



## Episode Forty-Five

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### **Boxer Falls: Episode 45**

By: Carter Quinn

Phil Boxer left his astonished husband standing alone in the kitchen of their bed and breakfast and set off walking. He had no clear plan, just an overwhelming need to put physical space between him and Grady, something to match the emotional distance between them. What he really needed was to free himself from his own mind, as impossible as that was. Who knew he'd find himself wishing to have back the amnesia that had once wiped away the memories of his life?

Three months after his kidnapping ordeal, he was still haunted by the memories. Not of being trussed up like a pig nearly naked in a cargo container. Not of staring death in the face yet again. No, those memories paled in comparison to the lingering sensations of Conrad Cotten's body sliding against his. The taste of his sworn enemy's skin nearly exploded on his tongue even now. Hell, he could practically feel Conrad's thickness thrusting into him, filling him, thrilling him. He was supposed to have been picturing Grady at the time, one last mental lovemaking session with his husband, the love of his life, before the sick bastard who kidnapped them made good on his threat and killed them both. He was supposed to use Conrad Cotten's body only as a proxy. But goddammit, that wasn't the way it had turned out.

Belatedly realizing he was half-hard walking down streets still occupied by

construction workers going off shift and townies checking on their progress, as they did every fucking night, Phil shook his head to dislodge the thoughts of Conrad fucking Cotten. Instead, he pictured Grady's face when Phil confessed to having had sex – amazing sex, even if Grady didn't need to know that part but probably would anyway – with Grady's former lover.

He had just stepped onto the street when a gleaming white van barreled around the corner three feet in front of him, its tires squealing in protest.

"Idiots," he thought aloud as he watched the van careen around another corner two blocks down.

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Adam rolled onto his back, pulling Zach over on top of him and deepened the kiss. He slid one hand down Zach's smooth back and cupped his tight ass, encouraging his fiancé to hump against him. Adam desperately needed this, needed Zach to fuck him senseless so he could put the bullshit of the day out of his head.

Zach moaned into Adam's mouth and kissed him back until he felt Adam's hand on his ass. Then, just as quickly as he'd gotten into it, Zach's erection died. He broke away and rolled over to sit on the edge of the bed, his heated face hidden in his hands.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled. "I'm just really tired."

Stung by yet another rejection, Adam scooted up the bed to lean against the wall and stared at his lover's bowed back. "Yeah. You've said that all week."

Zach glared at him over his shoulder. "Well I'm sorry if helping my dads get the B&B back together is a bit more strenuous than fluffing soufflés at Whispering Ridge." He stood and pulled his jeans the rest of the way off. "I'm taking a shower."

Before Adam could respond, Zach had closed himself into the other room. He leaned his forehead against the door and fought the urge to pound the wood into submission. It had been almost two weeks since he'd seen that video of someone torturing and raping Adam. They still hadn't discussed what happened or who had done it. All Zach knew was that with each passing day the guilt ate at him a little more.

He turned on the water in the shower and remembered the fun, sweet sex they'd had in that very spot just before Zach had made the huge mistake of turning on the television. His world had crashed down around him as he'd watched the images, heard Adam's pained pleas. Oh, he knew what he saw and felt couldn't possibly compare to the reality

Adam experienced, but didn't that just make it worse? Knowing if he had been a better friend, thinking with his head instead of his dick, he never would have left Adam and none of it would have happened. But he wasn't and it had. And now he felt so damn guilty every time he looked at the man he loved his cock shriveled to the point of turtling. How could he ever ask Adam to give himself to him again, knowing what he'd gone through? Wasn't that just abusing him all over again? And damn Adam for acting like it never happened!

Shoving shampoo through his hair, Zach forced his mind to other things, like what the hell was wrong with his dads now that Phil was back from the dead.

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Sheriff Victor Neale impatiently tapped a staccato beat on the hard wood with his booted foot and glared at Conrad Cotten's distinguished profile. The billionaire had been completely ignoring Vic since granting him access to the sacred sanctum three minutes ago. It pissed Vic off to be reminded just how little Cotten thought of him, even while it was a bit of a turn on.

The old man hadn't so much as looked at him, just pointed to a chair the sheriff obediently filled. Vic intensified his stare, hoping to draw some reaction out of the man busily typing away at his computer. He didn't need to be here after all. What little information he had to impart could have been done over the phone, but he really wanted to see Cotten's face when he sprang the news. Maybe it would be enough to wipe that smug superior smirk off his face. And pigs were flying by outside the window, too.

Finally, Cotten ceased typing and turned to his visitor. "What can I do for you today, Sheriff Neale?"

Victor cleared his throat and straightened his back. "I requested your security chief be here, too. I'd rather wait for —"

Cotten brushed his words away. "I'm afraid he's otherwise occupied. What is this about? I'll pass it along to him if I feel it's warranted."

Nine o'fucking clock in the morning and Blake's already otherwise occupied? Bullshit. Vic resisted the urge to say it aloud. Instead he said, "I have reason to believe you may be in danger."

Cotten rolled his eyes. "Please, Sheriff. I'm Conrad Cotten, or have you forgotten? I was kidnapped three months ago by persons unknown for reasons about which I can

only speculate. I'm a very wealthy man. I've been a target for years. If you have some specific information, please leave it with my secretary for Blake Hartnett. Otherwise, I really do have business to attend to." He nodded once and turned back to the computer, already typing away.

"Your twin brother is looking for you," Vic spat out in annoyance.

Cotten's fingers stilled on the keyboard and his spine tensed for a moment. Then he laughed, looking at Vic again. "I have no siblings, Sheriff Neale. I'm afraid you're wasting your time."

The man's cold gaze cut through Vic until the sheriff actually shivered. "This man thinks he's your twin." He pulled a scanned photo of Bryce Smith from his jacket pocket and placed it on the desk. "He looks just like you."

Cotten barely glanced at the picture. His focus was clearly on Vic. "Coincidence, I'm sure." He sighed mightily, leaning back in his high-backed chair. "Fine. Since you're so convinced this is some real threat, tell me: what is it you think this man wants?"

"I don't know yet. It could be as simple as confronting you about your privileged life versus his. It could be much more. The reverend says he's been looking for you, that a 'darkness' overtook him when he found out about you. He's convinced this man is in town."

"Reverend Jacobs? From the Baptist church?"

Victor shook his head. "No. Reverend Smith. He's this Bryce fellow's adoptive father."

"Reverend Smith?"

"The Reverend Jordan Moses John Smith. He goes by Malachi. He's a kook, but his info has nuggets of sanity in it."

Cotten leaned forward, pinning Vic in place with a steely gaze. "Let me get this straight. Some lunatic calling himself a reverend starts ranting and raving about me having a long lost twin out for revenge or my blood or something, and you have the unmitigated gall to waste my time by repeating it to my face without any regard for the fact that I've been known in this community my entire life and any Tom, Dick or Mary could tell you I'm an only child? Get out of my office."

Vic was slightly disappointed. He'd expected a bigger hissy fit than that. He slowly stood, adjusting his gun belt on his hips. "Reverend Smith is convinced this Bryce is in

town. I haven't been able to confirm it yet, but I advise you to brief your security chief on the possibility and have your people be on the lookout for him."

"And how did you get ahold of this Reverend Smith?" Cotten snarled.

Victor met the challenge in Cotten's eyes without flinching. "Deputy Sanchez picked him up the other day. He's being held at Lenox Ridge at the moment."

Cotten snorted in disgust. "You shouldn't believe every crackpot conspiracy theory you hear from the mentally deranged or the biblically inspired, Sheriff Neale. Good day."

Vic nodded and tapped the photo on Cotten's desk. "I'll just leave that for you to pass along to your guys."

Cotten completely ignored him as Victor Neale walked from the room. As soon as the door closed behind the sheriff, however, he leaned back in the chair and issued a long string of fucks under his breath. That damn nosy sheriff and the bumbling insane old man were not going to screw this up. He'd worked too long and too hard – and it was working like a fucking charm. Glaring at the closed door, he reached for the telephone.

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Grady Boxer licked a stripe up his husband's back and thrust deeper into him. Phil moaned and fucked himself back on Grady's thick cock, reaching around to grab Grady's taut ass in encouragement. So good. The sex was always so between them. Grady knew just how he liked it, knew exactly what Phil needed even before Phil did. Today he needed Grady wrapped around him, fucking him hard from behind. It was enough to lose himself in the moment, to forget all the secrets tearing his mind apart, ready to destroy his beautiful life. It was enough.

Almost.

Grady thrust harder, losing his rhythm as he approached his zenith. He reached a lubed hand down to stroke Phil's straining cock and tug on his swinging balls. As he rocketed over the edge, he bit down hard on Phil's shoulder. Phil spilled into his hand a second later, yelling Grady's name through his own orgasm.

Grady collapsed atop Phil's sweat-slicked back, kissing the spot he had so savagely bitten. "I love you," he whispered into his man's ear.

Phil chuckled and eased himself down on his stomach on the bed. "I'd hate to see what you'd do to someone you hated."

Grady laughed and eased out of Phil to collapse on his back beside him. He turned and smiled at the blissed out man next to him. "I probably wouldn't make love to someone I hated."

Phil opened one sleepy eye. "Just fuck him, huh?"

Grady rolled to his side and carded a hand through Phil's short, silky hair. "It's only you. And you may piss me off on a regular basis – it's part of your charm, I know – but I could never hate you."

Phil grunted, eyes closed again. Grady watched the tension radiate through his body and wondered for the five millionth time what Phil was hiding from him now. It wasn't a question of "if." Phil was acting the same way he did for years when he was whoring with anyone with a dick. The same way he did before he confessed to the brain tumor, except at least this time Grady was still getting quality sex from him. No, it was definitely a question of "what" and Grady had had all the goddamn silence he could stand.

"Talk to me." It came out more gruffly than he'd intended so he consciously softened his voice. "Baby, I can't help you if you won't open up to me. Something's been bothering you since you came home from Salem. Okay that was a stupid way to put it. Of course something is bothering you. You were drugged to appear dead and kidnapped and nearly killed for real. That's some seriously heavy shit. Wouldn't it help to talk about it?"

"Jesus, Grady," Phil grouched. "I've got cum oozing out my ass and I'm lying in the wet spot. Can't we talk about this later?"

"When, Phil? When? It's been three fucking months!"

Phil sprang from the bed, angrier than Grady had seen him in a very long time. "Just later! Fuck, Grady, I'm not a girl and you're not a shrink. I don't need to talk about my feelings every damn minute."

Grady sat up and pointed at his infuriating husband. "One damn minute would be a nice start!"

Phil shoved his hands through his hair. "I can't do this right now, Grady. I can't spill my guts on command."

Grady scooted to the edge of the bed. Wrapping his arms around Phil's massive thighs,

he kissed the still-flat stomach before him. "I don't want you to spill your guts on command, baby. I don't want it to feel like that at all." He propped his chin on that stomach and gazed up at Phil. "I'm your husband, your partner. I know your brain is eating you alive. It never rests, Phil. I can see it and it tears me up that you won't let me help you through whatever it is. You should feel safe enough with me to be able to tell me anything and know that I'll still love you. Isn't that what we've been doing the last twenty-plus years?"

Phil caressed Grady's face. He wanted to tell him. God, how he wanted to unburden his soul. But what would happen when Grady heard the truth? Could he still love an ex-organ trafficker? Would he be able to forgive Phil for mutilating innocent men and women like that and for hiding it all these years? He couldn't take that risk. All that made thinking about Conrad Cotten while Grady fucked him seem like child's play. And when that seemed inconsequential, he knew the real secrets would drive Grady – and probably Zach – away at light speed.

He bent and pressed a deep, passionate kiss to Grady's still-swollen lips. "I'm still trying to figure it all out, babe, but I need more time. Can you just trust that I love you and that I'm not doing this to hurt you? I promise when I'm ready to talk about it, you'll be the first to know."

Grady sighed and squeezed Phil's thighs. "Just don't take too long, Phil. You know how secrets are – the longer they fester, the harder they explode."

Phil chuckled. "Nice zit analogy, babe."

Grady grinned up at him. "It was, wasn't it?"

"You're a sick bastard."

"I'm your sick bastard."

Phil kissed him again. "Let's go shower. See if we can't get some other kind of explosions happening." He winked and pulled Grady to his feet and into his arms.

A reprieve. But for how long?

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"Call off his dogs?" Blake blinked, sure he'd misheard.

"Yes. The good Sheriff is wasting time and city resources pursuing this evil twin

nonsense." Conrad Cotten looked at Blake pointedly. "If I must be so crude as to say it, you're fucking him; see to it that he stops this ridiculousness at once."

"Evil twin?"

Cotten waved the question away impatiently. "Never mind. It's insanity."

Blake Hartnett silently thanked every training officer he'd ever had for the ability to stand before this rat bastard and maintain a stone face. Because inside? Inside, Blake was screaming "I've got you!" He didn't know exactly what the hell he had, but he was convinced Rider Cotten's daddy did not occupy the chair in front of him. But just who the hell was this guy? Was he really Conrad Cotten's evil twin? What the hell kind of soap opera had his life turned into? How was he going to prove this imposter wasn't Conrad Cotten? And possibly least important, where the hell was that asshole?

"I'll do what I can, Mr. Cotten," he said aloud. "The sheriff has a mind of his own, but I'll work on him."

"Yes, do whip him into shape, will you?" Cotten shuffled some papers around on his desk. "Have you seen Oz today?"

"I was with him an hour ago. We're still trying to figure out who has Quinn and why."

Cotten looked at Blake curiously. "The boy's your son, yes?"

Blake nodded, teeth clenched.

"Use whatever resources we have available to aid in your search. Family shouldn't be separated, especially by something so vile as kidnapping. I've learned that the most unfortunate way."

"Oz already authorized that, sir."

Cotten nodded. "Good then. That's all. If you see my sons, please ask them to come see me at their earliest convenience."

Blake nodded silently and left, closing the door behind him with a soft click. As he walked out of Whispering Ridge, he slid his cell phone from his pocket. "Slappy's. 7pm," he texted.

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The good Reverend Smith – Raphael today – looked up from reading the Book of Revelation at the sound of his door opening. He jumped to his feet, spilling the Holy Word onto the floor. He clasped his hands together as in prayer as a large grin cracked open upon his face.

“Oh, thank the Good Lord in Heaven!” he exclaimed. “You brought cheese!”

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*Will Adam ever get Zach back in the sack?*

*Who finally brought the Reverend his cheese?*

*Will Rider and Blake be able to expose the imposter Conrad?*

*And who the hell has Quinn?*

**TUNE IN NEXT WEEK!**

***Boxer Falls: The bigger they are...***

**AUTHOR BIO:**

Carter Quinn was born and raised in a very small Western Kansas town where cattle

vastly outnumber humans. Because he's contrary by nature, upon graduating high school, he went East, young man, hoping to find more people like him (shh: the gays!). After stints living in places as different as Omaha, Nebraska, and Ft Lauderdale, Florida, he settled in Lawrence, Kansas, and attended the University of Kansas (Rock Chalk!). Although he still bleeds (Crimson and) Blue, Carter recently relocated to Colorado where he can be closer to his beloved Colorado Avalanche. He is currently seriously pissed about the NHL lockout!

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