



Episode Twenty-Four

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Boxer Falls: Episode 24

by Amy Lane

Sam huddled against the tree on the edge of the rehab facility grounds, his gloved hands pushed deep into the pockets of his green parka.

Jesus Christ, the things he did for Rider Cotten.

He shifted uncomfortably in the chilly predawn and thought of something heinous, cold, and painful to do (or have *done*) to Conrad Cotten. Stupid asshole had no idea what his son was dealing with, and cutting him off drugs cold?

Jesus.

Why do you care ? Sam scowled. *I don't.*

He didn't. It was no skin off his fine brown nose if Rider Cotten lost his fucking mind without a little bit of chemical leveler. Yeah, sure, he was spoiled and unable to take a dump without a maid, but that didn't mean... Sam shivered and huddled further back

in his parka. God, that memory from school seemed so far away. The picture of Rider, naked, covered in come and using his own blood from the scratched back of his hand to finger paint on the walls-*that* was something Sam couldn't escape. Sam had talked him down with a couple of Quaaludes-Just one or two, that's all it had taken, and Rider had been laconic and cynical and cracking jokes about bragging that he got the bandage on his hand from fighting muggers off a coed. A little... something. A few tabs of X when he got too needy, a snort of amyl or coke when he got too down, and 'ludes when he couldn't *come* down. Rider had important family contacts, that was it. See, he was too valuable for Sam to let him get strung out too badly, or, even worse, not strung out at all.

Exactly. That explained why Sam had been about ready to let loose with some physical violence-something his rich childhood hadn't exactly train him for, but his days as low man on the drug dealer's supply line had taught him to mete out if necessary-to get the info from Rider's foolish, besotted old man. He needed Rider. End of story.

Sam closed his eyes at the memory Rider, curled up against him in bed, docile as a puppy. Yeah. Rider was a tool, no more. A tool who was on a morning nature hike, hopefully, so Sam could get out of these fucking woods.

He heard them-the rehab inmates were none too quiet, and a lot of them were bitching, loudly, about the cold and the hike and the sunshine. Sam hunkered back in the shadows, hoping that, true to form, Rider would be slacking in the rear. (And thank God that wasn't a habit that followed him to bed!) Sam waited until Rider passed him, and then started walking at the end of the line. Rider's artfully messy hair was now messy for real, but it wasn't until Sam touched Rider's shoulder and got his startled look back that Sam could see the real change in him.

His eyes. His eyes were always big and limpid, bright and trusting-young. But not now. Now his eyes were thoughtful, sharp, and a little bit tired. But still-they lit up when they saw Sam.

"You're-"

Sam kissed him, telling himself it was to shut the kid up while he hustled him behind a tree, but he'd forgotten how sexy-dirty-sweet Rider tasted, and the kiss... oh hells... it went on, and Sam's arms wrapped around Rider's shoulder and Rider's eyes may have changed but his body just seemed to melt into Sam's space, filling it, making it liquid and warm.

The broke apart and Sam closed his eyes against Rider's hopeful hero worship. God. Stay on task. He pulled the little baggie of X tabs out of his pocket and pressed it into Rider's hand. He usually didn't carry-not in this town, where the Cottens and the Boxers seemed to be constantly in his business. He'd had to make a special trip to his lowest distributor to get these.

Rider shook his head and gave it back.

Sam's eyes widened. "Rider-you... you must be losing your mind!"

Rider grimaced. "Lost it. Actually, *really* lost it. Like, years ago. I'm taking these meds-anti-psychotics, sort of. They told me that if I mixed them with X or any of the other shit we've been doing, it could fuck up my brain chemistry permanently. Like forever."

Sam wondered which was going to kill him first-his exploding brain or his frozen lungs. "Anti-psychotics?"

Rider looked down and crossed his arms, pulling that sweet, hurt-puppyiness out of Sam's reach. "Like, bi-polar. I didn't know. I was rehabbing, and coming down, and then... like you know how I get? Like everything's a good idea and I can't really sleep and they were... I don't know. Peeling me off the walls. They gave me sedative and I cried for days." Rider's newly thoughtful brown eyes looked up and Sam flinched away from the naked longing in them. "You weren't there for *days*."

"Your father wouldn't tell me where you were," he snapped. "He told me it was a rehab center, but not where. It took me forever to figure out you were here." Fucking Conrad Cotten, *finally* figuring out that Rider's "college friend" was more than he seemed and then doing exactly the wrong thing about it.

Rider's face relaxed, his faith renewed, and nodded. "So you weren't there, and I wasn't allowed to have *anything*, and the doctors came and they talked and I took all these tests and..." he shrugged. "They gave me these other meds, and this mood diary and all sorts of shit. I guess what I've been doing-they call it self-medicating."

Sam swallowed. Self-medicating. Four years of solid drug abuse, and it was self-medicating. Sam had been giving Rider cocaine and X in an effort to control what he saw was a weak mind, and as it turned out, Rider had been staving off mental illness. Wonderful. God. Samantaka, god of the Vermont's drug empire, and he was, in fact, a good Samaritan-with a poor little rich boy on his list of corrupted souls.

"So you're getting help?" he asked, feeling something alien and sad stirring in his chest. "Real help?"

Rider nodded. "I am," he said with a hopeful little smile. He took the little baggie and upended it symbolically, and Sam didn't even yell at him for wasting stash. Rider would remember this moment, he hoped. Rider would remember that Sam was proud of him and not freaking out because a well-functioning Rider wasn't going to be as easy to control. Rider looked up at him, those big eyes limpid with trust. "You'll still visit me, won't you?"

Right, Rider. Keep the guy around who had you strung out for four years. Excellent rehabilitation decision. In the space of a heartbeat, that alien, sad thing in Sam's chest exploded, leaving him coated with the slime of his own self-loathing.

"Yeah, of course!" Sam said. He wrapped an arm around Rider's shoulders and squeezed, not wanting to admit that he was holding himself up as much as he was reassuring Rider. Rider leaned on him for a moment, and then heard a voice in the distance, calling his name.

He popped up, gave Sam a kiss on the cheek, and said, "Visit me, right?" For a moment his almost terrifying new self-assurance faded. "It's really sort of awful in there."

And then he was gone, leaving Sam sagging against a tree. "It's not that much better here," he whispered. He wondered if Rider had any idea that he'd just thrown a hand grenade into Sam's self-assured little world and then run off while Sam mopped up the mess.

* * *

Neale eyed the early a.m. report with surprise. "Dead loons?" he said out loud to his dispatcher. "Dead frickin' loons? I'm supposed to haul my ass up to the fucking dry-out palace to look at dead loons? Unless they're talking about a resident-"

Marcy didn't even roll her eyes. She was a solid woman, in her fifties, who had been happily and quietly married to the man of her dreams for the last thirty years. The fact that half of the men Boxer Falls had grabbed his ass had, apparently, been the source of much amusement between the two of them, but it meant that Marcy was damned near unflappable.

"The report says they were poisoned with some sort of street drug," she said, her voice flat enough to iron a shirt.

Victor frowned. Well, it was a rehab center, but still. The kids in the nearby club had been going bugshit lately-and the presence of party drugs on the street had grown astronomically. "Is there anybody up there we know?" he asked, thinking.

Marcy shrugged. "Rider Cotten," she said, and Victor's eyes narrowed. Before his little "episode" with the chainsaw, and the mysterious fire at the Cotten hotel, Rider had been hanging out with that guy-some sort of college friend, but Vic didn't like the guy's smell. About the time Sam had come to town, the whole club scene had exploded, and Victor wasn't stupid. He'd sent the bullet that had been pulled out of his ass, as well as the shell casings that went with it, to Boston for identification. They'd mysteriously disappeared, and Vic couldn't get shit back on his calls. Either the detectives in Boston were more incompetent than he was (and even Vic knew that was a stretch) or someone there was dirty. Either way, Vic didn't have a line on any of the hinky things that had gone down the night he'd been getting reamed by a stranger and almost got shot instead.

And now the loons were dropping out of trees. Vic wondered if maybe he couldn't get a little day pass to go visit Rider. Hell, if nothing else, he could go see Oz and ruffle his feathers. Little Lord Fauntleroy liked to get in Vic's grill and... Vic shuddered, thinking of their run in before the fire at the Cotten hotel. Yeah, it had totally turned his key. He wasn't sure exactly what Oz and Quinn had going--Vic himself didn't see it. Yeah, the little shit had been an okay lay, but the punky attitude, *that* was something Vic hadn't been sorry to see go. Of course, that punky attitude in Quinn's old man-well, *that* was some kick-ass sadism right there. Vic was a fan. But Oz... God. He'd seemed so needy when they'd been investigating the murder. Vic had been totally turned off-who needed that shit? He'd grown up being needed, being his family's provider, being his sister's hero-when he came into his own sexually, he wanted someone to provide for *him!* But now that he knew Oz could throw some attitude? Ooooooh... not *bad*. Not bad at *all*.

Either way-whether it was to work out his bad mood or to inform Oz of his plans to go visit Rider, it looked like Vic's day had just gotten the tiniest mite more interesting.

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Oz opened his eyes and looked at his phone. Fuck. Seventeen messages? Oh for the love of...

"Hey, Caitlyn?" he mumbled into the phone. "Yeah-sorry. Overslept. I know-we've got shit to do today. Contracts and... oh fuck, I've got a meeting in an hour and..." Oz

squeezed his eyes against the light coming in through Quinn's windows and tried to pull his shit together.

Wait. Quinn's windows?

Oh. Damn. *That* was an interesting development.

But his assistant was talking to him now, and he needed to focus. "Dead birds," he said blankly. "Dead birds? Really? *Interview* me? When? What do you mean 'where I'm at'? *Here*? Caitlyn, how in the *fuck* does he know to come here?" Oz sat up in bed and looked around Quinn's little seasonal rental cottage. The bed was lumpy, the furniture was used, and the shower was miniscule. So many other places they could have ended up, but then, what they'd done here the night before hadn't been *planned*. It had been as simple as Oz finishing work at his corporate office and wanting a drink. Of course, his home office had liquor-good stuff, too. There were bars on the way in from the city where he could have stopped, ones with willing women-or rich men, if he was up for being that honest about himself with strangers-were just waiting for someone to come in and drink with them.

But that's not where he went.

No, for Oz these days, a drink meant the rustic little pub, and the snarling, sarcastic, swaggering little prick behind the bar.

Last night, that swaggering little prick had looked up from washing glasses and smiled. An *actual* smile. No sneer, no sarcasm, no half-scowl/half-grin. It was a *smile*. And even though this little pub attached to the quaint B & B wasn't half the thriving business his father's hotel had been, he started to think the place was feeling a lot like home.

So he'd had his drink, and he'd let Quinn drive him...

Here.

It was only a few blocks from the pub-with his car parked outside for the whole town to see, but...

Fuck. Even the sheriff knew he was here.

He looked next to him, where Quinn slept, curled up into a tight, defensive ball, only a dandelion top of fuzzy orange hair sticking out. God. He remembered their last abortive sleepover, when he had wanted... softness, and Quinn had just wanted him gone. Now that he'd *gone* and spent the night-the least he could do now was see if maybe, just maybe, this second/third/fourth date wouldn't go a little smoother, right?

He shook Quinn's shoulder. "Quinn... Quinn, I need you to wake up."

Quinn grunted something that sounded like "Godafukawa," and Oz shook him with a little more authority. "Quinn! The fucking sheriff is on his way over. Do you have any idea where my underwear are?"

Quinn's back was to him, so Oz felt rather than saw the moment his eyes opened. "Sheriff Vic?" Quinn sat up in bed. "Are you fuckin' *kidding* me?"

"Yeah, Quinn. That's what I do. I hold sleepovers so I can wake my bedmate up and tell him the law is coming over. That's what us rich boys do for kicks."

Quinn's sleep-hooded eyes narrowed. "Did you top last night?" he snapped, and Oz felt his face heat. Not last night, no. He'd topped once, and it had been awesome, but Quinn... Quinn needed to be in control of that part of them. If nothing else, Quinn needed to know that's where he stood in bed. Quinn scowled as Oz looked away. "Yeah, I didn't think so. Don't jerk my cock here, Oz, why the fuck are we getting a cozy visit from the long arm of the law?"

Oz shrugged and pulled his knees up against his chest. There was a bundle of something there under his foot. Oh good. Underwear. He grabbed them and shoved them under his pillow so he'd know where they were. "I don't know, Quinn. Remember, *he's* the kinky bastard. I prefer to get off one on one with no witnesses." He sighed and rested his forehead against his knees. He'd begged, last night. He'd forced Quinn's cock to the back of his throat and then got on his hands and knees and begged. How could he do that with such a punk-ass, prickly little fucker? How could he make himself vulnerable like that? He knew how to lead. He knew how to take charge. But somehow, with Quinn, that wasn't the issue. With Quinn, the issue was greed, pure and simple. Oz was as greedy for Quinn as he was for power. Taking Quinn up the ass was all win.

Suddenly some of Quinn's attitude slipped. He sat up in bed and scooted so his bare ass was touching Oz's, and the outside of their flanks were rubbing together. "I'm a prick in

the morning," he said by way of apology. Oz glared at him, remembering that piss-bitchy brush off the last time they'd tried to wake up together.

"I'd noticed."

Quinn sighed, and got close enough for their shoulders to brush. "So what's got Sheriff Vic's cock in a knot now?"

Oz blinked again and wondered how late they'd been up the night before. It had been... late. And more than once. His ass was sore and his chest and groin were sticky, and he knew he smelled like sweat and come. In a way, it was turning him on, and his cock was making a determined attempt to wake up and start stiffing around a little. In another way, it made him feel acutely underdressed-especially around Quinn, who didn't give a ratfuck if he was naked or not.

"Birds," he answered. "Dead birds. Fucking things are dropping out of the trees by Shady Pines or Whispering Pines or wherever the hell Rider's staying. Vic wanted to know if my brother was using again."

Quinn snarled. Literally, brought his thin little upper lip up and let out a growl. "Then why doesn't he ask your psycho brother? *Jesus* I can't believe they let this guy do more than take a dump unsupervised. I mean holy Christ, here we were, sleeping-for once, I didn't even fuckin' *doanything!*"

Oz snickered and patted him on the knee. "He can't ask my psycho brother," Oz said practically. "Rider's committed, and there needs to be a lawyer present, and Vic knows he doesn't have a thing that will get him in there to talk to him. Or he needs me to explain the mess to Rider, either way. So Vic can't ask my psycho brother, and he's afraid of Sam. He thinks he's got something on me, so I'm the logical choice."

Quinn looked at him sideways. "What's he got on you?"

Oz shook his head. "You, genius. I'm not exactly out and proud you know?"

Quinn's shoulders shook. "Well, you are if he shows up here. I think he just wants to question you 'cause you get all rich and powerful on him and it gives him a woody."

Oz shrugged. They'd both seen how Sheriff Vic had responded the last time they'd gone toe to toe. "Yeah, well, that too. But if he smacks me down, he'll feel better about himself. Win/win."

Quinn sighed and got out of bed. "Yeah, that's cause he's not coming to *your* place while there's fuckin' condom wrappers all over the fuckin' bed."

Oz grinned at him and grabbed his briefs from under the pillow. "No, that was *my* win," he said, rolling out of bed. He was going to head for the shower, but there was a knock on the door, and he figured his cozy little moment with Quinn had pretty much eaten up all his time. That was okay, though. As morning afters went, it beat the hell out of the last time he'd woken up in Quinn's bed. Maybe if-when-if, oh hell *when* they did this again, they might manage to have some morning-after sex. That was worth it, right?

He slid his briefs on and shook his head at Quinn because his clothes were strewn all around the tiny cottage. "Go get in the shower," he ordered quietly. "I'll talk to him."

Quinn rolled his eyes. "Are you kidding me? I'm gonna answer the fuckin' door just as I am. Watching you two slap'em around gives me a stiffie."

"No, hey, Quinn-" Oz dropped his head. "Fuck." Because Quinn had opened the door and there stood Sheriff Vic.

Oz sucked in his stomach and pulled on his boardroom face like a fine wool suit.

"Good morning, Sheriff Vic. You must be pretty desperate for *something* to show up here this morning."

Vic's eyes made a long, slow, lazy perusal of Oz's body, tanned and trimmed and toned and Oz looked levelly at the man and let him.

"Not quite as desperate as you," Vic said, and Oz peeled his lips from his teeth in a semblance of a smile.

"Well, obviously I'm not desperate for pretty much anything I've ever wanted," he said thinly. "I mean, I've never had to solicit it in the back alley, if that's what you're asking."

Vic flushed, and Oz let one eye half close and his lip curl up in an expression he knew wasn't *quite* a sneer. Oh yeah-they all knew that Vic wanted it in a back alley and up the back alley, and that he wasn't discriminating. Sloppy, Vic, very sloppy, going for points that way.

"Yeah, well, your brother ain't so choosey," Vic said, his own sneer open and ugly. "We all know he's got a thing for that... guy. That *criminal* he says he went to school with. And I need to know what you know about him!"

Oz didn't posture for a moment: he thought. "Not much," he said speculatively. "I know that Rider thinks he hung the moon, and that he seems to be supportive of Rider's work in rehab."

"Are you sure that's not just because he's real fuckin' crazy now, and easy to manipulate?" Vic asked, and Oz tried to keep himself from bristling. Oh, it was really easy to pick on Rider now, wasn't it? Now that he wasn't just the wastrel brother, blowing his inheritance and his brain cells, he got sneered at for being legitimately ill. Oz didn't stop to ask himself how much of this was guilt-he was pretty sure there was a hefty portion. But for once, his little brother was defensible. For once, Oz could be the good guy with Rider, and Oz found he was reluctant to blow this chance.

"He's actually a lot saner now that we know what's been wrong," Oz said evenly. "And no, he's not doing drugs, poisoned or otherwise, so I think your time here has been wasted, Sheriff."

Vic looked him up and down again, and Oz realized that Quinn had been right. Vic's breath had sped up and his eyes were a little dilated. His cheeks were flushed, and Oz thought that if he looked down, the helpful Sheriff very well might be sporting a little wood.

"Now I wouldn't say wasted," Vic drawled, his arousal dripping from his voice like come. "I'd say it's really very promising."

Oz couldn't help it. His disgust surfaced. "Really? What exactly do you think we're promising?"

The Sheriff's grin was downright dirty. "I don't know, Mr. Cotten. Two people in this room like to bottom. What you want to do with that information is totally up to you!"

Oz grimaced. "Well, I'd prefer to keep it to myself," he said levelly. "And I'd also prefer to keep where I spend my nights and mornings to myself. So the next time you decide to drop by to interview me about dead loons, maybe you could pretend to be a professional and stop by my office!"

Vic's expression twisted, even if his boner got bigger. "Yeah, is that the problem? Your guy here a professional? What's the matter, Mr. Cotten-couldn't buy yourself a flesh-jack or it was cheaper to bone him than pay him to clean it?"

When Oz came to himself, Quinn was holding him back and the sheriff was bent over, howling, blood streaming from his nose.

* * *

Quinn was torn between laughter and outrage, and as Vic straightened up and snarled at Oz, pulling out his handcuffs and advancing like the almighty wrath of a masochistic god, he settled on outrage.

Oz settled down when he saw the cuffs, but his glare as still pretty fucking hellific, and his body was tight as a piano wire.

Vic chuckled evilly. "Oswald Cotten, you're under arrest for assaulting an officer. You have the right to remain silent-"

Oz interrupted, turning to Quinn even as he was being hustled out in his undershorts. "Quinn, could you get my phone and call my secretary? She can arrange bail and call my lawyer-"

He was through the doors by then, and Quinn was left in his apartment, trying not to gape like a fish. Oz Cotten... *Oz Cotten* was on his way to the clink because he'd lost his elemental cool and slugged the sheriff in the nose. And why did he do it?

Because Sheriff Vic had insulted Elliot Fucking Quinn.

Now wasn't that a twist in the fucking knickers?

Quinn picked up the phone, and then realized he was following an order, when Quinn *never* followed orders. He glared after the shut door and shivered and finally remembered he was still naked. God, he'd just stood there, naked, while the sheriff had ogled Oz, but Oz? One nasty word in Quinn's direction and **POW!** right in the schnozz.

Quinn was gonna let him get away with that shit? There was like, no fucking way!

Quinn scowled. "I'll call your lawyer, Oz Cotten," he muttered, "but I'll be damned if you pay your own bail."

* * *

Conrad put down the phone and scowled at the clock. Nothing happened at ten o'clock after breakfast, did it? No. If he was going to get called out of bed because one of his sons had fucked up, it was going to be at the hellish crossroads of dark and dawn.

Conrad sat up and groaned. It was just that he was used to having to bail *Rider* out of trouble.

Tony rolled over and whimpered like a puppy when he found Conrad had gotten out of bed. "Where you goin', hoss?" he asked sleepily, and Conrad gave into the impulse to ruffle his hair.

"Trouble with one of the kids," he said. "The family lawyer just called-Elliot Quinn just asked him to come to the Sheriff's office to help him bail out Oz."

Tony yawned and sat up. "He got it wrong," Tony said confidently. "Oz doesn't get arrested. It must be Rider."

Conrad resisted a sigh. The boy's heart was in the right place but, well, it was a good thing he was pretty. "Rider's still in rehab, sweetie. Oz is the only one out and about and getting into trouble."

Tony sighed and fell back against the pillows. "You could always leave him there and come back to bed," he said yearningly, and Conrad smiled. They'd been having a good time in bed, especially here in the cabin.

"We'll come back when I'm done," he reassured. Oh God, so many depravities they could enjoy together. Tony was tanned, fit, and could fuck like a god-or be fucked like a bitch. And the amazing thing about him was that he seemed to enjoy either. Conrad liked him so much, he wished he could clone him-he'd get paid a *mint*.

Tony nodded and sighed. "Do I have time to shower?" he asked, and Conrad closed his eyes. Tony had bottomed the night before, and at the climax, he'd come all over his abs and his chest, and then Conrad had ripped off the condom and added to the mess. Tony

had rubbed it into his skin while Conrad watched. It was still there-Conrad could see flakes of white as it fell off his six-pack.

"No," Conrad whispered, his cock waking up enough to indulge in the fantasy. "Wear me on your skin for the day."

Tony nodded, apparently just fine with that. "Okay," he said. "I'll get dressed."

* * *

Oz wondered if he had enough money to buy his dignity back.

He'd been locked up for three hours in his white cotton briefs, talking to the town drunk on the other side of his cell. Clarence was a really nice guy, and Oz was positive he'd get back on his feet when his investments in foreign oil came through, but in the meantime, Oz really wished he'd shut the fuck up for ten minutes so Oz could get inside his own head and try to figure out how this had happened.

One minute, he'd been baiting Sheriff Vic, and had actually been enjoying the holy hell out of it. Vic wasn't stupid-self-destructive and debauched, maybe, but not stupid-and it had been fun to get him all riled up. That, and, well, Quinn seemed to think it was high entertainment and Oz didn't mind looking like a hero for the guy.

And then Vic had shot his mouth off about *Quinn*, who had the balls and good sense not to be owned by *anyone* in this town-not Oz, not the Boxers, not Vic. Yeah, he fucked as good as he got, but Quinn was his own goddamned man.

And then his knuckles had been throbbing and Vic had been putting the handcuffs on.

It just didn't make any fucking sense!

There was a clink as the outside jailhouse door was opened, and Conrad entered saying, "Really, Oz, like your brother isn't enough trouble."

Oz smiled grimly at his father. "I've got my own lawyer, Conrad. You didn't need to bring your puppy to the pound to bail me out."

Tony looked at him with big hurt brown eyes and Oz winced. Well, that had been low. Tony scoring with his old man was Tony's problem-Oz didn't need to kick the guy around because Tony didn't have the teeth to fight back.

"No offense, Tony," he added lamely, and Conrad grimaced.

"Your manners are as impeccable as your brother's," he said dryly, and Oz shook his head.

"Well, jail makes a guy rude. Like I said, what can I do for you? I've already arranged bail."

Conrad looked puzzled. "That's why I'm here. Mr. Kettridge told me that he'd been enlisted to help, but he needed my authorization to pay the bail. I came down to pay the bondsman myself."

Oz frowned, and felt a little bit of Elliot Quinn seeping through his skin. "I've got my own fuckin' money and I can pay my own fuckin' bail, Conrad. Take Tony and go back to your little love nest-I'm just fine."

Conrad glowered at him, and they both ignored the noise in the background of the outer jail door being opened again. "But Kettridge was all up in arms. He said no request had been made to free funds from either account. He thought you were planning on staying in jail until the case came to court in a week!"

"But that's ridiculous! I told Quinn-"

"Quinn? Why would you need to tell Quinn *anything*?" Conrad asked, and Tony looked up like he was pleased he knew that one.

"Cause they're fucking," he said placidly, and Conrad looked at his young lover like he'd sprung another head.

"Even if that was true, why would Quinn be in charge of something like Oz's money-"

"Cause I'm the one bailing him outta the clink," Quinn said, walking down with a deputy who was eight inches taller than him at least. That didn't stop his bow-legged

swagger though, or his fuck-with-me disdain. "And since I'm the one bailing him out, that means you got no business here so scram."

Oz gaped at him, all pretense of dignity, of coolness, or anything at all falling from his shoulders like a cheap blanket. "Quinn, what in the *fuck*?"

"Yeah, I should ask the same damned thing. You're in *jail*, you fuckin' mook-and for what? You were defending my fuckin' honor. You think I'm gonna let that slide?"

Oz flushed. Well, there you go. Out and proud to Conrad, and probably the whole world. Just like he'd always been afraid of. But Quinn was glaring at him even as the deputy unlocked the cell and gestured for Oz to step out. Oz did and Quinn handed him a pair of jeans and a T-shirt that he'd obviously picked up at the local thrift store, and Oz put them on without reservation.

"I was doing nothing of the sort," he muttered, sliding into the jeans, and Quinn rolled his eyes and threw down a pair of flip-flops. Oh God. Oz almost preferred to be naked.

"The hell you weren't. *My* honor. Like *I'm* some sort of virgin fuckin' princess. Jesus." Quinn shook his head and ignored Conrad and Tony gaping at him. "You defended my honor, and you know what? I don't owe anybody nothing. I'm paying your fucking bail, and your lawyer can get you outta this, cause those assholes specialize in blackmail, and Vic was bein' a fuckin' boner. But I'm payin' your bail, you hear me?"

Oz grinned at him. "Yeah," he said, sliding his feet into the flip flops. "I hear you. You don't owe me shit, and my lawyer's going to blackmail away the charges. You got anything else you're going to tell me about? How to run my business, maybe? How to make money? Do you have plans to trade in my car or buy all my clothes now?"

His voice was flip but Quinn was still fuming. "Nobody owns me," he muttered, and Oz reached out and grabbed the collar of his T-shirt, and hauled him in for a kiss, right there in front of his father and everybody.

"No," he said against Quinn's compressed lips. "You don't owe me a goddamned thing."

Quinn closed his eyes, and for a moment he went soft. "You do anything like that again, they'll have to arrest *me*," he snapped-but he was missing his usual heat. "I'll fuckin' kill ya."

Oz closed his eyes and went after the kiss harder. Maybe next sleepover, they could actually try snuggling. They always seemed to go the wrong way around to get right here.

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What will Sam do when he realizes his product was poisoned?

- *Will Sam keep his promise to Rider, or let him down again?*
- *Will Oz be charged with felony assault?*
- *Can Conrad Boxer really clone Tony as a living sex-toy?*

TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!

Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...

AUTHOR BIO:

Amy Lane has four children and a beloved Mate and did not need her writing dragon, forcing her to write m/m fiction, but he showed up anyway. She, her family, and her

cursed dragon all live in a teeny-tiny house in the pit of the Nor-Cal 'burbs where she cons her useless teenagers into doing housework and avoids as much responsibility as possible. She also knits, because it's the only way she can justify buying more yarn. If you want to keep up with her bizarre brain functioning in an unexciting life, tune in at www.writerslane.blogspot.com, and if you want a product list and some free fiction (most of it annoyingly het) go ahead and visit www.greenshill.com. If you want to e-mail her and tell her to stay off your lawn and stop annoying your animals, you can reach her at AmyLane@greenshill.com--and she'd be more than happy to get off your lawn and stop petting your cat, even if the cat loves her best.