



# Joey's Trick

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**Category:** LGBT+

**Description:** Hateful words and eight years separated Joey from his family, but a shocking discovery changes everything.

After avoiding his hometown for years, Joey Waters reluctantly returns for his parents' anniversary. Within moments of his arrival, he's confronted with the ghost of his past: Patrick "Trick" Harrison, the man who'd shattered his heart with just a few cruel words. Joey believed he'd left those painful years behind, but seeing Trick again ignites a whirlwind of emotions he thought he'd buried.

As old wounds break open, Joey is determined to ignore the man who'd caused him so much pain and sent him on a downward spiral in his college years. However, a staggering revelation about Trick forces Joey to reconsider everything he thought he knew. Can the two men overcome their troubled history, or will the scars of the past keep them apart forever?

**Total Pages (Source):** 9

The more miles which grew between his new life and the old one the more anxious Joey became. When he'd gone off to the University of Central Florida in Orlando after high school, he'd sworn he'd never go back, no matter what. His mother had tried everything to get him to come home for summer vacation, Thanksgiving, even Christmas, but Joey refused every time claiming he needed to study or to work. It wasn't a long drive to Fort Lauderdale, but sometimes he felt like the two hundred and fifty miles still wasn't enough to separate him from the entire reason he'd chosen to leave and never go back.

He tightened his grip on the steering wheel in agitation. He'd rather have bamboo shoots shoved underneath his fingernails than go home. The idea of facing Patrick 'Trick' Harrison, high school all-star quarterback and all-around asshole, caused his stomach to clench and sweat to build over his body in anxiety. Joey had known Trick his entire life. His older brother Anthony had been best friends with Trick since Joey was in diapers.

Joey could still remember the day his world shifted, and he'd gone from being a starry-eyed teenager to being a tarnished, bitter young adult. The memory had never left him and he carried it with him always, using it as fuel to push himself, to give no one else the power to hurt him. That fire was why he'd gotten a promotion so quickly after being hired as an intern straight out of college at a sports agency where he already had more than one client under his belt, including the Heisman Trophy winner Wesley Prince. His bosses had been ecstatic at his landing a big win like Prince. What they didn't know was Prince's proclivities in the bedroom. The reason Joey landed the contract with Prince had nothing to do with the deal he'd negotiated

with the Dallas Cowboys, and more to do with the fact that Prince liked the size of Joey's cock and that he knew how to use it.

A road sign appeared up ahead stating Fort Lauderdale was only a mere twenty miles away and Joey scowled, his heart thumping hard in his ribcage. He hated what he felt right then and how he could still feel it after all these years. It didn't matter that he worked out two hours a day to maintain a flawlessly sculpted body, or how he kept his dirty blond hair styled deliberately unkempt so it fell into his dark green eyes precisely, or how he'd perfected his smile which could charm his way into any man's pants. None of it mattered when it came down to how Trick made him feel inside. Like he was still the same nerdy, slightly chubby dork who'd followed him and Anthony around with hero worship in his eyes.

Joey had known from the time he'd turned thirteen he wasn't interested in girls. He'd had eyes for no one but Trick. He'd noticed the way Trick's body filled out, the way his muscles flexed when Trick and Anthony played football in the backyard, the way he smiled and the dimple that popped out whenever he did. Joey had seen the way he'd shot up an entire foot over the summer just before Anthony and Trick started high school. It wasn't until Joey followed them into high school though, a year behind them, that Joey realized Trick would never see him the way he wanted him to.

He'd maintained a fantasy in his head of Trick coming out as gay and sweeping Joey off his feet, the two of them being a couple at Trick's senior prom, the entire package. But then Joey started seeing Trick walking down the hallways of their high school with a new pretty girl on his arm almost every week. The knowledge Trick liked girls cracked Joey's fantasy wide open, but it wasn't until much later when he truly broke Joey's heart.

Shaking his head, Joey refused to acknowledge the memories. He would get through the next week if it killed him and go back to his life. He had a good life and he sure as hell wouldn't let Trick- fucking -Harrison ruin it. With resolve straightening his

spine, Joey took his exit into Fort Lauderdale and made his way toward his childhood home, refusing to give into the insecurities he'd buried so long ago. Trick didn't deserve to have any kind of power over him.

Not much had changed in the time he'd been gone. Some neighborhoods looked more run down, whereas others had been built up, but Fort Lauderdale itself had the same familiar feel and Joey navigated the streets with ease. He didn't even realize until he pulled into the packed driveway how hard he had his jaw clenched as he worked to loosen it by taking a deep breath, holding it for a couple of seconds, and letting it out. He stared at the house he'd called home for eighteen years. It was a single-story contemporary style house painted light green with white trim.

His mom loved flowers and several varieties trimmed the driveway and sidewalks, but Joey couldn't have named them for the life of him. An American flag drifted lazily in the breeze near the front door and he could see his parents had added some kind of covered two-person swing to the porch.

The entire scene transported him back to when his parents used to have huge barbecues in the summer and all the kids would play with the hose out back while the adults would sit around the picnic tables laughing and drinking beer. He'd still been enamored with Trick back then and, to his consternation, his heart ached in his chest for the much simpler time it had been. Joey mentally slapped himself for even thinking of Trick.

"Joey!" a female voice cried out.

He winced and forced a smile onto his lips before climbing out of the car. His t-shirt immediately clung to him from the humidity after being in the air-conditioned interior of his recently bought moonstone metallic BMW Alpina B7. He hadn't even received the new plates yet. "Hey, Aunt Susan."

“Come here and give me a hug, you sight for sore eyes!” she screamed from the front porch.

Joey stuffed his keys in his jeans pocket and wove his way between the other cars to where she stood, engulfing her slender five-foot-four frame against his six-foot-two muscular one. She hugged him as tight as she could before stepping back. “Look at you! My goodness, Joseph Waters! You’ve certainly grown into a fine man. You put on some muscles there. Of course, your mother showed us the pictures, but seeing it in person! I bet you’re beating the men off with a stick.”

His entire family knew he was gay since he’d come out to his parents and brother when he was sixteen. It had been one of the most terrifying moments of his life. He’d considered waiting after reading about some of the horror stories of others and how they’d been disowned by their families, thrown out of their homes, or worse, and feared the same treatment. But he knew his family loved him, and he’d held out faith his parents would still love him afterward. Thankfully, his faith hadn’t been misplaced, and they’d accepted it without blinking an eye. In fact, they’d told him they’d already known, shocking the hell out of him.

Joey blushed. “Thanks, Aunt Susan.”

She smiled at him. “So, how’s that job of yours? Your mother said you’re doing well at it.”

“It’s going great actually. I’m full time and even already have my own client list.”

“That’s wonderful, sweetie. You really shouldn’t have waited so long to come home for a visit though. If you weren’t so big now, I’d bend you over my knee,” she threatened.

Joey laughed and fidgeted. “Yeah, just had a lot going on. I needed to get settled in

my job and all.”

“Well, you better visit more often,” Aunt Susan said. “Your mother has missed you so much.”

Guilt stabbed Joey straight in the gut. “I’ll try, Aunt Susan.”

“Go on, get inside and say hello to your mom. She’s with your brother in the kitchen.”

“Thanks.” Joey kissed her on the cheek and headed into the house. He was stopped several times on the way. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives, all happy to see him after so long, all exclaiming over how much he’d changed, and every one of them giving him a trip down shame lane for not coming home sooner. By the time he made it into the kitchen, he felt thoroughly wrung out.

His mom stood at the stove, her back to the door, hair disheveled as per her usual appearance when cooking for a large group of people. Anthony leaned against the counter nearby, a beer bottle in one hand and an arm thrown over the shoulders of a blonde woman. Recognition and delight flashed across the face so similar to Joey’s own. “Joey!” Anthony cried before releasing the woman to rush across the room to crush Joey in a bear hug.

Anthony was only an inch taller than Joey, but there the differences halted. They had the same dirty blond hair, dark green eyes, and now, muscular builds. Anthony had apparently kept up his workouts despite no longer being on the college football team.

“Hey, bro,” Joey greeted quietly. It disturbed him how quickly he’d noticed the lack of Trick in the house.

His mother had turned away from the stove, her hands on her hips, elbows out.

“Joseph Richard Waters!”

Joey grimaced as Anthony stepped back out of the line of fire at the tone in their mother’s voice. “Hey, Mom.”

“Don’t you ‘Hey, Mom’ me, young man! Seven years! Seven years!” There’d been multiple times where she’d threatened to drive up there with his father over the years when he hadn’t come home, but he’d talked her out of it. He’d used school and then work obligations to convince her, usually throwing in a casual offer of attempting to come home at a later date. Only he never did.

Flinching, Joey tried to turn on the grin he knew killed in the contract negotiations, but his mother seemed immune to it as she stalked toward him. Her hand flew out, and she smacked him on his right bicep. He winced. “Mooooom!” he whined and then kissed her cheek and hugged her tightly.

“You may be taller and outweigh me, Joseph Waters, but I can still put you over my knee. I brought you into this world and I can take you out!” She returned his hug and then stepped back and narrowed her eyes at him as she studied him, looking for evidence he wasn’t taking care of himself. Her mouth flattened into a thin line when she saw the tattoo sticking out of the edge of his T-shirt. “And you got a tattoo!”

“Aw crap,” Anthony muttered nearby.

Joey glared at his brother and then tried to give his mom a sheepish grin. “I was drunk?” he said, lying through his teeth. He hadn’t really been drinking, but he knew how his mother felt about tattoos and didn’t want to tell the truth about why he’d gotten it or the others that weren’t visible.

“As if that makes it better! What those people up there must think about how you were raised!” she squawked as she shoved the sleeve of the shirt up to get a better

look at the tattoo.

Thick lines of black ink swirled around his bicep up along his shoulder and higher still. She didn't have to be an expert at tattoos to know it took more than a couple of hours to complete. Her mouth flattened into a thin line as she glared at him and she let his sleeve drop over the tattoo. Joey didn't plan on letting her know about the others he had on his chest, calves, and on the back of his shoulders, the most important one. He'd gotten it the day he'd realized he had to let go of his past or it would swallow him whole.

"I'm sorry, Mom. Things are different in Orlando. Besides, it's pretty cool, isn't it?"

His mother reached up and cuffed him on the back of the head. "No, it's not pretty cool. I didn't raise a hoodlum."

"Tattoos don't make you a hoodlum, Mom!" Joey protested while he heard Anthony choking back laughter nearby. He tossed a glare at Anthony, whose face was bright red from suppressed chuckles while hanging onto the blonde woman, who looked amused at the exchange. Joey fought the urge to duck his head and hide like he would have as a teenager and held his head higher. He had nothing to be ashamed of, and he didn't intend to let his family destroy the confidence he'd built over the last seven years. No fucking way.

"I can't wait to hear what your father has to say about them."

Joey sighed. His father wouldn't care, he felt sure. The man hadn't so much as batted an eye when Joey announced he was gay or when he didn't want to try out for the football team in high school like Anthony had. "Speaking of, where is Pop?"

"Don't think you're getting out of it that easily," she snapped. "But your father is out back with Bob setting up the grill."



“Trick’s out helping them,” Anthony added.

Joey stiffened. So Trick was there. He’d been hoping Trick wasn’t around. Too much to ask, he supposed. Taking a deep breath, he prayed didn’t appear visible to the others, Joey pasted one of his infamous fake smiles on and winked at Anthony. “Why don’t you introduce me to your friend here and then I’ll head out back to say hi to Pop?”

“Shit, of course. Sorry, baby. This is my little brother, Joey. Joey, this is my girlfriend, Veronica.”

“It’s nice to meet you.” Veronica held out her hand and Joey accepted it. She was Anthony’s usual type; petite, slender, with large breasts, long blonde hair, and big green eyes. Although he noticed one thing, there was intelligence in this one. He could see it in her eyes. She smiled at him and Joey’s grin widened, becoming sincere.

“It’s nice to meet you too, Veronica. How long have you two been together?”

“Six months,” she replied. “He’s told me a lot about you.”

“I deny every bit,” Joey deadpanned.

She laughed. “Somehow, I don’t doubt some of it’s true. I don’t want to keep you as I’m sure you’re eager to say hi to your dad, but I hope we have time to talk again while you’re here.”

“I’m sure we will. Make sure you keep this one on his toes, yeah?” Joey slapped Anthony on the stomach lightly with the back of his hand.

Anthony grunted. “She already does.”

Veronica smirked. “He has no idea what he got himself into.”

“I bet,” Joey said. “All right, going to head outside to say hi to the rest of the family and Pop. Is my old room open or did you convert it into a storage room or something, Mom?”

His mother turned away from where she’d resumed watching over whatever she was cooking to answer. “It’s still your old room. I didn’t change anything, except for the bed. Trick was staying here for a while and your old twin was too small.”

Startled, Joey’s brows went up in shock. What the hell? “What?”

Anthony shuffled in discomfort while their mom shook her head. “Long story for another time, sweetie. Go say hi to your father. I’m sure he’ll be happy to see you.”

Why the hell had Trick been staying in his room? Joey tried to think of a reason as he stepped out onto the deck overlooking the large backyard, barbecue smoke immediately assaulting his nose and making his stomach growl. He’d been too nervous to eat before leaving Orlando and he suddenly found himself ravenous at the smell of cooking hamburgers. Several tables had been set up and lined with chairs currently occupied by even more family members who waved at him from where they were seated. Joey returned the waves, smiling at several of the kids running around. He felt almost out of sync with his family now, since he’d been away for so long.

“Is that Joey?” a voice boomed near the grill and Joey winced, but hid it quickly.

“Hey, Uncle Bob,” Joey greeted, moving forward to accept the backslapping hug. He embraced his father next. “Hi, Pop.”

His father looked like he’d aged more than the seven years Joey had been away and Joey experienced the same stab of guilt from before. Joey no longer had to raise his

head to meet his father's gaze. They were exactly the same height now and were pretty close to the spitting image of one another. Only his father's hair had gone completely gray and Joey could see lines around his dad's eyes and mouth which hadn't been there the last time he'd seen him.

"You're looking well, Joseph."

Another difference between the world and his father, everyone called him Joey except his dad. Joey smiled softly at the familiar baritone of his full name. "Thanks, Pop. So are you."

"Don't need to lie to your old man." His dad scoffed and turned back to the grill.

Joey chuckled. "You're not an old man, Pop."

"Make him show you his tattoo, Walter." Joey heard his mom call from the kitchen window and Joey groaned, covering his face with a hand for a second.

His dad raised a brow at Joey, spatula poised over a burger. "Brave man."

Joey almost laughed, but it died in his throat when he heard the familiar smooth tenor of the one voice he'd never forgotten, no matter how hard he'd tried. "Hey, Joey."

Stiffening, Joey swallowed several times and then kept his face blank as he looked at the man who'd shattered him with a few careless words. "Trick."

Trick still took Joey's breath away. The years had been generous to Trick and had only made him more handsome. Dark brown hair, as sinful as chocolate melted over heated skin, drifted lazily in the soft breeze blowing through the backyard, making Joey itch to reach out and brush it away from Trick's sculpted cheekbone. Sapphire blue eyes studied Joey like they could see right through to the heart of who he was

and it took every ounce of strength Joey had to not fidget under the watchful gaze. Joey took in the way the white t-shirt Trick wore clung in just the right ways to the carved muscles of Trick's upper body and how the tight blue jeans, ripped in several places to show tantalizing glimpses of tanned thighs, hugged every inch of Trick's long legs, straight down to the dark brown hiking boots he wore. Joey wanted to rail at just how good the years had been to Trick. He wanted to shove Trick off the deck and beat the ever-living hell out of him for what he'd put him through. He wanted to throw Trick down onto the ground and latch onto those gorgeous full lips of his and drink from them until they both couldn't breathe. Fuck, his cock was getting hard just thinking about Trick's thick muscular body pinned beneath his, their stiff pricks grinding against one another.

Scowling, Joey spun away from Trick and strode over to a cooler nearby where he opened it to grab a beer. He needed a second to cool off and to get his head on straight. What the fuck was wrong with him? How could Trick still affect him after all this time?

"You look good, Joey," Trick said, having followed him to the cooler.

Joey grunted, wrenched the top off the beer and swigged down several mouthfuls. He didn't respond. He noticed Trick's frown.

"Something wrong?" Trick asked.

A bitter laugh welled up in Joey's throat and he glared at Trick. He knew Trick didn't know he'd overheard what Trick had said that day, but for Trick to act like they were best friends when Joey knew what Trick thought of him was too much. He couldn't stop the words from exploding from his lips even if he'd wanted, and he was thankful none of his family were within earshot. "Fuck you, Trick."

Joey set his beer down on the nearby railing and stomped off, satisfaction roaring

through him at Trick's astonished expression. He made it through the house and out to his car before Trick caught up to him. The trunk popping sounded loud in the silence after the raucous conversations and ear rattling music inside the house. Joey gripped the handle of his duffle bag and the small suitcase he'd brought with him for the week and yanked them out of the trunk. He set the suitcase down on the ground and slung the duffle bag over his shoulder. Trick stood to his left when Joey slammed the trunk closed.

"What was that about, Joey?" Trick demanded, anger and bewilderment clear on his handsome features.

Instead of answering Trick, Joey picked up the suitcase and brushed past Trick. Except Trick didn't seem to want to let go of the subject because he grabbed hold of Joey's arm to stop him. Joey growled and almost swung the suitcase at Trick, turning a harsh gaze on Trick for daring to touch him. Rage bubbled through him and the desire to unleash the resentment and fury he'd held all these years on Trick simmered underneath the surface. "Let go of me," Joey bit out through tightly clenched teeth.

"Not until you tell me what the fuck your problem is."

Joey gave Trick an incredulous stare. "I would think you'd be happy I don't want you around me, Trick. After all, you hate fags, don't you?"

The color in Trick's face leached away and Joey thought it would have felt good to see Trick feel some of the pain he'd felt all these years, but all Joey could feel was anger and bitterness. "Yeah, I heard you, Trick. I heard you call me a fag and I heard you tell your friends how pathetic I was. How I was a loser and that I wanted your cock so bad, but you'd never deign to let a "faggot" like me anywhere near your precious dick. So if you think for one second I want anything to do with you, Patrick, you need to get the fuck away from me before I beat the shit out of you. You got me?"

Trick released him and stumbled backward. “Joey, I-”

“I don’t want to hear any lies or excuses. You can go fuck yourself and whatever bimbo you dragged with you to the party, Patrick . Now stay the hell away from me before I forget this is my parents’ twenty-fifth anniversary and I kick your ass.” Joey tagged Trick’s shoulder on his way past Trick into the house. He didn’t care that it really didn’t make him feel better, that all it did was make his stomach twist farther into knots and caused sour bile to settle into the back of his throat.

He stomped up the stairs to his old bedroom and slammed the door shut behind him before tossing his duffle onto the bed and setting the overnight suitcase down by the dresser. The surge of emotions left him and he suddenly felt drained. Sinking onto the edge of the bed, he covered his face with his hands and took a few deep breaths. God, not even an hour and he already wanted to get back into his car and head home to Orlando. Could he survive an entire week here? Why had he agreed to it in the first place?

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The sound of his cell phone ringing roused Joey, and he dug it out of his pocket. Without looking at the caller ID, he answered. “Waters.”

“Joey, baby!”

Joey winced and wished he’d checked the phone before he’d answered. “Hey, Vince.”

“Where are you? I went by your place, but you weren’t there.”

He could practically hear the pout. Vince Kilner was the assistant to the CEO of All-Star Formula for the last six months. Joey had made the mistake of hooking up with Vince for a couple of nights and now Vince thought it gave him exclusive rights to Joey whenever he wanted. He’d tried on more than one occasion to blow Vince off, but Vince didn’t seem to want to take the hint. Even when Joey hit him over the head with it like a sledgehammer. “Had to go out of town,” Joey grunted into the phone.

“Oh. Where to?”

Nosy fucker. “Personal business. What do you want, Vince?”

“I wanted to give you the chance to take me to dinner, baby. I miss you.”

Joey rolled his eyes. He didn’t do relationships, and he’d made that perfectly clear the night he’d fucked Vince. “I told you already, Vince, it was a onetime thing.”

“Come on, Joey, don’t be like that. We’re good together. You know you enjoyed what I did with my mouth and I can do it again.” Vince dropped his tone a few octaves, going for a seductive quality. Joey rolled his eyes. His cock didn’t respond. Even if he hadn’t been so upset after his run-in with Trick, he wouldn’t be interested.

“Look, I gotta go.”

“Wait, Jo-”

Joey disconnected the call. He dropped the cell onto the bed and fell backward, closing his eyes. Vince hadn’t helped his mood. If anything, his call had made it blacker and Joey scowled harder. He opened his eyes to stare at the ceiling. Damn, he should have just made up an excuse to not come back home. He knew this was a mistake. He needed to get out of the house and away from the one man who could always make him feel like a failure, like he was back in high school and he was the same geek hero worshipping the football quarterback. Like he’d never grown up and become someone more, something more.

Pushing himself off the bed, Joey knew what he needed to get his mind off Trick. He rifled through his suitcase and pulled out a pair of tight red jeans and a black tank top before stripping off his clothing. It didn’t take but a few moments for him to redress, forgoing any underwear, and spike up his hair. A bit of black eyeliner brought out the emerald green of his eyes, so they were practically snapping in the dim light of the mirror over the dresser.

He knew he’d only just gotten to his parents’ house, but the idea of staying there while Trick was around made his blood boil and his skin itch. He dug out the pair of black boots he’d brought with him and shoved his feet in them. They didn’t take long to lace up. Then he made sure he had a condom and a small packet of lube in his wallet before he stuffed it in his back pocket and put his car key fob in his front pocket, along with his cell. Taking a quick look in the mirror, Joey considered



himself ready with a slight smirk and a casual tilt of his head. He opened the bedroom door to find Anthony standing there.

“What?” Joey asked when he saw the judgmental expression on his brother’s face.

“You’re going out?” Anthony asked, eyeing Joey’s clothing and hair.

“Obviously,” Joey said, brushing past Anthony toward the stairs.

Anthony followed on his heels. “But you just got here.”

“I need to get out for a bit.”

“Joey!” Anthony said sharply.

Joey halted halfway down the stairs. “What, Anthony?”

“Don’t do this. Mom and Dad... they’ve really missed you.”

Scowling, Joey spun around to look up at Anthony. He didn’t need the guilt bullshit right now. “I’ll be back tonight. I’m not going to be gone long.”

“What happened with Trick?” Anthony asked, hitting the problem square on the head.

Joey stiffened, his shoulders tightening. “Nothing,” he snapped.

Anthony came closer, stopping on the step just above Joey. “I know it’s been a long time since we’ve been close, Joey, but we’re brothers. I hope you know you can talk to me. I saw the way he came back into the house. It was obvious something had upset him and I know he followed you outside. What’s going on?”

“Nothing is going on, Ant.” Joey easily slipped into the nickname he’d always used with his brother growing up. “I just really need some time to myself, to clear my head. I’ll be back in a couple hours. Just... cover for me, okay?”

Sighing, Anthony reached out and squeezed Joey’s shoulder. “All right, but we’re going to talk when you get back.”

Joey would have snorted and replied with a negative remark, but he needed out of there so he just gave a passive smile and a nod. “Sure, Ant.”

Turning on his heel, he sprinted down the remaining stairs, brushed past his relatives with as few words as he could when they called to him, and made it through the front door unscathed. The tension didn’t ease from his shoulders until he’d slipped into his car and started the engine. His eyes locked with Trick’s, standing in the shadows on the side of the house, as he put the car in reverse.

Joey clenched his jaw at the sight of him, but backed off of the grass without flooring it, knowing his parents would probably pitch a fit if he tore up their lawn. He could just barely discern Trick’s features and he almost thought he saw sorrow on Trick’s face, but mentally scoffed it away. As if the great Trick Harrison would ever feel anything resembling an emotion which required a heart.

Night had fallen completely and the lights from the streetlamps flashed over the windshield as Joey drove toward Wilton Manors. He didn’t know if any of the familiar places were still around, but there had to be at least one bar or club. He needed to lose himself in another warm body, to forget about the one man he’d never been able to get out of his mind, despite the time and distance he’d put between them.

Joey slammed his fist into the steering wheel as his throat tightened. Goddamn it! He’d thought he’d put all of this behind him. Five minutes in Trick’s presence and it all came flooding back; the same insecurities and the same feelings of inadequacies

which had driven him to stay away from his own family for seven fucking years. How could just one glimpse of Trick almost bring him to his knees?

Joey glanced at the thick black leather band he'd placed on his wrist before driving down from Orlando. He flicked the snaps away and allowed the band to fall into his lap. Thick swirls of black ink shaped into a circle formed a Celtic Tree of Life tattoo on his inner wrist. The art covered his biggest shame, one he'd never shared with anyone except his college roommate who'd helped him through it. Though the ink covered the scar, the ridge underneath the coloring could still be felt.

There were many times Joey ran his fingers over the blemished skin in times of stress. It had become a kind of comfort to him in a sick way, perhaps a reminder of what he'd survived somehow. He wore the wristband or a large watch whenever he was meeting clients, and in this case he'd worn it to keep his mother from getting even more upset about how many tattoos he had. He tossed it into the middle console for now and pressed down harder on the accelerator, desperate to outrace the demons of his past.

Wilton Manors, a very well-known LGBTQIA+ community, boasted many various businesses, including bars, restaurants, clubs, and clothing stores. Joey drove down Wilton Drive, frowning as he saw several of the places he'd known were gone. He passed a few new establishments, including what looked like a bar, but when he saw mostly women entering, he knew it wasn't for him. He figured he'd see if The Cubby Hole was still around and turned onto Federal Highway.

A small smile graced his full lips when he saw the familiar front. Before he'd left for college, The Cubby Hole had been the place he'd received his first blow job in one of the bathroom stalls. He wondered if the inside remained the same as he pulled into the parking lot nearby and exited his BMW.

Locking the car with a quick press of a button on his key fob, Joey walked toward the

back of the building, remembering the entrance had actually been at the rear, not the front. As his eyes adjusted in the dim lighting once inside, Joey almost grinned when he saw how nothing had changed in the last seven years. Only tables and chairs lined the floor across from the bar just after the restrooms. They had an old-fashioned style jukebox which someone had tossed a few dollars in to queue up some Guns 'N' Roses. A loud crack of pool balls breaking reached Joey's ears as he made his way to the bar.

There were already several men inside despite the still relatively early hour, and Joey could feel more than one pair of eyes on him. He'd already taken stock of the men with a few flicks of his gaze. A couple of middle-aged men were at the pool table, obviously out to unwind after a day at work. Another older man, perhaps mid-to-late forties, sat at one table nursing a beer and watching one of the TVs overhead. Joey realized they were showing porn and currently one guy was in the middle of being gang banged by six guys and loving it from the looks of it.

Some guys were on the stools at the bar. Joey pegged two off-duty cops immediately, along with a couple of in the closet married guys looking to get their rocks off. He eyed one cop discreetly, finding the man rather attractive, but didn't want to call attention to himself just yet. Or more than he had, as several men in the bar were already eyeing him. He saw a couple of guys coming out of the bathrooms, clothing disheveled, faces flushed, and Joey smirked, his cock perking up. He could almost smell the scent of fresh cum on their skin when the two men came close by to claim a table for a drink.

"What can I get ya?" the bartender asked, pulling Joey from his perusal.

"Whiskey, neat."

"Got any ID?"

Joey bit back a snort and pulled out his wallet, flipping it open to show the bartender his age. The bartender nodded in acceptance and reached beneath the bar to pull out a glass. A snifter appeared before him as Joey slid onto an empty stool and he immediately found the stool next to him occupied by a man who appeared to be in his mid-fifties. He had salt and pepper hair and dark brown eyes. Joey could tell he spent a lot of time in the sun from how tan his skin was. The man did nothing for Joey's libido, though. "You new around here, gorgeous?" the man asked, as the bartender finished filling the glass.

Joey hid a grin and picked up the snifter, tossing back the contents quickly. He enjoyed the burn of the liquid as it smoothly glided down his throat and indicated for the bartender to refill his glass. "No. Lived here most of my life."

"Never seen you at The Cubby before."

"That's because I haven't been in for the last seven years."

"Why not?" the man asked curiously.

"Been living in Orlando. Just came down for a visit."

Joey could feel the man's eyes travel down his body and back up again, but it wasn't him who made every hair on Joey's skin stand on end. At some point, a new patron had arrived, a man who took the stool on Joey's other side, and at first, Joey had to do a double take. He thought for sure Trick had followed him, but no, the stranger just looked close enough to be Trick's brother. Their noses weren't the same and the latest arrival's eyes were green instead of blue. A five o'clock shadow dusted the man's cheeks and Joey wondered what it would feel like brushing over the sensitive skin of his thighs just before the man swallowed his cock between the moist, plump lips just above that solid chin. A dark blue, button-down, encased broad shoulders much like Trick's and black jeans hugged long, hard thighs with a firm, rounded ass

Joey would love to sink his teeth into. He flicked his tongue out along his lips to wet them, imagining tracing the curve of those cheeks with said appendage.

Lust flared in the man's eyes, and Joey knew he'd found the warm body to lose himself in for the night. "Can I buy you a drink?" the newcomer asked.

Joey lifted the corner of lip in his trademark smile and replied, "Sure."

He couldn't wait to get this guy swinging from his dick. The guy was hot and he could take out his frustrations at Trick in one go. Fuck, the idea of holding Trick down and pounding into the son of a bitch made his cock harder than nails. "Whiskey, neat," he supplied to the unknown Trick look-alike.

The man turned to catch the bartender's attention, and Joey heard a sigh to his left. Joey glanced back at the man he'd originally been conversing with, who had a wistful look on his features. "If only I was that young and hung again."

Biting back a laugh, Joey gave him a rueful look and tipped his head in acknowledgement before turning toward his intended conquest again. They didn't exchange names, but rather small tidbits of polite conversation before Joey saw the subtle tilt of the head toward the restrooms. He ran his fingers along the guy's jean encased thigh to show his willingness, stood, tossed down some bills to cover his whiskey, and sauntered toward the restrooms. He never looked back to see if the Trick look-alike followed or not.

Joey went into a stall as soon as he entered the bathroom, ignoring the guy standing at the urinals, and didn't have to wait but five seconds before his hookup joined him. He grabbed the stranger by the lapels and yanked him into a heated kiss, his tongue jamming deep down the man's throat.

"Fuck, you're hot," the guy said when they broke apart seconds later.

Joey didn't respond, just ground against him, showing what he wanted without words. The Trick look-alike reached down between them and undid Joey's pants, hissing when he realized Joey wasn't wearing underwear. "Fuck, yeah."

Sinking to his knees, 'Trick' wrapped his lips around the crown of Joey's dick and swallowed him whole. Joey gasped and leaned his head back against the stall, uncaring that he'd started thinking of the guy as Trick, only wanting to dominate the bastard who'd made him feel so insignificant for so long. "That's it, suck it. Suck my cock," he snarled, grabbing the guy's head and thrusting his hips forward.

Trick gagged, but didn't stop his motions or try to still Joey's movements. Spittle dripped down Trick's chin at the harsh face fucking Joey subjected him to. Joey could feel his cum rising and despite wanting to humiliate Trick by coming on his face, he wanted to fuck him even more. He yanked his cock free from Trick's mouth. "Stand up and drop your pants," he demanded, taking out his wallet to grab the condom and lube.

"Damn, someone must have pissed you off," the stranger replied as he got off the floor and did as Joey commanded.

The sight of the guy's firm ass nearly undid Joey, and he palmed one of those glorious globes of flesh, squeezing, as he stepped in close to Trick to rub his raw cock along the crack of Trick's bottom. He groaned at the feel and hurriedly slipped the condom over his prick, then dumped the contents of the lube packet over his sheathed length. He guided the tip toward Trick's tight entrance and nudged at it, ready to slam forward, to make Trick pay for what he'd done to him.

"Easy, dude. I'm not the guy you're pissed at," the stranger snapped, dodging Joey's attempt to breach him.

Joey breathed in deep and leaned his forehead on the broad shoulder in front of him.

He knew the guy wasn't Trick, yet the fact he looked similar enough to him had caused him to lose his head. He reached down and wiped some of the lube from the condom onto two fingers before sliding those fingers between the muscular ass cheeks. Trick... no, he needed to stop. It wasn't Trick. The stranger groaned as Joey probed at his entrance and then slid inside. Joey gave a few quick thrusts of his fingers to loosen the guy up and then pulled away to replace the digits with his cock. He pushed in slowly and evenly.

"Fuck, man. That's a gigantic cock," the guy groaned. "Take it easy at first."

Joey gave a few shallow thrusts to allow his hookup to adjust and then began moving faster until he could have been trying to fuck the guy through the stall wall. He dug his fingers into the guy's hips to hold him immobile in the onslaught of his still fiery anger. The thump of the loud music from the jukebox kept time with his hard slams into Not-Trick. Joey couldn't tell what song played right then, but he didn't care. Not-Trick grunted and moaned, clearly enjoying the vicious fucking.

Finally, Joey felt his balls tightening as he got closer to coming. What tipped him over the edge and made him fill the condom was the sensation of Not-Trick's hole contracting suddenly around his cock. A loud guttural groan rattled in Not-Trick's throat and Joey knew the guy had shot his load all over the stall wall. Joey leaned his head back and sneered as he came, each hard pulse sending a shudder of gut-wrenching pleasure through him.

He collapsed against Not-Trick's back for a moment to catch his breath. The moment his cock softened enough to pull free of Not-Trick's hole, Joey stripped the condom, dropped it in the toilet and stuffed his flaccid dick back in his pants, carefully zipping up. "That was good. Thanks, man."

"I wouldn't want to be the guy you're raging about," Not-Trick drawled as he straightened his own clothing.



Joey shrugged and opened the stall door, exiting it and heading to wash his hands. He caught sight in the mirror of a guy standing at the urinal, staring at him. Joey smirked and dried his hands. His sexual appeal to the surrounding men made him feel good. He ignored the fact it would only temporarily fill him with confidence. Eventually the confidence waned again, and Joey would have to repeat the experience he'd just had to bring back the emotion.

Despite his outward cockiness and his megawatt smile, Joey still struggled every day with the person he used to be. Ignoring the inner voice of his previous chubby persona wasn't easy. It would remind him of how much of a loser he used to be. How he'd been so pathetic even Trick had called him a disgusting faggot. Joey swallowed hard, forcing back the thoughts. He wouldn't let them do that to him again.

He left the bathroom and headed toward the bar. The bartender gave him a knowing look, but remained silent except to ask, "Another drink?"

"Yeah, straight up."

The bartender set a snifter on the bar, grabbed the same top shelf bottle, and poured two fingers. Joey tipped it back, tossed a twenty on the counter, and stood. "Keep the change."

"Thanks. Be careful out there. Cops been watching who comes out of here lately."

"Thanks for the heads up."

Out in the parking lot, Joey looked around casually as he walked to his car. He didn't see any of the customary lights on top of the vehicles, so he felt pretty safe at getting into his car. Of course, he'd forgotten cops could also be in unmarked vehicles. As he backed out of the spot, he heard sirens and a red light flashed across his dash. "Fuck," Joey swore.

This would be great to explain to his parents. He put the BMW in park and lowered the window, waiting for the cop to come to his window. “Evening, Officer,” he greeted as the guy stopped at his driver’s side. “Is there a problem?”

“License and registration please.”

Joey suppressed a sigh and took out his wallet to retrieve his license, then went to lean over to open his glove box for the registration.

“What are you doing? Hands where I can see them, sir,” the police officer demanded, hand on his holster.

Joey put his hands back on the wheel quickly. “My registration is in the glove box, Officer.”

“Keep your left hand on the steering wheel. Slowly reach over and take out the registration.”

Hiding his face as he rolled his eyes, Joey left his one hand in plain sight while unlatching the compartment. The officer shined the light into the car to ensure Joey had no weapons. Joey passed over the paper registration he had until his plates came. “It’s a new car, Officer.”

The cop grunted and looked over the paper and Joey’s license. “Says here you’re from Orlando, Mr. Waters. What are you doing down here?”

“My parents are having their wedding anniversary. Just down for a few days.”

“Have you had anything to drink?”

Joey debated on lying, but figured the police officer saw him come out of the bar. “A

couple.”

“I’m going to need you to step out of the car, sir.”

“I’m not drunk.”

“Get out of the car now.”

Joey turned the engine off and opened the door. He got out and waited to see what the officer intended to do.

“I’m going to need you to submit to a sobriety test, Mr. Waters. Walk in a straight line while touching your finger to your nose.”

Figuring it would be better to just do it, Joey grunted and walked with one foot in front of the other, alternating between his hands to touch his nose. When he reached a good two to three feet from his car, he turned and made his way back, repeating the motions. He dropped his arms to his side. “Am I good, Officer?”

The cop scowled. “Get back in your car, Mr. Waters. I won’t issue you a citation tonight, but I am giving you a warning. I’ll be watching for you so you better decide to not drink and drive.”

“Of course, sir. You have a good night,” Joey replied as he opened his door and got into the front seat. He watched in his mirror as the police officer stomped back to his unmarked and got back in. As soon as the officer’s car was clear, Joey continued backing out of the spot and left the parking lot, heaving a sigh of relief.

While the whiskey hadn’t been enough to get him drunk, it had left him a bit buzzed. Drinking with prospective clients over the last couple of years, Joey had learned how to mask the effect of alcohol on his system and built a high tolerance to liquor. If the

cop had given him a breathalyzer test, he probably wouldn't have passed. He didn't want to have to explain to his parents why he'd been arrested and he'd only been back in town for a few hours.

Keeping to the speed limit on the drive home, Joey hoped Trick had left. He couldn't deal with him right now. When he pulled onto his street, he saw several cars had already left and only a handful remained. Maybe he'd get lucky again tonight. He parked behind his parents' SUV and got out. The front porch was empty this time around. Entering the house, Joey glanced around casually, but didn't see Trick. He entered the dining room to find his father sitting at the table with Anthony, Veronica, his mother, and two of his uncles playing some kind of card game.

His mother gave him a hard look. "Where did you run off to? Here for less than an hour and already disappearing. Do you hate your home that much?"

"Mom," Joey groaned. "It's not that. I just needed some fresh air."

"And out back wasn't enough fresh air?" she demanded.

Joey didn't respond as he walked past them to the kitchen to grab a beer from the fridge. When he turned around, Trick stood in the doorway. Joey immediately scowled, but said nothing. He popped the top off the bottle and tossed it into the trash can before stalking toward Trick. "Please move," he growled.

Trick looked uncertain, as if he wanted to argue, but with a sigh, stepped back to let Joey out of the room. "For what it's worth, Joey, I'm sorry," he murmured as Joey swept past him.

It took all of Joey's willpower to ignore Trick. He yanked one chair out from the

dining table and dropped into it. He was aware of Trick hovering in the doorway, watching him.

“Where’d you go?” his mother asked.

“Just drove,” Joey lied.

He thought he heard Anthony snort, but let it go. “Babe, would you grab me another beer?” Anthony asked his girlfriend.

“Sure, baby. No looking at my cards, ya cheater.”

“I don’t cheat!”

Veronica rolled her eyes. “Uh huh.”

“I resent being called a cheater.” Anthony sniffed at her.

Joey grinned. “He used to do that all the time when we were kids. Always came up with some excuse to get me to leave the room when he was losing so he could peek at my cards.”

“I did not!” Anthony shouted.

“Inside voices, please,” their mother admonished as Veronica went to get Anthony’s drink.

Anthony huffed and slumped in his chair, clearly pouting. Joey chuckled. “She’s got your number, Ant.”

Veronica came back with his beer and set it on the table near his elbow. She’d

grabbed another for herself. “She knows it, too,” she said with a wink at Joey.

A delighted laugh escaped Joey. “I like her, bro. She’s definitely going to keep you on your toes.”

Anthony smiled and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, hugging her close and kissing her temple. “Never met anyone like her.”

Envy fluttered in Joey’s chest for a split second, but he brushed it away. His brother deserved to be happy. Being jealous of Anthony’s relationship was dumb. “So what do you do for a living, Veronica?” Joey asked.

“I’m a nurse at Holy Cross Hospital on Federal.”

“Nice. Do you like it?”

“I love it. I work in Pediatrics. It’s hard sometimes, but there are a lot of happy and rewarding times to outweigh the bad ones.”

Trick hadn’t left. He leaned up against the wall nearby and just seemed to listen to their conversation. Joey did his utter best to ignore the bastard. “Are you trying to hold up the wall, dear?” Joey’s mother asked. “Have a seat, Trick.”

Joey stiffened as Trick took the one to his left. He deliberately turned further toward Veronica. “Did you always want to be a nurse?”

Veronica shook her head. “When I was in high school, I wanted to be a teacher, but in my first year of college a friend of mine was in a pretty nasty car accident. I took care of her after they released her from the hospital, helped change her dressings, and made her meals. I found I enjoyed doing it. So, I switched my major and went into nursing.”

“Why pediatrics? Isn’t it hard seeing sick kids?” Joey asked.

“It is hard, but seeing the relief on the parents’ faces when the doctor tells them their child is going to be okay or giving the children something to smile about when I visit their rooms and just knowing I can brighten their day even a little is more than worth it.”

“What about you, bro? How’s things at the dealership?”

Anthony glanced past Joey at Trick and then shrugged. “I’m actually not working there anymore.”

“Oh? What are you doing now?”

“Trick and I opened our own landscaping business.”

Joey couldn’t have been more shocked, but he struggled to hide it. “That’s... interesting.”

“I didn’t really enjoy selling cars,” Anthony said.

“He’s great with flowers actually,” Trick said.

Joey ignored Trick. “Not exactly what I see you doing, Ant, but if you’re happy that’s all that matters.”

Anthony gave Joey a questioning look at the slight to Trick. “I am. It’s satisfying work and it keeps me in shape. Plus, I get to work outdoors in the fresh air rather than stuck inside a stuffy dealership all day.”

“Why don’t you tell us about working with such big superstars?” his mother asked.



“There’s nothing to tell. They’re people like all of us. Just making a shit ton more money than we do.”

“Joey! Language!” his mother exclaimed in horror.

Joey grinned. “Sorry, Mom.”

“Heard you’ve already got some clients on your roster,” his dad said. “Prince, right?”

“Yep,” Joey replied, pride in his voice. “No one else at the agency could get him to sign with us.”

“What’s he like?” Veronica asked. “Is he as hot in person as he is on TV?”

“Hotter.” Joey laughed and winked at Veronica.

Veronica leaned forward. “When you go back home, do you think you could get me his autograph?”

“Sure.”

“Thanks!” Veronica replied.

Joey shrugged. “We meet regularly so it’s not a big deal.”

“Who else do you have as a client?” Anthony asked.

He rattled off a couple more A-list sports clients and a few of the lesser-known individuals. Tension settled into his shoulders further when Trick shifted around beside him.

“Sounds like you’re really busy,” Trick said.

Joey clenched his jaw and shrugged again. He found being so close to the one man who’d almost destroyed him nearly unbearable. Abruptly, he stood. “I’m tired after the long drive, Mom. Think I’m going to get some sleep. I’ll see you in the morning.”

“Be up and ready to leave by eight, sweetie. We’re all going to the beach.”

“Okay, Mom. Goodnight, everyone.”

Without sparing a single glance in Trick’s direction, Joey left the dining room and jogged up the stairs. He knew this would be a mistake. He never should have come. The same insecurities and self-doubt were beating at the solid steel door he’d locked them behind inside his mind. They wanted out. They were screaming to be set free, to eat at the facade he’d crafted painstakingly over the last five years. One of the last conversations with his therapist replayed in his mind.

“I ’m going back in a couple of weeks.” Joey didn’t have to tell Dr. Garrett where.

“How does that make you feel?”

Joey ran a hand through his hair. “I fucking hate it. I loathe the idea of ever being near that prick again.”

“Have you reconsidered talking to him about your feelings?”

Snorting, Joey gave Dr. Garrett a sarcastic sneer. “The only thing I want to consider is beating the shit out of him. Talking to him about my feelings? The fucker would probably laugh in my face and call me a fag again.”

“It’s been seven years. Don’t you think maybe he may have changed? Matured as an

adult?”

Joey shook his head. “No, I don’t.”

“But you’ve changed. Why is it impossible for him to have grown up in those years?”

Instead of answering her right away, Joey looked around her office for several seconds. There were a handful of framed photos of her with a smiling, attractive blonde woman, including a wedding photo. Dr. Garrett was the only person who knew the truth of his life after leaving Fort Lauderdale, the things he’d done, the self-destructive behavior, and the entire reason he’d started seeing her almost six years ago. Sighing, he slouched in his chair. “I’ve known him for most of my life, doc. I doubt he’s changed. He...”

She waited quietly for him to continue. Lips twisting wryly, Joey finished his thought. “He was always the person I thought I knew the best in my life, aside from my brother, but he proved how wrong I was.”

“I think this visit will be good for you, Joey. It’s a chance to find the closure you need on that part of your life and move forward.”

“That’ll only work if I talk to him, Dr. Garrett, but I’m not even sure I can manage that.” Joey started picking at one of his fingernails. “He’s the reason... no, he’s part of the reason I tried to kill myself.” He knew Trick had only exacerbated the anxiety and depression he already carried with him. Trick wasn’t the only reason he’d done what he’d done.

She gave a small nod and wrote something on her notepad. “It took you a long time to admit that out loud the first time, Joey. You’re making progress with understanding yours and Trick’s role in your decision to hurt yourself.”

Joey snorted. “I hate myself for letting him and his bigoted opinion of me push me that far.”

“Why do you hate yourself for allowing yourself to feel so deeply?”

He scowled and stood, pacing. Restless energy ate at him and he picked up one of the picture frames of the doctor and her wife. “You’ve never felt stupid for being hurt by someone who so obviously hates who you are?”

She hummed. “It’s never stupid to let yourself care, Joey. Why do you think it’s stupid to have cared about someone?”

Joey set the frame down and shrugged. “Because I thought I knew him.”

Before she could respond to him further, the little alert signaling the end of their time together rang out. “I’d like to see you again before you leave for home.”

“It’s not my home,” Joey snapped. “Not anymore.”

Standing, Dr. Garrett came around to his side of the desk. “No matter what has happened in your life, Joey, it is still your home. It’s where your family is and from what you’ve told me, they love you.”

Guilt swiped at Joey, but he shook his head. “I don’t belong there anymore.”

“We’ll explore that further next week, Joey. Stop by and speak with Amy to schedule a time.”

He gave a jerky nod. “I’ll see you then, doc.”

The next morning, Joey got up before everyone else to go for a run. He set the

playlist on his phone to his favorite running tunes and placed it in the armband before starting off. It wasn't long before the usual Florida mugginess caused his shirt to stick to his chest and back. His mind trickled back over the events of the day before and he grit his teeth. Sleep had been elusive. Dreams of Trick plagued him throughout the night. The memory of Trick shattering his heart playing in his mind when he was awake.

His feet pounded the sidewalk as he wove up and down the blocks around his childhood home. Disturbed blasted in his ears, chasing away the insecurities still riding Joey hard, burying them beneath the shield of confidence he'd built up to protect himself. He wouldn't let Trick get to him again. It would be too much to hope Trick would stay away the rest of his time at his parents'.

By the time he looped back around to his parents' house, sweat soaked his white shirt completely, becoming translucent. The sun was just above the houses when he came to a stop in front of the house. He did some stretches, cooling down from his run. The back of his neck itched and Joey glanced at the porch to see Trick standing there, watching him with a pained expression.

Joey scowled at him before giving the bastard his back and finishing his cool down. When he turned back around, Trick was gone. Most likely in the house. Joey entered the front door and went upstairs to grab a quick shower and get dressed. The rest of the family was in the living room by the time he came back down.

Disgust at himself rolled through him when he realized how quickly he pinpointed where Trick sat. Once again, he felt the prick of Trick's gaze, but he ignored it, smiling at his family. "Morning, Mom, Pop."

"Hey, sweetie. We're just about ready to go. I've got towels for everyone, packed a cooler with sandwiches and drinks, and your dad threw a football and a volleyball in the car."

Joey eyed his brother. “You ready to get your ass handed to you?”

Anthony snorted. “Big words, little brother.”

“I’ve gained some skills since we last played,” Joey said. “Don’t underestimate me.”

“Guess we’ll see, won’t we?” Anthony said.

Joey smirked and shrugged. “I’ll take my car.”

“Nonsense!” Joey’s mother interjected. “No sense paying for two parking spaces. There’s enough room in the car for all of us.”

He really didn’t want to be in that close a vicinity of Trick, but he knew he couldn’t argue with his mom and he grunted in reply. His dad had already put everything in the back of the SUV, so they filed out of the house and Joey sat in the far back behind the driver’s side. To his utter dismay, Trick climbed in next to him. It was a bench seat instead of two individuals, like the ones in the center row. Joey crowded as close to the side of the car as possible and pulled out his phone. Thankfully, the beach wasn’t far from his parents’ home, about twenty minutes. He could last that long in close quarters with Trick. Couldn’t he?

As soon as the car was in motion and everyone in the front began talking, Trick interrupted his perusal of his emails. “Are you going to ignore me all day, Joey?”

Joey clenched his jaw, but didn’t respond. Trick sighed. “That was a long time ago and I was a stupid kid in high school.”

If they’d been alone, Joey just may have exploded on him like he had the previous evening. A long time ago? A stupid kid? Those were Trick’s excuses for shattering his world and sending him on a dark fucking spiral? He raised his head to glare at

Trick and kept his voice low as he responded. “It doesn’t change the fact that you hate me for existing just because I have men in my bed.”

“I don’t feel that way anymore, Joey! I didn’t even feel that way back then!”

“Bullshit. People don’t say shit like that if they don’t mean it.” Joey tightened his hold on his phone.

Trick placed his hand on Joey’s arm. “I am truly sorry you overheard what I said. There’s a lot of things from back then I wish I could take back, but I can’t. Will you please forgive me?”

Joey glanced down at Trick’s dark, tanned fingers on his arm. “We only have to be around each other for the next few days. I don’t see the point in even having this conversation. I’ll be heading back to Orlando at the end of the week. Why does it matter if we talk or not?”

Sighing, Trick took his hand off Joey and set it on his own thigh. “Because I really miss talking to you. We were friends once.”

“Were we? Because friends definitely don’t say what you did,” Joey replied.

“Things... things are different now, Joey. There are some things you don’t know. If you give me a chance, I’d like to explain them to you.”

Joey side-eyed Trick. He’d hear him out, just to see what had changed. “Fine. Why can’t you explain it now?”

Trick cleared his throat and gave a slight toss of his head toward Joey’s brother. Joey grunted and tipped his head in acknowledgement. If Trick didn’t want to talk about it in front of Anthony, either his brother didn’t know or there was something else going

on. “Fine. When?”

“When we get back from the beach. We can go grab some coffee.”

Joey ignored the flutter in his stomach at the idea of a coffee date with Trick. It wasn't a date. Hell, he shouldn't even be considering giving Trick the chance to explain anything. But the teenage boy who'd lusted after the bastard wouldn't let him say no. He went back to checking his emails, responded to one, before they pulled into one of the parking lots near Fort Lauderdale Beach. The scent of salt and sea slapped Joey in the face as he followed Trick out of the backseat. He grabbed a couple of things from his dad to help carry down toward the shore.

Despite it being the middle of the day on a workday, there were still quite a few people in the water and lining the beach. They found a place to spread out the blanket and Joey kicked off his flip-flops. Anthony took off his own shoes and his t-shirt, then grabbed the football. “Let's see how you've gotten so cocky, baby brother.”

They decided on touch football so Veronica could play as well. Trick and Joey against Anthony and Veronica. Years ago, Joey would have practically squealed over being teamed up with Trick, but despite their uneasy truce in the car, Joey still couldn't stop his resentment and anger that easily. They set the “end zones” as a couple of palm trees on either side of their area. He said nothing as they separated and Trick made a simple pass to him.

“Come on, little bro,” Anthony taunted. “Let's see these new skills.”

Joey smirked and darted around Anthony, breezing past his brother with more than a couple of arm lengths between them. He tagged the tree and grinned at his brother, casually tossing the ball in the air before lobbing it over Anthony's head to Trick. His brother was extremely competitive and after he saw how easily Joey bypassed him, it became an all-out war to get the ball from him.



Anthony was panting and sweating like crazy by the time the score was tied. “Damn, Joey. Must be working with all those football star quarterbacks!”

Laughing, Joey winked at his brother. “More than just working.”

“Aww, gross!” Anthony shouted. “I don’t wanna hear about my baby brother and the dude he’s banging.”

Joey couldn’t stop the full belly laughter he fell into from Anthony’s reaction. “Just remember that the next time you try to share details about you and your girlfriends.”

“Hey, there better not be any other girlfriends,” Veronica said, her brows drawn.

Anthony grabbed Veronica, tugging her close. “Just you, baby.”

“Let’s finish this,” Joey said. “Next point wins.”

He glanced at Trick, giving him a nod, and tossed the ball at him. Joey’s shirt stuck to his skin from the sweat. Without thinking, he yanked it over his head, tossing it aside, and he crouched slightly, watching Trick intently.

“Holy shit, Joey!”

Anthony caught Joey off guard and Joey straightened, frowning. “What?”

Then the realization of what he’d done sank in. Fuck. He hadn’t wanted his family to see how many tattoos he had. Especially his mom. They knew about the ones on his bicep and they’d obviously seen the other one on his calf this morning. Surprisingly, his mom had said nothing about it. Groaning, he rolled his eyes as Anthony moved around him to look at the various tattoos he had.

There was a tattoo of a snarling wolf on his left pectoral and another of a dragon on his right. His calf sported another with thick lines much like his bicep. But the one on his back, he'd wanted to hide that one from both his family and Trick. The one spread across his shoulders was the words "Never Again" and beneath was a warrior angel, wings spread, spear raised, standing on the impression of a man beneath him. Radiating lines to show the light he'd stepped into as he defeated his demons. He'd gotten it as a promise to himself to never let another push him to the brink again.

An intake of breath caught Joey's attention, and he looked at Trick. He did a double take. He could almost swear he saw lust in Trick's gaze. Trick came closer and reached up to touch the one on his back. A shudder raced down Joey's spine. The calloused fingers tracing over the lines of the angel. "Did you design this?" Trick asked, his voice husky.

He had. In the hospital where he'd awakened to find himself still alive after he'd sliced his wrist. The pain had been so great, he'd passed out with the first wrist, never getting to the second one. His college roommate had found him, called the ambulance and stemmed the flow until they arrived. The only reason his family hadn't found out was because Joey was over eighteen and he'd insisted he didn't want them to be contacted.

Shrugging, Joey nodded. "I've got tattoos, no big deal. Let's finish the game." He felt uncomfortable with everyone's eyes on him, not to mention Trick's touch.

They continued the game, but he felt Anthony's attention on him more than once. There was no way in hell Anthony hadn't realized the words on his shoulders meant something. Joey scored the last point, tossed the ball at Anthony, and without a word, strode into the ocean. Emotions he hadn't allowed himself to feel in a long time swamped him. He went out several yards, then turned parallel to the shore to begin a breaststroke. Less than forty-eight hours and he'd already revealed more than he ever intended when he'd come home. Losing himself in the mindless exercise, Joey swam

close to the pier before swimming back to where he'd entered.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:06 pm*

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S eated on the blanket, Anthony, Veronica, and Trick accepted drinks and sandwiches from his mom. Joey exited the water, grabbed his shirt, pulled it on, and took a seat on the blanket close to his dad.

Thankfully, Anthony sensed Joey wouldn't want to discuss anything in front of their mother, so he didn't ask. "You picked up some skills in your time in Orlando. When you left, you could never make it past me."

Joey gave a smirk he didn't feel. "It's been seven years, Ant. More practice."

"Surprised you've had time with how busy you've been," he said.

He knew that was a dig at not coming home sooner. "Usually after work. No weekends in my line of business."

Of course, that was bullshit. He had plenty of days to do what he wanted, but coming home and possibly seeing the one man who'd broken him definitely wasn't what he'd wanted. He accepted a sandwich and a can of soda from his mom. While the four of them relaxed on the blanket, his mother and father went for a quick swim in the ocean. Joey smiled when he saw the way his dad still cared for his mom, making sure she didn't get knocked over by some kids running around or holding her hand as they entered the water.

"How long did you think you could hide the tattoos from us?"

Joey mentally sighed. His peace had lasted all of sixty seconds. “I didn’t want mom to freak out. You saw how she was at the house about my arm. Can you imagine my back? I’m surprised she didn’t say anything about the one on my leg this morning.”

“Is that all it is?” Anthony asked, brow raised.

“Why else?” Joey said.

“Did they hurt?” Veronica asked.

“Not that bad. Certain areas hurt more than others.” Then Joey slipped up in a way he wanted to slap himself for. “The one on my inner wrist hurt the most really. Guess it’s a more sensitive area.”

“Your inner wrist?” Trick interjected, frowning while looking at Joey’s left wrist, which was blank.

Joey flinched. The black band covered it. Even going into the water, he hadn’t removed the band. “Uh, yeah. I keep it covered when meeting clients and, of course, my mom.”

Veronica didn’t let it go at that, though. “Can we see it? I’ve thought about getting one but I didn’t know if I could handle the pain.”

He glanced at the ocean to see his parents were pretty far away before flicking the buttons free and pulling the thick band away. The Celtic tree was rather large, enough to cover the three-inch scar. Before they could look closer or even touch him, Joey closed the leather cuff back into place. “That’s really beautiful, Joey,” Veronica said.

“Thanks.” He shifted in discomfort. Everyone seemed to target the things he had no desire to talk about. “So how is the landscaping business?”

They embraced the change in topic with ease, and Anthony and Trick began conversing about the modifications they planned to make soon. They wanted to bring on another couple of guys to help, since their business was growing so quickly. “Sounds like you guys are doing great.”

“Whoever expected me, Anthony Waters, to have his own business,” Anthony said. “It’s totally a mind fuck, bro.”

Joey chuckled. “I think it’s great. I’m glad you’re happy.”

“What about you? Are you happy, Joey?” Trick asked, surprising Joey.

“I’m great. Nothing to complain about.” Joey shrugged. “Got a great job, nice car, nice house. Can’t ask for more really.”

“No significant others in Orlando?” Veronica asked.

“Nah. Too many fish in the sea to pick just one,” Joey said, laughing. “Just playing the field for now.”

“You’ll know it when you find the one,” Veronica said, looking at Anthony with adoration in her eyes.

A twinge of envy struck Joey. Something which shocked him because he truly had no intention of ever settling down. He swore to let no one close enough again to destroy him like Trick had. But seeing the way Veronica looked at his brother caused his heart to ache. No one had ever looked at him like that. Joey shifted in discomfort and switched his gaze to the ocean, watching his dad swimming. When he glanced back at Trick, he saw Trick watching him, a strange look in his sapphire blue eyes.

Instead of commenting, Joey just cleared his throat and stood from the blanket.

“Going to go for a walk.”

He grabbed his phone and started off down the beach, away from his family and Trick. He wanted to hate Trick, wanted to despise the air the fucker breathed, but even now, his heart clenched whenever Trick was nearby. Sighing, Joey ran a hand through his hair, brushing the strands tousled by a passing breeze away from his face.

His cell vibrated, alerting him to a text, and Joey looked at the screen, scowling at the sight of Vince’s name. He never would have dipped into that well if he’d known how clingy the little shit would get. The agency didn’t have a no fraternization clause, so if it became a bigger problem, he may just have to talk to his boss. Ignoring the text, Joey walked a little farther, working on what the hell he’d tell Anthony about the tattoo when his brother got him alone.

Maybe he could just tell Anthony he’d just really liked the sentiment. But Anthony wouldn’t buy that. His brother knew him too well. Maybe just lie about a nasty breakup? It wasn’t entirely a lie, but it wasn’t exactly the truth, either. He’d broken up with Trick in his mind because Trick had never really belonged to him. Then again, it would probably be better to just tell Anthony to leave it alone. Better than lying to one of the people he’d never lost faith in.

Joey turned around and walked back to where his family sat. His parents were packing up the cooler and blanket when he got there. “Just gotta rinse off the sand,” he said and headed to the little nearby freshwater showers.

The water washed away the sand from his feet. He slid on his flip-flops and trailed behind everyone to the SUV. They all took their original seats after laying down a couple of towels to keep the interior from getting damp. “Anything else planned for today, Mom?” Anthony asked.

“We’ll give you all your freedom for the rest of the day, but we’re going to Diego’s

Steakhouse for dinner so make sure you're ready to go by five. The reservation is for six-thirty."

The ride to the house was relatively silent. Everyone seemed tired after their outing. Joey leaned his temple against the window and closed his eyes. He'd almost fallen asleep by the time his dad pulled into the driveway. "Joey," Trick murmured, touching his arm. "We're here."

Joey sat up straight and wiped at his eyes. "Are you still okay with going somewhere to talk?" Trick asked.

Shrugging, Joey nodded. "Just let me get changed first."

"Sure."

Trick followed him into the house, but stayed downstairs while Joey headed up to change into dry clothes. He dashed a comb through his hair to straighten it before going back down to the living room. Trick was by himself. Frowning, Joey asked, "Where is everyone?"

"Your parents wanted to take a nap and Anthony and Veronica headed out to shower and change at their place." Trick stood from the easy chair. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah, I guess." Joey followed Trick outside.

"Do you mind if I drive?" Trick asked.

Joey didn't want to be a pretentious asshole, but he certainly didn't want Trick in his brand-new car with wet clothes and sand from the beach. "That's fine."

He climbed into the passenger seat of the black Toyota Tundra Trick had unlocked



with his key fob. “Nice truck.”

“Thanks. Just got her a few months ago. Really helps with the landscaping business.”

Awkwardness settled in and Joey forced himself not to fidget while Trick drove. He didn’t pay too much attention to where they were going, but he sat up a little straighter when Trick turned into an apartment complex. Frowning, Joey asked, “I thought we were going to get coffee?”

“I just wanted to have a little privacy. Plus, I need to change out of these clothes as well.”

Nervous about them being alone, Joey worked hard to hide it while following Trick into his building. Trick let them into his apartment and tossed his keys on the small table just inside the door. “Make yourself comfortable. I’ll just be a few minutes.”

Joey grunted in reply. Trick disappeared into a room nearby, closing the door behind him. He took the reprieve to look around the apartment. The walls were a bright white, while the floor was a gray wood laminate. The living area had a large flatscreen TV against the wall opposite the black leather couch, with a black recliner next to the couch and a coffee table in between. There were a few framed photographs on the wall on each side of the television. From where he stood, Joey could see Anthony and Trick in a couple of them, some of Trick with his football team in high school, and what looked like a work truck with the name of their business on it. There was a large abstract piece of artwork on the wall behind the couch. There was a counter which separated the living area from the kitchen, with two barstools in front of it.

Instead of sitting down, Joey wandered to the window and looked out onto the courtyard below. It was one of the newer buildings in the area, for sure. His mother had mentioned they were popping up all over the area like weeds. Crossing his arms,

Joey leaned his shoulder against the side of the sliding door leading onto the balcony.

This certainly wasn't going the way Joey had imagined. Coffee in a public shop with people around them would have been much safer. Not that he believed Trick would ever hurt him. But he didn't trust himself around Trick by himself. Joey wasn't sure if his anger would get the better of him and he'd punch Trick or if he'd lose his mind and kiss the hell out of the gorgeous bastard.

"You can have a seat, you know?" Trick said, interrupting Joey's thoughts.

Joey turned and almost swallowed his tongue. Trick had changed into a pair of tight faded blue jeans with a dark blue t-shirt which hugged every damn inch of each muscle the guy had. His feet were bare. "I'm fine."

Trick sighed and sat in the recliner. "My parents were extremely vocal in their venom and hatred of anyone they considered different. That included anyone in the LGBTQIA+ community. It was all I ever heard from them whenever the topic came up or they saw someone who was obviously gay. Teenagers aren't really all that different. Everyone wants to be popular. Wants to fit in. I thought it was the only way to survive."

Joey gave Trick a confused look. "What do you mean?"

"When I said those things to the others on the football team, I didn't mean them. They'd been ragging on me about the way you follow me around, the way you'd look at me, the obvious crush you had on me, and they were just being all-around assholes about it. It was what I thought they wanted to hear."

Clenching his hands into fists, Joey scowled at him. "That doesn't excuse a fucking word."

Trick held up his hand. "I know it doesn't. I'm just trying to make you understand why I said it. The thing is... I was also hiding who I was. From everyone."

He frowned at Trick. "Hiding what?"

Locking gazes with him, sapphire eyes shining with determination, Trick said, "I'm gay, Joey."

Shocked couldn't even begin to cover the emotions which raged through him at Trick's words. Joey stumbled to the couch and sank down, his hands gripping the leather fabric of the cushion. Trick moved closer, sitting next to him. "I'm truly sorry for what I said that day. I was afraid. No, terrified, because if my parents found out they would have disowned me. Thrown me out onto the street."

Trick gave a mirthless laugh. "They actually did. After high school, I still lived at home while going to community college. My mom walked in on me and a friend from school making out while we were supposed to be doing homework. That night I was out on my ass with nowhere to go."

The memory of his mother telling him Trick had lived with them for a while surfaced. "That's why you stayed in my room," Joey whispered.

"Yeah. Your parents took me in. Gave me somewhere to stay while I got my life sorted and got back on my feet. I had to drop out of community college because I couldn't afford to pay for it. Started working with a landscaping company where the owner taught me everything he knew." Trick set his hand on Joey's knee. "I never, ever wanted to hurt you like that, Joey. You were like a little brother to me. If I'd known you'd heard me, I'd have apologized sooner. Is... is that the reason you were so closed off whenever I was around your last year of high school and why you never came home to see your family?"

Looking at the clear regret on Trick's face and knowing what Trick went through didn't completely assuage the anger he'd held in his heart for so long, but it settled something inside of him. Joey studied Trick for several moments before he turned his gaze toward the television, concentrating on the black screen, before shrugging. Trick cursed and squeezed Joey's knee gently. "God, Joey, I'm so fucking sorry," he rasped.

"It doesn't matter," Joey said.

"It matters. Every time you didn't come home for Christmas, Thanksgiving, even the summer, your family was devastated and it's all my fault." Trick flexed the fingers on Joey's knee. "Please forgive me, Joey. If you can't, I understand, and I'll avoid your parents' house while you're here. You can't stay away from them anymore because of me. They love you."

He nibbled the inside of his bottom lip, still not looking at Trick. A slight gasp escaped him when Trick touched the side of his face, urging him to look at him. "Do you believe me?"

They were so fucking close to each other that if Joey leaned even a fraction of an inch toward Trick, their lips would meet. "I believe you," he whispered.

"Do you forgive me?" Trick's voice had grown deeper, huskier, sending flickers of lust through Joey and straight down to his cock.

Did he? Could he? Not realizing he had heard the words didn't diminish their cruelty or the pain they caused Joey. It didn't change the fact of how far he'd spiraled during his first year of college. "I don't know."

Trick rubbed his thumb along Joey's bottom lip. A slight whisper of his name left Trick a split second before his mouth brushed over Joey's. The soft caress of Trick's

full lips on his was better than he'd ever dreamed of. Joey threaded the fingers of his left hand through Trick's dark chocolate locks, tugging lightly as Trick deepened the kiss, tongue surging into Joey's mouth. He responded eagerly, tangling his tongue with Trick's, dancing that age old dance of seduction and desire.

Joey broke the kiss, gasping for air, chest heaving. "What was that?"

"I've been dying to do that from the moment I laid eyes on you again," Trick said.

There was absolutely no way Joey could hide the bulge in his pants, but he stood anyway, moving away from Trick. He needed breathing room to think. "Why? I'm just your best friend's little brother."

A noise rattled in Trick's throat and then he stood, crowding Joey close to the wall next to the sliding door. "You were more than just Anthony's little brother. I know you won't believe me, but I wasn't exactly oblivious to how gorgeous you were growing up to be back in high school, Joey."

Trick nipped at Joey's lip, sliding his tongue along it to soothe the tiny bruise. "You've only become even more beautiful and sexy."

The abrupt change in circumstances left Joey breathless and his head whirling. He pushed at Trick's chest. "Stop."

Trick immediately backed off, his breathing also giving away how affected he was. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to overwhelm you."

Joey snorted. "This whole situation is more than overwhelming, Trick. I've spent the better part of the last decade thinking you hated me for being gay, for... for having a crush on you back then, and then suddenly you're gay and kissing me? How the fuck am I supposed to feel?"

“You’re right,” Trick said, moving back to the recliner and sitting down. “I shouldn’t have done that.”

He didn’t know how to process everything he’d learned in the last ten minutes. To go from believing the person he’d thought hated him to suddenly being gay and kissing him? How the fuck was he supposed to unpack all of that? He felt sorely tempted to call his therapist right then. “I just need time to process this.”

Trick stood, slid on his shoes, and said, “I’ll drop you back at your parents.”

Joey didn’t argue, just followed Trick out of his apartment and to his truck. The ride to his parent’s house was quiet. When Trick pulled into the driveway, Joey didn’t immediately get out of the vehicle. “I wasn’t trying to mess with your head,” Trick murmured.

Staring at the house he’d grown up in, Joey thought back over the memories he had of Trick before the incident in high school. He’d thought Trick hung the moon and stars. Trick had been kind to him even when Anthony was being a jerk about Joey trailing behind them. But he found it hard to reconcile that this Trick and the Trick who’d said all those things years ago were the same.

“Do you really hate me that much?” Trick asked. Joey didn’t miss the sadness and regret in Trick’s voice.

“I thought I did,” Joey murmured. He still didn’t move to leave the truck, digging his fingers into his thighs where his hands rested. “I don’t know what I feel anymore.”

He couldn’t separate his attraction to Trick from the other emotions he’d felt for so long.

“I’ll stay home tonight,” Trick said. “Give you some time to think without my

presence being there to confuse you further.”

Frowning, Joey finally looked at Trick. “You have to come to dinner. My parents expect you to be there.”

Trick sighed. “You should spend some time with your family without constantly being on alert with me there. I know I’m the reason you’ve barely been around since you got home, and when you are around, you’re not yourself. You have this massive fucking wall around you.”

Joey didn’t dispute what Trick said. He had kept a wall up to protect himself. A wall he was beginning to see may not be entirely necessary. “Come to dinner.”

Eyeing him, Trick asked, “Are you sure?”

“They’re as much your family as they are mine,” Joey said.

“All right. I guess I’ll see you guys tonight.”

Joey nodded, opened the truck, and got out. He slammed the door shut and jogged up the driveway to the front door. When he turned around, Trick hadn’t moved to back out of the drive, just stared at him with a pensive look on his face. Joey tossed him a short wave and headed into the house.

Everything was quiet as Joey went upstairs to his room. He shut his door, took out his cell phone and hit the speed dial for his therapist before collapsing on his back onto his bed. “Dr. Garrett.”

“It’s Joey Waters.”

“Joey, how are you? How are things in Fort Lauderdale?”

The dam broke and Joey spilled out everything, his heart pounding in his chest, his stomach twisting. Once the words came, they didn't stop. Not until he confessed, "I'm so fucking confused, Doc."

Dr. Garrett made a non-committal noise. "It sounds to me as though Trick has grown up a lot since then, Joey. Do you believe him?"

A rough laugh erupted from Joey. "Believe him? How the hell am I supposed to do that?"

"Do you want to believe him?"

Joey's throat tightened and he flung his arm over his eyes, burying his face in the crook of his elbow. "Yes," he murmured. "I do."

"Then why don't you? Until something shows you that you shouldn't?"

"What if... what if he breaks me again?" Joey hated the weakness in himself. The emotion he'd tried so hard to shove down and stomp out of himself.

"Only you can let him do that, Joey. You can choose to believe him, but he has to show you he deserves your trust."

That was the part that scared the shit out of him. How did he separate the obvious feelings he still had for Trick from the outright fear of letting the guy back into his life? "I have to go, Joey. My next appointment is here. We'll talk when you get back, okay?"

"Sure, Dr. Garrett. Thanks," Joey said, disconnecting the call. He dropped the phone on his bed and continued to lie there, his head spinning in circles over everything. His entire perspective of his past had become distorted. He'd spent the last year of high



school miserable, depressed, and lonely, no longer tagging behind Trick and Anthony. Then in college, he'd made friends, gone off the rails with alcohol and sex, before the attempt to take his life. Finally, for the last six years, he'd been in therapy, still lost himself in sex most of the time, and continued to find his thoughts constantly dominated by Trick.

Now Joey wondered if he hadn't wasted the last eight years by being angry at Trick, letting that rage drive him, only for it to be pointless. A derisive chuckle echoed in the quiet bedroom. Dr. Garrett's words about believing Trick were hard to swallow, but that was all Joey wanted to do. Because if he did, Trick suddenly became available. Something Joey had wanted since he was thirteen years old.

His phone vibrated next to his ear and Joey grabbed it, cringing when he saw Vince's name and the start of the text message. The guy just wouldn't take no for an answer. Instead of responding, Joey deleted the alert and let the phone drop to the bed again.

Sighing, he rolled over, buried his face in his arms and dozed, needing an escape from the endless train of thoughts circling in his brain.

Dinner was the usual boisterous affair of laughter, wine, and good food. Joey spent much of the time forcing himself to join in, his mind still a muddled mess after everything he'd learned, and sneaking peeks at Trick when the guy wasn't looking. At one point, he caught Veronica watching him, a knowing gleam in her eyes. Joey shook his head at her, giving her a pointed look. She grinned but kept quiet.

Joey presented a matching set of engraved silver watches to his parents. Both of them attempted to refuse the gift, saying it was too extravagant, but Joey waved away their protests. "I wanted to get you something that would last and it was either those or an engraved silver-plated serving platter."

They thanked him and promptly put the watches on, all protests gone. Joey felt good providing something a little more extravagant to his parents. They'd done their best to give him and his brother everything they could while growing up, without spoiling them, but there were times they'd hit a few rough bumps in the road. His father had lost his job once because of cutbacks, which caused them to fall behind on their mortgage. They'd had a couple of years struggling to bring the payments current and almost lost the house.

His mother started asking him questions about his job, his life back in Orlando, and even if he was seeing anyone. Joey shook his head. "No. I am not in a relationship at the moment."

"No potentials?" she asked.

“Nope. Just enjoying my job and the traveling I get to do.”

“No one at all?” Veronica asked, an obvious teasing glint in her eye.

Joey took a sip of his beer and shook his head. “Not right now, no. My biggest client keeps me busy enough.”

“Oh? Who is your biggest client?” Veronica asked.

“Wesley Prince. Remember I told you about him last night.”

She smirked. “You and him have more than a professional relationship?”

Almost choking on the small bite of food he’d taken, Joey stared at her. What the hell was she doing? She flicked her gaze toward Trick before looking back at him. “I don’t kiss and tell,” Joey finally replied.

Veronica laughed. “That is always such a cop out. It’s obvious something has happened between the two of you.”

“Really, Veronica, this isn’t the type of conversation to have at dinner,” Joey’s mom reprimanded her.

She’d gotten whatever response she’d been trying to get because she agreed too easily. Joey glanced at Trick and had to do a double take, but Trick looked away before Joey could be certain at what he’d seen. Was Trick jealous? Trick had kissed him at his apartment earlier, so it was entirely possible, he supposed. But why? Joey frowned. They hadn’t seen each other for years and until this morning, he’d thought Trick hated his existence. Deciding to shelve the entire thing until he was alone again, Joey consciously pushed the thoughts from his mind, joining in on the conversation once more.

Afterward, they returned to the house where they all sat around and played Bullshit, a card game Joey had hated as a kid because his mother wouldn't let him swear. It wasn't until after midnight that his parents called it quits and headed upstairs. Trick made his excuses. "I'll see you in the morning, Ant," Trick said, standing.

"You're leaving, too?" Anthony asked. "But it's so early."

"And we have to be up early to finish Mrs. Levy's front lawn."

Anthony groaned and slumped in his chair. "Damn, I forgot."

Trick grinned. "Comes with the territory of owning your own business."

"Let me use the restroom and we'll head out, too, babe," Veronica said. She headed out of the kitchen toward the bathroom.

Trick looked at Joey. "Walk me out?"

Anthony gave them both a strange look that Joey didn't miss. Joey swallowed and shrugged. "Sure."

Without a word, Trick led the way out of the kitchen and through the living room. Joey trailed behind him down the driveway, his eyes locked on the flexing muscles behind the slacks Trick wore. He didn't notice Trick stop until Trick spun, grabbed him by the wrist, and drew him into the shadows next to the house. Joey startled as he found his body yanked up against Trick's and Trick's hands cupping the sides of Joey's face. "Wha-"

Trick stopped the exclamation, bringing his mouth down onto Joey's. A gasp gave Trick's tongue free entry and the thick, slick muscle flooded Joey's mouth. Joey reached up and grasped Trick's shoulders, his fingers digging into the hard muscles

there. He groaned into the kiss, sucking heatedly on Trick's tongue. A growl vibrated against Joey's mouth before Trick broke away, panting heavily and leaning his forehead against Joey's. Trick trailed his hands down the sides of Joey's neck, along his shoulders and around to his waist. "All night you've driven me crazy. Your fucking smile, the sound of your laugh, the smell of your skin."

"What is this?" Joey asked, his voice strained with desire.

"I want you, Joey. I have for years. Whenever Anthony would show me pictures of you from college or the ones of you with your clients, all I could think about was seeing you again. I know you won't believe me, but even before I admitted to myself, before I told my parents I was gay, I wanted you."

Joey thumped his head back on the side of the house, his body shuddering at Trick's words. They were all he'd ever wanted to hear in high school. Now, he couldn't stop himself from hoping they were true, but doubting Trick's sincerity. But he remembered Dr. Garrett's suggestion. Give Trick a chance. Let him show whether or not he deserved Joey's trust.

"Have dinner with me tomorrow night?" Trick asked.

Before Joey could answer, he heard the front door open and Trick drew him further into the shadows. "Trick's truck is still here?" Anthony said. "Where the hell are they?"

"Maybe they went for a walk or something. Let's just go home."

"Something is going on with the two of them. I just don't know what it is." Joey could hear the frustration and hurt in his brother's voice.

"Does it matter? They're both adults and it's none of our business," Veronica said.

The sound of Anthony's truck doors opening reached the two of them where they hid in the shadows. Joey couldn't hear anything else as their conversation became covered by the sounds of the doors closing.

Trick leaned in closer, feathering his lips over the side of Joey's neck and sending shivers down Joey's spine. "Say you'll have dinner with me. It's just dinner. Nothing else."

"O-okay," Joey breathed out.

"Thank you," Trick murmured, nuzzling at Joey's shoulder. "I'll see you tomorrow night, then. Seven o'clock."

Suddenly, Joey felt bereft of Trick's body heat as Trick walked toward his truck and climbed inside. Joey watched until the taillights of the vehicle disappeared around the corner. He sighed, wondering what the hell he'd gotten himself into. It wasn't as if there could be anything between them. He'd be returning home to Orlando in a few days.

Did he really want something to happen between them? He knew Trick had explained what had happened years ago. It didn't make the words hurt any less or take away what Joey had experienced these last eight years. Could he simply move past it and let Trick into his life? Could he give Trick the chance of destroying him again?

Sighing, Joey headed into the house to get ready for bed. He had a lot of shit to think about before dinner tomorrow night.

The next morning, Joey helped his mom make breakfast, then cleaned the garage with his dad. Homesickness hit him straight in the chest. He'd missed being around his family, missed his father's sense of humor and the way his mother fussed over him. Hell, he'd even missed the way his brother would hassle him about anything and

everything. Maybe now... maybe now he could come back home more often to visit.

“Want to tell me what’s going on with you and Trick?” his mother asked while they were doing the dishes after lunch, causing him to almost drop the glass he’d been drying.

“What are you talking about?” Joey asked, setting the glass on the counter to put away after all the dishes were washed.

She gave him a raised brow. “I may be old, Joey, but I’m not blind. When you first got home, you wouldn’t have anything to do with Trick. I may not know what was said outside during the barbecue, but I could see you were upset and angry. Did he do or say something to upset you?”

Joey couldn’t believe just how on point his mother was. He hadn’t given her enough credit. Could he tell her the truth, though? Maybe bare details? Sighing, he set aside the plate he’d just dried. “Let’s finish these and then we can talk.”

They didn’t speak again until everything was put away and his mother had put together some iced tea with a few cookies on a plate. Settling at the kitchen table, Joey gave a summarized version of his feelings and what he’d heard eight years ago, leaving out his off the rails details from college. “Oh, Joey,” she said, touching his cheek gently. “I am so sorry he hurt you like that. I knew you had a crush on him in high school, but I never dreamed when you suddenly stopped trailing after them the way you used to, that this was the reason.”

He shrugged. “I didn’t want to be around him again after that. As each year went by, it got harder to let it go and for me to come back. I didn’t know about him coming out and his parents kicking him out of the house.” He gave a derisive smile. “It was definitely mind blowing when I found out he himself is gay. I’m still processing it.”

His mother grabbed hold of one of his hands and squeezed it. “Trick was... a very confused, frightened young man back then, honey. I’m not defending what he said. Not at all. But to know his own parents hated what he was and if he ever acted on any of those feelings, he’d lose his family, must have made him feel so afraid and hopeless. Sometimes we do things we aren’t proud of because we’re scared. He’s a good man, Joey. Give him the chance to prove it.”

Her words sort of echoed Dr. Garrett’s. “For years I thought he despised my very being, Mom. A little hard to let that go so easily.”

“I didn’t say it was going to be easy, but it could be worth it. You could do worse than Trick,” she said, smiling.

Joey stared at his mother; brows raised. “I live in Orlando. It’s not like we’d have a future together.”

Why the hell was he talking about a future with Trick when he didn’t even know if he wanted to have dinner with him that night? Then he had to admit he was lying to himself. The idea of spending time with Trick still caused the gut-twisting excitement he’d always felt whenever it came to the sexy bastard.

“Promise me something, baby.”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t let him keep you away from home any longer. No matter what you decide to do. I’ve missed my baby boy so much.”

Guilt stabbed Joey straight in the chest. “I’m sorry, Mom,” he murmured.

She touched his cheek. “It’s okay, sweetie. At least, I understand now what kept you



away.” Her next words almost sent him falling out of his chair. “Now, want to tell me why you were in the hospital your first year of college?”

“You know about that?” Joey asked, shocked as hell.

“You were still on our insurance, of course we know about it. The explanation of benefits letter came a few weeks after the visit.” She pursed her lips and gave him the stink eye. “You wouldn’t exactly stay on the phone long enough to let me ask you about it.”

“I... ah... I just fell one day while horsing around,” Joey lied. “My roommate and I were being stupid. I fell and cut myself. That’s all.”

She eyed him a little longer, skepticism showing on her face. “I figured if it was serious, you’d at least have let us know what was going on.”

He hated lying to her, but there was no way in hell he would tell her about that. “Of course I would have, Mom.”

After that, she seemed to accept what he said and moved on. The day went by faster than Joey thought it would. He took a shower and dressed, spritzing himself with some cologne. He hadn’t felt nervous about a date in years. Not since the first couple he went on in college. His hands shook as he snapped his usual leather band back into place. He took a deep breath, letting it out slowly, and shook himself. It was just Trick.

“Yeah, right,” he muttered. “Just Trick.”

His phone vibrated, and Joey picked it up from his dresser. He frowned when he saw another text from Vince. Why didn’t the guy understand Joey wanted nothing to do with him? This time, Joey responded and told him to stop texting him, then blocked

Vince's number. He glanced at the time and saw it was already almost seven. Taking another deep breath, Joey stuffed his wallet in his pocket and double checked his hair before heading out of his room and downstairs. "I'll be back later, Mom!" Joey shouted.

"Have fun, baby!" she called back.

Trick pulled into the driveway just as Joey exited the house. Joey walked to the passenger side, where Trick leaned over to open the door. "I was going to pick you up at the door," Trick said.

Joey shrugged. "It's fine. So where are we going to eat?"

"I thought we could head back to my place. I'd like to cook you dinner and it'll give us a chance to talk without interruptions. If you're okay with that."

"Sure," he said, even though he was a little nervous about being alone with Trick. If they were alone, there'd be no buffer.

"Great. So how was your day?" Trick asked.

Joey relayed what he'd done with his mom and dad, leaving out the conversation he'd had with his mom about Trick. "Did you and Anthony get that project done?"

"Almost. We're about two thirds of the way through." Joey could hear the pride in Trick's voice.

"You really enjoy landscaping, huh?"

Trick nodded. "It gives me a chance to make something beautiful out of nothing. Kind of like an artist. After my parents kicked me out and I couldn't finish college, I

had to find something to support myself with and standing behind a register all day or sitting in an office really wasn't somewhere I could see myself. And witnessing the pleasure on people's faces when I show them the finished work really makes me happy. Happier than football ever did."

Joey winced at the reminder of Trick's parents' actions. "I'm so sorry about your parents, Trick."

"Thanks. I knew they wouldn't accept my being gay. But I just couldn't live the lies any longer." Trick slowed the truck to a stop at a red light. "Besides, I had Anthony and your parents. They did a lot for me and I will always be grateful for them."

Joey studied Trick, watching the late evening sunlight play across his face while driving. "I-I'm glad they were there for you, too."

Trick gave him a sardonic glance. "Even after everything?"

Tearing his gaze from Trick, Joey shrugged. "I may not have liked you, but you didn't deserve to be thrown out of your home just because you like men. You deserve a family, too."

The feel of Trick's hand on his startled him and he turned his head to look at him. A soft smile graced Trick's full lips. "Thanks, Joey."

"Uh, yeah, of course." Joey swallowed hard and shifted his hand out from under Trick's.

A few minutes later, they were pulling into Trick's apartment complex parking lot. Nervousness settled in again. Joey's stomach clenched even harder when he climbed out of the truck and followed Trick into the building. When they entered Trick's apartment, Trick waved a hand at the sofa. "Have a seat while I get everything ready.

Steaks sound good?”

“Sure,” Joey murmured, wandering toward the couch.

“You want a beer?” Trick asked, opening the fridge and taking out a couple of bottles.

Joey nodded and started to get up, but Trick stopped him and walked over to him. He popped the top off and handed him one. “So, tell me how you got into the sports agent business?”

He took a sip of his beer, then set it on the coffee table on a coaster. “I kind of just fell into it. During my last year of college, a friend of mine talked me into interning there with him for the summer before my senior year. I fell in love with the whole aspect of it. Watched a lot of the agents work, listening to what they did.”

Trick placed his own beer on the counter between the kitchen and the living room, then took out a pan to start the steaks. “Sounds like you really love your job.”

Joey smiled. “I do. I get to meet new people all the time, get to travel often, and there are a lot of perks.”

“Oh? Like what?”

He almost winced. Normally he hinted at the sex, but that just didn’t feel right with Trick. “Good money. Nice expense budget. Helps me afford my place and the car I just bought.”

Trick gave him a raised brow. “And I suppose meeting hot men has nothing to do with it?”

Joey's face went totally five alarm blaze. "Ah..."

Grinning, Trick let him off the hook. "I'm just teasing you."

Gods, what the fuck was wrong with him? To hide his inability to respond, Joey grabbed his beer and took a swig. He was acting like a fucking teenager all over again. Trick made him feel so off balance and as if the last eight years hadn't happened.

By the time they sat down to dinner, Trick had set him at ease again, changing the subject. Trick didn't have a dining table since the apartment wasn't big enough for it, so they ate at the counter, still chatting about various subjects. When they finished, Joey helped clean up after and grabbed a third beer from the fridge. He offered one to Trick, who nodded and motioned for him to set it on the counter.

Popping open the top, he tossed the cap in the garbage can under the sink and wandered back over to the couch where he sat in the far corner, slouching slightly. Trick joined him, sitting closer than Joey expected. He shifted uncomfortably, ignoring the heat he could feel radiating off of Trick's thigh, which was only a few inches from his own. "So, ah... What were you going to college for originally?"

"Honestly, I had no idea," Trick said. "I really didn't know what I wanted to do with my life then. Football had always been a big part of my life throughout middle and high school. I guess I thought I'd always play professionally."

Joey gave him a sympathetic look.

"But it's okay. I like what I do. I'm outside all day in the fresh air. Set my own hours. And I get to work with my best friend. What more could I ask for, right?"

"Sounds great," Joey murmured, twisting the beer bottle in his hands and picking at

the label. Okay, where the hell did his confidence go? He was getting mad at himself and at Trick for affecting him the way he did. “I think it’s time for me to go home.”

“What? But it’s still early,” Trick said, frowning.

“You said dinner. We ate. So unless you want to watch a movie or something, it’s probably best I go. I can call an Uber or something.”

Trick turned on the couch to face him, his right leg coming up to rest alongside Joey’s thigh. “Do I make you that uncomfortable? You still haven’t accepted my apology?”

If only it were that simple, Joey thought. “What do you want from me, Trick?”

“What do you mean?”

Joey turned his head to look at Trick. “I mean, what is this? Why did you want me to have dinner with you?”

Trick cupped Joey’s cheek. “I don’t want anything from you, Joey. I just wanted to spend time with you. Get to know you again.”

“Why?” Joey murmured.

A smile curled the edges of Trick’s lips. “Because despite how things were in high school, I liked... I like you, Joey. You’re smart, funny, you hide an enormous heart behind a tough facade, and so fucking sexy you break my heart.”

Joey only had a split second to suck in a breath before Trick kissed him. He gasped into Trick’s mouth before opening his own under the probing touch of Trick’s tongue. A sharp pang of lust struck through Joey so hard, his cock pulsed and his stomach

ached. Reaching up, Joey placed his hand on the side of Trick's neck, leaning farther into the kiss.

He ran his tongue over Trick's full bottom lip, suckling on the soft flesh. Trick groaned and pulled Joey onto his lap until Joey straddled him, their jean-clad lengths pressing together. Joey couldn't stifle the moan he let free when Trick gripped his ass, squeezing the rounded mounds in his large hands. He rocked his hips, grinding himself against Trick. "God, Joey," Trick growled. "You taste so fucking amazing."

Nibbling his way along Trick's neck to his throat, Joey heatedly sucked up tiny bruises, leaving behind his mark on Trick's skin. Their harsh breathing echoed in the silence, only to be broken by the sound of someone slamming their apartment door or voices chatting as they went by Trick's apartment. "I want you, Joey," Trick said. "Tell me I can have you."

The sheer hunger in Trick's deep voice sent shudders down Joey's spine. He pulled away to look into Trick's eyes, searching for deceit, lies, anything that would have him believe this to be a mistake. But the only thing he saw in Trick's gaze was desire. The deep sapphire blue had darkened further, lust shining out at him. Joey bit his lower lip, caught between fear and having the one thing he'd always dreamed of. Trick used his thumb to pull Joey's lip from between his teeth. "Nothing has to happen. If you still don't trust me, I'll take you home."

Joey hated how vulnerable he must look to Trick right then for him to offer to take him home. He tried to clear his insecurities from his face, but Trick shook his head. "No, Joey. You don't have to hide from me. I promise I will never hurt you again."

"You can't promise that," Joey said hoarsely.

"I can," Trick said, his face serious. "I will never hurt you ever again."

The absolute sincerity in Trick's eyes stole Joey's breath. Trick truly believed his own words. His throat tightened and Joey gave a minute nod. A blinding smile broke out over Trick's gorgeous features right before Trick captured his lips again, his arms wrapping around Joey's back and tugging him tightly to him. Joey snaked his hands under Trick's shirt, running his palms over the firm muscles of his stomach and higher still to his chest. Trick released Joey long enough to strip his shirt off, baring his tanned chest to Joey's ravenous gaze.

Sculpted, tanned muscles from hours of hard work in the sun rippled in the dim lighting of the apartment. Joey traced his fingers along the edges of Trick's pecs, circled his nipples, and trailed down to where the faint line of dark hairs disappeared into the top of Trick's jeans. The man was a god. There were no words to describe how gorgeous Trick's body was.

Joey tugged his own shirt off, tossing it aside haphazardly as he leaned in to lick one of Trick's nipples, then nipped it lightly. Trick hissed, his fingers digging into Joey's hips. "Fuck, baby, that feels so good."

He did it again, rolling the nipple gently between his teeth, only to soothe it with his tongue. Trick ran his calloused palms along Joey's back and over Joey's shoulders to his chest. His thumbs found Joey's pebbled nipples and brushed over them, wrenching a moan from Joey. Joey suddenly found himself on his back, Trick rising over him to kiss him again, one hard thigh slipping between his legs to rock against Joey's trapped shaft. "Wanna taste you, Joey," Trick rasped, trailing his mouth along Joey's throat and further still.

Deft fingers popped the button on Joey's jeans and tugged the zipper down, the teeth separating sounding harsh to Joey. But the feel of Trick's hand wrapping around his stiff cock wrenched a loud groan from Joey. "Trick!"

"Fuck yeah, say my name just like that, baby," Trick said right before he engulfed



Joey's cock in his hot, wet mouth. Joey cried out, his hands instinctively slapping onto Trick's head, fingers digging into the dark chocolate locks. He couldn't believe Trick could take the entire length. On more than one occasion, whoever he'd been hooking up with said he was too thick and long, but Trick went straight to the root.

Trick worked Joey's cock like a pro, taking him deep, then sliding back to the tip, swirling his tongue over the crown. Holy fuck, Trick was out to ruin him. The obscene sounds of slurping ratcheted Joey's lust even higher. Joey couldn't stop the upward thrusts of his hips or tear his gaze away from Trick's lips wrapped around his shaft. When Trick swallowed around him, Joey almost lost his shit. A loud groan rumbled from him. "Jesus, Trick," he panted.

Humming, Trick lashed along the bottom of Joey's cock on his way to the top. He released Joey, only to drop further down and nuzzle at Joey's balls. The wet heat of Trick's tongue on them caused Joey to toss his head back and forth on the couch pillow beneath him. Trick drew one into his mouth, then the other.

"Fuck, I'm not going to last," Joey said, his toes curling in his shoes. He'd had some pretty good blow jobs in his life, but hell, if this wasn't the best he'd ever received. Trick certainly knew what he was doing. Jealousy bit at the unbidden thought. He'd learned somehow... But Joey shoved the thought away. He didn't exactly have a leg to stand on, considering his own years of constant bed partners.

"Cum for me, Joey," Trick murmured before engulfing Joey's cock once more. Joey almost screamed as he let go, his spunk filling Trick's mouth, who promptly swallowed every drop. Sweat trickled along Joey's temple and into his hair as he lay there panting, tiny aftershocks flicking along his nerve endings.

Trick appeared in Joey's view, a satisfied smirk on his face. He leaned down and kissed Joey sweetly. It made Joey's heart ache because he would have given anything for this in high school. And the little voice in his head kept nagging at him, telling him he was making a mistake by letting Trick back into his life, and giving him the power to annihilate him once more. Joey liked to believe he was stronger than he used to be, but he knew Trick held him in the palm of his hand and could crush him with one thoughtless clench.

Joey forced the voice away, determined to enjoy the night even if it was only a onetime thing. He returned Trick's kiss with passion, running his palms along Trick's back, fingers trailing over the defined muscles. Trick stood suddenly, holding his hand out to Joey. He took it and Trick tugged him from the sofa, leading him into the nearby bedroom. A king size bed with a black metal frame sat against the far wall with a dark nightstand on either side. That was all Joey had the chance to notice before Trick pushed him onto the mattress, following him down to blanket Joey's body.

"From the moment I saw you the other day, this is all I've thought about," Trick said, his eyes liquid with heat. "Touching you is like touching the sun."

Joey sucked in a breath at Trick's words, his heart squeezing in his chest at the almost romantic words. He didn't get to dwell on them because Trick captured his mouth once more in an almost desperate kiss, distracting him from his thoughts. Trick broke the contact long enough to strip Joey's shoes, jeans, and briefs off along with his own.

His eyes widened when he saw Trick's impressive size between his thighs. At least an inch or two longer than his own, and thick like a can of Red Bull. It had been a while since Joey bottomed and his hole clenched at the idea of taking Trick's cock. Trick reached into the nightstand and pulled out a bottle of slick and a condom. He opened the lube, poured some on his fingers, and closed it, tossing it aside.

The bed frame creaked slightly when Trick lowered down onto him again and began to lick and bite along Joey's chest. Joey couldn't stop himself from tensing slightly when Trick's fingers probed at his entrance. Trick stopped and looked up at him. "Okay?"

"Been a while," Joey murmured.

Raising a brow, Trick asked, "Since you've had sex?"

Joey gave a husky chuckle and shook his head. "No, since I've been on the bottom."

Understanding dawned on Trick's face, quickly followed by tenderness. He leaned in and kissed Joey, his mouth soft and sweet. "I won't hurt you," he said.

Trick didn't resume his explorations of Joey's ass immediately. Instead, he pressed gentle kisses along Joey's cheek, chin, neck, and throat. He traveled further still along Joey's chest, navel and abdomen. Joey sucked in a breath when Trick flicked his tongue over the tip of Joey's cock before swirling it around the head. The distraction proved to be what Joey needed as Trick probed the tight ring of muscles, carefully sliding a single digit inside. A groan rattled in Joey's chest when one finger became two and Trick scissored his fingers, stretching him. Pleasure soared through him with each of Trick's movements.

Once Trick seemed satisfied Joey could accept him without pain, he withdrew his fingers, rose onto his knees to slide on the condom, and spilled lube onto the length of

his shaft. “Ready for me?” Trick asked, scooting closer until the head of his cock touched the entrance to Joey’s ass.

Joey nodded, grabbing the backs of his knees to lift his legs a bit more and open them wider. Trick eased the tip into Joey, pure pleasure etched on his face when the ring closed around the crown of Trick’s cock. “Jesus, you’re tight,” Trick moaned, inching further into him.

The stretch burned, but Joey pulled Trick down into a passionate kiss, ignoring the sensation. Both of them moaned when Trick bottomed out, balls deep inside of Joey. Nipping at Joey’s bottom lip, Trick undulated his hips, withdrawing a bit before pushing back in. Joey wrapped his legs around Trick’s waist while one hand gripped one of Trick’s biceps and the other remained locked around his nape. They never broke eye contact, just watching the other as the pleasure built higher and deeper.

Joey couldn’t stop trembling from the intimacy of the moment. Never in the seven years he’d been having sex had he ever felt such a deep connection with any of the men he’d been with. He didn’t know if it was because he wasn’t the one doing the fucking or if it was because it was Trick. The idea of the reason being Trick scared the shit out of him even more than before. If it felt this way between them, how would it feel when Joey headed back home? Or if Trick turned out to be the same jerk from high school?

He turned his head away, attempting to break the connection, but Trick wouldn’t let him. He cupped Joey’s cheek and urged him to look at him again. Trick gave him a tender kiss, still not increasing the speed of his movements. Perspiration had built on their skin and Joey couldn’t resist licking the bead of sweat that clung to Trick’s chin. The salt exploded across Joey’s taste buds, wrenching a groan from him.

Finally, Trick moved a little faster, increasing the intensity of his thrusts, until the bedframe was squeaking steadily. A grin broke over Trick’s face, and Joey furrowed

his brows at him. What the hell was so funny? “Never realized how much I need to oil the hinges on my bed,” Trick said, his voice rough from their passion.

Joey couldn’t help it. He broke out laughing and Trick chuckled and collapsed on him slightly, both lost to the humor of the moment. When their mirth calmed down, Trick raised his body again and gazed down at him, running a hand along Joey’s cheek and brushing the hair away from his face. “You’ve never had anyone here?” Joey asked, brow raised.

“No. Never wanted anyone else here,” Trick said. Sincerity radiated from the dark blue sapphires Joey had spent so many years loving. It twisted Joey’s heart even further and Joey knew he would be missing a chunk of his heart once more when he returned home. He wrapped a hand around Trick’s nape again and yanked him down into a hard kiss, trying his damndest to ignore the emotions building between them.

Trick moved into an almost kneeling position, pushing Joey’s legs further open, his eyes trained on his cock plunging in and out of Joey’s body. For the first time in a very long time during sex, Joey fought off a blush. He’d been in a lot of erotic positions, but to know it was Trick’s gaze on his body caused him to feel self-conscious. “So goddamn beautiful,” Trick rasped and grasped Joey’s bobbing shaft, stroking lightly.

“Shit.” Joey groaned, gripping the sheets under him at the dual sensation of Trick’s dick stretching him wide with each deep thrust into his channel and the callouses of Trick’s work-roughened hand tugging on him. He could feel his balls tightening, ready to unload, and he couldn’t take his eyes off of the head of his prick surging in and out of Trick’s hand. “Fuck, I’m going to cum.”

“Do it,” Trick ordered. “Come while I’m inside you.” The sensual deepness of Trick’s voice washed over Joey, and he tensed up slightly, back arching a fraction as his seed rushed up through his cock and splattered across his chest, stomach, and

abdomen. Joey shouted, his body shuddering with each hard spurt.

Trick followed him over the edge, grunting as he unloaded in the condom, his head tipped backward with his eyes closed. Joey could feel the heat of Trick's spunk through the rubber, and he almost bemoaned the fact the man wore it at all. The idea of being marked on the inside by Trick sent tiny aftershocks rushing through him.

He gasped when Trick withdrew from him and discarded the condom. Trick collapsed to the bed beside him, wrapped an arm around him, and drew him close, nuzzling at his neck. "You okay?"

"I—" Joey cleared his throat, his voice hoarse. "I'm okay."

Cuddling after sex felt weird and abnormal to Joey. Normally Joey ghosted the second he'd finished coming. He stared at the ceiling fan overhead, watching the way the lights from the courtyard danced across it, the breeze outside causing the palm tree fronds to blot out the light off and on. Trick didn't speak again, just continued to hold him, lightly caressing his arm. The gentle touch, Trick's soft breathing, and the release from his orgasm lulled Joey to sleep.

But his dreams didn't allow for peaceful rest. Memories of waking up in the emergency room, the cruel tone in Trick's voice as Joey heard those awful words over and over in his head, and his own insecurities about why Trick suddenly wanted him haunted every second. So when he woke to find himself face down, a slight gasp shaking his body, Joey's heart beat hard at his rib cage. It took several breaths before he realized where he was.

A warm palm settling onto his back jolted Joey even more. "What's wrong?" Trick asked, his voice sleep roughened.

"Nothing," Joey whispered into the darkness. "Bad dream."

He tensed when Trick traced the edges of the tattoo on his back. “Do you want to talk about it?”

At first, Joey thought Trick meant the tattoo, but then he realized Trick meant his nightmare. “No. It was nothing.”

Trick pressed a light kiss to the tattoo on Joey’s bicep, still trailing his fingers over Joey’s back tattoo. “You sure?”

Joey turned his head so he could see Trick. “I’m sure.”

Smiling, Trick ran his thumb over Joey’s cheek. “Okay. Why don’t you try to go back to sleep? I have to be up early to finish our latest project. I’ll wake you and we can grab some coffee before I take you home.”

“Maybe I should just go home now,” Joey murmured.

“Why?” Trick asked. “It’s the middle of the night.”

Joey studied Trick’s face for several long moments. He didn’t want to leave. No, he wanted to stay in Trick’s bed, in Trick’s arms, forever. Which is exactly why he should get up and leave. The weak part of Joey, the part he’d thought he’d banished for good, demanded he remain right where he was. “This can’t be anything,” Joey said.

Surprise and disappointment flashed over Trick’s features. “Because you live in Orlando?”

Sitting up, Joey moved to place his back against the headboard, a pillow stuffed behind him. “Mostly. My life is there. My job.”

“Mostly? You’re still angry at me for what I said to those guys in high school, then.” Trick sighed, shifting to sit beside him. “I promise you, Joey. That wasn’t me. It isn’t me. Why isn’t that good enough?”

“It’s not that it isn’t good enough, Trick. I just... it’s only been a day since my entire viewpoint of the last eight years has been knocked on its ass. I don’t know what the fuck I feel. I certainly didn’t intend on getting into bed with you tonight.” Joey ran a hand through his hair in frustration. “Eight years is a long time to believe you hate me then to suddenly find out you don’t? Fuck, Trick, I fucking loved you back then and you nearly destroyed me.”

Shit! Joey hadn’t meant to say all of that. He’d just been unable to hold his tongue any further. Confusion, shock, and sadness emanated from Trick. “I-I didn’t know that, Joey. I knew you had a hero worship thing for me and your brother, but I never imagined,” Trick breathed. “What do you mean I nearly destroyed you?”

“Nothing, it’s nothing. Just forget it.”

“No. You can’t say something like that and then not explain it.” Trick changed positions to face Joey head on, refusing to let Joey hide.

“I just went through a lot of depression,” Joey said. It was a half-truth. He had been very depressed and fought through that every day still. His therapist had diagnosed him with clinical depression and anxiety. He even took meds to control it. Either way, there was no way in hell he’d tell Trick of his suicide attempt.

Trick made a noise in his throat and reached out to yank Joey against him, hugging him hard. “I’m so fucking sorry, Joey. I really, truly am. You have to believe me.”

Joey tentatively returned Trick’s hug, his fingers digging into the muscles along Trick’s back. He knew he had to stop throwing everything in Trick’s face. He’d



apologized more than once and he'd even said he'd tried to forgive him. But the intimacy during sex had opened more emotions than Joey could have imagined. The hole he'd felt inside of him for so long had shrunk slightly. Almost as though those moments with Trick were filling more than just his body. Truthfully, it scared the shit out of him.

Until these last few days, he hadn't even realized just how much of a wall he'd erected to the world and the people around him. He hadn't truly let anyone in over the years. No relationships beyond what someone could do for him in bed. Hell, he barely had any friends beyond his co-workers and those were only for basketball games and going out clubbing to find his next conquest.

Swallowing hard, Joey rested his forehead on Trick's shoulder. "I'm not trying to guilt trip you, Trick. It's just really hard to let go of what happened in a few days of hearing an apology and realizing things weren't what they seemed back then."

"I get it," Trick said, his voice soft. "I'm not trying to push you, but I just need to know if you can give it a chance. You and me, I mean."

Joey lifted his head to look at Trick, studying the firm lines of his tanned features. He knew he wanted to. God, how he wanted to. The question which chased its tail in his head was, could he? Could he let go of everything and give Trick that chance he asked for? Anger at Trick had driven him for so long. Now that his anger was fading, Joey's insecurities reared their ugly head inside of him. Something which he hadn't allowed to affect him since his first year of college before his trip to the hospital.

Hope warred with uncertainty in the deep sapphires Joey couldn't get enough of. Despite everything, Joey knew he couldn't hurt Trick. If Trick truly wanted to be with him, he'd try. Once. He wouldn't have another one in him if Trick reverted to the boy he'd been in high school. "We need to slow down," Joey finally said, his voice shaky. "Okay?"

Trick let out a deep breath and nodded. "I can do that. It really wasn't my intention to get you into bed tonight, Joey. You're just so fucking sexy that you make it hard to keep my hands to myself."

Joey chuckled. "I think you've got that reversed."

"If we hadn't already said we'd slow down, I'd show you just how wrong you are," Trick growled, his eyes almost glowing with lust. He nuzzled at Joey's throat for a second, then released him, lying back down. Patting the bed, Trick said, "Lie down. I've gotta be up in a couple hours."

Joey did as Trick said, biting back a groan when Trick wrapped himself around him. "What happened to slow?" he asked.

"Just wanted to hug my body pillow while I fall asleep," Trick replied innocently.

He let the subject go and listened to Trick's breathing even out while he remained wide awake. His mind raced, his anxiety level sky high, leaving him unable to sleep. Thoughts circled around in his brain like a toy train.

The alarm on Trick's phone startled him, and Joey realized he hadn't slept at all. Trick mumbled something, tightened his hold on Joey for a second, and then rolled over to turn off his alarm. "Morning," Trick said, yawning.

Joey returned his greeting, watching Trick stumble into the bathroom. He slid from the bed, located his clothing and dressed, perching on the edge of the mattress to wait. When Trick exited the bathroom, Joey went in, relieved himself, washed his hands and used some of Trick's mouth wash. Trick was already in the small kitchen when Joey left the bedroom. "Ready to go?" Trick asked.

Nodding, Joey headed toward the door, but Trick stopped him before he could open

it. "Are we okay?"

"We're good," Joey said.

"We can hit the Dunkin' Donuts drive through before I drop you at your parents' place."

"Sure." Joey preceded Trick out of the apartment and a few minutes later, they were in Trick's truck on the way to grab coffee before heading to Joey's parents' house. They didn't speak much. Joey spent most of the time lost in his thoughts about the night before, the things they'd talked about, and what it all meant.

When they reached his parents' place, Trick placed a hand on Joey's arm to halt his exiting the truck. "Will I see you tonight?"

"I should spend some more time with my family," Joey said, but when Trick's face fell, disappointment clear, he added, "Come to dinner tonight."

Trick brightened slightly. "Sure."

Joey exited the truck and closed the door. When he reached the front porch, he stopped and turned to watch Trick leave. Once Trick disappeared around the corner, Joey sighed and entered his parents' home. His mother was already in the kitchen, a cup of coffee on the table in front of her. She gave him a knowing look as he kissed her temple and bid her good morning. "Trick is coming to dinner tonight."

"Sure, sweetheart. I'll see if Anthony and Veronica want to join us as well."

"I'm going to go for a run," Joey said before heading upstairs to change. He needed to clear his head, and running helped when he couldn't use sex. Sex had him in the discombobulated mental mess he found himself in, so it wouldn't help.

The moment his sneakers hit the pavement, Joey heaved a deep breath and started jogging. What the hell had happened? He'd only been home three days and everything he'd thought of in the car on the way had gone out the window. His entire perception of his past turned upside down, and he didn't have a fucking clue how to process it.

There was no way he and Trick could ever have a future together. Their lives were in two separate places. Joey shook his head, irritated at himself for even thinking some of the things he was. Sex was the simple part. It was all the other shit which complicated everything. He'd truly believed he'd eliminated the feelings he'd had for Trick. How could he not when he'd lived and breathed hatred for Trick for so long? But now... now he questioned everything he'd ever thought about himself and what he felt.

Sweat poured off Joey as he wound his way through the familiar streets. Cars passed him from time to time. He'd chosen his rock playlist on Spotify to run to. When Sign of Life by Motionless in White began playing, Joey's pace slowed a fraction. The song embodied many of the emotions he felt toward Trick. He knew he'd done what he'd sworn he wouldn't. Trick had worked his way back into Joey's heart. But Joey had to be honest with himself. Had Trick ever even left his heart?

Sighing, Joey turned the corner and headed home. Maybe he was overthinking everything. It was just sex. Right?

After a shower and a change of clothing, Joey went downstairs to spend the rest of the day with his parents, much like the day before. He tried to stuff down his uncertainties and thoughts about Trick, but the man was never far from his thoughts.

Anthony showed up close to dinnertime, walking in and calling out a greeting. When he entered the kitchen, Joey stood at the counter cutting veggies. "Where's Veronica?" their mother asked, frowning.

“She took an extra shift to help a friend at work. Smells good, Mom. Where’s Pops?”  
Anthony came over to snag a piece of carrot from the cutting board.

“He’s firing up the grill. We’re having chicken breasts, succotash, and baked potatoes.”

Anthony gave Joey a look. “Can I talk to you for a second?”

Joey shrugged, set down the knife, and wiped off his hands on a towel. “Sure, what’s up?”

“Outside.”

Frowning, Joey followed Anthony out to the front porch. “What’s going on, Ant?”

“That’s what I want to know, Joey. Ever since you’ve been home there’s been something obviously going on between you and Trick. He wouldn’t tell me a damn thing when I asked him. Are you two involved?”

Joey raised a brow at him. “Would it matter?”

Anthony scowled. “I just want the damn truth.”

Shrugging, Joey replied, “I don’t know what is going on. That’s the truth.”

“What happened back in high school?”

Joey tensed in surprise at the question. “What do you mean?”

“I know something happened, Joey. You just suddenly stopped following us around. Did he do something to you?”

Snorting, Joey looked at his brother. “What exactly would he have done to me?”

“I don’t know. Assaulted you or something?”

An incredulous laugh burst forth from Joey. “What makes you think he’d even been interested in me enough to do that in the first place? Where the hell did you get that insane idea from? And why are you waiting until now to ask me this?”

Anthony grunted. “I knew you had a crush on him, but we aren’t exactly confidantes to each other. I knew something happened, but I couldn’t figure out what. When I asked Trick back then, all he could do was brush it off.”

“He didn’t know,” Joey murmured, brushing a strand of hair off his forehead. “He didn’t know I heard him.”

“Heard him what?” Anthony asked.

Joey hadn’t ever wanted to tell his brother about this. Not with the possibility of hurting Anthony’s and Trick’s friendship. Mostly not wanting to hurt his brother since he’d just been overall pissed off at Trick for so long. “It’s not a big deal. Things are different.”

“Tell me,” Anthony demanded.

Giving in, Joey explained what he’d heard Trick say to his football teammates. Anger built on Anthony’s face and Joey winced when Anthony punched the metal bar of the rocking glider. “He did what?”

“It was a long time ago and things are different. He apologized, Ant. It’s over, okay?”

Awareness and even more anger deepened Anthony’s dark expression. “He’s the

reason you didn't come home before now, isn't he?"

Joey flinched and Anthony cursed, scowling. "Son of a bitch. Why didn't you tell me this before, Joey?"

"Because I didn't want to hurt you. I didn't want to ruin your friendship either."

"You're my brother!" Anthony exploded. "You come first. Always. I would never have remained friends with him if I'd known he was such a homophobic prick back then!"

"But he wasn't!" Joey said. "You know how his parents are... were... whatever. He was scared, Ant. That's all. You know he's not a homophobe. He's gay, too, remember?"

A few days ago, if anyone had said he'd be defending Trick to his own brother, Joey would have laughed his ass off. So much had changed in such a brief span of time, Joey could barely catch his breath.

Anthony's rage faded a bit, but Joey could see his brother was still angry. "We talked and cleared the air, Ant. I promise."

"I'm still going to knock him on his ass," Anthony growled.

Joey shook his head. "Please let it go. It's over. I just want to move past this."

"Are you and he... involved now?" Anthony asked.

"Hell, if I know what we are. Right now, I'm just trying to get my head wrapped around the eight years of believing he hated me for being gay. I spent a lot of time angry because of him." And depressed, but Joey didn't add that.

Anthony placed his hands on his hips and tilted his head backward, gazing up at the blue sky overhead. “Does this mean you’ll stop avoiding coming home? I’ve had to watch Mom cry almost every Christmas and Thanksgiving you weren’t home for.”

Not for the first time, remorse stabbed Joey hard. “Yeah, I’ll be home more often. I promise.”

Tilting his head so he could peer at Joey from the corner of his eye. “I’m glad. I’ve missed you, squirt.”

Joey rolled his eyes. “I’m the same height as you now and a bit more muscle. Don’t think you can get away with calling me squirt anymore.”

“You’ll always be a squirt to me,” Anthony said, grabbing Joey in a loose headlock and rubbing his hair.

Trick pulled into the driveway at that moment, and Anthony abruptly released him. Joey glanced up to see a deep scowl on Anthony’s face directed at Trick. “Come on, Ant. You promised.”

When Trick saw the way Anthony was looking at him, he exited the vehicle slowly. “Everything okay?” he asked.

Before Joey could say anything, Anthony strode toward Trick and popped him on the jaw, sending Trick colliding with the side of his truck. “That’s for my brother and for being an asshole!”

“Anthony!” Joey shouted, rushing to Trick’s side.

Trick rubbed his jaw and shook his head at Joey. “It’s okay. I deserved it.”



“You’re damn right you did,” Anthony growled. “If you hurt him again, I’ll kick your ass even harder.”

“If I hurt him again, I’ll let you,” Trick replied.

Anthony seemed mollified and nodded his head. “Damn right.”

After that, everything just went back to normal. A fact which just baffled Joey. He’d never had a friend who he could argue with that would just brush shit off after they’d had it out. Trick wrapped an arm around Joey’s waist on the way into the house and Joey didn’t know how he felt about that, but he just let it go, ignoring the warmth in his chest at Trick’s possessive move.

The pattern of Trick coming over for dinner with Joey's family and then Joey going back to Trick's repeated for the next two nights. But the day before Joey was due to return to Orlando, the shit hit the fan. After a long night of amazing sex, Trick dropped Joey at his parents' house, promising to see him after work. Joey went for his usual run and when he turned the corner of his parent's street, he saw a familiar car in the driveway.

Anger and tension flooded Joey. He knew all too well who owned the blue Honda Acura parked there. What the fuck? Joey raced up the drive and into the house. "Mom?"

"In the kitchen, sweetie."

Joey rushed in and saw exactly who he didn't want to be sitting in a chair at the table with a cup of coffee in front of him. "Vince, what the hell are you doing here?"

"Joseph Waters!" his mother reprimanded. "We don't talk to guests like that!"

Vince smiled at him. "Hey, baby! I was just talking with your mom about how we met."

Admittedly, the guy was smoking hot with platinum blond hair, light violet eyes, and a slender but toned body. Joey had enjoyed manhandling the little twink during the two nights he'd spent with the guy, but damn if he didn't regret that he'd given into his cock. "How the hell did you get my parent's address?"

Vince pouted. “I wanted to surprise you and convinced Jenny in HR to give it to me from your emergency contacts.”

Joey growled, loudly. “This is fucked up, Vince! I told you we weren’t together. You need to leave. Now.”

Joey’s mother must have realized something wasn’t right about the situation and didn’t reprimand him for his language this time. She just kept a watchful eye on their conversation. Vince stood and went up to him. “But, baby, I thought you were just teasing me. I know you weren’t serious.”

Fists clenching at his sides, Joey couldn’t believe how delusional the guy was turning out to be. “My blocking your texts and calls should have been more than enough to tell you that whatever we had is over. Go home. It was only sex. I told you that.”

Anger flitted over Vince’s face before it disappeared behind a fake moue of disappointment. “I know you don’t mean that.”

“I do. Get out.”

When Vince tried to protest again, Joey grabbed him by the arm and yanked him through the house to the front door. He shoved him out of the house, glaring at him. “This is entering stalker level bullshit, Vince. If you don’t stop this and get the fuck out of here, I’ll call the police.”

He slammed the door in Vince’s face, locking it. Shit. Vince had been clingy since those nights months ago, but he hadn’t expected him to go full blown single white male.

“Are you really in a relationship with him?” his mother asked from behind him.

Joey turned and leaned against the door. “No, Mom. I swear. We hooked up twice and that was months ago. He knew the score or at least I thought he did.”

She frowned at him. “He seems to think it’s more than that.”

Joey moved to sit on the couch. “I know. He’s been texting me and calling me ever since, but I really didn’t think he’d follow me down here like this.”

“Maybe you should call your company and let them know what’s going on. I wouldn’t have let the young man inside if I had known who he was. He seemed so convincing. I thought maybe you were...” she trailed off.

“Cheating on him?” Joey asked, his brow raised. “I wouldn’t do that.”

“I know your involvement with Trick wasn’t exactly planned. I wasn’t sure if maybe you were acting impulsively, considering.”

Joey shook his head. “Mom, I’m not exactly comfortable discussing my sex life with you, but I promise you, I have not been in a relationship with anyone since college. There’s been no one I’ve had any interest in long-term.”

She frowned at him. “Is that because of Trick?”

He opened his mouth to deny it, but then closed it. “I don’t know.”

They sat in quiet for several minutes before Joey stood. “I’m going to go grab a shower. Let’s go out for breakfast, okay?”

“Let me let your father know.” She paused and then said, “I don’t think you should take the young man’s actions lightly, Joey. He wasn’t very pleased with your dismissing him the way you did.”

“I won’t, Mom. I’ll call HR and advise them of what is going on after my shower. No one will be in the office yet.”

Joey headed upstairs to shower and change his clothing. The entire time, his mind replayed everything he’d ever said to Vince, or as much as he could remember. He’d never led the guy on and felt certain he hadn’t. Once dressed, he called the office.

“All-Star Formula.”

“Hi, Becca. It’s Joey Waters. Can you put me through to Jenny?” The agency wasn’t but a couple hundred employees across the various departments. Most everyone knew each other, so he didn’t have to expand on exactly who Jenny was.

“Sure thing, Joey.”

Hold music came on and Joey paced his former bedroom while waiting for Jenny to pick up. “Jenny Matheson.”

“Jenny, it’s Joey.”

“Hi, Joey! How’re things going on your vacation?”

“They’re good. I need to speak with you about Vince.”

“Oh. Is something wrong?”

Joey explained about their previous “relationship” and how they weren’t really together as Vince had led her to believe. He also informed her of his stalking and constant barrage of texts and phone calls. “It’s getting out of control now. I know he convinced you we were together to get my parent’s address, but him showing up here?—”

“Wait. I didn’t give him your parent’s address, Joey. I take our employees’ privacy seriously! Did he tell you I gave it to him?”

Uneasiness settled into Joey’s stomach and he rubbed at his belly. “He did.”

“Never would I breach your privacy for anyone, Joey. I hope you know that! I’ll talk with Mr. Rigario about this. I don’t know how he got the address for your parents, but it certainly wasn’t from me.”

“Thanks, Jenny. I’ll be heading back home tomorrow. We can discuss this in the office with your manager and mine.”

“Of course. In the meantime, I’ll start filing the report and we’ll get this handled. Hopefully a warning will be enough to prevent him from continuing this behavior.”

They disconnected the call and Joey headed downstairs to take his parents to breakfast. He spent most of the day trying to ignore the anxiety eating at him over Vince finding his parent’s home address. The last name Waters wasn’t exactly exotic, and there had to be dozens of people listed with the same surname.

Joey was on edge by the time dinner rolled around. His boss had texted him a couple of hours after his phone call with Jenny, requesting he keep him informed if anything else occurred with Vince. He hadn’t seen Vince since he’d kicked him out of the house, but something told him Vince hadn’t gone far. When his phone vibrated and he saw the text was from Trick, Joey smiled.

Come outside.

Frowning, Joey left the house. His brother had already arrived with Veronica and was in the kitchen with their mother. He saw Trick leaning against the side of his truck, hands in his jean pockets. God, the man was breathtaking in the fading sunlight. Trick

wore a tight white t-shirt with dark-washed jeans and a pair of black boots. Joey's mouth watered as he thought about dropping to his knees right there in his parent's driveway to worship the obvious bulge at the front of Trick's pants. "Everything okay, Trick?" Joey asked when he got close enough for Trick to hear him.

Trick grabbed hold of Joey's belt loops and yanked him against him, crashing his full lips onto Joey's. Joey gasped at the abruptness, but immediately melted into Trick, looping his arms around Trick's neck. Their tongues dueled together, sliding slickly over one another. Joey groaned into the kiss, fingers plunging into the dark chocolate tresses at the back of Trick's head.

"You're so fucking gorgeous," Trick growled, breaking the kiss and leaning his forehead against Joey's.

"You're not so bad yourself," Joey said, his chest heaving as he tried to capture his breath.

Keeping his arms loosely wrapped around Joey's waist, Trick asked, "How was your day?"

Joey tensed, his good mood from Trick's abrupt, passionate kiss gone. Trick frowned. "What's wrong?"

He bit his lip, wondering if he should bother to tell Trick about Vince. He didn't really want Trick to know about his hookups, or how easily he found it to move from one body to another. Whatever was happening between them didn't have a definition, but Joey found himself slightly embarrassed by how many men he'd slept with since college.

"Hey," Trick said, tugging Joey's lower lip from between his teeth. "Talk to me. Something happen? Are your parents okay?"

“Oh, they’re fine. It’s nothing like that.” With a sigh, Joey gave a brief rundown of what happened with Vince, not going too far into details, and just how they had had nothing serious going on.

Trick gave him a worried look. “Do you think he’d turn violent?”

“What? No. I don’t think so. He’s just not good at letting go, I guess. I’ve already spoken to the HR department about him.” Joey hadn’t considered Vince getting physical about the situation. “Besides he’s probably a hundred pounds soaking wet. I don’t think there’s anything to worry about there.”

Trick ran his hands up and down Joey’s back, large palms soothing along his spine. “What did your company say?”

“We’re going to talk more in depth when I get back home.” Joey felt Trick grow rigid against him and leaned back enough to see Trick’s face. “Trick?”

“I know this thing is like two days old, Joey, but... what’s going on with us?” Trick asked. “I mean, you go home tomorrow. Is this... was this just sex?”

Surprised, Joey replied, “I don’t know. I wasn’t sure what you wanted to go on with us, to be honest. My life is in Orlando and yours is here.”

Trick grunted. “I’m aware of that. Was this just sex for you?”

Joey didn’t respond right away. He actually took a minute to think about Trick’s question. Though his brain was already screaming, no, it wasn’t just sex. The biggest sign was how Joey hadn’t hauled ass after they’d both gotten off. He’d never stayed the night with any of his hookups. Most of the time he ghosted before the cum had cooled. “What do you want this to be?” Joey asked, his heart beating hard and his throat tight with uncertainty.



“Answer my question first, Joey,” Trick said.

Swallowing around the lump in his throat, Joey whispered, “No. It wasn’t just sex.”

Trick kissed him fiercely. “It wasn’t for me, either,” he murmured.

“What does that mean for when I go back tomorrow?” Joey asked, gazing into the sapphire blue eyes he’d always loved.

“It’s not like we’re thousands of miles away from each other. There are weekends, the phone, video calls, and text messaging. We can see where this goes. If you want to.”

Joey couldn’t stop the slight laugh he let out before dropping his forehead down to Trick’s shoulder. “Fuck, if you’d asked me how I thought this week would go when I was driving down here, I sure as hell wouldn’t have expected any of this.”

Trick ran his fingers through Joey’s hair, brushing some back from his cheek. “Is that a yes?”

Blowing out a breath and hoping this didn’t explode in his face, Joey nodded. “It’s a yes. Though I can’t tell you if I’ll be any good at it. I’ve never been with someone past a night or two, really.”

“Well, you’ve already done that, so the rest should be easy,” Trick teased and pressed a kiss to Joey’s temple. Joey chuckled, realizing Trick was right. They’d spent the last three nights together. “Will you stay with me tonight, too?”

“Yeah,” Joey said.

“Hey! You two going to get in here so we can eat or continue sucking face in the

driveway?” Anthony shouted from the front door. Joey stuck out his arm and flipped his brother off. He hadn’t been too sure how his brother would react to him and Trick together, but Anthony had taken it better than he’d expected. “I’m starving. Get your asses in here!”

Both laughed and Trick released Joey, grabbing his hand and tugging him up the drive to the house.

After dinner, Joey went up to get some clothes and toiletries to stay overnight at Trick’s. The last few nights Joey had just changed when he’d gotten back to his parents’ place. But tomorrow was Saturday and the last day he was there. Trick had taken off from work so they could spend some time with each other before Joey left. He didn’t want to waste any of that time coming back to the house to shower and dress.

Joey hugged his mom and dad. “I’ll see you both before I leave.”

“You better,” his mother said, a mock glare on her face.

Smiling, Joey kissed her cheek. “I will.”

She cupped his cheek and gave him a fond look. “I’m just glad things have worked out to where I will get to see my baby more than once every seven years.”

Joey flushed, still feeling guilty as hell about how he’d avoided his own family for so long. “Me, too,” he murmured.

Trick stood waiting for him by his truck when Joey exited the house. Joey smiled and trotted down the drive, his duffle over his shoulder. Moments later, they were on the road to Trick’s apartment, Trick holding his hand the entire way. Butterflies took flight in Joey’s stomach at how attentive Trick was being. He felt like a high school

student with his first crush all over again. In fact, he'd never even experienced the giddiness he was having right then, back in school or with the first guy he'd made out with in college. Fear still edged in from time to time. But he stuffed it down. There'd been nothing to show Trick would hurt him again.

When they entered the apartment, Trick asked, "You want a beer?"

"Sure." Joey set his bag down by the sofa while Trick went to the fridge to grab a couple of drinks. He accepted the bottle with a smile. "I thought maybe we could get some breakfast tomorrow and then play some basketball."

Joey sat on the couch, resting the bottle on his knee. Trick dropped next to him and shrugged. "That sounds good. What time do you think you'll want to head back to Orlando?"

"It's a long drive. Maybe around five? I'll be home before too late which will give me some time to unpack, shower, and unwind."

Trick took Joey's bottle, setting it on the coffee table, before turning to him. He grabbed hold of Joey and pulled him onto his lap. Joey laughed, amazed someone could actually manhandle him so easily. "Hey," Trick said, looking into Joey's eyes.

"Hey," Joey murmured, his own gaze flicking down to Trick's lips, then back again.

Reaching up, Trick slid his hand around Joey's nape, massaging the tendons there with his thumb. He leaned in and kissed Joey, gentle and reverent. Joey slid his tongue along the seam of Trick's mouth, encouraging him to open to him. He pushed inside when Trick complied, tangling his tongue with his. Trick gripped Joey's ass, squeezing and rocking him forward into his erection. "I want you to fuck me," Trick groaned.

The last three nights, Trick had been the one topping. Joey hadn't cared, but the idea of being inside of Trick made his cock pulse. "Yeah?" Joey whispered, moving his lips down along Trick's jaw to his neck where he nipped, licked, and sucked.

"Fuck, yes," Trick said, his voice more of a hiss. "Need to feel you inside me. Wrecking me."

Joey moaned at Trick's words. A shudder raced through him. Leaning back, Joey stripped Trick's t-shirt off, tossing it aside. He ran his palms over the broad, tanned expanse of chest revealed. "You want me to hold you down and fuck you until you know who you belong to?"

Lust glittered fiercely at Joey from the depths of Trick's sapphire eyes. "I want to feel you for days, baby. To know you destroyed me for anyone else."

Growling, Joey tweaked Trick's nipples, wrenching a gasp from him. "Don't even think about anyone else."

"Never," Trick snarled, jerking Joey forward to kiss him, a tangle of lips, teeth, and tongue.

Joey broke the kiss, slid from Trick's lap, and kneeled on the floor before him. He nuzzled at the bulge in Trick's crotch while making quick work of opening the zipper and button. Trick wore a pair of dark blue boxer briefs underneath. Joey separated the already slightly damp fabric, releasing the hard length to the cool air and his hungry gaze. He licked a line from the base near Trick's balls to the tip, swirling his tongue around the crown. Salty pre-cum exploded across Joey's tastebuds and Joey swallowed Trick down, taking as much of his dick into his mouth and throat as possible. "Shit," Trick said, fingers diving into Joey's hair and gripping lightly. "Feels so good."

Swallowing around Trick's cock, Joey massaged the shaft with his throat muscles, which wrenched a loud groan from Trick. "Fuck, Joey. If you keep doing that, I won't last long."

He released Trick and tugged Trick's jeans and briefs off. Once Trick sat there completely naked, Joey smirked at him and engulfed his prick again, this time wrapping a hand around the shaft and stroking while suckling the tip. Using his free hand, Joey sought the bottle of lube Trick had stashed beneath the cushions. They'd fucked on the couch the night before and Trick had admitted to placing it there when he knew Joey would be over.

Placing his hands on the backs of Trick's thighs, Joey urged him to scoot down, baring Trick's tight star to his hungry eyes. He flicked his tongue over the crinkled entrance, savoring the hard moan Trick released. Like a starving man, Joey dove into Trick, pushing as deep inside as he could get. Trick's hands replaced Joey's on the backs of his legs, holding himself open for Joey to continue feasting on him. "God, baby, don't stop."

Joey didn't intend to stop. He popped open the lube, spilled some onto a couple of fingers and began to play, slowly sliding one inside the ring of muscle. The tightness almost made him gasp, knowing that it would soon surround his own aching cock. He thrust his finger in and out, seeking the bundle of nerves that would give Trick the most pleasure. The guttural groan Trick gave let Joey know he'd struck it. He slipped a second finger inside, scissoring the two while ensuring he continued to bounce off Trick's prostate.

"Fuck me, Joey," Trick said. "Need you inside of me."

Pulling his fingers free, Joey stood, stripped off his clothing, and grabbed a condom from his wallet. Trick snatched the condom from him, ripped it open with his teeth, and slowly slid it down Joey's hard cock. He locked gazes with Joey as he lubed up

his palm and gave Joey several strokes before leaning back against the arm of the couch, spreading his legs wide in invitation. Joey lowered himself over Trick, taking his mouth in a fiery kiss. But Joey didn't enter him yet. He continued to rut against Trick, loving the feel of Trick's hard muscles beneath his own.

Trick reached between them and guided Joey's shaft to his hole. "Please, baby. Don't tease me. Want to feel you so deep."

Nudging the head of his cock at Trick, Joey slammed his eyes closed at the feel of Trick's body sucking him in. The tight heat around his cock almost sent him over the edge and he had to think unsexy thoughts to keep from coming too soon. "Fuck, you feel amazing," Joey groaned. "So hot and soft."

A whole-body shudder wracked Joey's runner's frame when Trick squeezed around him. "Jesus, Trick, if you keep doing that, I am definitely not going to last long enough to pound your ass into the sofa."

Trick gave a husky chuckle, sliding his palms over Joey's chest and along his forearms. "Short trigger?"

"Only with you," Joey said, giving a small thrust of his hips. Trick grinned seductively at him and wrapped his legs around Joey's waist, urging him even deeper, if that were possible.

"The things you say," Trick murmured, rocking his pelvis up toward Joey, increasing the friction inside of him. "Let loose, baby. Fuck me into next week."

Joey took Trick at his word and started a punishing pace, slamming into Trick so hard the sound of flesh hitting flesh could no doubt be heard in the hallway. Sweat quickly built on their skin, the salty scent permeating the air with the smell of pre-cum and sex. The couch creaked under the harsh treatment. Joey licked, bit and nipped

anywhere he could get his mouth on Trick. He wanted to leave behind marks so Trick and everyone else knew who he belonged to. The idea of leaving Trick, of being over two hundred miles away, drove him crazy. Now that he'd had Trick, he couldn't imagine going back to sex with random men or being away from this man.

Needing to get as far inside Trick as possible, Joey pulled free of the tight sheath and flipped Trick, almost bending him over the arm of the sofa. Placing one foot on the floor for leverage and a knee on the cushion beside Trick, Joey plunged back into his hole. "Can't get enough of you," Joey growled, grabbing hold of Trick's hips in a tight grip, using them to yank him back into every thrust.

"Yes," Trick hissed. "Harder, baby."

Joey could feel the telltale tingle in his balls, signaling his impending orgasm. He reached beneath Trick and wrapped a hand around Trick's bobbing shaft, beginning to stroke him in time with his thrusts. The desire to feel Trick cum on his cock cooled his lust slightly, as he was dying to know how it would feel for Trick's channel to tighten on him, draining him of every drop.

"So close," Trick said, moaning and rocking back into Joey.

"Yeah? You gonna cum for me, sexy?" Joey said, stroking Trick faster and snapping his hips again and again.

"Oh, fuck, fuck. Cumming," Trick howled, his body tensing. Joey felt the pulsing of Trick's prick as he splashed the couch cushions with his load. But the clenching of Trick's asshole on his dick sent Joey careening over the edge. The hard flutters of his canal milking him wrenched a loud grunt from Joey, a grunt which continued with every spurt into the condom deep inside Trick. His toes curled from the pleasure swamping his body and he leaned his head back, relishing the mind-blowing climax tearing through him.

Joey panted as he collapsed onto Trick's back, his forehead between Trick's shoulder blades. Tiny aftershocks trickled along his body. He couldn't contain the hiss he let forth when he slipped free of Trick's entrance. Taking care of the condom, Joey helped Trick up from the couch, wincing when he saw the red mark across Trick's chest where it had dug into the arm of the couch. "Sorry," he said, running his fingers along the mark.

Trick grinned. "I'm not. That was fucking amazing."

Chuckling, Joey took Trick's hand and led him into the bedroom. "Yeah? Did I ruin you for everyone else?"

Trick yanked Joey to him, expression fierce, saying, "Damn right you did," before kissing him breathless.

Joey took Trick down to the mattress, desperate to ensure Trick really had been ruined for other guys. Insane jealousy raged through him at the idea of anyone else touching Trick, getting to hear the moans the man gave while being sucked off, or seeing the way Trick's eyes darkened with passion when he was turned on. No one else would ever get to know what loving Trick felt like. Joey froze, his mind rabbiting a million miles a second. Oh... shit .

"Everything okay?" Trick asked, frowning at him while running his fingers through Joey's sweaty hair.

"Yeah," Joey whispered, still blown away at his mind's revelation. He still loved Trick. Had he ever stopped? Even with all of his anger toward Trick, had he mistaken love for hatred? Instead of answering the questioning look on Trick's face, Joey captured his mouth in another kiss, pushing the thoughts from his mind. He didn't quite know how to process his feelings, especially since he was heading back to Orlando tomorrow.



They slept very little that night, each of them taking the other multiple times over the hours until dawn. It wasn't until they both collapsed from exhaustion, did they get a couple of hours consecutively. The sound of the shower cutting on woke Joey, and he saw sunlight filtering in around Trick's blackout curtains. Rolling over, he stretched, his muscles burning from constant use. Sliding from the bed, he entered the bathroom to see Trick soaping his chest. He leaned a shoulder against the door, a smile hovering on his lips, as he watched.

"Why don't you join me?" Trick said, turning his head toward Joey.

Joey entered the shower stall, closing the door behind him, and wrapped his arms around Trick from behind. He nuzzled at Trick's throat. "Good morning."

"Good indeed," Trick murmured, leaning back into him. Joey ran his lips over Trick's bare shoulder in a gentle caress. "Do you want to order breakfast in?"

Humming, Joey slid his palms along Trick's chest, over his abdomen and lower to his half-mast cock. "Insatiable, are we?"

"Can't get enough of you," Trick replied, turning his head to kiss Joey. It was awkward, but damn if it wasn't hot. Joey lightly stroked Trick, squeezing the shaft coming to full hardness.

"Surprised you have anything left in these," Joey said, using his other hand to fondle Trick's balls.

“I don’t,” Trick said, rutting into Joey’s grip. “But damn if I care.”

Joey laughed, kissed Trick’s shoulder, and stepped back a little. “Let’s get cleaned up, go get some breakfast, and give them a chance to revive.”

Trick turned toward him, pouting. The look seemed so incongruous on the face of such a masculine man, but Joey couldn’t help the way his heart melted. He still couldn’t forget the realization he’d come to the evening before, but he was nowhere near ready to admit it out loud. To himself or Trick. “We can always come back after breakfast instead of playing hoops,” Joey said.

“Deal,” Trick said, the pout disappearing. Joey shook his head while smiling.

The shower took a little longer, both of them wanting to clean the other. They ignored their simmering desire, instead drawing out the anticipation. Trick dried Joey off slowly, running the terry cloth towel over every muscle, every nook, and every inch of skin. Joey couldn’t ever remember feeling so... cherished was the only word he could think of.

Once they’d finished drying off and were dressed, they headed out of Trick’s apartment and down to his truck. They walked with Trick’s arm around Joey’s waist, not speaking, and just enjoying being close to each other. Joey saw him a split second before he attacked. Trick cried out when a tire iron slammed into his back, the sharp end raking across the skin and leaving behind a large gash. The impact of the weapon sent Trick careening into someone’s car, setting off the car alarm. Trick fell to his knees beside the car. “No!” Joey cried out, lunging in front of Trick to stop Vince from hitting him again.

“Why?” Vince screamed. “How could you fuck him? You’re mine, Joey! We’re meant to be together! You know it’s true or you wouldn’t have made love to me!”

Vince tried to hit Trick a second time, but Joey grabbed the iron, wrenching it from Vince's grasp. Tears poured down Vince's cheeks, and he flung himself at Joey, fists beating at Joey's chest. Joey tossed the tire iron in the back of Trick's truck and tried to restrain Vince, struggling to capture the tiny fists hitting at him. "You're mine! He can't have you," Vince screeched. "Not after what he almost made you do!"

Shock held Joey immobile. "What?"

Vince glared at Trick, who'd managed to get to his feet by holding onto the car. "You told me what he did to you. How it's his fault you tried to kill yourself! How could you forgive him, Joey? He doesn't deserve you!"

He tried to get past Joey to Trick again, but Joey forced him back. How the fuck did Vince know about that?

"Joey?" Trick said behind him. "What's he talking about?"

Joey heard sirens getting closer and knew someone must have called the cops with the shouting and the car alarm going off. Vince sneered. "He told me all about you and what you did to him. How you almost destroyed him and how he was so depressed that he tried to kill himself because of you!"

"When the fuck did I tell you any of that?" Joey demanded, ignoring the intake of breath behind him from Trick.

"You came over to my place after the Graves' party and stayed the night," Vince said, still staring murderously at Trick. "Don't you remember? You made love to me and then told me about him. That he's the reason you have that tattoo on your back."

Joey shook his head and tried to remember. It had only been a short time ago. The Graves' party had been to celebrate the signing of a new high-profile client. Joey

knew he'd had a few drinks that night, but he hadn't remembered going to Vince's. Or telling Vince anything about Trick.

Before Joey could say anything else, a police cruiser pulled into the parking lot and things became hectic and messy for the next half hour. The police arrested Vince for stalking and battery. Vince was still yelling as they handcuffed him and put him into the backseat of the cop car. They also called in a First Responder to check out Trick. Though it wasn't life threatening, they cleaned and bandaged the wound and suggested he go to the hospital to get checked out to make sure there weren't any other issues.

Trick remained quiet unless answering questions from the police. Joey knew he would have to explain things to Trick. Things he had never wanted to tell anyone again. The only people who knew the truth were his college roommate and his therapist. Trick refused a ride to the hospital in the ambulance, so Joey said he'd drive him there.

When Joey tried to take Trick's hand in the truck, Trick pulled away and Joey's heart ached. Damn Vince. He knew wishing he'd never hooked up with Vince wouldn't change what had happened, but he regretted the little twink more than ever. "Talk to me, Trick."

Silence reigned for several long breaths. Then Trick asked, "Did you try to commit suicide because of me, Joey? Because of what I said?"

Swallowing hard, Joey tightened his grip on the steering wheel. "After overhearing you, I went into a terrible depression. Things were rough." He stopped at a red light, staring straight ahead to avoid Trick's gaze. "I-I loved you, Trick. When I found out you hated me for being gay, for being attracted to you, it broke something in me. I turned to alcohol and sex when I got to college. But none of it helped dull the pain. Eventually, it became too much and in a moment of weakness, I cut myself.

“But I passed out from the pain,” Joey rushed on. “My roommate came back and he called an ambulance. I woke up in the hospital a little later. After that, I started seeing a therapist. She’s helped me a lot.”

When Trick remained quiet, Joey glanced at him to see such hurt and anguish on Trick’s face. “Trick?”

Haunted eyes met his. “I’m the reason for the tattoo on your back.”

Joey reached out and took Trick’s hand. This time Trick didn’t pull away or fight his hold. “It wasn’t just about you, Trick. I had previously untreated anxiety and depression. That, combined with my first broken heart... well, it didn’t go well together, but I chose to live. To get help.

The tattoo... it was a reminder to myself to be strong and to not let my depression push me toward that cliff again.”

Yes, what Trick had said about him had been cruel, but Joey realized it wasn’t only Trick’s words which had sent him on the downward spiral. “You didn’t know I’d overheard you or know about my mental health issues. I don’t blame you.”

“How can you not?” Trick asked, his tone dull. “I’m the reason you almost...”

“Because it wasn’t your fault,” Joey replied. “You were a scared teenager, Trick. Just trying to make it through high school and life in one piece. After everything you’ve told me, I know that now. I can see that you aren’t the person I thought you were back then. Hell, you weren’t even that person at all. We all do stupid shit when we’re scared. Please don’t blame yourself for the choices I made.”

They pulled into the hospital parking lot and Joey found a spot, guiding the truck into it and putting the vehicle in park. He turned off the engine and faced Trick. “Yes, you

hurt me. Unintentionally. It was a long time ago and I want to move on from it. With you. If you still want me after knowing what I've done. And after being hurt because of my carelessness with Vince."

Trick's expression crumpled even further, and he leaned over the console, wrapping his arms around Joey and burying his face against the side of his neck. "How can you still want to be with me after I've hurt you so badly?"

Joey gently embraced Trick, running a hand over Trick's shoulders, careful to avoid the slice across his back. He took a deep breath, knowing what he was about to admit would leave him wide open to having his heart ripped out again. "Because I... I still love you, Trick."

Anxiety dug hard into Joey's chest and belly. He held his breath as he waited for Trick to process his words. Trick yanked backward, staring at him wide eyed, his lips parted in shock. "How?" Trick asked.

Shrugging, Joey glanced away from Trick. "Doesn't the phrase go, 'it's a thin line between love and hate'? I kind of shocked myself when I realized it last night." He looked back at Trick. "I never stopped loving you, but my mind channeled the feelings into what I took for hate because I didn't know how to process still being in love with you. Especially believing you didn't want me."

Trick leaned his forehead on Joey's shoulder, a shudder wracking his large frame. "Jesus, Joey."

Joey frowned. "Is that a bad Jesus?"

A wet chuckle issued from Trick. "No, baby. Not at all. I'm just grateful you're giving me a second chance." He raised his head and snared him in the slightly damp, dark sapphires Joey loved so much. "I may not know if I love you yet, Joey, but I

want a chance to find out. If you're serious about still wanting me."

"More than anything."

Trick captured Joey's lips in a soft kiss, no heat, just emotion behind it. When they broke apart, Joey caressed Trick's firm cheek with his thumb, his palm resting on the curve of Trick's jaw. "Let's get you inside and get you checked out."

They exited the vehicle and after an hour in the waiting room, a nurse finally took Trick back to be examined. The doctor ordered a couple of tests just to make sure there were no problems besides the slice on Trick's back. They applied new bandages, prescribed some antibiotics, and sent them on their way.

"Let's go back to my place," Trick said tiredly.

Joey cursed Vince for what he'd done and himself for getting involved with the little fucker. He drove again with Trick dozing in the passenger seat on the short ride to Walgreens to pick up the prescription and then on to Trick's apartment. He wouldn't be leaving that day. Leaving Trick after he'd been hurt because of him didn't sit well with Joey.

After getting Trick settled in his bedroom, Joey shot off a quick text to his boss, letting him know he'd be returning a day late because of a family emergency. Trick had already passed out by the time Joey stripped down to his boxer briefs and curled up beside him. Thankfully Vince hadn't hit Trick in the head or he may have seriously or fatally injured Trick. Joey's heart ached at the thought of Trick dying. He curled around Trick, pressing his face against the back of Trick's head and breathing in the scent of Trick's shampoo.

He drifted in and out of sleep, never releasing Trick. The shadows grew long across the wall as the day floated by and eventually, Trick stirred, causing Joey to waken.

“Hey,” Joey murmured, his voice deep and husky from sleep. “How are you feeling?”

“I’m okay,” Trick said. He turned to face Joey, placing his palm on Joey’s chest. “Don’t you have to leave?”

Joey shook his head, yawning. “I texted my boss. I’m staying until tomorrow.”

Trick frowned. “Are you going to get into trouble?”

Snorting, Joey gave Trick a droll look. “I’m like their star agent right now. Plus, I told them it was a family emergency.”

Humming, Trick burrowed into Joey, sliding his arm around Joey’s waist. Joey ran his fingers through Trick’s dark chocolate locks, enjoying the silky feel sliding over his skin. “That feels nice,” Trick said, eyes closed.

Joey continued playing with Trick’s hair, memorizing the feel of Trick’s warmth beside him. He knew he had to go back home, but he hadn’t guessed just how hard it would be for him to find the desire to leave. Not now. He couldn’t help the huffing laugh he made and Trick looked up at him, questioning the sound. Smiling, Joey said, “I’ve done a complete one-eighty.”

“What?”

“On the way down, I couldn’t wait to go back home. Hell, I wanted to do a U-turn in the middle of the turnpike and go back before I’d even gotten here. Now... I can’t stand the idea of leaving.”

Understanding dawned on Trick’s face, and his features softened. “But there’s always the weekends and phone and texts. Like we talked about.”



“Not the same as getting to touch you,” Joey said. “It can’t compare to the feel of your body on mine”—he tugged Trick closer—“the smell of your skin”—he ran his nose along Trick’s bare shoulder—“and the taste of your lips”—he brushed his lips over Trick’s.

Trick moaned and deepened the kiss, pushing his tongue inside Joey’s mouth. Soft, wet muscle slid over soft, wet muscle. Joey sucked gently on Trick’s appendage, reaching down to grip Trick’s hip and pull him tighter to him, their rapidly hardening cocks aligning. “Joey,” Trick groaned.

Rolling his pelvis, Joey rutted against Trick, pleasure tingles racing through him. He reached between them to free both of their shafts, gripped them in a firm hold, and stroked them together. “Can’t get enough of you,” Joey said, his voice a low growl.

“Don’t stop touching me,” Trick said, undulating his body.

Joey reached over Trick to grab the bottle of lube on the nightstand. He popped the top open and spilled some over their cocks before closing the bottle and tossing it aside. Tightening his grip, Joey jerked them faster, desperate to feel the hard throbbing of Trick’s dick as he shot his load. Trick caressed him everywhere he could reach, his calloused palms smoothing over Joey’s skin and sending fine shivers through Joey.

Their ragged breathing sounded harsh in the apartment’s quiet. Sweat quickly built on their skin despite the air conditioning. Sheets rustled from the frantic movements Joey made to get them both off. Joey could feel Trick’s cock grow harder, thicker, getting closer to the edge. “Cum for me,” Joey demanded.

Trick released a keening cry as he climaxed, his shaft twitching in Joey’s palm as hot spurts of semen pulsed between them. The warmth, the erotic noises from Trick, and the scent of Trick’s seed sent Joey headlong into his own orgasm. He shouted his

pleasure to the room as his balls emptied all over him and Trick. Joey collapsed, releasing their shafts and panted, his spunk covered hand resting on his stomach. “Fuck.”

“Yeah,” Trick murmured, pressing close to Joey and laying his head on Joey’s shoulder. “I think my SunPass will be getting a work out really soon.”

Joey chuckled. “Yours and mine both.”

“Did you call your parents?”

“Way to kill the mood,” Joey grouched. “Don’t talk about my parents right after we both busted a nut, babe.”

Trick grinned tiredly. “I figured they may be a little worried since you were supposed to be back to pick up your stuff and leave already.”

Joey glanced at the clock on the nightstand and cursed. “Shit, I totally spaced. I’ll call them.”

He left the bed long enough to grab his cell from where he’d tossed his jeans and cuddled back with Trick before hitting the contact for his mother’s cell. “Joey? Where are you? Are you guys okay?”

He rushed to assure his mother they were fine and then explained to her about Vince, the hospital, and how he wasn’t leaving until the next day to stay with Trick. “Good Lord,” she murmured through the phone. “I had a bad feeling about him after you left yesterday. I’m just glad the both of you are all right!”

“We are. I’ll see you both tomorrow.”

They disconnected the call after she made him promise to call her immediately if something else happened. He heard Trick's stomach growl, which triggered his own. "You want to order in or go out and get something?"

"Order in," Trick said, yawning again. "I'm too tired and too satiated to get dressed and go somewhere."

Joey smirked. "I wore you out, huh?"

"Mmm, you certainly did."

He knew Trick was tired from more than just the orgasm Joey had given him, but he wanted to keep things light. Joey used his phone to place an order through one of the delivery apps. When the food arrived, he insisted Trick stay in bed while he got the food.

They took turns feeding each other little bites until they were both full. Joey cleaned everything up, put away the leftovers, and climbed back into bed. Trick was out like a light within minutes. Reality settled in, and Joey couldn't stop trembling. He'd almost lost Trick before they'd even begun. Vince could have seriously hurt him much worse if he'd hit Trick in the head or even possibly embedded the end of the tire iron in Trick instead of just taking out a couple of layers of skin. He pulled Trick tighter to him, who mumbled in his sleep, and he nuzzled at the crown of Trick's head.

Sighing, Joey spent the majority of the night merely dozing, jerking awake whenever Trick made a noise or moved. His eyes felt gritty by morning, and he knew the drive back was going to be rough. After he made breakfast for both of them, Trick drove him to his parents to pack his stuff and say goodbye to his family.

"You better come visit more often," his mother said, scowling at him. "I expect to see you down here for every holiday, you hear me?"

Joey laughed. “Every major holiday, Mom. I can’t come down in the middle of the week for the smaller ones. I’ll also come down some weekends, too. Okay? I’ll make it up to you.”

She hugged him tightly. “You better, Joseph, or I’ll have your father drive me up there so I can tan your hide. And no more tattoos!”

Rolling his eyes, Joey returned the hug, noticing Trick’s smirk at his mother’s reprimand. Joey flipped Trick off behind his mother’s back. He got a backslapping hug from his father next, along with a generic goodbye. His father really never had been great at displaying emotions. He moved on to his brother and Veronica. “You better snap this one up, bro.” Joey pointed at Veronica. “She puts up with your bullshit.”

“Hardy, har, har,” Anthony groused.

Veronica chuckled and kissed Joey’s cheek. “I like you.”

“Back at ya,” Joey replied. “Keep him on a leash so he doesn’t wander off.”

Anthony growled again and took a half-hearted swipe at Joey. “Shut up, squirt.”

Trick loaded Joey’s bags in his trunk and stood by Joey’s driver’s side door. His family headed inside after one last round of hugs, leaving Joey with Trick. Joey walked up to him, sliding his arms around Trick’s waist.

“I really don’t want you to go,” Trick said, a slight pout on his face.

“I know, babe, but we can see each other next weekend.”

“Call me the second you get home.”

Joey laughed. “I will.”

Trick took Joey’s mouth in a crushing kiss, wrapping one arm around Joey’s waist while gripping Joey’s ass in his other hand. When he brought the kiss to an end, Joey was panting and his entire body shook. “Now I gotta drive home hard. Thanks a lot.”

“We can take care of it together over the phone,” Trick said, winking at him, then reluctantly pulled free and opened Joey’s door for him.

Joey moved to enter the car, but hesitated, turning to look at Trick again. “This can work, right?”

“We’ll make it work.”

Nodding, Joey lowered himself into his seat and closed the door. He didn’t look away from Trick for several minutes as Trick stood there watching him. Then he backed out of the driveway and headed down the street. The farther away Joey got, the more his heart ached. He wanted to turn around, but he knew he needed to be realistic. They weren’t ready for anything beyond getting to know each other again and seeing where things took them.

He cranked the radio up for the almost three-hour drive, only stopping for gas and a drink once. When he reached his house, he popped in one of his earbuds, took out his cell, and called Trick. “Hey, baby. You make it home all right?” Trick said in way of greeting.

“I did. Just got into the driveway.”

Trick chuckled. “I didn’t literally mean call me the second you got home.”

“Needed to hear your voice,” Joey said while exiting his car and grabbing his bags

from the trunk.

“Me, too,” Trick replied, his voice dropping several octaves. “The weekend can’t come fast enough.”

Joey agreed. He remained on the phone with Trick while unpacking and putting together something for lunch. Eventually they had to disconnect the call, but Joey felt better about things working out between them. They wouldn’t always be able to talk for hours, yet hearing that Trick’s anticipation was as considerable as his own settled something inside of him. He looked forward to the time ahead and relearning everything there was to know about Trick. Agreeing to go home for his parent’s anniversary had been the best decision of his life and for the first time in a very long time, Joey looked forward to the future. A future with his Trick.

*Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 12:06 pm*

Excitement and joy raced through Joey as he stood there staring up at the building in front of him. A year had passed since he'd made the best decision of his life to return home to visit his family. In that time, he and Trick had spent as much time together as possible between weekend visits, holidays, and other ways of communications. They'd become pros at sexting and using video chat.

Two months into their long-distance relationship, Trick finally declared his feelings for Joey. Which led to a fantastic weekend marathon of sex and cuddling. Joey still couldn't believe how good things were between them. In and out of the bedroom. He showed Trick around the various tourist sites in Orlando, including Disney World and Universal Studios. Actually, Joey had lived just outside of Orlando for the last several years, but he'd never taken the time to go to the amusement parks or other attractions around there. It was fun discovering everything with Trick.

Joey had taken Trick with him to several sessions with Dr. Garrett, mostly because Trick still didn't believe that he wasn't to blame for Joey's attempt to take his own life. It took a while, and a lot of talking with Dr. Garrett, but eventually Trick accepted it wasn't his fault. Joey had also told Dr. Garrett about Vince, the stalking, and how he'd attacked Trick.

The little prick pleaded insanity and ended up in a mental health facility instead of jail for the one-year sentence the judge gave him. During the trial, it came to light Joey wasn't Vince's first stalking victim. There'd been at least two others, but they'd never pressed charges. He didn't know how they'd gotten Vince to leave them alone.

Vince had gotten out about a month ago, but thankfully he hadn't shown up or tried to contact Joey. Of course, the agency he worked for fired Vince and Joey couldn't

have been happier about that. Joey had gone to see Vince once. Mostly because Dr. Garrett had encouraged him to confront Vince, but also because Joey still didn't believe he'd told Vince anything about Trick. He'd needed to know how the fuck Vince had known about everything.

That was when Vince admitted Joey hadn't told him about his tattoo or the scar on his wrist. Vince had followed him one day to one of his appointments with his therapist and then hired someone to hack into Dr. Garrett's private records from Joey's sessions. He'd listened to the recordings she made and read through her notes about Joey. Angry didn't begin to describe the rage he'd felt when Vince told him the truth. If he could have, he'd have strangled the little shit right then. He'd told Vince to never contact him again and to stay out of his life.

Joey jumped when arms came around his waist and a chin dropped onto his shoulder. He leaned back into Trick, placing his hands over Trick's. "Hey, babe."

"Happy?" Trick asked.

"Absolutely." Joey smiled and looked at the sign on the building again. Epic Waters Sports Agency. He'd chosen to go into business for himself when he knew Trick and he were a sure thing and he no longer wanted to be separated from him by over two hundred miles. Every weekend he'd been in Fort Lauderdale with Trick, he scouted office locations, setting up the renovations, and putting together the business plan to get a loan at the bank. A month ago, he'd made the move down from Orlando after resigning from his job. Today was the first day of the office being open, and Joey could hardly believe it.

"So proud of you," Trick said, kissing Joey's cheek, down his neck, to his shoulder.

"I'm glad you're here with me," Joey replied, snuggling further back into Trick's embrace. "I love you."



“Love you, too, baby. Maybe during lunch, we can rechristen your desk,” Trick said.

Joey chuckled and shook his head. They’d already christened his desk on multiple occasions during the remodel of the office. “Don’t you have that new project to start over in Lighthouse Point?”

Trick shrugged. “Anthony told me he’d start without me. Gave me the day off to celebrate with you.”

“I still have to work,” Joey said. “Until I get a couple more clients, I’m running on my savings.” A couple of his clients from his previous agency followed him, wanting to keep him as their representative. His boss hadn’t been happy, but had grudgingly agreed to let him have the two. One of which was Wesley Prince. Joey had considered declining Prince’s option to move with him, but they’d had a conversation about Joey no longer being able to provide those additional “benefits” and Prince had been understanding. In fact, the guy had been downright jovial when he’d met Trick, wishing them the best.

Pouting, Trick sighed. “Okay. But tonight, we’re going to dinner and then I intend on ravishing this sexy, amazing body of yours until you can barely move.”

“Bet,” Joey said, grinning.

Trick reluctantly released him, giving him a quick kiss, and then headed to his truck. “I’ll see you tonight, baby.”

Joey waved at Trick before walking through the front door and into his office. Things definitely hadn’t worked out the way he’d expected a year ago when he’d been dreading his trip to Fort Lauderdale, and he couldn’t be happier about it. A wide smile crossed his lips as he took the seat behind his desk, eager to begin his new job and, more than anything, his new life with Trick.