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Hyacinth Club

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Hyacinth Club

By BA Tortuga

Perhaps he was simply becoming jaded, but Caleb Fitzhugh was bored nearly to tears. The masquerade opening to the weekend party ought to have been a fine idea, and there were entertainments aplenty, but none of them appealed.

T'was obvious from the gaiety of the other guests that his friend and host, Devlin Mountebanc, had not lost his ability to throw a soiree. So it must be his own difficulty. The problem, he deduced, was that when you lived a life of idle pleasure, there was very little you had not done after a certain length of time.

Adjusting his mask, a green and silver leather affair fashioned as a dragon head, Caleb took another glass of sparkling wine and scanned the room. Perhaps someone he knew would catch his eye, assuage his boredom. Or perhaps someone he did not know.

Such as the tall gentleman in the stark black evening clothes, overlaid by a red and white cloak, masked as a fox. There was something in the man's posture -- in the way his hips rolled as he walked, perhaps, or the tilt of his head -- that intrigued Caleb greatly. Perhaps he had found a temporary relief for his ennui. If not that, at least talking with the fellow would pass some time.

He set his glass aside and made his way slowly through the crowd, eyeing his quarry all the way. The deep red of the man's waistcoat and the rubies at his throat and wrists made him stand out, as did his height, which put him a head above the rest of the guests. The movement of his hands as he filled a plate spoke of sensuality, as did the choices of food. Which gave Caleb the perfect opening salvo.

"I should be careful of the almond cakes," he said when he reached the man's side. "They have been known to mean eternal love, and surely anyone attending Devlin's party cares not for that."

"Ah, but they are garnished with mint leaves, dear sir, and surely that which attracts the Lord of the Underworld would not invite the more gentle forms of eternal bliss." He received a quick smile, dark eyes flashing behind the mask.

The wit matched the smile. The man might well prove as interesting as Caleb first thought. "One hopes, at any rate. I fear I would much prefer the company in Hell. Tell me, which of Devlin's entertainments are you here for? One hesitates to ask, but it is too easy to overstep certain bounds, and I should hate to do so before we are properly introduced."

Caleb returned the smile, hoping the gentleman in question understood what he asked.

"Ah, a prudent man, to be sure." He was offered a slight bow, a tilt of the head. "You may call me Reynaud, Sir Dragon. And so far as niceties, if Devlin saw fit to invite you to one of his so-charming soirees, then there are precious few boundaries which are sacrosanct, for he has very particular tastes."

He chuckled. "True enough. Well then, perhaps you might do me the favor of lending me your company? I find I am having great difficulty in summoning enjoyment this evening." Caleb let his shoulder brush the man's arm as he reached for the quince jelly.

"That depends, sir." The thin lips twisted in a smirk. "Are dragons such as yourself often in hunt of a fox? I have found tonight's chase dreary thus far."

Caleb stiffened, uncertain as to whether the man meant Devlin's party, or his own attempts at conversation. He was unused to being rebuffed. Very deliberately, he leaned in, letting their bodies touch closely, allowing the other man to read the intent in his eyes. "I assure you, sir, that fox is a most pleasing prey to a dragon, and one to be savored as carefully as it is snared."

That earned him a flush and the softest gasp, the man's long neck arching, a sure temptation. "In that case, Sir Dragon, I would find your company most welcome."

"Oh. Good." Beneath his trousers, his cock grew and hardened, a most uncomfortable state of affairs, and an unusual one at that. In the main, he had far better control over himself. There was simply something about the man. "Shall we find a place to dine?"

"There is a fine table set at the end of the hall, behind the emerald curtain, so that one might... dine unobserved." The fox moved away, walk sleek and sensual. "Devlin is very considerate of his guests and their comfort."

"He is a fine host." Caleb followed, enjoying the sight of the flowing cloak the man wore. Somehow it was more intriguing than if the man was completely uncovered. His own leather breeches left little to be imagined, and he counted his blessings that the guests here would hardly take notice.

The table Reynaud indicated was indeed private, and had the advantage of a single cushioned bench seat, large enough to fit four and covered with green velvet cushions. Caleb was not above using it to his advantage, letting his fox sit first, trapping the man neatly between the wall and his body.

When the cloak was pushed back so the man could sit, Caleb caught sight of a fluffy, white-tipped tail, the sight quick enough to be a tease.

"Foxtails are highly prized keepsakes for dragons, you know." Caleb settled in just close enough to smell the tang of the fox's soap, to feel the heat of his long body.

"Are they?" The long fingers pushed light hair from where it fell over the mask, the scent of pomade fragrant and rich. "Fortunately for me then, that I am careful to watch for mine and protect it from being stolen away."

"I shall have to be very clever then." They had both set their plates in the center of the table, and Caleb reached for the same tidbit as Reynaud, letting his fingers slide over the back of the fox's ungloved hand. "I beg your pardon."

"Of course." The man's skin was smooth, cool as the first touch of satin sheets to a heated body.

It made him wonder what it would take to warm the man. Really, he had not been so intrigued by a companion in what seemed an age. Caleb felt as randy as a ram. 'Twould do no good to go too quickly, though. He had no wish to spoil the chase. "Devlin's chef has quite a way with truffles. Would you like to try one?"

A spot of cream was lapped off the bow of his companion's lips. "Oh? I have heard the new man is quite the master. In truth, one would suspect him of being in league with the spirits, his gift is so unique."

Caleb licked his own lips, quite unconsciously. "Yes. Surely you have heard the rumors that Devlin is in league with his namesake, and therefore gets only the best people." Dipping his fingers into the fingerbowl and wiping them on the hot towel provided them, Caleb picked up a bit of toast bearing truffle in creme fraiche. "Shall we test the theory? Have some."

Those long fingers slid against his own, the morsel stolen away and taken into that smiling mouth. A soft moan sounded, rich and wicked and decadent. "Devilish indeed."

"Indeed." His own voice sounded rough in his ears, and Caleb forced himself to lean away. What on earth was the matter with him? He depended upon a certain amount of detachment. It served to make him seem aloof, which most found more attractive than eager. Where were all his finely honed skills now?

Caleb sipped his wine, considering his next move. The masks were both a blessing and a curse. His own hid his turmoil quite effectively. The other man's hid fine reactions that Caleb normally used to read his partner.

His companion shifted, languidly cleaning his fingers. "If you'll allow me to return the favor, Sir Dragon, Devlin's taste in sweets is notable."

A dark petit four was held towards his lips, the tiniest white icing rose atop, leaves fashioned of mint.

Perhaps he had not failed so badly as all that. Caleb held the fox's hand in his to steady it and nipped the tiny sweet carefully out of long fingers.

The flavor was exquisite, and he could not hold back a delighted sound, eyes closing as he savored it.

Those thin fingers just brushed his lips before disappearing, leaving a faint tingle behind.

"That was delightful." Letting the interpretation of that up the listener, Caleb offered another morsel, a shellfish of some sort, with slivered almonds and violet petals. "A veritable feast for the senses."

"Ah, the sea and the garden all held together. What fascinations Devlin has discovered." Reynaud took the shell, tipping it into his mouth, long throat working as he swallowed. Such a temptation -- that pale, smooth flesh.

Far too much of a temptation, he feared. The backs of his fingers brushed against it, seemingly of their own accord. The skin was warmer there, smooth but for the area just below the jaw. "What shall we sample next?"

Dark eyes glittered at him, a glass of the palest wine offered over. "To cleanse your palate so that you might truly taste the next offerings?"

"Thank you." He sipped lightly, eyes on the other man's all the while. There was a certain hint of mischief in those eyes that he admired, and he wondered what his conveyed. Unadulterated lust, no doubt.

"Your mask is exquisite, Sir Dragon. Just fine work? Or perhaps it is your true visage and you hunt truly." The sparkle in those eyes grew positively wicked. "For tail."

Caleb laughed aloud, toasting his fox with the wine. "We shall see when the call to unmask comes about. In the meantime, I should try to make more progress on my own personal foxhunt, should I not? I would hate to bore you." Any man who flirted in such a way deserved the sort of pursuit Caleb wanted to give him. Relentless. He threw all of his carefully ordered rules out the window.

Moving close again, Caleb let their breath mingle in the small space between them. "Would you care to try the wine?"

That pink tongue slid out again, close enough that he would feel its heat. "Is it as sweet as it seems?"

"Oh yes. But it has a certain underlying piquancy that I find vastly appealing." Dipping a finger into the clear wine, Caleb brought it to the other man's lips, tracing their shape, wetting them.

They parted for his touch, lush and inviting, that quicksilver tongue darting out to touch the tip of his finger. "It is a rare flavor indeed, Sir Dragon."

"Not to everyone's taste, I am sure, but I hope it suits you." Caleb licked the rest of the wine from his own finger, letting his thigh brush against Reynaud's hip. The half masks they wore allowed for eating and drinking, but not for the kiss Caleb longed to take, and he cursed them for it.

"I fear I will find myself searching for it, indeed. Quite addictive, this nectar." Reynaud shifted, the scent of man and soap and wine quite heady.

The food was utterly forgotten, as was the wine. Caleb caught his fox's wrist as the man reached for another morsel, letting his fingers slide against the pulse there. "Yes. Quite addictive. One hopes you will not search too far afield though. I have no doubt that what you seek can be provided here."

The steady beat quickened, leapt beneath his touch. "And when you have snared me, Sir Dragon? Will you devour me, find my flesh a similar addiction?"

"Oh. I certainly hope so." He brought the hand in his to his lips, licking at the tracery of pale veins in the wrist, sucking lightly at the base of the thumb. The flavor made him throb, from his toes, to his balls, to the top of his spine. The man was a fine cure for his general dissatisfaction with life.

A deep flush darkened the long throat, the angular jaw, and the moan that sounded was threaded through with threads of desire.

"Such a lovely sound," Caleb murmured. "I wonder if I could draw forth another."

Nibbling on the thin fingers, Caleb brought his other hand up to cup Reynaud's neck, thumb brushing the deep hollow at the base, nail tracing the movement of the Adam's apple.

"You are temptation itself, given form and function." Oh, but the whisper was rich, hungry, the quiet tones sliding down his spine to settle in his groin.

"I? Never say so, my fox. You are like nothing I have ever tasted." Extravagant compliments were not his way, but in this case it was the truth. The skin beneath his lips drew them again and again, and his tongue snuck in between the fingers, gathering up more of the taste.

"You are a demon sent to unmask me, truly." Those fingers traced his teeth, stroked his tongue, explored his mouth.

He let those long fingers trace his lips, his jaw and throat, just as his hand explored similar territory. Such a small touch, but it jolted him as hard as if the man had unbuttoned his trousers and taken him in hand. Oh. Oh that thought made him shift uncomfortably. "If I am, you must be a fallen angel, sent to tempt me out of the Hell I so love."

"Then we are well-met, Sir Dragon, for I would be a fool to allow your return to Hades before tasting the pomegranate nectar from your lips."

God above. The man would have him rushing to a finish before they ever saw one another's faces. He had not been so desperate at so little since he was a lad of five and ten. It was with profound relief that he heard the bell toll which signalled the moment of unmasking. Surely time had stopped for them and flown for everyone else.

"'Tis the witching hour, Sir Dragon." One finger traced the lines of his mask. "Will you reveal yourself to me?"

"Yes. I have a desire to taste your mouth." Caleb traced the lines of the fox mask one last time before pulling back, reaching for the fastening of his own mask. He was unaccountably nervous as he pulled it off, hoping that his fox would be pleased with what he saw.

The gasp he got surprised him, his fox's hands stilled over the ties of the false face. "Fitzhugh!"

Oh, tell him he had not dallied with someone who despised him. He pushed the hands away that would stop him and pulled at the ties of the other man's mask, baring the fox's face to his view. He could not have been more surprised. "Eliot?"

A bright laugh sounded, those dark eyes dancing. "My dear Caleb... are you telling me those years at school were wasted on my own hand?"

Eliot Kerr, an old friend, though one not seen recently. In truth, the rumor had been that he was traveling abroad, exploring the wonders of the Far East heathens. "Apparently so. And honestly, Eliot, I would never have thought..."

Eliot's cheeks flushed, head tilting. "It appears we are both more adept at keeping secrets than one would expect."

"Yes." Caleb paused, feeling awkward. He knew perfectly well how to seduce a stranger. A friend, albeit a mostly absent one in recent years due to school and family obligation, was another matter entirely. Still, he wanted to, as his unsubsidized cock would attest.

Those long fingers reached for the wine glass and he caught sight of a tiny red mark his curious lips had left, nestled on that pale wrist, just before the white cuff.

His lips. Eliot's skin. No. His fox's skin. His fallen angel. What had passed between them was not void by who they were. Caleb knocked the wine glass away, cupping his hand once more behind Eliot's head, drawing him down for a kiss that scorched his lips.

Eliot gasped, lips parting for him immediately, tongue sliding against his own as he was fed one soft sound after another.

Yes. Just yes. Caleb moved against Eliot's long frame, half rising to his knees to turn and press the man against the cushions behind him, tasting wine and almonds and mint. Simple perfection in a kiss.

Those long hands slid up his blouse, rubbing the material against his tight nipples as they moved to wrap around his shoulders -- holding tight.

The kiss went on for an eternity, and yet seemed so fleeting as to be over before it began. Caleb needed another, and another, letting his weight settle against Eliot, feeling that cool skin warm beneath him.

Eliot arched into him, long body pressing against him, the hint of hard heat fleeting and addictive. Delicious. Hedy.

He wanted more. Immediately. Their world narrowed to an emerald box, of heat and hot skin overlaid with rough cloth, and while it was enough to send him reeling, it was not enough.

Gasping, he pulled away. "Eliot. I... this has ceased to be a game. I would have you. If that is not what you wish, we should part ways now."

One smooth hand stroked across his cheek, so warm now, hot against his skin. "I have a suite of rooms. The privacy we require. I would continue this exploration further, Caleb."

"Let us go then, before I am unable to go anywhere without ravishing you." One last, hard press of lips, and he moved away, holding out his hand for Eliot. "I still have yet to see your tail, Sir Fox."

Eliot took his hand, standing with a fluid grace. The red cloak was settled around those shoulders, the smile made yet more wicked by kiss-swollen lips. "Follow close then, Sir Dragon, and I'll wager you'll catch your glimpse."

Surely there was a potion in the wine, or in the draught Devlin had offered him earlier. Surely, it must be so, for his blood truly burned in his veins, his heart throbbed as he took the dark, quiet stairs towards the rooms he called his own on his visits to his oldest friend. Headed towards those lovely scarlet rooms with a dragon on his heels, hunting him. In truth, the hunt was familiar, what set his insides to the flame was that, in this instance, he would be caught, and most happily at that.

He was snagged on the landing between floors, as if his hunter could no longer control the impulse, pushed into an alcove where Caleb kissed him thoroughly. He gasped and opened, drawing the heat deep and deeper still until the burn settled in his groin, the need fierce.

The kiss went on and on, Caleb's body hard against his, hands holding him firmly in place. Finally it ended, and Caleb looked at him, eyes dark in the shadows. "What sort of enchantment is this that I cannot stop touching you?"

"A sweet curse, indeed, for I do not remember it being thus when we did our lessons side-by-side."

Nodding, Caleb found the skin above his neck cloth with warm lips. "Neither do I, Sir Fox. Now, however, you enflame my senses."

Oh. He saw stars, bright and spinning and -- ridiculous! A man of his age, his experience, his... "My room waits at the top of the stair, tempter."

A bite stung his skin, an exquisitely delicate closing of teeth. "Yes." Caleb straightened away from him. "I shall follow."

Eliot's moan was sharp, drawn from him by those delicious lips.

"Go, Sir Fox, before I take you here, where another might come upon us."

"Indeed." He found his suite easily, opening the heavy mahogany door to find the hearth blazing, a flagon of wine chilling with two glasses set beside. Geoffrey -- a good man, indeed, and well worth the salary of three. Warm and rich with dark woods and sumptuous hangings, the Red Rooms were his favorites here, suiting both his coloring and his passion.

They suited his companion as well, who stared at him with the hunger of a starving man as the door whispered shut behind them. Advancing upon him, Caleb found the ties that held closed his cloak, slipping it off his shoulders. "Time for me to claim the fox's tail as my prize for this hunt, I believe."

Eliot took a long, shaky breath, inhaling the heat and musk of his companion. "So sure that I am snared." He smiled, his words pointless. He had been snared ere their lips ever touched.

"The hunter is just as helplessly tangled in the snare as the prey, in this instance." Their lips met once more, the kiss deep and searching, Caleb's hands coming about him to stroke down his back, finding the base of his foxtail.

His hand slid up the flat line of stomach, up to touch, to stroke, to work loose ties and buttons so as to expose the skin of his demon to the light.

Caleb gasped. "Your touch is akin to flame, Sir Fox." The tail was left in favor of his waistcoat as his seducer began working on the fastenings of his clothing, searching for his own skin.

"My fingers itch to learn the map of your skin." Oh, but he ached, full and heavy, the hardness a dull throb at his centre.

"I will gladly allow any exploration you choose." Clever fingers loosened his cravat, waistcoat gone, heavy starched collar loosened. Eyes burning with passion's light, Caleb attacked his throat once more, lips and teeth hard upon him. He felt the blood rising to the surface of his skin, answering Caleb's call. He arched, head falling back and offering more as his soft cry filled the room.

Caleb licked at the spot that throbbed along with his heartbeat before starting on his shirt studs. "Oh... it looks good on you. My mark."

"Oh, Sir Dragon..." He reached up, touched the hot, damp spot with his fingers. Claimed. Marked. But he did not allow... Not ever... "You have snared me, truly."

His shirt floated to the floor by his feet, and Caleb stared at his body like a starving man at a Roman feast. "Such beauty."

His body responded, muscles rolling, nipples firming, skin heating to a pale rose. He reached for Caleb's shirt fastening, needing to admire in kind.

A shudder went through Caleb's body, but other wise he made no move, simply watched. The heat in Caleb's eyes burned like a true dragon's fire.

His fingers were sure, only trembling a bit with need as he finally exposed the lean muscles and rich, smooth skin. He moaned as his palms flattened against Caleb's belly, drowning in the silk and heat he found there.

"Oh..." The sound was deep, full of longing. Stepping forward, Caleb took him in those strong arms, skin touching his. The kiss he received scorched him, plunged deep within him. He arched into the demon sent to tempt him and followed eagerly, need drowning all else. His fingers were tangled in ebony curls, his body plastered against the object of its greatest desire. A thorough exploration of his torso began, Caleb stroking his shoulders, his arms, nails scraping his nipples. His belly, his ribs, the small of his back, all received equal, deliberate attention.

By the time Caleb was finished, his world spun, tilted upon its axis. "Oh, Sir Dragon, you intoxicate me. Shall we find the comfort of my bed and continue our explorations?"

"Yes." Caleb's voice was rough, dark, with a kick like spiced rum. "I wish to see all of you."

"Yes. I would look upon the one sent to tempt me into the embrace of pleasure itself." He took a step back, then another, not stopping until they were standing together near the heavy four-poster bed, draped with scarlet.

With one hand, Caleb traced his cheek and chin, touching his lips lightly. "I confess, Eliot, I have never been so tempted myself. What a tumult you cause in me."

Eliot reached out, stroking the fine soft velvet that purported to be mere mortal skin. "I cannot explain. I am wont not to make attempt -- who am I do deny such need, such fire?"

He reached behind him, unpinning the fluffy foxtail, and handed it over into Caleb's hands.

"Yes. Oh, my fox." Caleb tossed the foxtail onto the chair beside the bed and reached for the waist of his trousers. "Let me see you."

"As you wish it, my Dragon." Between them, they managed trousers and shoe-buttons, boots and drawers, finally standing full and naked, kissed by the light of the fire.

"Lovely." Caleb looked, simply looked, for long moments. The only sound in the room the crackle of the fire on the hearth and their deep breathing. Then a hand came up, touched his hip, stroking lightly. "I am humbled by you."

"I am enthralled by you, sweet demon." The words were mere whispers, the truth in them too fresh, too raw for comfort. He stepped forward, close enough that their separate heats mingled. They came together as easily as they had all evening, heat and hunger surging between them. Caleb pulled him closer, hand at the top of his buttocks, lips once again finding his throat.

One hand slid back into silken curls, the other running along the hot flesh of Caleb's side, exploring and mapping the skin. A low moan echoed against his skin, a rough silk tongue scratching along the mark left there previously. Caleb's hands moved, one cupping his buttocks, the other moving over his chest and belly, coming back to pinch and pull at one of his nipples.

"Oh... You are a demon, no mortal could make me burn so with need." His body blazed, his fingers sliding down to find another mass of curls to card through.

"If I am, then you are an angel, fallen to the earth, irresistible to me." Caleb moved into his touch, heat and hardness filling his hand, even as a broad hand closed around his own aching shaft. Bright eyes met his, blues and greens mottled together, wild with need. His hips pressed forward, even as his fingers wrapped around silken heat. "Yes. Oh, yes. Though I fear should we continue this quickly it will be over before it is even begun."

"The coals blaze longest when the first flames are spent, warming throughout the night."

Those eyes so caught in his flared with heat. "Indeed? Then by all means, let us fan the flames."

He was pushed back against the bed, so quickly that he was forced to catch himself on his arms. Pressing him back so that he was supine, Caleb covered his, their legs tangling together, heat and hardness against his. Arching up, he moaned at the heat, the satin, the raw need that arced between them.

He was well- and truly-caught now, body willing to lose contact with Caleb, hands trapped by his own treacherous weight.

Caleb moved against him, urgently, showing him a sure glimpse of the pleasures of Hell. "Oh, my fox. What have you done to me?"

"Only wanted, Sir Dragon. No, needed." His voice sounded desperate to his own ears, shaken and wild with arousal.

His own furor found its match in Caleb's. The man seemed unable to stop touching him, tasting him. Hands and mouth moved in exquisite concert, driving him mad. "Oh! Yes. Need."

"Cal! Oh!" His breath was caught in his chest, passion flooding him. Caleb waited no longer to crest the first wave of their passion, spending himself between them, hot and wet, the scent strong and male.

"Oh! Demon!" Eliot arched, crying out, his cock jerking as it slid along Caleb's newly slick skin.

"Yes. Eliot." Caleb continued to move against him, leaning down to lick the sweat from his skin.

"Sweet Cal..." He moaned, head falling back as he arched. "Dragon."

The expanse of his throat received a line of biting kisses, down to the base of his throat where Caleb's lips settled. A sharp sting bloomed there as Caleb bit deep. "Eliot. Your skin... 'tis amazing."

His cry was harsh, ripped from his lungs by the touch of those teeth on his skin. He convulsed, seed spraying from his body, anointing their skin.

Caleb moaned against his skin, pressing again at the spot on his throat that throbbed in time with his racing pulse. Sliding a hand between them, Caleb wetted his fingers with the evidence of their passion, and brought it to their mouths, sharing the taste with him.

His shaft jerked, a final pulse pulled from him, tongue sliding over Caleb's fingers.

"Eliot. Tell me this is no dream. Not merely a phantasm of my wishful brain."

"If it is, then let us sleep eternal." He stroked Caleb's face, shuddering.

Meeting his eyes, Caleb nodded, most seriously. "Yes. Let it be so. I still have need of you, my fox."

"I am yours." The words fell from his lips, ringing with truth. Ridiculous, fanciful, but undeniable truth.

"I devoutly pray that is so." Caleb looked almost frightened.

"I will give you nary a reason to doubt." Eliot pulled him in for a kiss, legs wrapping around Caleb's waist.

They kissed, just as hungry as they had been before, the need not lightened by their activities. Indeed, it seemed heightened by knowing how hot their flame burned. Caleb bit his lower lip, tongue soothing the sting. "I would be inside you, Eliot."

"Yes, Caleb. Let me know all of you, deep within."

With a deep groan, Caleb pushed back, fingers finding his belly, rubbing at the moisture there. "Spread for me, Eliot. God, yes. You appear as a fallen angel to me, ready to find the ultimate debauchery in the arms of a demon."

"Your heat, your fire... it tempts me so that I know nothing but desire." He spread his legs, knees drawing up to expose himself to those eyes, that touch.

"Mmm." Caleb pressed a kiss to the inside of one thigh, licking gently at the sensitive skin between his legs before sliding one finger inside his body. "A velvet vice, my angel. How this will feel around my body!"

Trembling, quiescent shaft growing again heavy and full, Eliot's legs moved, shifting on their own as the combination of tongue and finger worked to drive him towards delicious madness. The preparation was quick, perhaps too much so, but he was as impatient as Caleb, and could not fault him for it. Soon Caleb pushed at him, parting him easily with his blunt, hot flesh.

The stretch was sweet, the burn sweeter still, his body pulling and pulling at his own dragon's shaft, drawing it within. Caleb pushed into him, inexorable, stopping only when they fused together. The kiss he received was sweet, wondering. Eliot reached down, hand sliding between them to stroke the place where they joined, heat to heat.

"Oh, sweet demon, you truly are desire made flesh."

"And you are temptation incarnate. So giving." Moving within him, Caleb began a slow, deep rhythm, surging into him before pulling most of the way out. "When you touch me..."

He slid his hands up along the fine, smooth skin of Caleb's stomach, Caleb's chest.
"When I touch you?"

"It quite takes me out of myself, my fox. I have never felt such bliss, and I have tried many things." Indeed, his touch inflamed Caleb, and the man bit again into the skin of his neck, moving fast and furious inside him.

The shock of pleasure slid down his spine and ended deep within, growing and sparking with each thrust, each motion, each touch. Eliot bucked, fingers tangling in dark locks, soft encouragements and needy perversions falling between them.

The pleasure of it went on and on, as Caleb opened him, pushed him to great heights, made him soar. "Eliot!"

"Yes. Please." His fingers wrapped around his aching hardness, pulling strong and steady, in time with those fierce thrusts.

"Yes. So utterly devastating." Caleb sped his thrusts, losing all grace, eyes wild with need. When his body spilled its need, all that filled his vision were those eyes and the firelight held within, the passion burning within the hunter who had ensnared him, most truly.

Caleb cried out, eyes never leaving his as that strong body convulsed, hot seed flooding him. The word Caleb shouted was his name, in broken syllables.

He reached up, hand cupping Caleb's jaw, drawing their mouths together, tasting the truth of satiation on the sweet lips.

"Stay with me? We have the fullness of the next week's time to indulge this need." Caleb kissed his mouth, his fingers, the palm of his hand.

"Yes." He did not dare whisper the thought that by the week's end, he would be well-used to the company of his dragon, and unwilling to return to the hunt.

Nearly a week passed at Devlin's country home, the masquerade ending without them making another appearance. Indeed, aside from leaving occasionally for the brief meal, Caleb and Eliot did not leave the room they were assigned very often at all.

It was really rather frightening. Never had he attended one of Devlin's affairs without sampling far and wide the pleasures to be found therein. Yet he found that with Eliot in his bed he had no reason to search restlessly for entertainment.

The week drew to a close the day next, though, and time grew too short. Something clenched in his chest whenever he thought upon it. Returning to their room with a

breakfast tray, Caleb looked at Eliot's long form, spread out upon the sheets, and started plotting then and there their next meeting.

He set the tray aside, leaning down to kiss the corner of Eliot's mouth. Those lips opened to him, Eliot turning towards him with a soft murmur and a smile, eyes still closed. He kissed Eliot again, pressing the sweetest lips he'd ever tasted wide, tongue pushing deep.

Long fingers combed through his hair, Eliot pulling him down until their bodies met. A soft moan slid into his mouth, vibrating his tongue, warming him through.

"Good morning, my fox."

"Mm... Sir Dragon. How does the morning find you?" His bottom lip was taken between sharp teeth and teased, bright eyes catching the sunlight that filtered through the half-drawn curtains.

"Pleasantly diverted, now I have you awake. Shall we breakfast before or after I take you inside me, my angel?"

That made Eliot groan, eyes flashing. One hand slid down his spine to wrap around his buttock and stroke out a distracting pattern. "I find myself disinterested in food, my demon. In truth, my hunger is of an entirely different nature."

"Oh. Obviously it matches mine." He took another kiss, running his hands along Eliot's chest, easing the sheets away. Eliot flowed into his arms, encouraging him to roll so that the rangy body rested against his own. Hot lips fastened onto one nipple, fingers moving to unfasten the belt of his robe.

He let Eliot control the pace, spreading out beneath him, letting him strip the dressing gown from his body.

With a truly lascivious grin, Eliot oiled those long hands, then began a slow, thorough massage of Caleb's body that left him aching for each slide of flesh against flesh. His fox's eyes were dancing, wicked and playful as they ran over his body and admired each twist, each arch. All he could do was take the pleasure offered, let it twist him up. He held his arms above his head, letting Eliot have what he would. His legs were stroked and parted, open mouth swooping down to nudge at his sacs as oiled thumbs swept into his cleft, stroking against him.

"Oh, my fox. How you tease." Holding himself wide, he rolled into the touches, the sensation, so perfectly attuned to him, so far from what his jaded palate made him seek.

Eliot's hum vibrated against him, hot tongue sliding down as those fingers cupped his buttocks and spread him wide for the touch of his fallen angel's mouth. Digging his heels into the mattress, Caleb bucked and rolled, moans coming from deep in his chest. Tasted, opened, licked and laved and spread by long lazy strokes of that slick tongue -- Eliot sent

him soaring, the sensations crashing over him like so many waves on the shore. He rode the crest of it, letting it rock him to his core. "In me, Eliot. Please, I must have you inside me."

That heat disappeared and then he got the pleasure of watching the sun pour over his fox's body, highlighting each dark mark upon milk-pale skin, even as that long, curved shaft as covered with oil, slicked for him.

He reached for Eliot, letting his hands touch those marks, left by his fingers and mouth. His marks. Never in his history had he been possessive of a lover, and certainly not in such a short time.

"Such a fire you build within me, my demon. Such a need." Eliot moved forward, slowly pressing into his body and his hands.

"Yes. Oh, my fox." The pressure was immense, splitting him wide. Deep and hard and so very hot. He hooked a leg behind Eliot's pulling him close. Eliot stretched out above him, arms shaking slightly as they stilled, connected and close. Caleb could see the vein in Eliot's throat, pulsating.

Too tempting by far, that pale throat. Rolling up, he put a hand behind Eliot's head and pulled that smooth skin to his mouth, latching on, sucking like the demon Eliot called him. Eliot cried out, hips jerking and then beginning a fierce, driving rhythm, rocking their bodies together. Yes. So unbelievably good. The perfect fit. He gave as good as he got, sweat beading along his body, watching eagerly as Eliot practically glowed in the light.

Perversions of the finest sort were threatened, whispered, promised in that husky voice, the scent of need strong between them. One long, still-slick hand discovered his need, stroking and pulling in time with those thin hips.

"Oh God! Eliot!" It was too much. So very much. Pleasure coalesced within him, riding up out of his body along with seed as he found completion with Eliot inside him.

His name was whispered again and again, Eliot pressing hard, depositing liquid heat within his body, eyes wide and bright, his own face reflected deep inside.

They lay there, breath coming back to them slowly. He stroked Eliot's hair, haloed by the morning sun. "I must return to Town tomorrow."

A soft sigh brushed over his shoulder. "Yes, I have too long neglected my own affairs and have promised Devlin that I will see his home readied for the change of seasons." Eliot nuzzled his shoulder. "I have enjoyed our time together, Sir Dragon. I confess that I am quite addicted to your presence, your touch. Your company."

"I find myself equally snared. I... I would see you again. Soon."

Well, that was honest, at least.

"The bed in my quarters is equally as large -- and as welcoming -- as the one you found here, Caleb."

The tightness in his chest loosened somewhat. "That is a fine thing to hear, my angel. Would that I could invite you to my home, but it is my father's still, and he would not approve. The hazards of handling family affairs. There is a place, in town, however. Madame R's."

Eliot grinned at him. "Oh, yes. The boys there are smooth-skinned and worth their price. My horses know the path from home to dalliance well."

"Brilliant. Then we shall cross paths there at the earliest opportunity. And at every other place that can be arranged. I will give you my direction, and hope that you will write to me. Or do I presume too much?"

"No more than I do, demon." Eliot took his hand, pressed it against a dark mark above one nipple. "For I am well-snared, indeed."

He stroked the mark, letting his fingers linger. "Then it will not be out of place for me to tell you that these last days have been my happiest, and the thought of separation makes me ache."

"Not out of place." The softest of kisses brushed against his throat. "But instead shared and echoed. It is a brighter day, knowing that our happiness is simply headed to its busy home and not ended at all."

"Yes. Something that we may explore and expand." Turning Eliot's face to him, he sealed their resolve with a kiss. "Shall we breakfast?"

Taming the Texan

Lowell sighed. He would simply have to tell Devlin that he needed new blood at his affairs. As he looked about, sipping the marvelously strong punch, he saw that most everyone there was either someone he had no intention of dallying with ever again, or they were paired up. Truly, Devlin was a matchmaker at heart. The few who might have been prospects were inevitably not at all the type for the games he liked to play.

Damnation.

He was about to call for his cloak, and head out into the night to find a brothel with a sweet, willing boy, when the door opened at the butler announced two newcomers.

The one was an old friend, one that he had only passing interest in saying hello to, but the other, well. My goodness, he thought.

Making his way over, he greeted his old friend Samuel, a minor baron, cheerfully in hopes that he would introduce his companion.

"Samuel. It has been a long time, old friend. How are you?"

Samuel greeted him with a distracted smile. "Fine, fine. Look, I need to speak to Devlin. Can you amuse my young friend? Good, good." And off he went, leaving the strapping young fellow at his disposal.

Low smiled. "More gambling debt, I assume. Francis Lowell, at your service."

A square hand was offered over, along with a nod. The hand he took was callused, rough, grip firm. "Stephen Key. Nice to meet you. Right nice party y'all are having."

"Yes. Devlin knows how to give a fine event. Is this your first?"

"Yes, sir. Sammy invited me along after losing his shirt at a friendly little poker game. I don't usually let a man welsh on a wager, but Sammy's persuasive." The man chuckled, brown hair flopping forward into the rugged face. "Still, I figured I needed to get out a little more. Granny's house is plumb stifling."

"Sammy!" Lowell laughed. "How delightful. He must loathe you."

Tilting his head, Lowell studied his companion closely. Obviously a colonial. Edible.

Lanky and lean, the man was deliciously unfashionable, chestnut hair too-long, skin too coarse, clothes rough and unpolished. Still, those dark brown eyes were full of energy and spark and those hips promised quite the ride.

"Loathe me?" He got a quick grin. "I reckon so, given he owes he fifty pounds even after he handed over his cufflinks."

"Oh, that is precious. Samuel is a good enough man, but weak when it comes to gaming." Oh yes. Things had just gotten more interesting.

"Every man's got a weakness. Some's gambling, some's drinkin', some's fightin'." Stephen nodded, hand smoothing the front of his shirtwaist, showing that flat, long line of stomach.

Much, much more interesting. "I prefer a man with somewhat more discipline." Taking Stephen Key by the elbow, Low lead him into the drawing room, offering him a drink. "Do you have a weakness, Mr. Key?"

The whiskey was downed with a smooth, sensual motion. "If I did, I'd be a fool to go announcing it to strangers now, wouldn't I?"

Laughing softly, he sipped from his own drink. "Yes. Quite possibly true. But if we knew it, we could admire you for overcoming it."

"That figures that I don't just revel in my own little...peculiarities." He got a quick wink and, if it had not been for the flush on the man's cheeks, he might have convinced himself he had not seen it at all.

"There are some that one should revel in." He moved close enough to feel the heat of that long body, crowding the man to see what he would do. "Although I do not account gaming and drinking among them."

Low could see the pulse speed in that long throat, see the hard swallow, but Stephen stood his ground. "Too much drinkin' leads to too much gambling, that's the truth, and I'm not figuring on being sore-headed or poor come morning."

"A fine policy." One could only hope he would not object to being sore elsewhere. He let his arm brush against Stephen's ribs. "I do hope you will unbend enough to enjoy some of our many entertainments tonight, however."

"I reckon I didn't come here just to taste the whiskey. You have any recommendation for this poor Texan so far from home?" The drawl got heavier, slower, as those eyes heated.

"Oh I am certain I can turn you toward something that might amuse you. Something I might benefit from as well." Such a lovely specimen. So perfect a match for his mood.

"Sounds plumb promising." He could smell warm arousal -- so male, strong and heady.

"Yes. Oh yes indeed." He offered a slow, conspiratorial smile.

"Another shot of liquid heat for you?" Stephen motioned for the waiter, the slightest sheen of heat crossing the man's face.

"Thank you, no. I find that I want all my faculties about me. So, tell me, what are the origins of your fascinating accent?"

He got a confused look and then those eyes grinned, something more wilful than mischief shining in them. "I'm from what used to be the Republic of Texas. She's a state now, but it wasn't when I left."

"I see. I have not met someone from there prior to now. Only from Boston, where the vocal inflection is quite poor." He smiled.

"Yeah, they sound like they're talking through a cotton boll or a big ole mouthful of mush."

"They do sound awkward." He moved ever so slightly, watching as Stephen moved back. Soon he would maneuver him into a private corner.

"They're something else, all right." Stephen swallowed, roughly shaved Adams-apple bobbing above the man's collar.

"Yes. So are you, really. Quite unlike anyone I have ever met. Intriguing."

"I..." Another swallow, another half-step back. The muscles beneath the lawn shirt rippled, lean and long and tempting. "Intriguing?"

"Oh, my, yes." He kept advancing, Stephen kept retreating, until they were in a quiet, secluded corner.

"I cannot say I have been so interested in anything in a long while."

Stephen's shoulders bumped against the wall, dark eyes going wide. "Interested, sir? I'm not quite sure we're talking about the same thing."

He could smell Stephen's arousal, feel the heat that belied those words. Such lovely confusion. Mastering this one would be a challenge and a pleasure. Low pressed lightly against Stephen's side. "I abhor being bored. I prefer my company to be... stimulating."

"There's more than a touch of trouble a bored man can get himself into, I agree." There was the smallest shaving scar at the underside of Stephen's jaw -- a white faerie's kiss on that bronzed skin.

"Precisely. I am glad you see that." Low inhaled deeply. Addictive. Truly. "Tell me, what sort of company do you prefer?" He let his shoulder brush against Stephen's nipple through the lawn of his shirt.

The invisible shudder was delicious, as was the response of that stiff nub of flesh that reached towards him. "I tend to spend my time with fellas that know their own minds, strong men."

"Well, then, we should have much to discuss. I tend to be a man with strong opinions and passions." It was all he could do not to put a hand to Stephen's obviously stiff cock.

"I've got no end of opinions, that's a truth." Oh, those lips were luscious, full and wet, swollen from being caught between those teeth.

He could almost see them wrapped about his prick, stretched wide to accept him. Such submission from a man of Stephen's mettle would be heady. "Yes. I imagine you are. I fear were you to share much time with me you would find that you only expressed them when I wished, however."

One dark eyebrow challenged him, natural fire flaring deep in those rich brown eyes. "It's either a damned strong or a damned fool of a man thinks he can lasso himself a Texan, I'm thinkin'."

"Oh, I cannot recall ever being called a fool." Giving into temptation, Low reached out and cupped Stephen's hardness. "But I will pit my will against most anyone."

Long thighs parted -- just slightly and the motion was stopped almost before it began, but it was immediate and sweet. "You... You are most forward, sir."

"I have no wish to waste time." Squeezing, he moved yet still closer. "You stimulate me greatly, and as I said, that is what I most look for." Those eyes were locked with his, the battle between pushing into his touch and backing out of the corner and away from his will clear. Caught between desire and pride, Stephen shivered, nostrils flaring. 'Twas like gentling a frightened horse. Some of them needed soft words and softer touches. Some of them, though, needed a firm hand; needed to know who was in control. Time to show Stephen who was, indeed. Injecting steel into his voice, he looked deep into Stephen's eyes. "I want you. Come upstairs with me."

Spots of pure rose bloomed on the high cheekbones, chin lifting. The heat in his head throbbed, so responsive. Those lips parted as if to speak, but in the end, he was given a single nod, Stephen's eyes never leaving his own.

So wonderfully proud, this Texan. All unknowing, so utterly his. Cupping a hand about Stephen's elbow, both to guide him and to keep him from bolting, Low quietly led him through the crowded room and up the stairs to his customary room. How fortuitous that he had not left earlier in the evening.

The muscles beneath his hand were granite and there was a scent in the air -- danger and desire, musk and male and sheer need. As they passed Devlin, Low received a single, long look, one eyebrow arching in question. He simply smiled, inclining his head. Devlin

would make sure they were not disturbed. They would discuss it in the morning, over breakfast. The door closed behind them, and Low turned the latch. The sound made Stephen jump, and he ran a soothing hand down the man's back. "You're doing so very well."

"I..." A shudder met his touch. Then that strong jaw set and his eyes were met, bravado underlaced with the most charming confusion. "What sort of amusement do you have in mind?"

"I merely suggest that we get to know one another more intimately, my Texan. Disrobe." He did not want to push too far, to quickly, but he knew he must keep Stephen off balance.

"Dis... Well, I'll be damned but you're sure of me. Does that happen often, some buck wanders into your room and drops his drawers?" Stephen might play indignant and shocked, but there was the flush of pure arousal covering that fine skin.

"Not at all. I choose my partners with care. You I decided upon immediately. Such fine carriage, lovely skin, and pride enough for fifty Englishmen. Utterly desirable." True. All of it. Putting a hand to Stephen's cheek, Low looked straight into wary eyes. "Now do as I tell you and disrobe. I wish to see all of you."

"I... You're serious. You think I'll just... Just because you asked?" That cheek leaned towards his touch, hot and stubbled, beautiful. Even as the words were asked, one callused hand slipped free the buttons on the rustic jacket.

His fingers moved, seemingly of their own accord, tracing cheeks and chin, the incredible softness of lips contrasting the whisker roughened skin. "Because I wish it, yes. Because the thought of you nude excites me. And because you wish to please me."

"I don't even know a thing about you." A shrug of those thin shoulders left Stephen in shirttails and trousers, thin lawn fabric hiding that glorious skin from his eyes.

Stepping back, Low leaned against a small clothing press, crossing his arms. "What would you like to know? The shirt next, I believe."

"Who are you? You're sure as shit not like the other fellas I've run across here." A huge Bowie knife was removed from the leather belt, the suspenders carefully unbuttoned.

Stifling a smile, Low nodded. "I suppose that's true. I refuse to waste my life on idle gaming when I can spend it perusing other pleasures. I hope you do not judge us all on the basis of Samuel the portly. Not that I should claim myself among his sort as we are not even countrymen."

Low worked his cravat open, pulling it off, then opened his cuffs, setting the links neatly on a tray atop the chest, which made him smile. "Surely you can go faster, Stephen."

"I swear, don't y'all have the slightest modesty? Even back home we have the decency to look away 'til a man's covered up proper-like in the bed or in the water." Stephen turned, hands working with nervous energy at the dozens of tiny mother-of-pearl buttons.

"Oh. And modest as well. I could not ask for better. The entire idea behind you shedding your covering is for me to see the whole of you." Low watched the movement of strong shoulders under the thin shirt.

The shirt was slid off, set over the back of a chair, giving him his first glance at the seemingly endless line of Stephen's spine. Oh. Oh, yes. The bronze skin followed down to the small waist, smooth and unmarked, rich and fine.

A small noise of appreciation escaped him, and he actually took a few steps forward before stopping himself. Control. 'Twas all about control. "Yes. Oh, that's quite the thing I had hoped for. Turn about, please."

Those lean muscles rippled, and then Stephen turned, meeting his eyes quite firmly. Warm and strong, taut nipples the only marks on the smooth planes of chest and stomach. There was a dark line of curls, just beginning to show below the indentation of navel, leading Low's eyes.

Heat bloomed, deep in his belly. "My God, you're exquisite." Stephen bloomed beneath his gaze, skin going rosy and warm. "Come. Sit down on the bed." To his own ears his voice sounded deep, husky with the effects of Stephen's body on his own, his accent deepening. The man stunned him. Despite the stubborn pride on the surface, Stephen was pliant to his will, pleased to be pleasing, he could see it. Adorable. "I shall help you with your boots."

For whatever reason, the offer seemed to ease his so-stubborn Texan, a smile gracing the rough face. "I'd be grateful. They're damnable hard to get off when a man's not got an extra hand."

Stephen moved to sit on the edge of the bed with its dark, sumptuous coverlet. The deep tones suited the man's coloring, made him look wanton and needy, darkening his eyes to near black.

Giving a small amount of control to Stephen would relax him, make him feel more comfortable. 'Twas a fine give and take, the game he liked to play; calculating. One must use any advantage. He walked to the bed, until he stood parallel to Stephen's legs. "Delicious." He cupped the ball of one shoulder in his hand, feeling the heat pour off Stephen's skin. Trailing his fingers down Stephen's arm, he smiled. "Lift your leg, hmm?"

One long, long leg stretched out, Stephen's arms going behind him as the motion upset his balance a bit. That pushed strong chest muscles out, allowed a hint of Stephen's musk to fill the air.

The bed was far too high to do things as his valet might, as in straddling that long leg and presenting his backside to be pushed upon. Sad, but most likely a good thing, as he did not wish to allow Stephen that much of the upper hand. Instead, he ran his hand along the length of that leg as he moved to the end of it, settling the boot sole against his hip, hands on the ankle. And manfully resisting the urge to rub it against his cock.

"Pull back as I pull forward." Low waited for Stephen's leg muscles to tense against him before pulling hard, allowing the boot to pop off in his hands.

Stephen gave a soft sigh, elbows buckling a bit beneath his own weight before straightening again. "Thank you. That one came off like it wanted to."

"Indeed. Let us see if the other is so acquiescent." Setting the boot aside, Low rolled the thick stocking off Stephen's foot before turning to the other. The man even had attractive feet, strong and long, and well cared for. Nothing worse than diseased feet. They boded ill for the more intimate body parts.

"They are well-cared for, well-used. They tend to perform as they're asked." The left leg was offered. "In truth, it's the new boots that chafe and fit poorly, because they haven't stretched to your shape yet, haven't learned whose they are. Once they do, though, if you've done right, you've got a good, solid pair. Funny how many greenhorns will wear a boot a few days, let it blister them, then throw it out."

He allowed a chuckle to escape. "Greenhorn being someone new to the conditions in your native country, yes?" The other boot came off just as easily, and he lingered over removing the stocking. Let his hands tarry over the warm skin and delicate bones off Stephen's foot.

Stephen's toes curled, the only visible reaction to his touch. "That's right. Someone put into the wild without the skills to handle it. Mainly folks running from New England to California hunting gold."

"I suppose that is kinder than what many Englishmen would call a man from without of their social circle. Colonial. Provincial. Indeed, I have been called worse, as I am sure you have." One last stroke to the arch and he let Stephen's leg settle back against the bed. "Your trousers now, I think. As a reward for my patience."

He thought that Stephen would balk, but instead the man stood, invading his space, pride and will strong as the trousers were pushed down, leaving the pale knit drawers, hugging from waist to knee.

He did not back away, as perhaps Stephen expected. He stepped forward instead, letting his body brush against the lanky form. He took the thin undergarment in his hands and pulled, stripping it away.

The softest of rumbles sounded, the dark eyes flashing again. Stephen's cock was thick, full, bobbing with its sudden lack of support.

Oh. He had to feel. Simply could not resist the lightest of touches, one finger tracing the length of the flushed skin, hot and smooth.

"Oh!" Again, those long thighs began to open, those full lips parted on a gasp. Stephen's cock jerked and pressed towards his touch, wanting more.

Then he did step back, hands going to the tiny studs at the front of his own shirt. "Turn about. I want to see all of you."

"I have all the parts of every man." Stephen turned, tanned and lovely, down to the pale and inviting flesh of the tight, small buttocks. Ah... skin that had been even untouched by the sun.

"True. And yet some men have more to admire than others. Verily, would you want to see Samuel nude?" By the time Stephen finished his circle, Low was removing his shirt, attempting to be unselfconscious, even in the face of such undeniable masculine beauty. A show of weakness now could be disastrous.

Stephen laughed, hand coming down to cover his erection. "Sammy? I have to say that I'd rather kiss a hare-lipped billy goat than be in the room with that man naked. He smells like the ass-end of a sulfur mine."

Low laughed as well, tossing his shirt aside. "How eloquent! Please, Stephen, you have no need to hide from me. Take your hand away." Injecting just that simple hint of command into his voice once more, Low sat in the low chair next to the bed, pulling of his shoes.

"Do you need help with your shoes?" The question was offered bravely, no timidity, not for his Texan.

Still that hand slid to one side, hovering in the hollow of one hip.

"No. I will manage, I believe. I prefer to watch you. You... oh, Stephen. Has no one ever told you how beautiful you are?" The shoes and stockings disappeared and Low stood, working the buttons of his trousers. Time to even the ante, as it were. Stephen surely felt terribly vulnerable by now.

"Beautiful?" He got a soft, incredulous laugh, Stephen's eyes stroking over his body. "I have been called many, many things, that's not one of 'em."

"Well, then, you have not kept the proper company." A deep breath, and Low pushed away both his trousers and smallclothes, letting them fall to the floor. Truly, he felt pale and thin next to Stephen, and his age he felt acutely as well, knowing he'd passed the first

bloom of youth. Still, he was trim and firm in all of the right places, and he held himself proudly, not a bit of his worry showing. He stepped back into Stephen's arm's length, feeling the heat of his long body, enjoying his scent. "You are marvelous."

Those eyes slid over his exposed skin, warm and wanton, then met his gaze again. "And you are a fine man, damned fine."

The heat in his belly spread to his chest, his balls, and his prick twitched hard. "Thank you. I should like to kiss you."

Stephen nodded, eyes watching him closely. He moved even closer, hands finding Stephen's chest and moving up over sweetly formed muscle to the back of Stephen's neck. He applied only the slightest pressure, and Stephen answered by bending to him, just as he'd hoped. He pressed his lips against Stephen's, lightly, sharing breath. Trembling, Stephen was trembling for him, lips just moving against his, muscles tight with anticipation. He held the man steady, letting the kiss deepen at an excruciatingly slow pace. His first taste of Stephen exploded into his mouth, filling his senses. A soft moan vibrated his lips, silent, but there. Long eyelashes brushed against his cheek, feather-light and teasing.

"Mmm." He pulled away, looking into Stephen's eyes. "Yes. Marvelous indeed. Stretch out on the bed for me."

Those eyes never left his, not as Stephen backed away, not as the long body stretched out, radiant against the dark velvet. Such a lovely picture. Impossible not to touch. He started at the strong feet, moving them to the position he desired, widely spread. The ankles were bony, but roped with sinews, and he touched them lightly, watching muscles jump.

Those square hands were resting on either side of Stephen's heavy phallus, not concealing, but protecting, hovering there, the exposure unnerving his Texan.

Such grace, such lovely submission, tempered by stubbornness. Giving up on the legs, he moved to the hands, taking one away from Stephen's hip, kissing the palm before laying it up beside Stephen's head. "There is nothing to worry over, my Texan. I intend only to give you pleasure. Only do as I ask." He took the other hand away, kissing it as well before moving it to the other side.

A low moan slid into the air, Stephen doing as his asked, still and, if not trusting completely, than trusting enough. Enough for now.

"Yes. You see. If you trust me, I will reward you." Low kissed those trembling lips again, putting one hand to Stephen's throat to feel the pulse beat there.

He felt the nervous swallow, the rapid heartbeat, the invisible tremors. Lovely. Heartbreaking, the battle going on inside Stephen. Beauty incarnate. The line of chest and belly called his hands, down, then up, the dark, hard nipples receiving his full attention.

Stephen's hands twisted in the coverlet, body growing tense and tight as those bits of flesh. "Oh. Oh, I... Sweet Lord..."

"Shhhh. Oh, Stephen you have no idea what pleasures await you this night." He soothed, petting Stephen's belly for a moment while the man calmed. Then he lowered his head and took one tiny nipple between his teeth, tugging gently.

Shifting, that fine body arched, pushing up towards his mouth -- whether to lessen the sweet pressure or ask for more, Low doubted even Stephen knew. He rewarded Stephen with a sharp, stinging bite, knowing the intense feeling would drive him mad, before blowing lightly across the sensitive skin. Stephen's gasp was loud, shocked, delicious. His Texan's strong shoulders left the mattress, the coverlet complaining at its seams.

"Yes. You see now what I mean?" Low moved back to cup Stephen's chin in his hand, kissing those sweet lips once more, drinking in that shocked passion, feeling the rough-shaven cheek against his. "Shall I go on?"

His eyes were searched, explored, then the words he had been waiting on were offered over in a quiet whisper. "Yes. Yes, please."

This one might very well be the death of him. How quickly had this stubborn Texan captured him! Such perfection. Low took another kiss, this one deeper, harder, letting Stephen feel the fullness of his desire. His fingers found the hollow of one hip and lingered there, nails lightly raking through the curls descending the flat belly.

Opening to him easily, Stephen returned the kiss, meeting Low's passion with strength and determination. His Texan may be still, but the man was not passive, not uninvolved -- even this kiss was threaded through with a most certain will, a fire that met his will unafraid.

It was perhaps too soon to think that he had finally met his match, but the thought did ring in his head as he cupped Stephen's heavy prick in his hand and stroked it, luxuriating in the feel of steel overlaid with hot velvet. Low, needy cries pushed into his lips as Stephen's buttocks shifted on the bed. Legs spread too far to thrust easily, the motions were clumsy and ineffective, shaft jerking against his palm.

He let his lips travel over cheeks and chin and neck, soothing and inciting at the same instant. Stephen's reactions bred in Low an excitement almost unknown to him. Yet he knew he must maintain mastery of the situation in order to guide Stephen through it, in order to make it perfect for him. Another deep, searching kiss was offered, while he surreptitiously pinched the base of his own cock to regain some measure of control.

Stephen captured his tongue, sucking on it with a rich passion and he imagined he felt the lightest brush of fingers along his side. Stopping the kiss immediately, he pulled away enough to press Stephen's hands back to the bed. "So impatient. You must ask, my Texan."

"Do you not want to be touched? I can feel you, hard enough that a cat can't scratch it." Husky and low, the voice was one more caress, added to the rub of a sharp hip along his shaft.

"Of course I want it. I want to feel your touch so much I ache. But more than that I want your compliance. It excites me beyond measure." He touched Stephen's palms lightly. "Do you understand?"

The long body beneath him jumped, fingers curling in instinctively. "No. No, I don't understand this at all, but I know I want you. I reckon I'll figure out the rest."

Oh. Such trust from such an unexpected place. "What have I done to deserve this encounter?" Low gave another kiss before taking one of Stephen's hands in his and placing it against his own chest.

The callused hand stroked his skin, those dark eyes shuttered by heavy lids. "You feel mighty good to me, Francis Lowell."

"I am glad to hear it so. You feel addictive. And you may call me Low, my Texan." He could not hold back much longer, and so moved between Stephen's wide-spread thighs, stretching out atop him so their skin touched from head to heels.

"Yours. You sound sure of that." Stephen rippled beneath him, rubbing against him.

Low shifted once more, bringing their prickles together, gathering them up in one hand, moving his hips lightly to rub them together. "Somehow, I feel sure."

A soft cry sounded, Stephen's eyes flying open. Hands hovered above his skin, close enough to feel their heat. "Let me touch you."

"Yes. Yes, I need your touch now. So badly." Low gave up fighting for control. Stephen had proven himself well, and there would be time for such games later. Now was about need, and the scent of male arousal, and the feel of a strong body beneath his. Stephen didn't tease, didn't play, simply slid hot hands over him -- one sliding down his spine to curve around his hip, the other traveling up to cup the back of his head, bringing their lips together in a desperate kiss. Tightening his grip, Low moved faster, bringing them together almost harshly, skin slapping against skin. He took as much from the kiss as Stephen gave, so needy it almost frightened him. He was cradled by thighs, Stephen's feet gaining purchase on the bed, adding more strength to their thrusts, more passion. They reached a fever pitch, pleasure riding up his spine and exploding inside his head. Low held on with only the tiniest margin of control, pumping at Stephen's glorious cock. "Come for me, Stephen. Now. I want to feel you come."

"Low..." The whisper was shocked and stunned and needy, heat pouring over his hand at his words, Stephen's body heeding his call.

His own body reacted violently, and he spilled as well, his own heat joining Stephen's as he cried out, biting down against Stephen's neck. "Oh. Oh, my Texan."

Soft gasps filled the air, the hands on his body caressing and trembling all at once. "You... We... Oh, I swear, you make my dizzy."

"Good." Stroking the damp hair away from Stephen's face, he smiled into those dark eyes. "One hopes I shall have the opportunity to do so again, very soon."

There was that sweet blush again, the hint of innocence, of vulnerability. "A betting man would put odds on it, yes."

"And we know that you are willing to take odds, yes?"

How fortunate was he that he had stayed that crucial extra moment at the soiree, rather than leaving when he had thought to. He would have to make sure to thank Devlin. And perhaps he would buy Samuel a new set of cufflinks.

Fallen Angels

He found an old book, one with illustrations that would give vapors to one of less sophisticated interests. He poured a glass of wine, pulling his robe around him and settling into a dark chair, waiting to hear if Geoffrey had been successful in delivering his missive.

Recovered from an ague that had lingered far too long, Eliot was itching, aching for contact and entertainment, passion and heat. The act of shaving had left him firm and aching, the places where silk met skin sparking need.

He stretched, feeling tight and uncomfortable in his own skin. As the minutes passed he watched the fire blaze, falling into a dream where a hot-eyed demon hunted, whispering sweet perversions over his skin.

He awoke thinking he still dreamed. The fire burned sullenly, casting Hellish a glow throughout the room, and the form before him might well have been the Dark Man himself in a black wool cloak and silk top hat.

Then Caleb came forward into the light, and pushed the cloak off, letting it pool on the floor. Such hunger in Caleb's eyes, and all for him. "How glad I was to hear of your recovery, my fox." "Oh, Sir Dragon, how you have haunted me, in both fevered dreams and lonely hours filled with empty solitude." He reached one hand out, hungry for a touch. "My man found you well?" "Right as rain. I assured you there was no need to keep me away." Eschewing his outstretched hand, Caleb began to pull at the restrictive evening clothes he wore. Neck cloth, stock, shirt studs, cuff links. "I have missed you, my own. The feel of your skin. The scent of your hair. The worst was knowing that when I saw you next you would be void of my marks."

A series of shudders rocked him, so sweet, so rich when compared to the false shivers brought by fever. He stood, attending his lover with the skill of any valet. "What sort of man would I be if I endangered my most precious demon-lover?"

Caleb let him strip away the jacket and shirt, the straps and trousers. "Less stubborn than the sort of man you are now, undoubtedly."

Unabashedly nude, Caleb grabbed the front of his robe and pulled him close. "I have been too long without you," Caleb said, just before kissing him deeply.

Eliot moaned, lips parting, hunger biting him deep. His hands slid down the ridged belly, curling into the dark curls that crowned the curved shaft that leapt for him.

His lover moaned as well, pushing at his robe so that their skin might touch, hands hot and hard and greedy upon him. They traced his neck, his back, the indentation of his hips. Dark, drugging kisses made his head spin.

Wicked and sweeter than opium, his demon's touch dimmed the firelight, dissolved the heavy perfume of the wood, the flavor of the wine.

Until the kisses were taken away, at least. Caleb pulled back, face set in stark lines. "The chaise, Eliot. On your back. I wish to see you displayed for me."

His breath caught, pressing tight against the body so desired, before stepping back and back again. With each step away from the irresistible temptation of his Caleb, Eliot's mischief grew.

He draped himself over the chaise, stretching, offering himself most fetchingly.

Chuckling, Caleb came close, standing just beyond the foot of the chaise. "Such a feast. I hardly know where to begin. Are you comfortable? Warm? I have no desire for you to be ill. Ever again." "Indeed, I burn, but my fever comes from need, not ill night air." His eyes were hot, dragging over what seemed acres of delicious skin. "Very well." Caleb bent, lean muscles standing out under pale skin, and curved a hand around one of his feet, stroking the ankle lightly. "Shall I begin here?"

He fought not to jump, not to pull away as lightning shot through him. "As you will it, Sir Dragon. I await your touch as none other's."

A growl issued from deep in Caleb's chest, a sound to fit the dragon or demon he often accused his lover of resembling. "I should hope so, my own, for while I enjoy seeing others give you pleasure, only I will mark you, so that they will know to whom you belong."

Turning his head, Caleb set his mouth against Eliot's ankle, sucking and biting until he could all but feel the blood rushing to the surface of his skin.

A soft sound -- almost a whimper, but not quite, not yet -- slid onto the air, his toes curling. "Yes, my Demon? Will you... will you claim me as your own?"

Hands sliding up his calf, Caleb lowered one leg to the chaise, between his. That devilish mouth found the tender skin behind his knee, sucking hard, marking him there as well. "You are mine, Eliot. This," Caleb nipped the throbbing bruise with sharp teeth, "only serves to remind you of it." "Oh, sweet tempter, how bare I have felt without your brand upon my skin." He reached out, fingers tangling in ebony curls, luxuriating in the silken softness. "You cure me of the most determined melancholy." "How very sweet it is to know that my touch has restorative powers. Yours simply sets me aflame, my own." His legs were pushed apart widely, and he got a flash of wicked blue eyes before Caleb bit deeply into the skin of his inner thigh. "Cal!" His cry split the air, body convulsing with the sweet, familiar mixture of need and possession. His retort, sharp as his desire, crumbled, leaving him breathless and spread wide. "Yes. Oh, yes, my own. Mine. As I intend to remind you." Lowering his leg back to the chaise, Caleb sprawled between his thighs, rubbing against him, resting one cheek atop his belly. "To see your skin so bare.

So bereft. It pains me." "It called for you. Even as I bathed, washed myself, rode my own fingers to attempt to ease my hunger, my flesh begged to bear your mark upon it."

The moan Caleb gave him vibrated through his ribs, his chest. "Oh. My fox. What a gift that sight would be. You will show me someday hence." Lips and tongue drew up another mark, just to the right of his navel, as Caleb slid long fingers between his legs to touch the spot where his own had so recently been. "Yes, Sir Dragon." He groaned, rocking towards that touch, those wicked, tempting fingers. His body burned with need and he savored it, embraced the sensations. "I would offer you all you need." "Yes. So willing. So giving." Caleb moved up, tracing his side wetly with a rough tongue, teasing his nipples with soft lips before marking him, just off to the side of one of them. Those fingers he so longed for slid against him, dipping into his body. "Such hunger. Such need." He bore down, sliding upon those fingers with a wanton ease. His fingers danced and teased, played over Caleb's face and throat, causing his dragon to shiver. "Give me your throat, Eliot." Breathing heavily, Caleb pushed into him, fingers searching out his most sensitive spots.

Eliot lifted his chin, arching his throat for the touch of teeth and tongue. His body shook, sacs growing heavy and drawing tight. "Yes." Caleb took his throat, teeth fastening down, lips closing around them, a sharp, exquisite pain. A pain accompanied by the most exquisite pleasure as Caleb found the spot inside him that made him fly.

His body offered its pleasure, its need, its very essence to his demon, drawn forth by the deepest ache. "Oh. My angel." Caleb kissed his lips, finally, soul deep and bruising.

He captured his dragon's tongue, pulling it in time with the fingers still invading his body. His fingers trailed between them, fingers drawing circles around the flared tip that awaited his touch.

Another deep sound greeted his touch, Caleb arching against him in a pleading manner. The kiss broke, and Caleb looked down at him, demon eyes in a human face. "Inside you, my own. Please." "Yes. I ache for your touch deep within." He reached down, trailing his fingers within the pot of salve that awaited such pleasure, fingers anointing the heated flesh he wished buried within him.

Caleb wasted little time, pressing him open, looking him in the eye as that hard, hot flesh slid inside him, settling deep.

How he had waited, wanted, dreamt of this forbidden pleasure again and again. He offered all the wonder and need inside him, all the heat and blessed sentiment in his gaze. "So damnably lovely, my angel." Caleb began to move in him, sparing nothing, giving no tenderness. Only fierce, animal need. He met Caleb's desire with his own, eyes held tight as he, in turn, held Caleb tight within him.

As if sheer force of will to see him marked was the only force that had held him, Caleb unleashed a passion on him that he had missed dearly in the time they were apart,

impaling him, filling him as nothing else did. Only moments passed, an eternity as the read each other's eyes, and Caleb cried out, filling him with liquid heat.

He moaned, hand cupping one cheek, drawing his demon down into a long kiss. The flavor of need and satiation was a heady combination, rich and addictive and he feared his need to taste it simply grew with each sample.

Replete, Caleb rested against him, lips moving upon his. "Oh, my own. How I have missed this. Missed you. Truly, if I am a demon I must find some way to keep you from ever finding illness again."

"Oh, that would be a fine magic indeed." He licked the corner of Caleb's mouth. "For now, let us take joy in the fact that the fortnight is finished and our drought over."

"Too long a drought." A nuzzle to the hollow of his throat sent delicious twinges through his nerves, as the mark Caleb left there throbbed. "Mine."

"Yes, my demon. Your own." There was no doubt within him, between them, on this point. His demon nodded, the fire dancing against the fine skin. Loose and well, his skin aching and warm, Eliot took yet another kiss and another, their hunger banked, awaiting a wind to breathe it into life.

Taming the Texan

This whist shit wasn't poker, but it wasn't bad.

Stephen leaned back in his chair, legs sprawled, keeping an eye on the other player. The Earl with the nervous twitch was almost out of money; the fat bastard beside him was cheating, or trying to. They weren't the ones to watch.

The German fella with the big purse and skinny hands -- he knew his cards.

He knocked back another whiskey, felling it burn all the way down. He was up by enough to keep himself in liquor for another year. The German kept winning and this was his last hand.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught movement, someone sitting down at a small table behind theirs. Someone familiar enough to make his gut tight.

Oh. Oh, Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

He kept his focus on the game, or tried to, losing the hand tidily to the German. "I think I'll quit while my purse is full. Y'all have a fine evening."

He made sure his jacket covered him completely before he stood.

It was indeed Francis Lowell, Low he'd said to call him, sitting there smiling at him. He motioned, inviting Stephen to his table, which held a small chess set.

"Good evening." He nodded his head in greeting, sitting down without losing sight of those green eyes. "You missed a fine game earlier. The German's a sharp one, though, I'd watch him, if I were you."

Heaven above he'd not been this nervous since Mamma and him had crossed Indian territory. For some reason, he believed this man was more dangerous than a band of Comanche.

Low inclined his head. "I shall remember that. Good evening to you, Stephen. I hoped I might see you here this evening."

"You did?" He tilted his head, curious. He'd not gone back to Low's club, innards all tied up by the sight of the marks -- Low's marks -- on his body, but he hadn't expected Low to come hunting him.

"Certainly. I hope this does not upset you? Frankly I was here to collect upon a bet from yesterday's derby. I set the meeting here, however, in hopes of meeting you once more."

The words were matter of fact, to be taken at face value. No artifice.

He felt his cheeks heat and he offered Low the same honesty. "Not upset at all. Did you get good odds on the race?"

"I got excellent odds. I also got a tidy sum for the horse in question when he proved to be a winner. Do you know horses?"

Low gestured for a member of the staff, ordering a brandy, and a whiskey.

"I do. Leastways I know the Indian ponies well enough. Y'all's horsemeat is a hell of a lot stockier, bigger, but damn, but they sure know how to run." He relaxed, grinning across the table. "I got a little paint pony back in Texas. Sweet as she can be, clears a hedge like nothing."

"I hear the mounts from your part of the world are rangier, and perhaps more truculent, but they have a great deal of heart." There was a gleam in Low's eye, a certain quirk to his lips.

Stephen nodded, running one hand through his hair, "The prairies are wilder back home and the stallions aren't penned up like they are here. They have to fight for their territory, for their herd."

"Yes. I can see how your homeland might produce exceptional specimens."

Their drinks arrived, and Low toasted him with a raised glass. "To your Texas."

"I can drink to that." He lifted his glass, the whiskey burning on his tongue and throat. Stephen nodded toward the chessboard, feeling a little warm, a little loose in his joints. "You play?"

"Why yes. I do. Would you care to?" The smile he got was positively smug.

"I'll give it a try." He'd learned from the soldiers camped near their farm, and wasn't bad. Hell, he wasn't bad at all.

"Very well, then. I shall let you take white and begin. Shall we wager?"

He lifted his chin. "At what odds?"

"Well, I suppose that depends upon you." Low settled the board square on the table. "I should wager for your time, I think. But you are welcome to wager for my money."

"My time?" His cheeks flared and his chest got tight, nipples stiffening. He shifted, just slightly. "I... Yes. So, say an hour of my time?"

"I should think that would be a fitting wager. What would you have from me?"

Low was easy, sipping his brandy, relaxed in his chair.

"I..." He bit his lip. "I have to admit, I've never bet against my time... Let's keep the cash out of this. A bottle of good whiskey."

"Done." Low held out a hand to shake, lingering over his when he held his own out, fingers warm and smooth.

Oh. Stephen nodded, free hand just sneaking down to adjust his need, trying to gain control.

He picked up a cool marble pawn and started his attack.

The first game went slowly as they learned one another's moves. There. He sure as heck wasn't bad, because he beat Low right handily. Low simply smiled good naturedly and suggested a second game, double their bet.

He nodded. Two hours. He could handle two hours. His body was encouraging him on, skin tight and hot. "You got yourself a bet, sir."

The second game was quick, brutal, Low missing the same defensive move as before, Stephen taking advantage of it quickly. "Checkmate, my friend. I'm afraid your stores are going to find themselves short."

He didn't boast or crow, but he was tempted to, wanted to.

"Oh, I think I might be able to stand a bit more pain. Perhaps a third game? Your choice of odds against a full night of your time."

"A whole night?" A hint of worry slid up his spine, but his pride had him nodding, agreeing. "Fine. And you stock my bar for the season, should you lose."

"A worthy bet." Low replaced one of his men, on the board at the same time he reached to straighten one. Once more Low's hand lingered against his, Low's eyes warm as they met his. "Let us play."

The battle this time was short and fierce, Low driving him ruthlessly into a corner and taking his army, trapping his king easily. Stephen shook his head, admitting both defeat and amazement. "I'll be damned, but that was a brilliant play, Low!"

"With the wager you agreed to I could not bear to lose." Slender fingers caressed his king while Low looked at him intently. "What are your plans for the night, Stephen?"

He should have invented a party, an assignation, but Stephen's honor would no more have him lie than welsh on a bet -- and in this case, one was as the other. "In truth, I had none, barring a few hands of whist after a simple meal."

There were times honor and pride were overrated qualities.

An expression he could not name crossed Low's face, fleeting, before a smooth mask of politeness indifference dropped into place. "Stephen, truly, you need'nt honor the bet this evening if you do not wish to. I have no desire to make you do something you find unpleasant."

"I would not have agreed to our wager, if I wasn't willing to pay it in full." Stephen met those cold eyes with a look of his own, heat filling him -- a familiar and comforting fire. He'd be damned if he cowered like a boy, just because these damned Englishmen got all icy and... English.

"Well then." The smile was back. The man rose and fell faster than the temperature during a desert sunset. "Shall we adjourn somewhere private? My club, perhaps, or my city home?"

"What about your wager from the horses?" Stephen found himself nodding, even as he spoke. Hell's bells, but this man drove him to distraction.

"I collected upon that before I met up with you. May I say that I very much admire the way you handled your game. Many men would not have quit when the German began winning." Low motioned and their coats appeared, the waiter helping them assume them.

"I don't ever bet what I'm not willing to give. A man who does that is controlled by the game." He settled his coat and hat, keeping his knife where he could reach it with the habit of years. Pickpockets thrived around these sorts of places, damn their greedy little souls.

"Yes. I like to maintain control myself. Shall we?" Leading him outside where a well-appointed coach waited for them, his horse tethered to the back, they headed out. For Low's home, apparently, as that's where he told the driver to go.

It took him a moment to find a comfortable position, his long body unused to carriages -- much to his grandmother's utter disgust at having her grandson appear at parties and event astride a horse like a "classless colonial".

"You're welcome to stretch your legs out, Stephen. I assure you, your boots will not offend me."

Leaning back in his seat, Low crossed his hands over his flat belly, stretching those slender legs out toward him.

"My father insists he prayed for two sons and somehow the good Lord misunderstood and just gave me two man's worth of leg." He offered a smile, eyes sliding over that stomach, the fine skin of which had tempted his dreams in a most damned, wicked manner.

His legs found a place where they could rest at ease and not crowd Low and Stephen relaxed, hat in hand.

Low chuckled. "Your father sounds like quite the original."

Stephen nodded. "He was one hell of a man. Died in the battle of San Jacinto after surviving the massacre at Goliad. He's a hero -- not that y'all will ever hear his name, but I know."

"Then you may be proud of him, which is fortunate. My father gave me little more than a name and a large amount of debt."

"Oh, debt's a hard pony to ride. I don't envy you that one bit, but a name's good thing, 'specially round these parts." He did so enjoy talking to Low, enjoyed the brains and the quick wit. "These folks put a goodly weight on who bore you and which spot of land you dropped on."

"Oh yes." The carriage lurched to a halt, and Low stepped out, offering a hand. "Your horse will be stabled with the carriage mounts if that suits you?"

"She's a good nag. She'll follow along easy, so long as there's oats at the end." His hand fit well into Low's, the sensation sending a jolt of heat through him. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome." Keeping hold of his hand, Low tucked it into the crook of his elbow, body brushing against his. "As you say, the people here put a great deal of stock in who you are and where you came from. I fear I have fought not only the stain of debt, but also the horror of being from Scotland. How lucky I am to have friends who do not care."

The house was immense, a townhouse of stately proportions, but not, if he was correct, in the most fashionable section of town. Looked fairly old, so the family must have bought it long before Low's old man lost their money.

"Oh, so you're a Scot?" Stephen stopped still, making a show of looking Low up and down, amusement filling him. "Funny, you don't *look* terrifying and half-troll. You must hide it well..."

Then he dared wink, pushing the tease just that much farther.

A warm, husky laugh was his reward, full of genuine amusement. "Well, sir, I do have the benefit of an English education. I suppose that beat the troll right out of me."

They ascended the steps into the foyer, where they were met by an elderly butler, who made a show of taking their coats, which probably weighed as much as he did. "Thank you, Kearns. Could you have drinks and dessert sent to the library?"

The old man nodded and shuffled off, and Low led him to a room full of books, warm and inviting, with two large chairs set up next to the fire.

"You've got a good house, Low. Feels right comfortable, like it could tell tales." A quiet voice inside whispered, wondering what tales tonight's wager would bring.

"I think it shows that it has always been more a family house than a show house. Someday perhaps I will take you to Edinburgh. I am even more fond of it."

Low worked off his cravat, and his coat, stripping to his shirtsleeves and trousers. "I hope you don't mind? I cannot bear all of those stuffy clothes when I return home to relax."

"Surely." Still, he was quite fine in his own jacket, that flat plane of body calling all the blood in his body south, making him stiff and obvious in his tight trousers.

There was a matching bulge in Low's trousers, but the man seemed completely unconcerned with it, smiling at him as their drinks arrived, along with some sort of dark creamy cake-like pudding. "You know, I must tell you, Stephen, I find your company most congenial."

"Thank you. You... I don't think I have the words for you, Low. You're not like any one I've ever met." He tried not to blush and failed miserably, but managed to meet Low's eyes. He would not back away, he would *not*.

"Truly?" That look was back in Low's eyes, the one he had seen the night they met, intense and hot, searing him. "You will, I hope, excuse my arrogance if I find that pleasing."

Lowering his voice, Low went on, the tone becoming compelling, almost commanding. "The evening coat, Stephen. Please take it off. Along with the waistcoat."

His body went stiff and he almost argued, but a bet was a bet and better to lose the little battles and win the battle in the end. He unbuttoned his coat and shrugged it off, setting it aside carefully, before beginning on the waistcoat with its little bone buttons.

Perhaps his treacherous body would have cooled by the time he was done.

Watching intently, Low dipped a finger into his dessert, licking it clean with short flicks of his tongue. Maybe he wouldn't cool down after all.

Finally, after chewing on his lips to keep the sounds in and his focus clear, Stephen was in shirt-sleeves and trousers, nipples and shaft both complaining as the fabric enflamed them.

Leather creaked as Low shifted, on hand moving between Low's thighs to adjust the growing length there matter of factly. "Lovely. You should wear nothing but the finest lawn shirts. 'Tis such a shame to cover such loveliness with layers of coats and stiff brocade. One should always be able to see the fine lines of your body."

"You don't have a lick a shame, do you?" He softened the complaint with a grin, cheeks hot. "I don't know whether to say thank you or call you out for being forward."

"There is one thing to be said for maturing. One hardly has a use for shame." Low took another taste of the pudding. "Open your trousers, Stephen. I wish to see your need."

He could hide his gasp no more than he could hide the tremor that rocked his body. No shame at all. "Low..."

"Yes. It is just us here, Stephen. Just us two. I want you, which I think is no secret. There is no need to hide yourself from me." Low smoldered, voice mesmerizing. His fingers trembled as they undid the buttons, his prick pushing against the fabric as if it wanted to heed Low's will. Finally his trousers were opened, his smallclothes pulled aside so that his heat was visible.

"Oh." Low looked at him like he was the dessert and Low was a starving man. "So unutterably perfect. You call to my hands, my mouth, Stephen. You excite me like no other ever has."

The words made him ache, made his shaft throb. "Low... the things you say."

He met Low's eyes, bottom lip caught in his teeth again, biting back the need, the want, the moans that wanted out.

"They are only the truth." Sitting forward, Low removed his own shirt, revealing a lean chest, sprinkled with ginger hair, and that flat belly he admired. Low settled back in his chair before asking, "Tell me, Stephen. Have you ever been taken? Have you ever had a man inside you?"

His mouth dropped open, eyes burning in their sockets as he shook his head. No. Not even attempted -- Lord, the things this man suggested. He had touched other men, shared pleasure with mouth and tongue, but that? No.

A hard flush rose in Low's cheeks, and the man actually moaned, moving restlessly. "Oh, Stephen. What a treasure you are. How long I have waited for you. I want that with you, Stephen. Want to enter your body, want you to feel me deep inside you."

His cock leapt, balls growing tight with a painful speed, and he gripped the base of his cock, moan sliding from his open lips.

"Yes. Oh God, yes." Low slid a hand inside his own trousers, stroking and pumping. "Bring yourself off, Stephen. Please, I want to see you. Then we shall play."

He nodded, open-mouthed, eyes sliding from green eyes, down that stomach, then to that hand, then took the tempting trail back up. His own hand moved in time, his low cries sounding as he pushed into his own, familiar touch.

Those eyes, following his movements, were like a separate caress, wrapping around him and over him, moving him faster and faster. Low panted, hips moving sensually, a feast for his own eyes.

His free hand slid into his trousers, cupping his sacs and tugging, the bright ache enough to send him to climax, seed splashing over his fingers.

"Oh." In a flash, Low was up, crossing to him and taking his hand. Bringing his hand up, Low licked at his wetness, sucking his fingers clean.

Stephen could not have looked away, could not have stopped his low cries to save his very life, entire body responding to that tongue.

"Mmmm." When his hand was free of his seed, Low pressed a kiss to his palm and pulled him up, helping him fasten his trousers. "Come, Stephen. Come upstairs with me to my bed."

"Yes." His voice was hoarse, husky, hungry, his eyes hot as he admired the man that fascinated him so. "Yes, Low."

They ascended the enormous staircase and traversed the hall to the master suite, where a full tester bed awaited them, dark woods and deep greens and golds the colors. It was both comfortable and imposing.

Low smiled at him, going to sit on the bench at the foot of the bed. "Take off the rest of your clothes for me, Stephen."

Stephen nodded, eyes still focused on those fascinating eyes, those still-damp lips. He worked off his low boots and stockings. His trousers and smallclothes came off without too much effort. He even managed his shirt buttons well enough, but damned if his fingers didn't get tangled in the cuffs.

"You've got me all twisted and off-balance. Can't even work my own cuffs."

"Shall I help?"

Low motioned him over, letting him come to stand between those spread thighs as Low worked his cufflinks, freeing him from the shirt. Without any warning, low leaned forward and licked at the skin just above his hipbone.

"You are addictive."

He shifted a bit, stifling a half-chuckle, half-moan. "Tickles."

Low chuckled, breath sliding over his skin. "I am sorry. The things I intend will not tickle, though, I assure you."

He reached out, unable to help himself, and stroked the line of Low's neck. "So fine. So very fine."

"I am glad you approve." Pushing gently at him, Low stood and moved to the side of the bed, climbing the single step to reach the bed. "Come."

His cock began to slowly fill again, growing heavy and hot against his thigh. He walked over close to Low, inhaling the musk and soap scent, feeling his entire body respond.

Low drew him up on the bed, gentling him like he had the first time they were together, like he was a frightened animal. Which probably meant he was in for something just as new and terrifying.

As he had the first night, Stephen trusted in those eyes, in those careful, sure hands. He trusted in Low, letting the worry and nerves and anticipation fill his body.

They shared a kiss, careful, searching. Low's hands settled on his body, stroking, shaping him in to a long sprawl on the bed, fitting against him easily.

A soft sound was drawn from him, not quite need, but more than want – a happy noise, low and rumbling, the sound of pleasure made real.

They simply kissed for what seemed an endless time, long and slow, deep kisses that left him breathless. Low's hands moved over him, tracing the line of his spine, testing the muscles of his arms.

He trembled, head spinning. "Low...make me dizzy." His lips met Low's again and again until all he knew was that sensation, that flavor.

"Stephen." The word fell between kisses. "I would be inside you. I have no wish to make you do something you would not. But I desire it above all things."

One hand found his buttocks, stroking lightly.

He stopped, caught his breath. So intimate, such a deep, secret thing this man asked of him.

Stephen caught Low's eyes, felt himself seen and heard. Known. Touched.

"I would give myself whole to you, if you would take me."

Something extraordinary darkened those eyes to emerald, and Low kissed him deeply, holding him tight. "I will indeed."

Somehow, in some way he did not yet truly understand, things settled between them. He pressed towards Low, tongue sliding in to taste the need and passion in that hungry mouth.

The kiss was returned eagerly, Low taking control of it, plunging deep with his tongue. The hand on his bottom stayed, stroking, dipping between his cheeks. The other came to their joined mouths, fingers slipping in.

His hands came up, holding onto Low's shoulders as the room spun again. He took turns sucking on tongue and fingers, body hungry again, rubbing steadily against the heat atop it.

Pulling his hand away, Low slipped his wet hand down behind as well, pressing between his buttocks, circling his most secret place.

He gasped into Low's mouth, thighs shifting, parting, unsure of whether to pull away or press closer.

Stroking, pushing, Low pressed again and again, the tip of one finger pushing into his body, touching him lightly inside.

He moaned into Low's hungry mouth, hips shifting. Oh... such a strange feeling, so intimate, so close, it sent volleys of shivers through him, made him ache and want.

"Do you see, Stephen? Do you see why I want to be inside you? Only imagine how it will feel."

Low murmured the words against his mouth, into his mouth. Into him, just as the long finger speared him, pushing in.

The touch, the thought itself, pushed a moan right out of him, right into the man touching him. Huge as the night sky, this feeling, and threatening only to get bigger -- Stephen was caught in its web of stars.

"Yes. Oh, Stephen I can feel your heartbeat. So beautiful." Low kissed him again, sending them both spiraling up and up, making them fly.

He never imagined... Terrifying -- the need and the heat and the speed that this man could undo him. Terrifying -- the things that he offered over. Stephen held on, watching those eyes, letting them be a comfort, a truth.

A soft kiss met the corner of his mouth and Low pulled away, just for a moment, leaving him cold and bereft. "Just a moment, my Texan. Let me get something to ease the way."

Before he could even blink, Low was back, a tiny vial full of amber liquid in his hand. Stretching along his length once more, Low offered his lips, settling him, giving him what he needed.

Part of him wondered at the speed in which his body gentled, like he was a wild pony brought in to corral. The hungrier, more immediate part simply took the sensations that were offered, fed from them.

"I'm going to prepare you now, Stephen. I cannot wait any longer." Low took his chin in one hand.

"If I do anything you do not wish, anything that pains you, tell me and I will cease."

He nodded, body growing tight with something less than fear and more than anticipation.

Another soft kiss, and Low pulled his head to rest in the hollow of that slender neck. Slick hands slid down his back, cold oil warming against his skin, following the trail of his spine back to his bottom.

Stephen closed his eyes, lips open and sampling the salt from Low's skin, the act almost enough to distract him from the motion of that hand.

"So open. So giving."

Low found his center, one finger sliding back into him, much more easily thanks to the oil. Deep and searching, Low moved **inside** him.

It made him jerk, moan low, hips moving with an unsure rhythm -- pushing and pulling, trying to make sense out of sensation.

That single finger worked him until he relaxed, Low's other hand working the tight muscles of his back and shoulders, sweet kisses pressing against his ear, his hair.

Soon enough he felt open, ready, and that was when Low slipped another finger in beside the first.

"Oh..." He groaned, feeling his body stretch and spread. There was a moment of burn, but it faded, leaving him feeling stuffed full.

"Yes. Perfect. My Texan." Low spread those long fingers, stretching him harshly, sensation streaking up his spine. "T'would be easier if you faced away from me, but I want to see your face. Do you trust me?"

He fought to catch his breath, body still focused on that bright, odd feeling, before he realized he was nodding. He did, and those scared parts of him that did not, wanted. "Yes."

"Yes." The kiss he got took his breath. Low moved him easily, pushed him back slightly, pulled one of his legs up over Low's hip.

"You amaze me, Stephen. So lovely. So wonderfully sensual." Low's voice went deep, slow and sweet, telling him how perfect he was, how open and needy. Low's fingers slid free of his body, and moments later something blunt and hard and much larger pushed against him.

He focused on Stephen's face, on those eyes. Trust. He had given himself to this man. Trust.

Stroking his lower back, giving him kisses and words and solemn green eyes, Low pushed slowly, minutely, into his body.

His lips parted, the mixture of pressure and stretch overwhelming, unlike anything he knew, his body spread wide.

Low licked at his face, his neck, face showing the strain of holding back. Those thin hips flexed, pushing Low's hardness deeper inside him, splitting him. Cracking him open. Devastating.

A soft noise escaped from him -- feral and wild, broken and whole all at once.

Slowly, surely, Low began to move, broken noises coming from deep within Low's chest. "Oh. Oh, my Stephen."

Huge. So huge, this ache that wanted to be a need. This burn that threatened everything within him. "Low... Full..."

"Breathe, Stephen. Breathe deep and it will ease." Low's hands were seemingly everywhere, smoothing his skin.

His first breath hitched in his chest, but second filled his lungs, as did the third. The pressure remained, easing into a pure heat, a blazing need.

"Yes." Low moved faster, keeping the pace steady and sure, but filling him more completely with every push of those hips.

"So perfect. So very tight. Never... Oh."

Moaning, he opened farther, knee raising up and hips tilting, offering more.

Low took more, in and still in, deeper and deeper. Putting a hand to his back, Low tilted him up even more, stabbing into him, and heat exploded at the base of his spine, a feeling as he'd never had before.

"Low!" He arched, hands scrabbling, breath escaping him. "Oh!"

"My sweet Texan." Low kept driving at him, hitting that spot over and over, smooth hand sliding between them to grasp his cock and pull at it strongly.

His body clenched, the sensation of something, someone spreading him wide as he tumbled towards pleasure excruciating and perfect.

Low marked him with lips and tongue and teeth as heat flooded his body, deep within. Low shook with it, rough, deep sounds pouring forth.

He sobbed out his own pleasure, his need emptying over Low's hand. They shook together, and Low rested against him, breathing hard, hands moving over him randomly.

"Are you well?"

"I..." Something like panic filled him, tempered with pleasure and happiness and he chuckled. "I'm damned if I know. You're inside me, Low. Am I well?"

"Very, very well. The most wonderful thing I have ever encountered."

His breath caught again and he stroked the fine red hair. "You... you make me dizzy inside."

"Good." Low leaned back enough to meet his eyes. "Perhaps if I keep you off balance enough you will be here when I awake."

He pinked, but did not drop his gaze. "Perhaps, especially given I only have so many cufflinks to leave behind as excuse to retrieve them, and the one you have was gifted me by my mother."

Low stroked his cheek. "I am honored. Stay with me, for this night, at least."

"You have my word." He nuzzled into the touch, eyelids drooping.

"Then I shall depend upon it." Low smiled suddenly, and on a less dignified man it would have been a wide grin. "And I shall collect upon the night you owe me at some future date."

Oh. Oh, he would have to watch this coyote of a man more closely. "I look forward to gaming with you again, indeed."

Low's soft chuckle led him into sleep. There would be many games between them, no doubt. With any luck they would both win.

Lessons in the Classics

The night went quite slowly. Driven out of his home for the night by the incessant whinging of his sister, and the constant inquiries of his dowager grandmother, Drummond Carroll had flown into the night, arriving at his club late and immediately drinking a mite too much wine.

Frankly, it was a deadly bore and he should be careful what he wished for, as a quiet night was what he had prayed for on his flight from home. Certainly that was what he had.

The mostly empty club rang with the loud tones of Lord Mandever, who he avoided, as the man held forth on the economic ramifications of a certain canal. Shaking his head, Drummond decided to leave to seek other divertissement. Unfortunately he was so involved in Lord M.'s bombast that he utterly missed the man before him until he ran smack into him.

Dark eyes flashed back at him even as spotlessly gloved hands caught him up. "Careful, the Lord's stories are interminable, but not terrifying enough to flee from.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I did not see you just then." Though how he could not have was a mystery. The man was quite striking.

"Your apology is most firmly not accepted." Those eyes were deep, wicked, the look sharp. "Not unless you come to sit with me and occupy the empty seat at my table."

"Oh." Well, that was quite the best invitation he'd had in some time, even if it was simply that the man was only asking out of the same sense of ennui that had driven him out in the first place. "Very well, sir. I shall do so and we may call it an offense forgiven."

He received a silent nod, a small smile, then that long, elegant hand was offered to him. "Thaddeus Montgomery, at your service."

"Drummond Carroll." He smiled back, feeling the slightest touch of heat in his cheeks at the tiny pressure of that gloved hand on his. What on earth was he about? "'Tis a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"Indeed, it is always good to meet a fresh face in a familiar room." He was led to a small, white-clothed table set for two. "Please, have a seat."

"Thank you." He seated himself opposite Montgomery and studied the man from beneath lowered lashes. "I vow, it might well be worth my while to stay and eat now."

"The kitchen promises a lobster bisque that is most memorable." Black curls topped a sharply featured face, near-black eyes framed by arched brows. Dressed simply, the man exuded an air of the utmost elegance, an almost feral grace.

Quite a contrast to his own pale hair and eyes, and Drummond caught himself wondering what they would look like together in passion. Which made him blush furiously and silently chastise himself. 'Twas only dinner with a gentleman as bored as he. Certainly, he should not act as though he were at one of Devlin's soirees. "Excellent."

"Are you too warm, sir? Shall I have a window cracked?"

"Oh, no. I am quite all right. I... should you like a drink?" Thank heavens for the server approaching.

"A bottle of your best with the soup course. Brandy with dessert. I will forgo the main course this evening." Rich and crisp, his companion's voice was made for giving quiet orders.

"Would it be too much trouble for you if I had a full meal? I am afraid I left home today without a thought to luncheon, let alone dinner."

He had no idea why he felt he needed to ask, but he did. 'Twas not a bad feeling altogether, either.

He received a quiet, almost pleased look. "My companion will have the full courses. Thank you."

Then those dark eyes landed upon him, sharp and attentive. "I have not encountered you before at the salles, the clubs, have you been abroad?"

He laughed, as humorlessly as always when thinking of such things. "Sadly, no. I have been away, but not abroad." Eyes on Montgomery's chin, Drummond fingered the cravat pin he wore. "I was at the seminary if you would believe."

Those eyes glanced at his fingers, then at his face. "It did not suit, I assume?"

"Not a bit. 'Twas my father's idea, you see. I was more interested in a... classical education."

"Ah. The studies of the Romans and the Greeks? They do not suit all men, but the one's that are called are bound to a fascinating path." Those thin gloves were removed and carefully folded as the soup course arrived.

"Yes." Those hands fascinated him, and he wondered at himself. "I find they are uniquely suited to my appetite for knowledge."

"Appetites are difficult things." Thaddeus nodded, lifting the fine silver spoon. "It is a rare man who knows what needs drive him."

Lord above that sounded suggestive. Drummond squirmed in his seat, so unlike him, as he was quite adept at stilling himself in odd situations. Something about the man simply unsettled him, spoke to him on a sensual level. He distracted himself with his soup, sipping a bit from his spoon before answering.

"I have only just found the direction I feel I should turn my attention. Most freeing."

He received another long look. "It is most fascinating, is it not, how finding the correct boundaries can set one towards flight?"

His spoon quivered in his hand. Surely it was only a flight of fancy to see heat in that look. "Quite."

The wine was a wonderful compliment to the soup. Too bad he consumed the first glass so fast he barely tasted it.

Thaddeus ate slowly, sipped at his wine. In fact, the man's eating seemed timed so he was finished with his soup as Drummond finished his roast lamb.

Replete, much more comfortable, Drummond sat back to enjoy his wine, and the sight of the utterly fascinating man across from him.

The dessert tray was left and those pale fingers chose a plate of chocolate-dipped fruits and a pale lemon ice. "Please, help yourself. Did you find the lamb to your liking?"

"Most enjoyable. Thank you for choosing." He smiled, the wine warming his belly. The brandy arrived, and he sampled it as well. "Oh. That's wonderful."

"Yes." Thaddeus ate the fruit slowly, savoring each piece. They did not speak of matters of import, simply commented on the color of a peach, the richest bouquet of a fresh berry. When the waiter came by to refill their snifters, the dark head shook. "We have had enough. Thank you."

Disappointment threaded through him. Their time together neared its end. The lemon ice melted upon his tongue, and he hid his upset as quickly as possible.

"I was headed to my club for company and conversation after the sweet course." The words are spoken quietly, firmly. "Would you care to attend me and continue our discussion of education?"

"Yes. I should like that very much indeed." The relief staggered him, and he tried with great difficulty to explain it away as not having to go back to the Town house and face his female relatives. "Very much."

Thaddeus nodded, a cherry sliding into full lips. "Then we will travel there and continue our intellectual pursuits. In truth, I am intrigued to explore the limits of your knowledge."

"And I find that I am most eager to reveal myself to you."

Good God. Where did that come from?

"I have no doubt that, in our discussions, I will strive to discover what lies beneath the skin of your philosophies." Oh, those eyes were hot, fierce.

How was he to get up from the table in this state? His cock pressed hard against the placket of his trousers, rubbing against him in a maddening manner. He could not hold that stark, hot gaze, and lowered his eyes

Once more.

"Drummond." Thaddeus waited until he met those dark eyes. "Take yourself in hand and relieve your need. Take care not to be noticed. I wish to watch your face in ecstasy."

He stared, neck and face flaming, but his prick did not subside. "You... you cannot be serious." His voice came out no more than a whisper.

"I assure you that I am completely serious, Drummond." Those eyes held his, steady, sure. "It is your choice, but be aware that there are consequences for doubt and rewards for trust."

"I... rewards?" Yes. That sounded far better than consequence. Trust, though, that concept was more foreign. Still, the man compelled him somehow, bent him easily with a will far greater than his, and he had cause to think his was fairly strong.

Taking up the cloth napkin he covered his lap, hand going to the buttons along his fly, fingers shaking so that it was difficult to open.

"Yes. Rewards." The rich voice dropped to a low timbre, vibratory and seductive. "My education is varied and I understand the finer points of need."

Leaping into his hand, his shaft throbbed at the words. Of late his education in such matters grew by leaps and bounds, but nothing in his experience prepared him for this. Resisting the urge to look about,

Drummond applied a firm pressure to his cock, stroking slowly so as not to give himself away.

Thaddeus lifted a strawberry, ate it with small, careful bites, eyes never leaving his face as if the man were not eating the fruit at all, but was instead feasting on his need.

He spread his thighs further, free hand gripping the table hard, other hand moving beneath the table in a steady rhythm. The heat of Thaddeus' eyes seared him. Biting his

lip kept the sounds that tried to escape him. The muscles in his belly quivered. He would simply explode any moment, which would certainly attract attention.

The snifter of brandy was brought to smiling lips, Thaddeus' focus unbroken. When the snifter was drained, a single finger brushed over his whitened knuckles. "Quite delicious, indeed."

Drummond shook, hot seed spraying his hand, falling into the napkin he held. 'Twas all he could do not to cry out. Surely the scent alone would give him away, but he could not care, not when Thaddeus watched him in that manner.

"Beautiful." Thaddeus moved closer, trading napkins with him without so much as batting an eye. A single finger, wet with his own seed, touched against his lips. "You wear pleasure well. I am most intrigued. Ready yourself now and we shall explore further."

Tasting himself unconsciously, Drummond cleaned thoroughly, never once looking away from Thaddeus. Smitten. He was well and truly smitten.

When he was put back to rights, Thaddeus stood. "Come. We have much to discuss, to learn of one another."

He only hoped that were so. Standing as well, he pulled his evening coat around him, making sure no stain or spot showed. "Lead the way, then, sir. I am a most eager student."

Oh, the heavens did reward the patient and faithful.

Months of quiet waiting, of patient watching for someone to answer his need and this lovely boy was dropped into his lap like manna from Heaven. Angelic in appearance, but with a tongue just forked enough to promise entertainment, Drummond was the picture of bliss, rosy-cheeked as that hidden prick spent itself on command.

Most delicious.

They settled quietly in Thaddeus' carriage, his command to the driver only to take them to the club. Better that Drummond wait to know that they belonged to the same establishment.

The carriage lurched into motion and Drummond swayed, reaching out instinctively to catch himself, hand landing on Thaddeus' thigh. "Oh! I beg your pardon."

The touch sent a shiver of a most dark need through him, sliding up his leg to settle in his groin. Still, all things tasted better in time, and he waited until Drummond straightened, pale cheeks glowing. "Do you?"

Beg, that is."

Those pale eyes flew to meet his, wide and shocked, before Drummond looked away, creamy skin turning darkest rose. "I. I have found it aids the cause very little."

Oh, now, that would simply not do. No shame. Arousal, excitement, perhaps embarrassment and the stretching of ridiculous boundaries -- yes, but no shame.

He reached over and gently turned Drummond's face toward him, taking a single chaste kiss to remind the young man the road they traveled. "What cause is this you speak of?"

Staring at his lips, Drummond shook his head. "Any. When I begged my father not to send me away to the church school when I was little more than a babe? It had no effect. And when I begged to go home? Less. I prefer not to."

"Let me assure you, I have no desire to act as your father." He took another taste, this one pushing a bit, insisting. "There is not a single paternal bone that resides within."

"Ohhh." The sound was small, breathy, and Drummond simply melted into his kiss.

He took another kiss and another, allowing himself to luxuriate in the flavors of brandy and need. Before the situation careened too far out of his hand, Thaddeus pulled back, gloved thumb rubbing Drummond's swollen bottom lip. "Tell me, why did you answer my will at supper? Why did you take yourself in hand?"

Attention rapt, Drummond leaned into his touch. "I have no idea. Because you wanted me to, I suppose. I wanted to please you."

Such candor.

"You were quite lovely, Drummond. Beautiful as you found your pleasure." He took another swift kiss. "I am quite curious to hear of your education, your desires."

Oh, such a lie, when his prick demanded that this most beautiful one be bound against a lavender-papered wall, hole stretched wide, his own seed captured within, while he spread dark, hot stripes along pale thighs and ass.

"My desires? I fear I am only beginning to explore them. I thought... well. I thought I knew until this evening."

"And what have you learned this evening, sweet lad?" Nothing near what your education will be, nothing compared to what we shall teach one another.

"That there is a wealth of learning I have not even discovered." Drummond moved closer, wholly unconsciously.

"Indeed." He allowed himself a final kiss as the carriage slowed, assuring himself that Drummond's lips were wet and swollen, those pale cheeks flushed with passion.

"Oh. Are we there?" Drummond seemed drugged, unaware of his surroundings, focused solely upon him.

"Yes, we are. Come, my pet, let us find a warm corner to explore further." Such lovely focus. What fun they would have.

The carriage door opened, the deep green door with its bronze hyacinth knocker coming into focus.

Drummond accompanied him, hand lingering in his as he alighted. The club got a look, a double glance, and Drummond smiled, his look rueful. "That is how you knew to approach me?" One hand went again to the cravat pin Drummond wore.

"It is how I knew to invite you to dine with me." Thaddeus stopped, lifted that chin again, and spoke most firmly. "Do not doubt me, pet. I would have approached you regardless. A need as sweet as yours is not to be ignored."

Then, without awaiting a response, he led Drummond into the foyer, divesting them of overcoats and hats and arranging for his favorite rooms to be heated. Drummond let him make the arrangements, following him quietly, smiling at a few acquaintances, but not stopping to speak.

Thad made his way through the foyer into a large sitting room. Devlin was not sitting in attendance -- undoubtedly playing cat and mouse with the bright soldier. He looked back at the bright eyes of Drummond -- no need of playing here, he thought, just a firm hand and attention.

He stopped to speak with Low, making small talk just long enough to make Drummond fidget. Perfect, time to continue their journey. "Be still, Drummond."

A jump, a quick glance, and Drummond went still. Bless him, one could almost feel him vibrate, but he stood quietly, without moving. Low acknowledged it with only a quirk of an eyebrow, continuing their discussion easily.

They spoke for a few moments then Thad leaned forward, grinning wickedly. "See, Low? Just a babe in the woods and he bends more easily than your barbarian colonial."

From the corner of his eye he saw Drummond's deep blush. Low simply smiled. "That is the charm of my Texan. No doubt, to you that is the allure of this one. We have always preferred different levels of adherence."

He chuckled and clapped Low on the arm -- a most glorious man and a dear friend, and quite possibly the best chess player in the land. "Come, my pet, let us find your reward for such lovely demeanor."

Face and neck, indeed, all visible skin, burning red, Drummond followed. Truly it made his eyes glow.

He led Drummond into a fire-lit room, the flames dancing over the violet walls, the deep purple velvet upholstery. The door shut behind him and he locked it, placing the key where Drummond could see it on the mantle.

"You did very well, Drummond. You color beautifully. Indeed, you were the centre of attention."

"Oh, I hope not. That would be very dull for them indeed." Drummond began to fidget once more, but immediately stilled. "Your attention I will easily take, however."

"Drummond. Do not believe for a moment that I would spend my time on anyone but the most desirable." He cupped Drummond's jaw, took a kiss, and then stood back. "Undress."

There was no resistance in the line of Drummond's body as he began to work buttons. Those hands shook the tiniest bit, but when the coat was drawn away, Thaddeus could see the evidence of Drummond's need.

"You are a lovely one, my pet. What would you have as a reward? Would you have me stand you before a looking glass, stroke that hidden need until it spends? Would you have long kisses while you are bound so that you may neither come or touch?"

"Bound?" That look was utterly curious, terribly focused.

"Yes, Drummond. Leather cuffs around your wrists, your ankles, stretching you out. A thin leather strap keeping that fine prick in control." Thad removed his jacket, his waistcoat, eyes never leaving Drummond's body.

Naked, Drummond could not hide his reactions, could not cover the deep flush of his skin, the way his prick jumped. Better still, his pet did not try. "I.. oh. Oh, my God."

"Mmm... such beauty." Thad turned towards a finely carved, mahogany armoire, and pulled out his cuffs, his straps. "Would you have that, my pet? Would you like to be stretched beneath me, unable to move?"

"I..." Drummond took a step toward him, prick almost purple with need. "Oh, yes." His pet stopped. "If it pleases you."

"It does." He held out the larger cuffs. "Bend and put these on your ankles. Turn so I might admire that sweet backside, that secret hole."

Slowly, Drummond obeyed him, turning his back. He bent, the slim, knobby line of spine giving way to sweetly rounded buttocks that pushed back at him as Drummond fastened the cuffs.

They would be perfect with his marks cutting across them. He leaned forward, blowing softly at that exposed, tight ring of muscles.

"Oh!" Drummond jumped, falling forward and catching his weight on his hands. Those thighs parted, balls swaying, muscles tightening. Lovely.

"Oh, my pet. Move carefully, now, else I set those fine blushing cheeks to burning with the purest fire." His hands moved over the fine skin, thumbs stroking along the crease.

The touch moved Drummond to press back against his hands, moaning lightly. "You want to mark me?"

He leaned down, bit the swell of Drummond's hip hard enough to bruise. "I have marked you, my Pet."

"Please!" Drummond begged very prettily for someone who preferred not to.

"Please what, my pet?" His hands stroked circles, lips teasing the top of Drummond's cleft.

"I need. I. I need you." Rocking, whimpering, Drummond gave him the most beautiful portrait of wanting.

"And you will have me." He bit down again, one hand sliding down to squeeze and roll the tight sacs. He would let Drummond spend once more and then spend the night in bonds, learning the sensations, learning patience.

Sweet, soft sounds of utter desire escaped Drummond as he searched for more touch, more sensation. That secret hole taunted him, promising heat and tightness as yet unknown by him, and the tight sacs in his hand drew up with the need to expel.

"How lovely you will look, your skin red with my marks, your body snapped around my shaft." He tugged at those taut sacs, whispering over the trembling skin.

A sharp cry greeted his word, his breath, and Drummond spilled, hips thrusting against the air.

The scent washed over him and he groaned, standing Drummond up and taking a harsh kiss before dragging him over to the wall wherein hooks were driven. He fastened one

cuff, then another around the thin wrists, then bound his pet to the wall. "I will take you, Pet, take you and then mark you." The way Drummond took to the bonds warmed him. The line of Drummond's body showed him trust, submission to his will. Desperate need for the things he promised. Remarkable.

He fastened Drummond's legs, spreading and stretching those thin muscles until they shivered. He opened his mouth to warn Drummond to relax when his pet eased into the leather, muscles allowing the bonds to do the work of support. Beautiful. Utterly beautiful.

Reaching for the oil, Thad slicked three fingers, pressing two into that tight space while his free hand undid the buttons on his trousers.

Drummond sighed, opening for him as easily as something so tight could. If his pet had begun his education of the senses, it was less practical application and more academic. For which he should be grateful. That body would be the sweetest vice.

"Such trust, such sweet yielding. Shall I reward you, my sweet pet, fill you and allow you to feel my need?"

"Yes. Please. I long for you." Drummond rode his fingers, proving his words true.

He added another finger, stretching the tight ring further while oiling his shaft. He burned within, fascinated as he had not been in years, if ever. Such trust, such need, such beauty.

When Drummond bore down against him, he slipped his fingers away, replacing them with his own heat.

"Oh! I feel you." Shuddering, burning with the sweetest fire, Drummond took him in, writhing upon him. Sweat beaded along the fine skin of Drummond's neck, his spine, tempting his lips.

He fastened his mouth over the top of Drummond's spine, swallowing the cry of pure bliss that threatened to escape him. He was lost, held tight by perfection and caught there, pushing deep and then deeper still.

Swaying in the bonds, Drummond absorbed the impact of every thrust, giving and giving, taking it all. "Thaddeus! How you feel! I cannot bear it."

"You will, my Pet. You must." He started moving rhythmically, giving into his need.

A long, low moan was his reward, as Drummond moved with the impetus of his thrusts. Moved so easily, matching his rhythm as best he could.

He did not last -- could not with that heated silk pulling at him, tugging his pleasure out in needy little strokes. Thad bit down when he spent himself, shuddering in sheer bliss.

Drummond simply wailed, milking him gently with deep reverberations of his body. That sweet spine snapped straight, Drummond's shining hair falling against his face.

"So good, so open. Such perfect trust." He kissed Drummond's shoulder gently, reaching into the chest of drawers, fingers finding the object he desired. "I am within you now, my pet. Deep inside and there I will stay."

He slowly eased out of the sheath that seemed made for him, replacing his own length with a small phallus, narrow right before the flared end, capturing his seed within this lovely vessel.

"Oh. Good." Dazed, head lolling, Drummond rested against the bonds, sweet bottom clenching about the faux phallus.

"One last thing I would have from you before we retire into the safety of my bedstead, Pet." He lifted a cane from a well-chosen collection atop the chest. Heavy and wide, it would leave a mark, but not cut, not slice the skin. So much had been learned this day, those harder lessons were better left for another. "I wish you to wear my stripes, to be marked as my own, to have every motion tomorrow remind you that I see you."

"Stripes?" Moving restlessly, Drummond tried to look over one shoulder at him.

He brought the cane around so Drummond could see it. "Three stripes and then we will retire to the bed and I will hold you as you sleep."

"This will please you?" The voice shook as much as the body, Drummond's muscles tensing and releasing, buttocks moving around the phallus.

"To know you are marked as mine and mine alone, by my own hand? To know you braved pain for no greater reason than I wish it?" He took a long, heady kiss, hand cupping those sensitive buttocks, thumb jostling the wood imbedded there. "Yes, my pet."

"Anything. Anything you wish." Drummond's whole demeanor became one of yearning, swaying toward him, stopped only by the cuffs.

He gave another kiss and another, filling himself with the heady flavor of Drummond's trust.

Then he stepped back, stroking the fine skin. "I will be quick, you have my word."

He let three blows fly, two upon the sweet buttocks, the third landing upon the stretched thighs. The marks were beautiful, even, white for a heartbeat and then a deep rose, as if a fire had been lit within.

Still pliant, still giving, Drummond took his marks beautifully, crying out sharply only once. Those hips moved sweetly even after the blows stopped falling, and Thaddeus felt should he look, he would see Drummond once more roused.

He stripped quickly, then unhooked his pet from the way, leaving him at once loose and bound. He then eased Drummond to the bed, holding the heating, lovely body in his arm and delivering the long touches and needy kisses so truly earned.

Eager, needful, Drummond moved against him, panting. "Thaddeus. Oh. I never knew."

He stroked along Drummond's shaft, reaching down to nudge the phallus within every few breaths. "I am blessed to be offered the chance to show you. So sweet, so pliant."

He let his voice add to the touches, his pleasure with Drummond's obedience obvious, rich.

"I have never even dreamed." The touches went on and on, Drummond pushing against him easily, happily, sweet noises falling upon his skin.

Thaddeus chuckled, happiness a most fine drug. "Oh, I have, my pet. I have dreamed. And tomorrow when every motion of my hand upon that lovely rear makes you moan, you will wonder if it is a nightmare."

"Oh!" Drummond came for him, hot seed spreading once more between them, his very words providing the final impetus needed. When it was over Drummond relaxed so profoundly against him that he wondered if his pet had gone right into sleep. Only when a soft kiss fell upon his cheek did he know that Drummond awaited his word still.

He brought his hand up and slowly licked it clean, then settled upon the pillows with a well-satisfied sigh, settling Drummond against him. "Sleep, sweet pet. Tomorrow dawns all too early and you might rest easy here always."

"You will be here when I awake?"

"You have my word." He draped the covers around them and extinguished the lamp.

"Then I shall depend upon it." Truly, Drummond must have taken him at his word, for only moments later soft snores told him his pet slept.

One hand found its home around a rounded hip, the other in silken hair, relaxing towards sleep. Yes, the heavens did truly reward the patient and faithful.

Lessons in the Classics

The world was purple. That was Drummond's first thought when he opened his eyes. The next thought was that he was unaccountably sore in his thighs and buttocks. His third brought him back to the reality of what he'd done the previous night, and of the warm body wrapped about him.

Oh.

Despite the fact that there was no one to see, Drummond's face burned with hot blood, and he squirmed, setting off a ripple affect that started at the center of his body and worked up his spine.

The things he had done. That had been done to him. He had never even dreamed. Thaddeus. Oh my. Unconsciously, Drummond rubbed against the warm skin pressed against his, prick growing as he remembered in vivid detail how he'd given over to the other man, so easily bending to that strong will. Oh.

Thaddeus' hand slid over his side, his hip, a soft moan sounding as he was held close. "Mmm... good morning, Pet."

"Good morning." Thanks to years of entrenched manners he was able to reply. "Good morning."

Oh, goodness.

His still bound hands were drawn up and up, slowly stretching him, awakening a dozen little aches inside him, making him aware of the hard phallus still lodged within him.

His entire body tingled and throbbed, growing tight and hot, nipples drawing up, cock firming. Drummond was both amazed and embarrassed, but too aroused to care. This man enchanted him; that was the only explanation.

Dark, wicked eyes gleamed at him, hot and focused as the chains were fastened to the bed. "Are you well, Pet? Did you dream?"

Quick, biting kisses made his lips tingle, sure hands sliding over welts that felt afire.

"I. I rather thought I had. Now I see it was all real." Really, he had no control whatsoever with this man.

"Oh, I assure you, Drummond, I am most unequivocally real." Fingers combed through the curls that crowned his head, lips mapped his face. "The question is, do you want me to fade as does a phantasm?"

The very thought made his heart plummet. So quickly had Thaddeus worked his way into the fabric of Drummond's very being! Gasping, pushing into the touch, Drummond shook his head. "No! I... please. I would spend more time with you."

"Oh." He received a deep kiss, Thaddeus' prick hard and hot against his thighs. "Of all you have offered me, this pleases me the most, my Pet."

Attempting to touch Thaddeus brought fire to the stretched muscles of his arms, and he whimpered, a needy sound to his own ears. The kiss he took eagerly, and returned doubly so. The taste of Thaddeus enflamed him.

The kisses continued until he was shuddering, shaking, fingers dancing over his skin. His nipples were teased, the phallus within him shifted, the tip of his shaft rubbed.

He burned, and the stripes across his arse and thighs throbbed in time with his rapid heartbeat. Every shift and pull of the phallus stabbed at him.

"Mmm... so eager. Shall I let you spend yourself this morning, Pet? Or shall I bid you wait?"

"Wait? I am not certain I can." He would, though. Oh, he would if Thaddeus only asked.

"I am certain of you, though." Thaddeus' eyes twinkled, winked. "Still, I have plans for our day and this would be a delightful start to it."

Then that dark head moved, heat surrounding his need, lips feasting upon it as his stripes were touched by wicked fingers.

He cried out sharply, heat and wetness and sweet, sweet lips and hands making his belly clench. His entire form rocked with it, pleasure rising in him in a great tide. The phallus within him was bumped, the heat surrounding him pulling hard, suction causing his toes to curl, hands fisting. It was too much to contain, and Drummond thrashed, hips rising and falling, his seed falling hotly into Thaddeus' voracious mouth. Before his passion-fogged mind cleared, Thaddeus took his mouth with a sharp-edged kiss, sharing his own bitter-salt flavor.

Stunned, drained, he lay beneath Thaddeus and shared drugging kisses, heartbeat slowing, languor stealing through him. "You. I. Oh, Thaddeus."

His wrists were released, leather removed, his body slowly caressed as Thaddeus removed the bonds at his ankles, lips and teeth testing his skin. "So beautiful, my Pet."

His limbs felt strangely light without the bonds. How odd that he should be so eager to give himself to this man, thrilling rather than bridling at the sobriquet of "pet".

His... lover? friend? bedmate? Thaddeus settled beside him, eyelids heavy, lips swollen. Hands traced his welts, lazy and slow.

"You said you had plans for us today? Do any of them include food and bathing?" He could not help but feel Thaddeus, hard against him, and he squirmed.

"Indeed. Breakfast with Sirs Devlin and Lowell. They will be quite eager to hear that your skin takes a mark well. We should also have a bath drawn, yes? Ready your sweet skin for more of my attentions? In fact, I imagine my little gift," The plug was nudged, Thaddeus' heat sliding against him. "Will be becoming most uncomfortable, yes?"

"Well, now you mention it." Drummond gave Thaddeus a rueful grin. "I fear it has become more painful than pleasing."

"You will become more used to them." His lips were lightly kissed. "I will keep you filled and marked, Drummond, but I will never take more than you can offer. I give you my word."

Lord above. If his cock tried to rise once more, it might kill him. Still, it proved he would eagerly take anything this man chose to give him. Even if it meant the embarrassment of breakfasting with Lord Mountebanc with the marks of a cane on his bum.

"I trust you."

"I will never offer you reason to do otherwise."

With all of his heart, Drummond believed it. He nuzzled Thaddeus' shoulder. "What other wonders have you planned for us?"

He received a soft chuckle that sent shivers down his spine. "Oh, lovely Pet, you will have to wait and watch." A hand brushed his welts again, making him shudder. "And feel. Now, you find a robe and ring for a bath and my coffee and let me send for some things from my home so we might explore further."

Giving Thaddeus a light kiss, Drummond did exactly that, wondering at himself all the while. The man was certainly compelling. And thorough. He ached in places he did was not even aware existed.

He shrugged on a robe, eyes catching on the straps of leather left on the floor from the night before. Somehow he knew he would have discovered even more ere tomorrow morning dawned.

He had spent the day quietly, resting and relaxing with Low and Devlin, playing chess and conversing before heading back to the suite of rooms he preferred, waiting for his lover, his Drummond, his Pet.

Thaddeus had planned for the night's entertainments, had made careful, quiet invitations, had slowly increased the intensity of their games, had carefully watched Drummond and noted the low whispers that turned those pale cheeks rose.

The suggestions that filled even the most spent shaft.

He would no more push his lover unwilling than he would turn him aside. He had never met a more willing, a more yielding, a more well-suited match to his own needs. Now that the plans were set, he would share a light supper with his lover and present his will, see if he had indeed judged Drummond's desires correctly.

A soft knock preceded the arrival of his lover. Drummond came into the room, tossing his hat and gloves to one side. "Thaddeus." He got a smile and a soft kiss on the cheek.

"How does the day find you, Drummond?" He stretched out, admiring the fine lines, the sheer beauty and unexpected strengths of his lover. So beautiful.

"Well enough, now I'm with you. You look wicked."

"Wicked? No. More... eager. Have you dined?"

"I could use a bite, but I did have a meal earlier." Drummond threw himself into a chair across from him. "What have we planned for tonight?"

"I have something special arranged, my Pet." He watched Drummond's face carefully, intent on the emotions that flashed in those expressive eyes. "I wish to share the sight of your beauty, your compliance, your need."

"Share?" Drummond stared at him, eyes wide. But the heat that rose in Drummond's cheeks was unmistakable. The thought intrigued him.

He nodded. "Yes, my Pet. I wish to allow our friends to see you, to see the touch of my will upon your body."

"Oh." Those clear eyes went cloudy as Drummond thought on it. "Oh, yes."

Such perfect need. His body tightened, one hand reaching out towards his lover. "Kiss me."

Drummond came to him easily, hand in his, kissing him with melting sweetness.

He drew Drummond in close, holding his lover close and taking that sweet, open mouth.

Nothing enflamed him as this sweet body did. Nothing ever had. Straddling his lap, Drummond moaned into the kiss, hands in his hair.

Thaddeus dove into the kisses, offering Drummond a taste of his need, his hunger. His hands cupped the fine buttocks, stroking over the flesh he would mark, sign with his own hand. "Mine."

"Yours. Whatever you wish. Whenever." Drummond smiled down at him, affection shining in his eyes.

"I wish to show them all how you have honored me, how blessed I am that I only might touch and mark and bind you." He stroked Drummond's cheek, fingers in love with Drummond's skin.

"If it pleases you, Thaddeus. You are all I see."

"You please me, Drummond, in all ways." Thaddeus brought Drummond close, hands removing his pet's clothing with practiced ease, baring that skin to his eyes.

Not just compliant, Drumm was eager, moving to ease his way, body moving into his touch naturally. Soon his pet was bare for him and he admired, hands sliding over the fine skin. His fingers tangled in the pale curls above the full prick, then down to weigh velvet sacs within his palms. "I would have your mouth, Pet."

"Anything." Drumm kissed him deeply, before sliding off to sit between his knees, on the floor. "I love the way you taste."

He rippled, prick throbbing with need. Yes. Yes, he should spend his need now so that his lover might have nothing but his attention, undivided. Drummond opened his trousers, releasing him to the ministrations of the sweet tongue and soft lips that closed about him. Oh, yes. His eyelids dropped, hands stretching out along the back of the couch as he allowed himself to drown in the pleasures Drummond offered.

Sucking strongly, Drummond set to his work happily, lips teasing sweetly, fingers at the base of his shaft.

Thaddeus began to whisper -- soft words of faith, of pleasure. Hints of wicked acts yet to come. Perversions that he would explore, journeys that he would take with Drummond that would sink them deeper into their explorations. The words, or perhaps the act, made Drummond moan, made him suck harder, working him unmercifully. His words faded, focus dissolving as Drummond sent him flying pell-mell into unadulterated need.

Drummond drank him down, tiny noises of pleasure falling from him.

Relaxing into the cushions, he reached down, stroking Drummond's hair, thigh muscles tightening as aftershocks rocked through him. "My sweet pet. My love. My Drummond."

"Yours." Lips shining with his seed, Drummond looked up at him, offering pure devotion. "Only yours."

"Yes. Mine." He leaned down and licked those open lips. "Go, Pet, and find the leather bindings. I will place them upon you before we go downstairs."

Eyes shining, cock bobbing before him, Drummond went, retrieving the bindings as requested, delivering them to him with a smile.

"Are you happy, my Pet? Truly?" He asked the question as he opened one well-used cuff, opening it for Drummond's fine wrist.

"Oh, Thaddeus." Drummond leaned against him, body molding to his own. "I have never been happy before, though I had no idea until I met you.

For now I am."

No one responded so beautifully to the bindings as his lover. He fastened the buckles around one, then bound the other wrist. "You are loved, Drummond, wanted. Needed."

He took a chaste, careful kiss. "Seen."

"You give me things no one else ever has." Drummond offered him the bindings for that sweet cock.

"That is because you are my own." He took the leather, smiling up. "Stroke yourself, my Pet, but do not spend. I wish to bind you at your most needy."

Deep red rose in Drummond's cheek and chest, tinting his skin with need. "Yes, Thaddeus." Closing his hands around his prick, Drummond stroked himself, eyes never leaving Thaddeus' own.

"I remember our meeting, Pet. How you cheeks pinked for me as you spent yourself beneath the table." He tilted his head, teasing gently. "I could smell you, did you know? Smell your need."

"I... oh. I worried about that." That sweet cock swelled even further, Drummond's hips moving rhythmically. "I hoped it would not offend. You took me out of myself utterly."

"Offend?" Thaddeus leaned forward so that his laughter brushed against Drummond's skin. "For offering me that which is mine? It will not happen."

"I hope devoutly that it does not. I worry sometimes that this is all a dream." Drummond trembled on the edge of release, he could see it in the fine tremors of Drummond's muscles, smell it in the air.

He pushed Drummond's hands away, wrapping the leather around the throbbing shaft and tight sacs. "Not a dream at all, my Pet." He leaned down once his lover was bound and took the weeping tip into his mouth, sucking softly for a few heartbeats. "Not at all."

A soft cry met his ears, Drummond reaching out to touch his shoulder to steady himself. "You... oh Thaddeus."

"Yes, Drummond?" He smiled up, tongue lapping and teasing. Such fine games they played together, such things they discovered.

"You make my knees unsteady." Such honesty, of both words and countenance.

"This is only the beginning." He stood, running his hand down Drummond's spine to cup the rounded buttocks. "Shall we go downstairs, Pet?"

Rising to his toes, Drummond breathed in sharply. "Yes. If that is what you wish. I admit, I am somewhat fearful, Thaddeus." Drummond looked to him, searching his face. "You will be with me all the while, though. I trust you."

"No one will touch you." He cupped Drummond's jaw. "And I will not leave your side. Your trust will be rewarded."

The touch was taken easily, moved into, a smile offered tremulously. "Then let us go."

He nodded and simply opened the door, one hand wrapped around Drummond's elbow. They walked down the hall to the suite of rooms at the end, Thaddeus refusing to hurry, refusing to allow Drummond to hide behind him.

Drummond tried very hard to be brave, 'twas obvious in his carriage. That he was mortified was also patently obvious in his color, in his nervous stumble.

Halfway down the hallway, Thaddeus stopped and took a long, hard kiss, wrapping Drummond in his arms for a moment before continuing on. He would take no more than Drummond could give. Dazed from the kiss, Drummond continued on with him, eyes downcast, but no longer appearing so afraid.

There were only five within the well-appointed room, and them sitting easy in the shadows, away from the light of the hearth. One long couch awaited them, a small box and a long, shining cane remained where he had left them earlier.

He nodded and smiled as he led Drummond to the divan. "Good evening, my friends. I pray the evening finds you well."

A tiny movement from Drummond, and then his pet settled quietly, no fidgeting or moving as their friends nodded, but made no sound. He stood and looked down at Drummond, well-pleased and letting that approval show. "Give me your hands, Pet."

With a quick, nervous glance at the corners of the room, Drummond presented his hands, a deep breath swelling his chest.

He took those hands, pressed his thumbs in the center of each. "Nothing matters here, nothing but my will."

Then he moved Drummond around, turning his pet until Drummond knelt on the divan, head and bound hands on one curved and padded arm. Thaddeus brought up a thin, fine chain from the heavy wooden legs and fastened it through a ring on each wrist. The bonds were most visual than practical, but would comfort his Pet, ease him, force the illusion of control into Thaddeus' hands where it belonged.

The sight of the chain did exactly what he hoped. The entire line of Drummond's body softened, his back stretching to present a long, perfect target, buttocks pushing out. Perfectly attuned to his will, a picture of need.

He heard the appreciative murmur, and indeed, he could no more resist his own sound than he could resist running his hand along that sweet, fine spine. "Spread your thighs, Pet. I wish to see all of you."

As if pulled by the very sound of his voice, Drummond's thighs opened, torso tilting just so that all of his most tender parts were exposed.

"Such perfection." His hands followed his eyes, fingers sliding along fine line, moving down to stroke the place where leather bound flesh.

"Oh." Drummond shook beneath his hands, soft sigh issuing from him. Those sweet legs parted further for him, opening to his touch, and from somewhere behind him he heard a long moan.

He stroked with hands and lips, loving and admiring the trusting man who offered him so much. He reached down for his box, fingers finding the spiced oil that would tingle and heat him all through. Small movements met his own, yet Drummond was pliant to his will, staying where he was placed, awaiting his ministrations.

Thaddeus leaned up, slicking his fingers well with the oil, grinning as his fingers warmed immediately. What a delicious burn it would deliver to his pet, what a sensation.

Without warning, he slid one finger deep inside Drummond's body, piercing and invading.

A sharp cry escaped, quickly stifled, and Drummond's body closed around him tightly. "Oh! It... Thaddeus, it burns." There was more pleasure than pain in that beloved voice, and Drummond's entire form undulated upon his hand.

"Yes, Pet, and it will not cease 'til I will it so." He added another finger, spreading the oil further, deeper.

Muscles jumping, Drummond swayed, head pressing down onto his arms, back rolling. The scent of him was rich, his need obvious.

He stopped his own motion, watching as Drummond rode his fingers, exposed that sweet, addictive need without hesitation. "Lovely."

"I... oh! Thaddeus!" He had hit a spot within Drummond's body that never failed to make his pet crazed. Such lovely desire.

"Yes, Pet. Yes." He rubbed the spot again and again, spreading the heat deep.

With his free hand, he carefully unwrapped the wooden phallus coated with sweet, clear oil that would ease the burn, quench the tingling itch inside his lover. Drummond contracted around his fingers over and over, muscles clenching and relaxing. He waited for the tension to build, for the need to crest, for his pet to reach and surpass the limit of patience.

There was the moment he waited for, Drummond's body shaking, balls drawing tight, shaking hard. "Please, Thaddeus."

He gave a soft sound of approval, sliding his fingers out and pushing the gleaming phallus in with the same motion.

Spine arching, Drummond took it easily, fairly glowing in the low light, forcing soft sounds from their audience.

He spent a moment just stroking and petting, then retrieved the cane and walked to kneel before Drummond. He showed the shiny implement to his lover. "I wish you to wear my stripes, Pet. What say you?"

He knew very well that Drummond loved the cane, took it like he was made for it, as wielded by Thaddeus' hand, but it was good to have it confirmed by the soft moan, the sweet shudder that moved through his lover.

He gave Drummond a single kiss. "This then, and we shall retire together, Pet, and see to our pleasure."

Drumm leaned into the kiss eagerly, and nodded when it ended, pillowing head in crossed arms once more, soft and relaxed and ready.

Thaddeus stood and began, working his pet from thighs to shoulders with sharp, definite stripes, white marks flushing a deep, dark rose. His own body responded, pleasure flaring with each line left behind.

Each mark was accompanied by a sound, a sweet, dark sound from his pet. The bound genitals, the plugged arse, the marks that sprang up beneath his hand, they all told him of his utter possession of his lover. Drummond was indeed his. When the last blow fell, a sharp, fierce blow crossing the crease where thigh met arse, the cane dropped, his entire body was sheened with sweat, his prick full to bursting.

Drummond still moved as though the cane fell, body pushing back and up. The tension in the room was almost unbearable, and the sounds and scents of male arousal added to the pressure in his groin.

The urge to yank the phallus from Drummond's body and replace it with his own body was fierce, but he would resist, wait until they were alone to offer his Pet his own control, his need. He ran his hand along Drummond's back and buttocks, tracing the stripes, fingers jostling the plug. "Perfect. Mine."

"Yours. The answer was immediate, and sincere. Every touch of his hands brought fresh tremors, new sounds.

"Mine." He moved around to the front of the sofa, unhooked the chain from the floor and caught Drummond's eyes. "Come, my Pet. Let us retire."

"Yours." Drummond leaned toward him, silently asking a kiss, a reassurance. The evidence of tears showed upon his face, utterly beautiful.

He gave that kiss, letting his lover know his pleasure, his pride. He slowly helped Drummond stand, exposing the marks, the phallus still held snug, the dark, bound prick. "Thank you for your attention, my friends, but it is time to bid you adieu."

Then he led Drummond toward the door, thin chains held in his hand.

Following him easily, Drummond ignored their audience, eyes only for him as they left the room, never once letting the chains go taut.

It was a matter of pride that he managed to make their rooms before he pulled Drummond's arms above his head and took the kiss he needed, free hand tilting the beloved face up toward him. His pet simply melted into the contact, kissing him back with equal fervor. The heat from his body was astonishing. The kisses continued until his ache could not be denied, then he lifted his head, panting. "Bed, Pet. Hands and knees. I need to feel your heat."

"Yes." Drummond scrambled, made awkward by his engorged prick, going to the bed and climbing upon it. He assumed a hands and knees position, the marks on his buttocks and thighs stark against the pale skin.

"Oh... my Pet. I ache for you." His clothes were thrown away, as were the games between them. Drummond had given him all he asked for and more, now he would offer his own need, his own passion. His love.

His knelt behind his lover, groaning at the heat, fingers playing with the embedded phallus. "I would have you."

"Yes. Please. Oh, Thaddeus, please." Now that they were alone his pet was ready to beg, to ask anything of him. Each shift of the phallus brought him a whisper of desire

"Yes, my love, my pet." Unable to wait, he pulled the wooden phallus away, his cock pushing deep into that incredible heat, that gripping perfection.

"Oh! Thaddeus. Yours." Drummond took him in, body pulling at him. Hands fisting in the coverlet, Drummond rode it, begging him.

He draped himself over Drummond, thrusting furiously, hissing at the heat that poured from his lover. "Mine."

"Yours, yours, yours. I need. Oh, please." It was a chant, a series of irresistible pleas.

He fumbled with the leather strap, freeing Drummond's need with a quick motion. "Yes, love. Now. Come for me. Give me your need. Now.

Now."

Clamping down on him so hard he saw stars, Drummond did just as he asked, spilling immediately. The sound of his name on his pet's lips was sweet and good and right. His own pleasure pushed from him, flooding his lover, teeth sliding over Drummond's nape.

"Oh. Thaddeus." Drummond collapsed beneath him, sprawling on the bed, flushed and wet with sweat and seed.

"Yes. Oh." He settled beside Drummond, petting his lover, fingers dancing over the marks. "You are so pleasing to me."

"I hope I continue to be so. I... what would I do without you, Thaddeus?"

"It pains me to even think on that, Drummond." He stroked the damp blond hair. "Indeed, I love you too much to imagine being without your company."

Drummond squirmed, and when he moved to accommodate him, his pet turned to take a deep kiss. "I love you."

"I know. It is a constant that soothes me." He took another kiss. "Now,

Pet. Back on your stomach so I might clean you and rub in the salve."

Offering his back once more, Drummond gave him a contented sound, almost a purr, letting him clean and salve the welts, his marks, on that straight back.

Finally they were put to rights and he could lean against the pillows, drawing his lover into his arms, holding them tight together.

"You know, Thaddeus. After we began, I did not even know they were there. You really are all I see."

Oh, such honor, such love. "After we began, Pet, they no longer mattered. And Drummond? You were all they saw, your beauty."

"Mmm. Oh no. They saw you too, Thaddeus. You are never more beautiful than when you mark me." Drowsy, Drummond snuggled against him, warm and slack.

He chuckled, petting and rocking, lost in the sensation of sated peace that filled him. "If you would prefer, we can ask Devlin his opinion upon the morn."

"Mmm. Naturally we should see what he thought."

Thaddeus grinned and chuckled, nodding. "Yes, naturally. Sweet wanton pet."

His plan had worked more perfectly than even he had expected, and no matter what Devlin thought, or Low or Caleb, he knew that no other could ever surpass his pet in beauty and obedience. Drummond never failed to make him proud. His Drummond. Always his.

Stephen and Low Imitate Thaddeus and Drummond

There was something about the spot just above Stephen's buttocks, a tiny diamond of skin made to be stroked, that intrigued him beyond all reason.

Especially when Stephen was on his knees, folded arms pillowing his head, long spine curled over as he offered his ass to Low.

Earlier in the week they had seen at the club his dear friend Thaddeus do just what he did now to Drummond, in front of the small gathering of trusted friends, pushing him down and sliding a carved phallus into his bottom. Low had seen the curiosity in Stephen that night, the need. So as soon as they were able, he chose to replay the scene in private, just between the two of them.

"Are you comfortable, Stephen? Ready to begin?" He stroked Stephen's back, soothing him.

Stephen nodded, a soft sound preceding the soft affirmation. "Oh, sweet

Low. Lord have mercy on me, yes."

Lovely. So uncertain, yet so trusting. "I spoke to Thaddeus about it, you know, asked him where to get the phallus, how to determine what size to get. He told me about one that Caleb bought for Eliot, made of jade. Perhaps next we will try one made of stone, hmm?"

"Stone?" That long back rippled, Stephen's hips shifted. "That... It would weigh heavy, Low."

"Yes." He simply could not resist bending to kiss that tiny bit of skin that glowed in the dull firelight. "Very heavy, hard to hold in."

The oil jug yielded easily to his hand and he moistened two fingers, pushing them against Stephen's entrance. "But you would do it for me."

Stephen opened for him, pushing back towards him so surely. "Yes. For you."

Verily, this man awed him. "Only for me, Stephen. That is all I ask." His fingers slid in, both at once, pushing perhaps too fast, but needing to feel that heat close about him.

The softest moan sounded as his fingers were surrounded by shivering heat, muscles holding him tight, pale skin going the lightest rose.

"Oh, Stephen." He pushed his fingers deep, spreading the oil, preparing Stephen for the further intrusion. "How beautiful you are."

Those long thighs parted, body welcoming his touch without hesitation. "Only for you, Low."

"Oh. What you do to me." More oil and a third finger, and soon the sleek, lightweight phallus was deeply seated inside Stephen, the slightly larger end looking marvelously obscene against the rose tinted skin.

Stephen's body moved as if touched by a phantom hand, just slightly shifting and rocking, hips canted as if begging for more.

"Perfect." Sweet, soft skin under his fingers. "I adore you, you know."

Low stood, moving about to face Stephen, sinking a hand into his thick hair. A slight pull had Stephen upright.

Stephen's eyes had a slightly wild look to them, focused on him, almost cleaving to him. The sweet lips were parted, cheeks flushed a deeper shade than those rounded buttocks. "Low..."

"I want your mouth, Stephen. I want to see your lips close about me." Oh, he wanted that more than his next breath.

A series of shudders rocked his Texan, those eyes growing darker, hungrier, cheeks stained dark now. "A...as you will, Low."

"You want to taste me, my Texan. You know it." That sweet face called to him and he bent to kiss it as well, Stephen's overlong hair curling about them.

Stephen opened to him with a low groan, lips fastening over his tongue and sucking firmly, steadily. His wanton.

As many lovers as he'd had through the years, both casual and serious, he had never known anyone like Stephen. Never. The kiss went on until those ripe lips were swollen and wet, and then Low straightened, opening his trousers to let his prick take the place of his tongue.

As dark as his lover's flush was, that sweet mouth took him easily, eagerly, tongue sliding against his shaft, lips pulling at him rhythmically. Those eyes never left him, rich pools of hunger, offering him access to every ounce of need.

He pushed in, the sight of Stephen kneeling before him, stretched and filled in two ways enough to render weak his own knees. Throbbing, aching, he let Stephen minister to him. Stephen took him deep, throat tight around the tip of his shaft. Hungry, sure, focused upon his pleasure -- he was surrounded by Stephen's desire, Stephen's compliance.

"So wonderful. My Texan." He let it carry him, feeling his balls draw up, his blood pounding in his ears.

A hum surrounded his buried flesh, vibrating him deep with, creating echoes of need.

Oh!" When had that last happened, his seed spilling from his body with little or no warning? Not since he was a young man had he been so desperate.

Stephen swallowed around him, a single line of seed escaping from the corner of those swollen lips. He stopped its descent with one finger, pulling gently away and slipping his finger between Stephen's lips. Stephen sucked his finger clean without hesitation, without balking. In truth, there was hunger painted over his Texan's face.

"What would you have as your reward, my Texan? I do not imagine you would wish to take the beating Thaddeus administered Drumm, hmm?" His knees gave way and he dropped in front of Stephen, kissing lightly.

"I think if you came after my ass with a stick, I reckon you'd best have me hogtied first." That irrepressible humor flared, Stephen resting lightly against his shoulder, leaning into him. "That I didn't understand a bit, lover."

"I know, my Texan. Perhaps someday you will have a tiny inkling, but I prefer you as you are." He felt Stephen's smile against his skin, felt the soft kiss to the side of his neck. He stroked that long back again, unable to keep his hands away, finding that sweet patch of skin before pushing against the base of the phallus.

"Low!" The cry was sweet, shocked, needy, Stephen jerking against him.

He was stiffening again, like the boy he had just compared himself to. Stephen simply astounded him. So giving. "Yes, love. What would you have of me? Anything, so long as this," and here he jostled the phallus, "stays in you."

That earned him a whimper, a shudder that rippled through the long body. "In? Oh... Low... It feels... Sweet Lord." Stephen's lips fastened over his shoulder, pulling.

"Yes. I want it inside you, reminding you that I am possessing you, even as we do what you wish." He pressed against the carved bulb again, making the phallus shift and push.

Stephen shifted, hips rocking, prick throbbing obscenely. "I want to lie with you, Low. Touch you. Want to feel your hands on me."

"Come, then, Stephen." He stood again, pulling Stephen carefully to his feet so that the phallus stayed inside. He led Stephen to the bed, helping him stretch out. "Like a feast, you are Stephen. Where do you want my hands?"

Stephen reached out and placed one of his hands on the flat belly, the dark eyes half-closing as those muscles moved under his touch. The feel of Stephen under his hands was something he wondered how he had lived without for so long. He touched, leaning forward to kiss as well, lips against Stephen's, tasting himself there.

Stephen's hands brushed through his hair, stroking softly. "Mm... Low. I never knew..." The low voice trailed off, fading into another kiss.

"Stephen. My Stephen." He drank deeply of the kiss, and of Stephen's care, and of the rightness of the feeling they engendered in him. He stroked and petted, hands finding Stephen's belly, his chest, those hard nipples.

In turn he was kissed and nuzzled, cries and shudders offered to him easily, his lover generous with both pleasure and need.

He bit into Stephen's shoulder, leaving a mark there, stark and telling. Possessive was not a word he associated with himself, but oh, this Texan made him so. "Where else would you have me touch you, Stephen? Here?" His fingers slid to wrap about Stephen's cock.

"Oh! Oh, please. Yes." Stephen turned toward him, hips almost immediately moving that stiff flesh along his palm.

So soft, the skin there. So hot, overlaying the hardness. His teeth found Stephen's nipples, each in turn, scraping hard as he pumped his fist along the perfect length.

Cries and whimpers filled the air, then Stephen's hips began to move, cries sharp as the motions moved the phallus within the tight body. "Low! Oh, sweet Lord! Low, please! I need."

"Yes. I do as well." He could not wait any longer. Sliding against Stephen's body, he moved lower and wrapped his lips around the head of Stephen's cock.

"My Low!" Stephen arched, shuddering violently, sobbing as those thin hips pushed deep, shaft pulsing on his tongue.

The taste was addictive, wonderful, and he sucked hard, taking it into himself. To hear Stephen call his name so, to claim him in such a way, filled him with a savage joy. Stephen's breath was harsh, his name and love and need and desire all running together and pouring down on him. He pushed against the phallus, taking Stephen all the way in. Making love to Stephen the best way he knew how.

His Texan, his lover whispered his name, shoulders lifting from the mattress as seed slid into his throat. He took all that Stephen would give, finally pulling away to ease the fake cock from his lover's body. "I want you, Stephen."

"I'm yours, Low. Please." The words were almost silent, but threaded through with need.

"Yes. Mine." Stephen was still so slick, so open, that he simply pressed against the entrance and slid home in a single thrust.

Stephen's legs bent, spread wide, hands holding himself open for Low's eyes, Low's cock, Low's need. "Yes. Oh, sweet Lord. Yes."

He kissed Stephen fiercely, pushing in, invading him with hands and tongue and cock.

The feeling was unbelievable.

Stephen's prick began to fill, responding to his thrusts, his touch. Still watching, always watching and wanting and holding them tight together, his Texan accepted him, wanted him, gave him all he asked and more.

He moved strongly, hips pumping, breath coming hard and fast. "Oh. Stephen."

"Oh, my Low." He got a gasp, an almost smile. "Feel you so deep."

"So deep." So open for him, so wonderfully hot. "I... oh, my Texan, I do love you."

Those eyes caught him, serious and sure. "Not a bit more than I love you, my Low."

His climax began deep inside and rose up his spine to burst out of him, into Stephen. He cried his lover's name aloud, shuddering and shaking, giving Stephen all.

Stephen took him, held him.

Loved him.

He collapsed against Stephen, still cradled by him, inside him. "Oh, my Texan."

Stephen nodded, arms warm and sure. "Yes. Only yours, Low."

As much as he professed to be in control, Low knew that he had lost that long ago. They played a delicate game, he and Stephen, but when it came right down to it, there was far more to his fascination for the man than one patch of skin.

Devlin

Dinner went gloriously well. The food was perfect, as he'd come to expect with his temperamental but talented chef. Dessert was marvelous. The rounds of cards accompanied by port and cigars were congenial.

And Caleb and Eliot were simply stunning together.

He knew they would be. Had known, in fact, that they were, but this was his first opportunity to spend time with either of them since they became an item, and watching them enthralled him as much as it... saddened him.

He had hoped, once, that he and Elliot might become more than friends. Still, 'twas obvious that his friends were indeed made for one another, in both form and temperament, so how could he been anything but pleased? More than that, to see them together, talking and laughing, sharing small touches, well. It was most arousing.

Terribly so.

So, while dinner and entertaining had gone well, he was uncertain of what to do next, a state he rarely encountered. Truly, he wished to see them together in a much more intimate setting, but he had no idea whether they would be... accepting of such a thing.

He also had the feeling he had missed one of them asking him a question. "Hmmm?"

Eliot chuckled, one eyebrow cocked. "What phantasm has stolen you away from our company, dear friend? What dances through that wicked mind?"

"You do." Good Lord. Where did that come from?

"Us?" That eyebrow lifted higher. "Indeed? Do tell, you tease. What dance would you have from Caleb and me?"

Caleb smiled at him, reaching to stroke Elliot's thigh. "Yes, dear friend. Tell us what you would have of us."

So generous, his friends. "You are far too good to me." He encompassed them both with a fond gaze. "I find myself imagining all manner of things."

Eliot shifted, legs parting so slightly at Caleb's touch. "You need not step gently with us, Devlin. There are no better friendships than the ones built here."

Long fingers slid up Elliot's leg to the crease of his thigh, distracting him once more with the sight.

"Truthfully then. I find the very thought of the two of you, well, enlightening. I pray you will indulge me."

Eliot looked over at Caleb, eyes burning, the heat noticeable across the room. "My Dragon?"

Smiling, Caleb nodded. "Yes, my fox. If you wish it."

Two sets of hot, hungry eyes turned to him and Eliot offered him a warm smile. "Where shall we retire, dear friend?"

Oh. "Upstairs, I think. My own bedchamber should hold us, yes?" Devlin rose, gesturing for them to precede him. Caleb pulled Eliot to his feet and they kissed, long and deep, before turning to the stairs.

Adjusting himself, Devlin followed.

The stairs took an endless time to traverse, Eliot and Caleb stopping to touch, to kiss, to delight his eyes. Such beauty they presented him with. By the time they reached his chamber he was aching, so hard he thought he might burst. Still, he let them go ahead, keeping himself out of touching distance.

Eliot moved into Caleb's arms, fluid and warm, liquid under Caleb's touch.

Taking a kiss, Caleb slid his hands down to cup Eliot's backside, pulling them together, and he stared, feeling the heat of them from where he stood.

"Oh, my Dragon..." The words were whispered against Caleb's lips, Eliot leaning in enough that a dark mark became visible on the pale skin of his throat.

"My fox." Oh, they were truly besotted. Frankly amazing. Devlin pulled at his jacket as Caleb began tugging at Eliot's clothing, a coordinated dance.

As the layers fell away, jackets and waistcoats falling to the ground, skin began to glow in the firelight, soft moans rich as cream upon the air.

The lean lines of Eliot's tall body contrasted with the muscles of Caleb's, two sets of hands moving easily over two equally stunning forms. He could not hold back a moan, opening his trousers.

"Oh... sweet demon, such needs you release within me." Eliot's head fell back, their hips sliding together, the heat between them near sparking.

What beauty. Devlin sat upon the bed, legs spread wide, watching as Caleb took Eliot in hand and stroked him. Eliot's cries were free, wild, his pleasure offered over to Caleb without the slightest hesitation.

Caleb was just as easy, just as intense, the two of them so perfectly matched. It was heartbreaking. Lovely and his balls drew up at the sight.

He was gifted with the sight of Eliot arching, body convulsing as seed poured over Caleb's hand, the scent of completion heady. It was all he could do not to spend himself, but he wanted to wait, to make it last.

As he watched, Caleb's hand was brought up, two tongues fighting over the wet fingers, teeth sliding over skin, Caleb's moans growing sharper.

"Oh, my own." Caleb's voice came to him, hoarse and needy. It went straight to his groin.

"Yours, beloved demon." Eliot drew Caleb's hand to the black bruise marring the long throat. "Yours."

He and Caleb came to pleasure nearly simultaneously, both of them sent over by Eliot's act. The feeling was astonishing.

Eliot and Caleb moved together, Eliot's dark eyes blinking over at him, a warm, sated smile offered. The same smile graced Caleb's face and most likely his own. He offered them his hand, asking them silently to join him. His friends moved toward him, taking his offer and offering the mixture of open lips, soft skin and honest care in return.

How could he not approve of this union? So very lovely, the two of them. Such a perfect fit. Perhaps, he thought, as they worked together to hold him, to make him feel cherished, he would find something such as they had for himself. Until then, he would be content to bask in the light of what they had.

Stephen Braves a Storm

The night was foul, rain coming down in sheets, the skies dark enough to match Low's mood. Damn the gods tonight for keeping him where he did not want to be, but he had only just recovered from a chill and a cough in his chest, and so could not venture out.

Damn growing older as well. When he was a young buck he would have scoffed at the lowland English weather and ridden out to meet his lover as planned. Instead, he had been forced to send Stephen his apologies and his urgings for Stephen to go on to dinner at Devlin's without him. Buggering fuck.

He was just about to sink from angry to morose and call for a bottle of whiskey when the door to his library flew open like the wind came inside, startling him madly.

"You don't think for a second that I'd rather sup with another when my heart's bent on you, do you?" There, big as life, stood his Texan, soaked clear to the bone, no hat, no gloves, leather duster unbuttoned to expose long planes draped in wet fabric. Dark hair was plastered against throat and forehead, those dark eyes flashing.

His heart literally leapt, and his prick did so as well. Good God. Stephen's tight nipples showed through his shirt, the lawn so thin and fine that nothing was left to imagine. Trust his Texan to rush about with no waistcoat, no dinner jacket. Breathtaking.

"I had not thought upon depriving you of fine company and food, my Texan. I can only say how glad I am to see you."

"Your company is fine enough for any man." Stephen shrugged off his coat, setting it carefully before the fire, long hands ruffling through dark hair. "Mine is a bit disheveled, but I reckon you'll forgive a cowboy his wanting."

"I do believe I could forgive you anything, Stephen." Low finally forced his feet to move, taking himself over to within an arm's reach of Stephen. The firelight played over that thinly covered skin, making it glow and him ache.

One cool, damp hand stroked his cheek, feather-light, before it disappeared. "So fine."

"I? I pale next to your beauty, my dear Stephen. We really ought to get you out of those soaking clothes before you catch a chill, hmmm?"

"Oh, yeah. It was raining a wee bit harder than I'd been thinking it was." Stephen pinked and rolled his eyes. "Always flying off on a wish, that's me."

"Whereas I consider things perhaps too much." Low reached out to loosen the top stud of Stephen's shirt. "Shall we dine first? Or would you prefer a bath?"

Stephen swallowed, Adam's apple rubbing his fingers. His could see those dark nipples tighten even further, tiny, hot points. "I am... at your disposal."

"Oh, good. Then I think a brandy by the fire to warm you while the staff draws a bath, and then we will dine together." He left Stephen briefly to arrange things, then returned to lead his Texan up the stairs to his bedchamber.

Stephen was standing by the window, watching the rain, verily glowing in the firelight. The tight trousers clung to the tight curve of buttocks, cleaving to those long-long thighs.

"Oh. You take my breath, Stephen. You are glorious." He returned to Stephen, holding out a hand for him, unable to take his eyes off the vision the man presented.

Stephen snorted and tossed his head. "I'm a rude, mannerless Texan sent to scandalize and horrify." The long hand slid into his. "Are you horrified yet?"

"Utterly terrified." Low smiled, feeling the comfort Stephen's presence always afforded him from his restlessness. "I'm certain if you were unclothed it would be worse."

"Shameless." The complaint was whispered, familiar, Stephen's heat delicious.

"Utterly." He led Stephen up the stairs, taking him into the sitting room adjoining the bedroom, awaiting the bath he knew would soon be ready. Once firmly inside he resumed his attack on Stephen's shirt, opening it completely.

So delectable, the long line of chest and belly, lean muscles drawing the eye to that dark line of hair leading to more delights. No hints of their last assignation remained, the dark nipples unmarked by teeth or leather, the flat stomach not holding a single kiss to tell tales. 'Twas a situation he would have to remedy as soon as possible. The shoes came next, then Stephen's trousers. Difficult as it was, Low held back until his Texan was utterly nude, from head to heels.

Stephen shivered, just slightly, muscles stretched and waiting. Used to being nude, it still made his Texan vibrate, made the long cock fill, the scent of need sure. So beautiful. Those sweet, hard nipples called to him, and he pinched one, twisting it between his fingers, watching it fill with blood as he let it go.

"Low..." Oh, yes. The flush that painted his Texan was perfection; the way that breath caught even sweeter.

"Yes." The other nipple received the same attention, and he could not help himself. Low leaned forward and place his lips around the tiny bit of flesh, sucking until the skin about it was a lurid royal colour.

He looked up into eyes made almost black, dark hair tousled and wind-blown and framing that wanton face.

He traced Stephen's amazing lips with his fingers. "Kiss me?"

"Yes, Low." His lips were brushed, then the kiss deepened, Stephen feeding a moan into his mouth.

"Yes." He took a deep kiss, fingers sliding into Stephen's damp, springy hair, holding him down to his own level. Such a flavor, truly overwhelming to his senses.

Stephen bent for him, pliant and curious, hungry beneath his hands.

"So lovely." He turned at a soft tap on the door, pulling Stephen with him. "Bath, I think."

"Hmm? Oh!" Stephen nodded, grinning. "Yes, my decadent Scot."

"Decadent!" Low smiled, affecting insult with little success. "I am not. I simply like my creature comforts. Of which you are one, my barbaric colonial."

The large copper tub sat next to the fire, water steaming gently. Two buckets sat upon the hearth, waiting for them to rinse.

"Creature or comfort, hedonist?" Stephen's hands hovered over his buttons, one eyebrow arching in an implicit question.

"Both. A magnificent creature, and a comfort to my old bones." He nodded, lifting his arms to allow Stephen to remove his coat.

"You are not old, Low." The rumble was low and sure, that edge of passion and defiance sharp and sure. Still Stephen's hands were careful, gentle as his coat and waistcoat was removed.

A chuckle moved through him. "I am certainly not as young as I once was. How I cursed the rain this night. Now I should thank it for bringing me the vision you presented when first I saw you in the study."

"Wet and bedraggled and smelling of horse?" His shirt was removed, Stephen teasing now, eyes dancing and challenging. "I shall remember that."

"Wet, clothes clinging to your body, eyes flashing fire." What a picture indeed.

Stephen dropped to his knees, helping him with his shoes and offering him a glance at that long, curved spine.

Low reached down to stroke the line of that straight, proud spine. The skin under his hands warmed instantly from rain cool to sweetly hot. He allowed Stephen to remove his shoes and trousers, watching intently all the while.

His Texan leaned forward to help him step out of his trousers, lips daring to brush against his hip, leaving a hot tingle behind.

"Mmm. Best not get started on that, lover, lest the water go cold. Join me in the bath? I find I have a powerful craving for you to bathe me."

Stephen met his eyes and nodded, nostrils flaring again, breathing him in, wanting him.

Such passion in his Texan. Such acceptance, tempered by a will as strong as his own. What Stephen gave he chose to give, and that made it all the sweeter. Low held out a hand to help Stephen up, gesturing to the big tub.

Stephen stood and climbed in, helping him into the heated water with a strong, steady hand. He waited for Stephen to sit and arrange himself before sliding down into the water, back to Stephen's chest. He groaned at the feel of the hot water and even warmer skin beneath him, relaxing muscles still tense from his illness.

Stephen's hands started moving, stroking along his shoulders, his arms. The touch was sure, strong, as masculine and willful as his Texan himself. Lips moved over his ear, his jaw, his neck, quiet and careful.

"Oh. Stephen." They felt so good, the careful touches, and Low let himself sink into them, head falling back onto Stephen's shoulder. "I am glad you came to me."

"I wanted your company and wasn't willing to wait this damned fool weather out for it." His body was washed, groin, legs, supported and petted.

They stayed in the water until it cooled. He wanted to return the favor and wash Stephen, but he could not seem to make himself move to do so, too relaxed and happy. They stood and Stephen rinsed them both, wrapping them in thick toweling.

"Shall we have that brandy now?"

"Yes, Low." Stephen stayed close, hands and body warm against him. So caring.

"Mmm." Unaccustomed as he was to being cared for, he found the feeling of it incongruous, but enjoyable. It served to remind him that while he usually chose the tenor of their interaction, Stephen was a strong, giving man in his own right. Stephen eased him over into his bed, lips dropping heady kisses on his face as warm skin was pressed against him. The blankets were pulled over them, cocooning him in a delicious heat, scented with his favorite soap and his Texan.

Unbelievable that he should waste such an opportunity, such a vision as Stephen was when he came upon him, but the lethargy stealing through him spoke otherwise, and Low stretched out against his Texan, drifting into a light doze.

When he woke, the fire was no more than a sullen glow. A single lamp had been lit, a cold collation laid out for them by the hearth. The sound of Stephen's heartbeat thumped beneath his ear. And he was much refreshed. Very much indeed.

Arching like a contented cat, Low rubbed his cheek against Stephen's chest, tongue coming out to taste delicately. Stephen murmured softly, shifting just slightly, one hand stroking his spine.

"Mmm." Yes. Oh, lovely. Between the entrance Stephen had made, which lingered in his dreams, and the vision of him now, sleep rumpled and warm, his passion was well and truly fed.

Stretching out so that he could compare one slightly reddened nipple to its pale pink partner, Stephen was a vision. He pulled the coverlet away, admiring the long leanness, the heavy cock resting against the strong thigh, the dark, shining mass of curls that crowned his Texan's groin.

The nearest nipple was the slightly darker one and Low wrapped his lips around it, sucking hard. It had to attain a certain color before he moved on to the other. Stephen woke with a jerk, shoulders rolling up towards him, body curling with surprise and sensation. He kept on until the skin beneath his mouth was a deep, rich color, blowing cooling air against it.

Shudders rocked his Texan, sleep-dazed eyes blinking at him, lips open and gasping. "Low..."

"Yes, my Texan?"

"I... You..." That familiar, lovely flush covered those cheekbones. "What you do to me."

"I thoroughly enjoy what I do to you, my Texan." He leaned across and latched onto the other, still pink nipple, pulling at it with his teeth. Oh, the ripples that moved through that belly, the way the heavy shaft filled, curved, grew dark and stiff and wet -- indeed, he enjoyed little as much as his Texan and those sweet responses.

Once both bits of flesh matched, the second taking double the effort to match the first, Low moved on, teeth scraping along Stephen's belly.

Moaning, Stephen's hands danced around his head, almost touching, but not quite. The skin tried to move from his mouth, marks appeared where his teeth caught true.

"Wonderful. You may touch, if you like, love." He wanted Stephen's touch, needed it.

"Yes." Those warm hands tangled in his hair, stroked his scalp. Hot and good and strong, those hands were so perfectly right. He bit down upon one hipbone, practically purring.

"Oh, my Low. My fine Scot... you make me ache inside with wanting." The words floated to him on a husky voice, the sound rich and needy.

"Then we are well matched, my Texan." He nudged that thick cock with his chin, stroking it with his cheek before closing his mouth about it, licking up the crystalline drops that awaited him.

Stephen swallowed a roar, shaft throbbing, seeming to swell in his lips. He took more, lips sliding down, tongue rubbing along the underside. The scent was heady, pure male animal, and he breathed deeply, taking it in as well.

His cheeks were caressed with trembling fingers, Stephen's thighs parting, exposing the satiny, soft skin of inner thigh and sacs. Those vulnerable places drew his fingers, the skin there thin and sweet. The tender thighs needed decoration as well and he withdrew from Stephen's prick, sucking hard on Stephen's skin.

"Low! Oh!" Stephen sat up halfway, knees spreading wide, eyes hungry.

No one had ever been more stunning to him, more beautiful in need. Perhaps because no one had ever needed him quite as Stephen did. Low pushed further, tongue pressing against Stephen's hole, tasting his most intimate spot. A shocked, desperate cry sounded, echoed through the room, Stephen's shoulders slamming back into the mattress.

Oh. He could become addicted to that sound. He pressed harder, tongue pushing inside as his hands came up to cradle that long shaft, the heavy balls.

"Low! Low, please." His hand met Stephen's, those callused fingers pulling at the hungry prick, trying to release the sudden tension.

"No." He pulled back, knocking Stephen's hand away. "I want to be in you."

Stephen whimpered, hands fisting in the sheets, the vision of passion made flesh. "Anything. Low. I need."

"Yes. As I need you Stephen. Always." He put a hand to Stephen's belly. "There is oil, in the jar beside the bed. Prepare yourself for me."

"Low..." That flush grew darker, eyes hot and shocked at once. The scent of arousal was thick, seductive, utterly necessary. "I..."

"Yes. You. You cannot imagine how it will please me to see you ride your own fingers, to be able to see the look upon your face." The thought made him throb, made sweat bead along his neck and belly.

Stephen stared at him for a long moment, searching his eyes. He waited for his Texan to submit, to give him what he desired, anticipation stretching. When Stephen reached out

and dipped those thick fingers in the oil, he thought he would forget to breathe. Every time he thought he could ask no more of Stephen, the man gave him more. Freely. It awed him. He watched intently as Stephen reached tentatively for his own entrance, needing this man more than his next breath.

Flushed and trembling, twisted and so exposed, Stephen oiled that tiny, secret ring of muscles, fingertips pressing inside and drawing forth dark moans.

"Stephen." The name was a moan in its own right, his body growing tense, tight, trembling on the edge of completion himself. So much so that he was forced to squeeze the base of his cock to back off. "You... you simply amaze me, my love."

"S...so fine. So fine, Low. Oh..." Stephen was beginning to move, body jerking on his own fingers, need kissing his belly with wet heat.

"Yes. Oh, yes, you are." He watched until he could stand no more, until Stephen was stretched around his own fingers so well, so sweetly, that he could no longer be outside of that incredible heat. "Now, my Texan. Now use the oil upon me."

"Yes." Growled, hungry, Stephen almost pounced him, slick fingers sliding over his shaft and pumping.

Low cried out, the sensation almost too much to bear. "Stephen. Yes."

Stephen rubbed against him, breath coming quick and sharp, little moans pouring from his Texan.

"Stephen. Please. Inside you" Low leaned back, letting Stephen slide against him, pushing his cock against Stephen's arse.

"Yes, Low. Yes. Please." Stephen settled on the mattress, pulling those long legs up with trembling fingers, exposing that slick hole to his need.

There was no tenderness in his entry, only a deep need, and Low settled between Stephen's legs and pushed inside him almost with one motion. A soft keen sounded, Stephen's body pulling at him, rippling around his shaft, holding him tightly.

The most exquisite sensation in the world was Stephen's body closing about him, pulling him deep. 'Twas raw and intimate and utterly undoing. Low began to move, pressing hard with his hips, shoving into Stephen over and over.

His Texan met each thrust, shuddering around him, eyes closed, lips open. "Low..."

He could not hold back much longer. "Stephen. Look at me." He wrapped his hand about Stephen's prick, pulling hard. Those dark eyes blinked open, Stephen convulsing around him, another cry sounding.

"Stephen!" There was no more holding back, nothing he could do but spill himself into Stephen's waiting body. Heat sprayed over his hand as he slumped forward, Stephen gasping and twitching, legs slowly lowering.

"My Low."

"Undoubtedly. How I adore you, my Texan." Indeed, when he thought on it, it frightened him how much.

"Can I stay?" The words were soft, quiet enough to be ignored. Another stretch, another offer, Stephen asking to share his bed for the first time without being asked first.

He settled against Stephen, holding him tightly. "Yes. You came to me. I am keeping you."

"Oh." He felt Stephen's blush and the slow smile. "I could get used to that."

"Good. I shall depend on it." He would indeed keep his Texan, for who else would come to him on such a miserable night to provide comfort and company to a man such as he?

He could only hope that Stephen would continue to feel he was worth braving the storm.

An Impatient Meeting – Caleb and Eliot

He strode through the club doors, throwing his hat and coat at the coat check without glancing back, note in hand. His dragon had returned and awaited. He had no interest in niceties. Eliot moved through the waiting room, into the sitting room that Caleb frequented, eyes burning in his head. Weeks. He had been without for weeks.

Caleb sat with Low and Travis and Dare, seemingly at ease, smiling and social. Yet Eliot saw the restless movement of Caleb's fingers, the way his dragon glanced at the door as if waiting.

"Caleb." The word was a hoarse whisper, his person vibrating as if he were fevered.

Over bright blue eyes snapped to his, Caleb half rising before even seeming to realize, murmuring no more than a perfunctory apology to his companions before joining him. "Eliot."

"Are our rooms ready?" No grace, nothing but unadulterated need buzzed through him.

"Yes." Caleb's hands opened and closed, as if resisting reaching for him. "Shall we?"

"Please." He turned, heading up the stairs to the vermillion room they preferred, forcing himself not to run.

The pace they maintained was stately, unhurried, but he felt Caleb behind him, felt the weight of his lover's stare, his need. The heat between them flowed, tangible and thick as honey, the richness of need slowing his steps and drawing each breath out. The door was heavy, the knob cold in his burning palm as he turned it.

The moment he gained the interior of the room, the treacle flow of time speeded drastically, Caleb's hands upon his shoulders turning him about for a deep and desperate kiss. His hands made their home in Caleb's hair, feasting upon the wine and need that awaited him on his dragon's lips.

Hands moved recklessly over his back, his hair, his shoulders, going finally to cup his buttocks and pull him close. So close, in fact, that he felt the hard evidence of Caleb's need press against him. His own body responded most eagerly, shaft throbbing as if to draw his demon closer. Shuddering, Eliot moaned, rocking into Caleb's heat.

"Too much cloth, my own. Stop hiding from me. I need you now." Caleb drew back, tearing at his clothes, pulling and pushing impatiently at the fabric.

"Yes. I have ached for you, my demon. Dreamt of little but your touch." His fingers worked clumsily at the buttons and pins, baring himself to the touch of those eyes.

"I have ached for you, my fox. Do not ever let me agree to such a trip again." Caleb finally found his skin, hands sliding inside his fine lawn shirt, tearing it from him.

"Never." He reached towards Caleb, tremors rocking him, nipples peaked and stomach taut with desire.

Caleb came back into his arms easily, lips finding his neck and latching on hard, bringing up a mark that throbbed in time with his heart.

"Yes! I was bare without your marks." Eliot dipped his head, panting against Caleb's ear. "My need for you is unending, beloved demon. I would risk hell itself for a heartbeat in your arms."

"My angel." Caleb drove him back, forgoing the bed in favor of the much closer settee. The rest of his clothing fell away under those hard hands, and Caleb bent, lips and tongue bringing up another mark on his thigh.

Spread wide, he floated in a most exquisite web of need, the desire made sweet by the promise of completion. Another mark joined the first two, on his hip, then one about his left nipple, over his heart. Caleb licked and sucked, mapping his need with a thoroughness that bespoke a desire too long in check.

All the while his fingers stroked through dark curls and he whispered, telling of his dreams and phantasms, his long nights and bleak mornings spent in impatient waiting. Apologies fell on his skin, as many as there were kisses. Caleb's hand found his shaft just as the apologies were stifled by that talented tongue finding the sensitive spot just beneath his sacs.

"Beloved!" He arched, gasping, knees drawing towards his chest, skin licked with the sweetness flames.

"Mmm." The sound was pure pleasure, purely that of a hunting dragon, deep and strong. Caleb's tongue found his center, pushing into his body even as Caleb pumped his prick.

Eliot's world shattered, twisted and cracked as he gripped the slick heat invading him, seed flowing from him to drip, burning on his skin.

Caleb would not let it stop, would not let him knit himself together once more. That tongue stabbed at him, hands moving on him, soft sounds of need vibrating against him. Stopping only when he was open, wet and ready, Caleb finally rose, opening the trousers still between them and pushing against his hole.

His fingers scrabbled at the velvet, body pulling his demon in and in again, gripping that oft-dreamt of heat within the hollow of his body.

"My fox." The words were the barest puffs of air against his lips. Moving inside him, setting a steady rhythm, Caleb took his mouth, tongue plunging deep.

It was then that his desperation eased, settled into a pure heat that soothed him, filled him and eased his very soul.

They moved together as they always did, in perfect concert, Caleb holding him tightly, whispering against his lips the things they would do together. Love words, curse words, they were all offered up as gifts, proof of Caleb's contrition for parting them.

"Love you. Caleb. Demon. All is well. I love you." He gave his dragon a smile, silly and besotted, rocking beneath Caleb with a steady hunger.

"How I adore you, my own. Love you so." The rhythm changed, Caleb plunging into him, hard and fierce, huge and hot inside him.

Lightning filled him and he arched, one hand wrapping around his reawakened shaft to tug and pull. Caleb's eyes burned down at him, that beloved face twisting with pleasure, hands pulling him up, cradling him.

"Beloved." He whispered the word, knowing that it rang within his demon's soul, heaven found here in hell's embrace.

No more than that was needed for Caleb to give him all, hot seed spilling into his body as his dragon bucked and shook against him.

"Welcome home, my dear Sir Dragon. You were sorely missed and are joyously received." He held tight, unwilling to release this warmth so soon.

"Home, indeed, Eliot. My father's house will never be so again, now I've had you. You are my heart and soul." Caleb went lax and heavy against him, nuzzling his skin.

He stroked, gentling his beloved demon into a doze, breathing in their combined musk as if it were the finest incense meant to soothe the most tortured soul.

Absinthe and Leather – Stephen and Low

He was going to kill Quincy Hollingsworth.

The debacle at Miss R.'s was bad enough -- it had taken two baths to get the wax off his backside, he'd hidden out from company in general for two weeks to hide the black eye he'd taken on the escape, and that blowhard of a man whose lap he'd landed in wouldn't stop visiting -- but then, last night?

That absinthe shit was dangerous.

From now on? Only whiskey.

His own whiskey.

That he poured himself.

He sank down lower on the long divan in one of the club's sitting rooms, pulling his hat over his face.

Maybe hanging.

"Are you hiding, Stephen?" The voice was Low's, full of laughter, as the man himself settled next to him on the settee.

"Hiding? Why on Earth would I be hiding?" Please, God. Say there weren't any reasons beyond a sore noggin that he ought to be hiding.

"I just wondered. You have been quite the object of conversation." A warm hand settled upon his thigh. "You are a treasure."

"I'm gonna kill Hollingsworth next time I see him. This town could use a good hanging." He let his thighs stay parted, drinking in the warmth of that touch.

"Oh, I hardly think you will kill your favorite partner in crime. Besides, Garrick would surely call you out if you did." Low stroked him absently, waving to a passing waiter. "A whiskey and a brandy, if you please."

"Yeah, well..." He closed his eyes, relaxing under Low's touch, growing warm and easy. "Maybe just a solid ass-whupping."

"Oh. Now that, my dear I would like to watch." No shame in that man at all.

He chuckled, hot cheeks still hidden under his hat. "Shameless. You'd watch things a decent man would turn his back on."

"How lucky for you that beneath my proper exterior I am truly indecent, for I know my actions excite you, hmm?" Low's knuckles just grazed his trapped cock, pressing briefly against his fly.

"Low." His voice was needy, embarrassingly so, from just that touch, and he cleared his throat to hide it.

"Yes? I have a gift for you, by the by. Upstairs, in the green room."

He lifted his hat, peeking out. Oh, Low knew he was curious at a cat and twice as liable to get in trouble over it. "You do? What is it?"

"It should ruin the surprise if I told you, now wouldn't it?" Low pressed against him again, briefly, before taking his brandy from the proffered tray that appeared before them. "Suffice to say that it is an article of clothing I though would suit you especially."

"You're a tease." Stephen grinned and shook his head. "I'd pretend to be surprised. I'm fair at acting." He offered Low a wink and a slow arch of his eyebrow. "Well, maybe not quite as good as fair."

"Oh, yes. So good at it that you were able to hide your distaste for Lord B. by calling him old fart-face."

"I did not." Oh, Jesus, Mary and the saints. Quincy was going to die.

"What would your dear grandmama say?" Low gave him a wicked smile before tossing back his brandy and standing, offering him a hand. "Shall we?"

"I guess I'd better before the challenges start pouring out of the woodwork." He took Low's hand, shaking his head. "I hope it's a huge cloak -- something that'll hide me from my own damned fool mouth."

"Oh, you have nothing to hide from me, my Texan." There was that tiny hint of command, the challenge that so excited him.

A shudder slid down his spine and he knew without question that Low felt it, saw it. Knew how his heart sped.

The smile he got told him so. Low turned, tucking his captive hand into the crook of his arm. They ascended the stairs, stopping to greet a few friends briefly, but gaining their room with relative speed.

Low locked the door behind them, turning to take his shoulders in a strong grip, kissing him fiercely.

His cry escaped him before he knew it was coming, lips parting as he bent to his lover, his Low. Low kissed him fully, lips and tongue moving over him, letting him feel the passion that ever simmered beneath the surface.

Stephen whimpered, hands quiet and gentle on the flat belly that called to his eyes, his lips.

Low pressed one last light kiss upon him before pulling away. "There. On the divan."

A paper wrapped package sat upon the divan, awaiting him.

He gave Low a smile, squeezed one hand. "Thank you. You spoil me."

"Naturally. It pleases me to see you smile."

Oh, but one day he would learn to stop blushing before this man. He would. Stephen lifted the package and opened it, fingers just barely clumsy as he worked open the knots.

The package fell away to reveal a heavy garment in rich, walnut brown leather. When he shook out the folds he found an old fashioned frock coat, a style he had seen only in pictures. Fitted through shoulders and waist, it buttoned just below his navel, flaring into a heavy skirt, gathered at the sides.

'Twas a garment designed to show off his figure, something he could not hide in.

The scent was heady, the leather fine and sensual beneath his fingers. "Oh... Low. It... I have never seen anything like this. The smell is... Stunning."

"Yes. I find it most stimulating. I had it dyed to match the color you favor. I cannot wait for the scent of it to mingle with that of your skin." There was something dark, something dangerous in Low's look, his voice.

His fingers fisted in the leather, nipples and shaft going immediately stiff and sensitive, calling out for his Scot.

"I can see you like it, hmmm?" Low moved close, putting a hand to his cheek and stroking. "I would see it on you."

He nuzzled into the touch, using the guise of nodding to disguise it. "Of course."

He was rewarded with a bright smile and a sweet kiss, before Low pulled away and began to pull at his clothing. "I would see it against your bare skin."

"My... It's a coat, Low."

"So it is. Can you imagine how it will make me feel to see you in it? Buttoned across your belly, nipples just hidden by the fabric, skirt open to show my your legs and prick?" Low's cheeks reddened, breath coming faster.

Stephen felt his face flame even as his prick leapt, heart slamming in his ribcage. Such suggestions. Such exposure. Such heat.

He watched Low's fingers unfasten his shirt, moaning as the lawn rubbed his nipples.

"You like the idea?" Low smiled, eyes dancing.

"I... I like the way you like the idea, Low." He was never less than honest with his Scot.

"Good. Because I am truly enamoured of the idea." Soon enough his clothes were gone, whisked away so quickly by Low's nimble fingers. Low stepped back to look at him and something like awe flashed in those green eyes.

His entire body rippled under that gaze and he picked up the leather coat, groaning as the fine folds touched him.

"Oh, yes. I can see it will be amazing against your skin. Put it on, my Texan." Low began unfastening the cravat at his own throat, eyes never leaving him and the coat.

He turned partially, drawing the coat around him. The moan that left him at the cool heaviness of the leather was completely unconscious, the tremors in his fingers as his fastened the brass buttons unavoidable.

"Oh. Stephen. You have no idea. Turn to face me." Deep, husky, Low's voice commanded him.

Turning, he forced himself to meet Low's eyes, refusing to back away even though he was so exposed -- somehow more bare now than he had been nude.

"Yes. Oh, my, yes." Staring at him, hand on one cuff, Low licked his lips, looking utterly greedy. "Beautiful."

"Shameless." Oh, he did feel completely shameless, shaft swollen and dark, sacs heavy with need, the sun still up in the sky...

"Naturally." As if he only just remembered, Low finished working his shirt off, hands dropping next to the deep gray trousers. "Touch yourself for me, Stephen."

"Just like... Oh, Low..." Stephen's thighs parted, hand dropping to wrap around his prick even as his voice protested.

The trousers dropped and Low bent to remove the high boots before straightening, fully nude. Shaft hard, flat belly he so admired flushed, muscles standing out in sharp relief. "Stephen. You weaken my knees, I vow."

He stepped forward, desperate to touch his Scot, hide the lines of his body against Low's.

"No." It was not a request. "I want to see you. Want to see your need. When I've had my fill, oh, my Texan, then what delights we will discover."

He stopped, groaning, hand sliding over his prick, slowly rubbing along its heat, its heavy need.

"So very lovely. I can smell you, you know. Your scent, mixed with the leather. Intoxicating." Low eyes stroked him as surely as a touch.

"Low..." Hot drops slid from his slit, pouring over his shaft. Oh, what his Scot did to him.

"Only a few moments more, Stephen. I simply must... you are so amazing." Low began stroking himself as well.

He whimpered, teeth digging into his bottom lip, his own strokes matching Low's, buttocks clenching.

"Now, Stephen. Come here to me. I need your touch."

"Yes, Low." He moved into Low's heat, leather moving around him. He bent his head for a kiss, palms flat on that perfect stomach.

Low gave him what he asked, taking a deep, perfect kiss, hands moving up along his arms to his shoulders.

He moaned into Low's mouth, little things that would have been words had he not swallowed them up and just fed Low raw want.

"Mmm." He gained appreciative noises in return, Low rubbing against him like a cat. The sensation of skin against skin was fleeting, allowed only where the leather did not separate them, but the coat was its own sort of caress.

His hands slid around, teasing the nerves in Low's back before moving to cup the fine rear, pulling that fine body closer.

Low moaned, moving close, hand coming between them to stroke his cock while the other lifted the skirt of the coat to grasp one buttock. "Oh! Stephen... it feels... Yes. God, yes."

He moved them together, bodies slapping in a frenzied rhythm as he panted out his need upon Low's throat. Moving with him with equal desperation, Low pulled at his prick, warm and firm, needy. He spilled his seed with a soft cry, lips pulling at Low's skin as he shuddered.

"Yes. Oh, so perfect, my Texan." Low brought his hand up, licking it clean with delicate strokes of his tongue. "On the bed now, Stephen. I would have you."

He nodded, trying to catch his breath, hands moving to unfasten the buttons of the coat.

"No. Leave it." Low led him to the bed, pushing him down upon it. The coat was unbuttoned, but left to spread about his body upon the bed, framing him in the deep satin lining and soft leather.

He shifted, moaning low in his throat at the scents and sensations around him.

"Oh. My sweet Texan." Low spread his legs, kneeling between them to nuzzle his belly, lick at the curls about his cock. Strong fingers found his nipples, squeezing the already sensitized skin, pulling and pinching.

He gave Low a long, low moan, shoulders lifting from the bed. "Low! Oh! So much."

"Yes. So beautifully responsive." Licking, sucking, Low gave him more and more, sending his senses reeling. Finally he felt Low shift away slightly, then back, one slim finger pushing inside him, slick with oil.

Thighs parting, Stephen offered Low anything, caught in layer upon layer of need.

A quick preparation was all he got before Low was sinking into him, hard and hot and heavy, a deep moan pushing out of his throat. He slid on the coat, hips pushing to meet each thrust, body clinging to Low's heat, keeping him Scot within.

Deep, hard, Low opened him, took him, teeth stinging against his throat, marking him. The scent was unbearable, the deep, animal scent of leather and male lust, the sounds just as hard to withstand, the coat creaking in time with their harsh breath, their moans.

Cock forced back to life, he curled his hand around it, drowning in Low, in Low's need and Low's touch.

"Stephen!" Low redoubled his efforts, slamming against him, hands digging into his skin.

Stephen managed to whisper Low's name a heartbeat before he came again, spine melting.

His lover shouted, hips snapping wildly as Low filled him with liquid heat. The violence of it astounded him. Low collapsed against him, breathing as if he'd run a race.

"Oh. My Texan. How I adore you."

He held Low close, moaning. "Love... Oh..."

"Mmm. Yes. Thank you for wearing my gift." Low stroked his chest, kissing him lightly.

He simply nodded, purring softly, wrapped close with the scent of leather and sex filling his nose.

With Low at his side, and the evidence of his lover's pleasure still inside him, he might even forget to hang Quincy Hollingsworth after all. Maybe.

A Giving and a Taking – Low and Stephen

Frankly, Low was in a foul mood.

One after the other, his dependants had arrived on his doorstep, begging indulgences as if he were a pardoner in the days of Chaucer. How in the name of all that was holy did Devlin, who had many more people beholding to him, stand it?

Stalking into the club, Low threw his gloves and cane at the doorman, and then sighed and quickly apologized to the fellow. 'Twas not his fault, after all.

The rancid mood could not be blamed upon Stephen either, but Low fully intended on taking it out on him, or rather, working it out with Stephen. If he could find the man.

He found his Texan dozing in a shadowed corner, dressed in stark black, which didn't suit at all, long legs sprawled out, empty whiskey glass on the table beside.

Simply the sight of Stephen calmed him, and he smiled at himself just thinking on it. How he adored his Texan. He walked over and looked down at Stephen's slack face, leaning to kiss those slightly open lips.

Those warm brown eyes flew open, a gasp pulling at his breath. "Low!"

"Hello, my Texan." Oh, he thought, the things he had planned for this man.

Stephen gave him a smile, the corners of those eyes crinkling. "Evenin', Scot. How's the day treating you?"

"Terribly, I fear. Better now that you are here with me. Those clothes, though, oh Stephen they must go." He wanted that severe black cloth gone, and his Stephen's skin showing.

Stephen pinked, but nodded, the barest stubble chaffing his palm. "Shall we find our rooms, then? And shall I go lynching the hangers-on that drive you to distraction?"

"Lynching can wait. I cannot. I would see you, spread and trembling for me." The thought fair made his mouth water.

The pink deepened to a deep rose, Stephen's teeth digging into his own full bottom lip. "Low! The things you say."

He held out a hand to Stephen, smiling. "I would think you would be accustomed to them by now. Come."

Stephen stood, eyes sliding over to tease him. "It's not everyday I hear the lynching can wait..."

"Indeed? How odd you Texans are." He could not help but tease in return, his mood lightening by the moment.

"Almost as odd as Scots, I hear."

"Oh, yes, we are truly unique among the barbarians of the world." Low gestured for Stephen to precede him up the stairs. "I have a wish to watch."

Stephen moved with a long-legged grace, not attempting to arouse or entice, simply striding towards their rooms, eager for him, for his touch.

Eager himself, Low followed close, hands itching to touch, but waiting until they were in the privacy of their rooms.

Stephen opened their door, moving towards the hearth to stir the fire into light.

The door closed behind him with a tiny snick, and Low turned the lock, waiting for Stephen to finish his task. Then he smiled. "You will look lovely in the firelight, my Texan. Nude. Now, please."

Dark curls brushed the edge of Stephen's cheek as he ducked his head, fingers opening jacket and shirtwaist, the dark fabric falling away in delicious stages.

Slowly, but not teasingly, Stephen disrobed. His lover might be reticent at times, but was always willing. Truly, it humbled him.

"You are the most amazing thing I have ever seen."

Stephen turned, moving towards him. "You flatter me, my Scot. Lord knows you are most fine to me."

"Am I? I sometimes wonder. Stop. There."

Oh. Backlit perfectly, every muscle limned in sweet light, Stephen took his breath.

Stephen stopped, the barest tremor sliding through the rangy form. "You never need wonder how you are to my eyes, Low."

"I love you." He hoped Stephen would keep that in mind through the night.

That earned him a smile, a nod, those dark eyes fastened to his. "As I love you, Low."

"There should be oil on the table just there. I want you to prepare yourself for me, Stephen." The very thought made his stomach clench.

"Low..." He could see the effect on Stephen, the ripple of need that his words caused.

"Yes, my Texan?" As an enticement, Low removed his coat and cravat. "Have you any idea how much the thought excites me, Stephen? How much I long to see you touch yourself, knowing you do it solely for me?"

Stephen's eyes were fastened on him -- trailing over his belly, his face. "O...only for you, Low. Only you."

"I know. That is the biggest share of your allure. I have had many lovers, Stephen." Fingers moving on the studs of his shirtfront, Low smiled. "I have only once been in love."

"Oh." Stephen took a step towards him, eyes flaring, voice raspy. "You honor me, my fine Scot."

"Stephen." His voice was not sharp, but it still stopped his Texan where he was. "Please indulge me. The oil." His prick was pressing almost painfully against the buttons of his trousers, so those went next.

Stephen turned, offering him the smooth, long line of spine, muscles shifting and sliding as the oil was unstoppered and poured upon long fingers.

Oh. Low understood well Stephen's urge to touch, because he found himself stepping forward as well, closing the gap between them. "So lovely."

"Do... do you want me on the bed, Low?" He could smell Stephen's musk, the herbs in the oil.

"Not yet." No, he wanted to see this, unobstructed. "Soon."

Stephen reached back, curls falling across one sharp cheekbone. A gasp sounded as Stephen's fingers moved, sliding against that hidden hole.

His own breath caught in his chest, holding inside him as he watched. There was something so vulnerable about the curve of Stephen's spine, so terribly exposed about the spread legs. It made him ache.

He could feel Stephen trembling, feel the brush of that breath on his skin. "Low..."

"Yes, my Texan." Low stepped to one side so he could see both Stephen's face and back. Taking the oil from Stephen's free hand, Low wet his own fingers, sliding one hand down Stephen's back, pushing at Stephen's fingers with his own. "Oh, yes."

Stephen's lips parted and his Texan took a half-step forward, a sweet cry splitting the air.

Lovely, that sound, the way it wavered in the room, the way it echoed in his ears. Slowly, carefully, Low slid one of his own fingers in next to Stephen's.

Those fingers trembled, sliding against his own, the ring of muscles clenching and squeezing them together.

He shook a bit himself, the feeling of Stephen inside, flaming hot and tight, the slide of Stephen's fingers against his, all of it conspired to drive him mad. Low set his lips to Stephen's shoulder, kissing lightly.

"Low...Oh, my Scot... So full with... us." The words were gasped, whimpered.

"Yes. Soon you will be even more full, my Texan. But this... oh, Stephen. I cannot describe it." Surely he was going to Hell, as such bliss must be considered a sin.

Stephen nodded, leaning into him slightly. "You... the things you make me feel."

"They are only equalled by the things you give me." Goodness but he was flowery this night. Perhaps it was his awe at how Stephen could better even the foulest mood. He withdrew his finger slowly and easily, pulling Stephen's away as well.

"To the bed now, my Texan."

Stephen stumbled towards the bed, prick bobbing. "Which way, Scot? Hands and knees or on my back?"

"On your back, Stephen. I want to see your eyes." Following, Low brought the oil with him, knowing he would need it. A thought occurred to him, and he looked at the small vial regretfully. "Next time."

He got a curious look, Stephen long and dark against the sheets, stretched out for him.

"I was only thinking, my Texan," Low stroked an oily hand over his prick, feeling it twitch. "How unbelievably indecent you would look with my whole hand inside you. How it would excite me."

Those dark eyes went wide, Stephen lifting onto his elbows, mouth agape. "You cannot be serious... A hand? You would split me in half."

"Not at all." More oil on his hands allowed his fingers to move across Stephen's prick and below his balls with perfect ease. "The sensation is... well. You would hold me so perfectly."

"You... you have done it before? With another?" Stephen's voice was delicious with jealousy, those thighs parting for him easily.

"Once. When I was much younger than I am now." He soothed Stephen's jealousy with two fingers sliding once more inside. "I can only imagine how it would be with you."

His Texan shuddered, eyes fastened upon him with fascination, a sweet dark flush crawling up the flat belly.

"Yes. To see your face in the throes of such pleasure? To know only I have ever taken you to such a place? It fair makes me spend, my Texan."

He wanted to be inside his Stephen when that occurred, however, so he withdrew his fingers and settled between those heavy thighs.

"I... Low..." Stephen moaned, heavy sacs drawn tight. "Please."

"Yes." A quick adjustment, and Low slid inside, pushing into Stephen, groaning heavily.

One callused hand reached out, stroking along his stomach as the heat surrounding him fluttered and squeezed.

"My Texan!" Reaching in turn for Stephen's needy prick, Low thrust hard, needing the release he could find only in Stephen.

"Yours." Stephen met his hunger full-force, the low, needy cries that filled the air desperate and rich, the slap of their skin together creating a fine rhythm.

"Mine." Low moaned, deep in his chest, his belly contracting under Stephen's hand as he shot deep into his lover, hips snapping.

"Yes!" Stephen arched, seed pouring over his fingers, the sheath of his Texan's body tightening about his sensitized flesh.

"My Texan." Gasping, twitching, Low settled against Stephen, feeling warmth and wetness between them.

Stephen's hand stroked across his back, petting him, then slowly stroked down along his arm to his hand. He felt the flush heat Stephen's skin. "I... Low..."

Chuckling, Low licked the sweat from Stephen's skin. "Next time, my Stephen."

His Texan shivered, held him close, surrounding him in musk and heat and care.

This time was for him, to ease him, as only Stephen could. Next time would be for Stephen, to show him the things that only Low could teach him.

He could think of nothing better.

Oh, but Stephen disliked this cold, wet English weather. It left his hair damp and his skin clammy even under his coat, made the mount uncomfortable between his thighs. Still, to visit his Scot? He would dare worse.

Stephen left his horse with Low's man and headed in, bottle of good whiskey in hand.

Hell, to see Francis Lowell, he'd dare the hounds of hell.

"Stephen." Low met him at the door, rather than the butler, something warm and eager in those eyes.

"Evenin' Scot. How does the day find you?" He smiled and handed over the bottle, pleased down to his boots.

"Well, now that you are here, my Texan." Low looked him over like he was prime beef on the hoof.

Stephen felt his cheeks heat and he tipped his hat, letting the motion hide his color. "You're looking fine, Low."

A pleased smile lit Low's face as the man played valet, taking his coat, and holding a hand out for his hat. "No hiding, Stephen. Not this day."

"I..." He shook his head and handed over his hat with a sheepish smile. "Yes, Low. Is this day special? Have I missed something?"

"You've missed nothing, my Texan, but I vow it is a special day. Thank you, by the by." Lifting the whiskey he still held, Low hung his hat and led the way to the drawing room.

He followed along, eyes following Low's body, admiring the fine line of spine sliding down to the firm nether regions. It made his mouth water.

"Share a drink with me?" Lord above but Low fairly vibrated with something. Anticipation? Mischief? He wasn't sure he'd ever seen just that look before.

"Of course." He tilted his head, watching closely, curiosity itching at him. "What are you plotting, Scot?"

"Why, whatever makes you think I'm plotting, Stephen?" Whiskey splashed into two fine crystal glasses, and Low handed him one, a smile flirting with the edges of that fine mouth. The burr was evident in Low's voice, a sound he had come to recognize as arousal.

His body stiffened, prick growing hot and full. "You are something else. Your eyes are gleaming like a wolf on the hunt."

He knocked the whiskey back, the burn filling him.

"Are they?" Low sipped easily, tongue coming out to catch an errant drop, teasing him, by God. "And you are my prey."

"I'm no rabbit, Low." He could tease, too. He could.

"No. You are far better prey for a wolf. A stag, in full rut. Magnificent." From mischievous to searing heat in the space of seconds, Low's eyes never left his. One hand held the whiskey glass, the other came to rest on the flat belly he so admired. "And all mine."

Oh, sweet Lord.

Every nerve within him flared, a low needy sound only partly swallowed.

"Are you ready to play my game this evening, Stephen?" That tone, oh, he began to know it well by now. It was one of pure command, one that put his back up even as it hardened his prick even further.

He lifted his chin, eyes fastened onto Low's, heart pounding. "I am. What game are we playing? Whist? Poker? Chess?"

"No. A far more pleasurable game than that. Though I think game is a misnomer. Upstairs, my Texan, so that we might be more comfortable."

Low's hand took his elbow, as was customary, the grip sure and steady, the heat flooding him as he followed, drawn by need and pure distilled wanting.

They ascended the stairs, leaving behind the polite world of the drawing room. If Low had seemed anxious before, he seemed perfectly predatory now. The heat from Low's body added to his already fired nerves, making him damn near smolder.

He leaned his head forward, breathing in the hint of musk, the whisper of need on Low. It was a storm on the mesa, far enough away that the rain still threatened, but the dust stirred and the wind made a man shiver.

Low paused suddenly, turning so that their cheeks brushed. "Yes. You feel it, too. How I need you."

Stephen nodded, throat tight, voice rough as sand. "Yes. Yes, Low."

He did feel it, in every muscle and joint and deeper still. It made him shiver, made him ache.

"Yes." Something dangerous flashed in those clear green eyes, and Low kissed him, pushing up to take his mouth hard. He could not have held back the gasp, not kept from opening wide to that hungry mouth, not stopped his hands from sliding around Low's waist. One of Low's hands tangled in his hair, pulling sharply as Low almost overbalanced, their lips pushing together hard enough to bruise.

Oh! He shuddered, tongue pushing against Low's for a number of heartbeats before retreating and letting his Scot in deep.

When they both lacked air to a serious degree, Low pulled back. "Oh, my Texan. How you tempt me."

"I am grateful for it." He cupped Low's cheek. "My fine Scot."

Low's hand covered his and used it to pull him along. "The game will be up far too soon if I allow it."

Stephen followed, chuckling, daring to cup the swell of that rear. "And when have you ever allowed for that, Low?"

A slight jump and a glinting look over one shoulder was his reward. "You are far too much of a distraction. I have allowed things with you that I have allowed with no other."

"The same words would be true from my lips." Oh, as if he would ever allow another the things he longed for from his Scot.

"Then we are well matched."

Low's bedchamber was well prepared, fire burning on the hearth sullenly, bed turned down to show crisp sheets of Egyptian cotton. Several bowls and bottles sat on a table by the bed.

The temptation to ask was huge and he resisted manfully, knowing that his Low would only tease and tell him in time. Still, his eyes explored before settling back onto green eyes.

"Do you remember, my Texan, when we spoke once of something you had never even conceived of?" Low would indeed tease him mad, as his Scot stripped off collar and cuff links.

"Which time, Scot? You never cease to educate me." He moved forward to help his Scot undress.

Low allowed it, raising his arms and letting Stephen touch him. "Think hard, my Texan."

The words made him chuckle, his body throbbing and as hard as he was bid to think. "A hint, Low?"

One hand dropped to his chest, playing against his nipple, squeezing it through his shirt. "It involved my hand."

"Your..." Oh. Oh, the room swayed for a heartbeat, his nipple tightening with breathtaking speed. Low's hand. Oh. Oh, sweet Lord. "Oh..."

"I see you remember now." His Scot smiled, rewarding him with another tiny pinch. "I have thought of little else. The very idea haunted me until I had to plan for it."

"I... Low..." He groaned, a burning mix of passion and nerves rolling in his belly, feeling like he'd had more than his share of tequila.

"Yes." Those fingers went next to his shirt studs, helping him to disrobe. "I know that that you are nervous, but I think excited, yes?"

His cheeks flared, moaning low. "I... Yes. Yes, although I am not sure that I ought to be. You tempt me to such heights."

The slow smile he got in return spoke volumes. Pride, command, and deep affection were all there, all his. "Come to the bed with me, Stephen. You cannot imagine the heights we can achieve."

He followed, drawn by those eyes and that heat and that smile. So fine, his sure, strong Scot -- Stephen could no more resist Low than his next breath. The rest of his clothes were stripped away efficiently, leaving him nude to Low's eyes. Every place those eyes touched seemed aflame. "Stretch out, my Texan, on your back."

Stephen made his way onto the bed, hands exploring the fine weave of the sheets, the scent of lavender sweet and fresh. He stretched out as best he could, muscles tense and jumping all of their own accord.

"Like a fine thoroughbred stallion." Low stroked his skin, watching intently as he moved restlessly. "But I think perhaps we need to relax you a bit, my Texan."

He moved towards that touch, the softest sound spilling from his lips.

"Mmm." Bending, Low kissed him softly, far too gentle for his needs, but heated nonetheless.

The kiss made his need flare, made the ache in his belly bright and sharp. He dared to slide his hand over Low's belly, moaning low at the heat.

"The touch of your hand makes me forget my purpose, Stephen." Drifting away before Stephen could catch him, Low moved to the small table and took up a bottle of oil. "I think my trousers might stay on. Else I will lose my composure completely."

"I cannot touch you if you keep the damnable things on, Scot." Stephen watched, curious and wanton -- spread out nude and hard while Low's heavy need stayed hidden.

"You may touch me later, Stephen." There was that look again, the one that fairly smoldered, making him remember Low's idea for the evening.

His muscles tightened again, toes curling as his prick throbbed. "Oh, sweet Lord. How you make me feel."

"I adore you." The oil was aromatic, but not spiced. More sweet, and he could smell it as Low removed the stopper and poured a small amount into his hands.

The scent relaxed him, the act of his Scot coming back to the bed warmed him through. "I love you, Francis Lowell."

"Good. For that allows us trust to do such things as we will tonight." Climbing onto the high bed, Low straddled his waist, the feel of Low's fine wool trousers shocking against his bared need. Slow, soft touches were used to massage his shoulders and chest.

Oh. Stephen stretched, eyelids going half-mast as his muscles went lax. The burning within his belly eased to a slow, steady warmth that felt necessary as breathing.

"Yes. Just like that, my Texan." Low rocked against him, their breathing deep and steady, matched by the movements of Low's hands upon him.

"Mmm... so fine..." He would stain Low's trousers if he was not careful, the first clear drops of happy need slipping over the head of his shaft.

"Your skin is so warm, Stephen. I cannot imagine how you will feel inside. Like flame." His nipples were oiled well, his belly tickled as Low moved back to straddle his thighs. Low's words poured down on him like warm spring rain, made him arch into the sensation of pure bliss.

"Oh. Look at this." One finger danced along his shaft, Low taking up the drops of moisture on his shaft on one finger before licking them away.

The act made him whimper -- his Scot so sensual, so fine in his eyes. "W...wanton."

"Would you believe there have been people who called me cold-blooded, my Stephen? You bring out the wanton in me." Warm and firm and slick, Low's hands closed about his length, sliding up and down.

"Cold? Not you, Scot. You burn..." His Low was all fire and blazing heat, those eyes and hands setting him aflame.

"For you." Faster, harder, Low pulled at him, eyes hot on his skin, tongue coming out to touch those sweet lips.

Need flared and his thighs tried to part beneath Low's weight, hips desperate to meet that touch, to find completion.

"Have you any idea how you appear to me?" Still faster his Scot drew his need up out of him, stroking him roughly, the oil on those hands the only thing saving him.

A sharp cry escaped him and he spent, fingers tangled in the sheets as strings of heat painted his belly.

"Perfect." Low bent to him again, this time to lick at his seed, cleaning it from his belly. "Utterly perfect. And ready for me now, I think."

Ready? Stephen moaned, eyes falling closed. Boneless and warm, melted -- Low had drawn his nerves from him, left him floating.

"Yes, ready." His Scot left him, pushing off the bed to retrieve a basin of warm water and a cloth, coming back to wash his face and neck gently, his chest and arms. So intimate, so close -- Stephen did not fight the quiet, the lassitude, letting Low's touch lead him, heart and soul. The cloth was rinsed, wrung, and applied once more, smoothing over his belly and hips, cleaning any spots Low might have missed, passing gently over his prick, skipping down to his thighs and calves. "Spread wide for me, my Texan."

He moaned low, eyes opening as his body flushed with heat. The things his Low asked from him.

The things he gave...

His thighs parted, baring all to Low's eyes.

"How beautiful you are." Low bathed him, from the base of his prick to his balls and beyond, the cloth pressing against his opening. Oh, sweet Lord, so much. So close. He felt exposed and vulnerable, all his secrets stripped away under Low's touch. One more rinse and the warm, rough cloth was back, cleaning him thoroughly, pushing inside a tiny bit, almost tickling.

His legs shifted, belly clenching. Stephen took a deep breath, unsure whether he wished to chuckle or protest. "Low. I..."

"Mmm?" Low set the cloth and basin aside and moved to kiss him, lips warm and firm on his. "You're doing so well, my Stephen."

The kiss made him moan, made him ache. Made his prick start to fill again, growing warm and heavy against his thigh.

"You are an addiction." His Low was mussed, lips swollen, hair in disarray, and altogether wonderful as he moved back down, taking up the oil again. "Remember that you may trust me, Stephen."

"With... with all I am, Low." he wanted to close his eyes, to avoid this act which intrigued and worried him so. He could not. His curiosity burned, strong and overpowering.

Low tipped the bottle and oiled those strong, slim hands well, then poured out a generous amount and began rubbing the sensitive skin around his opening, wetting him. Gentling him.

A low sound rumbled in his chest, his shaft full now, bobbing over his belly.

"You excite me beyond all reason, my Texan. The way you trust. The way you respond. For me." Two fingers slid inside him suddenly, pushing in easily.

His knees raised, parting as he groaned, pushing down onto the intrusion, eager.

A soft sound came from Low, approval and need, and those fingers worked inside him, twisting slightly to find a spot that drove him mad.

"Oh! Oh, my Low!" His back arched, hips moving -- whether to escape or repeat the sensation he wasn't sure.

"Yours as you are mine, my Texan." Low withdrew, and added more oil. Truly, he felt he would swim in the stuff. Then three fingers pushed in, solid and deep.

He moaned, riding slowly, muscles working out his pleasure on those fingers.

Three was more of a stretch, and Low worked the oil into him deeply, slowly, but surely. "So hot."

"Yes. So... So hot." He could feel the air brushing on his skin, feel his body respond and shift and need.

"I am going to put four fingers inside you now, Stephen. You need to take a deep breath, and let it out when I tell you to." More oil, the scent almost overwhelming as it heated, and Low pushed against him. "Now."

Oh...

The breath slid out of him as Low pressed in, legs tingling with the burn that swept through him. "So full..."

"So open and giving. Oh, Stephen." Before he even knew what was happening, Low had folded his thumb under and was sliding the whole hand in, widening him impossibly.

His breath caught, a fire burning deep within him, stealing his voice, his thoughts. All he knew was Low and pressure and heat and Low and oh...

Slow but inexorable, Low slid into him, stretching him until the burn was all he could feel. The widest part of Low's hand made him moan, almost pain, and Low stroked his belly with the other hand until suddenly he pushed through.

A low sound, one more suited to beast than man, pushed from him, filled the air.

Petting him, Low murmured love words, soft and sweet, easing him as that hand settled deep inside, letting his body snap tight around Low's wrist.

"Low..." His legs were shaking as hard as a newborn colt's, muscles moving and fluttering around the pressure inside him.

"My Stephen. I cannot believe... I am holding your very core. How I love you." The hand inside him moved, minutely, slowly tightening into a fist.

"M...my fine Scot... I... So full." Sensations threatened his good sense, stunned, pleased tears filling his eyes.

"Oh. Stephen." Low began to move, still petting him on the outside, but now touching him inside as well.

All of him -- need and passion and fire and love and laughter and light -- all of him was distilled into the center of his being, held within the safety of his Scot's hand, leaving his form free to simply be, to fly.

That sweet hand moved within him, and Low bent to him, kissing his belly and thighs and cock. Each touch of lips to skin tingled, burned like a brand and it surprised him, to lift his head and not see marks left behind. Either way he was marked. Branded like a prize animal, deep inside where Low touched him. Low's mouth closed over him, sucking at the tip of his prick.

"Yours..." His body tightened, rippling around Low's hand.

"Mine." Low's fist moved, fingers opening and closing as that mouth teased him.

"Yes! My Low!" His head tossed, so much. So hot and full and please. Please.

"My Texan. So sweet." Driving him relentlessly, Low took him inside and out, hands and mouth moving in perfect concert until he knew he would surely go mad.

Stephen sobbed, cries and need and tears and seed pouring from him in a rush that would surely have left him empty, had his Low not filled him completely.

Low soothed him, free hand on his belly, holding him in place, tongue moving to clean his skin once more, soft sounds pouring over his skin.

Tremors shook him, and all he knew was Low's touch. All he needed was Low's touch.

"Shhh. So wonderful. So good, my Stephen." Low continued to stroke him, to love him with words and deeds until he relaxed. Then Low applied yet more oil and began to slide out of him.

He ached, a sob escaping him as Low slid free, his body suddenly empty and searching.

"Oh. So beautiful." Low stretched out atop him, now-bare body covering his, prick rocking against his thigh. His hands were clumsy as they slid over Low's spine, holding his Scot close. It took very little time for Low to spend against him, adding to the scent of rutting that lingered in the room.

He hid his face in the curve of his Scot's throat, unable to yet face the world outside the arms that held him. Low let him rest there, seemingly content to keep the world at bay, holding him tightly, kissing him.

"Thank you."

He nodded, opening his mouth to speak, to say yes and thank you and I need you and I love you, but all he could say was, "Yours."

"Mine. As I am yours. I love you." There was little more to say. What did you say to the man who held all of you in his hand?

Their fingers twined and he slept, held close until long after the flames in the hearth died away.

Uncommon Bonds – Low and Stephen

Low waited, sipping from a short glass of Devlin's finest single malt. Stephen was late. Not overly so, as it was not in Stephen to be rude and miss an assignation, but enough that Low knew he had been detained greeting his friends down in the common rooms.

He would make sure Stephen knew he was forced to wait, for he loved setting his Texan off guard immediately. It made for the most beautiful confusion, brought forth irresistible blushes.

Arranging himself of the settee took only moments, shirt open and coat off, one booted foot planted on the floor and the other along the cushion. The pose showed both the juncture of his legs and his belly in their best light, making one bulge and the other flat. He could not wait to see Stephen's eyes. The whiskey sent warmth through him -- he felt it in his cheeks -- made him loose and ready. His Texan had a wonderful night in store for him.

He heard Stephen's laughter, heard the distinctive voice even as the doorknob turned. "...sorry, Garrick, but my dance card is filled. You and Quincy should find another. Night."

Then the door opened and his Texan appeared, tousled and mussed from the wind, eyes searching him out and landing heavily upon him.

"Good evening, my Texan." Low smiled, eyeing Stephen over the rim of his glass. "I hope you are well this evening?"

Stephen nodded, admiring him, tongue sliding over those full lips. "I am. Oh, Low, you are so fine."

"I am pleased you find me so, my Stephen. Lock the door behind you, yes?"

Oh, there it was, that lovely blush of color pouring over the high cheekbones, the long throat. "Yes, my Scot."

The lock turned, offering them blessed privacy to amuse themselves.

Oh, perfect. Stephen was already feeling it, already wondering. Low felt his prick twitch. "I have plans for you this night, my Stephen. Come here and kiss me so we might begin."

Stephen stepped forward -- so very male, so wanton -- and leaned down, lips brushing against his own, warm breath filling his lungs.

Low moaned, sliding a hand into Stephen's dark curls to bring him closer, feeding Stephen whiskey and lust from his own mouth.

Stephen opened eagerly, accepting all he offered, lips parted and all heat, all need.

Oh, Stephen tempted him so. Every time was an exercise in control, one which he lost happily at times. Not this night, however. Low wanted.

Pushing Stephen away, Low indicated the clothes hiding Stephen's magnificent form from his view. "Disrobe, if you please."

Another blush, this one deeper, but those thick fingers slowly worked open jacket and shirtwaist, slowly exposing that fine body to his eyes.

"Oh. Yes." Low sat back against the arm of the settee, letting his legs open further, hand coming to rest between them. He touched himself and licked at the whiskey, waiting for more.

Stephen ducked behind those curls, cheeks flaming, fingers stripping coverings away.

"Do not hide from me, Stephen. You know how I love your form."

Low adored that look, the one that came from under Stephen's lashes and made his blood boil. He pushed hard against his fly, hips rolling up.

"You are most perverse, Scot." And his Texan loved it, grew hard and heavy and full for it.

"I am, indeed. You know we barbarous types." Low smiled, breathing in deep as Stephen's trousers came off. He could smell Stephen's need as well as see it. Lovely.

"I do indeed." Stephen's prick bobbed, heavy and full between those strong thighs, the tip dark and swollen, damp.

"God, you are breathtaking, my Texan. Utterly entrancing. On the table by the door there are some things I need. Would you get them for me?"

He never passed up a chance to watch Stephen move, especially nude.

Stephen headed for the table, ass firm, hips just swaying.

Low knew well what Stephen would find; a pair of soft leather cuffs lined with fur, a fine cloth blindfold, and an exquisite new restraint for Stephen's most private parts.

He heard Stephen's quick intake of breath, saw the ripple that preceded the flush on Stephen's spine.

"Is there something, wrong, my Texan?"

Stephen was not turning about, not bringing him the items, and Low knew it was so difficult for Stephen, so hard, but he did so well.

He could see the pride stiffen Stephen's spine, lift the square jaw. "No, Low. N...nothing. Nothing wrong."

Those fingers gathered the items and drew them up, Stephen bringing them with cheeks ablaze.

The front was as arresting in the back, long muscled legs, flat belly and strong chest all conspiring to make Low sweat. "So proud. How I love that about you, my love."

Stephen shivered. "The things you make me feel, Scot."

"Oh, I intend much more." Low set aside his glass finally, and stood, holding out a hand. "Thank you, love. Now, I think the cuffs first."

Stephen bit into that vulnerable bottom lip, placing the cuffs in his hand.

"Excellent." Low smiled, lifting up to reward Stephen with a kiss, licking at the impressions left by Stephen's teeth.

Stephen's free hand slid along his belly, his Texan stepping closer, bringing them together.

Low allowed it, taking the kiss deeper, teasing them both with thoughts of what was to come.

A long groan pressed against his lips, Stephen's arm wrapping around him.

"Mmm." Reluctant, but resolute, Low pulled away and took Stephen's wrist, wrapping the cuff around it.

"I promise you, Stephen, you will enjoy this much more if you have patience."

"Patience is oft overrated...." Still Stephen did not fight him, stood still and shivering, his own stallion.

"On some occasions, yes. Not this one." Taking the other toys from Stephen's hand and setting them on the settee, Low bound that hand as well, kissing the knuckles.

Stephen's fingers stretched out, stroking his cheek. "My Low."

"Yes. Yours as you are mine, love." He pushed Stephen down on the settee. "I think the other binding next, hmm?"

"The other?" Stephen sprawled beautifully, thighs well-spread for his eyes.

He stared hungrily, then touched, fingers lifting Stephen's balls, stroking the fine cock.
"Oh, yes. For here."

Stephen whimpered softly, moving towards his touch, lips parting. "The things you say...."

"Do they displease you?" He took up the small tangle of straps and straightened them, wrapping them easily about Stephen's prick and sacs, securing then testing to make sure they were not too tight. "You have no idea how you look to me, love."

Stephen watched him with dazed eyes, bound hands reaching down to touch the leather-bound prick. "You find me pleasing?"

"If you must ask after all of this time, I must be doing something wrong."

Leaning down, holding that dark gaze with his, Low licked the tip of Stephen's prick, savoring the flavor.

"Low...." Those thighs spread wider, Stephen's hips shifting, eyes begging him.

There was nothing more appealing than his strong, masculine Texan saying his name that way, body tight and needing. Needing him. Low licked and sucked, taking Stephen's hands away.

Stephen shifted and twisted, eyes watching his every move.

So unutterably beautiful. Low sucked harder, pulling Stephen in deep, wanting his Texan trembling for him before they went to the bedchamber for the rest.

"Low! Love!" Stephen arched, crying out, fingers and toes curling.

"Mmm." Hands sliding over heavy thighs, Low nuzzled and breathed deep, the scent making his head spin. So good, his Stephen, so obedient to his wishes. "I think the bedchamber calls us, love."

A soft confused sound filled the air, Stephen watching him, dazed, passion-drunk.

Low stood, taking up the trailing length of leather attached to the cuffs and pulling.
"Come, love. I have many more wonders for you."

Stephen followed him, hair falling into the dark eyes, a sheen of sweat covering the lovely skin.

Low led the way to the bedroom, pulling Stephen to the bed and pushing him down once more, giving caresses as he stretched his Texan out on his back, arms and legs spread. He tied Stephen securely to the posts before stepping back and smiling ruefully.

"You make me forget myself. Or at the very least the blindfold. I shall be right back."

Stephen blinked, tugging on the bonds, the fine muscles rippling. Those eyes, so soon to be covered, followed his every motion, burning through him.

He left the room, breathing deeply once out of Stephen's sight, trying to remain in control. His love did such things to him; it was difficult to focus. The blindfold in hand, Low returned, his breath catching once more at the sight of Stephen's long body laid out for his delectation. "Are you ready, my Texan?"

"My Scot...how I need you...." Stephen twisted, bound cock bobbing.

"As I do you, my Stephen. We will fly, I vow it."

Low folded the blind so only the softest cloth would touch Stephen's face, before kissing Stephen gently and slipping the blind into place. It should heighten the sensation for Stephen, should make it more intense.

Stephen's hands tightened into fists. "You will not leave me alone like this, Scot?"

Petting those hands, straightening out the fingers to kiss the tips, Low shook his head. "Never. You must trust me, my Texan."

His words seemed to ease Stephen, breath slowing. "With all I am, Low, I swear it."

"Good." Low moved from one bound hand to another, then to Stephen's mouth once more, licking. "This is for pleasure, no more, no less. Now listen closely, love."

Standing straight, Low backed up a step and removed his shirt, then his trousers and smallclothes, standing nude beside the bed.

Stephen's nostril's flared. "I can smell your need, my fine Scot."

"Can you, Stephen? Can you sense how I want you?"

Yes. That was exactly what he wanted, for Stephen to feel it deeply, their desire.

Stephen moaned, cock throbbing. "You're hard for me. I can smell you. Low...."

The tiny restless movements of Stephen's bound hands, the rise and fall of those lean hips, the blood he could see beating in Stephen's cock, all conspired to make him quite mad. Crawling upon the bed, Low moved between Stephen's thighs.

"Yes. As much as you are for me."

Stephen's head moved at the sound of his voice, tongue wetting those parted lips. The scent of Stephen was musky, male, strong and rich, arousing him further.

With one finger, he touched the hollow of Stephen's belly, watching muscles tremble. Then he leaned and kissed that spot.

"Oh...." Stephen's arms tensed, body moving toward the touch.

"Yes. You see how it feels?" Low licked, scraping his whiskers over Stephen's belly, letting his chin drop to touch the very end of the bound cock. "See how it makes it more."

Stephen gasped, whimpered. "Oh, yes. Yes. My Low."

"Beautiful." He would feast too much too soon if he stayed where he was, so Low moved nimbly to one side of Stephen's body. Stephen's chest called to him, muscles pulled tight from the slight strain on Stephen's arms, and Low traced the delineation of each one, fingers light on the damp flesh.

Stephen shifted, gasping, nipples tightening.

Low rewarded his reaction with a touch of lips and tongue, sucking the nipple closest to him into the warmth of his mouth.

That earned him a husky cry, Stephen's flesh wrinkled and hard between his lips.

He let Stephen feel the edge of his teeth, scraping, stinging.

So responsive, his Texan, calling out to him, muscles rippling, bedstead creaking with the pulls.

"Oh, Stephen. Such a feast." The other nipple he pinched between his fingers, watching it redden, throb.

"Yours. Low. You make me need." Stephen was panting, purring, body arching under his touch.

"Mine." The wealth of satisfaction he felt in that came out in his voice, so surely Stephen felt it as well. One more kiss to those tempting lips, deep and hard, and he would move on. The time for control was over.

Stephen's lips parted eagerly, tongue plunging deep into his mouth.

Lost in the sensation, Low moved closer yet, his body over Stephen's pressing down as he kissed, naked skin sliding against skin.

Stephen rubbed against him, soft whispers of need filling the air.

"I cannot...oh, my Texan." Low lunged, reaching for the oil on the bedside table, fumbling until he opened it, wetting his fingers to slide them between Stephen's legs. His Texan shattered his control just that easily.

"Please. Low. Please. How I need you...." His Texan took his fingers in, begging for more.

"Yes." He pushed deep, stretching Stephen for him, fingers moving in and out. He wanted to tease, wanted to make Stephen wonder, but he could not wait. Instead he withdrew, quickly oiling himself and pushing his cock against Stephen's opening.

"Yes...." Stephen bore down, body seeming to pull him in deep and then deeper still. So hungry, his wild one. So wanton.

Low pressed in, hips plunging, hands moving over Stephen's chest, his belly, finally to that bound prick, stroking hard, surprising Stephen with his touch.

Bucking and gasping, Stephen rode him with a furious need, desire matching his own, making him shudder.

The sight of Stephen, bound for him, helpless to their passion, enflamed him as nothing else, and Low felt his climax rising in his spine.

"Stephen, yes. Love."

He could see Stephen's arms ripple, body clenching tight upon his flesh.

The last thing to do was to tear the bindings from Stephen's flesh, first the blind, then the complicated twist about cock and balls. Low wanted to see Stephen's eyes when he spent.

Stephen blinked and gasped, hips moving as if possessed. "Soon. Low. My Scot. How I need."

"Now, Stephen. Now. Need you now." Low pushed and pushed and gasped, trying to hold back just long enough.

Stephen's eyes went wide, a rough cry torn from him as pearly seed poured over the flat belly, the scent of his Texan filling the air.

That was all the catalyst he needed, and Low let go his last fraction of control, crying out as he spent inside Stephen's body, his own form shaking and shuddering.

Stephen's body was a warm and comfortable mattress as he slumped forward, listening to the pounding of the strong heart.

"Oh. Stephen." He should loose Stephen's arms he knew, but he was loath to move.

"Mmm...yes, Low." Stephen's lips brushed the crown of his head, breath slowing, body relaxing.

"Did you enjoy that, my Texan?" Low knew the answer, could feel the evidence of it on his skin, but he wished to hear it from Stephen's lips.

That would be his reward.

"You made my very soul tilt on its side, Low."

Oh. Oh, dear. "How I love you." Low moved, creaking in his bones, and undid Stephen's arms, pulling them about him.

Stephen held him close, cradling him so near. "As I love you."

No matter what his exercise or plan, his Texan made it impossible to continue. Everything came down to the common denominator of their love, their need, leaving him no patience for the games.

How wonderful it was. Even when Stephen was late.

Seven Card Stud – Low and Stephen

They were in a private playing room -- just him and Low and a bottle of whiskey and a deck of cards.

It was warm and close with the door pulled closed, even with his jacket unbuttoned, the lamp making Low's eyes all lit up and green as spring hay. Stephen was two sheets gone, the whiskey singing through him, making him brave.

"Are you sure you want to play against me, Low? It's a rare man can best a Texan at poker."

"Naturally. You are brave enough to try me at whist. I can only return the favor." Low was at least one sheet gone, too, he could see it in the way Low held his mouth, hear it in the deepened burr of Low's voice, the polished accent slipping.

Course that just made him want to touch, to lean over and taste those lips, eat Low whole. Eat Low whole. He almost chuckled, reaching for the cards. Knowing his Scot, the attempt would find him bent to that will, moaning out one promise after another, spread like a mining camp whore.

"You find me amusing, my Texan?" Low watched him shuffle, eyes hungry and sharp on his hands, teasing him with images of what they might do later.

"Just thinking about the things I might win in the game, my Scot." He held Low's gaze, cheeks flushing dark rose, damn them.

Low sat up straight in his chair, hands on the table, looking at him most intently. "Ah. So are we playing for stakes, then? What sort of wager would you put on this?"

His body flushed with heat and he licked his lips. The last wager he'd made with Low had been lost and most eagerly paid. "Perhaps we ought start small, for your sake, Scot. This hand...you tell me your private thoughts, what you imagine when you're alone, when you're wantin'."

"Oh. Why, Stephen, you amaze me with your boldness." Low was teasing him, those mossy eyes just sparkling. "And if I should win this hand?"

His cheeks blazed, but he held that gaze. "What would you have, Scot?"

"Something of an equal value to what you suggest. Perhaps...a kiss?" Low smiled at him, and it wasn't a comfortable sort of smile. But it made his belly ache in a damned good way.

"I reckon I can do that." He winked, found his poker face, determined to give Low a run for his money. He dealt out five to both of them, a pair of threes and a pair of fives. Not bad.

Low took up his cards and relaxed back into his chair, face bland as butter. "I assume we are dispensing with the usual round of betting and, I believe you call it calling? Or was our wager simply an ante?"

He gave it some thought. "I can handle raising the stakes, Scot."

"Can you?" Low looked him over, looked at his cards. "Why do we not play this hand without, simply to refresh my memory as to the rules of the game."

Stephen chuckled, nodded. "Three of a kind beats two pair. Full house beats that. You need to exchange any cards before you show and tell all?"

"I believe I should like two." Low pulled two cards and set them aside, face down.

He dealt two and then took one for himself, keeping his two pair. "Okay, Scot. Show your hand."

The hand Low laid out was unfortunate, for Low at least. A pair of kings with the next highest card being a nine. No wonder the man didn't want to bid any higher.

He showed his two pair and reached to freshen their drinks. "My hand, then."

He couldn't hold back his grin, his anticipation.

"Indeed." Low smiled back at him, a flush rising on those pale cheeks. "Would you like for me to pay now? Or wait until later?"

"I think we ought to keep the wages all paid up, don't you? Lest we misplace one?"

He shifted, thighs parted a bit, prick full and throbbing in his trous.

"Very well." Oh, that look Low gave him was hot enough to burn. "My most private longings are at your disposal. Let me see. What do I think of when you are trapped at one of your Grandmama's endless social events? Or when I am forced to return to Scotland without you?"

Low paused, looking at him, making sure his interest was complete.

Stephen nodded, eyes intent, entire focus on those eyes, the promised tale. Nothing affected him like this man, not hunt or drink or mount.

"Why, I think about you, Stephen. I think about asking you to strip off the cloth that hides you from me. I dream about putting my hands upon you, inside you. I dream about tying you to my bed and never letting you leave, of ordering you to ride me like you would your most prize mount and of having you do it. I dream of you, my Texan. Only you."

A whimper was torn from him and he was across the table, mouth against Low's before his mind understood where his body was.

Low kissed him, hands coming up to sink into his hair, holding him there while Low's tongue explored his mouth with devastating thoroughness.

Stephen opened, his own hands on shoulder and belly, exploring, petting, touching as his hips pumped the air.

Far too soon the kiss ended, Low pushing him back, leaving him gasping. Low touched Stephen's lips, tracing their swollen outline. "Now, now. It would be unsporting of you to not allow me the chance to redeem my loss."

His lips parted, tongue touching the tip of Low's finger, but he nodded, moving away, randy as a stallion. "Your deal."

Waiting until he was seated, Low picked up the cards, practically fondling them. Indecently. "What shall we wager this time, my Texan? I believe I should like to hear your one most depraved wish. What have we not done that you would like to, but are afraid to speak."

He bit his lip, but found himself nodding, settling into the chair gingerly. "I'm thinkin' that sounds fine, Scot. And when I win the hand, you can do the same."

Figuring, of course, Low had one.

"Very well. If you are certain." Low nodded once, shuffling the deck and doling out five cards each, picking up his own and waiting for Stephen to do the same, eyes serious and intent upon him.

He looked at his cards, one card short of a straight. Damn. He pulled the four, meeting Low's eyes. "I'll need one."

"And I shall take two." Low dealt him his one card, then the two to himself, a half smile coming over that much loved face as he looked. "Well?"

He wrinkled his nose, showed his hand of nothing at all. "I got a King."

"Ah. Then my three Jacks have served me well." Ever gracious, winning or losing, Low laid out his cards and waited. Watching him.

Hell and damnation.

He met Low's eyes. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in double or nothing?"

"Not a bit. I think your policy of settling each wager between hands is an excellent one." Oh, the very Devil was in Low's smile now.

He poured another bit of liquid courage, wishing now the lamps were lower, dimmer, could hide the blush in his cheeks.

"I...I have thought of...of being yours away from the press of the city. Of not having to worry on who sees, who speaks. Just long days to...do as we do here." He met those eyes, lifting his chin. "Lord, I did not even know to want so much that you have made me need."

"Oh." Low nodded, nothing of the earlier teasing in his look. "Yes. I should like that too. To take you away and...oh." He could see Low shift in his chair, see the sudden flush that rose up Low's throat. It would stain his belly and chest, too, making the pale skin glow.

He moaned, legs moving restlessly. "Oh?"

"Devlin. He has a country home where the servants are much more circumspect than mine, and would surely open it to us, should we wish a sort of retreat. Would you go, should I ask?"

He nodded, vibrating like a taut fence line. "I would, just say the word."

This time it was Low who rose, leaning across the table to trace his lips with one finger. "I am asking."

"Yes, Low. Yes." He kissed Low's finger, then drew it in, sucking gently, then with more hunger as the taste filled him.

"Stephen." Everything about Low excited him, but nothing so much as when Low lost that tight thread of control and his voice turned to that throaty growl. Like now. He was pushed back against his chair, Low moving suddenly to straddle him and kiss him hard enough to stun, like a horse kick to the belly.

His hands settled on the trim waist, sounds torn from his throat, the want sharp, deep, nearly painful.

Rocking against him, Low explored his mouth, lean body pressing down on him, hardened shaft obvious even through their clothes. Low's hands slid under his open jacket, working the studs of his shirt, searching for skin.

His thumbs rubbed either side of the hard shaft, teasing and lingering at the tip.

"Stephen!" Low bit him, hard, right on the side of his neck, like some kind of animal. Lord Almighty.

He bucked, growling low, jerking them together, need a bonfire in his belly.

The shirt finally gave way by the simple fact that Low tore it, studs flying off to clink on the floor and bounce away. Then those hot hands were on him, Low's fingers finding his nipples and pinching.

His head slammed back, thighs spread beneath Low, hips jerking wildly.

"Oh, my Texan. What you do to me." Low was moving just as quick and hard as he was, pushing against his hand, biting and scratching like a thing gone wild.

He would wear his Scot's marks for days. Damnation.

Days.

Stephen arched, spending.

Low joined him, his Scot's wild cry scraping across his skin, Low's hips jerking, prick dancing under his hand.

"I.... My Scot...." He shuddered, skin flaming, awake, alight.

"My Stephen." They rested, Low heavy and damp against him, idly kissing his neck. "Shall we play another round, my Texan? Or adjourn for the night?"

"We could bring the cards upstairs, Scot. Allow ourselves a more comfortable place to decide." His hand moved along Low's spine, petting in a lazy swipe.

"Yes. I fear I need to assume a less...damp costume." He got a wicked smile again, Low's control firmly back in place.

He gave his own rent shirt a look, unable to hide his grin. "At least you don't look like you've been mauled."

"Mauling you is my favorite pastime, Stephen." He got a light kiss and then Low was up, holding out his hand. "We should bring the whiskey as well. All of the creature comforts."

He grabbed Low with one hand, the bottle with the other. "You want to assure my hands are full and cannot hold my blouse closed."

"Now, Stephen, would I parade you past our friends so?" Of course Low would, and that was precisely what he did, though it was late enough only a few members of the club were downstairs, and those friends.

Thaddeus was the worst, too, those eyes approving, Drummond bound and draped over the long legs. "Impressive."

"Isn't he though?" Low's thumb stroked his hand, right at the bundle of nerves at the base of his wrist. "You will excuse us, I trust? I intend to avail myself of him."

"Of course, enjoy yourself. I, as you see, have my own entertainments well in hand."

His face felt as hot and red as poor Drummond's backside.

"I do see." Low winked at Thaddeus and pulled his hand. "Come, my Texan. There is more to be wagered and won this night."

"I do believe you're right, Scot." He followed easily, perhaps even eagerly.

The stairs were endless, the hallway longer than any he had ever traversed, but in the end he got his reward, the door hardly clicking closed behind them before Low pushed him back against the door, the deck of cards falling to scatter on the fancy rug.

The bottle landed on the sideboard with a thud, his hands reaching for his Scot.

Low kissed him like a starving man, like that fine control in front of their friends was all used up, burned away by their need. His shirt and jacket got pushed all the way off, easily with it open as it was, and Low pulled back, tracing the marks he'd made. "Oh, my Stephen. Mine."

"Yes." He lifted his chin, vibrating. "The morning after our first night, I spent an hour before the glass, looking at your marks, needing you."

"Oh." Those eyes were so dark a green they were almost black, and Low bent to him, sucking up a dark mark on his collarbone. "Would that I could keep you nude, with only my marks for adornment."

He moaned, hands on Low's head, heart trip hammering in his chest. "My Scot...."

"When we go for our country retreat I will. I will strip you down and build up all the fires so you can be ready for me. I will open you, oil you, keep you filled until I am ready to fill you so I may have you."

The sound that escaped him shocked him, feral, wild, desperate. His body was hotter than a grass fire, eyes rolling. "Low...the things you say...."

"You inspire me." Those nimble fingers slid down to open his fly, undoing the buttons with skill, delving in to touch him. "I could bind you here, too, keep you at the ready for me, make you wait."

His hips jerked, pressing into that warm, sure hand. "Always ready for you, damned Scot. Always."

"Yes. 'Tis one of the many things I love about you." Warm and firm that grip, and Low used it to pull him forward, like a rein on a horse. "Come to bed, Stephen. I would have you."

"It's not a lead, Low." Still, he followed, didn't he? Eager and wanton, ready for Low's hunger.

"No. Yet I have your full attention, hmm?" When they reached the bed Low released him in favor of sliding off his trousers and pushing him down to play valet with his boots, pulling them off as well. When he was well and truly nude, Low pushed again, causing him to sprawl on the bed before beginning to strip off his own clothes.

"There is oil on the bedside table. Get it and oil your prick, Stephen. I intend to ride you."

He bit his bottom lip, grabbed the base of his shaft and squeezed it into patience. By the good Lord above, Low said things that made him wilder than a mustang. When he had control in hand, he reached for the oil, slicking himself carefully.

When he was done, so was Low, and that lean body was nude and open for his exploration. Low held out hand for the oil, standing proud and hard beside him. "Would you like to watch me now, love?"

Oh, Heaven help him. His thighs parted, the very air a maddening temptation. "Yes. Yes, Scot."

"Watch then." Low wet his fingers with the oil, turning so he was in profile. Oh. That way Stephen could see both Low's prick, which was flushed and wet, hard for him, and Low's fingers as they sank inside Low's body.

He moaned, sat up, drawn to the sight like his eyes were burning. "My Scot...so fine."

Those eyes found his, Low panting, entire body moving as he stretched himself. "Yours."

"Yes. Please, Low. Now. I need you." Need was too gentle a word for it, too simple.

"I am ready." Straightening, hand falling away from his body, Low climbed upon the bed, straddling him, leaning down for a kiss. Then Low was up again, hand reaching back to find Stephen's prick and line it up, pushing back on it so the head slid inside.

The church called it a sin because nothing was closer to bliss. His entire body jerked, hands sliding on Low's belly. "Low...."

A rough groan was his only answer, Low pressing down on him, taking him all the way in. The muscles under his hand clenched and released, Low's thighs shaking.

He reached for Low's prick, rubbing it, encouraging it so full life. "So fine. I need you."

"Yes. Always." Low braced against him and rode him, just as he'd promised, up and down, so tight and hot around him. "Stephen."

He nodded, breathless, eyes fastened on the sight of his prick, dark and slick, appearing and disappearing inside the perfect heat.

It went on forever, and yet it could not be more than minutes before Low was moaning, one hand covering his and pulling on Low's prick, Low's body clamping down around him. "Please. Stephen."

"Yes, Low. All I have." He pushed, moving hard into that heat, slamming them together.

"Oh!" Low's head fell back, giving him the most amazing view, Low's throat and chest and belly one tight, hard arc of pleasure, and the prick in his hand jerked, spilling heat over his fingers as Low spent.

He sobbed, fingers trailed along that belly, the pleasure more than he could bear, his seed escaping him in a rush.

This time when Low fell on him there was no regained control, no teasing smile. Just the press of Low's sweat and seed damp flesh, the harsh rasp of their breathing.

"Oh, my Texan."

"Your own." He held on, stroking as his heartbeat slowed.

"Yes." A soft laugh ghosted over his skin. "I like your game, Stephen. We shall have to do it again."

He grinned, nodded. "I reckon we should. Seven card stud next time, make it challenging."

The next laugh was louder, utterly merry, and Low looked up to kiss his mouth. "You are all the challenge I shall ever need."

"Good." He answered Low's smile with his own. "I will clear my schedule when you find Devlin's country home free."

"I will ask as soon as possible." Nestling against his chest, Low yawned. "Do not think I have forgotten what I would do with you then."

"I may be a Texan, Scot, but I am no fool. I depend upon that memory."

"Excellent. I cannot wait."

He reached out, turning down the light. "Of course, we could make a wager on who might be bound and filled...."

Low's husky laughter chased the flame into darkness.

Thaddeus and Drummond Meet Again

The universe was insufferably boring without Drummond.

Thaddeus had spent the time while his pet visited the family's country home planning vengeance on that sweet, fair body for thus deserting him.

He had found smooth phalluses and plugs to fill the tight body, new canes to leave perfect marks. Jeweled clamps for both ball sac and nipples, gloves with the palms lined in the finest furs. All for his much-longed for pet.

Word had come that Drummond was due to return, so he waited, quiet and patient, watching Dev and Low torment their lovers with games of chance.

The door to the gaming room opened and someone entered in a mad rush, practically bowling over the footman. His Drummond, fair hair array and cheeks flushed the most delicate pink, looking about anxiously.

He did not stand, but allowed himself a smile, eyes trailing over the beautiful form, noting that his pet wore the bright blue he so preferred.

Upon spotting him, Drummond gave a blinding smile and made his way over, stopping hardly at all, a rudeness most uncharacteristic of him. Arriving in a breathless rush, his pet smiled and turned him a very pretty leg in a bow. "Thaddeus."

"Drummond." He inclined his head, motioning to the cushion beside him. "It is good to see you, pet. How was the countryside?"

Oh. Patience, Thaddeus. Patience. Things would be all the sweeter for waiting a moment.

Subdued slightly, Drummond took a seat next to him, body naturally inclining toward his. "The country was tolerable. My mother is quite well, and my father and I are once again at odds. In short, nothing new. How have you fared, my Lord?"

He leaned in close, holding Drummond's gaze, watching those cheek blush dark, lips parting. "I find my world grays without a certain person in my bed."

"Oh." Swaying ever more near, Drummond moistened those sweetly curved lips. "I.. oh, Thaddeus. How awful it was."

"Yes. We shall have to find you a commission to keep you busy the next time they call." He stroked along Drummond's thigh. "Keep you with me."

"Yes. I have no wish to leave you for them again." That brilliant smile was his again.

His own smile answered it, happy and pleased, so ready to return to their games, their lives, their circle of need and desire.

"Have you dined, Drummond? I have ordered a repast up in our rooms."

"I have not. I fear I left off dinner in favor of meeting with you." A single finger touched the back of his hand.

"How you please me, pet." He stood, not bothering to hide the proof of his desire. There was no need. "Come, Drummond. We shall retire."

Then he headed for the stairs, steps sure and quick, if not bouncing.

Drummond followed with all due haste, drawing indulgent smiles from both Devlin and Low, who acknowledged their departure with polite nods.

He resisted taking his pet's mouth until they entered their rooms, turning to taste those sweet lips as the door closed. Pressing against him eagerly, Drummond bent under the force of his desire, dangling over his arm, panting for breath.

Thaddeus took one kiss, then another and another and yet another, feeding from the soft cries and swollen lips, kissing until his need to touch and mark and feel superseded the desire to taste.

"Strip for me, Drummond. I wish to see your skin."

The deep flush rose up Drummond's neck above his stock, staining Drummond's face crimson, but his pet was ever obedient, and stepped away to remove coat and neckcloth, collar and blouse.

"My lovely pet." He smiled, pacing around and watching, touching. Pinching one fine nipple until it peaked.

Oh, yes. Lovely.

"Oh!" Drummond jumped, then smiled at him. "I missed you."

He tilted Drummond's face and took another kiss. "As I longed for you. Now, the rest. It has been too long since I have seen you, Drummond."

A short nod, and Drummond was stripping off his trous and smallclothes, stockings and shoes. Finally his pet was bare to him, slim, curved cock standing out proudly. He stood behind, drawing Drummond back against him. One finger traced down the flat belly, slowing sliding over that unbound prick, petting. "Lovely."

"Thaddeus!" Drummond's voice took on a desperate sharpness, whole body trembling before him. So tender and sweet, so young.

"Yes, pet?" His lips traced the shape of one ear, tickling. "Tell me, Drummond, how did you satisfy this need while you were away?"

"I did not! I could not, not with my father in the next room over, praying so piously."

He chuckled. "Praying, pet? For your soul or his own?"

His finger followed the same path again, spreading the wet heat at the tip.

"Mine, I imagine. Oh, Thaddeus.. I cannot bear it. Please." Hips rolling, Drummond pushed against his finger, begging more of the touch.

"You can bear it, love, so long as it pleases me." He walked them over to the looking glass, letting Drummond see the fair beauty.

"Yes." Drummond nodded, eyes on his in the glass. "Whatever you wish, my Lord."

He continued touching, stroking and petting, mouth marking the long pale curve of neck. Responsive to his every move, his every touch, Drummond rested against him, body trembling, hips thrusting back and forward.

"I have missed this, missed your sounds, the scent of your need." Thaddeus pushed towards Drummond's warmth. "The clasp of your body around me, the fire of my marks on your skin."

Moaning, Drummond opened to him, legs spreading wide, leaning forward over his arm, trying to take him in though he was fully clothed. His eager, wanton pet.

Still, he rubbed, letting Drummond know his need. His hand pumped, driving his pet higher, low words of lust and need and love pouring between them. Soon it became apparent that Drummond was in a desperate way, thigh muscles trembling, that sweet prick full to bursting. Pleas came from Drummond's mouth, the sweetest sounds imaginable.

He drank them in, let them arouse and entice and then whispered, "Now, pet. Give me your pleasure."

The response came immediately, Drummond giving a low cry, hips snapping as he spent with forceful jerks.

His own need, so long held in check, flared, and he walked Drummond a few steps to bend the shuddering form over the divan. He tore at his fastenings, shaft springing free.

Thaddeus slicked himself with the proof of his pet's desire and pressed deep, crying out at the tight heat that surrounded him.

The slight body beneath him bowed, Drummond crying out for him, a deep song of desire, body opening for him easily. Taking him all the way in, where he belonged. He did not tease or finesse. He simply took his need, offering his Drummond his passion.

Everything he gave, Drummond took, the fire leaping between them, words of need once more pouring from Drummond's mouth. Love words. Promises that his pet would never leave again.

Reaching around, Thaddeus stroked the reawakened cock, tugging almost roughly, driving them towards pleasure. Hands bracing their weight, toes almost leaving the floor, Drummond rocked beneath the fury of his loving, begging, skin blooming with his marks.

He roared when he spent, arching and pushing deep into that beloved body, filling his pet, his lover, his Drummond. His last thrusts found a match in Drummond as the lad spent as well, cock pulsing in his hand. Sharp, sweet cries that formed his name were his reward.

They panted together, warm and sated. Together. "I am glad you are home, pet."

"Oh. Yes. Thaddeus. So am I. Home."

" Yes." And, Lord save him, he would work to assure it stayed that way.

Thaddeus Brings Dessert

The lamb was nicely done, the wine rich, Low and Devlin's company most fine.

They laughed and made small talk and Thaddeus was enjoying himself quite thoroughly. When the brandies came, he took a long sip and bent to offer his Drummond a long, silent drink, the slender body nude and aroused, bound beside him.

Beautiful.

Drummond drank slowly, savoring, eyes not quite rising to meet his. Muscles jumped under the pale skin, but that was the only movement save Drummond's throat working to swallow.

He rewarded his pet with a soft caress, hand stroking the thin back, before sitting back up. "I say, fellows, you should have your compatriots by your side during supper. It makes for a delightful view."

Low laughed and toasted him with gently irony. "Stephen would balk at such, Thaddeus, and I would not blame him. Your Drummond, though, is exquisite."

"Your barbarian cowboy would not bend to your will?" He offered Low a quick smile, the tease familiar and fond between them.

As he spoke, his fingers found one of Drummond's nipples, drawing it to a peak.

A small gasp, quickly stifled, and a shudder answered him before Low did. "Stephen would do all that I asked. So long as it were for me alone." One silver eyebrow went up. "And Devlin's Adrian is completely intractable."

Thaddeus chuckled. "Ah, Devlin, is your lad not one to expose his obedience in the public eye?"

He let his hand wander, let his voice express his pride in Drummond.

Those summer violet eyes flashed to him quickly from beneath lowered lashes, the look one of pure adoration.

Devlin simply cut a tidbit of cheese to give him to feed Drummond and smiled. "Adrian is not meant for such displays. Each to their own talent, I have always said, and Drummond shows an absolute aptitude for it."

"He does, doesn't he?" He smiled, thumb brushing Drummond's bottom lip. "I am rather proud of him."

"So you should be." That from Low, and their admiration and his pride made a deep rose flush rise in Drummond's skin, made that sweetly curved prick bob.

Their conversation continued, wandering from one subject to another. The entire time he stroked and touched, petting and teasing both of them. By the time they reached the dessert course Drummond was trembling like a leaf in a gale, breath fast and shallow.

He scooped a bit of whipped cream up, trailed it over Drummond's lips before bending to lick and lap it away. "So lovely, Pet."

Drummond's tongue caught his as they both licked the same spot, and a tiny moan escaping his pet. The sound seemed to echo around the table, Low and Devlin voicing their appreciation. Thaddeus allowed Drummond to see his pleasure, his pride, slowly sliding his finger into his pet's lips, tracing tongue and teeth.

That seemed to make Drummond sit up straighter, head tilting at the perfect angle, chest pressing out against the bound arms. His pet was so attuned to him, so wonderfully responsive.

He fed his pet dessert, bite by bite, mixing his complete attention with a feigned casual air, pretending to attend Low and Devlin.

Those sweet lips closed on his fingers, licking cream from them. Every line of Drummond's body began to speak of need, begging him.

Low grinned suddenly. "He nears the end of his patience, I think."

"Is it a look you are most familiar with, my dear man?" He slid a wet finger over the tip of a dusky nipple, grinning at the shudder the touch caused.

"Oh my, yes. Most likely more so than you will ever be."

They all laughed at that as Drummond swayed under his touch.

Thaddeus leaned close and carefully unbound that pretty cock, the end of this game in sight. "Spend for me, Pet. It is time for us to retire and our company has been most patient."

The response was immediate and perfect, Drummond's back arching as thin hips rose. Drummond spent in great, forceful jerks, seed pale against the flushed skin of Drummond's thighs and belly.

He drew a line through the offering, painting Drummond's lips and licking them clean. "Perfection."

"Utterly lovely." Devlin's voice was rough, full of appreciation, but Drummond spared him not a glance, eyes solely on Thaddeus.

His body ached and his hands trembled just a bit with pride. "Yes. My Pet."

Thaddeus stood, drawing Drummond up, eyes fastened onto that beloved face as he draped a soft wrap over Drummond's frame. "I bid you good evening, my friends. I must retire."

A soft chorus of goodnights trailed behind him as Drummond followed him out of the room and up the stairs.

They turned the corner and Thaddeus stopped, offer his pet a long, deep kiss. "Come, my love. I wish to make love to you and sleep with you in my arms. You performed perfectly."

"You are easy to obey, my Lord." Slender arms twined about his neck as Drummond returned his kisses.

"You were made to do so." He gathered his Drummond in his arms and spirited him away, to a room where the love between them might be untouched by others.

Beautiful.

Alain and Keiran Meet

Bloody bugging fuck! His first night at the theater, and he was probably never going to see another. All the bowing and scraping and lessons on how to talk were going to come to naught if the grubby old bastard pounding down the stairs after him caught him up.

Normally he could outrun the poncey rotter easily, but he'd had a bit part as a girl tonight, and his long skirts and tight-laced stays made it hard to breathe, let alone run.

Still, he made good time out the back and down the stairs, through the alley and toward the street. It wasn't until he hit the cobbled walkway that he tripped up, sprawling arse over teakettle, petticoats flying.

Scrabbling, Kieran tried to right himself, but didn't manage in time, and hurtful hands grasped his arms, pulling him up as whiskey-laden breath fanned his face. "Got you now, you little trollop."

Bugger all.

"Now look 'ere, don't go using that language 'round the wee thing!" A low rumble filled the air, huge, warm hands landing on his upper arms and easing him back.

Those hands swung him about and set him down gently. Clawing his way free of his wig cleared his vision, but all he could see was a very, very broad back keeping him apart from his assailant.

More growls filled the air, the large man backing the nasty bastard away, steady and sure. Huge black cloak, massive black boots, bushy auburn hair flying wildly as the man's top hat rolled along the cobblestones.

His first urge was to run, but unholy curiosity kept him glued in place, watching his savior trounce the slimy old creep with a sort of morbid interest.

The row was over quickly, the sound of fist hitting flesh preceding flesh hitting the wall. Then his rescuer turned, bright blue eyes shining from beneath the mop of hair. "Are you well? Did he harm you?"

He took a step back without meaning to, but the man was truly huge. "I...I am well enough, I suppose. 'Cept I've lost my breasts. Suppose they'll take those out of my pay." He sighed. Damn it all.

"Slippery things, those." The man stooped, grabbed the flyaway hat, then bowed, eyes twinkling. "You look faded around the edges, are you sure you're well?"

Just then the fallen cad groaned and his rescuer's eyebrows lowered. "Is there somewhere safer I can show you to?"

"Oh. Well." He looked at the theater and grimaced. He couldn't go back in there with their clothes all dirty. He'd have to wash the street grime off before he could take them back. "S'all right. I'll just go home."

Home was far enough away to make him right nervous, but there was no need for the giant to know it.

"Are ye sure? That's a fine dress to go walking -- even without the fillers at top." A huge, gloved hand was offered over. "Alain Lamont, at your service."

Reacting to the mannered greeting he reached for the man's hand, only to wince when he saw the bloody scrapes across his palm. Hadn't even felt them. "Kieran, sir. And I'd best not get you all filthy. Thank you, though, for that." He motioned to the old lecher, who was starting to stir.

"You're hurt, lad. Come now, my carriage is close and my rooms nearby." He was gently herded towards a simple carriage, a pretty pair of ponies attached, the look on the driver's face one of patient resignation. "Hop in, lad. We'll get you patched and dressed and sent home safe and sound." Alain frowned. "Hate this mean place, so dangerous for pretty ones."

Well, Hell. The fellow didn't look like the type to molest him, and he needed to clean up, didn't he? His room had nothing more than one basin of water a day, and he'd have to use that for his clothes. He nodded. "All right, then. But only until I get cleaned up."

He got a nod and a hand into the carriage, then the huge man settled across from him, handing over a handkerchief. "Here, for your hands. You must've taken a nasty tumble."

"Not near as much of one as I would have, thanks to you." He scrubbed the blood off, trying not to wince too much. Wasn't so bad, was it?

"Careful, lad. We'll rub some salve in and make it right." Alain watched him, nodded. "And I hate the idea of some horse's arse taking advantage where it wasn't welcome."

Oh. Kieran smiled. Salve would be nice. So would warm water and it had been a long, long time since anyone cared whether or not he welcomed attentions. Course, maybe it was all the make-up, or mayhap the fellow didn't even like boys. "Is it far?"

"Just a skip and a jostle, sparrow." He was given a warm smile as the carriage came to a stop. "Or even less, in truth."

The carriage door was opened and he was helped out and again herded through a gate and up to a brightly painted door with a brass knocker. "Come now, Bernard's good about the ponies and Miss Lindy's bound to have a spread set out."

He was led into a foyer, then into a sitting room with huge hounds rolling and lounging by the fire. "Sit here, lad, and I'll get Miss Lindy to find you some trousers and a room to bathe and dress before we fix those wee hands."

"A spread? Oh." Food. He meant food. That would be good, too. "Could I have some clothes?"

Alain patted his shoulder gently. "Sit, sparrow. We'll set you all to rights. Mean, grabby-arsed, vile drunkards...hurting and scaring wee ones...Miss Lindy! We've a lad needs a suit of clothes and a bath. He's a tiny thing, do we have something to suit?"

The man wandered through a door, booming voice becoming a rumble.

Well, he sounded a bit odd, but the fellow seemed gentle enough. Perching on the edge of a chair, Kieran surveyed his surroundings.

Warm and simple, the furniture was sturdy, well-stuffed, mismatched and well-chewed upon. Odds and ends were scattered upon mantle and shelves -- tiny glass figurines and little samplers obviously done by inexperienced hands, framed drawings and beaded fruit. A matched set of three huge dogs watched him, tongues lolling and a much smaller pup, furry and bouncy, came to investigate, eyes bright.

As he reached to pet it, he saw that one ear was missing, torn and healed. "One of Master Lamont's strays, dearie. He's a love. I'm Lindy and you're needing a bath and either some padding or some trousers."

Pulling his hand back quickly, Kieran looked at the new arrival, Lindy. She wasn't scary at all. "Trous would be a fine thing. These skirts get heavy." Not to mention that he was having some trouble drawing a breath. "And if it's not too much trouble, the water would be helpful too."

"The Master's having a full bath drawn and there's a stitch of clothes to boot." Sharp eyes looked him over. "They'll be a touch big, but they'll do. Them three there are Faith, Prudence and Charity. Don't believe the names, the Master's got a blind eye when it comes to them. Come now, I'll point you the way."

"Thank you." He followed along, trailing skirts and frills and furbelows, the puppy attached to the bottom hem.

The room he -- and the pup, who cried when Lindy tried to take it out -- were left in had a steaming tub with all the doodads that went with, a simple but whole suit of clothes, and delicious privacy.

Wonderful. Well, except that he couldn't get out of the ruddy stays by himself, no matter how he bent and twisted. The pup sat and watched him, head tilted and panting happily, until he opened the door and stuck his head out.

"Excuse me?" He didn't want to shout, but he raised his voice just enough to be heard.

"Aye? Sparrow? You well?" Alain's bushy head appeared, hand holding a cloth as he scrubbed his face.

"I...I need some help." He could feel the blush rising in his cheeks, because it was such a silly thing, but there it was.

He got a nod and then Alain headed toward him, chuckling as the puppy tumbled toward him, tail wagging hard enough to knock it over. It was scooped up in one huge hand, cuddled close without concern to buttons or shirt.

"My stays. The corset I mean. I can't get out of it without some help." He presented his back to the huge man, feeling terribly vulnerable without the overdress that went with it.

"Oh." The puppy was placed on the floor and then warm, gentle fingers began working to set him free. "Can you even breathe in this, Sparrow? I could span your waist with my hands."

Well, he was having enough trouble, wasn't he, without suddenly having fluttery things in his belly? He tried to breathe, he really did, but it wasn't until the laces loosened that he could draw a deep lungful. "Oh, thank you."

"Yes. You're welcome. Can you manage the rest?" He could feel a great warmth behind him, hear the soft breath.

"Yes. I think so." It was so strange to be warm and soon clean and in a safe place with no noises and voices and leaky ceilings.

"I'll gather some salve for your wee hands then, when you're done." That heat slowly disappeared, the sound of the door closing loud.

Well. Well well well. The bath would get cold if he didn't hop in, wouldn't it? So he slipped into the silky, hot water. He scrubbed all the weeks of cold basin baths from his body and the greasy stage make-up from his face and blew bubbles at the dog, watching him chase them. He very nearly fell asleep. His growling stomach was what drove him out and into the trousers and shirt left for him, and then out into the hall.

Low, warm laughter drew him into the sitting room again, the great man playing with the big hounds. The table was set with two covered plates, plus a stack of bandages and a pot of salve -- enough to doctor a dozen little scraped-up actors.

He blinked. It was such a homey sight. Like before he left for the city. Not that the big man, Alain, that was his name, reminded him of his da. Not one bit. Well, he should be presentable enough. "Smells good. The food, I mean."

"Ah, he didn't melt, ladies!" He got a grin and then Alain settled, hands held out. "Come, Sparrow, give me those poor hands and we'll make them right."

He sat across from Alain and gave over his hands, wincing again at the raw, scraped flesh. Bloody bastard.

His hands were tsked over and the salve was gently worked into the scrapes, the scent of spice filling the air as it sank into his skin.

Once again, as with the bath, the sensation lulled him almost to sleep. So gentle. So very soft, those big hands. His grumbling belly broke the spell, though, and he blushed hard.

"Would you eat now before I bandage 'em up?" Those blue eyes were bright, warm.

"Yes, please. I...you're being very kind."

"It's not right, for a young lad to be hurt, scared. I don't like seeing it at all." Alain lifted the lid on a plate of roast, pushing it towards him. "Eat, Sparrow, before you fall right to sleep hungry."

His mouth watered. Roast! He hadn't had roast in an age. He dug in, eating enough that he felt his belly would explode. It actually stuck out when he was done, and he was too sleepy to be ashamed. "It's very good."

Alain nodded, finishing his own dinner with a happy sigh. "Aye. Miss Lindy? She's a lovely cook. Come and sit and I'll bandage your hands up."

His elbow was taken in one hand and he was led to a soft couch, soft cloths wrapping his hands.

He blinked drowsily, offering Alain a smile of true thanks.

"Rest, Sparrow. You're safe here, you have my word." He was settled back upon a pillow, a soft blanket spread atop him, the puppy snuggling down by his feet.

That word was bound to be good, and he let it lead him into sleep. He'd worry about cleaning the bloody dress in the morning.

He'd let the worn-out wee thing sleep the night through, checking on the sweet face throughout the night and letting the puppy down to do his business once.

Poor lad, all mangled up by that drunken, ham-handed sot. He growled softly, glaring out into the garden, eyebrows lowering. Damn this busy, evil, over-crowded place. Damn the

tiny rooms and lack of meadows and stubborn gentlemen that couldn't just marry a girl and let her brother head back to the country estate where he belonged.

The hounds heard his unhappiness and started milling, whining and pushing long muzzles into his hand, seeking reassurance and comfort, the tiny puppy waking from his little nest at Kieran's feet.

The pup wasn't the only one waking, if the tousled head of shining spun gold hair popping up off the pillow was any indication. Wide blue eyes stared at him, sleep-fogged, fear beginning to creep in as the lad looked about, most like trying to remember where he was.

"Shh...shh...'sokay, sparrow. You're safe, like I said." He moved away from the window, moving to sit in one of the big chairs by the hearth. "How are your poor hands?"

"Oh!" The boy, Kieran, sat up, blinking at him. "They'll do."

"Told you that salve would make things right." He nodded, pleased. "Would you take some breakfast with me? Miss Lindy's cooking, I could hear that infernal stove rattling at dawn and the most unladylike curses floating through the air."

The lad giggled, but it was quickly stifled, those huge eyes peering at him over the hand the boy clapped over his mouth.

He grinned over and did a passing-fair imitation of Lindy at her most rumbly, hoping for another taste of that laugh. Sweet, this one was. Sweet and lovely and dear.

Another laugh rang through the room, this one true and clear and not hindered by self-conscious doubt. "She's a fine woman, your Miss Lindy."

Alain nodded. "She's a love and a dear and I wouldn't do without her. Who else can cook and manage a household *and* deal with these beauties?" He reached down, scratching behind Faith's ears.

"I imagine it's quite a job, if you bring home mongrels like me all the time."

"A mongrel? Have you seen yourself in a glass, Sparrow?" Alain shook his head, confused. Those eyes were pretty enough to make the lad's career in the theatre, much less the line of that spine spanned by....

He shook his head, cheeks heating. "Would you have tea, Sparrow?"

"Oh. That would be...yes. And, well, where's the loo?"

"Oh, right! End of the hall. I'll put the beasts out so they don't steal the bacon."

He gave the lad some time, and soon enough the sweet thing was there, hitching his trousers up over skinny hips, pup trailing along behind.

"Smells good."

"Got to break your fast well, makes the day go better." He sat at the table, taking up his tea and sipping. "Sit, Sparrow, feed your bones."

Kieran sat, as told, and tucked into the food. "Why do you call me Sparrow?"

"Oh, well...." He grinned, ducking his head a bit. "You're so fine and your eyes are bright and your frock from before? Brown as a sparrow's back. It suited well. The color."

He put some bacon on his plate, digging in. Silly old man. Hush now.

"Oh. My frock." Kieran giggled again. "I guess I do a right good girl."

"Do you like it? Acting up on the stage, I mean? I don't go much -- just when Sallie needs an elbow to hang her hand on." He dug into his omelet and toast, sneaking the wee pup a touch of meat.

"Sallie." Oh, now what put that look on that sweet face? Looked stricken, he did. "You're married?"

"Married? Me? Not bloody likely!" Alain shook his head, horrified. "No, Sparrow. Sallie's my youngest sister. She's why I'm here in the city. She's husband-hunting. Now there's some serious business for you."

"Oh!" Brow smoothing out, Kieran began stuffing food in again, like he was starving. "S'hard business, finding a man, s'true."

He nodded, pouring himself another cup of tea. "Lots of fluttering and giggling and plotting. Me? I prefer a person to just say what he wants. I'm not much on games, lest it's throwing a stick for the pups."

"Oh. Lots of games in the theater. Everyone currying favor, gossiping about who's doing who." Kieran shook his head. "That's the part I don't like."

"Currying favor? From who?"

"The rich patrons, o'course. Not much of a living, the stage, unless you have someone helping out." So matter-of-fact for one so young.

"Someone who likes your acting, then? Someone's taking care of you, Sparrow?" He told himself it was relief making his belly twist a bit. Relief. The wee thing needed taking care of, he did.

"No." A mouthful of eggs went down, and two more pieces of bacon. "No one. I...I'm too picky, I suppose."

"Picky is good." He tilted his head, curious. "Picky about what?"

"Don't like old. Don't like frog lips." Kieran grinned at him over toast and preserves. "Particular, me."

"Well, that puts me right out of the running, Sparrow." He winked, finished his tea. "Not to mention the nasty bugger who I bashed last afternoon."

Not that he had frog's lips.... At least he didn't think he did. He might have to check in the glass later.

Head tilting, Kieran looked at him quizzically. "Why's that? You're not old. And you're very kind, you are. And...and you're safe. Like home."

"Oh." Alain blushed dark, head ducking. "I'm older than you are, Sparrow, and it's only natural to be kind to one as fine as you."

"Well of course you're older than me. Most everyone is." The lad licked his fingers happily, making little moaning noises. "Least that's what they say at the theater."

He refused to look, to respond. He was simply being kind, he was. "What do these patron types do for you then, Sparrow? Do they come to your plays?"

"Oh, for certain. And they buy things and help you find a nice place to live. Leastways that's what Tom says. *He* says I shouldn't have any trouble finding someone, but I don't want someone who stinks like that old fart last night."

That tickled him and he chuckled. "No, he didn't seem the non-frog lipped type. So, do you have a decent home now? Somewhere safe?" He fed the pup one more tiny scrap from his plate, stroking its sweet little head.

"Well. It does me up right enough." The lad wouldn't meet his eyes.

"Aye?" That made his teeth itch, made that low growl tickle him deep. "Because there's spare set of rooms here. They're small, but safe enough and warm. I could see a lad resting there easy, having tea with a friend, letting the pup have a place at the foot of his bed."

Wide, wide eyes flew to his. "Oh, I couldn't! I mean, that wouldn't be right, taking advantage that way. You've been far too good already."

"Well, it's up to you, of course, but the rooms are empty and you're only a spare thing." He winked, wanting to know the lad was safe, sound, warm and home. "How much can you eat?"

"A lot?" Kieran blushed. "I would like that, though. The staying I mean."

"You're welcome to, you know? You could help me learn the ins and outs about the theatre, aye? Maybe give the pup a name?" He smiled, pleased straight through.

"Truly? Would you want to be my patron? Because I wouldn't mind kissing you at all." The poor lad went pale, and looked at his hands.

His shaft leapt, his body responding immediately to those words, to the thought. "I've never been a patron before. Is this place fine enough to suit?"

"It's perfect! You have Miss Lindy and the dogs and food and it has you." Spots of color rose on Kieran's cheeks.

"Well, then, I don't see why not. You could stay in the spare rooms and I would know you were...." He flushed deep. "I don't like thinking about you being in danger."

"You, oh, you're so good." Kieran bounced up out of his chair and over to him to kiss his cheek.

He blushed dark, pleased to the core. "You.... Thank you, Kieran."

"Oh, no. Thank you." Bouncing, Kieran petted his shoulder.

"You want to see your rooms, Sparrow? Get settled?"

"Yes? Oh! I need to wash my dress. I have to return it to the theater today."

"We'll talk to Miss Lindy. It might just be laundry day." He smiled sheepishly. "In truth, she gathered it up last night for this morning's work."

Poor lad was a bit overwhelmed, for he looked as though he might cry. "Then I should see those rooms."

He petted the thin shoulder and led Kieran down the hall, past his own rooms, and into a tiny sitting room with a single divan and a tiny hearth, a slightly larger bed chamber beyond with a bed, a coal stove and a window seat. "Will this do you, Sparrow? The armoire's empty and the linens are fresh."

"S'perfect." Kieran twirled. "I think this will be very good."

"You can gather your things whenever you'd like. Just take the carriage over." He grinned, nodded. The lad looked happy, healthy. Like he belonged.

"The carriage!" Kieran twirled back and bounced right into his arms, hugging him tight. "I knew it was a good thing I was picky."

He wrapped his arms around the lad, holding lightly. "Yes, I think you're right, Sparrow."

He dared to brush the softest kiss against the soft blond hair.

Eyes shining, Kieran looked up at him. "I'd be honored to stay."

"Then these rooms are yours." He stroked the soft cheek with one finger, fascinated.

"And I'll be yours." That bright head rested against his breast, so trusting.

Oh.

Alain held his sparrow, warm and happy, the puppy chewing on Kieran's ankles. He thought he could get used to this patron thing, to having his sparrow home.

The Terrible Two

Ah. Jolly old England. Frankly, Garrick Evington, former junior officer of her Majesty's guard, had never thought to see it again. Two years. Two ruddy years on the continent, and Devlin finally got him a pardon. Thank God for Dev, because he was bloody sick of French food.

Shouldering his bag, Garrick stepped out on the dock, breathing in the black city air. Not exactly a light, refreshing scent, but it smelled of home. Wet, heavy, so dark with coal smoke it left you with a permanent mustache, but home.

The docks were teeming with people, and he was sorely tempted to pinch a purse so he could have a pint. Should really go see Devlin, let him know he was home. Sighing at the loss of opportunity, Garrick headed toward the nearest carriage for hire, amazed that there was actually one to be found in this part of town.

He got there just in time to be jostled out of the way by someone else, some ruddy little bugger with a rude elbow. He shoved back. "Ey, you banty rooster. I was here first."

"Kiss off, you grinder, an' find another. I ain't sharin'." Two bright blue eyes looked back at him, then grew huge. "Garr?"

Garrick looked down, taking note of the small stature, blonde hair and bloody amazing blue eyes. Jesus God, had anything ever looked better? "Quincy."

The blond head bobbed, knuckles white on the carriage door. "You've come back to stay?"

He could hear the hope, the need in Quincy's voice, the barely disguised tremor.

God almighty he'd missed that voice. His own sounded rough as sand. "Yeah. Back to stay, Quin."

"Got somewhere to go?" Just then Quincy's eyes shot up the road and the dazed look faded. "I ain't got time, love. Come to Hollingsworth House. Please."

"Yeah. I can do that, Quin." He let Quincy shove him into the carriage and piled in next to him, rapping the roof to let the driver know they were settled.

He was positively spinning. What were the bloody odds of meeting up with Quincy Hollingsworth on his first day back. In his first hour. A deep breath swelled his chest, and he inhaled the scent of his former lover, bay rum and citrus and wool. God.

Quincy was vibrating, Garr could almost hear it in the buttons and coins and the chains on his watch. "I... How long you been back? Did Devlin fix things for you? You're home all nice and legal-like?"

"Yeah." He nodded, turning to face Quin more fully, taking in the new cut of his hair. "Full pardon. I... I've missed you, Quin. So much."

"Oh... Oh, Garr... Don't. Not here. Not yet. Not before we're home and I can..." A hint of sheer wickedness flared in those eyes. "Well, love, you know what I'm needing."

Something hard and hot settled in his belly. Or perhaps just below. After all this time, Quin got to him so quickly, so sharply. "Soon. Yeah?"

"Soon. Yeah." Quin stuck his head out the window. "There's double in it for you if you get us to the end before the bells."

He was hard, aching, and his hands itched to touch, but he held himself very still. If they started, they would not stop.

"I can smell you." Quincy's eyes flashed, hands gripping the edge of the carriage seat.

"Quin. I." Clearing his throat, adjusting his need, Garr looked away. "Have you been well?"

"Aye. Been working the gaming halls a bit, working the clubs a bit." Quin shifted, legs crossing. "It's been hard, working alone. Being alone, yeah?" There was no accusation in that longed for voice, simply statement of fact, and yet it wounded. He had never meant to leave Quin. Ever. 'Twas his own damned temper that had sent him fleeing to the continent, that and the man he'd injured in a duel. The matter was compounded by the fact that it was an accusation against Quincy that he'd called the man out for. So much misery over something so stupid.

"I'm sorry, Quin."

"Yeah, but it's over now. You're back, like you said. I waited, like I said. It's all put to rights." He got a grin and just like that, he was home in those bright eyes.

The carriage finally lurched to a stop, and his hands shook as they climbed out, Hollingsworth house looming before them. He paid the cabbie and followed Quin up the stairs, and suddenly he was horribly nervous. Quincy didn't give him a chance to stop, to think. Without a word, he was pulled into the dim foyer and a pair of fine gloves were tossed at the ugly little table that was still beside the door.

Those hands reached up, cupped his face. "It is you, love. Oh..."

"Yes. Quin." He had to taste, had to see if it was the same. He leaned, pressing his lips to Quin's, practically sobbing at the contact. The soft cry that pushed into his lips was sweet, rich, familiar. Then Quincy's tongue slid into his mouth, demanding more. Oh, bloody Hell. Yes. All the nervousness fled, chased away by sheer need. He pushed Quin up

against the wall next to the door, pushing a leg between Quin's to feel his lover's hardness.

Cries were fed to him, along with that hungry tongue, hands hard against his shoulders. Quincy, hungry now as always, rubbed against his thigh, hot and stiff beneath the form-fitting trousers. He reached for the row of tiny buttons covering Quin's shaft, needing to feel, only then realizing he still wore his gloves. He tore them off, finding the buttons once more and opening them, one by one. Quincy was working open his shirt, petting his hair, cupping his buttocks -- the man still had hands that moved faster than good sense, faster than imagination.

"Quin. God." He dropped to his knees as Quin's prick pulled free and nuzzled the tip, pushing his face into the gap in Quin's trousers, taking in the scent. Nuzzling and licking, wondering at how he'd lived without this for so long.

"Oh. I need. Garr..." Those fast hands tugged his hair, eyes fastened to him like Quin was afraid he'd disappear.

"So do I." He opened and took Quin in, deeply, sucking and licking until his chin rested on Quin's balls. Oh, how he'd missed the taste and smell and feel of him. He'd hardly let himself think of it. Now that he had Quin once more, he luxuriated in it, greedy, hands and mouth working hard. Quincy cried out, hips moving, pushing towards his lips. Soon rich, salted drops of need blossomed upon his tongue, the flavor heady and familiar, echoing deep within him.

Addictive. Lovely. So damned perfect. But he was hardly satisfied, would not be until Quin found his pleasure, and so he redoubled his efforts.

"Garrick!" Two years since he had heard that sound, the sound of his name ringing in this old house as Quincy spent himself, hips jerking with hard, random motions.

He took it all, drinking Quincy down eagerly. When he'd licked his lover clean, Garr rose, and took a kiss. "I love you."

"And I you as well, Quin. What a team we'll be once more."

Devlin would have to wait. He had a lover to reacquaint himself with. But he would make sure to thank the man for returning him to his home very soon. For returning him to Quin.

The two were wonderful together. Separately, they were stunning. Mr. Hollingsworth with his bright eyes and shining hair and devil may care attitude. On the surface, Mr. Evington seemed cooler, just as his icy green eyes and cool dark gold hair would suggest. When one put them together, however, there was a spark that West found irresistible.

It drew him to them, even though he could barely form two words to put together with them about. He made a point to be near them, only occasionally losing track as they simply outran him, thanks to his lame lag. 'Twas just such a time now, and West limped back to his library (well, Devlin's to be precise) ready to settle in and do some work.

Obviously, the last thing he thought to find there was his current obsession, the two themselves. He heard them before he saw them, and peeked around the door before entering, just to see what they were up to.

Garrick stood before Quincy at the divan. The young man was murmuring soft perversions, encouragements, hand stroking the bright hair as that head bobbed in... Oh. Oh, goodness.

He had read, but he had never *seen*... outside of woodcuts and etchings. Oh, good heavens.

And the things Garrick said. Praise for Quincy's beauty, his skill. In between words the quiet swelled, and he heard the wet noises of Quincy's mouth on Garrick's.. oh my.

Quincy's hands were flat against Garrick's waist, holding them together, encouraging the motions of Garrick's hips. Even still half-clothed, they were the most beautiful thing he had ever seen, and though he felt like the worst sort of voyeur, he could not look away. They had no idea he was there, so he widened the gap between door and frame to gain a better view.

Garrick's partially bared bottom flexed and released as he thrust, pulling his eyes, and Quincy... well. Goodness. A low hum sounded and Garrick's hips jerked, Quincy's head moving faster, taking Garrick deeper, fingers sliding and pushing against Garrick's flesh. The sounds Garrick made covered his own, thankfully, as the man gave a loud wail, whole body shaking, every muscle taut. Quincy's throat worked, moans growing louder, needier.

Good gracious. He was rubbing against the door like cat against a table leg! But he could not help himself as Garrick slid his... appendage out and went to his knees before Quincy, sharing a deep kiss.

Quincy pushed into those arms, melting close with a low cry, hands sliding into Garrick's dark hair.

"Mmmm. Love the way I taste on your mouth." Garrick's words were loud, shockingly so, and West almost withdrew, starting back a pace, almost stumbling. Still, they were so wrapped in each other they did not hear.

"Sweet, Garrick. You taste sweet." Quincy grinned, rubbing against Garrick's long body. "Need you, love. Need your touch."

"Anything you need, lover." Garrick worked at Quincy's clothing, revealing more and more to West's shocked, yet hungry eyes, and he was so lovely! Compact yet muscled, and any who said the male form was the less beautiful was quite wrong. Quincy moved unabashedly beneath Garrick's gaze, displaying need and desire to his partner, hands moving to work open Garrick's buttons.

Oh. How sad it made him that no one would ever look at him in that manner, with such complete absorption. How wonderful they were. West was hard in his trousers, as hard as Quincy as he pushed into Garrick's caressing hand, and he thought he might simply combust.

Soft cries filled the air, needy and sweet, desperation raw within them. "Garr... Love... 's good. So good."

"Mmm. Quin. Love you." Garrick stroked, arm moving very fast, and West could just hear his own gasps over Quincy's. How different it looked when it was someone else touching. Quincy spread his thighs, balls swinging in the air. A dark flush covered the tight buttocks, moving up along the muscled spine.

"That's it, lover. Want to feel it when you come. Want to hold it." Garrick's voice was low and raw, and it jolted him right down to his toes as he strained for Quincy's reply.

"Yes. Yes, Garr. I need... Oh, love! Now, love..." Quincy arched, lifting onto his toes, body shuddering.

"Ooooh, love. For me. That's it." Garrick sounded so... loving. It all but brought tears to his eyes.

Settling back down, head on Garrick's shoulder, Quincy panted, shivering and offering low moans. Garrick stroked Quincy's back, an intimate gesture that made him even more of an interloper, and he ignored the ache in his groin as he moved back from the door. He worked very hard to remain quiet, but his leg had stiffened, and protested, and a small sound escaped him.

"You don't have to go, friend. You can come in, lock the door." Quincy's voice was rumbling, soft, body never so much as tensing.

He thought he might die from embarrassment! He stumbled back, his foot tangling with the doorjamb and down he went, arse first on the floor. Two sets of strong arms helped him up, helped him in, locking the door firmly. They were on their way to the divan before the fact dawned on him that one nude and one partially dressed man pressed on either side of him.

"Didn't mean to startle you. Not at all. Just thought you might want to relax."

He simply stared, the throbbing in his nether parts exchanged for one in his knee and ankle.

"I think we broke him, Quin."

"Yeah, Garr. You think we need them smelling salt things?"

"I am perfectly fine. Well, except my leg pains me, and you are quite nude." West directed his words to Quincy, unable to look away.

"Oh. Yes. Well..." Quincy gave him a playful grin. "I was this way before you took your tumble and it wasn't causing you troubles. Can I help your leg?"

"There's tumbles and there's tumbles. That one wasn't amusing, I'd wager. I'll just go and get some hot towels." Garrick smiled at him as well, hitching up his trousers. And leaving him with the naked Quincy.

"I... please. It's simply my lame leg. There is nothing you can do."

Quincy frowned and scooted closer. "We'll do what we can, yeah? Make it ache less. Make you ache less." One hand rested gently on his thigh. The curls above that quiet shaft were bright, gold, visible and close enough to touch.

"Thank you." Really, it was too unreal. "Are you going to reassume your trousers?"

"Do you want me to?" Simple, forthright -- the question was just handed over with a distressing lack of artifice.

"Well, not terribly. Oh my goodness."

A soft laugh came from the doorway as Garrick reappeared with an armful of towels. "I think he likes you, love."

"I would hope so, Garr! Given that he's seen me in my altogether spending into your hand."

"That would certainly make me like you, if I didn't already." Good Lord. He really would simply melt and die soon.

It didn't seem that Quincy minded though, giving him a wide, warm smile. "He's a dear, Garr love! I think we should keep him."

"Do you? Then by all means." Garrick smiled at him as well, just as open and happy, and he could hardly bear it.

"Keep me?"

Quincy slid off the seat and helped him stretch out so that the warm towels might be used. Hands petted his head, his hair, bright blue eyes shining at him. "Aye. Keep you. You don't look happy lest you're watching us. Happy's good for you, West."

"You... I. Happy?" Oh, yes, well. That came out well.

Garrick nodded vigorously. "You look sad. He looks sad, doesn't he love?"

"He does. You do. And you don't have to. We'll help." Fingers brushed over his lips. "Shall I kiss him, love? Show him?"

"Ooooh, yeah, love. No one could resist your kisses."

"Going to kiss you, then." Quincy's thumb brushed his bottom lip and he was the sudden center of their focus, warm and wanton. Then warm, soft lips covered his, sweet breath pushing into his mouth.

He simply froze, unable to believe it, feeling soft, soft skin and slow touches of someone else's mouth upon his and letting it quiet take him away. The careful touches slowly drew deeper, the surprising heat of a wet tongue teasing and tempting his lips open. Garrick's hands were on him, as warm as Quincy's lips. He could not fathom what was happening.

Simply could not, but it felt very good indeed. Then Quincy's tongue pushed into his mouth, parting his lips and sliding along his tongue. The touch was gentle, someone playful, insistent and warm and utterly overwhelming.

He had never been kissed that way. Well, he had only been kissed a very few times, and certainly those had been more chaste. But this. Oh. His hands searched for purchase, finding Quincy's shoulders, skin smooth beneath his fingers.

Quincy hummed into his lips, muscles rippling under his hands. "Mm... 's it, lovely man. Got a nice touch, you do."

"Th-thank you." What did one say in a situation like this? There were no rules of polite engagement, and he was decidedly lost for words.

Quincy licked at his lips, offering soft, sweet, sucking kisses that made his head spin. Meanwhile, Garrick worked upon his clothing, which he did not even realize until he felt a distinct breeze on his partly bared chest, and it jolted him right out of the moment, making him pull back. His knee twinged sharply, and he gasped.

"Sh... sh... nobody's going to hurt you, West. You want we should stop?" The question was punctuated by another long, deep kiss, blue eyes shining down at him.

"No. Yes? I haven't the faintest idea. You're both so beautiful." They were. He was not. Self-conscious, he stared at Quincy, not sure where to go next.

Garr wrapped a warm bit of toweling around his sore leg. "S'all right, West. Promise."

"'s nicer if you just feel. Leave the worrying for after over a nice pint." Quincy grinned against his mouth and it feel good, like the man was sharing the joke, including him. "Your mouth tastes sweet, West."

"So does yours." Lord, he just kept saying these *things*.

"Mmm. I want a taste." Garrick moved about and knelt closer, placing a hand on Quincy's cheek and turning the man to take a kiss. Oh. He was tasting West on Quincy's lips. Quincy gave a soft, purring sound and he could see their tongues sliding against one another.

"Goodness." He watched avidly, loving the look of them together, amazed at how such a wonderful thing could be his to see.

Their lips parted and Quincy gave Garrick a slow, sensual smile. "See? Sweet."

"Yes, love. Very sweet, indeed, mixed with you." Garrick shared the smile between both he and Quincy, then leaned forward and kissed him gently as well. A small, sharp noise escaped him.

Quincy's lips brushed his ear. "Open for him, lovely man. Garr... his kisses are like magic."

West opened, because he could do nothing else. Garrick invaded gently, touching all the surfaces of his mouth with that sweet tongue. They made him dizzy. So dizzy and hot. Quincy moaned, tongue sliding along his ear, lips pulling gently at the lobe.

His leg was forgotten once more, a pressure higher up taking precedence, hard and needy. He felt utterly wanton as Garrick's kisses were joined by Quincy's caresses, body hot and tight. Fingertips ghosted over his hardness, just brushing enough to feel. "Oh... West... I can smell you, warm and good. Bet you'd be sweet on my tongue there too, rich and salty. Hot."

He gave a soft cry, whole body trembling as he came in his trousers, the unbelievable sensation making it impossible for him to stop. He gasped for air, chest heaving, and relaxed so profoundly he thought he might fall asleep.

Someone's lips nuzzled him, even as someone cleaned him, someone else placed a warm blanket over his sore legs. "Mm... he's lovely, Garr. Utterly."

"He is. We are most definitely keeping him."

Dazed, yet happier than he could remember being, he simply watched them through half-closed eyes, drinking in their sweetness.

"Most excellent." Bright blue eyes smiled down at him, glinting and dancing. "D'you hear that, lovely man? You're taken. All ours now."

He nodded, smiling as he began to doze off. "Very well."

Oh, what a lovely, lovely pair. Perhaps he was already dreaming. One way or the other, he would remember this experience for the rest of his life.

Harmony

Oliver took the stairs two at a time. He had barely stopped to say hello to Mdme. R., knowing what awaited him above stairs.

Not that it was like him to be rude, but he had just finished a commission for Her Majesty the Queen, and the shadow of it hanging over him was gone. He had presented Mdme. R. with a cheque for a considerable sum just yesterday, and she had assured him that his favorite gift would be waiting.

He stepped inside the room he frequented, taking in the coal fire in the hearth, the bottle of amontillado on the tray beside the bed, and his gift, poised perfectly, waiting for him.

Violet silk kept his gift still, positioned on the bed with one full glass resting on a curved hip. Arms drawn up and bound together were fastened to the hook within the headboard. The pale green eyes were covered, lips parted with a darkened bit of silk within. Two long ribbons trailed from slim ankles and Oliver knew, should he look, that slim, long shaft would be completely wrapped, bound to his will.

So utterly beautiful. A feast for the senses, his Samuel. He could ask for no more in life than this.

Shedding his coat, Oliver closed the door behind him, watching that bound head shift just slightly at the hearing of him. He crossed the room and took up the full glass of sherry, sipping it lightly. Perfect.

As perfect as the shining skin of the hip presented to him, which he stroked gently. "Good evening, Samuel."

A soft moan greeted him, welcomed him. The lean muscle of that thigh jumped beneath his touch.

So very lovely, so eager. He touched the sweet buttocks, what he could reach of the quivering belly, still sipping at his drink.

Samuel was controlled, not moving into his touch or away from it, but simply waiting for whatever he offered, resting pale and still in the firelight.

He moved about to the other side of the bed, looking at his sweet gift from that side, deciding where to start.

"Oh, how I have longed for you, my sweet one. You are simply incomparable." He bent, placing a soft kiss on the stretched lips.

Those lips trembled for him, trying to steal a taste, a kiss, something. He licked at them, tasting Samuel's lips, and the silk between them. So soft. The moans that escaped were

hungry, wanton. He could feel the heat and desire pouring from Samuel, passion that rang with pleasure.

He moved Samuel to lie on his back, easing the stretched arms around, going to the ankles to bind them to the bed as well. He would start with the front.

Samuel's shaft bobbed, purple silk criss-crossing it, tied tight at the tip and again around the heavy sacs. From this angle he could see a fine violet collar locked around Samuel's throat, dark against the pale skin.

He just touched the bound prick, feeling the heat of it beneath its wrappings, watching Samuel's muscles clench. He petted Samuel's belly, his thighs, adoring the smooth, unmarked skin that he would paint with his marks.

Now that Samuel was bound, fastened to the bed, Samuel's lithe body shifted, begging for his touch, his will. "Shhh. Hush little one. Soon, I promise you, you will have reason to beg so prettily."

He went to the table that held the sherry to refill his glass, and also to choose an implement from the ones there. He chose a small, thin strap, one that would sting but not injure.

He snapped it against his own palm, testing its strength. Lovely.

Samuel lay quiet now, listening intently, focused on what was to come. The pale expanse of Samuel's belly called to him, but he started higher, flicking the strap against one rosy nipple.

Samuel gave a surprised cry, the skin around the nipple wrinkling and going tight, hard, peaking under his gaze.

Yes. That was exactly what he was looking for. The other nipple felt the sting, as did the space between them, a tiny patch of skin going bright red. His gift's breath was speeding, hands opening and closing slowly as the sensitive nipples stopped throbbing, stopped protesting. Just when Samuel relaxed he let those bits of flesh feel the strap once more, before quickly snapping it against one hip.

The pale skin displayed his mark perfectly, Samuel just barely shifting in the bonds, just gasping.

He crossed that sweet skin with marks, chest, belly, thighs. Finally he snapped it lightly against the bound cock, lightly, back and forth.

Samuel whimpered, arching so beautifully against the bonds, phallus bobbing under his attention. Time to move on to his favorite part. He untied Samuel's ankles, rubbing them lightly, then the wrists, chafing them as well. He gently untied the gag, taking a short

taste of Samuel's red lips. "Are you well, my gift? I would go on."

"I am well, sir." The voice was low, rich, velvet-smooth. "Please, Oliver. I am yours."

"Yes. You are. Mine alone." He took one more kiss before sitting on the bed and pulling Samuel facedown across his lap, stroking the firm, soft buttocks that awaited him. Samuel was moaning, rocking gently into his touch, bound prick rubbing his leg with a quiet desperation. "I would hear your sounds, Samuel. Do not hold back."

With that he pulled his hand back and let it fly, landing hard against the cheeks of that fine arse.

"Oh!" Samuel jerked, dark curls bobbing as the cry echoed through the room. The pale skin showed a perfect imprint of his hand, rose petals against snow. He let another blow fall, reveling in the sound, and the scent of Samuel's need. Another, and yet still another he gave, finding a rhythm.

Soft cries filled the air, dark words, promises, and his name sobbed again and again in that melted sugar voice, made rough by his hand. He took what he needed and gave Samuel what he asked, keeping at it until those sweet, round cheeks glowed cherry bright.

Samuel moved upon his lap, shifting, hips pushing up and back into each blow. His gift begged like none other, entire body pleading for him, cock hard and hot against him.

Once he had achieved the color he desired, he lifted Samuel up against him, tearing the blindfold off to see those eyes, kissing his gift deeply.

Samuel was liquid against him, light green eyes shining with moisture, thin fingers tangled in his hair. So hot, burning against him, Samuel offered everything -- each sob, each moan, each shudder -- into his hands.

'Twas the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. His hands were drawn to that glowing arse, and he squeezed gently, knowing it would cause exquisite pain. "Get the oil, my gift."

The whimper that pressed into his lips was sweet as spun sugar. Samuel reached, arching under his eyes for the vermillion pot that held the spicy, golden oil.

He took it in hand, savoring Samuel's sounds, dipping his fingers into the oil and pressing them against the opening of Samuel's body. He pulled Samuel to straddle him, pushing those hot cheeks wide.

"Oliver." The words were soft, whispered, bright eyes hungry. "I... Please. Oh, please."

"Yes, now." Angling his hips, he pulled Samuel up, positioning the tip of his cock against

the slick hole. Sinking deep, he pulled again, down this time, seating those searing buttocks against his thighs. Samuel arched, crying out at the touch. The silk at the tip of the bound prick was dark, wet, proving Samuel's need.

Soon, soon he would let Samuel unbind that sweet prick and stroke it to completion, but first he wanted the long, drawn out pleasure of a good hard plugging. He yanked at Samuel's hips, up and down, faster and faster. His own hips rose to meet that sweet butt, feeling the heat he'd left there.

His shaft was well-ridden, Samuel burning around him, against him, squeezing him tight.

"Yes. Oh, Samuel." He could feel it, rising in his spine, and could wait no longer. "Unbind yourself, my gift, let me see your pleasure."

Thin fingers fumbled to open the knot, free the long tube of flesh from its bondage. So careful, body clamped tight as Samuel fought valiantly the urge to spill, green eyes flashed up at him, begging. "Yours. Oliver. Oh. Oh, please. Give me the word."

"Yes, love. Now. Come for me now." He watched, entranced. A low wail split the air, heated seed pouring forth from Samuel, offered to his sight. His own climax burst forth, flooding Samuel's body, shaking his entire body.

Samuel collapsed down onto him, panting, moaning, hands careful in his hair.

"Oh, Samuel, I could not have asked for more precious a gift." Tilting Samuel's head up, he kissed those longed for lips.

Samuel kissed him back, lips soft, swollen, so warm. "I waited to hear that you have asked for me again. That you want me once more."

"I always want you, my gift." And he did. He simply did not always remember how much he needed. Tonight, though, he would make sure Samuel knew it.

There. The last notes fell perfectly into the otherwise silent room, and Oliver scribbled the measure on the paper. The piece was finished. There was only to neaten the score and send it over to Master Pomfrey at the conservatory on the morrow.

Sitting back from the piano caused his back to pop audibly, a surprising sound, as surprising as the one that followed, a small gasp from one darkened corner of the room.

It was with some considerable surprise that Oliver remembered he had sent to Madame R.'s for Samuel some two days before, and forgotten he was about immediately upon receipt of the newest commission. Oh dear.

He would simply have to make it up to the boy in the best of ways.

"Samuel. Oh, my dear gift, I am sorry. Come." He held out his hand.

Samuel's thin form slowly unfolded from the chair, the ebony curls tousled, clothes wrinkled from wear. "Good evening, Oliver."

His gift's voice was husky, unused, rasping gently over his nerves.

Relatively certain that his housekeeper, Edna, would have fed the boy -- as she liked him -- Oliver still asked as he drew Samuel near. "You are well? You have eaten?"

"I have, sir. Your people have been most kind to me." Those dark eyes were shining, warm. "I have occupied myself by reading and watching a master at work."

His cheeks heated, both with chagrin at his own thoughtlessness, and with pleasure at the words. "Excellent. Well, my gift, now my attention is wholly yours. I shall let you claim your own reward."

Samuel chuckled. "If I have your attention, Oliver, then I have already received my reward."

Such a lovely one, his Samuel. "Then I claim a kiss as mine." He smiled, pulling Samuel even closer, until the lad sat on his lap.

"Oh. Yes. Yes, please." Soft, yielding, those lips parted for him, offering him all he asked for, all he required.

Irresistible. Oliver took those lips in a rush of need, the energy of the music still in him, needing an outlet. Samuel's cry was sweet, pushed into his lips, a counterpoint to his own moans. So wonderfully musical, his sweet one's sounds. They fell upon his ears perfectly. He grasped Samuel's buttocks, pressing them together, and kissed harder.

Samuel's legs wrapped around his waist, hands buried in his hair, holding them together. A stiff heat teased his stomach through their clothes, the evidence of need close and yet hidden.

His own shaft hardened almost unbearably, and he spread his thighs, gaining leverage to thrust up against Samuel, bending his gift back over his arm with the force of their kiss. Samuel's hands were hard on his shoulders, breathy gasps sounding as they shifted and moved, thrust and struggled together.

Skin. He needed skin. The clothes muffled their passion. It would not do. Oliver shifted, turned and lifted until Samuel stood before him once more. Then he started stripping the lad with ruthless efficiency.

Samuel tried to help, but their fingers kept getting tangled, distracting him, and finally Samuel just relaxed, let him tear the clothing from that slender form. Yes. That pale skin glowed in the light, and he ran his hands over it, feeling the silky warmth under his fingers. Playing the most sensitive spots.

"Oh..." Samuel shivered, undulated beneath his fingers like a sylph. "How you make me feel, Oliver."

"My gift." There were no words for how Samuel made him feel. Oliver turned the lad, draping him across the closed keys of the piano, and stood, disrobing himself.

Dark eyes watched him, focused and hungry, sliding over each exposed bit of skin. The curved shaft bobbed for him, dark and wet-tipped.

Oh, how he wanted to taste that skin, the fine nipples, that sweet cock. Nude, Oliver sat once more upon the piano stool, leaning to take another kiss. Samuel bent almost double to accommodate him, his sweet obedient boy, as Oliver had not said he could move from where he was placed.

Samuel was hungry, lips hot and sweet and swollen, trembling as they balanced together.

The kiss was flavored with Samuel's need, with his patience, and Oliver wished to reward that. He pushed Samuel back, licking at the tiny nipples that stood out dark and hard on the smooth chest, scraping them with his teeth.

"Oliver!" Samuel jerked, hands scrabbling along the polished wood of the piano.

"Yes, my gift. So sweet." The flat belly called him down, licking at Samuel's tiny indented navel, but he moved on quickly, greedy for his sweet one's musk and need. So hard for him, so ready, and Oliver took the tip of Samuel's cock into his mouth, sucking strongly.

A soft, unbelieving scream sounded, Samuel's cock leaping, throbbing against his tongue. The bittersalt mixed with the sweetness of his gift was a symphony of addictions.

There was more flavor here, less there, but Oliver explored the whole of it, using his tongue against the underside. Samuel's heart beat in his mouth, making his own leap.

Samuel offered him all -- happy cries and clasping fingers, jerking hips and heated need - - all pouring over him like waves.

Pulling back just enough to speak, Oliver groaned. "Now, Samuel. Now."

"Oh! Oliver!" That sweet shaft slid upon his tongue like a glissando and then heat filled his mouth.

The taste was delicate and yet purely masculine, something to be savored. Every drop was consumed, enjoyed, before Oliver stopped his ministrations. "My sweet gift."

"Yes, Oliver." Samuel was flushed, panting, glowing in the firelight. "Yours."

"Yes." He stood, letting Samuel slide from the piano to stand as well, turning the lad once more so that he was face first over the piano. "Do not move."

A shiver moved down Samuel's spine. "Yes, Oliver."

"Excellent." Confident that Samuel would do his bidding, Oliver went to gather what he would need. His own shaft ached, but his need went deeper than a simple rut. His need was to claim.

When he returned, Oliver held two vials of oil, a delicate set of clamps, and a straight wooden paddle. "Up, my gift."

Samuel stood, graceful and sure, body loose and relaxed, trusting him completely.

The curve of one buttock was an overture he could not resist, and he stroked there, fingers cupping where it met the slim thigh. "Beautiful."

The skin beneath his hand twitched and Samuel flushed a deep rose. "Yours."

Such utter trust. "Yes, sweet one. Even when I forget it." He moved behind Samuel, pressing against the almost dainty line of the lad's spine to reach about and pluck at the sweet nipples he'd so recently tasted. Then he attached the clamps, one at a time, admiring them in the fold down silver mirror attached to the top of the piano. "Never was there such a heady thing, my sweet one, as your beauty and your love."

Samuel shuddered, gasping, clamps glinting, twitching against that chest as white teeth sank into kiss-swollen lips. "Oh. Oh, Oliver. Oliver."

He hummed, a jaunty little tune, and flicked at the clamps with his fingers. Oh, yes. Lovely. Next the vial of cinnamon oil was chosen and opened, and Oliver touched some to his finger, feeling it tingle.

"Just a bit of this, my gift. Not enough to burn, hmm?"

The rich scent was unmistakable.

Samuel whimpered, body swaying slightly. Those nipples were dark, hard, goose bumps covering his gift. The thin, long cock curved up, need renewed, tip wet.

And was that not the most perfect place. The tiniest dab of the oil made its way to the underside of Samuel's cock, just below the sensitive head.

"Oh... Oh, Oliver... It... I..." Dark eyes blinked up at him, wide and aroused, gasping.
"Such warmth."

"Yes. I would have you burn for me." More of the oil went in a thin, thin layer across the backs of Samuel's thighs, and then along the cheeks of that ever-tempting bottom.

The smooth skin warmed beautifully, Samuel's breath coming in sweet pants.

"Yes. Oh, Samuel." Cleaning his hands thoroughly, Oliver took up the other vial, coating two fingers and bending Samuel so that he might push them inside the lad's body.

Samuel arched, thighs parting, a soft, sweet sound echoing in the room.

Once he was satisfied that Samuel would receive him easily, Oliver set the oil within easy reach and took up the paddle. "Are you ready, my gift?" 'Twas part of the ritual, the asking, for he would never play this sort of game with his love if Samuel was unprepared.

"Yes, Oliver. I am. Yours." Samuel nodded, voice sure, sweet buttocks arched and offered to him without hesitation.

One last caress to the line of Samuel's back, patting the burning arse, and Oliver stepped back, letting the paddle fly through the air to contact sharply with Samuel's thighs.

Samuel gasped, body tensing as the sweet flesh turned pale and then warmed to a deep rose.

The oil, as well as the clamps on Samuel's nipples would, he knew, heighten the sensation as he let the paddle swing again. The blows were solid, the flesh of Samuel's arse going a deep, rich color. How he ached.

Each time the crack of wood on flesh sounded, those clamps swung, a cry sounded, that beloved, tempting body rippling, attempting to be perfectly still.

"Your sounds are like the most exquisite music, my gift. Let me hear them fully." He swung again, and again, heating the thighs as well.

"Oliver! Love!" The cries were desperate, rich, aching. The heat poured from his gift.
"Such... such **heat**!"

The deep scent of cinnamon mixed with his lover's musk, making his head spin. The last blows had rather more force than he intended, smacking roughly against the sweetly rounded cheeks.

"Please, love! Please!" These words were sobbed, Samuel's head thrown back.

"Now. Yes." Oliver took up the oil and dropped the paddle, coating his shaft with the slick stuff, and pushing at Samuel's entrance.

Samuel jerked, pushing back towards him with a rich hunger. So hot, so tight -- the sensations poured over him, wild and addictive.

The feeling intensified with each thrust, and Oliver searched out more, holding Samuel tightly by the hips, thrusting with great vigor and need.

Each time his gift's arse met his body, Samuel jerked, pulling away, almost bouncing upon his need. 'Twas a sight to behold.

That sweet bottom glowed for him, the color a fine match for his own shaft as it slid in and out. Oliver reached about and took the clamps off those tortured nipples, knowing they would be the same color.

The cry that rang through the room was rich with depths of need and pain and pleasure -- an Aire of desire.

Hips snapping, Oliver shouted, filling Samuel with his heat, with his approval.

His gift shuddered beneath him, gasping for breath, heat blazing.

"Oh, my Samuel. So beautiful."

"Y...yours. Yours, Oliver."

"Mine. Only mine." That smooth skin was so hot under his hands, so good. So patient, his Samuel. Always waiting for him to remember.

Always waiting for him to claim his gift.

Grant and Krystof

The carriage rattled to a stop, Piotr opening the door with a glowering frown. Krystof forced himself to meet the old man's eyes with an icy look. He was no child. He was King L.'s son. He was ambassador to the Queen of England.

An old family retainer would not prevent him from living a life outside the heavy weight of his father's robes and seals.

He stepped from the carriage without a word, striding up to Mr. Grant Dunham's door and allowing Piotr to ring the bell for him. He had never visited the counsel at home, but the man had been faithful and kind and Krystof had become quite fond of him over the last months. Fond enough that, when Krystof had needed to discuss some rather personal matters and Mr. Dunham had invited him to speak of them over supper, Krystof had agreed.

Eagerly.

Mr. Dunham himself opened the door. "Oh! Good evening, Your Highness. Please, come in. Would you like your man to come in? He may wait in the kitchen, and have his supper."

"Piotr, you'll wait until I call for you." He spoke in his native tongue, making the command as firm as possible. He hid a relieved sigh when Piotr dropped his eyes and nodded. "Yes. Thank you, Mr. Dunham. You are... most kind."

"I am sorry, my housekeeper had to go and be with her daughter. But she was kind enough to prepare a fine repast."

Mr. Dunham led the way to the kitchen, showing Piotr where he might sit by the fire in a comfortable chair and eat.

"Please. This way." He then led the way to a cozy dining room, done in deep, masculine colors.

So comfortable, so much easier on the eye than the gaudy rooms Krystof was kept in. "I thank you for your kindness, your hospitality."

Krystof pushed his damned curls back out of his face, cheeks heating uncontrollably.

"You are most welcome, Highness. Please, sit down. Shall we dine now, or would you prefer to talk first?"

Grant held a chair for him, moving to sit across from him once he was settled.

"I... I believe we should eat first. I... My business is quite personal, you understand." He had no one else to turn to, no one else to ask about the... manners of lovemaking among these stolid Englishmen.

"Of course." Dunham was up again in an instant, smiling at him briefly before excusing himself to retrieve dinner. The sight of the normally distinguished man in his shirtsleeves and braces was something of a revelation.

He settled himself into the chair, refusing to let his thoughts linger on his host lest they lead to inappropriate ideas.

Dunham was back soon enough, a wheeled cart laden with food before him. "Should you like tea or coffee, Highness?"

"Krystof, please, Mr. Dunham. And coffee would be lovely." He reached for the cups. "Might I help?"

"Certainly. And you must call me Grant." Deep green eyes glinted at him as Grant allowed him to pour, setting out plates of savory meat pie and bowls of soup.

"Oh... Yes. Grant. Thank you." He blushed dark, carefully pouring the dark, bitter brew he so preferred to the weaker tea. He managed to fill the cups and passed one to Mr. Dun... Grant.

Dinner was congenial, if quiet, but there was no awkwardness. Only good, solid food and easy companionship.

The dishes went back on the cart afterwards, and Grant served him something called cream tarts, a dessert consisting of lemon curd and cream and pastry.

"Would you like a brandy, or a port?"

"Brandy please, Mister... Grant." He licked a spot of cream from his bottom lip. "You have been most kind to serve me."

"Not at all. It pleases me to have you dine in my home, away from the people who usually surround you." Grant blushed then, and busied himself with snifters and bottles. "I am so sorry, Highness. That was thoroughly uncouth."

"Uncouth? I... I am afraid I do not understand." He offered Grant a smile, hoping to ease the discomfort. "It is a... a goodness, to be only Krystof and Grant, not Your Highness and Mr. Dunham."

"Oh." That got him a brilliant smile, one that showed Grant's relative youth. One forgot, seeing the man's prematurely gray hair. "Well, then. Here, Krystof. Your brandy."

"My thanks, Grant." He curled up a bit more, fingers wrapping around the goblet. His nerves started to eat at him, and he found it increasingly hard to meet those green eyes.

"So." Grant settled across from him. "What was it you wished to speak of?" Then he looked chagrined. "Goodness. Would you care to move to the study?"

"I... Wherever you wish, Grant. This chair is quite comfortable." He looked into his brandy. "I... I wish to inquire about the... well... the intimate practices of your country, Grant. I am not clear what is... available."

He could see by the bland expression that Grant assumed that he had asked an unexpected question. "I am not sure precisely what you mean. I would not want to misunderstand."

"I..." Oh, this was a poor idea. A terrible idea -- to ask such a bold thing to the closest thing to a friend he had here. "Perhaps I should be off. I... I would not offend you, Mr. Dunham."

"No! I mean, I simply do not wish to offend you by answering indelicately."

Grant shook his head, smiling slightly. "I suppose I handled that badly. I am truly not sure what you mean, though. Are you talking about hired companionship, or seeking a wife, or..."

Grant trailed off.

"A wife? No. No, Grant. I... I have no taste for a wife." He bit his lip, daring to meet Grant's eyes. "There was a whisper in a hall the week past of a place where one might... be with their companion."

"Companion? There are many such places, to be sure." Grant sipped at his brandy. "That depends upon what type of... companion one seeks."

"I seek one similar to myself." He hoped that was enough, a hint enough.

Once again the look was blank, but it soon cleared and Grant went fiery red. "Oh! Oh, I see. Yes, well. I do happen to know of a few such places. Personally."

"Personally?" Oh... Oh.

Oh.

Krystof's cheeks were burning, flaring.

Grant's seemed just as hot, but those green eyes were steady upon him now that the confession appeared to be over on both parts. "Perhaps you would like to accompany me one night? Or perhaps meet some of the people who frequent such places first."

"I... Do you have such a companion?" He was sure he shouldn't ask, but just as sure he needed to know and would hide behind his foreign manners to excuse it.

"No. Not at the moment. But many of my friends attend the club I speak of, and it is open to those who simply wish for a game of chess as well." Grant looked at him closely. "Have you someone you wish to bring with you?"

"No. Only... only the one who offered invitation to me."

"I... oh." The blush, if anything, intensified, and yet Grant looked pleased. "That is most flattering."

"And true." He sipped his brandy, filled with warmth. "Most true, Mr. Dunham."

"I would be most honored to have you accompany me, Krystof."

"Thank you, Grant." He offered over a shy smile, nodding. "I will accompany you with pride."

"It will be my pleasure." Grant truly looked pleased.

"Shall we share a game of chess then, Grant, since the business of my visit is so well finished?"

"That would be most congenial." Grant stood, and offered him a hand, square and male and well-cared for.

He took the hand with a smile, enjoying its warmth and feel. "Yes... my friend. It would."

How glad he was that he had asked. Grant led him into the study and sat across from him, and they spent the evening learning each other's silences and words. He looked forward to learning more, and surely he would, if they were to be companions in the way he hoped.

Why he so was terribly nervous Grant was not certain. Perhaps because, for the first time in the weeks of their close association, he and Krystof were going about in public together.

Even if it was only to his club, they were leaving the sanctuary of their meetings at his home and venturing out, and he feared greatly that their dynamic would change; that he

would have to become the man of affairs once more to the prince, rather than the close companion, a role he greatly enjoyed playing.

Still, he had promised a trip to such a place, where Krystof might meet other men such as themselves, and enjoy quiet companionship, and he would not renege on his promise. Therefore, they were inside his carriage, on the way to his club.

He could only hope he did not appear as nervous as he truly was.

Krystof was quiet, visage set in what a man less-used to dealing with the prince would call sternness, but what was in truth worry and shyness. Dressed simply in dove grey, an opal at his throat, the young man was the pure image of style and class.

So much younger than he at first appeared, so much less tight-laced. Never more beautiful than when he smiled. Oh yes, Grant was quite taken with him. No doubt about that.

"Krystof? Highness? Are you well?"

"Oh. Oh, yes, Grant. I will confess, I am most nervous." Coppery eyes looked over at him, framed by black lashes. "What if I cause offense, cause you embarrassment?"

"Nonsense! I assure you, there is naught you could do to embarrass me. Frankly, I worry that I will somehow compromise you." He put a hand to Krystof's, unable to feel skin due to their gloves, but it comforted him just the same.

He received one of those brilliant smiles, worry and stoic appearance falling away. "Compromise me? My friend, I... I believe in you above all others. You need not to worry."

That smile had the effect of tightening his belly, no matter where they were. Such genuine joy. "Then we shall both cease to worry. These men will become friends, I have no doubt of it."

He had inquired ahead, and it promised to be a quiet night at the club; none of the more contentious older members were in residence, so Grant hoped it would indeed go well.

By the time the carriage stopped they had relaxed in one another's company, Krystof's soft laughter bouncing within carriage, eyes dancing.

He stepped down and offered his hand, happy that the tight feeling had eased in both of them, and hoping that his friends and acquaintances would not let him down. "Come. I understand there is to be that caramelized sugar dessert you so enjoy."

He received a quick grin and a deliciously arched eyebrow. "You are finding each of my weaknesses, one at a time. I wonder, will you find them all?"

Oh. One could only hope. "I will endeavor to, as you seem to have found mine as well. It is not lost upon me that the last time you visited, you brought me spun sugar floss."

He led the way up the stairs and into the quiet, wood-paneled front hall of the club, where a liveried footman took his coat. "Master Devlin awaits you in the main drawing room, sir."

Oh good. Excellent. Devlin would put Krystof at ease. They continued on to the drawing room, where small groups of men stood or sat, playing at cards and chess, sharing drinks and laughter.

Krystof stood beside him, chin lifted, carriage sure. Such a difference between grim, silent Prince E. and his dear friend Krystof with the laughing eyes.

Still, Grant knew, were he to ask, Krystof could tell him amazing details about the room and the men they passed. Born and trained to the art of diplomacy, even nervous and unsettled, Krystof missed little.

Everything about Krystof intrigued him, made him proud. He took him straight to Devlin, who sat in splendid solitude at one end of the room, awaiting them.

"Ah, Devlin. There you are." He smiled at the man who had made his life in the City more bearable, giving him a place to go and be with others of his own kind. "Highness, may I present my dear friend, Devlin, Lord Mountebanc. Devlin, His Royal Highness, Prince Krystof."

Krystof bowed his head gracefully. "It is a great honor to meet a friend of Mr. Dunham, and I pray that one day I might be introduced to another as the same."

Devlin smiled, gray eyes twinkling so that they looked silver. "It is a very great pleasure to meet you, Your Highness. Do you know you are the first man Grant has brought to us? You must be very special indeed. Please, sit down."

Grant held a chair for Krystof and assumed one himself, allowing Devlin to put them all at ease, as was his particular talent.

Devlin had Krystof chuckling at one story after another, the prince relaxing into his chair. Grant was pleased to notice that those warm copper eyes looked to him again and again, and the open, easy smiles were saved for him alone. A young man came around offering tea, which Krystof politely declined, accepting instead a tiny cup of strong coffee, sipping and murmuring happily at the flavor.

The situation could not have been better. Since they sat with Devlin, Krystof got to meet everyone who crossed the threshold, as they all came to pay their respect to the head of their little establishment.

He got to watch Krystof in a relaxed social setting rather than a formal one, and he was thrilled to see his friend sink into the atmosphere easily. Krystof nodded and smiled, shook hands and made small talk, and was altogether charming. Oh, it did seem his friend would become a fast favorite here, most welcome and sought after.

"Well, my friends. Have you dined?"

Devlin addressed the question to Krystof, and Grant was most pleased, for he would hate for his friends to treat Krys as an extension of himself. They had not dined, but he would let Krystof decide the answer, for he may prefer to return home.

"We have not, my Lord. I was most eager to meet the members of this establishment." Those eyes turned to him, looking subtly for direction.

"Oh, wonderful. I have taken the liberty of arranging a private dining room for you, and having our excellent chef create a menu you might find pleasing. I hope you forgive my presumption. The baroque room, Grant. I have most greatly enjoyed meeting you, Krystof, and seeing you Grant, as we see too little of you."

Devlin rose, signaling the end of their time together, and Grant could not have been more pleased to bid him and the drawing room farewell, and withdraw with Krys to privacy.

Krystof stood, bowing to Devlin. "It is a great honor to meet you, indeed."

"I hope we shall do so again, and soon." Devlin returned the bow with a pleased smile, and Grant steered Krys off to the small but opulent dining room Devlin had indicated.

"That wasn't so bad at all, was it?"

"No, your friends are most pleasant, indeed." Krys smiled at the decor, fingers trailing over one ornate chair. "What lovely decor." Eyes met his, shining. "Not as right as a certain drawing room with a well-used chess board, but lovely."

He laughed aloud. "I think perhaps we got this room because very few people venture here. It is a bit ornate. But I am most pleased that we are to dine alone." Grant gestured for Krys to sit, and sat next to him rather than across from him, so that their legs brushed together.

"Oh..." He got a sweet, slow smile, Krys' face alight. "I too am most pleased. Most."

His heart speeded its beat, and he smiled back, happy deep in his bones. A serving man slipped into the room and set out their first courses, and Grant was amazed to see a representation of dishes from Krystof's home country.

"Oh!" A soft stream of words flowed from Krystof, eyes glowing. Suddenly Grant saw the prince as he must have been before he left home, young and happy and beautiful.

"Oh, how lovely of him. You must tell me what everything is. It smells delightful." He cared little whether it tasted like sand if it put that look on Krystof's face.

"Oh, oh yes. This is a soup called borleves -- cooked with wine. My... how do you call the women who care for another's children? She would cook this and tojasleves for my brothers and sisters and me."

Krystof lifted a spoonful of the clear soup and sipped, a soft, happy moan sounding.

"A nanny, perhaps?" Lifting his spoon, Grant tried the soup himself, smiling at Krystof's bliss.

"Perhaps. Eleyna was a great woman, wide and round, hands large enough to gather a running child and careful enough to cure any illness. There were fifteen of us. Fifteen children and she was our... caretaker."

"Fifteen!" Grant stared. "My goodness. She must have been a saint." Grant tried to imagine his lady mother bearing even five children, and he could not conceive it.

"My father has had four wives; they have borne many children." He got a soft, oddly playful grin. "But Eleyna? She was a most wonderful woman. She wept when I left for this place. I am not sure if it was for sorrow or relief."

The soup was very tasty. So was Krystof's mood. "Were you awful? I was a dutiful child."

"I was... playful. Not a mean child, but I was often bored with my studies and would go missing. Eleyna would spend hours trying to find which corridor I had found and fallen asleep in." Krystof clapped as the next course entered. "Tocitura! Oh, I would have this on my birthday celebration! Grant, what magic!"

The food got a cautious once over, Grant taking a tiny bite. Well, it was no worse than kidney pie. Better, in fact, for the wine in the sauce. "I am pleased if you are, Krystof. And I must remember to give Devlin our thanks."

Krystof nodded, beaming as he ate, using the bread rolls to sop up the gravy. He did not eat a vast amount, Krystof never did, but he did sample each type of meat, murmuring most happily over the sausage.

"Tell me of your family, Grant. Have you many brothers? A special treat to celebrate the day of your birth?"

"I. Oh. I had a brother. He died when I was but a small child." Grant pushed a bit of meat about. "My birthday is generally a quiet affair."

"What day is it, your birthday?" Krystof pulled out a small bit of meat and offered it over on a fork. "This is not so much grease."

"It is in May. The fifth." He took the morsel, holding Krys' hand in his.

"May. The fifth." Krystof nodded, eyes focused on his. "I will remember. We will celebrate."

"It will be a first." He smiled, thinking how his life had changed since Krystof came into it. "My family was very restrained about such things."

"A first. I like your smile, Grant, your happiness. I have missed laughter since I left home."

"I like yours as well, Krystof. I have never known anyone such as you."

"No? I am..." The thin cheeks flushed and Krystof looked down at the table. "I am honored."

It could not have been more obvious that that was **not** what Krystof had intended to say.

There was a short, awkward period of silence, and he nudged Krystof's leg with his. "So what is this new dish?"

Krystof looked over, cheeks darkening further, this time with pleasure and amusement, if he read the smile right. "Dobos torta. Caramel tart. Very sweet. Very good."

"Really? Sweets make me bounce." Oh goodness, what an idiotic thing to say. And it was not as if Krys had never seen him after eating too much cream tart.

Krystof's laughter was worth it, bright and happy. "They make me... silly. We should take care, else others think us drunk."

"Well, I can assure you, the others will have no room to talk." They settled into eating the caramel, and he could not help the happy noises that escaped him. Oh, it was wondrous.

Krystof ate more slowly, offering him bites when his dessert was gone, feeding him the rich sweet without comment. 'Twas lovely, and somehow more intimate than anything that had passed between them before. His prick twitched, and he fought his urge to flinch away. There was no shame in it.

Finally the sweet was gone, the plate empty. Then, without a word, one long finger gathered a bit of caramel from his lip, Krys bringing it to his own mouth.

Oh. Perhaps it was the sugar, or perhaps the atmosphere, but Grant could not help himself. He leaned forward and pressed his lips lightly to Krystof's, tasting their combined flavors happily.

Krystof's lips parted slightly, breathing into him, touching the tip of a hot tongue to his bottom lip.

It jolted him, his entire body tingling, and he leaned into the kiss, letting his own tongue come out to touch Krys'.

That earned him a new noise, a sound heretofore unheard -- a sweet, low moan that was pure need, sheer desire.

His own moan answered, shockingly loud in the quiet room, and he put a hand to Krystof's cheek, holding him close.

Krys leaned into the touch, warm and nuzzling, kiss growing bolder, more heated, quiet sounds sliding past his lips.

So wonderfully soft, those lips. So good against his. He let the kiss go on and on, loving every moment of it.

A careful, gentle touch drifted against his throat, the brush of butterfly wings.

"Oh." He pulled away, noting that Krystof's lips were swollen. From his kisses. It was all he could do not to spend right then and there.

He could see himself, reflected in Krystof's eyes. "Have I caused offense?"

"No! Oh no. I simply... I. Oh, you're unbelievably lovely, you know."

"That is only because you cannot see your own eyes." The words would have been laughable, had they not been so sincerely spoken.

He could do nothing but take another kiss, so pleased was he with the soft words.

This kiss was more heated, more passionate, Krystof's lips open and needy against his.

His own lips opened to accept the kiss, moving against Krystof's. 'Twas the most wonderful torture he had ever endured.

Their thighs pressed together, Krystof's tongue sliding against his again and again. He could feel the brush of eyelashes against his skin each time Krys blinked.

'Twas more intimate than even the most carnal acts had been with other men, and Grant savored it, turning his mouth just so to rejoin the kiss, smiling against Krys' mouth.

The sounds that pressed into his lips were sweeter than any caramel, any tart, rich with the knowledge they were meant for him and him alone.

He was hard. So good. He wrapped one hand in Krys' curls, pulling him even closer, trying to crawl into him, really. To hold onto this moment.

Krystof's hands slipped around his waist, explored, spanned, deliciously forward.

Oh. Oh, that gave him the courage to explore some in his own right, and he rubbed his hand up and down Krys' back, counting each bump and curve.

Lean and fine, Krys' spine was an addictive map, leading up to soft curls, down to curves yet unexplored.

Grant felt he could touch it forever, save for the fact that Krys had another side, the front, where he could touch the wide chest and the flat belly, fingers lightly moving from one area of interest to another.

"You will bring me to the end, just with this, just with your touches." Krys lapped at his lips as if tasting a fine cream.

"I...I know." Yes. He felt exactly the same. He feared he might embarrass himself if they did not... What? Slow down? How could one slow a force of nature? "We have the night."

"Is there a place? A place we might... Explore further?"

"Above stairs, yes. There are private, er, chambers." His cheeks flamed.

"Would you... I mean, have you interest in..." Krys' eyes dropped, but only a moment, only a heartbeat. "In finding such a spot, Grant?"

"I would. Shall we? I can simply ask." Grant gently disengaged them, standing, offering an arm to Krys. Oh, he was stunning.

Krys' fingers wrapped around his arm, pale against the dark broadcloth. "Please, my friend. There is little I wish more."

"Excellent." He led the way, not even needing to speak to the attendant outside the door before they were ushered up to a private room. It must be quite obvious.

The room was quiet, simple yet rich, and it earned a smile, Krys nodding and squeezing his arm. "Quite perfect. Perfect for us, yes Grant?"

"Oh, yes. Yes, perfect." Just what they needed, no more, no less. No pomp and circumstance. Krys had too much of that, he knew. "Just us two, together."

"Together is a beautiful word in so many tongues." Kryz turned toward him, dark eyes alight. "So many."

That deserved a kiss, and Grant gave it happily, pulling Krystof to him, lips soft and gentle so as not to startle.

Krystof's lips parted easily, opening for him as a lock to the perfect key.

He never thought to find something so good. So very lovely. Those curls called to Grant and he stroked them, loving how they sprang back from his touch.

His waistcoat was no barrier, Krystof working to find his skin, himself between the fastenings.

His breath came hard, his belly shivering as Kryz touched him. 'Twas like being a green boy once more. He could not fathom it.

"Your scent is like the summer, like sun on skin, Grant." Kryz moaned as they began to rock, began to slide together.

"I have never. Well. That is to say I have never been nude in the sun." He struggled with more clothing, trying to see and touch. "Have you?"

"Never? I have, yes. There are hot springs, the water bubbling up within and the sun pouring down. It is magical." Kryz helped him, layer after layer falling free.

"Really? I have heard of the waters at Bath, but have not been." He had rarely left the city. He stared at Krystof once the clothing was out of his way. So beautiful. Kryz fair took his breath.

"I am not so muscled as your countrymen, not so pale, but still pleasing?" Oh, it would be so easy to forget oneself in those copper-kettle eyes.

"You are beyond wonderful." He reached and touched, nearly worshipping Kryz with his hands.

Not one ounce of emotion was held away from him, not a single gasp or moan denied. Each one was offered freely, eagerly to him.

Though he was accustomed to hiding his own thoughts, Grant gave freely in return, allowing the dam to break. When Kryz touched his belly, he shook. And when they progressed lower... Well, he could barely control himself.

Kryz' mouth moved upon his shoulders, such wicked promises offered to him that it seemed for a moment Krystof was the elder of them.

Perhaps he was in this. Grant had more experience, he felt sure, but where Krystof came from people touched and laughed without reserve. He pulled back to smile. "You humble me."

"Humble? Is this good?" Krystof's lips touched his jaw, his chin.

"It is very good. Humble in this case means awed." He dared to put one hand on Kry's bottom, squeezing one cheek, testing the musculature.

"Awed..." Kry's moaned the word, head falling back. Those wet lips were parted, swollen, near begging his attention.

"Yes. You make me young. Amazed." Aroused. He pressed forward, letting Kry's feel his need even as he kissed that mouth again, beginning to pant with it.

Kry's was brave, hand pressing against the placket of his trousers, pressing his heat.

"Krystof. Can we. There is a bed." He did not want to be too forward too quickly, but his legs might give out.

"Yes. I would lie with you." He received a smile bright as the sun. "It seems large enough for us."

"It is definitely large enough. Come." He led the way, holding Kry's hand, nervous but so happy. Oh, so happy. He knew everything they would need would be by the bed in a little basket. Devlin was most thorough.

Kry's slipped off soft shoes, then knelt before him, stealing his breath as his own were unbuttoned.

"You do not have to play my valet, I vow." Not that he minded. His whole body took notice.

A soft kiss ghosted over the flesh of his stomach, a promise of more kisses to come. "I would care for all of you."

"Then I am all yours." He meant it. With all of his heart. He touched Kry's curls again, sifting them through his fingers.

Kry's served him with careful fingers, baring him to those curious, dark eyes.

Grant shuddered, trying hard to stay still, to let those copper eyes see all they wanted. 'Twas entirely too difficult. His chest and face flushed a deep rose, his eyes wide as he watched Kry's in return.

Then Krys leaned forward, nose and lips upon his most private curls, inhaling his scent in deep.

Their moans combined, both rich with need, with hunger.

"Oh. Yes. Krystof. I... that feels unbelievable." He could not bear it. And yet he did, thigh muscles twitching even as his prick rubbed Krys' cheek.

"The bed." Those soft lips moved, trailing over his hardness, exploring him.

"Yes." Thank goodness he could simply topple over on it.

Krys climbed up alongside, warm and close against him, face against his shoulder. "The scent of you... it is perfume."

"I would know your scent as well." He worked at what remained of Krys' clothing, finally touching his most intimate places lightly, just tracing them with the tips of his fingers.

Krys shuddered, eyes huge, lips parted on a gasp. "Oh. So different than my own touch."

His ink-stained and pen-rough fingers looked dark against Krys' skin. Not the hands of a gentleman. He pushed the thought aside and circled the sweet, hot prick with his thumb and forefinger, rubbing up and down.

Oh, he was not the only one so affected, not the only one caught within this storm. Krys reached for him, hips pushing, moving up toward his touch.

He pressed Krys back on the bed, lowering himself atop that strong form, letting all of their skin touch, slide. Rub.

Krys arched beneath him, lips meeting his again and again, little prayers and promises pressing inside him.

He said his own oaths, taking kisses deep and strong, loving. His hands found Krys' hips, holding them together as he moved.

"My own." His lips were licked and lapped, the kisses becoming wilder, needier. "Grant. I have such need."

"I know. Oh, I know." There was no way he could be debonair now. All he could do was to press down, a rhythm starting with their hips, primal, as old as time.

Krys' hand found the small of his back, a small blaze set there, driving them to a full-blown conflagration.

His teeth tested the skin of Kry's throat. Grant told himself that a neck cloth would cover any mark he left, a fine justification to bite harder.

Then Kry's arched, body bucking beneath his own, and justifications were unnecessary.

"Oh. Love. I have never." Never had he felt such a need. Such desire. "Please. Please."

In his whole long life, he never knew the joy of his own name cried out in a voice like music, the syllables echoing through the rafters as heat sprayed against him.

"Oh!" He spent himself with a violence he could never have imagined, his whole body shaking as he held tight to Krystof.

Krystof's hands pet him, stroked him as he floated back down from the heavens.

"I. Thank you, love. Krystof." He rested his head against Kry's shoulder, nuzzling at the sweat beaded there, feeling happy and lost.

"Yes. Love. My dear Grant." His hair was petted, the touch so soft. "Yes."

"Are you happy with the companionship you have found, Your Highness?" He chuckled, thinking how awkward it had been, that conversation.

"I believe that I am, sir. Happier than I'd prayed."

"Then I have done what I wished. I have done my best by you."

And in the process he'd gained a dear friend. One who would hopefully be about to explore the full benefits of what their sort of friendship could bring.

The Last Hand

He'd be hornswoggled, just hornswoggled.

Stephen'd taken to playing a hand or three of cards with Quincy and Garr on the odd night, Eliot and Caleb joining in with increasing frequency. Now, it looked like they had a full table, with that slip of a man Drummond draped over his lover's lap as they all played in pairs.

He leaned over to Low as he grabbed for the bottle to fill his glass, shaking his head a little. "This is the strangest game I've heard of, Scot."

Low gave him a look of pure devilry. "Why is that, my Texan? Are the rules too confusing?"

"Ornery man. The stakes are just...."

Indecent.

Purely perverse.

"Just what?" Oh, Low could be pure D innocent-looking when he wanted. Stephen knew better.

"Low...." He filled his glass, Drummond's moan making his hand jerk a bit and spill the whiskey.

"Yes? You mustn't worry, Stephen. I'll not force you to do anything, you know that. Enjoy the...company." Fingers light on his skin, Low picked up spilled drops and licked them off.

His prick leapt and Quincy chuckled, tossed his head. "Coo...Francis Lowell, are you flirting with the Barbarian?"

Stephen aimed a kick under the table.

"Flirting? No. Promising." Low winked at Quincy. "Your play, I believe."

He'd let Low have it later. He surely would.

"Oh. My wager is it? What would you have me start with, Garr? A coin? An act? A promise?"

Garrick gave a low chuckle, the sound rubbing Stephen's nerves. "An act, love. I'm getting hungry."

"Mmm. Start the bidding with a kiss. Keep it easy, for the Texan."

"Don't make me call you out, Quincy."

"Now, now, Steph." Garr winked at him. "You can thrash him all you want, but he just likes it."

"Bah, you like to watch him." Stephen nodded, threw in his marker and looked to Caleb.

Caleb was just smiling at them, looking like some sort of benevolent, and amused, benefactor. But he anted up just fine, didn't he. "Garrick and Quincy are singularly hilarious, Stephen. You should stop taking them so seriously."

Eliot nodded, hand sliding down Caleb's thigh. "Indeed, Stephen. They are harmless at worst and utterly charming at best."

The amount of touching at the table was just unseemly. Especially when Low touched him as well, hand sliding against his back where none of the others could see, distracted as they were by Drummond and Thaddeus doing...that.

Thaddeus chuckled, eyes heated as they stared down at Drummond. "So, pet? How would you have me bet? Simply a kiss? Perhaps more? What say you?"

"Whatever you like, Thaddeus. I know I shall enjoy it too." Slender fingers stroking through Thaddeus' hair, Drummond snuggled closer to his lover. Surely such compliance wasn't natural.

"A kiss then, the couple chosen by the winner."

"Sounds fair," Caleb said with a grin at Eliot.

Low hummed his approval, the sound vibrating right through him.

Stephen's cards did not lose the hand, but did not take it either, that benefit going to the Fancipants, as he called them privately, Eliot smiling as he took the hand.

"Chose your couple, Eliot," Thaddeus said, and they all waited, watching.

"Mmm...such a lovely tableaux of options..." The wicked eyes danced and Stephen held his breath. "Still, I should like to see you and Drummond share a kiss, 'tis such a joy to see his passion."

Drummond's smile was like the sun breaking over the Texas hills. Stephen could see why Thaddeus thought him beautiful. The lad leaned up and pressed his lips to Thaddeus', happy noises emanating.

Thaddeus' hand cupped the back of Drummond's head, the kiss suddenly deep and fierce, Drummond near to melting against his lover.

Impossible to watch, yet Stephen could not look away, and damned if the mood around the table did not change, heating, the very air thickening like it did before a thunderstorm.

Eliot's applause broke the pair apart. "Bravo. Bravo! Oh, Caleb, I do think I'll quite enjoy this game. Who's next?"

"The deal goes to the left." That was Low, whose eyes just twinkled in the low light of the room.

That put the first card dealt to him, the first wager landing on him. His hand was fair, not stunning, but fair. He threw out a coin, refusing to meet Quincy's eyes as the little bastard hooted.

"Quincy, that's perfectly acceptable and you know it. Stop baiting him." There. Low was finally voicing reason. Even if that hand on his back was working under his coat.

"You'd think he was a virgin, Lowell. It's lovely, to see him twist. I don't suppose he'd agree...." Oh, Thaddeus was a wicked man.

"I wouldn't."

"Neither would I. Stephen and I are happy to answer any forfeit, but we will do so in the other room." The accent deepened, his Scot meaning it.

The others chuckled, especially Thaddeus, who by all accounts had known Low a long while.

"And how would we know your debt is paid, say, should the wager be a phallus, pressed in snug?"

"I think Thaddeus has already made his wager, and you are holding up the bidding." That growl was hard to go against, and play resumed, for one hand at least resembling cards back home.

He took the hand too, making him relax some, even though the next hand was Caleb and Eliot's to set the wager on.

"I prefer high stakes," Caleb said. "Perhaps a kiss somewhere more...intimate."

"Indeed. Something sweet as a cherub's song and wicked as an incubus." Eliot was incorrigible.

"The winner of the hand shall choose. Whatever spot their dear one finds most pleasurable."

Oh, that was...well, it was enough to let him wiggle out of anything too showy if he lost. Low had a spot just below his ear.

Thaddeus nodded, hands rubbing most obscenely over Drummond's body. "We are, of course, in."

Drummond hummed and twisted, causing Caleb and Eliot to laugh, Garr and Quincy just watching with hot eyes. "We're in," Garr affirmed, never looking away from the tableau.

He tossed in his marker, Garrett and Quincy taking the hand and Quincy crowing like a damned fool.

The room got too darned hot as Garr looked at him carefully for a minute. But thank the good Lord his and Quincy turned right to Caleb and Eliot. "You two."

Eliot smiled up at Caleb, not in the least bit shy. "Who shall kiss, my Dragon, and who shall be kissed?"

"You know how I love your mouth, my Fox. Please me and I will mark you as my own later on." Wicked. They were just wicked.

Stephen's cheeks just flared, eyes wide as he turned to Low, whispering low. "He didn't mean...."

"Oh, I imagine he did, my Texan. I imagine he did." Soft and wet, Low's lips moved on his neck just below his ear, sending a shiver down his spine.

"Low...." His prick jerked, belly going tight as a board. His moan was matched by Drummond's, by Caleb's, Eliot's head cradled in his lap, bobbing up and down.

It couldn't be right, what they were doing right there in front of him. No, indeed. If he thought he was hornswoggled to begin with, now he was downright chicken-scattered. Low leaned against him lightly, not obtrusively at all, petting him.

"Yes, Stephen. Such a lovely thing, to be among friends."

He looked away, eyes fastened on the table, on the pattern on Low's trousers. "I hardly know where to set my eyes."

"Set them on me, then." Fingers cupped his chin, turning him to look into Low's eyes, smoky and dark. "Just me."

As if set to racing, his heart pounded, throbbed inside his chest as Low held him. So intimate. So huge, that singular touch, those eyes upon him.

"There, you see? Much easier, to think of the rest as simply a periphery." One finger slid over his lips.

His lips parted, the moans from the others distant, unimportant. All he felt was warmth and a growing need. "Low."

"My Stephen. You know how I adore you, don't you? How all I really see is you?" Low leaned forward, inch by inch, until their lips met for the briefest of moments, the touch more affecting than anything the others had done all night.

"The things you say, Scot."

"Blimey, listen to that shite. One kiss and the man's turned to pudding!" Quincy's voice ripped through the air, put his back right up and he stood, reaching across to grab the front of the bastard's shirt.

"Oh, now. Let's have none of this." Garrick jumped right in, yanking at his arm. "He's just having you on, Stephen. He always does."

"Stephen, please." It was Low's voice that stopped him from wrapping Quincy's face about his fist. Barely.

He released the shirt, growling low. "You keep your tongue civil, now."

Quincy arched an eyebrow and nodded. "Just having a bit of fun, now. No harm meant."

One good thing came of his upset, and that was that he missed Caleb and Eliot finishing. Both of them sat blinking at him when he glanced over, cheeks flushed, Eliot's lips wet and swollen.

Thaddeus chuckled, applauding lightly. "Two shows for a single hand. Impressive."

"I rather thought so, yes." Low winked at him, patting his chair. "Come, Stephen. There's still amusement to be had."

Stephen sat, nostrils still flaring like a mustang's. Lord, this whole thing chafed him like a new boot, but his prick was contrary as always, alive and leaping.

"There's nothing wrong with liking it, you know." That was from Thaddeus, who gave him a shrewd look.

"Indeed." Eliot smiled, leaning into Caleb's embrace. "Here, as nowhere else, we are free to share our hungers."

"I think Stephen believes there's nothing wrong with keeping some things private." Low came to his rescue. "Whose deal?"

Eliot handed Caleb the cards. "Our deal. Thaddeus? Your wager."

Thaddeus' eyes shone, eyes dancing toward them. "Oh, I believe a long draught, offered from one mouth to another is a fair bet."

"I say that's fair." Truly Drummond sounded like an opium eater, dazed, slurred.

"Careful, Pet, else I lose apurpose." Thaddeus' stern face almost smiled.

Drummond smiled up at Thaddeus as if he were the only man in the world. "I would not mind."

Quick and simple the hand was played, Stephen and Low taking the pot. He looked to Low, offering his Scot the choice.

"Do you wish to retire for our forfeit, Stephen?" To be given the choice settled him some, eased the tightness in his belly. Though the task at hand was not overly perverse.

He lifted his chin, met Low's eyes. "I can do this, Scot. 'tis a hint of a kiss, really."

"Then give me a kiss, Stephen." Those eyes twinkled for him, Low letting him do the doing in order to set the pace and tone.

He smiled back, took a sip of whiskey, then pressed their lips together, barely letting the liquid seep into Low's lips.

Low licked at him, lips moving under his, tongue finding more of his taste. He heard a soft moan, wondered for a moment if it came from one of the others, but the puff of breath that touched his mouth was shaped just like it. It must have come from Low.

Stephen's lips opened, letting his Scot have more, taste more.

One long-fingered hand cupped the back of his head, Low pulling him close, but not too close, always aware of his limits. Sweet Scot. The sting of teeth on his lower lip made him gasp as Low withdrew, breathing hard, cheeks flushed.

His Scot. Sweet heavens above.

He sat back in his chair, heart just pounding.

Low's hand slid from the back of his neck to his cheek, then away, those eyes scanning the rest of the group. "Shall we continue, gentlemen?"

"I believe we should." Thaddeus picked up the deck, dealing easily, handing him a fairly solid hand.

"I think we should up the ante, Quince." Garr grinned, bouncing a little. "I like how Caleb and Eliot answer bets, I do."

"You're a rotter, you are. What should we bet, then? Something right wicked and toothy."

"Yeah. Something like some trousers or some hands on parts."

Oh, good Lord. That was all he needed, to lose his trousers in a bet.

"Oh, there you are. A good solid chunk of clothes -- partner's choice."

This game was getting out of hand.

"Don't forget," Low whispered. "You may always pass on the bet." His Scot was certainly accommodating. It made him wonder what forfeit he would pay tonight, alone.

He nodded, looking at his cards. Solid, but not a guarantee. "I fold."

"Oh, there's a coward's way out. Eliot? Are you daring enough to play?"

"Always." Eliot's marker was tossed in, the laugh deep and knowing.

"My fox is always daring." Caleb laughed as well. "And not so reticent as the Texan. Though he and Francis are quite well suited that way, I think."

He gave Low a sideways look, wondering. He'd hardly heard a word from any of the Club about what Low had been like before.

All he had to go on was Low's lack of shyness with him that first night.

Thaddeus threw his marker in without being asked. "Lowell deserves the Texan, no doubt. He requires a challenge from a mount."

Well, now. That was uncalled for.

"Thaddeus, I shall thank you to keep that sort of opinion to yourself." Soft as he said it, Low's voice cracked like a whip. "You are an old and dear friend, so I shall forgive it this once."

"Of course, my friend. I misspoke. You know I hold your Texan in the highest regard."

Thaddeus nodded to him and Stephen nodded back. Complicated. Unnerving. These games tried a man's soul.

"Yes." Low took a deep breath, a smile appearing. "It seems I am as contentious as my partner this evening. I've lost track. Who won the hand?"

"I believe Quincy owes us the debt, Lowell. Garrick? Make your choice."

Garrick tilted his head, a wicked grin glinting, looking like the bounder he was. "Oh, I think. Stand up here, Quincy."

Quincy pinked, and it felt good to see it, to know he wasn't the only one. Still Quincy stood, little backside just wiggling.

Touching first Quincy's belly, then his hips, Garrick made a great show of deliberating. "I think the jacket and waistcoat and shirt love. You know how I love this."

The belly it was, or at least that was what got stroked again, Garr smiling hugely.

Quincy purred, fingers working buttons loose, exposing the pale, pale skin. It was intimate. Erotic.

Even more so because Garrick never touched, not really, his fingers simply hovering over the nude skin. It wasn't until Quincy sat once more that Garrick touched him, hand disappearing beneath the table.

His body responded, Quincy's bare belly flushing dark, fingers jittering over the cards.

Amazing, how he thought it was too much, too shocking, and yet how he could not help his need at the sight. The game carried on, though, the others waiting expectantly.

It was their bet and he looked to Low. "It's your choice, Scot, I believe. Your wager."

Low's eyes blazed for him, those long fingers stroking the pile of coins before them. "A touch then. The bidding partner's choice of where and for how long."

"Oh, a lovely wager." Eliot's marker was out before his prick stopped beating against his buttons.

"Oh yes." Thaddeus joined eagerly, smiling down at Drummond and kissing his cheek. "Just the thing."

"Touching works." Quincy's lips were parted, hips shifting restlessly beneath the table.

Caleb laughed, the sound rich, rough, full of male satisfaction. "I'm not certain you get to bet, Quincy. You're getting your reward now."

"This...this is...oh, we pass this hand. Pass." Quincy turned toward Garrick, moaning low.

Garrick kissed him as if he could not resist, drawn to his lover with a harsh moan. Their lips met, and Stephen saw the shocking pink of Quincy's tongue.

Stephen shuddered, cards on the table, eyes flashing to Low, caught between arousal and panic.

The scent in the room. Well, he'd had stallions that smelled like delicate flowers next to this card game. And he'd swear it intensified when he won the hand, the others staring at him like hungry cats at a fish market.

"I...Low." Shivers rocked him, deep and sure.

"Your choice, my Texan. Should you like to go to the other room?" Low too looked hungry, lips open and damp, hands reaching.

"Yes. Yes, Low." He needed, everything within him vibrated. This was not to be shared.

"I hope you gentlemen will let us sit out a hand or more. My Texan wished to collect on his bet." Low stood, the evidence of his need proudly displayed by his tight trous. Holding out a hand, Low beckoned him. "Come, Stephen."

He nodded, fingers sliding against Low's. He was hard enough to ache, his balls feeling like tight stones.

They walked out of the room and right into the next, Low latching the door behind them before reaching for him. The kiss seared to his toes.

His arms slid around his Scot, moaning deep in his throat as he pushed closer, body near begging.

"Where would you like me to touch you, lover?" Oh, his Low so rarely lost control.

"Oh, Scot. There's not a square inch of me isn't needing your touch."

"Where do you need it most? Here?" Low touched his mouth. "Or here?" His chest received sweet pressure, right over his heart, then his nipples.

He brought Low's fingers down to the so-sensitive spot behind his sacs, just the brush of those fingers making his head toss. "Here. Just here."

"Oh, Stephen. You would tempt an angel. That I am not. Let me see what I touch." His buttons gave way easily under Low's questing fingers, his trousers falling to the tops of his boots. That spot. Oh, Low found that spot again unerringly, stroking.

Lightning, it was sweet lightning through him, and his head snapped back, cry echoing through the room. "Low!"

"So utterly lovely. I swear, Stephen, you were made for my touch." The other hand came down to touch his prick, thumb rubbing across the head. The pressure was just what he needed.

"Yes. Yes, Scot." He balanced himself on Low's shoulders, rocking back and forth restless, waves of heat pouring over him like spring rain.

"Do you have any idea what it was like in there, watching you shudder and color so beautifully, having to wait to touch?" A determined squeeze had his balls drawing up, Low's teeth scraping his throat.

"I...Low. Low, I can't. I'll spend." He wanted no more games, barring the games reserved solely for the room they shared here.

"And I will watch. Then we might make our apologies and retire so that I may make you spend again and again." That look scorched him.

"The things you say...." He arched so far his back liked to groan, seed pouring from him, near burning him as it spread.

"I mean them. Oh, Stephen." Breathless, wild, Low pulled him close, rubbing against him, covered cock against his spent one. Low thrust against him once, twice, then cried out, his whole body shaking.

"No more games, please Low. Please, the stairs are right here." He'd never beg another soul.

"No more. Go up and wait for me. I shall tell them...I. Go. Before I take you on the settee."

"Sweet lord, yes." He grabbed up his trousers and took off like hyenas were on his heels. They would finish their own game in privacy.

Mindful of his wet trousers, Francis Lowell pulled his coat around him and went back to the card room. The debauched scene that met his eyes made him chuckle. Drummond now wore not a stitch of clothing as he writhed on Thaddeus' lap, and a half-naked Caleb sucked hard on Eliot's throat, drawing up marks. Garrick and Quincy had withdrawn to the corner.

"Well, gentlemen," he said, drawing hardly a look. "Goodnight."

With that he hurried up the stairs, encountering no one, and made his way to the room he and Stephen frequented, hoping to find his Texan in a state of dishabille.

Stephen was, indeed, in nothing but a silk robe, bent temptingly over a low table to pour two drinks for them.

Sliding out of his coat and waistcoat, Low crossed the room, purring at the way Stephen filled out the robe, the shape of his bottom clear. "Tempter."

"Only for you." His Texan turned toward him, growing erection clear, tenting the silk.

"Come here to me." The studs and links in his shirt gave way and Low slipped it off, grabbing Stephen as soon as he was near, slipping his arms beneath the robe to feel Stephen's skin.

"No more games for us?" Stephen's hands danced over him, dark eyes near glowing with need. "My fine Scot."

"No more games. Much as I enjoy the sport, tonight I am just yours." They played enough games. Some nights though, it was just need. Such as this night.

Stephen nodded, hands sliding down to work his cock free. "I would see all of you, love you."

"I've made a bit of a mess." Not that his prick cared. It rose to Stephen's touch like Low was a young man again, just as Stephen made him feel. "Kiss me, my Texan."

Those lips were eager against his, hungry and needy, tongue pushing deep within to taste.

Low kissed Stephen just as deeply, lips bruising, his eyes fluttering shut. His cock pushed out, free of his confining clothing, the rough calluses on Stephen's hand abrading him deliciously.

Stephen knew him, knew the ways to touch, to tease, to drag those fingers over him.

"Stephen. I. Oh. Bed. Come to bed." Yes. Yes, they needed to lie down.

"Yes." Stephen near tugged him, prick leaving tell-tale stains about the red silk, proving his Texan's need.

They tumbled together, the robe fluttering to the floor, his own trousers and soft shoes falling as well. Nude, Low rubbed against Stephen, straddling him.

All the angels in heaven did not equal the look in Stephen's eyes, the admiration there, the beauty Stephen saw. "My Scot."

"Yours. Undoubtedly."

He smiled down, rubbing back against the hard prick, his balls pressing and pushing.

The kisses along his jaw burned and stung, just slightly, Stephen's hunger unmistakable.

"What would you have from me, love?" He wanted Stephen, not to beg, but to ask. Low wished to hear it aloud.

"I..." Stephen's lips found his ear, tongue slipping out to taste. "I would feel you inside me. I would have you touch me deep."

"Yes. Oh, yes. Is there oil?"

Stephen's stubble just abraded as he nodded, the moan more than easing the burn.

Leaning, he reached blindly for it, slipping back to kneel between Stephen's thighs. Such beauty sprawled before him, masculine and heady. Low stroked the quivering belly. "Inside you. Yes."

"I remember the night I met you, shivering, near to aching for your touch." Those tanned cheeks pinked. "It hasn't faded a bit, Scot."

"If anything it has intensified, love." Unable to take it slow, Low slicked his fingers, sliding two between the cheeks of Stephen's arse, moaning as they slid deep.

Stephen's knees drew up, the act redolent with such trust, such need.

Low prepared him quickly, two fingers having to do, for he could not bear to wait longer, not the way his prick beat with his heart. Low slicked himself as well, panting as he settled at Stephen's entry.

"Deep inside, so it's all I feel, Scot." Demanding. Wanton. Beloved.

"Deep." He could give that, and he did, pressing inside where it was tight and hot as an inferno.

Their cries mingled, filled the air with a deep, needy noise, the sound echoing.

The skin slapped, their breath grated, and his own deep moans shocked him so that he bent to kiss Stephen, stifling them.

The time had long passed that they need search for a rhythm, for a balance between them. Stephen's hand was on his cheek, upon his hip, their need driving them.

His body moved effortlessly into Stephen's, his prick squeezed and adored even as he reached for Stephen's, his hand moving until it became a blur.

"Low. Low. My Scot." Stephen shuddered, head tossing, body fluttering around him like a million beating wings.

"Stephen! My own." It took little more than that for him to spend himself, his back a tight arc, his belly so tight he thought the skin might break. His seed shot deep into Stephen, just as he had promised. All of him, for all of Stephen.

Heat covered his fingers, the second such offering tonight. Stephen moaned softly, drawing him close. "Your own. I swear it."

"My own love."

Another nod, a sweet, happy sigh. "My own Scot."

Low nodded, licking Stephen's sweat. He could never have imagined finding what he had with Stephen. Indeed, Low knew the men downstairs could not fathom it either, though they had each found it for themselves. Stephen was his and he was Stephen's, he thought, collapsing on that broad chest. Francis Lowell had always been something of an island.

Now he was no longer deserted there alone.

END