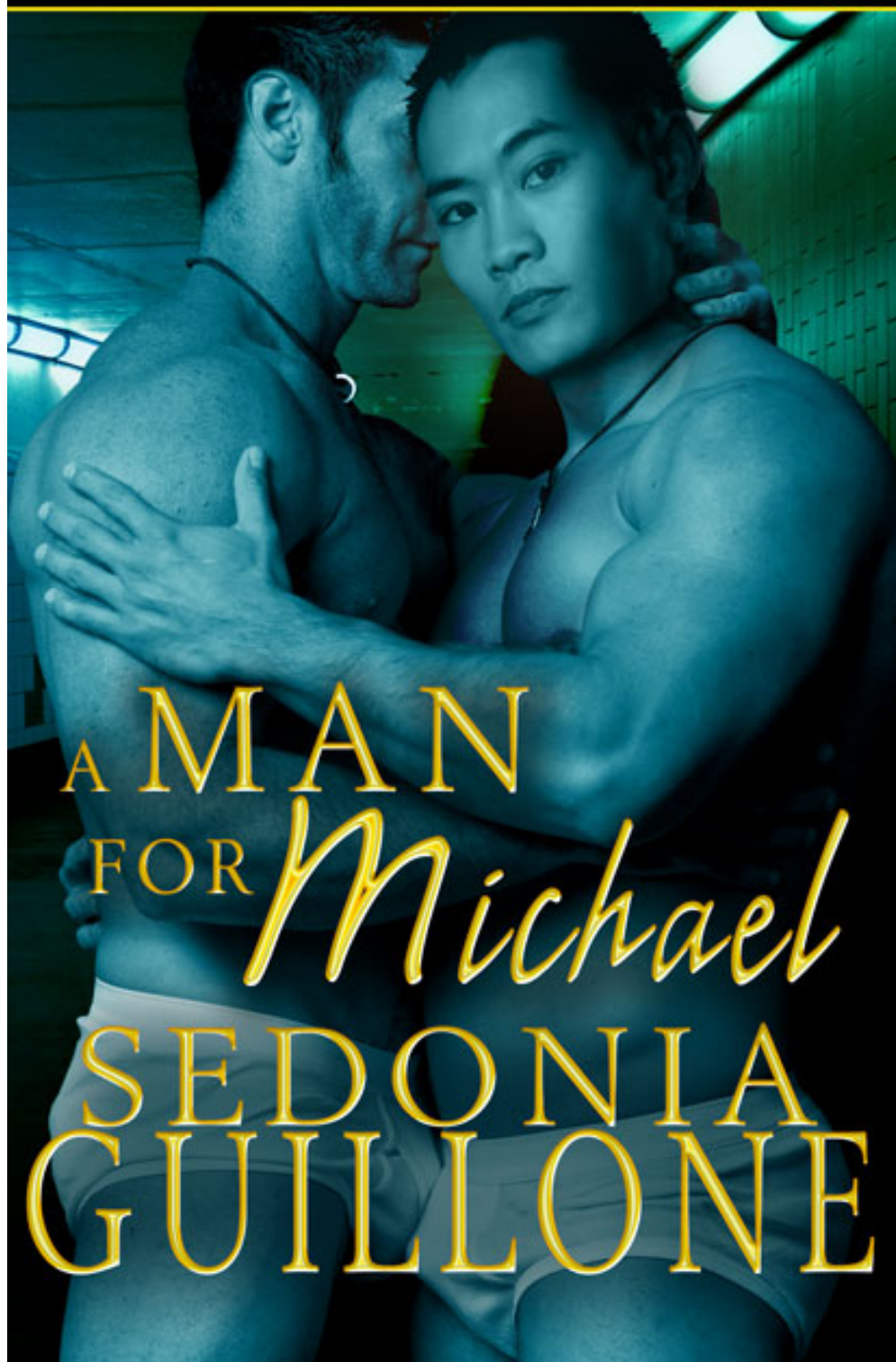


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



A MAN
FOR *Michael*
SEDONIA
GUILLONE

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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A Man for Michael

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A MAN FOR MICHAEL

Sedonia Guillone

Dedication

For Mitch, the love of my heart and the guide of my spirit.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my editor Jaynie, my critique partner, Ruth Axtell Morren, and to the following people for their input and encouragement with my writing: James Buchanan, Stephanie Vaughan and Kiernan Kelley (all superb writers themselves). And to Les Byerley for the fabulous, sexy cover.

Author Note

Several Italian slang words appear in the book. Here are their English translations:

stroonz: shit

cafone: low-class slob, literally means “pig”

marron: Is like the English equivalent of saying “oh wow” or “oh brother”, depending on the context. Can be used to express annoyance or excitement. Kind of all-purpose.

Chapter One

The only thing that had changed about Donnie's place was the faces.

Stepping into the noisy, poorly lit basement the stench of sweat, stale cigarettes and beer put Mike right back into his fighting days. Surrounded by shouts of bloodlust, testosterone sizzling in the air, he felt like that tough kid again, fresh off the streets of Allston, one of the tougher neighborhoods in Beantown. He'd spent his late teens and twenties fighting in this club, getting his face beat in like a punching bag every weekend in order to scrape together the money he needed to buy his gym. Looking back, Mike was grateful he'd made it to thirty-six.

Even the pit-cage in the center of the place was the same. Donnie was a cheap bastard. Couldn't even use his generous income from the fighters to upgrade the hard rubber matting in the center and the chain link wall guards that kept the fighters from being hurtled into the bloodthirsty crowds.

Noodle and Mike jostled their way through the press of bodies toward the back where Donnie's office was—just to let him know they were here and ready to work. Mike opened Donnie's office door without bothering to knock because Donnie would never have heard such a tiny sound over the crowds.

Donnie looked up from his desk, that mercenary gleam still in his rat eyes, his skin still shining with an ever-present sheen of sweat due to his corpulent body. He'd never thrown a punch in his whole rotten life, but he got lots of money selling bets on guys who did.

A crooked smile spread across Donnie's thin lips when he saw Mike and proffered a fat hand. "Mikey Hard Head Antonio. Never thought I'd see your broken nose in my place again."

Mike gritted his teeth at the reference to how many times his face had ended up looking like a tomato someone had thrown against a wall and accepted the handshake. "Yeah, well, here I am."

Donnie chuckled against the backdrop sounds of the club-goers outside, rumbling in anticipation of seeing the Chow. He nodded in Noodle's direction. "Yeah, seems our friend here is in one of his usual scrapes."

"Never mind that." Mike wasn't going to let Donnie take shots at Noodle no matter how much of a jerk his friend was. "We're just letting you know we're here to run the tickets and bounce razzers." Well, Mike would do the bouncing. Noodle couldn't bounce a ball, never mind a guy trying to start a fight. Even though Mike had lost a significant amount of his power lifter's muscle mass, he still had the rounded hard physique of a heavyweight who could kick a razzers' ass and make him go to the back of the line to wait his turn or get the hell out.

Donnie chuckled again and waved a dismissive hand. "Whatever you say, Mikey. Just be extra tough tonight. There'll probably be a shitload of those assholes trying to get into the pit with the Chow. Even though the little scrapper's undefeated."

Mike nodded, not wanting to stay in close quarters with Donnie any longer than he had to. It wasn't that he was ungrateful for all Donnie had done for him back in the day, it's just he didn't like how Donnie condescended to people, treating them like pieces of meat. Donnie was like a lot of people in the world today and well, even though part of Mike was still a tough kid from a broken family, he'd always thought that made it more important to be nice to people, especially when they were worse off than you.

Noodle and Mike left the office and worked their way through the crowds, taking bet tickets on the fights and keeping an eye on anyone in attendance whose hungry expression had the potential of a razzers.

Donnie finally came out into the center of the pit, clanging his little bell, and holding up a chubby hand to stave off the rounds of cheers that drowned out his voice. As was Donnie's cock-teasing style, he named the fighters of the first three rounds to

take place before the main event. A deafening chorus of boos and hisses met his announcement. Mike knew Donnie couldn't have cared less. The guy was going to reap fucking gold tonight if everything Noodle told Mike about the Chow was true. He was a five-foot-eight guy who could bring down giants in a few kicks—the most amazing fighter.

Standing at the edge of the cage, Mike's gaze went to the emperor's box, a seating area at the end of the pit reserved for those who paid a hundred or more to get in or who supported a particularly good fighter. A man in an expensive suit and dark hawk-eyes sat there, flanked by two larger men, presumably his goon bodyguards. A tiny smug smile curved the guy's lips and his thinning hair was combed back on his scalp. Mike didn't need to be told this character was most likely the Chow's sponsor or something like that.

The first three rounds went relatively quick, the crowds cheering with extra gusto, probably because they wanted the preliminary fights over so they could see the Chow.

Finally, after the last guy had been knocked unconscious and lay in a heap, blood running down his face, Donnie made a show of signaling his two runners to come out and drag the defeated fighter out of the pit-cage. Someone stomped their foot near the pit and soon the entire club filled with the roaring clamor of stomping feet and shouts of "Chow now! Chow now! Chow now!"

Like a benevolent master, Donnie held up his hand and nodded. Immediately, the chant gave way to cheers, hooting and clapping. In spite of everything Mike felt about this place, he had to admit his own blood had heated, his heartbeat quickening with the telltale anticipation of a good fight, not to mention his intrigue at Noodle's description of the Chow. In fact, it was this Bruce Lee image of some gorgeous guy, muscles flexing as he leaped and kicked, that had really convinced Mike to come. Well, that and the fact that Noodle's ass was on the line because he'd been to the loan sharks again.

Without another word, Donnie pointed to the entryway of the pit-cage and a runner pulled the gate back.

The crowd went wild and Mike's body was pressed hard against the chain link sides. He succumbed to the weight against him and watched the first fighter come in, a beefy guy wearing nothing but tight studded leather in straps around his body. He was bald and wore a competitive scowl, which showed large rows of white teeth gleaming in the lights. A mixed round of cheers and boos followed this guy whose name he couldn't remember from the tickets, caught up as he was by his own anticipation of seeing the Chow.

Leather Guy moved in a tight, beastlike circle of the pit, obviously trying to rouse support from the crowd. However, the cheers grew suddenly deafening and Mike knew why. Straining to see the gate through the lunge of bodies, Mike saw the star of the evening emerge at the pit entrance and caught his breath.

So unexpected was Mike's physical response that he began to shiver.

The Chow looked to be about five-foot-eight or so, his dark hair shorn almost to his scalp. Even through the press of the crowd, Mike could see the guy's physical beauty emanating like a light. His skin, the color of roasted almonds, offset the sleekness of his muscles. His torso tapered into a V-shape and his shoulders were surprisingly broad for his stature. His hairless pecs were round and hard, the dark gold skin and brown nipples gleaming under the lights.

His face was a beautiful mask of intensity, and he stared at his opponent from large almond-shaped eyes. His full lips were parted, his breathing hard, his hands clenched in fists at his sides. Below he wore a pair of ratty-looking baggy pants and black slip-on shoes, the kind that guys wore in kung-fu films.

Mike's heartbeat rose and something inside told him it wasn't from anticipation of the fight. He found his gaze riveted on the Chow's face, to the intensity blazing in his large eyes. Sweat erupted on Mike's body that wasn't only from the hot press of the crowd. The sensation of arousal curled in his groin and his cock twitched and started to harden.

That's when he saw it.

A collar like a bulldog would wear, its shiny spikes glinting in the lights, was fastened around the Chow's neck. Okay, Mike would have dismissed such an article as a gimmick. But then he saw the collar was attached to a leash, the other end of it held by a large goon, also in an expensive suit. No doubt that suit had also been bought by the Chow's sweat and blood.

A sick feeling rose in the pit of Mike's stomach at the sight of the leash, the bile churning in sharp contrast to the unexpected fanning of desire in his entire body. He swallowed hard, the roar of the crowd around fading to the background in his consciousness. It was just like a scene in a movie the way he blocked out the chaos and bloodlust around him to concentrate his attention solely on the Chow.

In the next moment, the goon holding the leash reached out and unclipped it. Before Mike could blink, the Chow bounded into the ring and leapt through the air. His hard, powerful body sailed in defiance of gravity, and one kung-fu shoe-clad foot pounded into his opponent's beefy chest.

Leather Man staggered back, his mouth open in a stunned expression. He hit the chain link wall and growled. After a moment he gathered himself and charged the Chow. The Chow twisted and turned, avoiding the large body hurtling toward him and took a running jump. He ricocheted off the chain link wall and delivered another sharp kick.

Once again, Leather Man staggered back. To the galoot's credit, he put up a lengthy, exciting fight. But the Chow's punches, flying kicks and chops finally did him in. One last kick from the Chow left Leather Man in a heap in the center of the pit. The crowd's thundering practically made the earth shake.

Donnie lumbered into the pit and held one of the Chow's rippling arms up in the air to another rousing thunder of hurrahs. He turned the Chow this way and that, and Mike was captured by the sight of the Chow's chest heaving from the adrenaline of the fight. Sweat gleamed off the Chow's smooth, cut muscles, seizing Mike with the most wicked desire to lick the salty moisture right off the Chow's skin.

Donnie turned him some more and the Chow's gaze came even to where Mike stood.

Their gazes locked. Mike could swear the Chow was staring right at him.

Donnie went to move the Chow to another angle, giving the crowd a view of the glorious victor. However, the Chow yanked his hand back and stared at Mike. It couldn't have been more than a few seconds that they watched each other, but shit, however long it was, was too damn short. Mike could have stood there indefinitely.

Mike blinked and in the space it took his eyelids to shutter, the Chow had turned and paced back to the entrance of the pit where he stood, waiting like a trained animal for the suited guy to clip his leash back on.

Mike stood there, gaping, wondering at how the Chow let this man lead him away in the direction of the holding room, as if the Chow had not just pummeled a man more than twice his size into the ground. They made no show of his bound state, conveying the lack of gimmick in it.

The sudden nearly overwhelming urge to follow them and get the Chow away from his captor seized Mike, but he had to stay by the pit-cage and keep the razzers from starting chaos. The jostling and razzing was rampant this night as any number of idiots wanted to bully their way into the cage pit to fight the Chow. Once that task was done, Mike went back to the holding room, but the Chow was long gone.

Finally the session was over. Noodle and Mike received their cut, which was generous indeed, and the two of them caught a cab back to Allston. The entire ride, Mike listened to Noodle's ramblings of joy about how he was free now and what a fucking amazing friend Mike was. Noodle seemed oblivious to Mike's distracted state.

Mike's mind was filled only with images of the Chow and of the moment their eyes met. Mike had heard people talk about moments like that over the years, but he hadn't yet had one for himself. Now he had, and the power of it had every nerve ending in his body simmering.

Mike let Noodle crash on his couch. He took a shower and went to bed, eventually falling asleep to dreams full of the Chow. The Chow fighting, leaping through the air, the fierce look in his almond-shaped eyes, the sweat glistening on his flawless skin. Then Mike dreamed of lying on top of him, their naked bodies pressed together. The Chow was his, gazing up at him from under heavy lids, his full lips parted, wanting Mike's kiss. Mike moved over him, their hard cocks gliding against each other, silk over hard muscle rubbing together in the most fucking incredible bliss.

Mike woke up in a sweat, his chest heaving, mind racing. And even though he'd sworn to Noodle that he'd never go back to Donnie's, he knew he'd be there the next night, collecting tickets, this time determined to get close to the Chow any way he could.

* * * * *

My name is Cory Chow. I was born in Hong Kong, April 26, 1982. That makes me twenty-four now. My mum's name is...was...May. And my dad was Chow Sing Fen.

Cory recited his facts silently as he sat in the tub being washed. It helped him ignore Duffie's rough hands and he also never wanted to forget who he was or where he'd come from. There had been a time he'd known something different. There had been a time his mother held him and smiled at him. She'd wanted him to be better, to rise above. She'd made certain he imitated the way the rich London people she cleaned for spoke, so he would sound cultured, educated. She'd looked at him in this sweet way as if he really mattered somehow. Just like that bloke who'd been staring at him through the fence after his fight, as if Cory were...special.

Duffie tossed the washcloth into the tub. Cory looked at him just as the large man turned to Master. "Don't know why I got to wash 'is bollocks, Guv'nor."

Master smiled from where he sat back against the counter, dressed in his black robe, watching. "'Cuz I enjoy it. Stand up, Cory."

Cory obeyed and stood up from the hot water, which streamed off his arms and legs, chest and back.

Duffie growled and pulled his sleeve up, retrieving the cloth from the bottom of the tub.

"Soap 'im up good. I fancy a suck and he always does it better when he's riled up."

"Yes, Guv'nor." Duffie soaped up the cloth and slapped it softly onto Cory's stomach, sliding it down, wiping around his cock and under his balls.

Cory started to get hard. He couldn't help it. The warm wet cloth felt too good on his balls. Besides, it was what Master wanted. And yet, Cory couldn't stop thinking about that guy, the one through the fence who'd been staring at him. It had been difficult to see him really well through the crowd, but the bloke had been tall enough and muscular enough to stand out, chest muscles straining against his white t-shirt.

Remembering that face, the crooked nose that had obviously been broken, the angular jaw, heavy with dark stubble, his skin tone a tan gold like Cory's own, made his cock stiffen more.

Master chuckled. "See, Duff? You're doin' it good. Look 'ow excited he's getting."

Duffie growled again and slopped the cloth back and forth across Cory's balls and then down his erection. "I think he's clean enough now for you, Guv'."

Master stood away from the counter. He was looking at Cory in that way he always did when he wanted a suck. "All right, Duffie. Just get 'im dried off and you're excused."

Duffie sighed and grabbed a towel, waiting while Cory climbed out of the tub and stood, dripping and naked, his cock jutting out hard under Master's stare.

While Duffie rubbed the hotel towel over him, Cory kept thinking about the bloke at the fight. In the moment their gazes locked, Cory wanted nothing more than to break away, tear through the fence and throw himself into his arms. He didn't understand why he felt that way because even though he'd been wanting someone to hold him, he

hadn't ever known there was actually someone he'd feel that way about just by simply *looking* at him.

Duffie ran the towel over Cory's ass and down his thighs. The material grazed his balls in a pleasant way, even though it was Duffie holding the towel.

Duffie stood up and tossed the towel onto the counter. "'E's dry, Guv."

Master waved him away and Duffie went out the door to the adjoining room of the hotel suite.

"Wot's the matter with you?" Master snapped his fingers in Cory's face. "You 'ad your bangers and mash like I promised you. You won another fight. Life is good." He laughed.

Cory looked at his master, wishing so badly he were that bloke on the sidelines. Even though he liked the taste and feel of Master's cock in his mouth, he'd much rather be giving that other guy a suck.

Master picked up Cory's leash and tugged it. "Come on now. Some fun before bed." He led Cory into the bedroom, tugging the leash more so that Cory got onto the bed. He sat on his haunches, watching Master open his robe, slip it off and toss it on a nearby chair. Master had once been a fighter himself and still had a stocky, strong build. He had a nice mat of dark chest hair and a thick cock, which was already hard, ready to be sucked.

Cory's mouth watered. This was the one pleasurable thing he did. Fighting had begun to lose its shine, especially since that's how his dad died. He leaned over and took Master's cock deep in his mouth, tightening his lips on the shaft and bobbing his head up and down.

A drop of cum seeped from the tip and Cory swiped it away with the tip of his tongue. Master sighed and groaned, one hand resting on Cory's head. His cock tasted good, the silky skin musky and Cory swallowed him deep, fondling his heavy balls with one hand.

"You do that so sweet, Cory."

The praise urged Cory on. His own cock throbbed and twitched. Pressure built in his balls, needing release. He closed his eyes and sucked his master harder, stopping every few strokes to run his tongue around the head and push the tip into the tiny slit in the opening.

Master's fingers pressed into his head and Cory knew that meant he was coming any second. Cory dipped his head down one more time, taking his cock in deep.

Master groaned and erupted, shooting his hot cum into Cory's throat.

Cory swallowed it. He liked how it tasted, salty and sweet. He drank every last drop and let the other man's cock slip from his mouth. He sat up, wiping a few drops from his lips.

His master was breathing hard, but smiling, his eyelids heavy, and a sheen of sweat gleamed on his chest hairs.

Cory longed to stroke that chest, to let his fingers play in the springy-looking hairs, but Master didn't like to be touched that way.

Master looked up at him, his eyes dark and velvety, the way they always got after Cory had sucked him. "No one does that like you, Cory." He grinned. "Now beat yourself off while I watch."

That was the way they did it each time. Cory lay on his side, facing his master and took his own hard cock in his hand, stroking it the entire length eagerly. Sucking always got him excited and it never took long for him to come.

He felt Master's gaze on him, watching him stroke himself. Some cum oozed from the tip and he gathered it with his thumb, using it to make his hand glide on the shaft.

"That's the way, Cory. God, I like that."

The pleasure built in Cory's balls. He closed his eyes. Without making it happen, he saw that bloke again. That handsome face with the large eyes staring at him, looking at him so sweet. He remembered that body too, those muscles, round and powerful-looking. A fighter himself, no doubt, that bloke.

He pictured the guy without a shirt on, muscles flexing, maybe a mat of dark hair on his chest like Master. He imagined the man's nipples a dark brown, like his own. He imagined tasting them, licking them.

Cory exploded. His cum shot out in hot spurts, the image of the man strong in his mind. His climax lasted a long time and warm milky cum pooled on his stomach.

His master chuckled. "I'm the luckiest bloke there is." He reached for a few tissues and handed them to Cory.

Cory wiped himself off and waited to see what Master would do. Cory always wished Master would hold him and fall asleep that way under the covers, like he mattered to him.

But Master pulled the covers down and turned over. "Get to sleep, Cory. You got another match tomorrow night and I 'ave something big planned for us." He held onto the leash and gave it a tug, meaning Cory should get under the covers.

Cory lay on his back in the dark, staring up at the ceiling. He could still taste the tang of cum in his mouth and it gave him an odd comfort.

"Remember, Cory. No one loves you like I do."

Cory sighed and continued to stare upward. He thought of the guy behind the fence and thought that if Master really loved him, wouldn't he look at him the way that bloke did? It was confusing. If Master loved him, would Cory always think of running away from him? But where would he go? He didn't know anyone or have any money of his own.

He was alone.

The same lonely feeling that always enveloped him after the pleasure of sucking was over invaded him now. He couldn't help but think that if this was love, he'd not feel this way.

Hopeless. Wanting to die.

Cory sighed and closed his eyes. There was only one thing he could do to get free.

And he'd do it tomorrow night.

Chapter Two

When Mike got to Donnie's the next night, he went to the office to let him know he was there. Mike pushed open the door, stepped in and froze. Right there in Donnie's office, seated on Donnie's ratty leather couch, was the Chow.

Mike recognized the stocky guy in the expensive suit who'd been in the emperor's box the night before. And of course, he recognized the Chow, whose large dark gaze rested on him, the expression on his beautiful face inscrutable. The Chow still wore the same shitty pants, black kung-fu shoes, and a moth-eaten sweatshirt, presumably to be removed just before the fight. His owner apparently diverted Cory's winnings only to his own designer suits. If the Chow didn't fight for him, Mike doubted the guy would have even kept him fed.

To Mike's disgust, the Chow also still wore his collar, the tether ending in the large paws of one of the suited monkeys. It was all Mike could do not to lunge forward and yank the leash out of that *stroonz's* hands.

"I-I'm sorry," Mike stammered, his heart already scudding in his chest. He couldn't understand it, the way this little guy's mere presence reduced him to a lovesick adolescent. But there you have it.

Mike glanced at Donnie who wore a scowl. "I'm just letting you know I'm here," he told him.

"Good, now get out. We're talkin' business."

Same sweet old Donnie.

"No, *we're* going." The Chow's owner spoke, rose from his chair and looked at Donnie. He spoke with an English accent, the kind you usually hear in the movies from characters who sweep chimneys and shit like that.

"Those are my terms," he went on. "Seventy percent and put all your night's fighters into the pit with him at once. Or we walk. You're not the biggest show on this circuit. New York is just panting for the Chow."

Donnie held out a fat hand. The sweat was pouring from his skin and Mike actually almost felt sorry for him. Almost. "All right, Benson. All right. You got it."

Benson gave him a smile that made Mike think of the way the cat in his gym looked when she'd caught a particularly juicy rat. "I thought you'd see reason. I know you'd not want to empty out your place now, would ye's?"

Donnie didn't answer, just mopped his drenched brow with a handkerchief. But Mike knew Donnie too well not to know the guy was seething inside.

Benson signaled to his guys and the one holding the leash gave it a yank. "Come on, doggie," he said, his Cockney accent matching his boss's.

That treatment sent a potent wave of anger through Mike, especially in the docile way the Chow rose from the sofa and obeyed. Mike's stomach did a flip to find the Chow's even gaze still on his, the intensity behind the brown irises unlike anything he'd ever seen before in a pair of eyes, as if the Chow could look right through him.

Benson stopped just in front of Mike, still wearing his glib smile. "You know why we call him the Chow, don't yuh?" he said.

Mike suppressed a scowl. "No, why?"

"Because that's what they call a dog in China. Those Chows guarded the Imperial Palace, they did. Can rip a man limb from limb if they get angry enough."

It was on the tip of Mike's tongue to say, "Piss off, motherfucker". He didn't, not because he didn't want to insult the bastard, but because he didn't want him to take the Chow away. "I'm sure he has a first name," Mike heard himself say.

Benson chuckled and reached up and gave Mike's cheek a few condescending pats. Mike held himself back from grabbing him and twisting his arm until it snapped.

"Now, Guv'nor, if I told you 'is first name, you might think 'e's a faggot." He started laughing and headed out the door, the obvious signal for his goons to follow him.

Mike stayed where he was, his sneakers feeling rooted to the ground, watching the Chow. The Chow was no longer looking at Mike, his eyes downcast, as if he were afraid he'd trip on his feet if he looked up. However, just as he brushed past, Mike felt the unmistakable press of fingers into the palm of his hand.

Mike had the presence of mind to act as if nothing was happening even though the Chow's touch sent streaks of sensual fire right up his arm and a pleasant shudder through his chest, right where his heart was. The contact lasted all of about two milliseconds and then it was gone, the Chow following along on his leash, disappearing through the back hallway before the waiting spectators could see him and rush in on him.

The tiny spirals of heat in the calloused palm of Mike's hand lasted much longer than the touch itself. Long after he'd closed Donnie's office door and worked his way through the crowds, collecting the tickets for what promised to be the underground fight of the century, he replayed that moment, over and over again in his mind, like a videotape being rewound and played until the ribbon inside wears out. Of course, that tiny whisper of a touch from the Chow only made Mike hungry for more.

However, along with the pleasant memory was the ring of Benson's voice as he said the things he'd said. Something about his words gave Mike the horrid suspicion that he used the Chow for more than just fighting. It seemed this small but powerful man was a slave in every way, with no control over his body or his destiny. Strange too, how a guy who could probably kill all his captors with his bare hands seemed so docile when he wasn't in the pit-cage.

After what felt like forever and the crowds emanated that restless shuffle wanting the fights to get on, Donnie went into the center of the pit and held both chubby hands in the air. He had to wait one full minute for the cheering and clapping to subside

enough so that he could be heard. When it had died down sufficiently, he made the announcement that mirrored the deal Mike heard happen in Donnie's office. All the fighters on that night's ballot were going in with the Chow at once.

Mike's heart felt like it was trying to claw out of his chest and he made sure to position himself as close as possible to the gate of the pit-cage.

As was custom, the lesser-known fighters were announced first and made their grand entrances to the blend of cheers, boos and hisses according to their popularity. Within seconds, four burly guys sporting a motley assortment of tattoos, body piercings and leather stalked around the pit. Mike swallowed hard past a painful lump in his throat. He couldn't imagine that a small guy like the Chow could take on all these beasts at once and come out alive, no matter how superior a fighter he was.

Then he was there. The Chow paced to the entry gate, his gaze fastened on his opponents. As he'd done the night before, his fists were at his sides, clenching and unclenching, and Mike could practically smell the testosterone emanating from the pores of the Chow's body. His lust for him forgotten in his fear, Mike wanted to call out to him, to jump into the ring and fight at his side, but knew he couldn't. All he could do was stand there and watch, hoping the Chow could hold his own.

The crowd roared, drowning out everything else. All that mattered to everyone there was the fight at hand. Even the loads of money changing hands that night over the Chow's head seemed to pale in comparison to the challenge he was facing in the pit-cage.

The runner pulled back the gate and the goon holding the Chow's leash reached out and unclipped it. The Chow bounded into the center of the pit and was immediately surrounded by the crew of fierce bloodthirsty-looking opponents.

One man, a big bald guy with a handlebar mustache, charged him, a large foot kicking his back. The Chow went right down to his knees.

Boos and hisses filled the entire club. The jeers grew deafening when the Chow remained on his knees, staring straight ahead as if he were in a trance.

Mike froze, goose bumps erupting on his arms in spite of the hot press of sweaty bodies around him. What the hell was the Chow doing?

The opponents in the pit-cage were dancing around him, jeering at him, making lewd comments about his mother. They baited the Chow relentlessly, all to no avail.

That's when Benson shot up from his seat. "What you doin'?" he yelled over the crowd. "I'll kill you meself if you don't get up and fight!"

Mike's heart lurched. He remembered the way the Chow'd been looking at him in Donnie's office. The brief touch of his fingers on Mike's palm. Like he'd been saying goodbye.

Holy fucking crap! The Chow was throwing the fight. He was getting himself *killed*.

Another beefy guy landed a booted foot against the side of the Chow's head, sending him onto his belly in the middle of the pit-cage. The rest of his opponents circled around him. They'd finished jeering and now pounded and kicked him, a merciless barrage of fists and boots.

That was it. Mike fought his way out of the crowd and charged the gate, crashing through before anyone could stop him. He lunged into the center, the crowd's hisses of anger echoing in his ears, and covered the Chow's body with his own. The Chow remained unmoving beneath him and Mike screwed his eyes shut, pulling the Chow tight against him so the fighters couldn't pry him off.

Mike gritted his teeth and held on, grunting against the blows of boots hitting his backside, his thighs, a punch to his skull. He didn't know how the hell he was going to get him and the Chow out of the fucking mess they were in.

Just when he figured they were both dead, the aggression spread into the crowd. Like fire through gasoline, a riot began, and fighting erupted everywhere. Soon enough, their attackers were diverted, sucked into the melee of fighters who now spilled through the gate into the pit.

Mike was now able to raise his head. He and the Chow were almost forgotten in the chaos. Someone had even dragged Benson and two of his goons from the emperor's seat area and were messing them up.

That's when Mike saw the flames. Someone had started a fire and where there wasn't fighting, a path had cleared of people escaping the flames.

The place was a mess, but this was his chance. He dragged the Chow to his feet and heaved his muscular body over one shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Mike wasn't sure if the Chow was even conscious at this point, but all he cared about was getting both of them out of there. He gave a quick thought to Noodle. Mike had always gotten Noodle out of scrapes but Mike didn't even know if the guy had shown up tonight. Noodle had made himself scarce during the day, alone with his spoils of the previous night's earnings.

Scooting out the back, Mike burst through the door and took off for the street. For a full five minutes he jogged, leaving the burning, riotous place behind. Sirens blared in the distance and he moved faster, breaking into a run, the Chow's limp body weighing into his shoulder.

He must have run for a full ten minutes and was panting heavily by the time he'd gotten away from the warehouses by the wharf where Donnie's club was. There he found a cab and threw open the door. He piled the Chow into the backseat and slid in next to him.

Mike gave the cabbie his address and told him there was an extra twenty in it if he burned rubber. He eyed Mike suspiciously but did as Mike asked, doing a great imitation of a New York City cabdriver hustling for a bigger tip. It worked, however, for in the space of ten minutes, they were at the curb outside Mike's place in Allston. Mike paid the cabbie and then, gently as he could, slid the injured Chow out of the backseat.

The street was pretty quiet, Mike's part of the neighborhood not being the center of nightlife, so nobody saw him pick the Chow up and do the potato sack thing again with

him while he took him upstairs to his apartment above the gym and laid him out on his bed.

* * * * *

The first thing Mike did was check his own body for broken ribs. He damn well couldn't patch up the Chow if he, himself, risked a punctured lung from a busted rib. Tenderly, Mike patted his own bruised skin for signs of more serious damage, but thank God he wasn't badly injured. The riot had broken out before their attackers could do him any real damage. He wasn't so sure, however, about the Chow.

Turning his attention to the Chow, Mike felt the injured man's rib cage, ignoring the pleasant thrill that came with the contact to the Chow's warm bare skin. Mike breathed a sigh of relief, finding no breakage other than points on his torso where the other fighters' boots had cut him.

The Chow's head was another matter. That kick he'd received had looked vicious and Mike feared he had a concussion. A large lump had already begun to rise, purple and swelling. In spite of his state, Mike couldn't afford to bring the Chow to the hospital where there was the chance of him being recognized. Mike threw together an icepack from the kitchen and placed it against the bruise. The Chow's whole body jumped and he came out of unconsciousness long enough to yelp and pant as Mike held the cold poultice in place.

After that, the Chow lay on his back, his chest heaving, his hands limp on either side of him. He was badly in need of a bath, but Mike didn't dare move him, only washed off his cuts, disinfecting and applying butterflies where needed. The entire time, the Chow lay docile and silent except for an occasional whimper when Mike cleaned a particularly nasty cut.

At one point during Mike's ministrations, the Chow looked up at him, his dark eyes huge. Only this time, his expression wasn't so fathomless. In fact, a kaleidoscope of emotions seemed to pass through the chocolate-hued irises. Mike had never prided

himself on being the most perceptive guy in the world, but in those moments of staring into the Chow's eyes, Mike could have sworn he saw sadness, defeat, gratitude and a heartrending look of desolation. After all, the way the Chow had let those fighters work him over could only mean one thing. He'd wanted to die.

Mike didn't know what seized him in the moment, but before he knew what he was doing, he'd reached out and passed his hand tenderly over the Chow's brow. The black stubble of the Chow's hair rasped in a pleasant way against Mike's fingertips and his eyelids shuttered rapidly, as if Mike's touch was pleasurable to him.

One caress followed the next and Mike found that he couldn't stop, didn't want to stop. It seemed to him, the guy hadn't gotten a drop of affection, maybe in his entire life and well, he sure as hell needed some now.

With each caress, the Chow's breathing calmed, growing normal and softer. His eyelids stopped shuttering and remained closed, the heavy fringe of ebony lashes resting against his bruised cheeks. In the next minute, Mike realized the Chow had fallen asleep.

Mike sighed and finally lifted his hand away from the other man's brow. Not wanting to leave him for a second, Mike watched him. His gaze roved down the Chow's face, over his sharp cheekbones and full, plump lips. Unable to stop looking at him, Mike surveyed the rest of his face, his slightly pointed chin and his upper lip, both of which showed the slightest shadow of beard. Mike couldn't help smiling. The Chow probably shaved once a year by the looks of it.

That's when Mike's look fell onto the collar. Anger seized him and his hands itched to unbuckle it. He resisted the urge, however, not wanting to wake the Chow up from badly needed rest.

Finally, Mike got up and went to the easy chair on the other side of the bed. His body protested even the short move to the chair. Damn good thing the next day was Sunday and he didn't open the gym until noon. They both needed to recover.

He toed his shoes off and leaned heavily back in the chair. Propping his feet on the edge of his bed, he sank down and reclined his head. He stared up at the ceiling and listened to the Chow's quiet breathing.

Mike exhaled a long breath. In all his days as a fighter, he'd never had a night like this one. Images of the assault on the Chow haunted him, making sleep difficult for a long time. He almost felt afraid to sleep, as if those people would hunt the Chow down and kill him. Strange how a top fighter like the man in his bed made Mike feel so protective.

Sleep finally began to take over but not before he also felt a wave of incredible gladness over the presence of the Chow in his bed. He wished very much that he knew the Chow's real name and hoped he'd tell him.

Mike also hoped that that guy Benson, if he'd survived the riot and the fire, didn't decide to come looking for the Chow. Benson had probably lost a shitload of money and prestige by Chow's throwing that fight the way he did and if he did search for him, it wouldn't be to give him a pat on the head and tell him what a good boy he'd been.

A wave of fierce protectiveness surged in Mike's chest. There was no way in fucking hell he was letting that piece of shit get anywhere near the Chow. And if Benson tried, he'd end up wishing that the fire or the riot had gotten him instead.

* * * * *

The Chow basically slept the next thirty-six hours straight. The injury to his head gave him a slight fever so he didn't even get up to piss or have a drink of water.

Mike stayed at his side for nearly the entire time, only leaving to go downstairs and open the gym. Thankfully, one of his regulars was interested in a job and Mike gave him one on the spot, assisting him in keeping an eye on things and registering new members should someone join. This was a Godsend, since it freed Mike to go upstairs at regular intervals to check on his patient while the gym was open. Mike found himself

referring to him as Chow rather than *the* Chow. It seemed a hell of a lot more human and really, Mike thought, Chow could very well be his real last name.

To lower Chow's fever, Mike kept the covers off him, pulled off his shoes and bathed his torso with a cool sponge. It was really hard not to get turned on by the gleam of the water on Chow's hard muscles or by the way droplets of it clung in his belly button or to his dark brown quarter-sized nipples.

Gently, Mike lifted Chow's hands one by one, and slid the damp sponge all the way up into his armpits where even the small soft thatches of ebony hair did it for him. Maybe not all guys were turned on by that part of the body, but Mike always had been. He loved to press his nose to that intimate spot and inhale the musky body scent that gathered there. Not that he'd done that to every guy he'd been with, but he'd found that when he had feelings for someone, it enhanced the sex.

When Mike opened his eyes early on Monday morning, Chow was awake.

Mike practically sprang from his chair in spite of his own minor injuries and went to the bedside, relieved to see the droplets of sweat on Chow's forehead and upper lip.

Chow blinked several times and stared up at Mike. His lips moved and a strangled sound came from his throat. Mike realized he was terribly dry. He got him a glass of water, calling his assistant from his cell phone at the same time, asking him to open the gym for him.

Mike held the glass for Chow and cupped the back of his head, gently supporting him so he could drink. Chow took a long sip and Mike loved the tiny sounds Chow's throat made as he swallowed. When he'd finished, Mike eased Chow's head back to the pillow so he could rest.

Chow remained in bed for several more days, only getting up to pee before falling back into bed and sleeping. However, he proved quite resilient and after a few more days, the light returned to his dark eyes and he started to eat more solid food besides the minestrone soup Mike got for him at Sid's Pizza and Subs down the block. Not only that, but Chow's hair had started to grow in a bit, lengthening from soft stubble to a bit

longer brush. Mike found himself looking forward to seeing Chow's hair longer – it was probably quite beautiful, ebony and smooth, framing his angular face just right. Even with the swelling and bruising, Mike could see how gorgeous Chow was.

Finally, late on Saturday night, Chow was ready to get up and take a bath. Mike figured it would be easier for Chow to sit in the tub and soak rather than take a shower so he filled the tub with steaming water, set out soap, shampoo and towels for him. Mike's hands shook as he turned off the faucets and rose to go get him. He turned and practically jumped out of his socks.

There Chow stood, close behind Mike, already naked except for that Goddamn collar. In spite of the fact that every inch of Chow's body was exposed, Mike locked gazes with him for several moments before letting his vision rove lower, over Chow's voluptuous lips, across his broad hairless chest, luscious dark nipples and rounded, cut arm muscles, down his flat carved-looking abs and lower.

Mike swallowed hard, his cock already tight and starting its aroused climb to attention. Chow seemed to want Mike to look at him, standing there quietly, docile like always, while Mike stared at his cock already standing at half-mast from its thatch of black pubic hair. Chow's cock was surprisingly large in proportion to the size of his body, the head like the tip of a plump, rounded spear, the thick, veined shaft reddish-gold above his heavy balls.

A sweat broke out in Mike's armpits even though he only wore a light t-shirt. "Come on," he said softly, hearing his voice nearly crack. "Get into the tub."

Obediently Chow went forward giving Mike a perfect view of his broad back, which was equally defined and carved. The muscles along Chow's spine blended seamlessly into narrow hips and a perfectly round, hard ass, the same dusky gold as the rest of his skin only smoother-looking. Mike stood by, making sure Chow got into the tub all right, and watched him lower his naked body slowly into the hot water.

Once seated in the tub, however, Chow's hands went to his sides. His knees were bent and he sat in the water, submerged to his chest, not moving.

Mike waited several moments before he realized Chow wasn't going to move. Mike's heart squeezed painfully at the sight and his eye fell on the collar again. Somehow that dreadful piece of studded leather held a connection to Chow's docility. Mike knelt down by the tub bringing his face even to Chow's.

Chow turned and looked at him, his expression neutral, his enchanting almond-shaped eyes almost unblinking.

"I'd...um...like to take this thing off you." Mike pointed to the collar. "Do you mind?"

Chow continued to stare at him as if he didn't comprehend and Mike began to wonder if he understood English.

Mike moved his outstretched hand closer, coming to within inches of the collar's buckle. He dared to let his fingertips land on it.

Chow jumped as if Mike had burned him and Mike pulled his hand back. "I'm sorry."

Chow watched him, thankfully without fear in his eyes, but his reaction gave Mike the strong sense he wasn't ready to part with the collar.

Mike sighed. "Look, why don't you wash up?" He picked up the washcloth and a bar of soap and held them out to Chow.

Chow watched him blankly as if he didn't know what to do with those items.

"Don't you know what to do?"

Still he watched Mike.

Apparently, he didn't, which meant Mike was going to be washing Chow if Chow was to get clean.

Damn. Mike's cock grew harder. He looked at Chow a moment longer. "Here goes." Mike dipped the washcloth into the steaming water and lathered it over the back of Chow's neck and behind his ears. A shiver of lust tore through Mike at the simple way the water darkened the golden hue of Chow's skin and beaded off his golden

expanses of hard muscle. Mike wanted more than anything to press his lips to the curve of Chow's neck, to taste his watery skin with the tip of his tongue. Even with all his bruises, Chow was fucking gorgeous.

Mike smoothed the cloth down Chow's muscled back and then up over his strong chest. Carefully he cleaned around Chow's neck, trying his best to ignore the collar. The passive way Chow let Mike wash him was both touching and unnerving. The only evidence that Chow was enjoying his bath was his hard-on, barely masked by the depths of water in the tub.

Swallowing hard, Mike lifted Chow's arms one by one, as he'd done during Chow's fever, swirling the soapy cloth around his armpits watching the little puffs of black hair flatten against his skin from the water. Mike had never bathed a guy in this way and the experience was the wildest combination of cock-hardening eroticism and tenderness. He felt like Chow was fragile even though he was a man obviously somewhere in his mid-twenties and probably could have beaten Mike into the ground with a few kicks.

Mike was very tempted to have Chow go up on his knees so he could wash his ass and cock, but he really didn't feel like it was the appropriate thing to do. Mike wanted Chow to know he had some control over what was done to his body.

Fighting down the arousal pounding relentlessly through his own cock and balls, Mike concentrated on Chow's hands, scrubbing his nails with a nail brush and trimming them. Chow's hands were really as beautiful as the rest of him, strong-looking, blunt-shaped fingertips and nails, skin smooth and golden. Mike handled Chow's hands as carefully as he'd bathed the rest of him, realizing as he did so that he was already more than half in love with Chow and felt more like he was worshiping him than just getting him clean.

Once Mike was done with Chow's hands, he took a cup and poured water over Chow's head, tilting his head back with a careful fingertip under his chin. Even though Chow's hair was barely half an inch long, Mike shampooed it, massaging Chow's scalp with gentle fingers, encouraged by the small groan that vibrated in Chow's throat and

the telltale fluttering of his eyelashes that showed his enjoyment. Chow seemed to love having his head touched and Mike wondered about that, especially considering that Benson couldn't possibly have treated any part of Chow's body with tenderness or reverence.

Mike rinsed his hair, taking care not to get the suds in Chow's eyes and decided he was clean enough. Even though he'd really wanted to touch Chow's privates, he felt it would be a terrible violation going there when not invited, especially when he had the chilling suspicion that's exactly what had been done to Chow numerous times.

Mike pulled the drain and grabbed a towel, encouraging Chow to stand up.

Chow climbed out of the tub and stood, dripping on the bath mat. Again, even though he was shivering a bit, he stood in his docile way, obviously waiting to be toweled off.

Mike stole a glance at the water beading off Chow's dark nipples before gently wiping his skin dry. He especially enjoyed toweling off the strong columns of Chow's legs. They were slightly bowed, chiseled with rounded muscles and had just a bit of dark hair on his inner thighs and on his lower legs. His feet too, were as perfectly shaped and strong-looking as his hands.

By the time Mike finished drying off each muscular leg, his own hard-on was so tight and painful it was all he could do not to groan out loud.

Mike stood up and showed Chow the fresh clothes he'd brought for him to change in to. "You put these on," he said, figuring Chow would get dressed since he'd undressed himself back in the bedroom. "I'm going to change the bedding, okay?"

Chow looked up at Mike with those killer gorgeous eyes and though he didn't nod or answer, the look in them seemed to show comprehension. Mike set the clothes on the closed toilet seat and turned abruptly, lest he stand and stare at Chow's magnificent naked body any more.

Quickly Mike stripped the old sheets off and put on the new ones, feeling especially glad that Chow would have nice clean sheets to lie down in. Mike kinda liked taking

care of Chow, especially because of the treatment he'd so obviously suffered. Mike wanted Chow to know that people could be kind too.

When he finished putting on the blanket and pulled the corner back for him to get in, he felt Chow's presence behind him. Turning, Mike caught his breath.

Chow was standing there like he'd done in the bathroom, still naked, still with a hard-on, his gaze locked on Mike's in that mysterious way of his. Silently, Chow padded over to the bed, climbed in and got on all fours.

Mike's eyes widened at the sight of Chow positioning himself with his ass up in the air. He turned and looked at Mike, a pleading look in his large dark eyes and said one of the most startling things anyone had ever said to Mike in his entire life.

"Fuck me, please."

Chapter Three

"I'm sorry?" It was a lame as hell response, but Mike was so shocked, he wasn't sure he'd heard him right.

"Please, fuck me." Chow changed the word order, but the request was the same.

Chow's accent wasn't like Benson's. Chow sounded more like he should have been starring in a Shakespeare play or something cultured like that. Strange.

Mike stared at Chow, his hands trembling all over again. He couldn't help it. After days of silence and of Chow's passive way of being handled all the time, this request was shocking. Tempting but shocking, enough to keep Mike frozen.

Of course, Mike wanted nothing more than to smooth his hands over the perfect globes of Chow's ass, to kneel behind him, spread his butt cheeks and lick every part he could see, from the underside of Chow's balls, to his perineum and around his puckered hole before burying his cock inside him right to the hilt.

However, Benson's statement had burned its way into Mike's consciousness and Mike wasn't about to use this guy any more than he'd already been used. Mike wanted Chow to experience pleasure, to know he could receive as well as give. Chow was special to him and Mike wanted him to know it.

"Um...Chow, I...uh...admit, I'd like to do just that, but not this way." Mike's shoulders sagged. "You're a *man*, not a slave or a thing to be used."

Chow continued to watch Mike, not moving from his ready-to-be-fucked position, a stance Mike had the horrible feeling Chow had been trained to take on command. Mike rushed to the bathroom, grabbed the t-shirt and pajama pants he'd set out for Chow and returned to the bedroom.

When he walked back in, Chow was sitting up, still wearing a stiff hard-on, his eyes glued on Mike. Mike saw that Chow looked worried he'd displeased Mike, an expression that cut right to Mike's heart.

Mike sank down on the edge of the bed and put the clothes between them. "Do you understand what I'm saying?" he asked in a gentle voice. "I don't even know your name." He sighed. "I kind of like to know a guy's name before we...you know." Mike had never totally been into the anonymous sex thing. Call him a romantic at heart, but here you have it.

Chow kept his gaze steadily on Mike's. Chow's soft full lips moved a bit as if he was about to speak, but in the end, decided to remain silent.

Mike opened the t-shirt and held it out to Chow. Of course it was several sizes too big but it was all he had. He fully intended to get Chow clothes as soon as he could. "Please," he said, "put this on."

To his shock, Chow reached out and took the shirt, slowly slipping it on. Mike had to admit he was sorry to see Chow cover that gorgeous muscular body, and even more sorry when he covered his beautiful ass and cock with the pajama bottoms. But Mike would be dipped in shit and locked in hell before he'd fuck Chow heartlessly like the bastard who'd put the collar on him.

Once dressed, Chow continued to sit quietly, obviously waiting for Mike to tell him what to do.

"That collar," Mike said. "I just think I should take it off you. May I?"

Stare. Silence.

Of course.

Mike began to wonder if Chow would ever say anything besides the words he'd uttered a few minutes before.

Though Mike expected Chow to pull back again when he reached out and touched the collar, he didn't even flinch. He actually let Mike unbuckle it and slip it from his

neck. This time, it was Mike who winced at the chafed skin the leather had left on Chow's neck. Mike couldn't help brushing his fingertips across the damaged skin, back and forth as if he could ease away the years of slavery that fucking thing represented.

Chow's breathing deepened a bit with each gentle swipe of Mike's fingertips on his neck. Chow swallowed and his Adam's apple slid up and down, tempting Mike to kiss it. Mike watched Chow's eyelids shutter, the heavy lashes moving up and down. Damn, Chow seemed to be enjoying his touch and Mike sure as hell was loving touching him. But Mike was still painfully aware of the collar in his other hand and the simmering anger it roused in him by its mere presence.

Mike lifted his hand away from Chow's neck. "I'll be right back," he said. If Mike thought he was going to protest, he was wrong and understood that even if he'd believed Chow needed to keep the collar on, in Chow's view, Mike was the one in control and he bowed to whatever Mike wanted.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, Mike slipped on his sneakers, ran downstairs and dropped the collar into the nearest sewer grate, hearing it hit the water below with a satisfying *plop*.

When he went back upstairs, Chow had gotten under the covers and lay propped on one elbow, watching him. Something about the way Chow was looking at him told him very clearly that he wanted Mike to climb into bed with him but couldn't ask.

Well, Mike sure as hell wanted that too. He slipped in beside him and when Chow didn't move, patted the empty space next to him.

Chow's eyes widened for a moment, but he inched over and Mike reached for him. Chow practically fell against Mike, as if he'd been desperate for an embrace. Mike's heart thumped and he gently pulled Chow closer.

Damn, even through the baggy clothing Chow's hard body was warm and delicious. Mike held him close, Chow's head resting against Mike's chest. One of Chow's arms draped around Mike, his palm resting on Mike's back. Mike cradled the

back of Chow's head in one hand and closed his eyes, feeling like he could die just from the delight of holding Chow.

Mike heard Chow mumble something then, his breath warm against Mike's skin. He pulled back. "What? Did you say something?" His heart hammered.

Chow looked up at Mike. "Cory," he said. "My name's Cory, Guv'nor."

Mike stared at him. This beautiful man was ever full of surprises. "Cory," Mike whispered. Even saying Cory's name was erotic and sweet for him. "And I'm not Guv'nor," he said. "I'm Mike."

Chow looked at him. "Mike."

Mike loved the way he said it. *Moike*.

God, he was in love! Mike caressed Cory's head again the way he had before and his touch had the same hypnotic effect as it had earlier. Cory's body relaxed completely in his arms and he sighed. It was on the tip of Mike's tongue to ask Cory who used to caress him this way, but he didn't want to pry. It would be all too easy to treat someone like Cory with no boundaries and that was the last thing Mike wanted to do.

In spite of Cory's earlier aroused state, he dropped right off to sleep as if Mike's stroking his head were a magic spell. Mike continued to hold him, listening to Cory's soft breathing. Finally his own exhaustion caught up with him and he dropped off to sleep, during which he had the most delicious dream that Cory was going down on him, massaging the entire length of his cock with his wet hot mouth.

However, when Mike opened his eyes for real, the morning sun pouring through the window, there Cory was, stripped of his t-shirt and pajama bottoms, crouched by Mike's groin. Cory's dark head bobbed up and down, Mike's whole cock engulfed in his mouth, pajama bottoms worked down past his hips to give Cory access.

How he'd slept through this Mike had no idea, but Cory's nakedness gave Mike a delicious view of Cory's smooth, naked body, muscles flexing with his movements. Mike groaned. Pleasure tightened Mike's balls, and tingled the length of his cock under Cory's mouth. Cory seemed to know exactly how much pressure to suck with to get

Mike to come. And Mike wasn't going to last much longer. It had been quite a while since someone had done this to him and he was more than ready.

Damn, it felt so amazing! All Mike could do was lie there and watch Cory's head moving. Wide-eyed with pleasure, Mike experienced the heated suction of Cory's mouth as he pulled back and descended on Mike's cock over and over, pausing every few strokes at the head to feather the tip of his tongue in the small opening. Cory obviously had a lot of experience giving blowjobs because Mike could have sworn Cory was going to suck his brain right out through the pee-hole of his cock. Not only that, but Cory had one finger pushed to the first knuckle in Mike's ass, and he wiggled it around while he sucked him. Man, Cory knew all the right angles.

Mike's lips parted to accommodate his heavy breathing while the rest of the world faded away, all of life distilled to the mind-blowing pleasure concentrated on his cock.

Up, down, tighter, looser. Cory's mouth worked his cock like he was licking his favorite flavored Popsicle. One more wiggle with his finger and one more swipe of his tongue around the head of his cock and Mike fucking exploded. Cory didn't even take his mouth off him as he came. Cory eagerly swallowed each splash of hot cum into his throat like it was a magic potion.

On and on, Mike's climax washed through him. It had to be the longest most intense climax he'd ever had. He emptied himself into Cory's greedy mouth and then sagged against the mattress, chest heaving.

Meanwhile, Cory sat up and back on his haunches. He wiped his lips with the palm of one hand. His large-eyed gaze watched Mike as if to see if Mike was pleased with how he'd sucked him.

However, Mike was speechless. His energy was temporarily drained by the sheer ecstasy Cory had just given him. By the time Mike could open his mouth to speak, Cory had turned around, lain down on his side facing Mike and fisted his own cock.

For a second, Mike thought he'd hurt Cory's feelings and that Cory was sulking, but no anger showed on Cory's face as he pumped his cock. He groaned softly, his full lips parting. His eyes darkened under heavy lids and he groaned again.

Mike watched, riveted, not only by the eroticism of it but also by the understanding his actions were giving him about Cory's life and his past. Of course Cory wouldn't expect Mike to turn around and suck him off in return. That's not what Cory had ever gotten. Cory was getting himself off because that's the only way it was going to happen.

Damn. Mike had always been a softie at heart, but everything about Cory cut into him on a level he'd never experienced before. Maybe Cory did feel rejected because rejection was a way of life for him. Well, Jesus, Mike didn't want him to have a moment more of it.

"Cory," he said softly.

Cory's arm stopped moving. He looked up at Mike. "Fancy another suck?"

Mike stared back at him. "No. I mean..." He raked a hand through his hair, bewildered. What should he do or say? "I mean...well...you did a nice thing for me and well...um...don't you want me to give you...a...suck?"

Cory's dark eyes widened as if Mike had said the most shocking thing to him. "That's not how it works," he said. "I suck you and then you watch me beat off." His voice echoed complete confusion.

Mike watched him, searching desperately for the right thing to say. "It doesn't have to be that way, Cory. Don't you want...more?"

Cory's eyes clouded over. God, the idea of reciprocity was completely alien to him. The discovery made Mike's heart ache.

"Like what do you mean?"

Mike's heart sped up. He reached out and brushed his thumb across Cory's cheek. "Well, I could show you...but *only* if you want me to."

A light went on in Cory's eyes, raising Mike's hopes. "You mean like holding me?"

Mike couldn't help but grin. "Whatever you want. Holding, licking, touching." He sat up and pulled off his t-shirt and pajama bottoms, then lay back down, looking at Cory. Mike's cock was hard, jutting intensely, craving Cory's hot body, but he held back. "Cory, do you understand what I mean about only if you want me to touch you?"

Cory appeared to be searching his mind. "Yes. It means if I say I don't want a suck then I don't get it."

Mike nodded. "Pretty much."

"But I do want it."

The admission heated Mike's blood even more. He leaned closer to Cory and cupped his cheek. Each moment that passed, Mike felt himself falling deeper in love. Cory was adorable, sexy, and...strangely...innocent. He was...precious. Mike smiled. "Well, me too."

Cory grinned, his dark almond-shaped eyes shining softly.

Permission granted, Mike moved closer and half covered Cory's body with his. A shiver of delight coursed through Mike, and sparks of heat darted along every inch their bodies touched – chests, stomachs and cocks.

Cory's mouth opened in what appeared to be surprise, and his heavy-lidded gaze locked with Mike's. Cory rested his hands on Mike's triceps. Just like in his dream.

Mike stared at Cory's bottom lip, a bit fuller than the top one, each side firm and plump, ripe for kissing. Mike just had to taste it. He brushed his lips across Cory's, a long, lingering sweep that enabled him to taste the softness of both Cory's lips. Mike breathed in Cory's scent, a blend of soap from his bath, natural male musk and the lingering tang of Mike's cum.

Mike kissed him again, teased his lower lip with playful jabs of the tip of his tongue. Though Cory's lips parted, his mouth remained slack, impassive.

A warning flutter erupted in Mike's gut and he raised his face from Cory's. Cory was staring up at him, a look of worry darkening his gaze.

"What's the matter?" Mike asked softly, "Don't you like kissing?"

"Master says kissing ain't for dirty whores like me."

Mike's mouth gaped open. He stared down at Cory. Anger blazed through every nerve ending of Mike's body. "You're not a dirty whore," he said in a fierce voice. "You're...beautiful...a prince. Better than a prince."

Cory laughed then, a rich yet gentle sound. "A prince! That's a good one, Guv." He laughed again, but his laughter broke Mike's heart open.

Mike shut him up by dipping his face to Cory's and capturing Cory's open mouth in a deep kiss. Mike greedily swiped his tongue over the moist insides of Cory's mouth, not giving Cory a second to protest. Back and forth Mike licked, tasting every soft nook and cranny, drinking in Cory's sweet, ripe flavor.

A deep sigh vibrated from Cory's throat into his mouth. Cory's whole mouth softened and he swirled his tongue against Mike's in obvious surrender. Cory parted his lips wider, letting Mike lick out the insides of his mouth where the tang of his cum lingered.

Mike's body sank against Cory's, and his cock, which had gotten hard again, rubbed the length of Cory's with the movement of their bodies.

Cory's fingers tightened on Mike's arms and he pulled his mouth back from Mike's. His lips were swollen and moist from Mike's kisses. "Fuck me, please," Cory said. As if for emphasis, he pushed against Mike's arms, trying to wriggle his body out from under Mike's, but Mike held him fast.

"Please, Cory, stay like this. I'll fuck you, but I want you under me, like lovers, please."

Cory's large eyes clouded and Mike had the terrible feeling Cory was going to call himself a "dirty whore" again. Before Cory could speak, Mike reached down and caressed Cory's balls. The heavy twin globes in their sac, plump and firm against Mike's hand felt delicious and he squeezed them gently.

Cory moaned and bucked his hips.

With a grin, Mike teased the base of Cory's cock with the pad of his thumb while seeking his tiny puckered hole with his index finger. Mike didn't have to worry about hurting Cory, for when he probed the entrance of his hole, Cory's ass swallowed up Mike's finger with a delicious suction.

"Ohhh," Cory groaned, his lips still against Mike's. The tiny sound held a note of surprise, as if Cory had never felt anything so good before. Cory's pleasure encouraged Mike and Mike moved his finger around a bit just inside the opening, pushing in to the first knuckle, as Cory had done to him.

"Ooooh." Cory's eyelids shuttered rapidly on this syllable and he bucked his hips again.

Mike grinned and pushed his finger in deeper. He swiveled it in widening circles, rubbing his fingertip against the fleshy insides of Cory's tight passage.

Cory pulled his mouth from Mike's, panting. "You've gotta fuck me, Guv'nor. Please."

Cory's heated plea turned Mike on this time. Way past turned on, his body raging with need. Cory's plea became something erotic, a lover asking for pleasure, rather than something that horrified or shocked him.

Mike smiled down at him and wiggled his finger inside him. "I'll fuck you, Cory, good and hard, if that's what you want, but you gotta say my name. Please."

Cory stared up at him, his dark golden skin flushed even darker, his full ripe lips parted, his breath panting, pulsing warmly onto Mike's chin.

"Go on, Cory. Say it. I beg you. Say my name and I'll fuck you like crazy."

Cory's dark eyes widened. Their pleading expression shook Mike to his roots. Cory's musky scent swirled in the air, released like fragrant incense by the heat of their bodies. Mike's cock, now hard enough to cut diamonds, pushed against Cory's inner thigh and he teased Cory with a light rub of it against him.

"Mike," he breathed.

Mike wiggled his finger inside Cory's ass again, not satisfied with one time. "Please, say it again."

Cory's fingers clutched wildly at Mike's arms, his fingertips digging into Mike's triceps. "Moike. Moike. Please!"

Mike looked at Cory and, his heart flooded with the most intense mixture of emotions he'd ever experienced. There was no logic to anything Mike felt, only raw, burning love. "Thank you." Mike bowed his head to Cory's and kissed his lusciously ripe mouth again while he slipped his finger out of Cory's behind and reached to the nightstand where he kept rubbers.

Cory lay quietly while Mike ripped open the packet and rolled on the rubber, then reached for a bottle of lube he kept with it. It had been awhile since he'd used these things and his hands trembled from the anticipation of burying his cock inside Cory's luscious body.

Drizzling some lube into his hand, Mike reached down again and smoothed it over Cory's ass.

"Ohhh, that's nice," Cory breathed. His eyelids fluttered and he spread his legs, giving Mike more access.

Mike grinned and pushed his oiled fingers deeper in, spreading some of the slippery, fruit-flavored stuff inside Cory's passage. The lube got warm as Mike massaged it around Cory's hole and Cory thrashed his head back and forth on the pillows, his breath panting as if Mike were already deep inside him, riding him hard.

Adjusting his larger body over Cory's, Mike nestled between Cory's legs, which Cory wrapped around Mike's hips. The look in Cory's eyes was that of both astonishment and greedy hunger. Cory was so readable to Mike right from the very start that Mike could almost feel Cory's surprise that two people could fuck in a position like this.

Guiding his cock to Cory's sweet oiled hole, Mike pushed the head in, loving the catch of Cory's breath as he did so. Cory tilted his head back and murmured, "More, Moike."

Whether he knew it or not, Cory was in complete control. Mike would fuck him as fast or as slow as he wanted. He'd worship Cory forever if that's what Cory wanted. And Cory didn't even have to ask.

Obediently Mike slid in deeper, loving the electric friction of his hard cock against the tight walls of Cory's passage. Delicious icy heat tingled right through the thin rubber. Mike pushed in all the way until their bodies touched.

"Yessss," Cory hissed, bucking wildly against Mike. "Ride me hard."

And man, Mike did so. He braced his body on his elbows and pushed his knees into the mattress so he didn't crush Cory. Cory's delicious scent of musk and soap filled the air around them, intensified by the sheen of sweat on their bodies.

Cory's hands stole from Mike's arms to his back, where he grabbed at Mike's muscles. Cory's lips stayed parted, his eyes wide and he stared, unseeing, yet glazed with delight.

Mike dipped his head down every few strokes and swiped his tongue across Cory's open lips, sometimes plunging deeper into his mouth, matching the strokes of his tongue with the strokes of his cock in Cory's delicious ass.

Harder and harder Mike thrust into him, barely pulling back all the way before sinking into him again. Whatever Mike did, no matter what angle he went at Cory's ass, Cory loved it. Cory moaned and groaned. He thrashed his head and even whispered Mike's name in that sexy cultured accent of his.

Mike was close to coming. The pressure built deep in his balls. Cory's ass was too tight and sweet. With every ounce of strength, Mike forced himself to slow down and he lowered his body onto Cory's so that his stomach could rub Cory's cock.

This drove Cory wild. "Oh, oh, oh!" he cried and clawed Mike's back.

Mike grinned at him and increased the friction of his body against Cory's cock.

That was it. Cory erupted. His cum shot in white-hot spurts, coating Mike's chest and oozing down his cock. Cory groaned long and soft the whole time he came, which seemed to last quite a while. By the time he'd finished, Mike's climax hit him hard and hot. His body jerked and he squeezed his eyes shut as he filled the rubber, his cock still buried to the hilt inside Cory.

After that, Mike was spent. He collapsed as lightly as he dared on top of Cory, his lips against Cory's shoulder.

Cory's slipped his hands from Mike's back to his arms. Cory's fingers loosened and tightened in an even rhythm on Mike's muscles, his thumbs brushing Mike's biceps. The tiny movements gave Mike the sense Cory was agitated.

He lifted his head from Cory's shoulder and looked at him.

To Mike's relief Cory's eyelids were heavy over his eyes and he looked...well...satisfied. However, there was a strange air of expectancy about him.

"Are you all right?" Mike asked. "Was that good for you?"

"Can I stay here a while with you before you lock me up?"

If someone had run a knife through Mike's heart, that question couldn't have been more painful. Not because he felt insulted, but because of the simple, matter-of-fact way in which Cory had asked. If Mike had had any doubts about the way Cory was treated, that one question told him everything he needed to know. In that moment, Mike found himself hoping that Benson *was* looking for Cory because it would give him an opportunity to kill the bastard.

It took Mike several moments to recover his presence of mind before he could answer that one. "Cory, I'd never lock you up. I care about you. I want you to be free and happy." He passed his hand over Cory's brow. Mike was still breathing heavily from their lovemaking and from the shock of Cory's question. "I mean, I need you not to leave the apartment for now only because...Benson might be looking for you, but

other than that..." He sighed and gazed down at Cory. "You can stay here with me as long as you want. I promise."

Cory blinked several times, his eyes seeming not to comprehend the essence of what Mike was saying. Well, after what appeared to be a lifetime of captivity, Mike couldn't imagine he'd understand just like that.

Cory remained quiet while Mike slipped out of him and got rid of the condom. He followed Mike to the bathroom and stood at the toilet with him, taking a piss at the same time and grinning up at Mike the whole time.

Back in the bedroom, Cory climbed right into bed and sat on his haunches, watching Mike.

Mike returned his gaze. It was painfully obvious that Cory couldn't ask for what he wanted. But Mike sensed they both wanted the same thing. "Cory, please? Come here."

Cory crept closer, lowering his body down onto the bed, his dark eyes still fastened on Mike's.

Mike reached out to him, wanting nothing more than to hold him.

A tiny smile lit Cory's voluptuous lips, still swollen from kissing. He lowered his body into Mike's arms and snuggled up next to him, his cheek against Mike's chest. Thank God it was a Sunday morning and there was time to snuggle. Mike closed his eyes and cradled the back of Cory's head. He brushed his fingertips over Cory's growing hair, savoring the sleek feel of it.

That's when Cory floored him yet again.

"Master cared about me too," Cory murmured. His breath ruffled Mike's chest hairs, tickling him pleasantly. "But I like your care better. It doesn't make me want to die."

Chapter Four

Cory couldn't sleep he was so excited. He couldn't believe Mike was holding him like this, just holding him. Mike's arms were strong, bulging with muscles, as was his chest, which had a delicious mat of dark hair, like his master had. Only Mike had let Cory rake his fingers through it as they lay there together. Mike *wanted* Cory to touch him, seemed to love it. Nothing was better than that. Well...except for resting in Mike's arms and watching him sleep.

Cory couldn't stop staring at Mike's face. He memorized every little detail, like his dark eyelashes resting against Mike's cheeks as he slept. Mike's skin was a tan color almost like Cory's own, and Mike had dark, heavy stubble. Geez, Mike probably had to shave at least twice a day.

Cory loved Mike's hair too, very dark brown, like Mike's eyes. Mike kept it short around the sides and longer on the top, long enough to have a part running down the middle of his scalp. His ears were nice too, the lobes just big enough to nibble on. Cory even loved the bump on Mike's nose. The tiny scar, a whiter shade than the rest of his skin, gave him a tough look. But Mike *wasn't* tough. That's what he'd seen in Mike's eyes that night when Mike had been staring at him through the fence. Cory had seen that Mike was basically gentle.

Cory sighed and continued staring at the sleeping man. Mike had a perfect cleft in his chin and his lips were softly sculpted and a dusky pink color. Ohhh. And the way Mike had kissed him. Cory had always felt he was missing something. He'd seen Master kissing women that way, and Cory had always wished he'd kiss him like that too. Now Cory knew what he'd been missing. Mike had been really angry when Cory had told him what Master said about kissing, but now, Cory could believe that kissing was for the likes of him too, and he wanted to do it all the time.

Mike sighed in his sleep. He chafed his lips together as if they were dry and he was trying to wet them in his sleep.

Cory stared, watching Mike's lips move. They *did* look dry. Cory's body came alive with heat. He swallowed hard and his heart pumped. Maybe he could just wet Mike's lips for him so they wouldn't be so dry...

Inching his body upward in Mike's arms, he slanted his lips over Mike's, touching them just a tiny bit.

Mmm. That little taste was delicious. Cory glanced at Mike's eyes. They remained closed. He looked again at Mike's lips. For a brief moment, he almost stopped, but couldn't. Mike just tasted too good. Cory leaned in again and gently ran the tip of his tongue across Mike's bottom lip.

That was one of the best-tasting things in the whole world! Better than bangers and mash. Mike's lip gleamed from Cory's tongue. Just another taste...that wouldn't hurt, would it? Cory licked Mike's lips again, following the seam of his lips. He couldn't stop it was so delicious. One lick led to the next...

A tickling feeling woke Mike up. He opened his eyes, reflexes kicking in fast enough so that he didn't jump.

Cory was licking Mike's bottom lip.

Mike's heart fluttered and he almost died of sweetness at the way Cory imitated Mike's kisses from earlier, jabbing lightly at Mike's lip with the tip of his tongue, tasting his lips and beard stubble with tentative swipes.

Mike moaned softly and parted his lips for Cory. Twice now Cory had woken him up in the most delicious way. His arms were already around Cory, hands on Cory's smooth muscled back. With light pressure, Mike urged Cory closer.

Cory sank willingly against him, his bare chest pressed to Mike's. Obviously encouraged by Mike's response, Cory plunged his tongue eagerly into Mike's mouth, lapping at his tongue and teeth, tickling the roof of his mouth, sighing as he did so.

Mike met Cory's tongue with his, slid it against the moist warmth. Never before had a kiss been so erotic for him. The smell of their earlier sex still clung to the sheets, infusing the air from the heat of their bodies, warm and sweaty from sleeping piled together naked.

A soft groan vibrated in Cory's throat and he shifted position, working his body on top of Mike's. Cory's movement made the lengths of their cocks slide together.

Mike groaned softly and caressed Cory's back. He sensed Cory's need to explore, to do whatever he wanted. Cory's chest crushed against Mike's and he stroked Mike's cheeks with eager fingertips, testing Mike's heavy morning stubble, which Cory seemed to like very much. Cory covered Mike's lips with his, and eagerly dueled his tongue with Mike's, at the same time, rubbing his cock against Mike's with rhythmic jerks of his hips.

Cory's eyelids fluttered closed and he groaned again into Mike's mouth, seeming lost in a haze of pleasure. Cory's tongue stopped moving, but his lips remained open softly over Mike's, his breath pulsing warmly into Mike's mouth as he humped him.

Mike moaned. God, he loved the way Cory was using the length of Mike's cock to get himself off. *Let him*, Mike thought. *Let him use me all he wants.*

Cory's grinding motions grew faster and harder and he slipped his hands down to the mattress on either side of Mike, bracing himself, his mouth never leaving Mike's.

The slide of Cory's silky hard cock against his was so fucking erotic that in the next moment Mike came. His cum gushed onto their stomachs and cocks.

Cory stopped moving and looked down at Mike, his eyes wide as if he hadn't expected that. Without speaking, he rolled off Mike and lay back against the pillows, palming his cock, slick with Mike's cum, and started stroking it.

Mike watched him for a few seconds while he caught his breath, enjoying the erotic sight of Cory pleasuring himself, but as soon as his breathing quieted a bit, Mike leaned over and stayed Cory's hand by grasping his wrist.

Cory looked at him, his eyes dusky, a light sheen of sweat on his golden skin.

Mike grinned. "Please, let me."

Cory let Mike pull his hand off his cock.

Mike leaned over and ran the flat of his tongue up Cory's cock. Cory was delicious beyond belief. The silky skin of his shaft had a light musky taste, mixed with the tang of Mike's cum.

Cory groaned. "What are you doing, Mike?"

Mike lifted his face and grinned. "Making you feel good. That's what."

Cory didn't answer so Mike put his attention back on Cory's cock. He feathered the tip of his tongue in the tiny hole at the tip, grateful that Cory didn't try to stop him. To Mike's delight, Cory slipped a hand into Mike's hair, just long enough on top for him to tangle his fingers into. Mike licked Cory's cock again and Cory laid his head back against the pillows and closed his eyes.

Satisfied that he would accept the gift of pleasure, Mike ran his tongue up and down the smooth hard length, right to Cory's balls, which Mike laved eagerly until Cory whimpered. Encouraged, Mike licked his way back up to the head of Cory's cock, took the whole plump head into his mouth and sucked it gently between his lips and tongue. "Ohhhh." Cory thrashed his head back and forth. His fingers tightened in Mike's hair.

Mike swallowed Cory deeper. The head of Cory's cock brushed the roof of his mouth. At the same time he cupped Cory's balls, lightly massaging them with the palm of his hand.

Guttural groans slipped from Cory's throat, one after the other, matching the speed and tightness of Mike's mouth on his cock. Copying what Cory had done to him, Mike

stopped every few strokes at the tip to lick the tiny opening and run his tongue around the ridges of the head, earning a grab of his hair each time. He slid his hand from Cory's balls to his tight hole, which he teased in light circles with his index finger.

Cory bucked his hips. "Oh yes, please!" he breathed.

Obediently, Mike pushed his finger right in to the first knuckle and then dove down again, taking Cory's cock in almost to his pubic hair. Cory's cock twitched in Mike's mouth and pulsed. Mike pulled back, releasing Cory's cock just as spurts of hot cum hit his cheeks and throat. He enjoyed watching Cory climax and listened to his moans of pleasure. Maybe Cory was so into it because it was new, or because Mike really took extra care with him. Either way, Mike didn't care, he loved how much Cory was enjoying being with him.

When Cory had finished coming, Mike went to grab for a tissue to wipe off his face, but Cory grasped Mike's wrist and leaned into him. Cory lapped up his own cum from Mike's cheeks and chin. It was a little strange at first that Cory did this, but no less enjoyable or erotic.

When he was done, Mike wiped his face anyway and settled in the bed with Cory spooned against him. They still had a bit of time before Mike had to get up and make breakfast and open the gym and Mike was going to savor every moment.

Without thinking, he started stroking Cory's head the way Cory liked.

"Mmm," Cory murmured. "My mum used to do that."

Mike's heart squeezed in his chest. Now he understood. Frankly, he was relieved to know Cory had gotten some affection in his life. "Where is she now, your mum?"

"Master says she's sleeping with the angels," Cory said. "When my dad got punched in the chest in a fight and didn't wake up, Mum ran out of the flat with me and down the street to the tube station. She told me we were leaving the master and going back to Hong Kong where she came from. Master found us though and took her away. He told me she was with the angels even though she'd done something bad and had to be punished."

"Oh God, Cory." Mike didn't know what to say after that. The horror of Cory's life was inconceivable to him. Everyone Mike knew had suffered, but this... Mike just held him, stroking his head and pressed a kiss into his hair.

"Mike."

Hearing Cory say his name the way he did melted Mike to his toes. "Yeah?"

"You taste better than bangers and mash. That's what I get when I win my fights."

Being Italian and growing up on pasta and pizza, Mike didn't know what bangers and mash were, but he figured it was some kind of English food. He decided to ask Eric at the gym about bangers and mash so he could get Cory some. Eric was from London and would surely know.

Mike kissed Cory's head again. "Cory, you can have bangers and mash any time you want, and you *don't* have to fight at all to get them."

Cory looked at him, his dark eyes full of amazement. "But that doesn't make sense, it don't. You don't fuck, suck or fight, you don't get fed."

In Mike's head he could just hear Benson saying that to Cory. "Jesus, Cory, I don't live that way, okay? You don't have to *do* anything for me to love you or to feed you."

When Cory continued to look at him blankly, all Mike could do was sigh and hold him, breathing in his musky scent. Being the romantic sap that Mike was and falling crazy in love with Cory, he felt hot tears sting his eyes. "You'll see, Cory," he said softly, "We'll start with breakfast now."

Cory pulled back and looked at him. "But I already fucked you and sucked you. I earned my breakfast."

Mike cupped his cheek, brushing Cory's cheekbone with his thumb. "Yeah, but I fucked you and sucked you back."

For a moment Cory just stared at him. Mike thought he was still blanking out, but then his full soft lips broke out in a grin and he started laughing, his rich soft laugh that

Mike was fast growing to adore. Mike laughed too and Cory fell into his arms, his muscular body shaking with laughter against Mike.

Of course, they both got hard again and ended up kissing for a long time and jerking each other off, after which Mike finally tore himself away from Cory's hot naked body, slipped into a t-shirt, boxers and jeans then went into the kitchen.

Mike made a feast for Cory, every breakfast food for which he had the ingredients in his small kitchen. Having grown up with an Italian mother, he was used to keeping a fully stocked kitchen at all times and hadn't escaped growing up without learning how to cook. Mike gave Cory heaping plates full of scrambled eggs, bacon and pancakes, several servings of which Cory gobbled up, washing his food down with two full glasses of orange juice and coffee. Cory ate very fast, as if someone were going to snatch his food away before he could finish, but Mike said nothing, only watched him while he smoked a cigarette.

Mike had to admit that even though he was happy in love and thrilled that Cory was here with him, along with his presence came the specter of Benson. Puffing his cigarette, Mike decided that he'd spend some time in his office downstairs, calling the local hospitals, seeing if maybe he'd been brought to one the night of the fire. Perhaps there was a way he could get an idea of Benson's whereabouts.

Mike also decided to install a first-rate alarm system in his place, just in case. The funny thing was, even though he knew Cory could kill Benson with his bare hands if he wanted to, he had the funny feeling that Cory wouldn't ever do it. Something about the way Benson had trained him kept Cory from turning on his abusers, instead believing that somehow he was getting what he deserved.

After breakfast, Cory helped Mike do the dishes and tidy up. Cory gave Mike the impression of a little kid helping his mom in the kitchen. When they'd finished, Mike led Cory into the living room, explaining to him that he had to go downstairs to work but that he'd be checking back on him and Mike was right nearby if he needed him. "You can watch TV if you'd like, or listen to music." Mike flipped on the television set

and handed Cory the remote. "After work, I'll get us some pizzas for supper and then come back. How's that?"

Cory looked at him and smiled, again, melting him down to his toes with the way the smile reached his large eyes. Looking at the sweetness in their brown depths, it was hard to equate Cory with the vicious fighter he'd seen knock a huge guy senseless in the pit-cage. Mike felt suddenly very sad having to leave him, even though it was only for a few hours. He took Cory in his arms and kissed him. With gentle strokes of his tongue, he tasted Cory's lips until he started to get yet another hard-on. Cory kissed him back now with equal fervor, but Mike forced himself to pull gently away. "I really have to get downstairs." He pointed to the remote in Cory's hand. "Do you know how to use one of these things?"

Cory held it up and looked at it, then at Mike. "No."

Mike explained to him how to switch the channels and raise and lower the volume, then kissed him one last time and went downstairs. While he was there, he called the area hospitals and explained who he was looking for. It turned out that several people had been rushed to the emergency room that night from the fire, but no one with the name Benson.

Mike hung up, and raked a hand through his hair. No doubt that if one of them had been Benson, he probably had aliases or some shit like that. Mike got nowhere with that and the dead end only intensified his fears.

Finally at five o'clock, Mike closed up and went to Sid's where he picked up two large pizzas with everything and chicken parmigiana for him and Cory. He paid for the food and carried it back to his building, his heart lightening in anticipation of seeing Cory.

Earlier that afternoon, he'd gone upstairs a couple of hours after opening the gym to check on Cory and found him sitting on the rug in front of the television set, watching a children's program. Cory was so mesmerized by the picture on the screen, he didn't even hear Mike come in. Mike had smiled and called Cory's name so he

wouldn't be startled, touched by the wholehearted intense way Cory did everything in his life, including sex.

Mike let himself into the building and was halfway up the stairs with their supper when he heard a crash come from the apartment.

"Help!" a man yelled.

Mike's blood went cold and he bounded the rest of the way up the steps.

* * * * *

"Help! Help! Mike!"

Mike recognized Noodle's voice. He raced to the top of the stairs and barged through the partially open door, half relieved and half horrified by what he saw.

Cory had Noodle pinned to the middle of the living room floor, his knees digging into Noodle's thin chest, one powerful fist raised, poised to smash down onto Noodle's face. Mike's skinny drugged-out friend would not take a blow like that well.

Mike set down the food and rushed in. "Cory, Cory! It's all right! He's a friend."

"Mike!" Noodle groaned. "Get...him...ugh." His skinny arms were flailing, but Cory wouldn't let up.

Mike knelt down and put a gentle hand on Cory's shoulder. "Cory, please. He won't hurt you."

Cory looked at Mike, his dark eyes like two small storms. "It's not me I'm worried about."

Cory's fierce expression told Mike without words what Cory meant. Cory was protecting *Mike*. Well, damn, he was almost right. Since they were kids, Mike had gotten into some bad scrapes trying to protect Noodle from the bad people he got messed up with. As usual, Mike's heart melted and he smiled at Cory, in spite of his friend's agony, pinned under one of the most powerful fighters on the planet.

Mike put his hand around Cory's upper arm. Cory's muscles were tensed and fully pumped, conveying how ready to pummel Noodle he'd been. Mike wondered how a

skinny malink like Noodle had gotten Cory so riled. "I've known Noodle since forever. Don't worry." He tugged Cory's arm gently, urging him off Noodle.

Cory's arm muscles remained tight, but reluctantly, he lifted his knees off Noodle. Noodle rolled onto his side, gasping. "Damn," he panted between breaths.

Mike observed him, making sure Noodle wasn't injured, then pulled Cory against him. Cory was trembling and Mike caressed the spot on his head that relaxed him.

With each stroke, Cory's body relaxed. When Cory was calmed enough, Mike gently released him, noticing that Cory kept a suspicious, ready-to-attack-again gaze on Noodle. "I didn't want him to hurt you, Mike," he mumbled.

Mike squeezed Cory's shoulder gently. He was shocked at how much love he could feel for one human being. "It's all right," he said softly, "I appreciate it." He pressed a kiss to Cory's head and released him, turning his attention to the man Cory had laid out flat.

Noodle groaned again. He was clutching his stomach and still breathed heavily. Noodle seemed all right enough for someone who'd been blindsided, so Mike reached out, grasped his arm and helped him to his feet. "This guy attacked me out of nowhere," Noodle mumbled. "All I did was knock on the door." He groaned a protest as Mike led him to the sofa and eased him down into the cushions. "I heard the TV on so I thought you was home."

Mike made a mental note to keep the back door to the building locked from now on as he helped Noodle lean back. Noodle groaned as his skinny torso sank into the cushions. Only then did Noodle look up. His gaze fell on Cory who remained standing where Mike had left him.

Cory's fists pulsed in his pre-fight stance and his look remained riveted on Noodle.

Noodle's eyes widened. "Holy shit! That's the Chow! What the hell is he doing here?"

"Don't call him the Chow, Noodle. His name's Cory. If you call him the Chow again, I'll kick you the fuck out." Mike found his own fists clenching and was shocked at his ferocity, like a lion defending her cub. Never before in twenty-some-odd years of friendship had he spoken in such a way to Noodle, even though he could be such a *cafone*.

Noodle held up his hands. "All right, man. Sorry. Can't help it if I'm shocked as hell to see the...I mean...him...here."

Mike glanced at Cory. To his surprise, Cory had sunk to a kneeling position, his fists on his thighs. Cory's facial expression looked more relaxed but no less alert.

"Yeah, well, he was losing his fight," Mike said. "Donnie put him in the pit-cage with four guys at once. A riot and then a fire broke out. He would have been killed."

Noodle looked at Mike. "Whoa! Hot shit! Hey, got a smoke?"

It was then Mike saw the especially dark circles under Noodle's eyes and the whacked-out look in their watery blue color and knew Noodle had been using again. As if he'd ever be clean and sober. Mike sighed. "Sure." He pulled the pack from his jeans pocket and handed Noodle one, giving him a light, as usual. "You might as well stay for supper. I brought plenty of pizza."

Noodle exhaled a puff of smoke, his pale, bloodshot eyes now taking in Cory. Mike could just imagine what Noodle was thinking. The thought made Mike slightly uneasy.

Mike looked one more time at Cory and then rose heavily from the sofa. He expected Cory to follow him into the kitchen, then realized Cory was keeping watch. That also made Mike uneasy. He sensed the tension the whole time while he retrieved the boxes of takeout from the floor and busied himself setting it up at the kitchen table. Finally, Mike decided that with Cory's past, it would only be natural for him to be suspicious.

As Mike worked, he kept one ear trained on the living room. Every few moments, Noodle would ask Cory a question about himself and Cory would answer with silence. Mike couldn't help smiling.

Well, maybe Cory had an intuitive feeling about Noodle's penchant for getting into trouble. Even though Noodle was so skinny and didn't look like much of a threat, Mike knew it was actually weakness that could often get a guy into trouble. And Noodle had always had a gift for getting into trouble. In this case, it could be deadly trouble. Noodle was using. When Noodle was using, he was borrowing money from gangsters. No doubt the time was near when Noodle would need to make quick cash again. The knowledge put Mike on edge. Of course, if Benson ended up offering a reward to get Cory back, Noodle could now lead him directly to his quarry. All Noodle would have to do was check the fight club blogs on the Internet. No doubt, Cory's disappearance would be big news.

Trying to ignore that niggling doubt, Mike finished setting up by putting sodas and beers on the table and then calling Cory and Noodle into the kitchen.

Noodle straggled in, his cigarette dangling from his thin lips. Cory trailed after him, still wearing a guarded look. Through the whole meal, Cory rarely took his eyes off Noodle.

After supper, they sat around in the living room and watched TV for a while. Unlike this afternoon, Cory didn't stare at the screen with absorbed fascination. He sat close to Mike, dividing his attention between the comedy show they were watching and looking at Noodle.

When the show was over, Mike walked Noodle down to the street. The closer they got to the building's entrance, the more uneasy Mike became. He turned to Noodle at the entrance of his building. Desperation chilled his blood. "Listen, Noodle," he said, "you gotta keep it really quiet that Cory is here, okay? If his owner finds him, he'll kill him. Cory lost that guy a shitload of cash and if he survived the fire, I'm sure he'll be looking for him." For emphasis, Mike reached out and grasped the sleeve of Noodle's grungy t-shirt. "Please, man."

Noodle stared at Mike as if he were deciding whether to believe him or not. But finally he nodded. "Sure, Mikey. Whatever you say." He puffed on the cigarette Mike

had given him just before going outside. "The Chow...I mean Cory...he's awfully protective of you. I thought for sure I was a goner, the way he charged me. He moved so fast I barely saw him coming, just like in cartoons and shit."

Mike sensed an undertone in Noodle's words. He remembered the way he'd threatened Noodle and understood that Noodle felt rejected. "Well, he's had one of the hardest lives I've heard of. Just fucking awful. I don't want anything else to happen to him. But you're the only one besides me who knows he's here."

Noodle held up his hand. His demeanor conveyed to Mike that he didn't grasp the seriousness of the situation but was agreeing anyway. "Whatever you say, Mikey. I owe you big-time and so I'll keep your secret."

"Thanks, Noodle. Listen, whatever you need, money, food, anything, you just come here. You can hang out at the gym all day if you want." Mike heard the plea in his own voice, hoping that if he just gave Noodle whatever he needed, he had a better chance of staying out of trouble, and of giving Mike potential trouble. *Bad* trouble.

Noodle tossed his butt on the sidewalk. "Thanks, man. Just one more cigarette before I go would be great."

Mike obliged him and watched Noodle saunter away, his ashes glowing in the night. When Noodle disappeared around the corner, Mike sighed and went back upstairs.

When he reached the apartment, it was dark and quiet, the only light one small lamp he'd left on in the living room. The quiet made his heartbeat rise. "Cory?" he called softly.

No answer.

Mike's heart went zero to sixty. He bounded to the bedroom and rushed in.

Relief. Cory sat on the edge of the bed, still dressed, his hands in his lap. His head hung down and he didn't look up.

Alarmed, Mike inched toward Cory, his gaze riveted on the top of Cory's dark head.

"Cory?" Mike switched on the bedside lamp. The soft light cast Cory's handsome face, almost all healed now, in shadows.

Cory looked up at him finally. The expression on his face startled Mike into silence. Cory's dark eyes glistened with unshed tears. Small lines crinkled the middle of his forehead and his lower lip trembled.

A shiver ran over every surface of Mike's skin and he knelt in front of him, putting his hands over Cory's. "Cory, what is it?"

For several long moments, Cory didn't say anything, just stared back at Mike, his bottom lip trembling. One tear rolled from his left eye and made a track down his cheek. Mike watched the droplet slide over Cory's cheekbone and down the smooth plane of his cheek, and drop off his jawbone onto the t-shirt Mike had given him.

"Oh my God, Cory." Mike squeezed Cory's hands gently. He sensed Cory's suffering and wished like hell he could just make all the pain of Cory's life disappear in the same simple yet magical way Cory's sweetness made his bones melt.

"You saved my life," Cory said softly.

His words shot through Mike, straight to his core, just like everything else Cory said. Mike had a fleeting vision of Cory on the dirty mat of the pit-cage, his body being assaulted by boots and fists, by bloodthirsty cretins who didn't give a shit about the man inside.

"I didn't want you to die." Mike squeezed Cory's hands again. A memory rose of the way their gazes had locked that first time, after Cory had won the premier fight. "Did you know I'd do that?" The question popped out and Mike felt immediately like a jerk. How could Cory have known such a thing?

Cory shook his head. "No. But when I looked at you that time from the pit and saw the way you were looking back at me, all tender-like, sweet, the way my mum used to

look at me, only better, I thought to myself, that's what *I* want." He shook his head. "I knew I could never have it, so I tried to die."

Holy fucking shit. That confession nailed Mike like no other words ever had. If there was an exact moment that Mike officially fell in love with Cory, that was *it*. Mike lifted both Cory's hands and brought them to his lips, something he'd never done with another human being in his life. Mike kissed Cory's hands softly and held them like that, his eyes closed.

"Mike?"

Cory's soft voice made Mike open his eyes and look up.

Cory was staring down at him, his expression completely wide-eyed and full of disbelief.

"What is it, Cory?"

"Does this mean I'm your sweetheart?"

Marron! Was there anything Cory could say that didn't floor him or make his heart squeeze with love? Mike grinned at him, feeling like a lovesick adolescent. "Absolutely you're my sweetheart."

Light came back into Cory's eyes then and he grinned. "Good job that, 'cuz you sure as hell are mine."

Mike laughed and released Cory's hands so he could rise up higher on his knees and embrace him. After a long hug during which Mike breathed in the clean musky scent of Cory's skin and caressed his hair, sleek and soft, he pulled back so they could kiss.

Cory readily accepted his kiss. He parted his lips and danced his tongue playfully yet hungrily against Mike's tongue. Cory fell back, taking Mike with him and Mike could feel Cory's cock, already hard against his leg. Cory ground his pelvis against Mike's thigh, and his burgeoning hard-on rubbed Mike's.

Lust tore through Mike, fueled by his intoxicating passion for Cory. Eager to taste every inch of Cory's body he hadn't yet tasted, he slipped Cory's t-shirt up, tried to work it off him without ever having to lift his lips from Cory's.

Cory raised his arms above his head, giving the t-shirt a straight path to slip off Cory's magnificent torso. Mike broke their kiss long enough to work the shirt up Cory's arms and then strip his own off. Once they were both shirtless, he lowered his body back down to Cory's.

Starting with Cory's mouth, which he had already worked to an erotically swollen, moist state with his kisses, Mike proceeded to lick Cory's jaw, his throat, his earlobes, collarbone and chest. He took a long time with each quarter-sized nipple. The dark rounds pebbled immediately under his tongue and Cory panted. "That's amazing," he breathed. Cory slid his fingers into Mike's hair and sighed.

Mike bit gently down on Cory's nipple and Cory let loose with strings of what must be British curses, each one conveying the wildly aroused state he was in.

Of course, when Mike was finished with Cory's nipples, he moved to one of his armpits. He pushed his nose into the soft warm crevice, breathing in Cory's scent, sweet and musky with that newly bathed silkiness from his recent shower.

Cory lifted his head from the pillow and giggled. "What're you doing, Mike?"

Mike raised his face from Cory's underarm and grinned. His cock throbbed, ached to fuck Cory but he felt mellow at the same time, as if the warm, pleasant-smelling intimacy of Cory's body had worked aromatherapy on him. "What does it look like I'm doing?" Mike nuzzled Cory's underarm again and Cory lay down again and giggled some more.

Apparently, Cory's question had been more one of curiosity than protest, for he lay still, his chest rising and falling, his lips parted, sighing in pleasure as Mike went back to his sniffing, licking and exploring.

Even though Mike could have spent an indefinite amount of time at Cory's underarms, there were other parts of him too luscious to ignore. Mike licked a trail

down Cory's side and back to his stomach. With the tip of his tongue, Mike followed the etchings of Cory's stomach muscles until he reached Cory's belly button. Mmm. Discovery. A whole new spot to enjoy and savor. Cory's navel, an innie, was the perfect little round hole and Mike teased it with his tongue, swiveling it around the indentation with the tip.

"Oooh, fucking amazing that." Cory's voice dropped to a guttural whisper and his fingers tightened in Mike's hair.

One of Mike's hands drifted lazily down to Cory's cock. Over the soft material of Cory's sweatpants, Mike slid his touch up and down the contours of the bulge. Cory hissed and swore again.

Mike grinned. He slipped his hand under the elastic waistband and wrapped his fingers lightly around the deliciously hard cock underneath. Cory groaned again and Mike pumped the silky hard length in short, gentle bursts while his tongue remained implanted in Cory's belly button.

Cory seemed lost in pleasure. His hips were thrashing. "Mike, suck it, please."

Mike smiled against Cory's skin, loving the edge in Cory's voice when he gave orders. Mike was only too happy to obey.

He sat up and slipped Cory's pants off him, letting Cory's thick, delicious-looking erection spring free. He then did the same with his own pants and boxers and had Cory scoot up toward the middle of the bed so Mike could straddle his face and take Cory's cock into his mouth at the same time without slipping off the side of the bed.

Damn, Mike was instantly glad for their sixty-nine. He swallowed Cory's delicious cock almost to the base, sucking it tightly but gently in his lips, massaging the length with the flat of his tongue.

Cory swallowed Mike in deep too. Cory licked Mike's cock wildly and probed his tight hole with one finger. Man, the dual action of Cory's hardness and musk massaging the roof of Mike's mouth and Cory's hot tongue on his cock was one of the best experiences in his entire life, aside from falling in love with Cory in the first place.

Mike went wild, sucking Cory like mad, leaving his cock every few strokes to lick the crinkly firm skin of his balls. Even Cory's balls tasted great and Mike laved them in fervent circles. Cory groaned with each swipe of Mike's tongue. Cory's wildness made Mike want to do more and he licked his way to the little space between Cory's balls and his puckered hole, around the small bud until Cory groaned again and then returned to Cory's cock.

All Mike could hear were the sounds of their groans and sighs of pleasure as they worked each other's cocks, their hands anchored on each other's hips. The entire outside world with all its potential threats to them melted away for just a little while from the pleasure they were giving each other.

Cory's sucking felt too good for him not to come. Cory tugged Mike's cock with his lips and sent Mike over the edge. He moaned with the tiny spasms. He felt Cory's mouth on him, drinking in every bit of cum that gushed out.

Mike pulled his mouth away, letting Cory's cum splash on his cheeks and throat. And then they both collapsed, Mike rolling onto his side so he didn't crush Cory.

They lay there, panting, dazed and Mike stared at Cory's legs. Lazily he toyed with Cory's knees, tracing his kneecaps and then skating his touch down his shins, tracing the slight curves of Cory's legs.

"Mike?"

Mike heard a catch in Cory's voice that made him nervous. He reached for a tissue on the nightstand and wiped his face quickly so he could settle back down beside Cory. He pulled Cory against him. "Tell me what you're thinking," Mike murmured against the softness of Cory's growing hair. Asking Cory what was bothering him would be insulting considering the answer was painfully obvious.

"Was I wrong? I mean...I caused a lot of trouble for Master."

Mike felt a spike of anger. "Of course you weren't wrong. Why would you think that?"

Cory shrugged. "He tried to be good to me."

Mike's blood froze. He'd never considered that Cory would feel guilty toward Benson. To Mike, the situation was clear-cut. "He made you a slave. He..." Mike caught himself from saying any more about how Benson had killed Cory's mom. "He took every bit of money you earned from fighting and kept it for himself," he said instead. The fact that Cory would have been a millionaire by now had he kept his earnings also disgusted Mike.

Mike held Cory softly. Cory remained quiet and Mike was coming to recognize Cory's silences as periods of introspection.

"I don't have to go back, do I?" Cory sounded small and frightened, such a strange contradiction for one of the toughest fighters in the world.

His question almost made Mike cry and he held Cory possessively tight against him. "No," he said, hearing the hard anger in his own voice. "I'll kill whoever tries to take you away from me. I promise."

Cory squeezed Mike and his body relaxed in Mike arms. "That bloke who was here."

Prickles cascaded down Mike's arms. "You mean Noodle?"

He nodded. "Yeah. Him. Made me nervous, that one. Made me think of Master, he did."

Mike felt a new wave of anger and made a mental note not to let Noodle anywhere near Cory. At the same time, the parallel Cory made confused him. Mike couldn't see the resemblance and wondered at Cory's thought process. "What d'you mean?"

Cory looked up. He was quiet for several moments in that thoughtful way of his. "Well, he wants you to do everything for him, like. He doesn't want to do it himself and he'd sell his own mum to get what he wants."

Mike stared down into Cory's eyes, stunned at his bull's-eye assessment of Noodle's personality. Well, if anyone would recognize a user, it would be Cory. In his entire life, Mike hadn't met anyone who'd been used more than Cory.

Mike sighed and began to caress Cory's brow. Immediately, a tiny smile played on Cory's lips and his breathing deepened. With each caress, Cory's body melted against Mike's.

Mike lay like that, holding Cory and stroking him for a long time. After their conversation, Mike found it incredibly difficult to fall asleep. All night, Cory's words about Noodle rang through his mind, fueling the uneasy feeling he'd already had when he found Noodle in the apartment with Cory.

Mike had known Noodle too long and too well not to know that somehow, the guy would find a way to cause trouble for him and Cory.

It was only a matter of time.

Chapter Five

While waiting for Noodle's other shoe to drop, Mike used the time to have a really state-of-the-art alarm system installed in both the gym and upstairs. He even had one of those silent-alarm buttons put in several places, like under the surface of the desk in his office. Just like in banks, he could push the button discreetly and send the police hurtling down the streets to his place, sirens blaring. The whole to-do cut significantly into his profits, but considering it was to protect the most precious love of his life, it was worth every damn penny.

Several times he told Cory they should just go away, but Cory begged him not to. Cory couldn't bear the thought of driving Mike from his home and Mike saw just how guilty Cory felt. Of course, that, like everything else about the man he loved, broke Mike's heart. But he agreed to stay.

Cory spent most of his time upstairs during the day. Mike hated keeping him sequestered like that, but Cory actually didn't seem to mind at all. He was good at tidying the place and doing the wash, something that was needed frequently considering how much they messed up their sheets every night.

Cory also took to reading. His reading level was like that of a grade school kid, but he was proving to be sharp as hell and rapidly improved even without much tutoring. Almost every day he asked Mike for books of a higher reading level. Happily Mike checked piles of stuff out for him at the library and also ordered young adult novels for him online so he could keep the book for his very own.

In the evenings after Mike had closed the gym, they'd have supper, during which Cory recounted the stories he'd read that day. Then they'd go back downstairs and work out. Sometimes they'd spar in the little boxing ring Mike had. Needless to say, however, their sparring always disintegrated into wrestling matches, bodies writhing

and twisting together on the mat, while they grunted and laughed, ending up in erotic positions that ended with them both half naked, sweats pushed down to their knees, giving each other fervent blowjobs.

In all that time, Noodle actually didn't come around that much. As summer passed into early fall, Mike began to think his warning to Noodle about throwing him the fuck out if he called Cory the Chow made Noodle feel left out, rejected. And that certainly wasn't Mike's intent.

In spite of everything, he didn't want to be mean to Noodle. However, he had to be realistic about Noodle's character and weaknesses. Thankfully, when Noodle did come around, it was during business hours when Cory was upstairs. When the weather began to sharpen and the leaves changed colors, Mike even found himself believing it was possible that the whole thing had blown over and Benson had either died or recovered and cut his losses.

The moment he heard the car motor outside on the street one evening, an intuitive chill passed up his spine and Mike realized he should have known better than to believe they were out of danger.

Mike froze. He dropped the paperwork he'd been working on.

Cory had been reading. He looked up from his seat on the other side of Mike's desk. He must have had the same premonition Mike had for he too froze and a wary look darkened his face.

Mike had already locked the front door but when he heard the crash of glass, he ordered Cory to get under his desk. Cory stood up, his fists clenching immediately. "I'll take care of them, Mike."

Mike gave him a hard look and pointed. "No! Do as I say."

Footsteps crunched across the glass.

Without another word, Cory scrambled over the surface of the desk, scattering papers and books while Mike rolled his chair back so Cory could hide under the desk.

Mike pressed the silent-alarm button and then sat there, hiding Cory. His heart raced so hard it felt like it was standing still in his chest. He couldn't even move to wipe the sweat off his palms.

"Oh, Cooooorrrrryyy! Where are you, you little 'ore?"

Mike's blood froze in his veins at the familiar, menacing voice. So, against all hope, Noodle *had* finally ratted them out. Mike immediately regretted not selling the gym and taking Cory to his sister's place in San Francisco as he'd wanted to. He should never have let his soft spot for Cory talk him out of common sense. More footsteps crunched through the broken glass and Mike could hear Benson and at least one other person moving about.

"I'll find you, you little fucker."

They walked around more, the sounds coming closer to the back, where the office was. The light was still on and Mike knew it was obvious he and Cory were there. Never before had he understood the expression *fish in a barrel* so clearly. The fact that Benson didn't come directly to the office gave Mike the sense he was toying with Cory, trying to frighten him.

"After all I done for you," Benson went on, "this is 'ow you pay back your master. You bloody little tosser! I know you're in 'ere. And when I catch you, I'm going to cut your bollocks off and feed 'em to you before I slit your throat."

Cory reached out and gripped Mike's knee. This was one of those moments Mike saw the frightened child Benson had taken for a slave after killing his mother.

Mike put his hand over Cory's, squeezing him, as if he could convey his promise of months ago to protect him.

"I made you what you are today, Cory. Your dad was a bloody little guttersnipe on the streets of 'ong Kong when I found 'im. Would a died a loser wit'out me. So would you 'ave done, you little bitch. Get out 'ere right now!"

Benson appeared in the doorway of the office, leaning on a cane.

One side of Benson's face was scarred, the skin red and puckered. "'Ey, I know you." A wicked grin came to his lips. "So, Cory, replaced me already, 'ave you? But do his cock feel as good up your arse as mine did?"

Cory's fingers tightened on Mike's knee.

"Cory isn't here," Mike told him. He worked as hard as he ever had in his life to look calm, even threatening. However, there was no way to lie to a liar like Benson.

Benson grinned. His glittering dark eyes showed that he wasn't fooled. "Of course he ain't, Guv'nor. Your skinny friend was lying, I'm sure." He hobbled into the office, followed by the goon who used to hold Cory's leash. A brand-new collar and leash hung from one hand, a gun with a silencer on it in his other.

Benson nodded to him. "Go on, Duffie. Flush the little rat out of 'is 'iding place."

The guy aimed the gun right at Mike and before Mike could move, Duffie squeezed the trigger. A blinding flash of pain unlike any Mike had ever felt sliced through the right side of his chest just under his shoulder. The bullet impact knocked Mike out of his seat to the floor.

"No!" Cory yelled and scrambled out from under the desk. He leaped over the desk. "Don't hurt him! I'll go with you."

Benson chuckled. "It's too late for that, lovey. You're getting your bollocks cut off right 'ere while your new fuck watches. And if you try to fight back, Duffie 'ere'll finish your girlfriend off."

Through his haze of pain, Mike saw Benson pull out a knife and pop open the blade. The steel glinted in the light.

Cory stood silent and Mike couldn't see him from where he lay on the floor, blood pouring freely from his wound.

Duffie held the gun pointed toward Mike but Cory put himself between them. Mike struggled to stay conscious but his vision grew dimmer and he could just hear Benson's voice before he blacked out.

Cory stared Master down. His heart raced like a train through his chest, but he stood still, clenching and unclenching his fists. His gaze locked with Master's—Benson's—gaze and Cory worked not to let the guilt he felt toward the man engulf him. "Go away," Cory said. "Leave me alone." If he reached for the phone, Duffie would kill Mike. There was no help. It was just him and Benson. And Duffie.

Benson raised his eyebrows, looking amused as if Cory had told him a good joke. "Givin' orders now, are yuh? Get a load a 'im, Duff. A real prince now, are yuh?" Benson scowled. "After what you did to me you have the bloody nerve." He jerked his head toward Duffie. "Get him and we'll go."

The second Duffie moved, Cory turned and kicked the gun from Duffie's hand.

"You bloody cunt!" Duffie lunged for him but Cory's anger over Mike had heated him into a rage. As if he were in the pit-cage, he battled with Duffie. Rage unleashed, Cory punched, kicked, lunged at Duffie like he never had in any other fight in his life. Their combat destroyed the office and spilled out into the gym. Their crashing bodies knocked over anything that wasn't a heavy weight machine. Before long, the whole place looked like a battlefield and Duffie lay in a bloody heap.

Just as sirens sounded in the distance.

Cory ran back into the office and knelt over Mike. His lover was deathly pale and unconscious.

Cory heard a click behind him and whirled around.

Benson stood with a gun pointed at him. He wore a dark scowl and glared at Cory. "I loved you, Cory. No one did for you wha' I've done."

Cory rose to his feet as the sirens drew closer. He was panting. Blood dripped down his face into his eyes, but he didn't wipe it away. His fists opened and closed at his sides while his heart pumped like crazy. Anger welled up from so deep inside him he hadn't known it was there, squelched for all those years of slavery. He'd had to believe all that

time that Benson loved him. How else could he have lived with the fact that Benson had murdered his mum? The one person he'd loved more than anyone in the whole world.

"If that's love," Cory muttered, "I'd rather die."

Benson cocked the safety. "That can be arranged, lovey."

The blare of sirens pulled up close.

Cory lunged lightning fast and kicked the gun from Benson's hand then whirled and kicked him to the floor. Benson grunted and reached for the gun but Cory kicked it away out of Benson's reach. He whirled around and crouched by Mike. He pulled Mike's limp body into his arms and cradled him, rocking him gently. He started to cry. "Please don't die, Mike. Please. I love you. I love you." He buried his face in Mike's hair and waited for the police to come in.

Chapter Six

Mike opened his eyes. His mouth was deadly dry and all he could hear was a strange beeping noise above his head. He blinked, his eyes adjusting to the light. Slowly, he came to see he was in a hospital bed, wires and tubes coming out from under the white sheets on top of him.

"Mike."

Oh my God! He must be dreaming. That sweet voice. He'd dreamed of Cory endlessly until he'd opened his eyes.

Almond-shaped brown eyes stared down at him, full of hope. Their rims were red, as if Cory had been crying. Cory sniffled.

"Cory." Mike's voice came out a hoarse whisper.

Cory gazed down, his eyes wide and pained. "Mike."

Mike blinked back a sudden rush of tears.

"Mike, I love you. It's all right now. He's gone. I told the bobbies what he did to my mum and they're sending him back to London. They said he'll get more time for murder there than trying him for what he did to you." He moved closer and leaned over. "I'm sorry, Mike. I'm sorry."

Mike blinked several times as Cory's words sifted in. They were free. Free! "Kiss me," he rasped.

Without another word Cory leaned down and took Mike's mouth hungrily. He slipped his tongue between Mike's lips, laving the insides of Mike's mouth, taking the dryness away in the most delicious way.

A nurse came in just then and Cory jerked away.

She was sweet enough, not making anything of what they'd been doing or the way Cory held Mike's hand to his cheek. She warned Cory about not sitting on the bed and putting any pressure on the tubes or on Mike's wound. With that, she left them alone again.

As soon as she'd gone, Cory leaned back over Mike and laved his lips again with his tongue. He splayed the fingertips of one hand on Mike's stubbly cheek. In the next moment, his hand left Mike's cheek and stole under the blanket.

Mike caught his breath, his skin tingling under the trail of Cory's palm over his stomach.

"I missed you so much," Cory whispered against Mike's lips. He slid his hand down, lower, his thumb brushed across Mike's belly button, making Mike forget the discomfort from his wound.

Mike groaned into Cory's mouth. Under Cory's caresses, Mike's cock got immediately hard. It felt so damn good and he was so damn happy. Cory stroked Mike's hardening cock in light quick movements.

Mike panted into Cory's mouth. He half worried that the nurse or one of his sisters or brothers could come in and find them, but was too completely under the spell of Cory's hand to stop him.

The tension in Mike's cock built quickly, trembling deep in his balls. In moments, he exploded, spilling cum all over Cory's hand and on his stomach, hidden by the bedsheets.

Cory lifted his mouth from Mike's and grinned down at him. He giggled softly.

Mike smiled up at him. He was still breathing heavy from the climax Cory had given him. God, he was so happy. "Cory," he breathed, "I can't return the favor just yet. But I love you."

Cory looked at him. A mixture of feelings passed through Cory's beautiful brown eyes. Mike saw it all, the guilt, the love, the wonder. "You love me?"

“Cory, I’ve loved you since that first time we looked at each other.”

Cory leaned down again and gave Mike a hot kiss on the lips. “Me too.” He pressed his forehead to Mike’s. “And as far as getting me off, that’s okay, Mike. You’re my sweetheart and I’m yours. I know you’ll get me off when we get home.”

Mike smiled. He’d never been happier. Didn’t know a man could feel so happy. “I sure as hell will.” And he looked forward to it, grateful and happy that they had all the time in the world.

About the Author

Award-winning multi-published author of erotic romance, Sedonia Guillone spends her days writing deliciously naughty romances—when she's not cuddling with the man she loves or watching kung fu and samurai films and eating chocolate.

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