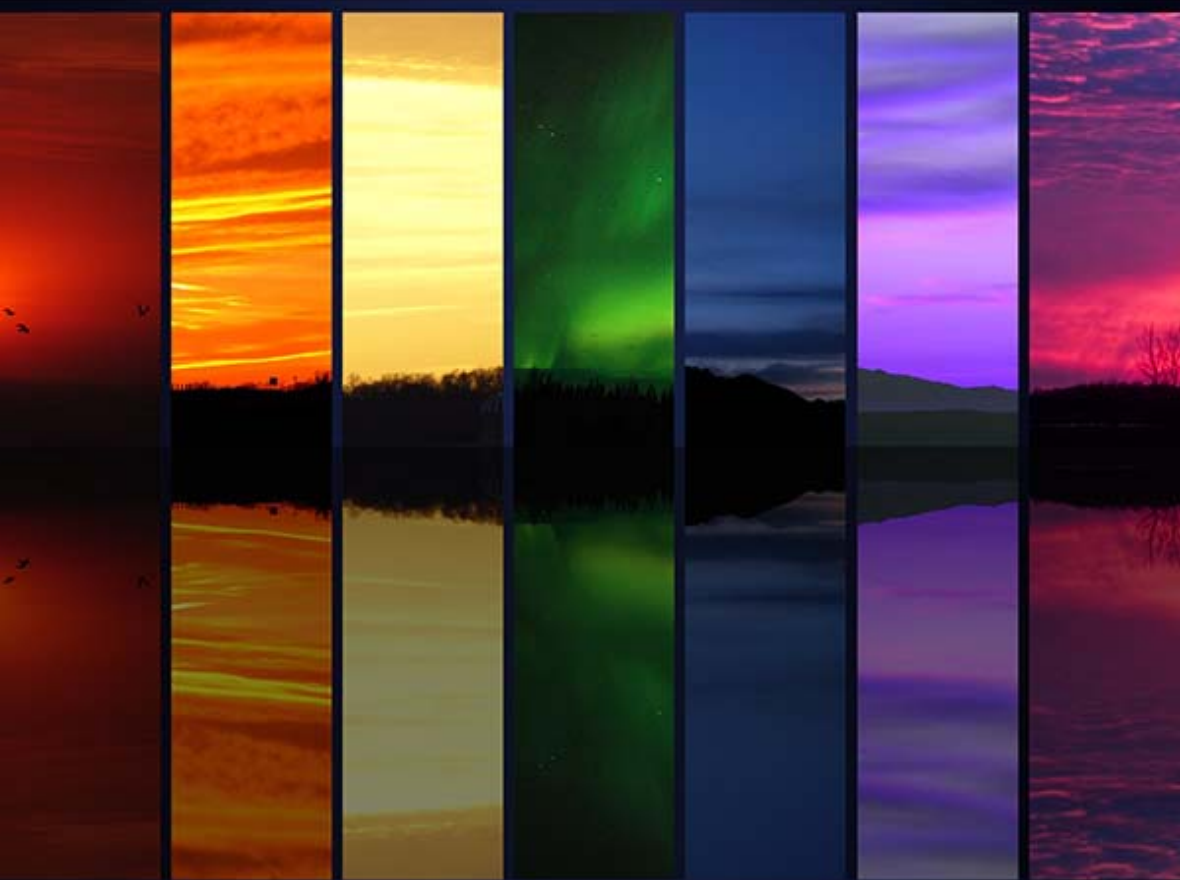


LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

Janel White

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

By Janel White

Introduction

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

What Is Love's Landscapes?

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's Landscapes*.

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.

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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UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

By Janel White

Photo Description

Two men are in a hallway with small doors all around, one open. The first man is sitting with hands behind his back like he is cuffed, and staring straight ahead with a blank expression on his face. The second man is standing over the first. He is wearing a police uniform that is form-fitting. The police officer is looking down at the first man and holding him in the chair with his hand.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

He's got the wrong guy. I'm the victim and someone is trying to kill me. That body was left as a message, and I was only there because of the note. He knows me. He knows my body and my heart. I thought he was falling for me. How can he think I am capable of murder?

Please no BDSM or anyone younger than mid-twenties (preferably without a large age gap), and please give these men an HEA. Violence, scares, near-death experiences, hospital scenes, graphic brutality, and past abuse are all pluses as long as they're not consensual or considered a good thing.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

Kelly

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: law enforcement, fetish/toys, abduction/stalking, tearjerker, revenge, suspense, mystery

Content Warnings: graphic violence, prison violence

Word Count: 11,495

Acknowledgements

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UNTIL DEATH DO US PART

By Janel White

Prologue

He drew back into the shadows as the police officer stepped into the house. His gaze followed the man as he walked deeper inside the dark, empty residence. The cop's uniform was snug, hugging his body in all the right places, showing off his firm ass and muscular chest. The shirt sleeves ended right before the cop's large biceps. It would feel so good to run his fingers over them... No, he had other things he wanted to do.

The officer's handsome face was filled with excitement. "Babe, you here?" he called out, then quickly paused.

"Hum... Police! Come out with your hands up!" The police officer waited for a while, his excitement slowly turning into disappointment as it was clear the person he was waiting for was not going to come out.

The man in the shadows watched as the cop turned to walk out, and quietly snuck up behind him. When the officer stopped and turned, the man swung the heavy mallet in his hands toward the officer's face.

Chapter 1

Jake trembled as the corrections officer pushed him into a small room with no windows.

“Take off all your clothes and place them in the bag,” said the officer gruffly. He shut the door, and leaned against the wall, staring at him. Jake started to slowly remove the blood-stained clothes, trying not to smear more blood on himself.

“Can I keep my underwear?” he asked softly.

“No.”

Jake sighed and took the remaining garments off, shivering in the cold. When his state-issued clothes were thrown at him, Jake quickly put them on.

As Jake and the officer made their way into the housing unit, shouts and sexual grunts came from the cell doors.

“Fresh meat!”

“CO, CO, let him bunk with me. I’ll show him how it works in here!”

Jake started to shake even more, wondering who he was going to end up bunking with.

The officer leered at him. “You might want to find a friend in here, if you know what I mean. You’re going to need one.” He pushed Jake inside an empty cell.

“Oh, and do not count on us for any help in here, cop killer!” the officer sneered, as he shut and locked the door.

Slowly making his way to the short metal bunk, Jake stared at the very thin mattress.

“How did this happen to me?” he sighed. He looked around the small cell. There was a metal toilet and sink combo bolted to the wall, a tiny window that let in a little light and a small desk and stool that was bolted to the ground. Jake curled up on the bunk in a ball and thought about the day that had started out so well and ended up with him being thrown in this hellhole, with no hope of ever getting out.

Jake jumped out of bed and made his way to the bathroom, to get ready for work. Looking in the mirror, his bright, green eyes sparkled, as he saw cum that had dried on his toned chest from the night before. While Jake was in good shape, he did not have the massive muscles that Paul had. Those strong, large arms that Jake enjoyed holding onto, while Paul pounded into him, the ridges of Paul's stomach that felt so good as he licked across them, the soft dark hair tickling his tongue... After two months of heated dating, this was the first time Jake and Paul had been able to spend the whole night together. The only bad part was that Paul had to wake up earlier than Jake to go to work. Both were worn out from the energetic lovemaking, so when Paul said goodbye and laid a soft kiss on his lips, Jake was still half-asleep and could only mumble and pull the covers closer around him.

Walking into the kitchen, Jake was happy to see coffee already made and still hot. As he poured a cup, he looked at his phone to see if any new messages or emails had arrived while he was asleep. One email caught his eye.

To: jake234@mmc.com

From: paulnjake4ever@mmc.com

Subject: surprise today at 2pm

Jake,

Please meet me at: 739 E howler rd. @2pm!

Love Paul

This email address was new, but Jake did not think too hard about it until later. He just hoped it was a statement of how Paul felt about him. It was the first time that "love" had been used in any conversation. Butterflies flew circles in his stomach, as he thought of all the things that Paul could surprise him with.

Jake had just transferred six months ago, to Sacramento, California, but his job as a photo journalist helped him learn the streets of the city pretty quickly. Paul was an unexpected bonus to moving across the state. While he had enjoyed working in the state capital, Jake had been very lonely and friendless, until fate gave him such a wonderful man. Paul had finally made detective a month ago, after being a street cop for over ten years. While Jake was very proud of him, the hours at work were worse than when Paul was on the streets. The two men had not been able to really celebrate the promotion until last night, and Jake could not help but hope that this afternoon was a continuation of the private part of the celebration.

At two p.m., Jake walked through the door of the house that was at the emailed address.

“Paul? You here?”

He moved further into the house. The lights were off and there was an unearthly feel to the room, with small spots of light from the holes in the curtain at the window hitting the floor. Jake looked down and felt his heart stop, as he saw the large body covered in blood, on the floor. As his vision wavered, and heart pounded like it might burst out of his chest, Jake slowly knelt on the floor, eyes frozen to the uniform on the body. In the low light it looked like it could be Paul...

Chapter 2

Crawling slowly towards the body, Jake held his breath. As he got close, it was plain that while this guy looked a lot like Paul, it was not him. But the small differences, like the fact that the breadth of his shoulders was not as wide, his butt not as round, were details that only a lover would know. The uniform was another difference. Paul had not put his on for a month now, since his promotion allowed him to stay in plain-clothes. The dead man was face down, so Jake could not tell who he was or see a name tag. He shuddered as the blood seeped through his clothes and reached to turn the body.

“Stop! Hands where I can see them!”

Crap, I know that voice! Jake put his hands in the air and felt his arm wrenched back as he was put into handcuffs. A hand gripped him hard and he was pulled to his feet and turned around to look into the cold blue eyes of his police lover. “Paul! I thought...”

“Quiet. You have the right to remain silent.” Paul pushed him down on a stool and read Jake his rights.

Jake stopped listening, his worst nightmare coming true. He didn't understand why Paul would even think that he could hurt a fly, let alone a person! *I thought he was falling in love with me! Why is Paul treating me like this? He should trust me and help me figure this out!* Jake kept his head down and let himself be pulled up and led outside to be put in the back of the police car.

Paul walked back into the police station, threw his paperwork on his desk, sat down and laid his head in his hands. *How did this happen?* Paul thought that he had finally found a great guy. Had he picked the wrong one again?

But something felt off; the look of relief, when Jake looked up from the body and saw him, which quickly turned to confusion, then fear. Paul still felt shaken, from seeing the dead body of someone that closely resembled himself, and seeing his lover covered in blood. The police at the scene still did not know who the victim was. While he was wearing a uniform, his face was unrecognizable, having been bashed in by some type of weapon. Officers were searching the whole house for any type of object that could have made that much damage, but still had not found anything.

Walking to the coffee pot in the back of the station, Paul was glad that most people knew his moods and stayed out of the way. But there was always one guy that could never just leave him alone when he was upset.

“Hey, Paul wait up.” Matt ran up and started walking along with Paul, ignoring the sneer on Paul’s face. Both Matt and Paul had made detective at the same time, and had been partners for five years, while on patrol.

“Dude, I just heard what happened! You know that Jake would never do anything like that! And besides, you really think he’s strong enough to bash a face in like that?”

“I don’t know, okay? I mean, why was he there? Why did that guy look like me?”

The room became quiet, as officers stopped what they were doing and watched. It had seemed like the news of Paul arresting his lover had already made the rounds, and everyone wanted to see how Paul was handling the pressure.

“We just need to find out who the hell did this!” Paul stormed off and Matt was smart enough not to follow him. *Matt’s right. God! I need to find a way to get Jake out of there. I’m sure he thinks I abandoned him and is scared right now.* Paul walked back to his desk, coffee forgotten. He was determined to find something, anything, that would help him get his lover back in his arms.

As Paul stared at a picture of Jake that he had on his cluttered desk, he remembered the first time he met Jake. It had been a routine traffic stop, but quickly turned into the best traffic stop in his career. As he walked up to the window, Paul saw in the driver seat a cute but scared man with bright, beautiful, green eyes. He was manly, but had a softness that spoke right to Paul’s loins.

“License and registration, please.” Paul’s voice sounded harsh to his ears.

The man handed over his papers, and swallowed hard.

“Officer, I know that I deserve a ticket and I will pay the fine, but is there any way for me not to lose any points? I drive a lot for work and can’t afford to lose any points. I’ll do anything you need me to.”

You could put those nice plump lips around my cock! Paul adjusted himself, and thought of a legal way to help this beautiful man, and maybe see him again.

“I have a driver’s safety course next Wednesday night. If you show up and complete it, I’ll talk to the judge about dropping the points.”

Jake, as his license said, gave Paul a huge smile, which made him look impossibly gorgeous.

Paul felt himself grow even harder and he quickly returned to his car to write the ticket. Matt had teased him the whole time he was trying to write the ticket, and he knew he would hear more about this later. Luckily, the license check did not reveal anything sinister about Jake; he had just moved here from southern California about four months ago. *Maybe he might need a tour guide!*

Paul returned to give Jake his ticket and tell him how to get to the class on Wednesday.

After class, Paul and Jake had ended up getting coffee and talking for hours.

After Jake’s court date, they had their first date and first slow kiss.

“Hey, Paul I think we need to talk.”

Paul blinked his memories away and focused his eyes on John, one of the detectives on the murder case.

“I was looking at the case, and it reminded me of another case I’m working on. Now that I see that picture in your hand, it’s reminding me even more.”

“What do you mean, John?” Paul put down the picture and grasped the file John was holding out.

John sat on the corner of the desk. “Do you know of anyone that would have a grudge against you or your boy?”

“Why would you...” Paul trailed off as he stared at the crime scene pictures. The body and what was left of the victim’s face looked just like Jake; Paul felt his whole body go numb. “I need to see him! I need to see him, now!”

John patted Paul’s shoulder. “I’ll see what I can do.”

“Please, quickly!” Paul implored.

John nodded, knowing that Paul never asked for anything. While Paul was open with his close friends, he never showed his feelings at work.

Chapter 3

Jake lay in a fetal position. Fists and feet continued to pound on him. The water from the showerhead rained down on him, making it hard to breathe. What started as a quick shower had turned into hell, as an inmate tried to get him to give sexual favors for protection. When Jake refused, the inmate punched him, and others were happy to join in. The pain became too much and he started to fade out, only vaguely aware of officers yelling to break it up and the sound of feet as the other inmate ran away. Then everything went black.

The next thing Jake knew, he was staring up at lights and lying in a hospital bed. He looked down and saw that he had an IV in his right arm and a bandage on his left leg.

“Baby, you’re awake.”

Jake’s eyes widened and tears filled them, as he saw Paul rising from the bedside chair. Jake’s tears fell as Paul brushed his hair back and kissed his forehead.

“I didn’t do it, Paul.”

“Shh, I know. We were coming to get you out when the officer found you in the showers. Can you ever forgive me for doubting you and putting you in danger like that?”

Jake looked at Paul for a minute in silence, and then slowly started talking. “I can forgive you, but it might take some time for me to be able to trust you like I did before. I told you things that I never told anyone. I thought that you knew me. I thought we were falling in love.” Jake turned his head away.

“Baby... Jake, please look at me!”

Jake shook his head, and closed his eyes in pain.

“I know I should have trusted you, and I will make it up to you, as long as you let me stay in your life. I didn’t know what to think, I can only say I was in shock. So I just did my job, but once I was able to think, I knew there was no way you could have done that to anyone.” Paul’s voice became pleading. “Please believe me, baby! We weren’t *falling* in love, because I am already deeply in love with you.”

Pain sheared through Jake’s head as he quickly turned to look at Paul.

“Yes, I just said I love you, and we will talk about us later, and about what happened. But right now I need you to rest, because once they release you, we’re headed to a safe house.” Paul kissed Jake softly on his lips. “I’m not leaving you. Close your eyes.”

The safe house was located off Highway 99, in a rundown farmhouse, in the town of Lodi. The huge yard was overgrown and brown paint peeled off the building’s external walls. It was not a very large house from the outside, but at least it looked like no one lived there. After plain-clothes police checked out the area, Paul helped Jake out of the car. Jake leaned on him as they walked up to the door. Once inside, the officer showed them the room they would be staying in. Jake was surprised to find that the house was much bigger inside and it looked nice and cozy. The bedroom had a large king-size bed, two dressers and an en-suite bathroom. If things were different, a tub for two would have been a dream come true.

“We have an officer that will be staying in the other room. Please stay away from the windows, and don’t answer the door.” The officer left both men alone in the room and shut the door.

Jake walked to the bed and climbed in. “Rest with me for a bit?” He held out his hand to Paul.

“You sure?” Paul took his hand.

Instead of answering, Jake pulled Paul onto the bed. “Please make the dreams go away. I just need you to hold me close right now.” Turning to be the little spoon, Jake wrapped Paul’s arm around him. “We still have a lot to talk about, and we will, but I need to be held and forget the last few days for a few hours.”

Jake felt a small kiss on the top of his head. “Whatever you need, baby. I’m just happy you’re letting me this close.”

Hours later, Jake awoke to dim light. Looking at the clock, he saw that it was six p.m., and his stomach started complaining. He moved to slowly get out of bed.

“Where you going?” Paul tightened his arms around Jake, and kissed his neck.

“I’m hungry, and I have to pee, so let me go!” Jake smiled softly as he turned and gave Paul a quick kiss and limped to the bathroom. After seeing to

his needs, Jake returned to the bedroom to find Paul gone, and wandered out to the living room. Paul was sitting on the couch, with Matt and another guy who also looked like a detective. They were busy talking, and Jake took the opportunity to admire the three handsome alpha men. Of course, he thought Paul was the most handsome, with his dark brown hair and deep blue eyes. At six foot three, Paul was four inches taller than his lover.

Jake had met Matt before, as he had been Paul's partner, and they still worked a lot of cases together, even now. The first time Jake saw Matt, he could not help but be a little jealous of the bond Paul and Matt had, and the long hours that they spent together. It got worse when he found out Matt was also gay. Matt was a tall, muscular African-American, with light brown eyes, and Paul assured Jake that he loved Matt as a brother. Once Jake had gotten to know him, he found that the strong man had a gentleness about him, and Matt quickly became the big brother Jake never had.

The new guy was also a big guy, but a little shorter than the other two. He was blond and blue-eyed, with a scar along his right cheek that gave him a dangerous, rugged look. Jake swallowed down his drool and cleared his throat.

"Hey, guys. What's going on?"

Matt quickly came up to Jake and gave him a huge, but gentle, hug.

"Whoa, get your paws off my man!" Paul came over and gave Jake a quick kiss. "Sit down, babe. I know you're hurting. By the way, this is John. He's helping us with the case and watching our back, while we're here, along with Matt."

"Watching us? So, what's going on? Are we in danger?" Jake sat down heavily and cuddled up to Paul as he sat next to him. Paul and Matt looked to John to explain to Jake about the two murders and notes that were found by the bodies.

"While the killer never wrote yours or Paul's names, the fact the bodies looked like both of you, combined with the email that you got to put you at the right place at the wrong time, clearly indicates this is someone that knows you or Paul."

"How did you know to go to the house when I was there?" Jake asked Paul.

John answered on Paul's behalf, "That's why it took a little longer to put it together. The call came to Matt, not Paul, about a break-in," He sat back in his chair, taking a sip of his drink before continuing. "So we're going to stay here

for the next few days—maybe even weeks—depending on how long it takes to get this perp.”

“Weeks?”

Jake didn't want Paul or himself in danger, but he couldn't help but feel excited. A glance at Paul told him his lover felt the same way. Having time together, without Paul's crazy hours getting between them?

While John was talking, Matt had left. He returned with pizza and beer, which he set down on the table.

“Let's eat!”

Chapter 4

After dinner was done, Jake and Paul returned to their room. Paul walked into the bathroom and saw the huge, claw-foot tub. He smiled widely as he saw that two people could fit nicely. Walking back in the room, Paul went over to Jake and kissed him lightly.

“I know we need to talk. Do you want to do it here or in the large tub?”

“I... can we... um I think out here would be best, then maybe the tub, so we enjoy ourselves?”

Paul sat back on the bed next to Jake and put his hand on Jake's leg. “That's fine. I guess I hoped because we slept in the same bed last night, everything could be good again, but I know that you might be insecure about us,” Paul sighed. “And believe me, I get that... I know I'm not good at talking about anything, but even more so when it comes to feelings. All I can say is that I was in shock, and I went on automatic.”

“I get that, Paul, I really do... I know you were doing your job. I just don't understand how you thought for a minute I could kill anyone!”

“I know, I just... I've seen too much, I have watched people that I thought were good people turn evil. I never really talked about my family because they turned their backs on me when they found out I was gay.”

Running his hand over his hair, Paul continued, his voice gruff. “Not that it excuses what I did, but it's one of the reasons I have a hard time trusting people—when the people that loved you change from being loving to hateful. And that one second, when I believed that it was possible for that to happen to you, I can never take back. All I can do is hope that I did not lose you in that one moment.”

“You haven't lost me, Paul, I'm still here. But it will take me a while to forget you slapping those cuffs on me and reading me my rights, like I was a common criminal.”

Paul scooted closer to Jake and put his arms around him. Jake knew that Paul wasn't the biggest cuddler, but knowing that's what Jake needed, Paul still did it and felt him relax.

“As long as you give me a chance to regain your trust, I'll be happy. Hell, I'll even let you handcuff me to the bed all night long, if that helps.” Paul wiggled his eyebrow, and was overjoyed when Jake started laughing.

“You just want sex.”

“Yup.”

“Well, let’s go have that bath first.” Jake stood up and started taking off his shirt. Paul just watched as he saw pale skin revealed. While Jake couldn’t be considered a twink, he was smaller than Paul. There was a dusting of light brown hair on Jake’s pecs, that narrowed down to a treasure trail. His stomach didn’t have a six pack, but was flat, and his waist small. Paul held back a gasp as he saw the bruises all over Jake’s body, still amazed at how beautiful his lover was. He walked slowly to Jake and put his large hands around his waist, moving them down to cup Jake’s round ass. Jake stepped back and lifted Paul’s hands away with a small smile.

“Let me finish getting undressed. You might want to follow suit, if you’re going to take a bath with me.”

“Sorry, got distracted.” Paul quickly removed his shirt and started taking off his pants, groaning as the fabric brushed against his growing cock—Jake had turned around and taken off his pants, showing off his tight, pale ass.

“Um, you might want to hurry and get in the bath, or we’re not going to make it,” Paul growled.

Jake turned his head, smiled, and quickly walked to the bathroom. Paul finished taking off his pants, tripping on the discarded clothes as he rushed to follow. Getting into the bathtub behind Jake, Paul took the washcloth and slowly washed his lover, making sure that he was being gentle. Jake then took the washcloth and cleaned Paul slowly, like he was memorizing every part of his body. By the time they were done and drying off, both men were hard, their cockheads deep red and leaking.

“Let’s go to the bedroom.” Jake’s voice was deep with need.

Jake was very nervous as he walked back into the bedroom. Making love to Paul was still very new, and this would be the first time since Paul had told him that he was in love with him. Jake felt that he was also in love with Paul, but with everything that had happened in the last few days, he wanted time before saying it back. *Should I even be thinking of sex right now?* He wanted Paul, though, and even if he still felt betrayed, he knew that the sex would drive all his tormented thoughts away for a while. Maybe it wasn’t fair to Paul, but sex might help both of them to get back to where they had been.

“Baby, if you don’t want to do anything, I understand. We can just lie down for a bit, or go back to the living room with Matt and John.”

Jake looked up to see Paul watching him with concern. He looked down again, at his straining cock, and smiled. “I think we both know what I want to do. I just don’t want you to think that everything is perfect. I still need time to forgive. But I also want to make love to you right now.”

“I get it. Whatever you want, I’m yours.”

Jake walked over to Paul’s bags and found the handcuffs, staring at them as he remembered how they felt on his wrists. Part of letting go and forgiving Paul was to make better memories by erasing the bad. Maybe using the handcuffs with sex could be a great way to start. Jake grabbed the cuffs and lifted them up for Paul to see.

Paul just smiled and shrugged. “I said I would let you, if you wanted to.”

Jake pushed Paul onto the large king-size bed, which, luckily, had a dark iron frame. Once Paul was lying flat, Jake straddled his hips, moving his hands along Paul’s sides and up his arms. He grabbed Paul’s hands and raised them up to the bed frame.

Paul’s breath hitched in his throat, as Jake carefully handcuffed him to the bed and started slowly kissing him, down his arms, to his neck and his chest. He loved the taste of Paul’s skin. He used the tip of his tongue to lick a pebbled nipple, sucking softly for a second, before moving on to the other one. He also loved the fact that Paul’s chest hair was thicker than his, enjoying the soft dark fur, as his hands roamed all over Paul’s muscled chest.

“Please, Jake,” Paul groaned, raising his head.

Capturing Paul’s mouth with his own, Jake sucked on Paul’s bottom lip and started grinding his hips against Paul’s weeping cock. He moved away and gave him a sly smile. His lover moaned.

“No, don’t.”

“Shh, just a minute.” Jake leaned over the bedside table. He grabbed a bottle of lube and a condom, placing the latter on Paul’s chest. Taking the lube, Jake opened it and placed some on his fingers. Jake watched Paul’s eye widen, as he reached behind and placed his fingers in his hole, opening himself up. Jake continued, his eyes closing, as he moved his fingers in and out. He heard Paul’s moans, matching his own.

“So, sexy—I could come just watching you do that.”

Jake opened his eyes and grinned at the lust and trust he saw on Paul's face. Grabbing the condom, Jake opened the foil and unrolled it on Paul's cock, his hand moving up and down as he spread lube along it.

“Oh, god!”

Lifting himself up, Jake aligned his hole with Paul's cock, and slowly slid down onto it. As he surrounded the hard cock, Jake breathed hard, giving his body a moment to get used to the intrusion, before he started moving up and down. He moved his hips around, going faster as Paul's moans got louder. Jake's hands trailed over Paul's chest, pinching his nipples.

“So good, Jake. Don't stop.” Paul thrust his hips up as Jake pushed down, sweat pouring from both of their bodies. Moving faster, Jake kissed Paul hard, swallowing each other's moans. As Paul hit his prostate over and over, Jake could feel himself get closer to the edge.

“Come for me, Jake!”

Jake threw his head back and yelled as his cum shot out, across Paul's chest hair. Paul's hips rose quickly, as he followed Jake, and filled the condom. Jake collapsed across Paul's body, trying to slow his breathing.

“Handcuffs,” said Paul, his voice hoarse.

“Oops, sorry!” Jake quickly removed the handcuffs, and was immediately grabbed and pulled down under Paul, who kissed him deeply, gazing into his eyes. “That was unbelievable. Hopefully one day, you can trust me enough to return the favor.”

“Maybe. It was fun.” Jake leaned in to kiss Paul. He winced, as the action reminded him that he wasn't as healed as he thought. “But now, I'm worn out and starting to hurt again.” Jake got off the bed to take some pain pills and cleaned himself off. He returned with a warm washcloth, wiped Paul down and collapsed beside him, in the bed. Within minutes, both men were sound asleep.

Chapter 5

Paul awoke to the sound of arguing in the living room. Moving quickly, so as not to wake Jake, Paul dressed and quietly walked out the door. Matt and John were yelling at each other, about who was going to go get food for breakfast. While this was not a big deal, Paul had noticed that lately there was tension between the pair, and more than once Matt had complained about John.

“What’s going on here, guys?”

The men jumped apart, red-faced, and Paul wondered if he’d walked in on them doing something other than fighting.

“We were... We were deciding who should go to the store,” Matt explained. “I did it the last few times—just thought it should be John’s turn.”

“You didn’t ask, you told! I don’t take orders from you. You got that?”

Paul stepped between the other two men. “Whoa! Okay, guys, it’s not that big of a deal. I would go but since I’m stuck here, I can’t. Can you go, John, please? If Matt goes, we’ll only get pizza or doughnuts.”

John nodded and walked off.

When Paul turned to look at Matt, he was surprised to see him looking after John with sadness, not anger. “You want to tell me what’s going on with you two?”

Matt started and looked at Paul. “Nah, man, it’s nothing... Well, maybe not nothing but we should be worrying about who wants to kill you. We can worry about John and me later.”

“I thought you didn’t like him...” Paul paused. “He’s gay?”

Matt raised his hands. “Hey, I never said I didn’t like him! He just knows how to get to me... Anyway, later, please?”

Matt looked uncomfortable, so Paul let it go but promised himself that once the case was over, he would get to the bottom of whatever was going on. Matt was his best friend and always a joy to be around. Paul didn’t like to see him looking so down.

“Okay, just try to get along with each other. We might be here for a while and I don’t think Jake needs the tension.”

“What tension?” Jake yawned, looking sleepy and cute as he rubbed his eyes.

“Nothing, baby, just Matt and John getting a little stir-crazy.”

Matt gave Paul a grateful smile and moved to the couch, pausing to rub Jake's already mussed hair on the way past. Matt turned on the news. Paul grabbed Jake's hand and led him over to the couch, too, sitting down and pulling Jake on his lap.

“Paul!” Jake slid off his lap, but stayed close, sitting close up next to him. Matt glanced over at the two men cuddling. He smiled, but it seemed sad.

“So, John and I looked over the case notes last night, trying to drown out suspicious noises coming out of the bedroom.”

Paul smiled as he saw a blush move up Jake's neck, to his face. “Did you find anything?” Paul asked.

“Well, we also looked at the email that was sent to Jake, and we're trying to track the sender using the ISP. We're also trying to get information from the domain owner, but you know how hard that can be. Were you guys able to think about anyone that might hold a grudge against either of you? I would be looking at past lovers, seeing as they're killing people who look like you guys, and setting Jake up to be arrested by you... It might be your past, Paul.”

Before Paul could answer, John walked back in the house, looking a little uneasy. He carried two large bags of food, which he put on the coffee table. “I got bagels and different types of cream cheese. There's also orange juice for anyone that doesn't want any more coffee.”

“Thanks, John.” Jake pulled a bagel from the bag. Matt went to grab some knives and plates from the kitchen. He handed the first set to John with a shy smile.

“Thanks for getting the food. It looks great.”

John went a little red. “You're welcome. Did you tell them about last night... um, I mean, the things we found about the case?”

Paul looked at both men and shook his head, hoping he didn't have to wait too long to find out what had happened between them.

“He told us that the murderer might be someone from my past. But I really don't remember anyone this mad. Jake is the first major relationship I've had. Most were hookups that knew I wasn't looking for anything. They all seemed to feel the same way at the time.”

“Was there anyone that you didn’t hook up with, but they wanted to?”

“Well, John, I think everyone has those people in their lives. I mean, I can’t help it if someone wants me but never said anything. But have we looked at my cases? Maybe I put their lover away, or something?”

Both John and Matt glanced at each other, then quickly away.

“Okay, maybe it could be that.”

“Don’t know why we didn’t think of that.”

It was quiet for a while, as everyone ate. Matt got up to clear the breakfast mess and John headed to the bathroom.

“So what is really going on with those two?” Jake whispered after both were gone.

“Don’t know, but I’m going to get to the bottom of it after this is all over.” Paul pulled Jake up next to him, just enjoying the closeness.

Matt walked in and sat down. “I can go and get some case files, so we can see if anything matches.”

“That’s a good idea. I want to get this over with,” Paul said. “As much as I like being stuck in a house with Jake, we both have jobs, and I am sure we will get stir-crazy after a while.”

The kitchen table was covered in files, mugs of lukewarm coffee, and notepads covered in writing. The three officers worked quietly, going through each file with a fine-tooth comb. Jake was getting bored, but he was doing his best to keep the men going, with fresh coffee and back rubs. Okay, only Paul got the back rubs; Jake tried to be nice and give Matt one too, but a glare from John stopped that pretty quickly.

Matt and John weren’t talking to each other, except to share small details about the case, but it seemed like every time one left the table for any reason, on their return they sat a little closer to the other. While Jake didn’t understand what was going on with the cases, he was happy to watch what he thought to be a love story in the making.

When he wasn’t watching Matt and John, Jake turned his attention on Paul, who was going over Jake’s file, already kicking himself for the arrest. Knowing it could be one of the cases he worked on must’ve been making Paul feel even worse, and Jake was starting to get an idea of the pressure cops go through

every day, relying on their instincts. It made Jake feel better, and brought him a step closer to forgiving Paul.

Looking at the clock, Jake noticed that it was already after one. He was sure that the cops must be hungry by now, but were so involved in the case and wouldn't stop until they found a clue. He went to the refrigerator, pleased to find it stocked with sandwich fixings, and started making big sandwiches, for the big men hard at work. Setting them down in front of the men earned him smiles all round, and a quick kiss from Paul.

"You guys need to take a break. I know this is important but if you don't eat, you won't be able to think clearly." Jake cleared a small space for his own food and sat next to Paul. John was the first one to put down his notepad and start eating.

"He's right, guys," John said, swallowing a large bite of sandwich. "I know we want this over with, but I am starving."

Matt and Paul moved their files away and followed his example.

"So anything look promising?" Jake asked. "And is there something I can do to help? No offense, but I'm getting a bit bored watching. So, unless you guys want to start looking at these files butt-ass naked, I'm gonna need something to do."

John's eyes widened and he started coughing. "W... W... What? Naked?"

Everyone else started laughing.

Jake got up and slapped John on the back. "Sorry, was just trying to lighten things up. I don't think Paul would want me seeing you guys naked anyway."

"You got that, right!" Paul said, still laughing. "But you are doing a lot, by feeding us, and making sure we have coffee. I think there are books and movies in the living room, if you want. Give us a few more hours, and we'll take a movie break with you, okay?"

"Sounds good, thanks." Jake took the empty plates away and washed them. Checking to make sure the officers didn't need anything first, he walked into the living room and started watching a movie.

Paul stretched, and popped his neck. All this paperwork was getting on his last nerve. He felt bad that Jake had to go through this, and that he couldn't

spend as much time with him as he wanted. He just wanted to make love to his man, and hoped that Jake would return his words back to him.

Will he ever say that he loves me? Or is this just the beginning of the end?

Paul had never had someone stay in his life this long before. When his parents found out that he was gay, they kicked him out, and in ten years, he had not heard from them once. Matt was the only family that he had now, and he hoped that Jake would become a real part of his life. Paul refocused and tried to get back to the case file he was reading. It was then that the notes caught his eye.

"I think I might have found something. Matt, you remember the guy named Ronnie that was beating his lover?"

"I'm not sure," Matt said.

"It happened about five years ago, when we'd just been partnered up. The lover, Chris Holden, didn't want to press charges, but with all the witnesses, and the fact that Ronnie Williams also came after me, he was sent away for ten years. There's a note in this file that says about three weeks ago, he was beaten to death with a bat out in the yard by homophobic inmates."

"Yeah. I remember that one. When we talked to the couple, you talked to Williams... and I interviewed Holden, the lover." Matt thought for a moment. "But you'd think Holden would be mad at me, not you."

John took the file from Paul and looked it over. "You were most likely doing the good cop thing," he said to Matt. "And Paul was arresting his man." John pulled out his phone. "Let me call this in and see if we can find out where this guy is."

John made the call and talked on the phone for ten minutes, before hanging up.

"They're sending some guys to check out Holden's house. Before you say anything, they're just staking it out. They'll let Matt and me know more soon, and we'll go get him. I know you want to get him, Paul, but for charges to stick, you have to sit this one out."

Paul understood, but still didn't like it. He wanted to make sure that if Holden was responsible, he paid for the lives lost and what he'd done to Jake, and to their relationship. Paul slammed his hand on the table "I got it, John!"

"Hey!" Matt said. "Don't take it out on John. He's just looking after you and this case!"

“You don’t have to defend me, Matt. I know why Paul’s upset. I can handle it... I’m a big boy.”

Matt and John glared at each other. Paul backed off.

“Okay, okay, guys. I’m sorry if it sounded like I was mad at John, I’m just tired of this shit. But we need to get along. Please save your issues until after this case is closed.”

“We have no issues,” both men said at the same time, and then blushed, quickly looking back at their papers.

“Okay, good. Let’s take a break and watch a movie with Jake, like I promised. All we can do is wait for more information, anyway.”

Chapter 6

Paul was tired of being stuck inside. It had been seven days since this all started—three of those days spent in the house. He didn't know how much longer he could deal with the stress. The only light spot was being able to spend time with Jake. When not working on the case, Paul and Jake used the time to talk about their issues, their hopes and what they both wanted out of the relationship.

Paul still hadn't heard the three words he most wanted, but he believed that it was coming, and that trust was being repaired. While working out every evening with Matt, they discussed the impact his family's rejection had on Paul. Matt raised great points on how this most likely was the reason that he had problems trusting people, which had led to Paul arresting Jake.

Paul stared out the back window, thinking of how lost he was until he met Jake. He enjoyed being a cop, the excitement of closing a case, and fulfillment when the case went to court and the criminal was put away. The job was his salvation, when he had no family, and nowhere to go. But now the job that he loved so much was putting the man he loved even more in danger. He didn't know if he could continue being a police officer after this was all done.

Paul felt arms circle around him. "What are you thinking about?"

"I just don't know if I should leave the job. I mean, look at what happened to you... And it's all because of me!"

Paul felt Jake's arm tighten and a kiss on his neck. "You can't give up the job that you love, Paul. You do a lot of good for people. Right now, everything is crazy, so I'm just going to suggest you wait until things calm down, before making a huge life-changing decision. Think about Matt, too. What would happen if you weren't there to watch his back? He's your brother in every way. I, for one, feel better knowing that you watch and take care of each other at work, when I am not around."

Matt ran into the room grabbing his service weapon and jacket. "Hey, guys. We got a great lead! The officer watching Chris's house said he finally returned. He's there right now! John and I are going to pick him up and question him."

John walked in with his gear, ready to go. "Please remember to stay here, until we know for sure this is our guy."

Paul broke away from Jake. "Good luck, guys. Call when you know something." Paul gave both cops a one-armed man hug and locked the door after them. He looked back at Jake and shrugged.

"All we can do is wait. Let's watch the game, and hopefully we will hear something soon."

They went and sat on the couch, cuddling up together to watch the game, and after a while both men fell asleep.

Matt drove to the house; tension in the car was thick. "John, are we good? You won't talk to me, unless it's about the case."

"We're good," John said. "I just think that we should stay friends. I can't begin to imagine what Paul is going through, with Jake in so much danger. We work great together, and I want to continue to work great together. Things just got out of hand that first night. It was fun but it can't happen again."

John stared out the window the whole time he was talking. Matt thought that there was more to what he was saying, but now was not the time to dig.

"Okay, if that's what you want. Just thought I'd clear the air before we go in. We need to have each other's back."

"Always." The conviction in John's voice cheered Matt. He changed the subject to the case.

"Where do you think Chris was the last week?"

"I don't know, but they're still looking into it. He might have another house that he used. Hopefully, we can find it and get a better idea of what his plans were."

Matt pulled up next to the police car, and John jumped out to talk to the officers for a minute, then climbed back in the car.

"They said that Chris came home about an hour ago, and he hasn't left. They're going to watch the back, so he doesn't run. We're going in the front. You ready?"

"Ready!" Matt parked and they got out of the car. They walked up to the house and knocked loudly, listening for any noise inside.

"Chris, we know you're in there. We just have a few questions," Matt yelled through the door.

John shook his head. "Don't think he's going to answer. I was also told that the IP address of the email Jake received was traced back here, so we have cause to go in."

"Okay, let's get this done."

Matt and John rammed the door open and walked inside the house, guns drawn. Matt went towards the bedrooms. John checked the living room and kitchen.

"Clear!"

"Clear!"

Matt went through to the kitchen to join John. "I don't think he's here. How did he get out?"

"I don't... You hear that hissing?"

Matt's eye widened as he saw the gas line cut and the pilot light on. "It's the gas from the stove. Get out!"

Matt pushed John ahead of him as they ran out the door. A loud boom ripped through the air, and Matt felt himself being thrown forward, heat at his back, landing in the yard.

"Matt! Oh, god, Matt!"

As his vision faded, Matt saw John running toward him with a look of horror on his face.

Paul woke up with a start. It felt like someone had stabbed him with a needle in the neck. He started panicking when he realized he couldn't move his arms. That panic turned to deep fear, as he opened his eyes and saw a man standing over Jake with ropes and a gag. Paul tried to move but felt himself losing consciousness.

Hours—or *was it days?*—later, Paul awoke and found that he was tied down to a chair, and gagged. He quickly looked around and saw Jake unconscious, also gagged and tied to a chair. The room was large, with no window and one dim light hanging in the middle. The walls were brick, and the floor concrete. The one door was made of a thick metal.

Paul tried to move his hands to get out of the rope, but after trying for many minutes he could feel blood starting to run down his hands and drip onto the

floor. Jake started moving a little and a muffled moaning came from the gag. Jake opened his eyes and looked around, finally meeting Paul's gaze. Jake's eyes were wild with fear, his face pale. Paul swallowed down his own fear and tried to convey strength as they stared at each other in silence.

"Well, well. Look at the happy couple now! Are you guys comfortable? No? Good. Let's get started!"

Jake watched in horror and started to shake, as the man walked into the room. The man was holding a small bag, and had a sinister smile on his face. He was tall and skinny, and wore dirty coveralls. He looked like he hadn't showered in days, his greasy, dirty-blond hair hanging lank around a cap that bore the name of the local electric company. Grabbing a chair, the man moved in front of Paul, blocking Jake's view of his lover. Paul stared fearlessly into the man's eyes. *Chris.*

"So, Paul. How did it feel to arrest your lover, to think that he was a killer?" Chris's laugh was wicked. He turned and gave Jake a huge smile. "Did you enjoy jail, Jake? Too bad it wasn't for longer. I'm sure you could have found a better lover than this pig right here!"

Paul tried to jump up out of his chair towards Chris, making him laugh even harder.

"You think you can scare me? You're tied up. You can't even talk!" Chris delved inside his bag and took out a small knife.

"You're going to pay for Ronnie's death. It's your fault he died. We were happy!" Chris waved the knife in Paul's face. "I'm going to make Jake watch you die. It's your fault your partner and the other officer are dead. I blew up my house with them in it."

Jake felt his tears flowing as he saw Paul's breath hitch and the pain in his eyes. *Not Matt and John. All this death, because a man couldn't live without his abusive partner!* Trying to be strong for Paul, Jake tried to communicate his love through his eyes. He couldn't let Paul die, not without knowing that he really did love him. Jake wished he'd said those words to Paul, cursing his fear of being hurt again.

Chris took his knife and ran the blade down Paul's chest, cutting both the shirt and skin underneath. Jake watched as blood started running down Paul's chest and soaked his pants.

“NO! Please stop!” Jake yelled through his gag, but Chris just laughed. He put down his knife and started hitting Paul’s face, hard.

“You can’t stop me! Paul will feel my pain and die, knowing that you will be in my mercy.”

Jake could only watch as Chris beat Paul until he passed out. Jake didn’t know if it was from the pain, or if he was even still alive. How deep was the knife wound? How much blood was lost?

Chris walked over and punched Jake in the side of the head.

Jake welcomed the darkness, hoping that if Paul was dead, he would soon be following after, to find him in the afterlife.

The paramedic was finished with him, and John jumped up and put his torn jacket back on. He looked at the ambulance that was carrying Matt. John wished he was inside with him, but he knew that when Matt awoke, the first thing he would do would be to ask about Paul and Jake.

This ends now! John hurried to his car, and called for information from the officers that were sent over to the safe house. When it became clear that no one was there, John called the station and had every man available out looking for Paul and Jake, or any information on where Chris could be holding up. When the dispatcher came back with the address that Chris had last lived at with Ronnie, John had a feeling that this was where he would have taken the two men.

Speeding through the town with his lights on and sirens streaming, John’s heart pounded as he thought of all the things that he could come across in the next twenty minutes. His mind kept thinking of how still Matt was when he was carried away. *Focus, John! He was breathing when you left! He’s going to be okay. You need to finish this for him!* John shook his head and forced himself to think only of what lay ahead.

Pulling up to the old house, John jumped out of the car. Other police arrived soon after and came over to join him.

“Listen up, this guy is a killer, and he has one of us! I want every inch of this house covered, and the street blocked off. No one comes or goes until I give the all-clear. Does everyone understand?”

“Yes, sir!”

“Then let’s go!”

The first team rammed the door down and cops poured into the house. John heard shouts, calling out at every corner, as he made his way to the basement. A metal door blocked his entrance. John opened it and stared dumbly at the horror that was inside.

Paul was unconscious, bound to a chair and gagged, his shirt cut down the middle. Blood covered the shirt and the top part of his pants. Jake was also unconscious, blood dripping from his temple, and Chris was standing behind him with a bloody knife at Jake’s throat.

“Stop moving!” Chris shouted. “Put down your gun, or this one is dead! Paul will soon be dead anyway!”

Staring at the scene, John quickly considered all his options. He knew that one wrong move could cost both bound men their lives.

Just then, a loud shout sounded above them. When Chris looked up, John shot.

Chapter 7

A beeping noise awoke Jake. He tried to go back to sleep but it sounded like it was getting louder. Opening one eye, he tried to see what was going on, but everything was blurry and it took him a minute to focus.

“Good, you’re awake!” Jake attempted to look in the direction of the voice and saw a man he didn’t know, sitting in a chair next to the bed. Jake tried to get up.

“Whoa! Hold on, don’t get up. You’re okay. You’re in the hospital, and have a concussion, so you need to move slowly.”

“Who are you?” Jake rasped, his throat dry.

The man handed him a cup with a little water.

“I’m Captain Winders. John asked me to stay with you. You’ve been here for about a day.”

“What happened? Why did he ask you to stay? Are Paul and Matt okay?”

“Shh, calm down... Paul and Matt are up in ICU. John’s watching them. They’re both going to be okay, but Paul lost a lot of blood and both are unconscious. I’ll go relieve John up there and send him to tell you more.”

Jake felt tears in his eyes, as he thought about those strong men, lying helplessly in bed.

“Do you need anything before I get the nurse and John?”

Jake shook his head, wincing at the pain. He watched the captain walk out the door.

The next day, Jake was cleared to go up to Paul and Matt’s room. Fortunately, the hospital staff knew that it would be much easier with all the police coming and going to keep both men in the same room.

Jake was told he had to stay in a wheelchair if he wanted to see his lover, and John wheeled him into the room. A gasp left his mouth as he saw the two men lying in their beds. Paul was pale, with bandages on his chest and head. Wires hooked him up to monitors, and there was an IV in his hand. Matt also had a bandage around his head and both of his arms, and was hooked up to an

IV and monitor. Both of them looked like they were just sleeping, but Jake had never seen them this still.

"I'll let you have some time alone with them," John said. "I'm going to try and eat, but call me if anything changes, please."

"Go ahead, John. I know you've been back and forth between me and them. You need a break, but you're the first person I'll call if there's any change, after the nurse, of course."

Jake waited until John walked out of the room. He got out of the wheelchair but he didn't go to Paul first. He went to Matt and whispered in his ear.

"Matt, you need to wake up. John won't leave the hospital until he knows you're okay. I don't think he'll admit that he needs you, but he does. It'll break him if you don't wake up, and it will also hurt me and Paul. Wake up, Matt!" Jake watched Matt's face for a minute, placed a small kiss on his forehead, and turned to his sleeping lover.

"Oh, god, Paul, I need to you wake up. I'm so sorry I didn't tell you that I loved you before. I was just so hurt, but if you don't wake up, I'll never forgive myself. I love you, Paul. I love you!" Jake kissed Paul's lips, and sat in the chair beside the bed, holding Paul's hand with both of his own, as he watched for any sign of life.

"J... John."

Jake turned and looked over at Matt. His eyes were open slightly and he looked like he was in a great deal of pain.

"Matt! You're awake! Hold on, I'll call John." Jake pushed the nurse-call button as he quickly used the bedside phone to call John, looking at Matt as he waited for John to answer. "Of course you decide to wake up the first time we convince him to leave your side!" Matt managed a brief smile. John picked up.

"Matt's awake!" Jake said and hung up. He turned back to Matt. "He's on his way. How are you feeling?"

"I hurt. Where's Paul?" Matt tried to sit up, but the nurse came in and put her hand on his chest, so he couldn't move. She started checking his vitals. A minute later, John came in the room, out of breath, as if he'd run the whole way.

"How is he? Is he still awake?"

“Why don’t you ask me, John? I am right here,” Matt said sarcastically, but with a huge smile at the sight of John looking so disheveled.

Jake smiled and went back over to Paul. He listened to John update Matt on what had happened after the house turned into a fire ball. He was so happy to see the two men holding hands, daring to believe that things would get better for them.

Looking at Paul, Jake’s smile faded away again. He sat on the chair next to the bed, and rested his head next to Paul’s. He closed his eyes, letting Matt’s and John’s voices wash over him.

Paul felt the searing pain in his chest like it had been split wide open. He tried to stay awake for as long as he could, but his vision wavered. As he felt a fist hitting him in the head, he could hear Jake yelling, “No, Stop!” Paul tried to answer but then the scene changed.

Paul was tied to a chair. Jake was standing over him with a knife.

“You ruined my life, you bastard! You lied! You never loved me!” Jake slashed Paul’s chest. The pain sheared through him.

“No! Please, Jake I love you! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!”

Matt and John appeared in the room, both also holding knives and advancing on him.

“You killed us! We could have been happy! How many lives must you destroy?”

“Noooooo!”

“Paul, please come back to me.”

Oh, god. It was just a dream! Where am I?

“I love you, Paul! Open your eyes.”

Jake? He’s safe!

Paul moaned, as he tried to open his eyes.

“Did you hear that? I think he might be waking up.”

“Jake, I know you want him to be awake. We all do, but he’s been making noises for the last two days.”

Matt is alive!

“Matt, let Jake have his hope. Paul does seem to be moving a lot more.”

John! Everyone's okay!

Paul strained to open his eyes. There was pain as he took in the bright lights, and his vision was blurry. He could make out the three men next to his bed. His head pounded as he moved, trying to see more clearly. He wondered how long it was going to take someone to notice he was awake.

Jake loves me!

“Hey.” Paul's voice didn't sound like him, but it got them to shut up and turn quickly towards him.

“Oh, thank god! Someone call the nurse!” Jake buried his head in Paul's shoulder, shaking and whispering over and over. “I love you, I love you!”

“Shh, I know,” Paul tried to reassure Jake, but his voice cracked.

Matt handed Paul a cup of water, which he sipped clumsily and tried to talk again.

“Jake, shh, it'll be okay, I love you too!”

The next few hours were filled with doctors and nurses examining Paul, tests and blood being taken. John had left a while ago, and Matt was asleep, but Jake refused to leave Paul's side. Finally, when they were alone in the room, Paul patted the side of the bed, and Jake carefully lay next to him, holding his hand.

“I was so scared that I would lose you,” Paul whispered in Jake's ear. “I could never forgive myself if something had happened to you.” He kissed Jake's temple. “I want to be with you forever. I know that we have things to work out still, and it's only been three months. But I can't live without you.”

Jake smiled. “Until death do us part?”

“And long after that!” Paul kissed Jake until there was no more room for other thoughts left in his head but them and their future.

The End

Author Bio

Janel White has been reading all her life; raised with no television, it was her only outlet. After years of dreaming up her own storylines, she decided that this event would be the perfect way to dip her toes in the water. When she is not dreaming, she is a working single mom, with two boys that light up her life. Janel knows that real life many times has no happy endings, so she looks for them in her books.