



Episode Twenty- Eight

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Boxer Falls: Episode 28

by Taylor V. Donovan

He should be following Phil Boxer.

Checking with Tony to see if the man had finally tired of marital bliss and decided to have his still impressive package wrapped by someone other than Grady Boxer.

He knew what Conrad Cotten wanted him to do, and even though he'd yet to understand the purpose of this *mission*, he didn't have a problem following his boss's orders. Or maybe he should say he hadn't had a problem because, for the past twenty-four hours, he'd been incapable of doing anything but to think about that sick fuck also known as Gino Torres.

Blake stood with his back against the front wall of Bear and Bones and rubbed his chest absently, torn between memories of what was taken away from him and guilt over what he had done as a result.

He was callous and irresponsible.

He'd abandoned his son when he most needed him and, years later, he was trying to breach the distance between them. *Trying, trying, trying...* More like he'd thought about it. Deep down, he was too much of a coward to ask Elliot for forgiveness. He didn't deserve it. Even if he was out of his mind with contrition and heartache at the time, he'd been wrong to be so selfish.

His cell phone beeped loudly, bringing him back to the present.

Are you free tonight?

Vic.

Blake ignored the text message. He wasn't in the mood. He had more important things to take care of.

Like protecting Elliot from the danger he felt brewing within the picturesque limits of Boxer Falls.

Like finding out what the hell was Gino Torres doing here.

Like figuring out the connection between that heartless prick and Sam Kabir, stop whatever it was he was planning, and then making him pay for his past actions.

Time's up, asshole , he thought as he walked inside the bar to make sure Elliot was safe and working. *You're about to reap what you sowed...tenfold.*

* * *

Aishwarya Kabir remained collected and expressionless as she made her way through the airport. Not a hair out of place; her appearance immaculate. Designer sunglasses successfully concealed the fury burning inside her.

Her companions followed her closely.

To her left was Gino, her trusty shadow. Quiet. Lethal. Ready to take care of Aisha's business.

To her right, Trip Whitlock was all but bouncing. So excited for the new opportunity he'd been given to bring down Oz Cotten, he hadn't stopped salivating and making suggestions he hoped would be incorporated to their plan to destroy Boxer Falls. That he'd get snuffed if he dared step out of the line didn't seem to cross his mind at all.

Behind her, in his mansion, was her beloved brother. Worried. Heartbroken. Too invested in that good-for-nothing Cotten boy.

Aisha fisted her handbag.

It'd been difficult to pretend Sam hadn't hurt her when he turned down her invitation to vacation together. Even after learning all she'd done to protect him, her little brother chose to stay in that God-forsaken town instead of showing her some love and appreciation. He wanted her to think he was only interested in exposing the skeletons Boxer Falls' residents kept in their closet and, in all fairness, he probably believed it was his only intention. He was jaded enough to not recognize his reluctance to leave for what it really was, but Aisha knew better.

She'd seen it in the way he paled when he thought she'd killed Rider Cotten... In the way he now hesitated to carry out his plan of stripping the Cottens of their family fortune.

Aisha handed her bag to the head of her security detail and put a hand on Gino's forearm. He stopped immediately, apparently aware her touch meant she was about to say something extremely important.

"Stay," she spoke softly in his ear. "I want daily updates on Rider Cotten's recovery and Sam's activities. Be discreet."

"I'm on it."

Aisha lifted her chin and continued on her way towards their gate. For the first time in years, she regretted her actions or, as the case would have it, lack thereof.

She shouldn't have spared Rider Cotten's life. Had she not, Sam couldn't have disappointed her.

But he had.

Perhaps the time had come to teach her dear brother the value of loyalty.

* * *

Deputy Officer Diego Sanchez adjusted the nose pads of his mirrored sunglasses and rubbed the lenses with a tissue while he waited for his cup of coffee. Not because they needed any cleaning, but because he'd learned a long time ago the laziness of the action made him look all innocent and disinterested. It was a perfect way to put civilians at ease when he was out to gather intel in an unofficial capacity. Throw one of his killer smiles into the mix and nobody remembered he was an officer of the law, whether he was in uniform or not.

That suited him. The more at ease people were around him, the less they worried about saying anything inappropriate, and wasn't that exactly what he needed? To learn the drama and the gossip. The comings and goings and the nitty-gritty details. He was on a mission to collect as much dirt as he could on certain citizens.

He took his cup of java from the young barista and flashed him a thank-you smile. Not too wide or appreciative to lead the boy to believe he was interested in getting his number, but not too subtle that he'd never believe his twenty-year-old perky ass didn't have a chance with Diego. Not that he'd ever touch the kid, as hooking up with guys fifteen years his junior wouldn't do anything to further Diego's agenda, but he knew for a fact Teddy got around and was extremely involved in the club scene. He could be an invaluable source of information.

Diego grabbed a newspaper from the stand on his way to a corner table. No one looked at him. No one cared. He was just another customer, and it was perfect. He took a sip of coffee and glanced at the front page. As he expected, there was an article on the town's latest scandal.

According to Matthew Prescott, the paper's social events columnist slash investigative reporter, the nature of Yoshi Pollack's death was undetermined, and damn if that didn't sound like murder. It was too soon to have obtained a copy of the autopsy report, but that little detail hadn't stopped Prescott from writing the death was "yet another event that, albeit suspicious, is not under police investigation."

Obviously, Prescott had started keeping tabs at some point. He was right to do so, too. Something was fishy. There couldn't be that much trouble and sticky situations and not

have people notice there were never consequences. At some point, they'd start questioning why the Sheriff Department wasn't enforcing the law, protecting lives, and investigating crimes. That an ambitious reporter was determined to "bring the truth to the citizens of Boxer Falls" made Diego a very happy boy.

From what Diego had read, Prescott had a list, and every event in it involved the Cotten family to some extent. Smart man. They *were* involved. Not only that, but the one time a Cotten got brought in was for assaulting an officer, and he just so happened to be wearing only his tighty whities. At the end, there was no questioning and no charges. Arresting officer? Vic Neale, sleaze-ball extraordinaire and shittiest sheriff ever.

Thus the reason Diego, much like Mr. Prescott, had been keeping his own tabs and documenting every irregular departmental procedure he'd observed. As an officer of the law, he had a responsibility. Someone had to step up and put an end to Vic Neale's unethical behavior. He got worse as days passed, and he needed to get exposed. That Diego was gearing up to do it a few months prior to the county's election process was only a coincidence.

Victor Neale was a disgrace. He picked up strangers in his cruiser and solicited sex while wearing his uniform. The man's brain was impaired by his massive dick, and the harder he got rammed, the sloppier his performance as top official of the law was. It baffled Diego that the other deputies pretended not to notice any of it. Didn't they have pride? Self-respect? Didn't they care the entire department was nothing but a big fat joke? What the hell was wrong with them all?

Diego took another sip of coffee and glanced outside the window. His grim mood took a turn for the worse when he spotted Tony pumping gas across the street. To see that fucking idiot was the last thing he needed. He had to remain focused on his goal. No time to worry about the other man's recklessness and what Diego considered to be Tony's path to self-destruction. He was obsessed with Phil Boxer and only God knew what with Conrad Cotten, and too much of an idiot to even consider other possibilities.

Diego tried to finish reading Matthew Prescott's article. He tried making eye contact with Teddy-boy. He reminded himself there was plenty more fish in the sea to waste time looking at the hooked ones.

Goddamn it.

Diego got up from his chair, put on his sunglasses and rushed out of the coffee shop. He took several deep breaths and stuck his hand in his pockets. He wasn't nervous. He wasn't sweating. He wasn't wishing Tony would start believing he deserved better. It wasn't his problem. He'd tried once... twice&... okay, dozens of times he'd tried to get him to give Diego an opportunity, but now he was done with it. He didn't miss talking to Tony. He wasn't dying to get with him.

Goddamn it.

* * *

"We need to go to the hospital," Rider said for the thousandth time. "We need to get Yoshi."

Oz looked up from the blanket video release form his assistant Caitlyn signed as per Conrad's instructions to his brother standing by his office door. Lord, but he looked terrible. Gaunt and contrite, he appeared to be carrying the world on his shoulders.

Oz didn't know what he could do to help his brother.

Now that Rider had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and started treatment, Oz was hoping he'd stay on the right path. Finish school and come back to run the hotel with Oz and Conrad. Do something productive with his existence. And if Rider decided to go in a different direction, Oz would support him in his decision and help him in any way possible.

He was looking forward to getting to know Rider. To narrow the feelings of distance between them and become something more than brothers, as it'd please him greatly to become Rider's confidante. But in order to accomplish that, he first had to find a way to keep Rider safe and as far as possible from his past weaknesses and bad influences. The kid had changed since his stint at rehab, but he was definitely vulnerable... and maybe even in danger.

"We aren't Yoshi's family," Oz explained softly. "They'll never release the body to us."

"Don't say it like that!" Rider barked. These days it didn't take much to get him worked up.

"He's not just a body... It's Yoshi!"

Oz rounded his desk, took one of his brother's hands and pulled at it gently. "Come inside, okay? Let's talk about this."

Not that Oz didn't have a million things to do -like finding a way to stop Dean Cummings from shooting video in their property- or that the situation had changed. He was getting tired of explaining to Rider why they couldn't claim Yoshi's body and make funeral arrangements, but he knew he'd do it for as long as his brother kept asking.

"We need to call the cops," Rider said, his eyes fixed on the floor. "I need to turn myself in."

Oz groaned and rubbed his eyes with a thumb and index fingers. "You didn't kill Yoshi." Maybe if he repeated it enough, Rider would start believing it.

"But-"

"And you aren't responsible if somebody else did it either." Oz guided Rider to the chairs in front of his desk and sat next to him. "You really need to let this go."

Rider wiped his runny nose with the back of a trembling hand and turned begging eyes in Oz's direction. "I have to say something."

For crying out loud.

Oz shook his head in an attempt to keep his panic at bay. What the hell was he supposed to do about Rider's suspicion in relation to Yoshi's death? He didn't want to discard his brother's concern, but going to the sheriff with it was out of the question. Admitting a close family friend may be involved in murder was ammunition Oz couldn't afford to hand out to Neale.

"You have no proof," Oz whispered. He didn't want anyone to overhear them. "What if you're wrong? You could do some serious damage to Sam if you start spewing accusations and they turn out to be false."

Truth was, Oz couldn't care less about Sam Kabir's reputation. He'd gladly pay good money to see him go the hell away and not contact Rider ever again, but only after he'd found out how such events would affect his brother. The way Rider was acting wasn't

promising. He might have sent Sam on his merry way, but it was painfully obvious he was hurting over it.

"I'm not wrong." Rider's voice was small and shaky.

It gave Oz goose bumps.

"What's going on here, Rider?" Oz turned on his chair and forced his brother to make eye contact. "Why are you so sure Sam Kabir is capable of murder? Is there anything you need to tell me?"

Rider hesitated. He wrung his hands and bit his lower lip, and Oz didn't know if he was having second thoughts or considering his answer.

"Sam's always been there for me."

So it was the former then.

"Why?" Rider screamed. "Why would he do this?" He got up abruptly, sending the chair crashing to the floor and startling the shit out of Oz in the process. "Why would he put me in this position? Doesn't he know I-" He shut his mouth and raked his fingers through his hair.

"Doesn't he know you... what?"

Rider's eyes darted all over the office, and he refused to answer.

Wonderful.

Oz approached his brother carefully, hoping to God and all the saints that his apprehension didn't show on his face. He needed to project confidence and serenity. He needed Rider to believe Oz was capable of taking care of anything.

He plastered a smile on his lips and squeezed Rider's shoulder briefly. "Tell you what." He cringed at his tone. It sounded cheery and fake but thankfully it flew right over

Rider's head. "I'll try to get in touch with Yoshi's family again. You go ahead and get some rest, okay? I'll come get you as soon as I hear from them."

"Okay..." Rider had almost reached the door before he remembered his other request. "How about the cops?" He asked, looking nervous and hopeful at the same time. "Are you going to call them?"

"I'll call my lawyer first," Oz rushed to say. "Let's see what he recommends we do in a case like this."

Oz knew his answer was vague, and he had no idea what he meant by "a case like this," but his words seemed to put Rider at ease, and that's all that mattered.

"Thank you, Oz," his brother whispered. His smile was equal parts hope and relief when he left the office.

Oz rubbed his face and flopped back in the chair. Hopefully, he'd be able to figure something out.

* * *

Tony saw Diego Sanchez approaching from the coffee shop across the street and cursed under his breath. It was too late to make a clean escape. He'd been too busy filling up and cleaning the windshield of his truck to notice Deputy Sheriff Thick-Veiny-and-Uncut was coming his way.

Walking, he corrected himself. *Get it right, Tony. He's walking your way.*

Diego looked exactly the same. Not a hair out of place. Dark eyes protected by the ever-present mirrored sunglasses. Soft olive skin Tony knew to always be warm had yet to start showing any signs of age. Smoking hot and perfect. Larger than life, even though he was only six feet tall.

It'd been quite some time since Diego walked, came, or even spat his way, but Tony hadn't forgotten how he'd felt the times the Puerto Rican officer stood behind him, his hands sliding over Tony's belly then cradling his balls. The heat of Diego's breath, the rasp of his beard stubble as he kissed and tongued his way down Tony's back until he reached his hole.

Hmmm. Good times.

"Hello Tony." The greeting was low and sultry. "Long time no see."

Not his fault if Diego didn't want them to be friends. Tony'd offered, and gotten turned down in the blink of an eye. Too bad. There had been times when he'd needed Diego's advice more than anything else in the world.

"Been around," Tony said under his breath.

"How've you been?"

"Busy." He put the gas pump away and wiped his hands on his jean-clad legs.

"So I've heard." Diego took a step closer.

Tony almost jumped out of his skin. "How's Cotten treating you?"

For a moment, Tony couldn't figure out how Diego knew he was seeing Conrad, then remembered catching a glimpse of his former flame at the station the morning Oz was arrested.

"Like you really care," Tony muttered. Only friends gave a damn, and Diego hadn't wanted to be his.

He tried to open his truck's door, but Diego stopped him.

"Don't touch me!"

Diego put his hands up and backed off slowly. "Let me buy you a cup of coffee."

"Nah, I'm good."

"We need to talk."

Tony was tempted. He wanted to listen to whatever it was Diego had to say for himself. Maybe he'd finally explain why he'd abandoned Tony when he most needed the other man. But doing so would mean opening up to the guy and setting himself up for some serious heartache and aggravation. Thank you, but no. He wasn't as stupid as everybody thought he was. He'd learned his lesson and he was finally on the right path. He needed to keep lying low.

"I'd rather not." Tony got inside the truck, slammed the door closed, and started the engine. "It's like you told me. I'm too much of a fucking idiot to understand certain things, so why bother?"

"Tony-"

"Stay away from me."

He pulled out of the gas station and didn't look back. As far as he was concerned, Diego Sanchez could go to hell.

* * *

Turned out Dean Cumming's cock-sucking skills couldn't make Sam forget about Rider. On the contrary. Dean's mouth wrapped around his erection only reminded Sam how much harder he got when it was Rider doing the blowing.

He'd enjoyed himself. Dean was an extremely skilled, enthusiastic lover, and he'd put all his effort and sexual knowledge into making Sam's toes curl and his eyes roll. And yes, he'd succeeded. He'd made Sam come. Rope after warm and white rope of rage and fucking longing landed on Dean Cumming's face, and Sam was finally tired enough to catch some sleep.

He'd been desperate to get a reprieve from his troublesome thoughts. He'd been more than ready to forget how much he missed he missed his boy, and he'd promptly gotten rid of Dean.

But he hadn't been able to escape.

Rider invaded his dreams. A shadow of his former happy, full-of-life self. A ghostly figure, he was. Solid enough for Sam to see where he was, but too ethereal to grasp.

Ethereal.

What kind of bullshit was that?

Sam jumped in the shower, hoping the state-of-the-art jets system he'd had installed washed his despair away. It didn't work. *Nothing* seemed to work. What the hell was he going to do?

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What does Blake have in mind for Gino Torres?

- *What will Diego do with the information he's gathered about Vic?*
- *Can Oz keep Rider from making a confession?*
- *What is Sam going to do to get rid of Dean and win Rider back?*

TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!

Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...

AUTHOR BIO:

Taylor V. Donovan is a compulsive reader and author of m/m romantic suspense. She

is optimistically cynical about the world; lover of history, museums and all things 80s.

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When she is not making a living in the busiest city in the world or telling the stories of gorgeous men hot for one another, Taylor can be found raising her two daughters and two terribly misbehaved furry babies in the mountains she calls home.

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