



# Fatal Temptation (Toxic #2)

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**Category:** Suspense Thriller

**Description:** Akio has lived most of his life as the unwanted son of a sadistic Yakuza boss. His escape included gaining a brother he didn't know existed, a big family of outlaw bikers, and a fiery crush on the FBI agent who helped them. Lucas is a reluctant family friend and the ex-fiancé of Akio's new brother-in-law, but that doesn't stop him from falling hard for the man.

Lucas is a federal agent and a decade older than Akio. He should never have looked at him twice. What started as innocent affection has turned into a desire so deep that he fears it may have fatal consequences for him if he ever gives in. Already walking a fine line at work, he might end up in even more trouble when Akio desperately needs his help, but he'll do whatever it takes to keep Akio safe.

When they discover a connection between Akio's former life and the trafficking ring Lucas has been trying to shut down for years, they're thrust into a high-stakes game of danger and desire, where every move could be their last.

**Total Pages (Source):** 30

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

THE GROUND was cold underneath him. It was hard, too, but it was the cold that seeped into him. Into his skin and bones. It was the cold that made him shake, eyes barely opening to see the bars in front of him, around him. The cage felt smaller each time he woke up in it. The air felt colder.

The footsteps were loud, the slight heel on the shiny black dress shoes making a click-clack as his father crossed the basement. He closed his eyes, swallowing back a sob. He knew it would only make things worse for him.

“Pathetic.”

He looked up and flinched. It wasn't his father standing before him. It was a mirror image of himself. Who he might have become had his father been successful in breaking him. In molding him into the son he so desperately wanted. The son who'd gotten away.

But it wasn't his brother who stared down at him with dead eyes. It wasn't his brother in that expensive suit, a dark red splotch spreading on the left side of that white shirt. He was looking at his worst nightmare; the man he could have become. Darkness tainted the very air around him. That bullet wound in the exact place he'd shot his father.

He hadn't done it to be heroic. To save the others.

He'd done it for himself.

To survive. To escape the darkness he might become himself.

The other him stepped closer, the red now dripping onto the floor. He crouched down, an ugly grin on his face as their eyes met.

“Pathetic,” he spat again.

He raised his right hand, a gun in it, and then he smiled. The wickedness burned through him when that gun fired and the only good part of him died.

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Akio woke with a startled breath, body shaking as his heart hammered in his chest. He gasped for air, squeezing his eyes closed as he clutched the sheets. A nightmare. It was only a nightmare.

He blinked, slowly orienting himself. He was in his bed. His room. His door was slightly ajar, which was not how he’d left it. His brother had probably left it like that when he’d checked on him after he’d fallen asleep.

There were no lights on, no footsteps on the hardwood. He was relieved to know that he hadn’t screamed this time. If he had, his sister would be crawling into his bed to hold him while his brother would be pacing the room looking guilty, his husband trying to calm everyone.

They’d done that particular song and dance many times since he’d been saved from his father. He and Diesel’s father. Diesel hadn’t been good at hiding his guilt. Especially in the beginning. That guilt wasn’t his to bear, though. They both knew it was their father’s. Diesel had escaped because his mother had taken him with her. Akio hadn’t even been born when they’d run. Diesel couldn’t have saved him then, and when he found out that they were brothers, he had already saved him.

Diesel and Chris had given him a home. A family. Love. Things he'd never truly had before. He was good. He was happy. He shouldn't be having nightmares about the past and those dreaded what-ifs. In fact, he hadn't had that nightmare for months. He wasn't sure why it was back now. Stress from the last finals approaching? Or perhaps the uncertainty that came with graduating because he didn't know what came next?

He'd lie awake for hours, trying to find a reason, knowing he wouldn't find one.

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

HE HATED waiting. They all had their own way of coping with it, but it was one of those things about the job that just made it that much harder. Sitting on your ass because you needed to wait for confirmation or a warrant? The inactivity was almost the worst part of being in law enforcement.

He leaned back in his chair, gazing across the bullpen he called home for most days of the week. There were eight desks, one at the opposite end from him occupied by Special Agent Ezra Moses from his task force. Mo was a big bald man who always looked like he was about to burst the seams of his suits. Most criminals ran the other way when encountering the man and rightfully so. He could put someone down in less than ten seconds.

His boss' office was to his left along with the hallway to the kitchen, bathrooms, and elevators. Straight ahead was the computer room. He hated that damned room. You spent enough time in there prowling the dark web for depraved people and you ended up with visceral reactions to stepping through that door.

Special Agent Gemma Sutton was seated at the desk next to his, tapping her pink nails against the top of her desk. They were chipped, the nail polish coming off. She was usually on top of it but lately, she didn't seem to care too much. She never got long nails done but since day one, she'd had colorful nail polish. It was her little spark of joy in their rough job. She didn't care what anyone thought of it because if all they could complain about was her nail polish, then she was doing pretty damned well. She was a fantastic agent and even their sourpuss of a boss didn't dare say anything about it to her. He couldn't afford to lose her.

They all had that small thing to brighten their usually very dark days. Tahir had his superhero socks he wore every day, Mo had an endless supply of mugs with dirty quotes on them, Evan had the little notes his wife wrote him each morning, and even Sanchez had something. Sanchez, being their grouchy boss, of course, kept his hidden away, but what kind of a federal agent would he be if he hadn't figured it out?

Sanchez had two daughters, both grown and living on their own, but Sanchez had an old drawing in his desk drawer from when the twins were little. Whenever things got to Sanchez, he would go to his office and pull out that drawing, staring at it for as long as it took for him to calm down.

Sanchez had been doing the job for longer than any of them, so they didn't begrudge him taking that time. They all knew what the others needed and when they could sense someone falling, they reached out to support them.

Evan would drop a new pair of Spider-Man socks on Tahir's desk, Gemma had the Sanchez twins' numbers and texted them when their dad needed to hear their voices but wouldn't call himself, he and Gemma would buy anything with a dirty quote on it when they saw it to give to Mo, and Mo would write outrageous notes pretending they were from Evan's wife and slip them into the man's bag to make him laugh. He would buy the most colorful press-on nails he could find for Gemma, so she'd always sparkle. He was going to buy her some once they got off work because, clearly, she was in need of some support.

Gemma had a far-off look on her face, and he was sure she was trying to disassociate from the situation. He wasn't surprised when she turned to him, though. She gave him a flat smile and reached out to squeeze his hand.

"We'll get them," he told her. "No matter what it takes."

There was a flash of something deathly in her eyes as she nodded.

“Let’s nail these fuckers,” she said, conviction in her voice.

While he liked his team, Gemma was the one he felt the closest to. They’d connected instantly and she was the only one on the team he cared to see outside the job. Granted, they all went out for beer and wings every once in a while, but he considered Gemma a friend. The fact that they hadn’t seen each other outside of work for a few weeks never seemed to matter. They always picked up right where they left off. Sometimes, there were just periods where hanging with someone from work was too much for one or both of them.

Their latest case had been a shock to the system. They’d cracked down on a pedophilia ring and the footage they’d had to watch had given him nightmares and an aversion to food for a good few weeks.

The case they were working on now probably wouldn’t be any less heartbreaking. The local PD had gotten a tip for a location where a trafficking ring they’d been hunting for the past three years might have some of their girls stashed away. The police had asked them for assistance and while Sanchez was busy coordinating the op with them, all the rest of them could do was wait for the green light.

Knowing that someone was hurting while they sat on their asses was rough as hell. Unfortunately, they had to. They needed to make sure they had enough evidence, otherwise, it would’ve been for nothing. If they couldn’t convict those sick bastards, that meant they’d be straight back out there hurting people again.

Footsteps had him looking up to see Special Agent Evan Torres walking toward them. Evan had short black hair and lively brown eyes. He was five-eight, shorter than even Gemma, though only by half an inch. Despite his short stature, Evan was vicious on a sparring mat, often holding up longer against Mo than the rest of them.

Considering Mo’s slow pace, Lucas knew not to expect much of an update.

“Any news?” Gemma asked, though the light drawl to her voice told him that she too wasn’t expecting much.

Evan shrugged and pulled out his desk chair, dropping into it with a sigh.

“Tahir’s getting the van ready, but Sanchez and the others are keeping a tight lid on the op.”

There had been a shift lately. More closed doors. Less intel flowing. He knew what that meant. He wasn’t surprised either. There was only one way an organization as big as this trafficking ring could remain undetected and ahead of the FBI for so many years; they had someone on the inside. Corruption wasn’t anything new but whoever was doing it had to be sick in the head to assist these bastards.

He often wondered how he ended up on the Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking Task Force. It was one of the hardest jobs an FBI agent could have. Murder was one thing. These people were alive. They had to see what those sick fucks were doing to little kids. He had to take home with him the knowledge of just how many deprived people existed in the world. It sometimes made it very hard to function like a normal human being.

He’d given up a life with his ex to become an FBI agent. To do this . He had to make it worth it. Chris’ brother had been involved with an outlaw motorcycle club, and they found out too late that it meant Chris couldn’t join the FBI. He’d been forced to choose between the job he’d always wanted and the man he’d planned on marrying.

He’d told Chris once that he’d chosen wrong and yet, he wasn’t so sure now. Chris was happy. He’d returned to his hometown and become a detective. Then his brother had been murdered, and Chris had suspected his motorcycle club was responsible, so he’d gone undercover only to fall for Diesel, one of the full-patch members of the club.



When Lucas had arrived in York to investigate the club for being involved in trafficking, he'd gotten way more involved himself than he'd expected, throwing his badge to the side to help Chris and the bikers. Diesel had turned out to be the son of a Yakuza boss. The one who was actually doing the trafficking, and when he had taken Diesel captive, Lucas had helped Chris and the motorcycle club to get him back.

When they'd gone to rescue Diesel, they found someone else, too. Akio. Diesel's younger brother. Their father had held him captive his whole life. He didn't think there had been sexual abuse though there had been plenty of abuse. Akio had lived in it his whole life whereas his brother had escaped when he was a child.

Chris and Diesel had taken Akio in, and he was now in his last year of college. It had been four years since he'd sat at Akio's bedside in a small hospital in York, Pennsylvania, telling himself he hadn't put his life and career on the line for a bunch of criminals but for a young boy who looked at him as if he'd hung the damned moon and stars.

It had been a year since he'd been at Akio's twenty-first birthday. He'd almost swallowed his tongue when he'd seen the man he'd become in what felt like the blink of an eye. Akio was still slim and delicate but gone was that scared little boy he'd bribed with chocolate ice cream just to see him smile in that hospital. A lot had changed in such a short period of time. He'd done his best to avoid Akio from then on. The way Akio looked at him had made it pretty fucking clear to him that he needed to stay away. Akio being off to college would've been great if said college wasn't located in the same city as he was.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

HIS NIGHTMARE had shaken him. It wasn't anything new. He'd been having that nightmare since that dreaded day he'd shot his father and was finally freed. He tried to keep quiet about the nightmare, but Chris and Diesel always seemed to know anyway. Which was probably why Chris had been making pancakes for breakfast instead of their usual cereal. It was likely why Diesel had given him a tighter hug than usual before leaving for the day.

He couldn't find it in himself to complain about it. He knew all it meant was that they loved him. Love . It had been hard to accept at first. Their help, too, despite how desperately he'd wanted both.

He was in a much better place now, having had a real family for four years with all that came with it. The good. The bad. The endless support and love. The nagging, too. He almost hadn't accepted Chris and Diesel's offer to go to college because he'd have to leave them, and he knew especially Diesel didn't really want him to go. He'd needed to, though. He'd realized that after his first week away. He'd needed that space to grow.

He heard the door open and close and rose from his desk chair, leaving his laptop on, the white page utterly blank as it had been for hours. His assignment wasn't exactly moving along smoothly but statistics would have to wait.

He headed into the hallway and walked downstairs, unsurprised to find his sister sprawling on the couch, feet on the coffee table. Her backpack was on the floor next to the couch along with her jacket.

“D’s gonna kill you if he sees those dirty feet on his coffee table,” he said with a smile on his lips.

Addie looked up at him with a raised brow. Right . Diesel wasn’t here. Yet.

“He won’t know unless you rat me out,” Addie said.

“And what kind of brother would I be if I got my precious baby sister in trouble?”

He sat down on the couch next to her, poking her in the ribs.

“Hey,” she exclaimed, slapping his hand away.

Technically they weren’t siblings. Adelyn was his brother’s adopted daughter. His brother and brother-in-law were pseudo-parents to him, though. They’d practically been his parents for the past four years despite him being an adult. There was something to be said about him never having had a real childhood, though. His mother had tried to shield him from his father, and she’d been somewhat successful the first few years, but Kaito hadn’t appreciated it. He’d killed her before Akio’s sixth birthday. He barely remembered her, but he hoped she would be proud of how far he’d come along.

He put his feet on the coffee table next to Addie’s and snatched the remote out of her hand.

“So, what’re we watching?”

Addie groaned and dropped her head back against the couch.

“I hate when you’re back from college,” Addie grumbled.

He could only grin at her because he knew she was lying. The two of them? They shared a special bond. When she'd shown up a few years ago looking for Diesel because he was the only one who'd made her feel safe in a long long time, she probably hadn't expected to end up in a family of four. Diesel had saved her and a bunch of other kids from some traffickers. Well, his and Diesel's father's traffickers to be exact. Because that was the kind of thing a Yakuza boss did. That's what Kaito had been. He'd been a horrible father, too.

Diesel and his mom had escaped Kaito when Diesel was just a kid, but Kaito had found Diesel again. At that time, Diesel was already a member of an outlaw motorcycle club that Chris had been undercover in. Obviously, Chris had ended up choosing a side. Or, choosing Diesel, really.

Kaito had kidnapped them both and when Akio had seen them, he'd been scared and angry. There was the brother he'd been compared to his whole life. The brother that had escaped. He'd never told Diesel, but he'd been afraid that Kaito would decide to kill him because he had finally gotten Diesel back.

Kaito had sent Chris off to find some money his late brother had stolen from him. When Diesel and Chris' MC brothers had come to save Diesel, they hadn't come alone. Chris' ex-fiancé Lucas, who was also an FBI agent, had been with them. A firefight had ensued in the parking garage of the hotel they'd been at. He wasn't really sure if he'd seen a way out or just an end to it all when he'd picked up that gun, but he was glad it hadn't been the end. He wouldn't have gotten to experience what it was to have a family. To have people in his life who actually cared about him.

He'd shot his father, but Diesel had finished it. Most likely so Akio wouldn't have to live with having killed someone. Even someone as terrible as Kaito.

He'd been in a bad state himself and had been in the hospital for a little while. Lucas had been there a lot. He liked that. A little too much if Diesel's glaring had been

anything to go by. His brother sure wasn't a fan of Lucas or the way Akio looked at him. Whether it was hero worship or something deeper, he didn't know. No. That was a lie. He knew. He just didn't want to think too hard about it. It wasn't as if anything would ever happen between them. There was more than ten years between them. Lucas was a federal agent, and he was the son of a dead Yakuza boss. Oh, and Lucas was his brother-in-law-slash-pseudo-father's ex. It was never happening. No matter what his heart tried to tell him.

He heard the front door open and close and then Chris walked through the living room toward the kitchen with a grocery bag in each hand, and without sparing them a glance, he said, "Feet."

Akio shared a glance with Addie and then they both lifted their feet off the table, knowing Diesel wouldn't be far behind Chris.

The second Diesel entered the room, he gave them a knowing look. He stopped, staring at them as he crossed his arms.

"What have I told you two about feet on the coffee table?"

Akio pressed his lips together but wasn't the least bit surprised when Addie didn't keep her mouth shut.

"You're worried about feet on the coffee table when you've fucked Dad across the kitchen counter?"

Diesel's expression didn't change.

"Good luck getting out of that one," Chris said, leaning a shoulder against the doorway to the kitchen, a sparkle in his eyes as he looked at his husband.

Diesel spared Chris a dark look before snapping his gaze back onto Addie.

“You can put your feet on your coffee table and fuck your husband wherever you want when you get your own home that you pay for yourself,” Diesel said, voice smooth and his smile sweet. He walked closer, grabbing Addie’s backpack off the floor and dropping it in her lap. “For now, you do as you’re told which includes doing your homework.”

Addie’s loud sigh had a snort of laughter escaping Akio.

“Buzzkill,” Addie muttered, rolling her eyes at Akio.

“Now, Addie,” Diesel snapped.

Akio watched with a smile as Diesel walked toward Chris, the man’s wicked smile telling him to get the hell out of there before he heard things he couldn’t unhear.

He followed Addie upstairs with a light laugh while she grumbled the whole way. The second they entered her room, he closed the door behind them and she connected her phone to her speakers to blast music that might drown out the horndogs downstairs.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

THE WAITING was everlasting. They'd moved to the van now, parked a street away from the building they were surveilling. Mo and Evan were set up a street over, waiting for the go-ahead. The local police had provided their SWAT officers as well as two detectives, all of whom were busy securing the surrounding area.

Gemma was next to him and Tahir was sitting in front of the screens in the van, Sanchez behind them on the phone with the others to coordinate their entry.

Lucas was watching the screens in the van, all of them showing different cameras that Mo and Evan had set up around the building along with the few CCTV feeds around the area. They had a video feed from SWAT's sniper as well and that was the one he kept coming back to. He watched the people visible in the window of the building, talking and gesturing. One of them kept looking at his watch until he said something that had them all moving.

"Something's wrong," he muttered, staring at the screen. "Something's happening."

He got up, putting his hands on the desk, leaning down to stare at the monitor.

"What are you seeing?" Tahir asked, turning in his chair to look up at him.

He ran his gaze across the screens, noting the movements of the men inside the building. He pressed his lips together when he caught sight of people with their heads down, walking between the men.

“They’re moving the girls.”

If they let them move the girls now, they would never find them again.

“We have to?”

“No,” Sanchez snapped, phone still in hand. “Do not interfere, Davis.”

“But?”

“Stay,” Sanchez ordered.

Lucas dropped back into his seat, glaring at the back of the man’s head as he exited the surveillance van. He turned his gaze to the monitors, annoyance grating at him.

“He’s going the wrong way,” he mumbled.

He heard the click of the door opening and looked up at Gemma as she jumped out and poked her head in, a brow raised at him.

“You coming?”

His lips tilted up for a second and he threw a glance Tahir’s way before following Gemma. He could only see the side of Tahir’s face, but the man was smiling. He was about to get them all in trouble, but it would be worth it if it ensured these bastards didn’t get away.

He put in his earpiece and pressed the button clipped to his sleeve to say, “We have movement on the west side of the building. Agents moving in to intercept.”

He dropped his hand to pull out his gun and ignored the commands coming through



his earpiece. Sanchez was smart enough to cease the cursing to keep the line clear, but he knew the man was stewing, and he'd definitely pay for the insubordination later.

He and Gemma made their way down the empty street, thanks to the detectives and SWAT who had cleared it for them.

The building was one floor with ten-foot-high ceilings, surrounded by two-story buildings and a busy road on either side. They moved to the entrance opposite of where the men were headed, to a door leading out onto the street. The building had a loading dock that led out to the street behind the building. That's where they would be taking the girls. They had to have had a truck already there because no vehicles had entered through the big green gate in the time they had been watching the place.

They reached the door, and he got into position, giving Gemma the go-ahead to open the door. He hadn't expected it to be unlocked but it took Gemma three kicks before the lock shattered and the door swung open.

Gemma pushed the door out of the way and stepped back to let Lucas enter first. Despite the ruckus they'd made, no one came running for them. It was eerily quiet as they stepped inside the building and his voice was loud as he pressed the button to his earpiece.

"Agents entering from the east entry point."

He got confirmation through the earpiece, and they continued inside, knowing their backup would be arriving shortly.

The entryway gave way to a staircase on their right side and what he knew to be a kitchen to their left. He knew the men had taken the girls through the kitchen to the back of the building.

He pointed to his right and Gemma gave him a curt nod before splitting up and heading in that direction. He continued down the hallway, listening closely but it wasn't until he closed in on the door to the loading dock that he heard it. A truck idling. Running footsteps on wet gravel.

He stopped at the door and poised himself before reaching for the handle. He opened the door and kept his gun raised, stepping out. The door led to the only place they couldn't get cameras pointed at without risking being spotted. These guys had already known they were there so it would've been a moot point, but they couldn't have known that when Mo and Evan set up the cameras.

At the far end of the gravel road, right in front of the green gate, there was a truck with the back doors open, a man jumping up into the bed. From what little he could see of the inside, he guessed that the girls were in the back.

He took off running. He was too far away to get a good shot off. He didn't have enough vision of the inside of the truck to risk it, either.

The man turned around, grabbing one of the doors and when he'd closed it, he looked up. He stared right at Lucas as he slammed his hand against the side of the truck and yelled for the driver to go. Their eyes met for a split second before the last door was jerked shut and the truck was taking off too fast for him to follow on foot.

"Fuck," he yelled.

He pressed the button to his earpiece and relayed the make, model, and license plate, knowing damn well there was nothing he could do to stop that truck.

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He dumped his tired ass into the chair across from his unit's Assistant Special Agent

in Charge. They'd lost track of the truck. These guys were sophisticated enough to make a whole ass truck disappear. The others were at their computers, waiting for any camera in town to pick up the truck again, but he knew it was gone. The plates would've been switched by now, and the truck was white. It would be impossible to find again. They'd had them and they'd blown their chance at catching these bastards.

He could feel ASAC Robert Edmunds' eyes on him and slowly raised his head.

"You look like shit," Edmunds said.

The only answer he had to that was a grunt. He knew he looked like shit. He felt like it, too.

"Sanchez isn't happy with you."

He pressed his lips together to keep from saying exactly what he thought about Sanchez. It wouldn't do him any good to mouth off to his ASAC about his boss. It didn't matter anyway. It wouldn't change anything.

"It could've been worse," Edmunds said, bushy brow arching.

Lucas leaned back in his chair, a sigh rocking through him.

"If he'd listened, we could've got them. We could've saved those people."

"I don't disagree, but it is what it is."

He gave a tight-lipped nod.

He knew how it went. He knew the rules. The politics. He hated them just the same.

“You haven’t used a single vacation day this year. Take the next two weeks off,” Edmunds said, giving Lucas a stern look that meant he wasn’t asking.

A grunt escaped him, and he nodded as he got up. A week of doing nothing was the last thing he needed.

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

A PILLOW slapped him in the face, and he turned his head to glare at his best friend. Maggie was grinning right back at him. They had met on the first day of class. He'd been completely overwhelmed and unsure if he'd been heading the right way. Maggie, however? Despite it being her first day, too, she'd taken him under her wing and got him to class with time to spare. They'd been inseparable since then.

"Get your ass up," Maggie said, a wicked smile on her lips. "We're going out."

Akio groaned. "I just got back."

Maggie sat down on the bed next to him and tugged him into a seated position.

"Which is why I've been waiting two days for you to get back, so we could go out."

He rolled his eyes and received another pillow to the face for his trouble.

"We're just going to the bar," Maggie said.

"Why do I have to come if you're just going to get laid?"

Maggie gave him a pinched look and said, "That's so not why we're going to the bar. You feel safe going there and sure, I could have a quicky in the stock room, but I want to play pool with you. Talk. Drink. Like college students are supposed to."

It was a biker bar and a lot of the guys who frequented it were friends of his brothers.

They were always looking out for him, so yes, he felt safe going there. The few times he'd gone with Maggie to a club, he'd felt like his skin was too tight and he'd gotten a massive headache within the first five minutes, so he'd stopped trying to go.

Maggie went with a few of her other friends if she wanted to go clubbing but, most often, she preferred the bar, too. After all, she had at least three of the bikers under her spell. Which made sense considering how stunning she was. She was five foot six with all the right curves, beautiful freckles across her nose, and brown curly hair that could make anyone envious.

"Fuck. Fine," he breathed with a shake of his head.

"Yay," Maggie exclaimed and poked Akio with her elbow. "We might even get you laid this time."

They both knew that wasn't happening, though he didn't bother telling her. Again.

The bar didn't exactly scream gay hookup place. The bikers there weren't homophobic, but they were all straight. It didn't matter anyway. His heart wasn't in it. There was only one man he wanted, and he couldn't have him. There was no point.

He sat back and watched as Maggie pulled clothes out of his closet to pick something for him to wear. As if it mattered. Everyone there would be wearing jeans and a T-shirt.

He almost released a sigh of relief when Maggie dropped a pair of jeans and a black shirt into his lap.

"Get dressed," Maggie said, clapping her hands together and giving a little jump in excitement.

He rolled his eyes and started laughing when she urged him to get going. He changed clothes, satisfied with the look she had chosen.

It was still quite cold outside, so he grabbed his jacket and pulled on his boots. They were black lace-up motorcycle boots Chris and Diesel had bought him for the few times he rode behind either of them on their bikes. They were extremely comfortable and also warm, so he'd started using them as everyday boots.

Once ready, he followed Maggie out the door and down the stairs to the street. They decided that walking to the bar would be fine. It was only a twenty-minute walk, and they spent the time talking about their weekend.

They turned down the street to the two-story brick building that sat between a gym and a parking garage. There were at least twenty motorcycles parked in front of the bar, and it made him breathe a little easier. A small group of men in leather cuts were standing just outside the bar talking and when they heard someone approach, they turned around.

"Akio," one of them said and stepped closer, a smile on his face. "Good to see you."

Ryder was easily over six foot tall with wide shoulders covered by the black leather of his cut, dark blond unruly hair, tattoos everywhere, and sparkling blue eyes that always put him at ease.

"You too, Ry," he said and shook the man's hand.

"I see you brought the trouble maker," Ryder said, gaze on Maggie who rolled her eyes and walked past them toward the door.

Ryder was the vice president of the Savage Rebels Motorcycle Club. He'd had to pull his brothers off each other a few times because of Maggie. He understood why the

guys liked her. She was drop-dead gorgeous, smart, and took no shit. Half of those MC guys liked it when a woman could hold her own against them. The other half tried to keep those guys from making fools of themselves.

“How’s your brother? You were home this weekend, right?”

Akio turned back to Ryder and smiled. “I was. He’s good. Addie’s driving him up the wall, but nothing new there.”

Ryder laughed and slapped Akio’s shoulder.

“Girls,” Ryder said, a gleam in his eye. “They’re good at making men lose their minds, huh?”

He shook his head with a low laugh and headed inside, looking around until he spotted Maggie at the pool table. She was racking the balls, one guy next to her being all chatty, while another was staring at them from the other side of the pool table with his arms crossed and an offended look on his face. Mr. Chatty had probably given up the table for Maggie much to the other man’s annoyance. He wasn’t surprised. She had that effect on most men and unlike some women, she was well aware.

He walked to the bar to get them drinks, saying hello to all the MC guys he passed on the way. When the bartender put their beer bottles on the bar, he grabbed them with a nod of thanks and headed toward the pool table.

“Here you go,” he said and handed Maggie her beer.

“Thanks, babe.”

Mr. Chatty was wearing a cut Akio didn’t recognize. The name of his club wasn’t on the front so unless he turned around so he could see the colors on the back of his cut,



he wouldn't know which club he was from.

"Don't tell me you're with that guy," Mr. Chatty said, then motioned to himself, "When you can be with me."

Akio snorted, which, unsurprisingly, didn't appease Mr. Chatty.

"You got something to say, little man?"

Mr. Chatty stepped closer, puffing out his chest like some Cartoon character. It still sent Akio's heart racing. He'd seen what people could do to each other when they lost their shit, and this guy wasn't exactly small.

"Do we have a problem here?" Ryder asked, stepping up behind Akio and putting a hand on his shoulder. Akio squeezed the shit out of his beer bottle, sloshing the sticky liquid over his hand and probably his shoes, too.

"Yes, but I'm handling it," Maggie said and placed her beer on the table next to her before facing Mr. Chatty.

"Oh, you're handling it, sweetheart?" Mr. Chatty sneered, clearly over his attraction to her already.

"Yes. I am. Let me guess," Maggie said and ran her gaze over Mr. Chatty. "You're one of those transactional assholes who think because you decided to do something for me, it means I have to spread my legs for you. Newsflash asshole, I'm not your bitch, but I'll make you mine."

Despite Ryder's hand on his shoulder, nerves were starting to hit him, his pulse spiking rapidly. He didn't like the look in Mr. Chatty's eyes. There was something dark and dangerous there.

Before Mr. Chatty could do or say anything, every single Savage Rebel in the bar stood and turned toward them, arms crossed or a hand on their sidearm.

“I think it’s time you left,” Ryder said, the menace in his voice making the hair at the back of Akio’s neck stand on end. He knew Ryder would never hurt him or Maggie, but he also knew what it took to be an outlaw biker. He’d seen plenty of that ruthlessness before.

Mr. Chatty was smart enough to walk away, though not without sneering something derogatory under his breath as he passed Akio. His friend hadn’t so much as made a face throughout the ordeal and simply followed Mr. Chatty out of the bar.

The hand on his shoulder squeezed once, then disappeared.

“I don’t need saving,” Maggie snapped at Ryder and pushed past him and Akio, heading for the bar.

The groan coming from Ryder had Akio fighting a smile. His girl was ferocious. No, she didn’t need saving. He couldn’t say the same about himself, though.

“Thank you.”

He turned, smiling tentatively up at Ryder. The annoyance cleared from Ryder’s face, and he returned the smile.

“Anytime. I promised your brother I would keep you safe while you’re here, but I mostly do it because I like you, Akio.”

Warmth spread through his chest, and he knew he was blushing. He rolled his eyes when Ryder ruffled his hair.

“Asshole,” he mumbled, chuckling when Ryder winked at him as he backed away.

Akio shook his head and turned to the pool table. He put his beer down and reached for the balls Maggie hadn’t racked yet and placed them inside the black rack the way Maggie had taught him. He’d never played before coming here and Maggie had been so excited to teach him. Excited because it meant that she would win every game. He didn’t mind losing. Not to her.

He looked toward the bar, brows scrunching when he didn’t see her there anymore. She had likely found someone to angry fuck out in the alley behind the bar or in the stock room. She claimed angry fucking was the best kind of sex. He had no frame of reference himself, so he didn’t bother arguing with her, though something told him sex with someone you loved was probably the better of the two.

He heard a bang which he later realized had to have been the door slamming open as cops entered. The bar was swarmed by uniformed cops within seconds, the uproar loud with cops and bikers yelling at each other.

“Hands up. Turn around,” one barked at Akio who was quick to do so, confused as the cop grabbed his right hand to twist it behind his back. He cried out at the pain it sparked in his shoulder, gasping for breath as his heart raced in his chest and then he was slammed over the pool table, cold handcuffs closing around his wrists.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

HE WAS tapping his foot. He knew it. He couldn't stop it. If he tried, his anxiety would only get worse without that outlet. He'd never been in an interrogation room before. The walls were bare and maybe the paint had been white at some point but it sure wasn't anymore. The chair he sat on was more comfortable than he'd expected. His hands weren't cuffed nor attached to the table. It told him they either didn't see him as a threat, or they wanted him to think they didn't. He wasn't sure which.

They had taken his prints when he came in and he dreaded what might show up. He knew his brother had done something to protect him, he just didn't know how far he'd gone. He'd gotten a new identity. Diesel's surname. His brother and his partner had shown him more love and compassion in the past four years than he'd had his whole life.

He heard a click and snapped his head toward the door. A man wearing a suit stepped into the room. It was a cheap suit. At least compared to the ones his father had worn. With good reason. Being a cop didn't pay very well. At least not according to his brother-in-law who used to be one.

"Hello, Akio. I'm Detective Holland."

Akio gave him a wary look as Detective Holland pulled out the chair across from him and sat down. He had a manilla folder with him that he put on the table. He didn't open it.

"It's Ah-kee-oh," he mumbled.

“Sure.”

He didn't know why it annoyed him. Though maybe it was because he'd done nothing wrong and had been arrested and was in an interrogation room?

“Savage Rebels,” Holland said, brow cocked expectantly at Akio. “You're not a member, are you?”

He shook his head.

“I don't even know what this is about? I was just playing pool and having a beer with my friend.”

“Oh? What's the name of this friend ?”

“Why?” he asked hesitantly, unsure where Holland was going with this.

“Well, you'll want your information to be cooperated, don't you?”

He didn't want Maggie to get in trouble, too. He hadn't seen her get arrested. In fact, he hadn't seen her at all when the cops raided the bar. They'd dragged everyone they handcuffed outside to sit on the curb. Maggie hadn't been there. Everyone who'd been arrested were bikers. Except him.

“Why? Like you said; I'm not a Savage Rebel. I only got my driver's license last year and I have no idea how to drive a motorcycle.”

“Here's the thing, Akio,” Holland said, mispronouncing his name again, “I think you're lying.”

Akio leaned back, confusion making him blink at Holland.

“W-what?”

“You’re not just some innocent civilian bystander, are you?”

“I don’t understand?”

Holland was trying to hide his sneer as he opened his folder and pulled out a picture. He turned it around and showed it to Akio.

It had been taken outside the bar. He was shaking Ryder’s hand. He was wearing the same clothes in the picture as he was now, so it had to have been from tonight.

Holland thought he was in bed with the Rebels. Figuratively, of course.

That was a whole ton of trouble he didn’t need. Neither did his family. He knew the Rebels were into illegal shit, otherwise, they wouldn’t have been raided and arrested tonight. They wouldn’t have that one-percenter patch on their cuts.

The last thing he needed was the cops looking into who he was and tracking down Diesel and Chris. Once the cops made the connection between him and the Disciples, it was game over.

“Tell me again how you don’t know the Savage Rebels?”

Akio looked at Holland with creased brows. He hadn’t said that. The man was trying to put words in his mouth. He was probably trying to see if he could catch him in a lie so he could pressure him into taking a deal to flip on the Rebels. The only problem with that was that he hadn’t done anything, nor did he know anything about the Rebels’ business.

He was already under arrest which meant he had rights.

“I would like my phone call now.”

He couldn't call his brother. He couldn't put this on him. He should've stayed away from the bar. He'd fucked up and he knew Diesel would forgive him in a heartbeat and he didn't want that. He wanted to fix this on his own. As much as he could.

He was lucky he'd memorized the number. He doubted the cops would let him look up the number to the nearest FBI field office.

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

LUCAS' HAND on his back was the only thing he could think about as they passed all the other holding cells in the police station. His heart was thumping in his chest, his hands getting clammy around his phone and keys.

He shoved his keys into his pocket, and it was as if the movement brought Lucas out of whatever trance he'd been in and the hand disappeared from Akio's back, taking the warmth with it. He swallowed against the lump of disappointment in his throat and kept walking as if his heart wasn't trying to beat its way out of his chest.

His phone was low on battery, but he managed to send a text to Maggie before it succumbed. There was one missed call from her but nothing else. He wasn't sure if she'd been arrested or not. Maybe they'd arrested her later?

He was quiet as he followed Lucas out of the police station. He wasn't sure what to say. Lucas had caught him looking at him and it certainly hadn't been thoughts of his father going through his head.

Lucas led the way to a black SUV and opened the passenger side door for Akio who crawled in and promptly fastened his seatbelt.

Lucas got in the driver's seat and backed out of the parking spot. Once they were on the road, Akio turned to the man whose knuckles were white from how tight he was squeezing the wheel. Lucas had never once been mad at him before so he figured it was Holland he was stewing over.



“Where are we going?”

“Your place. We’ll go grab a bag and then you’re staying with me. I have the next two weeks off anyway and I don’t like the way that asshole looked at you. I think this is far from over.”

Akio gulped and hurried to nod when Lucas glanced at him.

He was back to tapping his foot though Lucas didn’t seem to mind. He had never been to see him at his dorm and yet he knew exactly where to park. He hesitated as he stepped out of the SUV. Mostly because he knew his room looked like a bomb of clothes had exploded in there, though also because knowing that Lucas had cared enough to find out where he was staying had his heart speeding up.

Logically, he knew that it was probably just because Chris had told Lucas so he could keep an eye on him since they were in the same city, but his stupid heart would have none of it.

He quietly led the way through the dorm building until they reached his room. He took a breath before pulling out his keys and unlocking the door. He stepped inside first, holding the door for Lucas, and as he ran his gaze across the room, he decided that it didn’t look as bad as he’d thought. Yes, there were clothes on his bed, but everything else seemed to be in the right place.

He grabbed his duffel bag. The one he’d just emptied after having spent the weekend at home. Now he was filling it again and he had no idea which clothes to pack. He had no idea what was really going on.

“What do I...?”

He looked up at Lucas and he knew from the look of pity in the man’s eyes that he

had to be looking like a lost puppy.

Lucas stepped closer and grabbed Akio's hand, tugging him down on the bed to sit with him.

"It's gonna be alright," Lucas said and that conviction in his voice was making it hard not to believe him, but there was a part of him that had been through indescribable things and had learned the hard way that things very rarely ended up being alright. He'd gotten lucky once. There was no guarantee that it would happen again.

Lucas wrapped an arm around him, and he buried his face in Lucas' shoulder, drawing in a deep breath, the man's cologne filling his nose and making him feel safer instantly.

"Grab enough clothes for a week if you can."

"You don't have a washing machine?"

Lucas' voice was light and teasing as he said, "I do, but you might also have to stay longer than a week."

Akio nodded, a smile tugging at his lips.

He pulled back, feeling the loss of contact quite heavily when Lucas' arm dropped from around him. He kept his expression as neutral as possible and went to his small closet.

Being gone for a week or more wasn't exactly ideal. Diesel and Chris were likely to find out and they wouldn't be happy. He didn't even want to think about the classes he'd be missing.

He grabbed some shirts, pants, and socks and shoved them into the bag, then went to grab some underwear and hesitated. He glanced over his shoulder at Lucas but found him looking at the books on his desk. He hurriedly grabbed a handful of boxers, unsure why he was being so weird about it. It was just underwear. It wasn't like he was wearing them.

He grabbed his toiletry bag from its usual place on the shelf by the door along with his shaving kit though he rarely had to use it and dropped both into the duffel bag. He closed his eyes for a second, trying to figure out what he was missing because he knew he'd definitely forgotten something.

There was a knock on his door and before Lucas could tell him to ignore it, he was pushing down the handle because he knew that particular knock very well. He barely had the door open before his best friend was walking inside. His mouth dropped open when someone followed her inside. Ryder. What the hell were those two doing together?

"I can't believe you were arrested," Maggie said, curls bouncing as she whirled around to face him. "What even?"

Before she could finish her sentence, Ryder had drawn his gun and aimed it at Lucas. Akio's heart skipped a beat, and he stepped between them, hands up as he exclaimed, "Whoa. He's a friend."

"Friend?" Ryder sneered. "I know a fed when I see one."

"So, this is the asshole that got you into trouble?" Lucas asked, making Akio groan. Neither of them was helping the situation and while Ryder had lowered his gun to point at the floor, the tension coming off the man had Akio's pulse spiking.

"No wonder you got out so fast." Ryder's expression was thunderous as he stared at

Akio. "Does your brother know?"

"Know what? What the hell is going on?" Maggie asked, taking the words straight out of Akio's mouth.

"He's a fucking snitch."

Akio felt like rolling his eyes might set Ryder off, so he settled for crossing his arms and glaring at him.

"Looks like your friend here is the world champion at jumping to conclusions," Lucas drawled, a hint of amusement in his voice.

Lucas leaned back against Akio's desk, hands grabbing the edge on either side of him. His jacket was hanging open, revealing the gun holstered on his left hip. He looked completely unfazed by Ryder but also quite intimidating. His gaze was on Ryder, one brow raised slightly, but Akio felt like Lucas might as well have been staring straight at him. The intensity coming off Lucas was making his legs weak and from the look Maggie shot him, she noticed.

"You must be Lucas," Maggie said and stepped forward, Akio snapping wide eyes onto her.

Lucas' lips twitched just slightly when Ryder's hand shot out to prevent Maggie from moving any closer to Lucas. He recognized that move for what it was. He'd been around his brother's club enough to know how a member was with their old lady.

"And you must be Maggie," Lucas said, giving her a nod.

"You know this asshole?" Ryder asked Maggie, his tone flat.

“He’s a family friend,” Akio said, his voice finally deciding to work.

Ryder glared at Lucas for a beat longer, then holstered his gun.

“Want to tell me why your whole club was just arrested?”

He found Lucas’ stare chilling, and the man wasn’t even looking at him.

Ryder seemed reluctant to talk, but Maggie put a hand on his arm and after a moment of those two staring into each other’s eyes, Ryder relented.

“I’m not entirely sure. Obviously, the cops thought they were going to find something.” Ryder turned his gaze on Akio. “I don’t know why the hell they arrested you, though. You’re quite clearly not a member.”

“The cop that interrogated me thought I was,” he said with a confused shrug.

Ryder pulled a face, looking just as surprised as Akio had been.

He glanced between Ryder and Lucas, then settled his gaze on Maggie. They needed to talk. Like, really talk.

“Don’t shoot each other,” he said and grabbed Maggie’s hand, dragging her out of the room with him.

He didn’t stop until they reached the empty common room. He let go of Maggie’s hand to turn around and stare at her in disbelief.

“What the hell? You and Ryder? Since when?”

Maggie dropped her head back with a loud sigh.

“It’s complicated.”

He arched a brow at her, head cocked to the side. “What about all those other guys?”

Maggie shook her head, eyes rolling.

“The fucker kept telling the others to beat it. He was the first one I hooked up with at the bar and he made sure he was the only one after that.”

Akio frowned at her and said, “But I didn’t see you with?”

“I went there with one of my girlfriends after you’d taken me there a few times. That’s when I hooked up with Ryder.”

He crossed his arms as he went over her words. Neither of them had been arrested, which probably meant they’d been together and had gotten away together as well.

“How long have you been his old lady without telling me?”

Maggie spluttered.

“I am not his anything,” she said, voice snappy. “I’m way too young to settle down and he just wants a lawyer he doesn’t have to pay for, anyway.”

Akio arched a brow at her. “He’s a bit early out if that’s the case.”

Maggie’s brows lowered and she gave him a peevish look.

“What? You’re not done with college for a few months and then you’ve got at least three years of law school.”

When she sighed and rolled her eyes, he couldn't help but laugh. He linked his arm with hers and tugged her back down the hallway.

“We should probably check on our trigger-happy guys.”

“Your guy is gorgeous,” Maggie said.

A groan pushed past his lips. “Don't even.”

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

HIS HEART wasn't happy as he watched Akio disappear out the door. His FBI training was screaming at him that he wasn't safe with Ryder in the room. His gut was telling him the opposite. That Ryder cared too much about Akio and Maggie to do something stupid.

"Family friend, huh? Is that what they call it nowadays?"

He shook his head, wondering if the amount of paperwork he'd have to do would be worth shooting Ryder.

"It's not like that," he said through gritted teeth.

Ryder leaned a shoulder against the wall, one brow cocked and an infuriating smile on his lips. "That so?"

"I'm a friend of Chris and Diesel's."

Ryder nodded and Lucas knew something infuriating would come out of his mouth just from the look in Ryder's eyes before he spoke.

"But you want to be more than just a friend of Akio's."

"No."

They both knew it was a fucking lie. Ryder was smart enough to not keep poking,



though.

Akio had been eighteen when they met, and he would've thought himself disgusting if he'd been attracted to him then. He hadn't. He'd felt something, though. Protective. Enamored. Had that shifted into attraction over the years? Unfortunately, yes. The unfortunate part was Chris. And Diesel. And his impending murder if he ever acted on that attraction.

Akio looked at him like he was some kind of savior and he'd be lying if he claimed he didn't like it. Of course, he did. Having those deep brown eyes looking up at him with wonder and awe sent his head spinning.

The door opened and they both tensed until Akio and Maggie stepped inside. He caught Akio's gaze, and Akio gave him a small smile before walking to the bed to grab his bag. He pulled the strap over his shoulder and turned to Lucas.

"Ready."

Lucas nodded and after a second of hesitation, he turned to Maggie and said, "You should probably steer clear of Ryder."

Ryder's lips pressed into a thin line for a moment and then he shook his head. "Unfortunately, he's right. I don't want you caught up in this shitstorm."

"Seriously?" Maggie snapped her gaze onto Akio. "And you're leaving me, too."

"He has to," Lucas said. "I'm not sure what this is yet, but I'm not letting anything happen to him."

Maggie stared into Lucas' eyes, fire burning in her light brown eyes. "You'd better not."

He gave her a sharp nod, then grabbed Akio's bag off the bed, motioning for him to move. Akio looked at Lucas for a second, then went to hug Maggie, whispering something to her that had her choking out a laugh, eyes darting first to Lucas, then to Ryder.

Akio let go of Maggie and walked back to Lucas' side.

"I'll let you know what I find out," Ryder said, not to him but to Akio.

"Thank you." Akio hesitated for a moment. "I hope your guys are alright."

"They'll be fine. Don't you worry, sweetheart," Ryder said with a wink, eyes gleaming as he gave Lucas a challenging look.

Akio tugging on his arm was the only thing stopping him from stalking across the room to plant a fist in the smug bastard's face.

"Let's go," he ground out instead.

Akio opened the door, and Lucas gave Ryder a deathly glare before turning and following Akio into the hallway.

As they made their way to the stairs, he tried not to grind his teeth at that knowing look Ryder had given him. He hated that the bastard knew. He was a federal fucking agent, he should've been able to keep that particular information to himself. Especially from someone like Ryder.

"He called me sweetheart," Akio murmured, looking up at Lucas with a frown as if asking him why.

"He was just trying to stir the pot."

He could see Akio trying to make sense of it but, fortunately, he didn't ask any further questions like why would him calling me sweetheart stir the pot? He wasn't anywhere near prepared to explain that to Akio. Not one fucking bit.

Akio was quiet on the drive, and he couldn't exactly blame him. Everything was a mess. If this Detective Holland dug deeper into Akio's life and history, he would find that Akio Sato-Walsh didn't exist until four years ago. He would, undoubtedly, find the connection between Akio, his family, and the King's Disciples MC. That certainly wouldn't help convince Holland that Akio didn't ride with the Savage Rebels. Akio's best friend being involved with the VP of the Rebels surely didn't look good, either.

It was a clusterfuck, is what it was.

At least he was only on forced vacation and not suspended. It was a small mercy, but he'd take it. Akio's and his own mess coinciding was something he tried not to think too hard about. He was a cop. He didn't exactly believe in coincidences. Gemma would call it karmic intervention. Diesel would call it Lucas' impending funeral.

He chanced a glance at Akio, finding the young man looking out the window with an emotionless mask on his face. To everyone else, Akio might seem lost in thought, but he'd seen him do this too many times. He was disassociating. Understandable, considering the situation, though he hated seeing it. Hated how this affected such a sweet soul like Akio who had never done anything to deserve the shit he'd gone through.

He didn't care how long it would take or what it took, he would ensure Akio could return to his life unscathed.

???

He pulled out his keys and unlocked the front door. He opened it and stepped inside, holding the door open for Akio who'd insisted he could carry his own bag from the car. He watched as Akio looked around, a small smile on his lips.

“What do you think?”

He knew it wasn't the most extravagant of places. It didn't have a whole lot of his personal touch. It was a place to put his head down and his feet up. He was working most of the time, so decorating hadn't exactly been something he wanted to spend his time on. He preferred filling a space with people over objects and trinkets.

“It's... nice,” Akio said, eyes wide and lips pressing together.

“If you're gonna lie like that, you should probably practice some,” he said, lips pulling into a smile.

Akio went beet red in the face and dropped his gaze to the floor.

“I just didn't want to be rude. You did kinda save me today,” Akio mumbled, slowly raising his gaze to meet Lucas' eyes.

He stepped closer, hands going to Akio's arms. “Just kinda?”

Akio snorted, a smile spreading on his lips.

“Yeah, just kinda.”

“Uh-huh.” He nodded slowly. “Sure, let's call it that.”

Brown eyes were twinkling up at him and the part of his heart that wanted him to just say screw it to the consequences was pushing hard against the walls he tried

desperately to keep up around Akio.

Akio's skin was warm under his hands, and he swallowed hard as he let go and stepped back. Before he did something stupid.

"The guest bedroom is through here," he said, leading the way down the hall to the left. His own bedroom was just across from the guest bedroom, the bathroom at the end between the two rooms.

"Dibs on the shower," Akio said.

Lucas chuckled and went to the hallway closet, grabbing a towel for Akio.

"All yours."

Akio took the towel, looking up at Lucas with a small smile, gratitude and something else swirling around in those dark depths. Akio stepped back, eyes dropping to the bag he'd put on the floor. He bent down to pick it back up.

Lucas' gaze followed, landing on Akio's ass as he bent over, and he promptly squeezed his eyes shut with a low curse and ran his hands down his face.

Of all the things he definitely shouldn't do, Akio was at the very top of the list.

## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

LUCAS' GUEST bed was nice and comfy and yet sleep didn't come. Just knowing Lucas was in the other room had his brain in overdrive. His body, too. It took everything to try and suppress those images, those feelings. The last thing he was going to do was jerk off to thoughts of Lucas with the man in the next room.

A clinking like two glasses touching had him sitting upright. It had to be Lucas. If someone had broken in, he doubted they'd start with a glass of water in the kitchen.

He pulled the covers back and stepped into the slippers Lucas had handed him earlier. They were blue, fluffy, and very comfortable. There wasn't a whole lot of heat on. Whether Lucas was saving on the bills because of how rarely he was home, or if he simply preferred the cold, he didn't know.

He headed into the kitchen, unsurprised to find Lucas standing by the sink, an empty glass on the counter next to him.

"Can't sleep either?"

Lucas raised his head slowly, those dark, enchanting eyes leveling Akio with a look that had goosebumps rising on his arms.

"No," Lucas said, his voice like a soft blanket settling over him.

He stepped closer.

“I can see the worry on your face,” he said, stopping when he was right next to Lucas, their arms nearly brushing.

Lucas’ jaw clenched for a second and then he sighed, leaning back against the counter, one hand grasping the edge.

“It’s hard not to worry about you.”

Why that had his stomach filling with butterflies, he wasn’t sure. He already knew Lucas cared. It was quite obvious considering the fact that he was staying with the man who also hadn’t given him much of a choice in the matter.

He turned his back to the counter, and rested against it, gazing out the window at the buildings, some still with the light on here and there.

“I once thought no one caring about me was the worst,” he said, keeping his voice low. He knew Lucas was looking at him, but he kept his gaze straight ahead. “People caring enough to worry? I still don’t know how to handle it. I mean... I’ve gotten good at pretending but in all honesty? Knowing that people think me so weak that they have to constantly worry about me, I just...”

Arms wrapped around him, and he could barely suck in a breath, his chest so damned tight he felt like it might cave in.

“No one thinks you weak,” Lucas said, cheek against the top of Akio’s head.

Lucas leaned back, meeting Akio’s confused gaze.

“There aren’t many people who would survive what you went through.”

He shook his head, knowing full well that what he went through was nothing

compared to what the people his father trafficked went through. The abuse he suffered had nothing on theirs.

Lucas' hands rose to cup Akio's face, keeping him from shaking his head.

"Yes." Lucas' gaze was burning with conviction. "You went through hell. No matter what you're trying to tell yourself. No matter the justifications you're trying to come up with. You survived, and now? You've chosen to thrive. To live. In spite of him."

He could only nod, eyes closing for a second as he soaked in the feel of Lucas' hands on his face.

"You're not weak, Akio. You're brave. So fucking brave," Lucas said, voice getting softer with each word.

Lucas' gaze dropped to Akio's lips and his heart took flight as he stupidly thought for a fleeting second that he might actually kiss him. Logically, he knew he wouldn't, but there would always be that little part of him that couldn't give up that dream. That hope.

The hands on his face disappeared and Lucas took a step back.

"You want something to drink? Tea? Water?"

"Do you have hot chocolate?" he asked, perking up a bit.

Lucas' smile was warm as his eyes lit up.

"I do. I'll make you a cup."

Lucas nudged Akio toward the couch, and he went with a soft smile on his lips.



The couch was too big for just one or two people, but it looked comfortable to lie on, which was probably why Lucas had gotten it. After long days of seeing unspeakable things, dropping onto a couch seemed like a necessity.

There was a soft blue knitted blanket folded over one end of the couch. It was soft between his fingers as he grabbed it. He wrapped it around his shoulders and sat down on the couch, the warmth making him relax.

He was staring out the windows when Lucas put a steaming mug down on the coffee table.

“Thank you,” he said, smiling up at Lucas before reaching for the mug.

Lucas sat down on the couch next to him, both too close and too far away at once.

“How did you and Chris meet?”

Lucas turned surprised eyes on Akio, mouth opening and closing as he stared at him for a moment.

“We met in college.” Lucas dropped his gaze to his hands, leaning forward, elbows resting on his knees. “We were together for three years. I was convinced we’d last forever. We’d get into the FBI together and we’d work together. I thought he was my forever. That’s why I proposed.”

The lump in Akio’s throat was almost too painful to swallow against.

“You know why we broke up.”

He nodded even though Lucas wasn’t looking at him.

“Chris and I have different versions of what happened,” Lucas said and dropped his head into his hands with a sigh, fingers sliding into his hair. “Of course, his account isn’t wrong, but he never got to be on the other side of that experience, either.”

He was quiet for a while and Akio busied himself with his hot chocolate to keep from pushing Lucas to speak before he was ready. As much as his heart hated this conversation, he knew it was something he needed to hear. Something he wanted to know.

“From the second we got word that Chris would never even be considered for the Bureau, he changed. He had this anger like I’d never seen in him before. It tore us apart. I ended up at a point where I knew I had to choose: the career I’d always dreamt of or a relationship I wasn’t sure could be saved. If we’d stayed together, if I’d become an FBI agent while he couldn’t, he would’ve resented me and if I hadn’t become an agent, I would’ve resented him. It was the best decision for both of us. I had to let him go.”

A hand on top of his had him glancing up to find Lucas looking at him, something vulnerable flashing through his eyes.

“I’m glad I did,” Lucas said.

He didn’t know if Lucas was wrong, if he and Chris could’ve made it work, but he was glad they hadn’t tried. His brother wouldn’t have Chris, and he wouldn’t have had a family.

He felt his lips twitch and forced a smile as he said, “I’m sure Diesel is, too.”

An unreadable expression crossed Lucas’ face momentarily, but then he grinned at Akio and leaned back.

“You should drink that before it goes cold,” Lucas said with a nod toward Akio’s mug.

Akio tried to smile, unsure if Lucas bought it. He grabbed the mug, using it to cover his face as he took a sip of chocolate.

“Do you know what you’re going to do after college?”

He was relieved by the change of topic but winced at himself when he instantly blurted out, “Fuck, no.”

Lucas laughed, the hearty sound making his heart beat faster, warmth spreading through his body. Lucas had always made him feel at ease in a way no one else could. He’d always felt safe with him.

They kept talking until he could barely keep his eyes open, and he vaguely recalled feeling a warm body against his before he drifted off.

Lucas

HE WOKE slowly, the heat, the body pressing against his, keeping him from wanting to open his eyes. A soft groan had him blinking, though, and when Akio's black hair came into sight, all he could do was smile. Akio was asleep, face buried in Lucas' chest. He wasn't sure when Akio had unwrapped himself from the blanket to cover them both, but it meant that Akio was firmly pressed against him. He could barely see the side of Akio's face but what he could see had his heart squeezing almost painfully.

He pulled his right hand out from under the blanket to run his fingers through Akio's soft hair. He knew he had no right, but he couldn't deny himself this innocent moment. He had to be careful when it came to Akio because the man was making his walls crumble left and right.

It hurt to know that Akio thought himself weak. He was anything but in Lucas' eyes. He was the strongest person he knew. He'd been a kid, raised in the hell that was Yokota's home. He should've been brainwashed into wanting to follow his father, but Akio had a sense of justice that Yokota had never been able to tear down. He'd fought back. He'd fought and his father had punished him even more for it.

Once Akio had gotten away from all that, he'd carefully and slowly started to thrive, living with Chris and Diesel. Despite having learned that even family could hurt you in the worst ways, Akio had opened his heart to his brother and Chris instantly. Akio had been braver at eighteen than he had his whole life.

Black lashes fluttered and then he was looking into warm brown eyes.

“We fell asleep?” Akio whispered.

He nodded. “It’s not the first time I’ve fallen asleep on this couch.”

Akio’s eyes crinkled at the corners, and he said, “I figured. It’s comfy.”

He wasn’t about to tell Akio, but he probably spent more nights on the couch than he did in his bed. It was so fucking empty in that room. So cold, and not because he kept the temperature low.

Akio froze, eyes widening, and before Lucas could ask anything, Akio was extracting himself from Lucas’ side.

“Breakfast?” Lucas asked, watching Akio closely as he stood, flustered and blushing, lashes fluttering as he blinked down at Lucas.

Fuck.

He was going to have to stay under the blanket for a while, especially if Akio didn’t leave.

“Uh, s-sure,” Akio stuttered. He pointed over his shoulder, saying, “I’ll go get dressed,” and then realized he was pointing in the wrong direction and blushed harder.

Akio took off without another word and it was all Lucas could do not to huff out a laugh. His man was nothing if not adorable.

No. Not his , he chided himself with a shake of his head.

Yet his heart whispered.

He sighed and pulled the blanket off, sparing his semi a glare before getting up. He heard the door to the guest bedroom shutting and headed for the bathroom, making a quick stop in his bedroom to grab some clean clothes.

He took a shower. A very cold one. He was shaking as he pulled his clothes on.

The door to Akio's room was still shut when he walked past it to the kitchen, Akio's soft voice telling him he was likely talking on the phone.

He grabbed two glasses and the juice, putting all three things on the counter. Then he found some bowls and the cereal he needed to restock soon. He made sure to add it to his grocery list along with more juice and some chocolate for Akio.

He turned to grab the milk from the fridge when he heard footsteps.

Akio was still on his phone when he walked into the kitchen, a tight expression on his face as he listened. Lucas dried his hands off and turned, leaning back against the counter to watch Akio.

Akio's gaze met his, the dark depths of his eyes piercing, and he had to dig his nails into the palms of his hands to stay where he was.

"Sure. Will do," Akio said before lowering the phone.

Akio put his phone down on the counter and said in a low voice, "That was Ryder."

"What's wrong?"

Akio took a shaky breath, then looked up and said, "He told me they found cameras in the bar. That the cops must've planted them there because they couldn't get into the Rebels' clubhouse."

“That’s... not really surprising.”

Akio shook his head, dark eyes looking haunted.

“No, but they have video of me.”

Lucas straightened, brows snapping together.

“What do you mean?”

Akio turned, his distraught gaze clashing with Lucas’ eyes.

“The Rebels treat me as one of their own. That’s why they arrested me, too.”

He almost laughed, though he knew it would come out completely sarcastic.

“They arrested you because the Rebels treat you nicely?”

Akio nodded.

“What a bunch of incompetent assholes.”

He had a friend in the police department looking into the case against the Rebels. They’d held most of the members on bogus charges that sure as hell wouldn’t stick in court. Why? He still didn’t know. Perhaps just because they could?

He understood wanting to remove criminals from the street. His job wasn’t much different from Detective Holland’s in that regard. But dragging an innocent college student into it? Fuck that and fuck Holland.

Akio was nibbling on his bottom lip, looking concerned with a deep line between his

brows, gazing at nothing.

“Hey,” he said, reaching for Akio’s hand. “It’ll be alright.”

“Not if they find out about Diesel.”

He had to give Akio that one.

“They won’t find out if I have anything to say about it.”

He stepped closer, unable to stop himself and a relieved breath coursed through him when Akio went straight into his arms. His eyes fell closed, and his heart did a happy jump as he held the man against him, loving every second despite knowing he should only feel guilty for it.

He placed a kiss to the top of Akio’s head and instantly regretted it because the sharp intake of breath that followed had him wanting to do it again just to see which other sounds he could get out of Akio.

He stepped back, letting his arms fall to his sides as he swallowed hard. He needed to keep his hands and lips to himself. He shouldn’t have fucking touched him to begin with.

It didn’t make it any easier for him that Akio was staring at his mouth, tongue poking out to lick his lips. Then Akio raised his gaze and what he saw in those dark brown eyes had his heart stuttering in surprise.



## Page 11

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

HE WASN'T wrong. He couldn't be. Not with the way Lucas was looking at him. Touching him. Letting him sleep up against him the whole night. That was desire he saw in Lucas' green eyes just now.

Lucas had called him brave so perhaps it was time he earned it.

“Kiss me?”

“Akio,” Lucas breathed, the sound of his name in that deep voice washing over him like a warm embrace.

“Will I have to beg?”

Something flared in Lucas' eyes and then he had the man's lips on his, warm and rough and so fucking good. Lucas' tongue licked at his lips, and he opened for him with a strangled moan, tilting his head slightly to the side to fit their mouths together.

Lucas kissed him like he was air, and he couldn't breathe.

Fingers dug into his waist, holding him against Lucas' body, the man's hardness pressing against his stomach. He rocked his hips forward, his hardening dick rubbing against Lucas' thigh, and he wished their clothes weren't in the way. Lucas' tongue took control of Akio's mouth, the kiss leaving him a panting mess.

Cold hands slid under his shirt, up his lower back, and he pulled back with a shudder.

He opened his eyes to find Lucas looking down at him with lust raging in his green eyes, the man's chest rising and falling just as rapidly as his own did.

Lucas stepped back, head tilted to the side as he ran his eyes across Akio's face.

He knew what he wanted, and he thought, considering the evidence in front of him, that Lucas wanted the same, which meant he had to address something important.

"I... haven't."

Lucas' pupils flared, darkness overtaking the green of his eyes.

"You haven't had sex?"

Akio shook his head, heat spreading in his cheeks as Lucas took a step closer, towering over him and looking down at him with something wicked in his eyes.

"Did you wait on purpose?"

He swallowed hard.

As much as he thought it mortifying to admit to, he also felt compelled to tell Lucas.

"I waited for you," he whispered. "I haven't... I can't get you out of my head, Luc."

Lucas cursed and took a step back, shaking his head.

"You don't make it fucking easy, do you?" Lucas said, his voice deep and gravelly.

"Make what easy?"

Lucas' searing gaze snapped to Akio's eyes.

"Staying away. Keeping my hands off you."

Akio frowned. "Why would you?"

"Fuck," Lucas muttered, hands grabbing his hair. He dropped his head back, eyes squeezed closed. "Chris."

He felt like he'd touched a live wire, that good buzzing he'd felt now replaced with a zap so painful he stumbled back a step.

"Oh."

He dropped his gaze, his mouth going dry while his heart squeezed painfully in his chest. He turned, the embarrassment too much. He needed to go. He needed to get the hell out.

He took off toward the hallway but only made it a few steps before a hand caught his arm and jerked him back around. He kept his gaze locked on the ground, something bitter burning bright in his chest.

"Akio."

Lucas' husky voice sent delicious shivers down his back, and he bit his lip to keep any wanton sounds from escaping him.

Lucas cursed and Akio snapped his gaze up. He barely met his hungry gaze before Lucas' hands were in his hair, Lucas' lips on his, the man's tongue pushing inside his mouth.

He gasped, pulling away.

“What...?”

Lucas shook his head, need burning in his eyes.

“I didn’t mean because I still want him.”

Akio blinked at Lucas, still not understanding.

Lucas stepped closer, hands sliding up Akio’s arms and leaving goosebumps in their wake.

“I meant that Chris would kill me. Fuck.” Lucas shook his head. “ Will kill me, because who the fuck am I kidding at this point?”

“But...”

“I have never wanted anyone as much as I want you right now, sweetheart, so don’t you dare pull away now.”

He felt his lips part on a silent gasp, eyes wide as he took in the man standing in front of him. There was stark hunger in Lucas’ darkening gaze, his skin lightly flushed.

“Kiss me.”

This time it wasn’t a request. It was a fucking plea.

Lucas surged forward, sealing their mouths together in a hard kiss. Lucas’ lips felt incredible against his. Lucas kissed him like he owned him. Like his lips and tongue belonged to him.

He had kissed others before but none of them had ever come close to making him feel the way Lucas did. The insistent press of those lips had a storm brewing inside him.

Lucas' lips were on his, his fingers wrapped around his upper arms, his body pressing against his and he wanted more. He wanted his hands on bare skin. He needed the man naked. Needed to know where his fantasies differed from reality.

He chased Lucas' lips when he pulled away, feeling the man's smile when he found his lips again.

Lucas took Akio's hand and tugged him down the hallway and into his bedroom. He released Akio's hand as they crossed the threshold and turned around, taking a few steps backward, gaze dark with need as he looked at Akio.

Lucas pulled his shirt off, revealing a mouth-watering sight that had Akio's mouth dropping open. The man worked out, that was for sure.

"Wow. I uh..."

Lucas frowned at him, clearly catching onto the apprehension in his voice.

"What's wrong?"

"It's just um..."

He scratched his cheek, gaze dropping to the floor.

He felt Lucas moving closer and snapped his head up, his startled reaction making Lucas come to a halt.

"I don't want to disappoint you, and I certainly don't look like that. I mean, I'm kinda

skinny and not,” he flapped his hands around, motioning in the general vicinity of Lucas’ muscular chest, “ Defined .”

Lucas laughing was not the reaction he’d expected, though laughing at him was probably better than so many other things he could’ve done.

“You really think I don’t know what you look like?”

His gaze clashed with Lucas’ unwavering one.

“What?”

“Akio... You really think I’d pretend to want you? You think this isn’t solely for you?” Lucas asked, motioning at his crotch and the very visible hard-on there.

“Sweetheart, you’re all I think about. You’re all I want.”

He had no reason not to believe Lucas. His insecurities were trying to take him to a place he didn’t want to go.

He took a trembling breath, and with jerky movements, he tugged his shirt over his head and shoved his sweats and boxers down his legs to step out of them.

He was still hard and aching as he looked up at Lucas. The man’s gaze roamed over his body, the heat in his eyes like a warm caress across his skin.

“Beautiful,” Lucas said, his voice quiet as if he hadn’t meant to speak the word.

He swallowed hard, something burning in his eyes. He’d never thought anyone would call him that. Not with the scars covering his body. They were pale now, but they were almost everywhere. His chest. Arms. Back.

He raised his chin as he tried to summon the pride he knew he should feel because those scars meant that he'd fought back. That he'd won.

Lucas crossed the room, hands cupping Akio's face as his lips crashed over Akio's.

"You're perfect the way you are," Lucas said against his lips and then he was turned around, feet trying hard not to stumble as Lucas walked him toward the bed. When they reached it, he found himself pushed to sit on the edge while Lucas remained standing in front of him.

Lucas' hands went to the waistband of his pants, his long fingers slowly undoing the button and zipper. Akio's mouth went dry. Who knew such a simple thing could turn him on so much?

Lucas' pants slipped down his hips and revealed a thick cock that had him swallowing back a whimper.

He dropped back on the bed, breathing out heavily.

Holy. Fucking. Shit.

His fantasies had nothing on the real thing.

Lucas was the sexiest man he'd ever seen. Those defined abs, that trail of dark hair running under his navel, the thick thighs covered in a fine sprinkle of black hair... fuck. He was downright exquisite. Then there were those eyes, several shades of enchanting green, burning fiercely with need for him.

He thought he might come untouched just from looking at Lucas. He didn't want to test that theory, so he moved up the bed until his legs no longer hung over the edge of the mattress. His legs quivered when a warm hand slid up his left calf, the touch

gentle and exploring.

No one had ever touched him like this.

“Tell me what you’ve done.”

He lifted his head to look at Lucas with utter confusion.

“Have you touched yourself?” Lucas asked, eyes dark and consuming.

He felt heat spread on his face and could have cursed.

He wasn’t embarrassed that he’d jerked off before. Of course, he had. That wasn’t what Lucas was asking. At least he didn’t think so.

Lucas confirmed his thoughts by asking, “What did you imagine me doing?”

He was hit with the onslaught of all his fantasies. Lucas’ lips on his body, his hands trailing over places that made him moan. Loudly. Lucas fucking him. Driving that thick cock inside him until he came all over himself.

“Everything,” he gasped out.

Lips on his inner thigh had him trembling. Having Lucas between his legs, his mouth so close to that part of him? Fuck. He was close to bursting already and no one had touched his dick yet. He was about to embarrass himself but when he met Lucas’ gaze, he found he didn’t care because he knew Lucas would never think him an embarrassment or a disappointment. His insecurities had fled with that one word whispered in awe. Beautiful.

Lucas gave him a dirty smile before lowering his head, lips wrapping around the head



of Akio's cock. He couldn't fucking think as heat enveloped him, hot, wet, moving down his cock, then back up.

A hand found the middle of his chest, moving down and, as if caught on an invisible string, Akio's back arched along with it.

Lucas' lips moved to his hip, trailing across his stomach, up his chest, placing kisses haphazardly across his body. He had to look before he realized that each kiss was to a scar and his breath hitched, something pulling tight in his heart.

"What do you do when you think of me?" Lucas asked, lips feathering across a scar by his hipbone.

He sucked in a breath, eyes falling shut. He couldn't tell him that. Could he?

"Tell me," Lucas demanded.

He nibbled on his bottom lip until a thumb brushed across his lips, pulling it free from his teeth. His eyes shot open and as he stared up into eyes full of need and desire, he couldn't have denied Lucas anything.

"I... imagine it's you."

Lucas' pupils flared, the green swallowed up by all that black. The man looked ready to devour him and fuck if he didn't want that too. Desperately.

Akio

HE WAS sitting cross-legged on the couch, phone in his lap after having talked to his brother. Lied to his brother was more like it. Despite telling himself it was only to protect his family that he was lying to them and making them think everything was alright, he had a hard time dealing with it. Yes, he wanted to keep Lucas and his relationship between only them for now, but it also felt wrong to not disclose it.

He nearly jumped out of his skin when Lucas appeared in front of him. He hadn't heard him return from his grocery shopping.

"You alright? You didn't answer when I called out," Lucas said, brows creased.

Akio cleared his throat and nodded. "Fine."

Lucas' gaze dropped to Akio's phone when he tightened his hold on it.

"Did you talk to Diesel?" Lucas asked, voice quiet as he sat down on the couch next to Akio.

"I didn't tell him."

He ran his fingers along the side of his phone, then tapped his nails against the screen. A hand covered his, stopping his frantic movements, and making him release the phone, letting Lucas take his hand into his instead.

"That's not what I asked, sweetheart."

A breath shuddered through his body.

He raised his gaze, eyes locking onto green pools of warmth and affection.

“I don’t want to worry them,” he whispered.

Lucas nodded, gaze soft as he ran his eyes over Akio’s face.

“Let’s see if we can’t solve this thing. A week or if something happens. Then we tell them.”

“Just about the arrest, right?”

A smile pulled at Lucas’ lips and Akio forgot how to breathe for a second or two.

“You can decide when we tell them about us. Whether Diesel hands me my ass next week or in a few months doesn’t really matter to me,” Lucas said, a gleam in his eyes as he leaned in, lips brushing across Akio’s.

Lucas pulled back but Akio followed, lips pressing hard against Lucas’ mouth to keep them from disappearing. He unfolded his legs and with Lucas’ hands on his waist, he slid into his lap. He rocked against Lucas, the man’s groan making him break the kiss to look at him, lust spreading rapidly through him at the dark gaze that met his.

“God. I’ve turned you into a sex fiend,” Lucas teased.

Akio’s expression was serious as he said, “Yes.”

Lucas shook his head, the heat in his eyes only burning hotter. He grinned smugly at Lucas and then he found himself on his back on the couch, Lucas between his thighs, hands sliding up his sides.

He was wearing one of Lucas' hoodies because why wear his own clothes when he could just wear his boyfriend's and smell the man all day? Lucas was at least two sizes bigger than him, so everything was loose on his smaller frame. Just the way he liked it.

With Lucas' help, he managed to free himself from the hoodie. He missed it for all of a second before the man was kissing him, lips trailing down his chest, the scruff on his cheeks scratching just the slightest.

He dropped his head back, a ragged breath escaping him when teeth scraped across a nipple.

He grabbed a handful of Lucas' shirt and pulled it up. Lucas moved back to reach behind his head, grabbing his shirt and tugging it over his head. The man's muscles were on full display, flexing as he pulled the shirt off.

He might've made a sound. No. He definitely made a sound at that mouthwatering sight.

Lucas smirked and pulled Akio back up into his lap, lips and tongue making a meal of Akio's mouth. Hands grabbed his ass, jerking him closer. He could feel Lucas' hard cock between the thin layers of clothing separating them and couldn't stop the moan escaping him.

"I want you inside me," he said, unsure where the candor came from. Lucas seemed to bring out a certain level of confidence in him. It was exhilarating and slightly terrifying but fuck if it didn't feel good.

"How do you want me?" Lucas asked, lips brushing the shell of Akio's ear and sending a delicious shiver through his body.

“Just like this,” he managed to gasp out.

The fingers on his cheeks dug in, making him groan and roll his hips. Lucas’ lips brushed a path up one side of his jaw, his heart beating wildly when those lips found a particularly sensitive spot.

“Bed?”

Lucas pulled back, a wicked look in his eyes as he shook his head slowly.

“I want to get this couch messy with you,” Lucas said before diving back into kissing Akio’s heated skin, lips trailing down his neck.

As much as he wanted to remain in Lucas’ lap, he needed to get his pants off and fast.

“I’ll have to get up,” he gasped out, eyes falling shut at the pleasure rushing through him. That insatiable need only Lucas brought out in him.

Lucas scraped his teeth along the side of his neck, eliciting a delicious shiver.

“Hurry, then.”

Untangling himself from Lucas wasn’t easy. Mostly because he didn’t want to stop touching him. He didn’t want Lucas’ hands and mouth off his body. He managed to get his feet on the floor, though his hands lingered on Lucas’ shoulders before he straightened.

He stood in front of Lucas and as the man leaned back on the couch, arms along the back as he watched Akio with nothing but hunger in his green gaze, he didn’t feel self-conscious as he slid his fingers into the waistband of his sweats and tugged them down.

He stood in front of Lucas completely naked and felt nothing less than worshipped as those dark eyes drank him in.

Lucas freed his cock, hand moving slowly as he stroked himself, his chest moving visibly as he ran his gaze over Akio.

“You’re so fucking gorgeous,” Lucas said, his voice rough.

Akio was blushing and for once he didn’t care. Not when a man like Lucas was looking at him like that.

“There’s lube in the grocery bag,” Lucas said with an expectant brow creasing.

Akio licked his lips and nearly came from the heated look Lucas leveled him with.

He took off toward the kitchen, finding said bag on the counter. There was a tube of lube, a jug of orange juice, and a box of mini chocolate bundt cakes. His favorites. He was smiling to himself as he grabbed the lube and headed back to the living room.

“You got me chocolate?”

Lucas looked up as he stopped in front of him.

“I did.”

He shook his head, his smile only growing wider. He loved that Lucas knew him so well.

“Come here.”

He crawled back into Lucas’ lap, a knee on either side of him, holding the tube of

lube in one hand while he placed the other hand on Lucas' chest. He could feel Lucas' frantic heartbeat and knowing it was only for him sparked a special kind of feeling inside him.

"You want to do it?" Lucas asked, gaze shifting from the lube to Akio's eyes.

Akio shook his head.

Fuck no. He wanted Lucas' fingers inside him. He wanted Lucas' cock inside him.

Lucas grinned and took the lube from Akio, opening the cap with a quiet snick. He poured some onto his fingers, spreading it out over them, and then he put the tube down and slid his slick fingers between Akio's cheeks.

His eyes fell shut and his lips parted on a gasp when those fingers pressed inside him. It felt so good. The stretch. The friction. Being filled.

"Fuck," he said in a whisper.

Lucas' fingers pumped inside him, spreading him wide for his cock and just the thought had his own cock twitching, lust churning in his belly.

He rolled his hips, rubbing his cock against Lucas' drool-worthy abs.

"Yes," Lucas hissed. "Keep going."

Akio moaned and thrust against Lucas again, the man holding his fingers still, so he had to sink back onto them himself. Fucking himself on Lucas' fingers.

It felt so fucking good, but it wasn't Lucas' fingers he wanted.

“I don’t want to wait.”

“You want my cock inside you?”

“Yes,” he groaned.

“Then do it,” Lucas said and removed his fingers.

He reached behind himself, fingers wrapping around Lucas’ thick cock. He positioned himself above it, groaning when the head slid between his cheeks and found his hole. He lowered himself on Lucas’ cock, curses falling from his lips from how fucking good it felt. Lucas filled him so well.

A bead of precome pearled at the tip of his cock and he nearly came when Lucas swiped his thumb across it and brought it to his mouth to lick it off.

He chased Lucas’ mouth, tongue delving past the man’s lips in a hungry kiss, loving the taste of himself on Lucas’ tongue.

Lucas ran his hands down Akio’s thighs, then rested his arms on the back of the couch, eyes dark as he said, “You set the pace.”

With his hands on Lucas’ shoulders, he rose up, groaning at the slide of that thick cock inside him.

He started slow, making sure he was good before he began riding Lucas’ cock in earnest. He slammed his ass down, taking Lucas’ cock fast and hard, and from Lucas’ hiss, he wasn’t going easy on him. Lucas’ fingers were clutching the fabric of the couch, and that tick in his jaw? He was holding back.

“Please.”



“Please what?”

Despite how much he knew Lucas wanted to take over, he was still holding himself back and letting Akio enjoy himself.

“Touch me. Kiss me. Please , kiss me.”

Lucas surged forward, one hand finding the nape of Akio’s neck while the other grasped his hip, the man’s mouth slamming over his, tongue eagerly slipping past his lips.

A hand wrapped around his cock, stroking him almost lazily. Lucas was clearly trying to drive him insane. It was working, too. He was completely lost in this man. His crush four years ago was insignificant compared to what he felt for Lucas now. What had been building between them for years. That string holding them together was pulling them closer and closer with each kiss, each tender touch. With each passionate look between them. That streak of possessiveness he felt in Lucas only made him fall that much harder for him.

“Akio,” Lucas gasped, his voice sounding strained. “That’s it. Keep going.”

Their gazes met and he felt like Lucas was staring straight into his soul. He wasn’t sure what the man was seeing but he hoped it was everything he was feeling right then. How desperate he was for Lucas to love him. To see him. To know him.

His thighs were starting to burn with exhaustion, but he didn’t slow down. He could feel his orgasm draw near and from the small gasps coming from Lucas, he knew he wasn’t the only one rapidly approaching that cliff.

He clenched tight around Lucas, the strokes on his cock getting more frantic. He gasped, pleasure bursting through him as he came, ropes of hot come covering both

their chests.

He moaned over and over as Lucas grabbed his ass and slammed up into him, chasing his own orgasm while drawing out Akio's. He held on tight, groaning when Lucas stilled, fingers flexing against his skin.

He dropped his forehead against Lucas', their breathing labored as they came down from that incredible high they'd shared.

"I get to call you my boyfriend, right?" he asked before he could think better of it. They hadn't actually talked about it, and he realized he'd just assumed.

Lucas snapped his eyes open, something deliciously possessive swirling in those green depths.

"Yes."

Akio nodded, heat filling his cheeks. "Good."

The smile spreading on Lucas' lips was downright dirty and Akio let out a startled yelp when he was unceremoniously dropped onto his back on the couch, Lucas on top of him, the man's lips on his in a kiss that had his toes curling. He figured that meant Lucas liked being called his boyfriend. He liked it, too. A lot.

## Page 13

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

HE SAT down across from Akio at his dining table, a glass of whiskey in hand. Akio was looking at him over the top of his beer. He'd told Akio they needed to talk, and he'd instantly demanded alcohol which he couldn't exactly blame him for. Everything between them was progressing very fast especially because they were somewhat stuck together since Akio was staying with him. A week had already passed since he'd moved the man in, and despite all the sex they'd been having, they hadn't talked much. Not about the real stuff.

He'd had Akio twice already today, once when he'd woken up with Akio's ass rubbing against his morning wood, and the second time because Akio had announced he was taking a shower with a naughty look in his eyes, and he'd been unable to keep his hands off the man.

"Do we need to talk?" Akio asked, a hopeful look on his face. "I know other things we could do. More enjoyable things."

Lucas gave him a disappointed look, and Akio sighed dramatically.

"You know we do. This relationship is moving fast, and you've never been in one before."

Akio glared at him. "Is my age a problem for you?"

"You're a grown man."

“Doesn’t really answer my question,” Akio muttered.

“It’s not as much the age gap.”

“What is it, then?”

He hesitated for a second, unsure how Akio would take it.

“The way we met...” He sighed and shook his head. “Let’s not mince words here, you saw me as a sort of hero.”

Akio crossed his arms and said, “What was it you said about your ego?”

He stared at Akio until he sighed, arms falling to his sides.

“Fine. Yeah. I had a crush on you from the start, but I knew that wasn’t what it was for you. I was a kid to you.”

“You were.” He met Akio’s unwavering gaze. “Until you weren’t.”

He watched as Akio swallowed, his Adam’s Apple moving up and down. He stared at that elegant throat of his, so pale in comparison to his flushed cheeks.

“When?” Akio asked, eyes widening as if he hadn’t meant to ask.

He raised his glass to his lips and threw back the whiskey, cringing as it burned on the way down. His voice was rough as he spoke, and he could almost convince himself it was from the whiskey.

“Last year. Your birthday.”

Akio blinked at him, then snapped his brows together. “Why?”

Lucas shook his head slowly, trying to find the right words.

“I could no longer pretend you were a kid, and when you saw me... the way you smiled, the way you looked at me, I just?” He ran a hand down his face. “I was a fucking goner right then and there. Then you made me dance with you and I was more focused on you than teasing Diesel. I couldn’t look away from you. I could barely get myself to let go of you again. I sure as fuck didn’t want to let go.”

“Teasing Diesel? What do you mean?”

Fuck.

Lucas pressed his lips together. He’d said too much.

Akio narrowed his eyes.

“What. Do you. Mean?”

“Your um... crush? It was kinda evident from the start,” Lucas said with a grimace.

Akio’s mouth dropped open, and he shook his head.

“My brother knew the whole time?”

“Yeah. We all did, and I would?” he cut himself off, not wanting to admit it, but Akio looked at him with such an amused smile on his lips that he told him anyway. “I would engage you because Diesel hates it.”

Laughter burst from Akio, and he found himself looking at the man with confusion

and just a pinch of hope for his own dignity.

“I can’t?I can’t believe I never saw it,” Akio said between bursts of laughter.

Lucas arched a brow at him and said, “To be fair, you were kinda occupied by your crush on me.”

Akio’s eyes gleamed dangerously.

“Oh, I was. Very occupied.”

Lucas knew just how much. He knew what Akio had been doing while thinking of him and it set his whole body aflame with desire.

He pushed his chair back, rising with deliberately slow movements. He rounded the table just as Akio got up as well, dark eyes trailing Lucas.

He stopped in front of Akio, hands going to his face, soft smooth skin against his palms. Akio looked up at him and his heart squeezed almost painfully.

“I know this thing between us is very new, but I’ve wanted you for a year.”

A bashful smile spread on Akio’s face. “I’ve wanted you for a lot longer.”

Lucas’ lips quirked at the corners, and he stepped closer, bringing them nearly chest to chest. Akio tilted his head back to keep eye contact and Lucas slid his hands into Akio’s soft black hair.

“I’m not just talking sex,” Akio blurted out.

“I know.”

The way Akio looked at him? That was far beyond just physical attraction.

As he ran his gaze over Akio's face, he knew it was much more than that for him, too.

"I think I'm falling for you," he said, his voice sounding rough with the emotions he didn't try to hide.

"Really?"

He poked Akio in the ribs, chuckling when Akio jumped and slapped a hand against his chest. The hand stayed there, in the middle of his chest. Akio could probably feel the frantic beating of his heart.

"You don't think me a liar, do you?" he teased Akio who went bright red in the face and started spluttering.

He shook his head and shut Akio up with a soft kiss to his lips. He pulled back to see a flustered Akio blinking at him, lips parted slightly, that lovely flush on his skin. Those dark brown eyes enthralled him, pulling him into their depths. There were so many emotions swirling around in there and it was all for him.

If someone had told him four years ago that he would end up lucky enough to have someone so sweet, brave, and loyal as Akio looking at him with affection and desire, he wouldn't have believed them.

"I don't know what I've done to have you?"

"You see me," Akio said, cutting Lucas off. "You've always seen me. You never looked at me as... as Yokota's son. As someone who was abused and shot his own father. You just saw me as a person."

He felt tears filling his eyes at the raw emotion in Akio's voice.

"You have been the only bright thing in my life for so long," Lucas said, voice barely above a whisper. "Every second I've spent with you has been real. There has always been an understanding between us. Something that binds us together. I don't know how to describe it."

"How about we just feel it?"

He looked at Akio, the man he was most certainly falling hard and fast for, and he knew in his heart that he would never find someone who made him feel the way Akio did. He was quickly becoming his everything, a lighthouse shining across the sea to call him home.



## Page 14

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

HIS PHONE beeped with an incoming message and when he saw Gemma's answer to his text, he felt like throwing his phone at the wall. No progress. Almost two weeks and there hadn't been a single sighting of the truck, the men, or the girls. They were no closer to finding them or shutting down the ring.

He would never complain about the time he'd gotten to spend with Akio, but he'd be lying if he claimed that this case wasn't niggling at the back of his head the whole time.

"What's wrong?"

He snapped his head up to see Akio standing in the doorway, his brows pinched in concern.

"Nothing. It's alright."

He didn't want to put any of that on Akio. Since becoming an agent, he'd never been good at leaving work at work. The very few boyfriends he'd had after Chris hadn't exactly appreciated it. One had gotten mad he wouldn't share what was bothering him and in a fit of annoyance, he'd shared enough to make the man never look at him the same again.

Akio took a step closer, one hand lifting until he was pushing two fingers against Lucas' forehead.

“You frown when something’s weighing on you,” Akio said, smoothing out said frown and leaving Lucas fighting a smile.

He wrapped his arms around Akio’s waist and tugged him closer. Akio tilted his head back, his fingers sliding from Lucas’ forehead into his hair until his hand was against the back of Lucas’ head.

“It’s work stuff. It’s not… most people don’t?”

“I’m not most people,” Akio said with a small shake of his head. “Or did you forget my last name?”

“Yokota or Sato-Walsh?”

The corners of Akio’s mouth creased.

“Either will do it.”

“True.”

He lowered his head, nose finding the crook of Akio’s neck. He drew in a breath, Akio’s scent filling his nose. It was mixed with the soap he had in the shower and a pinch of his cologne. Despite the bag full of his own clothes and his washing machine, Akio was still mostly wearing Lucas’ clothes, and it drove him fucking crazy. He liked it more than he would ever be brave enough to admit.

When he pulled back, Akio was staring into his eyes with such unwavering determination he felt his heart skip a beat.

“Tell me about it?”

Akio looked so genuine. So invested. He couldn't have kept his mouth shut if he wanted to.

“In the past few years, a new trafficking ring has sprung up. We've had a hell of a time trying to shut it down. We only catch a few of the lowlives involved. Save a few girls. No matter what we do, they're always ten steps ahead of us. We don't know who's at the top. No one talks.”

Akio was looking down at his hands as he spoke low, “They filled the void my father left behind.”

The guilt lacing Akio's voice was like a sting to his heart.

He grabbed Akio's hands, making him look up. “This is not your doing.”

Akio's lips trembled.

“He's dead because of me,” he whispered.

“No.” Lucas shook his head. “He's dead because he was a monster. He's dead because Diesel killed him.”

“He wouldn't have if I?”

“No,” he snapped, cringing when Akio jerked at his harsh tone. He raised his hands to cup Akio's face, thumbs brushing across his cheeks. “There was no way he was getting out of that situation alive. If it hadn't been Diesel, it would've been Chris or me. Do you understand?”

There were tears in Akio's eyes as he nodded slowly.

He knew the second Akio's mind went into the past, the look in his eyes far off. It had happened a lot in the beginning when he'd still been in the hospital, just after escaping his father.

He tugged Akio toward the couch, making him sit down next to him.

"It was cold and dry," Akio muttered.

Lucas kept his mouth shut, staring at Akio who was wringing his hands.

"My skin would get so dry and dusty, and it would get really scratchy." Akio looked up, meeting Lucas' gaze. "Why is that the thing I remember?"

He reached for Akio though he didn't touch, didn't want to cross any boundaries Akio might have as he recalled his trauma. Akio smiled softly at him and then he was crawling into Lucas' lap, knees on either side of him, arms wrapping around the back of his neck while Akio hid his face in Lucas' chest.

He listened to Akio's breath as he held him tightly, not letting go until Akio pulled back. He brushed Akio's hair out of his eyes, loving the sweet smile Akio gave him.

He knew exactly how to bring Akio out of this damaging mindset. He'd done it hundreds of times before.

"You want some chocolate?"

Akio's smile turned almost bashful as he nodded. Lucas leaned in for a kiss, stopping a hairsbreadth from Akio's lips to let him press their mouths together in a soft brush of their lips.

He turned to put Akio onto the couch so he could get up and headed toward the

kitchen and the chocolate bundt cakes he'd bought for him.

"Maybe my father didn't just leave a void," Akio said, voice low.

He turned to look at Akio with creased brows and confusion.

"What do you mean?"

Akio met Lucas' gaze. "Maybe they're using his places. His methods."

He blinked at Akio. That wasn't farfetched at all. In fact, it would make a lot of sense.

"It has to be someone who knows. Someone who was there," he said, arching a brow at Akio.

"One of his men," Akio said while nodding.

"Do you know the locations?"

Akio's eyes widened and his lips parted before he nodded.

Lucas got up and walked to the sideboard behind the dining table. He rummaged through a drawer, coming up with an old tourist map of the city he'd bought when he'd moved here. He brought it to the coffee table where he opened it up and laid it down.

Before he could point to the building where the traffickers had last been, Akio placed his fingertip on it.

"That's one of his places. He had several in the city. He used to rotate between

them.”

His pulse was picking up fast as he said, “They were there recently. They got wind we were coming and took off before we could get them.”

“I guess they didn’t change how they do things.”

“If it ain’t broke,” Lucas said with a raised brow.

Akio shrugged, then pointed at another part of the map.

“This is the place they use for the girls they keep in the city. There’s a basement connection to a few of the other buildings and I think that’s maybe how they keep the place from being discovered.”

Akio pointed out several other locations and Lucas made sure to write them all down.

He nodded slowly, taking a step back. “I’m gonna have to check it out.”

“What? Now?”

“If they’re actually using that place, then I need to get to them before they move on. I can’t risk losing them again.” He pressed a kiss to the top of Akio’s head and said, “Thank you,” before heading toward his bedroom and his gun safe.

“Be safe,” Akio said, smiling up at him though it didn’t hide the worry in his eyes.

He walked back to cup Akio’s face and pressed a kiss to his lips.

“I will. I promise.”

???

Traffick wasn't the best, though it could've been worse if he'd gone just an hour before. The sun was going down, the lights on the cars on the road turning on. It took a good hour to get to the address Akio had pointed out. It was a commercial area with lots of people coming and going. It was perfect for assholes who ran trafficking- and prostitution rings. No one would suspect anything when people came and went from the building that looked just like any of the other commercial structures surrounding it.

He parked at the closest spot he could get to the address, knowing he might need a quick getaway if he was discovered. He would be cautious and careful, but he wasn't one to keep away from doing the dirty work. He'd been through a dumpster or two in his day. He'd run surveillance days on end, barely able to move from his position. He would gladly put himself in the line of fire if he needed to.

He did it all for people like Akio. Those caught in terrible situations with no means of escape. Those who were taken and trapped against their will.

He stayed on the street across from the front of the building, taking his phone out as he leaned against the outside wall of a closed store. He put his phone to his ear, pretending to take a call while he surveyed the building.

The building's windows were all covered from the inside though that wasn't uncommon in this part of town. The only way to see who came and went was by the front door but knowing there were underground connections between the buildings told him that was likely where they brought people in and out.

He knew there was vehicle access to the back, garage doors in almost every building. No one would look twice at a truck arriving to unload their wares there.

He needed to get closer.

He ran his gaze across the buildings on either side of the trafficking ring's. He settled on the one to his left and slowly made his way down the street, crossing it to walk down the driveway that led to the side door of the building.

There were no cameras to be seen, nor any people when he looked up and down the street, so he reached for the door handle. It was locked. He wasn't surprised.

He didn't have any tools on him and kicking the door down wouldn't do.

He cursed under his breath and took off toward the back of the building. He was moving into dangerous territory. While there were plenty of roads leading in and out from back there, he would be wholly exposed with only a few cars to hide behind if necessary.

He pulled a cap out of his pocket, kept there for purposes like this, and tucked it over his head, keeping his gaze low as he walked down the street.

The only access points he found were either boarded up or fenced in. It was a damned fortress.

He was close to heading back when he heard a car approaching. He dropped behind one of the parked cars, hand on his gun as he watched a blue pickup truck driving down the street, heading toward him. It stopped in front of the garage door leading into the ring's building, two men jumping out.

He kept his hand on his gun as he watched them unlock the padlock on the garage door and push it up. One of the men turned, giving Lucas a good look at him.

It was the guy from the other location. The one who'd seen him as he was closing the



back of the truck. He was certain. This was it. This was the place. They could finally take out at least one big part of the ring's operation.

He snapped a few pictures for the warrant but stayed where he was, watching as the pickup drove inside. He damned near held his breath when he watched those men drag a woman out of the backseat. She was wearing a short skirt, her white top barely in one piece, and she looked absolutely strung out. Her black hair was matted and in a bun on top of her head.

He made sure to get pictures of her, too. He had no doubt she was likely on that ever-growing missing person's list at the Bureau.

When the garage door was pulled back down, he got up and made his way back to his car where he called Edmunds.

The second the call was picked up, he said, "I have a location for the trafficking ring. I'm sending you the address. Meet me there with the team."

He hung up before Edmunds could protest and texted him the address and then he sent Akio a message, too.

Akio

GETTING A, 'you did it,' text wasn't on his bingo card. The only thing he'd done was tell Lucas his father's dirty secrets. Things he'd realized he should've told someone?anyone?years ago. Yes, he could hide behind the fact that he didn't know someone would take over where Kaito left off. That he was essentially in a sort of witness protection because of who he was. Whose son he was. But it didn't lessen the guilt.

He'd seen the people Kaito took and sold. He'd looked at them and remembered being almost jealous of them. At least they'd had the fortune of not being born Kaito Yokota's son. He'd known it was wrong to feel that way even then.

He'd been helping his father. Hell, he'd been pissed at Diesel when Kaito had taken him and Chris. He'd been so helpless and scared and seeing his brother so strong and loved? He'd wanted to hurt him. He'd seen his psychologist enough to know that he'd been in an impossible situation. He'd been abused and brainwashed by his father.

The abuse had gotten worse, and he'd fought harder, but it had no end. Even before that day, he'd known what he'd end up doing. Had known it was the only way and in the end, he'd grabbed a gun and fired it at Kaito. He'd shot him in the chest. He'd been frail to begin with, the most recent of his wounds only a few days old, and coupled with the adrenaline crash, it had been too much for his body.

He'd been in the hospital for weeks, Lucas occupying the chair next to his bed when Diesel and Chris weren't there. Lucas's face was the one he saw when he needed

peace. When he needed something warm and tangible to hold onto. Lucas smiling down at him and cracking jokes as if he hadn't watched him shoot his own father. As if Akio was just a person. Lucas saw him. He always had.

He jumped when his phone started buzzing in his hand. He looked down at it with a fluttering in his chest, but it wasn't Lucas calling.

"Hey, sis."

"Hey, you. Everything alright? Your text was kinda cryptic," Addie said.

He barely remembered having texted her, but he knew he'd asked her a question he probably shouldn't have because it was about his father.

"I..."

Addie understood better than most. She'd been kidnapped and held for weeks, destined for one of Kaito's auctions. Diesel had saved her and a bunch of other little girls. She'd been stronger than him, though. She'd protected the other girls. Standing her ground whenever she could. Addie was a fighter.

He wasn't sure how to get the words out, so he'd just said the first thing that came to mind. He knew it wouldn't make much sense to Addie without some context.

He released a breath. "My father left a void."

He could tell from the lack of sound that Addie had likely frozen at his words.

"A void?"

He could hear the hesitation in Addie's voice and squeezed his eyes shut.

“For someone else to continue his work.”

“Oh.” There was a pause and then, “Ooh.”

“I thought you meant inside you or something,” Addie said.

Surprisingly, that wasn’t the case at all. He wasn’t lacking a father figure. He had two pretty great ones.

“If I had told Lucas what I knew years ago, he could have stopped them. He could have saved all the people they’ve taken.”

“Akio,” Addie said, her voice stern and leaving no room for argument. “You can’t change the past. Trust me, if I could, I would have. We both would have, but we can’t. We can’t change who we are because of our past, nor should we want to. We survived and we’re stronger because of it.”

He soaked in her words, knowing they rang true, an echo of what his therapist had told him so many times over the years.

“If... if you had told Lucas back then, you would’ve ended up in witness protection and I wouldn’t have a brother. Hell, I probably wouldn’t have had a family.”

Chris and Diesel had seen the two of them together and knew they needed each other. Desperately. He wasn’t certain he would’ve learned to laugh again if it hadn’t been for Addie and her sarcastic self. If he hadn’t had someone in his life who was more than willing to make dark jokes about the shit they’d both been through.

“Shit happens, Akio. You didn’t make those bastards kidnap and sell anyone. They decided to do it and if it wasn’t your father’s men, it would’ve been someone else. There still would have been a vacuum for other traffickers to fill.”

He knew she was right. He knew it. But knowing it and feeling it were two very different things. He was starting to feel it, though, and he knew that was thanks to her unwavering belief in him.

“I love you.”

“Who wouldn’t? I’m fucking awesome,” Addie said, the amusement in her voice laced with just a hint of doubt.

“Yeah, you are.”

“I love you, too.”

He heard the tapping of Addie’s nails against what was likely her desk at this time of day. He already knew that whatever came out of her mouth next would have him cringing, but she somehow still managed to surprise him.

“Are you seeing Lucas?”

He choked on the breath he was taking, coughing while his sister laughed over the phone.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you screwing?”

His brows snapped together, and he almost wished they were face-timing so she could see the disappointment on his face.

“You’re not even old enough to know what that means.”

Her cackle told him she thought otherwise.

“I’m in high school, honey. Trust me, I know shit. Also, kudos for distracting me instead of answering. Too bad I’m smarter than you, huh?”

He dropped his head back with a groan.

“We’re not... screwing . That’s like a bastardized version of what we are.”

Addie’s squeal had him wishing he’d kept his mouth shut and hung up on her.

“I fucking called it, man,” Addie exclaimed. “I wanna be a bridesmaid at your wedding. Blue, I’ll wear blue. I’d totally rock a blue maid of honor dress.”

“I don’t know about wedding. We’re kinda just figuring things out right now but I can promise you that if we ever do get married you can wear whatever dress you want.”

“And that is why you’re my favorite brother.”

“I’m your only brother.”

Her cackle had him laughing, too, and for a moment he felt like everything might just turn out alright.

## Page 16

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

THE WAIT was killing him. The lack of contact? Not knowing? Fuck. He hated it. He knew it came with Lucas' job, but that didn't mean he had to like it. After pacing the apartment for what felt like hours, he'd finally ended up on the couch, wrapped in the blue blanket while he watched whatever popped up on the TV.

It was well past midnight when the front door opened. He pulled the blanket back and padded into the kitchen. Lucas was wearing a dark blue FBI jacket over the clothes he'd left in, a tired look on his face as he smiled at Akio.

He walked straight into Lucas, forcing the man to wrap his arms around him.

"You okay?" Akio whispered, face buried in Lucas' neck to breathe in his scent, the spicy smell of his cologne mixed with sweat and something he didn't want to discern.

"I'm fine."

Hands found Akio's face and tugged him back until he was looking up into Lucas' green eyes.

"Are you?" Lucas asked, worry creasing his brows.

Akio nodded and tried for a smile. Lucas didn't relax so he figured he failed miserably.

"There were eighteen girls there," Lucas said, his voice catching for a second.

“They’re all safe now because of you.”

Akio felt his throat close up.

“They wouldn’t have been there in the first place if it wasn’t for me.”

Something dark flashed in Lucas’ eyes and he gripped Akio by the arms.

“Don’t you dare think that. It happened to you, Akio. Not because of you.”

Lucas was not talking about the girls. He was talking about Kaito.

He shook his head, tears prickling in his eyes.

“I know,” he whispered, his voice coming out croaky.

Lucas pulled him tight against his chest and held him there, face buried in Akio’s hair, hands on his back keeping him from moving away. Not that he wanted to.

He could happily stay just like that forever, wrapped in Lucas. In the warmth of the man’s embrace.

He knew. He knew it deep in his bones. Straight into his soul.

He was in love with Lucas.

Deeply. Terribly. In love.

He knew Lucas loved him. He had loved him since they met, and he had told Akio that he was falling for him.



Akio

IT WAS dark. So dark and cold. Every breath hurt his throat and seized his lungs. The floor was hard under his hands and knees, the cold biting into his skin.

“Pathetic,” a voice whispered. His voice.

He snapped his head up and seeing the black bars of his cage sent shivers down his spine.

“Look at you.”

His father stood in front of him, that bloody shirt of his sending pangs of guilt through Akio.

He knew it was a nightmare. He could feel his body moving, trying to fight it off, but the nightmare had its claws sunk too deep inside him.

His father laughed at him, his face changing, morphing into his own. That evil version of him that had given in to his father’s cruel ways stood before him, looking down at him with dead eyes and then it was Lucas standing in front of him, a cold smile on his lips.

“Pathetic,” he taunted Akio.

“No,” he gasped out, tears stinging his eyes. “No. Please.”

Lucas crouched down in front of him, laughing when Akio reached through the bars for him. He remained just out of Akio's reach, eyes on Akio's fingers trying desperately to touch him.

The laughter turned into a scream. His own.

Then he felt hands on him, holding him down, drowning him in the stale air of his cage.

He gasped for breath, eyes snapping open. He was in a dimly lit room. Someone was holding him. Talking to him in a hushed voice.

"It's okay. It's okay."

Lucas kept repeating the words, arms wrapped around Akio as he rocked him gently. He squeezed his eyes shut and tried to slow his frantic heart along with his breathing.

"Sorry," he croaked out, tears in his eyes as Lucas pulled back, hands moving to cup Akio's cheeks.

"Don't you ever be sorry for that, sweetheart."

He took a shuddering breath and tried for a grateful smile.

"I guess it all just came back at once with..."

"I'm so fucking sorry," Lucas said, remorse filling his voice. "I shouldn't have dragged you into it."

He punched Lucas lightly in the arm, the man's startled bark of laughter making his lips try to pull into a smile.

“If you hadn’t, you wouldn’t have found those people, would you?”

Lucas tilted his head to the side, gaze running over Akio’s face.

“How about we skip the sorry’s and you just kiss me until I fall asleep?” Akio suggested.

Lucas’ smile was the most beautiful thing he’d ever seen.

“Happily,” Lucas agreed.

The man’s lips were soft against his skin and drew a chuckle out of him when Lucas placed those kisses all over his face. He wasn’t sure when he fell back asleep, but he knew it was with Lucas’ arms around him.

???

He was sitting on the couch, eating the breakfast Lucas had made for him when Lucas sat down on the coffee table in front of him, a cautious look on his face and his phone in hand. He cleared his throat before he spoke and Akio held his breath, clutching his bowl of cereal tight between his hands.

“We got footage of the men coming and going in that place from the store across the street. I wanted to see if you’d recognize any of them. If you’re okay with that?” he asked and handed Akio his phone.

He put his bowl on the coffee table and took the phone.

He clenched his jaw, unsure how he felt about the whole thing. Yes, he knew helping Lucas catch the bastards was the right thing to do, but it also meant putting Lucas’ life in danger. He could definitely be without that part. The fact that his nightmares

were back had nothing to do with it. He'd gladly take the nightmares if it meant he did any part, no matter how small, to save those lives he'd endangered by keeping quiet.

He sighed and looked down at the phone in his hand.

He scrolled through the slightly grainy pictures of men in different kinds of clothing. Some were in full suits while others were in jeans and denim jackets. A few of them seemed familiar but it was hard to place them. He could've met them on the street or they could be men who'd been involved with his father. He couldn't tell.

He kept scrolling, though. For Lucas. For those people the ring still held against their will. Perhaps even for himself.

He stopped on a picture, a shaky breath escaping his lips. It showed a man in a navy pinstripe suit with a brown briefcase in hand. He had a scar through his left eyebrow, his black hair cut short. He was looking almost exactly into the camera. His eyes were brown but so fucking cold that Akio nearly shuddered.

"That's Daichi Kuroki. He worked for my father."

"Let me see?"

He handed Lucas back the phone.

"Do you think he could be one of the bigger players?"

Akio nodded. "He was running part of the business already. His father was mine's right-hand man for years. It would have been easy for him to take over the rest of the business."

Lucas pressed his lips together, a contemplative look on his face.

“I’ll send this off to my team. See if they can confirm his identity and, hopefully, his involvement.”

He nodded, watching as Lucas walked away, phone pressed against his ear, a painful lump in his throat.

Lucas

AKIO HAD been quiet since identifying Kuroki. He wasn't surprised. He hated that this was taking him back to that time, that trauma. He felt like shit for asking him about the pictures, especially after that nightmare. He knew Akio wanted to help, though, and lives were at stake. Lives Akio would blame himself for losing if he didn't help.

He'd gone to buy more chocolate. He'd basically thrown anything with chocolate into the basket and brought it home for Akio. He put the bag of goodies on the kitchen counter and went in search of Akio.

He found his boyfriend standing in front of the living room windows, arms crossed as he gazed out at the buildings across the street. He walked up behind Akio and wrapped his arms around him, tugging him close against his chest as he dropped a kiss to his shoulder.

"You doing alright?"

He hated how much bad shit all of this was dredging up for Akio. He'd been through more than enough already. He certainly didn't need this reminder of it all.

"I guess."

He held on tighter, his heart breaking at the dejected tone in Akio's voice.

He wasn't sure what to do except be there for him and listen if he needed to talk. He

couldn't slay Akio's demon because it was already dead and gone. If he could have, he would. Without hesitation.

Akio turned in his arms, head down as he mumbled, "It's my birthday tomorrow."

He pressed his lips together to keep from smiling.

"Did you think I'd forget?"

Akio snapped his head up, eyes alight with excitement.

There was no way he could ever forget Akio's birthday. The last one had sent him spiraling.

"What did you get me?"

"Nuh-uh. I'm not telling you."

"Oh, come on."

Akio batted his lashes at him and gave him an innocent smile, but he wasn't falling for that. He tugged Akio closer and rested his chin on top of Akio's head, grinning to himself.

"Not happening."

He'd bought the present weeks before Akio's brush with the local police. He'd seen the old-school black leather-strapped watch and known Akio would love it. He knew Akio hadn't planned on throwing a birthday party this year and they hadn't exactly seen much of each other either, but he hadn't been able to stop himself. Knowing how that watch would look on Akio's wrist had him pulling out his wallet and buying

it before he could change his mind.

Hands slipped under his shirt, running up his back. He pulled back to look down at Akio, finding him smiling up at him, a wicked look in his eyes.

“Oh, you think sex will get you your present faster?”

Akio’s mock gasp of outrage had him chuckling and reaching behind him to grab Akio by the wrists and pull his hands out of his shirt.

“Absolutely not.”

He was a sucker for Akio, but he would not be giving into this. He would not.

The flirtatious smile Akio gave him had his breath catching.

Lips pressed against the side of his neck, and he tilted his head to the side with a groan, his grip on Akio’s wrists slipping.

“Absolutely,” Akio brushed a kiss to the underside of Lucas’ jaw, “Yes.”

“Cheat.”

Akio laughed, the sound low and breathy.

Hands slid back under his shirt and this time he let them wander over his skin, soaking in Akio’s exploratory touch. He sucked in a breath when those hands moved to the front of his pants.

“Get your perky little ass to the bedroom. Now,” he growled.



Akio laughed and backed away from Lucas, exuding nothing but confidence as he smirked at Lucas. He turned, glancing over his shoulder at Lucas before taking off. He followed Akio out of the living room and into the hallway, only a few steps behind him. Akio made it to the bedroom before he caught him.

He wrapped his arms around Akio from behind and lifted him off his feet. Akio's laughter was like balm to the soul.

He put his lips against Akio's ear and whispered, "What shall I do with you?"

Akio turned in his arms and looked up at him with desire swirling in his dark eyes.

"I have an idea or two."

Lucas' response was cut off when something buzzed in his back pocket. He took a step back and pulled his phone out with a curse, giving Akio an apologetic glance. The second he opened the text, his heart rate spiked with excitement.

"They've confirmed Kuroki's identity and with your information on his involvement with Yokota, they're now looking at him as the possible leader of the ring."

"That's good, right?"

He nodded.

"It means we have a real shot at closing down the whole ring." He tugged Akio against his chest. "Because of you."

Akio rolled his eyes, and he could only smile and steal a kiss because it was decidedly a much better reaction than whatever might've come out because of the guilt that still clung to him.

“Now, where were we?”

He was reaching for the hem of Akio’s shirt when he heard a floorboard creak and froze. He knew every sound this apartment made, and that particular floorboard was in the living room.

Akio watched him with a frown, eyes searching as he scanned Lucas’ face.

He put a finger to his lips and tugged Akio behind him as he headed for his gun safe in the closet. He unlocked it, thankful for the thing being silent, and pulled out his gun. He quickly checked that his magazine was full, then grabbed a spare from the safe, sliding it into his back pocket.

He heard another creak and rage sparked inside him. It was one thing to have dangerous assholes like Kuroki coming after him. He was trained for that. But coming after him while he was with Akio? They were going to regret that.

“What is it?”

Akio’s words were whispered. He knew something was going on. He also knew when that something was dangerous.

“Stay quiet and stay close,” Lucas whispered back.

He kept ahold of Akio’s shirt as he started moving. He led them down the hallway, being careful to walk slowly, listening for the others’ footsteps. Still in the living room from the sound of it though there could be someone in the kitchen, too. The second he took a shot, whoever else was in the apartment would discover their position.

He turned to Akio and motioned for him to get low and stay. Akio crouched down but

shook his head, the fear in his eyes tugging hard at Lucas' heart. He wished he could simply erase it. That he could snap his fingers and bring them to safety.

He gave Akio a stern look to make sure he listened as he pointed back at the bedroom. Akio didn't look happy about it, but he nodded and backed down the hallway. Lucas watched until he was certain Akio would reach the bedroom.

He snuck down the hall, making his way to the living room with silent steps, knowing exactly where to step and where not to. Stopping in the doorway, he found the intruder instantly. By the couch was a small man dressed in black. It looked like he was searching the room. For them. He was armed and his gun had a suppressor attached. There was no doubt in his mind that he was there to kill them.

He would never let him get the chance.

Lucas raised his gun just as the man turned, catching Lucas' reflection in the living room windows. He wasn't fast enough and Lucas' bullets tore through his body and hit the window behind him. The glass cracked but didn't shatter, staying in the frame.

He stepped into the living room, eyes scanning for movement, but it was a sound that had him whirling around. Something hard crashed into his side, and he hit the floor with a shout, the man on top of him heavy and keeping him from rolling away.

He grunted at the pain flaring in his hand when it was slammed against the floor, his gun flying out of his grip. He brought his knee up and managed to plant it in his attacker's side. He drew back just enough that Lucas could roll away.

He threw himself across the floor to grab his gun. His fingers nearly reached it when an arm wrapped around his throat, pulling him up onto his knees while his airways were squeezed shut.

He slammed his elbow into the man wherever he could reach him, but he only squeezed harder. Panic started to hit him as he realized he only had seconds before he passed out. Seconds before he could no longer protect Akio. He reached up, finding the asshole's face, and jammed his fingers into his eyes.

He was released with a shout and dropped to his hands, gasping for breath.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the man pulling a gun from his waistband and knew he only had seconds to reach his own.

Before he could move, blue glass exploded against the back of the man's head, and he fell to his knees. Akio stumbled back, away from the man, half of the broken vase still in his hands.

Lucas lunged to the side, grabbing his gun off the floor to fire it twice into the bastard's head, not taking any chances with Akio's safety.

He got to his feet and reached for Akio, pulling the shattered glass free from his cold and shaking fingers. He was hit with a memory as Akio's startled eyes met his. Four years ago, it had been a gun he'd taken from Akio. A gun he'd used to shoot his father with.

He dropped the vase, not caring one bit about the glass littering the floor. All he cared about was Akio and whether he was alright.

He felt the man's knees give out and caught him, lowering them to the floor with a pained grunt. That tackle to the floor hadn't done anything good for his body and his throat was sore as hell, though all he could think of was Akio.

He held Akio close against him as they both simply breathed for a few seconds, adrenaline surging through his body and leaving him lightheaded though that could

also be from the strangulation.

“Are you okay?” he asked as he pulled back.

Akio nodded, gaze snapping up over Lucas’ shoulder. He whirled around, finger on the trigger though he never got to pull it before the dark-clad man standing before them had a hole in his skull. His body crumbled to the floor and Lucas dropped back with a sigh. He wasn’t sure he should be relieved at seeing Diesel and Chris standing in front of them, though.

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

“YOU’D BETTER start explaining yourselves,” Diesel said as he pulled Akio to his feet, hands going to his face to tilt it every which way to check for injuries.

“I’m fine,” he muttered.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Diesel growled.

Akio glanced at Lucas out of the corner of his eye and the worry he saw on the man’s face did painful things to his insides. He could tell that Lucas wanted to cross the room, that he wanted to be the one checking Akio over for injuries, but he couldn’t with Chris and Diesel there. They hadn’t even had a chance to talk about what they were. Sharing anything right now would be foolish.

“Your Savage Rebel friends got arrested,” Lucas said to Diesel. “They arrested Akio, too.”

He gave Lucas a less-than-pleased glare. He didn’t need to lead with that.

“Arrested?” Chris sputtered.

“What for?” Diesel asked, narrowing his eyes at Akio.

“The cops think I’m a Rebel or involved with them because they’re protective of me.”

Diesel opened his mouth, then clenched his jaw for a moment before he cursed. “They’re only protective of you because I asked them to be.”

“Try explaining that to the cops,” Lucas said, arching a brow at Diesel.

Diesel shook his head and drawled, “That wouldn’t go over well.”

“I know,” Akio said with a shrug. “Which is why I called Luc. He got me out.”

Chris crossed his arms and said, “You should’ve called us. At least after.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I just didn’t want to worry you.”

“That went well, didn’t it? Who the hell are these assholes, anyway?” Diesel asked, nudging the closest of the bodies with the toe of his shoe.

Lucas sighed. “Traffickers. From a case I’m working on. We just blew open their operation and I guess they decided to get some payback.”

Chris snapped his head toward Lucas, anger blazing in his eyes.

“You brought Akio here when you knew there was a target on your back?”

Lucas raised his hands, taking a step back as he said, “I didn’t know. I would never have brought him here if I thought it would put him in danger.”

Akio glanced at Diesel, not at all surprised to find unbridled anger in his brother’s gaze. His husband was watching them all somberly, but he thought he saw something resembling understanding in Chris’ eyes.

“At which point during all this did you decide to fuck my brother?”

Akio snapped his head up just in time to see Diesel charge at Lucas. When Diesel's fist landed on Lucas' left cheek, he jerked back with a wince. Fortunately, Chris was there to wrap his arms around Diesel and pull him away from Lucas before he landed more hits.

"First you try to get with my partner and now with my baby brother?" Diesel hissed at Lucas.

"He's an adult," Lucas said, rubbing his sore cheek.

"Barely," Diesel snapped. "You're also not taking into account the shit he's been through."

"Or perhaps I'm the only one who sees beyond that trauma."

Akio lifted his head, eyes landing on Lucas who was staring at him, those green eyes of his burning with unsaid words.

"Oh, fuck you," Diesel yelled and almost got free from Chris' hold.

"I suggest you leave," Chris said to Lucas, a threat clear in his tone.

Lucas shook his head, then winced. "No. We all need to go. Unless these guys followed me, which they didn't, then there's only one way they got my address."

"You have a leak."

"Probably," Lucas said and turned his gaze on Diesel. "You can go back to breaking my jaw once we're safe."

Diesel was still for a moment before he nodded, giving Chris a look that made him let



go of him. Diesel kept his eyes on Lucas as he walked to Akio and wrapped a hand around his upper arm.

“Let’s go,” Diesel barked, tugging Akio with him toward the front door.

Lucas

HIS JAW hurt like hell though not as much as the disappointment and betrayal he'd seen in Diesel's eyes. He hadn't entered into a relationship with Akio with the intent of hurting anyone, but he'd known Chris and Diesel would take it as such. He hated Diesel's comparison between Chris and Akio. He hadn't tried to take Chris from Diesel four years ago. He'd thought Chris was single and he'd wanted a second chance with him. Diesel made it sound like he was only after sex but that couldn't be further from the truth. He'd loved Akio long before he'd become attracted to him.

He was following Diesel and Akio down the stairs, Chris close behind him, and he wasn't surprised when he felt a hand on his shoulder and was brought to a stop. He spared a glance toward Akio before turning to meet Chris' scrutinizing gaze.

He could see the conflicted feelings in the man's gray eyes. It couldn't be easy for Chris, either. The man he'd once promised to marry was involved with the man he considered a son. It was one hell of a messy situation. Should he have known better? Should he have stayed away from Akio? Probably. The only problem with that was that he didn't want to. He wanted to be with Akio. He wanted to be the one who made him laugh. The one who brought him pleasure and made him feel loved and needed. The one who made him feel whole.

"What are you doing?" Chris asked, his voice low but sharp. "Please tell me it's real and not some stupid..."

Lucas licked his lips and nodded.

“It’s real. I love him, Chris.”

Chris’ eyes widened and for a heartbeat or two, he didn’t move at all, stunned by Lucas’ words.

“I once told you I made a mistake in choosing the Bureau over you,” he said, grabbing Chris’ hand to squeeze it in apology, “I don’t think I did. You might not have found Diesel. You might’ve gotten yourself killed trying to find your brother’s killer because you wouldn’t have had Diesel.”

Chris’ jaw clenched and unclenched though he didn’t say a word.

“I know this might hurt to hear, but I will never choose the Bureau over Akio.”

They stared at each other for what felt like minutes but was likely only seconds considering Diesel hadn’t come back for them yet.

“Good,” Chris said with a sharp nod and started walking again, moving ahead of Lucas down the stairs.

They didn’t find Akio and Diesel until they stepped out of the building and into the parking lot. There were two bikes parked in front of his car. Diesel stood with a helmet in one hand while he talked to Akio who shook his head, glancing up to catch Lucas’ gaze.

Relief spread on Akio’s face and as he exhaled deeply, his shoulders slumping.

“Just put the damn helmet on,” Diesel snapped.

Akio jerked around, glaring at his brother as he said, “I’m not riding with you,” and then he walked to the passenger side of Lucas’ car, hand on the handle as he waited

for Lucas to unlock the car.

While Akio got in the car, Lucas passed Diesel, acutely aware of the seething rage in the man's eyes. Diesel didn't stop him, though, and as he got behind the wheel, Diesel and Chris straddled their bikes and pulled their helmets on. He checked that Akio had buckled in before pulling out after the bikes, following them out of the parking lot to the road.

"You okay?" he asked and glanced at Akio out of the corner of his eye.

Akio motioned at Lucas' face. "Shouldn't I be asking you that?"

"I'll take this over a bullet wound."

Akio crossed his arms and dropped back in his seat with a huff.

"That's not funny."

No. It wasn't.

He reached across the console and within seconds, he had Akio's hand in his. He gave it a soft squeeze and rested their hands on his thigh. He kept them there as he drove, following the two bikes through the city.

He didn't think he'd seen the house they pulled up in front of before, but the street name sounded familiar for some reason.

They stepped out of the car, and he ran his gaze across their surroundings, assessing their safety and exits. It wasn't exactly an FBI safehouse, but it would do for now. At least three out of the four of them were armed. Not that he wanted to give Akio a gun. The last time he'd held one...

He shook his head and went to the trunk to grab his go-bag he always had stored there. He had another gun and a few magazines in there along with some clothes. They hadn't had time to grab any for Akio from the apartment though he supposed it didn't really matter seeing as Akio preferred to wear his clothes.

He pulled the strap of the bag over his shoulder and turned to see Diesel and Chris dismounting their bikes.

The front door of the house burst open and none other than Maggie came running down the steps, heading straight for Akio who looked as surprised and confused as Lucas felt when his best friend tackled him in a bear hug.

"I'm so glad you're okay," Maggie gushed, then pulled back, eyes wide and fear shining in them. "Are you okay?"

Lucas was fully aware of the man waiting for them in the doorway, that smug smile making him clench his hands into fists. Despite how satisfying it would be to slam his fist into Ryder's face, he wasn't about to do something that stupid with Chris and Diesel around. Or Akio, for that matter.

Maggie spared him a glare before tugging Akio toward the house.

Lucas sighed and followed.

Ryder shook Diesel and Chris' hands and stepped back to let them inside the house. They must've called him when they left the parking lot to get this address because he realized it was Ryder's house, and his research into the Rebels MC was the reason he recognized the street name.

Ryder took one look at Lucas' bruised cheek and grinned at him.

“It’s not like that, huh?”

Lucas didn’t answer. There was no point.

Akio looked between them, his brows pinched in confusion.

“Hi, Ry,” Akio said, smiling softly at the man.

“Hello, sweetheart.”

There was no stopping his hand from going to the gun at his hip, nor was there any stopping Akio and Maggie from seeing it. Maggie rolled her eyes while Akio stared at Lucas, his mouth falling open.

“ Ooh .” Akio snapped his gaze back onto Ryder. “ That’s what that was. In my dorm room.”

“Idiots,” Maggie muttered and tugged Akio with her into the house, poking Ryder in the chest on her way past him.

There was a tick in Ryder’s jaw as he gazed after her.

“She’s mad at me because she thinks I’m responsible for Akio being in danger,” Ryder said, giving Lucas a pointed stare.

“If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you wanted to get shot.”

Ryder put his hands up, his wry smile grating on Lucas’ nerves.

He walked past Ryder into the house and followed the voices into a spacious living room with two gray couches and a big TV on the wall above the fireplace. Maggie

and Akio were holding hands, and it looked like Maggie was practically hanging onto Akio who kept shooting glances between Chris and Diesel, the two of them seemingly carrying a silent conversation.

He heard Ryder walk up behind him and stepped aside to let the man pass him.

Akio met Lucas' gaze and after a moment of staring at each other, Akio seemed to relax a bit as he turned to Chris and Diesel.

"How did you know I was with Lucas?"

Chris and Diesel shared a look, small matching smiles on their faces.

"We were going to your dorm to surprise you. We wanted to be there for your birthday. You obviously weren't there so we called Maggie to not spoil the surprise by having to call you. She told us you were with Lucas," Chris said, his smile fading instantly. "We got to the apartment just in time to hear the gunfight."

"Who wants you dead?" Ryder asked, brows raised at Lucas.

Lucas shared a glance with Akio who nodded.

"A trafficking ring," he said, throat closing up at the haunted look entering Akio's eyes. "It was... It used to be Yokota's ring."

Diesel's nose flared as he sucked in a breath. "The fuck do you mean?"

"One of his men took over after..." Akio trailed off and Lucas understood him not wanting to say the words. He wasn't sure how much Maggie knew anyway but what she had seen and heard already wasn't exactly good for any of them. Then again, she was seeing the vice president of an outlaw motorcycle club. He figured she would

keep her mouth shut. If not for her own sake, then for Akio's.

"Do you know who?"

"We'd been trying to figure that out for years. It took Akio to identify him," Lucas said, fully expecting the ire in the glare Diesel gave him. "His name is Daichi Kuroki."

Diesel went completely still, his eyes taking on an unseeing look.

"You knew him?" Chris asked, hand on his husband's arm.

Diesel nodded almost absentmindedly. "He was the son of Yokota's right-hand man. We... we spent a lot of time together as kids."

The silence that ensued felt like it was starting to choke him.

"I should call my ASAC. Let him know what happened."

He didn't much like being considered a fugitive or whatever else they might label him once they got news of the bodies at his apartment.

"Here." Chris handed him a phone. "It's untraceable."

"Thanks."

He walked out onto the patio, resting his elbows on the railing as he ran his gaze across the green backyard, the trees wide and tall. There was a lounge area with a big couch and a brick fireplace. It was...nice. Not exactly what he expected from Ryder but, then again, he'd learned four years ago that criminals weren't always what they seemed.



He called Edmunds' private phone and tried not to hold his breath as he listened to the dial tone.

"Edmunds."

"It's Davis," he said, trying to keep his emotions out of his voice. "Kuroki's men attacked me in my home."

"Fucking hell, Davis." Edmunds was silent for a second, some rustling of clothes coming through the phone. "Yeah, we heard about the shootout. Thought I was gonna find your body there."

"I'm good."

"Alright. Why don't you meet me at my office?"

"I... can't."

"What the hell do you mean?"

He could hear the mistrust seeping into Edmunds' voice, and he couldn't blame the man.

"They knew where I lived, Edmunds. Someone told them."

"You think...? Fuck."

"I'm not going anywhere near the field office. Not while someone's trying to kill me."

He heard a groan and then what sounded like Edmunds' dropping into a chair.

“I hear you, Davis. I’ll see if I can plug the leak from this side. Do me a favor, though? Look into it, too?”

He had to swallow against the lump of emotion clogging his throat. “You’re trusting me?”

“Davis... I’ve seen you with our victims. There’s no fucking way you’d ever be on the opposite side of this. So, yes, I trust you.”

“Thank you, Sir.”

Akio

HE HADN'T slept a lot. There was too much noise in his head. The only thing that helped was Lucas' hand in his. He was on the couch, Lucas on a mattress on the floor right in front of it. There were only two bedrooms in Ryder's house. Diesel and Chris had taken the guest bed and despite the glares she kept giving Ryder, Maggie followed him into his bedroom when it came time to go to bed last night.

He hadn't complained when Diesel told him he could sleep on the couch and Lucas could sleep on the floor. Lucas hadn't said a word, either. He'd simply smiled at Akio and graciously accepted the blankets, pillows, and sheets Ryder had handed him.

Lucas' thumb was brushing over his knuckles, so he knew the man wasn't asleep either. The sun was only starting to rise so he knew it was still early morning, but it meant that he was twenty-two now.

It was almost hard to believe. He hadn't thought in his wildest dreams that he would have a boyfriend on his birthday. He would never have believed that boyfriend was Lucas, either.

Lucas' thumb was replaced by lips. They moved further up, finding his wrist and making him bite his cheek to keep from making any sounds.

He heard rustling and then Lucas was sitting up, the smile on his lips making Akio's heart skip a beat, heat rushing through him.

Lucas grabbed Akio's blanket and threw it over the back of the couch. He got on the

couch, settling between Akio's legs and Akio pushed up on his elbows, his breathing getting louder when Lucas' fingers slipped into the waistband of his boxers to tug them down his thighs.

His cock was rock-hard with one hungry look from Lucas.

"The others might hear," he said, casting a glance toward the staircase.

Lucas' lips spread in a wry smile and there was something deliciously wicked in his gaze. "Be quiet, then."

Heat enveloped his cock, and he dropped back with a strangled moan.

Lucas was going to be the death of him.

A hand joined the mouth on him, stroking the base of his cock while that wicked mouth sucked on the head. His eyes rolled into the back of his head, a strangled moan escaping him.

He reached blindly for Lucas, his hand landing on the top of his head. He threaded his fingers through those soft strands that were just long enough that he could hold on while Lucas tortured him. It was a delicious form of torture as Lucas took him deeper, tongue pressing against the underside of his cock.

"Luc," he gasped out and followed up with a deep groan.

He slapped a hand over his mouth, but it wasn't enough. He couldn't stop the sounds Lucas wrung out of him.

The hand around him slid down to his balls, Lucas taking his dick deeper into his mouth, sucking hard, the heat and tightness pushing him closer to that inevitable

edge. He let his hand run down Lucas' face and felt the scruff on Lucas' cheeks against his fingers, groaning at how good everything felt.

He bit into the palm of his hand as a wave of pleasure hit him. He dug his heels into the couch, thighs straining as he shoved his cock deeper inside Lucas' hot mouth. Lucas swallowed around his cock with an appreciative groan and kept sucking until Akio felt completely wrung out.

He gasped for breath and had to blink a few times before his eyes refocused. He looked up, finding Lucas watching him from between his thighs and he knew he'd been loud when he saw that proud smile on Lucas' face.

He dropped his head back on the couch with a heavy exhale.

"Happy birthday," Lucas whispered, breath skirting across the overheated skin on his inner thigh before lips kissed the same spot.

A shiver rocked through him.

Happy birthday to him, indeed.

He lifted his hips off the couch when he felt a tug on his boxers and Lucas put them back in place. He couldn't stop his smile when he felt lips moving up his body. He leaned up on his elbows and watched Lucas kiss his way up his chest, grinning by the time those lips reached his.

Lucas kissed him softly, just a quick brush of their lips.

"What about you?"

Lucas sat back, a loving smile on his lips.

“That was for you and the others are awake now.”

He pulled a face and cleared his throat as he untangled his legs from Lucas to sit up. He glanced around, looking for his pants and shirt. He did not want to be in only his boxers when the others came downstairs.

He found his pants and put them on faster than he'd ever put pants on before, ignoring Lucas' low huff of laughter. Lucas stood and Akio stopped his search for his shirt to look at the man's muscular chest for a moment, a cheeky smile finding his lips when Lucas noticed. The man didn't seem inclined to dress, remaining in just his sleep pants, the visible bulge in the front of them making Akio nearly swallow his tongue.

Lucas simply smirked at him, that ego of his only getting bigger. He couldn't help it, though. The man looked like a god.

Lucas disappeared into the kitchen while Akio grabbed his shirt off the floor and tugged it over his head, jumping when he heard footsteps on the stairs.

He nearly breathed a sigh of relief when it was Chris who appeared around the corner.

“Happy birthday,” Chris said and from the teasing look he gave him, he knew they'd all heard, and his face got flaming hot.

He dropped his head into his hands, his ass hitting the couch as he wished it would just swallow him up.

“I'll try to keep your brother from killing him,” Chris said.

Akio looked up at Chris through his fingers, an embarrassed sound escaping him.

“I make no promises, though.”

He squeezed his eyes shut and shook his head.

“I’m so sorry,” he whispered, turning his head when he felt Chris sitting down on the couch next to him.

“Don’t be. I get it. I was engaged to him,” Chris said with a wink.

“Oh, my god,” he said under his breath. If it was possible to blush any harder, he would have.

Chris laughed, his eyes sparkling deviously.

“Should you be talking about me?”

Akio turned his head to see Lucas standing in the doorway, shoulder leaning against the doorframe, one foot cocked behind the other. He was looking at Chris with a raised brow and an amused expression on his face.

“You don’t like us comparing experiences?”

Akio nearly got whiplash from how fast he snapped his gaze back onto Chris.

“What would be the point? I’ve evolved a lot since college,” Lucas said, his voice going down an octave and causing a shiver to rock through Akio who had to dig his fingers into his thighs to try and stave it off.

Chris hummed, head tilting to the side.

“Well, perhaps then, the point is for my husband to overhear,” Chris said, lips

quirking up at one corner. “He can get a little jealous sometimes and you know what he does when that happens?”

“Shoots me?”

“Possibly, but I was mostly referring to what he’ll do after.”

Akio slapped his hands over his ears, muttering, “ Nononono. Nuh-uh.”

Chris laughed, low and heartedly.

“Paybacks a bitch, huh?”

Akio gasped. “It wasn’t even my fault.”

“Oh, it most certainly was,” Lucas said, his voice husky.

The only thing he could think of doing was flip them both off and as they laughed, he tugged his blanket off the back of the couch to wrap it tight around his shoulders and then glared at them from his cocoon on the couch.



Akio

HE LEFT Lucas in the kitchen and the second he stepped into the living room, he had Maggie's arms around him. He felt a sigh rock through his body as a tightness in his chest loosened.

"Consider this your temporary birthday gift," Maggie said and squeezed tighter. "The real one is back in my room."

He chuckled and squeezed her back.

"That's okay. This is more than enough."

He didn't have to see her face to know she was rolling her eyes at him. He wasn't being modest, though. Her presence soothed his anxious heart and her unwavering support for his and Lucas' relationship meant the world to him.

He pulled back to cup her face and stared into her eyes.

"I love you."

She blinked rapidly and he knew she was holding back tears.

"I love you, too. Even if you do get me into trouble," she snarked.

He let out a huff and said, "You're usually the one who gets me into trouble."

She only laughed at that, her eyes twinkling.

“Though, speaking of trouble,” he said and placed his hands on her shoulders, “You’re definitely not staying here.”

Maggie pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes, staring at him for a few seconds before she sighed.

“I figured as much. I don’t like leaving you here alone.”

“I’m not exactly alone,” he said and raised a brow.

She pinched his arm, making him jump and slap her hand away.

“You know what I mean,” she said.

Yeah. He knew. He felt the same about her. He didn’t like her being away from the people who could protect her the best, but he also knew that she was likely safer away from them. She’d certainly be safer on college grounds than wherever the guys decided they needed to go to end this thing with Kuroki.

He tugged Maggie back into a hug and dropped his head against her shoulder, eyes falling shut as he soaked in the moment. Maggie didn’t seem much inclined to end the hug, either, and though he didn’t know how long they actually stood there, he wouldn’t be surprised if it was a couple of minutes.

“If I’m going back to campus, I’m gonna need a shower first,” Maggie said and pulled back. She met Akio’s gaze with a twinkle in her eyes. “Ryder’s shower definitely beats out my dorm’s.”

“Does his bed beat your dorm’s?” he quipped, unsurprised when he received a light

slap to the arm for it.

“No. The bed does not,” she said and winked.

He shook his head as he watched her run up the stairs. He smiled to himself as he made his way to the couch and sat down with a sigh, the memory of what Lucas had done to him there earlier making his cheeks heat.

He took a deep breath and rubbed his hands down his face. Thinking about that was only going to get him into trouble. More trouble.

He looked up when he heard footsteps behind him, expecting Maggie to have returned but it was Chris who appeared, his hair looking a mess and that was definitely a different shirt from the one he'd worn in the kitchen.

“You're alive,” he said, brows raised as Chris took a seat next to him.

Chris leaned back on the couch, his expression relaxed and he damned near radiated happiness. He grinned at Akio and said, “I've got bitemarks everywhere but, yeah, I'm alive.”

Akio groaned and shook his head.

“You're overcompensating.”

Chris chuckled, then tilted his head to the side, eyes narrowing.

“Whatever do you mean?”

“The joking around? With Lucas. About... you know . I know you're trying to compensate for my brother's less-than-stellar reaction.”

The smile on Chris' lips was warm and he couldn't help returning it.

"You got me there," Chris said with a shrug, a wistful look finding his face. "I used to think Lucas was the one that got away."

Akio raised his brows at Chris, his pulse picking up instantly.

"Then I met D," Chris said, a wicked smile spreading on his lips. "I was so fucking gone for him before I even realized it. I didn't think we'd ever get to be together, though."

Akio nodded. He knew that part of their story. Chris' brother had been a member of Diesel's motorcycle club, and he'd ended up dead right around the time half of the club disappeared and what was left changed their club's name. Chris had thought someone in the club was responsible and when his captain had refused to let him go undercover, he'd quit to do it anyway.

Chris had prospected at the club under an alias, trying to solve his brother's murder while fighting his attraction to Diesel. They both fought it until they couldn't any longer. A lot of things happened after that and, of course, it all came to a head when Diesel's father showed up and took Diesel and Chris. At that time, Diesel had discovered Chris' identity and had told him to leave the club before he told the others.

"He was worth fighting for," Chris said, smiling softly. "If you and Lucas are willing to fight for each other, then I don't see why it should be a problem for you two to be together."

Chris shrugged, eyes gleaming wickedly. "He already knows he's a dead man if he hurts you."

A burst of laughter escaped Akio, and he shook his head at a grinning Chris.

It was pretty clear to him that they were both willing to fight for each other and for their relationship. There was nothing he wanted more than to be with Lucas.

Chris' expression sobered.

"He told me he would choose you over the FBI."

Akio sucked in a surprised breath, mouth hanging open as he stared at Chris.

Chris' lips twitched as he threw a mischievous glance around the room. "I think he's already proved that."

He dropped his head into his hands again, wishing the ground would just swallow him up so he didn't have to be reminded that everyone knew what they'd done that morning.

"Here," Chris said and handed Akio a small purple box.

"What's this?"

Chris grumbled something under his breath then shook his head. "Diesel had it made for Addie but with everything going on, I figured why not?"

Akio frowned but pulled the lid off the box, then frowned harder when he saw the thin silver bracelet inside.

"What is...?"

Chris exhaled. Loudly.

"It has a GPS tracker."

A snort escaped Akio, and he gave Chris an incredulous look.

“Don’t look at me like that. Diesel is the one who got it and, besides, it’s for emergencies.”

“Whose emergencies? Addie’s or yours?”

“Addie’s. Trust me, it took a long fucking time to talk him out of a live tracker,” Chris said. “You just press the gemstone and hold it in for five seconds. It goes straight to both our phones.”

“Thanks?”

He put the box down with a soft smile. How could he not love that Chris cared enough to be worried about him? That was part of loving someone.

“Akio.”

He turned his head slowly, unsure what he was in for when he heard Diesel’s voice behind him. His brother held his hands behind his back, a conflicted look crossing his face as he took a step closer.

“I wanted to apologize for my… reaction.”

Akio nodded, a lump clogging up his throat.

“Happy birthday?”

Diesel opened his arms, a vulnerable look on his face as if he thought Akio might not hug him. He was off the couch and in his brother’s arms the next second. He understood Diesel’s overprotectiveness. He understood the worry and fear coursing

through his brother. He was sure they were all going to be much worse when it came to Addie, himself included.

He pulled back, a line forming between his brows.

“Wait. Where is Addie?”

“She’s staying with Ares and Jace. We didn’t want to pull her out of school for the trip. I’ve never been more thankful for that decision,” Diesel said with a heavy exhale.

“I gave him the bracelet,” Chris said to Diesel, pointing at the box on the coffee table.

Diesel winced, then said, “Yeah. Sorry. We left your present in your dorm room.”

“We’ll go grab it later,” Chris said, a smile widening his lips. “Along with cake.”

Akio’s groan had them both laughing.

Akio

LUCAS HAD left an hour ago, rushing out the door with a thundercloud above his head. There was an arrest warrant out on him, so he understood Lucas' anger though he didn't like the man rushing off seeing as there were dangerous people who wanted him dead.

He was left to his own devices as all the others were gone, too. Left with his own thoughts. So much had happened over the past few weeks. He could barely believe it. He'd gone from having a drink with Maggie to being arrested to calling Lucas in a few short hours. He'd never truly thought Lucas would look at him as anything more than that kid he'd saved and now? They were together. Lucas loved him. He loved Lucas. When they were alone he could almost forget everything else that was going on, but Lucas wasn't there with him now.

It was almost as if fate wanted to pull them away from each other.

He wasn't going to take that lying down, though, and he knew Lucas wouldn't either. He was prepared to fight. He wasn't about to give up on them no matter what was thrown at them and besides, he had faith in Chris, Diesel, and Lucas. They would work all of this out and hopefully, no one would get hurt except for those traffickers. Those bastards deserved all the hurt in the world.

He groaned when he heard the doorbell ring but dragged his body off the couch to see who it was. He figured he was safe to open the door because he doubted the mole or double agent would bother knocking.



He opened the door just enough to look out.

“Akio?”

A woman was standing there. She looked put together with her blonde hair pulled back in a tight ponytail and wearing a black pantsuit. It wasn't exactly a surprise considering the FBI badge she showed him. He didn't think it was a coincidence that there was an agent at this door asking for him.

“Yes?”

“Hi,” the agent said, smiling warmly at him. “I'm Gemma. I work with Lucas.”

“Oh, hi.”

“He told me to watch you while he's at the police station,” she said and motioned at the door.

He stepped aside to let her in, asking, “Did he find out who the mole is?”

Gemma nodded, a wistful look in her eyes.

“Is it...” he swallowed hard, the words stuck in his throat. “Is it someone he's close with?”

Gemma turned her head to the side, eyes going vacant for a moment before she looked back at Akio and said, “You could say that.”

“Shit.”

“Yeah, it fucking sucks,” she said with a sigh.

“He’s gonna be so torn up about it,” Akio said, turning to make his way to the living room. He sat down on the couch and leaned forward, elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands.

Gemma sat down on the couch across from him.

“You really care about him, huh?”

A longing sigh passed his lips, and he offered her a slight smile.

“Ah, it’s like that?”

He cocked a brow at her. “He didn’t tell you?”

With a shake of her head, she said, “He just told me to go here and keep you safe with that warrant out on you and, you know, the mole looking for you, too.”

He nodded.

“This thing between you is new, right?”

“Yeah, it is. I mean, we’ve known each other for years.”

Gemma arched a brow at him, her lips quirking up at the corner. “So, you’re his boyfriend and his CI?”

Akio shrugged. “I guess? I haven’t really thought too much about the CI thing. I just told him what I knew.”

The buzzing of his phone had Gemma tensing, and a rush of dread came over him. He could tell that something wasn’t right.

“That’s probably him,” he said, trying to keep the worry out of his voice.

He reached for his phone on the coffee table and just as his fingers wrapped around it, Gemma stood and pulled her gun.

“Nuh-uh,” she said, motioning with the gun for him to put the phone down. “That’s not how this is gonna go.”

He blinked up at her, eyes on her face instead of the gun aimed at him.

“You’re the mole?”

She shrugged. “Call me what you want. The only thing that matters is that you’re coming with me. Kuroki wants to know how Lucas’ CI knows so much about his operation. He’s not happy which means... doesn’t matter. You’re coming with me.”

His heart skipped a beat, and he felt like he couldn’t breathe.

The box with the GPS bracelet was on the coffee table right next to his phone. That hopeful part of him wanted him to believe that Gemma wouldn’t shoot him if he reached for it. The realistic part of him knew better than to put his faith in someone who was betraying everything they had sworn to protect.

“Let’s go,” Gemma said, motioning for him to stand.

He got up on unsteady legs.

He didn’t know exactly where Diesel and Chris were. He knew they’d dropped Maggie off at college because she’d sent him a picture of her holding his birthday gift. They could be on the way back but how far they were? No idea. Ryder had left hours ago and Lucas... he hoped Lucas hadn’t walked into a trap. The thought was

like a cold splash of terror. He felt his throat close up as tears filled his eyes.

“Please don’t do this.”

Something flashed through Gemma’s eyes and for a moment she looked conflicted but then she squared her shoulders and grabbed him by the arm. She turned them around, pulling him along as she headed through the living room. They only made it a few steps before Gemma jerked to a halt and he felt a flash of pain through his arm from the sudden jolt.

Lucas was in the doorway, anger pouring off him worse than when he’d left, but Akio found that he could breathe again.

“Gemma,” Lucas said, gun aimed at her head.

He didn’t know why, but she didn’t drag him in front of her. She didn’t use him as a shield. She just let go of him.

He didn’t think twice. He just ran to Lucas, slamming into his side. An arm wrapped around him, and he took a second to just bury his face in Lucas’ shoulder, breathing in deeply. It was as if a blanket of safety wrapped around him. Safe. Lucas was safe.

“Why?” Lucas asked, his voice filled with anguish.

Gemma shook her head. “Fuck you.”

“Gem, come on. What the fuck is going on?”

“They have my niece, you asshole,” she sneered, anger flashing through her eyes. “They’ve had her for weeks. What the fuck was I supposed to do? They’d kill her the second I said anything to anyone. She means everything to me.”

Lucas breathed out shakily, the sound almost heartbreaking to Akio's ears.

"I understand, but you could've?"

"I could what? Try to make you all suspicious of me? What would that do? Get me suspended? That would only get her killed faster. I tried to make you notice something was wrong. I know I'm good, but no one's that good. Still, not one of you noticed something off. You're all too busy getting ahead in your stupid careers to fucking care."

"That's not true," Lucas said, voice strained.

"Like hell, it isn't. If I'd told any one of you, I know damned well none of you would've risked your careers for me. For her."

"Lucas would have," Akio said and straightened, taking a step toward her. "My real name is Akio Yokota. Kaito Yokota was my father."

"Akio," Lucas hissed and tugged him back against his side.

He looked up at Lucas, staring into those gorgeous green eyes as he said, "What's the difference between her and you? If they had taken me, what would you have done?"

Lucas shook his head, but it was clear from the sorrowful look in his eyes that he'd hit the nail on the head. He knew Lucas would have done whatever he deemed necessary.

Akio turned his gaze back on Gemma who looked close to breaking down, tears in her eyes as her lip quivered. She had to be exhausted. From the lies and secrets. From the fear of losing her niece. From the things she'd had to do.

“Lucas helped my brother’s motorcycle club get my brother back after our father kidnapped him. He... he watched me shoot my father and yet, I’m still here. Not in prison.”

Gemma’s eyes dropped to the ground, and she worked her jaw for a moment before holstering her gun. She met Akio’s gaze and gave him a nod.

“I’ll take any help I can get.”

“We’ll help you, but don’t think that means you get out of this free and clear. Not after what you’ve done. I would never have given them your address,” Lucas said, voice low and cold.

Gemma’s brows creased ever so slightly.

“You didn’t give them Lucas’ address, either, did you?” Akio asked her.

She shook her head.

“Then how...?”

“I’m not the only one they have in their pocket though I suspect whoever else they have is in it for the money,” she said and glanced at Lucas. “Anyone in the Bureau could have gotten your address.”

Akio freed himself from Lucas’ hold again and walked up to Gemma, taking her hands in his. They were cold and shaking just slightly. “We’ll help you get your niece back.”

He felt Lucas behind him and looked up to see Lucas put a hand on Gemma’s shoulder, staring into her eyes as he spoke.

“We’ll get her back.”

That was a promise he knew Lucas would do anything to keep.

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Lucas

HE WATCHED Gemma out of the corner of his eye. He couldn't imagine what she was going through. What she'd been going through. Five weeks they'd had her niece. She got a picture once a week of her niece with the daily newspaper to confirm that she was indeed still alive. It had to be hell.

Gemma was sitting on the couch, staring into the wall, as the others returned sans Maggie who was remaining at college.

Ryder took one look at Gemma and leveled Lucas with a deep glare.

"Is this gonna be a thing?" Ryder drawled. "You bringing in more feds?"

"No one asked you to be here," Lucas snarled back.

Ryder threw his arms wide. "You're in my house."

"Really, guys?" Akio asked, giving them both a disappointed look.

Lucas knew he wasn't the only one who looked sheepish at Akio's chiding, which made him feel slightly better about it.

He drew in a deep breath, then said, "Gemma, this is Chris and Diesel."

Gemma watched them wearily for a moment, then her eyes widened slightly, and she threw a curious glance at Lucas.



“That Chris?” she mouthed.

He pressed his lips together and avoided her eyes.

“I’m Ryder.”

He didn’t offer Gemma a handshake though from the leery look she gave him, she wouldn’t have shaken his hand anyway. Not with that leather cut and one percent patch. Chris and Diesel were smart enough not to have worn theirs.

“Kuroki took Gemma’s niece five weeks ago,” Lucas said.

He felt the change of atmosphere immediately upon speaking those words. Diesel went completely still as if he was holding his breath, his gaze remaining on Akio who was trying not to drown in that guilt that still ate him up. Chris sat down next to Gemma, offering his help without a second thought.

Ryder, though? There was anger in the man’s gaze, and he might’ve thought it was directed at Gemma if he hadn’t noticed Ryder glancing at a picture on the wall. It was of him, a woman in a pink dress, and two kids. Ryder’s sister and his nephews. He recognized them from his dive into Ryder’s background.

“I’ve...” Gemma cleared her throat, avoiding everyone’s eyes. “I’ve had to work for him. He told me to get Lucas’ CI. He was pissed after the raid but even more so when his guys failed to grab Lucas at his apartment.”

Lucas couldn’t help his huff and when Gemma looked up at him, he mumbled, “I don’t think they were there to grab me.”

He held Gemma’s gaze, noting the lack of emotion there. She was reaching the end of her rope, and he knew what someone dissociating looked like. He saw too much of it

at work. Both from his colleagues and from the victims.

“Kuroki is expecting you to bring Akio to him, yes?” Ryder asked Gemma.

Lucas and Diesel were protesting the next second, both knowing exactly where Ryder’s question was leading to. Using Akio as bait.

“Not happening,” he snapped at Ryder while Diesel growled, “Over my dead body.”

Ryder threw his hands up, mumbling, “Just saying.”

“I’m not following,” Akio said, confused gaze moving between the three of them.

“He’s asking because it will give us a way inside,” Chris explained.

“The only thing it will do is get my niece killed. Akio, too,” Gemma said, voice cold and her words blunt.

“We need to find a way to get Gemma’s niece out alive while also shutting the ring down,” Lucas said.

It wouldn’t be easy. Not at all. But they had to try.

Akio

SNEAKING AWAY was easier than he'd thought it would be. Then again, it wasn't him they were all focused on right now. Gemma would have a harder time leaving without them noticing, which was likely why he'd waited for over five minutes by her car.

She'd told him which car was hers and where she'd parked it and to wait for her there. He was on the verge of heading back when she finally appeared, a somber expression on her face. She pulled out her key fob and the lock on the doors clicked.

"Get in."

He didn't hesitate to pull open the passenger side door and slide into the seat, buckling his seatbelt with shaking hands.

"You made the call?" he asked when Gemma was in her seat, too.

Gemma gave a short nod. "I have an address."

Gemma stayed silent on the drive and while he wouldn't know the first thing to talk about, the silence meant that his thoughts got very loud. He nearly asked Gemma to turn around several times, when he thought about how his brother or Lucas would feel knowing what he'd done. The risk he was taking. He knew he was basically screwing them over in the process, but he had to do something, and he knew they would never agree to use him as bait.

He needed to do this because he didn't know how he would ever live with himself if he didn't. He didn't think he would ever be able to let go of that crippling guilt without doing this.

They'd already had Gemma's niece for five weeks and he could do something to get her home, to ensure she was safe.

He knew he wasn't responsible for Kuroki's actions, but he was responsible for his own. He hadn't even thought about telling anyone what he knew of his father's business. He didn't do his part to stop it four years ago, but he could do it now.

His gaze dropped to his right arm. The sleeve of his jacket had rolled back just enough to show the silver bracelet around his wrist. He hadn't brought his phone because he knew it could be traced. He wasn't sure that the bracelet couldn't but from what Chris told him, it would only send a signal when the gemstone button was held for five seconds.

It was his only lifeline.

He swallowed hard though it did nothing to dissolve the lump in his throat. The longer they drove, the thicker that lump got.

He knew there was a chance he didn't make it out of this alive and while he tried not to think too much about it, he found it hard not to. The things he would miss. Every second he could've spent with Lucas, loving him, being loved. His sister at prom. Her graduation. His own. Maggie and Ryder maybe getting their shit together. Diesel losing his shit over the dress Addie would likely wear to prom. Chris joking about him and Lucas. There were so many things he'd miss if he didn't make it. Maybe even his own wedding.

He sucked in a breath and knew Gemma noticed but thankfully she didn't mention it

and kept her eyes on the road.

He dropped his head back against the headrest, eyes closing as he tried to imagine it. He didn't care much about the venue. He cared mostly about the people attending. His family being there to celebrate with them. He knew Lucas would look handsome as hell in a suit, and he would likely find a way to get Akio out of his own before they even walked down the aisle. He loved that. Lucas' lack of restraint when it came to how much he wanted him.

He wasn't sure if that was how it always was or if he'd just gotten extremely lucky. He saw it with his brother and Chris because, god help him, he'd had to put his headphones on or escape out of a room because of those two and their inability to keep their hands off each other a million times.

He wanted that for himself. He wanted it for him and Lucas.

Desperately.

He had so much to live for. He'd once fought for a chance to have that. Now he was fighting for it.

He felt the car stop and then the engine turned off. He opened his eyes and looked at Gemma. Her knuckles were white as she squeezed the hell out of the steering wheel. She turned her head, likely feeling his gaze on her and he caught a sliver of fear in her icy blues before her expression shuddered and she released the steering wheel.

"Let's go," she said and stepped out of the car.

Akio took a second before he unbuckled his seat belt and followed her out onto the street. Gemma headed for the back of the car and opened the trunk. He moved toward her with heavy steps.

“Here,” Gemma said, handing him a Kevlar vest. “Put it under your shirt.”

He took the black vest, grimacing as he held it in front of him.

“Is it necessary?”

Kuroki was much too sadistic to simply shoot him. He would want him to suffer. It would hurt physically. He knew he would never truly be prepared for that but that wasn't what he feared. It was not what he had nightmares about.

A chill ran down his back and if it wasn't for the lives he'd already cost others, he would've tucked tail and run already.

“Humor me,” Gemma said though the look she gave him made it clear she was leaving no room for discussion.

He nodded and held the vest between his legs to pull his jacket and shirt off. He put the vest on and as he fit it on himself, he watched Gemma do the same with hers. She pulled the strips with Velcro tight across her chest, so he copied her.

He was glad he at least had an undershirt on because the vest wasn't exactly soft against the skin. It made his upper body feel completely stiff and his movements were impeded. It forced him to hold his arms a little away from his body.

He grabbed his shirt and pulled it back on. Good thing it was black. Kuroki might not notice the vest under it. At least not from a distance. His jacket would probably help to conceal it, too.

“Let's go,” Gemma said and shut the trunk.

He tried to keep up with her long strides. He was only a little shorter than her, but her

legs were definitely longer, or perhaps it was simply that they were walking in a direction he didn't want to go in.

They were in an industrial area. He could hear a train close by though he couldn't see any tracks. They were likely behind the two-story building Gemma was leading them toward. There were a few trucks and building supplies in the fenced-in yard next to the building and a lot of cars parked along the street. He didn't see any people, though.

When they reached the open gate of that yard, Gemma continued inside, heading toward a side entrance. She stopped in front of the door and took an audible breath. Her hand wrapped around his upper arm, and they shared a quick look before she pushed open the door and stepped inside.

They walked into a large room with several rows of huge, filled shelving units. Halfway down the row Gemma was taking them down was a group of at least seven men. They all had black hair and Asian features, one of them with a scar through his left eyebrow.

Kuroki stood in front of his men, all of them wearing expensive suits as if that would hide the fact that they were some of the most dangerous criminals in the world. His father had been much the same. He had preached about etiquette and image while throwing his son into a cage when he misbehaved which was just his fancy way of saying that Akio had disappointed him by not being his brother.

“Took you long enough.”

Gemma didn't answer, she just pulled Akio to a halt a few feet away from Kuroki and his men.

Kuroki's cold eyes were chilling. He tried to stave off any flashbacks and memories

of his father, but it was hard. Very fucking hard considering the situation they were in.

He was about to go back into that cage. Willingly.

It felt like letting his father win though he would happily surrender himself when it meant that the others had a chance to take down this piece of shit before he hurt anyone else.

His hand went to the bracelet around his wrist. It was a risk to be sure. Kuroki might have it removed later but it was the only thing he could think of to help the others find them. His fingers wrapped around his wrist and when he felt the gemstone under his palm, he pressed down on it. He kept his hand over it, holding firm.

Kuroki tilted his head to the side, a wicked smile on his lips as he ran his gaze over Akio.

“How long has it been, hmm? Four? Five years? Welcome home, Yokota-San.”

Akio knew better than to speak. He glared at Kuroki with all the ire he felt for him.

There he was. The one man responsible for so many ruined lives.

He almost felt bad for him because he knew how Kuroki had been raised. He'd seen the bruises Kuroki's father had left on him when he fucked up, but he also knew he was the stronger of the two. He hadn't given in to his father's sadistic ways. Kuroki had.

“And our deal?” Kuroki asked Gemma when Akio didn't rise to his bait.

“You can have him once my niece is safe,” Gemma said.



Akio tried not to react but there was something in Gemma's voice that made his heart stutter.

"Well, a deal is a deal."

Kuroki motioned to one of his men and a moment later, a beep sounded next to Akio.

Gemma looked at her phone, relief crossing her face for all of a second before she gave Kuroki a short nod. She typed on her phone for a moment, and then she looked up at Akio, meeting his gaze, gratitude in her blue-gray eyes.

He heard a door open and close and then footsteps behind them.

His shoulders shut up, his whole body tensing, and his heart raced at the almost amused look spreading on Kuroki's face.

Kuroki grinned. "And so, the prodigal son returns."

Akio glanced over his shoulder, a fleeting look, to find his brother walking up behind him. His lip was split, and he had a menacing look on his face. He was wearing black clothes, but his leather cut was missing. His gun was visible in his hip holster, but he didn't reach for it as he stopped next to Gemma.

"Daichi," Diesel said, addressing the man by his first name and without an honorific. If his brother wanted to piss Kuroki off, that was certainly the way to do it.

"Rude," Kuroki said with a haunting smile. "Though I should expect nothing less from someone who ran like a coward."

"He was a kid," Akio found himself interjecting.

He felt eyes snap onto him and tried not to move or fidget. He kept his gaze locked on Kuroki, refusing to look away.

“Must be hereditary,” Kuroki mused, gaze turning to Diesel.

There was a slight tick in Diesel’s jaw, but he didn’t speak as the two of them stared at each other. The tension between them was thick and he felt like he could’ve choked on it.

“What do you want?” Diesel asked.

“Well.” Kuroki’s lips turned up at one corner. “Your brother has been fucking me over lately.”

“Has he?”

There was just the slightest tone of amusement in Diesel’s voice and from the way Kuroki’s eyes narrowed, he noticed it, too.

“He’s a fucking snitch,” Kuroki hissed. “He’s probably the one who turned your father into the FBI, too. He needs to pay.”

The man’s evil smile had Akio’s heart skipping a painful beat.

“He’s my brother. I’ll deal with it,” Diesel said, his expression unreadable and his voice cold.

Kuroki’s lips twitched and Akio got the sense that he didn’t believe Diesel. Kuroki didn’t say as much, though.

Akio wrapped his arms around himself. He was shivering and not from the freezing

air.

“I hear you’ve expanded from human trafficking,” Diesel said, eyes shooting toward Gemma. “Extortion. How boring of you.”

Kuroki shook his head. “You have no imagination, brother. I’ve expanded the kingdom. I remain unchallenged. I ensured the right people were in my pocket.”

“All you did was take over what my father had already built,” Diesel said with a sneer. “I should’ve known when I killed him that I’d have to run down his lapdogs, too.”

Kuroki’s brows snapped together and there was surprise on his face for a second. He hadn’t known. Well, how could he? The public thought it had been an FBI raid that killed Kaito Yokota and his men.

“Perhaps you’re not as much of a coward as I thought you to be.”

“Oh, I’m no coward,” Diesel said with a dangerous smile.

Akio

ALL HE could do was hold his breath as he watched Diesel and Kuroki stare at each other. He knew things were about to get ugly. There was no way around that. Kuroki couldn't let Diesel live. Not when he'd practically stolen his heritage. Even though Diesel sure as shit wouldn't want it, letting him live was not an option for Kuroki. It certainly wouldn't have been an option for his father, and Daichi Kuroki had taken it upon himself to become the son Kaito Yokota had always wanted. He was just as ruthless if not more so.

He hoped Diesel had thought of a plan before showing up here. While both Gemma and Diesel were armed, they wouldn't stand a chance against Kuroki and his men. There were too many of them and not enough places to hide in here.

“Unfortunately, coward or not, you're in my way.”

“Is that so?”

“How did you think this would go?” Kuroki asked, smirking at Diesel.

Diesel returned his smile, and Akio felt a shiver rock through him at the malice in Diesel's voice as he spoke.

“Exactly how I want it to.”

As if on cue, a loud sound had Akio jerking and dropping into a crouch.

People were shooting, the sounds, the flashes, he could barely focus. Could barely breathe.

A hand grabbed him by the collar of his jacket and dragged him backward. There was an opening between the rows of shelving units and Diesel shoved him through it, following while he shot his gun toward Kuroki and his men.

He didn't know where Gemma was. Hopefully, she was still alive.

A sob tore through him, and he knew he was close to having a panic attack, his body shaking and his lungs seizing.

"Go," Diesel snapped at him, reaching into his gun belt to switch out his spent magazine.

Akio stood on shaking legs and told himself he could do this. Diesel needed him to do this. To be strong. To survive.

He turned and ran. Away from Diesel. Away from the gunfire.

The part of him that wanted to label him a coward was surprisingly quiet as he ran, his legs pumping fast under him, carrying him further and further away from danger.

When he reached the end of the row, he skidded to a halt, trying to remember which way the door they'd entered through was.

He took two steps forward and then arms wrapped around him from behind. He trashed as he was brought against an unfamiliar chest and felt the cold splash of fear run through him.

"Not so fast," Kuroki snarled, fingers locking over Akio's throat and putting pressure

on his windpipe. He gasped but air didn't come.

"I'm gonna enjoy?"

He slammed his head back and heard a crunch as he broke Kuroki's nose, the man crying out and pushing Akio down. He hit the ground with his knees and hands and felt a sharp jolt of pain in his joints.

He saw the white and yellow flash of a gun firing and whipped around to watch Kuroki stumble, his hand going to his left side, blood pooling under his hand and coloring his white dress shirt a red so deep it was nearly black.

His heart was beating so fast and hard that he had trouble breathing.

He watched as his brother stepped closer, his eyes a black void as he stared at Kuroki, gun still aimed at him.

"Fuck," Kuroki gasped out.

"You should've stayed away from my brother."

Diesel pulled a black wire out of his back pocket and Akio realized he'd been recording everything. Lucas. It had to be from Lucas.

"I'm gonna take my time carving him into pieces," Kuroki spat and followed it with a chilling laugh.

Diesel met Akio's gaze for a heartbreaking moment.

"We're not doing witness protection," Diesel said under his breath, his voice icy.

Akio didn't look away as his brother pulled the trigger, the bullet piercing Kuroki's left eye and sending brain matter splattering on the ground and wall behind him.

While his stomach rolled, he couldn't claim to feel sorry for the bastard.

Bullets pinged off the metal shelves around them and Akio ducked down, hands covering his ears as he cried out.

"Go," Diesel yelled at him, a darkness in his eyes Akio had only seen once before.

Lucas

HE'D BEEN given another week off work after everything that went down with Kuroki and to recover from his barely-existing injury. While it sounded nice in theory, he'd spent most of it worrying about the outcome of Gemma's case and Akio's state of mind. Neither of them had gotten out of that shit show without more scars to the soul but at least it seemed Akio had finally let go of his guilt. Most of it, anyway.

He'd hated the days Akio had gone home with Diesel and Chris, unable to sleep without the man next to him, without hearing his soft breaths and feeling his warmth against him. The apartment was so empty without him and all he'd been able to do was stare at that broken window that still needed replacing. At least Edmunds had made sure the place was free of bodies and blood before they'd returned home.

When he'd opened his door and found Akio on the other side, he hadn't gotten a word out before Akio tackled him and they ended up on the floor, just holding onto each other for a long time. They had cried as much as they had laughed, relieved that it was all over and they got to start their life together for real.

As much time as they had spent in bed, Akio had spent double that on catching up on his missed classes. He had decided yesterday that today was the day he returned to college. He'd only been gone for a few hours when the doorbell rang, which was why Lucas was frowning as he headed down the hallway.

He opened the door and blinked at his coworkers. Mo had a six-pack in each hand and was grinning as he pushed past Lucas to step into the apartment. Evan was



carrying an armful of pizza boxes while Tahir had a grocery bag he suspected was filled with sugary shit. He nearly keeled over when he saw Sanchez standing behind them.

“What are you guys doing here?”

Tahir scrunched up his face and said, “What’s it look like? We’re taking care of you.”

Lucas’ mouth dropped open though no words found him.

Mo placed a hand on Lucas’ shoulder, a soft smile on his lips.

“You’re always making sure everyone’s okay. We figured with Gemma gone, it was up to us to make sure you’re okay. Sorry we’re a little late on that front.”

Just the sound of her name had his stomach squeezing. He wished he could’ve done more. That he could’ve seen what was going on in time to at least save her career.

“You really didn’t have to,” he muttered.

“Hey, we all have our thing,” Mo said with a shrug.

“And this is supposed to be my thing?”

Mo grinned. “Your thing is human contact.”

He blinked at Mo as a lot of things fell into place for him. He’d never really thought about what his thing was. He’d never had a physical thing like Mo’s mugs or Tahir’s socks because his thing was people. It was contact. It had been Gemma’s and his friendship. It was Akio. And now, it seemed, it was becoming the rest of his team as well.

He knew better than to complain.

“Kitchen?” Mo asked, holding up the six packs.

Lucas motioned in the general direction and watched as Tahir and Evan followed Mo. He took a breath before turning to face Sanchez.

He shook the man’s hand and said, “Sir, if you’re here under duress, you don’t have to stay.”

He didn’t expect Sanchez to smile or grasp his hand with both of his.

“I’m not. I wanted to be here for you, Davis.”

A smile tugged at his lips.

“Thank you, Sir.”

“I’m working with the DOJ and OPR to ensure Gemma gets the best outcome possible.”

Words clogged his throat and all he could do was nod. Gemma had impeded investigations and conspired with criminals, and though it had been under duress, that only helped her so far. Sanchez having her back was good, though. Last he’d spoken to Gemma, she’d told him she didn’t care what happened to her because her niece was home and safe.

He knew exactly what she meant. There was nothing he wouldn’t do, no laws he wouldn’t break, to keep Akio safe. He would tear down the world for him. It was why he’d gone into his bank box to retrieve his parents’ wedding bands earlier today. They were simple bands of gold, the smaller one with three in-set diamonds. He

wanted to put that ring on Akio's finger immediately, but he had to go get both rings resized before he got on his knee. He wanted that ring to slide onto Akio's finger with ease.

He hadn't even considered his parents' rings with Chris. He'd bought something new. With Akio, though? Their history was important to them both so he knew how much Akio would appreciate Lucas including him in his.

Noise from the living room startled him and he was surprised when Sanchez reached out to squeeze his shoulder and motioned with a tilt of his head to get him walking.

He led the way to the living room and the absolute carnage they stepped into had him rolling his eyes. He had a feeling that today would be a long day, but he would end up enjoying it despite himself.

*Source Creation Date: July 21, 2025, 11:30 am*

Akio

HE PULLED out the key Lucas had given him just a few days ago and unlocked the front door of his apartment. He was surprised to hear quite a bit of noise as he stepped inside.

“Luc?”

He heard hurried footsteps coming from the living room. He placed his bag on the floor and shrugged out of his jacket. He was hanging it up when Lucas appeared at the other end of the hallway.

“Hi, what’s?”

He had his face pressed against Lucas’ chest before he could finish his sentence. He huffed out a breath and rubbed his hands over Lucas’ back.

Lucas moved back with a deep sigh.

“I needed that,” Lucas said, smiling softly at Akio.

Akio put his hands up and said, “I wasn’t complaining.”

“I know,” Lucas said and stole a quick kiss before taking Akio’s hand, lips pressed together as if to stop a smile. “They’re here. My team.”

“Oh?”

Lucas' eyes gleamed as he said, "They came to show their support."

"That's very nice of them."

"Let's see how nice you think they are after you see what they've done to our apartment," Lucas said with a chuckle.

His heart fluttered at that word; our. He didn't think Lucas had meant it as such though he did have a key burning a hole in his jacket pocket.

Lucas reached for him, fingers hooking into the belt loops on his jeans.

"Guess I'm not the only one that frowns when I'm stressed out," Lucas said, leaning down to run his nose along Akio's, their mouths so close they shared a breath.

"I'm not stressed out," Akio said, the high tone of his voice betraying him.

"You certainly don't need to be," Lucas said, leaning back to smile at Akio who glared when he didn't get the kiss he thought he would.

"You better kiss me," he said, eyes narrowing. "Like you mean it."

Lucas' laughter was impossible to resist, and he was smiling when the man did kiss him. Arms wrapped around him, tugging him against Lucas' bigger body. The lips on his were heavenly, Lucas' stubble rubbing lightly against his skin and causing a delicious shiver to run through him.

Lucas pulled back and when Akio opened his eyes, he found the man smiling softly at him.

"Approved?" Lucas asked.

“For now.”

The man’s hearty chuckle filled him with warmth.

Lucas motioned for him to go ahead of him, and Akio walked to the living room with sweaty hands and a racing heart.

He’d never been in a room full of FBI agents before but somehow he’d expected it to be more intimidating. The two men on Lucas’ couch who were fighting over a PlayStation controller, and the guy lounging on a few pillows on the floor while throwing peanuts at them while he narrated their fight in a deep voice, was not it.

“Unfortunately, this is their way of showing support,” Lucas said, stepping up behind Akio, arm wrapping around his middle to tug him back against his body. He looked over his shoulder, grinning when lips found his.

“Does their ‘support’ include paying the cleaning bill?”

There were pizza boxes and empty beer bottles everywhere. It looked like a greasy hurricane had blown through the living room.

“Doubtful,” Lucas said and squeezed Akio once before releasing him.

Despite the man being practically right up against him, he still missed that contact immediately.

He’d had his first day back at college and the familiarity and structure had been good for him. He still didn’t know what he was going to do after graduation in a few months but one glance at Lucas and he knew it wouldn’t matter as much as where he’d be. Who he’d be with.

“Guys?” Lucas called out, getting everyone’s attention. “This is Akio. My boyfriend.”

While they’d met in passing when they’d all shown up to save his sorry ass from Kuroki, he hadn’t been introduced to them yet.

“The man. The myth. The legend,” a dark-haired man said as he stood from the couch. He crossed the room to shake Akio’s hand.

“I don’t know about that,” Akio mumbled, heat finding his cheeks.

“Without you, that fucker would still be out there exploiting girls.”

“This is Evan,” Lucas said with a clap to the man’s shoulder. “He’ll talk you to death about how amazing his wife is.”

Evan raised his hands, a fond smile finding his lips as he said, “But she is.”

“She has to be. She chose to be with you,” Lucas teased, knocking his shoulder against Evan’s.

“Yeah, yeah,” Evan said with an eye-roll.

A soft curse had Akio looking toward the man on the floor. He was getting up and as he walked toward them, all he could think about was how tight the guy’s shirt looked on his muscular form.

“This is Mo, short for Moses,” Lucas said with a twinkle in his eye.

Mo grabbed Akio’s hand in his big one and shook it much more gently than he’d expected from the sheer size of it.

“Last name, not first,” Mo said.

Akio blinked at him, unable to take in anything he said.

“You’re huge,” he blurted out and immediately regretted it, heat rising to his cheeks as he slapped a hand over his mouth as if that would stop him from saying something worse.

Mo laughed, one of those belly-aching laughs that had him holding his stomach.

“He’s not that big,” Lucas muttered.

The third man who looked like he was of Middle Eastern descent, his brown eyes bright as he walked up behind Lucas and Mo, putting an arm around their shoulders as he stepped between them.

“It’s not the size that matters. It’s what you do with it,” he said and winked at Akio who only blushed harder. “Just ask Evan’s wife.”

Evan flipped him off. “Fucker.”

Lucas sighed, a smile on his face as he shook his head. “And this is Tahir.”

Tahir grinned at Akio and said, “Nice to finally meet you.”

“You, too.”

“So, I assume we’ll be swapping stories,” Tahir said, yelping when Lucas shoved him into Mo.

“Not happening,” Lucas said and crossed his arms.



Tahir and Mo shared a look and then Mo said, “I hold him, you get the dirt?”

“Deal.”

Akio was chuckling as he watched Lucas try to keep Mo from grabbing him.

“Don’t make me shoot you,” Lucas warned, slapping Mo’s hands away.

“With what? Your invisible gun?” Tahir teased.

Mo got his arms around Lucas and made him curse as he elbowed the man in the gut to no avail.

“Alright, leave the poor guy alone,” someone said from the doorway.

Mo released Lucas and gave him a two-finger salute before heading back to his spot on the floor. Tahir grumbled under his breath as Evan dragged him back to the couch.

Akio turned to see an older man with graying hair and stubble walking toward them. He was wearing a dark suit, the top buttons of his dress shirt undone, no tie in sight. He had a feeling he knew who was responsible for him needing to take it off.

“Akio, this is my boss. Supervisory Special Agent Miguel Sanchez.”

“Hi,” he said shyly.

“It’s good to meet you, son. Thank you for what you did for Gemma and her niece. It was very brave of you,” Sanchez said, the gentle look in his eyes telling Akio that he meant it.

“It was the least I could do,” he mumbled.

Lucas' snort had him jerking his gaze onto the man who was watching him with raised brows while Sanchez chuckled.

"I hope you give this one as many gray hairs as he's given me," Sanchez said with a slap to Lucas' shoulder.

Before Akio could speak, Lucas said, "I think he's already given me a few."

"I promise to never hand myself over to a Yakuza boss who wants me dead?"

It was Sanchez who laughed first and when Lucas' face split in a wide grin, Akio let a laugh loose as well.

He liked seeing how comfortable and easygoing Lucas was around his team. How protective they seemed of each other despite their teasing. He knew it would make it just a bit easier for him to watch Lucas leave for work each day.

Mo emptied the contents of a grocery bag onto the coffee table and picked up a few things, brow arched in a question as he looked their way.

"Is that chocolate?"

He was off before anyone could answer and gave a happy wiggle of his fingers as Mo handed him the chocolate bar.

He looked over his shoulder, unsurprised to find Lucas watching him with that look of utter devotion and love that he knew he would never want to be without.

Akio

HE DIDN'T think he would ever find anything better than Lucas pressed against him, the man's insistent lips on his, hands traveling up his naked body. The man was everything he could ever want or need. The four months they'd had together so far had been the best of his life.

"We're gonna be late."

"I don't mind being late," Lucas purred.

He huffed out a short-lived laugh that quickly turned into a moan when lips found the side of his neck.

"I think everyone else will mind," he said between groans.

Lucas pulled back, a wicked gleam in his eyes as he said, "Guess we'll better hurry, then."

"Fuck," Akio breathed.

Lucas had taken one look at him as he exited the bathroom after his shower, only a towel slung around his hips, and then he'd been pressed against the wall, hands on the backs of his thighs lifting him up until he could wrap his legs around Lucas' waist. The towel had hit the floor and Lucas' appreciative groan had set his body on fire, desire flooding his whole system in seconds.

It was his own fault for staying the night at their apartment instead of in his dorm room. He should've known better. Keeping their hands off each other was never an option.

Lucas pulled him away from the wall and Akio put his lips to good use while he was carried into their bedroom. He loved the feel of Lucas' short beard against his lips as he kissed his way up the man's jaw. Loved the sounds Lucas made.

Lucas crawled onto the bed and put Akio down on the mattress. They hadn't made the bed yet, the blankets thrown on one side of the bed and their pillows in disarray above his head. They were about to make it even messier, and he knew he'd love every second of it.

Lips brushed his collarbone, soft and gentle. He didn't want that. He wanted Lucas to fuck him so thoroughly he couldn't walk straight.

He groaned and thrust up against Lucas, seeking that much-needed friction against the man's abs. He felt Lucas smile against his skin before he put a hand on his hip to keep him from moving again.

Akio dropped his head back with a frustrated sigh, eyes rolling into the back of his head when Lucas continued kissing his way down his chest, finding sensitive spots with his lips that had his cock leaking.

"Please," he gasped out, grasping at the sheets when Lucas kissed his inner thigh and made him tremble. "Luc."

Lucas pulled back, grinning down at Akio before he reached for the bottle of lube still on the bedside table from last night.

Slick fingers slid between his cheeks, finding his hole and spreading him wide. He

pushed back on them with a groan.

“That’s it, sweetheart,” Lucas purred, his voice dripping sex.

He was aching hard, lust burning inside him because of that gorgeous man between his legs. He could never get enough of him. Never.

Lips wrapped around his cock and Lucas took him to the back of his throat, the tight, wet heat exquisite. His mouth dropped open on a loud moan as Lucas sucked his cock while his fingers found that spot inside him and put pressure on it.

He cried out, the dual sensations too much. He wanted to come with Lucas’ cock inside him, not his fingers.

“Fuck me,” he gasped out. “Need you to fuck me.”

Lucas pulled back, mouth and fingers disappearing. He grabbed the lube and covered his cock, watching Akio the whole time he stroked himself. That dark look in his eyes, so hazy with lust, did indescribable things to him.

Lucas held his cock against Akio’s hole, watching his face as he guided the head slowly in. Too slow.

He grabbed Lucas’ ass cheeks and pulled hard, making the man sink inside him in a swift slide and filling him so fucking good.

“Fuck,” Lucas gasped, and Akio moaned in response.

Akio let his hands roam up Lucas’ back, digging his fingers into hard muscles when Lucas pulled back and thrust forward, burying his cock deep inside him.

Neither of them moved for a moment, staring into each other's eyes while Lucas was as deep inside him as he would ever be. If he could, he would've had the man crawl right into his soul. This man owned him. Every part of him. His body, soul, and heart. He loved him with everything he had, and he knew Lucas loved him just as much. He showed him every day.

Lucas thrust against him with short and slow movements, his lip between his teeth and his gaze on his cock sliding in and out of Akio's ass.

Akio wrapped a hand around his cock and stroked himself, feet locking behind Lucas' back when the man started to fuck him in earnest, his hips slamming against his ass.

Lucas' hand found his, fingers slipping between his, the cold metal of the engagement ring on his finger stark between them as Lucas pressed their hands against the mattress.

Lucas' lips and teeth were on his neck, and Akio buried his other hand in that dark mop of hair as his fiancé slammed into him with hard thrusts that had him panting and cursing.

He threw his head back with a groan, that desperate need building fast inside him. He wanted it to last forever almost as much as he wanted to feel that pleasure only Lucas knew how to give him.

He moaned Lucas' name as his orgasm crashed into him and all he could do was hold on as Lucas fucked him through it. The intense pleasure had him gasping for air, hands grasping at Lucas' back.

Lucas caught his lips in a searing kiss, groaning into Akio's mouth as he came, his hips jerking before stilling against him.

He clung to Lucas, pulling him as close as physically possible.

“We’re definitely gonna be late,” he said, his voice low as he tried to catch his breath.

Lucas buried his face in Akio’s neck, his breath warm against his skin as he chuckled.

???

He smoothed down his gown for the umpteenth time, the three diamonds on his ring finger catching on the light. He couldn’t help but smile.

The proposal had been sweet and intimate. He’d said yes before Lucas could even get a word out after kneeling in front of him. Lucas’ carefree laughter had sent his heart into a frenzy, the love he felt for him only growing with each day they spent together.

It was only when that ring had slid onto his finger—a perfect fit—that the tears had come. Tears of happiness. Tears of disbelief.

Just a few months ago, he’d thought he might not get to marry Lucas. That he might not survive. And now? The happiness radiating inside him took him by surprise some days. He hadn’t dared hope he would get this. Love. The man of his dreams.

He was wringing his hands as he waited for his name to be called. To go and receive his diploma case. They’d barely made it in time, the knowing looks from their friends and family making him blush even harder than he already was.

“Akio Sato-Walsh.”

He couldn’t help his smile because he knew that soon there would be a Davis at the end of his name. He couldn’t fucking wait.

He walked onto the stage and shook a few hands and with his diploma case finally in hand, he headed back to his row of seats, a proud smile on his face.

Maggie was jumping in her seat when he reached her, and he laughed at her squeal as she threw her arms around him.

“We did it,” she gushed. “We’re fucking done.”

“We’re just getting started.”

With life. Their lives were just starting.

Maggie laughed and hugged him tighter.

Once the commencement was officially over, he went in search of his family. He knew where they were, but his heart still jumped happily when he saw them standing by a row of seats, waiting for him.

Lucas opened his arms, and Akio was crashing into him a second later, hanging on tight to the man he loved so deeply it felt as if his world was only right when he was with him.

“I’m so proud of you,” Lucas said, face buried in Akio’s hair.

The fact that he knew without a shred of doubt that Lucas meant it sent his heart soaring. When Lucas called him brave and strong, he believed him.

“I love you,” he breathed.

Lucas chuckled and pulled back, his eyes gleaming. “I love you, too.”



A second later he was inhaling blonde hair and stumbling back a step when his sister jumped into his arms. He laughed and held her tight.

He felt arms wrap around both of them and soon he found his whole family in a group hug with him and Addie in the middle. He closed his eyes, taking in the moment. Taking in the happiness and peace he felt, the guilt that had haunted him for so long barely there anymore.

Even his nightmares had become less intense over the past few months. Or, perhaps, it was simply that Lucas was there to hold him through every one of them.

Lucas was everything he'd ever wanted and so much more. Was everything always perfect? No. Did the good times outweigh the bad ones? Absolutely. Every single time.

They might have only been together for a couple of months, but he'd loved the man for four years. To outsiders it might look like they were moving fast but, in truth, he felt like he'd waited forever for Lucas.

He looked at his ring, a smile gracing his lips, and then he looked up at Lucas.

He was done waiting. Their forever was now.

Akio

“I CAN’T believe you,” Maggie said by way of greeting as she stormed into the room. Her blue dress billowed around her as she sat down on the futon between Akio and Addie with a huff, her gaze deadly as she pouted.

“What?” he asked, grinning because he already knew the answer.

“Why would you invite him ?”

“Am I not allowed to invite my friends to my wedding?”

She gave him a cross look. “No, because your best friend doesn’t want him here.”

“He misses you.”

“That’s on him.”

He shook his head, a smile spreading on his lips.

“Ryder stays.”

Maggie groaned and mimicked getting stabbed in the heart.

He only laughed.

“Me thinks the lady doth protest too much,” Addie said as she wagged her brows at

Maggie.

Maggie flipped her off much to Addie's amusement. Akio slapped Maggie's hand down with a shake of his head. Maggie simply used her other hand instead.

His disappointed groan only made them laugh.

They had spent the morning getting ready together. Their hair was done, and they were dressed to impress. Maggie and Addie had chosen their bridesmaid dresses themselves. He'd once promised his sister she could wear whatever dress she wanted at his wedding, and she had indeed chosen a blue dress like she'd said she would. It was a gorgeous dusty blue with a very elegant silhouette. As was Maggie's. Both had a slit high enough to make Diesel say a prayer.

The door opened and Chris poked his head inside, an excited look on his face.

"Are we good to go?"

"Yes," Addie yelled and ran toward Chris who caught her with a chuckle. "Let's go. Come on."

She was jumping in place, her excitement making them all laugh despite her hurrying on them.

Akio stood and took a deep breath. He couldn't believe it was actually happening. He was about to walk down that aisle and say I do. He was about to marry the man he loved.

He felt a hand on his arm and glanced at Maggie.

"You ready?" she asked.

A smile spread on his lips, and he looked at his best friend feeling like the luckiest guy in the world for having so many people who loved him and wanted to spend this momentous day at his side.

“I’ve never been more ready for anything in my life.”

Maggie chuckled and tugged him toward the door.

They walked out into the hallway where Diesel was waiting for them, nervously pacing back and forth until he saw them.

Maggie planted a kiss on Akio’s cheek and stepped aside for Diesel to walk up and hug him tight. He held on, surprised by just how much it meant to him that his brother was there.

All he could do was smile as Diesel fussed over him, straightening his tie and brushing dust that definitely wasn’t there off his shoulders.

He grabbed Diesel’s hands and when his brother met his gaze, he said, “Thank you. For loving me. For giving me such a wonderful life and family.”

Tears welled in Diesel’s eyes and his tough-as-nails brother did nothing to hide it.

“I love you,” Diesel said and squeezed Akio’s hands. “Let’s go get you married, shall we?”

Akio huffed out a low laugh and shook his head at his brother.

“Gladly.”

Diesel held out his arm and Akio took it, turning to look for Chris so the man could take his other arm. Chris was pushing Addie to the front and ensured she remembered

her bouquet before he made his way to Diesel and Akio's side.

The music began and his heart jumped, excitement thrumming in his veins.

The girls walked first and then it was his turn, the two men who'd changed his life and taken him in without hesitation on either side of him.

The white chairs filled with people he knew and loved were the first thing he saw, the next was the man standing at the end of the aisle waiting for him. The man who saw all of him. The one who loved him for who he was and not in spite of it.

He was looking fantastic in his dark suit, the tie matching his green eyes perfectly. Mo, Tahir, and Evan were standing by Lucas' side, his groomsmen looking excited with their matching grins.

He knew he was blushing from the look Lucas gave him, but he couldn't care less.

Once he stood in front of Lucas and held his hands, looking into eyes filled with nothing but love, he knew this was just the beginning and he was so ready to spend his life with Lucas at his side.