

“No!” Daniel Reilly yelled. “How many times do I have to say it? No fucking way is it okay with me.”

He stalked the length of the condo, stopping at the far end to cross his arms and stare out the picture window. He heard Jason say something conciliatory, but chose to ignore his partner. Jason had developed the art of ‘handling’ him to a fine point, and right now it pissed the very bejesus out of him.

The pale sunlight of the November morning gave the view of woods and the golf course beyond an Impressionist haze. Deciduous trees were bare, and the little resurrection fern on the live oak tree directly in front of the main window had shriveled to a tangled mat of brown. Unlike two years ago when rains and hurricane winds had nearly wrecked the island, this fall had been peaceful, almost storm-free, the air still and soft.

Nothing to upset the idyllic existence he and Jason had found here. Nothing, of course, except the expected, given their chosen profession of black-ops government trouble-shooters. Since the horrors of the Voodoo affair had initiated them into the kind of service and action they would perform, they’d carried out numerous missions for the Director under Nora Groton’s instructions. Those missions had been dangerous enough, but successful. They had saved lives and had survived to fight another day. Other than that life had been pleasant and quiet.

Until now.

“Dan, calm down.” Jason came up behind him and put his hands on Daniel’s shoulders. “I have to go. This is what we do. It’s our job.”

Daniel shrugged him off. “No, it’s not. It’s not our job if it’s not for both of us.”

“And your point is?” Jason’s tone was calm to the point of being patronizing. That touched the final spark to Daniel’s temper.

“I don’t have a fucking point!” he yelled, turning and confronting Jason. “Do I always need to be so fucking logical? Like you?”

“No. You need to be you,” Jason said, his eyes showing nothing but tolerant affection. “That’s all I’ve ever asked.”

The truth of that and the warmth of his partner’s body lured him and almost broke through his mood. But Daniel resisted, turning back around, standing cold and alone, still staring out the window.

A group of groundskeepers walked by on the course. He could see them talking and laughing as they prepared the greens for the day’s golfers, their enjoyment of the cool fall morning apparent. He and Jason ought to be out too. Running on the beach before breakfast, taking an invigorating swim in the cold ocean, strolling through the dappled sunlight along one of the many bicycle paths.

Or they ought to be still in bed, warm and randy, fucking their brains out. Not arguing over something beyond their control. He knew he was in the wrong, but that didn’t stop him.

“We’re a team. You’re taking off on a solo op. That’s not a team thing and you know it,” he snapped.

Jason sighed. “It’s a solo op, all right,” he said. “And like I’ve said a hundred times since last night, I’m sorry but I’ve got to do it.”

“Fine. Go. Go ahead and leave. Without me to watch your back, you’re dead meat. Get yourself chopped into cat food. I’ll buy myself a kitty and feed you to him when they ship you back to me in tiny pieces.”

“Oh grow up, Dan!”

Daniel smiled thinly, perversely pleased to hear anger from his lover. “I mean it,” he replied. “Get going. I really don’t care.”

Jason said nothing. A moment later, Daniel heard him leave the condo, the front door shutting behind him with a sound like that of a coffin lid lowering.