making Butch long for it so much that he'd be damned near begging for it.

He let his head fall forward on the pillow as V parted his thighs. There was no doubt about V's powers of persuasion either, so he'd probably be best served just enjoying the journey. He could feel the solid warmth of V's shoulders settle before his hands resumed their position, stroking and kneading before parting him again, and this time Butch purposefully relaxed his body, trying not to tense up as he waited.

He felt the warm air puff, sending tingles up his spine before a fire rocket went off in his head. And then there was just heat. Heat and solid currents of electricity shooting from where V's tongue moved, down to his cock. The wet warmth of V's tongue circled, relaxed, he licked down the seam again before pressing hard against Butch's hole. It was intense, intense like Butch had never felt. It wasn't like any blow job he'd ever gotten, where you melted into where you lay, becoming liquid and loose. This sensation short circuited any thoughts or brainwaves he might of had. Made him grip at the sheets until he'd swear they'd rip clean in two. Made his cock throb and ache, pressed hard into the mattress and Butch moved his hand to ease the ache, but V beat him to it.

Butch felt as V slid a hand between his stomach and the bed, dragging down his skin before reaching his cock, encircling with a tight grip at the base as his tongue continued to lave and lick. V shifted behind him, the sheets rustling, and Butch felt a firm hand grip his hip. The long fingers dug into his skin as he felt V lift him closer, and then the tongue pressed harder against his hole, before it gave way and allowed it to delve in.

Butch's throat caught, it was mix between a moan and a gasp. Like the air had just been pushed out of his lungs and he couldn't complete the sound.

The pleasure had his skin humming; his heart was racing so hard that he could feel sweat forming at his temples. His body was starting to take over; mind completely shut up shop, cock desperately wanting to thrust into the bed, needing the friction to finish. The pleasure from V's hot tongue made him want to push up higher against his mouth. Both were unattainable as V's heavy body was pressing him down, shoulders and arms over the backs of his thighs as he gripped and stroked him. Unable to decide what he wanted more, Butch clung at the sheets harder, and pulling at them as his mouth went off.

".... Ah...fuck...I ... V.... I need to...."

Butch felt V's tongue thrust in and out twice more before he pulled back, breath caressing the heated skin of his ass. The world spun he was quickly flipped onto his back, and Butch had to blink to regain focus again. V's shoulders were tense, thick arms holding himself up, straddling either side of Butch's hips. He was naked and hard and white eyes burning with such intensity as they raked down Butch's body. When they finally travelled back up to meet his eyes, he held them as he said "I know"

V trailed a hand down his stomach, Butch watched as it moved down to cup him, the pressure making him lift his hips into it. He stroked, slow and torturous, before leaning down and taking him completely into his mouth. The teasing stopped and he felt V's hunger kick in. He heard the growl as he was tugged, ass lifted up, closer to his mouth, one of his knees placed over V's shoulder and hands gripping his ass. As Butch felt his cock hit the back of V's throat, his hand reached out and grabbed tight at V's arm, fingers digging into the hard muscle. He was close, beyond close, if V licking into him had sent him spiralling out of control, V moving his fingers to rub at that sensitive spot behind his balls as he sucked him down had him careening over the edge. Butch felt his balls tighten up and reached his other hand to grip the opposing arm as V ploughed on.

"V....fuck.... babe... I'm...."

Butch saw V's eyes lift up, just before he felt a finger enter him. It was invasive and shocking, causing him jerk up and deflate a little. It was still wet from where V had been licking, but then V twisted his wrist, moving his finger and Butch felt a sudden hit of intense pleasure. And Butch went from kicking back to second gear to overdrive in less than a second. V resumed sucking him down, licking and pulling at the head as his finger continued to slowly push in and out. With each push in, Butch head

pushed further into the pillow, wave jolting through him, getting him not only back to where he was, but now a few billion miles further. The pleasure winding up in his belly, building back up in his balls and when V pushed in one long stroke, Butch came with a strangled moan, lighting radiating down his chest, exploding off his cock, setting fire to his insides, pulsating into V's mouth. Leaving him boneless on the mattress, not even enough energy to open his fucking eyes to look at the man that had blown his mind.

Butch heard him take a sip from his Goose before leaning over, pushing down onto his body and kissing him. Butch was so fucked that he could barely make his mouth move. V chuckled against his mouth "Cop, you alive?"

He meant to make sense in response; it was just that part of his brain needed a new fuse. It came out a mumble.

"What was that? Come again?"

Butch cracked open an eye, taking in the more than satisfied expression on V's face. "I'm sure if anyone could make me...."

The grin was small, but it was one of those rare ones that Butch figured only he got to see. "Ah man, you do an ego good." He leaned back down to kiss him, pulling at his mouth if soft drags. Butch latched a hard hand onto the back of his neck and dragged him down to flop beside him. Hand gripping tighter as he sucked into his mouth, his other reaching down to grip V's erection, stroking slowly.

"Mmm, you taste so fucking good" V pulled at his lower lip, thrusting into Butch's hand.

"I'm so glad" Butch sped up his strokes, intent as fuck at getting V off.

Suddenly, V sat straight up, just as there was a banging that sounded like someone at the sliding glass door of his penthouse.

"Fuck!"

"You expecting someo-"

"Fucking Rhage," V growled as he got out of bed.

"What?" Butch started to get up too.

V put a gentle hand on his chest and urged him back down. "Just ... just stay here, okay? This isn't someone you want knowing you're here, you feel me?"

Butch sat back down on the bed, pulling the sheet over his lap as images as of some mob boss or the fucking Chief of Police flashed through his head. "Yeah. Yeah I got it."

~*~

V stormed out of his bedroom, but managed to close the door without slamming it and remembered to lock it behind him. Maybe that would at least keep Rhage from busting in there. If he tried to dematerialize in his penthouse, well then he'd have to choke the nosey fucker.

The banging continued like a herd of elephants trying to break through the glass.

"V!" Rhage shouted from the other side. "Open the fucking door or I'm poppin' in!"

V pulled back the curtain to see that Rhage wasn't smiling, which meant he wasn't here for the sole purpose of pissing him off.

"What do you want?" he yelled through the glass. "Ever heard of a phone?"

Rhage glared at him through the glass. "I was gonna ask you the same question since you aren't answering yours. We got a job and you're too good to take my calls?"

"Shit," V said to himself. He'd put the thing on vibrate and left it in the kitchen because this was supposed to be his night. He reluctantly unlocked the door for his Brother, knowing it didn't matter now. Rhage was good on his word of popping in, uninvited.

Rhage shoved his way in, his enormous frame taking up even more than

its usual space.

"This is my night off," V reminded him.

"Since when have you cared either way? You always live to work so your name came up to help. Besides-" Rhage stopped short as if he'd finally gotten a clue. Taking in V's state of undress, his hair no doubt sticking up at all ends, the smell of sex in the air - he looked at the bedroom door and back at V.

"You got someone here," he stated.

"Rhage. Go. I'll meet you downstairs in ten."

He wasn't listening though. Rather he was totally focused on a new smell.

"Rhage!" he barked, no longer surprised at the level of protectiveness that geared up every time the cop came into the equation. "You wanna listen to what the fuck I'm saying? I'll be downstairs in ten minutes. Now get out."

Rhage faced him, his hands settling on his hips as he thrust his head out from his neck. "Who you got here, V?"

"I'm gonna say that's never been any of your damn business," he narrowed his eyes at the Brother. "And the longer you stand here running your pie hole, the longer it's going to take us to get this important job."

All he got for his reason was the classic Rhage look of "not buying it". So he went for below the belt.

"You want me to start asking particulars about you and Mary and what you do on your days off?"

Evidently not low enough as he just kept staring at him.

"Or how about if she prefers it on the days you're on patrol. After you've been working all night. Tell me, does she prefer you to get cleaned up or just give it to her standing up, still dirty in the leathers?"

At that, Rhage bristled and stepped towards him.

"Didn't think so," V nodded. "I ain't in your shit, don't get in mine."

Rhage dropped his arms and took a deep breath. "Fair enough, but ... just tell me it's a female."

V stared dead at him, knowing that his Brothers have always known his taste were wide in range, but never actually having been called out about it. "Would it be easier for you if I said yes?"

"Fuck you," Rhage pointed at him. "I don't give a shit about that. I meant female as in vampire. Or male! I don't give a good goddamn if it is male, so long as it ain't man!"

V put his hands up as a truce. Rhage was yelling now and Butch hearing this extremely bizarre conversation was not good. "Just fucking chill, okay?" he urged, lowering his voice. "Damn. If that ain't the pot calling the kettle black on the human thing, but yeah ... yeah ... it's a male, alright? A civilian male. You happy now?"

Rhage looked at him, his cheeks full of color either at his temper or the awkwardness of the situation.

"Are we both appropriately uncomfortable now or should I go into deets so you can real good and twitchy?" V continued.

Rhage ran a hand over his perfect blonde hair and looked a little shifty, despite trying hard not to. "Shit. Look ... I'm ... Sorry about being all in your biz. It's just you've been weird as hell lately and-"

"This is something new?"

"Good point," Rhage grinned blindingly. "Anyway. Ten minutes. Downstairs." He turned to go, but stopped. "And next time, save us both this Kodak moment and answer your damn phone."

V pushed open the door to find Butch standing near the bed looking both bristled and anxious. His hair was more bed mused as he ran another hand through it. His jeans barely sat on his hips as if they had been hastily yanked on. But he wasn't wearing a "Damn this-crazy-as-shit-i'm-bailing" look. Nope, by the tight set of the cop's jaw and the tensing of his forearms, Butch was gearing up to knock someones block off. The thought that Butch was prepared to run in there, guns blazing, without even knowing the odds, to protect him, had V's heart clenching. It also made

him off the Richter scale worried. Butch's death wish plus Rhage's tendency to not think was a flammable combination.

At the sound of the door Butch looked up and met V's eyes, arms crossed over his chest. "You gotta leave, huh?"

V nodded as he moved closer. He needed to touch his cop, more to reassure himself than the other way around.

"You catch much of that?"

Butch finally met his eyes. "Who was that?"

"A..." *Pain in the ass?* "colleague. I gotta go." V slid his hand up Butch's bicep to rest just at the base of his neck. "You cool?" he gave him a little shake.

"Yeah," Butch answered after a moment. "Just with all the yelling, I was ..." he shook his head. "Whatever. It's no problem. I can catch ya later."

He was letting the matter go, but V suspected that was just how it seemed. Butch rarely let anything go. Reluctantly, V started to suit up, pulling on his harness as he watched Butch finish dressing.

"I'm sorry we were interrupted," he told him. "I have to go though. I'll call you as soon as I can."

Butch laughed as he pulled on his shoes. "You're making me sound like a needy girl." His grin soon faded. "V?"

"Cop."

"So your ... colleagues know about you? I mean, I'm sure I'm not the first guy you've ... but they're okay with it?"

V nodded. It was true, they really were okay with it - just not the human part. Man, he was going to have to come out about that. And soon. He couldn't help but smirk at the irony. With a male, no BFD. With a human male, huge motherfuckin' deal. "Yeah. It's no secret, but it's still my biz. And for the record, you're not just some guy. Feel me?"

He had to tell his cop the truth too. The time had come to take that leap

and deal with his reaction. No matter what it might be. They'd already gone too far without Butch knowing all, but it wasn't like he could stop wanting him physically just because of a guilty conscience. He'd been powerless to throw on the brakes with a "Lemme tell you something that might send you screaming for the hills" conversation because he was just plain greedy. He didn't want to give Butch up. Period. But it wasn't fair. The whole coming out of the closet to Butch thing had to happen at the right moment, but it had to be ASAFP.

Butch was suddenly in front of him, tugging hard on his harness and roughly pulling V's mouth down instead of leaning up. His shadow beard brushed against V's face as he let Butch take full control of the kiss. He sucked hard on his bottom lip before pushing deep into his mouth, a possessive burn against his lips as Butch pulled harder on the brace. No doubt his cop wanted to brand his brain with the kiss before he left. Give him something to think about while they were apart.

As if he'd be thinking about anything else.

Butch finally released the leather, dropping his hands from V's chest. "I'll catcha V." The casual words sounded misplaced against the intensity of Butch's look and the sound of their charged breathing.

V nodded, giving sex rumped Butch one last look before heading out. He made sure to use the door to his penthouse, rather than just popping out. Butch would definitely notice the lack of sound and his Escalade still parked out front. He noticed even the smallest of details so there was no way he'd miss the big. V hated the subterfuge. There was no way in hell he was letting this go further without his cop knowing the deal. Tomorrow. It had to be. He cared too damn much about him to keep him in the dark any longer.

But just how did you got about saying *"Hey cop, since we're seeing each other and I'm feeling you on way more than just a short term level, I wanted to let you know I'm a 300 year old Vampire. Y'know, before we fucked?"*

~*~

Butch stared at the door of the penthouse, willing himself to walk out and go home. He had to work tomorrow and needed at least a few hours of beauty rest. Still ... the bits of conversation he'd heard bounced around in

his head like like a Foosball. He knew V wanted him staying put, but fuck that when someone had just been raising hell and possibly threatening V. He couldn't very well sit on his ass if a fight was going to pop off - and that's exactly how it'd sounded. Fair enough if the guy was a friend of V's, guys could sometimes razz each other to the point of aggression, but seriously, who talked that way?

I don't give a goddamn if it's male?

Butch had played it off like nothing was amiss, but he'd heard a few things loud and clear. Not only had the visitor used those exact words, but so had V. V had called him a civilian too, which for the record he wasn't. It was all just ... off. Just like he'd referred to a victim as "human" more than once. He wanted Butch, "the civilian" staying home while he went out and did what? With whom? Butch didn't like it. Not one bit.

But it wasn't just any *one* thing. It was lots of things - all of these things - piling up. The words V used, how secretive he remained - even to this day, how he was all weird about his fucking hand and refused to take off the glove, how he swore the truth would endanger Butch. Butch could grip the odd hours because he kept odd ones too, but it wasn't lost on him that he *never* saw V during the day. Was it possible his new ... lover? Boyfriend? Whateverthefuck - was leading a double life? Hell yes he was! It didn't take a genius or even a cop to figure that out. But as a cop that was blinded by lust and ... everything else they had going on, he couldn't see shit. Even when it was right in front of him. Couldn't or didn't want to. That had to change.

"Shit," he said to no one, rubbing both hands over his face. A guy could go crazy trying to piece the puzzle together. So why didn't he just ask? Yeah. Good question. It wasn't like Butch had a problem with words or being in someone's face. But he knew the response he'd get from V because he'd gotten it before. Can't tell you. Won't tell you. Blah, blah, fuckin' blah. Well fuck that. He'd just find out what was going on his damn self. He'd held off from the snooping for far too long already

~*~

He'd followed V and watched him for almost half an hour. He couldn't believe V hadn't caught on to him yet, but sometimes he really was *that* good of a detective. Besides that, he was safely tucked into his car,

almost three blocks away. V weaved in and out of alleys, in and out of sight, hunting for something. Someone more likely. V was obviously on a job, but he hadn't found what he was looking for yet. This was exactly the same kind of shit V did when Butch was working with him. Hell, they'd been at this together for over a week now. So what was the deal about V having to go alone? Why didn't V want him by his side? They were supposed to be a team on this. He damned near made Butch swear not to do any of this on his own, and yet here V was - all alone. Double standards were bullshit.

But suddenly, things changed. V looked like he was talking to himself. Butch could've sworn nobody was there, but next thing he knew, some enormous blonde guy was there. He must have popped out from around a corner.

Butch's knee jerk reaction was to charge out of the car in V's defense, but it quickly became clear that V didn't need defending. This blonde guy was no enemy. He was saying something and V nodded. With a good natured slap on the arm, he actually made V side step. V was a big dude, but this motherfucker was huge. Still, V didn't act threatened or intimidated. In fact, he punched the guy in the arm in response. If somewhat hard, it was still friendly.

Butch couldn't see V's face, but he saw him shake his head in that way of his. He must have made some V type remark too, because the big blonde threw his head back and laughed. Then, as God as his witness, he threw his arm around V and squeezed. It wasn't necessarily sexual. In fact, it was probably more like how a brother hugged you when trying to get on your nerves. Butch recognized all this. He even saw V shrugging him off and heard him cursing the other guy as he got out of the car. All of this went into his brain, but Butch was still half way to them, working up a major mad-on, before that ever computed.

It wasn't jealousy or insecurity that pushed him on. Although, sure, that was probably part of it too. But this fucker *knew* V. It was obvious. Knew him well enough to joke around and not get smacked down. Knew him well enough to work with him when Butch was told to go home. He was probably who had shown up at the penthouse earlier that night too. He was familiar enough to just "pop by" whenever the hell he felt like it, raise hell and yell at V, and V just dropped everything to go with him while leaving Butch in the dust. Plus, he probably knew more about V than Butch ever would and that was what really stuck in his crawl.

Because while Butch had laid so much of himself out in the open, by the looks of things V was still keeping far too much under wraps.

Well, *fuck that*.

"Fuck," he heard V hiss just as he approached.

"My thoughts exactly," Butch bristled. "Wondering what's so damn secretive that I had to be sent home."

"What the hell are you doing here?"

It wasn't so much the question that got to him, as if Butch were intruding, but the look on V's face. He looked like he'd been caught. It was that look you got when you'd fucked up. Big time. Like when you cheated. He didn't want to be caught, but caught in what way? With Blondie? With Butch? Both?

"Who's Blondie?" he asked, ignoring V's question and intentionally stirring up trouble..

The big guy puffed up about two inches taller. "*Blondie*? I don't know who you are, buddy, but why don't you scurry on home before I rip you a new one?"

He probably could too, but Butch wasn't about to turn tail. So what if they guy was massive, looked like he'd just stepped off a movie set, and had an air almost as menacing as V's? This wasn't about jealousy over some stranger, it was about getting the truth out of V.

"Answer the question, V. Why are you sneaking off, doing the same thing we've been doing for days now, and wanting to make damn sure I'm not around? What am I missing, huh? You and I have worked like this together before. Except without Blondie. I think I'd remember if he'd ever tagged along. So what's the big damn deal that's got you looking guilty as fuck?!"

At that, V pulled him aside. "Cop, just go home."

"*Cop*?" Blondie piped up, his jaw almost hitting the sidewalk. "Hang *on* a second ... worked together on this ...?" Butch swore he could see the

gears turning in the big guy's head. "Oh you gotta be fucking kidding me!"

Blondie didn't seem pleased. At all.

"Fuck, V!" the blonde yelled. "This is the cop? This is who ... what the hell are you thinking?! You said male, you lying sack of shit."

Butch dug his heels in when V tried to move him any further. "Back off, asshole," Butch tried to step up to the blonde guy. He might be madder than shit at V, but no one was going step up to him while he stood idly by.

"Cop," V growled in warning.

"I'm going no damn where until you tell me what's going on," he directed at V. "You working our case without me or with princess here? Either way, I wanna know what the hell is going on. All the secrets are getting real old, real fast."

"*Princess?*" Blondie looked floored. "Did you seriously just- you wanna check that mouth of yours before I shove my-"

"Enough!" V yelled. "Go home!" he pointed at Blondie who looked like he'd like to rip Butch's head off. "And you," he got a good hold on Butch and began hauling him towards his Escalade, "come with me."

Butch pulled away, somewhat unsuccessfully. "I want answers, V. Not more bullshit and-"

"Butch, please." V's voice was suddenly quiet and that got his attention more than any yelling ever could. "I need you to please just get in my car and give me a minute. Maybe two. I need you to-"

"Trust you?" Butch snorted. "Yeah, I've done that. Now I want answers."

"V," Blondie yelled from behind them, his voice filled with disapproval. "You wanna muzzle him and tell me what the hell is going on?"

"Yeah, fuck you!" Butch called out, the south Boston coming out in full force at his defense. He didn't know what all the guy disapproved of, but he could guess. He didn't look at Butch like he was jealous, but he sure as shit wasn't happy.

"Stop provoking him, Butch. I mean it," V warned. "You don't want to see his bad side."

Butch wasn't sure what that meant, but he was ready to keep provoking until he got the truth.

~*~

V opened the door to the Escalade, tugging Butch away from Rhage. All he knew was that he needed to get the two of them separated and make Butch listen. Butch wrenched his arm out of V's grasp and stood outside the car, right in Rhage's path. Oh, this was going from bad to worse.

"I'm going fucking nowhere 'til you explain what the hell is going on," he threatened.

"Yeah, V. Tell us what's going on." Sarcasm dripped from every word as Rhage stared him down.

"Fuck off Blondie, no one's talking to you." Butch didn't even glance over which only cause Rhage to bristle further.

Rhage was over in a couple of long strides. "What the fuck did you say to me?"

Butch wasn't backing down, despite the fact that Rhage towered over him and could easily back hand him into the fence on the other side of the street. Time to take this over before Butch set Rhage off to the point of no return.

V got between them and shoved Rhage back, hard. "*Back* off," he ordered. There was a quick flash of recognition in Rhage's eyes at V's protectiveness before morphing back to the angry scowl.

He turned to Butch and all but lifted him into the open door and plonked him in the passenger seat. "Do *not* move."

To V's surprise, Butch did stay in the car. However the level of pissed off emanating from his cop was enough to shatter a windshield. V watched as he crossed his arms over his chest and practically vibrated with the urge to fight. There was that mad as hell look, flicked between him and Rhage, mouth set into a thin line ... Fuck.

Rhage was also standing with his fists clenched, one of the rare times that there were creases of displeasure on Hollywood's face. The male was always so damn jovial that V forgot what a scary sonuvabitch he could be when he was pissed. And Rhage was pissed and then some. He looked like the fucking world was about to come to an end.

With Butch staring daggers into his back, V moved over to placate his brother, to try to bring this out of control merry-go-fucked up-round to a halt. But if V thought he'd get the brooding silent routine from Rhage, he was wrong.

"You're a fucking lying bastard! You said you were with a civvie. Well that smart ass cop of yours ain't no civvie. He's human. And an arrogant one at that. What the fuck are you thinking V?"

"It's no one's biz but mine. That's what I think."

"Like hell it isn't. I heard what he said, V. Working together? Doing the same thing we've done for days? Stand there and tell me he hasn't been out here with you, hunting. Go on, tell me. Lie to my fucking face - again!"

Rhage started to gesture wildly, the crazed movements causing his harness to clink with the daggers, his blonde hair falling in front of his eyes. "I know you're crazy, but Virgin in the Fade, I didn't know you were insane! The king is gonna have your balls. In a jar. On his desk! I asked you about this weeks ago! I warned you. I tried to tell you. Dammit!" He flung his hands up. "Look, you need to -"

"What I need is for you to get gone."

"V."

"I'm asking you, as nicely as I can, will you just go home and let me handle this? And keep your trap closed so I don't have to sew shut? I will deal with the King and ... no more lies. I - I can't do it anymore anyway. I'd already decided that before this, but - well shit blew up instead."

Rhage's laugh came out as a shout. "Ya think? Well, congratu-*fucking*-lations. Shit blew up. I'd say so. You know I can't -"

"I'm not asking you to lie for me," V stopped him from even going there. "I don't expect you to ignore this either. Just give me a chance to take care of it myself. Okay? I can clean up my own mess."

Rhage wiped a hand over his face, looking weary for the first time since he'd gotten with Mary. "I just can't believe you went and did this ... and yet," he shook his head, "I can."

The question mark was probably written all over V's face.

"Nothing can ever be easy with you. Can it?"

V chuckled. Not that any of this was remotely funny. "Too late to start now."

"Way too late. Shit, man," he shook his head. "Forty eight hours, V. I'll sit on this for a couple of days so you can clean your mess up; just because ... I feel you on the not being easy thing. Falling for a human? Not easy."

Rhage got really quiet for a moment, which was never a good sign.

"You love him?" he asked.

V just stood there. He knew the words. Felt them. But how could he say it to Rhage when he couldn't admit it to himself or Butch.

"Well damn," Rhage looked quickly at the pavement and then back at V. "My sitch with Mary was hell until I just came out in the open with it. All of it. Who I was. What I felt. Honest with her, honest with my Brothers. You might consider giving it a try."

V nodded, more than a little amazed that the voice of reason and clarity came from Rhage. Figured.

Rhage patted him on the shoulder. "I know, I know. You appreciate my wisdom and understanding. You're gonna need it, brother. Trust me. I don't envy you right now. Not one bit."

With that, he walked around the corner and no doubt poofed it home.

V took a deep breath and crawled in behind the wheel of his Escalade. He

met the icy silence of Butch's anger with some calm silence of his own. However, silent wasn't something Butch O'Neal did for long.

He turned in his seat, hands now palm down on his thighs as if to keep from shaking the shit out of V. "I'm tired of guessing with you, V. I don't want to hear your usual excuse either. You have some serious explaining to do."

V started the car and put both hands on the steering wheel. "You have no idea."

V let Butch enter the penthouse in front of him. Not that he had much choice since Butch shoved past him.

"So I'm here," he said, walking straight to the couch and leaning against it, arms crossed. "Talk." He looked like his patience had left him years ago and he was just looking for an excuse to spark off.

V made a detour by the kitchen, pouring himself a finger of Goose and holding up the Lag as a peace offering. Butch shook his head. No Lag? That didn't bode well. He took another swallow, wishing a couple of shots was enough for him.

"Quit stalling, V. You brought me here; tell me what the hell is up."

He took a deep breath and opened his mouth, hoping against fuck that this would all come out right.

"I wanted to tell you before, even before we... It just wasn't never simple"

"It is simple," Butch insisted. "You just open your mouth and let the words come out."

"It's about what I am."

"What you are," Butch repeated, almost monotone. "Some stealth covert ops man. I got that. I want deets."

V just shook his head, holding Butch's gaze.

"You're not Covert Ops?"

"I'm not a man."

Butch gave him a look and then snorted a nervous laugh. "*Please* don't try to tell me you're a woman."

V had to grin at that. "No. I am not, nor have I ever been, female."

Cop actually looked a bit relieved. "I was about to say, I've seen you. Ain't no way in hell. Although that might explain why I'm hot for you but not other... *Anyway*. You were saying?"

V wanted to keep grinning at the "hot for you" statement, but shit was about to get dire. He cleared his throat.

"I'm not a man, Butch. As in, I'm not human. I'm ... a vampire." He dropped the bomb and Butch just stared at him with a blank look.

"You hear me, cop?"

"Yeah. I heard you."

They stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity, Butch wearing his most intense interrogation face. V didn't know if he should keep talking or give him a moment. It was unnerving, not knowing *exactly* what to do with the silence.

"Well say something," he heard himself tell Butch.

Butch pushed himself up off the back of the couch. "Fuck you!" he pointed at V, going from blank to furious anger in 0.5 seconds. "How's that for something?" He was half way to the door before V could intercept him.

"Wait," he grabbed Butch only to get shoved away.

Butch had his fists clenched, either wanting to fight or to keep himself from punching V. "I'm leaving to keep from beating the ever-loving *shit* outta you, so you might wanna let me go. You don't wanna do this anymore? Fine! But man up and fucking say it. Don't give me some crazy bullshit line about *I'm a vampire*. And keep away from the fucking fantasy books while you're at it." He turned for the door again, but this time V spun him around and pinned his shoulders against it.

"I'm not lying, cop. I *am* a vampire."

"And I'm a fuckin' unicorn; wanna see my horn?!" Butch spat out. "Now get the fuck away from me unless you wanna fight."

Butch was hurting, V could see it. Otherwise he wouldn't have spoken at all, he just would've started swinging. His cop actually thought V was trying to end things. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"I don't want to fight you cop. I want to talk to you. *Really* fucking talk, if you'd just listen! I'm trying to tell you-"

Butch punched him. Just hauled off and gut punched him, stealing his air. He'd warned him, but when Butch tried to leave again, V had had enough. In one fluid movement he had Butch on the floor, pinning his hands over his head and holding him down by sitting on his legs. He no longer held back or masked his strength and speed and it felt damn good.

"Holy shit," Butch managed after a moment. "What the...?"

Obviously Butch had no idea how he'd wound up on the floor. He wore the shock of it all over his face, just before he replaced it with rage.

"Get off me," he ground out between clenched teeth.

"You're probably wondering how you ended up down here before you could so much as blink, right? *Vampire*, Butch. Not human. I don't move at human speed and I don't have human strength. You hearing me yet?"

Butch didn't say anything, but he was still shooting *fuck you* daggers out of his eyes.

"You feel this?" V tightened the grip on his hands. "I could snap these without ever breaking a sweat."

Butch grunted and tried pushing him off. Of course he failed miserably.

"*Listen* to me, cop. You know this is true. You've been suspicious; I know you have. You're too fuckin' smart not to be. Why have you had so many questions? Why are you always digging at me for answers? Because you've known something isn't normal."

"You really thought *real* hard about this," Butch scoffed.

His cop was so *fucking* stubborn sometimes, so V did the only thing he could think of. He kissed him.

Butch didn't kiss him back, but he didn't exactly stop him either. He moved against V to dislodge him, but that was only more of a turn on. V let the kiss build, greedily taking Butch in, one hand still holding his wrists over his head and the other moving to hold his jaw still. His cop was not pleased about it, but he opened to him like it was second nature. Kissing Butch had the same effect it always did. Except this time, V let go. Let go of everything he'd been holding back, and he'd been holding back a storm. He thought of Butch's taste, the feel of him, the scent. The way he laughed. The way he kissed. The way he fought. The way he'd fuck. All of it. It swirled into a maelstrom that V knew would light him up from within. He felt the fire low in his belly as the flames licked at every one of his senses. He felt the need grow until it consumed him and only then did he pull back far enough to let Butch see.

He knew exactly what he looked like too. The look of pure, unmasked lust set off by tattoos meant to warn Butch away. Intense, glowing eyes. Jaw clenched tight with hunger. Two lethally sharp fangs...

He heard Butch's intake of breath. "*Fuck.*"

He didn't want to scare him, but Butch had to understand. He had to see because then he couldn't deny it. His lover wasn't a man. When he was like this, he wasn't much more than an animal.

"I won't hurt you," he heard himself say, which was stupid because surely Butch knew that.

Butch's focus was split. Eyes, then his fangs. Fangs, then eyes. "Is it...?" He shook his head as if to clear it. "I need you to let go of me now," he requested, suprisingly calm.

V released his hands, but didn't move off of him. Butch stared at him for a long time before he finally spoke. "I knew I wasn't crazy," he said. "You're eyes, they've ... done that before."

V nodded.

A tentative hand reached for him and V forced himself not to move. Butch

touched an inquisitive finger to the tip of one fang and V's eyes almost rolled out of his head.

"That hurt?" Butch asked as a shudder ran through V.

"Not exactly," he managed.

"How come they've never-

"They have. I just tried to hide it from you, like my eyes. The fangs, they elongate when I'm angry. Or horny. Basically any time I'm around you."

Butch smiled then caught himself.

"I know this has to be hard," V began, but Butch stopped him.

"The healing up so fast after you got knifed?" he asked.

"Because I'm a vampire," V replied.

"The fact I've never seen you during the day?"

V nodded.

"The reason you're so fucking quiet yet you're built like a Mack truck."

V grinned. "Yes, all of it."

"*Shit*," Butch exhaled. "The glove?"

"That's something different. My hand is ... let's say a genetic anomaly."

"I want to see it."

"No. Fucking. Way."

Butch looked at him. "You just showed me *fangs*, but you won't take off the glove?"

"I have some control over the rest of it, but this," V wiggled his fingers, "all I have is the glove. Believe me when I tell you it's incendiary and I don't want you near it."

Butch shook his head like V was something out of 'Ripley's Believe It or Not'. "Sure. Why not? A hand that burns shit up. What's a raindrop in the middle of a monsoon, right?" His head turned to the side as if he was looking at nothing at all. "Can I get up now?" he asked.

V moved off of him. They sat across from each other on the floor, each regarding the other like a new acquaintance, even though they were far from it.

"Cop, I know it's hard to believe, but-"

"No," Butch held up a hand to silence him. He'd looked wrapped in thought. "Actually ... it explains a lot, but ... shit. I mean, seriously? *Shit*. This is uhm ..."

V just let him have a moment. He couldn't imagine the roles being reversed. How did someone even digest this kind of thing?

"So aren't you supposed to eat guys like me or...?"

V's eyes widened. Oh *that* old tale. "No!" he was quick to answer. "No, nothing like that. At all. That's ... well, I don't know where that came from other than fiction, but no. We're just a different species, Butch. Yes, I feed, but from other vampires. We don't ... eat people."

Butch laughed to himself and it sounded maniacal.

"Right. Because *that* would be crazy," he said. "And *just* another species?"

He grew silent again, then, "You know what's really crazy? That I'm sitting here, having this crazy conversation with you and yet ... in my gut ... I know it's true. I know it isn't crazy. *That* is what's crazy."

"Butch, I-"

"No, no," he spoke quickly. "I got it. I mean, I believe you. May make me madder than a shit house rat, but I do. I knew it was something. I wouldn't have guessed *this*, but I knew it was something. I can normally solve any mystery, but not you. Well, this explains it. And I never would've figured it out since the answer is *fucking crazy as hell!*"

Butch jumped to his feet and V followed, unsure of what his cop might do. Did he accept it? Was he going to run? Try to take the first bus to the loony bin?

"Let me see 'em again," he said and V knew what he was asking.

He pulled his lips back and there was Butch's finger, touching the tips of his fangs, damned near fondling them.

He grabbed his cop's hands. "You need to stop doing that."

"Why?"

"Because ... it makes me want to- They're just sensitive. Let's leave it at that for now."

Butch considered this, then crossed his arms in a defensive stance. "You should've told me about all this a hell of a lot sooner than now."

"I won't argue with you there."

"Yeah, you better not!"

"I am so sorry. I should have told you this weeks ago, but ... no, there is no excuse. I should have told you. Period. I'm sorry I waited this long."

His cop face softened a little, the assessing hazel eyes never leaving V's face. "You don't ever apologize, do you?"

"No. Basically never. I don't make a habit of being wrong."

"Shit, V...." Butch shook his head, running a hand quickly through his dark hair. "And big blondie? He ain't really your brother is he?"

"Well ... not exactly. Not in the way you mean it. It's a long story."

"Seeing as how I got no where else to be," Butch moved and parked it on the sofa. "Spill it."

And spill it he did. He figured the best way to go about it was the O'Neal way. In for an inch, in for a mile. He told Butch about the Brotherhood; how they were bred to fight. They are warriors, pure and simple. They'd

die for each other; that they were *that* kind of brothers. He tried to keep it as simple as possible. There was no need to melt his brain completely. Just the facts. They live together. Their numbers are few. Their leader is blind, but so bad ass it doesn't matter. Rhage, aka Blondie, is an idiot ... but a damn good Brother.

They hunt those that would kill off their kind, those that have been killing the prostitutes - probably for bait. Bad guys were bad guys, regardless if you were human or vampire.

All the while his cop was planted on the leather couch, elbows on knees, leaned over and listening intently. A few times throughout his explanation, V could see Butch putting the pieces together in this fucked up thousand piece puzzle. But true to his nature, he hadn't interrupted and hadn't run for the hills. When V finished, Butch was leaning deep into the cushions, arms crossed, eyes a million miles away. When he finally met his gaze, it wasn't with rejection, but there was a whole lotta shit whirring in that brain.

Butch let out a long breath. "Okay. That's about as much as a man can try to comprehend without something to drink. I just ... it will take me some time to understand. Process some shit, y'know?"

V shook his head, knowing this next part wasn't going to go down well at all. "I can't let you leave, cop. Number one, because of what you now know. Number two, it's almost daylight and- " As if on cue, the shutters rattled on their way down and slammed home.

Butch watched them as the room grew darker, the lights flickering on, softening the sharp planes of his face. "Nice." He turned back to V, he was yet to close the distance between them or indicate he had any intention of it. "I'm assuming I'm trapped here and any resistance is futile?"

V looked at him, wishing it didn't have to be this way.

"Don't answer that," Butch rubbed at his face awhile. "Can I at least have some privacy then?"

It was the least he could do after dropping the bombshell from hell. "Absolutely. I'll ... be in the bedroom if you need me."

~*~

V walked to his bedroom, peeling off his standard issue black shirt on the way. He sat heavily on the edge of his bed to unlace his boots. Pairing them and placing them next to his bed, he flopped the rest of the way down, slinging a forearm over his eyes. He'd done it. He'd actually spelled it out and the world hadn't imploded on him. While he was more than fucking pleased that his cop knew, the weight of carrying that shit around finally gone, now came the painful process of waiting for Butch's response. He refused to try and poke around in Butch's head to get a jump on his thoughts. He could read his cop very well anyway, knew just from his body language that he believed him.

But he had no idea if this was *it*. As in *end of*. His cop could finally pack up, cut his losses and bid V a *fuck you* farewell. Just the thought of that hurt like getting sliced from the inside.

Never had V needed anything like this. He *needed* Butch O'Neal. More than his next fucking breath. He couldn't remember all the steps it took to get to this place or exactly when he'd gotten here, but there was no denying it now. V had nothing to compare it too, no letter of reference, but he was fucking bonded. He simply would not, *could not*, let his cop go. Forget about the danger to Butch now that he knew the truth. Even if he didn't, Vishous wasn't going to let him go.

It made the possibility of Butch wanting to leave him a real bitch of a problem. Go ahead and cut out his freakish five chambered heart, because there was no way he'd survive Butch ending it and leaving. It fucking sucked to want something so bad. And yet ... it was quite possibly the best feeling in the world to know it was reciprocated.

Oh *sweet Virgin in the Fade*, even if he did avoid ever uttering her name, *please* let it be reciprocated. He didn't deserve it, but he would sure as hell try to earn it. From this moment on, if Butch would give him just a chance, he would make sure that-

A small sigh from the doorway brought him out of his personal torture. V lifted his arm to watch as Butch moved to stand beside the bed. Without breaking their gaze, V slowly sat up. They both studied each other as though they were something new. And maybe they were...

The warmth of the lighting cast a soft intimate glow about the room and V felt a longing tug at him, the likes of which he thought he'd never know. He moved a tentative hand to touch the side of his cop's leg, resting against the side of his thigh. *Please don't push me away.* When his hand wasn't smacked away in disgust, he rubbed it along the seam, feeling the solid warmth of Butch through the denim.

Butch lowered his eyes to watch V's hand. His arms unfolded from where they were crossed over his chest and his hand covered V's where it rested.

"I am truly sorry I didn't tell you sooner," V told him again, praying that Butch would offer forgiveness. "And I'm sorry it's all so ... freakishly complicated." *Don't say this is it. Just give me time to...*

"Yeah," Butch said, finally meeting his eyes again. "You should've told me." His hand remained still over V's, but his face was impassive. *This was it,* V thought. A reluctant let down, but a drop off the jagged cliff nonetheless. He was going to hit every rock on the way down too. Fuck. How could he expect anything any different? His no nonsense, shoot straight from the hip cop was just supposed to accept that he was a vampire and what? They'd go along their merry way, happily ever after? Butch was not only coming to grips with the fact that he was intimate with a male, but also a creature that up until moments ago he only thought existed in books? Yeah right. V was never that lucky. In fact, he was the complete opposite of that lucky.

He felt himself swallow hard, his throat actually hurting with the pain of choking back a plea. *Way to carry that whole demi-god mantle,* he thought. To hell with it. He looked at those hazel eyes and knew some things were not only worth fighting for, but worth getting on your knees and begging.

Then the hardness of Butch's face softened. A rough thumb brushed over the back of V's hand. "You should've told me a lot, a whole lot sooner," he said. And then, Blessed Virgin, a small smile escaped. "*Definitely* before that night in the Escalade. But ... I guess it's not exactly like telling me your favorite color, is it?"

V couldn't move. *Was it possible?* He couldn't breathe. Hell, he couldn't even blink. He was basically frozen until his cop spoke again.

"I get that this is something that takes time and ... consideration. I'm glad you respect me enough to finally tell me. But seriously," he continued, a loaded smirk now firmly in place, "the fangs? You are gonna let me touch 'em again, right?"

V looked up at him, hope and mischief playing across his face. "You can touch whatever you like," he said. "Just say nothing's changed."

Butch touched the tattoos at V's temples, realizing that there was still so much he didn't know. At least now V could tell him. Would tell him. "Well a *lot* has changed ... but not that."

V buried his head into Butch's stomach, relief rolling off of him in a way that Butch had never felt. "What? You thought I was gonna take off?" He let loose with a small laugh. "I mean, yeah, it's crazy. I don't even know that I can say the words. Like it's normal? Like I'm going out with a firefighter or an electrician? It's still very bizarre, but ... it's you." He let himself touch the top of V's dark head, the hair sliding through his fingers like silk.

"I knew you were something different and actually I'm glad to finally know why."

He felt V exhale against him, his face moving back and forth against the bottom of Butch's t-shirt.

"I'm glad you know too, cop," he said softly. "It feels ... right. I'm not gonna bullshit you and say I'm not relieved that you know *and* you're still here."

V glanced up quickly. "Not that I'd let you leave."

He went back to rubbing his face against Butch even as he untucked Butch's shirt and urged him to pull it off over his head. Then it was skin against skin and the slightly rough feel of V's goatee along his stomach. Butch laid his hands on V's shoulders, not wanting him to stop. It should've seemed surreal, the fact that there was a ... a vampire now running his lips and tongue across his abdomen; licking at the sensitive skin near his hips. All he could think though was this was V. V's hands reaching around to grab his ass and drag him even closer. V's lips hot against his him. V's teeth nipping at the skin revealed as he tugged down Butch's pants.

Ah yes, the teeth. Or fangs. And damn didn't that just make him instantly harder. He didn't know why exactly, was a little scared to delve into the psychology of it, but the fangs totally fucking did it for him. They were sharp and deadly. Butch liked sharp and deadly. Somewhere deep inside, in the dark recesses that you don't want people to know about, he wanted to know how they felt.

"You feel right," V said, sliding Butch's pants and boxers down around his ankles. He made a sound of approval since now there was no hiding the effect that V had on him. "Everything about you feels right," he said.

Then V gave him such a predatory look that made him forget what he was going to say. It was probably something like "uh huh", but instead he just stood there. Watched as V gave him a grin before taking him into his mouth.

"*Fuck,*" Butch exhaled and steadied himself against V's shoulders. It was all he could do not to come right then. V's grin had been a bit wider than before ... and had two little points that he no longer hid. His mouth was hot and wet and so unbelievably eager. It was a good thing Butch was holding on or he might've fallen over. He needed to think about something else. Baseball stats. Anything to keep this from being over in about five seconds. All he could think of was V. V over the past few months. The way he'd been that first night; all darkness and intimidation. V had gone from public enemy number one to this. He was still the same smart assed, bad assed, mean assed guy that had threatened Butch that night, but there was so much more to him than that. He'd sought Butch out again and again, revealing a bit every time until now it was hopefully, finally, all out in the open.

Butch tried to keep thinking, wanting this to last a whole lot longer, but his hips were already moving of their own volition. V didn't stop him and the sight of that dark head at his waist, those perfect lips wrapped around his cock... Dear God forgive him. His hands were in V's hair before he knew it, pushing himself further into that willing mouth. He waited for V to stop him, shove him off for being too damn aggressive. Butch knew he was perhaps being a tad forceful, but he needed this. He couldn't explain why, but he wanted V there to service *him*. To pleasure *him*. He thought a guy like V might be opposed. Instead, V looked up without stopping, his eyes alight with a kind of approval; a hunger and heat more intense than Butch had seen before. *That's right, cop, don't be afraid to show me what you want. What you're really like. Watch me while I make you come.*

Butch came hard. He didn't know if it was a thought or a voice or what, but it was in V's eyes that he wanted it like this too. He kept his hands entwined in V's hair, even as he finished. V never pushed him away or so much as flinched. Instead he ran his hands along the backs of his legs, his ass, his lower back. He'd wanted Butch *exactly* like that. Butch felt himself sway a little and V steadied him, then he was somehow on the bed, next to a very satisfied looking V.

Butch spoke languid and slow. "Guess my legs don't work so well right after."

V eased him back and quietly settled beside him, still with the toothy grin.

"You wanna share the joke?" Butch nudged him. "Or is that just one of your self satisfied looks?"

V shook his head as he looked up at the ceiling. "Oh I'm satisfied, even with the serious hard on I have going-"

"Nice," Butch laughed.

"But, no. The grin isn't only that. It's because I'm actually ... content. Wow. Yeah, content." He made a noise that was like a laugh, but low and dry, almost to himself. "Never would've thought."

"I'm sure it's a temporary affliction," he teased V and blindly sought out this so called *serious hard on*. "Yep," he said when his hand found the long ridge against the smooth leather, "don't think *content* is gonna last long."

V cocked his head to give him a look. "You know what I mean, smart ass," he said, but he held Butch's hand in place and rolled towards him.

And he was right. Butch knew. V had really thought that Butch would take off upon learning the truth about him, when really it was just about as shocking as learning the truth about himself. Was realizing the fact that he wanted to be with a vampire any harder than realizing he wanted to be with a *male*, as V put it? Nope. For a life time straight guy, gay and vampire weren't too far apart on the shocking as hell scale.

"Yeah, I know what you meant," Butch admitted. "I guess, all things considered, I'm relieved to. I just ... I wish you would've trusted me

enough to tell me sooner, that's all."

V let go of his hand and pushed up on an elbow to look down at him, his jaw set. "You have my trust, cop. In a way that no one does. *No one*. You always did. I wouldn't have risked finding you the second time if I hadn't had a feeling about you. I wanted you to know all along, but I knew the baggage that would come with it. This information puts you and me both in a dangerous position. Humans aren't supposed to know about us. Ever."

Butch's eyebrow shot up. "Have you seen the bookshelves and movie marquees lately, V? I think folks might have a clue."

"I mean *really* know. Look, we'll cross this bridge when we get to it, and believe me we *will* get to it, but my brothers aren't going to be pleased or laid back about you knowing. More than likely they'll want the risk eliminated, but that ain't gonna happen so-"

"Hold on," the hair on the back of Butch's neck stood up as he sat up. He knew what was between the lines. "You're saying they'd want me dead if they knew I knew. So I can't go run and tell? As if I would."

V pushed himself all the way up as well. "I know you won't. I also happen to know *nothing* is going to happen to you. I won't let it. It'd be over my dead body and they won't touch me. Either they accept both of us or ... they accept neither of us."

He said it so matter of fact too. There was hardly any inflection in his voice, as if he were just stating the obvious. Something any idiot should know. V eased himself back down and stretched out. His hand brushed against Butch's thigh and he rubbed it, moving it higher in a light massage. The touch was relaxing and stimulating, but V's words-

Butch stopped V's hand with his own. "You're saying ... if it came down to it. You'd," he swallowed hard. "You'd choose me over them?"

V nodded and continued to touch him anyway.

"*Shit, V.*"

He'd just spent the last hour explaining how much his brothers meant to him. How much he meant to them. Butch removed V's hand and held it by

his side as he leaned over him. "I don't know if I could let you do that. If it came to that."

"Not really your choice to make, cop. My choice. And I chose you. Besides, I said we'll cross that bridge when we get there. We're not there yet and I for one prefer to spend this time-

Butch kissed him. Just leaned down and kissed him, letting his weight bare down completely. V let himself be pinned down. Butch knew how easily he could roll anyone off if he really wanted to finish that sentence. He knew what V was saying though, and hopefully this was a totally rhetorical conversation anyway, but it didn't change what V had just admitted. V wasn't a man that wore emotions on his sleeve. He wasn't going to show up at Butch's door one day with flowers and a poem, but that one admission told Butch more than any overture ever could. It meant Butch meant more to V than anything else. He'd give up his brothers just to be with him. Give up the life he had. And that's when Butch realized it. He felt exactly the same way.

If the guys on the force knew, if the chief found out, it'd be a career ender. The job was all he had.

Correction.

Used to be all he had. Now he had V too - and given a choice it was a no-brainer. Damned if he knew how it happened, but this man, this ... vampire, now trumped everything else in his life.

Sliding a hand against the sheets to cup the back of V's head, rubbing a thumb against the rough texture of his cheek, Butch pushed all of that emotion into the kiss. V sighed into his mouth, seemingly happy to let him take over, tilting his chin up, exposing the strong column of his neck. Butch felt the long fingers glide over the small of his back as V's tongue slid hotly against his.

Butch pressed his thigh against the hard line between V's legs. V was "content", but content wasn't what Butch wanted. He wanted V losing his shit just like he'd been. He wanted to make V as loose limbed and fucked over as when his knees had given out. He wanted...well he wanted V naked for a start. He reached for V's belt, pulling at it until it gave way. He dragged down the leather, sliding his hands down the solid thighs and throwing the pants onto the floor behind him. V's eyebrow raised in

amusement, but there was heat there too - like being hit with a blowtorch.

Butch grinned back. "You with me?"

"Oh, I'm with you."

Butch moved his hand to grip him, lowering himself back onto V, pressing him deeper into the mattress as he pumped. The feeling of total skin to skin was near frying his brain. "I didn't know if I'd worn you out or something."

V chuckled low and deep, hips moving in time with his hand. "I love it when you bullshit, cop. And you know that is complete and utter bullshit." Despite the amused tilt to his mouth, the grin no longer hiding the fangs, the gaze was near flaying. Scratch the blowtorch. Make that a fucking volcano.

Bullshit or not, when Butch pressed his mouth back to V's the intensity had definitely shifted. V clamped his hand down on Butch's neck, pulling at his mouth in drags. He tilted Butch's chin to press hot open mouthed kisses down his neck, running a fang over the outer shell of his ear, sucking at that spot on his neck that drove him fucking insane. Butch barely let out a moan before V flipped him over so he was underneath. V, overwhelming him, covering his body and pushing him further into that heat. Nipping at his neck, running his mouth over his collarbone, sucking at his nipples. This was the V that was not so content. This was *his* V, that was all need and take. No apologies. And Butch fucking loved it.

V had completely taken over and shit got overwhelming, fast. Butch's hand stuttered at V's cock, hand struggling to keep connected to his brain, but V didn't seem to mind. He ploughed on, working Butch's fried and over-sensitized nerves.

Butch re-tightened his grip, determined to get V off, regardless of how much V wanted complete control of this. He let go of his cock and brought his hand up to lick at his palm, to slick V up. But V encircled his wrist tight, the strength within that hold, the power that could easily break it if he wanted. V's eyes glowed as he pulled the hand to his mouth, sucking one finger into his mouth up to the knuckle.

Now Butch got the memo that he was pushing thirty eight and had long since waved goodbye to his teenage refractory period. But the warmth of

V's mouth, sucking in the next finger, sent sparks straight south. As V slicked the last finger, it brushed against a long slender fang and V shuddered, opening his eyes to watch Butch as he licked a path down his palm. Now that V felt the freedom to be who he was without hiding, the other worldliness of him was so fucking obvious. The glow of his diamond white eyes, their unique dark blue rim, the glowing tattoo to his temple, the perfectly white fangs.

This guy, that wasn't a guy but a vampire, who was off the planet hot, who had blown his mind every step of the fucking way - with all the shit that they had done ... and hadn't done. The way V was looking at him now, as he guided Butch's slicked hand back to encircle him, it took over all his senses. V's hand was over Butch's as he stroked him, sliding easily up and down his length. He moved the hand back to Butch's side, pinning it down, before he moved the now slicked cock between Butch's thighs. V stroked against his inner thigh, feather light brushes against his own cock, getting him harder again. He could feel V's powerful thighs pump with controlled movements. V stared at him before taking his mouth again, kissing him hard as he pumped his hips. Butch felt the muscles move with his free hand, the movements pushing him deeper into the mattress with each thrust.

And his mind totally went there. Went there and stayed there. With V's body holding over him, thrusting between his thighs, the muscles of his arms tightening with holding him above him. The look of pure intensity and pleasure across V's features. Butch realised he wanted it. Wanted to know what it felt like, what V would feel like. Look like.

"V?"

"Mhmmm?" V mumbled as he pressed hot kisses against Butch's neck, his thrusts brushing their cocks together again, sending shots of pleasure up his spine.

"I -ah ... I ... I think I want ... I'm ready to-ahh, you know."

V stilled at his neck, before moving to press his nose against Butch's temple. "You think?" he asked, actually sounding a bit breathless.

Butch felt V bite gently at his ear and he inhaled sharply. "Ah. Well, no, I ... know. I definitely know."

V's lips moved to take Butch's hard. "What do you know?" he asked between breaths.

"I ah-"

"Come on, Butch," V encouraged. "Tell me what you want me to do to you."

Butch couldn't believe it. Couldn't believe he wanted it or that he was going to say it.

"I want you to fuck me."

~*~

Butch knew it would hurt. He wasn't kidding himself there. He knew he ought to relax and he *was* relaxed, but when V was finally there, positioned behind him-

"I need you to breathe, cop. Relax."

Butch turned his head to the side and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly. It didn't help. Shit, V hadn't even done anything yet - except massage him like he'd done before. V was taking his time and had pleased him until he felt like he's eyeballs might roll out of his skull. Didn't mean he wasn't nervous.

"Listen," V leaned over him until his chest rested against Butch's back. "I told you, we're gonna do this slow. Your pace, you feel me? If I think you're tensing up or might get hurt, I'm stopping."

And if anyone had that much self control, it was V.

He planted his ungloved hand right into Butch's line of sight. "Here. Just grab on to me to anchor yourself because I want to try something. Close your eyes and just ... sort of blank out your mind. Open it up. Try to ... envision me. Us. Like a mirror."

"Sounds kinky," Butch laughed nervously.

V laughed too and Butch could feel the vibration of it against his back. "That's good. Laughing is good. Now close your eyes and do it."

Butch let his lids drift closed and did exactly that. He pictured the way they must look together. Right now. Naked. V all control and confident strength behind him. Butch, passion and sweat soaked muscles beneath him. It was a damn fine vision even if he did say so himself.

"That's it cop. Keep that in your mind. Go with it."

He didn't want to know how V knew what he saw ... but he could imagine it was some kind of vamp mojo. Figured.

"Focus," V encouraged from very close, his breath tickling Butch's ear.

He pictured V kissing him, tasting the salt of his skin, how he'd used his fingers and mouth on him again to prepare his way. Rubbing across that place inside that felt so-

That's right. Open for me. Just relax and breath and let me in. Yeah, you so feel good. The things I'm gonna make you feel ... what you do to me ... Shit cop, I could come right now just thinking about it.

Butch tightened his grip on V's hand. That voice hadn't come from V's mouth. It was just there, in his head.

"It's cool," V whispered aloud. "You're fine. We're just ... in tune. Don't shut me out. It'll help; trust me."

And Butch did trust him. Implicitly.

He released the breath he was holding and let his head relax on the pillow, felt his shoulders melt. He felt the pressure of V pushing in.

You feel amazing. I'm right here, cop. I'll slow down or stop anytime. You call the shots. Just keep breathing. Fuck, you look good right now. All the time. I wanted you the moment I saw you. Then you opened that smart assed mouth and I knew I had to have you.

Butch smiled at that, then grimaced slightly at more pressure.

"Shhhh, I'm right here."

Butch could see them too, as they must look, in his mind. V's desire making his eyes glow, making the corded muscles in his neck stand out. It was probably killing him to be so patient and slow.

"Squeeze my hand," V told him. "Don't worry about hurting me. I might even like it a little."

Butch wanted to laugh, but he couldn't. He opened his eyes and focused on V's hand, his wrist, the muscular forearm. He got the imagery of that arm wrapped around him, V's hand working it's magic on him, pumping him to his release like he'd done before.

Oh yeah? You liked that huh? I liked it too. I gotta admit, I could do that every day. The look on your face when I touch you. I want to get you off every day. I'll never get tired of it.

V pushed in further and Butch tightened his hold.

"You are so relaxed now, cop. I can feel it. Like you're floating. You feel that? I'm going to make you feel so good. You just let go and let me handle it."

V began kissing his neck and raking his teeth over the sensitive skin at his hair line, and still he pushed further.

Holy hell, the stretching burned. But V was right there to catch his focus.

"Squeeze my hand harder, cop. Go on. Hurt me. I won't complain."

Butch dug his fingers into V's wrist, certain his fingertips were going white with the pressure. Then he felt the scrape of V's teeth beneath his ear and he knew. He knew exactly what he wanted. He knew what was missing and what would take his mind off of this just enough to get there. He tilted his head slightly forward so that his neck was bare. V knew what he was offering because he suddenly went still behind him.

"You sure?" he finally asked, his breathing ratcheted up about five notches.

"Yeah," Butch said against the pillow. Because it mattered. Because it would help and God, he wanted it. He'd seen in his head too; understood

that it was V's desire as much as his that put the picture there.

"You know you want to," he prodded V, "and I want you to."

"Ah ... cop," he exhaled. "I..."

"Don't make me change my fucking mind," Butch said.

V lowered himself without withdrawing from the progress he'd made with Butch's body. He began to suck hard against the skin of Butch's neck. He could feel his flesh entering V's mouth, dangerously close to those fangs. It was exhilarating. Mind consuming that it was going to happen. All of it.

"Butch..." he felt V whisper his name reverently against his neck, just as the fangs pierced his skin. It was at the exact same time V penetrated him fully.

He'd thought he might cry out with pain ... but he didn't. He did however latch on to V's hand through the burning pressure - so tight he thought he heard bones crunch. Butch ground his back teeth until they probably cracked, but then he grew still.

V was inside of him! But V didn't move, instead he drank slowly from Butch's neck. It wasn't long, hungry draws. No, V was tasting him. Savoring.

Without ever lifting his head, V slid out slightly and back in. Butch felt the pressure, the fullness, along with the overwhelming feeling of being stretched like a rubber band. V had stilled as Butch gripped tighter at his hand. He felt the slide of V's gloved hand up his side as he licked at his neck. Butch tried to focus on the way he could feel V's chest pressed against him, the way his mouth burned at his neck. But the feeling of too much stretching lessened and morphed into the overwhelming need to expel. It wasn't pain, but it wasn't exactly pleasure either. He started to wonder how anyone could derive pleasure from this.

It's okay, Butch. It will get better, just give it a moment and then I'm going to move. You feel fucking amazing.

V remained still, except for his mouth, alternately pleasing him and talking dirty enough to make Butch hard despite the odd feeling. Once the feeling lessened, Butch loosened his grip and gave V's hand a squeeze to tell him

to move again. He felt V lick his neck clean before he slid a hand to rest on Butch's hip as he slowly thrust in. This time, when V pushed until he was flush against his ass, Butch felt the hint of a familiar thrum of pleasure. Like the time V had pushed in with his finger.

V did it again and again, very slow. He was ever cautious, ever careful until the thrum grew to a shot of pure heaven. Yeah, it was like his finger ... only a thousand times more intense.

V must have known it too, because he began to rock against Butch a little faster. Never rough, but not quite so controlled. The feel of V inside him knocked the breath right out of him. He could hear the effect it was having on V as well. Mr. Control was barely hanging on and Butch was the cause. Any of his uncomfortable feelings disappeared. Butch let out a moan and dropped his head. "*Fuuck. Me.*"

V's hand moved across his hip. "Ah ... cop. A quick ... come back is so ... tempting right now but ... yeah ... fuck me too."

Butch's fingers knotted up into the pillow, his neck straining. It was like finding that itch that needed scratching, only to skip it, then find it again. "Oh God ... V," he groaned, needing ... something.

He knew V understood what he couldn't put into words. He felt V slide a hand over his hips, leveraging himself, pulling him up to change position. V's hand spanned over his stomach, controlling the thrusts, going deeper, smoother. Whatever it was he was doing, it rubbed over that spot again and again and again - teasing at first, then manipulating it until Butch felt like his entire body was that spot.

"You think ... you were rough with me earlier?" V panted against his ear.

Huh? Oh that...

"Not at all. I fucking loved it ... because it's you. The way you feel ... ah, that little noise you make. You're gonna make it again cop. I'm going to drag it out of you again."

V hoisted Butch's hips up just enough to grab his erection. He stroked him again, in time with push of his hips.

"Not yet," he slid a finger over the head. "Don't come yet."

Butch clenched his eyes closed. The complete over stimulation had short circuited his brain. He was only instinct and greedy need at this point - and he *needed* to come.

V was close too ... thank God. Butch could tell by his breathing. He didn't think he could hold on-

"Make the noise for me, cop. I wanna feel you come with me. Right fucking now," he growled. V's climax shook through him, heat pouring inside. V ground out his name as he came. And Butch exploded.

~*~

Butch finally floated back down to earth to find V beside him on the bed. He was on his knees, sitting back on his feet, studying Butch intently.

"You okay?" he asked.

Butch rolled over to look up at the ceiling and run a hand over his face. Was he?

He realized V had cleaned him up a bit and he'd also pulled the sheet and blanket up around his waist. For some reason that made him feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

"Okay?" he glanced over at V. "That big brain of yours and the only adverb you can come up with is okay?"

"Adjective," V smirked. "And are you?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I think I am."

Some tension left V's face and he stretched his arms up over his head and rolled his neck around on those broad shoulders. He hadn't covered up with a sheet, totally comfortable with his body now - scars and all. He reached over to his bedside table, fired up one of his hand rolled cigarettes and sat back on his knees again.

Butch wanted to laugh as he pushed himself up to his elbows. "Are you seriously smoking a cigarette after we...?"

"Had sex?" V finished for him. "Yes. I am." He gave Butch a grin and there were the tell tale fangs, not the least bit receded.

"When will they, y'know, go back in?" Butch indicated towards V's mouth.

V's left eyebrow arched. "I have you naked in my bed, cop. I'm gonna say - not anytime soon."

Butch just stared at him, thinking about what they'd just done. What V was. *Holy mother of-*

"Again I ask, *are you okay?*"

Butch pushed himself to sit up, felt the aches of his body. They were none too subtle reminders of what they'd done ... and Butch had no regrets. However...

"V," he said, taking the cigarette out of his hand. "You're a fucking vampire."

V's smile was broad then. "Yep. Pretty much."

Butch shook his head and began to laugh. "Sonuva- a vampire. As in, really ... a vampire."

V nodded and took the cigarette back from Butch's loose hold. He raised his eyebrow, amused. "We covered this awhile ago, remember? You were saying it was no BFD. You change your mind or need a smoke too or-?"

"No it's not that. It's ... just when I thought I'd surprised the shit out of myself as much as I possibly could - then I remember my fucking boyfriend is a *vampire*."

The temperature in the room changed dramatically and suddenly. In fact, a whole lot changed. Besides things getting about ten degrees hotter, V was there, even closer without Butch ever seeing him move. His eyes a piercing glow as the room took on that sweet and spicy fragrance that Butch knew he'd smelled before.

"What is it?" Butch asked, instinct telling him the heat and potent potpourri were somehow V's doing. "Now it's my turn to ask - you okay, V?"

V's head dipped for just a moment, stubbing the turkish out before he looked back at Butch. "I'm ... I'm fine cop. Great, in fact. Just ... *major* approval on your word choice."

Butch rested his elbow on his bent knees, realizing that, yeah, he'd called V his boyfriend. Well. He was. And he had a feeling that V has at least thought the word before, even if Butch used it first.

"So ... you're sayin' my adjective is even better than yours, genius?" Butch smirked.

V gave him a grin before he crawled forward to urge Butch back against the pillows. "Proper noun, wise ass. And yeah, that word is perfect."

V woke up slowly, content to just be in the moment. Normally he woke up all at once, brain going from zero to one hundred before he could even blink. Tonight he stretched out onto his back and resettled himself, thinking of nothing but the warmth Butch created between the sheets. Cop was like a radiator. That made V the heat seeking missile because he did his best to get as close to that warmth as possible.

"You're a bed hog," Butch mumbled, his voice low and gravelly from sleep. V figured it was about the sexiest thing he'd ever heard.

"Technically, I'm still on my side. You just sleep large."

His cop slept on his stomach, legs thrown out, one arm under the pillow, one crooked beside him comfortably. He took up a whole lot of space to be the smaller man, but V forgave him because of the damn fine picture he made just lying there.

Butch blinked groggily at him. "So you claim you aren't scootchin'? Because it feels an awful lot like you're scootchin' over to *my* side." The corner of his mouth turned up.

Butch had a side in his bed. Life was fucking good.

"I plead the fifth," V rolled away to hide his amusement.

"Hold on a second now," Butch said. V could feel him moving around behind him until he was almost spooned against him. "I wasn't complaining. Just stating the facts."

A hand came to rest against V's hip, the fingers strong and capable as they smoothly made their way across his abdomen then drifted lower. Butch brushed against him and the cop's erection was pretty hard to miss when it was pressed against the back of his thigh. The evening was about to get interesting...

Except his cell phone chose that particular moment to go off with an all too familiar rhythm.

"Sonuvabitch," V groaned, knowing it was Rhage and knowing if he ignored it the brother would just show up on his balcony.

"Hold that thought," he told Butch and reached to answer his phone.

"What?" he bit off.

"Hey man, I'm on your balcony. Let me in."

"What the- *why* are you on my balcony?"

"I need to talk to you. As in *right now*."

Rhage made it sound very urgent, which didn't necessarily mean anything because the brother was easily excitable sometimes.

"I'm only letting you in so I can kill your ass."

V hung up on him and pushed his way out of bed.

"What's going on?" Butch sat up, instantly in cop awareness mode.

"Nothing. I mean, nothing for you to worry about. Rhage, my pain in the ass colleague? He's on my balcony, living up to his job description."

"Should I go with you or-"

"No, no," V waved him off as he shoved his legs into pair of track pants.

"Just relax. Whatever fire he needs putting out shouldn't take long."

Butch shifted around in bed, his body language telegraphing that there was something on his mind. "I thought we were done with secrets."

V stopped midway through pulling on a t-shirt. It was still only half way down his chest when he looked his cop square in the eye. "We are. This isn't a secret. I thought I'd spare you the special moment of meeting Rhage - again - right now, but if you wanna come on out, then be my guest."

Butch considered him and then looked at his pile of clothes on the floor.

"I think I will," he said.

"Okay," V pulled his shirt the rest of the way down. He shook his head and couldn't help but smile. "But maybe we can go without the pissing contest this time? Breaking up a fight isn't on my short list of things to do today."

V stepped out of the bedroom, but left the door partially open. He could hear Butch dragging on his clothes as he made his way to the glass doors that lead to his balcony. The shutters had lifted and he could see Rhage's large form looming on the other side.

"You said forty eight hours," he told Rhage, before he'd even gotten all the way inside. "It hasn't even been twenty four. What are you doing here?"

"I think the King knows!" Rhage blurted, the very real concern etched on his movie star face. "I didn't say a word, I swear, but he knows ... in that kind of creepy, suspicious of everyone way he has. He kept asking me questions about you and giving me ... this look. Like this evil, knowing eye."

"Wrath is blind and wears sunglasses. How can he-"

"It doesn't matter! He has the look. He knows I'm not telling him something and he thinks if he just keeps picking, I'll crack."

"Rhage, I swear to Fade, if you've blabbed-"

"I haven't! But he won't let up. He's relentless and ... he's asking for you."

He got V's attention with that.

"Shit," they both mumbled in unison.

"Oh!" Rhage's head jerked towards the bedroom as Butch emerged. His cop was a bit ruffled with his dress shirt untucked, hastily buttoned and no shoes on his feet, but more than that he looked good and properly sexed up. "Uhm ... sorry," Rhage muttered. He looked back at V apologetically. "I didn't meant to-"

V stopped him. "It's fine, don't worry about it. Rhage, Butch. Butch, Rhage," he made quick introductions. "You've met, but perhaps you were both too pissed off to remember?" he asked sarcastically.

"No, I remember," Butch spoke first. He nodded at Rhage in acknowledgement. He kept his hands loose by his sides, his stance in no way aggressive. All of it intentional, V had no doubt.

"Yeah," Rhage nodded back. "Kinda hard to forget." He shoved his hands in his pockets, then took them back out.

The three of them stood there in an awkward silence. Rhage looking at Butch, Butch looking at V, and V looking at Rhage.

~*~

Rhage snuck a glance at V to find him staring right back at him. V's eyes were boring into him like he expected him to say something. What was he supposed to say? It wasn't like this situation had come up before. Ever. V never had ... anyone. The brother was so damned secretive. The other Brothers knew he was the total opposite of a monk, but they also knew that when V got his rocks off - that's all it was. There had never been anyone of significance in V's life and he never, ever picked up anybody at Zero Sum or anywhere else. In the past, whatever he did, he did it in the privacy of his penthouse. No one saw and he never spoke of it. And now?

Well, from all indications and big flashing red signals, Rhage was standing two feet away from V's *human* male mate.

Ho-oly Shit.

Did this cop, Butch, know he was now irrevocably linked to a vampire? And did he have any idea how marked he was? He may as well have been dipped, head first, into a vat of V's bonding scent. He was coated in it. Maybe because they'd had wild, sweaty monkey sex all night, right up until the point Rhage had materialized on the balcony.

"So," Rhage rocked on his feet, eager for someone to say something. Anything. Soon.

V, the bastard, actually wore a shit eating grin at his discomfort. "Easy, Hollywood, before your head explodes," he slapped him on the shoulder. Asshole was actually in a good mood. It was freaky.

"The big pink elephant in the room has been acknowledged, so you can relax," V said. "Acknowledged, given a name, and a place at the breakfast table. And I told Butch everything. All of it. So there's no point in wasting time before telling Wrath the deal."

Wait. What?

"You did what?!" Rhage's eyes flew wide.

Humans didn't have anything quite so obvious as bonding scents, but if they did then V would've been just as marked as Butch. Because the way the cop bowed up when Rhage raised his voice at V screamed, *I don't care how fuckin' big you are, I will take you on. Back off from what's mine.*

Rhage had to hand it to him. Willing to step in for V, no matter the odds? That was solid. He would've taken time to be impressed with the cop if V hadn't just told him that this particular cop knew *everything*, while their King still knew nothing.

"So," Rhage cleared his throat and tried to settle down, "You're saying you told him. All of it. Okay. That's the V way and I'm fine with it, but uh ... one question. What the hell are you gonna tell Wrath?"

The cop had simmered down only slightly and now he looked from Rhage to V. "Wrath, Vishous, Rhage?" he smirked. "Nice names. At least their subtle."

Rhage couldn't have stopped his smile, even if he wanted to.

"Well I haven't been practicing in front of the mirror or anything. But I figured I'd just tell him the truth."

It's not like he could sugar coat any of this shit. The King was gunna...
"He's gunna flip his shades over this, you know? I'd hate to be in your spot right now."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence." V shrugged. "What'll be, will be. It won't change anything. Give me a minute."

V went back to the bedroom, probably to finish getting dressed. That meant he was alone with the human cop, Butch, who was watching V go with an intensity that was a little uncomfortable. The fact that he and Rhage were ripping each other a new one last night didn't help either.

"So...", Rhage tried to break the silence. "I s'pose this is all a lot to take in."

Butch reverted his eyes back to meet his. Rhage didn't know what V's type was, but evidently intense, fearless, and opinionated were a plus. Add loud-mouth, cop, broad shoulders and a busted up nose and you had a shoe in.

The hard hazel gaze let up, softened as the cop chuckled dryly. "If he'd told me that you all were leather bound mafia that specialized in selling plutonium, I would've been less shocked."

Similar sense of humor too. It sort of made sense if he thought of it that way, but a human?

"I never would've pegged him for going for a human," Rhage thought out loud.

V strode out of the bedroom, leather and holster in place, a pair of black dress shoes dangling from his gloved hand. "You do realize that *you* happen to be mated to a human, right? This should not be a novel idea to you." He handed the shoes over to the cop.

Butch's eyebrows raised at what V said "Wait, so you do have human contact. And whaddya mean 'mated'?" But he took the shoes with a quick

smile. The damn socks were even dangling out of each shoe, as if just tucked in there

V moved to stand near Butch sliding his knives into place as the cop pulled the shoes on, looking back at V as he straightened. "It's like married, only more so." If the cop noticed the way V's eyes heated on the topic, he didn't let on. Maybe V always looked at him like that.

Rhage's chest puffed automatically. "My Mary is human. And awesome. You ready?" he asked V.

V nodded. "Let's go see our King." He turned to Butch, "We'll drop you off at your car."

The cop obviously didn't like that, hand gripping V's bicep before he could move. "Hold up. One, why the knives to see the King? Two, if you need them, I'm coming with."

Rhage noticed V's hand slip over Butch's, the intimacy all too familiar. "It's not gonna be like that; we wear them everywhere." V turned his gaze over to Rhage, looking pointedly for a moment until Rhage finally got it. He opened his leather jacket to show the cop he was wearing his too. Even on the trip over to visit V.

V looked back at the cop. "And second, it'd probably go down better if I do this alone. Either way, I won't be long."

Butch still didn't look too happy about it, but his shoulders relaxed, meaning he accepted it. V started moving for the door, scooping the keys as Rhage opened the front door.

Rhage watched as V walked out, followed by Butch. The two of them walked to the elevator side by side, arms brushing as they moved. He heard the low murmuring of the cop's gruff voice. "But if I don't hear from you in a couple, King or no King, I'm coming to get you."

V's low voice answered back, warm with a barely held chuckle. "I wouldn't expect anything less."

Rhage felt his mouth pull into a grin as he punched the down button.

~*~

Butch knew it was surprising, how quickly a situation could spark off. Years on the force had taught him to always be ready for a confrontation. You could be driving around, on a simple patrol one minute, be in the middle of a riot the next. There wasn't always rhyme or reason. Sometimes it was as simple as someone making one observation that led you down the road to finding trouble. Observations like "Did you see that?" or "I thought I heard something." In this case it was a seemingly innocuous phrase from his new big, blonde acquaintance, Rhage.

"Hey, you smell that?" he asked.

He'd been relaxed in the passenger seat one minute, elbow hanging out of the rolled down window, breeze in his face. Next second he was sitting ram rod straight, asking about smells.

It meant nothing to Butch. Did he smell burned up brakes? Trash from the alley ways of the city?

"Shit. Yeah, I got it too," V nodded and looked way too serious over a fucking smell.

Then they both glanced back at him.

"It wasn't me," Butch defended himself, wondering if maybe they thought-

"What are you doing?" Rhage interrupted that train of thought just as V slid the Escalade into street parking.

"I'm not going to just drive on past, Hollywood." V gave him his best *You're a dumb shit look.*

"But," Rhage tried to nod inconspicuously towards Butch, but he caught it.

"What the hell is going on?" Butch piped up.

"Besides, cop has ... had some dealings with them before," V told Rhage.

The guy's eerily turquoise eyes went wide at that. "You gotta be fucking kidding me. Are you serious?!"

V nodded gravely.

"Excuse me!" Butch got a bit louder, not dealing well with being ignored. "I said, someone wanna tell me what the hell is going on here?"

V turned in his seat to look into that back. "Cop, it's *lessers*. We need to take this."

"As in our pale haired friends?" Butch's one hand was already on his seatbelt the other on the door.

Blondie piped up, face like he'd gotten a mouth full of lemon. "We are *not* taking him with us."

V was already out his door. "I'd like to see you convince him of that, Hollywood."

Butch gave a pointed look at Blondie since he was staring at him. The vampire open and closed his mouth a few times before rolling his eyes dramatically and getting out in a huff. Annoying the shit out of the guy was a little too much fun.

Butch moved to stand near V, and recognized that line in his forehead. "What's wrong?" he asked. When he didn't respond, Butch gave him a hit to the upper arm.

"Hmm?"

"What's wrong? You got your scowly face on."

"My *what* face?"

Blondie, aka Rhage, stepped up, clearly finding some familiar ground. "Yeah, the one where you look like your concentrating on being pissed off ... or constipated."

Butch tried to hide his grin as he watched V's eyebrows raise into his hairline.

Rhage kept digging. "You know, the one that means a brass band could march by but you're so into the brood that you'd still be-" Rhage did his best V face impression, arms folded and everything. It was so fucking spot on that Butch laughed before he caught himself.

V cut his eyes at both of them. "I take it back. I like it better when you two want to kill each other. Is it okay if we focus on work now?" When Rhage stopped smiling, V caught Butch's eyes and then nodded to street. "Recognize the area?"

Butch took in the lit streets, the running oval over the road, the well manicured park just down a bit. This was the neighborhood that he and V had he'd been scouting, trying to find their "head albino" aka lesser.

"*That's* why I'm scowling. Still got it?" V asked Rhage as he moved to the back of the Escalade, popping the trunk. When Rhage nodded, nose now in the air as he started off down the street, V grabbed Butch's hand, the other sliding a dagger from his holster and planting it, handle down, into Butch's palm. It was made of some deep liquid black metal, weighted perfectly. It was artistic without being overdone, strong, but smart strength, not brute force. It was cool and deadly and reminded him exactly of V.

"Now cop, I'm not gonna get all up in your biz about sitting it out 'cause I know you won't. You can handle yourself, but as you know, bullets don't work on these guys. It's a knife to the heart. Trust me when I say that they are stronger than they look. I heal quickly, you don't. Back me up, but try to stay out of the thick of it, feel me?"

Butch nodded, vividly remembering the mofo he'd shot to pieces getting up and taking another charge at them. But he wasn't going to be the little misses, sitting on the sidelines. They were partners and as such, they protected each other. Where V went, he went. Butch looked up to find V smirking, but there was definitely warmth and affection in the light eyes. Had he just said that outloud or...? Nope, it was V mojo.

"You gotta stop doing that," Butch told him. "Sometimes I need *me* time in my head."

"Sorry, but you were projecting that at about 115 decibels and when I like what I hear, I listen."

They shared a heated look as they followed after Rhage. "Only you would take me being territorial as a good thing."

~*~

They'd found them, the pale faced fuckers. Their much sought after lead lesser, the one that had such a grand time carving up that girl as bait, was currently slugging it out with V. Butch wanted a piece of him so bad he could taste it - but he had his hands full enough.

Then, all Butch knew was one second he had a fist full of pale, sweet smelling, scum sucking, shit bag bastard, doling out some ass whipping in a very non-cop way. The next second, V had a fist full of Butch.

"What are you doing?" he tried to shrug V off as he drug him towards the Escalade. "I was winning. And enjoying myself!"

"Fuck that!" V yelled over a loud pop and a flash of light. "Forget the *lesser* and get your ass in the car!"

Butch did as he was told, scrabbling to find a foot hold as V launched them both at the car, a pure survival instinct part of his brain telling him that between fight or flight - flight was suddenly his only option. He didn't know why until he was ass planted into the passenger seat and V had both doors locked. Butch looked through the side window at a sight he knew he would never, ever forget.

Where Rhage had once stood, where that pop of light now dimmed, stretched eight feet of green and purple scaled, sharply clawed...

Hell, *dragon* was the only word he could come up with.

"What the...?" his mouth just fell open. "Is ... is?" He shut it because he sounded like an idiot.

"That's Rhage's beast," V stated, as always Mr. Matter of Fact and Understatement. "I forgot to tell you about him."

"Forgot to ... uh yeah!"

Butch watched as the Beast systematically and efficiently took out each

and every lesser. And by "take out" he meant ate.

"Oh ... God. If I had a weak stomach, I'd be sick."

"Not in the Escalade," V said, his voice sounding as if all this was normal. Like it happened all the-

"This happens a lot," Butch's head whipped around to look at him.

V shrugged one shoulder. "Sometimes. He gets royally pissed or we get in deep shit or one of us gets hurt or-"

"So a lot," Butch said it for him.

"Enough, yeah," V agreed. "He turns into that. Told you that you didn't want to piss him off."

Butch looked back out the window. "Yeah. Thanks for the heads up. Uhm, are we safe from the crunch n' munch in here or...?"

"Oh yeah," V blew it off like it was no big. "Nowadays. There was a time when it was a crap shoot, but now he's got a reasonable amount of control over it. I give Mary all due credit for that. Finding her changed him ... for the better. I think I can empathize now."

Butch turned again to find V watching him, the scene outside going dim.

"Don't guess I'll have to worry about solving this case anymore," Butch told him, because he could think of nothing else to say. Smoooooth, he thought. "Since, you know, Rhage just ate my main suspect."

V's face broke into a full grin, then he laughed. "Yeah I'd say that's case closed. You okay with not hauling in the bad guy? Skipping the law and order, justice system and all that jazz?"

"Yeah."

"You okay with what else I just said? Not too deep for you, is it?"

Butch's lip twitched up. "Better than okay."

V returned his look for a moment before he honed in on something just

over Butch's shoulder. "Oh!" he sat up and Butch jumped. "Here we go. We're up." V was already out of the car when Butch saw there were no more lessers and no more Beast.

Butch rushed to V's side where he was knelt beside a naked and shivering Rhage.

"Shit. Is he okay?"

"He will be, cop. Just gotta get him home to his shellan, ah, his wife. This is the price he pays to cover all our asses. You know seems like nothing in this world comes without sacrifice." Butch thought he took a quick breath after that, but then V told him to grab his leather jacket out of the car and there was no time to ask.

"Help me get him into the back," V instructed him.

Rhage was mumbling something unintelligible and groaning in pain. The blonde hair stuck wet to his face with exertion, he was tucked up in a ball, eyes tightly shut. V was all action; knew exactly what to do. It was plain the pair had worked together a lot and that they'd taken care of each other before. Even though they talked a lot of shit and tried to act like they didn't give a rat's ass, V and Rhage cared about each other in a way only brothers could.

Butch helped V lay Rhage into the back of the Escalade, gently closing the door. They climbed in and it wasn't a couple of minutes before they were outside of Butch's apartment.

"I need to get him home like yesterday," V told him as he got out. "I'll call you ... shit ... I gotta talk to Wrath too. Fuck. It might be a day or two, but I will be in touch."

"A day or two?" Butch asked.

"Look," V told him as he stood there with the passenger door open, "it'll be fine, but it might take a couple of days to ... get through to the others. They aren't all as agreeable as Rhage here."

Agreeable. That's not a word he would've used to describe the big guy. Damn, that meant the other's must be-

"This is a big fucking deal no matter how you slice it," V told him. "And since I've lied by omission to them as well, there'll be some hell to pay. Nothing I can't handle. I'll be in touch and thanks, for helping with him." V nodded towards the back.

"And thank him for me, yeah?" Butch said and closed the door.

~*~

He felt like he had ants crawling under his skin. Butch got up and went to the kitchen for the third time in fifteen minutes. He didn't need anything in the kitchen. Wasn't hungry. Didn't think he'd be hungry for another few days after watching Rhage dine on lessers, but what the hell else was he supposed to do besides pace?

It hadn't been twelve hours. He didn't expect V to show up in the middle of the day since ... well, vampire. But he had expected a call by now. Just to know what the story was. What had mighty Wrath, supposed King of ... what? Vampires? had to say about V's announcement?

Yeah, so I want you to know that I've met someone and he's a he and he's human and he knows all our deets and I hope you're cool with that or I'm gone.

And what the hell kinda name was Wrath anyway?

For V's sake, Butch hoped it went well. For their sake, Butch hoped his other brothers had accepted the news and hadn't given him shit. So help them if they hurt him, literally or figuratively. If he didn't hear something in the next twelve, he was going to call. If he got no answer, he was going after him. Fuck if he knew how to find him or where to start ... but he wasn't a detective for nothing. V had said it might be a couple of days, but the silence didn't sit well.

"Ah shit," Butch grumbled to himself and grabbed his keys. Staying at his place wasn't doing him any favors. He was going nuts. He'd be better off doing something. Maybe grab a cup of coffee. Because caffeine *always* helped you unwind.

He found himself in downtown Caldie, the un-seedy side that he never

saw unless it was his day off. Turned out some fresh air and a walk to the Double D for coffee and a powdered doughnut really did shake off some of the nerves. What was he twitching about? V would be fine. There wasn't much he couldn't handle and these guys, vampires, were like his family. Surely his brothers wouldn't choose him leaving over letting him be with Butch.

And that was the real twitch, wasn't it? That V might have to give up who he was for them to be together. That their nonacceptance would hurt. He didn't want it to come to that. V was a warrior. He was quite literally born to it; just like Rhage and the others. Besides, Butch had a feeling it wasn't the part about him being a guy that would be an issue for his brothers - it was the part about him being human. Well, Rhage said his wife or whatever was human. So? It stood to reason they could bend the rules again.

He hoped so. In fact, he found himself praying so. It'd been awhile, but as he crumpled up his empty coffee cup and tossed it into the trash can, he said a silent prayer for V and another prayer that he wasn't going to have to find and whip some vampire ass.

When he finished, he looked up to see a surprisingly familiar face walking into the shop next door.

"Hey!" he yelled for her as he walked out onto the sidewalk. "Hey, stranger!" he waved.

Seeing him gave her major pause, as if she'd just been caught breaking the law. Butch knew better than that though. She was as pretty as ever and Beth Randall had probably never so much as jay walked in her entire life.

He popped in a piece of gum for his coffee breath and strolled right up to her. There was a time when she totally did it for him. Did it and then some. But then she'd dropped off the map ... and he'd found V.

She'd literally disappeared though and it had always struck him as odd. Quit her job, moved and everything without so much as a kiss my ass. He hadn't seen her in months and, upon closer inspection, she actually looked pretty stressed.

"Wow, where have you been hiding?" he asked as they shared a strained hug.

Her eyes kept glancing back towards the street, looking for someone. A jealous boyfriend? Fair enough. He wasn't trying to scope her anymore so he took a step back and took up with the niceties.

"I thought you'd moved away or something. You still livin' in Caldie?"

"Oh. Oh yeah, I'm still here," she smiled politely, but it was forced. "I, uhm, just moved out of the city. I came in just to, you know, run a few errands."

Everything about her body language was nervous. She *did not* want to be here. She was trembling ever so slightly and her color was off. Others might not even notice it, but Butch saw it plain as day. What was she so nervous about? She sure as shit couldn't be nervous about him. They'd always been friends and nothing but. So was someone harassing her?

Butch took a detective's look around and saw nothing. Only a fancy assed Rolls Royce across the street ... with tinted windows.

"Beth, you okay?" he asked glancing back at the car, then stepping between her and it, all business.

"I'm fine, Butch. Really. It surprised me to see you is all. It's been so long. I probably just need to eat something soon. You know, hunger makes me jittery."

"Yeah. You want to grab some lunch?" he asked, hedging his bets.

"No, thank you. I need to get back."

"You sure? You're looking a little pale."

And just as he said it, she swayed. Shit.

"Why don't we sit down over here. I'll get you a soda or something."

"No, no. I'm fine," she insisted, way too wound up for what the occasion called for.

"Okay, relax. I'm just trying to hel-"

And that's when she bit it. Knees just buckled right out from underneath her. Luckily he'd only taken that small step away. He grabbed her before she hit the pavement and settled her back onto the low wall outside the store.

"Beth," he said loudly, reaching into his pocket, hoping for a mint or some candy or something. "Beth."

"Majesty!" someone yelled from the street.

Butch turned to see that who came out of the Rolls was not what he expected. An old guy, as in *very* old, made impressive time as he ran over to them. And what the hell was he saying?

"Majesty!"

At least, that's what Butch thought he heard. He was beginning to wonder what the hell Beth had gotten herself mixed up in. But it wasn't like he had time to nut out the gritty details because the old guy had decided to try to move Beth. The skinny arms stretched in the darkly pressed suit and he looked like a strong breeze would blow him over.

"Whoa a second there grampa! You ain't carrying her nowhere."

The old man shivered, the blood draining from his wrinkled face as it twisted into something akin to finding your car aflame and then realizing you left your fireworks in the trunk. "Excuse me *sir*, her majesty needs to return to the mansion." The accent was clipped and he sounded as if he'd collapse in on himself if this didn't happen immediately.

"Majesty? Mansion? What the hell are you talking about? What she needs is a fucking doctor. And we're going there, *now*." And with that Butch bent down and scooped Beth into his arms. She was completely out for the count, head lolling back, dark hair swaying. The old man sounded like he was going to pass out too.

"I wish you'd release her sir," he pleaded.

They had begun to draw a crowd too, people calling out for help and others on mobile phones. Butch went into cop mod. Quickest route? He'd parked his car a couple of blocks down, so it looked like it was up to Jeeves and his Rolls. He shifted his grip on Beth as the old man began

tugging on his arm. "I must protest sir, I understand the situation more so than you ever will. Now please release her."

Butch was getting tired of his complicated way of speaking and the jittering he was doing from foot to foot. Maybe it was a good thing Butch had left his gun at home. "I will protest your ass if you don't get into your car and drive us to the hospital." And without waiting, Butch strode across the road towards the black car, hoping that the old guy didn't have a heart attack on the way over.

He didn't. He followed to unlock the door and for the first time annoyance was plain in his voice. "If you insist, then it must be this way."

"I insist."

When the door was opened, Butch lowered Beth onto the long stretch of leather, sliding himself in alongside as the chauffeur or whoever the hell hopped into the driver's. The motor growled to life and lurched forward. Butch prayed that he actually knew how to drive as he held a hand in front of Beth's face. Warm breath touched his hand, thank God.

"The closest is County General," he told the driver. "Turn down this cross street and-"

They passed the turn off.

"What the hell?! Where the fuck you going, Jeeves?"

There was a quick glance in the rear view mirror and Butch lost all semblance of patience. "She *needs* to go to a hospital," he yelled at the old guy.

"I'm sorry, sir, but she *cannot* go to a hospital."

Well at least he was polite when refusing to be reasonable. Fuck, no gun, no way to get him to go in the right fucking direction unless he wanted to start wrestling seniors. *No* idea how serious Beth was. He couldn't be dicking around if it was something urgent. Butch reached for his phone, punched in the speed dial.

The call was picked up on the second ring. "Cop?"

"V, I know I said a couple of days, but I got a situation."

Butch could almost feel the leach of cold through the phone. "Where are you?"

"I'm alright. It's not me. It's - I got an old friend in the car ... well, I think we're in her car. Anyway, she's sick, but the old man driving *won't take her to the hospital!*" he yelled, "and Beth ain't looking too hot right now. Thought maybe I spell out the details and you tell me if she's gonna check out on me or something. I mean, I don't think it's that bad, but damned if I know what's wro-"

"Butch," V cut him off. "Slow down and back the fuck up. Did you say, Beth?"

"Yeah an old friend, Beth Randall, and we're not even going in the right friggin' direction!"

"Whoa! Cop. Are you telling me you have *Beth Randall* with you?"

"Yeah. Could you meet us wherever gramps is taking us or ... shit it's daytime. Uhm ... maybe I can get him to come to you. He said no hospitals, but-"

"No! No hospitals. Is she okay? Bleeding? Injured? Breathing? Pulse?"

"No, she's not injured, no blood. Just passed out cold on me. Pulse is steady, breathing is good. She looks a bit pale and puny, but feels warm and we're racing along God knows where. Mach two in the lap of luxury but I don't know where the fuck he's going!"

He thought he heard V's short, dry laugh, the one he saved for the kind of stuff so ironic it left a metallic taste in your mouth.

"Don't worry. I think she'll be fine. This kind of thing happens when ... just let the old guy drive. I'll see you very shortly, you can be sure. Fuck, this'll be interesting. And Butch?"

"Yeah?"

"Put on your seat belt and hang on to Beth."

V hung up. Butch was starting to get a serious mad on, mostly because he didn't know what was going on, where they were going, and he was in a position of absolute uselessness. The worrisome look in the rear view mirror returned and Butch was glad at something to bitch about. "Keep you're eyes on the road, Jeeves."

"The name is Fritz, sir."

"I don't care if it's fucking Prince Charles, watch where you're going!" He was starting to feel better already. When you can't be a man of action, be a man of many and colorful words.

There was small sigh from the front, but the eyes returned to the road. "You'll certainly fit right in."

"Fit in where?" Butch growled.

"Where we are going, sir."

"Well are we ever gonna get there or do I have to-"

The car lurched to the right, taking a turn he didn't even see. Fritz, aka Mario Andretti, created enough G-force to push Butch back and down against the seat, nearly knocking the breath out of him. "Jeeesus, Mary and Joseph!"

They sped along a solitary, single road as it carved through trees. Butch had a sneaking suspicion that this was someone's driveway. If so, it was hella long. They cruised right through a patch of fog so dense, Butch couldn't see a thing.

"Careful!" he snapped at Fritz, but the old guy kept it at just over sixty, cool as a cucumber.

Once through the anomalous fog in the middle of the day, Fritz punched them through a tremendously intimidating gate.

"Uh oh," Butch muttered under his breath, getting that ominous feeling like when a bust was about to go wrong and someone was going to get shot. Something was going on here and he got the sneaking suspicion that all kinds of shit was about to collide.

"We're here, sir," Fritz stated as they turned one last sharp corner and came into full view of the biggest fucking house Butch had ever seen.

"Holy-"

Fritz sped by in a blur and kicked it into some freaky underground garage thing that came up out of nowhere.

"Batman build this place?" he uttered in awe.

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Nothin'."

This was Beth's home? No friggin' way. It looked more like the kind of place V would...

They finally came to a stop in pitch black. Butch released the death grip he had on the door handle and felt for the latch. He thought he had a finger on it when it was ripped out from beneath his touch.

"Cop."

"V?"

His eyes hadn't fully adjusted to the dark as he got out to find V standing there.

"How did you...? Where the - is this...?" Butch shook his head. "What?" he finally managed.

V smiled, his eyes glowing dimly in the gray darkness. "Hit some lights for us, Fritz."

"*You* know Fritz?" Butch wasn't only confused, he was getting some seriously foreboding vibes. He somehow knew what was coming next, but his brain was going on total lock down mode. Denying all acceptance of the obvious.

"Give me a hand?" V asked, motioning to Beth.

"Yeah," he snapped to as the lights came up. He reached in to cradle

Beth's head as V slid her out.

"You know her," he stated, realizing he shouldn't even ask.

"Yeah. And you better let me carry her, Butch. I know she's an old friend, but ... just go with me on this."

Butch felt like he'd been asleep too long, waking up groggy and disoriented. "Ah yeah, okay," he agreed easily.

"Don't worry, I'll explain all this. Let's just get her in the house before--"

A door that must have led from the main house to the garage flew open and slammed back against the wall.

"Beth!"

And the biggest fucker Butch had ever seen in his life came barrelling at them at full speed.

"No, no. It's cool," V said to Butch as he felt him grow tense and defensive. "That's Wrath. As in my King, Wrath. You know, the Boss?"

The enormous man with a long, sleek train of black hair carefully took Beth from V's arms. It was amazing a man that big could be so gentle.

"V," he growled, but there was a hint of something pitiful to it, almost pleading.

"She's okay, my lord. Her heart is steady and breathing is good. She feels over heated though."

"She said she hadn't eaten," Butch added helpfully.

At least, he thought it sounded helpful. But tall, dark, and deadly gave him a look that really shouldn't have felt like anything since he was wearing sunglasses. Instead, Butch felt ice water shoot through his veins. Interestingly enough, the look elicited and equally lethal glare from V, directed right back at his boss.

"He's with me," V said, his voice not hiding any of the intensity. "What I wanted to discuss with you, but our Queen first, my lord," he nodded

down towards Beth.

Wrath's gaze met V's and something silent passed between them. "Get inside, but neither of you step foot beyond the foyer," he ordered before he turned on his heels and left, Beth cradled carefully in his arms.

"Well. That went well," V said.

Butch knew he was missing a whole hell of a lot and was still in denial's perdition as V's arms came around him. "You're here," he said, pulling Butch against him.

Butch's hands went around V's waist and he let himself melt into the embrace, gladly letting go of the anxiety and confusion for just a moment. V was rock solid beneath his palms. All that strength was reassuring, but the feel of V was so much more. He had the overwhelming desire to find his way underneath V's shirt so he could lay his bare hands on his skin. He knew that skin, knew it would feel like silk over steel. Butch knew how sensitive it was and just where to go to make V moan. But he also knew how tough it was. He knew what it'd been through and how well it healed, thank God. He'd thought he knew so much about V, but apparently there were volumes more to learn.

"I want to know how you know Beth," he thought outloud. It wasn't a question. "Have known her for awhile, obviously."

"She is my Queen, Butch. She's mated with - sorry - married to Wrath. And she is very well thought of. By all of us."

Butch couldn't believe it, although he should be used to the unbelievable by now. "I'll be a sonofabitch," he muttered.

"Me too," V laughed softly. "I was hoping I'd get to handle all of this a little differently, a little less fucked up and thrown together, but I should've known better."

Butch laughed into his shoulder, mouth pressed against V's collarbone. He could feel the warm breath as V's mouth brushed his temple in a kiss.

"It's gonna take forever to learn everything about you, huh?"

"If I had my way, yes," V clung a little tighter.

"But I figured out why you guys need a place this big."

"Hmm?"

"Because your king dude is the fucking Hulk."

V laughed, finally letting him go. "Speaking of, we better go do this thing."

V led him through the door that the Wrath-guy had raced out, moving through the maze that would evidently take them inside the palace. The vampire legend rang true to form as it was still freaking dark, everywhere. The twists and turns didn't make it easy to judge distance and Butch nearly ran into a wall for the fourth time and swore. "That's it, hold up."

He reached out towards the tall, dark shape in front of him and ran a hand down V's arm until he wrapped a hand around his sturdy wrist. "Alright, lead on."

V chuckled and pressed forward; Butch tucked himself behind him, figuring it'd mean less wall interaction.

"You want to just hold my hand, cop?" The tone was teasing, he could even picture the smirk.

"Smart ass," but Butch smiled, feeling the strength beneath his fingers. It wasn't lost on him that V was leading him in the dark both literally and figuratively. Butch was completely relying on V at this point, being so far out of his depth and then some. He figured what was at the end of the corridor was not going to be pleasant or easy. Butch trusted him though - life or death trusted him - and that was more than enough.

The corridor ended in light and as they stepped into it, Butch's eyes took a moment to adjust. Then it was like he was in freaking England. Or how he'd imagine England would go down. Buckingham Palace and all that. White marble, rich wood, paintings that probably cost more than Butch's car. Okay a lot more. Butch was still amazed that his Crown Vic stayed in one piece.

Butch's gaze settled on V to find him watching him, almost gauging his reaction. He gave V's wrist a reassuring squeeze and a teasing smile. "So the crazy butler and the Rolls makes sense now."

V grinned back at him, before moving to stand closer to him. The dark head turned towards the entrance off the main foyer as a familiar blonde figure appeared.

Appeared and limped. Rhage, dragon man, moved like an old woman. An old woman who'd just run a marathon. He looked over and smiled; it was big, warm and genuine. Butch figured that most of what made up Rhage was big, warm, and genuine. The man was as open as a book, and Butch read people very well. Hunched over in black track pants and a hoodie, Rhage shuffled toward them.

"I thought I smelled something familiar. Heya cop," he nodded at Butch before looking at V. "I saw a very angry King stomp by. I'm assuming this surprise visit went over as well as a turd in the punch bowl."

V nodded. "This wasn't the plan. But it seems my plan gave me the finger and left, so now it's damage control."

"Figured."

Then V went from being relaxed in Rhage's presence to visibly tense. It was like a black cloud had blown into the room as he entered. The guy was the kind that made most cops call for back up. Cagey. Unpredictable and nasty. And the aura he put off was a menace so thick it was hard to breathe. The black eyes went straight to Butch's, the angry scar twisting his mouth as he snarled. "What ... is that?"

Black Eyes didn't take his glare off Butch, but the question was directed at V. "This why you've been as distracted as fuck and MIA? *And* why you got your ass stabbed the other night?"

V growled and the lights in his eyes flashed. "I didn't know you cared, Z."

He stepped up to crowd in on V, the air around him going cold as a morgue's freezer. "I didn't know you were so stupid, V."

The stare off continued until Black Eyes was pulled away by Fabio. Actually scratch that, the dude was a lot better looking than Fabio. The mane of hair was striped with all sorts of colors, colors that shouldn't be on a guy, but somehow, with the expensive suit and freaky eyes, it worked.

"Z. Allow the King to settle this," he said.

And super polite. The scary dude actually relaxed a bit and walked back to lean against the far wall with hair guy. It could've been his imagination, but without the scar, Butch swore the two looked exactly alike. Twins. As he studied them, the evil twin still glared, but at least from a safer distance.

And just when Butch figured there were more than enough large and volatile guys in one area, another one came in. He moved in and stopped as if suddenly realizing that a) there was some sort of weird ass, impromptu meeting going on in the fancy foyer and b), Butch fought not to hum the childhood song, *one of these things was not like the other*.

The guy had a serious air of authority and calm that made Butch think he might just be the leader of this crazy ass circus. Yet V had said that was Wrath, of the long hair and humongous height. So this guy had to be his second in command. The military shorn head turned to look at Butch and then at V. Butch could plainly see his blue eyes taking it all in and trying to put it together like some fucked up math problem.

"Ah, V? Care to explain what the hell is going on?"

V nodded to the stairs moments before the sound of solid footsteps signaled the return of the King guy, a lot less stressed, but still scary as hell. There were a hell of a lot of big guys in here, Butch thought. He automatically sized each one up and played out the odds. It was force of habit. Well, that and knowing a hostile environment when he was in the fucking middle of one.

He figured Rhage probably wouldn't be of much use in his condition and his position was questionable anyway, but Butch didn't like the odds of him and V against the rest of them. Whether that's where this was leading, he had no idea. But damn, it felt like a bar brawl of epic proportions was about to happen.

V tried to inconspicuously position himself in front of Butch, but Butch wasn't about to go down like he was defenseless. He moved to stand shoulder to shoulder with V, spread his legs, relax his shoulders, to show he wasn't scared of these fuckers. Fangs or no fangs. He met each of their gazes head on too. Butch O'Neal had never backed down and he wasn't

about to start with these WWE wanna-bes.

The King cleared his throat, garnering everyone's attention. He looked mad as hell, even though he was still wearing the sunglasses.

"V," he turned to them. "I'm not so blind that I don't know there's an extra body in our foyer. I know that you know him and I know that he knows my queen ... yet I can smell that he is human. So you better explain to me just what the hell is going on."

"He is why I've wanted to meet with you, but you keep blowing me off because Beth-"

"V!" That seemed to prickle the king right up. He held out a hand, stopping V mid sentence. "You're coming with me *right now*." He pointed at Rhage, indicating to Butch. "Keep him here."

Ah hell no! "Fuck. That." Butch looked back at Rhage who had not seemed all that enthused to follow orders anyway. "No offense."

"None taken." Rhage's crazy colored eyes were wide. Obviously he thought Butch was crazy for talking to their King that way. And when then King leveled his stare at him, the coldness seeping into his skin, Butch began to agree.

"This doesn't concern you human."

"Like HELL it doesn't." He didn't even know he'd moved forward until Rhage placed a warning hand on his arm. He was starting to like the guy, but that didn't mean he was going to let that stop him. This was V they were talking about.

He shrugged the hand off. "Back off Blondie or you're gonna draw back a nub." He focused back on the King. "V goes, I go. I don't know who you are and maybe V trusts you, but I don't trust you within shittin' distance of him."

He could hear Rhage laugh behind him. "Call me crazy, but I like him."

"Can it Hollywood." Wrath pushed his glasses up and pinched the bridge of his nose, suddenly looking like he was dealing with a bunch of unruly kids instead of aggressive and massively built vampires.

And that's when Butch felt it. Or more like he smelled it. He looked at V, who had not taken his eyes off him during his entire rant. He had that intense look on his face. The one Butch had now come to recognize as rather vulnerable because he knew what it meant. The rich aroma of dark spices filled his nostrils, filled his head, seeped into his skin. It was like being wrapped up in a warm blanket of V; the dark spice reminding him of the Turkish V always smoked.

Then he realized that everyone else had also picked up on the smell and evidently it was the equivalent of a crazy dog running into the room and tearing the place apart ... because that's about the reaction it created.

"Holy Fuck," someone said.

"Well *that* cat is outta the bag," Rhage muttered, somehow managing to look both as guilty as hell and pleased as punch.

Fabio wiped a hand down his face. "Virgin in the Fade."

Military man stood rigid, looking between Butch and V, then Wrath. "My Lord?"

The King had that stunned mullet look on his face, which was almost amusing on a man that large and intimidating. He shook his head and pointed at them. "Both of you. My office. NOW!"

V nodded at Butch and followed Wrath. Butch fell into step behind them and caught a glimpse of Rhage, bringing up the rear.

Wrath sighed as he looked back. "*Both* does not include you, Rhage."

The blonde actually pouted, sucking his teeth. "Ah, man."

As they started up the stairs, watching the very broad back of the King, a voice spoke from behind them.

"Should've known V would go for the mouthy, royal pain in the ass type." Butch turned to see Black Eyes watching them; still glaring, but with an amused glint in his eyes, as if the chaos was enjoyable.

Butch pointed at him, "Fuck you very much," he grinned, He started back up the stairs, leaving an amused looking V to follow him.

It took all he had not to plant a wet one on Butch as they walked up the stairs. No one deserved a "fuck you very much" more than Z when he was in a mood. They were supposed to be solemn though. After all, V was about to get his ass handed to him. Plus, there was no need to rub it in everyone's face. He should've been upfront about his cop a long time ago. Never should've kept it from his Brothers that he'd bonded, but Rhage was right (Virgin help them all if it became a habit) that cat was out of the bag now. Way out. His Brothers wouldn't care about Butch being male, V's sexual leanings had never been a big secret or surprise, but they did care that he wasn't a vampire male.

They'd been through all this with Rhage and it had taken its toll on everyone. All of them suffered right along with the big guy when it came to the rythe so they weren't going to be happy that V may have caused that very scenario to go down again. He hated that it'd happened this way, but watching Butch's broad shoulders roll as he looked this way and that to gawk at the surroundings, he knew it was so going to be worth it.

"In," Wrath snapped as he opened the door to his office.

They both followed him in as the candles in the room flared to life. With his mind, Wrath slammed and locked the door behind them without so much as looking back towards the door.

"Shit," Butch muttered. "He's pissed."

"And he has excellent hearing," Wrath bit off, leaning back against his desk. "Sit."

V parked it on the small sofa nearest Wrath's desk and Butch sat beside him. It was no mistake that the King stood as they sat. It was all part of

the penitent roll that V had better start playing. But damn he sucked at penitent.

"Don't tell me that we're going through the same shit we did with Rhage," Wrath said.

"Okay," V answered succinctly, locking his fingers together over his stomach and leaning back on the couch.

"Fuck you,V!" Wrath shoved off his desk. "Fuck you and your know it all, grander than thou attitude." He circled around behind his desk.

Butch sat forward like he was about to light into Wrath for talking to his man that way, but V stopped him with a hand on his arm. This was all a part of it. This was how he and Wrath communicated. How they almost always communicated. In fact, pretty much every conversation started off with a pissing contest. They had to bitch at each other before they got down to business. That's just the way it went when you put two control freaks together.

"I tried to tell you sooner, my lord." V used the expression to mend fences. "I'll admit it should have been much sooner. That's on me, but I did try before today and you've been so, shall we say preoccupied, that you basically told me that me and my bullshit could wait."

Wrath grimaced. "I've had a lot on my mind. But this," he indicated the two of them on the couch, "is not something you keep from your Brothers."

"And the future heir of our race isn't something you keep from them either," V's eyes narrowed.

Wrath's brow furrowed as he growled and looked down his sunglasses at V. "In the Old World I could kill you for-"

V cocked an eyebrow at his King.

"Touche, my insolent brother," Wrath finished instead. "Touche."

"Wait," Butch shifted to face V, "What?"

"I tried to discuss you and me and all of this with my King," V explained, "before the bomb got dropped in the middle of the fucking foyer for all and sundry to witness, but he's been bent all to hell because his shellan is expecting. Beth? She's pregnant."

Cop's eyes flew wide. "Really? That's awesome! Congratu-"

V shook his head.

"That's not awesome?" Butch asked.

"Pregnancies are rough on our kind," V told him. "Even though I've seen it in my dreams and tried to tell Wrath that it would all result in the healthy, future heir of our race ... Our mighty King is still scared shitless."

Wrath sat down with a thud. The burden of his stress was so obvious to V, but others hadn't seen it yet. Or if they had, they took it as just the usual strains of ruling.

"Thank you for your editorial, but this isn't about me or my shellan," Wrath ground out through clenched teeth. "This is about you lying."

Omission is still lying. You've bonded with a human, broke a cardinal rule by bringing him into our home and into our lives, he obviously knows Rhage and Beth already, and yet I've never laid eyes on him in my life." His fist hit the desk so hard, V thought it might crack. "To say that I am fucking pissed as hell is a gross understatement. So start fucking talking, right fucking now."

V thought it wise to do exactly that.

Just like with opening up to Butch, he laid it all out. He'd learned that lesson well - when the shit hits the fan, better to just spill your guts and worry about clean up after. The dirty metaphor seemed fitting as well.

V slipped, told him everything. How he'd met Butch, how he'd bonded, how Butch had already fought more than his fair share of lessers. Hell, he figured he'd take a note from his cop's book - in for an inch, in for a mile. Wrath looked like he might have a coronary at that bit of info, but he kept going. He explained how Butch met Rhage, how he already knew Beth before today, how the cop was solid and he'd bet his life on it, and how, no matter what, he wasn't giving Butch up.

Butch watched them with hesitancy. When V was finished, Wrath leaned forward, resting his forehead on his temple fingers.

"Why is it never simple? It's never easy with you. Just once, why couldn't it be something mundane like you brought home a cat or you had a fender bender?" Wrath looked like he was speaking to the dainty desk, but V knew it was all meant for him.

"I'm a complicated male, my lord," V replied.

Wrath shook his head. "I cannot believe ... no, yes I can. I can totally believe you'd pull this shit." He slipped into the Old Language. "I didn't

want to venture down this road again. Rhage's rhythe was enough to last us all a lifetime."

V replied, still using their language. "I know, but like with Rhage, there is only one other option."

Wrath's eyebrow arched from behind his glasses.

"He stays," V nodded towards Butch, "Or I go."

"V, this is not-"

"He stays," V stopped him, "Or I go. I mean no threat, merely a statement of fact. You can mull it over all you want, but I was decided long ago. Before I even knew I was decided. I'm not giving him up. Not for you, not for anyone. I will take whatever punishment is necessary, so long as he stays."

Wrath shoved up his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. "You know none of us want you to go."

"I don't want to go either. So it seems like a simple decision to me."

"Nothing about this damn job is simple," Wrath replied. "Dammit, V. You've given me no choice. You lied to me, to your Brothers."

"If you want to meet with mommy and decide what she feels is appropriate, whatever. It changes nothing. I'd go through Rhage's ceremony three times if that's what it will take. If it was Beth, so would you. So with all due respect, let's commence with dropping the bullshit. My lord."

Wrath spread his hands out, palms down, on his desk. He studied his fingers and the heavy ring on his hand. An immeasurable silence past and he finally spoke without looking up. "If I didn't love you as my Brother," he told V in the old language, "I would kick your ass."

"I know, my King," V nodded, thinking he'd try.

Wrath looked up and V felt the burning stare from behind those glasses. "He doesn't leave your side until we've ironed out the details. Details on him and on the rythe. We clear?"

Hope bloomed in his chest. "He won't. He's not going to go anywhere, I swear it."

"And even then, he goes nowhere alone until I decide he can be trusted."

V nodded in agreement.

"You would have him as your mate?" Wrath asked, looking like he already knew the answer.

"We haven't discussed that. Yet."

"Well he's here now, so regardless of whether it comes to that or not, if he feels the same about you or not, he's your responsibility. No matter what happens, no matter what that might mean, he is yours to deal with. You prepared for what that might mean?"

V knew what he meant. If Butch woke up one day and decided this wasn't his shtick, V could never let him go. Butch was here or he was no where,

and though his infallible insight told him that here was where Butch wanted and was supposed to be, he knew he should make sure Butch understood.

"I know what it means, but it won't ever come to that."

Beside him, Butch was getting shifty, clearly aggravated that he had no idea what was being said since they'd used their language, but trying his damndest to be patient.

V looked at him and Butch cut his eyes back. "Are you two done with talking in code now? I'm trying to be cool, V. I really am. But this keeping the human in the dark bullshit was old before it even began so..."

"It's okay, cop. The King and I are just making sure we understand each other. Now that you're here, he wants it clear that you can't just up and outtie, you feel me?"

Butch looked at Wrath and then at V like they'd both lost their minds. "Like I would? I said I was coming with and, no offense, but until I know the Get Along Gang downstairs isn't twitchy, I'm going to make sure I have your back."

Wrath actually had to hide his amusement and surprise at that. "You're going to have your hands full," he said to V.

"You have no idea," V arched his brow.

"Don't over-share, my Brother." He spoke in the Old Language, "But, so long as he doesn't get twitchy and after I make sure he's for real ... you'll have my blessing."

Immediately, V knew he was grinning like an idiot. Worse than Rhage when Mary made him Sunday brunch to feed five. "Thank you," was all he said though.

Wrath stood and Butch popped up, rubbing his palms on his pants as if he were well past ready to get out of there. "So, we done here or...?"

As Wrath walked around his desk towards the door, V leaned in closer to Butch. "We're done. You anxious to get me alone or what?"

"Well there's that," Butch admitted, "but this curlicue office gives me the itch. Tiffany lamps. Really?"

"Ears," Wrath said, turning back, one hand on the door. "I may be losing my sight, but my ears work just fine."

Butch's attempted an apologetic look and as Wrath yanked open the door, an off balance Rhage stumbled into the office. He tried to look non-chalant at being cold busted eavesdropping, but failed completely.

"Oh. Uhm ... Right! So, Beth," Rhage turned to Wrath. "Yeah, the queen was asking for you. Mmm hmm, and ahhh, I told her that I would come and get you ... so here I am."

Wrath didn't even dignify his babbling with a reply, just walked past him with a shake of his head, muttering something about being three peas in a pod.

"So?!" Rhage asked, nudging V as he tried to pass him by as well.

V stopped as Butch slowed in the doorway. "So ... the cop stays."

"Alright," Rhage grinned and then caught himself. "I mean, okay. That's cool, I guess. Y'know, whatever."

For the first time in who knew how long, V actually gave Rhage a friendly slap on the shoulder. Of course, he couldn't be too sure if Hollywood was just happy for him or happy that he now had something to give V shit about for the rest of his long vampire life. Either way, it was good. All the times he'd razzed Rhage for finding Mary and being so happy it was disgusting, Rhage never once looked like he really minded. Now, V knew why.

~*~

V pushed open the sliding door after leading Butch down the tunnel towards the Pit. It was odd, he was nervous of what Butch would think of the place. He didn't normally care, a like it or lump it kinda guy, but this was different. The Pit was even more a part of V than the penthouse had ever been.

He hung back as Butch moved further inside, looking around and taking it all in.

"S nothing like the big mansion, huh?"

"No, it's not. Sorry."

Butch turned to look at him. "What - are you kidding?! This is so much better. All that marble and shit?" Butch shook his head, running a hand along the leather couch. "Too fancy for my taste ... and what is up with Wrath's desk?"

He turned to lean against the leather, that Butch smile already in place, the one that was all warmth and that dimple near his chin made V's chest tighten. "Nah, leather couches and big screens are definitely better."

Then his cop caught sight of what was in the corner. "Ah no way! You got Foosball?!"

V followed him over to the table, Butch looking like a kid in a candy store instead of a 37 year old hardened cop. He spun the handles and moved the players about the table, then looked up at V, arching his eyebrow and smirking at him with that telltale spark in his eyes. "Oh I am SO kicking your ass at this. Wanna play?"

And that's when V realized that his cop wasn't freaking out at all about what he'd heard with Wrath, or the fact that he'd been dumped in the middle of another world, with vampires. V walked up to him, brushing a hand along the wood of the table before meeting Butch's gaze.

"You're not freaking out about Wrath or the others or ... all that was said about how, now that you're here, you're here?"

Butch stopped spinning the handles and placed a hand over V's where it rested, rough thumb running over the back of his hand. "I told you before I accept who and what you are. I tried before to just walk away from you and that went about as shitty as possible. I'm with you. So if that means that Fabio and friends are part of the deal, then so be it." Butch grinned cheekily and patted V's hand. "Anyway, you seem to get along with them okay, so it can't be that hard."

V answered that with a half hearted slug to Butch's upper arm.

Butch gripped where he was punched, rubbing it, grin still firmly in place.

"True enough though, I guess," V agreed.

Butch turned his body into V's, moving to rest a hand against V's stomach. Rubbing in soothing circles before resting it on V's hip. "We'll figure it out, right? I mean, if the 'King' hasn't thrown me out on my ass then I think we're good. Everything else, we'll work it out as it comes."

"Your job?"

Butch looked thoughtful. "Yeah, I've thought about that too. I ... I love being a cop. I do. But even when they benched me, I still worked ... with you. I don't know that they'll ever let me do my job the way it oughta be done anyway. Hell they could fire me for doing things the right way! I just ... so long as I can still do my thing like when you and I were out hunting, and then with Rhage and his dragon thing, I'm good."

V nodded, looking at his cop. Really looking at him. The relaxed drop to the broad shoulders, the warmth of his hands, the intensity of the hazel eyes. Butch patted his hip a last time, turning to the table, nodding towards him as he said, "So you wanna play or not? You're just stalling because you're scared of my skills. Admit it."

V had no idea how he got so fucking lucky. How had he found the one person that fit him and was so willing to accept him? It made playing Foosball the last thing on his mind. After having a balls of steel cop backing him and and willing to take on a room full of vampires, V didn't feel like playing at all. He stepped behind Butch and turned him around. V cradled his face and proceeded to kiss the breath right out of his cop.

It seemed Butch was down with that plan too, as V felt him smile against his lips.

"Or we could do this."

V's need flared. Having Butch in his home, having him be down with whatever came their way and showing no weakness towards his Brothers, the confidence was intoxicating. He pushed Butch into the table, pinning him there with a leg between his thighs. V rubbed his thigh against the growing hardness in Butch's pants, reaching down and ripping the already wrinkled shirt up and over his head. He ran a hand down his cop's chest, through the dusting of hair, loving the feel of it, the strength there, moving down to cup him through his pants, tracing the outline with his thumb. Butch groaned, pushing his hips into it, now forcefully pulling clothes off, V's shirt already on the floor and the cop reaching for his fly.

V stilled him, "No. I want you first." And with that, V unbuckled him and dragged down his pants and boxers as he kneeled in front of him. Butch's erection bobbing in front of him, he wrapped a hand around it, giving it a long stroke before guiding into his mouth.

"Fuuuuuuck. Ah- V," Butch moaned, there was a rattle, his cop probably trying to grip onto the table. It had to be at least a little uncomfortable, those handles at his back, but Butch wasn't complaining. V didn't give him much of a chance either, he just pressed on. Sucking him down, pulling back to suck hard on the tip, circling it with his tongue before drawing him back into his mouth. There was a soft thump as at least one string of Foosball players kept getting bumped across the table, and V moved his hands to grip at Butch's ass. Pulling him away from the table, V took him in deeper, and each time Butch moaned, or swore, or mutter something nonsensical, V felt the possessiveness for his cop swell. The tightness in his pants grew, his fangs started to elongate and he tried to cover them with his lips. He massaged the firm muscles of Butch's ass, controlling his thrusts into his throat. V felt Butch move a hand into his hair. The rough hands stroking his hair, threading fingers through, brushing down the side of V's face. Butch brought with him an ability to be so fucking intimate, and so at ease with showing what he felt, the same man that stood his ground protecting him, and insisted that he fought beside him. V's bonding scent roared, the scent now already soaked so deeply into Butch's pores that V could smell it everywhere.

And as he felt Butch start to climax, his hips getting out of rhythm and the grip in his hair tightening, he reached out for Butch's mind. Bright and warm and steady, it was a swirling mix of arousal and affection. Butch was picturing V on his knees, doing this to him. The feeling of V's hair, how it was so damn soft, even on his face. How each time V took him in deeper, he could feel the tiniest brush of those fangs, and how it turned Butch on more. And the questioning part of his mind that couldn't understand the smell, the intoxicating smell that reminded him of V.

He tapped into that link between them. It's my bonding scent, cop. And it's there because of you. You're covered in it.

At that, Butch moaned, beyond the nonsense words he usually started spouting. Both hands now gripping V's head and, as he came closer, V relaxed his neck, letting Butch fuck his mouth. The strength in those arms and the movement of his ass as he thrust making V now painfully hard in his leathers.

V moved a hand from his ass to slide around Butch's inner thigh, brush against his balls, stroke the soft skin, press against the sensitive spot behind them. The other hand moved down the smooth skin of his ass, brushing gently at the seam. No more movement, just enough of a reminder.

And Butch's mind was bright sparks, the memory of them being together, of V fucking him, the power and strength involved, the fact that it turned him on. V sensed confusion at what the bonding scent meant, but that was it, Butch was apparently totally okay with whatever being covered in V's scent meant.

It means you're mine.

Butch groaned, spilling warmth into V's mouth, his hands gripping tightly in his hair.

V held him steady as Butch swayed. Once he thought Butch was steady on his feet, V slid his pants up as he stood, guiding them both over to one of the couches.

"Damn," Butch muttered to himself, practically melting down into the soft leather. "I ... I don't think I'll ever look at Foosball the same."

V grinned and slouched back. "A more complimentary light now or-"

"Oh! Definitely seeing it in a new and improved light," Butch nodded as he settled back as well. "Shit," he sighed. "X-rated Foosball. Color me a fan!" he laughed and V realized he was totally sapping out on the guy.

Not only did his cop make him laugh more than anyone else ever, but now he'd get to hear his cop's laughter any and all the time. Shit. He should just go ahead and buy a diary and a Hello Kitty pen, because he was admittedly that far gone. Rhage was going to have a fucking field day.

Butch's breathing slowed as he took a slow look-see around the place from the comfort of the couch. Eventually, his gaze settled on V, and slid lower to what was also obviously a fan of their Foosball in V's leathers.

Butch shifted his weight so he could turn towards V, bending one knee up on the couch and resting his head against the back.

"So..." he let the word hang there as he rested his hand on V's thigh, then slid it up the leather pants until it brushed against his erection.

"Mmm ... so," V put his gloved hand over Butch's to rub harder.

Butch pulled at the button and zipper, "I don't think I can, so soon after-"

"No," V shook his head, drawing his cop's hand into his pants to touch him, palm against delicate skin. "I just want you to touch me," he told him. "Like this," he brought Butch's hand up and swept it back down and over his balls.

Butch helped him drag the leathers lower so that they were at his thighs. He guided Butch's hand, but it wasn't long before his cop had taken over completely. Leaning over him, Butch pinned him to the sofa with a kiss, and with V's legs effectively trapped by his leathers, Butch definitely had the upper hand. V thrust up into his clenched fist, having to lift his hips

higher each time as Butch raised his hand. V nipped at his lip when Butch lifted his hand for the third time. "You're a cock tease," he growled, but he knew the glow was there in his eyes.

He wrapped an arm around Butch to pull him closer, just as Butch began pumping him in earnest. Butch pushed him hard into the sofa, hand on his nape, locking him in place as he fucked V's mouth with his tongue. Fuck was right. Slow and deep sucks at his mouth, tilting V's head to pull at his lips, thrust of his tongue, V's mouth filled with the taste. He loved it when Butch took over, so much so it surprised him. V relinquished control to no one, but his cop made it impossible to resist. His lips tingled with the harsh brush of Butch's perpetual shadow, and as Butch pulled back to look at him, the hazel eyes flashed with want.

"Come for me," he said.

The hold on V's neck remained as Butch assessed his face, trailing his gaze down to watch his hips move in sync with Butch's touch. As Butch met his gaze, his voice became scratchy and low, like he was teetering on the same edge as V.

"Fuck ... you look hot like that," Butch said.

V pushed himself off the couch, eyes squeezing shut, wanting harder and faster. He was so damn close. When he opened them, Butch was looking at him, small smile on his face, but not one of his cheeky ones. It was warm, affectionate and ... loving. His eyes were trained on V's, the hazel now a deeper shade of green. The hand on his neck shifted a tad and

Butch's thumb brushed against his temple near the tats. His cop leaned down to kiss him once more.

"Come for me babe." he whispered against V's lips.

V's mind shifted as he came hard. Heat exploding from where Butch worked him, but also exploding in his chest. Pushing his hips harder into Butch's hands, he rocked the aftermath. He kept coming, wondering if it actually started all the way at his fucking toes, warmth spilling onto his stomach as he finally melted back into the couch. Sated, and not entirely sure his limbs would be up for moving, he felt Butch wipe at his stomach with what had to be one of their shirts.

He heard Butch sit back with a thump. When V eventually managed to open his eyes, he saw an entirely too pleased cop, leaning back on the couch like he had fucking won it.

"You alive in there, V?" the grin broadened.

"No," V let his eyes drift shut. "I'm long gone. I leave the Pit and all its riches to you."

Butch chuckled and nudged V until he opened his eyes again. "It's nice," Butch glanced around. "It's you, actually. More you than the other place."

The other place, where he had hid all his toys? It was also him, but he hadn't felt the need to bring out the goodies and use them on his cop. However, he did feel the need to keep this all truth thing running between them.

"Well this is where I live," V said. "The penthouse was ... where I fucked."

Butch turned his head to the side to look at him, an eyebrow raised.
"Fucked, huh?"

V lifted his hips and pulled his leathers back up, turning his body so he could lean into the couch arm and watch Butch as he explained. "Before you cop. You're the exception to just about every rule I've ever had, know that first. The penthouse was where I invited certain individuals who didn't mind certain activities."

That had his attention. His cop sat forward, tucking a leg up onto the couch. "Soooo ... you had other people-"

V interrupted him, "No. Not like that. Just one at a time. Vampires only. They'd met me there, I dominated them and sometimes I fucked them. Tied them up, got rough, and got off on the control. It was what they wanted as well and it gave me what I needed without having any strings. I hardly even touched them." V looked down and studied his nails. He felt very much like he was flaying open his chest and taking everything out for Butch's inspection.

He waited a beat, meeting Butch's gaze head on. "I tell you the truth when I say you're the first person I've kissed."

Butch's mouth dropped, shock plain in his voice. "Seriously?"

V eyeballed him in what he hoped was his don't-I-look-serious face. "Dead serious. Never interested before."

Butch seemed to process that for a moment, before nodding his head. "Makes sense, y'know, with who you are. Not wanting to get close." A small smirk grew on his face. "And God knows your a control freak."

V raised an eyebrow at him.

The smirk turned into a grin. "Oh c'mon. You gotta admit your a tad bossy."

V had to laugh at that. Once again, Butch surprised him with being totally okay with all that V was.

His cop shrugged. "It's cool though. Bossy I don't mind ... as long as you don't start gagging me when we're having sex."

"And not be able to hear that smart mouth? I'd never do that." Nope, V was perfectly content to hear Butch's sex babbles for the rest of his life.

"You'll have to show me sometime."

V nearly gave himself whiplash with the way he jerked his head up to see if his cop was joking.

Apparently not.

Butch ran a hand down the inner seam of his pants. "I don't mean breaking out a whip to beat me and leave bruises, just-" he shrugged with one shoulder. " ...I don't know."

V had to gather himself. "I do. Believe it or not, I think I might know what you mean ... and I'd never do anything I knew you wouldn't like." V certainly couldn't say he hadn't had thoughts of tying his cop up and driving him out of his mind wild on many, many occasions.

It was Butch's turn to stare. "Oh yeah?"

"Nice Irish Catholic boy, like you?" V tapped his temple, knowingly. "I know. Nothing too dark, just a little ... shadowy."

Butch snorted. "Shadowy?"

"Dim. Gray. Not black. Not vanilla, but not dark chocolate either. Nothing too dark for the newbie." He pushed at Butch's leg on the couch when the guy had the nerve to laugh.

Butch deepened his voice, all Vincent Price and taunting. "Darkness falls across the-"

V shoved harder until Butch swayed from his position. "For the love of God, I'm gonna have to stick my tongue in your mouth just to shut you up, huh?"

"That's one option," Butch's smile was damn near blinding.

V decided he'd weigh up his other options as he moved over to press Butch into the couch.

Butch put his socked feet up on the coffee table and slid down into the softness of the leather sofa. A guy could get used to this real quick. Hell,

he'd lived in the Pit just under three weeks and he was already used to it. Unlike V's penthouse, the Pit was somewhere a guy could kick back with his feet on the table and have a beer without using a coaster. Except around the computer desk. Only liquid that got near V's "Toys", as he called them, was V's shot of Goose. Butch had learned that rule quickly when he'd set his coffee down next to the keyboard one night. He had to hand it to V though, he didn't go ape shit, but he did look at Butch as if he'd lost his ever loving mind. Cup, Butch, cup, Butch - V's eyes had darted between the two. It was pretty easy to get the hint.

"Sorry," Butch had said, picking the cup up in a hurry.

V had visibly relaxed. "Nah, it's fine, cop," he'd said. "I'm just a pain in the ass about the Toys. It's my bad, but I don't think I can help it."

Butch had grinned and rubbed V's shoulder with his free hand, "'S okay. Neurosis is part of your charm."

That had earned him a one finger salute, but since it was accompanied by a smile, it was all good.

The other solid thing about life in the Pit was that he still got to go out on patrol with V. The Brothers wouldn't let him get into the thick of the action if things got hot, but they relied on him completely for other things. He was still doing the cop thing, using his years of experience to shed a different kind of light on their plight against the Lessening Society. Butch was stunned to learn how long the battle had gone on, but he could help. And he did. Which had led him to one of the easiest, and somehow still toughest, decisions of his life...

It was never easy for a cop to give up the badge. He'd seen retirees, that had served damn near 30 years on the force, with tears in their eyes as they packed it in. For him, it was different. He wasn't packing in shit. He was still doing all the detective work he'd ever done, just not in the name of the great city of Caldwell, New York. Obviously it didn't matter though, because on the night he'd gone to the station to turn in his resignation, a fifty pound boulder had landed in his gut.

He had to do it. He *wanted* to do it. But the job had been his only life for so long, it was like severing a limb.

"You want me to help you pack?" V had asked, suddenly showing up at his

desk.

"Nah," Butch shook his head before he jerked it up to look at V. "What the hell are you doing here?"

"Is that anyway to talk to your new partner?"

"Shhhh, keep your voice down."

"Ah, calm down, cop. They won't even remember I was here, much less what I said."

Butch knew he was in a pissy mood and that he had no right to take it out on V, but V was an easy target. He could handle it *and* he was standing right there. "First of all, I ask again, what the hell are you doing here? Second, you can stop calling me cop, because I'm not anymore. Third, you wanna explain how they won't remember you, because no flattery intended but you're pretty fucking hard to forget. And fourth ... what the hell are you doing here?"

V had had the gall to look amused. Amused! He came around Butch's old desk and leaned back against it with one ankle crossed over the other.

"First," he'd held up a finger, "you know I gotta follow you everywhere so that ought to tell you what I'm doing here. Wrath says I'm your shadow if I want you to stay, then I'm your motherfucking shadow. Get over it. Second," he held up two fingers, "You will always be a cop, so I'm always gonna call you cop, cop. Get over it. Third, I told you I can erase short term memories and these guys," he looked at the four officers milling about, being far too curious about the two of them, "are a piece of cake to wipe. Fourth *and* fifth," he had all his fingers up, "I'm here because I give a shit about you and I wasn't going to let you go through this alone. It's tough to leave your old life even if the new one is better, so here I am being all supportive and amazing and shit." He grinned enough to show his fangs as he grabbed Butch's collar and pulled him in close. "Get used to it," he said, before planting a kiss on Butch right there in front of God and everybody.

It was fast and hot and before he knew it, V had released him. "I'll wait on you right outside," he said and strolled towards the front doors.

The four uniformed officers that stood frozen in place, staring at both

Butch and V like they'd been hit with a cattle prod, changed expressions as soon as V passed them. All of a sudden they wore blank stares and looked around as though they'd lost their car keys. Butch went along as though nothing had happened, packing up his few remaining items and leaving the keys to his Crown Vic for Jose.

Butch wiggled his feet on the coffee table. They were sore as shit due to all the work he'd done the night before. There was no shortage of detecting work within the Brotherhood. It wasn't that he didn't miss his old life at all, it's just that there wasn't a whole lot to miss.

His new life on the other hand, turned out to be an even bigger surprise than he thought.

The Brothers had all been pretty decent to him, if you considered Z's silence and Tohr's quiet respect as decent. Phury was polite, Wrath was exactly what you'd expect from a King, and Rhage was a damn trip. He was the only one that was very social and was always game for some coffee and gossip in the kitchen. Any hour. It was a good thing too because, through Rhage, Butch got all the deets on the mansion's inhabitants. He was like the best CI a cop could have, sharing the intel Butch needed so he didn't feel like an outsider. It helped make the enormous place feel more like a home and made the large cast of V's people a bit more manageable.

Butch's nights were filled with meetings and patrols, always paired with V and Rhage. Turned out they made a pretty mean trio. After that, it was either back to the mansion to meals at a table that was bigger than his entire old apartment or the rest of the night at a bar with his boy. His days were filled with ... well ... V. And he wasn't complaining.

Butch's mouth tugged up into a smile. He'd be a sonuvabitch if he'd ever predicted it, but his crazy ass was living and *sleeping* with a male ... and he'd never been happier. V was an intelligent, arrogant, proud, private, powerful, OCD, control freak motherfucker and he and Butch suited each other perfectly. It made little sense on paper, but paper wasn't where it counted. And every time Butch thought about where it *did* count, he could swear he blushed a little.

The things V did ... the things Butch found that he could do...

Damn!

He'd started to wonder if he'd enjoy changing it up too, but how exactly did one approach the subject? *So ... I was just wondering if you'd mind lying underneath me while I-*

Just then the object of his wishful thinking walked in the door.

No. Not walked. Hobbled.

What the fuck?

"What the hell happened to you?" Butch blurted before he could temper his reaction.

V's head shot up and he winced as he looked at Butch.

Shit.

"Nothing," V grumbled, shuffling in.

"Nothing, my ass," Butch was off the couch and in V's way. "Nothing don't make you drag your leg. I thought you were helping Rhage with something?"

"I was." V grabbed his Goose as he sidestepped Butch and headed down the hall, obviously intending to shut him out. Butch didn't do shut out.

"Helping him jump off the roof?" he reached out and latched on to V's elbow, not pulling or turning him, just holding him still. "Like I'm just going to ignore the fact that you're almost crawling in? Just let you wall up and do your 'I am an island' routine in the bedroom?" Butch shook his head. "Not gonna happen."

He felt V resist, the tension running from his shoulder, down his arm, and right into Butch's hand. V shrugged Butch off, moving further into the bedroom, wincing as he pulled the cap off the Goose.

Butch followed, hot on his heels. V's dark eyebrows were drawn together, lips pressed. He was in pain and doing his 'all under control' V thing.

"V, start talking, 'cause you know I'm not gonna leave it and I'm pretty sure I can outrun you at the moment." He grabbed at the Goose and

placed it on the bedside table. "Where were you? You two run into trouble?"

V sighed, "No. Nothing like that. It was ... a technicality. Something that had to be done for you to stay."

Butch stared him down as V picked the Goose up again and took a long swallow.

"Details, V," he was losing all semblance of patience. "I'm not a fucking mind reader. What technicality?"

"It's a ritual," he blurted, setting the bottle down. "A kind of ceremony. It evens out the shit that went down. Rhage had to do it when he lied about Mary. Nobody likes it, but it makes it so everything is balanced and we can be together. It was necessary."

"And what, it was *necessary* to hit you with a two by four?" Butch hadn't even really noticed, but V was wearing some kind of silk robe, tied at the front. Butch laid a hand over the black silk, feeling the strong chest underneath. When V winced again, Butch's hands were on the sides, slipping through. The marks on V's chest were not subtle.

"*Fuck.*"

The angry, red marks were striped across his chest, already healing thanks to V's handy super-X-man like-powers. But it didn't matter. The surge of anger that ran through Butch was unlike anything he'd experienced. V stood there, letting Butch undress him, eyes on the opposite wall as if resigned to the fact that Butch was flipping his shit. And so he fucking should be.

"Who did this?!" Butch grabbed V's chin and made him look at him. The look there was that steely V resolve, but shit, Butch was just as stubborn. "Was this the King? That scary freak of a guy?"

Butch went for his Glock in the drawer. Not that he was gonna shoot up the place, but this at least leveled the playing field when up against super beings who could beat the crap out of you and then wear you as a hat. V knew him too well though, steadying him with a hand around his wrist.

"Leave it cop. It's done."

"Done my ass. And why wasn't this run by me first?"

"They don't need your permission, Butch. It was all of them. All of my Brothers. My world is a lot bigger than you realize and if we're gonna be together and stay in it, there's some shit that had to happen."

"Don't give me permission crap, I'm not your keeper, but you *are* mine here and if the roles were reversed, what would you be doing now?"

V let out a breath, face relaxing. "They'd be on their asses so quick they wouldn't know what hit them." V pushed the drawer shut. "I get it. I do. But I let this happen. I wanted it to happen. It means that you can stay and my Brothers and I can move on."

"So, is this it? Or you gonna come back here hobbling once a month? 'Cause I'm telling you now, that shit won't fly."

V reached for Butch's arms, holding on to his bicep, running his hands up and down. "This was it. It's done now. Hard to believe, I know, but this was a good thing. No reason for you to be all pissed."

Butch let out a breath, taking his hand off the drawer and running it through his hair. He was coming down from the biggest mad-on, hands still tingling from the adrenaline, still itching to make someone hurt for hurting V, but he nodded. "Fuck V. If I didn't love you so much, I wouldn't *be* so damn pissed."

The hands soothing his arms stopped. Actually, everything stopped.

The intensity with which V looked at him made the soul baring statement seem like it was literally hanging there in mid air between them. His insides were out for inspection. It made Butch twitchy. He needed V to say something. It didn't matter what.

Instead, V pounced, so suddenly in his space and crushing their mouths together that anything Butch had intended for filling the awkward silence was lost in the slide of V's tongue. It wasn't bossy V, or take over and make you lose your mind V. The kiss was tinged with desperation and vulnerability. V, clinging to the sides of Butch's face, hands crushing his ears to his skull, before moving one arm over his shoulder to wrap them closer together.

Butch knew V. Knew that their intimacy was a new thing and he could bet that no-one had ever told V that they loved him. V would have never allowed anyone to get close. Not that Butch had a line of past hook ups claiming their undying love for him either.

Butch slid the silk off V's shoulders, undoing the tie in the silk pants. The material slid down easily, pooling at V's feet. Butch was suddenly down with the idea of such easy access and wondered if and why the ritual had been done naked.

V had him down on the bed, hands already pulling at Butch's T-shirt, pushing it up and over his head and tossing it over his shoulder. Sliding those hands up his chest, he brushed past his nipples before holding onto his waist, leaning in to claim Butch's mouth again. Those capable hands, that flew quickly over his keyboard, or slid a dagger into place before straightening his harness. The gloved one slid down the back of Butch's pants, the other finally reaching for the fly, getting him undone quickly. The denim and boxers slid down his legs and V leaned up to tug the socks off, eyes smiling as his eyebrow raised at the pattern.

"No socks during sex."

Butch pulled V back down. The solid feel pressing him into the mattress. And he wanted it. V didn't fuck him often, but it was happening more and more each time they went out together. It was a strange pull in his chest that made him want V to take him; take control. They would come back from a night, usually ending in blood and adrenaline rushes, sometimes having to tug Rhage's pretty boy, heavy-as-hell, ass up the stairs to Mary. But V would give him that look and Butch knew that the moment they stepped through the door of the Pit, V would have him naked and pressed up against the nearest wall. Taking him into his mouth, he'd have Butch reaching out for anything to hold on to while he blew his mind. The desperation and want usually had Butch pulling them into the room where V would slick him up and carefully take him apart.

Butch wanted that now.

"V?"

V's hand was travelling south, brushing down the cut of his hip.

"V ...I want you to..." Butch made to turn over when V stopped him.

He shook his head. "No."

"No?"

And then V looked at him. It was a look so open, so bare and vulnerable, that he'd probably only ever see it again if it was a rainy Tuesday in February on a leap year or something. While Butch was privy to V in a way no one else was, V was still the type to clam up and keep his feelings on the DL. Hundreds of years had given him damn good practice. But V was asking for him for something and it made Butch's heart leap into his throat.

"You want me to-"

Butch, for once, ran out of words. What V was silently asking was not just what he'd been thinking about earlier. It meant so much more. And Butch would bet his gun that it was something he'd never asked anyone. Ever.

V proved him right by rolling onto his stomach, fine curve of his ass in the air, letting out a hiss of pain as the sheets hit his chest. He swivelled his head to look up at Butch, hand moving to touch his leg. "In my nightstand."

Butch leaned for the drawer, coming back with the tube in his hand. V had used this on him many times. Confident fingers warming it as he pressed into Butch, opening him. Butch looked back at the curve of V's back, the curl of dark hair at his nape where it'd grown longer. V spread his thighs, turning his face into the pillow and no. It wouldn't do.

"No, wait. I ... I wanna see your face," Butch said.

V turned his face back, staring at Butch briefly before nodding, curling himself onto his side, ass facing Butch. He reached for it, stroking the hard muscle, smoothing where it dipped into V's spine. Looking back down at the tube in his hands, it felt heavy. Butch had never done this. Plenty of women, but this was different. He didn't want to fuck V. He wanted to make love. If he hurt V or did something wrong or-

"It's a simple flip-cap mechanism, cop. It's not that difficult." The comment was accompanied by a smirk. He was attempting to distract

Butch from his freak out. It worked.

"Fuck you, V."

He raised a perfect eyebrow, as if *well, would you?*

"It's ok. You remember what I do to you."

Butch let out a shaking laugh, "When my brain isn't melting out my ears, yeah, I remember." Butch moved to settle himself nearer, knees brushing the backs of V's thighs. The marks were still bright on his chest, and it struck Butch that maybe V wasn't really up to this after being flayed by his family.

"V?" Butch ran a tentative hand down his arm. "You're sure you're not hurting too much?"

V took his hand, guiding it down between his legs so that Butch felt him throbbing hard.

"Guess not." Butch smiled a little, reaching for V's ass again. Remembering what V would do to him, he massaged the smooth muscle, the strong backs of his thighs, while bending down to kiss the curve of his shoulder. V sighed, relaxing into the movements, titling his head back as Butch pressed kisses to the side of his neck. When V closed his eyes, Butch opened the cap, pausing to slick his fingers. Trailing the cleft of V's ass, he slid his finger until he felt his entrance. Slicking and rubbing the hole, Butch circled it, spreading more of the stuff before pressing in. When the muscle gave way, Butch's finger was engulfed in a tight, hot heat. V's head still tilted back, eyes closed. Butch wanted to find that spot that made his spine become molten and anything remotely resembling a thought burned to a crisp. He wanted to do that to V.

When his finger brushed past something, V's hand gripped into the sheets as he pushed his ass back onto his finger. Butch rubbed again. This time it had V gripping tighter and letting out a strangled "*cop*." Butch continued to rub, the intensity of V's reactions turning him on until he was painfully hard. Slicking up more fingers, adding more until he had three sliding in, brushing that spot again, watching V try to keep it together, but seeing the sweat flatten the black curl at V's nape. V occasionally moaned, but more often pushed himself harder onto Butch's fingers. Butch wanted to fuck him. So damn bad he felt like his dick would explode. But watching V,

pleasure on his face, muscles moving and straining, hand brushing past his erection to try to relieve that ache ... Butch could've watched that for the rest of his fucking life.

V's eyes popped open and looked at him. The white was burning hot, the intensity combustible. "Cop..."

Butch nodded. He knew what it felt like to be where V was. So beyond pleasure it was pain. He slicked himself up. Lifting V's top leg, he curled an arm under, V still on his side. The position was perfect. He wanted to see V's face as he pushed in. Hand on his dick, he lined up, pressing against V's entrance until he felt it give way. There was more gripping and a grunt on his part. It was hard. Everything in him was screaming to push in, but he knew the feeling, the stretching, burning feeling. He waited until V gave him a nod, sliding in slowly until he was all the way in.

Inside of V.

His heat surrounding him, Butch bent down and found V's mouth.

~*~

V understood pain. Pain of battle, the good kind of pain you felt when you had fought with every last fibre, the bad kind of pain he'd been exposed to in his past.

This was different. Different when he felt Butch fully inside of him. Moving slowly at first as he kissed him sloppily, hand massaging his nape. Low, rough voice whispering words against his mouth. Words of 'beauty' and 'need'. The gun calloused hand moving to stroke his back, thread through his hair. Touching him everywhere. The shots of pure pleasure as Butch pushed himself inside, touching him where he needed it.

It was slow, and it was perfect, and it was painful. Because each time Butch left his lips and leaned back to thrust in deeper, he would look at him. And V didn't have to feel his thoughts to know *exactly* what was on Butch's mind. The intensity of the emotion was so fucking plain, it could be tattooed on his forehead.

Love.

Butch fucking loved him. He had blurted it out when he was pissed and now he loved him with his body. V had never had that, never felt it, never been close, never wanted to be. And this cop was slowly tearing him apart. V knew he wanted it all. Butch's name carved into his back. His name carved into Butch's. He wanted the whole damn thing.

"Touch yourself."

The voice was hoarse and Butch's eyes followed as V moved his hands down and wrapped them around himself. He was close, the slow build of what Butch did was shooting through his body. He tugged and couldn't help the moan as Butch thrust in harder. He was obviously getting there, the measured movements losing their rhythm. He looked back up at Butch, the affection and love in the hazel was warm, a hand moving to brush over the tats at his temple. Closing his eyes as Butch pushed back the hair. V had to squeeze his eyes shut to hold back the flood of emotions that Butch reached in and ripped out. But it didn't work. The longing to see the way his cop looked at him, the need to feel that, to *be* that, had him opening them again.

The fingers smoothed over the delicate skin of his temple and Butch wore a look of pure satisfaction. "You feel amazing. Thank you ... for giving me this."

Butch sped up and V followed him. The increase in speed, hitting that spot inside that had him tightening his grip. Sparks of pleasure shot through him. "Ahhh ... *Butch*."

"I know, babe. I'm right there with you. Come with me." The grip on his thigh tightened and V watched the sweat slide down Butch's chest as he thrust in. He gripped the sheets tighter, damn near ripping them off the bed. He was so fucking close.

And then he felt Butch shift, move down to kiss him deeply, pulling back to breath near his ear. "I meant what I said," the voice vibrated his ear, but it wasn't anywhere near the feelings that were coming out of his cop. V didn't have to try, they were being broadcast like he was yelling. The depth of emotion had V choking on his next breath.

"I love you, V."

And V moaned, eyes pricking and burning and pleasure shooting down his spine, making him spill into his hand. Butch groaned as his movements became erratic, pumping with his hips a few last times before V could feel the shooting warmth.

V felt Butch panting into the skin of his shoulder as he leaned heavily on him. V didn't mind at all.

After a moment, Butch groaned with the effort of movement. V felt him wipe at his stomach, cleaning him before settling down to spoon in behind. He felt Butch slip his arm underneath his head, the other settling on his stomach to pull him closer.

V settled in, the feel of Butch behind him one of comfort. "Mmmm, you smell nice," V mused aloud.

It seemed like an hour ... or maybe just a few minutes before V felt a nudge to his back. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Just thinking."

"Thinking....?"

"You make a great pillow."

He felt the laughter ruffle his hair. "Glad I can come in handy."

"You're handy for lots of stuff, cop."

"Yeah. Fuck me."

"Lemme get some sleep first, huh? Then we can work on that."

He felt another breath of a laugh and knew Butch was smiling. He felt his cop's breathing slow, fingers on his stomach tracing lazy patterns into his skin. V rolled over so they were facing, needing to see him as he asked something very important.

V watched as Butch cracked open an eyelid. "I thought the plan was sleep."

V smiled, surprised at how nervous he felt. "Yeah. First I've got to ask you

something. See ... there's another ritual that vampires have. A ceremony. This is a good one though. And it definitely requires your permission."

Six months later...

"You sure we have enough time?" Butch asked for the third time. He knew he was being, as the King called him, "a royal pain in the ass", but now that he went on patrol for real, he never wanted to appear slack.

"We aren't on 'til after midnight, cop. Chill."

Butch checked his daggers for what had to be at least the fourth time. They lay nestled in their holster, spread out neatly on the bed. V had made them last week, custom, and this was their first official night on the job. They were like pieces of art. Okay, pieces of art that could kill you because Butch knew how to wield them, but art nonetheless. In true V form, he'd tried to act like it was no biggie.

"I do them for all the Brothers," he'd said.

Yeah. What-the fuck-ever. Butch's daggers were special and one look was all it took for everyone to know it. Once you held them though ... you knew they were extraordinary. They were perfectly weighted for Butch's hands, the four black blades shined with the days V had spent, bent over heat and metal, obsessively focused on their perfection.

Butch took them for exactly what they meant. V's way of saying, "I love you."

The Brother didn't say it; he showed it. And not just with the daggers. With the way that he'd given of himself to prove his dreams about Butch were true, V had shown love. In the way that he stayed up for three days straight, researching any possible way that Butch could have vampire in his lineage, he'd shown love. In how he'd kept Wrath from chewing Butch in two as he'd needed to feed from Beth to survive ... yeah, that was fearless love. And in the way that he'd literally glowed with happiness after Butch's induction, V showed love.

And even before all that, when all the shit with the Omega went down...

If it wasn't for V and his ability to heal...

Well, Butch would be dead. That's where he'd be.

"Yo," V snapped his fingers from the other side of the bed. "Earth to Butch, you with me? You wanna stop molesting your gear and focus? I asked you what you thought. Don't leave me hanging."

Butch looked at his mate. His *hellren*. All six foot six of him, dressed for violence in shit kickers, black leather pants, black leather glove, and ... a Red Sox t-shirt.

"You can't be serious," Butch cracked up at the sight of V wearing a red t-shirt.

"What?" V turned toward the mirror and then back again. "The shirt is bad ass. What's the problem?"

"Not a problem for me. I just didn't know that a Red Sox tee was standard Brother-wear and I've *never* seen you wear anything but black. It's a bit inconspicuous to be wearing into Yankee Stadium *and* on patrol, dontcha think?"

"Nah," V shook his head, checking his reflection again as he slid on his harness. "It'll mostly be covered by my jacket, but it's the thought that counts."

"And I thought I was the one with the death wish," Butch muttered.

About a week ago, V had come to him with a "great idea". Butch was prepared for anything. Potato launchers; been there. Adding glowing green ground effects to Rhage's GTO; done that.

"We need to go to a Sox game," V had said. "Get out. Late fall at Yankees stadium. We wait 'til the last few innings, it'll be dark. We'll skip First Meal, be back in time for patrol."

Of course Butch had relented without argument. American baseball. Hot dogs. Cold beer. Red Sox. V. It was quite possibly the best mix ever. And he understood what V was offering. A bit of his old life. Do something

"normal", something human, something that had nothing to do with lessers or vampires or their war.

"S not a death wish, cop," V said now, rubbing on his shirt proudly. "Number one, no fan of the Yankee evil empire is even gonna be able to see the shirt, unfortunately. Number two, if they do, what are they going to do? Pick a fight? Doubtful. And third ... maybe it will attract some lessers later on tonight. Make the night interesting." He gave Butch a sideways grin. "Besides ... I got something for you too."

V pulled out a roll of navy.

"Oh God," Butch began to laugh.

"Well we can't be twins," V said. "That's going too far no matter who you are, but I thought this looked like you." He walked over and spread the shirt out over the top of Butch's plain gray undershirt.

"Navy doesn't really go with black."

V gave him a look. "You're getting worse than Phury. Just put the damn thing on. I had to order it special for your big ass too, so a little appreciation wouldn't kill you."

Butch grinned as he took off his shirt and folded it up to put in the drawer. He could feel V's eyes on him; no doubt looking at his back the way that Butch always looked at V's whenever he saw him shirtless. He was marked, just as plainly as his partner. V-I-S-H-O-U-S etched in big, bold letters across his back. Butch had told V he could get *Dhestroyer* if he preferred, but V said that would never do. He wanted *Butch* and that was the end of it. Then he'd made some smart ass comment that maybe C-O-P was an option too, just to make Butch laugh.

Butch tugged the shirt on and turned for V's approval.

"Now that is some of the hottest shit I have ever seen. No wait," V lifted Butch's harness from the bed and helped him slide it on. He stepped back with a look of heated approval. "*That* is."

V's eyes crinkled at the corners as he tugged Butch in for a kiss, making it a quick and hot slip of the tongue before he stepped back and grabbed his leather jacket. The room filled with a subtle mix of heat and spice and an

organic blend of Obsession for Men that would only grow stronger if they kept standing there.

"When we get home," V promised, knowing what it meant. "We start now and we'll miss the game."

And that night, as they sat at the game, beer in one hand, long legs spread out so that their knees touched, Butch touched his hand to his jacket, feeling the weapons underneath. He thought about his new home, this life and every aspect of it. He thanked God and the Scribe Virgin for what he had, then nudged V with a bump of his leg.

"Thanks," he said. "For tonight, for the shirt ... for everything."

V took a sip of his beer and nudged Butch back before looking at him. "You don't have to thank me, cop ... even though I feel exactly the same. You and me? It's the way things were meant to be, true."

Title: First Initiation Ceremony in 75 years.

Author: A collaboration of the TROIKA: [bitsofbrits](#) , [tekla](#) & [skybluerae](#)

Rating: R for language.

Characters: All the brothers.

Pairings: Vishous/Butch, Wrath/Headache, Z/Doom, Phury/Angst, Rhage/OMFGYAY.

Word Count: 964.

Disclaimer: Not ours, the boys are JR Ward's.

Summary: A majorly cracky view of Butch's initiation ceremony. This arose out of long msn chats. We decided to take a look at V and Butch's interaction from the perspective of the other Brothers.

Vishous was the last one to get the silver glove. Wrath was satisfied with the Ceremony so far. Mostly, he was glad a new Brother was joining them after all those years.

"My flesh." Vishous whispered after dripping his own blood in the skull. They were looking at each other, even the king could tell. The intensity of the moment was starting to get a little bit uncomfortable.

"Your flesh." Vishous' words and the bodies moving on the dais caught his attention then.

Wrath frowned. V was hesitating. Wrath couldn't see what he was doing, but the cop was just looking at him with a strange vulnerability. A beat. Then Butch offered his neck. The ceremony kept going and Wrath exhaled in relief, discarding that 'what the hell is that cop doing' feeling for later. The feeling that *something* was going down was just ridiculous, he told himself. Just. Ridiculous!

Right?

Wrath squinted into the dappled light of the cave. Going blind was tough, but wearing sunglasses in candlelight certainly didn't help matters. He roughly shoved up his shades, squinting harder.

What were those males doing?

Wasn't a damn thing wrong with any of his other senses; including his sensual sixth sense that currently tingled like a motherfucker.

"Uhm..." Z muttered beside him. "What the fuck's going on?"

Wrath let his sunglasses fall back on his nose and shook his head. He wasn't sure, but he *thought* that Vishous was adding a little something-something to the ceremony.

"I can't believe it," Rhage said from the other side of him, grinning. "The cop. Finally a Brother."

Wrath let that go and turned towards Zsadist. "As King ... should I, I don't know, stop them?" His voice low. He didn't want Hollywood overhearing. The damn vampire was excitable enough.

At that moment, Butch's hands drifted from the pegs in the wall and settled on V's waist.

Rhage was still grinning. For the moment. "Our cop. Gettin' all initiated. I never thought I'd Hey. I don't remember that part of my initiation."

"This is awkward." Wrath put his head in his hands, wishing they didn't have to do this shit naked. Wishing all of them weren't birthday suit butt naked.

Phury cleared his throat, leaning forward to peak around Z. "Should we leave or...?"

Z shoved him to stand up straight. "Fuck if I know! Maybe we could all just close our eyes," he offered, his lids fluttering closed.

"Times like these, I'm glad I'm blind," Wrath muttered.

"Amen to that," Z agreed.

Phury closed his eyes too, his neck craned towards the ceiling of the cave. "I can still hear them moaning though."

"Shhhhhhhh," Z hissed. "I wish I was blind."

"And deaf," Wrath covered his ears.

"Blind and deaf?" Rhage chimed in. "What you all whispering about? I thought this was supposed to be...you know... reverent?"

Z cast him a look, known to all as the "look of doom".

"What? What'd I do?"

Vishous's fingers were now curled into Butch's hair, his other arm still wrapped around the cop's waist. Butch moaned, drawing him closer.

"Wait," Rhage continued, glancing over at the two vampires, who were clearly in their own little world. "Did I do it wrong? Do we need a re-do 'cause I went too fast? I *knew* I shouldn't have gone second. I set the wrong pace. Dammit!"

"Rhage. Shut it!" Wrath commanded. "Z? Sing. Now!"

"I ... sing what my lord?"

"YMCA?" Phury suggested.

"Phury" the King growled in warning. "Zsadist, just sing. I don't care what you sing. Just let's get this over with."

Z cleared his throat and attempted an aria from La Traviata but didn't get far. Vishous chose that moment to release the cop. Butch, unsteady on his feet, clung to the pegs again. V turned to join his brothers.

"Whoooooooooaaah-ho!" Rhage exclaimed.

"Oh Sweet Virgin, no." Wrath buried his head again while Phury and Z began a thorough ceiling inspection.

"Dude!" Rhage pointed at V, "Someone is diggin' initiation a lil' too much!"

"I said this was awkward before" Wrath said to no one in particular, "I was wrong."

This is awkward."

"Sing Z!" Phury begged. "For Virgin's sake! SING!"

Z, screaming more than anything at this point, broke into a loud chorus of "Row Row Row Your Boat" garnering looks from his Brothers.

"What?" he growled, black eyes flashing. "I got nothin'! WHO could perform in these circumstances?"

"Looks like V could," Rhage interrupted.

"Rhage!" Z snapped. "I'm sorry, my lord, but you're getting Row Row Row Your Boat. It's the best I got!"

Zsadist began again, furtively eyeing the ceiling with his twin. Phury even came in a few beats later to create a round effect to the song. As the twins sang on, Rhage began to giggle.

"What?" Vishous asked, cocking an eyebrow at him arrogantly.

"Nothin' man. Nothin' at all. I just didn't mark you for a Brother that got *that* excited about tradition."

Wrath's voice boomed and echoed around the cave. "Vishous, this goes against tradition, but put your robe on. Now! ...In fact, *everyone* put their robes on. Rhage, get a robe on Butch too. Sonuvabitch is just as bad!"

He massaged his temples, feeling like his head might explode. Again. Rhage threw on his robe and carried one over to Butch, gingerly helping him put it on. He acted as a crutch to help the cop to seated position.

"First initiation in seventy five years," Rhage said from the dias, "went pretty well, don't you think?"

The other Brothers groaned collectively.

"Who feels like a group hug?" he turned around, shit-eating grin, arms spread wide.

"Oh for fuck's sake," Wrath turned to make sure everyone was re-robed.

Phury nudged his twin. "Let the record show that I may wear Ferragamo, but I've never been *that* gay."