

LOVE'S LANDSCAPES



Don't Read in the Closet 2014

KISS OF TRUTH

Ash Jay

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

KISS OF TRUTH

By Ash Jay

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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KISS OF TRUTH

By Ash Jay

Photo Description

A clean-shaven young man, not too alert since last night's fun went on until dawn. Not much of a fan of having his picture taken, and even less so when it's done before noon. However, he is awake enough to have applied his black eyeliner perfectly and styled his dark, sexy bangs so they sit just right on his forehead. Having a slight hangover is never an excuse not to look your best.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

The picture I have chosen represents a music singer who is struggling to find himself in a fast-paced society. He is secretly in love with a fellow band member, but hides it oh so well. When his band member is kidnapped, he begins to realize his feelings and does everything he can to find the band member. The band member he loves, also loves him but has witnessed too many failed couples and can be afraid to commit. The original band member can suffer from depression. I would like kink to be included, just don't overdo the d & s. I'd prefer no shifters and I hope your imagination runs wild. Enjoy.

P.S. It has to have a HEA

Sincerely,

Angie

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: kidnapping, musicians/rock stars, nightclub, kink, bondage, friends to lovers, secret love

Word Count: 9,618

KISS OF TRUTH

By Ash Jay

Chapter 1

Blackie peered into my face, leaning in far too close. I fought back the urge to kiss him.

“Where ya been?” I asked.

“How come you’re looking so good?” He stroked his long fingers through my black hair fondly. “Like you didn’t get as smashed as the rest of us last night.”

He was the one who looked good in his tight, white T-shirt that made his lightly tanned, muscular arms pop.

Usually I hated white but it suited him. But then, everything suited Blackie.

“I didn’t,” I said, trying not to flinch away from his touch. “I got to the bar about four hours after you did, remember?”

“Don’t be angry, Jaiden. They stopped the train between stations for, like, ever,” Blackie said, his mouth up against my ear.

“I’m not angry.” Clapping him on the back, I tried my best not to get distracted by his sparkling green eyes. “We just need to get going.”

Picking up his guitar, Blackie gave me the big grin he knew I couldn’t resist. “So let’s get going.”

Exhaling, I took my place at the microphone. Blackie didn’t know what kind of an effect he had on me when he was overly friendly. He was like that with everybody, not just me, but I was the one with a crush on him.

He didn’t know about it; I was careful about that. And I could manage it no problem, just as long as he didn’t touch me or get too close.

Fin counted us in to our first song and we tore it up. I kept a critical ear open for how everyone was playing while I sang, wanting to make sure we were the tightest unit possible. In just a few weeks, we were heading out on a midsize club tour all around the country. We’d scored a prime opening slot for another band who was getting very popular, and the tour could be a big break for us too. Everything needed to be perfect.

All I’ve ever wanted to do was play music. I was lucky that my best friend felt the same way. Blackie and I had played in bands together since high school, but Lead Wire was the first one where it all finally came together. All of us

clicked so well I knew we had a real shot at making it big. So far, it seemed I was right.

We'd just got the opening slot, pretty last minute, and there wasn't much time to get ready. We were rehearsing six nights a week as it was. I'd have been happy if we could play eight hours a day, every day, but we all still needed our day jobs to fund our trip.

And our rhythm section would have mutinied if I drove them any harder, I think. Fin and Roman had also done time in several bands together, and it showed in how well they played off each other. I couldn't risk losing them, and if one went, the other would follow.

We ran through our entire set several times before Fin stopped us.

"That's it. I'm out," he said, holding up a broken drumstick. "That was my last one."

"You could go get more," I pointed out.

"That's enough," Roman protested before Fin could retort. "We've been here for hours. We're good for tonight."

I was about to object when Blackie caught my eye. He was usually the one to rein me in when I got a little obsessive. I had learned a long time ago that when all three of them were together on something, I'd do well to back down.

But I didn't have to like it.

"All in for the Met?" Roman asked, his bass already packed up. Only a few blocks from our warehouse space, but across the invisible line into an even worse area was The Met, a bar that gave dive bars a bad name. It was our usual hangout.

"Can't," Blackie said. "I gotta go."

"What are you up to?" I wanted to know.

"Got a thing," he said, already at the door. "See you tomorrow night, guys."

It wasn't like Blackie to blow off our usual post-rehearsal beers. He was out of there so quickly he left his hoodie behind. I shrugged it on, leaving my own behind. His was warmer, nicer, and it smelled like him. *Bonus*.

As usual Roman and Fin drank like there was an imminent beer shortage. Usually I would have been right there with them, but I was too preoccupied with our upcoming tour, as well as wishing Blackie was there to talk about it.

It struck me then that I might be just a bit too dependent on him. I'd become pretty good at holding my feelings for him in check since we graduated high school, but these days I'd been backsliding, thinking about him all the time, talking to him every day, hanging out with him maybe too often.

I'd have to check myself. He was probably on my mind more lately because we'd been spending so much time together rehearsing, but that wasn't good. In a few weeks, we were going out on tour and I'd be with him twenty-four seven. Recipe for disaster, lusting after him while we're holed up together in the close quarters of a van for most of our days and nights.

The best cure might be finding a nice boy to take my mind off my best friend for a few hours.

The pub was closing down, and after they kicked us out, we walked a couple of blocks together before it was time for us to go our separate ways. Fin and Roman were roommates, and they lived further south than me. When I went to give Fin a parting slap on the back, something fell to the ground as I pulled my hands out of the hoodie's pockets.

The others took off and I picked up a piece of paper, about to shove it back in its place when an image caught my eye. A topless man in very tight pants was pictured in grainy black and white, blindfolded and tied to what looked like a cross. Intrigued, I gave it a closer look. The text was minimal.

Veer. Fetish Fridays. Grand opening February 28.

That was last week. I recognized the address. Last time I was there, it had been a punk club. Looks like they were keeping the alt vibe going. And alt clubs were always decent places to find a hot boy who was up for some fun.

There was only about an hour until closing. Perfect. I couldn't give a rat's ass about what kind of fetishes they had going on there because closing time in any bar meant having my choice of drunk, horny guys with little effort invested on my part. I picked up my pace. In five minutes, I was standing just inside the front door.

"Twenty bucks," the guy told me.

"You can't charge me full price when you're closing soon," I said. I had to talk him down as I only had twenty on me.

"It goes down to ten in half an hour."

No way was I going to stand around in the cold for half an hour. "How about fifteen?"

He stared at me, unflinching. Not wanting to waste my time, I called up my best cute-boy grin, sliding my eyes slowly over his body as if I wanted to do him right then and there. In truth, you couldn't have paid me enough.

“Okay.”

I handed over most of my cash and went straight for the bar, ordering the cheapest beer they had. Walking around, I drank it without interest while I cruised the thinning crowd. There weren't a lot of hotties left. Maybe I was too late.

Not ready to give up yet, I decided I had to check out all my options. Heading toward the back of the room, I found the dimly lit staircase leading down to where the real action was no doubt taking place.

The short hallway at the bottom was so dark I narrowly avoided walking into a black-painted wall that jutted out as if it was designed to trip a person up. Skirting around it, I found myself in a different world.

Blinking against the unexpected brightness, I tried to get my bearings. Quieter than upstairs, with only the faint echo of the thumping music making itself known every few beats, the room was small and intimate. A tiny bar at one end was the only reminder of where I was.

This is where the crowd had been hiding, and everyone was focused on what was going on in the center. Working my way around, I found a place to stand where there was a decent view of what was happening.

Three people were all lying face down on wooden cross-like contraptions, bodies as close to naked as they could legally be. Whips of varying sizes cracked as they met the willing flesh in front of them.

The guy closest to me had two men working him over. Given the visible red welts on his exposed ass, he had been there for some time already. The two circled his prone form, switching positions, stopping to raise their hands when they found a piece of flesh they wanted to explore.

“Quiet,” one of them growled when their victim groaned.

He seemed to be enjoying himself, but his tormentors were moving so slowly, pausing for so long, my eyes wandered away. Surely there should more action than that. A struggle would be fun to see.

Across the room there was a woman, waiting expectantly for her two female tormentors just as this guy was. Nothing exciting going on with her either.

About ready to give up, I moved a few feet over to see if the third person was putting on more of a show.

Unlike the other two, he only had one person concentrating on him. A big bear of a guy, shirtless and wearing a mask to shield his features, he wielded a smaller whip than the others. It looked fairly tame to me, but from the writhing of the guy on the bench, it seemed to be causing some distress.

I was shifting around, trying for a better vantage point, when I spotted something unexpected. Something familiar. The prone guy looked familiar too. Tall, long chestnut hair, wearing only tight black briefs made of some filmy kind of material that was see-through enough that I wished he was lying on his back.

But there was something else. The tiniest tattoo sat on his right side, just barely visible above the top band of his underwear. I stared at it, trying to make sure I was seeing what I thought I was.

Yes. It was. A treble clef, inked subtly in a thin white line so it looked like a scar instead of a tattoo. Easy to overlook when you didn't know it was there.

My eyes about popped out of my head. The man on the cross was Blackie. Swallowing hard, I moved as close as I could. It was him all right. I knew his body anywhere, even though this was the last place I would have expected to see it, bound up, nearly naked, and being whipped by someone I figured was a total stranger.

Blackie squirmed every time the whip met his flesh. Unlike the other ones, his torturer didn't stop him from letting out soft moans.

My breath caught in my throat. The sight and sounds were so erotic I was instantly hot and hard, my pants now uncomfortable and confining, my shirt barely long enough to conceal my erection. It probably wasn't the place anyone would have minded, but still.

Entranced, I started giving silent commands to the guy with the whip. Harder. Slower. Don't stop.

Time slowed way down while I stood rooted to the spot. Unaware of anyone else in the room, I didn't know if a minute or an hour had passed when the guy finally set his whip aside.

Watching him begin to free Blackie snapped me back to reality. I had to get out of there before he saw me. Hastily, I forced my way through the crowd that

had grown considerably around me. Apparently I wasn't the only one captivated by my friend's prone, glistening body.

Reaching the staircase, I turned back, unable to resist one more look. I only had a few seconds. It was enough. The image of him was burned into my memory. Blackie made a move to get up and I nearly tripped on the stairs in my rush to flee.

Back at home, I headed right for my bed. Far too wired to fall asleep, I replayed the events I witnessed at the club. It was such an unexpected scene to have stumbled on, I wanted to keep it as real and fresh in my mind as I could. But of course I changed up the memory into a fantasy of my own.

Instead of being in a nightclub full of people, Blackie and I were alone in my bedroom. He was tied down just the same, and I was the one wielding the whip. But we were past that stage. Blackie was wildly turned-on after my expert beating, as was I, and it was time to get serious.

After I freed him, he sat down on my bed, looking up at me, his eyes pleading for release.

"Please." It was the only word he managed to say, and after a moment I gave him a very slight nod.

Slowly he worked my boxers down, letting them fall to the floor. Grasping my raging erection, he stroked it reverently.

That wasn't what I wanted, but before I could move, his tongue was running up and down the entire length of my shaft.

"I've been dreaming about this for so long," he said, almost making me lose it right then.

Before I could even think of what to say, his mouth met my cock again, enveloping its throbbing length.

This time I was the one who groaned.

"Please."

My hand came to rest on the back of his head. He sucked me, swallowing as much of my stiff cock as he could manage, hands on my thighs to keep himself steady.

I couldn't help but thrust a little. When his hand reached my balls, rolling them, they tightened up instantly.

Knowing I was so close, he sucked me faster, more intently, making my cock pulse against his tongue.

My orgasm exploded almost violently from my body as I shot hard, over and over, filling Blackie's mouth. It was so intense my legs nearly gave way, and I collapsed down onto the bed beside him.

"Fuck," I breathed, incapable of anything more profound.

When I could move again, I wasted no time pulling Blackie down with me. Jerking his straining underwear out of my way, I engulfed his erection in my mouth. Blackie squirmed and groaned, thrusting his hips hard.

In seconds, his cock lengthened, thickened, and he exploded.

Imagining Blackie in my bed like that was more than enough for me in reality too.

Furiously stroking my throbbing shaft, I spilled quite a load all over myself, still picturing Blackie right there beside me.

Chapter 2

The next morning I delayed getting out of bed, thinking again about what I'd seen.

According to the flyer, fetish nights were once a week, Friday nights only. Might Blackie go there again? I didn't want to ask him about it. Maybe it was a one-time thing he just wanted to try out.

My thoughts kept going back to him all day and when I got to our practice space, it was harder than usual to act normal when he arrived. I sang like I had to reach the back rows of a stadium, trying to distract myself from Blackie, who had decided to stand far too close to me.

"Everything okay?" he finally asked me when we took a break.

"Sure, why?"

"You haven't said two words to me all night."

Heat crept into my cheeks.

"Oh, you know. Long day. Work sucked." *I can't stop picturing you nearly naked and getting your ass whipped in front of strangers*, I added silently.

He tossed me a beer. "You gotta chillax, Jai."

"Right." *That'll happen.*

Blackie and I hung out nearly every night that week. I was used to my crush on him, I'd pushed it well into the back of my head so we could be proper friends.

But this was a new level of torture. Up until now I'd kept my pervy thoughts about Blackie just for masturbation. I never thought about him that way when we were together in normal life. It had taken me a long time to be able to pull that off, and now it was blown all to hell.

When next Friday night came around, and I was just getting home from work, Blackie sent me a text. Writing back, I couldn't help but ask him what he was doing that night.

Hot date

Anyone I know?

No. See you Sat.

Blackie never had hot dates, only hookups now and then. My heart beating a little faster, I weighed my options. Head out to The Met and hang out with the usual crowd, or take the chance of finding Blackie strapped down once again at Veer.

It was a no-brainer.

But the price of stalking can be high. There was a different guy working the door, one who wouldn't fall for my half-assed attempts at flirting. I handed over the outrageous cover and stood still while the bouncer looked me over, making sure I met the "strict fetish dress code."

He jerked his head to the side, indicating that I passed his standards, but just barely. There was another guy, really tall, dressed all in black, standing behind the bouncer. He actually wore sunglasses. *Inside the nightclub*. He looked like he worked there, and for a moment I was worried he would stop me from coming in.

Solo guys aren't exactly the clubgoers they want. But in spite of the look he gave me, like I was the worst person on earth, he didn't block my way.

Stopping at the bar on the main floor, I ordered the cheapest highball there was so as to blend in and not look like I was just there as a perv.

I watched the dance floor, enjoying the view but wishing I had earplugs. It was some of the worst music I'd ever heard. I hated EDM more than anything else in the world. At least the people were better-looking as it was earlier on in the evening.

My drink finished and my paranoia about being kicked out abated, I headed for the staircase in back.

Easing my way through the crowd, I headed for the darkest corner. From my vantage point, I could see the center clearly.

Just like last week, there were three people strapped down. And there he was. Blackie and his tiny tattoo, right in between the other two. I hadn't known he had such a collection of sexy underwear. That was probably a good thing.

The scene played out much like last week. It seemed to be the same guy with Blackie too, although I hadn't exactly paid him any attention before.

My eyes were glued to them like they were the only two people in the room. I didn't look away once, not until it became clear their session was ending. Once again, I fled before he could spot me.

I was halfway home before an unwanted thought occurred to me, and when it did I actually felt a pain in my chest. Blackie had texted that he had a hot date. Could he be involved with that guy in the club?

I swung between jealousy and despair. I had never once let my feelings for Blackie slip. Nothing had ever happened between us. But still, in my head at least, he was all mine.

Back when we were still in school, I decided I would go for it with him. We were at his place, downstairs in his bedroom.

His parents were out and we were enjoying some weed along with our cheap beer. It was good stuff and I was buzzing, way more than was usual for me.

Blackie looked so sexy, lying back on the floor, his hair strewn about. I had to tell him how I felt. But he spoke first.

“My parents are getting divorced.”

“What?” I thought I hadn't heard him right, couldn't have heard him right.

“They told me last night.”

I didn't even know what to say. My head was fogged up, and I couldn't seem to switch gears from declaring my undying love to the bomb he had just dropped.

“Um... are you okay?” I finally managed, thinking about how stupid I must sound. But what else do you say to something like that?

“Yeah,” he said, taking the joint from me and drawing in a long pull. But something was off. He was a laid-back guy, sure, but he was acting like what he was saying wasn't even news at all.

“You don't seem like you're surprised. Did you see it coming?”

He shrugged, passing the smoke back to me, but I shook my head and he kept hold of it.

“I'm not surprised. Everyone I know has divorced parents. Every couple always breaks up.”

“That’s not true!” I said, shocked even through my stoned haze at the way he was acting. I’d never once heard a cynical word leave his mouth. He was kind of freaking me out.

“Oh yeah? Name anyone you know who’s stuck together. Anyone.”

I didn’t even have to think about it. “Mindy and Geo.” We had all known each other since first grade. They had been going out for years.

Blackie shook his head. “They broke it off last week. They just haven’t told anyone yet.”

“You’re fucking kidding me.”

It was more shocking somehow than the news of Blackie’s parents. It seemed more real, although that would change when Blackie’s father eventually moved out.

“It doesn’t mean it can’t happen,” I said, still thinking I wanted to jump him right then and there.

“It always happens. No point to coupling up when it’ll just end. Best to have fun and don’t ever get involved.”

I couldn’t even argue with him. He had a point, and even though it didn’t feel right, I kept my feelings for him to myself.

Every Friday after that, I went to the club and found Blackie there. When he eventually asked the band if we could take Friday nights off instead of Sundays, no-one objected. Least of all me.

I had become a regular, spending week after week downstairs at Veer, and so had quite a number of other people. I kept going back even though every time was exactly the same.

Except for tonight. It was especially crowded and even though I had actually arrived early for once, there was no room to stand in my usual spot. The dumbasses started late, too. I toyed with the idea of leaving, but I didn’t want to lose twenty bucks for nothing.

Finally, all the players came out. I turned away as usual so Blackie wouldn’t spot me, leaving enough time for them to get strapped down.

Three crosses, all full. So many people had worked their way in front of me, I could barely see what was going on.

Thoroughly pissed off, I was knocking back the rest of my drink when something hit me square in the back.

What the fuck? I turned around, only to get shoved out of the way by someone. Cayle, the club's owner.

Figured it was him. He was the guy I had seen my second time there, wearing sunglasses and standing behind the bouncer like he was trying to intimidate people. Like an ass, he still wore those bloody shades.

I couldn't stand him and now here he was, bashing me with a door I didn't know existed, just to make my night perfect. He shoved it closed, and it all but disappeared in the blackness. Even squinting, I could only make it out because I knew it was there.

Chapter 3

“Where have you been?” I walked into our warehouse to be greeted by an annoyed Fin.

“They wouldn’t let me leave work on time. What’s the big deal? You could have started without me.”

“The big deal is that bloody Blackie didn’t show. Doesn’t do much good without the singer or the guitarist, huh? Do you know where he is?”

“No.” Blackie had a habit of being late to most things, but never this late. Twenty minutes later, he still hadn’t put in an appearance.

“This is crap,” Roman said. “What’s he thinking? Did he call you?”

“No, but something must have happened. He’d never blow us off like this without a word.”

“Well, either let’s play anyway or I’m leaving.”

“Fine. We can still run through the set anyway.”

I was still hoping Blackie would show. When I hadn’t heard from him by the time we were on our way to the Met, I was starting to worry. This wasn’t like him at all.

Three nights later, Fin and Roman came by my place. Blackie had missed our last few rehearsals and no one had heard a word from him. Even Fin and Roman were getting concerned.

“He’s going to fuck up our tour. We leave in less than two weeks and there’s still tons of stuff to work out before then,” Roman said, looking at me like I might have been hiding Blackie away from him on purpose.

“Has he done this before?” Fin wanted to know. “You know, pulled a runner when the pressure got too high?”

“No. Never. He’s not like that. I’m telling you, something’s wrong. No one’s seen him for days,” I told them.

“What about his roommates?” Fin wanted to know.

“They’ve been gone on tour for a couple weeks now, he’s been living

alone." I sat down beside Fin on the floor. "I went to the cops today to report him as missing."

"What? For real? You don't think he's just bugged off for awhile somewhere?"

I shook my head. "No way. He'd have called me long before now."

"So what'd they say?"

"They had me make a report with a detective. He said he'd look into it."

At least the man had taken me seriously. Detective Branson seemed decent enough, but I wasn't convinced about what he was actually going to do.

"You really think he's gone missing?"

"All I know is, something's wrong."

It occurred to me long after Fin and Roman had left that maybe I should have mentioned Blackie's Friday night habits to the detective. But then, that didn't matter, did it? Who would stalk him there?

Other than me, of course. But if I was doing it, could someone else be? But why?

My thoughts circled again and again until eventually I drifted off to sleep.

Chapter 4

It was Friday night and Blackie had been missing for days. As a last-ditch effort, I went out to the Met to ask once again if anyone had seen him lately. No luck.

I left after I'd spoken to everyone. Spending time there without Blackie around seemed wrong, and I was in no mood to just hang out anyway. All I could do lately was worry about him.

There was only one other place I could go on a Friday night. In a burst of optimism, I convinced myself he might just be there, enjoying himself as usual. I could confront him and he would tell me it was all a mistake.

Buoyed by my fantasy that everything would be fine, I nearly ran the distance to Veer.

The bouncer's usual scrutiny of how I was dressed was treading on my last nerve. I was about to tell him to fuck off when I saw Cayle come up right behind him. I kept my mouth shut. No matter what, I needed to get inside.

The bloody bouncer was taking his sweet time tonight so I ground my teeth and looked at Cayle, silently directing my hate vibes toward him. He was as good an outlet as any. He took off his suit jacket—*so* appropriate for a fetish night, I was dying to say to him.

And then I saw it. Blinking hard, I was convinced I was imagining it. But there it was.

Dumbass Cayle always wore a T-shirt in the club. I'd seen his overdeveloped arms more times than I cared to count. They were bare, always.

Until now.

He had gotten a tattoo on his upper arm. It was his only one, so it stood out. What riveted my gaze was the design of it.

A treble clef. Not uncommon, but it was exactly the same as Blackie's scar tattoo. The one you would only see if he was practically naked.

I mean, it was identical. I had it memorized, just because I'd seen it so often. Blackie had drawn it himself, working on it for weeks and weeks when we were in school, showing me the new version every time he changed so much as even the thickness of the line. He had woven our common initial

through it in such a stylized way that only he and I knew it was there. It wasn't the kind of thing anyone else would have by accident. Ever.

And there it was, clear as anything. Tattooed in black on fucking Cayle.

Cayle went off even before the damn bouncer was done with me. As soon as he gave me the nod, I tore into the club, determined to find Cayle. Because I very much doubted Blackie would have given someone like him a close enough look at his tattoo to let him replicate it that exactly.

Which could mean he had a look at it against Blackie's will.

But I couldn't find him anywhere. I went downstairs to wait like I'd planned and to think about what to do about Cayle.

The crowd buzzed around me and I got more disheartened the longer I waited. Finally, everyone came out and took their places according to their roles. I didn't have to look, but I did anyway to prove it to myself. No Blackie.

I was about to leave when that damn invisible door about bumped me again. It wasn't Cayle who came out, it was some other guy. As he walked off, an idea started to form in my head.

If Cayle had something to do with Blackie disappearing, which I was now certain he did, I needed something to take to the cops. As I was here, I'd best do some looking around.

I waited impatiently until midnight, not moving an inch from where I stood. The door swung open and Cayle came out. I could have set a clock by him. This time I was ready. I caught the door at the last second and flew inside, squeezing myself as small as I could so the change in the light wouldn't be noticed.

Letting it fall closed naturally behind me, I had to stop and let my eyes adjust again. It was fucking dark in there, but there were LEDs set into the floor like in a movie theater or an airplane. Fucking bizarre.

Just like in the fetish room, all the walls were painted black.

I'd gotten in, but now I didn't know what to do. It was eerily quiet. I couldn't hear the music at all. Bloody great soundproofing for a hallway.

At one end was a door that I was fairly certain led outside. Down to my right, the rest of the hallway was blocked off with stacks of chairs. I don't know what I had expected to find, but so far it was a big letdown.

I got to the exit door, about to give up and get the hell out of there when I spotted another, smaller hallway. Fucking place was so dark I hadn't even noticed it.

I could make out two doors down there. The first one was wide open to a tiny room, oddly lit up. Not quite able to tell if anyone was inside, I went over as quietly as I could.

The light was coming from a bank of screens. Each one had a different feed from a camera monitoring the club. Standard security setup, but no one was actually watching them.

There were three in the fetish room, one focused narrowly on each cross. Huh. That wasn't security, it was perverting.

A shiver ran up my spine as I turned away, the creepiness of it all suddenly sinking in. Fear jolted my heart into high gear. What was I doing? If Cayle was in fact a bad guy, I shouldn't be sneaking around in the private areas of his club.

Then something stopped me in my tracks. My blood ran cold when I realized just what had caught my eye.

On first glance, it looked like a photo. But I was wrong.

It was another monitor. It was on the side, removed from the others, mounted into the wall and almost hidden from view by the open door. Someone could easily watch it and keep an eye on the door at the same time.

And very visible on this monitor was a person.

The figure had a hood covering their head and they were tied to a chair in an otherwise empty room. I had almost convinced myself it wasn't real when the figure moved.

I sucked in my breath. What the fuck was I actually looking at? It could be a movie. That's it. A movie.

Staring hard, I tried to will something to happen. But nothing did. It was the same image. It was real.

My hands shaking from fear, I bolted out the exit door without even thinking of whether it was rigged or not. Fortunately, I heard nothing. Even if I'd tripped a silent alarm that was ringing elsewhere, at least I was free. I popped out into the middle of an alley and ran for the street, not even knowing which way I was going.

I didn't stop shaking the entire subway ride home. What the fuck did I see?
What should I do?

Chapter 5

All day Saturday, I stressed about what I had seen and what I could do about it. The only thing I was sure of was that I had to go back and see if I could find something, anything that would be enough to tell the cops about. All I had to go on so far was a grainy image that might well turn out to be a film clip and a feeling that something was off there. Determined to resolve things one way or the other, I set out just after dark.

It was a regular club night so the crowd was a lot different. I stuck out in my rocker clothes. Fortunately, they let me in anyway. The fetish room was transformed into just another dance floor.

I hung around the door and just like before, Cayle came out at midnight. I slipped in again, trying not to think about what could happen to me if I got caught.

Terrified, I went down the hallway and around the corner. The door was open. I crept in, hoping I'd find something different, something that had a good explanation behind it.

There it was. The same fucking scene as before.

My heart about to pound through my chest, I watched.

And tonight there was a difference.

The figure was still there, still covered and bound, same as last night. There was someone else in the room. Cayle. Even in the dim light he was still wearing his stupid fucking sunglasses.

It looked like he was talking to the bound-up person, who wasn't responding in any way that I could detect. And then he moved out of the camera's range.

I froze. Someone was coming down the hallway.

Son of a fucker. There was nowhere to hide in this tiny fucking room except behind the door. I went behind it, pulling it as close to my body as I could.

Someone came in the room. I stopped breathing.

What the fuck? It was Cayle.

He started playing around with the main monitors. I had no way out. If he caught me there...

Then a phone beeped. Fuck. Was it mine? I about passed out in panic.

But it was his.

“What?” he snapped, not stopping what he was doing while he listened.

“Fine.” He walked out, pulling the door closed behind him. I stayed flattened against the wall, straining to hear whatever I could.

A muffled thud sounded and I could only hope it was the door to the main club closing behind him.

I didn't move until I realized this might be my only chance to get out safely.

Before I fled, I checked the monitor one last time. The figure was still there, still tied, unmoving.

Shaking so hard I nearly tripped, I shot out of the exit door.

I didn't even know where I was headed until I found myself at home. Still panicking, I paced back and forth. Cayle was keeping a person tied up. Somewhere in the club.

Who was it? Was it Blackie?

What the fucking hell do I do now?

If nothing else, I knew I needed some help. It took me three tries before I successfully dialed Detective Branson's number.

Straight to fucking voicemail. After I left a message asking him to call me as soon as he could, I went back to pacing. It was Saturday night. I had no idea if he worked over the weekend. He might not even get back to me before Monday.

So I was no better off. No longer caring if they thought I was crazy or not, I called up Roman.

“Did you call the police?” he asked when I was done telling him my half-coherent story.

“Yeah. They told me to talk to the fucking detective.” I said, my frustration spilling over. “We have to do something.”

“I know.”

Half an hour later, I met him and Fin in front of our warehouse.

Quickly, I outlined the plan I had come up with on my way over. “Veer closes at four. That only gives us a couple hours, so let's get going.”

“The only way in is through that locked door, right? Is there any time you’ve seen that guy come out of there other than midnight?” Roman asked while we walked through the empty streets.

“No. But I’ve never stayed past one.”

“Be careful,” Fin said to me before we split up.

The plan was risky, but there was no choice. There was no one to help us and nothing else we could do.

I flashed my hand stamp at the bouncer, half hoping Cayle would be standing at the entrance as usual so at least I would know where he was. But there was no sign of him.

I went downstairs, stationing myself right by the door. All that happened was that more people left, making me more conspicuous.

If someone didn’t come out soon, I didn’t know what we were going to do.

My phone vibrated and I pulled it out of my pocket. Fuck. It was already 3:25.

Fin had texted me.

What’s going on?

I started to reply when the door swung open wide, nearly bashing into me. I didn’t recognize the man who came out. Cayle wasn’t with him.

I let it close halfway, whipping my head around first before I slipped in.

Knowing Cayle could appear at any moment, I listened carefully. I didn’t dare go to the monitor room.

Heading for the exit door, I opened it as slowly as possible, clenching my jaw in the hope that it wouldn’t squeak.

Fin and Roman were waiting in the dark alley. I let them in, raising my finger to my lips so they would know we might not be alone.

The door to the monitor room was closed. I had only ever seen it open, so that probably meant it was occupied. I motioned for Fin and Roman to follow me past it.

We stopped at the second door. It was the only possible place that the captive person could be. Cayle had appeared too quickly for them to be in any other part of the club.

I hadn't realized there were two deadbolts as well as the lock on the door handle. I turned to Roman, breaking out into a sweat for about the hundredth time that night and practically shoving my mouth into his ear. "Can you do it?"

He shrugged. Shit.

Fin pulled me away and gestured for me to focus. We turned on our phones and held them as close as we could to the first lock, shining their light for Roman.

He slipped his key in and tapped it. I flinched at the noise, but there was no other way to pick the lock.

He twisted the handle to see if he had gotten it unlocked. It opened easily.

The second one worked just as well. I started to believe we were going to pull it off and actually get in.

The third lock stuck. He tapped again and again, adjusting the key by a millimeter each time to see what would work. It took every ounce of self-control I had not to urge him to go faster.

On the fifth try, it clicked. Glancing behind us, he turned the handle and opened the door.

Halfway open, it squeaked. It couldn't have been very loud but the sound was magnified in the dead silence. All three of us froze, not even daring to breathe. After what seemed like an eternity, Roman pushed on the door again, opening it the bare minimum necessary for us to get through.

We were all in. Christ. It was another fucking hallway. I wanted to punch the wall in frustration. We were running out of time. What was it with this place?

Three more doors. All locked, but no deadbolts so it should be a lot faster.

Roman got the first one unlocked quickly. I opened the door and froze.

It was the room I had seen on the monitor. And there was the figure, sitting in the center, bound, head covered.

We weren't two steps inside when someone spoke.

"What are you doing?"

I knew the voice before I even turned around. It was surprisingly calm and even, without so much as a trace of anger.

“You,” Cayle said when he saw me. “You know, trespassing is never a good idea.”

He had a gun in his hand. An actual fucking gun.

“Get away from him. Over there.”

He motioned us to move to the corner.

“I don’t have anywhere to keep you. So it looks like I’m going to have to get rid of you.”

Cayle was between us and the door. There was no way out. He advanced toward us, raising the gun.

“Drop your weapon.” A different voice broke the silence.

Someone else had come into the room. I couldn’t see who, but from the sounds of it, he didn’t work for Cayle.

And yet Cayle didn’t move, didn’t even turn to see who it was. He was so focused on us, he didn’t even blink. His eyes didn’t so much as flicker. Had I only imagined that there was someone else there?

But then I looked into his eyes and I knew what was going on.

He was deciding whether or not to take a shot at us anyway.

I actually think he was about to, but the man came up behind him and grabbed his arms, cuffing him roughly.

“You boys okay?” It was Detective Branson. I was too stunned to speak, as were Fin and Roman.

“We’ve been watching Cayle and this club for some time now. When I got your message, Jaiden, we had enough to obtain a warrant.”

I hardly heard what he was saying. There were cops in the room now, over at the still-silent figure on the chair. One was working on the chains that bound him, while the other untied the hood. I held my breath while he pulled it off.

It was Blackie. Eyes closed, apparently unconscious.

Chapter 6

The rest of the night passed by in a blur. I was dying to ride with Blackie to the hospital, but we all had to go back to the police station to make statements.

Even while he was being arrested, Cayle was threatening to charge us with breaking and entering.

Branson said that probably wouldn't hold up what with the things he had done. Apparently they'd been watching Cayle long before he kidnapped Blackie, but Branson was pretty tight-lipped about why.

The sun was coming up when we were finally allowed to leave. Detective Branson was nice enough to have us driven to the hospital by another cop.

Blackie was sleeping when we got there. After sitting in his room for awhile, Fin and Roman decided to go down to the cafeteria.

"You want anything?" Fin asked me.

I shook my head. I should have been starving, but the thought of food had no appeal.

Once they left the room, I went over to Blackie's bed, touching his hand lightly.

When he moved, I jerked back. Shit. I hadn't meant to disturb him.

He opened his eyes. "Jaiden," he murmured.

I tried to force myself to smile in what I hoped was a reassuring way.

"How are you feeling? Did he hurt you?"

He shook his head weakly.

"Just suffering a lack of food and water. They're only going to keep me overnight."

"You scared me, Blackie. Don't ever do it again." I wasn't even sure what I was saying, I was just so relieved he was safe.

"Okay," he said, closing his eyes once more.

Blackie's roommates wouldn't be back for another week, so I was staying with him to make sure he was okay.

He was crashed out on the sofa when I arrived, looking a lot better. I cuddled right up next to him, way too close, and he didn't even pull away.

He had the TV on but I couldn't pay attention to it. In spite of looking a lot better, he still seemed really freaked out and nervous.

"Do you want to talk about what happened?" I finally asked after I noticed he wasn't even watching the screen but staring off into space.

He didn't answer for so long I thought he had fallen asleep. I had just clicked the TV off when he spoke up.

"It was my fault."

Sitting up, I looked over at him but he wouldn't face me.

"Of course it's not your fault. Why would you even say that?"

"I've been going to that club for awhile now, since it reopened again. That guy Cayle was always real friendly to me, right from the start. He was okay, he bought me drinks now and then, it seemed harmless enough. When he really started hitting on me, I made it clear I wasn't interested. Obviously I should have shut him down a lot sooner."

We were sitting so close to each other I could feel Blackie's body tense up.

"He acted cool about it even after I turned him down, and he got me a drink like usual. It must have been drugged, because next thing I knew I woke up in that room, tied up. He told me then we were going to be together no matter what, that nobody ever said no to him."

Blackie took a drink of water and regarded me.

"The detective said it was you who found me. How did you manage that?"

I'd been dreading this moment. "I saw you at Veer one time. And I've kind of been going there too ever since. And since that was the last place I saw you, I started to wonder if there was something going on there."

"You've been... watching me?" Blackie's expression made my stomach twist nastily.

"I'm sorry. I saw you there once and then... well, I kind of got caught up in it."

He seemed to be considering my words. "Well, if you hadn't, I probably wouldn't be here right now."

I could tell it bothered him. I couldn't have felt more like a jerk than I did in that moment. Before I could think of what to say, Blackie continued.

"Cayle didn't hassle me much when I was down there, he just kept talking about us as if we were a couple. It was weird, you know, he was so calm about it. And then he told me we were going away together on Sunday."

A chill ran up my spine. "You know we found you on Saturday night."

"Yeah, that's what the cops told me. Just in time. He was talking about taking me 'far away', whatever that means. If you hadn't been looking for me... I wouldn't have had a chance once he took me out of the club."

He moved and grimaced. I had caught a glimpse of his back when he was getting dressed at the hospital. There were marks on his body that told me he wasn't being totally honest about what Cayle had really done to him.

"Hey, take it easy," I said.

Ignoring me, he kept shifting around while he spoke. "I was alone down there nearly all the time. It was making me crazy. There was no way out. Time lost all meaning and I couldn't tell if it was day or night. Or how long it had been. But I kept thinking that somehow you would find me. When I wasn't freaking out, thinking about how to escape, or if I even would, I thought about you."

"Me?" I swallowed hard.

"You were the one I wanted to see again. The idea of never seeing you again was scarier than Cayle, actually."

"Well, I'm here. And you're safe. You're never going to get rid of me, you know that. Friends for life, remember? That is, if you still want a stalker like me as your friend."

He shook his head, wincing in pain again.

"Stop moving so much," I told him, a little worried. He hadn't seemed like he was in any pain before, but then he was probably on painkillers in the hospital.

"I don't want to be friends," he said.

That knocked the wind right out of me. "I'm sorry I went to the club and watched you there, Blackie. Really I am. I'll do anything to make it up to you. I know it was wrong, I don't know what got into me."

"That's not it. I just don't want to be friends anymore."

“But why can't we be friends?”

“Because I want more than that. I'm in love with you.”

I didn't think I heard him right.

“Are you feeling okay?” I asked him carefully. “Do you remember if Cayle ever hit you on the head?”

“Shut up. I'm serious.”

“Maybe we should talk about this when you're feeling better. You've been through a lot—”

“Jaiden, please. I'm not telling you this because my head's fucked up. It's how I feel. I've felt that way for awhile now. I just never wanted to be in a relationship before. I didn't see the point. But the idea of never even giving it a shot with you while I had the chance... being trapped down there, thinking I might never see you again... that's what scared me more than anything else.”

“But aren't you involved with that guy from the club?”

He gave me a blank look. “Huh? What guy?”

“The guy who whips you every Friday night...” My voice trailed off when I saw his expression. At least I can still surprise myself with the depths of my own stupidity.

“Just how often did you watch me at Veer?” he asked me.

My cheeks burned. “Um... after the first time I saw you there... every Friday night. A few weeks now.”

He laughed, and even though it was at my expense, I was happy. I hadn't heard him laugh in so long.

“I never knew I had a stalker.”

“Yeah. I'm a loser, I know it as well as you do. But everyone else in that place had different people working on them. You were always with the same guy.”

“He's just a guy I met there. He knows what he's doing so I trust him. But we're not involved in any way other than that.”

He looked into my eyes so deeply it seemed like he could see right through me.

“The truth is, I love you, Jaiden. I always have. The only question is, do you feel the same way?”

He pulled me down and gave me the sweetest kiss I've ever had.
Kissing Blackie was better than I ever imagined it would be.
"Of course," I said when we broke apart for air. "Of course."

The End

Author Bio

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