

LOVE IS AN OPEN ROAD



Don't Read in the Closet 2015

STILTS

Valynda King

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Love is an Open Road

An M/M Romance series

STILTS

By Valynda King

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love is an Open Road* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love is an Open Road?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love is an Open Road*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Long legs, encased in leather tight enough to be skin. Black six-inch stiletto-heeled boots. Topless with creamy smooth skin. I cannot see his eyes but he looks lonely. Like the world sits on his shoulders.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

Yeah, I like to wear women's heels... so what? So what if I like to dance in them. Who is that hurting exactly? Why does he tell me I look like a freak when I dress looking like this? What the hell does he know anyway? I'm hot! When I dance in these heels, men can't take their eyes off of me. It's true, damn it! So why can he? Why can he look away? Judge me. Leave me.

All I want to do is dance. For him... and love... him. Why can't he love me like this?

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Sammy Goode

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: crime, mystery, dance, detective, aphasia, interracial

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STILTS

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Chapter One

CC paced the small dressing room, his long legs allowing him to go from one side of the room to the other in a few steps. The six-inch stilettos he wore lightly hit the concrete floor, tapping out a rhythm of a ticking clock. Seconds passed by as he and his group waited to perform.

Grady stood up and moved in front of CC, blocking his path, which put Grady on the receiving end of one of CC's many looks, the one that said he was annoyed. "Don't fuckin' give me that look, CC. Man, would you just sit the fuck down, you're starting to freak me out. We're at Inzane. We've performed here a billion and one times."

Grady had only been with the group for a year, replacing a member they lost to happily wedded bliss, two kids, a dog, and an Audi. Having left Northern California behind, Brian now lived in Southern California, teaching dance to high school students and loving every bit of his new life. CC was happy for his friend. He didn't lose Brian; they emailed and texted often. But with Brian leaving, he gained Grady. Tall, bronze-skinned, black-haired, obsidian-eyed Grady, whose Italian heritage didn't match his name. He was funny, quick with the comebacks, levelheaded, and for some reason, the only one able to keep CC from reaching atomic level.

"Well if you want my million dollars' worth of advice—I don't know why you're getting all worked up, those clumsy bitches out there ain't got nothing on us." Razz stood up from the faux leather couch he was sitting on and walked over to the full-length mirror, admiring what he saw.

Jesse was also sitting on the couch and watched Razz walk over to the mirror. "I thought it was two cents?" Jesse asked.

Razz glanced over his shoulder, humor in his honey-colored eyes. "Oh please baby, who the hell is going to listen to someone with only two cents."

"Holla." Jesse snapped his fingers. "Did you feel that?" Jesse gasped in shock and braced his hands on the cushions of the couch. "I swear I felt the floor shake from all the clodhopping."

"No, you didn't."

"Yes I did."

Laughter floated around the room, easing some of the tension. CC had met Razz, Jesse, and Brian after his stroke; he answered an ad in the *GayStirs News*

on his thirty-first birthday. They were searching for a fourth dancer. CC had always been an incredible dancer; people often told him that it should have been his chosen profession; it was something he was passionate about. After CC's life took a left turn, his focus changed dramatically and dance became his outlet, his voice. During the interview CC told them that he had never danced in a group before. He could tell they noticed how slow he spoke and he stumbled over some of his words. But this was about dance, not how well he spoke. They struggled with his inexperience, Razz, of course, voicing his opinion the loudest. In the end CC proved to be the best dancer of them all, picking up the choreography with ease. Any concerns or worries they may have had were gone, as Jesse would say, "Honey, we gave that bitch a boarding pass and sent her on her way." And they had been together ever since. That is until Brian left and Grady joined.

Now CC stared at Grady, and Grady arched his perfectly waxed eyebrow, waiting CC out. CC huffed out a hard breath before throwing his arms in the air, turning on his heels, and marching over in front of the vanity, plopping his narrow ass in the throne chair. CC crossed his legs at the knees, tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair, masterfully pulling off the impatient king. He didn't say anything. He rarely did, but when his anxiety level was up this high, he stayed quiet. Even if he wanted to say something, the words that would come out of his mouth would not necessarily be the words that were floating around in his head. Having a stroke at the ripe old age of twenty-five, for lack of a better word, sucked.

CC and his best friend March had just found out they passed the bar exam. They high-fived each other. The DA shook their hands while other lawyers shouted out their congratulations as they walked by. He and March interned at the district attorney's office, but they had big lofty ideas. They were going to move to New York to put away all the bad guys of the world. There was no stopping them. That is, until they reached the elevator, and CC's world tilted sideways. He still had no memory of what happened once they reached the elevator, only that he woke up in the hospital not being able to walk or talk. A feeling of dread washed over him. The two things he loved the most had been stripped from him—arguing and dancing.

CC looked across the room to the three men who would be on stage with him: Razz, Jesse, and Grady. They had changed his life; even though Grady came later, he was still a big part of the healing CC still dealt with. If it were not for them and the three men waiting out in the audience, CC didn't know where he would be right now. Yeah, sure, he had his family and he loved them

dearly, but his parents and siblings treated him like a Fabergé egg, as if any minute he would crack from too much stress. He needed normalcy, and he got it from March, Brick, and Danny. They had met during their freshmen year of high school in English class and instantly clicked. They did everything together; they even came out together.

March, Brick, and Danny never left his side after his stroke. When he woke in the hospital and the doctors discovered CC understood what they were telling him but was struggling to give a proper response to some of their questions, further tests were done, and he was diagnosed with Broca's Aphasia, more commonly referred to as Expressive Aphasia. The doctors explained the stroke had damaged the left side of the brain, which affects speech. The doctors gave them all the clinical terminology and proceeded to tell CC and his parents not to worry. Spewing out statistics of full recovery.

"CC is young," the doctor said, "and with therapy and hard work he will pull through just fine."

CC cried. His parents cried. His sisters and brothers cried. But not his best friends. They told him to get over himself. There was no time for a pity party; he had shit he needed to do. They kept his spirits up. They made CC laugh; they found perverse pleasure in helping his physical therapist kick his ass helping him learn to walk again. It was hard work, but it was worth the fight.

CC found speech therapy to be just as tough if not more so. It was a mental and emotional battle every day. But again CC fought and is still fighting today. At times his frustration would get the best of him. From everything CC read, his speech should be better by now. CC watched YouTube and there were people with his type of aphasia, some took a year to get better; some took longer. Some never fully recovered but the common thread between all of them is they never gave up, and neither would he.

He had made impressive improvements. His speech was slower as he concentrated on what he wanted to say, but CC's friends understood his word salad. Even after all the therapy there were words CC still could not say. Mug meant coffee, Fido for dog, and the list went on. It took them a while to put together a list of words CC commonly used that he replaced the actual word with. CC was still smart as hell; if he had to get aphasia, expressive, which only affects speech, is the one to get. If he'd had receptive aphasia, not being able to understand the spoken word, not even CC's friends could have pulled him out of his depression. CC still worked at the DA's office as a researcher, a paralegal

of sorts. His diplomas, the letter saying he passed the bar, and the job offer from New York were framed and mounted on the wall in his home office. CC was proud of his accomplishments.

A loud knock brought CC out of his thoughts. Zane, the owner of Inzane, popped his head in. “Five minutes, ladies,” he sang from the doorway. He turned his head, checking around behind him to make sure no one was within hearing range. “Now listen up.” Zane moved his large frame further into the small space; good thing no one was claustrophobic. “I am sponsoring this dance off, so I am not supposed to show favorites, but if you don’t go out there and let the commoners know whose castle they’ve entered; this queen will not be happy.” Zane pointed his finger at Razz. “Now get out there and stomp.” Zane’s dramatic exit as he closed the door behind him had CC shaking his head and a smile pulling at his lips.

Razz stood up, waving his finger. “Oh he did *not* just point me out.”

“Oh gurr! yes he did.” Jesse loved to throw fuel on Razz’s fire.

Razz threw the door open in fabulous fashion, his right arm flying above his head, as his leather-clad ass switched back and forth out the door. His voice rose over the faded thumping of the music pulsing through the walls, making sure Zane could hear him. “Honey when have I never worked? I’ll stomp all right. I’ll stomp all over ‘wonder dick.’”

Jesse brought his right hand up, holding his chin, casting his eyes to the ceiling, walking behind Razz. “I wonder where his dick is?” Jesse asked, pretending to ponder.

“No, you didn’t.”

“Yes, I did.”

Grady glanced over at CC as they listened to Razz and Jesse cackle down the hall. “You ready for this?”

CC took a deep breath before rising out of the chair, took one last glance at himself in the mirror, before turning to Grady. “Yes.” It was the first word he had spoken all night. Surprisingly it was the right word, and it was spoken with confidence.

Chapter Two

As CC, Grady, Razz, and Jesse walked down the hall, they could hear whistles and cheers for the dance group that just finished. Zane was yelling through the mic, trying to get everyone's attention. When they reached the curtain separating them from the stage, CC peeked through an opening, checking out the crowd.

"Yes, yes, that's what we want, those bitches danced their pert, tiny little asses off." Zane air clapped and put a fake grin on his face, showing all his teeth. He gave a wave to the group now standing off to the side of the stage; he blew them kisses. "Fabulous, just fabulous." Zane turned toward Carmalatte, his identical twin brother Carlton by day and his fraternal twin sister by night, and nodded. When she hit play, the lights started flashing, music started playing, and the noise was already at a respectable decibel level. "I can't hear you," Zane yelled in the mic. The crowd got louder, yelling and catcalling. "Now that's more like it. Here they are, serving attitude, DISCIPLINE!"

The music that Jesse put together, a mix of RuPaul's "Sissy That Walk" and Kazaky's "Touch Me," filled Inzane and had the crowd dancing. When he said he was going to mix the two very different songs and styles together, everyone thought he was crazy, but it worked. The rhythmic sounds and hard bass blended perfectly, and when Discipline appeared from behind the curtain, the crowd in Inzane went crazy. CC could feel the power of the music beating in his chest; he took his first step, threw his left leg up, and caught it in his left hand, balancing on his right foot. Grady, Razz, and Jesse all stood in the same pose, all four wearing six-inch stilettos. As the music went on, CC found himself lost in his dance, speaking the only way he could, letting everyone know he was in control of his life.

CC was long and lean, his muscles were tight, and with every move they flexed and rolled. His skin changed colors: red, yellow, and blue as the lights flashed with the beat of the music. For one unfocused moment, CC looked out in the crowd and saw his best friends. March, Brick, and Danny were front and center, whistling and clapping. Brick, the smallest of the trio at five-five, was the loudest. After seeing his friends, CC was right back in the zone. He was breathing hard, his legs were burning, his heart was pounding, and the leather pants that were painted on his body were getting tighter because he was hard. Dance had also become his sexual release. CC hadn't been with anyone since

his stroke, and he knew that once they were done and they were announced the winners—because they would win—he was going to the bathroom to rub one out. When the last beat of the music hit, Discipline ended their dance the way it began.

Those that were standing were jumping up and down, and those that were sitting were now standing and cheering. The crowd started chanting: DISCIPLINE, DISCIPLINE, DISCIPLINE! Zane came running on the stage, well, walking fast as CC and the others lowered their legs. Zane brought his mic up. “DISCIPLINE!” Zane called, as he pointed to the four men standing next to him. Everyone cheered again. They all waved to the mixed crowd of men and women as they walked off the stage. “Well, it’s up to the judges now. To be fair, we have judges from New York, Chicago, and DC. This is the first time they have seen any of the dancers, and they have never met any of them. Carmalatte, get the girls out here while we wait.” Carmalatte put on “Control” by Janet Jackson, and a woman who bore an uncanny resemblance to her came out and started lip-syncing her song.

CC walked over to March and his friends and was hugged within an inch of his life. Well, Brick hugged him tight around the waist. “You were phenomenal.” Brick beamed up at his friend, his large chestnut-brown eyes shining with excitement. CC loved how Brick put his whole body into his hugs, and out of all of his friends, Brick was the most sincere. He was also the most sensitive and the toughest one of the four of them. You did not fuck with Brick or anyone he loved or held close to his heart, or there would be hell to pay. His beautiful dark-brown skin was a stark contrast to CC’s cream colored. In his heels, CC stood six-nine, so he squatted as low as he could and hugged Brick back. “Very funny,” he said as he let go of CC’s waist and hugged him around the neck.

CC stood up and turned to March. “Meh.” March hunched his wide shoulders. “Not bad.”

CC flipped him off. “Fog in.”

March snorted. “I’ve told you before CC, I think it would ruin our friendship, but thank you once again for the offer.”

March reached out and hugged CC, being careful not to hug too tight. March was a big, soft-spoken man, and at six foot four inches tall, two hundred fifty pounds of pure muscle, he had been known to purr when hugged. Hard to believe that he could make a person cry on the witness stand.

March let go of CC. “You were good man. Shit, I didn’t know you could bend that way.” March wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, making them all laugh.

Danny, not one for hugging, or overly emotional, nodded in approval. “You should let me borrow those boots some night. They would look good with my... well with my everything!” Danny flipped his blond hair out of his face. Looking as if he couldn’t give a shit what people thought of him. Only the three of them knew that Danny wasn’t as shallow as he wanted everyone to think he was. He was kind and sweet, and that had gotten him in some ass-backward relationships. So now he surrounded himself in a coat of armor that no one had been able to remove.

“You.” CC paused. CC paused a lot before speaking, and sometimes he stuttered. “You, umm.” Danny waited patiently. “You give me five hundred and f-f-fifty dollars, and they are yours.”

Danny’s mouth fell open. “Bullshit. Are you shittin’ me, you paid that for those boots?”

“No,” CC said. “I only... I only paid a hundred. I wanted the rest for a leather j-jacket I saw.”

“You’re such an ass.”

CC tilted his head to the side. “I know,” he said.

Grady and the guys walked over to CC as Zane walked to the center of the stage. “We have a winner,” he yelled in the mic, waving an envelope high over his head. “Ten teams of dancers and only one winner of ten thousand dollars, grand marshal at the San Francisco pride parade, and a contract to dance at the best dance club, Inzane.” Zane turned to his sister, and Carmalatte, by far one of the biggest drag queens anyone had ever seen, hit a button, and a drum roll played. “The winner by only one point—” Dramatic pause. “—DISCIPLINE!”

The uproar of the crowd was almost deafening. Razz and Jesse ran on stage immediately, and CC received another round of hugs from his friends; well, Danny slapped him on his back. Grady waited for CC, and they both went on stage together. As soon as they reached the others, the chant for Discipline started again. Zane handed Razz the trophy, not one to shy away from the spotlight, and held it over his head. CC looked around at all the faces staring back up at them, and the hairs on the back of his neck started to stand up. He felt someone staring at him, and yes, there were a lot of people staring, but

someone was focused on CC alone. CC scanned the sea of faces, his head turning and stopping when he saw him. Impossible to miss, literally standing head and shoulders above everyone was the scariest man CC had ever seen. And completely and utterly beautiful.

CC's heart began to pound again, his palms were sweaty, and CC felt like he couldn't breathe. The man stood six feet seven inches, if not taller, and his arms were crossed over his broad chest. The long-sleeved T-shirt he wore hugged his body, putting every muscle he had on display. His biceps were the size of cannon balls and screamed for release from the confines of the shirt. He wore what looked like a black knit beanie, which brought attention to his eyes. He glared at CC as if he were pissed off at him, but they had never met. There was another man standing next to him, almost as big, but he gave the impression he wanted to be anywhere but here as he kept eyeing the door leading outside.

It was a scream for help that had them breaking eye contact, as CC watched scary-beautiful man and his friend run toward the cry for help. CC stood on the stage as people tried to see what the commotion was all about. CC's heart still raced, his body trembled, and his dick was still hard. He needed to go home. Scary Beautiful Man's friend came out, headed for the front door. He reached in his pocket and pulled out a leather wallet; nope not a wallet, a badge. He was a cop, which meant Scary Beautiful Man was also a cop. He showed it to the bouncers while he spoke and pointed at the doors. The bouncers closed the doors, leaving two standing inside after two went outside. CC dropped his head back. It was going to be a long night.

Chapter Three

Detective Mikkel Bass watched all the dancers, but none intrigued him more than the dancer from Discipline. Mikkel loved men, but he never dated anyone who was not black. His family could care less he was gay, but he damn sure better date someone black. His mother would say, “Don’t you bring some white boy in here.” And he had never been into femme men, and he sure as hell was not into men who wore heels. So what was it about the long-legged, long-bodied, tight-muscled, high heel-wearing white guy that caught his attention? Maybe it was all the leather he was wearing. The leather pants moved with him as if it were his actual skin; as tight as they were, they could have been. Or maybe it was the thigh-high leather boots with the six-inch heels; he might as well have been dancing on stilts. They made his legs look impossibly long and his ass perfectly round. Or maybe it was the dick he watched grow hard in his leather pants as he danced; he was impressive.

Whatever it was, Mikkel was hooked. When Discipline was announced as the winner, he had to admit he was excited. But he refused to show it, and when the creamy-colored dancer noticed him staring, Mikkel’s heart dropped to his feet and bounced back up to his chest, stopping his breath for a minute. The light from the ceiling shown in the dancer’s eyes, and Mikkel had never seen eyes that green before. Someone had found the deepest, darkest, shiniest emeralds and used them as the dancer’s eyes. His raven hair, eyebrows, and lashes so long Mikkel could see them from where he stood, made his green eyes glow. Mikkel knew he gave off an air of being pissed off, with his arms folded across his chest, but he was confused. He had never felt such an urge to claim someone as his own, yet he wanted to march on stage and drag this guy home with him. It was the scream for help that snapped Mikkel out of his trance and sent him and his partner running toward the bathroom.

They pushed their way through the crowd; it was not hard given their size. When they finally made it into the bathroom, he thought he’d stumbled into a slasher movie. Blood splatter was on the walls, the stalls, and the mirrors. There was a body of a guy on the floor covered in blood, the knife still lodged in his chest and a woman standing in the corner still screaming and crying as her friends tried to comfort her.

“Shit, shit, and double shit,” Mikkel heard Brant cursing behind him. “You had to come to Inzane. I said, ‘let’s drive into San Fran’ but *nooo* we had to come here.” Brant held up his badge and asked people to exit the bathroom.

The bathroom was empty save for the women still holding each other in the corner. The bathroom door flew open and in walked the owner, Zane. Apparently he misunderstood and thought they were giving out invitations to the crime scene. His gasp had Mikkel rolling his eyes. “Brant, go make sure no one leaves the building and no one comes in.”

“On it.”

Mikkel had to call in the murder before he could deal with Zane. If Mikkel had been on the job, he would have on a suit and his phone would be nestled in his jacket pocket. But as it was he was out to blow off some steam, so his phone sat in his back pocket. Mikkel reached behind his back, pulling out his phone to make the call to dispatch. “This is Detective Bass, I am at Inzane standing next to a DB. Detective Everson is with me, and we are securing the scene.” Mikkel waited and listened before disconnecting the call, returning his phone to his back pocket.

He turned to Zane who now, instead of shock from seeing a dead body on the bathroom floor of his club, was licking his lips while staring at Mikkel’s ass. Mikkel cleared his throat, only to have Zane slowly look up at Mikkel. *Never going to happen*, Mikkel thought.

“What can I do to help?” Zane asked in the softest voice he could muster.

“You can get out,” Mikkel snapped.

“Oh my, that voice.” Zane fanned himself with his hand.

Again, Mikkel rolled his eyes. Mikkel had heard it all his life. “Bass got a lot of bass in your voice.” Between his size and his voice, most people found it hard to believe he was gay. Not that he cared; it just got old. And at times like this he used it to his advantage. “Zane, right?” Mikkel said with all seriousness, but deepened his voice even more to get Zane’s attention, not that he didn’t already have it.

“Yes,” Zane breathed out.

Mikkel stepped closer to Zane. “I am sure there are some curious people out there who would love to come in. I sent my partner out there to make sure that no one leaves or comes into the building. I need you to go out there and make sure no one but my partner comes in.” Mikkel cocked his head and took a step closer to Zane. “You think you can do that for me while I talk to these ladies?”

“Why yes, officer.”

“Detective, Detective Bass.”

“Yes, Detective Bass.” Zane all but floated out of the bathroom as he left.

Shaking his head, Mikkel stepped around the body, not wanting to step in any of the blood that seemed to still be pooling. He stood in front of the three ladies, placing himself in front of the body so they would not have to look at it. Two were holding on to one. “I’m very sorry, ma’am, but I need to ask all of you a few questions.”

“Can’t this wait?” asked the one holding her friend the tightest.

“No ma’am, I’m sorry, I wish it could, but the sooner I ask my questions, the sooner you can leave.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” the woman being held cried out. “He’s my husband and I want to know who did this.”

Okay so that was one of Mikkel’s questions answered, the DB was married to the woman who was crying. “I am very sorry for your loss, Mrs....”

She dabbed her eyes with the tissue that had been handed to her. “Tanner, Anna Tanner and that is... was my husband Elliot. We were married almost two years. We were among the first to get married after Prop 8 was defeated.”

“Mrs. Tanner, I am sorry to have to ask these questions, but do you know of anyone who would want to hurt your husband?”

“No, absolutely not; everyone loved Elliot. He was a good man.”

Mikkel tried not to sigh; they all said that. He had been a cop for a long time, and at forty-two he had been a homicide detective for the last ten years. He had seen it all and heard it all, and not one person was bad. He was a good person, he wouldn’t hurt anyone, and everyone loved him. Yeah, he was getting cynical in his old age, but just once he’d love to hear someone say, “Yep, he was a bastard.” Not that that gave anyone the right to murder someone, but just once he wanted to hear it.

“So no recent arguments that you know about? He didn’t owe anyone any money?”

Brant walked through the door before Mrs. Tanner could answer. “Hey, the medical examiner is here and the crime scene investigators.” He looked around. “Not everyone is going to fit in here.”

“Mrs. Tanner, would you and your friends please come with me?”

Anna Tanner started crying, trying to pull away from her friends. “No,” she cried out, “I want to stay with him; he would want me to stay with him.” Anna

was strong; it took both of her friends to hold on and drag her out of the bathroom. There was an officer waiting for them outside of the door. Brant told him to take them to the back office.

Mikkel could hear Mrs. Tanner wailing all the way down the hall. Mikkel turned and said, "How do you know there is a back office?"

"It's a club, man, of course it has a back office." Brant stepped out of the way to let the ME in before Mikkel could call bullshit.

Ryland entered the bathroom, his messy man bun thrown up haphazardly on his head, curls slipping from their band and falling in his face. His baby face would never put him at forty. "What do we got?" he asked as he stood in the doorway putting on his paper booties alongside his assistant.

"A guy with a knife in his chest," Mikkel deadpanned.

"You, sir, are an asshole."

"You asked."

"You asked." Ryland mocked Mikkel, dropping his voice to sound like him. "You ever get tired of trying to sound like Barry White?"

"Ha fucking ha, because I've never heard that before."

"It's not just a knife, it's a kitchen knife," Ryland noted as he moved closer to the body.

"Yep, noticed that."

"Who found him?"

Mikkel smirked. "The wife."

Ryland shook his head. "Some people aren't too smart. Does she know you suspect her?"

"No, she was too busy putting on her show to notice that I was scanning her and her friends for blood. But she may be smarter than we think; I didn't see any blood, not on her, her friends, or anywhere on their clothes and shoes. I mean look at this place, the blood splatter should be on one of them, if not all."

Ryland grunted. "Where are they now?"

"In the back office, with a uniform, thinking they just got away with murder. We'll let them sit for a bit while we ask around to see if anyone knows them." He watched as Ryland squatted down, eyeing the body of Elliot Tanner as he put his gloves on. "You need anything before I head out?"

“Nope.”

Ryland was now in his zone; Mikkell wouldn't get any more conversation from him, so he left, and Brant was standing just outside of the door. “Hey, let's go talk to a few people to see what information we can get before we go and talk to the little woman.”

Chapter Four

“How are we going to play this?” Brant asked as they headed back out to the main floor of the club.

Mikkel scanned the club and found who he was looking for. Without taking his gaze off the guy with green eyes, he pointed to the far side of the club. “You cover that side, and I’ll cover this side, someone must know the Tanner family.”

“Okay, but wh...”

Mikkel was already walking away, moving through the crowd with ease. The closer he got to those eyes, the bigger they got, and Mikkel knew he had to have him.

CC’s whole body shook as he watched the scary-beautiful cop come his way. He wasn’t looking at anyone else, just CC. Leaning with his back against the wall and his legs crossed at the ankles, CC stood up straight when the cop made it to him. He was pleased to note that in his heels, he had a few inches on this man who was turning his insides into a pile of goo.

“I’m Detective Bass.”

“Yes, you are.” Razz lifted his hand for Mikkel to shake but was left hanging there. “I’m Razz, pleasure’s mine but it can be yours.” Still nothing. Razz cleared his throat. “Okay then.” Razz turned on his heels and went over to sit next to Jesse.

“He just didn’t see you,” Jesse said to a now pouting Razz.

“Of course he didn’t,” Razz said.

Jesse gave a little pat to Razz’s right knee. “Of course he didn’t,” he repeated while still patting Razz’s knee.

Mikkel didn’t move; he just stood there and stared at CC, looking down and following the length of his legs, his body, his long neck, stopping momentarily at his lips—pink and wet, plump, and a little pouty. A picture flashed in Mikkel’s mind, of this man down on his knees and his pink, wet, plump, and pouty lips wrapped around his thick brown dick. He almost moaned at the vision, but Mikkel shook that crazy, fleeting thought from his head. He

continued his eye fuck, finally stopping when he reached CC's eyes. And damn if they weren't a deeper green than he thought. "How do you walk in those things, let alone dance in them?"

CC stared back at Detective Bass. He wanted to walk away to get away from the look of disgust he was getting from the detective. "I..." His heart raced. CC couldn't find his words.

"Does this have anything to do with what's going on in the bathroom, detective, or are you just being a dick?" Brick to the rescue.

That seemed to snap Mikkel out of wherever the hell he was. *What the fuck am I doing?* Mikkel shook himself. "Uh, do any of you know Elliot Tanner?"

"Is that who's in the bathroom?" March asked.

Mikkel took his eyes off CC to address the linebacker standing next to the Chihuahua that just nipped at his ankles. "Yes, his wife just found him in the bathroom, so do you know him? And why do you look familiar to me?"

"Oh I don't know." March said, "Maybe because I work for the DA's office as one of the prosecuting attorneys. I'm March Hadley."

Mikkel almost smacked himself in the forehead but played it cool. "Ah." *Well that was a great comeback.*

"Ah," March repeated back. "But to answer your question, no, I've never met him."

Mikkel studied the rest of their faces, the other three dancers, and he guessed March and the other two were friends, the little Chihuahua was probably their pet.

"I know him," CC said. Everyone turned to him.

Mikkel walked closer to him. "You know him?"

CC nodded his head. "He... he..." CC stopped because again he couldn't find his words.

"He what?" Mikkel's voice boomed and made CC jump.

"Hey, man, give him a sec." Danny stepped forward, ready to protect his friend.

What the fuck? How fragile is the guy? Mikkel held up his hands to calm his friend down. "Look, I'm sorry." He gave his attention back to CC. "He

what?” he asked, lowering his voice so as not to scare the poor timid man into cardiac arrest.

Great, now he was staring at CC like he belonged in a mental hospital. CC looked around and found a napkin on a nearby table. CC pinched his thumb and forefinger together and mimicked like he was writing. “Scribble,” he said.

“You have a pen?” Grady asked Mikkel.

Mikkel didn’t say a word. Something was up with this guy, and his friends were circling the wagons around him. Mikkel didn’t know why he patted himself down; he knew he didn’t have a pen on him. He turned to the table behind him and found that a server had left a tray, and lo and behold, there was a pen. Mikkel picked the pen up and handed it to... He really needed to find out this guy’s name.

CC took the pen and wrote the word dance. He stared at it for a moment and then said, “Dance studio.” He took in a deep breath. “I know him from the dance studio.” He waited for a moment before he continued. “He s-s-started coming around about, about—” CC closed his mouth in frustration before he went on. “About three weeks ago.”

“I never saw him,” Grady said.

“Only at night.” The words were starting to come easier to CC.

Mikkel picked up on the stuttering and the pausing between words. He could see the guy was trying hard to put his thoughts into words. “All right so he started coming by a dance studio that you work in, practice in. Why did he start coming by? And if I could have your name?”

CC ran his fingers through his short black hair. Mikkel tracked CC’s long fingers as they glided through his hair. He wondered if it was as soft as it appeared. “Cassidy Carrington.”

Mikkel didn’t hear the name that was given; he was lost in his thoughts about the man who stood before him. The man stared at him, waiting for a response or maybe another question, but Mikkel still didn’t know his name. “I’m sorry I didn’t catch that, could you repeat that?”

CC stood a little straighter, the muscles in his jaw flexing as he worked to hold back—what Mikkel wondered—his anger, his frustration? “Cassidy Carrington,” CC said a little louder and with the confidence Mikkel hadn’t seen from the man since he was on the dance floor.

“Cassidy Carrington.” Mikkell tested the name on his lips. How would the name Cassidy sound as he shouted it while coming down his throat. *Where the hell did that come from?* Mikkell tried to shake these crazy thoughts he was having about this man, about Cassidy. “So, Mr. Carrington, you say he started coming to the dance studio.”

Chapter Five

At first CC was intimidated by the detective, his size, the timber of his voice, and the intensity of his pewter-colored eyes. But now he was just irritated by the detective, the way he stared at CC like he was some sort of alien. He didn't want to answer any more of his questions; he just wanted to leave. But he knew Elliot, if only for a short time. He was nice guy who was only looking to make a few extra bucks and learn how to dance. When CC saw Elliot watching him through the window one night, he was more curious than afraid. It was after eleven in the evening, and CC was dancing in the studio by himself, something he did often to clear his head. The sight of a saggy jeans-wearing, hoodie-cloaked, slightly sinister, unshaven stranger staring at him, should have made CC nervous. He may live in a town with very few homophobic people, but gay bashing was not unheard of.

But there was something in Elliot's eyes, a sadness that CC found himself wanting to remove. So CC walked over to the door, unlocked it, and asked Elliot if he needed some help. Elliot asked CC if he owned the place, and CC told him no. He could see Elliot deflate. CC asked him again what he needed, and Elliot just said, "A chance and a job." CC understood that. If the DA's office hadn't taken a chance on him and believed that he could still work for them and still be an asset and not a burden or a charity case, he didn't know where he would be. So CC talked to the owner, and Elliot started working there, cleaning after-hours, and CC taught him some dance steps. He was a quick learner and a good dancer and slowly became a friend to CC.

So CC stayed where he was and answered the detective's questions, never once acting on the impulse to punch him in the face.

"He was cleaning the studio when it closed for the night," CC said. "He said his husband worked too hard and he needed to help with the bills.

"So you hired him to clean the studio?"

"No, Baily."

"Who's Baily?" Mikkel asked.

Grady moved forward. "He's the owner of Allegro, the studio we practice in."

"And what? He lets you stay and dance when the place is closed?"

“We all have a key,” Jesse interjected. “Just the four of us. We’ve been dancing there for a long time, and we are all friends, and he trusts us to leave everything as is when we leave and lock up.”

“So why is it that you, Mr. Carrington, are the only one who knew that Elliot was working there? Were the two of you having an affair?” *Why would I ask him that? Because I am investigating a murder. Then why are you getting pissed, and he hasn’t even answered the question?*

CC shook his head as if the question had hit him across the jaw. “N-n-no! We-we-we—” CC stopped, pressing his lips together, anger showing in his green eyes. CC was done; he turned and stomped off the stage. The sound of thunder echoed through the club every time his heels hit the floor as he headed back to the dressing room. He didn’t have to put up with Detective Dickhead.

Mikkel watched Cassidy’s ass and hips switch back and forth as he stormed off. He groaned to himself. He wanted that ass in his bed, on his couch, in his kitchen, and anywhere else he could think of in his house. Which again shocked him; this line of thinking was crazy because Cassidy Carrington was not his type. He liked his men big, like him, someone who fought for dominance. Not someone who gave it over willingly. As Mikkel watched Cassidy walk away, he didn’t notice that his friends were staring at him until March caught the Chihuahua in mid-leap.

“CC is not like that; he would never sleep with someone if he knew they were married,” Brick snapped. March was holding Brick as tight as he could, when all he wanted to do was let Brick go so he could take the idiot detective down. If anyone could take him down, it was Brick.

Brant came up beside Mikkel. He noticed the big guy holding on tight to the little one. He looked at Mikkel. “Everything okay over here?”

“Yeah,” Mikkel answered softly.

Brant cocked his head to the side; he had never heard his partner sound so quiet. “All right, okay then, no one I questioned knew Elliot, but they know his wife and friends, and from what I could gather, those are not very nice women.” Brant put his hand on Mikkel’s right shoulder. “Hey, man, we have some suspects to talk to.” Brant waited before turning and heading in the opposite direction, going to the back office. “You coming?” he asked Mikkel.

Mikkel nodded his head, not really hearing his partner. His mind was on Cassidy and the urge he felt to go find him and apologize to him.

Chapter Six

CC had changed into his clothes by the time everyone had entered the room. He'd put his shoes in a separate bag from his clothes, and he was slipping on his jacket when the door opened.

"Oh no, where do you think you're going?" Razz asked. "We just proved we are the best dance group out there, and we are going to celebrate."

Before CC could get past his friends, Carmalatte walked in with Zane on her heels. Zane stopped in front of CC. "Do tell me, what did Mr. Delicious Mountain of Chocolate Goodness want?" Zane all but purred.

CC closed his eyes before taking a deep breath. He had to get out of there. He stepped around Zane and headed for the door. "No celebrating, going home."

Zane tried to stop him. "But they haven't said we can leave yet."

March placed his hand on CC's shoulder, stopping him before he could get to the door. "I'll call you tomorrow," March said. CC gave a quick nod of his head and was out the door.

Mikkel and Brant walked into the office where Mrs. Tanner and her friends were sitting on the couch. Mrs. Tanner sat in the middle of her friends while they hugged her. The officer stood against the wall in the rest position, feet apart and hands behind his back. Brant nodded to the officer while Mikkel kept his eyes on Mrs. Tanner. She was cold. She had tears on her cheeks, but hatred in her eyes. Her friends on the other hand were frightened; Mikkel knew they would break. Mrs. Tanner was the leader and as long as she was in their sight they would keep their mouths closed. So Mikkel would play along until they were at the precinct. There he would separate them and watch them fall apart.

Mikkel sat down on the chair across from the ladies, studying their faces. He admired how perfectly they applied their makeup. No one would ever guess that they were actually men. "Mrs. Tanner," Mikkel began. "Again, I want to tell you how sorry I am for your loss."

"Please call me Anna, and this is Jinna." She pointed to the redhead on her right. "And this is Kimber." She pointed to the blonde on her left. "And thank you. I know you will find who did this to my Elliot." Anna sniffed, "I feel like

my life is falling apart.” Anna burst into tears again and Kimber hugged her tighter.

Mikkel wanted to laugh. He caught a glimpse of Brant out of the corner of his eye. His head was down, and his shoulders were shaking. The truth was that until they had some proof that she or they murdered Elliot Tanner, he would have to play along.

“Mrs. Tan—Anna, I know this is a difficult time for you, but if you could please tell me what happened.”

Anna sniffed again, dabbed her eyes with a tissue and took a deep breath. “We, Elliot and I, had planned to come to the dance-off from the first day it was announced. Elliot loved dancing; he just wasn’t very good at it.” Anna smoothed her hands over her dress. “We were all pulling for Discipline to win. After they danced, Elliot said he had to go use the restroom. I told him to hurry up, because they were going to announce the winner.” Anna took a shaky breath. “He was taking so long, so we went to find him, and when we walked into the bathroom—” Anna’s voice cracked.

Oh she is good, Mikkel thought. “And is that when you screamed for help?”

“Yes. I wanted to go to him, but my girls held me back, and then you burst in, and here we are.”

There was a knock on the door, and Ryland walked in. “Can I see you both out here for a minute?”

“If you will excuse us, Anna,” Mikkel said.

“Of course.” Anna gave a weak smile as if she were becoming exhausted.

Mikkel and Brant walked out and closed the door behind them. “What’s up?” Mikkel asked.

Ryland tried to secure one of his wayward curls behind his right ear. “We’re heading out, but I can tell you now, he was not only stabbed, he was strangled. My guess is he was being stabbed and strangled at the same time. If he had been strangled first, blood flow to the heart would stop, and there would not have been as much blood. I’ll be able to tell you more when I get him to the lab, like the angle of the blade entry. We are still collecting evidence, but so far, no hidden panels hiding clothes or shoes, and unless their fingerprints are on the knife, we have nothing to say they did it.”

Brant let out a string of curse words. “There has to be something in there. There is no fucking way they didn’t do it.”

“Look, if it’s in there, we’ll find it, but it looks like for now we have nothing to go on.” Ryland looked between Mikkell and Brant, waiting to see if they had anything to add, and when they didn’t speak, he said, “I’ll let you know what we find.”

Mikkell didn’t want to tip his hand. If he asked them down to the station without something to push Kimber and Jinna over the edge they might get suspicious and try and leave town. He braced himself before he opened the door to the office and stepped back in. “Okay ladies, that’s all we have for now. Just please stick around, we may have more questions for you as we continue our investigation.”

Anna stood, and Jinna and Kimber stood next to her. “I am not going anywhere until whoever murdered my husband is caught.”

“Yes ma’am.” Mikkell stepped to the side and let them file out of the office. Once they were out of earshot, Mikkell turned to Brant and said, “Oh, we are going to nail her if it’s the last thing we do.”

“Bet your ass we are.” Brant huffed as they walked off, heading to the precinct to file their report.

Chapter Seven

CC made it home by midnight, and he was bone tired by the time he walked through his front door. He went straight to his room, stripped out of his clothes, and headed for the bathroom to take a shower. He turned on the light to the bathroom, almost sighing in relief when he saw his shower. He loved his oversized shower, with four showerheads spraying from all sides. CC hit the panel on the wall for the perfect temperature, pressure, and pulsing massage. The moan that escaped from his lips came from a man who was sexually and emotionally frustrated. He didn't understand why he was so attracted to a man who seemed to hold him in disgust. Detective Dickhead's face burned in CC's memory, and every time he closed his eyes he saw it, those pewter-colored eyes staring at him in confusion. He could hear how he spoke to him, as if he were a few slices short of a loaf of bread.

CC turned his face up and let the water pound on his forehead, hoping to push out the visions. The shower wasn't helping. All it managed to do was wake him up, and to top it off, he was still hard from dancing and from the detective. CC thought about jerking himself off, but why bother? He hit the off button on the panel, stepped out of the shower, grabbed the towel off the rack, and dried off. Instead of getting in the bed, he went to his drawer and pulled out his dance sweats and shirt. He put on his socks and shoes, picked up his phone, keys, and wallet from where he dropped them on the dresser when he walked in his room earlier, and headed out to Allegro. Maybe he could dance his way into exhaustion again and forget about the evening. Forget about Elliot dying, forget about the detective, and for the first time in a long while, he remembered he had a disability, and he wanted to forget that too.

It was two in the morning by the time Mikkel and Brant left the precinct and headed for their pride and joys. Mikkel and Brant weren't best friends just because they were partners. When they were put together five years ago, they found out they had almost the same interests—three of their favorite topics, sports, men, and cars. It was the love of cars that sealed the deal. Mikkel drove a metallic blue 1969 Chevelle COPO 427 and Brant drove a 1967 Mercury Comet 427. They drooled over what the other had, and they spent hours talking about their cars, meeting on the weekends at a detail shop to wash, dry, and polish their babies. No one was allowed to drive their cars. As much as they loved each other, they had never driven each other's car.

Mikkel said his good-byes to Brant. He settled into his Chevelle and started the engine. Mikkel's car roared to life. His favorite jazz station came on, and he pulled out onto the street heading home, or so he thought. He'd looked up Allegro while he was filling out his report and knew where it was. It was as if his car read his mind and made a left instead of a right. The streets were quiet as he drove; the only lights that were on were the streetlights and traffic lights changing from green to yellow to red and back again. Mikkel rolled to a stop across the street from Allegro. He sat in his car staring at the front of the building. Instead of brick walls it was completely made of glass. The lights were on and he could see inside. On the far side was a mirrored wall and speakers hanging in the corners. He stepped out of his car just as Cassidy Carrington leaped across the floor. Mikkel's heart thudded, he had never seen anyone jump that high, not even Zach LaVine. Cassidy's legs extended into splits, toes pointed, and his arms straight out.

Mikkel watched Cassidy move across the floor, effortlessly. He was fluid, ever changing like the banks of a river and powerful like the crashing waves of the ocean. He was beautiful. Mikkel gently closed his door, making his way slowly across the street, stepping on the sidewalk, and continuing to watch Cassidy. At that moment Cassidy spun around and stopped. They watched each other through the glass window, and it was Cassidy who moved first, walking over, still watching Mikkel, placing his hands on the door. Mikkel heard the soft click of the lock, hesitating, but only for a moment, before he moved to walk through the door.

Chapter Eight

CC had only been dancing for a little over an hour when he felt someone watching him. He spun around to see the person he had been trying to dance out of his head: Detective Bass. CC wasn't sure if he wanted to open the door, but they couldn't stand there and stare at each other until the sun came up. CC walked over and unlocked the door, never taking his eyes off the detective as he opened it. CC noticed the gun the detective was now wearing, along with a glimpse of hesitation in his eyes, before he moved to come in.

CC took a breath before he spoke because he didn't want to make a fool of himself. "What do you want, Detective?" There, he did it, no pausing and no stuttering.

Mikkel looked around the studio before his gaze landed on Cassidy. Without his six-inch stilts on, Cassidy was now looking up at Mikkel, his brilliant-green eyes searching for answers on Mikkel's face. Shrugging his shoulders, he said, "I wanted to see what this place looked like, check it out before I came in to talk to the owner in the morning. And my name is Mikkel." His answer seemed nonchalant enough.

"What?"

"My name is Mikkel, not Detective."

"Oh." CC backed away from Mikkel, turning and walking over to turn off the music he was listening to. "Baily will be in around seven. You can come back then." CC was feeling good; he was nailing his speech. He watched Mikkel through the mirror that took up a whole wall. Attached to all three walls in the studio were wooden bars for stretching.

Mikkel followed Cassidy over to where he had his MP3 player connected to a set of smaller speakers. He stood only a few inches away, keeping his eyes on Cassidy. "You didn't have to turn that off. It was nice." His rich voice dipped lower.

CC felt the vibration of the detective's voice throughout his whole body. *Damn, that man's voice could make an angel give up his wings.* CC was breathing harder, his chest heaving up and down. The closeness of Mikkel's body made him stutter. "I-it's," he searched for the word personal but said, "it's mine."

Mikkel smiled. It was the first time CC had seen him smile, and it almost brought him to his knees. “I won’t take it from you.”

CC closed his eyes. That wasn’t what he meant. “No.” CC shook his head and placed his hand on his chest. “Me, no.” his eyes started to glisten. He knew it was frustration, but he wanted to cry. The word he wanted to say was stuck in his head; he knew the word, but it wouldn’t come out.

Mikkel could see how upset Cassidy was getting. “Hey, I was just teasing.” He placed his hands on Cassidy’s shoulders.

“No!” CC shouted.

Mikkel put up both his hands. “Okay, I get it, no touching.”

CC growled, then he marched over to the far wall on the right and picked up his phone. He pulled up his notepad app and started typing. He marched back over to Mikkel, bare feet slapping the wood floor. Mikkel read what he had typed out. “*Personal, music, dance personal.*”

CC’s eyes still glistened, with anger not sadness. “I’m sorry.” Mikkel said, “I’m not trying to make you nervous, I...”

“No,” CC said again, cutting off whatever Mikkel was going to say. He shook his head. “Not nervous.” CC looked down at his feet then back up to Mikkel and took a deep breath. “I had a stroke, and it affects my speech.” There, it was out.

I had a stroke. Is that what he heard Cassidy say? Mikkel ran that around in his head. Cassidy didn’t look sick. “So does that mean you have trouble understanding me?”

Cassidy looked appalled. Mikkel was talking slowly and emphasizing each word. Cassidy said. “Fog in!” He stormed off.

“Fog in,” Mikkel whispered to himself. “What the fuck does that mean?” He turned to follow Cassidy. “Hey what does that mean?”

Cassidy turned and flipped him the bird. “Understand now?” he snapped. He picked up his keys and wallet and headed for the door. He didn’t even bother to put his socks and shoes back on, just carried them with him. But he couldn’t just leave; he had to wait for Detective Dickhead to follow him out so he could lock up.

Mikkel hurried behind Cassidy. “Whoa, just hold on a sec.” Mikkel went to rub his head but realized he was still wearing his knit beanie. He pulled it off of his head and rubbed his hand over his hair. “Listen I’m sorry, I can be a serious dumbass sometimes. Just ask my friends.”

CC tried not to notice the tiny curls that sat on top of Mikkel’s head. “Move,” CC demanded. When Mikkel moved, CC locked the door and headed for his car. He noticed that Mikkel was right on his heels.

Chapter Nine

CC reached his Ford Talladega Fastback, and Mikkel stopped in his tracks. He walked around CC's car, touching it like it was a precious gem. "Umm you okay?" CC asked.

Mikkel couldn't believe he was looking at a '69 Talladega. He hadn't looked up at CC. He was still making love to CC's car.

CC knew why Mikkel was speechless; if the metallic blue 1969 Chevelle COPO was Mikkel's then that was something they had in common. CC loved cars; he got that from his dad. He worked with his dad every summer in the family-owned garage. CC was a good mechanic. His dad had even tried to get him to come and work for him after he was done with all his therapy, but he loved the law more than he loved cars. He refused to cave in; he was not going to let this siphon out his anger. But it didn't hurt to ask. He cleared his throat. "Is that yours?"

Mikkel's face beamed. "Yep, you want to take a look at her?"

CC did, he really did, but that would be giving in and he wasn't ready to. "No, I need to get home." He opened his door. "Maybe another time."

That seemed to take the wind out of Mikkel's sails. "Yeah sure, another time." He watched as Cassidy climbed into his car. He put his hand on the door before Cassidy could close it. "When?" he asked.

"When what?"

Mikkel smirked. "When will it be another time?"

"I-I'm not sure."

"What about tonight? We could go out for dinner?"

CC shook his head—wait—what, was he being asked out on a date by Detective Dickhead? And what was worse, was he about to say yes? Damn it, he was. "Okay, tonight sounds good."

He handed Cassidy his phone. "Here, put your number in my phone, and I'll call you for your address later today." Cassidy put in his number and handed the phone back to Mikkel. "CC," Mikkel said out loud, he remembered the little Chihuahua calling him that.

"Yes. I've always been called CC."

“I prefer Cassidy. Is that okay by you?”

CC swallowed, his Adam’s apple bobbing up and down. Mikkel’s voice rattled his brain, and he found it hard to think. “S-s-sure.” CC sighed. “Sure, that’s fine.” He pulled the door from Mikkel’s hand and slammed it shut. He started the engine and waited for Mikkel to back up before pulling away from the curb and heading for home once again.

Mikkel watched Cassidy pull away and drive down the street. He watched until the taillights disappeared around the corner. He couldn’t believe he’d asked him out and that Cassidy had said yes. He was headed back to his car when his phone went off with the theme from the TV show, *Barretta*. “What’s up Brant?”

“There was a 9-1-1 call. It was a man, saying someone was trying to kill him and to send help. There was a high-pitched shriek before the call disconnected. By the time a unit made it over, he was dead.”

“Okay, so why are we catching it?”

“The man’s name is Oscar Hart.”

Mikkel closed his eyes. “Fuck, Jinna.” They had gotten all the ladies’ real names before they had let them go.

“That’s exactly what I said.”

“Are they sure his name is Oscar Hart?”

“The body had two IDs; one said Oscar, the other said Jinna.”

“Where are you?”

“On my way there; fifty-one, fifty-one Cress Street.”

“I’m close by. I’ll be there in five.”

“You still haven’t made it home? What, you getting you a little sumthin’ sumthin’?”

Mikkel rolled his eyes. “Shut up man, I’ll see you in five.” Mikkel hung up and jogged to his car and headed up the street. He was not missing his date with Cassidy tonight, DB or no DB.

By the time Mikkel made it to the scene, Ryland was already there, the yellow caution tape keeping all unofficial people out. It was amazing how that

yellow strip of tape acted like an invisible shield. Mikkell flashed his badge and ducked under the tape. He was walking up the sidewalk when Brant jogged up behind him. “You don’t look like a man who was just fucking.”

“Do you ever have anything else on your mind?”

Brant thought about it. “No, I can honestly say no.”

Mikkell shook his head. “Let’s go see what we have.” They slipped on their paper booties before walking in. They walked through the door and into a war zone. Lamps were busted, chairs smashed, and glass was shattered. There wasn’t one piece of furniture that had not been turned over. They carefully walked through the living room to where Ryland was already squatting down next to a body that was barely recognizable.

Ryland glanced up and then moved his eyes back to the body. “As you can see, he put up one hell of a fight. We should be able to get DNA samples from under his nails. If it was Elliot Tanner’s wife who did it, we have her.” He shook his head. “What a waste.”

“Looks like we need to go and pick up David ‘Anna’ Tanner.” Brant pulled out his phone. “I’ll call for backup and have them meet us there.”

“Tell them to go in without sirens. I don’t want to spook him. I do not want to give him a reason to run.”

“Got it.”

“Fuck.” Mikkell got back into his car. “I am not canceling this date,” he groused.

Chapter Ten

Mikkel and Brant pulled up to the Tanner residence seconds before the patrol cars did. There were two of them with two officers in each. The house was completely dark, no sounds or movement. Mikkel motioned to the officers to move around the sides and the back of the house. Mikkel thumbed the leather strap holding his gun in place, Brant following suit. They cautiously took the stairs and moved on either side of the door. Mikkel took his gun out, holding it down in front of his body. Brant held his Glock in the same position, but he held his with both hands. Mikkel raised his left hand, knocking hard on the door.

“David Tanner, this is Detective Mikkel Bass and Detective Brant Everson. We spoke earlier this evening in regards to your husband’s murder.” Nothing. Mikkel knocked harder, but this time the door creaked open.

Brant blew out a hard breath, his voice low. “Shit, I hate when stuff like this happens. It’s like some horror movie. It’s pitch dark, and the crazed murderer comes running out with a butcher knife, and the black guy always dies first.”

“We’re both black, dumbass.”

“Yeah well, I’m also the buddy, so that sucks for me.”

Mikkel pushed the door the rest of the way open, holding up his fingers and counting. One, two, three. Brant went through the door low and right. Mikkel went through high and left. Mikkel’s eyes had to adjust to the darkness. There was no movement and no sounds. Mikkel reached around, feeling for a light switch, and once he found it, he turned it on and wished to hell he had left it off. Lying on the floor with an ice pick in her eye was Kimber. “Damn, we need to find him and find him fast.” Mikkel reached for his phone. “Go let the officers in.”

Brant took off, making sure not to step on anything so he wouldn’t contaminate their third crime scene. “We don’t have enough medical examiners for this. Hell, I think we’ve reached our murder quota for the year.”

After Mikkel called dispatch, letting them know what they had found, Mikkel and Brant took another look around, looking for a clue, any clue as to what had set David Tanner off. In the kitchen on the counter sat a wood block with a set of kitchen knives with one missing. The handles were exactly like the kitchen knife found in Elliot Tanner’s chest. Mikkel heard sirens in the

distance, and they made their way to the front of the house. As Mikkel and Brant walked outside, they saw that the officers had already taped off the area.

The medical examiner was there, not Ryland. It was a new person, a woman they had never met before. She was all business, saying she would let them know when she was done and could come back in.

While they waited outside, dispatch came over the radio, *“All available units within the vicinity of twenty-two-zero-one Wilshire Street... We have a hostage situation. SWAT has been dispatched. Repeat, all available units in the vicinity of twenty-two-zero-one Wilshire Street, we have a hostage situation. SWAT is en route. Hostage is tentatively identified as Cassidy Carrington.”*

Mikkel’s head snapped up, and he snatched the mouthpiece off of an officer’s shoulder. “Dispatch, this is Detective Mikkel Bass. Please repeat hostage name.”

“Detective Bass, this is dispatch. The hostage name is believed to be the owner of the residence, Cassidy Carrington. Are you responding?”

“Copy that dispatch, Detective Bass and Detective Everson are responding.” Mikkel ran back to his car while Brant ran back to his. Mikkel’s wheels spun as he flew down the street with Brant right behind him. It took ten minutes to get to Cassidy’s house. SWAT had made it there before he did. They already had barricades up, and people were filing out of their homes to see what all the commotion was about. Mikkel’s heart raced. *What the hell was going on?* He had nothing to go on with David Tanner. Why would he hold Cassidy hostage? Cassidy barely knew Elliot Tanner. Mikkel saw the SWAT commander, so he raced over there to see what they knew.

“Taylor, what’s happening?”

“As far as we can tell, someone has it in for Cassidy Carrington. So far all we know is he works at the DA’s office.”

“What? He’s a lawyer? He never said he was a lawyer.”

“We don’t know if he’s a lawyer.” Taylor glanced at Mikkel. “Do you know Mr. Carrington?”

“Well sort of. The person who is holding him hostage is most likely our triple-homicide suspect. Cassidy knew the first victim who is our suspect’s husband.”

“So what does Carrington have to do with all this?”

“No clue. We’ve been running around this damn city all night. We haven’t had a chance to sit down and put all the pieces together.”

“We have a negotiator on the way, let’s hope we can defuse this before it blows up in our face.”

Mikkel looked to the sky. The sun was coming up, and he nodded his head. “Yeah let’s do that.”

Chapter Eleven

CC made it home. He still could not believe that Mikkel was there at the studio and that he had asked him out on a date. And let's not forget that he said yes. CC knew he could sleep for a year as tired as he was. He was going to take another shower, and this time he was going to bed. It was Saturday, and he was sleeping in. He wasn't getting up until Mikkel called, telling him what time he was picking him up. The second shower didn't last as long as the first one. CC walked into his room, reached into his drawer, and pulled on his T-shirt and his boxer briefs. He made his way into his kitchen, turned on the light and stood still, sensing something wasn't right. Before he could turn around, someone grabbed him from behind. A forearm tightened against his windpipe, and the biggest knife he had ever seen was waving back and forth in front of his face.

“Well, if it isn't the little homewrecker. Welcome home.”

The voice in CC's ear was harsh, his breath hot against CC's neck. “Wh... wh—”

“What do I want?”

CC nodded. “Yes.”

“Ah, that's simple, I want you dead.”

CC's eyes grew large, his pulse quickening with panic. “Understand.”

“You understand why I have to do this.”

CC went to shake his head no but thought better of it. “I meant—” *This is not the time to lose it*, CC thought. “No understand.”

“That's what I just said,” the voice growled behind him.

“No.” CC's voice cracked with nerves. He was slammed face-first into the wall.

“Are you playing games with me, because if you are, I am not in the mood.”

“No, no games, confused.” He was finally spun around to face his captor. The tip of the knife pressed under his chin. He thought he would know who it was, but the man's face didn't ring a bell. He also noticed the man was covered in blood, which didn't bode well for CC.

“You don't know me do you?” CC shook his head no. “I'm David, Elliot's husband.”

CC's eyes softened a little. He was still scared, but Elliot was his friend. "I'm sorry for your loss."

David pulled CC away from the wall and then slammed him up against it again. "Don't you mean your loss?" David sneered. "You were the one fucking him. You stole him from me."

"What? N-n-no, tha-that's not left."

"Not left, what the fuck are you talking about? Are you just stupid? I am going to gut you for taking what was mine!" David kept screaming in CC's face, until there was a knock on the door.

"CC, it's Kara, are you okay?"

David dragged CC to the door and threw it open. Kara's breath caught, and she jumped back when she saw a man covered in blood holding a knife to CC's neck. "CC can't come out and play right now." Kara slowly backed off the porch before turning running off to who knows where.

David slammed the door closed while still holding CC in front of him. CC threw his head back, hitting the bridge of David's nose. CC heard a satisfying crunch and he pulled away from David's grip. He almost had his hand on the doorknob when he felt his hair being pulled from his scalp. "I didn't take Elliot." CC grimaced in pain.

David pulled CC's head all the way back, putting the tip of the knife next to his eye. "You are a very bad boy, CC. Daddy is going to have to teach you a lesson." He dragged CC back into the living room by his hair and shoved him down on the couch. Before David could make a scratch on CC, he heard sirens. "Well, it looks like your neighbor has saved the day."

CC could only hope so. CC did his breathing thing, focused, and said slowly, "Elliot and I were not sleeping together. He was working for Baily as a janitor. It was his job. He wanted to learn how to dance. He said his wife was a great dancer, and he wanted to go out and dance with her. I swear that is all it was."

David whirled on him. "You're lying."

"No. Why would I lie?"

"Because I have a knife!" More sirens, and then the phone rang, once, twice, three times. "Answer it."

"Hello." Before he could say anything else, David snatched the phone.

“Who is this?”

“My name is Sheila Hudson, and I am here to make sure everyone gets out of there safely. Whom am I speaking to?”

“Whom are you speaking to?” David sneered. “This is David Tanner.”

“Well, Mr. Tanner, tell me, how can we put an end to all this?”

“Well, you can come in here and kill this lying, cheating, backstabbing whore. You think you can do that for me, Sheila, hmm? If not, then fuck off!” David slammed the phone down and glared at CC. “This is all your fault. If you would have just kept your dick in your pants, we wouldn’t be here right now.” David paced. “You made me kill him. You made me kill my friends. This is all your doing.”

CC stood up slowly because he could see that David was on the edge. He made up his mind. CC was walking out or getting carried out, but he was not going down without a fight. The phone rang again, startling them both. CC lunged for David, knocking him to the ground. As they rolled around, a lamp crashed to the floor. They struggled for the knife, rolling left, then right. CC would not let go of David’s wrist because he knew if he did he was dead. They stood up, whipping each other in a circle. David drew his fist back and hit CC in the jaw. He grunted from the blow but CC held on. CC shouted and shoved David, putting all his weight behind it. They flew out CC’s front window and landed in the grass. CC landed on top of David, who was no longer struggling. CC looked down into a pair of vacant eyes. He rolled off David, his T-shirt covered in blood, but it wasn’t his. He glanced over to David only to see that fucking huge knife was sticking out of his chest.

All of a sudden, CC was surrounded, guns pointing at him, men dressed all in black yelling at him not to move and to put his hands up. CC just lay there, until he heard the familiar booming voice of Mikkel. CC closed his eyes and blew out a hard breath.

“Move. Get out of the way.” Mikkel shoved his way through, landed next to CC, and touched his face. “Hey, open your eyes.”

It took a second, but CC did as he was asked. “Hey,” CC said.

“Hey back.” Mikkel stared down at Cassidy and asked, “Are you hurt anywhere?”

CC shook his head. “No.”

Mikkel stood up and offered his hand to Cassidy, helping him to his feet. He checked him over to see if he had any bumps or cuts, but there were none. Mikkel looked down and noticed that Cassidy was in his underwear. “Uh, maybe we should get you inside to put on some clothes.”

“I guess you’re right.” A loud voice had CC turning around. Mikkel’s partner was giving orders to the other officers to keep everyone back. CC took one last look at David before stepping up on his porch. He opened the front door, looking over his shoulder to see Mikkel was right behind him. “I guess you know where I live now.”

Mikkel laughed. “Yep, I guess so.”

CC stopped at the door before they went inside. “So what time are you picking me up for dinner?”

Mikkel was shocked for a millisecond before he broke out into a smile and said, “How does seven sound?”

CC looked up at Mikkel and nodded. “It sounds like a date.” Once Mikkel was inside CC closed the door behind them, shutting out the outside world.

The End

Author Bio

My name is Valynda King, I am an LGBT author who believes that love is love, but prefers a good mystery. When my son left for college, it took me a minute to figure out what I wanted to be when I grew up. In a conversation with my sister, Tedra, it came out that I have always had a passion for writing, but kept it to myself. I was waiting for the laughter, but all she said was go for it. And that's how it has been with all of my family and friends. Just give it a go, so I did. I love mystery, suspense, anything paranormal, and romance. Same gender sex, transgender sex, or male/female sex, it is all good sex. I am loving this journey I'm on, learning, growing, and developing as an author. I am excited to see where this all takes me.

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