



Busted String (The Road to Rocktoberfest 2024)

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Jace Adams, a rebellious rock singer, commands the stage with a raw energy that denies his past. At sixteen, he chose the uncertainty of the streets over the constraints imposed by his strict religious upbringing. A decision leads him to Nico, a drummer with a rhythm as mysterious as his mafia heritage. Together, they form the band, Sacred Fire, blending their gritty street style into a symphony of success.

Nico Greco, the drummer with a legacy as complex as his beats, navigates the treacherous waters of his family's mafia ties while drumming up a storm on stage. Despite the sparks flying between him and Jace, he keeps his heart guarded, adhering to his father's stern warning: love is a luxury that could cost him his life.

As they rise from the ashes of their former lives, Jace harbors a secret passion for Nico, a love so intense he would forsake all others. But his vices—drinking, smoking, and a revolving door of romances—keep Nico at arm's length. Unbeknownst to Nico, Jace is ready to sacrifice it all for a chance at true harmony with him.

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Jace

Jace stumbled into the dimly lit rehearsal space, the remnants of last night's party still clinging to him. His head pounded with every step, a relentless reminder of his poor choices. He knew he was late, and he knew Nico would be furious. He was the only one in the band who would tell him off. The others wouldn't dare say anything to him. They weren't as secure as Nico, who had started the band with him.

Nico stood by his drum set, his long dark hair falling over his hazel eyes which were burning with anger. His muscular frame was tense, tribal tattoos seeming to ripple with his frustration. The colorful turbans and earrings he always wore only added to his imposing presence. He claimed it was a disguise to prevent his Mafia family from following him. Even with long hair, they still knew what and where he was. Scary people.

"Where the fuck have you been?" Nico's voice was sharp, cutting through the silence. "You knew we had early practice, Jace. You can't just blow it off to party with fans."

Jace winced at the harshness in Nico's tone. He wanted to explain, to make Nico see it wasn't just about the party. It was about trying to forget the ache in his chest every time he looked at Nico and saw only friendship in those green eyes.

"I'm sorry, Nico," Jace mumbled, his voice barely above a whisper. "I lost track of time."

"Lost track of time?" Nico's anger flared. "This isn't just about time, Jace. It's about

commitment. We have a gig coming up in Arizona, and we need to be ready. You can't keep doing this."

Jace's frustration bubbled up, mixing with his guilt. "I know, okay? I know I messed up. But it's not that simple."

With his arms crossed and his gaze unwavering, Nico stood his ground. "Then make it simple. Show up. Be here. Be present."

Jace looked down, unable to meet Nico's eyes. "I want to be here on time, Nico. More than anything. But sometimes...it's hard."

Nico's expression softened slightly, but his voice remained firm. "Then figure it out, Jace. Because if you don't, you're going to lose more than just a practice session."

"What do you mean by that?"

"We'll talk later. Let's practice."

As Nico turned back to his drums, Jace felt a pang of longing. He wished Nico could see how much he cared, how much he wanted to be more than just a friend. But for now, all he could do was try to be the bandmate Nico needed, even if it meant hiding his true feelings.

The band was gathered in their usual rehearsal space, a converted garage that had seen countless hours of practice and heated discussions. Jace, with his golden blond hair still slightly disheveled from the night before, picked up his guitar and strummed a few chords, trying to shake off the lingering effects of his late-night escapade .

Nico, already seated behind his drum set, tapped his drumsticks impatiently. His green eyes, partially hidden by his long dark hair, were fixed on Jace. Mark, the

second guitarist, tuned his instrument, his expression a mix of concern and frustration. Sammie, the keyboard player, adjusted his settings, glancing nervously between Jace and Nico.

“Alright, let’s run through ‘Midnight Drive’ again,” Jace suggested, his voice carrying a hint of hesitation.

Nico’s response was immediate and sharp. “If you can manage to stay focused this time.”

Jace’s jaw tightened, but he nodded, trying to keep his cool. He started playing the opening riff, his fingers moving deftly over the strings. Mark joined in, his rhythm steady, while Sammie added a layer of melody on the keyboard.

As Jace began to sing, his voice filled the room with a raw, emotional intensity. The lyrics spoke of longing and unspoken desires, mirroring his own feelings for Nico. But the tension between them was building, and it wouldn’t be long before it boiled over.

Nico’s drumming grew more aggressive, each beat echoing his frustration. “Jace, you’re off tempo again! What the hell is going on with you?”

Jace stopped playing, his blue eyes flashing with anger. “I’m trying, Nico! Maybe if you weren’t so damn perfect all the time, you’d understand.”

Sammie stepped in, his voice calm but firm. “Guys, this isn’t helping. We need to work together, not tear each other apart.”

Mark nodded in agreement, his fingers still resting on the strings. “Yeah, we’re a band. We need to support each other, especially with the gig coming up.”

Nico took a deep breath, his anger simmering down slightly. “Fine. But, Jace, you need to get your act together. We can’t afford any more screw-ups.”

Jace looked down. “I know. I’m sorry. I’ll do better.”

The band resumed playing, the tension still lingering but slightly eased by their shared commitment to the music. As Jace sang, he poured all his emotions into the performance, hoping that somehow, through the music, he could make Nico see how much he cared. For now, all he could do was focus on the music and try to be the bandmate they all needed him to be.

The practice session ended on a tense note, with the band members packing up their instruments in silence. Sammie and Mark exchanged worried glances before leaving the garage, giving Jace and Nico some space. The air was thick with unspoken words as Jace put his guitar back in its case, his movements slow and deliberate.

Nico’s long, dark hair fell over his eyes, which were blazing with anger as he spoke. “Jace, what the hell? You showed up hung over and late again!” Nico’s voice echoed off the walls.

Jace winced, his heart sinking. He had a crush on Nico, but he never knew how to get his attention in a good way. “I’m sorry, Nico. I didn’t mean to. It just...happened.”

Nico’s frustration only grew. “It always just happens with you, Jace! You say you want to be serious about this band, but then you party all night. Do you even care?”

Jace’s shoulders slumped. He cared more than anything. But he couldn’t seem to get his act together. “I do care. I really do. I just...I don’t know how to stop.”

Nico shook his head, his disappointment clear in his intense expression. “You need to figure it out, Jace. Because right now, you’re dragging us all down.”

Jace felt a lump form in his throat. He wanted to be better, for the band and for Nico. But he felt trapped in a cycle he couldn't break. "I'll try harder, I promise."

Nico sighed, his anger giving way to a weary resignation. "I hope you do. Because I can't keep doing this with you."

As Nico walked away, Jace stood there, feeling the weight of his own failures crushing him. He wanted to be someone Nico could respect, even like and love. But right now, he just felt like a mess. And that realization left him feeling more depressed than ever. The only thing on his mind was crawling into bed, pulling the covers over himself, and retreating from the outside world. His head throbbed relentlessly, a reminder of the wild partying from the night before.

Jace could physically feel the weight of Nico's disgust, causing his muscles to ache. What had he done to himself? All the sex and drinking...and all he wanted was Nico. They all lived in Nico's home, and each had a room of their own. Nico's father had released his funds last year because of pressure from other family members, including his mother, but Nico refused to accept the money. He claimed he had had enough from his Mafia past. No one dared ask how he'd earned that money, but Jace imagined violence was involved.

Jace followed Nico out of the building and made sure the drummer didn't notice him following. Nico walked to the other end of the street, the sound of car engines and honking filling the air. He entered the bar there and took a seat beside a man with a menacing expression. Jace didn't know why he met with this man or who he was to Nico, but he wouldn't be surprised if it were one of cousins who periodically checked up on him .

With a swift motion, he turned and walked away, his heart pounding in his chest as he sought distance between them. Nico constantly looked over his shoulder, worrying someone trailed behind him, and the thought of that happening filled Jace with

unease. He bumped into Sammie, dressed flamboyantly as always. Today, he wore hot pink shorts and a pink lace midriff top. Of course, he had matching sandals for each outfit.

“Jace, are you okay, sweetie?”

“Why?”

“You look pale. Are you walking home?”

“No. Let’s call an Uber. We need to pack again.”

“I’ll pack for you while you lie in bed directing me.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“I’m worried about you.”

“I’m sort of okay. My father called and left me one of his famous ‘you’re-going-to-hell’ messages.” Jace quickly texted for an Uber.

“Block him. Why do you listen to him?” Sammie asked.

“I’m sick, that’s why. I guess I was hoping he’d call to say he still loved me.” Jace felt safe sharing his painful feelings with Sammie. He listened intently, his face free of any judgment or criticism. He cared about Jace the way a little brother or sister would.

“I know you’re also upset because Nico came down hard on you. But if you notice, he never minds you being late unless you don’t come home the night before.”

“I never paid attention to that.” They sat on the bench where the Uber would pick them up. He wondered why Nico would care if he came home or not?

Mark joined them.

“I think if you two would be honest with yourself and each other, many sparkles would enter our home.”

“You’re so cute, Sammie. I wish he’d give me the time of day, but he told me he can’t have a relationship.”

“Why not?”

“His father threatened to put a hit on him and his long-term lover.”

“No way! That’s some scary shit.”

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Nico

Nico had taken one last look at Jace before he left. Jace was five foot twelve and had a lean, athletic build from countless hours of performing and practicing. His skin was lightly tanned, a testament to the time he spent outdoors, whether it was at the beach or on the road with the band. Jace's style was effortlessly cool, fitted jeans, graphic tees, and a leather jacket that had seen better days. Tattoos peeked out from under his sleeves, each one telling a story of a moment or memory that was important to him.

Nico walked into the dimly lit bar, his eyes scanning the room until they landed on Sal, his cousin. He was seated at a corner table, a half-empty glass of whiskey in front of him. Nico took a deep breath and approached, his heart pounding. Sal had always been a looming figure in his life, ten years older and deeply entrenched in the world that Nico had tried so hard to escape.

Nico had always found his cousin Sal a bit of an enigma. At thirty-five, he had a presence that was hard to ignore. His curly chestnut hair seemed to have a life of its own, often falling into his equally brown eyes, giving him a mysterious, almost brooding look. Those eyes truly set him apart. His father always compared him to Sal, who had taken over Nico's spot in the family business.

"Nico." Sal greeted him with a nod, his voice low. "Sit down."

Nico slid into the seat opposite Sal, his jaw clenched. "What do you want, Sal?"

Sal leaned back, his eyes narrowing. "Your father has a message for you."

“So, why did he send you?” Nico asked.

“You know I’m his right hand.”

“You wish you were his son. That will never be, Sal. And you’re more his left hand.”

“But you are his son! Do something about it.”

“Like what? Tell me, what’s in it for you?”

“He wants you to quit that band of yours and come back to New York. He needs you to work for him.”

Nico’s fists tightened on the table. “I’m not quitting the band to work for him. Ever! You can tell him that.”

Sal’s expression darkened. “You know how he gets, Nico. He won’t take no for an answer. You think playing the drums is going to protect you from him?”

Nico’s eyes flashed with anger. “I don’t care what he wants. He’s never cared about me. All he does is hate and control. I’m not going back to that life.”

Sal leaned forward, his voice dropping to a menacing whisper. “You think you can just walk away? You think you have a choice? ”

Nico stood up abruptly, his chair scraping against the floor. “I do have a choice, Sal. And I’m choosing my own path. Tell my father he can go to hell. It’s not that bad. I’ve been there.”

Without waiting for a response, Nico turned and walked out of the bar, his heart racing but his resolve stronger than ever. There would be consequences, but he was

determined to live his life on his own terms. This was the soft demand from his father. The next time, he wouldn't let him off so easily. He knew how his father worked. He had been gone for a couple of years, so why now? Was it because he was in California?

Nico wasn't moving back to New York to work with his family. His father had made it clear he wasn't welcome in the family because he was gay. He'd told him to act straight to get by in the family, but when he refused, made his life miserable. The men in his family, under the direction of his father, took pleasure in calling him derogatory names, intent on publicly humiliating him. That's when Nico left New York for Los Angeles and met beautiful Jace.

As Nico walked towards the van at the service station,

Nico had strong feelings for Jace. He could sense when he was around, especially when Jace was in trouble and Nico would heedlessly run to his rescue. As much as Nico wanted him, Jace needed to grow up before he could make him his. Jace had a striking presence, making him stand out in any crowd. His tousled, golden-brown hair framed a face looking both boyish and rugged, with a strong jawline and high cheekbones. His eyes, a deep shade of blue, often sparkled with a mix of mischief and an intensity reflecting his passionate nature. He was the most beautiful man Nico had known. Day and night, he could stare at him endlessly, captivated by his wild magnetism and charm.

Nico knew Jace followed him around as if he were a jealous lover, but Nico acted like he wasn't aware of what Jace was up to. They never spoke a word about it. One day, Nico would reveal the truth to him because no one followed him without his knowledge. He had too many enemies, but Jace wasn't one of them. Jace was lonely, lost, and loveable.

He waited at the service station until they processed his bill for the van's tune-up,

preparing it for their tour of Nevada. They had decided to camp out, but that would go by the wayside if the boys changed their mind because of the heat. All pussies. But he loved all three of them.

As he was driving, he saw the three of them sitting on a bench—waiting for a ride—so he pulled over and used his hand to direct them into the van. All three piled inside, Jace taking the front seat beside him. Of course, that was his place. He knew that much, and so did the other two.

“Why didn’t you guys tell me you needed a ride? I thought you had things to do in town,” Nico asked.

“We did,” Mark said, “but we’re done now.”

“Yes, we’re all done and ready to pack,” Sammie piped up from the back seat.

Jace remained silent, not uttering a single word. Maybe Nico needed to tone down his reprimands of Jace’s deplorable behavior, especially in front of the others. Something else was going on with him. They had too many important gigs coming up for him to be on edge. He’d have to cheer him up.

“Did you get lucky last night?” Nico asked, tapping his thigh with his hand.

“Lucky? Ah, many times and then some. Why, are you jealous?” Jace asked with a sheepish grin.

“Yes. I never have so much fun that I don’t come home.”

“So you noticed?”

“I noticed when I went to your room to wake you up for practice. ”

“I see.”

“We didn’t even have a gig. So where did you go?”

“To a club.”

“You know, in two days we have a gig in Bakersfield, then on to Black Rock City. Those are big gigs for us.”

“I know, and I won’t disappoint you.” Jace leaned his head on Nico’s shoulder.

Jace had no idea what he did to him when he leaned on him or touched him. Jace was a touchy person. No one turned him down except Nico. It was tempting, but Jace was too unstable, and the group was more important at this point. At least, that was what Nico told himself.

After Nico packed his suitcases, he walked into Jace’s room, his eyes landing on Jace sprawled on the bed, lazily directing Sammie as he packed a suitcase. Nico’s irritation flared in his chest.

“Jace, what the hell are you doing?” Nico snapped, his voice sharper than he intended. “You’re using Sammie like he’s your personal servant.”

Jace barely lifted his head, a smirk playing on his lips. “Relax, Nico. Sammie offered to help.”

“That’s not the point,” Nico shot back, stepping closer. “You can’t just lie there and let him do everything. It’s not fair.”

Sammie glanced between them, sensing the tension. “It’s really fine, Nico. I don’t mind and I offered.”

Nico shook his head, his gaze never leaving Jace. “No, Sammie. You shouldn’t have to do this. Jace can pack his own damn suitcase.”

Jace sat up, his expression hardening. “Why are you making such a big deal out of this? It’s just packing.”

“Because you need to start taking responsibility for yourself,” Nico retorted, his frustration boiling over. “You can’t keep relying on everyone else to clean up your messes.”

Sammie slipped out of the room, leaving the two of them alone .

Jace’s eyes followed Sammie’s departure before turning back to Nico. “What’s really going on here, Nico? Why do you care so much?”

Nico took a deep breath, trying to steady his emotions. “I care because I want you to be better, Jace. I want you to stand on your own two feet. And...because I care about you.”

Jace’s expression softened slightly, but he still looked confused. “Then why are you pushing me away?”

“Because I’m not ready for this,” Nico admitted, his voice quieter now. “I’m not ready for us. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want you to be better. So, pack your own suitcase, Jace. Show me you can.”

Jace stared at him for a long moment before nodding slowly. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

Nico watched as Jace got off the bed and started packing, a mix of emotions swirling inside him. He wanted Jace, but he needed him to be stronger first. And maybe, just maybe, this was a step in the right direction.

“Is there something going on?”

“Nothing that I know of.”

“Don’t lie. I know something is off.” He inched closer to Jace.

“Nothing is going on.”

“You’ve got to get your head straight. You’re the lead singer and guitarist! If you fuck up, we are all fucked. This is way too important to me and the guys for you to fuck around.”

“I’m sorry.” Jace continued packing while Nico stood watching him.

“Jace, come here.” Nico softened his tone and opened his arms.

He moved closer to Nico, who pulled him into his arms, giving him his shoulder to lean on. “You know I want the best for you. With all that we went through on the streets, you can do this. You’re better than that.”

“I know.”

Despite Jace’s outward confidence, there was a vulnerability in his demeanor, especially when he was around him. It was in the way he sometimes bit his lip or ran a hand through his hair when he was nervous or unsure. Jace’s appearance was a blend of rockstar charisma and boy-next-door charm, making him both approachable and enigmatic. One day, he wanted to love him the way he deserved.

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Jace

Jace's nightmare began in a dark, desolate place. His father appeared; face twisted with anger. Without a word, he grabbed Jace, binding his hands with rough rope. Jace struggled, but his father was too strong. He forced a gag into Jace's mouth, silencing his cries for help.

Jace's tall, muscular father threw him into the back of a pickup, the metal truck bed cold against his skin. The truck roared as they drove through an endless night. Fear gripped Jace as he felt every bump and turn, unable to see where they were going.

Suddenly, the truck stopped. His father yanked him out and dragged him to a massive iron gate. Beyond it, flames blazed and licked at the sky, casting an eerie glow. Jace's father shoved him towards the gate, his eyes filled with hatred.

"This is where you belong," his father hissed. "You're going to hell."

Jace's heart pounded as the flames grew closer. He tried to scream, but the gag muffled his voice. Just as the heat became unbearable, he woke up, drenched in sweat and screaming in terror.

Nico burst into the room; his face etched with concern. He rushed to Jace's side, wrapping his arms around him.

"Jace, it's okay. It was just a nightmare," Nico whispered, gripping him.

Jace's breaths were ragged, his body trembling. "It felt so real, Nico. My father...he said I was going to hell."

Nico pulled back slightly, looking into Jace's eyes. "Your father isn't here, Jace. He can't hurt you anymore. You're safe with me."

Tears welled up in Jace's eyes. "He left a message on my phone, Nico. He said I belonged in hell."

Nico shook his head, his grip on Jace firm and reassuring. "You don't belong in hell, Jace. You're a good person, and you're loved. Don't let his words haunt you. You're stronger than that."

Jace nodded slowly, taking comfort from Nico's presence. "Thank you, Nico. I don't know what I'd do without you."

Nico smiled softly, brushing a tear from Jace's cheek. "You'll never have to find out. I'm here for you, always."

"I can't sleep, Nico. I'm afraid of the fire again."

"Oh, Jace." He sat on Jace's bed and ran his hand through his hair. "Want to sleep in my bed?"

Jace nodded and more tears tumbled out.

"Let me carry you out of here like a caveman," Nico said, picking him up and hoisting him over his shoulder.

He carried him completely naked to his bedroom. He put him on the bed and handed him a pair of boxers, helped him into them and then made sure his head was on a

pillow.

“You okay now, pretty boy?”

Jace seamlessly slipped into Nico’s arms and nodded his head.

“You’re safe with me. So, sleep. We have a long drive to Bakersfield. ”

Despite Nico’s tough exterior, Jace adored the way Nico’s eyes softened when they looked at each other. His smile, which had the power to light up even the darkest room, and his composed demeanor spoke volumes about his self-assured nature. Nico was a perfect blend of strength and sensitivity, making him both intimidating and attractive. Jace was drawn to his strength when he was hurt and needed protection. Suddenly, the bear transformed into a gentle, docile lamb. The man he loved who wouldn’t fuck him.

They nestled together, their bodies fitting perfectly like spoons.

When Jace woke up, Nico wasn’t in bed anymore. He checked the time. It was nine o’clock, and they planned to leave at ten. Jace got up, used the bathroom, took a shower, then dressed. He went to the kitchen to find something to eat. Sammie was fussing with pancakes and strawberries.

“Jace, want some pancakes?”

“Yes. I had a terrible night.”

“We heard. You okay now?”

“After I eat, I will be.”

Jace sat at the kitchen table, the smell of pancakes filling the air as Sammie worked his magic at the stove. His stomach growled in anticipation. Just then, Nico walked in, wearing tight jeans and a T-shirt that clung to his muscles. Jace couldn't help but take a moment to admire him.

“Hey, how are you doing?” Nico asked, his voice soft and concerned.

Jace smiled. “I'm better, thanks. ”

Nico nodded. “Good to hear. Listen, you both need to be ready to go in an hour. Mark and I are going to pick up the instruments.”

“Thanks, Nico. I really appreciate you helping me out last night.”

Nico shrugged, a playful grin spreading across his face. “Anything for you, Jace. Just make sure you're ready to rock.”

Jace chuckled, feeling a warmth spread through him that had nothing to do with the pancakes. “You got it.”

When Nico and Mark left to pick up the instruments, Sammie put the pancakes with strawberries and whipped cream on his plate, then he got them both a cup of coffee.

“Thanks, Sammie.”

“This happened to you last year when we played in Bakersfield.”

“My family still lives there. I'm so afraid of them showing up at the club and causing shit.”

“Nico told us we're not to let you go anywhere without us. He doesn't want you

walking around Bakersfield.”

“He didn’t tell me that.”

“Don’t sweat it, babe. He will take care of you like he did last night.” In a burst of happiness, Sammie danced in place, his every movement radiating joy to Jace spending the night in Nico’s bed.

“Sammie! Nothing happened.”

After they finished eating, Jace grumbled as he rinsed a plate, the warm water feeling oddly comforting against his tired skin. The last thing he wanted was to be cooped up with the band for two days in his hometown. He already dreaded going back to his hometown in Bakersfield, the awkward small talk, and the constant prying eyes.

“Hey, guys, come into the living room,” Nico called out, his voice carrying over the clatter of dishes. They shuffled into the room, their faces a mix of curiosity and confusion .

“Listen,” Nico began, his tone serious. “Jace isn’t going anywhere without all three of us. We’re sticking together, no exceptions. No partying, no wandering off. We have two days in Bakersfield, and we need to take care of each other.”

Jace’s heart sank. He’d hoped to slip away, maybe catch up with an old friend or two without the band’s watchful eyes. “Come on, Nico,” he protested. “I’m not a kid anymore. I can handle myself.”

Sammie and Mark exchanged a glance. “It’s not about you not being able to handle yourself, Jace,” Sammie said gently. “It’s about keeping you safe. We know what kind of people your family are.”

Jace felt a pang of guilt. He knew they were only trying to protect him, but it still stung. He'd always been the independent one, the one who didn't need anyone's help.

"Fine," he muttered, defeated. "But I'm not going to be happy about it."

Nico nodded. "I understand. But this is for the best. And after Bakersfield, we have a very important gig in Black Rock City."

The mention of Black Rock City perked him up. He'd always wanted to go to Burning Man. Maybe this trip to Bakersfield wouldn't be so bad after all.

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Nico

Nico adjusted his grip on the steering wheel, the van's engine humming beneath him. He had been driving for a long time. The sun was beginning its descent, casting long shadows across the freeway. He glanced at Jace sitting beside him, his face etched with a familiar frown.

"You okay, man?" Nico asked, trying to sound casual.

Jace shrugged, his eyes fixed on the road ahead. "It's just...I don't know. I'm not really feeling this whole 'band on the road' thing."

Nico understood. The idea of spending a weekend in Bakersfield, a small town where Jace had grown up that was miles away from their usual haunts, wasn't exactly thrilling. But the gig was important, and they needed to keep their spirits up.

"Hey, look on the bright side," Nico said. "We'll get to spend time together, eat some good food, and maybe even discover a hidden gem or two."

Jace didn't seem convinced. "I just wish we could have a little more freedom. You know, do our own thing when we're not playing. "

Nico nodded. He knew what Jace meant. They were all used to their own routines, their own space. Being cooped up in a van together for days on end was a big change.

In the back seat, Sammie was busy applying makeup, his reflection shimmering in the rearview mirror. Mark was completely engrossed in his phone, his fingers flying

across the screen.

The traffic was heavy, and the van crawled along at a snail's pace. Nico reached for a soda, taking a long sip. Jace followed suit, and soon the van was filled with the sound of cans being opened and the rustling of snack bags.

As the sun dipped below the horizon, casting the sky in shades of orange and purple, Nico couldn't help but feel a sense of anticipation. This was a new adventure, a chance to step outside their comfort zone. And who knew? Maybe they'd all come out of it feeling a little closer.

As they finally broke free from the city traffic and hit the open road, Nico felt a sense of relief. The drive to Bakersfield would give them all some time to decompress, to prepare for the weekend ahead. He glanced over at Jace once more, hoping that the miles ahead would bring them closer, even if just a little.

The two in the back fell asleep, but Jace was awake and finally enjoying the drive. He wondered what was inside his head. He had to make sure Jace didn't leave the hotel. They'd booked one room with two double beds. They'd done that before and had all decided they didn't want to camp until they got to Black Rock City. It was going to be hot as hell there, but they would have to deal with it.

"I can't wait to take a shower," Jace said.

"What did you do to get dirty?"

"Nothing. I just need it. Since we're stuck in the room tonight, are we going to have drinks? "

"No, Jace. You need your energy level high and don't you dare smoke. You can't ruin your voice."

“Damn, when did you become my babysitter?”

“I’ve been taking care of you since we met on the streets. You’re important to all of us. We’re family.”

“I left home to get away from a controlling father. Please don’t control me. Let me be me.”

“Jace, I want to spend some time with you after dinner. We need to have a talk like we used to.”

“I love our talks.”

Nico surprised them by taking them all out to dinner before they entered Bakersfield. They had one day off, then would play two nights in a row before they left for the big gig in Black Rock City.

Nico sat in the outdoor restaurant on Venice Beach, the salty breeze from the ocean ruffling his hair. The sun cast a golden glow over the waves that crashed gently against the shore. The restaurant was bustling with life, the sound of laughter blending with the distant calls of seagulls.

They had all ordered fish and chips, accompanied by fresh salads and cold beers. Nico had insisted on treating everyone, wanting to show his appreciation for the band’s hard work. As they ate, he watched his bandmates—Mark, with his bright red hair and ever-present grin, Sammie, wearing his favorite hot pink shorts and top and animatedly discussing a new keyboard riff, and Jace, the quietest of them all, lost in his own thoughts.

After the meal, Nico cleared his throat, drawing everyone’s attention. “Alright, guys, listen up,” he began. “Tomorrow, we practice at the club and then play there in the

evening. It's important we stay together, support each other. We've come a long way, and we need to keep that momentum going. ”

He glanced at Jace, knowing how tough things were for him. Bakersfield was Jace's hometown, but his family had cut ties with him. Despite that, Jace had a lot of friends there, people who believed in him. Nico hoped that would be enough to keep him grounded.

“We need to stick together,” Nico continued, his voice firm. “No matter what. We're a family, and families support each other.”

Mark and Sammie exchanged a knowing glance before nodding in agreement, their silent communication speaking volumes. They all knew the importance of unity, especially with the challenges they faced. But Jace remained silent, his eyes fixed on the table. Nico could sense his discomfort, the weight of his past and the strain of their current situation pressing down on him.

As the conversation continued, they all reaffirmed their commitment to the band and to each other. But Nico couldn't shake the feeling that Jace was struggling more than he let on. He made a mental note to check in with him later, hoping to offer some support and understanding.

“Let's walk the boardwalk for an hour, then we have to drive to Bakersfield.”

Nico stayed close to Jace while the other two stayed back a bit, giving them space to talk.

“Remember when you told me you wanted to be good enough to go to Black Rock City this year?”

“What are you getting at? I still want to be good on stage. We're going to have tons

of competition.”

“I know. If I thought you guys weren’t ready, especially you, we wouldn’t be going there.”

“I have people who want to see me after we play.”

“We can hang out there for an hour, but we’re staying together. No quick fucks with any ex. ”

“I hope you’re kidding.”

“Jace, look at me.”

He faced him with a grin.

“I’m serious. Don’t make me chase after you.”

“How do you do it?”

“What?”

“You don’t fuck anyone.”

“First of all, you don’t know what I do when you’re sleeping. Or maybe I’m waiting for someone I care about.”

“It must be nice to have a low sex drive.”

“Hey, you’re acting like a brat. I’m going to get my drumstick and make you regret saying that.”

“I didn’t mean it. You live with the three of us. You never jump on any of us.”

“And you know this how?”

“I guess I don’t.”

“Let’s go in here and look around,” Nico suggested. All of them followed inside a T-shirt shop.

“Let’s get matching California shirts.” Nico picked out navy blue shirts with rainbow writing and paid for them.

“We can wear them at Black Rock,” Sammie said.

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Jace

Once they arrived at the hotel, Jace stood beside Nico when he checked in. Nico got him to wear a baseball cap and sunglasses so he wouldn't be recognized in his hometown at this hour. Because Mark had such unusual bright red hair, he had to wear a cowboy hat and shove his hair underneath it. Nico had Sammie wear a baseball cap the color of his outfit. They all had sunglasses on to cover up.

Nico's style was unique and unmistakable. He always wore a turban, which added an air of mystique. His ears were adorned with small but noticeable earrings. The woman at the check-in desk had her eyes all over Nico. Whether he was on stage or off, Nico's clothing was a blend of casual and edgy. He wore jeans and fitted shirts that highlighted his muscular build. Jace felt jealous when the flirting lady winked at Nico, but there was nothing he could do but follow him. It seemed he enjoyed flirting with both men and women, but he never initiated it. Like he had told him, Jace didn't know what Nico did while he was sleeping. That only put sick thoughts into Jace's head of Nico fucking Mark or Sammie, or both, for that matter. He sure didn't mess with Jace, as much as Jace wanted him to.

They went upstairs to the shared room. Nico wanted the bed closest to the door as he said he had to guard them. Mark and Sammie took the bed beside the window. With only one bathroom, they had to take turns.

It was midnight, time to shower and hit the sack, but Jace wanted to meet some old friends from high school. He didn't know how he was going to get out, but he would find a way.

“We’ll take showers alphabetically, Jace, you’re first, and don’t take all night in there.” Nico wasn’t just the drummer. He also managed the group.

“No prob.” Jace unpacked some clean clothes and rushed to the shower. He made sure the water was warm enough. Before he jumped into the stall, he listened by the door to the conversation in the other room.

“He’s going to try to leave when we’re sleeping,” Nico said. “But I’m going to sleep very close to him, so if he moves, I’ll know.”

“Good luck! He’s quiet when he wants to be,” Mark said.

“He just wants to see his old high school friends,” Sammie added.

He knew they talked about him, especially since he’d had a few messes staying overnight with fans, then calling for a ride back. He had messed around more than he should have. None of it meant much. Who he really wanted was Nico. Mark and Sammie knew who he was after. Sammie was supportive, but Mark said it would be trouble for the group if they connected.

When Jace heard a few sets of fists pounding on the door, he quickly rinsed off and put a towel around his waist. He carried his clothes out to the room. Mark was in the bathroom as soon as there was space for him in the doorway. Sammie was removing his makeup with lotion and tissues, while Nico sat on their bed writing notes on his iPad .

“You don’t need to get dressed,” Nico said as he watched Jace put on jeans and a T-shirt.

“I’ll be sleeping with you, so I need clothes.”

“Oh please! You parade around the house naked all the time. Now you need to be covered? Give me a break. I wasn’t born yesterday.”

Jace ignored Nico, got completely dressed, and slipped into the bed beside him. “I don’t want you to get all turned on.”

When it was Nico’s turn to shower, Mark said, “You’d better stay put tonight because Nico’s onto you.”

“And we don’t want him pissed off tomorrow night,” Sammie said.

“No one ever gets put on restriction in this group except me,” Jace complained.

“Not true. Nico tells me I can’t walk alone if I dress up,” Sammie said.

“For your safety,” Mark and Jace said together.

“And the same goes for you, Jace,” Sammie said.

“All I want to do is see my friends. I’m not at risk.”

“Your father lives here,” Mark said.

Just then, Nico came out of the bathroom wrapped in a towel. “What’s going on in here?”

“Nothing,” Sammie said.

“Lights out!” Nico shouted, then slipped into bed beside Jace.

Jace’s fingers brushed against Nico’s warm skin, while the scent of the shower gel

filled his nostrils.

“You smell good enough to eat,” Jace whispered to Nico.

“Stop teasing and go to sleep.”

“Not teasing. If I can’t go out, then let me entertain you.”

Nico smacked his butt. “If I fucked you, you wouldn’t be able to walk.”

“Do it. ”

“Go to sleep.”

“We can hear you guys,” Sammie said. “We don’t mind a show.”

“I should have gotten two rooms,” Nico teased. “We have to practice tomorrow and then put on a show. No time for all this bullshit.”

“And who would be in your room?” Jace asked.

“You, of course. Please, I’m begging you to keep your ass in this bed.”

“Night, Nico,” Jace said.

Nico kissed Jace on top of his hair and rolled over facing away from him. Jace slipped out his phone and read his messages when he was sure Nico was sleeping.

Laura: We’re all here waiting for you. And there’s a surprise person too.

Tom: Hey, Jace! We’re waiting for you at Bailey’s.

Jace sent a group message to his friends.

Jace: Meet you guys at Bailey's in twenty minutes.

Jace slipped out of bed and made it to the hallway without waking anyone. In a rush, he sprinted towards the elevator and hastily pressed the button for the ground floor. He stepped out of the hotel and onto the lively street, the enticing aroma of food wafting from the nearby twenty-four-hour Mexican restaurant, as he made his way to a local bar to join his friends.

The bar was buzzing with excitement as Jace stepped inside. The dim lighting cast a warm glow over the rustic wooden tables and chairs, and the air was filled with laughter and the familiar scent of beer. An enormous banner hung above the bar, displayed the words "Welcome Home Jace!" in bold letters. Streamers and balloons in various shades of blue and gold adorned the walls, adding a festive touch to the cozy space.

Jace's heart swelled with a mix of nostalgia and surprise as he took in the scene. His high school friends, faces he hadn't seen in years, were gathered around, their smiles wide and genuine. One by one, they approached him, wrapping him in tight hugs and clapping him on the back. There was Laura, the mastermind behind the party, her eyes twinkling with pride. She'd had a crush on Jace since fourth grade. And then, amidst the crowd, he saw her—Erin, his younger sister.

Erin stood near the bar, her eyes brimming with tears of joy. Jace made his way over to her, his heart pounding. As he reached her, she threw her arms around him, holding him close.

"Jace, I've missed you so much," Erin whispered, her voice trembling.

"I've missed you too, Erin," Jace replied, his voice thick with emotion. He pulled

back slightly to look at her. “It’s been too long.”

Erin nodded, wiping away a tear. “It has. But Jace, there’s something I need to tell you. Mom...left Dad. I know you want to see her, but she’s in Lodi with Aunt Mary.”

Jace’s expression hardened, the mention of their mother bringing back a flood of painful memories. “When did this happen?” he whispered.

Erin squeezed his hand, her eyes filled with understanding. “She asked me to tell you to call her at Aunt Mary’s.”

“Damn. What happened?” Jace wanted to call her right this minute, but it was too late. He should have called her before now. He didn’t think she wanted to talk to him again. Maybe it was his father who had made her turn cold towards him. Now he was hopeful a phone call would help their relationship.

“It’s a story for Mom to tell. I have to go because I have to be at work early.”

“Are you still living at home?”

“Yes. I have a job here. Don’t worry. I’m coming to your two shows this weekend. See you tonight.”

“Love you.” He hugged her again then she left .

As he stood there, surrounded by the warmth and love of old friends, Jace felt a glimmer of hope. Maybe, just maybe, he could heal the wounds of the past and move forward. But for now, he was content to be home and to see his friends and sister, if only for a little while.

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Nico

Nico woke up to an empty bed. The outside lights filtered through the curtains. He rubbed his eyes and noticed Jace's phone charging on the nightstand. Curiosity got the better of him, and he glanced at the screen, seeing messages about a meet-up with high school friends at Bailey's Bar, just a short walk from their hotel. Nico had specifically told Jace to get a good night's sleep to be ready for their weekend gig. As the drummer and the band's manager, Nico knew how crucial it was for everyone to be in top form.

Determined to bring Jace back, Nico quickly dressed and headed to Bailey's Bar. The place was a cozy, dimly lit establishment with wooden beams, vintage posters, and a jukebox playing classic rock tunes. The bar was bustling with patrons, laughter, and the clinking of glasses.

Nico spotted Jace at a corner table, surrounded by his old friends. Jace was clearly drunk, his speech slurred, and his gestures exaggerated. Nico's heart sank as he approached the table. He had hoped Jace would take his advice seriously and seeing him drunk and careless was a bitter disappointment.

"Jace, what are you doing here?" Nico asked, trying to keep his voice steady.

Jace looked up, his eyes glassy. "Nico! Hey, meet my friends! We're having a blast!" he slurred, raising his beer mug. It was clear they had intended to stay until closing, as the table was scattered with empty glasses and half-empty pitchers.

The fact that Jace had dismissed his concerns turned Nico's frustration into anger. He

felt a deep sense of responsibility for the band, and Jace's behavior was a personal betrayal. The weight of their upcoming gig at Black Rock City and the effort they had all put into their music pressed heavily on his shoulders.

Nico frowned. "I told you to get some rest. We have a gig this weekend and the next, remember?"

Jace waved his hand dismissively. "Relax, Nico. It's just two nights in the same place. I can handle it."

As the argument escalated, Nico's anger became tinged with worry. He loved Jace, not just as a bandmate, and more than a friend. The thought of Jace jeopardizing their hard work and his own well-being was distressing.

Nico's patience was wearing thin. "No, you can't. You're drunk, and we need you to be at your best. Let's go."

Jace's friends exchanged awkward glances as the tension rose. "Nico, you're always so fucking serious. Lighten up!" Jace laughed, but it sounded hollow.

Nico leaned in, using his low but firm voice. "I'm serious because I care about this band and about you. We've worked too hard to let one night ruin everything. Now, get up. We're leaving." One girl had her arms hooked onto Jace as if she had planned to spend the night with him. Nico didn't know who she was, and he didn't know if Jace knew who she was. Clearly, she had wanted more with Jace. What was he going to do about her? Jace said he was flirtatious with girls, but nothing ever happened. Nico wasn't so sure of that, and this was one reason he was reluctant to start anything with Jace; not to mention his father's death threat if he engaged in a long-term relationship with a man. He really needed to rein in Jace for his own good and maybe eventually they could become a couple, but he was too unstable right now. As much as he wanted to fuck Jace, he couldn't risk the band. Every day, Nico struggled with

his desire for Jace, while having to witness him engaging in reckless one-night stands.

Jace's expression shifted from defiance to compliance. He stood up unsteadily, mumbling apologies to his friends. Nico guided him out of the bar, feeling a mix of frustration, relief, and sadness.

He was relieved that Jace was coming with him, but sad that it had come to this confrontation. Nico's heart ached, hoping Jace would understand the importance of their commitment and the bond they shared as a band, and much more.

They had a lot riding on this gig, and Nico needed everyone to be on the same page.

As Nico and Jace left Bailey's Bar, the cool night air hit them, a stark contrast to the warm, noisy atmosphere they had just left behind. Nico kept a firm grip on Jace's arm, guiding him back to the hotel. The streets were quiet, and the only sounds were their footsteps and the distant hum of traffic.

Nico's mind raced with thoughts about the band and their upcoming gig. He knew they couldn't afford any slip-ups, and Jace's behavior tonight had been a wake-up call. He glanced at Jace, who was stumbling slightly, but seemed more subdued now .

"Jace, you need to understand how important this is," Nico said, his voice softer now, but still firm. "We've all worked so hard to get here. We can't let anything or anyone mess this up."

Jace nodded, his eyes downcast. "I know, Nico. I'm sorry. I just got carried away seeing everyone again."

Nico sighed, his frustration easing a bit. "I get it. But we have to stay focused. We're a team, and we need to support each other."

By the time they reached the hotel, Jace seemed more sober and reflective. Nico helped him to their room and as he turned to move to his side of the bed, Jace grabbed his arm.

“Thanks, Nico. I’ll do better. I promise,” Jace said.

Nico nodded, a small smile tugging at his lips. “I know you will. Let’s get some rest. We’ve got a big weekend ahead.” He waited for Jace, who still stood beside the bed.

“What’s wrong, Jace?”

“I need to take these clothes off.”

“Okay, take them off.”

“I can’t.” He sat down at the foot of the bed and started crying.

Mark and Sammie sat up in bed, both heartbroken by Jace’s tears, but they remained silent. When Nico was around, they rarely interfered in their conversations. Nico moved next to Jace.

“I’m going to take them off, then your ass goes to bed without a peep.”

Jace nodded.

“You two go back to sleep!” Nico ordered.

Sammie and Mark settled back down in bed, their heads sinking into the soft pillows. Nico hoped they drifted back to sleep quickly. Sammie got very grumpy when he didn’t have enough sleep. Contending with a hungover Jace would be more than enough to deal with in the morning .

Nico removed Jace's shoes and socks. He discarded Jace's T-shirt, letting it fall to the floor, and swiftly unzipped his jeans, sliding them down to his ankles. Since Jace didn't budge, Nico took it upon himself to remove them. He carefully eased Jace under the covers. Once Jace was tucked in, Nico undressed and slipped into bed beside him. He scooped Jace into his arms.

"Night, Jace. Things will work out."

"I hope so. I'm such a fuckup."

"Naw, you just wanted to see your friends. We can visit here again when there's time."

"Okay." With a sigh, Jace closed his eyes, surrendering to the much-needed sleep. An overpowering smell of beer emanated from him.

Nico knew they still had challenges ahead, but he was confident they could face them together as a band. With Mark on his side, he could do it, but sometimes Sammie was too sympathetic to Jace. The difference was Sammie could influence Jace's way of thinking with his sweetness. Nico was grateful for all the love Sammie showered on each of them.

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Jace

In the morning, they had breakfast in the hotel café, then drove to the club to practice. The tension between Nico and Jace hung heavily in the air, making everyone at the meal unusually quiet.

Jace rubbed his temples, trying to ease the throbbing headache that had been plaguing him since the early hours of the morning. He knew he had to push through it; Sacred Fire had a practice session at the club in Bakersfield, and he couldn't let his bandmates down. As he walked into the dimly lit club, the familiar scent of stale beer and old wood greeted him. His guitar slung over his shoulder, he made his way to the small stage where Nico was already setting up his drums, Mark was tuning his guitar, and Sammie was adjusting the keyboard.

The club was unusually crowded for a practice session. A group of Jace's high school friends had dropped by, filling the room with chatter and laughter. Jace forced a smile and waved at them, but his mind was elsewhere. He could feel Nico's stony gaze on him, a reminder of the previous night's mistakes. Jace had left the room to party, and Nico was clearly not over it.

As they started their first song, Jace's headache intensified with every beat of the drums. Nico's drumming was precise, almost mechanical, lacking the usual energy that made their music come alive. Jace tried to catch Nico's eye, but Nico was resolutely focused on his drums, ignoring Jace's attempts at connection. A suffocating tension hung in the air, and Jace couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt.

During a break between songs, Jace took a deep breath and approached Nico. "Hey,

can we talk for a second?" he asked.

Nico didn't look up. "What's there to talk about, Jace? You made your choice last night."

Jace's heart sank. "I know, and I'm sorry. I shouldn't have left like that. I just...I needed a break."

Nico finally met his gaze, his eyes hard. "A break? From what? From us? From the band?"

Jace shook his head. "No, it's not like that. These guys are my friends from high school. I just messed up, okay? Can we move past it?"

Nico's silence was deafening. After what felt like an eternity, he sighed, "Let's just get through this practice."

As Nico turned back to his gleaming drum set, Jace felt a sudden disconnect from the man he wanted. He could hear the rhythmic beats reverberating through the room, the cymbals crashing like waves against the shore. The sight of Nico's skilled hands swiftly moving across the drums evoked a sense of admiration. The air was filled with the musky scent of sweat and his cologne. Jace's heart ached as he yearned to join Nico, to feel the exhilaration of creating music together.

The rest of the session was a blur of strained notes and awkward silences. Jace's friends cheered and clapped, oblivious to the undercurrent of tension on stage. When they finally wrapped up, Jace felt a wave of exhaustion wash over him. The headache was still there, a dull reminder of the day's struggles.

As they packed up their instruments, Jace tried one last time. "Nico, I'm really sorry. Can we talk later?"

Nico gave a curt nod. “We’ll see.”

“Hey, Jace! Got time for lunch?” Laura asked.

“Can’t. I have to get some sleep for tonight. Sorry.”

“When will we be able to go out alone?” Laura asked.

“I’m not on vacation. I’m working, but when we get some time off, I’m coming back to spend more time.” He looked over at Nico, who rolled his eyes.

With that, they all left the club. Jace hoped things would be better. They stopped for fast food, then took it to the room. Jace wanted to sleep instead of eating. He devoured his lunch and went to bed. Mark and Sammie sat in their cozy bed, their hushed whispers and the tapping of their fingers on their iPads filling the room. Nico finished his lunch and sat beside Jace.

“Hey, Jace. Are you okay?” Nico asked.

“No. I don’t like when you ignore me.” The other two stopped talking and watched them.

“You want my attention and approval every fucking minute. You acted like an asshole last night. You couldn’t even take your clothes off. You reeked of alcohol.”

Jace got up from the bed, put on his shoes and turned to Nico, “Fuck you, Nico!” He left the room.

Jace stormed out of the hotel, his anger at Nico boiling over. He needed space, a moment to clear his head. The coffee shop down the street seemed like a good place to escape. He ordered a black coffee and sat by the window, staring out at the bustling

streets of Bakersfield.

As he sipped his coffee, the door chimed, and in walked his father. Jace's heart sank. His stern face was the last thing he needed to see right now. His father marched over and stood at Jace's table. "Leave Bakersfield," he demanded, his voice cold and unyielding. "You're a disgrace to this family. You're on your way to hell."

Jace's grip tightened around his coffee cup. "I'm not going anywhere. This is my life, not yours."

His father's eyes narrowed. "Your life? Look at you. You're a failure. Everything you touch turns to ash."

"That's not true," Jace shot back, his voice rising. "I'm doing my best. You never see that, do you?"

"Your best is pathetic," his father sneered. "You were a mistake. I wish you were never born."

The words hit Jace like a physical blow. He stood up, his chair scraping loudly against the floor. "You don't mean that."

"Oh, but I do," his father said, his voice dripping with venom. "You're nothing but a burden."

Before Jace could react, his father's fist connected with his jaw, sending him stumbling back. The entire coffee shop fell silent, all eyes on the unfolding drama.

The manager rushed over, stepping between them. "Sir, you need to leave now," he said firmly to Jace's father. "Or I'll call the police."

His father glared at the manager but turned and stormed out of the shop. The manager turned to Jace. “Are you okay?”

Jace nodded numbly. Inside he felt shattered. The words, the punch, the public humiliation—it was too much. He felt destroyed, unloved, and utterly alone. He mumbled a thank you to the manager and left the coffee shop, his mind a whirlwind of pain and confusion.

He wandered aimlessly until he found himself at a bar. He needed something stronger than coffee to numb the ache in his chest. As he ordered a drink, he couldn't shake the feeling of being what his father had called him, unwanted, a burden. The bar's dim lighting and the hum of conversation did nothing to lift the heavy weight of his father's words from his heart.

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Nico

Nico began swearing under his breath when Jace walked out of the room, then got louder. “What the fuck is wrong with him? He’s putting the band at risk. He knows how important these gigs are for us. He’s so damn immature.”

“He’s upset, Nico,” Sammie said. “This is his hometown. Lots of shit went down here. He’s a walking wounded boy right now. He needs your love.”

“He’s messed up right now. Straighten him out before Black Rock,” Mark said.

“Let’s look for him,” Sammie suggested.

“You two rest for tonight. I’ll find his stupid ass.” Nico left the hotel in search of Jace. He checked into a nearby coffee shop, but unfortunately, he didn’t see him anywhere. As he looked around, his eyes landed on a lively bar, neon lights beckoning. Of course, he’d find a bar to drink his anger away. Hopefully, Jace wouldn’t be too wasted to play and sing tonight .

Nico’s heart pounded as he pushed through the swinging doors of Henry’s Bar. The dim, smoky atmosphere was a stark contrast to the bright, sterile hallways of their hotel. He scanned the crowd, his eyes finally settling on Jace, seated at the end of the bar, engaged in conversation with a beer in his hand. At least he wasn’t smoking. Despite California’s ban on smoking in public buildings, this bar still allowed patrons to light up. Nico despised the acrid smell of smoke, wrinkling his nose in disgust.

As Nico approached, he couldn’t help but notice the dark bruise on Jace’s jawline.

His stomach churned. What could have caused such an injury?

“Jace, we need to go,” Nico said. “The gig’s tonight.”

Jace glanced up, startled. “Yeah, I know. Just finishing up this conversation.”

Nico watched as Jace said goodbye to his friend and followed him out of the bar. As they walked back to the hotel, Nico couldn’t shake a feeling of dread. He had to know who had hurt Jace and why.

“Jace, what happened to your face?” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Jace hesitated, his eyes darting away. “It’s nothing. Just a small accident.”

Nico wasn’t convinced. “I can see it wasn’t an accident. Tell me what the hell happened.”

Jace sighed, his shoulders slumping. “My dad...he punched me.”

Nico’s blood ran cold. He couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Did you visit your dad?”

“No, he found me in a coffee shop.”

“What? Why would he do that?”

Jace shrugged. “Just a disagreement. ”

Nico’s anger flared. “A disagreement? That’s not a disagreement, Jace. That’s abuse.” In the old days, Nico would have made sure his father never touched him again. His desire for revenge hadn’t disappeared, but he had forced his behavior to

change. He would not be that man anymore. He was better than that.

Jace looked away, avoiding Nico's gaze. "I know."

Nico took a deep breath, trying to calm himself. "You need to get some rest before the gig tonight."

As he guided Jace back to their hotel room, Nico's mind raced with thoughts of Jace's safety, imagining how his jackass father had again damaged his well-being. A weight of anger and sadness settled heavily in his heart, the anguish of knowing Jace had endured a harrowing ordeal without him there to provide protection. He had upset Jace so much that he stormed out of the hotel room. He should have had more patience with him. Maybe Sammie was right, he needed to love him.

As soon as they entered the room, Sammie jumped out of bed and raced towards Jace. "What happened? Did you and Nico have a fight?"

"No. He wouldn't hit me. My father punched me."

Mark walked over to check out Jace's jaw. "Damn, that's why Nico told us to stick together."

"I know. I didn't listen. I got what I deserved. I never want to come back here again."

"You didn't deserve that. No one touches my Jace," Nico growled. "I'm pissed I upset you so that you left. My job is to protect you. I fucked up."

"I wasn't pissed at you so much as I was at my situation here. I don't want any more Bakersfield gigs. I'm so done here."

"How did your old man find you?" Mark asked.

“Hell, if I know. It’s no secret where we’re staying. He could have had someone watch for me.”

“Did he just punch you for nothing?” Sammie asked.

“No, he told me to get out of Bakersfield. And a ton of other shit I didn’t want to hear in front of all the people in the coffee shop.”

“You know he’s nuts,” Sammie said. “You did the right thing when you left home.”

“Jace is right. We shouldn’t have accepted this gig. I knew there might be issues, but I was hoping to avoid shit like this.” Nico inched closer to Jace. “Let’s rest for an hour, then we’ll get ready. We’ll order something light to eat in here.”

They returned to bed.

“Come closer, Jace.” Nico embraced Jace, feeling the warmth and weight of his body against his own. “You and I need to have a talk about us.”

“What about us?”

“Just clear the air about how things are right now, and how they might be.” Nico pressed his lips against Jace’s, feeling the warmth and softness of their touch.

“I want you near me like this,” Jace said.

“I know. We’ll have our talk alone about it soon. Let’s rest.”

Nico stood in front of the mirror, adjusting the colorful turban on his head. His fingers, adorned with rings, skillfully fastened the last of his bracelets. The room buzzed with the energy of pre-show excitement. Jace, already dressed in his leather

skintight jeans and a midriff see-through top, was tying a bandana in his hair. His boots, like everyone else's, were ready for the stage.

Sammie, as usual, was the last to finish getting ready. He meticulously applied his makeup, his hot pink jeans and sequined top catching the light with every movement. Nico watched as Sammie leaned closer to the mirror, carefully drawing a perfect line of eyeliner. The room was filled with the scent of hairspray and the sound of laughter.

“Hold still, Jace,” Sammie said, turning to apply eyeliner to him. Jace stood patiently, his eyes half-closed as Sammie worked his magic. Mark, dressed entirely in black, waited his turn.

“You’re a perfectionist, Sammie,” Mark teased, earning a playful glare from Sammie.

“Someone has to make sure you all look good,” Sammie said, finishing Jace’s eyeliner and moving on to Mark. The friendly banter continued, easing any pre-show nerves.

Nico felt a swell of pride as he looked at his bandmates. They were more than just a band; they were family. And tonight, they were ready to set the stage on fire.

When they were done, they jumped into the limo outside waiting for them. Jace wanted a shot, but Nico shook his head in disapproval.

“Hey, there’s my high school,” Jace pointed out.

“Were you an honor student?” Sammie asked.

“Nope. I barely made my way out of there.”

“Why is that?” Nico asked.

“Smoking too much weed and partying more than I should.”

“Figures,” Nico said.

“Were you a scholar, Nico?” Jace asked .

“Of course! I went to college.” Nico waved his ring hand towards Jace. “Saint John’s University.”

“I remember. You said it was a Catholic college,” Mark said.

Nico nodded.

Upon arriving at the club, they unloaded their instruments. Jace, however, made a beeline for the bar. Nico watched as Jace downed two shots of whiskey in quick succession. When he saw Jace with a third shot in his hand, Nico intervened. He took the glass from Jace and gently but firmly led him back to the stage area where they needed to set up.

They busied themselves with their tasks. Nico adjusted the drum kit, making sure everything was in place. Mark tuned his bass, his fingers deftly moving over the strings. Sammie set up his keyboard and checked the sound levels. Nico’s eyes occasionally darted towards Jace, who was now chatting animatedly with some old high school friends who had shown up.

Jace, with another drink in hand, laughed and reminisced with his friends, his voice carrying over the hum of the club. Nico felt a pang of concern. He knew how much this gig meant to Jace, to all the bands, and he wanted nothing to jeopardize it.

“Nico, come on, just one more drink,” Jace pleaded when Nico approached him again.

“Jace, we need to focus. We’re here to play, not to party,” Nico replied, trying to keep his voice calm.

Jace’s expression shifted, a mix of frustration and defiance. “I’m fine, Nico. It’s just a couple of drinks.”

Nico sighed, his patience wearing thin. “That’s your third. We need you at your best. Let’s just get through the set, okay?”

Jace glared at him for a moment, then his shoulders slumped. “Fine,” he muttered, setting his drink down .

Nico placed a hand on Jace’s shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “Thanks, man. Let’s do this.”

Together, they returned to the stage, the tension between them easing as they focused on the music. The club was filling up, and the energy in the room was charged. Nico knew that once they started playing, everything else would fade away, and it would just be about the music.

Nico felt the energy of the club course through his veins as Sacred Fire took the stage. The club was a sprawling, smoky venue that pulsed with anticipation and a raw, gritty energy. This was Jace’s hometown, and the crowd was electric. For someone who had so many terrible memories here, it was impossible to tell that from the audience’s response to Jace.

Nico sat behind his drum kit, his heart pounding in sync with the beat he was about to unleash. As the first notes of their opening song filled the air, the crowd erupted into a frenzy. The energy was electric, and he could feel it coursing through his veins.

Jace leaped across the stage, his voice soaring above the music. The audience’s

cheers grew louder, a cacophony of excitement and admiration. “Jace! Jace! Jace!” they chanted, their voices blending into a powerful chorus that filled the venue.

Jace danced around his bandmates, his flirtatious movements fluid and infectious. He and Mark shared the vocals seamlessly, their harmonies weaving together perfectly. Mark’s guitar riffs added a raw edge to the performance, while Sammie’s keyboard melodies provided a rich, atmospheric backdrop.

Nico’s eyes darted between his bandmates and the crowd. He saw people jumping, their bodies moving in time with the music. Some were dancing wildly, lost in the rhythm, while others sang along, their faces lit up with joy .

“Jace! You’re amazing!” someone shouted from the front row, their voice barely audible over the music.

“Go, Sacred Fire!” another fan yelled, waving a homemade sign with the band’s name scrawled across it.

Nico couldn’t help but smile. Despite the recent tension between him and Jace, moments like these reminded him why they did this. The music, the connection with the audience, the sheer exhilaration of performing—it was all worth it.

As the song reached its climax, Jace and Mark’s voices melded into a powerful crescendo. The crowd’s energy peaked, and for a moment, it felt like the entire world was singing along with them. Nico’s drumming intensified, driving the song to its explosive finish.

When the final note rang out, the audience erupted into applause and cheers. Nico glanced at Jace, who was beaming with pride. This was his hometown, and the love from the crowd was palpable.

“Thank you, Bakersfield!” Jace shouted into the microphone, his voice filled with emotion. “You guys are incredible!”

The crowd roared in response, and Nico knew this was just the beginning of an unforgettable gig.

Nico was so proud of Jace, singing and dancing. As usual, he was full of energy, as if nothing mattered once at the microphone. His gorgeous eyes gleamed with a mix of excitement and nostalgia. He strummed the last chord, and the crowd erupted into a thunderous roar. Nico’s heart raced as he joined in, his sticks pounding out a relentless beat. Mark’s guitar riffs soared above the din, and Sammie’s keyboard added an intricate melodic layer.

The band played two sets, each song more intense than the last. The crowd was a blur of bodies, swaying and jumping to the music. Nico could feel the energy radiating from them, feeding into his own performance. As the final notes faded, the audience erupted into a deafening cheer.

Jace’s name echoed through the club, chanted by a crowd of adoring fans. They were here to show their support. Nico grinned, a sense of pride and satisfaction washing over him. They had done it. They had rocked Bakersfield.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:12 am

Jace

In the morning, Jace woke earlier than he normally did. Everyone was still sleeping. He untangled himself from Nico and just as he sat up to get out of bed, Nico's hand grabbed him.

“Where are you going?”

“Umm, I was going to get an early shower and take a walk.”

“Not without me.”

“Are you coming in the shower with me?” Jace raised his eyebrows.

“What if I did?”

“Are you coming on to me?”

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“Nope.” Jace couldn't believe Nico wanted to follow him into the shower. Was it so he could make sure he wasn't leaving the hotel, or was it because he wanted to start something? It's not like he didn't know how he was. He knew more about Jace than Jace did.

Right behind him, Nico cupped Jace's ass in his hand. “You do have a teasing ass. ”

“I thought you’d never noticed.” As soon as they entered the bathroom, Nico locked the door.

Jace adjusted the shower knob until the water flowed out at the perfect temperature for them. He pulled down his underwear, revealing his bare skin, and stepped into the warm embrace of the shower. His cock stood straight up, but he didn’t see any condoms around for Nico. He knew better than to think he would fuck him without one, especially since he knew how much Jace messed around.

Nico’s beauty was even more striking when he stood naked. Hair lightly covered his legs and dusted his chest. He inched closer to Jace and put his arms around him.

“You’re so hot!” Nico whispered in his ear.

“Are you going to tease me in here?” Jace asked as he held his erection in his hand.

“I’m going to wash you, then you’ll see what I’m going to do what you’ve been dreaming about.”

Nico poured some gel into his hand. He rubbed it on Jace’s back in a circular motion, working from his neck down to his butt. He squeezed his ass cheeks.

“Ouch!”

Nico turned Jace around, the water cascading down his back as he lathered his chest, then took his time massaging his head. As he rinsed out the shampoo, he could feel his hair becoming lighter and refreshed. “I love your hair,” Nico said.

“Thanks.” Jace picked up the shampoo and washed Nico’s long, dark hair. He lowered his head so Jace would massage his head. Nico moaned as Jace rubbed his head.

“You’re good at this,” Nico said.

“Sammie taught me how to do it. ”

Jace rinsed Nico’s hair, then lathered his body from front to back. He played with his balls and immediately Nico took over. He moved Jace against the tile, then took both their cocks in his hand.

“I can’t fuck you until we talk, so I’ll rub us off.”

Jace grinned.

“Awe. I love how our dicks are becoming friends,” Nico said.

“I’ve waited a long time for them to meet,” Jace groaned.

Nico grasped both their erections tighter, applying a generous amount of gel to enhance their pleasure. Jace was in awe as he watched the two cocks, side by side, rubbing against each other. Their cocks. The moment their cocks had made contact, Jace felt an intense sensation. Nico continued gently caressing, his hand quickening its pace.

“Are you getting close?” Nico asked.

“Yes, are you?”

Mark and Sammie were pounding on the door.

“Hurry, we have to piss,” Mark yelled.

“What are you guys doing in there?” Sammie asked.

“Damn it!” Jace yelled.

“Ignore them,” Nico instructed.

As soon as Nico’s cum shot onto Jace’s face, he blasted his on Nico’s stomach and hand. While Jace leaned against the tile, panting and trying to steady himself, Nico pulled him in for a kiss. They allowed the water to wash the stickiness off them. Nico pulled him closer, their lips meeting in a passionate kiss that left Jace breathless. When their afterglow ended, and they had caught their breath again, they moved out of the shower to dry off.

The relentless pounding echoed through the room, intermingled with urgent shouts for them to open the door.

Jace laughed as he toweled himself. “I don’t want to see their faces. ”

“Me either.” Nico dried himself, then tied his towel around his lower half.

They stepped out of the bathroom, towels snugly draped around their wet bodies. Mark and Sammie both rushed into the bathroom and slammed the door.

Jace and Nico finished drying and put on jeans and shirts.

“Why did you want to shower with me?” Jace asked as he slipped his T-shirt over his head.

“I thought you were slipping out again.”

“So, it had nothing to do with wanting to be with me?” A sense of melancholy washed over Jace, disappointed at Nico’s reason. Nico’s behavior felt like a betrayal.

“Hey, it had everything to do with you. Have you seen me shower with Mark or Sammie?”

“No, but I could have missed that event.”

“There was no event like that. Only with you. I thought we could have breakfast alone. As I said, we have to talk.”

“Talk about our shower?”

“If you want to voice your opinion or disappointment with the shower, fine. We can talk about that too. But I have a list of things I want to cover with you.”

“What about Mark and Sammie?”

“I’m going to write them a note and tell them we’re having breakfast together, and we’ll all go to lunch before our show.” Nico used the hotel stationery on the table and wrote them a note. “Ready, pretty boy? Nico asked.

Jace nodded and followed him out of the hotel room to the elevator. A young man inside the elevator stared at them as they got in.

“Hey, Jace! How are you?” He greeted Jace warmly .

“Hey, Charlie! Nice to see you again. I’m doing great.”

“I heard you’re playing tonight.”

“We are. Hope to see you at the after-party.”

“I’ll be there.”

With a soft ding, the elevator stopped, and they stepped out into the lobby then exited onto lively Main Street.

“I think the coffee shop has fantastic breakfasts,” Jace said.

“The one your father spotted you in?”

“Yes. I don’t care. I’m fine now.”

“Okay, it’s right here and I’m starving,” Nico said.

Jace watched as Nico took in the quaint café on the bustling street of Bakersfield. It was a familiar sight, a place he’d frequented countless times growing up. The warm, inviting atmosphere was filled with the aroma of freshly brewed coffee and sizzling bacon.

“This place looks great,” Nico said, his eyes scanning the menu. “I’ll have the scrambled eggs, sausage, and hash browns.”

Jace nodded in agreement and ordered the same. As they waited for their food, a familiar face approached their table.

“Well, if it isn’t Jace,” Mary said, a wide smile spreading across her face. She was a former classmate of Jace’s, a bright and bubbly girl who had always been a friend.

“Mary!” Jace exclaimed, returning her smile. “It’s been a long time.”

After catching up for a few minutes, Mary left to get their food.

Once alone again, Nico turned to Jace. “So, about us...”

Jace's heart pounded. He'd been waiting for this conversation. "Yeah?"

"I want to be with you, Jace," Nico said, his voice filled with sincerity. "But it's got to be just us. No more partying without me. And I need you to stop smoking and getting drunk to the point you have no idea where you are."

Jace was taken aback. He hadn't expected such a direct approach. "I...I don't know," he replied, his voice hesitant. Was his behavior preventing them from being together?

"No, Jace," Nico insisted. "You have to try. I love you, and I want us to have a future together. But we can't do that if you're still stuck in your old ways."

Jace knew Nico was right. He had to make some changes if he wanted to be with him. With a heavy sigh, he said "Let me think about all this."

"Think about us? You don't want us? You'd rather fuck around like a whore?"

"I said I need to think about it. I didn't say no. You're asking me to change who I am. I don't know."

"You're going to lose all of us by your fucking behavior."

Mary carried over a tray with their breakfast orders and set their platters on the table in front of them. "Is everything okay here?" Her eyes betrayed a hint of worry.

"Yes, Mary. Thank you," Jace said.

Nico glared at him when she left. "Do you think you can fuck with me like this?"

"It seems you're fucking with me. You're the one with the demands for me to change for you. I want to be with you, but I don't know about all of this."

“What exactly don’t you know? You don’t know if you want to stop smoking? You don’t know if you want to stop drinking yourself into oblivion? You don’t know if you still want to fuck around with others? Tell me what exactly you don’t know.”

“I can’t. I just can’t right now. ”

Nico pulled his wallet out and threw money on the table. “When you can, let me know. Until then, stay the fuck away from me.” He pushed his chair back with a screech and got up abruptly, walking away.

Stunned, Jace sat there in disbelief as Nico walked away. Jace sat alone at the cafe, staring blankly at the empty chair across from him. Nico walking out left a void that felt impossible to fill. His heart ached with a mix of love and regret. He loved Nico deeply, but the thought of changing his lifestyle—quitting drinking, smoking, and partying—seemed like an insurmountable challenge. He wanted to try, but the fear of failing held him back.

As he nursed his coffee, Mary noticed his distress and approached him. She slid into the seat Nico had vacated, her eyes filled with concern.

“Hey, Jace,” she whispered. “I saw Nico leave. What happened?”

Jace sighed, running a hand through his hair. “He left because I couldn’t commit to changing. He wants me to stop drinking, smoking, and partying. I want to, but...I’m scared, Mary. What if I can’t do it? What if I fail?”

Mary reached out and placed a comforting hand on his. “Jace, I know it’s hard. Change is never easy, especially when it feels like you’re giving up a part of yourself. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I heard rumors that you’re in love with Nico. Is that true?”

“More than anything,” Jace admitted, his voice barely above a whisper.

“Then that’s your motivation,” Mary whispered. “You don’t have to be perfect, and you don’t have to do it all at once. Take it one step at a time. And if you stumble, it’s okay. What’s important is that you’re trying. Nico will see that effort.”

Jace looked into her eyes, finding a glimmer of hope. “But what if I mess up? What if I can’t keep my promise? We all live and work together. ”

Mary squeezed his hand reassuringly. “Everyone messes up, Jace. It’s part of being human. The key is to get back up and keep trying. Nico clearly loves you, and he wants to see you make an effort. That’s what matters.”

Jace nodded slowly, feeling a bit of the weight lift from his shoulders. “Thanks, Mary. I needed to hear that.”

She smiled. “Anytime, Jace. You’ve got this. Just take it one day at a time.”

As Mary got up to return to her duties, Jace felt a renewed sense of determination. Maybe he could do this after all. For Nico, for himself, and for them together.

Nico

Nico's frustration with Jace reached its peak, causing him to storm out of the café in a fit of rage. How could he have been so wrong about Jace? Despite knowing Jace loved him, there was a lingering hesitation that clouded his mind. Was Jace asking for an open relationship? Nico would never agree to anything like that, and Jace knew that. As he walked to work off some of his frustration, he could feel the failure weighing heavily on his shoulders. His timing was off, or perhaps there would never be a perfect moment for them. With each lap around the long block, he took in the sights and sounds of the bustling city before finally making his way back to the hotel room. He desperately tried to push thoughts of Jace out of his mind. Nothing would ever become of them as a couple. Jace had made that clear. Mark and Sammie sat around the table eating breakfast.

"Where's Jace?" Sammie asked.

"He's at the café."

"Did you eat?" Mark asked.

"No. I left Jace there."

"Did something bad happen between you guys?" Sammie adjusted his earring.

"I don't want to talk about Jace. Mark, have a back-up plan in case Jace doesn't show up tonight."

“Why?” Mark asked.

“I don’t know what the fuck he’s doing. He’s too busy trying to score a different fuck every night and pickle himself in alcohol. He might not show. That’s all I’m saying. Be ready to take the lead.”

“Should I talk to him?” Sammie asked.

“No. Leave him alone. I’m getting my own room, so I’ll be there until we leave for the show.” Nico packed up his things. “Call if there is a problem. I’ll have my phone on.”

“Things must be bad for you to get your own room,” Sammie said.

“You know what an asshole he is. I swear I’m ready to leave this group.”

“You can’t leave us. That’s why it’s not good to fuck people in the band. You put us all at risk.”

“Nobody fucked if that is what you think happened in the shower. I’ll see you at eight.”

Nico stormed out of the room, his heart pounding with a mix of anger and hurt. He needed to be alone, away from the tension that had been building between him and Jace. The ultimatum he had given Jace still echoed in his mind: stop smoking, drinking, and partying if he wanted to be with him. Jace’s uncertain response had cut deeper than he expected. He took the elevator to the desk to arrange for a new room.

Once he entered his own room, Nico slammed the door shut and leaned against it, trying to steady his breathing. He felt a knot of anxiety tightening in his chest as he thought about the gig they had to play that night. The fear that Jace might not even

show up gnawed at him, making him feel even more helpless. That little fucker!

Nico paced the room, his thoughts spiraling into worst-case scenarios. What if Jace didn't come? What if the performance fell apart because of the tension between them? He could almost see the disappointed faces of their fans, hear the awkward silence that would follow a botched song. The pressure was suffocating. It wasn't fair to Mark and Sammie, either. As the band manager, he was supposed to keep the band functioning and at peace with each other, not try to fuck the lead singer.

He threw himself onto the bed, staring up at the ceiling. The anger he felt towards Jace was mixed with a deep sadness. He wanted so badly for things to work out between them, but he couldn't ignore the destructive habits that Jace clung to. It hurt to think Jace chose those habits over him.

To distract himself, Nico picked up the phone and ordered some food. He had little appetite, but he knew he needed to eat something. As he waited for the food to arrive, he tried to focus on the music, on the performance they had to deliver. But no matter how hard he tried, his thoughts kept drifting back to Jace and the uncertainty of their relationship and how all this would affect the band.

Nico felt a tear slip down his cheek, quickly wiping it away. He hated feeling this vulnerable, especially when they had a show to put on. But the pain was too raw to ignore. All he could do was hope Jace would show up, and that somehow, they could make things right.

After he finished eating and took a long nap, his phone rang, breaking the silence. He picked up the phone with the hope it was Jace.

"Nico," Mark said. "Jace hasn't been here since you two left. We both called him, and he didn't answer. The limo is going to pick us up in an hour."

“Oh fuck! Are you ready to take over if he doesn’t show up?” Nico said. His pain again turned to anger. That no good pain in the ass! He could only imagine all the shit Jace was into when he was a kid. He had to figure out a way to save him from himself. Where the fuck was he all day? He had friends here, so he must be with them.

“I’m always ready for that, but this is Jace’s hometown and they’re expecting him. You heard them chanting his name last night as if he was the only one in the band.”

“Yes, well, he jumps all over the stage. They eat that up and his voice...”

“We’ll meet in the lobby.”

“See you then. And thanks.”

Nico stood in front of the mirror, pulling on his favorite pair of jeans and the Sacred Fire T-shirt he had been wearing became a second skin. He removed the shirt and put on a green one. His outfit had a draped, layered look, with a scarf over one shoulder, also adorned with gold patterns.

He meticulously fastened his large, gold earrings, which had an intricate design, resembling traditional Indian jewelry. They hung from his ears and were quite ornate. He put on multiple necklaces, including one with large black beads and another with smaller green and gold beads. Each one a small piece of his identity, followed by an array of bracelets and necklaces that clinked softly as he moved. The most time-consuming part of his routine was fitting his colorful turban over his long hair, ensuring every side strand was perfectly tucked away and leaving the rest down his back. Finally, he slipped into his black boots, feeling their familiar weight and comfort.

Once he was satisfied with his look, Nico headed to the lobby to meet Mark and

Sammie. The absence of Jace was a heavy cloud over their heads as they climbed into the limo, each of them silently fuming and worried .

The tension in the limo was suffocating, but as they arrived at the club and walked inside, they spotted Jace at the soundboard. He was dressed in black leather, his hair streaked with blue, a sight that instantly washed away Nico's worries. A wave of relief rushed through all three of them as soon as they laid eyes on him, knowing that their band was complete and ready to rock.

Jace ignored all three of them as if they weren't there. He wasn't noticeably drunk, and he had a Coke can in his hand. Jace staying sober was a relief on many levels. Nico walked over and smiled.

"You look hot tonight! Glad you could make it," Nico said, then went to his drums without waiting for a response from Jace.

Mark and Sammie were approaching Jace when the girl from last night unexpectedly appeared, jumped on stage, embraced him, and planted a kiss on his lips.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:12 am

Jace

Jace was relieved when he saw the rest of the band show up. He wasn't sure if he would have to do this show alone. Then there was Nico. He couldn't have dressed any hotter. Why did he have to look like that tonight?

Laura saw him in the café talking to Mary when she came for breakfast, then she sat down and talked to him. Jace ended up spending all day with her, and it turned out to be fun. Her apartment became Jace's refuge for the rest of the day. She was kind enough to add blue streaks into his hair. All the way back to high school, she wanted more from him than he could give. When she kissed him on the lips in front of the band, he saw Nico roll his eyes. What was he supposed to do? He wouldn't push her away and be rude.

Jace figured he needed to talk to Mark and Sammie before Nico. He walked over to them. "Hey, sorry about today. Things got messed up, but I'm okay now."

"You owe me," Mark said .

"For what?" Jace asked.

"Because I had to practice singing your solos. We didn't know if you'd show up or not. That's how my day went. Thanks to you."

"Sorry about that. I wasn't in a place to talk to anyone in the band."

"Fuck you too!" Mark said.

“You could have sent us a text,” Sammie said.

“I guess I could’ve. I’m sorry.”

“Are you trying to act straight?” Mark asked.

“No. Why would you say that?”

“We all saw you kissing that girl,” Mark said.

“I’ve known her since kindergarten. Just friends.”

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Sammie asked.

“Yes. I had a great day with Laura. She’s an old friend. She put the streaks in my hair.”

“I love them. But she forgot your eyeliner,” Sammie said.

“I forgot about it, too. Can you put some on?”

Sammie looked inside his bag and pulled out the eyeliner. He made Jace stand still while he applied it.

“Thanks, Sammie.”

“Hey, did Nico fuck you in the shower?” he whispered into Jace’s ear.

“No. But we had an argument at the café, and he left.”

“He was bummed out when he returned without you. He rented his own room.”

“He did?” Hearing Nico no longer wanted to sleep in the same bed upset him, so he decided it would be best to ignore Nico before they played. He couldn’t handle Nico destroying his mood. He plucked the strings of his guitar, fine-tuning each one until they produced a perfect tone .

“Attention, everyone, we need to evacuate the building immediately. Please remain calm and proceed to the nearest exit. Follow the staff’s instructions and move quickly but safely. Thank you for your cooperation.”

“Oh, no” Jace picked up his guitar while the others picked up what they could. They stood in line to exit, leaving the drums and keyboard in the club.

Jace’s heart pounded as he stepped out of the venue, the familiar streets of Bakersfield feeling more alien than ever. The church he had grown up in, the place that had once felt like a sanctuary, now seemed like a breeding ground for hostility. His eyes widened in horror as he saw his father among a crowd outside the club, his arm arcing through the air to hurl an egg that splattered against Jace’s chest.

On the sidewalk, a sea of angry faces and hateful signs greeted him. “Leave Bakersfield, Jace,” one sign read, while another proclaimed, “Sacred Fire is demonic.” The words cut deeper than any physical blow, each one a reminder of the rejection from the community he’d once called home.

Without warning, the crowd surged, and eggs rained down on him. The cold, slimy mess of raw eggs and broken shells clung to his skin and clothes, each impact a stinging reminder of their disdain. Panic set in, his breath coming in short, ragged gasps as he tried to shield himself.

Suddenly, Nico was there. He took Jace’s guitar and handed it to Sammie. With his powerful arms, he lifted Jace off the ground and threw him over his shoulder. Jace clung to Nico, his mind reeling from the shock and humiliation. Behind them, Mark

and Sammie pushed through the crowd, their faces set with determination.

The limo door swung open, and Nico practically threw Jace inside before diving in after him. Mark and Sammie followed, slamming the door shut just as another egg hit the window. Safe inside the vehicle, Jace's body trembled uncontrollably, the reality of the situation crashing down on him. He had never felt so utterly alone, despite the comforting presence of his bandmates.

Sammie handed Jace his guitar covered with broken eggs, and Jace felt the slimy remnants sliding down his jacket. Sammie then passed him a handkerchief. The protesters' jeers still echoed in Jace's ears, and the humiliation stung more than the physical mess. His father and the church people had made their hatred clear, and it cut deep into his heart. He cleaned his guitar as much as he could and broke a string from rubbing so hard.

"You okay?" Nico asked as he gently tried to remove the raw eggs from his face with a bandana.

"No. I want to get out of this mother-fucking town."

"Let's get you cleaned up. We'll leave after they deliver my drums and Sammie's keyboard," Nico said from beside him, his arm around Jace's shoulders. "Hey, don't let them get to you," Nico spoke softly, trying to meet Jace's eyes. "Last night, the crowd loved you. They were chanting your name, remember?"

Jace looked down, his voice barely above a whisper. "But my own father...and all those people from the church...they hate me, Nico. How can I face anyone in this town again?"

Nico squeezed his shoulder gently. "I know it hurts, Jace. But think about all the people who came to see you perform. They were there for you, cheering you on. You

were amazing on stage, and they saw that.”

Jace sighed, feeling the weight of the night’s events pressing down on him. “It’s just hard to believe that when all I can think about is how much my father hates me.”

Nico’s eyes softened. “Your father doesn’t define who you are, Jace. You have so much talent and so many people who support you. Focus on that. Focus on the music and the people who love you for who you are. ”

Jace nodded slowly, trying to absorb Nico’s words. “Thanks, Nico. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

Nico smiled, giving Jace’s shoulder one last reassuring squeeze. “You’ll get through this, Jace. And I’ll be right here with you, every step of the way.”

Jace listened to Nico’s voice as he made the call to the club, informing them they wouldn’t be coming back. With their safety in jeopardy, Nico urgently requested their remaining instruments be delivered safely to the hotel.

“What did he say?” Jace asked.

“They’re delivering the instruments. Mark and Sammie will direct them to my van.” He handed the keys to Mark. “Come upstairs and pack as soon as you have our things.”

Sammie handed Jace a chocolate bar.

“Thanks.” Tears ran down Jace’s face.

“Don’t worry, Jace. You’ll be as good as new once you’re cleaned up. We’re not staying here a minute longer than needed.”

Jace dropped his face to his hands, his eyes downcast as he purposely avoided making eye contact with anyone. He was ashamed, humiliated.

As they arrived at the hotel, Jace said, "I'm ashamed to walk into the lobby like this. It's going to be all over town. I hope no one at Black Rock finds out."

"We all have egg on us," Nico said as he helped him out of the limo.

He stood with Nico in the elevator, his head down. Once inside their room, Nico helped him into the shower and adjusted the hot water. When Jace finished, Nico left to get his clothes, then took a shower, and by then, Mark and Sammie had arrived from securing their instruments. They each took a shower and packed. As Nico took care of Jace, he asked Mark and Sammie to gather their gear and carry it out. Jace stumbled, disoriented, but Nico offered a helping hand as they made their way to the van. Jace never looked up at any part of town. Until Nico hit the freeway, Jace stared at his boots.

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Nico

Nico's frustration with Jace had reached its peak, and now this. He couldn't leave him helpless. His church family was far worse than his own mobster family. At least they put a hit on you for a reason. What had Jace done? He wanted to hug him and tell him he'd take care of him if he would allow it, but Jace's response to cleaning up for their relationship said it all. He didn't value Nico enough to make the change.

"Mark, where's the next hotel?" Nico asked.

"Ten miles from here. Want to make reservations?"

"Two rooms. You and Sammie and Jace and I. Make sure we have two beds," Nico said.

As soon as they reached the hotel, they checked in, and Jace followed him to the room like a zombie. He told everyone to meet at the diner for breakfast at nine.

The room was spacious and modern, with a large window offering a view of the open hills. The walls were painted in a calming shade of blue, and there was a king-sized bed with crisp white linens and a plush headboard. Unfortunately, they were out of rooms with two beds.

A sleek wooden desk sat against one wall, where Jace placed his guitar. Nearby, a small table held a vase of fresh flowers, a thoughtful gesture from the hotel staff.

In one corner, a mini-bar was stocked with various drinks, which would be a tempting

sight for Jace, who was struggling with his vices. Within minutes, Jace pulled out two beers and handed one to Nico.

Despite the room's comfort and elegance, the atmosphere was heavy with unspoken words and unresolved emotions. Nico sat on the edge of the hotel bed, watching Jace pace back and forth. The room was dimly lit, the only light coming from the streetlamp outside the window. Jace's shoulders were slumped, his face a mix of anger and hurt. Nico knew this was about more than just the eggs; it was about everything Jace had been through with his family and the church.

"Jace, sit down for a minute," Nico said softly, patting the spot next to him. Jace hesitated, but eventually sat down, his head in his hands.

"I can't do this anymore, Nico," Jace muttered. "I can't keep facing this kind of hatred. I just want to quit."

Nico took a deep breath, choosing his words carefully. "I know it's been tough, Jace. What they did was horrible, and you didn't deserve any of it. But quitting now...it won't make the pain go away. It'll just let them win."

Jace looked up, his eyes filled with tears. "I don't care about winning or losing. I just can't handle it. I feel like I'm falling apart."

Nico reached out, placing a hand on Jace's shoulder. "You are one of the strongest people I know. You've faced so much already, and you're still here. The band needs you, Jace. I need you. You're the heart and soul of the Sacred Fire. "

Jace shook his head, his voice barely above a whisper. "I don't feel strong. I feel broken."

Nico squeezed his shoulder gently. "It's okay to feel that way. But remember, you're

not alone. We're a team, a family. We support each other. And right now, we need you more than ever. Black Rock City is a big gig for us. We can't do it without you."

Jace sighed, wiping his eyes. "What if I mess up? What if I can't handle it?"

Nico smiled, a reassuring warmth in his eyes. "Then we'll handle it together. No matter what happens, we'll face it as a band. And I'll be right there with you, every step of the way."

There was a long silence as Jace absorbed Nico's words. Finally, he nodded, a small spark of determination returning to his eyes. "Okay. I'll do it. For the band. For you."

Nico pulled him into a hug, relief washing over him. "Thank you, Jace. We're going to get through this. Together."

As they sat there, holding onto each other, Nico felt a renewed sense of hope. They had faced challenges before, and they would face many more. But as long as they had each other, they could overcome anything.

"Nico, there's something I want to say, but I want you to listen until I'm done. Can you do that for me?" Jace wiped his tears with the back of his hands.

"I'm listening."

"You took me all wrong at the café. What I wanted to say was I wanted you from the day you helped me in the streets. My love for you never died out. But you asked me to change for you. I know you think I don't value you, value us, enough to change. I do. I really do. I said I can't change because I'm afraid of failing you, the band, and myself."

"Do you want a relationship with me? "

“Yes, but not with your conditions.”

“Get your clothes off and we’ll talk in bed. You’re tired and I’m wiped out.”

“Are you tabling our conversation?”

“No, Jace. I just need to lie down with you in my arms.”

Jace removed his clothes, then slipped into bed.

“Move over. I need to be the closest to the door.”

“Are you going to be my bodyguard?”

“I’d like to be more than your bodyguard.” Nico silently slipped into bed beside him, feeling the warmth of Jace’s body.

“I feel nice and safe in your arms,” Jace said.

“I just want to love you and help you heal. You’ve been hurt deeply today and I’m furious with your father and those people throwing eggs at us.”

“They threw them at you guys because of me, and that makes me feel like shit.”

“Where’s your phone?” Nico asked.

“Next to me charging.”

“Give it to me.”

Jace twisted, reached for his phone on the bedside table, and held it. “Why do you

want my phone?”

“I want to delete your asshole father’s number. You are to have no contact with him for your emotional health.”

Jace handed the phone to Nico. “It’s under Abraham Adams.”

“I know that.” Nico blocked the contact, then deleted it. “Do you promise never to call him?”

“Don’t worry. That won’t happen. I’ve learned my lesson.” Jace’s voice broke, and he covered his face .

“Jace, you don’t have to hide from me. If you want your father gone permanently, just say the word.”

Jace removed his hands from his face, wiped his tears, and faced Nico. “And what does that mean?”

“It means whatever you want it to mean. I’ll get the job done.”

“No. He won’t bother me anymore because he won’t have access to me, and I have you to protect me.”

“You’re damn right. I’ll do whatever it takes to keep you safe.”

“We didn’t finish talking about what I said before we went to bed.”

“I heard what you said. I have a few questions I need to ask you before I trust that cute ass with my dick.”

“Damn! What a fucking way to put it!”

“My first question is about you partying.” Nico sat up in bed. “What that means, no one fucks you and you don’t fuck anyone either. Tell me why you can’t do this? Do you want others to fuck you?”

“No. I want you to top me. Just you.”

“And what about you fucking other people?”

“No. I don’t want it. I want you to do that to me.”

“Okay, that’s a good start.”

“What do you mean?”

“It means we still have more to talk about. Do you trust me?”

“Of course I trust you. I love you, Nico. But I’m not perfect. Yes, I like to party, but not fucking other people.”

“I have another question about that girl who kissed you.”

“Laura?” Jace smiled.

“Yes. You spent the day with her. She streaked your hair and kissed you. What’s going on with Laura and you?”

“Have you ever heard me talk about her?”

“No. But I saw what I saw. ”

“Laura and I go way back. She used to be my girlfriend in high school. I didn’t dare date a guy. Then I left home, and I didn’t contact her at all. We met at the café.”

“What part are you leaving out?” Nico asked.

“No part. She did my hair, and we talked all day. She knows I’m gay.”

“You could be bi.”

“No. Trust me, I’m not. And no, I didn’t fuck her. We’re just friends. Let me ask you a question.”

“Ask.”

“Why did you tell Mark to order two beds for us?”

“So you were listening. I wanted you to have a choice. I didn’t want you forced to sleep in the same bed unless you wanted to.”

“Good answer.”

“Now, back to my questions. Why can’t you stop smoking? It stinks and it will ruin your voice, among other things.”

“You should be more observant.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I haven’t smoked in a month. The doctor told me to stop.”

“When did you go to the doctor?”

“I go every six weeks to make sure I’m clean.”

“I suppose that’s a good thing.”

“What else do you want to know?”

“Drink in moderation. No more blackout drinking.”

“I don’t know if that’s possible, but would you accept a try hard on that one?”

“Would you accept me telling you that you’ve had enough?”

“I don’t know. I can offer this, though. I’ll limit my drinking to three drinks. If I go for the fourth, you can remind me.”

“That’s a good compromise.” He leaned in and pressed his lips against Jace’s, savoring the softness and warmth. “You’re all I want,” he confessed with longing in his eyes.

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Jace

Nico's grasp on Jace was firm, radiating a sense of power and protection. He had cuddled him before when he'd had nightmares, but this was so different. They had spoken their words, and the room fell silent, the weight of their conversation hanging in the air. They would begin a relationship, something Jace had wanted for a long time.

Nico got up from the bed and got a condom and lube. He stood over him. "Turn over, Jace," Nico instructed.

Jace flipped over onto his stomach with enthusiasm. As Nico stood over Jace, he took a moment to put on the condom.

"Are you sure you want this?"

"I want your cock. I've always wanted it."

Nico crawled onto the bed, causing the springs to creak beneath him. He pushed Jace's legs apart and knelt between them. Nico squirted lube onto his fingers and massaged Jace's hole. He wiggled his finger in but didn't touch his prostate. He applied more lube and pushed a second finger in, then a third, fingering Jace fiercely .

"Like that?" Nico asked.

"Ahh. Yes." Jace's cock stood fully erect against his stomach, trapped against the bedsheets, and ready for meaningful pleasure.

Nico held his lubed cock to Jace's opening. Then, in one long slow stroke, he pushed in. A burning pain shot through Jace's legs, ass, and up his spine. He wasn't sure if it was from the pressure or if he needed more time to adjust.

With his body weight on Jace's back and his hot breath in his ear, Nico whispered, "My cock is where it belongs. Your ass is mine. Just relax and enjoy me."

"Why do you feel so fucking big inside?" Jace asked.

"Does it hurt right now?"

"A little."

"Do you need more lube?"

Jace nodded.

Nico pulled out, reached for the lube, and squirted more between Jace's cheeks and on his condom. "Sorry, Jace. I should have prepped you more."

"It's okay. I want you so much."

"And I want you, but I don't want it to hurt. Relax your body for me."

Jace slowed his breathing and relaxed his ass muscles the best he could. At least he wasn't screaming in pain. Nico gave him a few more seconds to adjust before moving his cock inside, filling him inch by inch, going even deeper. Every part of Jace sang with delight. He had needed more lube, but Nico's cock felt enormous.

"Oh, Jace. We live together and didn't do this?"

“I know. I was afraid to ask you to fuck me,” Jace panted .

Nico took full strokes in and out, leaving only the tip of his cock in Jace’s ass before driving all the way back in. Jace tensed up, but when he relaxed, his pleasure was enhanced. Something amazing happened. Every time Nico drove his cock into Jace, it punched his prostate. Each hit sent an incredible feeling to his balls, and it turned to ecstasy as Nico pounded into him.

He rocked his body and moved with Nico, who slipped his hand under Jace and rubbed his cock. Jace wanted this blissful feeling to last forever, but in seconds, he blasted his cum into Nico’s hand. Nico continued pumping until he came as well, spilling his cum into the condom.

“My beautiful Jace, you feel so good.”

“Hmmm.” Jace was lost in his afterglow.

Nico disposed of his condom by wrapping it with tissues and dropping it next to the bed. He used the hand sanitizer to clean his hands, then wiped Jace, who was still buzzing.

“Am I really yours now?” Jace asked.

“I always saw you as mine. We can do this, Jace.” Their lips met in a soft, lingering kiss, sending shivers down Jace’s spine.

“Are we going to tell Mark and Sammie?” Jace asked.

“We have to because you can keep your things in your room, but you’re sleeping with me.”

“In your room?”

“My room is much larger, and it has a private bathroom.”

“I don’t know, Nico.”

“What don’t you know?”

“Those dark gray walls and black sheets.”

“You don’t like my dark bedroom?”

“It’s kind of depressing. Can’t we redecorate it so it’s ours, not yours?”

“Yes, we can. What color were you thinking of?”

“I want blue tones.”

“Okay, that sounds peaceful.”

In the morning, Nico and Jace took a shower with sex. They both said they’d like to do that every day. They dressed and left for the diner to meet Mark and Sammie for breakfast.

The diner was a classic American joint with red vinyl booths, checkered tile floors, and the scent of sizzling bacon hanging heavily in the air. Nico and Jace slid into a booth across from Mark and Sammie, who were already engrossed in their menus.

“Morning, guys,” Nico greeted them, his voice bright.

“Morning,” Mark replied, his tone a bit subdued.

Sammie beamed at them. “Hey, you two! How are you?”

Jace returned his smile. “We’re doing great, thanks.”

They ordered the morning special—a hearty plate of eggs, bacon, pancakes, and hash browns—and settled in to eat.

As they finished their meal, Nico cleared his throat. “Hey, guys, we have something to tell you.”

Sammie’s eyes widened. “What is it?”

“Well, Jace and I…” Nico paused, taking a deep breath. “We’re together.”

Sammie’s face lit up. “Oh, that’s wonderful news!” he exclaimed, clapping his hands. “I’m so happy for you both.”

Mark, however, didn’t seem as enthusiastic. He frowned and crossed his arms. “Are you sure this is a good idea, Jace?”

Jace met his gaze directly. “Yes, I’m sure.”

“I just think…” Mark hesitated. “I think you’re volatile, Jace. This could be bad for the band.”

Nico bristled. “How can you say that? We’ve been getting along great.”

“It’s not just about you two,” Mark insisted. “It’s about the whole band. If things go south between you two, it could tear us apart.”

Sammie tried to intervene. “Come on, Mark. Let’s give them a chance. They’re

happy. Why can't we be happy for them?"

Mark sighed. "I just want what's best for the band."

"I do too," Jace replied firmly. "And I think being with Nico is the best thing that could happen to me."

"I'm the band manager. I can guarantee you our relationship will not destroy the band."

"You know how Jace can be sometimes. I doubt you can put up with his shit for very long," Mark said.

Jace couldn't believe the words coming out of Mark's mouth. They'd sung together so many times and he thought so little of him? Had he used Jace to get some success? This was not the way Mark should talk about him when he was sitting right there.

"If Jace gets in trouble, I'll spank him," Nico said.

Jace turned and looked at Nico. "You're kidding, right?"

"Do I look like I'm kidding?"

"See, they're about to have their first fight," Mark said.

"We're not fighting," Jace said.

"Let's pack up."

"Where are we going?" Sammie asked .

“We’re going to Sequoia National Park. I’ve rented a cabin for us. This will be a working vacation. We need to practice for Black Rock City. We’ll be deep in the woods, away from people.”

“Wow! When did you rent a cabin?” Jace said.

“Last night. Are you good with that?” Nico asked.

“Yes, I think we need time away from people,” Jace said.

“I love that idea,” Sammie said.

“What do you think, Mark?” Nico asked.

“Do we have our own rooms?”

“Jace and I are in one, and you two have your own rooms.”

“Sounds good.”

Jace caught a hint of disappointment in Sammie’s expression.

The conversation continued for a while longer, with Mark expressing his concerns and Nico and Jace trying to reassure him. In the end, Mark reluctantly agreed to give their relationship a chance. But he was still apprehensive, and Jace knew they would have to work hard to prove him wrong.

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Nico

The drive to Sequoia National Park took two hours, winding through picturesque mountain roads. Jace sat beside him, writing a new song, and Sammie was diligently crafting the custom-made colorful good luck bracelets for them, as he did before every important gig. Mark was engrossed in the pages of his book, completely oblivious to the world around him.

“I really need this,” Jace said, leaning his head on Nico’s shoulder while he was driving.

“Me too. Last night. Those fucking eggs. I swear I’ll never eat another egg.” Nico put his hand on Jace’s thigh.

“You saved me from all of it.”

“I protected what’s mine. No one will ever hurt you again.”

“I didn’t realize how deep my father’s hate was for me.”

“Now you do. Don’t have any hope he’ll change. He won’t.”

“Your father did. Remember when he cut off all your bank accounts, then later on he opened them ?

“Jace, my father educated me. He taught me shit and did things with me. He gave me values. Yes, he’s a dangerous mobster, but I didn’t grow up with hate and abuse.

Your father tried to brainwash you and prevented you from going to college. He'll never change. Never."

"You said your father told you if you have a relationship with a guy, he'd put a hit on you and your lover."

"He says a lot of crap he doesn't mean. No one in my family would respect him if he did. Just like when he shut my accounts. The difference is my father doesn't hate me. He loves me so much he wants me to take over. All that he does comes from love. It's a sick kind of love, but it doesn't come from hate."

Jace's face was stained with tears as they rolled down his cheeks.

"Jace, I didn't mean to upset you. I just think you need to face the truth."

"I know. It just hurts to hear all that shit."

They were quiet for the rest of the trip until they stopped at a grocery store. "Sammie, we're going to do the grocery shopping for this week. Jace and Mark, stay in the van," Nico said.

Nico had assigned Sammie as the primary grocery shopper for the band because he knew exactly what was needed, could find it at the lowest price, and he collected coupons each week. Nico always footed the final bill, then they all took turns cooking dinner. These were his guys, and he wanted to make their lives work better, but mostly he enjoyed watching them succeed in the music business. When they finished shopping, they put the bags in the back with Mark and Sammie, since the trunk area was occupied with instruments and suitcases.

The cabin was deep in the forest, twenty minutes from the grocery store and away from people so they could practice with no complaints. Nico parked in front of the

log cabin surrounded by towering sequoias with the soothing sound of a stream trickling nearby. He loved the wraparound porch with wooden rocking chairs, which offered a perfect spot for morning coffee or for the guys to engage in lively music discussions.

They all piled out of the van with their instruments and suitcases.

“We’ll put the equipment in the living room to set up once we’re settled,” Nico said.

An enormous stone fireplace dominated the room. The walls were paneled in rich, dark wood, giving the space warmth. Plush sofas and armchairs were arranged around a low coffee table, creating the perfect spot for them to relax between practice sessions.

Jace and Sammie went to the van and carried the groceries to the kitchen. It was well-equipped, with a vintage stove and a wooden dining table that could seat the four of them. The scent of pine and the faint aroma of coffee lingered in the air.

“Jace and I will take the main bedroom, and you two can decide which room you want,” Nico said.

Upstairs, the bedrooms were smaller than they were used to but comfortable enough, with each room having a view of the forest. Quilts and sheets were provided, so they hadn’t needed to pack bedding.

Jace and Nico went upstairs to stake out the primary bedroom with its private bath. The bathroom had a clawfoot tub with thick, fluffy towels hanging beside the vanity.

“That tub looks like fun,” Jace said.

“Want me to give you a bath tonight?” Nico asked as he pinched Jace’s butt.

“Only if you come in there with me.”

“That sounds sexy as fuck! ”

Once the others had carried their suitcases to their rooms, they agreed to meet in the living room to practice. Jace helped Nico with his drums, while Mark helped Sammie with his keyboard.

Nico sat behind his drum kit, the familiar weight of the sticks in his hands bringing a sense of calm amidst the turmoil in his heart. The room filled with the hum of amplifiers and the occasional strum of a guitar.

Jace stood at the front, his guitar slung over his shoulder, tuning the strings with a focused expression. Sammie was at the keyboard, fingers dancing over the keys, as he warmed up with a few scales. Mark, ever the quiet presence, adjusted his backup guitar, ready to follow Jace’s lead.

Nico cleared his throat, drawing everyone’s attention. “Alright, guys, we need to decide on our opening song. Any suggestions?”

Jace looked up, his eyes meeting Nico’s briefly before glancing away. “How about ‘Fire in the Sky’? It’s always a crowd-pleaser.”

Sammie nodded, a smile playing on his lips. “Yeah, that one always gets people going. I’m in.”

Mark shrugged, his usual laid-back self. “Works for me.”

Nico tapped his drumsticks together, thinking. “Okay, ‘Fire in the Sky’ it is. But let’s make sure we’re tight on the transitions. We can’t afford any slip-ups.”

Jace gave a small nod, his voice soft. “Got it. Let’s run through it twice.”

As they started playing, the familiar chords and rhythms filled the room, each member falling into their roles seamlessly. Nico kept a close eye on Jace, watching for any signs of distraction or hesitation. Despite the tension from Bakersfield, Jace’s voice was strong, his guitar playing precise.

After two runs, Nico called for a break. “That sounded good. Just remember to keep the energy up, especially during the chorus. ”

Jace wiped the sweat from his brow, giving Nico a small, appreciative smile. “Thanks, Nico. We’ll nail it.”

Nico nodded, hoping that Jace’s words would hold true. Their next performance was crucial, not just for the band, but for their future together. He just hoped that Jace would show up, both physically and emotionally, when it mattered most.

“Do you want to take a hike?” Nico asked Jace.

“Yes.”

“Let me grab some things for us.” He added some water bottles and snacks to his backpack, along with lube and a condom. He also found a small blanket and folded it before putting it in. He did all this while Jace was brushing his teeth for the tenth time today.

Raised in the city, Nico had always found solace in the towering trees of Sequoia National Park. He remembered once his father showed him a hideout in the forest, away from their enemies. He told Nico never to be afraid in the hideout, because the trees would protect him. At six years old, Nico believed him and to this day, he believed the trees were guardians of protection. That was what Jace needed.

As they hiked along the winding trail, Jace turned and glanced over at Nico. “Can you believe we’re actually here?” Jace exclaimed, stopping to take a sip from his water bottle. “I’ve wanted to see these trees for ages!”

Nico nodded. “Yeah, it’s pretty incredible. These towering trees will always protect us from evil.”

When a few branches moved, Jace stopped in his tracks and looked back at Nico. “What the fuck was that?”

“The wind circling around you to protect you from evil.” Nico inched closer to Jace.

“I could have used the wind last night.”

“We’re going to leave with a coat of protection after a week. ”

“You’re so fucking sexy. Do you know what I want you to do?” Jace asked.

“I know exactly. See that log by the brook?”

“Umm...yes.”

“Get your ass over there and wait for me.” Nico pointed to the log.

With a skip in his step, Jace made his way to the log and settled down, his face beaming with the most adorable smile.

With a swift motion, Nico unzipped his backpack and took out the blanket, lube, and condom. He walked over to Jace.

“I’ve come prepared. Drop your jeans to your ankles. It’s high enough for me to stand

behind you.” Nico placed the blanket over the log.

Jace stood, faced the log, and unzipped his jeans. Nico stood behind him and shoved his jeans and underwear down.

“Bend over,” Nico told him.

Jace had no hesitation in bending over the log for Nico.

“How does your bare ass feel in the wind?” Nico made a loud noise, unzipping his jeans, before he lowered them to the ground.

“Hot! I love the sound of your zipper.”

Nico squeezed the lube into his hand, then stuck a lubed finger inside Jace. He played around until he hit Jace’s prostate, and a guttural moan echoed in the forest. He pulled his finger out and added a second, then a third. When he stretched Jace enough, he slid on the condom and replaced his finger with his slick cock. He’d doused himself with extra lube and squirted more around Jace’s hole. He didn’t want him suffering.

Nico’s rhythm was slow at the beginning, then progressed to a faster speed. Slamming skin against skin outside made its own sound. He plowed his cock in and out, leaving Jace breathless. Nico found his prostate again, pulled out a little, and slammed back in. Jace moaned. Nico’s balls filled, needing release soon. The blood pulsating from his balls moved up to his shaft, and he spurted his seed inside his condom.

As the afterglow faded, Nico pulled Jace to standing, still facing the log, He lubricated his hand and rubbed Jace’s cock until he moaned and came.

Nico swiftly turned him around, their bodies pressed together as they shared a passionate kiss.

“I love fucking you,” Nico said.

“I love your cock inside me.”

“Maybe a blow job tonight?”

“Anytime. As long as it doesn’t stop me from singing.”

Nico slapped his backside. “Let’s clean up.”

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Jace

Jace had never had such an unexpected sexual encounter. Outside in the woods was new to him.

“Do you think we’ll see any wildlife?” Jace asked.

“Maybe some deer or squirrels,” Nico replied.

As they ventured deeper into the woods, they heard birds chirping, leaves rustling, and the distant trickle of a stream. Jace felt relaxed, enjoying the rhythm of their conversation and the surrounding beauty.

“Imagine if we found a hidden waterfall,” Jace mused. “Or an ancient grove untouched by time.”

Nico chuckled. “Or a bear,” he teased.

Just as Jace laughed, a low growl resonated from the thicket nearby, halting them in their tracks. Jace’s heart dropped as an enormous bear emerged, its dark fur glistening in the sun. Jace stood frozen, eyes wide, while Nico instinctively stepped in front of him, shielding him from the looming threat.

“Stay calm,” Nico said. “Back away slowly.”

Jace’s breath quickened, but he followed Nico’s lead, moving in sync as they carefully retreated. Jace felt the adrenaline surge through him, aware of every

movement of the bear.

“Do you think it’s hungry?” Jace whispered, his voice trembling slightly.

“Let’s hope not,” Nico replied. “Just keep moving.”

They edged back, never turning their backs on the bear. After what felt like an eternity, the bear lost interest, turning back into the underbrush. Jace let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding, his shoulders relaxing as the immediate danger faded.

“Fuck! It’s a damn good thing he didn’t come around when we were fucking.”

“Yeah, it was,” Nico replied. “But you handled it well. Just stay close, okay?”

Jace nodded. “I can’t believe we just faced a bear and lived through it.”

Nico smirked. “Just remember who kept you safe.”

“Of course. My personal bear guard.”

As they continued their hike, the earlier thrill transformed into a shared bond, their laughter echoing amidst the giants, a reminder of the wildness they had faced together. This was more than a hike; it was a memory etched in the forest’s heart; one they would carry with them long after the trees whispered their secrets away.

“My ass is sore now,” Jace said.

“Then I think it’s a good time to get home and soak in the tub.”

After the bear incident, they walked closer together, their footsteps synchronized.

“Do you think my voice will hold up in the desert?”

“Of course. I’ll make sure you’re hydrated. And on the drive there, you’re going to stay silent to save your voice. ”

“That’s a good idea.”

When they reached the cabin, Mark and Sammie were sitting outside on the rocking chairs and drinking Cokes.

“I thought you guys would never get home,” Sammie said.

“We saw a bear. He was really close,” Jace said.

“Did Nico save you?” Mark asked.

“He did. I’d be dead if it weren’t for him.”

“I’m going to the kitchen. Dinner will be ready in an hour,” Sammie said.

“Okay. We’re going to clean up before dinner,” Nico said.

Jace followed Nico upstairs to their bedroom.

“I need to make a call,” Jace said.

“Okay. I’ll wait for you so I can give you a nice bath.”

Jace sat down on the edge of the bed and dialed his aunt’s number where his mother was staying, his heart pounding with a mix of hope and anxiety. Erin had told him that their mother wanted to talk to him after leaving their father, and he clung to that

small glimmer of hope.

“Hi, it’s Jace. Is my mother there?”

“No, Jace. She went back home. Try her cell phone,” his aunt said.

“Okay. Thanks.”

Jace’s heart dropped when his aunt said she had returned home. He dialed her cell.

His mother answered on the first ring. “Jace, don’t call here anymore,” his mother said with a coldness that cut through his heart.

“I thought you told Erin for me to call you.”

“Don’t call again.” She ended the call.

Jace sat there, the phone still pressed to his ear, feeling a wave of emotions crash over him. He had always believed that, despite their differences, his mother still loved him. But now, his lifestyle as a musician, late nights, and the wild parties had driven a wedge between them he couldn’t bridge. The rejection stung deeply, and he felt a hollow ache in his chest.

He had thought his mother would understand; that she would see past the surface and recognize the passion and dedication he poured into his music. Instead, he felt more hated than ever, as if his choices had erased any love she’d once had for him. The pain of her words echoed in his mind, leaving him feeling lost and extremely upset.

“Jace, what happened?”

“I don’t know.” Jace threw himself on his stomach, not wanting to face Nico.

“Hey, something is wrong. Tell me.” Nico lay beside Jace, feeling the warmth of Jace’s body against his. He gently ran his fingers through his hair. “Didn’t they want to talk to you?”

“My mother and nope. She’s done with me,” Jace said.

Jace reflected on his life and choices. He realized that while his mother’s rejection hurt deeply, it didn’t diminish his passion for music or his commitment to living authentically. He resolved to stay true to himself, knowing he couldn’t change who he was to meet someone else’s expectations.

“Give me your phone.”

“Why?”

“I’m deleting your mom’s cell number and blocking her, too. This is bullshit.”

“Everything about my family is. My sister told me to call her. So, I did. I thought she wanted to talk to me.”

“Did your sister tell you the truth?”

“Erin told me my mother left my father. She told Erin to tell me to call her at my aunt’s house.”

“When’s the last time you talked to her? ”

“When I left. A couple of years ago. My aunt said she went back to him.” He handed Nico his phone.

Jace watched as Nico tapped on his phone screen, erasing his mother’s phone

number. It hurt him deeply that she continued to ignore his attempts to communicate. Nico acted as his personal guardian, ensuring that he would be spared any future harm, and Jace found he didn't mind.

Nico gently rolled Jace over to face him, wrapping his arms around him in a comforting embrace that lasted for quite some time. Jace felt energy coming to him from Nico. Crazy as it sounded, when Nico cuddled him like this, he regained his strength.

“Your parents don't define who you are.”

“I felt your energy flowing into my body.”

“Do you feel stronger?”

“Yep.”

“Good. Now get up and let's take a bath together.”

Nico got up, picked up Jace, and carried him to the bathroom. He helped Jace undress, then he ran the water.

“I feel like shit,” Jace said.

“I know. Think about us and how together we're going to make glorious music. And of course, with Mark and Sammie too. We're finally together, Jace.”

“I wish they had bubbles,” Jace said.

Nico looked under the sink and found some leftover bubble gel. He poured a few drops into the running water, then put his hand in and tested the temperature.

“There are your bubbles.”

“You’re the best.”

“I’ll go in first, then sit between my legs and we’ll soak. ”

Jace enjoyed watching Nico get into the tub and wait for him. He seemed so different when they were together as a couple. Jace stepped into the tub and sat between Nico’s legs.

“Your legs are so muscular and strong.”

“Chasing you for years.”

“We’ve known each other for seven years, and we finally got together.”

“You were too young when we first met.”

“Why do I feel your hard dick against my ass?”

“You turn me on, but no more for you. I don’t want you walking bowlegged.”

“I can take of you,” Jace said.

“Maybe. Just relax for now.”

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:12 am

Nico

After they practiced all morning and afternoon, Nico wanted to spend more time with Jace. He still looked unstable from his mother's rejection and one thing about Jace, he had to be busy all the time. Nico planned to keep him so busy he couldn't think on things making him sad.

Nico's phone rang, and it was a club nearby asking if they would play tonight for a few hours. He told the club owner yes. Then he called the guys into the living room and told them the news.

"The Thunder Club asked if we would play since their regular band had too many sick members."

"What did you say?" Mark asked.

"We'd do it. Make sure you're ready by seven."

"Aren't we here to practice and rest?" Sammie asked.

"Think of it as practice."

Nico followed Jace upstairs to their bedroom. He had said little to anyone, and he ate less than normal.

"Jace, did something else happen? "

“No. Nothing happened. I just feel like I have a chain around my neck.”

“Because of me?”

“I feel trapped here in the cabin and not able to get away.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Anywhere but here.”

Nico took the keys on the dresser and threw them to Jace. “You can go anywhere as long as you come back in time to leave for the gig.”

Jace turned around and left Nico standing there alone in the room. Maybe he was crowding him, and he really did just need some space.

Nico got a phone call from his cousin.

“Hey, when will your tour be over?”

“What’s it to you?”

“Nothing to me, but your father is coming to visit you in California.”

“If he wants to see me, then have him call me. I’m not making plans with you.” Nico ended the call.

He practiced with the others downstairs for a while. Jace was still gone when they stopped to get ready for the gig.

Nico paced back and forth in the cabin, his frustration mounting with every tick of the

clock. The van was gone—Jace had taken it, needing space. But they had to leave for the gig at seven, and with the time nearing six, there was no sign of Jace.

Mark slouched in a chair, idly strumming his guitar, the tension clear in his posture. “He’d better show up soon,” Mark muttered, his tone a mix of worry and annoyance.

“Typical Jace,” Sammie said from the corner, his fingers tapping nervously on the edge of his keyboard. “Always disappearing when we need him most.”

Nico clenched his jaw. “He needed space, but knew he needed to be back for the gig. We can’t keep doing this. He’s so damn selfish at times. We have a responsibility to each other and to the band.” He glanced at his phone for the hundredth time. Still no message from Jace. “If he doesn’t show up in the next five minutes, I’m calling an Uber.”

They fell into a tense silence, each lost in their own thoughts. Nico’s anger simmered beneath the surface. This wasn’t the first time Jace had pulled something like this, and it was starting to wear thin.

Just as Nico was about to pull out his phone, the door burst open. Jace stumbled in, looking disheveled but unapologetic.

“Where the hell have you been?” Nico’s voice was sharp, the worry in his tone overshadowed by anger.

Mark stood up, guitar in hand. “And why didn’t you answer any of our calls or messages?”

Sammie joined in, eyes narrowed. “We’ve been freaking out over here, man. We’ve got to leave for the gig soon!”

Jace held up his hands defensively. “I needed a break, okay? Just some space.”

“A break?” Nico’s voice was incredulous. “I let you take the van, Jace, and you know we rely on that to get to our gigs. You can’t just disappear without a word and stress us out.”

Mark nodded, adding, “We’re a team, Jace. If one of us screws up, we all feel it.”

Sammie crossed his arms. “You can’t keep doing this to us. We need to know we can count on you.”

Jace looked around at their angry faces. “I’m sorry, okay? I didn’t think—”

“No,” Nico cut him off. “You didn’t. We’ve got a gig to get to. Get your stuff and let’s go.” Nico couldn’t believe Jace’s audacity. He had put them all in a stressful situation, and his nonchalant apology was infuriating.

As Jace headed to his room to grab his gear, Nico exchanged a weary glance with Mark and Sammie. It was clear they all felt the weight of Jace’s actions, but for now, they had a show to put on. The rest would have to wait.

Nico scanned the club, taking in the aged but grand space buzzing with energy. The place, despite its years, kept an allure that pulled in a full crowd. The room hummed with anticipation, and the scent of spilled beer and cheap cologne wafted through the air.

As Sacred Fire took the stage, Nico positioned himself behind his drum set. The stage lights cast a halo around Jace, who clutched the mic with a casual confidence, Mark cradled his guitar with a focused intensity, and Sammie was at the keyboard, fingers itching to bring the keys to life.

The first notes ignited the audience. Jace's voice cut through the din, raw and melodic, as Mark's guitar riffs sliced through the rhythm. Sammie's fingers danced across the keyboard, weaving a tapestry of sound. And Nico—he hammered the drums, his heartbeat syncing with the rhythm of the night.

Nico's eyes flicked from his drum set to the stage where Jace was in his element, embodying pure energy. The song they played was one of their best—infectiously upbeat, with a groove that gripped the crowd and refused to let go. Jace's voice soared through the club, each note clear and powerful, blending seamlessly with Mark's electrifying guitar riffs and Sammie's resonant keyboard chords.

As the song intensified, Jace transformed into a whirlwind of motion. He didn't just sing; he performed. His dancing was chaotic yet captivating, each movement in tune with the beat Nico pounded out on the drums. Jace leaped onto the bar, the crowd's cheers escalating into a roar. With every step, he flirted with the audience, his eyes locking with theirs, his smile making hearts flutter. His little flirty lover who sparkled this evening. Happiness poured into Nico witnessing the Jace's success.

Nico's drumming was a solid foundation, and he couldn't help but watch Jace work the room. It was moments like these—when the music and the energy of the crowd melded into a single electric current—that made all the grueling hours of practice worthwhile. Jace, Mark, Sammie, and him—each played their part to perfection, and together, they created something truly spectacular.

When the set ended, the crowd's roar echoed long after the last chord. They moved to the bar, euphoric and soaked in sweat. Jace reached for his third drink, but Nico intercepted it, eyes narrowing.

“You've had enough, Jace,” Nico said, voice steady yet firm.

“Back off, Nico,” Jace slurred, irritation creeping in. “I'm celebrating.”

“Celebrating or drowning?” Nico shot back, tension lacing his words. The bar lights flickered, casting shadows on Jace’s face. “Remember you said you wanted me to tell you to stop at the third drink?”

Mark leaned in, his guitar slung over his shoulder like a silent observer. “He’s got a point, Jace. Can’t afford to mess up.”

Sammie added, “We need you sharp, man. One drink too many and we all go down.”

Jace’s eyes flared with stubbornness, but he knew they were right. He mumbled something under his breath and dropped the drink back on the bar. Together, they headed out, the weight of their words hanging in the air.

The silence was thick on the drive back to the cabin. After putting away their instruments, they met on the porch, each sitting in a rocker. Sammie brought out some fresh lemonade .

“Just trying to look out for you, Jace,” Nico murmured, settling into an rocker.

“Yeah, I know.” Jace sighed, running a hand through his hair. “Sometimes it’s just hard to stop once I start.”

Mark said, “We’re a team. We gotta keep each other in check.”

Sammie nodded, a thoughtful look in his eyes. “We’re in this together. One falls, we all fall. Let’s keep our heads in the game.”

Nico could see the understanding dawning on Jace’s face. The band wasn’t just about music; it was about holding each other up when the lights dimmed, and the crowd’s roar faded into silence. Jace stood to stretch.

“We need to talk,” Nico said to Jace.

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Jace

Jace could tell Nico was upset with his behavior, but he needed to understand he needed some space. He worried Nico would break up with him because he'd behaved like a teenager.

He sank back into the rocking chair, its creak harmonizing with the soft rustle of the towering Sequoias. The forest was full of ancient trees, their silhouettes etched against the twilight sky. The scent of pine and earth filled the air, grounding him before Nico yelled at him. He glanced at Nico, who was rocking his chair, tension clear in his posture.

The others had retreated inside, leaving them alone on the porch. Jace felt Nico's eyes on him, could sense they were filled with a mix of frustration and concern.

"Are you going to tell me what an asshole I am?" Jace asked.

"Always the smart ass. I'm not just your band manager, or drummer, or friend to you anymore. I'm your lover," Nico said.

"I know. I guess I don't know how to act."

"You had the van and disappeared. You didn't even answer your phone."

"Thank you for trusting me."

"I deserve respect from you."

“I know what I did. I’ve already said I was sorry. What else do you want me to do?” Jace took a deep breath, trying to find the right words. “I needed time alone, Nico.” Jace didn’t understand why Nico was pushing him so hard.

“I gave you my fucking keys without questions. I trusted you’d return on time.”

“I’m trying to deal with what happened when we had to leave Bakersfield.”

Nico’s eyes flared with anger. “And your timing sucks! You left us hanging again.”

“I know,” Jace admitted, the weight of his actions sinking in. “But sometimes, I just need space. When I’m upset, I need to be alone to process things and seem to lose track of time.”

Nico shook his head, the rocking chair moving faster. “You could’ve at least answered my calls. I was worried, Jace.”

“What is this really about? Tell me what you want from me.”

“I need to structure our relationship. I’m not comfortable with your disappearances and can’t accept your lack of respect for me. I want to be your number one.”

“You are and have always been my number one. I’m afraid to fail you and already have. I don’t know how to make you feel like my number one. Tell me how to do that.” Jace looked down at his hands, feeling the sting of Nico’s words.

The anger in Nico’s eyes softened, replaced by a weary understanding. “I understand you need space, but don’t you think you should tell me what is wrong? Let me know what’s hurting you and let me help. We need to trust each other. I never want you to treat me the way you did today.”

“I get it,” Jace said quietly. “I want to be an us more than anything in the world and I want you to love me.”

“How would you feel if I gave you some rules for our relationship?”

“Rules? Like, what rules?”

“I shouldn’t say rules. Call them promises to each other.”

“Do you want to be my Daddy Dom?”

“No. But I might consider it if that’s what it takes.”

“You can’t spank me because we live with Sammie and Mark.”

“I could spank you in a private place. When we’re not practicing, I can take you to the garage.”

Jace laughed as he rocked faster in his chair. “You’re too much.”

“I want three promises from you. If you break those promises, I’ll spank you.”

“What do I have to promise you?” Jace asked.

“Promise one is answering my calls or messages within fifteen minutes. Can you promise me that?” Nico stopped rocking and waited for Jace’s answer.

“I promise I’ll return your calls or messages within fifteen minutes.”

“Excellent. Promise two is staying monogamous in our relationship. That means no kind of sex with anyone other than me. Can you promise me you will be with only

me?”

“Of course I can. That will be easy for me.”

“Promise three is to trust me to take care of you. That means if something is wrong, tell me and let me help you. Can you promise that?”

“I do trust you. I guess I can tell you things so you can help me. You have always helped me. I need you so much.”

“I need you too. It’s not one sided. You’re very important to me. Now, ask me to make three promises to you, but you can’t spank me.”

“What can I do if you break a promise to me?”

“You can ask me to do anything you want sexually.”

“I have some ideas about that.”

“I bet you do. Now tell me the three promises you want from me.”

“Promise one is you promise to give me space when I need it. I won’t disappear on you. I’ll tell you where I’m going and when I’m returning. Can you give me space when I need it?”

“I can, as long as you tell me why you need space, where you’re going, and when you’re returning.”

“Okay, that’s good enough. Promise two is to promise you won’t give up if I mess up. Can you promise me that?”

“I’ll never give up on you, but I might get pissed.”

“Promise three is a promise to tell me the truth when shit comes down from your family. I know you saw some guy, but you never told me who he was or what he wanted.”

“I will tell you everything unless it puts you at risk. I talked to my cousin, and he told me my father wants me back in New York to work with him, and now he wants to visit me.”

“I like these promises.”

“Me too. Hey, why did you follow me?”

“Because I love you. I wanted to see if you had a lover.”

“No, lover. Just my Jace.”

They sat in silence for a moment, the forest’s peace wrapping around them. The argument had been necessary, but now it was time to move forward. Nico reached over, placing a hand on Jace’s knee. “We’ll get through this because our love is stronger than any problems. ”

Jace nodded, grateful for the unspoken forgiveness. It wasn’t perfect, but it was a start. And that was enough for now.

“Can I give you a blowjob to show you how sorry I am?” Jace asked.

“Oh, that’s a perfect idea. Let’s go up.”

“Since you’re going to do me,” Nico said, “I want you naked and waiting while I take

a shower to get ready for you.” Nico’s voice rumbled as he spoke.

Nico’s words ran hot through Jace’s body. Nico was so much more than who he appeared to be to others. They entered the cabin and carefully climbed the stairs, the old floorboards groaning with each step.

Jace followed closely behind, swiftly closing the door as they entered the bedroom. Nico quickly undressed, threw his clothes on the dresser, and made his way to the shower. Jace couldn’t contain his excitement at the chance to win back Nico’s heart. He removed his clothes and threw them on top of Nico’s. He sat on the edge of the bed, feeling the coldness of the floor beneath his feet, as he patiently waited for Nico to complete his shower.

Jace’s stomach dropped when the bathroom door creaked open with Nico standing there, completely exposed and wearing a mischievous grin. Jace froze, unable to move.

“Touch yourself,” Nico commanded.

“What? Where?” Jace asked, feeling a rush of adrenaline run through his body.

“Touch your cock.”

Jace looked down at his swelling erection, then at Nico. He wanted Nico to touch him, but he would settle for touching himself while Nico watched. Jace spat into his hand, stroked the tip of his cock, and slid his fingers slowly down to the base. He couldn’t believe he wanted to do this for Nico .

“Faster, Jace!”

Jace grabbed his cock and stroked himself as fast as he could, never breaking eye

contact.

“Stop!” Nico suddenly ordered.

Jace was ready to spill, but the sharp tone startled him into squeezing himself, preventing release .

“Why stop?”

“Because you haven’t earned it yet.”

Jace had played at edging with other lovers, but with Nico it was far sexier and more meaningful. Nico inched closer with his hand on his erect cock and balls as if he were carrying them to Jace. Nico’s cock looked bigger as he held it.

“Lick my balls.” Nico’s gaze was intense, capturing every detail of his features like a photographer framing the perfect shot.

Jace dropped to his knees and licked Nico’s balls, slobbering over them, so Nico would feel the wetness dribbling over them. He inhaled the fresh pine gel scent from his sack, igniting Jace’s desire. What surprised him was that he wanted to meet Nico’s demands. Jace liked him taking control; it made him feel protected. As soon as Jace’s lips wrapped around the tip of his cock, Nico pushed him away.

Very confused, Jace remained kneeling, waiting to see what Nico would do next. He focused on Nico’s cock, which was dotted with precum.

Nico caressed his own velvety ball sack with his left hand more vigorously than Jace had with his tongue while his right hand stroked his magnificent cock. Jace watched Nico’s nuts draw up tight.

“Do you want to come with me, Jace?”

“Yes, please.” Jace became instantly alive with hope .

Nico pulled Jace to his feet, took both their cocks in his hand and lathered them up with the lube on the nightstand. He continued to stroke both cocks in his large hand, and Jace felt Nico’s cock tightening against his.

As soon as Nico came, Jace jetted blast after blast of thick spunk over Nico’s hand while he leaned against Nico, panting and trying to steady himself.

Nico hugged Jace and found his lips as they held on to each other.

“Take your shower, Jace.”

Jace walked to the bathroom and ran the water, then stepped into the stall. He lathered up and scrubbed every inch of his body while thinking about Nico’s cock. He never thought Nico could be this hot in bed. He wondered why they didn’t connect sooner.

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Source Creation Date: July 17, 2025, 3:12 am

Nico

Nico leaned back in the van's worn seat, excitement bubbling up inside him. Tonight was going to be a blast. He listened as Mark and Sammie chatted about their plans for the night at the club. Jace sat beside him, tapping out a rhythm on his knee. Nico leaned over and kissed Jace on the cheek.

“Hey, Nico. Can't wait to check this place out,” Mark said. “Heard the music is top-notch.”

Sammie nodded. “Yeah, and the vibe is supposed to be amazing. We need a night to just let loose.”

Nico grinned, feeling the energy of his bandmates. “It's going to be epic. Let's just enjoy ourselves and forget about everything else for a while.”

They piled out of the van and made their way into the club. As soon as they stepped inside, they were hit by a wave of sound—a pulsating beat that vibrated through the floor and into their bones. The lights flickered in time with the music, casting a kaleidoscope of colors over the crowd .

Nico took it all in, the thrum of the bass, the laughter, and the sense of freedom that filled the space. He turned to Jace, a mischievous glint in his eye. “Wanna dance?”

Jace chuckled and nodded. “Yes.”

They made their way to the dance floor, losing themselves in the music. Nico felt the

beat guide his movements, each step in sync with Jace. They danced for what felt like hours, wrapped in the moment's euphoria. At one point, a man approached Nico, asking to dance. Nico politely declined, not wanting to break the connection he had with Jace.

Nico looked at Jace, a smile playing on his lips. He watched as Jace's face lit up under the soft glow of the bar's lights. After dancing to what felt like a hundred songs, they finally escaped the pulsating crowd to a quiet corner of the club. "I'm really enjoying this. Just being here with you."

Jace nodded, his face glowing with happiness. "Me too. It's been a while since I've felt this relaxed."

The hum of laughter and music faded into a comfortable backdrop as Nico ordered a couple of beers, feeling a warmth spread through him. They were finally together as a couple, and it felt right.

"So, where do you want to go on our next vacation?" Jace asked, leaning back in his chair, a playful glint in his eye.

Nico grinned. "I was thinking somewhere tropical. Maybe Hawaii?"

Jace's face broke into a broad smile. "Hawaii sounds perfect! Just us, the beach, and nothing but time to relax. I want some serious beach time with you."

Nico could easily picture it—the two of them lounging under palm trees, the sound of waves crashing in the background, nothing to worry about except which cocktail to try next. "I can already see us sipping drinks on the beach," he said, his excitement bubbling over. "What's your ideal beach day? "

"Definitely sleeping in, then grabbing breakfast and heading straight to the shore. I

want to build sandcastles and swim until we're too tired to move," Jace replied, his eyes shining. "Then, maybe a sunset hike? I've heard the views are incredible."

Nico nodded enthusiastically, picturing their adventure. "That sounds amazing. And I'll bring my camera to capture every moment."

Just then, an old friend of Jace's approached the table, his confident stride catching Nico's attention. Jace's expression shifted slightly, but he maintained his smile. "Hey, Randy! What's up?" Jace greeted him.

Randy's gaze flicked between them with his eyebrows raised. "I didn't know you were up here. Are you free when the club closes?"

Nico felt a tension prick at the edges of the conversation. Jace straightened, his demeanor shifting to something protective. "No, I'm not," he said. "This is Nico, my boyfriend."

Nico watched as Jace's words hung in the air, a declaration of their bond. The guy's expression changed, surprised, but Jace continued, "We don't share." The old Jace would have met the guy in a stall in the bathroom. Finally, he was maturing and leaving behind his wild selfish ways just as he said he was. It reaffirmed the wait for Jace was worth it. At an earlier time, this would not have ended well. He knew Jace was perfect for him, but he was much younger than Nico. Patience would go a long way and had all these years.

Nico held his breath, a mixture of pride and affection swelling inside him. He could see Jace's confidence in standing his ground, and it made his heart race. The other guy nodded slowly, a hint of disappointment crossing his features before he offered a tight smile. "Nice to meet you, Nico," he said, before turning and walking away.

"Wow, that was intense," Nico said, once they were alone again .

Jace laughed lightly, shaking off the encounter. “Yeah, but I meant what I said. I’m all in with you, Nico. I made my promises to you.”

Nico smiled, feeling lighter than ever. “And I’m all in with you.”

They sat in comfortable silence, watching the crowd. Soon, Mark and Sammie joined them, their faces flushed with excitement.

Mark clapped Nico on the back. “This was a great idea, man. We needed this.”

Sammie grinned, raising his glass. “To us, and nights like these.”

Nico raised his own glass in a silent toast, feeling a sense of contentment settle over him.

“Hey, Jace, what did Randy want?”

“Just to say hi.”

“I thought Randy was your secret jealous lover.”

“That was a long time ago.”

“So that guy was your lover?” Nico asked.

“Was is the operative word. And, Mark, there was no need for you to bring up shit.”

“I don’t know how Nico missed it. He was all over you when you played in Long Beach, and you didn’t come home either.”

“Sh...Don’t shit about Jace,” Sammie said to Mark.

“Jace has a big enough head already. Now he’s with Nico, he’ll get special treatment.” Mark slurred his words.

“Mark, how much did you drink tonight?” Nico asked.

“None of your fucking business.”

“Shut the fuck up, Mark,” Jace said. “Don’t disrespect Nico. You worthless piece of shit.”

Nico’s grip tightened around Jace as he pulled him closer and whispered in his ear, “Stop. Don’t encourage him. He’s drunk. ”

Mark got up and walked over to Jace. “You’re a spoiled brat. Everyone is wrapped around your ass. So sick of the preferential treatment,” Mark shouted.

Nico got up and stopped Mark from lunging at Jace. “It’s time to go before we get kicked out.” He grabbed Mark and forced him to walk out to the parking lot, Jace and Sammie following behind them. They waited until Nico shoved Mark into the van, then Jace sat up front, and Sammie went in the back.

The entire trip, Mark swore at Jace, then at Nico.

“Jace, sit on the porch and wait for me. I’m going to get Mark to bed,” Nico said.

He and Sammie helped Mark to his room.

“You need to stay in here until you sober up.” Nico said as he helped Mark undress.

“Sammie, go down and bring up two bottles of water for Mark.”

When Nico finally managed to get Mark into his bed, Sammie brought the water and

set them on the night table.

“Thanks, Sammie. I’m going out front.”

Nico raced down the stairs and grabbed two bottles of water for him and Jace. He made his way to the front porch, handed Jace a bottle of water, and sat beside him.

“I guess he had too much to drink,” Jace said.

“Yes. You used to act like that. I hope he gets over this and deals with our relationship. I don’t know why he thinks I favor you.”

“Mark wants to be the lead singer. He’s good, but not as good as I am.”

“Either he gets over it or finds another band.”

“That’s kind of harsh. ”

“I want peace in our band. If he thinks he’s too good for guitar and backup singing, then he has to go. We need our energy for practicing and creating. No time for this bullshit.”

They sat in silence to digest what was said. Next to him, Jace seemed content, his smile wide and genuine as they settled into the quiet of the night. Nico stole glances at him, marveling at how much he had changed. Jace had promised to keep his drinking in check, and it was clear he had honored that promise at the club this evening, barely finishing three drinks. There was a newfound clarity in his eyes, a confidence that Nico hadn’t seen before, and it filled him with warmth.

“Jace,” Nico started, his voice barely above a whisper. “I love you so much. Watching you grow into this incredible person has been...amazing.”

Jace turned to him, his expression softening. “You really think so?”

“Absolutely. I’ve seen you come so far. You’re not just the guy I fell for. You’re someone even better. It’s like you’ve discovered this whole new side of yourself,” Nico said, his heart swelling.

Jace chuckled, a hint of embarrassment in his laughter. “I’m just glad you waited for me to figure things out. I wasn’t ready before, and I get that now. But you were there, supporting me, even when I didn’t deserve it.”

Nico shook his head, feeling a rush of affection. “You always deserved it. I believed in you, even when you didn’t believe in yourself.”

Jace leaned closer, their shoulders touching, and Nico could feel the warmth radiating between them. “You were my anchor,” he whispered. “I’m really glad you stuck around.”

As they sat together, the sounds of the forest surrounded them—gentle rustling leaves, the occasional call of an owl, and the whisper of a breeze weaving through the branches. Nico felt a profound connection to this moment, to Jace, and to the world around them. It was as if the ancient trees stood witness to their bond, reinforcing how much they had grown, both individually and together.

“Here’s to more adventures,” Jace said, raising an imaginary glass, and Nico laughed, echoing the sentiment.

“More adventures,” he agreed, feeling the weight of the world lift just a little more with every shared heartbeat.

Jace

Jace sat in the living room, hunched over his notebook, penning the lyrics to their next song. The house was peaceful, with the faint aroma of Sammie's baking drifting in from the kitchen. Nico had left to meet his cousin, leaving Jace alone with his thoughts—and with Mark.

As he entered the room, Mark's face revealed a restrained anger. Jace barely looked up, too absorbed in his writing. But he felt the tension in the air thicken. The silence was pressing down on him. The memory of the fight with Mark replayed in his mind, each harsh word echoing painfully. He had always known Mark was jealous, but it hadn't seemed like a real threat until now. When Nico and he became a couple, Jace had hoped Mark would come around, that he would accept their relationship as just another part of their lives. But Mark's jealousy had festered, turning into something darker and more destructive.

Jace clenched his fists, feeling the sting of Mark's verbal barbs. It was more than just jealousy—it was resentment. Mark had taken every opportunity to belittle him in front of Nico, trying to make him look bad. And when that didn't work, he resorted to outright abuse. The constant tension wore on Jace, fraying his nerves and making him question everything.

He couldn't shake the fear gnawing at his heart. What if Mark succeeded? What if he drove a wedge between him and Nico? Jace knew how much Nico valued the band's unity. If Mark kept pushing, would Nico question their relationship, too? The thought made Jace's stomach twist into knots.

He didn't want to lose Nico. Not now, not ever. But the fear was there, a constant, nagging presence. He loved Nico with everything he had, but Mark's relentless attacks made it hard to hold on to that love without feeling the strain. Jace knew they needed to fix this, to mend the rift before it tore them apart.

As Jace sat there, lost in his thoughts, he resolved to talk to Nico about it. They needed to confront this issue together as a couple. They couldn't let Mark's jealousy ruin what they had worked so hard to build. But for now, the fear lingered, a shadow over his heart.

"Got something to say?" Jace asked, his voice casual, but his senses alert.

Mark scoffed. "Yeah, I do. You and Nico. Always together, like you own this place."

Jace straightened, feeling the jab. "What's your problem, Mark?"

Mark took a step closer, his voice rising. "My problem? You're my problem. You and Nico. You think you're so special because you're together. But what about the rest of us, huh? What about me?"

Jace stood up, his fists clenching. "This isn't about you, Mark. This is about the band. We're all in this together."

"Together?" Mark sneered. "It sure doesn't feel like it. Feels like you're leaving us behind. Leaving me behind."

The argument escalated quickly. Words flew, harsh and cutting. Mark's jealousy boiled over, and he lunged at Jace, fists swinging. Jace barely had time to react. They crashed into the coffee table, sending papers and pens flying. Jace's red guitar, caught in the chaos, splintered under the weight of their struggle.

Fists landed, and pain flared. Jace tried to hold back, but Mark's rage fueled his own. They grappled, each trying to gain the upper hand. The living room, once a sanctuary, turned into a battleground.

"Stop it!" Jace yelled, pushing Mark off him. "We're supposed to be a team!"

Mark backed away, chest heaving, eyes wild with frustration. "Then act like it! Stop making everything about you and Nico!"

Jace's breath came in ragged gasps. "You think I wanted this? To fight with my bandmate? Grow up, Mark. We all have our issues, but we need to deal with them like adults."

When Nico entered the room to the two men fighting, he rushed over and separated them, holding them apart with a firm grip. "What the hell are you two arguing about?" he demanded, his voice a mix of frustration and concern.

As Jace's eyes scanned the room, they landed on his prized guitar lying on the floor, all the strings broken. It was an expensive guitar, one that Jace cherished deeply. Seeing the damage, Jace's anger quickly turned to despair. He sank to the floor, cradling the broken instrument in his hands, tears streaming down his face.

Nico turned to Mark, his expression stern. "Go upstairs and stay away from Jace," he ordered. Mark, still fuming, reluctantly obeyed, stomping up the stairs and out of sight .

Once Mark was gone, Nico knelt beside Jace, placing a comforting hand on his shoulder. "Hey, we'll get you a new one," he whispered. "I promise."

"I want this one. It's my good luck guitar. My grandfather bought it for me. Do you think we can fix it before Black Rock City?"

“Let me look at it.”

Jace carefully passed the guitar to Nico, who grasped it in his hands. He examined it meticulously, seeming to note every intricate detail.

“We can replace the broken strings. Let’s repair the strings first.”

Jace opened his bag and pulled out the extra strings.

Jace sat in the dimly lit room, staring at the broken strings of his beloved red guitar. It had been his grandfather’s, a precious heirloom passed down through generations. His hands trembled as he tried to replace the strings, but nerves got the better of him.

“Here, let me do it,” Nico said gently, taking the guitar from Jace’s hands. “We’ll have it back in shape in no time.”

Jace watched Nico work, fingers deftly replacing the broken strings with practiced ease. The silence between them was comfortable, filled with the shared understanding of what this guitar meant to him. When Nico finished, he handed it back, a reassuring smile on his face.

Just as Jace was about to express his gratitude, Mark stormed down the stairs, suitcase in one hand and guitar case in the other. His face was a mask of anger and frustration.

“I’m done,” Mark declared, his voice echoing through the cabin. “I’m quitting the band.”

Jace’s heart sank as he saw the Uber waiting outside. “Mark, wait—” he started, but Nico cut him off.

“Mark, we’ve got a gig in Black Rock City next week. You can’t leave us now,” Nico pleaded .

Mark’s eyes blazed with fury. “I don’t care. I’m sick of this. Sick of you favoring Jace, like he’s the only one who matters. And you,” he turned to Jace, his voice dripping with venom, “you take all the credit for the band. What about the rest of us?”

Sammie appeared in the doorway with a tray of cupcakes in his hands. “Mark, please. Stay until after the gig. We need you.”

But Mark was resolved. “No. I’m done. You’re on your own.”

Jace watched helplessly as Mark stormed out, slamming the door behind him. The sound echoed through the cabin, leaving a heavy silence in its wake. Nico stood there, frustration etched on his face, while Sammie looked as if he might cry.

“I’ll go talk to him,” Nico said as he left the cabin right behind Mark.

Jace clutched the newly strung guitar, feeling a mix of guilt and sorrow. The band felt incomplete, fractured by the argument that had driven Mark away. As the Uber drove off, Jace couldn’t shake the feeling that things would never be the same.

Nico

Nico stormed after Mark, his mind a swirl of anger and desperation. The sight of Jace's guitar, the shredded and useless strings replayed in his head. The Uber idled in the driveway, a silent witness to the chaos unfolding.

"Mark, wait!" Nico shouted.

Mark spun around, suitcase in hand, his expression a mix of defiance and hurt. "What, Nico?"

Nico took a deep breath, trying to rein in his emotions. "We need you for the gig in Black Rock City. It's the biggest one we've ever had. You can't just walk out on us."

Mark's eyes narrowed. "I'm done, Nico. I can't stay here and watch you and Jace play a happy couple while I get sidelined. You don't see what this is doing to me."

A wave of anger washed over Nico, making his blood boil. "This isn't about you and your jealousy, Mark. This is about the band. We've worked too hard to let it fall apart now."

Mark's voice rose, filled with frustration. "Jealousy? It's not just jealousy, Nico. It's feeling like I don't matter anymore. Like I'm just a backup, a filler."

"You matter, Mark," Nico insisted, stepping closer. "But we need you to get past this. We're a team, and we need every member. Can't you see that?"

Mark shook his head, the Uber driver casting anxious glances their way. “I can’t do it, Nico. I can’t stay and pretend everything’s fine when it’s not.”

Nico’s fists clenched at his sides. “So you’re just going to leave us high and dry? We don’t have time to find another guitarist and singer. You’re screwing all of us over, not just yourself.”

Mark’s face twisted with pain and regret, but he remained resolute. “I’m sorry, Nico. I can’t stay. I need to do what’s right for me.”

Nico’s anger flared, but he knew pleading was pointless. “This isn’t right, Mark. It’s selfish. You’re better than this.”

The Uber driver placed Mark’s suitcase and guitar into the trunk.

“Good luck in Black Rock City,” Mark said as he got in.

When they left, Nico stood there, not knowing what to do first. He could call his lawyer and see what could be done, but there would be the possibility of Mark ruining the band on purpose if he were forced back.

Nico returned to the cabin. He entered the living room where Sammie and Jace were eating cupcakes and drinking coffee.

“What happened?” Jace asked.

“We’re down a band member. I don’t know how we can find someone else.”

Sammie got up and went to the kitchen, the sound of his footsteps echoing through the house. He prepared a steaming cup of coffee for Nico and handpicked two mouthwatering cupcakes to accompany it .

“Thanks, Sammie.”

“Why don’t you sing with Jace?” Sammie suggested.

“No way. I can’t sing and play the drums.”

“It would be easier to find a drummer for a few songs, while you two sing.”

“My cousin is hanging out in California. He could play the drums while we sing. Jace will have to do more solos, and maybe two songs with me,” Nico said. The thought of his cousin playing would not make his father pleased, but it was short notice.

“Will he stay here with us?” Sammie asked.

“How will he practice with us?”

“I don’t know. What if Mark returns?”

“Well, then we would be fine. Let’s pack up. We’re going to Reno.”

“That sounds fun. Did you just decide that?”

“That’s where my cousin is heading tomorrow. I’ll call him and see what he thinks. Just throw everything out. We have to leave the place empty. Pack things that don’t need refrigeration,” Nico said.

“What if Mark comes back here?” Sammie asked.

“He has our phone numbers. Right now, I’m pissed at him for attacking Jace, and for fucking leaving us. He’s on a contract. We can sue him.”

“I’ll help Sammie in the kitchen,” Jace said. “Then I’ll pack our clothes.”

Nico took Jace into his arms. “Remember, this is not your fault. Mark has been acting like an ass for months. Nothing will come between us. I have a feeling he’ll come crawling back to us.”

“Thanks for saying that.”

As their lips met, Nico could feel the warmth of Jace’s breath mingling with his own. Nico’s tongue moved inside of Jace’s mouth as he slipped his hand inside the back of his jeans, feeling his ass .

“I can’t wait until tonight when you’re in bed with me,” Nico said.

“I can’t wait either.”

Nico watched Jace leave for the kitchen. He packed up his drums and put them in the back of the van. He then packed up Sammie’s keyboard, put Jace’s guitar inside the carrying case, and took it outside and placed it in the trunk. Once he finished, he went upstairs and sent Sal a message.

Nico: Might need you to fill in for me if my guitarist doesn’t show. We’re on our way to the hotel in Reno. We can meet when I get there.

Sal: That would be fun. Waiting for your call.

Jace was upstairs with Sammie packing, so Nico picked up a couple of suitcases and carried them down. They all met in the living room.

“Jace, are you okay?” Nico asked when he entered the living room.

“I guess so. Sammie is going to call Mark tonight. I don’t know what I could have done to avoid this.”

“Nothing. This is on Mark to pull shit like this when we need him.”

“This can make or break us,” Sammie said.

“Mark wants to be lead, and he’s never going to be because I’m here. That won’t change what he wants,” Jace said.

“He was looking forward to Black Rock City. I just think he’ll come back,” Sammie said.

“He has a stupid way of showing he cares about anyone but himself,” Nico said. “

After a while, they left the cabin and were back in the van on the way to Reno.

Jace sat up front while Sammie was in the back using his phone.

“Are you excited about going to Reno?” Nico asked.

“I’m excited about you, more than anything.”

“What’s wrong?”

“I’m worried about our performance without Mark. ”

“He’s a jackass!” Nico said.

“So are we going to meet your cousin?”

“Sal. He’s thirty-five and a pain in the ass, but he always wanted to be in a band. He’s a good drummer. Of course, I taught him many good things. I don’t think we’ll need him, but even if Mark returns, he can do one song on the drums while we sing together. We’ll have to practice.”

“Where are we going to practice?”

“I have a place. I sent them a message. We’ll take tomorrow off, then the next day we’ll practice. Then we’ll be going to Black Rock City.”

“I can drive if you get tired,” Jace said.

“I’m fine, but thanks.” He placed his hand on Jace’s knee.

“I feel like the third wheel back here,” Sammie said.

“We love you, Sammie,” Nico said.

“I know.”

Jace

The moment they arrived in Reno, they were greeted by a dazzling display of city lights, while the lively atmosphere of the bustling streets engulfed them. Nico had booked two rooms at the hotel, ensuring that he and Jace would have the privacy they desired, while also providing Sammie with the space he required.

Jace stepped into the hotel room, feeling the plush carpet as he walked. The room exuded luxury, with modern art adorning the walls and elegant furnishings. Floor-to-ceiling windows provided a breathtaking view of the Reno skyline, the city lights twinkling like stars in the night. A large king-sized bed with crisp white linens occupied the center of the room, and a sleek glass table was set with a welcome basket of gourmet treats. Everything about the room screamed opulence and comfort. Of course, Nico had footed the bill. His money appeared to be never-ending, like a bottomless well that he could always dip into .

Nico collapsed onto the bed with a satisfied groan, clearly exhausted from the day's drive. Jace ordered room service, opting for an indulgent spread of steaks, lobster tails, and a decadent chocolate dessert.

Once the food arrived, they settled in, the aroma of the meal filling the air. Jace served Nico in bed on a tray.

“Thanks, Jace. Come and eat beside me.”

Jace removed his shoes and socks and carried his tray to the bed. “This is the life,” he said. “Us in bed together.”

“You finally grew up, Jace. I remember when I first met you. You were just adorable, and you looked up to me.”

“I still do. Don’t you still think I’m adorable?”

“Very. I love you so much. Now, you’re very successful. I can’t believe how well you perform, even when things are not in your favor. You lose yourself in singing and dancing.”

“You don’t just like my cute ass. That means a lot to me.”

“Jace! You’re so silly sometimes. I love all of you. Do you like your dinner?”

“Yes. Love it. You’re so generous to all of us.”

“You three are my family.”

“I know.” Jace paused for a minute. “Alright,” Jace started, cutting into his steak. “We need to figure out how to get Mark back.”

Nico sighed, running a hand through his hair. “I know. We can’t afford to lose him, especially with Black Rock City coming up. But he’s so stubborn. Once he’s made up his mind, it’s hard to change it.”

Jace nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation. “Maybe we need to appeal to what he cares about most. Remind him of what the band means to him. It’s not just about us, it’s about the music we create together.”

Nico looked thoughtful, chewing slowly. “He’s always been sensitive about feeling left out. Maybe we’ve unintentionally made him feel that way. We need to show him he’s an integral part of this band.”

“Agreed,” Jace said, feeling the weight of their discussion. “But we also need to be firm about his behavior. He can’t keep lashing out every time he feels insecure.”

Nico gave a small nod, a determined glint in his eye. “We’ll talk to him. Lay it all out. Hopefully, he’ll understand and come back.”

“I think Mark has the biggest problem with me. I need to meet him without you.”

“Only in a public place.”

“I’m going to call him.”

“Okay. You will tell me the place and time.”

“Yes, love.” Jace kissed Nico’s cheek and took his phone to the bathroom.

Jace took a deep breath as he stepped into the bathroom and closed the door. The quiet hum of the hotel room faded, leaving him alone with his thoughts. With a mix of determination and trepidation, he dialed Mark’s number.

After a few rings, Mark answered. “What do you want, Jace?”

Jace leaned against the sink, trying to steady his nerves. “Mark, I’m sorry. I’m really sorry you felt left out. You’re like the brother I never had, and I hate that we’re fighting like this.”

Mark’s sigh was heavy with frustration. “It’s not just about feeling left out, Jace. It’s about feeling like I don’t matter to the band anymore. You and Nico have this thing, and I’m just...there.”

“I get it,” Jace said softly. “I really do. But you matter to us more than you know.”

Nico, Sammie, and I miss you terribly. This band isn't the same without you."

There was a pause, and Jace could almost hear Mark wrestling with his emotions. "You don't know how hard it's been, watching you two and feeling like I'm on the outside."

Jace swallowed hard, the weight of Mark's words sinking in. "Mark, I will not pretend that everything's perfect. We have our problems, and we fight like brothers sometimes. But that's because we care about each other. We need you, especially now, with the big gig in Black Rock City coming up. No one can take your place."

Mark's voice softened, though the tension remained. "You really think I'm that important?"

"Absolutely," Jace said firmly. "We can't do this without you. Please, come back. We're staying at the Renaissance in Reno. We'll figure this out together."

Mark hesitated, but Jace could sense the shift. "Alright. I'll fly in tomorrow. But this doesn't mean everything's fixed."

Jace felt a wave of relief wash over him. "I know. But it's a start. Thanks, Mark."

As Jace ended the call, he felt a glimmer of hope. They had a long way to go, but at least they were moving in the right direction. He stepped out of the bathroom, ready to face whatever came next, with Nico by his side.

"Get back over here," Nico said.

Jace plugged in his phone to charge for the morning on the nightstand, then slipped into bed.

“Well?”

“He’s flying in tomorrow. I told him where we’re staying.”

“That’s good news.”

“Why does your face look like it’s bad news?”

“Why did you talk to him in the bathroom?”

“So I could think better. Why are you asking? ”

“I need to ask you something and I want the truth, regardless of the answer.”

“Sounds serious.”

“Did you and Mark ever have a thing?”

“What does that mean?”

“Did he ever fuck you?”

“Nico! I fucked around a lot, but not with Mark.”

“Are you sure?”

“Well, we kissed when we were both drunk and we slept in the same bed. But nothing happened.”

“Nothing happened because you both were too drunk to get it up, or for another reason?”

“Nothing happened because I don’t feel that way with him. He feels like a brother.”

“And what does he want from you?”

“He wants more singing time with me. That’s all he wants and to feel like he is needed.”

“And do you think he is jealous you’re with me and not him?”

“No, he feels like he’s lost me as a brother. We did a lot of shit together. And that’s why he feels like he is not needed anymore.”

“Then you can’t neglect him. Even though we’re together, spend time with him. As long as you keep your promises to me.”

“I’ll keep my promises.”

“Good. I guess my cousin will be disappointed.”

“We could still do one song together, and he can take over the drums.”

“I guess so.”

“Don’t you want to do a song with me?”

“Of course I do. Will that cause a problem with Mark?”

“I hope not. ”

With their strategy settled, they shifted gears and relaxed. Jace grabbed the remote, browsing through the movie options. They finally settled on a classic action film,

letting the tension of the day melt away as they watched.

Jace felt a sense of calm wash over him. Despite the stress, being with Nico in this beautiful room made him believe they could overcome any obstacle—together. The night was theirs, and for now, that was enough.

Jace

Jace pulled Nico's van in at the airport, the engine humming softly as he waited. His stomach churned with a mix of anxiety and hope. When he spotted Mark coming out, he gave a small wave, trying to gauge his friend's mood. Mark hesitated for a moment, then offered a tight smile as he climbed into the van.

They drove in silence at first. The tension between them was intense. It wasn't until they reached a little pub on the outskirts of town that Jace felt the weight begin to lift. The familiar setting—a cozy place with wooden beams, low lighting, and the comforting scent of pub food—felt like neutral ground.

After ordering drinks and some lunch, Jace finally broke the silence. "I'm glad you came, Mark. We've missed you."

Mark nodded, sipping his beer. "Yeah, I've missed you guys, too. Things just...got out of hand."

Jace nodded, choosing his words carefully. "We've had a lot of fun times, man. Just because Nico and I are together doesn't mean it has to change. We're still a band. We'll still have fun."

Mark looked down at his drink, the tension in his shoulders easing slightly. "I guess I just felt like I was losing my place. It's been tough."

Jace reached out, placing a hand on Mark's shoulder. "You're not losing your place. You're like a brother to me. Brothers fight sometimes, but it doesn't mean we stop

caring about each other.”

Mark took a deep breath and finally met Jace’s gaze. “I’m sorry, Jace. For everything. I was out of line.”

Hearing those words, Jace felt a rush of relief and a pang of sorrow. “It hurt, man. That guitar means a lot to me. But I get it. Emotions were running high. What matters is that we move forward from here.”

They sat for a while, reminiscing about their best moments on the road, laughing about the crazy adventures they had shared. The tension gradually melted away completely, replaced by a sense of camaraderie. By the time they left the pub, Jace felt a renewed sense of hope.

As they drove back to the hotel, Jace couldn’t help but feel grateful for the chance to mend things with Mark. The apology had meant more than Mark would ever know. It was a step towards healing, towards bringing the band back together. And for Jace, that was worth everything.

They were making good progress back toward the hotel when Jace noticed he was speeding a little. Before he could slow down, another car suddenly appeared from a side street, and there was no time to avoid it.

The impact wasn’t severe, but it was enough to dent both vehicles and bring them to an abrupt halt. Jace’s heart pounded as he quickly checked on Mark. “You okay, man?”

Mark nodded, looking shaken but unharmed. “Yeah, just a bit rattled. ”

Jace’s heart pounded as the red and blue lights flashed around him, casting an eerie glow on the aftermath of the accident. An officer approached, his expression stern.

“Have you been drinking tonight?” the officer asked, his voice direct.

Jace swallowed hard, nerves on edge. “No, sir,” he lied, hoping his fear didn’t show.

The officer studied him for a moment before nodding. “Do you or your passenger need a doctor?”

“No, we’re fine,” Jace replied, glancing at Mark, who gave a quick nod of agreement.

“Alright, step out of the vehicle and walk a straight line for me,” the officer instructed.

Jace’s legs felt like jelly, but he managed to step out and walk down the line, focusing on keeping his steps steady. He could feel the officer’s eyes on him, scrutinizing every move. Somehow, he managed to pass the test.

The officer handed him a ticket, his expression not softening one bit. “You were clocked at eighty miles in a sixty-mile zone. Pay attention,” he snapped, the reprimand stinging.

Jace’s mouth went dry, fear gnawing at him. He took the ticket, feeling the weight of his actions.

As the officer turned to leave, he paused, looking back at Jace. “You’re from the band Sacred Fire, aren’t you?”

Jace nodded, uncertain where this was going.

“Great band,” the officer said, a hint of a smile breaking through. “But drive better.”

The comment left Jace feeling both relieved and chastised. Once the officer left, Jace

took a deep breath, trying to steady his racing heart. The reality of the situation hit him hard—they had been incredibly lucky .

Jace assessed the damage. The van was scratched up, and the engine was smoking. It would need to be towed. The driver of the other car was also unharmed, just a bit frustrated. After exchanging information, Jace realized the van would have to go to the garage.

Jace pulled out his phone and called Nico. “Hey, Nico. We’ve been in an accident, but everyone’s okay. The van’s a bit banged up, and it’s being towed to a garage.”

Nico’s voice was tense, but relieved. “Thank God you’re both okay. Do you need help to get back?”

“No, it’s alright,” Jace replied. “We’ll take an Uber back to the hotel. We’ll see you soon.”

After arranging for an Uber, they rode back to the hotel in silence, each lost in their own thoughts. When they arrived, Nico and Sammie were waiting in the lobby, worry etched on their faces.

Sammie immediately moved to help Mark with his suitcase. “Glad you guys are safe.”

Jace nodded, feeling the weight of the day’s events settling over him. “Yeah, it was a close call. Let’s just get upstairs and try to relax.”

The way Nico looked at him had him worried. He and Mark had had three drinks. Before they left the pub, he’d brushed his teeth in the men’s room and stuck two mints in his mouth to ward off the smell of alcohol. He should have paid more attention to the speed limit instead of daydreaming. He’d broken the rule of not

driving after consuming alcohol. That was Nico's rule for anyone who used his van.

They all headed up to Nico and Jace's room, the atmosphere heavy but filled with a sense of relief that things hadn't been worse. As they settled in, Jace knew they still had a lot to discuss and resolve, but for now, he could breathe a little easier with Mark back.

"What do you guys need?" Nico asked .

"Need a strong drink," Mark said.

"Coke, please."

Once everyone was situated, Nico started his questions. "Can you explain how the accident happened?"

"I drove too fast, and I couldn't stop when this guy came out of nowhere and hit the van. It caused the engine to smoke. So, it had to be towed to the nearest garage for repair."

"When you say too fast, how fast were you driving?" Nico asked.

"I don't know."

"Where were you two coming from?" Nico asked.

"We went out to lunch," Mark said.

"Where?"

"Murphy's Pub," Jace admitted.

Nico nodded then turned to Mark and hugged him. “I’m glad you’re back. We couldn’t make it without you.”

“Thanks.”

Nico turned to Sammie. “Thanks for spending the day with me. We’ll have to do it again. Jace and I have things to talk about. We need to leave for Black Rock City tomorrow at noon.”

Sammie and Mark said their goodbyes for the evening, leaving Jace alone with Nico.

“Tell me everything.”

“I did.”

“What’s hanging out of your jeans pocket?” Nico asked.

The last thing Jace wanted was to show Nico his ticket, but he pulled it out and handed it to him.

“It says you were driving at eighty in a sixty-mile zone.”

“Yes, that’s what the officer said.”

“And you don’t agree? ”

“I didn’t realize how fast I was going.”

“I see. Did you have anything to drink with lunch?”

“Three beers. I promised you I wouldn’t drink over three beers.” Jace knew he

sounded pathetic, and Nico would never buy his story because it had nothing to do with drinking and driving. That was a long-time rule.

“I’m proud of you for sticking to your promise. It doesn’t go unappreciated, but you broke my rule for anyone who uses my van not to drink and drive at all. This means you’ve lost your privilege of using it again. You could have killed yourself and Mark or someone else. Never drink and drive.”

“I knew I couldn’t please you, no matter what I do.”

“Jace! Don’t act like an immature teen. You fucked up. You’re lucky you all came out okay.”

“I have nothing else to say.”

Nico pulled his phone out and called the garage to discuss the van. He walked out of the room into the hallway and left Jace alone with his thoughts. He was worried about the van.

Nico returned to the room with his phone in hand and a sour expression on his face.

“The van needs extensive work, and it won’t be done when we need it. I have to rent a van.”

“I’ll pay for it. I’m sorry.”

“Jace, you had an accident. Whether it was your fault doesn’t matter now. You got Mark back, so I’ll take care of it. I’ll be back later.”

“Where are you going?”

“To rent a large camper with air conditioning to accommodate all four of us.”

“Really? ”

“Not one of us can be stressed and you guys aren’t ones who can deal without air.” He pulled Jace into his arms. “I still love you. I know you’re trying, but, Jace, no drinking and driving ever again.” Their lips met in a gentle, lingering kiss, sending a rush of warmth through Jace’s body.

Nico

Nico stood back, admiring the camper he'd just rented. The exterior gleamed in the sunlight, a polished silver body with modern lines and tinted windows. The more he thought about it, the more he wanted to purchase this so they could avoid hotels and save money in the long run. He'd discuss it with the guys. Also, he wanted to see how they made out together in this shared small space without separate rooms.

Inside, the camper was even more impressive. The front area had comfortable chairs for the driver and passenger, complete with all the latest tech and navigation systems. Behind them, the living area opened up, filled with brown and beige contemporary decor. A plush sofa and a couple of armchairs were arranged around a small dining table, perfect for meals on the go.

The kitchenette was compact and efficient, with a mini-fridge, microwave, and stovetop, along with cabinet space for storing supplies. Farther back, the sleeping quarters featured two sets of bunk beds, and up in a loft was a double bed for Jace and him. Each bed had its own reading light and a privacy curtain.

The bathroom was well-designed with a tiny shower, sink, and toilet. Nico loved everything about the camper as he took it all in. This was going to be their home on wheels for the next leg of their journey to Black Rock City, and it was perfect for the four of them.

Before he went to the hotel, he made a call to his cousin.

“Hey, Sal. Our guitarist returned.”

“Oh shit! That’s actually good. I really wanted to play but I’m on my way back to New York. Your father needs me for a special job.”

“If I can fit you another time, I’ll give you a call.”

“Thanks.”

When he made it back to the hotel room, Jace was working on a new song. He had his guitar, and he was writing notes on a piece of paper.

“Hey, Jace. Everything is set up to leave in the morning.”

“I want to see the camper.”

“We have something to talk about first.”

“What now?”

“Our relationship.”

Jace put his guitar down and looked up at Nico.

Nico paced back and forth, his heart pounding in his chest. Knowing Jace had gotten a speeding ticket was bad enough, but when he learned Jace had also been driving under the influence, Nico’s blood ran cold. He had warned the band members countless times about his strict no-drinking policy, and he had clarified that any violation would cause the loss of the driving privileges of his vehicles. Their talk earlier wasn’t enough to appease Nico’s restless mind.

“I’m so sorry, Nico,” Jace mumbled, his voice barely audible. “I know I shouldn’t have done it. I was just stupid. ”

Nico sighed, trying to control his anger. “Jace, I’ve told you time and time again, drinking and driving is not acceptable. You’re putting yourself and others at risk. This isn’t just about breaking a rule; it’s about your safety.”

Jace nodded, his eyes filled with regret. “I understand. I promise it won’t happen again. I’ll do whatever it takes to make it up to you.”

Nico hesitated for a moment before speaking. “I need to know that you’re serious. That this is a serious matter.”

Jace nodded solemnly. “I promise, Nico. I won’t let you down.”

“I want to revisit our conversation about the consequences of drinking and driving.”

“You made your point. I won’t be allowed to drive your van anymore.”

“That’s the consequence for any band member.”

“I’m a band member too.”

“You’re more than a band member to me. I don’t think you being suspended from driving my van is a strong enough punishment for my lover.”

“So, are you’re changing the consequence just for me?”

“How many times did Mark or Sammie drink and drive my van?”

“I guess never.”

“That’s right. You’re the only one who has, and this isn’t the first time.”

“I’m not fucking perfect.”

“I’m not either.”

“You’re stressing me out.”

“I care about you deeply, and I want to make sure that you never make the dangerous decision to drink and drive again.” Nico didn’t like the idea of Jace putting himself and others at risk while using his van or any other vehicle. He also understood making a one hundred eighty degree change overnight was impossible. At least Jace had stopped at three drinks, which meant he took his promises seriously.

“I love you, Nico. I feel like shit. I fucked up the van.”

“When you break a promise, one of your punishments is a spanking, or you could be my sex slave for a day.”

“Do you want to spank me or make me your sex slave?” Jace’s face lit up with a wide grin.

“What if you were on your motorcycle and a car hit you? I don’t want to worry every time you drive or ride.”

“Why don’t you make it one of my promises?”

“That’s an excellent suggestion. And that means any car, van, or motorcycle, plus I’m including the surfboard too.”

“I promise, I won’t drink when I ride or drive or surf.”

“These promises are between us. I’m still thinking I need to give you a consequence

for what you did.”

“I have a ticket I have to pay, and I can’t use your van.”

“This is a very serious problem.”

“What do you want me to do?”

“I’m going to spank you over my knee.”

“That sounds like fun, not a punishment.”

“When I get done, you won’t be saying that.”

“What are you going to spank me with?”

“My hand. I’m not planning on killing you.”

“So do it and stop talking about it.”

“I wouldn’t be so bossy if I were you.” Nico sat down at the end of the bed. “Get naked.”

Jace toed off his shoes, then stepped out of his jeans and underwear before taking off his socks. He carefully removed his shirt and placed it on a chair. He stood completely naked with an erection. “Bend over.” Nico pointed to his lap.

Jace curved his body over Nico’s lap and pushed his hands down, so they were resting flat.

“I think I might spank you every day. I love seeing your ass over my knees.” He

smacked Jace's butt hard with a loud slap, leaving a red handprint.

"Are you turning into my Daddy Dom?"

"Maybe." Nico laughed.

"I'm sorry, Nico. I won't drink and drive."

"I've heard that before. Who is in charge around here?" Each smack produced a resounding thud.

"You are, Nico."

"Spanking you made my dick hard." Nico motioned for him to stand.

Nico unbuckled his belt and unzipped his slacks in slow motion, while Jace watched him in awe. He pushed them to his ankles at the speed of a turtle, then stepped out of them at a quicker pace. He unbuttoned his shirt and left it wide open, displaying his muscular chest.

Nico squared his shoulders like a soldier. "Kneel between my legs and suck me off."

Jace knelt on the carpet, Jace stroked Nico's cock while licking the shaft and maintaining eye contact. Jace spat on it a few times. He rubbed the spit up and down the shaft and tapped the head against his tongue. He made his way down to the base, and then pushed Nico's cock back against his stomach, giving him total access to his balls. Nico moaned and played with Jace's hair.

While Jace caressed Nico's rigid cock, he licked his ball sack. Jace spent a long time on his balls. Gently, he put Nico's balls into his mouth one at a time, careful not to use his teeth on his sack at all. He ran his tongue behind Nico's balls and licked the

area between his balls and his asshole. He ran his tongue as close to his asshole as he could reach.

Nico was going out of his mind as his cock thickened and hardened more when Jace licked and lightly nipped. He continued to make eye contact frequently. Jace made his way back up to the head of Nico's cock and took it into his mouth. Kneeling straighter, Jace gained an excellent position and angle to get Nico's cock deep into his mouth. He used his right hand to grip the shaft while with the forefinger and thumb of his other hand he grabbed Nico's testicles close to where his sack met his body, so that he gripped the loose skin above the balls. As Jace sucked on Nico's cock, he applied a constant downward pressure on his ball sack.

"You're driving me insane," Nico said.

Nico's heavy panting, gasping, and the catch of his breath as the pleasure was building made Jace suck even harder. The more he sucked, the more Nico's breath hitched and the more he uttered sexy moans.

"Oh fuck. Going to come." As Nico neared orgasm, Jace increased the pull on his balls.

Impatiently, Nico shoved his cock down Jace's throat. He pumped hard and fast until he came.

"Oh. Oh. Oh." Nico held Jace's head.

Jace milked his cock with his mouth and hand but kept the head as far back in his throat as he could. When Nico pulled his cock out of Jace's mouth, Jace took it back in, gently licked it clean, and swallowed all his cum. He used his finger to wipe the small traces of cum from his lips and ate all of it, while Nico watched with approval and pleasure.

“You really made me feel so good, Jace. I could get used to your sweet tongue on my cock.”

Jace looked down at his hard cock oozing precum, and he wanted to rub himself off.

“Bad boys must wait to come. If you’re good the rest of the day, maybe I’ll take care of that for you later.”

“Wait until tonight?”

“You’re not to touch yourself or do anything to make yourself come. You’ll learn not to drink and drive. I don’t reward destructive behavior.”

“Yes, Nico.” Jace both looked and sounded disappointed he would not get off.

Jace

Morning came bright and early for Jace. So much for morning sex. Nico wasn't in the hotel room and his things were gone. For a moment, Jace worried they had left without him. He shoved the covers away, stretching his limbs before rising from the bed and heading into the invigorating spray of the shower. When he got out of the bathroom, Nico was there packing his things for him.

"Are you in a hurry?" Jace dressed in his favorite jeans and slipped on a comfortable shirt.

"It's late. We should have been on the road by now. We're all packed, had breakfast, and gone grocery shopping." He moved closer to Jace and pulled him in for a kiss.

"Do you want to spank me for sleeping in?" He slipped his feet into open-toed sandals.

"You know, that's a good idea, but I'll have to add it to my to do list for when we get home. No spankings at Black Rock City. "

"Since we're all sleeping in the same camper, does that also mean no sex?"

"We're going to sleep in the same bed in the upper-level and there are privacy drapes for each bed. They'll be sleeping below us so they can't see us, but they will hear us."

"I need coffee," Jace said.

“You can make some in the camper. Do a walk through and make sure I got everything, then we’ll check out.”

They handed back the keys at the desk and proceeded towards the camper. Mark and Sammie were already there, making coffee for Jace.

“Wow, I love this camper,” Jace said.

“Sit up front,” Sammie said. “I’ll get you coffee and a bagel with cream cheese.”

“Thanks, Sammie.”

“Rules for the camper. No shouting or fighting in here. No smoking or drinking alcohol, either. You guys can rotate seats.”

“Sounds good,” Mark said.

“And if you have to fart, get your ass in the bathroom,” Nico joked.

Everyone laughed.

“I’m so excited,” Jace said.

“Me too,” Sammie said.

“We’re going to do great. We need to practice more tomorrow,” Nico said.

After an hour of driving, Mark walked up to Jace. “Can I sit up front for a while?”

“Of course.” Jace leaned over and kissed Nico, their lips brushing sending a rush of warmth through his body.

“Be good back there.” Nico said.

“Yes, Nico. ”

Jace sat back in a chair and started writing a song. He played his guitar while Sammie listened to him sing.

“That’s great,” Sammie said.

“Thanks.”

The drive was only two and a half hours, and before they knew it, they were there. After Nico parked the camper on the grounds, they all went outside to stretch.

“It’s so hot here,” Jace said.

“Yes, that’s why we have the camper,” Nico said.

“Let’s listen to some bands,” Jace said.

Excitement filled the air as they slipped into their Scared Fire shirts.

Sammie and Mark had friends to meet, so Nico and Jace walked to the arena. They stopped at a stand and ordered cold beers and shared nachos and cheese.

A young man with red hair came up to Nico. “Master Nico, what are you doing here?”

“Hey, Harry, this is the lead singer in our band, Jace Adams, and he’s mine.”

“Oh, you’re lucky, Jace. You have a great Dom.”

“He’s not my Dom,” Jace said, feeling a wave of shock.

With a mischievous grin, Nico replied, “Not yet.”

Jace wondered why the guy had called Nico, Master Nico. What was that about? This Harry guy sounded like he was from New York, like Nico. The enormous man who was with Harry walked up over, introduced himself, and shook Nico’s hand. The red-haired man pulled Jace over to speak to him.

“Hey, is Master Nico making you enter Locktoberfest?”

“What the hell is Locktoberfest?” Jace asked .

“You wear a cage on your dick for the month of October. Everyone is doing it.”

“No one is locking up my dick. This boy”—he pointed to his cock,—“needs to come every day.”

After the man talked to Nico, he took Harry and left. Nico gently clasped Jace’s hand as they made their way to the designated performance area, searching for seats.

Jace sat beside Nico, the heat of the desert sun fading into a cool evening breeze. They were perched on folding chairs, watching the bands play. The energy in the air was electric, the crowd a sea of swaying bodies and enthusiastic cheers. The stage lights pulsed with the beat of the music, casting vibrant colors over the audience.

The band on stage was tearing through a set of high-energy rock songs, their sound raw and powerful. The crowd responded with fervor, their hands raised, voices shouting along with the lyrics. Jace could feel the vibrations of the bass drum in his chest, a reminder of the power of live music.

Jace glanced at Nico, who was tapping his foot in time with the beat. “Tomorrow night, huh?” Jace said, a mixture of excitement and nerves in his voice.

Nico nodded, a confident smile on his face. “Yeah, it will be our turn to bring the house down.”

Jace leaned back, taking in the scene. “Think we’ll be ready?”

Nico’s eyes sparkled with determination. “We’ve got this. Mark’s back, and we’ve been practicing our asses off. We’ll give them a show they won’t forget.”

The thought of their performance sent a thrill through Jace. “You’re right. It’s going to be epic. We’ve worked too hard for this. ”

They watched as the band on stage transitioned into a slower, more melodic song, the crowd swaying in unison. Jace felt a sense of camaraderie with the surrounding people, all united by their love of music.

“Remember when we played that tiny club in Sacramento three years ago?” Jace asked, a nostalgic smile tugging at his lips.

Nico chuckled. “Yeah, and the sound system kept cutting out. We still rocked it, though.”

Jace laughed, feeling the tension of the past few days melting away. “We’ve come a long way since then.”

Nico nodded, placing a hand on Jace’s shoulder. “And we’ll keep going. Together.”

As the night wore on, they sat side by side, the music washing over them. The anticipation of their upcoming performance filled Jace with a renewed sense of

purpose. Tomorrow night, it would be their turn to take the stage, to share their music with the world. And with Nico by his side, he knew they were unstoppable.

“Can I ask you something?” Jace asked.

“Anything.” He kissed Jace’s cheek.

“That Harry guy called you Master Nico. Can you explain that to me?”

“Years ago, back in New York, before we met in California, Harry was my sub.”

Jace took a deep breath, trying to steady himself. “I just...I can’t believe you never told me about this. It feels like a punch in the gut.”

Nico’s face softened, a hint of guilt creeping in. “I’m sorry, Jace. It wasn’t something I thought about bringing up.”

“Not something you thought about bringing up?” Jace repeated, feeling the sting of those words. “We’re supposed to share everything, Nico. I thought we had no secrets.”

Nico sighed, running a hand through his hair. “It’s not that I wanted to keep it from you. It’s just...it was a long time ago. Before we met. It didn’t seem relevant.”

“But it feels relevant now,” Jace said, his voice trembling with emotion. “I thought I knew everything about you. Why didn’t you tell me?” Jace worried he’d never be enough for Nico. Maybe that was the real reason he’d never connected with him. He wasn’t planning on living a BDSM lifestyle. All kinds of thoughts went through his mind.

Nico looked down, clearly struggling to find the right words. “I didn’t want to bring

up the past and make things complicated. You mean so much to me, Jace. I didn't want you to feel insecure or hurt."

"Well, it's a bit late for that," Jace muttered, the jealousy gnawing at him. "I just wish you had trusted me enough to tell me."

"I do trust you," Nico insisted, leaning closer. "Please, Jace. Understand that it wasn't about keeping secrets. It was about protecting what we have now. You're the one I love, the one I'm with. That's all that matters."

Jace looked into Nico's eyes, searching for the reassurance he needed. Despite the pain, he could see sincerity there. "It's just...it's hard to process. You were Harry's Dom. What if what we have isn't enough for you?"

Nico nodded, reaching out to squeeze Jace's hand. "I'm here, and I'm not going anywhere. I'm not forcing you to be my sub. Those days are over."

Jace took a shaky breath, the initial shock and hurt beginning to ebb away. It would take time to fully come to terms with this, but for now, he could start by trusting that Nico's heart was in the right place. Jace would never consent to be a sub for Nico or anyone. He wasn't into that scene.

"Did you put Harry's dick in a locked cage in October?"

"Did Harry tell you about Locktoberfest?" Nico laughed.

"He did. I never heard of Locktoberfest. "

"Don't worry about that. We will not take part in that. I don't need that with you."

"Are you sure I'll be enough for you?"

“More than enough. I love you more than anything. What we have is real. I’ve always loved you.”

Nico

The morning sun pierced through the thin curtains, painting the interior of the camper in a golden hue. Nico stretched, feeling the buzz of anticipation in his veins. Today was the day. The band had agreed to meet early at a local practice space, so they could have one last run-through before their big performance.

Arriving at the practice spot, Nico felt a jolt of excitement seeing everyone ready and eager. They dove into their set, each song flowing effortlessly. Twice they went through their entire set list, hitting every note, every beat, without a single mistake. By the end, the room was filled with their triumphant energy.

Back at their camper, they took a brief nap to recharge. When Nico woke up, he nudged Jace. Nico chose his favorite outfit—a snug, black t-shirt and ripped jeans—and started getting ready. The others followed suit, each choosing outfits that reflected their unique styles but harmonized with the band’s vibe .

“Tonight’s the night, guys,” Nico said, pulling on his boots. “We’re going to light that stage on fire.”

Jace laughed, adjusting his guitar strap. “Just try to keep up, drummer boy.”

Sammie grinned, running a hand through his hair. “Hope the crowd’s ready for this. They won’t know what hit them.”

Mark, now calmer and more focused, nodded. “Let’s give them a show they’ll never forget.”

As they walked through the crowds, the sea of faces parted to let them through. Nico felt the energy building, a wave of excitement that matched his own. They reached the stage, and the roar of the audience washed over them.

Taking their places, Nico glanced at his bandmates, feeling the bond between them stronger than ever. The first notes rang out, and the crowd erupted. Jace's voice cut through the night, powerful and magnetic, as he danced across the stage, connecting with the audience who chanted Jace's name.

Nico's drumming was steady and relentless, driving the rhythm that kept everyone moving. Mark's guitar riffs soared, while Sammie's keys added depth and texture. The crowd clapped, sang along, and moved as one entity, completely enthralled.

Jace's energy was contagious, his voice reaching new heights as he jumped and danced, his movements fluid and free. Nico watched with pride, knowing that they had created something special. Each song blended into the next, the audience hanging on every note.

As they finished their set, the applause was deafening. The crowd's energy was still electric, and Nico couldn't help but smile. They had done it. They had brought the house down. And as they walked off the stage, he felt an overwhelming sense of accomplishment and unity with his bandmates. Tonight was a night they would all remember for years to come.

When they left the stage, there were people who wanted to sign the band up for more shows in different states.

"We want you to tour the East Coast in February," one manager said to Nico.

He turned to the guys. "What do you say about that?"

All three said yes in unison.

After that manager, another one wanted them to do a tour in Canada. They all agreed. They had almost six months booked. Their calendar was filled. Nico had heard of this happening after big concerts, but he never expected it to happen to them here.

He couldn't help but smile as they all gathered back in the camper. The energy from their performance still thrummed through his veins. Each of them took a shower, washing away the sweat and grime of the stage, and now they were ready to celebrate. The camper felt like a sanctuary, a place where they could let their guard down and just enjoy the moment.

Nico pulled a bottle of champagne from the mini-fridge, the cool glass a sharp contrast to the warmth of the room. He popped the cork with a satisfying pop, and the bubbly liquid foamed over the top. He filled each of their plastic champagne glasses.

“To us,” Nico said, raising his glass. “To our success and to this incredible journey we're on together.”

They clinked their glasses, the sound like a harmonious chord. Nico's heart swelled with pride and gratitude as he looked around at his bandmates. Each one of them had played a crucial role in their success, and he felt an overwhelming sense of camaraderie and love.

Sammie was the first to speak, his voice filled with excitement. “We killed it out there tonight. The crowd was insane!”

Mark nodded, a genuine smile on his face. “Yeah, and we didn't miss a beat. This is what it's all about—playing music, connecting with people. I'm glad we're all back together.”

Jace wrapped an arm around Mark's shoulders, his eyes shining with emotion. “I couldn't imagine doing this with anyone else. You guys are like family to me.”

Nico's chest tightened, feeling the weight of those words. "And we couldn't have done it without each other. Every one of us brings something unique to the table. Sammie, your keyboard skills add so much depth to our sound. Mark, your guitar riffs are legendary. Jace, your voice and presence captivate everyone."

He paused, taking a moment to let the emotions settle. "I know we've had our ups and downs, but standing on that stage tonight, hearing the crowd go wild...it's all been worth it. We're a team, and together, there's nothing we can't achieve."

The room was filled with a sense of unity and accomplishment. They talked and laughed, reminiscing about past performances and dreaming about the future. Nico felt a deep sense of contentment, knowing they were not just a band but a family, bound by their love of music and their commitment to each other.

As the night wore on, they sat together, the soft hum of the camper's air conditioner a comforting backdrop to their conversation. Nico felt at peace, knowing that no matter what challenges lay ahead, they would face them together. And that made all the difference.

After their celebration, Mark and Sammie left the camper to meet some friends and Nico and Jace found themselves alone in the quiet of their camper. The night outside was a still, stark contrast to the roaring crowd they had just left behind. The camper felt cozy, filled with the soft glow of string lights Nico had hung earlier .

Nico looked at Jace, his heart swelling with love and gratitude. "You know," he began, his voice gentle, "I've been thinking about how much I love this camper. It feels like our own little world on wheels."

Jace smiled, his eyes sparkling. "Yeah, it does. It's been great for all of us."

Nico took a deep breath, feeling the weight of his emotions. "And you...you've been my greatest escape, Jace. I love you more than I ever thought possible."

Jace's smile widened, but there was a hint of curiosity in his eyes. "What's brought this on, Nico?"

Nico swallowed hard, his hands trembling slightly as he reached into his pocket. "Jace, I've been wanting to ask you something for a while now." He got down on one knee, pulling out a small box. Jace's eyes widened, tears already forming.

"Jace, will you marry me?" Nico's voice was thick with emotion. He opened the box to reveal a pair of gold bands gleaming softly in the camper's light.

Jace's tears spilled over, a mix of shock and joy. "Yes, Nico. Yes, a thousand times yes." His voice broke as he spoke, overcome with emotion.

They slipped the bands onto each other's fingers, the moment feeling surreal and magical. Jace pulled Nico into a tight embrace, both of them crying and laughing at the same time.

After a while, they sat together, talking about their future. "How about getting married on Christmas Eve?" Nico suggested, his voice soft and full of hope.

Jace's eyes lit up. "That sounds perfect. It'll be the best Christmas ever."

As they sat there, wrapped in each other's arms, the world outside seemed to fade away. It was just the two of them, their love, and the promise of a future together. And in that moment, Nico knew that everything he had ever wanted was right here with him.

The End