

# MASKED UMUSSION CLAIRE THOMPSON

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Masked Submission

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# **MASKED SUBMISSION**

**Claire Thompson** 

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# Chapter One

Dylan ran his hands through his hair as glanced up at the clock. It was after ten o'clock on a Saturday night and he supposed it was time to call it a night. With a sigh he pushed the piles of reference books stacked around him to one side of the long table and collected his index cards scribbled with notes.

"Hey, Dylan. Dylan Reese, is that you?" Dylan turned to the sound of a familiar voice, though he didn't place it at first. Standing near the shelves of New York University's Bobst Library was a guy Dylan hadn't seen since their undergraduate days at Columbia six years before. "Jordan? Jordan Findley?"

"One and the same!" Jordan, a short wiry man with a ruby stud in his right earlobe, grabbed Dylan by the arm and pulled him up into a bear hug. "Long time, Dylan! It's great to see you again." Lowering his voice as a woman nearby glared, Jordan asked, "So you got a legitimate reason to be here? Or just hanging at the library to pick up undergrads?"

Dylan grinned and shook his head. "I was just accepted into the PhD program for history. I've been teaching at Rutgers in New Jersey for the past couple of years."

"That's great! I'm enrolled at the film school. Small world!"

"It is. It's really great to see you. I've been feeling kind of alone since I moved back to the city last month. I haven't even met my dissertation professor—he's been out of town at a big symposium at Oxford."

"Well, we'll have to reconnect for sure," Jordan replied. He glanced at his watch. "I was supposed to go somewhere tonight but I've been called back to do some lastminute edits on a film project I'm involved with. Say!" Jordan's face lit up. "You can have my invitation! You're probably the one person I know at NYU who would appreciate it. I hated the idea of it going to waste."

"Invitation to what?"

"Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself." Jordan leaned toward Dylan with a conspiratorial air. "You're still in the scene, right?" The scene – both Dylan and Jordan had explored their homosexual and submissive orientation at a number of gay BDSM play parties while at Columbia. When they'd graduated, he'd lost track of Jordan, who had moved to California for a while.

"I'm not actively into it, no."

"Well, your luck is about to change," Jordan grinned.

"What makes you think I want it to change? I'm fine with things now."

"You in love? Found the Master of your dreams?" Jordan interjected. Dylan recalled how Jordan had often asked very personal questions without hesitation. He also used to share more about his personal life than Dylan wanted to know.

Flushing slightly Dylan admitted, "No, but –"

"Okay then! Just making sure I wasn't stepping on anyone's toes. Here's the thing." Jordan reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. Opening it, he extracted a folded piece of paper. "Like I was saying earlier, I managed to get this invitation, something you could wait months for, I'm not kidding, if you don't have connections. I know a guy who knows a guy – you know how it is. Anyway, it's only good for tonight and I was really planning on going, but I can't get out of this edit. So someone might as well use it!"

"Use what?" Dylan said, slightly exasperated with all the mystery. Jordan held out the folded invitation. Dylan took the piece of paper and unfolded it, intrigued in spite of himself.

Printed in elegant lettering on a rich gold background were the words *Club Chained – Admit One.* 

Dylan recognized the name and felt a frisson of excitement. "Oh is this that club—"

"Yeah!" Jordan cut him off. "It's only *the* hottest underground gay BDSM nightspot in all of Manhattan. I'm really bummed I can't go tonight, but if you were able to use it, I'd feel better."

"I don't know," Dylan began, thinking about his as yet incomplete dissertation proposal due the following Monday. He glanced again at the invitation. After a long day among the library stacks, Dylan had planned to watch a DVD in his efficiency apartment near Washington Square and get a fresh start in the morning.

"Well, I'm sure I can find someone else —" Jordan scowled, holding out his hand for the precious piece of gold paper. Dylan found himself reluctant to hand it back. He did have all of tomorrow to finish the proposal.

"Do you think I'm dressed okay for it?" He was wearing black denim jeans and a red T-shirt.

"Are you kidding me?" Jordan grinned. "You could wear a potato sack and look fantastic. Jesus, Dylan, you haven't changed, have you? You honestly have no idea how incredibly hot you are, do you? I thought by now you would have figured it out!"

Dylan laughed, embarrassed and not altogether displeased with the compliment. He knew Jordan had once had a "thing" for him, though he'd never had the slightest reciprocal interest. Jordan pressed on. "Seriously, anything goes at this place. You might end up naked before the night's out!" He laughed and then sobered. "Go ahead, enjoy yourself. What have you got to lose?"

Dylan grinned, deciding to throw caution to the wind. Why shouldn't he do something fun and exciting! And since he'd be going alone, he could leave whenever he wanted. He would check out the hot new club everyone was talking about. "Okay, I will! Thanks!"

Jordan gave Dylan directions via the subway to the club. "It's word of mouth. No sign, no phone listing. Very underground, which means no rules, so just be ready for that. It's not like those namby-pamby clubs with the bullshit 'no exchange of bodily fluids' we used to hang out at back in college. At Club Chained anything goes, I mean *anything*." Dylan slipped the invitation into his back pocket, images of whips and chains flying in his head as his cock nudged its approval in his jeans.

"Well, I better get over to the cutting room before they kill me," Jordan said. "I'll want a full report!" They shook hands and promised to get together soon, exchanging cell numbers.

Dylan walked toward Seventh Avenue and stepped on the train headed downtown, finally emerging in the meatpacking district on the lower west side of Manhattan. He looked at the directions Jordan had scrawled on one of Dylan's index cards, following the street signs until he came to a narrow, poorly lit alley he hoped was the right one. A few yards down, he came to a small red metal door set in a crumbling brick building. There was no sign on the door and no one in sight.

Could this be it? Dylan found himself glancing to the left and right, suddenly nervous to be alone in the deserted alley. *What the hell, I'm here,* he thought as he rapped against the door with his knuckles and stood back. Slowly the door opened inward. A tall, thin man with long dark hair leaned out.

"Invitation?" he inquired, holding out his hand, each finger of which bore a silver ring. Dylan handed the gold piece of paper to the man. He inspected the invitation with some care before nodding slowly. Stepping aside, he gestured for Dylan to enter. Pointing down a flight of steep stairs, he said, "Go on. You'll see the entrance."

Dylan walked down the narrow metal stairs to a door at the bottom. As he pushed it open, it took a moment to focus in the semidarkness. Unlike many of the seedier basement clubs Dylan had been to over the years, this one seemed to exude elegance. He had expected the usual TVs hung along brick or concrete walls with X-rated films of men with improbably large cocks having sex on each little screen. He had expected a smoky, grimy atmosphere with shoddy furniture and men sitting in corners with their pants down and their hands on their cocks.

Instead, the air was lightly scented with subtle incense. Lit torches glimmered from gleaming brass wall sconces set every foot or so along walls painted pale gold. A mahogany bar curved along one side of the room. Most of the stools in front of it were occupied, a few of the men facing the bar but most facing the room to watch the action. Except for parquet flooring around the bar area, the rest of the floor was swathed in thickly piled, fine wool carpet of the same pale gold as the walls. Classical music wafted through small speakers set discreetly in each corner.

Men stood in clusters and as Dylan's eyes adjusted, he saw some of them were naked or nearly so, some with leather or metal cuffs on their wrists, around their necks, at their ankles. He couldn't help the sudden intake of breath as he noticed the far wall, nearly every inch of which was covered with whips, floggers, paddles, crops, chains, cuffs and other accoutrements of the BDSM scene.

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Turning toward the bar, Dylan ordered a beer. While he was waiting for it, a handsome dark man next to him said, "You're new. I haven't seen you here before."

"Uh, yes. This is my first time here." The man, somewhere in his late thirties, Dylan guessed, looked him slowly up and down. Dylan saw he had a pair of metal handcuffs hooked to his belt, no doubt the man's rather obvious signal he was a Dom.

The man affected a stern countenance as he held out his hand. "I'm Master John. I'm very partial to blonds and if I'm not mistaken, you're a submissive."

Dylan shook the offered hand, feeling his face heat as he replied, "Dylan Reese." He was amused by the man's use of the word "master" to describe himself but reminded himself this was all just a game to most of these guys. He found himself discomfited by the man's assertion albeit correct that Dylan was sexually submissive. "How do you know that?" he blurted.

John looked him over with a wry smile, his eyes raking insolently over Dylan's face and body until Dylan blushed again. "It's in your bearing. It's in your eyes. I can always tell." He dropped his hand to Dylan's thigh. Dylan felt his cock swell even as his mind resented the over-familiarity.

It wasn't that he didn't like the attention of other men, but casual pick-ups had never been his thing. So many guys seemed to assume because he was submissive, he was ripe for the plucking, eager to kneel at the feet of any man who called himself a Dom.

While he did long to find a soul mate – someone whose dominant nature would complement his own submissive one – he seriously doubted such a person would frequent this sort of club. No, the man he dreamed of would be sensitive and romantic, not some player of games for public consumption at an underground club, no matter how trendy.

"Well, I do believe you've attracted someone else's attention," John said, the irritation barely disguised in his voice.

"Excuse me?" Dylan asked.

"Zorro." John laughed mirthlessly as Dylan looked confused. "Actually he calls himself Tomas. Tomas de Torquemada. With that black mask he wears, he reminds me of the old Zorro movies." Dylan looked where John seemed to be focused but only saw a crowd of men. "Wait a second, you'll see him. His would-be slaves are obscuring the view. All the subs die for the chance at a scene with him. His reputation for delicious cruelty is well earned. No one knows who the guy really is—he's never seen in public without that mask. Obviously he has something to hide." Dylan recognized jealousy in the man's tone but had to agree he probably had a point. At the same time he found himself rather intrigued.

As the crowd dispersed around him, Dylan saw a tall man with long silky black hair nearly to his shoulders. He was indeed wearing a black mask made of leather. It fit snugly over his eyes and nose. He wore a black silk shirt with loose flowing sleeves, open at the throat and black leather pants that appeared to be painted on his strong thighs, molded over the sizable bulge at his crotch. His face was angular and strong, the lines purely masculine.

Dylan's breath caught in his throat as the man focused on him. He could see glittering black eyes beneath the mask, fixed directly upon Dylan as he strode forward. He struck Dylan as some kind of swashbuckling pirate, danger oozing from him along with a charisma so powerful Dylan found himself mesmerized. Aware he was blushing, Dylan looked down, his mouth suddenly dry, his heart tapping in his chest.

"Hello, John," the man said, though his eyes remained on Dylan. He had a rich, elegant English accent. "Is this your latest boy toy?"

"I wish I could say yes," John laughed. "Let's say I have dibs on him. I found him first!" The two Doms laughed and Dylan shifted on his stool. His cock strained in his pants even as he felt his indignation rise at being discussed as if he weren't there.

The man held out his hand to Dylan. "It's a pleasure to meet you..."

As Dylan struggled to recall his own name, "Dylan," John supplied.

"Dylan," the man echoed. He seemed to roll the word on his tongue, as if he were caressing it, kissing it, claiming it. Dylan prayed his hand wouldn't shake as he extended it to shake the offered hand.

"They call me Tomas de Torquemada."

Dylan stood from his stool to feel on more equal footing. He couldn't resist quipping, "Converted any heretics lately or did they die on the rack before you could 'save' them?"

Tomas laughed, his eyes sparkling behind the mask. "Not too many of our brethren here pick up on the reference." The man had chosen the name of the Grand Inquisitor of the notorious Spanish Inquisition as his public moniker. He had yet to release Dylan's hand. Dylan felt sweat prickling under his arms. He wondered if anyone else noticed his erection and took solace in the fact most of the eyes around them were fixed on Tomas' commanding presence.

Dylan finally found the wherewithal to pull away. He sat back on his stool, hiding behind his beer as he tried to collect himself. Confusion roiled through him as he tried to come to grips with the electricity he felt in this man's presence. What was happening to him? Normally Dylan avoided what he considered game-playing, posturing Doms, which obviously this guy must be.

Tomas had turned his attention back to John. "I have a new toy of my own. His name is James. He's waiting for me in one of the playrooms. Would you like to watch?"

"But of course," John said, his smile widening into a lascivious leer. "Shall I bring a slave or two in case you're in need of assistance?"

"Yes, that would be an excellent idea. Let's bring Peter. He's been such a good boy."

John nodded and moved away, returning in a moment with a bare-chested man in his early twenties who wore spandex bicycle shorts and nothing else. He looked as eager as a puppy as he waited quietly next to John.

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Tomas gazed slowly around the room as if weighing the options he saw there. His black-eyed stare finally came to rest on Dylan. "Would you like to come? A private demonstration of my slave boy's grace? I plan to put him through his paces." Tomas smiled a lazy seductive smile as he waited, the dare implicit in his invitation. The men still clustered around them were all fixated on Tomas as if he were a god instead of simply a poser at a sex club.

Yet even Dylan couldn't seem to take his eyes from Tomas' handsome masked face. Tomas was the first to look away, as if accepting Dylan's implied refusal with a slight shrug of his shoulders. Released from that compelling gaze, for a moment his rational mind kicked back into gear. Dylan found himself repelled by the thought of being included in this gaggle of panting men voyeuristically eager to watch someone being sexually tortured. Yet John's words slipped into his head—*his reputation for delicious cruelty is well earned*.

Dylan imagined himself as the one waiting in some playroom for this sexy man to "put him through his paces". Would he possess the same grace Tomas' slave boy was said to have? He was further intrigued with this Tomas, whoever he might be, as the concept of submissive grace was something close to Dylan's heart, though he had no idea if his definition dovetailed with Tomas'.

Tomas stepped very close to him and whispered softly, "I hope you'll do me the honor of accompanying us, Dylan. I have a feeling you won't regret it." As he put his hand lightly on Dylan's bare arm, Dylan couldn't help the sigh of desire that escaped his lips.

Surrendering to his strange attraction, Dylan nodded slowly. He followed the other three men as they weaved their way through the parting crowd. They went through a small door into a dark hallway. A few feet down was another room. Tomas pushed the door open. The room was softly lit by recessed lighting as well as a number of candles placed on high, long tables bordering two of the walls. In the center of the room knelt a nearly naked man, wearing only a leather codpiece and silver barbell piercings through his nipples. His head was bowed and he didn't move a muscle as the men entered.

Tomas moved toward him and placed his hand gently on the man's head. "James, do you wish to suffer for me?"

James looked up at the Dom looming over him, adoration apparent in his eyes. "If it pleases you, Sir." Tomas tapped the kneeling man's shoulder, evidently a signal he was to rise.

Dylan stood with the others just inside the doorway as Tomas led James to the wall where an oblong rectangular wooden frame had been secured. The frame had a roller at the top and a fixed bar at the bottom. James stood obediently on the bar as Tomas secured his ankles to either side. Using the manacles already dangling there, he chained James' wrists to each side of the roller. Slowly Tomas turned the handle to one side of the roller, causing James' body to stretch taut, his wrists raised high over his head. Dylan realized suddenly what he was seeing. The instrument of torture was a rack, like the kind used in medieval days to extract confessions from prisoners, the very kind the real Tomas de Torquemada was infamous for using on the "heretics" he tortured to death. Using the handle and ratchet attached to the roller, the gradual increase of tension on the chains could induce excruciating pain as the victim's joints were slowly dislocated.

For a moment his professional interest as a historian was piqued by what an excellent replica of a medieval rack this device was. Surely Tomas didn't intend to dislocate the joints of his boy toy for an evening's entertainment!

The man on the rack groaned as Tomas ratcheted the roller yet again. His legs were attached at either end of the fixed bar. Dylan observed he was very well-built with muscular thighs and arms now spread in a human X, the soft leather codpiece at his center bulging.

Moving toward a side table, Tomas selected a single-tail lash, which he flicked in the air as he returned to his captive. Tomas turned to the men standing against the wall. "James is afraid of the single tail." He turned back to James, his voice soft. "Aren't you, slave?"

James nodded, his eyes wide as they fixed on the single strand of knotted leather as Tomas gripped the long hard handle. "He should be," Tomas intoned as he gazed directly at Dylan, who couldn't seem to look away. "The tapered thong concentrates much of the force of the blow in the tip. If not handled properly, it will bruise and even break the skin."

Peter shuddered, though Dylan couldn't help but notice the huge erection pressing against his spandex shorts. He realized he himself was sporting an erection as well. Casually he dropped his hands in front of himself as Tomas turned toward James. Dylan well knew the sting a single tail could produce, having experienced it himself firsthand with a lover who had favored it.

Dylan was no stranger to BDSM play—it was just that he'd never been one for public scenes like this one. They had always seemed like little more than a game—a cheapening of something Dylan felt should be private and even sacred. He knew most guys in the scene didn't share his romantic sensibility regarding D/s. They were out to get their rocks off in whatever way they could. And while he didn't begrudge them, such public play had never held interest for him.

Until now.

What was it about this dark, dangerous man that seemed to capture and hold Dylan's attention so completely? If Tomas had commanded Dylan to strip and take James' place on the rack, he honestly didn't know if he could have refused. The man exuded a kind of alluring charisma one associated with true Doms, but beyond that was some kind of visceral attraction between the two of them that almost seemed to make the air between them shimmer.

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Dylan watched mesmerized as the knotted leather made contact with James' flesh, leaving a long white line along his flank that quickly turned pink, the abraded skin rising in a ridged welt. Tomas delivered several well-aimed blows, striping James' smooth torso in parallel lines of angry red. As one lash struck James' pierced nipple, he screamed. Tomas dropped the whip to his side for a moment as he assessed James' condition. James, his eyes squeezed shut, was panting and groaning, his chest heaving. Tomas leaned forward and kissed the man tenderly on the mouth. It was all Dylan could do not to touch his own lips with longing.

Tomas stepped back and Dylan saw James straining forward, his lips still parted eagerly for Tomas' kiss. Instead Tomas struck him across both thighs with the lash, the tip curling around to catch him sharply, drawing another scream from the bound man. Again Tomas stepped back, this time pulling the leather codpiece from James' cock, which jutted out from his body, completely erect. His cock and balls were shaved smooth, making him appear all the more naked and vulnerable. Dylan shifted uncomfortably, his face hot, both embarrassed at this intimate display and furiously aroused. All the men around him were riveted to the captive and his tormentor, their cocks bulging in their pants as they gaped.

James was panting, his head back, his body crisscrossed in welts. "Peter," Tomas commanded in his clipped accent. "Give the boy his reward."

Peter moved quickly forward, apparently needing no further instruction. He took James' erect cock into his mouth, his hands clasped behind his back as he knelt forward.

Dylan couldn't help but press his own cock through his jeans as he watched Peter suck the cock of the bound, naked man, using only his lips and tongue. He felt Tomas' eyes upon him and slowly looked up. Tomas' lips were curled into a cruel smile, his dark eyes sparkling. Dylan blushed and looked away, the air in the room suddenly much too close.

He knew if he didn't escape at that moment, he would do something stupid something like fall to his knees and beg to serve the enigmatic mystery Dom. It was insane—he didn't even know the man! He had never been the type to be swept away by an impetuous passion, and he certainly wasn't given to open displays of emotion in front of strangers. The room, the atmosphere, the scent of arousal and lust in the candlelit room—it was all conspiring to befuddle and confuse him. Brushing past the other men, he fumbled at the door, pulling it open.

He pushed through the crowd in the main room, making a beeline for the door. Without a backward glance he was on his way up the steep stairs, bursting out into the night, his heart pounding. He ran the several blocks to the subway station, taking the steps several at a time. Luckily his train was just pulling into the station and Dylan got on, gratefully sinking onto a seat. As he caught his breath and began to relax, he tried to tell himself his abrupt departure had had nothing to do with what he felt when his eyes locked on Tomas. He just didn't care for public play. As the tunnel lights flickered by, taking Dylan closer to his little apartment by NYU, the intensity of the night's events began to lessen.

He had left the club because it was late, that's all. He still had a paper to write. He would be meeting his dissertation professor for the first time on Monday morning and he was nowhere near ready. He would put tonight out of his mind, forgetting the masked man. He would focus on his meeting with Professor Jack Marchand instead.

# **Chapter Two**

Dylan knocked lightly against the closed office door. His dissertation proposal was neatly typed and nicely bound in a bright yellow folder, ready for his professor's review. Dylan couldn't believe his good luck at being assigned to Dr. Marchand for his dissertation. He'd admired the young professor, already renowned at only thirty-five for his extensive research and publications on medieval European history.

"Come in." He opened the door to a small cluttered office lined with bookshelves. Beneath a small window was a large wooden desk piled high with papers and books, its occupant bent over a thick manuscript.

Jack Marchand didn't lift his head as Dylan entered the room. "Professor? I'm Dylan. Dylan Reese. We have an appointment?"

"Be right with you," the professor responded, still not looking up. "Just need to finish this thought." He scribbled something along the margin of an already marked-up page. Setting down his pen, he looked up with a smile. He was good-looking man with a full head of light brown hair and expressive clear blue eyes. Dylan experienced an odd flash of recognition as he looked at him, though he was sure he'd never met Jack Marchand before. Perhaps he'd seen his picture next to one of his articles.

Professor Marchand's smile faltered and faded, his handsome face going pale as he focused on Dylan. "Are you okay?" Dylan moved quickly forward – the man looked as if he were about to faint. After a moment he wiped his hand over his forehead and smiled weakly.

"No, no. Forgive me. I think I may be getting a touch of the flu. It's nothing. Whatever it was passed—I feel fine now." He stood up, his shoulders broad above a tapering torso. His button-down shirt and tie couldn't hide his broad chest and bulging biceps. Dylan looked away, pretending to study the bookshelves for a moment while he willed his cock to go back to sleep. He realized he hadn't been expecting a professor of history to be so good-looking. He had figured someone who had made it so young would be a total geek—a brain without the brawn.

They shook hands briefly and the professor gestured for Dylan to sit. "So Dylan, it's good to meet you at last. My apologies for being out last week. I trust you haven't been idle in my absence?"

Dylan handed the yellow folder to his professor. "I'm open to input and suggestion of course. I have to say, Professor Marchand, it really is an honor to be working with you."

"Oh please. Call me Jack." He laughed, baring his white square teeth beneath sensual full lips. Dylan caught his breath, his body registering the smile with another nudge to his cock. Where had he seen this handsome man before?

"Jack then," he smiled back, hoping the heat he felt in his cheeks wasn't showing. They made small talk for a few minutes about the courses Dylan would be teaching while working on his dissertation. Then Jack leaned back in his chair, reading through the proposal, making suggestions as he went. As they became involved in their discussion, Dylan forgot to be nervous. Jack was easy to talk to. He seemed to really listen, nodding thoughtfully as Dylan presented his ideas, as well as offering useful criticism and suggestions.

Before Dylan knew it, an hour had passed. The legal pad he'd brought with him for the purpose was covered in notes and he felt the old familiar thrill in his gut that signaled the beginning of a new, exciting project. On an impulse he said, "Say, Jack, would you like to grab a bite of lunch?"

Jack glanced at his watch and shook his head. "I'm sorry. I have another engagement." He smiled that beautiful smile again, adding, "I'm looking forward to working with you. Keep me posted."

Jack sighed as he leaned back in his seat, lacing his fingers behind his head as he stared up at the ceiling. How stunned he had been when Dylan Reese had walked through his office door. Though he'd only seen him once before, that wheat-blond hair, those large green eyes ringed at the iris with a golden brown were imprinted in his mind like a tattoo.

Jack shook his head, admonishing himself at how poorly he'd covered his initial surprise. He well knew when one played the games he did, it was inevitable he would run into someone he'd met in the scene. But who would have dreamed the new sub boy he'd met at Club Chained would be his PhD candidate?

He had to laugh at the absurd coincidence. Jack loved to cruise the BDSM gay underworld, picking up eager slaves who flocked to his alter ego Tomas de Torquemada. He recalled now Dylan's recognition of the historical significance of his chosen alias – that should have been his first clue.

Jack wasn't ashamed of his sexual orientation—neither his homosexuality nor his predilection toward sadomasochism—but he was a realist. While it was reasonably well known he was gay, no one at NYU knew of his secret nightlife. What would the chairperson of the history department think if she knew he donned a black wig and mask on the weekends, frequenting dark clubs where men were stripped and bound, tortured for the sexual pleasure of both parties? How would the president of NYU react to the knowledge Jack derived great satisfaction from forcing submissive men to jerk off while being caned, or to worship his body with only their tongues until he gave them permission to stop?

Jack closed his eyes, recalling the young man to whom John had introduced him only two nights before. Jack wasn't given to sentimental nonsense. He didn't believe in love at first sight or even infatuation at first sight. Yet he couldn't deny the almost irresistible impulse to approach and introduce himself to Dylan when he'd spied the

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handsome blond in his tight red T-shirt from across the room. He'd actually felt a twinge of jealousy as he watched John drop his beefy hand to Dylan's thigh.

In fact he'd made his way over to the bar more to prove to himself there was nothing there than to make his presence known to the new boy at the club. He hadn't expected those captivating green and amber eyes, nor the sweet blush on the young man's cheeks as he gazed back at Tomas.

How disappointed he'd been when Dylan had suddenly rushed out of the playroom, disappearing from the club without so much as a goodbye. Jack thought back to the moment Dylan had run—for run he had, reminding Jack of a deer suddenly springing to life after having been frozen with fear. It was when Peter was sucking James' cock. Tomas had glanced over at Dylan, whose lips were parted, his face flushed, his eyes shining with unfettered lust.

When Dylan had realized Tomas' gaze was on him—that was when it happened. He must have been embarrassed that his naked longing was so plain on his face. If only he had stayed! Tomas would have dearly loved to strip the boy and chain him to the rack. Jack felt his cock swell painfully against his trousers as the image of Dylan naked and sweating in his chains leaped into his brain. He himself would have knelt at Dylan's feet, taking his hard member lovingly into his mouth before he whipped him to a frenzy...

Jack shook his head and stood, expelling a breath. "What the fuck are you even thinking?" he demanded aloud of himself. This was his colleague, for crying out loud! He was Dylan's advisor—he would be part of the panel who reviewed Dylan's work, and he would guide him along the way to its completion. Jack knew he should do the wise thing and forget he'd ever met Dylan in any capacity other than professional. Yet as he recalled Dylan's hungry gaze just before he'd bolted from the scene at Club Chained, he knew he wasn't going to do the wise thing.

"Oh what a tangled web we weave..." he murmured as he pushed the papers on his desk into passably neat stacks before heading out of the office to his next appointment.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hi, Jordan? Yes, it's me, Dylan. How's the film going?" Dylan tried to keep his voice light, forcing himself to engage in small talk before getting to his real request. Finally, in what he hoped was a casual way, Dylan said, "Say, I went to Club Chained the other night. It was really something. Do you have any idea how one goes about getting an invitation? I have next Friday or Saturday free and I thought..."

Jordan laughed gleefully. "See! I *knew* you'd love it! Isn't the place just fantastic? Was that crazy Lone Ranger guy there? He's usually there on Saturdays, at least for a while. He's something else, if you get to see him in action. He's the real thing, not like all those wanker boys pretending to be Dom so they can get someone to suck their dick." He laughed again.

"Uh, yes. He was there. Who is that guy anyway? What's with all the mystery?"

"I'm guessing it's part of his allure. It's his persona – his Dom package, if you will. It's theater, but he carries it off beautifully. I'd love to get in there with a camera and film him and his slave boys. That would be some piece of work, huh?"

"It would," Dylan agreed. "But do you know him? I mean, does anyone see him without the mask?"

"Not anyone I know, but I only move very casually in that scene. Maybe the hardcore players know him on a more personal level. Maybe he takes a few of those lucky sub boys home with him from time to time. I doubt he would *sleep* with the mask on! Though who knows – whatever floats your boat, I guess."

Dylan tried to steer the conversation back to the invitations. "So, Jordan. If I wanted to go this Saturday, how could I get an invitation without knowing someone?"

"You couldn't." Dylan felt his heart sink. He waited a beat to see what Jordan might offer. Sure enough, Jordan relented, laughing as he said, "But I could. I know Jeff, the bartender. He keeps a stash of invitations for his buddies, and as we used to be lovers and are still friends, he's pretty easy about slipping me one or two a month. They're only open on Friday and Saturday, you know. And the invitations are date-stamped. We'll definitely have to go soon, you and me. I can't make it this Saturday though. But I promise sometime soon—"

Dylan hadn't meant to interrupt him and could barely believe the intensity of his own voice as he begged, "Please! I have to go back. I have to see him again. Please get me an invitation. I'll pay you whatever it costs. I'll be in your debt. Please!"

"Whoa, Dylan. Is this the same Dylan Reese I used to know? The ice king who never let anyone get to him? The man who claimed he'd never been in love and wasn't entirely sure romantic love existed, at least not in terms meaningful to himself?"

Dylan stared at the cell phone in his hand, surprised Jordan remembered their earnest discussions about romantic love back at Columbia. Embarrassed, he retorted, "I'm not in love, for god's sake! Just..."

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"Just what?"
"Intrigued."
"With someone you met at Club Chained?"
"Yes."
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Jordan was silent on the other end of the phone and then he laughed. "Are you going to make me pull every word out of your mouth? Who is this person you met at the club, and if you were so into him, why didn't you make a move then? As I recall, you were reserved but you were never shy."

"Tomas. The masked man you mentioned."

Jordan groaned at the other end of the phone. "No! No way, Dylan. Forget him, come on! He's probably a judge or a kindergarten teacher—someone with way too

much to lose to take off that mask. He's probably married, for god's sake, with four kids and live-in mother-in-law."

Dylan was quiet, biting his lip to keep from screaming he didn't care what Tomas de Torquemada did when he wasn't at Club Chained—he just had to see him again! He had to know if what he'd felt the first night was merely a result of being so taken by surprise. It had been a while since Dylan had dabbled in the scene. He realized his romantic ideal about true love extended to a D/s relationship, so much so he wasn't willing to engage in frivolous BDSM play with men who meant nothing to him. He was, though he knew the idea was old-fashioned and even absurd—saving himself for the man of his dreams.

So what was different now? Why did he hunger so for the stranger hiding behind a leather mask? He had to see him again, if only to find out there was nothing there. "Dylan? You still there?"

"Yes," Dylan said softly.

"You got it bad, huh?" Jordan said gently.

"Yes."

"Okay. Let me call Jeff and see what I can do. No promises, but I'll see if I can get you something for Saturday. It costs fifty bucks – you got the cash?"

"Yes, sure. No problem," Dylan answered, trying to keep the whoop of joy that was welling up in his throat from bursting out before they said their goodbyes.

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Dylan glanced at his watch for the fifth time in as many minutes. Swiveling on his barstool, he scanned the room, pretending he wasn't looking for anyone in particular. He'd been at the club for nearly an hour, and except for fending off repeated attempts from Doms eager to play, he'd done nothing but nurse a beer and tear his napkin into a pile of tiny paper balls.

Shit! Maybe the guy wasn't coming! This was ridiculous. Dylan was almost twentynine years old, for heaven's sake! He'd had three serious relationships and dated any number of guys. Why should this one man make him feel like he was in junior high, his crush so painful he actually felt an ache in his heart?

He'd been so excited Thursday night when Jordan had called him, announcing he'd been able to wrangle an invitation to Club Chained from his pal Jeff. "He's a gouger though, the bastard," Jordan had said. "Claimed he was low on invitations and so the price would be seventy-five. That okay?"

"Sure, whatever, no problem." Dylan would have paid anything for the chance to see the masked Dom again. He spent an absurd amount of time getting ready, trying on and throwing off most of his wardrobe. What did a self-assured, confident, sexy submissive man wear for a night of underground clubbing? He had almost called Jordan to get his opinion—almost but not quite. Enough was enough!

Now he looked down at his pale green silk shirt, the one his last lover had said made his eyes look like cut glass. It was tailored like a T-shirt except the sleeves were three-quarter length, drawing the eye along his curved triceps to his masculine forearms. He worried for a moment he should have worn something more casual—something in cotton. His pants were olive drab khakis slung low on his hips, accentuating his high round ass. Brown leather boots completed the ensemble.

He knew by the very appreciative glances he'd been getting all night that most of the population at the club, Dom and sub alike, approved of his outfit and of him. Dylan was used to men—and women for that matter—ogling him. With his All-American blond good looks and his lean, well-built physique, he'd been noticed since he'd entered puberty. Mostly he tuned it out—by nature and upbringing uncomfortable with too much attention.

He looked yet again at his watch. It was nearly eleven o'clock. If the man didn't show soon, he probably wouldn't be coming. Seventy-five dollars and an evening wasted so he could drink an eight-dollar bottle of beer as he sat among strangers, many half-naked, none of interest to him at the moment.

"I know you." Dylan turned as a young man slid onto the stool next to his. As before, he was bare-chested with only spandex bicycle shorts accentuating his sizable package.

Dylan recognized Peter, the boy who had been ordered to suck James' cock while keeping his hands locked behind his back. His pulse quickened as he recalled the intensely erotic scene he'd witnessed. Peter was staring at him, clearly waiting for a response. "Yes, you're Peter," Dylan said, trying to quash the image of James long, thin cock disappearing between Peter's eager lips.

"You kind of took off last week, huh? What happened, were you about to turn into a pumpkin or something?" He grinned broadly, as if his remark had been exceptionally witty.

"Oh um. Yeah, kind of. I remembered I had somewhere I had to be."

"Well, Tomas wasn't too happy about it, I can tell you."

Dylan found he could barely speak, his heart suddenly leaping into his throat, blocking his voice. "What? Tomas? How do you know?"

"Well, it wasn't like he said anything – that's not Tomas' style. But I could tell. I've known him a while. The look he gave when you hightailed out of there made it pretty clear he didn't approve. You don't leave a scene until Tomas says so. You'd best watch out when he comes tonight! He might want to punish you." He grinned conspiratorially, raising his eyebrows to further make his point.

"Tonight? He's coming tonight? How do you know?" Dylan desperately tried to keep his voice neutral and calm. He knew he was failing miserably.

"Oh I don't know for sure. But why wouldn't he? He comes most every Saturday night. This is his hangout—he's the star attraction I guess you'd say. He's *made* this place since it opened last February. Shit, the owner can't do enough for him—fawning

all over him like he was Frank fucking Sinatra!" In a more respectful tone, the man went on. "Not that he doesn't deserve it. He *is* sublime." He sighed wistfully, staring off into space with a dreamy half smile.

Pulling himself from his reverie, Peter asked, "You a top or a bottom?"

Dylan tried to peer past him to the opening front door. "Huh?" Three men entered, none of them Tomas. Turning toward Peter, he replied, "Bottom, I guess. Though I don't especially care for those terms. There's so much more to a loving D/s relationship than who ties up whom."

Peter looked rather blank at this remark but before he could respond, if indeed he had intended to, the door opened yet again as a murmur rippled through the crowd.

Tomas de Torquemada had arrived.

Tomas quickly scanned the room as he entered, but before he could see the one person he was looking for, Stanley Richards was in front of him, grasping both his hands as he pulled him down for an air kiss. "Tomas, looking dashing as always," the owner gushed. Tonight Tomas was wearing a white shirt of heavy cotton and black linen pants over his blunt-toed black boots. Of course his leather mask was in place as always. "I'm so glad you could come."

"Yes, thank you, Stanley." Tomas smiled down at the overeager little man. Stanley was a good businessman and had quickly picked up on the appeal of the masked Dom to his other patrons. While there was plenty of action in both the main room and the playrooms, no other Dom could create the atmosphere of intensity and even danger the way Tomas could. He never harmed his subs—he was far too skilled with his chosen implements of torture—but he could make them suffer—suffer in the way they craved, always drawing out a sublime performance that kept the clientele wildly eager for more.

Stanley had seized on this unexpected windfall for his underground club, aware the shelf life of most of these joints was less than a year before the trendy place became old news. In the seven months the club had been open, because of Tomas, the place was packed each weekend, now with a standing waiting list for invitations. Tomas never disappointed, always arriving fashionably late, the cunning leather mask molded over his face to maintain his alluring mysterious air. Stanley, eager to keep his star patron, had given him carte blanche—he was one of a handful of men who possessed a gold plastic card embossed with the words *Club Chained – Open Admission*. The card was signed on the back in indelible ink by Stanley himself.

Tomas looked toward the bar, holding his breath as he turned. There he was! The sunny blond head, those green and amber eyes, the long elegant nose, that broad sexy chest—Tomas forced himself to stop. His tongue was probably hanging out. He well knew the way to a sub's heart was not through excessive attention, at least not at first. Let the boy long for *him*—not the other way around. After all, Dylan was the one who had run. He mustn't be rewarded for bad behavior.

And so Tomas casually walked into the center of the room, allowing men to crowd around him in greeting as he stood smiling, imperious as a king. Someone brought him his club soda – Tomas never drank alcohol at these clubs. He was too responsible to risk impairing his judgment while wielding a whip or a cane.

"Thank you, Greg," he said graciously in his very authentic-sounding British accent. Having lived in London for seven years while attending Oxford hadn't hurt and he was a natural mimic to boot.

Greg, an African-American man with large brown eyes and a slave collar around his neck, bowed toward Tomas and smiled shyly. Tomas knew Greg was eager to scene with him. Tomas hadn't chosen him because Greg's master Alan didn't wish it. Tomas knew Alan and indeed many of the Doms who frequented the club resented him because of his carte blanche with the owner and the attention his scenes drew. When he'd first started coming here, he'd let anyone who wanted to watch his scenes as long as they were quiet and respectful of the participants.

After a while things had gotten out of hand with so many men trying to cram into the playroom, there was no room for the scene and certainly the players became very self-conscious in the process. Thus he'd made a rule – only those invited to watch could come with him into a playroom. This had caused further resentment as Stanley had backed him up, giving him exclusive rights to the room with the rack while he was at the club. Still, the other Doms kept their grumbling to a minimum since Tomas did draw a bevy of submissive men each weekend, yet only a few were chosen as his play toys.

Impulsively Greg knelt at Tomas' feet, raining kisses on his boots. Almost at once he was jerked up roughly by the leash attached to his collar. "Get up, you worm," Alan snarled, pulling Greg to his feet. "Mine are the only boots you'll kiss."

Greg looked frightened as he gazed up at his stern master, though Tomas couldn't help but notice the huge erection poking against his soft cotton drawstring pants. "You'll be thoroughly punished for that, slave!" Alan barked loudly, clearly enjoying the attention he and his slave were attracting. Tomas watched with mild amusement as Alan dragged his hapless boy by the leash into a corner of the room.

Sitting on a chair set there for the purpose, Alan pointed to his lap, upon which Greg eagerly draped himself, pulling his own pants down to reveal his bare, well-muscled bottom. The view was quickly obscured as a crowd of men surrounded the pair to watch the spanking.

Finally Tomas allowed himself to turn slowly toward the bar. Dylan was looking directly at him, the longing palpable in his face. When Tomas caught his eye, Dylan flushed a becoming pink and quickly looked down. Tomas was enchanted anew with his endearing shyness. Most subs behaved more like Greg around him, fawning and begging for his attentions.

Recalling how Dylan had bolted from the scene the weekend before, Tomas told himself to go slow and easy with this one. He knew nothing about him, that is, nothing

about his sexuality. He had presumed he was submissive and was reasonably sure that was the case based on his demeanor and reactions when they had met. One thing he knew for certain—there was a fire in the boy's eyes. A passion as yet unexploited, uncontrolled. There was also a reticence, a reserve that might be shyness but might be something deeper and more difficult to penetrate. Tomas moved toward the bar, thrilling to the challenge of conquering the handsome, sexy man he knew instinctively was waiting just for him.

# **Chapter Three**

Dylan found himself rooted to his stool as the handsome masked man approached. When he'd first entered, Dylan had expected him to come straight to the bar. Yet as Tomas failed to do so, he realized this was absurd. Just because he harbored a wild crush on the flamboyant Dom, there was no reason whatsoever to assume those feelings were reciprocated.

True, he had turned those dark, sparkling eyes on Dylan, holding his hand in a firm grip perhaps a moment too long when they'd first met. And he had invited him to watch his scene. Yet those things in and of themselves meant little. Just because he had obsessed all week about the enigmatic Dom didn't mean the man had given him a second thought. Perhaps he didn't even remember him. Dylan cursed himself for having run out that night. He still didn't entirely understand himself what had frightened him so. For it was fear that had propelled him from the scene, even as his cock had throbbed with desire, his heart aching with longing.

"Good evening. Dylan, isn't it?"

"Yes. Hi." The stools on either side of Dylan were occupied. He controlled a sudden urge to push one of the occupants off their stool so Tomas might sit down.

Instead Tomas leaned down, saying softly to the man on his right, "Martin, would you mind terribly giving me your seat for a moment?"

"Oh no, Sir! Not at all." A bare-chested heavyset man with multiple piercings on his face and tattoos over much of his body stood abruptly. Dylan almost expected him to bow toward Tomas. What was it about this guy that made everyone including himself want to worship him?

Tomas slid gracefully onto the stool next to him as Dylan tried to force himself to a calm he didn't feel. When Tomas spoke, his voice was gentle. "What happened last week, Dylan? A moment you were there then you were gone."

For a moment Dylan savored Tomas' elegant British accent before he forced himself to acknowledge the words. "I know. I don't know. Uh, that is, I mean, I had to go. I'm sorry." He laughed ruefully, aware he sounded like a total idiot. "I apologize. Peter said you were upset. He said I was very rude to have left like that."

"Peter said that? No, no. Peter was mistaken. I was just surprised is all. You had seemed, if you don't mind my saying so, rather intrigued. Even," he added as he put his hand over Dylan's, "enthralled."

Dylan held his breath, resisting his urge to put his other hand over Tomas' to keep it there a little longer. He bit back a sigh as Tomas removed his hand. He was watching Dylan, waiting for a response. "I...I was intrigued. That was quite a display on the rack. I'm a student of history actually. I recognize that rack as being an excellent replica of the ones used during the Inquisition. Surely it's no coincidence—your clever pseudonym and that torture device?"

"A student of history? Formal or casual?"

"Well, formal. That is, I'm a professor of European history and I'm working on my PhD in medieval studies at NYU."

"Impressive." Tomas smiled and Dylan felt a warmth spread through him at the man's approval. He wanted to ask what Tomas did when he wasn't dominating slave boys at underground clubs but he didn't quite dare.

Instead he said, "So the rack? Is it yours?"

"No, no. It belongs to the club. Stanley Richards, the owner, he supplied all the equipment you see around us." Tomas waved toward the room, which housed a number of whipping chairs and several St. Andrew's Crosses as well as an old-fashioned pillory and a few whipping posts. "But I'll tell you a secret." He leaned closer and Dylan could smell his scent—a hint of vanilla blended with cardamom and musk Dylan wanted to taste. "That's how I picked my name for the club. The rack reminded me, as it did you, of the Spanish Inquisition."

"Are you a student of history as well?" Dylan asked.

"You could say that," Tomas said airily.

When he didn't elaborate, Dylan tried, "So what makes you use a pseudonym at all? Is that common practice at these places? I mean, I'm not all that familiar with the club scene but usually guys just tack the word 'master' or 'slave' to their first name and that's that. If you don't mind my asking, why the big mystery?"

Tomas smiled. "Well, first there's the obvious answer of course. I have my reasons for keeping my identity secret. But beyond that is something more essential, more basic, to the scene. Public scenes are very different from a private D/s relationship. Here so much of what matters is the ambiance, the atmosphere during the few minutes one has to create an experience. It's theater in a way, though the players and what they feel are real.

"My goal as a Dom is to create a sensuous, edgy environment, one where the sub can submerge himself, lose himself, if you will, in the intensity of the moment. Part of the thrill is submitting to someone who could be anyone. I become their ultimate fantasy because they can assign whatever qualities they wish to the enigmatic stranger in the leather mask."

Dylan was quiet a moment. Had he himself succumbed Tomas' creation? Was his crush on the masked persona, not the man behind it? He knew nothing of the real man, not even his name. On an impulse he asked, "What's your name? Your real name?"

Tomas' smile was sardonic as he slowly shook his head. "Come now, Dylan. That would be telling." Dylan didn't respond. He hadn't really expected the man to share with him what he had told no one else. Tomas went on. "What's in a name, after all? People come to these clubs to find fantasy—to play dark, dangerous games they might

not have the courage to explore on their own." He turned his gaze fully on Dylan, who couldn't seem to look away.

"Why are you here, Dylan? Why did you come?"

"I—uh, a friend gave me his invitation at the last minute."

"So you were just curious? No personal interest in D/s?"

Dylan felt himself coloring as he stammered, "Well, no. That is, yes. I mean, I'm sexually submissive, to the right lover. I don't really go in for these public scenes, if you'll pardon my bluntness."

"And yet here you sit a second time. What made you come back? Did your friend have another invitation just lying around?" Dylan looked down at the bar, recalling how he'd virtually begged Jordan to get him a second invitation.

Summoning his courage, Dylan looked back at Tomas. "You. I came back because of you."

"Yes. I know you did. In a sense you already belong to me, don't you?" His voice was quiet, his assurance absolute. Dylan found it difficult to breathe. He glanced toward the exit and Tomas reading his mind said, "You will not leave. You will not run this time, Dylan. You will stay and explore the reasons you're really here." Dylan nodded slowly as he felt himself slip more firmly under this man's charismatic spell.

Tomas put his hand on Dylan's thigh. A thousand tiny sparks of desire ignited in his groin as Tomas stared pointedly at his crotch, a slow smile spreading over his face. "I was watching you, Dylan, when James was on the rack. You wanted to be there. You needed to be there. You felt each stroke of the lash, each caress to his cock and balls. You've thought of little else since that night, am I right?"

"Please, I—" Dylan said weakly, trying to refute what he knew was true.

"Stop," Tomas commanded. "Don't waste my time or yours with denial. We both know what's in your heart." His hand slid up Dylan's leg to the bulging mound at his center. Dylan felt dizzy as the large hand covered his crotch, squeezing gently.

A part of him couldn't believe he was permitting this audacious man to be so intimate with him. Not only his actions, which normally Dylan would have rebuffed in short order, but his words! His claim Dylan already belonged to him, had returned just for him, needed to be tortured and used as James had been—how dare he presume all of this based on nothing! Yet if he were honest, hadn't the man hit the nail on the head, driving it home with the sureness of a master carpenter?

As Dylan sat frozen, his face hot, his cock raging, his heart hammering, he had almost forgotten they were in a public place. A place where Tomas de Torquemada reigned supreme. Though they'd been left alone this long, the eager men who had waited respectfully while Tomas spoke with the newbie had apparently decided their time was up.

#### Claire Thompson

"Excuse me, Tomas, Master Robert and Slave Brian are waiting for you, Sir." Dylan recognized the man with the tattoos and piercings who had given up his seat for Tomas. Several other men stood just behind him, leaning forward to listen.

Tomas glanced up at the man and said, "Thank you, Martin. I'm well aware Robert and Brian are waiting. Oh and Martin? Send your Master to me please."

"Yes, Sir," Martin answered. He hurried away as Tomas took a drink of his club soda. In a moment a tall thin man returned, his dark hair pulled back into a ponytail. He was wearing a button-down shirt, the sleeves rolled to the forearm, revealing elaborate tattoos of snakes curling around his arms.

"What can I do for you, Tomas?"

"Good evening, Frank. I just wanted to let you know your slave boy was very eager for me to go to my chamber. He thought it appropriate to interrupt my conversation to let me know the boy and his master were waiting."

"I see," Frank said thoughtfully, glancing toward Martin, who was hovering nervously nearby. "Well, thanks for letting me know." He grinned, his eyes gleaming wickedly. "I think my overeager slave is due for a whipping for his impatience and impertinence." Turning away, he shouted, "Martin! Get your ass over here!"

Martin hurried over, his expression an odd combination of excitement and dismay. "Sir? What is it, Sir?"

In a booming voice clearly designed to carry, Frank roared, "You interrupted Tomas! You think he doesn't know Brian is waiting for him? Tomas does as he pleases, as do I. You, on the other hand, do as you're told. So get over to the pillory. Your punishment will be public tonight." Martin paled and then flushed. "You heard me! Move!"

Dylan watched as Martin scurried over to a set of hinged wooden boards secured to a pole with holes cut for head and wrists. Conversations had ceased as Frank boomed his orders to his slave boy. Theater indeed, Dylan thought, as the men crowded around the scene in the corner. Obediently Martin bent over the now open pillory, placing his neck in the center indentation and his wrists in the semicircles cut on either side. Someone near him lifted the hinged top board, lowering it over the hapless slave. It was secured with a padlock, trapping Martin as he waited helplessly for his public punishment.

Dylan looked back toward Tomas, feeling a little shocked. "Seems rather harsh for just telling you your scene was ready, no?"

"Depends on your perspective. Martin is a manipulator. He's getting just exactly what he wants right now. He and Frank are very into public play. Martin approached me with the expectation I would tell on him. I'm feeling rather generous tonight," he smiled at Dylan, "and thus decided to play his little game for him."

"You mean he knew he'd be punished if he said that to you?"

"Precisely. He's doing what's called topping from the bottom, but he does it with some subtlety. That is, he doesn't demand to be locked in the pillory and have his pants yanked down so a bunch of guys can take turns swatting his ass until it turns purple. He just behaves in a way that will make it happen. It's a game, but for him and his master, a very satisfying one."

"But it's not submission. Not in the pure, romantic sense."

Tomas looked sharply at Dylan. "No," he agreed softly. "It's not."

They sat quietly a moment. Dylan realized he was at once relieved and disappointed by Martin's interruption as it had dispelled the dangerously erotic mood Tomas had woven over him with his words and his touch. "Would you like to watch?"

"Excuse me?"

"Brian. He's waiting in my private chamber. His lover Robert has asked me to teach him how to use the cane, delivering the stroke so as to mark but not damage the skin. Brian is already secured facedown to my rack, waiting patiently for his torture to begin. He's not really submissive from what I've observed, but he's deeply masochistic and needs a severe beating to keep him satisfied. Robert wants to please him but is afraid to give him what he needs."

"So the master will teach the master in a way."

"Yes, I suppose you could say that." Tomas smiled. "Would you like to observe? I'm sure Robert wouldn't mind." Tomas stood, smoothing back his long dark hair.

The image of a naked man stretched and bound in chains flashed into Dylan's mind. For a moment he saw himself on that rack, Tomas behind him slicing the air with a thin bamboo rod, marking the flesh as Dylan screamed... Dylan crossed his legs, trying to hide his erection.

He wanted to be in Tomas' private playroom but not as a spectator. As arousing as it might be to watch the staged scene, Dylan chafed at the idea of sitting on the sidelines as Tomas played with another man. "No," he said with more force than he'd meant. "That is, no thank you. Not tonight. I'll pass."

Tomas appeared startled by this response, as if his question had been a mere formality, Dylan's affirmative response assured. "May I ask why?"

Dylan flushed, certain Tomas wasn't used to being refused. "I...I just don't really go for the whole voyeur thing. I don't like to watch. I like to —" he paused, not quite daring to finish his sentence.

Tomas finished it for him. "Participate." He grinned, his dark eyes glittering. "You're in the wrong place then, Dylan, my lad. Club Chained is designed for those who like to watch and those who like to be watched, myself included. I really don't know what you're doing here, do you?"

Dylan looked down, confused and chagrined. Was Tomas losing interest in him now? He realized what he really had hoped was for Tomas to ask him out—to invite him home, to make love to him in the privacy of his own bed. Ridiculous! The man couldn't even show his face, much less give his heart. Foolish romantic! Dylan silently cursed himself as he stood from his stool. "No," he said, his voice wretched. "I guess I don't."

Tomas lightly touched his arm. "Listen. I'm being too hard on you. I can see you're sincere and I apologize. I'm used to the players, you see—the clubbers, the posers. There's something different about you. Something I want to know better." Tomas glanced toward the door that led to the playrooms and back toward Dylan. "I know it's late, but I promised Brian and Robert I'd do this scene. If you would wait for me—a half hour, no more. If you have the time, I'd like to take you back to my chamber alone. Just you and me. No voyeurs, no games. We can decide together what we want to do, if anything at all."

Dylan looked up into the handsome man's masked face, desire and fear whirling together in his head. "I have to go now," Tomas continued. "I won't press you for an answer. If you're here when I come back, we'll speak again. If you're not, *c'est la vie.*" The tall handsome man strode away.

Dylan sat in a daze for a while, making no conscious decision to go or stay. Though he'd been attracted to many men in his life, never before had someone reached him on such a gut level. It was as if Tomas could see inside him and knew his deepest secrets, secrets even he himself didn't know. This at once thrilled and terrified him. It also annoyed him as Tomas seemed such an obvious man to fall for. Indeed, easily half the men in this place were openly in love or in lust with the masked man. Dylan was just another fool in the crowd, thinking with his cock instead of his head.

He turned toward the scene in the corner. Curious what was happening behind the wall of men blocking his view, Dylan sauntered across the room, his hands in his pockets, pretending an indifference he didn't feel. Taking his place in the cluster of men, he had a side view of Martin, his pants pulled down to his ankles, his ass being paddled by Frank, each blow thrusting the man forward with its force.

After a several well-placed swats, Frank stepped aside, allowing another man to take his place. This man used his hand, striking first one cheek then the other. Dylan felt his own ass tingle with sympathy as he eyed the reddened, abraded flesh. He almost felt sorry for Martin, a public spectacle in his humiliating punishment, until he noticed Martin's huge erection waggling beneath the wooden pillory.

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Dylan knew this third beer was a mistake, but it helped to take the edge off as he waited. *Damn you for giving me this choice*, he thought, angry at Tomas for leaving the decision with him. Tomas knew the submissive mentality. He knew if he had ordered Dylan to stay, if he had made it clear he had no choice in the matter, Dylan would have complied. Though there was nothing between them but a conversation, Tomas knew he could have more directly called the shots had he chosen. As he'd aptly stated, a part of Dylan already belonged to him.

Dylan glanced at his watch. Twelve-twenty. Tomas had left the room nearly thirty minutes before. *If you would wait for me – a half hour, no more.* Tomas' deep voice floated in his head. Very well then. He would wait another five minutes. If Tomas didn't come out, he would take that as his signal to leave. *I don't even know what I'm doing here,* Dylan thought for the tenth time that night. He'd enjoyed the club scene when in college but as an adult he quickly tired of the games, however sexy these men were playing. He yearned for something more.

In a few minutes Tomas would come out and make some pronouncement in his stylized accent, ordering Dylan to submit or suffer the consequences, or some other such theatric nonsense. And Dylan knew he would obey – his cock and his eagerness to connect superseding for that moment his more cautious nature. They would share some kind of sordid sexual scene, cheapening what he felt for this man to such a degree he would lose respect for him and thus be set free of whatever claim he seemed to have over his heart and mind.

So be it, Dylan thought. Let's just get it over with – I suppose I could use a cheap thrill. Then I can get over this absurd infatuation and move on, focusing on my dissertation, which is what I should be doing anyway. True love will have to wait until "someday"...

Dylan jumped as he felt a hand on his shoulder. He'd been so deep in thought he hadn't heard Tomas come up behind him. "You're still here. I'm so glad."

"Yes," Dylan replied, his body tensed.

"Listen, I've been thinking, Dylan. I don't think it's the time to take you back to my chamber. I had considered putting you on the rack, testing your mettle as a submissive and a masochist, but something tells me the time isn't right. Something tells me whatever is flowering between us deserves to be taken more slowly. I don't want to force the bud, to continue the metaphor. If you're to blossom with me, I want it to be on your terms, in your own time."

Dylan hadn't expected this retreat, if that's what it was. Was Tomas looking for a way to let Dylan down gently? Had he lost interest so quickly? "I'm not sure I understand," Dylan said, his ego wounded at what he perceived was Tomas' rejection.

Tomas smiled gently, again correctly reading Dylan's thoughts. "This isn't a rejection – far from it. It's more of a...a reconsideration, if you will. At first I thought I'd enjoy a quick scene with you but I find I want more. I want to savor the discovery of you."

As Dylan took this in, Tomas continued. "Stanley has a private room, a special room for a few select clientele when they need a bit of privacy. He's graciously given me use of this room, though I've rarely had the occasion to go there. It's just a sitting room, but its primary appeal is it's unoccupied. I could get you a fresh drink and we could just talk some more. I feel somehow we have much to say to each other." He looked around the still-crowded room where several scenes were going at full blast, the air ripe with the scent of arousal and lust. "And this just isn't the place to say it."

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Slowly Dylan nodded. He hardly knew what to think. The beer had fuzzed his brain—he knew he wasn't thinking clearly. He also knew he didn't want to just walk away. Tomas wanted to "savor the discovery" of him. What a poetic, lovely thing to say. Dylan smiled, letting down his guard at last. "I'd like that. I'd like that very much."

Armed with coffee instead of beer, Dylan followed Tomas through a different door, one he hadn't noticed before located behind the bar. A few whispered words to Stanley and they were seated in a small room that held two large wing-backed chairs and a loveseat, set around a glass coffee table. There was no window but there was a fireplace, which Dylan imagined would lend the room a cozy feel in winter. It being only mid-September, it stood empty, its hearth blackened from use.

Dylan sat down on the loveseat. He set his cup of coffee down on the small table and leaned back, stretching his legs in front of him. He realized he'd been tensing his body all night, so much so his muscles ached. Now he made a conscious effort to relax.

Tomas sat in one of the chairs across from him, balancing a fresh glass of club soda on his knee. Dylan expected him to remove his mask now that they were alone in this private room. When he made no movement to do so Dylan sat up, unable to resist asking, "So when do you reveal the man behind the mask?"

Tomas laughed and shook his head. "It's better like this. You aren't ready yet. Nor am I. I trust you'll grant me this bit of caprice. I assure you I have my reasons."

Dylan nodded, not wanting to push. For the moment it was enough to be sitting in this quiet, private space instead of the heady, sexually charged atmosphere of the main room. He leaned back again against the cushions, closing his eyes. He half expected Tomas to join him on the couch, to pull him down into an embrace, but Tomas remained in his chair. Slowly Dylan opened his eyes to find Tomas looking at him, his gaze intense, the eyes flashing behind the mask.

"What is it you're looking for, Dylan?"

"What do you mean?"

"You've made several comments over the course of the evening that lead me to believe you're looking for, if you'll forgive a corny turn of phrase, true love."

Dylan looked down, not sure what to say. He looked up again and asked, "And what about you? Are you looking for that? Or have you already found it?"

"I honestly don't know," Tomas answered softly. He stood up, moving easily toward Dylan. As he sat next to him, Dylan shut his eyes, feeling his heart squeeze in his chest as if someone had reached in and grabbed it. He kept his eyes closed as he felt Tomas move closer, leaning in so his lips lightly brushed Dylan's own.

Heat seemed to edge through his body, firing his limbs, igniting his desire. Their lips parted, tongues tasting, bodies pressing closer. Dylan felt he was falling into the heat, being consumed with it, his entire being enflamed with the passion of that perfect kiss.

At last they pulled away, each panting with desire, their cheeks flushed, their eyes wild. "Who are you?" Dylan whispered.

"The one for you," Tomas replied.

# **Chapter Four**

Jack stared with unseeing eyes at the piles of un-graded papers before him. He touched his lips, recalling Dylan's impassioned kisses. He'd been surprised by Dylan's almost fierce reaction when he'd finally dared to kiss him. He'd had Dylan pegged as rather reserved – perhaps not entirely comfortable with his submissive nature or even his homosexuality. This impression had been strengthened by Dylan's refusal to watch a scene – no one at the clubs had ever turned down his invitation.

Yet when their lips had met, it was Dylan whose lips had parted, Dylan whose hands had pulled him closer. Jack's fingertips tingled with the memory of Dylan's soft thick hair as he'd held him close, exploring his delicious mouth. As their bodies had pressed together, chest against chest, cock against cock, he'd wished their clothes would simply vanish. Instead he'd slipped his hands under the pale green silk of Dylan's shirt, his fingers memorizing the smooth supple skin over firm muscle as his cock strained urgently in his pants.

When Dylan had touched his cock, rubbing his hand along the fabric of Tomas' pants, he'd groaned with pleasure. He'd forgotten for a moment to maintain the deep timbre of Tomas' voice when he'd moaned Dylan's name. Dylan, lost in his own lust, thankfully didn't seem to notice, his fingers tugging at Tomas' zipper so he could slip his hot, perfect hand beneath the elastic of Tomas' underwear.

What a brazen boy, Jack thought now, smiling. And hungry. He'd managed to open Tomas' pants and was in the process of slipping off the loveseat to kneel in front of him, his lips eagerly parted, when there had been a knock at the door. As Dylan registered the sound, he'd scrambled back to the couch, his face flushing though his eyes were still bright with lust.

Jack had realized his wig was just slightly askew and quickly but discreetly adjusted it before reaching down to close his pants. "Yes?" he finally called out.

"Sorry to bother you, Tomas," Stanley's voice came through the door. "Just making sure everything's okay or if you need anything." Solicitous, annoying Stanley. Jack grinned now but at the time how frustrated he'd been! For the moment had been lost. It was as if Dylan had somehow come out of a trance—a lust-induced trance—and all of his awkward, blushing shyness had returned.

Standing up, he'd glanced at his watch as he pulled his shirt back into place, tucking it into his pants and running his hands through his hair. "I didn't realize it was so late!" he'd exclaimed—code for "I have to get out of here". Jack had felt his withdrawal like a cold wall rising between them. He knew better than to try to recapture the moment. There was time.

Instead he said, "Before you go, I'd like your phone number. Perhaps I could call you later in the week." Dylan gave it to him and, with it, continued hope. Jack reached into his pocket, pulling out his wallet to look at the crumpled piece of paper napkin on which Dylan had scrawled his number. Of course Jack hadn't needed the number – because of his access to student records, he knew not only Dylan's number but also where he lived and many other personal details. Still, Tomas wouldn't know those things. Dylan's willingness to share his number meant he was still interested – at least in Tomas.

Jack looked down at the pile of exams he needed to grade. The situation was strange to say the least. He was scheduled to see Dylan on Friday, not as Tomas the mysterious Dom but as Dylan's advisor for his thesis. Would Dylan be interested in Jack Marchand, not as a professor of history but as a man and a lover? Was it wise meanwhile to continue his charade as Tomas? Was he setting himself up for a romantic train wreck of Shakespearian proportions?

Jack laughed softly. His alter ego, that part of him who delighted in acting the role of the swashbuckling Dom Tomas, told him not to overanalyze the situation but to take life as it came, seizing what he could in the process.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan fumbled for his ringing cell phone. It was somewhere beneath a pile of papers that comprised his research. "Hello?"

"Dylan."

Just the one word was enough to set Dylan's heart fluttering. The deep masculine voice had haunted his dreams in the three days since they'd shared that intense kiss at Club Chained. Dylan had thought endlessly about the kiss – Tomas' large, strong hands holding his head still as he claimed Dylan's mouth and then his hands slipping beneath Dylan's shirt, igniting a lust so fierce Dylan had been afraid for a moment he would ejaculate in his pants.

He'd barely known what he was doing as he'd fumbled at Tomas' zipper, desperate to feel the silky rigid cock he knew lay waiting for him. His mouth was actually watering at the thought of closing his lips around Tomas' cock and letting his tongue glide down the smooth flesh. Without recalling how he'd gotten there, Dylan found himself on his knees in front of Tomas when a sharp rap at the door had snapped him out of his lust-driven trance.

One-night stands were most definitely not Dylan's style and he could barely believe himself how forward he'd been with Tomas. He hungered for him—there was no other word. Yet as he'd sat there, aware the owner of the club could still be standing on the other side of the door, Dylan's sense had returned. Tomas was like some kind of fantasy figure. With his mask and his hidden identity, he wasn't even real! Was that why Dylan had succumbed so easily to his devilish charm? He didn't know anymore. He was tired, it was late and he knew he had to get out of there before he did anything else he might regret later.

"Dylan," Tomas said again, drawing Dylan back to the present. "I'm so glad I caught you. I've arranged something rather special, if you're of a mind. Stanley sometimes opens his club for private use during the week. I've been able to book Thursday evening, if you're inclined to meet me there. We'd have the place to ourselves – no onlookers, no distractions – just you and me."

"Just us?"

"Just you and me. Stanley will open the place for me and leave. He's done it before. I would expect you at seven o'clock. I want to test your mettle, Dylan. I want to see what you're really made of, my submissive friend. Will you come?"

No—it was better he nipped in the bud this crazy infatuation with a man who kept not only his heart but also his face hidden. Better to let it go and return to his comfortable if lonely world. He opened his mouth to refuse but somehow his heart decided to pull rank over his common sense. "Yes," Dylan replied softly as fear shot through his loins in equal measure with desire.

Over the next two days Dylan found it very hard to concentrate on his research. He taught his undergraduate classes on autopilot, his mind focused inward on the rendezvous with Tomas. Why had he agreed to meet him alone? What was he getting himself into? He recalled the bywords of the BDSM scene – safe, sane and consensual. What did he know of this man behind the mask? Was it sane to agree to meet with a man he'd only known for a few hours?

He thought about canceling but he had no way to contact Tomas. There had been no caller ID when Tomas had called. Dylan thought about trying to reach the owner of Club Chained but doubted he'd be able to reach him during the week. He toyed with the idea of just not showing up but rejected it. He'd committed to go—it wasn't his style to stand someone up.

Very well! He would go but that didn't mean he had to do anything. Tomas would understand. In the little time they had spent together, he had a strong sense of Tomas' integrity. Tomas wouldn't have lasted this long in the scene nor be as popular as he obviously was if he didn't respect his partners' limits.

Beyond all the doubt, beneath the hesitation and fear, lay the crux of Dylan's decision to meet Tomas as arranged. He couldn't get the man out of his head. He couldn't stop thinking about his kiss, his penetrating gaze, his challenging words on the phone – *I want to test your mettle...to see what you're really made of...* Dylan knew Tomas understood him on the subconscious level. He understood Dylan's need to submit, to be controlled, to give himself completely to another. In a moment of quiet candor, Dylan knew Tomas was the man he wanted to give himself to.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan stood uncertainly before the red metal door of Club Chained. He started to knock and saw the door was slightly ajar. Pushing it open, he stepped inside. The stairwell was lit but deserted. Shutting the door behind him, Dylan walked down to the entrance. The door there was open as well.

"Dylan, is that you?" Tomas' deep voice boomed from within.

"Yes, it's me," he called back as he stepped into the empty club. He looked around the room, its torture equipment placed here and there, the whips and chains hung neatly on the wall, the bar wiped down and gleaming in the soft glow of recessed lighting along the ceiling. The torches on the walls were not lit nor was there any soft music floating from the speakers. It was like a stage set before the show began.

Tomas stepped into the room from the door behind the bar. "Hello, Dylan. I'm glad you came." He walked around from behind the bar and held out his arms. Dylan moved into his embrace, feeling his own heart pounding against Tomas' chest as strong arms wrapped around him. They stood still for a moment until Tomas released him and stepped back. "Let me see you," he said, his eyes raking Dylan's body as he licked his lips. Dylan was wearing a simple blue T-shirt and his favorite faded jeans. He'd refused to let himself agonize over his wardrobe choice as he had the last time. He'd put on what he would have if he'd been heading over to the NYU library instead of a BDSM sex club.

Tomas was dressed in a white shirt, open at the throat. Of course the leather mask was in place, his dark eyes flashing behind it. He was wearing dark gray pants of very soft-brushed leather. Dylan couldn't stop his eyes from dropping to Tomas' bulging crotch, the supple leather stretched tight over it. Tomas saw where he was looking and said in a teasing voice, "That's right. Your gaze should be trained on the floor or my cock at all times."

Dylan looked up into Tomas' face as he said this, startled by his own visceral response to the words said in jest or not. Quickly he looked down again, no longer certain it had been in jest. Tomas placed a finger under his chin, forcing him to look up. "I was just teasing, Dylan. You don't yet belong to me. For now we are just exploring." He dropped his hand and said softly, "I'm so glad you agreed to come."

"Me too," Dylan whispered, swallowing. Tomas' words reverberated in his head – *You don't yet belong to me.* Yet...

Tomas held out his hand and wordlessly Dylan took it. They went through the door to the playrooms, stepping into Tomas' private chamber. Dylan looked around, seeing the rack with its rollers, manacles and chains. How many naked, sweating bodies had been stretched and tortured on that rack? How many erect cocks had been teased, whipped, sucked and adored? How often did Tomas invite new sub boys for a private meeting like this one? He'd said on the phone he'd done this before – maybe it was a regular thing. Maybe Dylan was just another in a series of boy toys the mystery man would use and then discard. "What's going through your head, Dylan?" Tomas asked softly. "You seem lost in thought."

Dylan started to lie, to say nothing, nothing at all. Yet when he looked over at Tomas, who seemed so sincere in his question, he decided to tell the truth. "Tomas. You don't know me at all. I know even less about you, since you hide behind that mask and keep your real name a secret. But I can't deny how you make me feel. When we kissed the other night it was like—" He paused, trying to find the words.

"Like a lark arising from sullen earth to sing hymns at heaven's gate," Tomas offered.

Dylan laughed, delighted at Tomas' quotation of his favorite Shakespeare sonnet. "Yes! Though I was going to say something a little less poetic!" They grinned at one another a moment. Dylan sobered as he continued. "I don't do this. I don't meet guys for quick fucks or staged BDSM scenes. It matters too much to me."

"Tell me," Tomas urged softly. "I want to understand."

"Well, I used to be pretty casual about the whole thing. Like most young guys, I didn't particularly care who I had sex with as long as it was often. I've always felt submissive sexually speaking, and I can really respond to a sexy whipping or spanking as part of play. But somehow lately, in the past few years as I've grown tired of playing around, I find I want something more."

He looked at Tomas, who was leaning against the wall, his arms loosely crossed over his chest, his eyes focused intently on Dylan. Dylan shifted his gaze to the rack, seeing himself naked and tethered there for a moment before he blinked away the image. He slid down against the wall, coming to rest on the floor. Tomas followed suit, stretching out his legs as he too leaned against the opposite wall. Dylan felt strange telling this still-virtual stranger all about himself but he found once he'd started, he didn't want to stop. He was tired of keeping himself held so tightly in check, so careful to keep from getting hurt.

"I'm going to be twenty-nine years old in a few weeks. I'm very happy in my professional life but in the love arena I can't say I've done so well. I've had three serious lovers and any number of guys who turned out to be Mr. Wrong. My last serious relationship was almost two years ago. He was a Dom and we tried living the lifestyle—he wanted a fulltime slave 24/7.

"I tried it – I really gave it my best, but it just wasn't for me. I need a partner, not a master. Yes, I'm sexually submissive, but in every other area of my life I require control, input. He wanted to run my finances, my friendships, my every decision!

"At first it was kind of hot, you know, sexy to be kept naked and on a leash, kneeling at his feet while he fed me. It was sexy to be forced to hold a position while he whipped me or not allowed to come until precisely when he said I could. It was sexy and fun, but it really wasn't anything more than that. I didn't feel the intense connection I need to flourish in a D/s relationship. I guess the bottom line was he

couldn't Dom me. Not like I need. And telling me when to pee and how to spend my money certainly wasn't what I needed."

He looked to Tomas to see if he understood. Tomas nodded, as if to say, "Go on". Dylan continued. "Oh he could make me do things—command this and that, but the emotional connection wasn't there. I don't know if I dare call it this, but the *spiritual* connection between us was missing. I think we both knew it was a matter of time before one or both of us tired of the game. And when that was done, there really wasn't much left between us."

"I understand," Tomas said simply. "A Dom can't hope to possess his lover's body if he doesn't first possess his heart." Dylan thought he sensed the quiet yearning beneath Tomas' words, though he said nothing more.

They were both silent a while and then Tomas said, "Dylan. I can't promise you true love. I don't exactly know what's happening between us. I do know the kiss we shared couldn't have happened if there was nothing there. I've been playing the scene a long time. And I too have been in love and lost that love because of my own stupidity. I don't want to leap in with you, to promise things I might not be able to give, to demand things from you I haven't earned."

He broke into a sudden smile and Dylan couldn't help but smile back. "That's better," Tomas laughed. "You're so serious. There is much pleasure to be had if you're willing to seize it. Stand up. Let me see you. Take off your clothes and show me your magnificent body."

Dylan remained seated as he processed Tomas' command. "What?" he finally said.

"You heard me. The connection we feel is too strong to deny. You came here today, Dylan. You knew we would be alone—you knew I would want you. I must find out, Dylan, if you are the one I have sought. You don't need to hide behind your lofty ideals of true love—not tonight. Trust me—I'll keep you safe.

"For I am no one, you see. I don't exist except in your fantasies. I am your dream lover." His eyes burned into Dylan's. "Stand up and strip, and let me take your measure. I want to exalt you—I want to make you suffer. You understand, as only those of us who share this predilection can, that those two things can be one and the same. Obey me. Now."

Slowly Dylan stood, Tomas' low soothing voice compelling him even as his dark eyes commanded him. He pulled off his T-shirt, revealing his smooth tan chest. As Tomas watched, he unbuckled his belt and pulled the buttons of his fly open, letting his jeans fall down his firm thighs. He stepped out of them and stood in his bikini briefs, folding his hands self-consciously over his growing erection.

"The underwear too. Then stand with your hands behind your neck." Dylan felt the heat creeping in his cheeks as he began to pull his underwear down. Tomas laughed softly. "Your penchant for blushing is utterly charming, Dylan. But it won't help you. I'll use you as I like, your modesty is of no concern."

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Dylan's raging erection belied his red cheeks. It had always been like this for him though the shyness wasn't feigned, neither was the desire. Obediently he put his hands behind his head, lacing his fingers together, aware that with this gesture of submission there was no going back.

Tomas pushed himself into an upright position along the wall with his powerful legs, standing his full height of six feet two inches. He stood with his hands on his hips as he watched Dylan strip. The man was gorgeous—long lean lines of perfection, as lovely as any Greek ideal. His cock was long, thick and straight, a perfect specimen of manhood, jutting from his body despite the sweet blush still evident on his cheeks.

When he put his hands behind his head, his legs parting to assume an at-ease position, Tomas watched the change that seemed to come over the younger man. His breathing, which had been short, almost a pant of nerves as he'd undressed, slowed. His body relaxed, the shoulders easing as he focused his clear green and amber eyes on the far wall. Tomas knew the look—the look of a submissive assuming the role they were born for. In that instant Tomas knew Dylan was a natural—a true sub.

"Dylan," he said softly. "For our time together this evening you will belong to me and only to me. You will relinquish all rights to protest, to resist, to refuse. You will obey me to the letter and serve me to the best of your ability. If you don't think you can do that, please get dressed and go."

Dylan remained in position, his eyes flickering slightly, the pupils dilating. Tomas walked right up to him, leaning down to whisper in his ear. "Who do you belong to, slave?"

"You, Sir," Dylan whispered. Tomas took Dylan's head in his hands, kissing his ripe sensuous mouth as he pulled the naked man hard against him.

Dylan started to drop his hands from behind his head, to respond in kind, but Tomas' command froze him. "No! Hands behind your head. Don't move until I order it." Dylan obeyed, allowing himself to be kissed and fondled, his strongly muscled arms held up as ordered, leaving him vulnerable to Tomas' touch.

On an impulse Tomas knelt in front of Dylan, leaning over to lightly circle the head of his cock with his tongue. Dylan moaned and thrust his pelvis forward, trying to press his cock into Tomas' mouth. Tomas stood, amused by his sluttish eagerness. "No," he said. "You haven't earned that sweetness, not yet. Do you wish to earn it?"

"Yes, please," Dylan answered huskily.

"Drop your hands and take your place on the rack." Tomas watched as Dylan's eyes widened. He saw the hesitation, the struggle as the man made his decision. For to allow oneself to be chained to the rack was to give up control in every sense. He would no longer be free to refuse. Tomas waited, aware he was expecting a great deal of Dylan as the trust had not yet been established between them.

Slowly Dylan walked to the rack. He stepped up onto the wooden plank at its base and leaned his strong, graceful frame against it. "Place your legs in the restraints,"

Tomas commanded. Dylan glanced down, positioning his ankles in the metal cuffs set on either side of the plank for the purpose. Tomas bent down and snapped each cuff shut with a click of metal. "Raise your arms and put them in the restraints," he ordered. Again Dylan obeyed, lifting his arms and setting his wrists willingly into the leather restraints that were attached to loosely dangling chains – chains that could be tightened with a turn of the rollers from which they were suspended. Tomas clipped the cuffs closed and stood back to admire the handsome and now helpless man in his control.

He savored the moment, his cock rock-hard with the power of his situation. This strong, sexy man had voluntarily given Tomas control of his body to do with as he would. No one else knew they were there – no one but Tomas could set Dylan free. He could turn the roller, stretching Dylan's body taut until he cried out for mercy. He could whip him to shreds or tease his cock and balls until Dylan was reduced to a frenzy of desire. Tomas felt the power of his position roil through him like hot wine. "Are you ready to suffer for me, boy?"

Dylan took a deep shuddering breath. Perhaps he was only now realizing the peril in which he'd voluntarily placed himself. He didn't know the name of the man who held him captive. He had never seen the true face behind the mask. He had only words and a few shared kisses to go on. Was it enough to permit him to submit without fear? Or if he was afraid, and a little fear was a good thing as Tomas well knew, would he have the courage to work through that fear? Tomas stroked Dylan's cheek, his heart brimming with tenderness even as his hand twitched for the lash.

Dylan looked back at him, his eyes clear in the half light of the room. "Yes," he said in a low, steady voice. "I'm ready. Take me where I need to go. Please."

Tomas needed no further invitation. Swiftly he moved to a high, long side table, selecting a heavy flogger of soft brown suede. Returning to his captive, he stroked Dylan's strong chest with the tresses, letting it fall over his erect cock before drawing it back up again. He was glad Dylan had told him about trying the lifestyle 24/7. This was no novice, no virgin to the penetrating intensity of a sensual whipping.

Drawing back his arm, Tomas struck Dylan's breast with the flogger, eliciting a grunt of pain. He struck him across his firm abdomen and across each thigh. Dylan shut his eyes, wincing with each lash. When Tomas brought the flogger across his erect penis and the balls swaying beneath it, Dylan cried out. Tomas leaned forward, gripping his balls tightly in one large hand. "This is just the beginning."

Next he selected a riding crop, his cock tingling with each slap of leather echoing against Dylan's flesh. He spent several minutes cropping Dylan's bobbing cock, noting with delight his erection never flagged, even when the sting of the crop made him moan with pain.

When Dylan's body was crisscrossed with marks from the flogger's tresses and spotted with squares of red from the crop, Tomas, whose own desire could no longer be contained, knelt before his slave and lovingly took the man's shaft into his mouth, letting it glide into his throat as he gently held and stroked his balls. Dylan at once began to ejaculate, shooting his warm sweet seed into Tomas' throat. Tomas swallowed and pulled back.

"Oh dear," he murmured, trying to hide his smile. "What a terribly naughty boy. Now you must be punished, both for coming too soon and coming without permission." As he spoke, he set about releasing Dylan's wrists and ankles. Dylan fell forward but Tomas was there to catch him as he stumbled.

Gently he led Dylan to a soft pad set in one corner of the room. He pushed Dylan's shoulder and said, "Sit there a moment." Dylan sank weakly down as Tomas unbuttoned and removed his shirt, dropping it to the floor. Dylan gazed up at him, his cock beginning to rise again as Tomas kicked off his boots and stepped out of his soft leather pants and dropped them by the discarded shirt. He remained in his black silk bikini underwear, the tip of his erect cock peeking over the top as he sat next to Dylan on the thick padding.

"Now for your punishment, slave," he said, affecting a stern expression though his eyes danced. "You're going to get a good old-fashioned spanking, the likes of which you won't soon forget! Come here." He pointed toward his lap and dutifully Dylan draped himself over it. Tomas' cock was sandwiched between them, hard as steel. For a few moments he massaged Dylan's firm ass, smoothing the skin to prepare it for the assault to come.

Without warning he brought his palm hard against Dylan's left cheek, thrilling to the smacking sound and the jerk of Dylan's body against him. Methodically he smacked each cheek, sometimes alternating, sometimes focusing on one cheek or the other, delighting as the flesh turned pink and then cherry red. Dylan was whimpering and writhing against him, every jerk and spasm of his body causing a delicious friction against Tomas' cock.

Finally relenting, he pushed Dylan from his lap. Reaching beneath the padding, he withdrew a black satin sleep mask. "Put this on," he commanded, "and do what you were born for, slave. Keep your hands behind your back and make love to my cock as if your very life depended on it. If I'm pleased I might not torture you anymore tonight. If I am not, be prepared for the cane."

Dylan, who had been lying on his side, his hands on his tender bottom, took the mask and put it over his head, covering his eyes. Tomas knew being blindfolded would heighten the submissive experience. Dylan knelt before him, parting his lips as he leaned forward, searching blindly for Tomas' cock.

Quickly Tomas pulled off his underwear, tossing it aside as he positioned himself in front of his slave. He closed his eyes as Dylan's hot mouth enveloped his cock in exquisite sensation. As Dylan wrenched a cry of pure pleasure from Tomas' lips, he knew he was losing his heart to this man. Just as he shot his seed into Dylan's eager mouth, a little voice sent a dousing chill over his pleasure. *What will happen now? Now that he matters to you.* 

Tomas shook his head to shake away the unbidden and unwelcome thoughts. He focused instead on the golden blond head at his belly, stroking the soft hair as he recovered himself. Let tomorrow take care of tomorrow. He wouldn't have traded this wonderful night for anything. Anything at all.

### Chapter Five

Jack handed Dylan's binder across the desk. "This is a good start on your thesis outline. I've noted where I think you might want to focus more and suggested additional reference material you may not be familiar with. I have some great old texts I picked up at Oxford that the NYU library doesn't have." Jack reached out toward one of his bookshelves, pulling down a fat old volume covered in faded brown leather.

As Dylan reached for his binder, their fingers touched. Jack kept his face impassive, forcing himself to resist his sudden urge to grab Dylan's hand. As far as Dylan knew, he was Dr. Jack Marchand and nothing more. He had to force himself to focus as Dylan began to talk about his thesis, though once he did focus, he was able to involve himself sufficiently in the topic to keep his erection at bay.

After about a half hour Dylan stood up. "Well, I've taken enough of your time, professor."

"Jack," he responded automatically, adding, "Not at all. I really enjoy working with PhD candidates. It reaffirms my faith in the continued vitality of our chosen curriculum." Jack flushed, aware he sounded like a pompous ass. He knew he was fumbling to keep Dylan from leaving.

Dylan glanced at his watch. He started to say something when Jack interjected, "You know, I'd love to continue our conversation over lunch. I've been in the mood for some serious pastrami. Care to go to Katz's Deli for a quick bite? My treat."

Dylan grinned, his brilliant green eyes with the ring of amber at the center slitting to half moons, the mouth Jack had kissed in the guise of Tomas parting to reveal his sunny smile. "That sounds great! I didn't eat breakfast and I'm starving. I haven't had a decent Reuben in ages."

While they waited for their food, Dylan asked casually, "So, you married? Kids?"

Jack laughed. "Are you kidding me? You mean my reputation as a gay history professor hasn't preceded me? I thought it was common knowledge all over campus." Dylan blushed, his expression chagrined.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I honestly didn't know."

"Your gaydar is faulty."

"Excuse me?"

"You know, your gay radar. We can pick up the vibe from each other, right?" If possible, Dylan's blush deepened. Jack was charmed and amused by his embarrassment. Was this really the same boy he'd had naked and on his knees?

"You serious?"

"Well, do you deny it?"

Dylan swallowed and then grinned sheepishly. "Okay, guilty as charged."

At that moment the food arrived. Dylan seemed relieved for the distraction and Jack decided to back off for a while. Over sandwiches of fresh rye bread piled high with cured meat, slices of dill pickle and bottles of root beer, the two men talked shop for a while, discussing an interesting article about King Henry II that had appeared in *Journal of Medieval History* that month. Dylan shifted the conversation in a seeming non sequitur. "I've always had an interest in medieval torture devices. I recall you've written several articles on the topic."

"I have. The phenomenal cruelty of the era, even for the simplest of crimes, like stealing a loaf of bread, simply takes your breath away! And the devilish creativity of some of those mechanisms. Some were really quite sophisticated, especially when you consider they were designed so long ago." Jack warmed to his topic, one of his favorites. "During the Spanish Inquisition when the Church set out to entrap the socalled heretics, they usually started with the infamous Water Cure. The accused would be placed naked on a ladder tipped so his head was lower than his feet. The torturer would stretch the victim to his full length and bind him tightly. Iron prongs would hold his jaws open. His nostrils were stopped, allowing breathing only through his mouth. Water was poured into the accused's open mouth. A linen cloth was washed into the opening of the throat, preventing the accused from spitting the water back out. The overwhelming sensation of drowning forced him to swallow literally gallons of water.

"If that didn't work to extract whatever confession they wanted to hear, they would move on to the rack. The accused would be laid face up on a table and bound with ropes at the wrists and ankles, which would be pulled in increments to produce terrible pain via rollers that were ratcheted until the victim's joints were dislocated. They were usually stripped naked, humiliating in itself, and tortured with melted wax and whipped bloody with the lash as well as being pulled literally to pieces! Tomas de Torquemada's reputation for cruelty was well-deserved."

Jack observed with veiled amusement Dylan's startled reaction at the mention of the name with its double meaning for them both. To his surprise Dylan said softly, "I've seen a rack. A real one. That is, a very good replica."

"Have you? At a museum?"

"Well, no. At a club. But instead of being laid flat, it was secured upright to a wall. I tried it out."

Jack raised his eyebrows at Dylan's candor. He felt his cock stirring as he recalled Dylan, naked and stretched taut, his gorgeous cock subjected to Tomas' crop and his lips... "Sounds like a rather unusual club."

"Yes," Dylan agreed. "Very unusual. Invitation only, gay only and..." He bit his lip and Jack knew he was struggling with the desire to admit the nature of the club versus his sensible hesitation with a man he only knew on a professional basis—or at least so he thought! Jack found himself desperately curious to get Dylan's true reaction to his experience with Tomas. Had it been merely a bizarre fling or had Dylan, as Jack had, replayed their brief time together endlessly in his mind, recalling every moan, every kiss, every cry? Knowing he was treading on dangerous ground, Jack said softly, "Club Chained. I've been there."

Dylan's face lit up. "Oh! I was so worried to tell you! I mean, I was dying to but you know..."

"Sure, not exactly something you'd share with your thesis advisor."

"No," Dylan nodded, grinning. Jack grinned back. "You know, you look familiar to me somehow." Dylan tilted his head, studying Jack's face. "I can't place who you look like, but something in the bone structure, your smile—I don't know—you just look familiar."

"Huh, I don't know," Jack answered, hiding his face behind his sandwich as he took a hearty bite. "Maybe we've been to the same history conferences over the years. The world of academia is not a large one."

"Nor the world of the gay BDSM community," Dylan quipped back, though Jack saw he was joking. Dylan started to say something else but hesitated, drinking from his bottle of soda instead. Jack watched him, feeling as if he were balancing on a tight rope as he waited for Dylan to speak.

To put Dylan more at his ease, Jack said, "I should share something with you. I'm active in the scene myself. My orientation is dominant. I understand the poetry of D/s, the unique intensity of a loving exchange of power. Not that you'd find something like that at Club Chained!" He laughed and waited.

"Well, that's the thing," Dylan said slowly. "I think I might have."

Jack felt a sudden warmth rushing through his veins. He leaned forward, holding his breath. "Tell me," he whispered.

"I met a man. Well, I should back up. An old friend of mine gave me an invitation he wasn't able to use. I went really as a lark—just to check it out. I used to play some in the scene back in college and a little bit when I was teaching in Jersey. I thought it might be fun to check out this new club.

"I went without any particular expectations. The place is nicer than your usual basement dive—I mean, the décor is very nice and they even have a full bar. Sorry, you know all that—you've been there. Still, it seemed to me there were just the usual crowd of players and hardcore scene types, except for one man. You may even have seen him there when you went. He calls himself Tomas de Torquemada." He glanced up at Jack with a question in his face. Jack slowly shook his head to indicate, no, he didn't know him.

"Well, anyway," Dylan continued. "He's this really bizarre guy." Jack stifled a small smile. "He wears a leather mask over half his face, like Zorro or something, so no one can identify him. You figure the guy has something to hide—like he's a judge or a doctor or a-"

"College professor," Jack cut in, grinning.

Dylan stared at him a moment and then laughed loudly. "Yeah! Right! Anyway, nobody knows his real name, nobody's seen his face without the mask. He's got these amazing dark eyes and gorgeous long black hair. He dresses like some kind of swashbuckling pirate and every guy in the place, Dom and sub alike, seemed to be drooling over him, trailing after him, hanging on his every word."

"Sounds like kind of a jerk, if you'll pardon me," Jack said. "With that ridiculous getup and the disguise." He waited for Dylan to confirm or deny this.

"Well, you would think so but that's the weird thing. He's anything but a jerk, I assure you. There's something wildly sexy about him. There's this kind of animal magnetism, an intense charisma. He exudes confidence and sensual power, and when we kissed—" Dylan broke off, looking away. "Jesus, I wasn't going to say that, it slipped out."

"Hey, it's okay. I'd like to think we were friends, not just colleagues. We share a kindred connection already, just by virtue of our shared predilection." Dylan looked up sharply as Jack said this and he realized Tomas had used this very word. He would need to be careful. "Whatever we share today will stay between us," he added.

Dylan nodded. "I know I shouldn't be talking about this but I have to tell someone. I can't stop thinking about him." He paused, staring at the table. Jack felt a confusion of feelings surge through him. He knew this was a bad idea—he was eavesdropping on Dylan's feelings toward himself—getting an unvarnished reaction Dylan might not share with Tomas. And yet he found he couldn't help himself. He was longing to hear Dylan's honest account. He waited on tenterhooks as Dylan stared dreamily at the table, lost in thought.

Finally he began to speak again, his voice barely audible. Jack leaned forward. "We met for a scene. I mean, you should know, that isn't something I usually do. Not for a long time. Not that there's anything wrong with it—it just isn't something I'm into. As a sub, for me trust is paramount. I don't see how you can really trust someone you just met or how the experience can be meaningful in front of a bunch of horny gawkers. But he arranged it so we would be alone. He…he was so masterful. I mean, from the instant I arrived I knew I could trust him completely."

Once Dylan had started to speak, it was as if the floodgates had opened. He continued eagerly. "See, I should back up again. I'd met him twice before. The first time I'd just been permitted to watch a scene. I could see he was really hot and knew how to run a scene, but playing at a club is very different from really exchanging power as I'm guessing you know from your comments." Jack nodded. "Well, the second time we met we actually got to talk. I mean really talk, just the two of us. He took me back to this private room—Tomas has connections with the owner. Anyway, we kissed." Dylan sighed. "Oh Jack—that kiss! It was like he took control of my heart at that moment. I really think there was nothing I wouldn't have done for him, if I'd had the chance. I don't know how to explain it. I can only say I've certainly never experienced anything like that before. You know?"

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"I do," Jack said softly, his heart constricting in his chest.

"So when he called," Dylan continued earnestly, "and said he wanted to see me. To 'test my mettle' – he actually said that! Well, I couldn't resist. I couldn't say no! Because I had to find out, you see, if that kiss was just some weird confluence of events and emotions, or if it was as amazing as I'd remembered. I had to see if the connection I'd felt was still alive."

"And was it?" Jack asked softly.

"Jesus, yes," Dylan said emphatically. "Oh Jack, it wasn't what he did so much—I mean that was super hot in and of itself, but it was how he did it. The way he took control. It's like I was under his spell! I mean, it was so erotic, being strapped to the rack for his sensual torture. And when he—" Dylan finally pressed his lips together, censoring himself at last. Jack could see Dylan didn't plan to spill the intimate details of their session with his new "friend" Jack, shared predilections notwithstanding.

"I'm sorry," Dylan said finally. "I'm talking way too much. You must think I'm crazy."

"Not at all," Jack said fervently. "You have no idea what it means that you could share that with me. No idea at all."

"Oh shit!" Dylan said, glancing at his watch. "I have to teach a class in a half-hour!" He started to pull his wallet from his back pocket.

"No, no," Jack said. "You go on, this was my treat! I'll – uh – I'll see you around."

"Okay, then. Thanks for lunch." Dylan touched the top of Jack's hand with his own. "And thanks for listening. I think if I hadn't talked about it, I might have imploded."

Jack laughed and nodded, waving as Dylan loped out of the deli, wondering what in the hell he had gotten himself into.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan hadn't been able to get an invitation to Club Chained for Friday or Saturday night. Jordan had been unavailable, apparently out of town, and thus couldn't tap his bartender friend for a bootleg invitation. He hadn't even been able speak to a human being at the club, getting only an answering machine that informed him in a monotone all invitations had been dispersed for the weekend, thank you and please call again. How he'd cursed Tomas all of Friday and Saturday as he'd waited desperately for a phone call that never came. Tomas could have gotten him into the club, he was sure of it!

Had what they'd shared meant nothing? Had the intense connection Dylan felt for Tomas been one way? Was he just another notch in the masked Dom's belt, now forgotten as he moved on to new conquests? Dylan had almost called Jack in his frustration, just for someone to vent to. He hadn't though, even now worrying he'd shared far too much with his advisor. Granted, they had a special connection, both being gay and into D/s, but still he knew it had been unwise to open up so much to a man he barely knew.

Yet he had been so easy to talk to! Not at all judgmental, and he had seemed truly interested in what Dylan was saying, really listening in a way few people seemed to. He thought about Jack, comparing him to Tomas. They were the same height and build, he realized as he thought about it. And their smiles! Dylan had realized as he sat daydreaming that Jack and Tomas had a very similar smile – the same straight, square teeth and the wide sensual mouth. They could have been related, except Tomas had gorgeous long shiny black hair and those haunting dark eyes while Jack's hair was cut short, light brown with steaks of gold shot through it. He had pale blue eyes with smile lines at the corners. He really was quite a good-looking man. The sort of man Dylan was usually attracted to.

But there was no room for Jack in Dylan's heart at the moment! It was filled with longing for the mysterious Tomas. He sighed, recalling Tomas' lips sliding down his shaft, sending shudders of pleasure through him so fierce Dylan had come on the spot. He'd worried for a moment Tomas would be disgusted with his premature ejaculation, but instead Tomas had turned it into something sexy, spanking him until Dylan had almost orgasmed again from the sheer, delicious intensity of "punishment".

As Dylan recalled Tomas' lush, sensual scent as he'd been permitted to suckle the Dom's huge perfect member, he shivered with desire, hugging himself as his cock swelled in his jeans. He'd spent a miserable Friday and Saturday alone in his apartment, forcing himself to work on his thesis for a while until he finally gave up even the pretense of concentrating on anything except how much he yearned for Tomas.

When his cell phone rang late Sunday morning, Dylan assumed it was his mother, who usually called each Sunday to see how "her boy" was doing. "Hello," he said, without looking at the cell phone screen.

Instead of his mother's sunny voice wishing him a good morning, he heard Tomas' deep accented voice. "Good morning, Dylan. I hope I didn't wake you."

"Oh! No, not at all." *Why didn't you call, you bastard!* Dylan controlled the impulse to shout. Instead he waited to see what Tomas had to say, trying to keep his silly heart from doing loop de loops in his chest.

"I missed you last night."

"I couldn't get in!"

"Oh! I'm so sorry. I have an open invitation there. I forget the protocol for getting an invitation. I thought perhaps you had had second thoughts."

"I did have second thoughts. And third and fourth! I've thought of little but you since Thursday!" Dylan admitted, laughing with relief that Tomas had called at last. "Why didn't you call sooner?" He hadn't meant to ask that—it had slipped out before he could stop himself. He bit his lip, hoping Tomas wouldn't find him petulant and demanding.

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"Please forgive me, Dylan. I was laboring under the impression you needed space." Tomas laughed mirthlessly. "When I didn't see you Friday or Saturday, I just assumed..."

"Yet you called today?" Dylan couldn't help but observe.

"Yes," Tomas admitted. "I wanted to see you. I want to see you. Stanley tells me he'll open the club for me this evening, that is, if you'd like to explore things further." How cool and collected Tomas sounded with his precise diction and clipped British accent. Yet he had called, had admitted he wanted to see Dylan again, had even gone to the trouble of securing the club for their rendezvous.

"I...I'd like that," Dylan said shyly, his cock stirring with the recollection of their last meeting.

"Excellent. Tonight we will pick up where we left off. I want to take your measure as an obedient slave, one who is willing to suffer to please me. So first I must ask, do you wish to please me, Dylan?"

"Yes, Sir," Dylan whispered, his heart surging against his breastbone.

"When you come to me tonight, slave, you will not question me. You will not hesitate to obey me in anything, large or small. If you cannot agree to this, please don't waste either of our time. I am not interested in casual play with you, Dylan. With you, I see the potential for more. Much more."

"Yes," Dylan responded. He seemed to have lost the capacity for speech.

"Seven o'clock. Tonight we'll explore your threshold for erotic pain. See you then."

Of course his last remark about exploring erotic pain was all Dylan could focus on for the rest of the day. He didn't even bother with the pretense of going to the library or doing any online research. To distract himself he graded some essays from a freshman history class and took a very long shower.

When he arrived at the club it was as before, with the doors ajar and Tomas waiting for him. This time when he entered the club Tomas was standing near a whipping post, a long dangerous-looking single-tail whip of supple black leather in his hand.

Dylan wasn't sure what he was expecting, but he hadn't expected Tomas' first words. He had thought they would talk again as they had before, easing into their session as Dylan's comfort level was established. Instead Tomas barked. "Strip, slave, and kneel with your forehead touching the ground, ass in the air."

Dylan glanced nervously around the empty club. "Out here in the open? What if someone...?"

Tomas glared. "You don't question, slave. You obey." Recalling his earlier admonition on the phone, Dylan began to unbutton his shirt, a royal blue he knew complemented his bright blond hair and tan skin. Dylan was strong and muscular – he'd always stayed active to keep in shape, racquetball being his game of choice. He wasn't shy about his body but now as he kicked off his boots and pulled off his jeans, he

knew his face was turning red. All his life he'd suffered the bane of blushing far too easily. Tomas merely smiled, cocking his head, his arms crossed over his chest.

Slowly Dylan pulled his underwear from his body, stepping out to stand naked, his hands automatically crossing over his crotch. "Come now," Tomas said softly. "You know better than that. You should be proud of that gorgeous body. You look so strong and firm, your abs like a washboard. I bet you could do fifty pushups without working up a sweat. Drop and show me, slave boy."

Dylan stared a moment, not quite sure he'd heard correctly. Was Tomas a Dom or a drill sergeant? Tomas took a step forward, his dark eyes flashing behind the everpresent mask. Dylan dropped to the floor. "Count them," Tomas instructed.

"One. Ow!" Dylan hadn't expected the sting of the single tail that cut into his flesh as he rose in perfect form from the floor.

"Don't stop," Tomas commanded. "Lose count and we start over."

"Two. Ow!" Dylan bit his lip, determined to exhibit his grace. "Three! Four! Five!" Dylan began to sweat by the twentieth pushup, less from exertion than from the lash searing his ass and thighs. Yet despite the cut of the lash or because of it, his cock was fully erect, mashing between his body and the floor each time he lowered himself.

When he finally gasped, "Fifty," his arms gave out and he fell to the floor. His heart was thumping in his ears, his ass numb though he knew he'd feel the sting later as the endorphins zinging through his blood dissipated. He lay still, expecting at any moment to feel Tomas' cool strong hands, perhaps smoothing a soothing balm into his welted skin or perhaps tenderly pulling him up into an embrace.

Instead he heard, "Get up." When he didn't respond at once Tomas said more firmly, "Slave, get up. I'm going to put you in the cross. I'm in the mood for some cock and ball torture."

Dylan forced himself to his hands and knees and slowly stood. He was still sweating and his ass was beginning to sting. It flashed through his mind someone who didn't understand the scene—who didn't yearn for the kiss of leather or the loss of sensual control to another—would think he was being abused at this moment. To the contrary, he found himself in that particular submissive headspace where he longed to please the man who had just whipped him. He wanted to crawl to his feet and shower them with kisses. He wanted to promise obedience and devotion just before taking Tomas' perfect cock lovingly into his mouth.

Instead he obeyed Tomas' order, moving in a trance to one of the St. Andrew Crosses. He leaned against the wooden X, lifting his arms to permit Tomas to secure him to the cuffs at the top of each plank. He left Dylan's legs free. Standing very close, Tomas leaned down and kissed Dylan. He responded with a moan of unrestrained lust, darting his tongue eagerly back into Tomas' mouth.

Tomas kissed him for a long while before pulling away, trailing his lips down Dylan's throat to his chest, swirling his tongue seductively around each nipple, lightly biting each one to erection. He stood upright, sheathing Dylan's cock with one hand, gripping his balls tightly with the other. Squeezing until Dylan winced, he whispered close to his ear, "Time to see what you're made of, slave."

Dylan drew a deep shuddering breath, fear now tipping the balance with lust, though his cock remained painfully hard. He watched as Tomas opened a large leather duffel bag he'd apparently had at the ready. He removed a set of nipple clamps. He clipped the rubber-tipped alligator clips onto Dylan's sensitive nipples. Dylan protested only with a sharp intake of breath as he registered the bite of the clips. If possible his cock hardened even more.

Next Tomas produced a metal cuff of chrome-plated brass. Gently but firmly he grasped Dylan's balls. "Do you know what this is?" Dylan shook his head, though he had some idea from its shape. "It's called a ball stretcher. Worthy of the real Torquemada." As he spoke, he opened the cuff at its hinge and carefully closed it around the base of Dylan's balls, screwing shut the small eyebolts at each side, effectively locking them into it. The cuff was snug around the loose skin above Dylan's balls but wasn't painful.

Tomas produced two long teardrop-shaped fishing weights, his smile cruel. He attached one to each eyebolt, creating an intense pressure on his balls. He moaned as Tomas again grasped his shaft, pulling it roughly, forcing Dylan to arch his back. "You need this, don't you?" Tomas murmured, his own cock clearly erect beneath black denim.

"Yes, oh god, yes," Dylan moaned, closing his eyes, afraid he was going to come in Tomas' hand if he didn't stop his rough massage. Tomas did stop, just short of Dylan begging for release. Reaching into his duffel, he pulled out a short red leather riding crop. He smacked the underside of Dylan's cock, flipping it upward toward his belly. Then he smacked it down again. He smacked it from side to side, laughing softly, his eyes blazing. When he struck Dylan's cuffed and weighted balls Dylan screamed, the pain too intense to withstand in silence.

### "Please! I can't! Don't!"

Tomas grabbed him by the throat, his voice harsh. "You can and you will! You will take what I give you!" Dylan was breathing hard, aware he was poised on the razor-sharp edge between panic and delirious pleasure. Which side he fell to would depend on Tomas' skill as a Dom.

More gently, Tomas said, "Be brave. I know you can take this for me. You said you wanted to suffer for me. You know I will exalt you. I'll take you to that higher plane where pain truly melds into pleasure." He smoothed Dylan's cheek, stroking it with cool, sure fingers. "Close your eyes. Breathe deeply and slowly. Remember why you're here." As Dylan obeyed, he felt his panic ebb, submissive desire again regaining control of his behavior.

"Much better," Tomas crooned. "Keep your eyes closed. Focus on your pain and the pleasure it gives me. I'm going to whip your cock with a wicked mini cat-o'-nine-tails I picked up in Amsterdam. Guaranteed to make a grown man cry."

Dylan couldn't help but open his eyes, which widened as he stared at the little whip. It had a stainless steel handle and knotted leather tails, and looked wicked. Dylan tried to shrink back against the cross but of course he couldn't avoid what was coming, chained and helpless as he was.

Despite himself, he'd begun to breathe hard again, his breath coming fast and shallow. Tomas dragged the tresses of the leather whip softly down his body, letting it pull a bit against the chain of the nipple clamps, still firmly in place at Dylan's chest.

"You do want this, don't you, Dylan? For me?"

Dylan nodded, closing his eyes, trying not to squeeze them shut. The odd thing was, he truly *did* want it, and not just for Tomas. A true sexual masochist, Dylan thrived on erotic suffering. He knew if he could get through the initial pain, if he could let himself go enough, he would arrive on the other side of that pain, transcending it, embracing it, becoming it, until all that was left was an intensity of experience he had yet to be able to adequately describe, but if forced to use one word, he would call heaven.

Tomas began to whip his cock gently at first, stepping back to watch Dylan's tethered, tortured balls sway. Slowly he increased the intensity of each blow, flicking back his wrist and releasing it in a rain of knotted leather against Dylan's bobbing cock.

The harder he hit Dylan, the harder Dylan's cock became. The stinging, relentless attack became too much to bear. It hurt! Oh god it was too much! He began to moan, to beg incoherently, his mouth forgetting the shapes of words he knew he had to say to get relief. Yet the whipping went on. Dylan forgot he had recourse. His mind shut down as his body struggled to absorb the torture being inflicted upon it.

When he knew he couldn't endure another cruel kiss of leather, it began to happen. The delicious, languorous, almost magical change began to settle over him like a veil. It covered his body and his very soul with a deep sensual peace so profound Dylan was no longer conscious of being chained, cuffed, tethered or even beaten. He became pure sensation, sailing in a vast ocean of perfect sensual peace. He was barely aware when the clips were removed, hardly conscious when the weights were removed and the cuff released.

When Tomas' soft lips slid over the abraded reddened flesh of his shaft, he came in deep shuddering spurts. He would have fallen to his knees if he hadn't still been bound to the cross by his wrists. "Where are you?" he heard Tomas' deep voice as if from far away.

"Heaven," he managed to murmur.

## **Chapter Six**

Over their second pitcher of beer at the Waverly, a pub favored by faculty, Dylan leaned forward, his elbows on the table, his expression emphatic. "I don't know what to do! He's the most exciting man I've ever been with but I don't know who he is! He refuses to take off the damn mask or tell me his real name. He only wants to meet at the club. I don't know who it is I'm falling in love with!" Dylan leaned back and drank deeply from his mug.

They'd both had plenty to drink and Jack knew of his own penchant for sharing too much when alcohol loosened his tongue. It had been three days since that thrilling night when Jack, in the guise of Tomas, had met Dylan at Club Chained for their private session. He'd nearly come in his pants as he'd whipped Dylan's gorgeous cock, hard and straight above his balls, cuffed and weighed down with iron. He wanted to shave Dylan bare. He liked his sub boys smooth and accessible.

Except for the little detail, Dylan *wasn't* his sub boy. As Dylan had been observing for the last hour, he didn't even know who Tomas was. While their sensual connection was undeniably real, little else about their relationship, if one could even call it that, was. Tomas de Torquemada was pure fantasy as far as Dylan was concerned. And Jack had to admit, up until Dylan had entered his life only a few weeks before, that was just how he liked it.

Until now he had enjoyed the dichotomy of his life—balancing his professional persona of erudite and accomplished professor by day with the mysterious masterful Dom by night. He was selective with the submissive men he chose to Dom in public scenes and he never took anyone home. Though he still harbored a desire for a life partner with whom to share every aspect of his life, until Dylan had slipped into his heart, he'd honestly thought such a desire was a pipedream—an unrealistic wish he would never be granted in this lifetime.

For years he'd contented himself with the superficial BSDM games at the clubs. He knew part of the reason for his immense popularity wasn't only his skill with a whip or his ability to understand what made the submissive heart tick, but his aloofness — a kind of sexy arrogance. He always held himself apart, never letting emotions cloud the issue. The leather mask was a metaphor for the conscious distance he kept from his lovers. It literally and figuratively kept them from getting too close. Oddly, this was an aphrodisiac to most men, many of whom, like himself, wanted to avoid the risk of true intimacy.

Yet with Dylan he found himself wanting to tear the mask from his face. For the first time he longed to confess his true identity. With any other man he might have dared. He would have made sure they understood it was his way of sharing himself at

last—of baring his soul along with his face. But with Dylan! How could he possibly admit now that the blue-eyed American sitting across from him was in fact the British black-eyed mystery man about whom Dylan seemed utterly obsessed?

Jack poured himself another beer and drank half of it, aware he was getting drunk and glad for it. Dylan had dropped by his office earlier as Jack was getting ready to leave for the day. He didn't have an appointment but when someone had knocked on his office door, Jack had automatically called out for them to come in. How his heart had leapt as Dylan's blond head and smiling green eyes appeared around the door.

"Sorry to bother you, Jack," Dylan had said shyly. "I know I don't have an appointment, but I thought if you had time maybe we could grab a beer or something. I could really use someone to talk to."

Jack had been torn even then, reasonably sure Tomas would be the topic of conversation. He'd avoided calling Dylan on the phone as Tomas—not because he didn't want to talk to him but because he didn't know what to say.

Sunday night had not ended well. He'd wrested a perfect orgasm from Dylan, brought on through erotic torture and pleasure so intense Dylan had nearly fainted when he'd let him down. As he'd cradled Dylan in his arms, Dylan had opened his eyes and whispered, "Take off the mask. Tell me who you are. We can't share something like this without me knowing."

Tomas, who had been planning to continue their session, eager to bring Dylan to new heights of submissive pleasure, had been put off by this demand. He'd tried the tack of using his status as Dom to divert Dylan. "I'll decide when the time is right, slave," he'd intoned in his faux British accent.

Dylan had pulled out of his embrace, struggling to a sitting position next to him on the floor. "I'm serious, Tomas. Or whatever your name is. Don't you feel it too? I can't believe this is just a game for you. What I experienced today…" He paused, seeking the words. "I just can't believe I could have gotten there if this was just a game. I know you're more experienced in all this, but the few times before when I've achieved that state of grace, it's been with someone I trusted. Someone who trusted me. Someone who," he said the last two words so softly Tomas hadn't been entirely sure he'd heard them, "loved me."

Tomas' heart had ached as he stared at Dylan, who blushed, taking Tomas' silence as a denial. How he had wanted to confess! Yet how could he? Dylan already knew him as Jack Marchand. How could he reconcile the two? How could he ever trust Jack, who had let this go much too far as it was?

As he struggled with how to respond, Dylan had gotten to his feet. Hurriedly he'd pulled on his clothing, averting his face all the while. Tomas had done nothing to stop him, uncertainty and despair turning him to stone. Dylan walked to the exit door. Turning back, he had said, "I don't want to see you again unless you can find the courage to show your face. For what it's worth, I love you—or at least what I know of you. Goodbye."

#### Claire Thompson

As he heard Dylan's footsteps on the stairs, he'd said in a whisper, "I love you too." He had sat where he was for what could have been a few minutes or a few hours, his mind numb with anguish. Finally he had heaved himself up with a sigh. He'd gone to the private bathroom behind the bar, pulling the mask and wig from his head and changing out of his pirate's shirt into a T-shirt with an NYU logo on its front. Carefully he removed the black-tinted contacts from his eyes and slipped them into their case. For a long moment he stared at himself in the mirror, wondering who he really was.

"Pour me another, will ya?" Dylan, his speech slightly slurred, lifted his empty beer mug and slammed it on the table, jerking Jack back to the present. Dylan gave a lopsided grin as he pushed his empty mug toward Jack, inadvertently tipping it over as he did so.

"I think maybe we've both had enough," Jack offered. "How about let's take a walk? It's a nice evening. Clear our heads a little."

"Okay by me," Dylan slurred. "Just gotta pee first. Meet you in front?"

Jack waited several minutes and was considering going back inside to look for Dylan when he came out. "Sorry," Dylan said, sounding a little more sober. "I splashed some water on my face. I'm feeling kind of woozy. I had more beer than I thought. Drowning my sorrows, I guess." He laughed mirthlessly.

They began to walk along the avenue in the direction of Jack's apartment house. Dylan hunched forward, his hands in his pockets, his eyes on the sidewalk. Jack maneuvered through the crowd for both of them, gently guiding Dylan. He hadn't realized he was taking Dylan to his place until they stopped in front of it.

The doorman just inside the glass doors clicked the lock open, acknowledging Jack with a nod and a smile. "This is my place. Want to come in and have some coffee or something? I could make some burgers, put some food on our stomachs."

Dylan gave the same lopsided grin he had back in the pub. "Sure, okay. Why not? Tomas has decided to break my heart. Maybe you can mend it."

Jack took in a breath at this unexpected statement. Though obviously he was wildly attracted to Dylan, Dylan had until that moment shown zero interest in Jack as Jack Marchand and not the fantasy persona he'd created. Of course, the guy was drunk and also on a rebound, at least in his own head.

Yet at the same time, maybe this was the solution! Jack would seduce Dylan on his own terms, without invoking the charismatic Tomas. After all, they had so much in common—both history professors, both gay and into BDSM. Imagine if he could have someone like Dylan! Someone to share *every* aspect of his life, not just his sexual secrets!

As they rode up in the elevator, Jack glanced almost shyly at Dylan. He realized the irony of the situation. As Tomas he wouldn't have hesitated to press Dylan back against the elevator wall, taking what was his, plundering his mouth, pulling his shirt up to feel his masculine sexy chest, pressing his groin against Dylan's as he exerted his sexual will. As Jack he didn't dare take that kind of liberty.

Jack unlocked his door and ushered Dylan inside. His apartment while small was nicely decorated with framed posters on the walls, recently redone hardwood floors and practical comfortable furniture from Scandinavia he'd assembled himself.

"Have a seat," he said, pointing toward a plump futon couch covered in bright yellow upholstery, flanked on either end with side tables, each one piled with books. "Can I get you a soda or a cup of coffee or anything?"

"Maybe coffee," Dylan said. "This is a really nice place." He looked around appreciatively. "You could fit my whole apartment into your living room."

Jack laughed. "Well, there isn't much more. There's a bedroom and a room not much bigger than a closet that's supposed to be my home office. I think it was originally a sewing room. I mostly just pile papers and books in there and do my real work out here on the couch as you can see." He pointed toward the books on the tables. There was a laptop beneath one pile.

"Well, it's really nice. It's nice of you to have a drunken colleague over, especially after he's bent your ear for the last hour about someone who doesn't even exist!"

"Oh stop. I hope you think of us as more than colleagues. I'd like to think we're becoming friends."

"Okay, drunk friend then," Dylan laughed. "I should know better. I never could hold my liquor. Cheap date." He laughed again.

"I'll remember that," Jack grinned. "Now let me get you some coffee. How do you like it?"

"Cream if you have it. A little sugar."

"Coming up." Jack moved into the kitchen, taking some burgers from the freezer to defrost in the microwave before making a pot of coffee for the two of them. He returned with two mugs a few minutes later.

"There you go," he said, sitting down next to Dylan. The situation felt surreal. Dylan looked so unhappy and he knew he was the cause of that unhappiness. Yet he didn't know how to undo it without losing everything. He edged closer to Dylan, daring to drop his hand to the younger man's thigh. Dylan didn't move or push his hand away. He sat very still, holding his coffee mug with both hands though he hadn't yet tasted it.

After a moment Jack withdrew his hand, focusing on his coffee. He took a sip and set it down next to the books on the side table beside him. Dylan also took a sip and set his mug down as well.

When Jack turned to face Dylan he found Dylan staring at him. "You're quite goodlooking, Jack. Those eyes, so blue, ice blue. I could lose myself in your eyes."

Jack felt himself flushing with pleasure, unprepared for this sudden compliment. *He's drunk*, he admonished himself. *Don't take advantage of that.* "Well, thanks," he responded. "You have really nice eyes too. The green is so clear. And I love the ring of amber brown around your pupils. It's very unusual."

"Tomas has black eyes," Dylan said. *Oh shit, here we go,* Jack thought as Dylan continued. "I mean, they aren't dark brown, like you might think, but actually black. You can't distinguish the pupil from the iris. When he stares at you with that commanding look, you just get all weak in the knees and you'll do anything for him. Jesus. I would have. If only he'd..." he trailed off.

"Listen, Dylan. I know you're hurting about this guy. But frankly, if he doesn't have the courage to reveal himself to you as a man and not just as some club Dom, he probably isn't the one for you. You deserve better. You deserve a Dom who understands your need for an erotic exchange of power but also has the ability to love you for who you are. Not just as a submissive but as a whole person. Someone who appreciates your scholarship, your humor, your sensitivity, your passion. Someone who understands your need to be tied down and whipped, along with your desire to be loved and adored. Someone who will sit with you when you're aching or sick and bring you tea and toast in bed, but who won't hesitate to cane you raw when that's what you need, or chain you to the bed and torture you with loving care until you're begging to come."

Jack paused, aware he'd probably said way too much. Dylan was staring at him. "Yes," he said softly. "That's what I need. What I dream of. What I long for. I thought, foolishly I now realize, Tomas might offer me that." He stood suddenly, striking his thigh with his closed fist. "What an idiot I was! To think because some stranger used me for a few hot BDSM sessions he was anything more than another shallow poser. Oh he spoke beautifully, he was sexy as hell, but in the end, I guess there was nothing there."

Jack stood as well as he realized Dylan had begun to cry. Not heaving sobs but tears spilling over his cheeks as he turned his face away. Moved, Jack reached out, pulling Dylan into his arms. Dylan clung to him, resting his head on Jack's shoulder. "I'm sorry. I can't seem to get over him. I keep thinking he'll call. I mean, it's only been a few days. Maybe he's out of town or something..."

Jack stroked Dylan's head, at a loss for what to do. Oh it felt so good to hold Dylan in his arms, even if he was doing so under false pretenses. He felt his cock stiffen against Dylan's body and to his surprise felt Dylan's erection against his thigh. He closed his eyes, daring to let his head drop down, willing Dylan to lift his head for a kiss.

When their lips met, Jack could barely suppress a cry of joy. Oh he tasted so sweet! Forgetting himself for a moment, forgetting if he was Jack or Tomas, just knowing this was where he had to be, Jack kissed Dylan with all the pent-up passion he'd been holding back since last they'd kissed.

He claimed Dylan's mouth, holding his head on either side as he bit and suckled Dylan's lips and then darted his tongue back into Dylan's mouth. He glided his tongue along Dylan's front teeth, slipping it along the gums as Dylan shuddered and went limp in his arms. When he finally released Dylan, he collapsed back onto the futon. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes bright. "Jesus," Dylan breathed. "What was that? That kiss! I must be drunker than I thought!'

"What? What is it?" Jack asked, worried suddenly that he knew.

"You could have been him. If I closed my eyes, that could have been Tomas' lips on mine. Tomas' tongue invading my mouth, taking control of me with his tongue. Jesus! Did you guys both go to the same Dom kissing school?" Jack laughed nervously as Dylan added, "No one except Tomas, of course, has ever kissed me like that. Even the way you held my head! I'm so confused right now."

Jack sat next to him, speaking softly. "Listen, Dylan. You probably have had more to drink than you thought. Certainly more than was good for you. Why don't you lie down a while? I'll make dinner and I'll come get you when it's ready."

Dylan nodded numbly, allowing himself to be led to the bedroom. The small room was nearly filled by Jack's queen-size bed covered with a thick down quilt of bright yellow. "You really like yellow, huh," Dylan grinned, though his eyes remained troubled.

"Yeah," Jack agreed. "Yellow makes me feel happy." He tried to smile but didn't quite manage it. "Just lie down and rest a bit, okay?"

Dylan complied, flopping facedown onto the bed. Jack stared at his cute ass so nicely packaged in his jeans and resisted his urge to smack it. Instead he pulled off Dylan's boots and set them neatly by the side of the bed. He was curiously moved by the hole in the heel of one of his socks.

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"Dylan? You awake?" Jack set down the glass of lemonade he'd brought in, in case Dylan was thirsty. Hamburgers with all the trimmings were waiting on the small table in his kitchen.

Dylan rolled over and squinted one eye open. He looked so adorable with his blond hair falling over his eyes, his face smudged with sleep. "Jack. Kiss me again. Like you did before. Kiss me."

Jack didn't need a second invitation. He slipped onto the bed next to Dylan and took him into his arms. Their kiss was as new and exciting as each one they'd shared before. What was it about this man that drove Jack into such a frenzy of passion? Never before had another man penetrated his substantial reserve with such ease. As they kissed, Jack rolled himself on top of Dylan, taking his natural place as Dom. Without thinking about it, he grasped Dylan's wrists, pulling his arms up over his head.

He lifted his own body a bit, leaning down with his weight on Dylan's wrists. He wondered for a moment who was the stronger. In a physical fight who would overpower whom? They were pretty evenly matched, though Jack was a few inches taller than Dylan. He recalled the ease with which Dylan had executed those pushups, his form perfect, his body parallel to the ground as he rose and dipped.

#### Claire Thompson

Jack felt a surge of dominant lust course through his body as he recalled the lovely welts he'd so casually inflicted on Dylan's bare ass each time he lifted himself, counting each lash like an obedient slave boy, his cock hard as steel all the while.

Jack bent back down, Dylan's wrists still held down against the pillows, as he sought Dylan's mouth. He was eager for another lingering kiss. Dylan made no struggle beneath him. Jack could feel his cock pressed against his own as their lips and tongues met again in a heady, passionate dance.

Abruptly he released Dylan's arms and rolled off him. Without speaking he began to pull off his clothing, throwing his shirt from the bed with one hand while he reached for his zipper with the other. In a moment he was naked. Dylan was staring at him with wide eyes, his lips parted, his chest heaving.

Jack grabbed the hem of Dylan's shirt and pulled it up over his head. Dylan half sat as he did this, making it easier to remove the shirt. He fell back against the pillows, making no effort to remove his own pants but nor did he stop Jack as he pulled the button-down fly open and dragged the pants down his legs, taking the underwear with it.

Dylan's cock was as erect as his own. Jack knelt beside him, grabbing Dylan's shaft firmly in his hand. Though he wasn't wearing the wig or the mask, Jack felt Tomas' dominant persona invade his body, his lust rising to a boiling point as he beheld the sexy man lying naked and willing before him.

He spit on his hand and returned it to Dylan's shaft, keeping it in a firm grip as he rubbed up and down its considerable length. Dylan closed his eyes and moaned. "Where there's pleasure there's also pain," Jack said as he gripped Dylan's balls. "You need both, don't you, boy? You need both and so do I." He squeezed Dylan's balls as he continued to stroke his cock. Dylan winced and shuddered but made no effort to stop him.

"Get up," Jack commanded. "Get on your hands and knees."

Dylan rolled over, scrambling to obey. If he'd resisted at all, Jack would have lost the courage to continue, knowing Dylan was still drunk, still "rebounding" from the loss of his imaginary lover Tomas. But Dylan did not resist. He didn't question Jack or himself. He was responding to Jack's dominant impulse with his submissive one. Together they completed one another.

"Do you want the pleasure or the pain first?" Jack said, aware there was no real distinction for Dylan or himself.

"The pain," Dylan said hoarsely. Jack began to smack his bare ass, not starting gently nor easing him into the sting, but hitting him hard with a cupped palm. Each blow forced Dylan's body slightly forward until his head was pressed up against the headboard. Still Jack smacked him, his cock tingling with each resounding blow as he watched Dylan's ass turn a lovely shade of crimson.

"Jesus," he finally murmured, nearly mad with lust. "I have to have you. I have to fuck you." He groped for his night table drawer, pulling out a tube of lubricant and a

condom. "Get your ass ready for me, boy. It's time to take what's mine." He bit off the last words. He'd been about to say "at last" but of course that would make no sense to Dylan. He tossed the tube to Dylan.

Did it make sense now? To fuck Dylan on what was essentially their first date? Not even a date – just one pal offering another a place to crash while he came down from his buzz. Jack knew he was being a jerk – thinking with his little head instead of his big one. As he stared down at Dylan's luscious ass, watching as Dylan dutifully fumbled with the lubricant, reaching back to grease his asshole for the impending invasion, Jack decided to hell with honor and decency. Fuck behaving like an adult! He had to have to this man. He wanted him more than he'd ever wanted anyone in his life.

Stripping open the packet, Jack slid a condom over his cock and moved himself behind the waiting Dylan. He leaned up against him, pressing the head of his cock between Dylan's ass cheeks as he reached around to assess the level of Dylan's arousal. He was hard as a rock, his cock wet at the tip with a bit of pre-cum. Jack used the natural lubricant, running his fingers down Dylan's length as he whispered in his ear, "Ready for the pleasure?"

Carefully he pressed against Dylan's entrance, thrilling to Dylan's tiny cry of pain at the initial penetration. Grasping Dylan's hips, he guided himself into Dylan's very tight asshole, pressing past resisting muscle until he was completely inside.

Again he reached around to grasp Dylan's shaft, teasing it with light deft strokes until Dylan's sweet gasps filled the room. Slowly he began to ease himself in and out of Dylan's tight tunnel, reveling in its velvet grip. As he brought Dylan closer to climax, he began to move faster, his balls slapping Dylan's ass with each pounding thrust.

They grunted in unison, Jack's fingers still curled around Dylan's cock. "Oh god, I'm going to -"

"Ask me!" Jack panted. "For permission. Ask me."

"Please," Dylan gasped, obeying. "I need to come. Can I come?"

"Yes," Jack hissed as he ejaculated deep inside of Dylan's hot, luscious ass.

They fell together onto the soft quilt, rolling to their sides, Jack's cock buried between Dylan's still-reddened ass cheeks. They lay still, except for their labored breathing and the beating of their hearts. As Jack's heart finally returned to its normal rhythm, he gently lifted his arms from around Dylan. Carefully he pulled back, withdrawing his now flaccid cock. He disposed of the used condom and wiped himself with a few tissues.

"Dylan?" he said softly. "You okay?" Dylan didn't answer. He was fast asleep. Jack lay quietly next to him for some minutes, wondering if things were actually going to work out after all. Dylan had been sexually submissive with him, responding to dominant commands and behaving as if he accepted Jack as his dominant lover.

Yet Jack knew from experience people who behaved one way while drunk didn't always feel the same the next morning. Well, he would have to wait and see. He'd never

dreamed they'd have come this far this fast. Lightly he stroked Dylan's strong back, reveling in the feel of his supple flesh.

His stomach burbled and Jack suddenly recalled the now-cold hamburgers waiting on the kitchen table. Should he wake Dylan to have some dinner? As he lay musing on this he drifted into a half sleep, his mind filling with images of Dylan chained to the rack, Dylan on the cross, Dylan on his knees with Jack's cock down his throat, Dylan in his arms...without realizing it, he closed his eyes and slept.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Jack awoke, the room was dark. He knew even before he reached out his hand he would find no one beside him. Life never worked out like that it seemed. Fairy tales rarely came true, there was almost never a happily ever after ending, at least not in his experience.

He clicked on the bedside lamp and sat up rubbing his eyes. It was three a.m. The beer and the sex had knocked him out for seven hours! He noticed the folded piece of paper where Dylan had lain and grabbed it with trembling fingers, afraid to read the words, desperate to read the words.

### Dear Jack,

I'm sorry to disappear on you. I had too much to drink and did things I wouldn't have normally done on a first date! <sup>(C)</sup> Seriously, I apologize with all my heart if I've given you the wrong impression. What happened was very hot and very sexy, at least as much as I can remember. But you have to understand, and I have to face up to the fact that my heart still belongs to another. Whoever he might be, the man who calls himself Tomas has captured me so completely I can't think about another man at this point. If you want me to find another advisor, I completely understand. I'm sorry. I hope you can understand.

Love, Dylan

Jack read the letter twice, shaking his head. He began to laugh and then to cry. Finally he balled up the paper in his first and hurled it toward the wall. "Dylan Reese. I'm afraid you give me no choice. You, me and Tomas are going to have to sit down together and may the best man win."

### **Chapter Seven**

Dylan sat in the back of the lecture hall. He was observing Professor Marchand's very popular course entitled *Marginal People in Medieval Times*. It was an investigation of disenfranchised groups in medieval Europe, including women, slaves, lepers, the poor, the insane, Muslims, Jews, heretics and of course homosexuals.

Dylan wasn't quite sure why he was there, though he told himself it was because he was curious as to Jack's style in the classroom. Most of Jack's courses were only open to graduate students but this one was open to undergraduates as well and was always completely filled. Dylan could see why. The professor controlled the room, his voice compelling, his attitude animated. It was clear he loved what he was teaching and this filtered through to the students, who sat with rapt attention as they listened.

It was Friday afternoon, two days after Dylan had persuaded his advisor to join him for a few beers. Dylan had willfully let himself get drunk, foolishly thinking he could drown his sorrows. And so he had, he supposed, at least for a while. He shifted in his seat with embarrassment as he recalled for the hundredth time the events of that evening as far as he remembered them!

Drunk or not, he'd led Jack on. He had permitted him to make love to him when he knew from the start it could never work. He could only hope Jack, like most gay guys he knew, would consider it a one-night stand, a bit of casual sex between friends, and think no more about it. Dylan almost regretted leaving the note, since he thought it inferred the experience was of more significance.

Yet was he so certain he had done the right thing? Jack hadn't called but then neither had Tomas. Jack was obviously right – Tomas had faded away when faced with Dylan's demand he remove his mask. The man didn't have the courage to face Dylan as whoever he really was. So why, why, why couldn't he just forget about Tomas!

As he listened with half an ear to Jack's lecture, he pulled out his wallet and removed the folded piece of paper within. Against a gold background read the precious words *Club Chained – Admit One*. He had dialed the number to the club the day before, telling himself he would let fate decide if he went one last time to see Tomas. If he got the answering machine, he would put the masked man behind him and try to go on with his life. But after only the first ring he'd connected with a real person who had taken his credit card information over the phone and told him he could pick up his invitation any time before Saturday night at a particular convenience store in the Village.

He'd felt like a spy in an espionage novel as he'd looked for the redheaded cashier named Ted as instructed. When he'd identified himself as Dylan and said he wanted to pick up his invitation, the young man had looked furtively from left to right before responding. After determining the coast was clear – from what, Dylan wasn't sure – the guy had pulled out a small notebook from his back pocket and flipped through its pages, holding it very close to his chest in case one of the patrons was trying to get a look at his top-secret list while browsing for candy bars and magazines.

Finally he'd said, "Let's see some ID." Dylan had offered his license, which Ted had scrutinized carefully, glancing repeatedly from it to Dylan's face. Dylan couldn't control the grin that began to spread as he watched the silly man behave with what seemed to him absurd caution and self-importance. Ted extracted an invitation from a cash strong box he kept beneath the counter and handed it to Dylan. "Don't lose it. Non-refundable. Good only for the date shown."

That date being tomorrow night, Dylan thought, as a spurt of adrenaline shot through him. He refused to entertain the possibility Tomas might not be there. Wasn't he a staple at Club Chained? Yet even if he were there, would he want to see Dylan? For that matter, what did Dylan expect of himself? Would he agree to participate in a public scene? To let others watch if it meant he got the chance to submit once more to the masterful Dom? Was he really willing to humiliate himself in that way, just for the chance to kiss Tomas' lips and feel the sting of his lash?

His mind shifted back to Jack. It had been uncanny how, if he closed his eyes, he could almost believe he had been in Tomas' arms instead of Jack's. The way he'd claimed Dylan with his kiss, so like Tomas! They even smelled alike—vanilla and cardamom with a hint of something else, something sexy but undefined. They must use the same cologne, he thought. *Eau de Dom—the scent of choice for the Dom in the know…* Dylan realized it had probably been his own desire, his own longing for Tomas, coupled with too much beer that had created the illusion of similarities between them. Sometimes one just wanted a thing so badly he thought he had it—until he sobered. Dylan grinned ruefully. Would sex have been so hot with Jack without beer and misplaced longing?

He looked up at the podium where Jack stood, taking questions from students as the class neared its end. He really was extremely handsome, as tall and elegant as Tomas himself. He tried to recall Jack naked but honestly couldn't remember. Of course, he'd been on his hands and knees most of the time, receiving Jack's hot, hard spanking and hot, hard cock from behind.

God, what was he doing? There was Jack Marchand, accomplished, sexy, sincere, so easy to talk to and a Dom to boot! What the hell was wrong with himself, Dylan wondered, to make him choose Tomas over Jack? Why was it he always seemed to make the wrong choice when it came to men? Why did he always seem to favor the bad boy over the mature, loving man? Was he as afraid of real intimacy as Tomas de Torquemada? Hiding behind claims of being in love with another to avoid a man who seemed to offer so much?

Dylan shook his head, annoyed with himself for obsessing over his stupid love life or lack thereof. He was way too old for this. He would go to the club tomorrow and see what happened. Meanwhile he'd go to the library and actually do some work for a change.

The lecture was over and most of the students were filing out of the rows, heading toward the door. A cluster of students stood around Jack. As Dylan stood, Jack happened to glance his direction. For a moment their eyes locked and Dylan felt his face flood with color. Jack was the first to look away, focusing again on the students around him as Dylan slipped unnoticed out the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

Jack continued his silent argument with himself as he dressed for the evening. Though he'd rarely missed a Saturday at Club Chained in the seven months it had been open, he knew he didn't have the energy or desire to masquerade as Tomas tonight. It wouldn't be fair to the sub boys who would cluster around him, eager to submit, eager to watch, eager to please.

For the first time the thrill was gone. He didn't look forward to selecting a silk pirate's shirt from his collection or sliding into specially tailored tight leather pants that fit snugly over his cock and balls. He didn't plan which implements of erotic torture to bring along to tease and delight his chosen boy toy for the evening.

Usually by the Wednesday prior, he would have selected someone in his mind, tailoring the scenario to fit that person's desires and needs. Dylan hadn't been the first man he'd taken aside to the private room. He liked to know a person before he Dommed them—to get insight into what made them tick, what turned them on, what frightened them. His public scenes were intense as a result. He wasn't flying blind as he pressed the sensual envelope of the lucky submissive chosen to receive his attentions.

Tonight he had no one in mind, except the one man who didn't want him. Well, that wasn't entirely true. Dylan wanted Tomas. But with a price. A price Jack was afraid to pay. He realized he didn't dare attend Club Chained as Tomas for there was a chance Dylan would be there. Unless he wanted to shun him entirely, he didn't dare show Tomas' masked face. No, he would go as Jack and let the chips fall where they may.

At eleven o'clock Jack arrived at the red door. He produced his gold card and presented it to the doorman, a man named George, who stared at him and back at the card, turning it over and over. "I don't recognize you," he finally said.

"I'm new. Friend of Stanley's. Is there a problem?"

"No, I guess not. I thought I knew everyone with a gold card."

"Well, I'm Jack," he offered, thrusting out his hand. "Nice to meet you."

George shook his hand rather half-heartedly, without offering his own name in return. He still didn't look quite convinced but he handed back the card and said, "Well, okay then. Go on in."

Jack descended the familiar stairs, feeling very strange in his "civvies", almost naked without his dark disguise. Many heads swiveled in his direction, giving him long

appraising looks. He was, after all, a "newbie" and they always received quite a bit of attention. He moved toward the bar, hoping to sit discreetly and take in the room, his eye out for the one man who mattered.

As he made his way to the bar, he was accosted by several men who tried to make small talk and assess his orientation—Dom or sub. He sat down on a stool, having waved most of them away. One persistent guy followed him to the bar. He was a tall swarthy fellow with a thick leather slave collar, whom Jack knew to be submissive, though as Tomas he'd never really gotten to know him.

"I'm Harold and I just wanted to welcome you to Club Chained. You haven't been here before, am I right? A gorgeous guy like you – I would have noticed."

"Uh, no. First time."

"And you're Dom, right? I knew the minute you walked in. Your confidence, your swagger." Jack glanced at Harold with a small frown. He hadn't been aware he "swaggered" and wasn't sure he liked the description.

"Uh, no actually. I'm a sub. Masochistic slut slave boy. Owned by a very stern master. He'd whip me to shreds just for talking to you actually. You too, if he catches you. Very jealous guy. He'll be here any second."

Harold stood rather abruptly, glancing nervously toward the door. "Well, uh, okay. Nice to meet you." He melted back into the crowd as Jack turned toward the bartender to order a club soda.

As he waited, he looked slowly around the room, his eyes finally resting on the stools at the bar, each one occupied. His heart lurched painfully when he saw him. Dylan was there, perched on the stool second from the end. He was leaning back against the bar, facing the room, his eyes trained on the entrance.

Had he seen Jack enter a few minutes before? Or had he himself only just come in? God, he was so incredibly handsome. He was wearing a white long-sleeved T-shirt with a low-scooped neck that revealed part of his tan muscular chest. Jack entertained a brief fantasy of ripping the shirt from his body just before he threw him down to the ground and fucked the living daylights out of him. He shook his head and took a breath. It was now or never.

Slowly he stood, taking his glass with him as he walked toward Dylan, who didn't appear to have seen him. He stopped just behind the man next to Dylan on the last stool. "Excuse me, would you mind terribly giving me your seat? I need a word with this guy here." The man turned and he realized it was Peter, a nice sub boy who loved to give head while others watched him.

Jack gazed at him sternly, using his best "Dom expression" as he dropped his hand to Peter's shoulder and gave it a firm squeeze. Peter obediently stood, saying, "No problem." He licked his lips lasciviously as he looked Jack up and down, adding, "Lucky Dylan."

Jack slipped onto the vacated stool and said softly, "Hi." His heart was hammering and he half expected Dylan to get up and walk away.

Instead Dylan said, "Hi. I didn't expect to see you here." He glanced again toward the entrance and then back at Jack.

"No? You're waiting for someone else?"

"Well, not exactly. I mean, kind of." Again he swiveled toward the entrance and then back to Jack. "Listen, about the other night. I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to lead you on. I was—"

"I know," Jack cut him off. "You were drunk and didn't know what you were doing." As Dylan nodded, Jack said flatly, "I don't buy it, Dylan. Excuse me, but that's a load of crap. You can't share what we did without it meaning something. Tomas isn't going to show up. Tomas is history. We have a chance for something, you and I. Something real. Don't throw it away over a fantasy."

Dylan furrowed his brow. "What do you mean he isn't going to show up? How do you know? He always comes here on Saturdays. He's a legend. The place wouldn't even exist without him. The man's a god here." Dylan's voice was annoyed, almost angry.

Jack grinned despite himself, amused and flattered by what he was sure was an overblown description of his alter ego's stature at Club Chained. He tried again. "He's usually here by now, isn't he? It's after eleven. How long are you going to wait?"

"As long as I need to," Dylan snapped. Jack looked sharply at him. The boy was clinging to a fantasy. He had to do something to stop this insanity. For a moment he considered leaving and returning as Tomas. Then he would treat Dylan horribly, make sure Dylan hated his guts and then be there for Dylan when he ran sobbing from the scene.

Jack knew even as he fantasized the scenario he would never do that to Dylan. He couldn't bear the thought of hurting him in any way, even in the guise of the masked man. Instead he said softly, "I'll wait with you."

They both sat quietly for a while, each lost in his own thoughts. Quite a few men approached them both since they were perhaps the best-looking men in the place. Several people greeted Dylan by name and asked if he'd heard from Tomas. Each time Dylan shook his head no and sighed.

By one o'clock Dylan at last seemed prepared to accept the fact Tomas would not be showing his masked face at the club that night. Jack had been able to engage him in small talk about campus politics, the club dynamics and other things he didn't remember. He hadn't broached the subject of the other night or what future if any they might have together. He didn't have the heart for it, and anyway, he didn't want to get into it in this noisy, crowded scene.

Dylan stood, thrusting his hands into his jeans. "Guess he isn't going to show. Guess you were right," he said sadly.

"Yeah." Jack paused, as if the idea he'd been harboring all night was only just occurring to him. "Say, want to come over for a nightcap or something? I get the feeling

you don't really want to be alone right now. I mean, it might be better to have someone to talk to." *Let him say yes*, he willed silently.

Dylan looked up at him. "You would want that? After the way I've treated you? I mean, I didn't mean to treat you badly but I'm such a basket case over Tomas right now."

"Not at all. I understand. You should come to my place because I have something I want to show you." Jack hadn't realized he was going to say that until he'd done so. All at once he knew what he had to do. This hideous charade of mixed-up identities and misplaced yearnings simply had to stop, whatever the cost.

Dylan was quiet during the subway ride to Jack's neighborhood. When Jack put his hand on Dylan's thigh, Dylan didn't pull away but continued to look out the window into the blackness of the subway tunnel.

His hand felt nice there actually. What a true friend Jack was turning out to be, inviting him home even after he'd obviously been waiting for Tomas. Jack was such a nice guy. If only Tomas hadn't slipped first into Dylan's heart, he could really fall for a guy like Jack. Maybe someday he'd get over that rat bastard and be able to give Jack the attention he deserved. Of course by then it would be too late. Dylan's entire love life had been one big case of bad timing, he realized.

Jack was quiet too, saying only, "This is our stop," when the voice over the intercom announced something unintelligible. Together they ascended the station stairs, moving out into the hubbub of the city that never sleeps.

Once inside Jack's apartment, Dylan accompanied Jack into his kitchen, watching as Jack pulled out a jar of salsa and some tortilla chips. He set them on the table and pulled two bottles of beer from the refrigerator. "A snack," he announced as he sat down. Dylan sat as well, noting the bright yellow Formica tabletop with a grin. The guy really liked yellow!

They munched on the chips a while with Dylan commenting on how good the salsa was. It was spicy, the way he liked it, with black beans and corn added. He took a long drink of the cold beer and set it down. He was feeling better already. So the bastard hadn't shown up. It didn't necessarily mean anything. It was possible he really was out of town. Who knew what he did by day? Maybe he had a job where he had to travel from time to time. Maybe his aunt had just died and left him a fortune. Maybe –

"A penny for your thoughts," Jack said.

Dylan laughed and ducked his head. "I'm sorry. I was thinking of, well, to be honest, I was thinking of Tomas."

"What were you thinking?"

Dylan felt a little sheepish. He knew he was obsessed and that it showed. Jack really seemed to want to know so he admitted, "I was thinking he's probably out of town and that's why he hasn't called or been around."

"Oh I see. They don't have cell phones out of town. No access to some form of communication."

Dylan flushed. "Look, you asked what I was thinking. I didn't ask for your opinion."

"Fair enough," Jack said calmly. "I want you to come with me into the living room. Sit with me on the futon. I have something to show you."

"Okay," Dylan replied, wondering what it was and why Jack couldn't just show him here. Still, he complied, following his host into the living room. They sat side by side on the couch.

"What do you want to show me?"

"Something you need to see. But first, I want to kiss you."

"Pardon me?" Despite his intention to refuse, Dylan felt a thrill jolt through his body as Jack ran his fingers down his cheek, the gesture familiar and very intimate.

"Kiss me. Let me kiss you. Give yourself to me for that one moment and then if you can honestly tell me there isn't something between us, I'll accept that."

Dylan tried to catch his breath as Jack's hand trailed down his chest and came to rest over his crotch, gripping him firmly as he leaned down. When their lips met, Dylan was transported as he had been before. This time he knew he couldn't blame it on alcohol. Jack claimed him with his tongue, owned him with his lips, enslaved him with his kiss. He moaned against Jack's mouth as their bodies pressed together. When Jack started to pull away, it was Dylan who pulled him back. He didn't want the kiss to end. He didn't want to come to terms with whatever it was Jack wanted of him. He realized he didn't want to admit Jack's kiss was as sweet and as powerful as Tomas', maybe more so. He realized with a small shock he'd rather enjoyed clinging to the romantic notion of a masked man coming to sweep him off his feet.

When finally they parted, he fell back against the futon, gasping for breath, his cock hard and painfully bent in his jeans. As if he had the right, as if they were lovers, Jack reached his hand below the waist of Dylan's pants and slipped it into his underwear. He pulled up on Dylan's cock so it straightened, hard as steel against his belly.

"I want you to choose, Dylan," Jack said in a low voice, a voice almost familiar, different from his usual pure tenor. "Tomas or me. You can't have both. Will you take a fantasy or a man who is falling in love with you?"

Dylan stared at him. He didn't know what to say. Yes, the kiss was amazing. Yes, Jack was masterful and sexy. But he wasn't Tomas! Tomas' dark eyes floated before him, sparkling with lust as he held Dylan captive. Tomas wasn't afraid to take him where he needed to go. He hadn't hesitated to whip him to a frenzy of desire so fierce he'd almost passed out. Somehow Dylan doubted Jack would be Dom enough, man enough, to use him as he desperately needed to be used.

"I don't know. I'm sorry. He's in my blood, you see. I can't explain."

#### Claire Thompson

Jack stood up abruptly. "This is ridiculous. I can't go on like this any longer. At the risk of ruining everything, I have to tell you the truth."

"What truth?"

"I am Tomas. Jack Marchand and Tomas de Torquemada are one and the same."

Dylan laughed. "You're speaking metaphorically I suppose. You mean to say you're both Dom, you're both strong, assertive men who know what they want."

"No, I'm not speaking metaphorically. He and I are one and the same."

Dylan stared at Jack as he tried to process what the man was saying. He was Tomas? Absurd! Ridiculous! Tomas had black eyes! Tomas had dark hair! Tomas was off at his aunt's funeral at this very moment... Jack was staring at him, his expression almost fierce. "Aren't you going to say something?" he said at last.

"You're not Tomas. I would have known."

Jack took a deep breath. For a moment Dylan thought he was going to hit him. Instead he said in a very calm voice, "I didn't want to do this. You've backed me into a corner. Whatever happens, know this. I love you. I know I'm showing my hand though I know you prefer a strong mysterious Dom who will always keep you on edge. Someone who will always keep you wondering so you can justify your adoration without worrying about actually having to commit to anything beyond BDSM play. So you won't have to get messy with a real, adult relationship with everything that involves."

Dylan opened his mouth to vehemently deny these unfair accusations. He hated games! He was longing for a life partner! He'd just never found the man he could commit to. Until Tomas. At least in theory. If he had had the chance to know him better...

Dylan was left with his thoughts, a small part of his brain acknowledging despite himself what Jack had said about him was true. He was scared of commitment and had always chosen men who were even more afraid so he'd never have to come to grips with his own fears.

Jack had left the room. "Don't go anywhere," he called out from his bedroom. "I'll be out in a few minutes. I'm going to show you now what you think you want to see." Dylan waited, very curious, very confused, very annoyed and still wildly aroused from their red-hot kiss. Idly he stroked his still-erect cock through his jeans and looked around at the posters of works by Klee and Rothko on the wall.

When the man walked out of the bedroom Dylan felt as if someone had slammed all the breath out of his lungs. He literally couldn't inhale for several seconds. Finally he murmured, "Oh my god. Tomas. You're here. My god. Jack had you waiting for me! I don't understand...I don't understand..." He continued to stare at Tomas, standing before him in white silk flowing sleeves, his dark eyes flashing, his long lovely hair framing his masked face.

"Dylan, what you see is an illusion. There is no Tomas." It was his voice! The deep rich baritone, the vowels pure and British.

He tried to stand and found his legs wouldn't cooperate. He felt lightheaded. Instinctively he knew he was missing something but for the life of him he didn't know what. What did it matter! Tomas had come back to him! But where was Jack? How had Tomas materialized in his place?

Dylan watched in silent horror as Tomas put his fingers up to his hairline and pushed. His hair fell off his head like some animal's pelt, revealing short light brown hair beneath. He pulled off the mask and dropped it on the floor. As Dylan gaped, he plucked the very color from his eyes and bore holes into Dylan's face with the ice blue eyes of another man.

Finally what he was seeing penetrated Dylan's thick skull. Jack had been telling him the truth all along. *Tomas is a fantasy... Tomas and I are one and the same...* "Christ," Dylan said softly, the full import stunning him with all its implications. Jack had sat there, listening with his sympathetic expression to all of Dylan's outpouring of adoration for Tomas and later his heartfelt misery of unrequited love. He had let Dylan reveal truths he never would have shared directly with Tomas—he wouldn't have had the courage!

And not only that, if Jack was Tomas, why had he refused to call when Dylan had confessed to Jack, who was Tomas, that he longed for a phone call? Instead Jack had gotten him drunk—Dylan knew this was unfair even as he thought it, but he couldn't seem to help himself—taken him home and fucked him, using Dylan's lowered defenses to take advantage of him!

Jack had played him on so many levels. Jack had betrayed his trust and humiliated him nearly beyond endurance with his callous cavalier charade. Dylan actually felt sick at heart at the hoax that had been perpetrated upon him. He gripped his chest as he slowly stood.

Jack was staring at him. "Dylan. Dylan, are you okay? I didn't want to do it like this. I couldn't figure how else to tell you. You were so convinced Tomas was real. I couldn't call, I couldn't take off the mask, because you knew me as Jack. I never meant for it to come this far. I didn't know what to do! I honestly didn't know what to do! I've never been in love. I know that now. You're the one I want. I couldn't bear to have you longing and aching for someone who wasn't even real. I'm so sorry! I hope we can work through this, you and I. Please understand, I couldn't allow this to continue. Please. Please say something. Say you forgive me."

Dylan heard the pain in Jack's voice. He saw the tears in his eyes and yet he couldn't find even an ounce of compassion for the man who had betrayed him so thoroughly. "I'm sorry," he said, his voice cracking. "I can't. I can't forgive you. I don't even understand what's happened. I need time to think. I...I have to go. I have to get out of here."

Turning on his heel, Dylan ran from the apartment, flying down the stairs and out into the night, his heart cracking clean in two.

# **Chapter Eight**

As the sky began to lighten to pearly pink and gray, Jack shifted on the couch. He realized he hadn't moved in the several hours since Dylan had fled his apartment. As his front door had slammed, Jack had slumped down on the couch, feeling as if he'd been paralyzed. He literally couldn't move – the weight of his loss heavy upon him.

Bright yellow paling into gold and darkening into brilliant orange—he'd been staring so long at his favorite Rothko painting, titled simply *Yellow and Gold*, that he had slipped into a kind of meditative trance, his mind slowly emptying.

"I have to get up," he groaned aloud, forcing his stiffened muscles to respond. He stretched his arms over his head and stood. He saw the discarded wig and leather facemask lying where he'd flung them and kicked at them with disgust. He knew he could never be Tomas again. Indeed, all desire to participate in the anonymous scenes he'd taken such pride in creating had vanished.

The whole underground BDSM scene, with the clinging half-naked sub boys and the posing clueless so-called Doms strutting about left him faintly nauseated. He knew his feelings weren't rational or fair—those men were playing at the same game he'd taken such delight in playing. Who was he to judge others now just because he'd lost his taste for the sport? Just because he'd lost the one man he desired.

Jack moved to the kitchen to make himself a cup of coffee. His mind had clicked back on with a vengeance. His plan to reveal himself as Tomas had backfired horribly. How could he have been so stupid as to think Dylan would understand? From Dylan's perspective Jack had been deceiving him on every level—seducing him as Tomas while pretending to be his friend and confidant as Jack. Though he hadn't been pretending! His intentions hadn't been cruel or manipulative. Jack sighed aloud, thinking about the road to hell and what it was paved with.

What happens now, he wondered. Would Dylan request a different thesis advisor? Would he fall out of Jack's life completely? The frustrating thing was Jack knew Dylan had feelings for him! When they had made love, the connection had been intense and real! The passion between them hadn't been created or even fueled by alcohol. Dylan had responded with ardent urgency to his hand and his cock.

Last night their kiss had been explosive. Jack's cock stirred at the memory. How he longed to take Dylan in his arms even now. If he had to dress up forever as Tomas, maybe it was just the price he would have to pay to have Dylan in his life. "What is wrong with me?" Jack demanded aloud of himself. This had never happened to him. He'd always been the one to leave. He'd always been the one to gently let down his partner, sadly explaining he just couldn't go on when the love had faded.

It wasn't that he was afraid to commit, or so he'd always told himself. He'd had several serious relationships, but they'd always fizzled out after a few months or a few years. They would end with a whimper not a bang as he found himself increasingly bored.

That's why being Tomas had been so fun. A new boy each week to tease and lovingly torment. If they pleased him, he might play with them again the next week or he might not. No strings, no messy real life to interfere.

Yet here he sat, thirty-five years old, his heart smashed by someone who honestly believed he had set out to betray and deceive him. If only Dylan had stayed longer – had let him explain! Instead he'd run, taking all the light in the room with him and all the hope in Jack's heart.

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan only vaguely remembered how he'd managed to get back to his apartment. He'd stumbled into his place and fallen into his bed without taking off his clothes. He felt sucker-punched, still reeling from Tomas' or rather Jack's deception. Each time he recalled the intimate details of his time with Tomas he cringed with embarrassment. Jack Marchand, his colleague and increasingly his confidant, had actually been the one to chain him to the rack, to whip and fondle him, to tease, torment and use him, to take him to heights of passion he hadn't realized existed.

Professor Marchand had sat blithely by, letting him spill his guts about his crush on a man who didn't exist. Dylan felt violated and humiliated. He felt betrayed. He felt bereft. Tomas was dead. Tomas had never lived! He was a fantasy of Jack's twisted mind. How many other men had succumbed to his dangerous charms, pining for a fantasy who could never be more than that?

Getting up from the bed, he poured himself several ounces of brandy and drank it with a gulp, causing tears to come to his eyes as it burned down his throat. He fell back upon the bed, cursing the day he'd decided to go that stupid club, cursing the moment he'd seen the dashing Tomas de Torquemada, hiding like a coward behind black leather and lies. Rage and grief fought a battle inside his head until at last he fell into a troubled, restless sleep.

He awoke midmorning, his head pounding, his eyes gritty. The sky was overcast, a leaden gray that matched Dylan's mood. He tried to summon his rage—it was easier to be angry than hurt—but this morning all he felt was sad. Jack slipped uninvited into his mind's eye—his kind blue eyes, his ready smile, his strong, masculine physique. How could he reconcile the sexy, funny and accomplished man he thought he knew with the devious, manipulating bastard he had turned out to be?

Dylan's phone rang and he answered it, recognizing the number as Jordan Findley's. How ironic—the man who had gotten him into this in the first place! "Hello?"

"Dylan? Hi, it's Jordan. How's it going, dude?"

"Fine," Dylan replied automatically. "Actually life sucks, if you want to know," he added.

"Yeah? What's the matter? Writer's block on your thesis?"

"Worse. Remember that guy you told me to steer clear of?"

"What, the masked man at Club Chained? Uh-oh, don't tell me."

"Yeah, he fucked me over but good."

"No way! Listen, I called to see if you'd like to grab breakfast. I'm on my cell, only a few blocks from your apartment. Want to meet? You can tell me all about what that asshole did."

Dylan started to refuse – he wanted to stay hidden in his lair, licking his wounds in private. Then he thought, why not? He'd betray Jack's secret to the world, starting with Jordan Findley. The man deserved it! "Sure. How about Rick's Café?"

"See you there in, what, fifteen?"

"Make it thirty and you've got yourself a deal."

Dylan felt better after a shower and shave. He saw through his window the clouds seemed to have disbursed somewhat, a bit of blue sky bravely showing itself. As he went out of his apartment door, he saw a note taped just above the doorknob. Curious, he pulled it off and unfolded it. It was handwritten, the script strong and angular. He scanned to the bottom of the page—it was from Jack.

Dylan's apartment house didn't have a doorman. Someone must have buzzed Jack in or perhaps he'd waited until someone was leaving to slip past them. Dylan felt his heart quicken. He toyed for a split second with balling up the page and tossing it unread into the garbage. But he knew even as this thought flitted through his brain he would read the note.

### Dear Dylan,

I've been staring at this blank page for over an hour, trying to come up with clever words to turn your heart around. I wanted to find the words to slip past your sense of betrayal and anger, and reach straight from my heart to yours. I'm not having any luck alas, so I'm just going to say what I hope you can hear without the poetry.

When I began going to clubs in the disguise of Tomas, I told myself it was because of my professional life. An NYU professor doesn't hang out at underground clubs torturing slave boys. But the real truth, or I should say a deeper truth, is I liked being Tomas because it kept me safe. I could hide literally and figuratively behind his mask. I could have my fun and disappear. Tomas didn't exist outside the confines of the clubs so there was no risk of someone getting my phone number, coming by my place, falling in love...

I sat up all night thinking about it - I haven't slept since you left – how could I rest knowing I'd hurt you? What I've come to realize is I've always been afraid to connect with anyone on more than a superficial level. While I've had no problem expecting submissive men to

bare their souls for me, I've never returned that gift, not in any meaningful sense. As hard as this is to confess either to you or myself, I've been a coward where love is concerned.

When I met you all that changed. That sounds dramatic, I know, but it's the truth. When I saw you at the club, it was as if something opened inside of me. Something I'd always kept tightly furled and hidden away, even from myself it seems, sprung open. I didn't mean to deceive you. No one was more surprised than I when you walked into my office as my new PhD candidate.

My mistake was thinking I could keep my life compartmentalized. Of thinking I could keep the love that had already begun growing inside me at bay. This has never happened to me before, you see. This thing called love! I thought it had, but now I understand those were just pale imitations, lust and the wish for love masquerading as the true thing.

Even as I knew I was falling in love with you, I still thought I could handle it. I would ensnare you with my masterful ways as Tomas while befriending you as Jack. Then at the right moment I would reveal myself to you and we would ride happily into the sunset. But as you know, life rarely works out so neatly. The mess I made of things compounded itself until I didn't know what to do or how to salvage it.

I was a coward but not out of malice, I promise you. The last thing I wanted was to hurt you but I know I have. The last thing I wanted was to lose you but I'm afraid I have, and only when I'd just found you.

I wanted you to know, Dylan, even if I never see you again, I am beholden to you. You have given me a glimpse into the possibility true love actually exists. While my dream would have been to explore that possibility with you, I understand this is no longer possible.

As a Dom, I demand "grace" from my subs, by which I mean the willingness to press through the fear or the pain in order to achieve a deeper peace, a spiritual connection. I must search for such grace within myself, Dylan. I must find a way to live my life without you in it.

Know this – I love you. I know it in my bones, in my dreams, in my heart. Do with this love what you will or nothing at all.

Love, Jack

Dylan read the letter twice before folding it thoughtfully and slipping it into his back pocket. He glanced at his watch—he was late for Jordan. He sprinted down the stairs and out into the daylight.

## \* \* \* \* \*

"So give me all the gory details," Jordan said just before loading a forkful of blueberry pancakes into his mouth.

"Oh. Well, nothing really. I mean, he's just a player, like you said." Dylan felt shabby, realizing if he hadn't read that heartfelt letter from Jack, he would have betrayed his identity in an immature effort to get back at him.

As he thought over the events of the past weeks from Jack's perspective, he was beginning to appreciate the tangled web Jack had been weaving around himself. Would he have handled it any differently? Had he been unfair to assume Jack's motives were selfish and cavalier? He remembered Jack's stricken expression when he'd finally taken off the wig and contacts. He heard his pleading voice, cracking with pain... *Please say something. Say you forgive me.* 

He realized now Jack had tried to tell him in a dozen different ways Tomas was an illusion. There had been other clues as well—Jack's delicious unique scent, his smile, their kisses... Dylan sighed.

"Don't let the posers get you down, Dylan," Jordan said. "It's all a game to them. I tried to warn you." He pointed to Dylan's plate, the French toast and sausage he'd ordered nearly untouched. "Say, you going to eat that?"

Dylan looked down at his plate and back up at Jordan. "I'm sorry, what?"

"Where is your head at this morning?" Jordan laughed. "You gonna tell me what happened or what?"

"No, no, I guess I'm not. It's something I've got to work through, I'm realizing." He took a bite of his French toast and a sip of his coffee and realized he was ravenously hungry. In short order he polished off his meal, accepting a second cup from the waitress. He listened to Jordan talk about his film work and a man he'd met in one of his classes he was trying to get the courage to ask out. He smiled at Jordan, a part of his brain processing and responding appropriately.

But most of his brain was busy watching a movie of the past few weeks as it scrolled past his mind's eye. When he thought of what Jack was going through at that moment his heart squeezed with sympathy. Poor Jack, sitting up all night trying to find the words to reach Dylan. In retrospect, Dylan hadn't given him a chance to explain. He'd been so busy nursing his wounded pride he'd completely discounted the courage it must have taken Jack to reveal himself, knowing Dylan's probable reaction.

*I couldn't bear to have you longing and aching for someone who wasn't even real!* Even as he'd admitted his ruse, it was to protect Dylan from continuing to yearn for a fantasy. Jack wasn't entirely to blame for this mess, Dylan realized suddenly. He sat up straight and threw his napkin onto the table.

"You haven't heard one word I've said for the last five minutes, have you?" Jordan said, grinning good-naturedly. "If I didn't know better, I'd say you were in love! Your head's in the clouds, dude. You better go take care of whatever it is you have to take care of. We'll get together again when you've returned to the planet earth!"

Dylan focused on Jordan and grinned. "You're right, I'm sorry. I know I've been terrible company this morning. I'm sorry I put you through this."

"Hey, it's okay, I was young once." They both laughed since Jordan was two years younger than Dylan. "Seriously," he added, "you look like someone who needs to be somewhere and it isn't here. Go see whoever it is and get this straightened out."

"Thanks," Dylan said. "I didn't realize I was so transparent but thanks for being such a pal about it. You're right. I do have somewhere I have to go. Someone is waiting for me. I don't want to make him wait any longer." He threw a handful of bills on the table, more than enough to cover the meal for them both. "Next time I'll be better company, I promise."

"Go!" Jordan laughed.

Dylan went.

# **Chapter Nine**

"Dr. Marchand, there's someone here to see you. A gentleman by the name of Dylan Reese." Jack pressed the intercom button to answer his doorman.

"Yes! Yes, please send him up." Jack ran to the bathroom mirror. He hadn't showered or shaved. A shadow of stubble covered his cheeks and the skin beneath his eyes looked bruised with fatigue. He splashed water on his face and ran his fingers through his hair. Then he grinned weakly at himself. Like it mattered what he looked like! Dylan was on his way up! Dylan had come back to him!

*No, stop,* he admonished himself. *You don't know if he's come back or merely come back for more – ready to continue the argument that had barely begun before he had disappeared.* 

A minute later there was a knock on Jack's door. He pulled it open, his heart pounding as he took a deep breath, trying to sound casual, trying not to burst into tears. "Hi," he said softly.

"Hi," Dylan answered. He looked tired too. Had his night been as sleepless? "Um, can I come in?"

Jack stepped back at once and gestured for Dylan to enter. "I'm sorry," he laughed, embarrassed at his rudeness. "Come in." Dylan entered and Jack closed the door behind him. He wanted to apologize again, to explain in a hundred different ways why he was sorry and how he longed to somehow repair what had been broken between them. He wanted to grab Dylan and catch him in a bear hug and not let go. He wanted to kiss him, to pull his clothing from his body, to throw him to the couch and have his way...

He did none of these things. Instead he said, "Can I get you some coffee?" He smiled, adding, "I always seem to be offering you coffee."

"Yes, actually," Dylan answered. "I could use a cup." He followed Jack into the kitchen and watched as Jack ground the beans in a little machine and dumped them into the coffeemaker. While it was dripping, Jack took out the cream and set it next to the sugar bowl on his bright yellow table.

They sat down across from each other. Jack waited. Dylan added cream and sugar, stirred for a while, put down his spoon and finally looked up at Jack. "I'm sorry," he said.

"For what?" Jack held his breath. Sorry for running? Or sorry but he just couldn't do this anymore...

"For running out like I did. For refusing to listen when you were trying to tell me about Tomas all those times."

Jack felt the tension he'd been holding inside ease a bit. "Oh Dylan. I'm sorry too. More than you'll ever know. I think I'm finally learning about myself, to tell you the truth. Learning just because I can dominate another man, it doesn't give me the right to take advantage of his heart. It's a hard lesson to learn, Dylan, and I'm afraid I learned it at your expense."

Dylan said nothing. He drank from his cup while Jack bit his lip to keep from begging Dylan to give him another chance. He'd made it clear how he felt in the letter. He wasn't going to beg now. He would not put Dylan on the spot or embarrass them both. It was up to Dylan to make the next move. As he sat watching those brilliant green and amber eyes, he forced himself to breathe deeply and be calm. He would live by Dylan's decree, whichever way it fell.

Finally Dylan said, "You know, I thought I loved Tomas. I knew I was crazy about you too," he smiled shyly. "But Tomas was the one who got my blood boiling, who made me nearly crazed with lust. I have a confession." He grinned. "A kind of strange one in the circumstances. But when you were making love to me—when you were inside of me, I pretended it was Tomas behind me. The crazy thing is, it *was* Tomas behind me! Only better. Because Tomas is a fantasy. Something you created as part of a scene—not a man at all but an idea. The perfect Dom—powerful, gorgeous, unattainable and therefore desired all the more.

"And that works great when it's a game. When deep emotions aren't at stake and when everyone understands the terms. I guess the mistake I made was thinking he was real."

"I know. That was my fault."

"No, really it wasn't in retrospect. You only presented that persona at the club. In the guise of Tomas you only met me there. You wisely refused to remove the mask and destroy the illusion. I guess neither of us planned the comedy of errors that ensued once I met my thesis advisor!"

Dylan started to laugh, a small chuckle at first. After a moment Jack joined him. In a few minutes they were laughing uncontrollably, holding their sides, tears rolling down their cheeks.

"When you first walked into my office..." Jack gasped between guffaws.

"You must have been like, 'Holy shit!'" Dylan added, dissolving again into hysterics.

"And when you started telling me about Tomas..."

"And you were trying to say forget him, he's an asshole..."

They finally gave up trying to speak as each leaned back in his chair, laughing so hard he might have been crying.

Jack sat back, wiping his face with the back of his hand. Their laughter had been cleansing—a melting of dark tensions held like shields between them. Jack got up from the table, took their mugs of now cold coffee and dumped them in the sink. He poured each of them a fresh cup and sat back down. "So what happens next, Dylan?"

#### Claire Thompson

Dylan looked up. "I don't know. You're the Dom, you tell me." He grinned but then added, "Seriously. I guess what I mean is, I want to find out what happens next. I guess we take it one day at a time and see. I want to know what it is to submit to Jack Marchand – no masks, no games. If you still want to, that is."

"If I still want to!" Jack exclaimed. "I should whip you for that!" He laughed but after a moment the smile slid away from his face. "I'm in love with you. I know you know that. But you should understand something. While you didn't know it was me behind that mask, I obviously knew who you were all the time. I have the advantage in that regard. I've already put you through your paces as a submissive and found you to be what I desire in a man and a lover. You, on the other hand, had to work with a fantasy. You don't yet know if you can submit to me as fully or as honestly now that I'm just Jack without the flowing hair and the black eyes, without the trappings of the dungeon-like atmosphere at Club Chained."

"But I *did* submit to you as Jack, remember? You claimed me in your apartment without any whips or chains."

"You were drunk. And you were using me or so you've said, as you fantasized about Tomas." He laughed at the irony of his statement, not lost on Dylan, he was sure.

Jack leaned forward across the table. "Here's the thing, Dylan. What you need to do is decide. If we are to become lovers, it's going to be real. I will demand your absolute obedience as I train you to become mine. That's what I require in a lover, you see. Tomas and I really are one and the same in that regard. I can't abide games, not between lovers. Your submission would have to be honest, open and freely given or it's worth nothing. What I mean to say is, if you submit to me, it won't be on your terms. I won't permit you to top from the bottom or manipulate me into giving you what you want. And I know all the tricks, believe me." He grinned but then sobered, reaching out to touch Dylan's hand.

Dylan whispered, "I want it. I've always wanted it."

"Are you ready to submit to me, to experience lovemaking with me without any false voice or fake hair or silky pirate's clothing? We'll have different constraints and limitations as Dylan and Jack, but we'll also have greater freedom to truly explore our relationship. You know I've maintained a discreet profile as far as the lifestyle is concerned. No one at the university has any idea of my private life. Sure, a lot of them know I'm gay but thankfully that's no longer a big deal in academia. An alternate lifestyle like the one I'm envisioning with you is something else again. You have the same constraints and concerns as I do as an associate professor. Will you be comfortable interacting at work as friends or at most as vanilla partners, knowing that whips and chains await you at home? Are you ready to submit to me? Can you give yourself as freely with me as you did with Tomas? And more importantly, do you want to?"

"Yes," Dylan said softly, the yearning palpable in his voice. "Yes, Sir. Please."

\* \* \* \* \*

### Masked Submission

Dylan packed his duffel bag, putting in a fresh pair of jeans, socks and underwear, a T-shirt and a light pullover sweater. He grabbed his toothbrush and hairbrush from the bathroom. As an afterthought he took his favorite cologne from the medicine cabinet that doubled as his mirror. As he closed the cabinet, he looked at himself. He'd run the gamut of emotions in the past twenty-four hours and he felt as beat as he looked. He was glad in a way Jack had sent him home to collect his clothing for the night and to get some rest before he returned. Neither had any classes to teach on Monday and both were eager to explore their fledgling relationship, now that there were no secrets between them.

Dylan stripped, dropped his clothing to stand under a hot shower, soaping his body and washing his hair. He stroked his cock, which quickly hardened in his hand, as he thought about Jack waiting for him. He thought about his comment of "topping from the bottom" and grinned to himself. With every Dom he'd ever been with, if he were completely honest, he'd managed to manipulate them in subtle and not-so-subtle ways to give him what he wanted. He got them to "punish" him for infractions but always made sure the punishment was to his liking, that is, not a punishment at all but part of a sexy game.

Yet when push came to shove, that is, when he was really put to the test, asked to submit to something he found difficult or unpleasant, Dylan had rarely complied. He had found a way to get out of things and as a result he had never truly submitted to the men who had demanded he call them "Master". Somehow he had a feeling he wouldn't be getting away with that sort of behavior with Jack. *I will demand your absolute obedience*, Jack had said. The question was, would he be able to give it?

\* \* \* \* \*

Jack heard the knock on his apartment door. The apartment building was a tall narrow building that housed only two apartments per floor. He knew the other tenant on his floor was out of town until the end of the week. The odds of anyone else stopping on his floor on Sunday evening were remote. Of course Dylan didn't know any of this. This would be his first test of obedience.

"Dylan," Jack said through the door. "Can you hear me?"

"Yes. Aren't you going to let me in?"

"Yes. First take off all your clothes and hand them to me when I open the door."

"Excuse me?"

"You heard me. Surely you can obey a simple request."

"Jack," Jack heard the disbelief in Dylan's voice, tinged with an edge of fear. "I can't do that. Someone might see me! I could get arrested."

Jack opened the door, though he didn't step back to invite Dylan in. "Lesson number one—you can trust me. You must trust me. I would never ask you to do something that would put you in danger or cause you harm. Lesson number two—

when I tell you to do something, you do it. You don't second-guess me or ask questions or try to negotiate. You obey. Understood?"

Dylan swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing. He looked so boyish with his bright blond hair falling softly over his forehead and into his eyes wide with fear and Jack was certain, desire. He glanced down at the telltale swell in Dylan's jeans. "Now we'll try this again. When you're naked, knock again and I'll open the door. If you can't do this simple thing, you might as well go home as I've no use for you." He shut the door and waited.

In about thirty seconds Dylan knocked on the door. "You did as I asked?"

"Yes, Sir," Dylan called through the door. Jack opened it to his naked lover, who held his clothing bundled in front of him.

"Hand me your things." Dylan did so, trying to edge inside. Jack blocked his way. "Get on your hands and knees and crawl."

Dylan looked wildly to his left and right down the narrow hallway. "Please, Jack! Let me in!"

"Do as you're told and come in." With an exasperated sigh Dylan dropped to his knees and crawled across the sill. Once he was in, Jack retrieved Dylan's forgotten duffel bag and closed the door behind him. "Stay on your knees, boy. You may sit back on your heels. Spread your legs and rest your hands on your knees. Back straight, eyes on the floor. I call this 'kneeling up', so each time I ask you to kneel up, this is what I expect. Understood?"

Dylan nodded as he sat back as instructed, his face pink, his cock nicely displayed between his spread legs. Jack patted his head and moved away to the couch. He sat down to appraise his beautiful naked slave boy. Jack had changed into soft black lounging pants. He wore no underwear beneath them and his cock was poking hard up toward his belly as he leaned back, draping his arms over the back of the futon.

"Tell me what you did wrong, slave."

"Jack, I'm feeling a little nervous here. You caught me off guard. I wasn't expecting -"

"You weren't expecting what? That the 'games' would begin until you were ready for them to? The first thing you'll need to understand, Dylan, is this isn't a game. You said before you wanted to submit to me. On my terms. I warned you I would require absolute obedience and you said you wanted what I offer. If you are to belong to me, it must an absolute exchange of power. There can be no other way, if you truly want to learn what it is to submit. Can you understand that, my love? If you want a repeat of the game you played with your last lover, you won't get it with me. If you want an honest, loving, real connection between us, you'll have to let me guide you and train you. I don't expect perfection and certainly not on our first night together as Dom and sub. But I do expect you to do your best and to submit with as much grace as you can muster." Dylan nodded. Jack saw his eyes were shining as they had shone for Tomas. His cock was sticking straight from his body. What protestations he made were belied by his body language. Jack suppressed a smile. "Now," he said, "let's try again. Tell me what you did wrong when you came to the door."

"I didn't obey right away. I questioned you."

"That's correct. And what else?"

"I, um, I didn't drop to my hands and knees right away."

"That's right. And what else?"

Dylan was quiet. He stared up at the ceiling but didn't appear to find the answer there. Finally he said, "I can't think of anything else."

"Then I'll help you remember. When you dropped to your hands and knees, you gave a loud, exasperated sigh. You showed your displeasure at what you were asked to do. That's lesson number three—no matter what you may think about what I have commanded you to do, you keep that to yourself and you obey. Period. You don't sigh or roll your eyes or give any other indication of your petulant misgivings. Understood?"

Dylan looked up at Jack, pressing his lips together. Jack stared back at him until Dylan looked down at the floor. "Yes, Sir," he said softly.

"Good boy," Jack said. "Now come over here and sit next to me so we can discuss your punishment."

Dylan knelt in a corner of the living room, his forehead touching the floor as close to the corner as he could get. He was glad of one thing—at least his face was hidden. Jack, with the sixth sense of a true Dom, had somehow homed in on one of the things that would definitely humble Dylan.

When he'd joined him on the couch to "discuss" his punishment, Jack had said, "Punishment's a tricky thing when it comes to a masochist like you." He had ruffled Dylan's hair playfully. "You *like* to be spanked and whipped. You get off on having your cock and balls tortured. You're a pain slut. Really the most effective punishment for a sub like you is confinement. Left alone to ruminate over your disobedience.

"But tonight I want to do something different. You hesitated over baring your body for me. You forgot an obedient sub doesn't think about whether someone will see him or whether what his master has asked him to do might embarrass him. A good sub simply obeys. That's all there is to it. Once you learn that, you'll be on your way to true submission.

"So, since you hesitated about showing your body, I think I'll make tonight's punishment fit the crime. You will kneel in a corner and bare your sweet little asshole until I tell you it's enough. You will spread your own cheeks and hold your position. If I touch you, you stay in position. No matter what I choose to do to you, you maintain that position. Is this clear, Dylan?"

Dylan had instinctively opened his mouth to refuse, to cajole, to explain he couldn't possibly do something so humiliating. He knew it was silly but while he loved anal sex, he was very shy about scrutiny. He didn't like to think someone was looking at his puckered asshole, staring at it, examining it, finding fault with it.

Yet even as he'd opened his mouth, he'd closed it again, forcing himself to stay quiet. It wasn't as if Jack were demanding he do this at the club or a play party. It was just Jack – Jack who had seen him naked, both in his guise as Tomas and in his own bed. He had penetrated Dylan and afterward held him in his arms. Surely Dylan could endure this punishment with – what were Jack's words? – what grace he could muster.

Dylan's arms were starting to get tired. It had probably been about fifteen minutes since he'd knelt in the corner, his face turning red as he'd reached behind to spread his own ass cheeks. He heard a click and saw a flash out of the corner of his eye. Jesus! Jack was taking pictures! Pictures of his bared asshole! It took all Dylan's willpower to maintain his position. He decided he'd find that camera later and delete those pictures!

He felt something hard and cold touch his anus, which made him jump. "Stay still," Jack warned. "Your punishment is not over. Keep your ass cheeks spread." Dylan obeyed, his heart beginning to thump as Jack pressed the object against his nether entrance. Whatever it was had at least been lubricated, thank god. As Jack pressed it past the ring of muscle at his entrance, Dylan grunted. It hurt, but at the same time his body was responding with its usual masochistic thrill, his cock hardening, his balls tightening.

Jack pressed the object in deeper, pulled it out and pressed it in again. It felt good now, yet Dylan's face still burned, knowing Jack was watching the object inserted and removed from his stretched asshole. He bit his lip to keep from begging Jack to stop. Yet still his cock remained rigid.

Finally the object was removed completely. "I'm very pleased, Dylan. I know that was difficult for you. You've done very well." Dylan felt Jack stroke his back. He felt a delicious warmth spreading through his body at Jack's praise. He realized he desperately wanted to please Jack and knew he would do anything to do so.

"Get up," Jack said softly, leaning over him. "I want to make love to you." Dylan stood, dizzy for a moment as he regained his equilibrium. Jack grasped his cock in his hand and laughed. "Such a slut! Even when you're blushing ten shades of red, your cock's as hard as a rock!" Dylan grinned and looked down, knowing he couldn't argue as his body gave him away.

Once in the bedroom Jack said, "Kneel on the floor by the bed." Dylan obeyed. As Jack stripped, Dylan couldn't help but stare at his thick, long cock. It was Tomas' cock! Dylan recalled with complete clarity the hot scene at the club when they'd met on Sunday. His mouth watered as he recalled wrapping his lips around that gorgeous member, inhaling Tomas' erotic, musky scent.

Jack recalled him to the present with the words he had used as Tomas, "Do what you were born to do." Dylan didn't need to be told twice. Eagerly he parted his lips,

sucking Jack deep into his throat. He held his breath as long as he could, milking Jack's cock with his tongue and throat muscles. Slowly he pulled back, delighting in the small moan of pleasure he pulled from Jack's lips. He glanced up at his master, whose eyes were closed, his face a study in rapture.

Dylan focused again on the hard shaft in front of him, gently cradling Jack's balls as he suckled and teased his cock. Jack gripped handfuls of Dylan's hair, holding it tightly. He pressed Dylan's head down to force him to take his shaft deep in his throat once again.

Abruptly Jack released Dylan's hair and pulled his cock from Dylan's mouth. Instinctively Dylan leaned forward, intent on continuing what he'd begun. "No. I want to come in your ass, boy. Get it ready."

Jack reached over to his nightstand, pulling out a tube of lubricant he tossed to Dylan. As he pulled a condom over his shaft, Dylan squeezed a dollop of the clear jelly onto his fingers and smeared his entrance with it. He started to climb onto the bed but Jack said, "No. I want you on the floor. You may lean against the bed."

Dylan obeyed, draping the upper half of his body over the bed, his ass lewdly offered for Jack's plunder. Positioning himself behind Dylan, Jack slid his cock in with a slow but relentless press. Dylan steeled himself for the initial pain but found to his surprise there was none. Perhaps Jack's "torture" with the dildo had left his muscles sufficiently relaxed. Or perhaps he was just so aroused at being with the man he'd known as both Tomas and Jack, now one delicious blend of masculine dominant authority, claiming Dylan as Dylan longed to be claimed.

Jack began to fuck him hard, his body slamming Dylan's body against the bed with each hard thrust. "You belong to me," Jack said, his voice low with lust, very nearly Tomas' voice, except for the accent.

Dylan's heart was pounding as Jack pummeled inside of him. Though Jack hadn't expressly given him permission, Dylan began to stroke his own cock. His rhythm soon matched that of Jack's as they moved together in the primal dance of lovers.

His orgasm came over him so suddenly he honestly didn't get a chance to ask permission. Jack came a split second after he did so the two of them shuddered and sighed in unison, Jack slamming inside of Dylan while he spurted hard in his own hand.

Jack remained draped over Dylan's back. He could feel Jack's heart hammering against him. His own heart was tapping back as he tried to control his shallow, panting breaths.

Finally Jack stood, disposing of the condom. "Let's lie down," he said. Together they tumbled onto the bed, Jack catching Dylan in an embrace. "You are perfect," Jack said. "Your body was made to be used by me. If you prove worthy, I'm going to place my mark upon you. We'll decide together what that mark should be." He kissed Dylan's mouth, just a feather brush of lips before pulling away. Tilting his head, he smiled a slow, cruel smile. "Meanwhile you're going to get some marks of a different kind. For I do believe," he reached down, touching Dylan's still sticky cock, "someone came without permission."

# **Chapter Ten**

As Dylan lectured a class of freshman students about the Spanish Inquisition, he had to suppress a smile each time he mentioned the infamous Tomas de Torquemada. How different from that cruel murderer Jack was! Three weeks had passed since the night Jack had required him to strip to gain entrance to his apartment. In that time, Jack had revealed himself as so much more than the masked man Dylan had thought he pined for.

Jack without his disguise was no less masterful or dominant. If anything, he was more so because they were now free to fully explore their relationship without the limits imposed by meeting at the club. Yet at the same time, their connection as lovers and as friends was blossoming. Dylan realized this was the first relationship he'd been in where both partners truly wanted the same thing. Though neither was yet ready to move in together, they spent at least three, sometimes four days a week in one another's company with Dylan spending the night at Jack's more spacious apartment.

Dylan grinned as he recalled the birthday presents Jack had given him on his twenty-ninth birthday. The package of socks had made him laugh as he'd cheerfully admitted he hadn't bought a new pair in years. His other gifts had been more serious and infinitely more thrilling. A pair of soft leather wrist cuffs, a beautiful slave collar of black leather with four large D rings dangling at equal intervals, a red satin sleep mask that doubled as a blindfold and a wicked single tail whip Jack had come to refer to aptly as "the stinger".

In a ritual that never failed to thrill Dylan, before Dylan left Jack's apartment in the morning he was required to drop his pants and lay over the bed. Jack would mark Dylan for the day with a single well-aimed stroke of the lash across his ass. Then he would lightly kiss the welt left there. Dylan would slide to his knees on the floor and thank his master for the reminder of what he was and who he belonged to.

On the nights they spent together, Jack introduced him to ever-deeper levels of submission and commitment. Because passion had been interwoven into their heady D/s mix, the experience was more intense than any he'd ever known. It was as if up to this point he'd been living a life in shadow, the colors faded and pale. Now his life seemed vibrant and rich, an explosion of brilliant experience and heightened feeling. He didn't know the word for it but dared to think it might be love.

His class over, Dylan stayed behind to accommodate the usual cluster of students with questions or concerns. He planned to meet Jack for a quick lunch before heading over to the library to work on his thesis. "You're bad for my doctorate," Dylan had teased, not entirely kidding. "I seem to have lost some of my drive to do research. I always have something else on my mind."

Jack had laughed. "Maybe we'll make it part of your training. You produce a chapter a week or suffer the consequences."

Dylan walked into the faculty lounge where Jack was waiting. "Sorry I'm late. I have an exam coming up for my freshman class and some overachieving students think they might get an edge if they stay after and pick my brain."

"That's okay. It's such a nice day I packed us a lunch. I thought we'd eat in Washington Square Park." As they left the building together Jack said casually, "I've been working on something that will be of interest to you."

"Working on something? What, that piece for The Journal of Medieval History?"

"No, no. Not that kind of work. Come on, I'll tell you over lunch." Though it was October, a week of chilling drizzle had given way to a glorious almost spring-like day. They found a bench in the park. Over sandwiches and cans of soda Jack said softly, "Who do you belong to?"

This had the immediate effect of sending Dylan into a submissive state of mind. His cock perked to attention as he looked into Jack's ice blue eyes. "You, Sir."

"That's right. Well, slave. I have a surprise for you at my place. When you get there, open the office door. You'll see what I've built just for you." Dylan was curious but he didn't probe. When they were in their roles as master and slave, he knew better than to ask questions. "Meanwhile," Jack continued, "I've been thinking about what kind of permanent ownership mark I want to give you. Have you been thinking about it too?"

Dylan nodded, his gut tightening. They had discussed piercing, tattoos, even a brand. Dylan was at once aroused and frightened with each possibility. He found the idea of being permanently marked by his dominant lover deeply erotic. But while he had a reasonably high threshold of pain, the idea of needles made him queasy and the thought of hot metal burning into his flesh made him shudder with fear.

Jack was watching him, no doubt seeing the play of emotions on his face. He said, "And what have you been thinking, slave?"

Dylan swallowed. Jack knew of his fears and his desires. Yet, despite his fear, Dylan found himself drawn to the thought of a cock piercing. Not only did he view the piercing itself as a deeply submissive act but the pictures he'd seen of pierced cocks were very sexy. "I've been looking online," he volunteered finally. "The cock piercings are very hot. I...I think that's what I want." He ducked his head in case he was blushing.

"A Prince Albert," Jack said, nodding. "Very sexy. And handy for tethering your cock with chains and rope, hmmm?" Dylan's cock hardened in his pants. "Before we make any final decision I want you to be absolutely certain. If I pierce you, you will always wear my ring as long as we are together. It will be a true symbol of my ownership and of your complete subservience to me. Are you sure you're ready for that?"

Slowly Dylan nodded. He realized as he gazed into Jack's mesmerizing blue eyes he longed for the ring and all it symbolized.

#### Masked Submission

Jack smiled, his eyes crinkling at the corners. "You look so solemn. Don't worry." He patted Dylan's thigh. "I've done it a number of times. The process is simple and not too painful. I've been told it hurts less than having your ear pierced. And the result is worth it."

"I know," Dylan tried to smile. "I admit I'm a little nervous. Needles and I don't get along so well."

Jack laughed. "I'm always amazed when I hear things like that from masochist sub boys. You can take a whipping that would make most any man cry, and not only take it but get off on it. But bring a skinny little needle within your line of vision and you faint dead away."

"Hey! I didn't say I would faint! I just don't like them is all."

"Duly noted. Maybe I've accidentally hit on a *real* punishment, if the time should ever come when you need one." His smile curved cruelly. "Speaking of which, I have to teach an early evening class. I'd like you to go to my place and let yourself in. Here's what I expect when I arrive." Leaning close, he murmured his instructions.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Dylan entered Jack's apartment late that afternoon he stood for a moment just inside the door, staring at what the last time he'd been over had been Jack's office. "Jesus," he whispered. Just inside the door, a second door had been installed, made of metal bars like the bars of a cage. Jack had emptied the room of its papers and boxes. Inside he had hung his vast array of whips, crops, floggers, ropes and chains on large hooks along the walls. What looked to be a large dog bed had been placed in one corner of the tiny room.

Dylan opened the metal door, noting the padlock hanging from its handle. He touched the tresses of the flogger, caressing the leather as his skin tingled with the memory of its kiss. He eyed the cat-o'-nine-tails with its many strands of stiff leather, knotted at the ends for an especially wicked delivery.

Jack had given him explicit instructions over lunch—instructions that had made it very difficult to concentrate at the library the rest of the afternoon, though somehow he'd managed to produce some work. Glancing at his watch, Dylan headed for the bedroom where he quickly stripped. He turned on the water for the shower and while he waited for it to get hot, he examined himself in the mirror. He still wasn't used to the sight of his shaven pubic area. His cock and balls looked so exposed, so vulnerable.

"That's how I like my slave boys—completely naked, completely accessible," Jack told him a few days into their new relationship. He had made the experience an extremely erotic one for Dylan. After a long steamy shower, Jack had clipped Dylan's pubic hair close to the skin. Then he'd cuffed Dylan's wrists together and secured them to an eyebolt he'd installed in the bathroom ceiling. While Dylan stood thus tethered and naked, Jack had lathered his cock and balls with shaving cream and denuded his slave boy with an old-style single-edge barber's razor.

### Claire Thompson

Now it was up to Dylan to keep himself groomed for his master on a daily basis. At any time while they were in the apartment together Jack might command him to drop his pants for inspection. This never failed to make Dylan blush but he always obeyed as Jack's command satisfied some deep part of his submissive nature. Jack would stroke his balls and pubic area, assessing if they were smooth enough. He would make Dylan bend over while he ran his finger along the crack of his ass, which Dylan was also expected to keep smooth and hairless.

Dylan had forgotten to groom back there but only once. Jack had discovered his oversight during an inspection. "Oh dear," he'd said. "It looks like someone has been lazy. You seem to have forgotten this body now belongs to me. Go and get rid of that disgusting stubble and report back to me, naked and on your knees." Dylan had obeyed, thoroughly humiliated by the whole exercise. But Jack hadn't been done yet.

He'd inspected Dylan's ass again and said, "Much better. Now hold yourself open for me. I'm going to punish the offending area. I trust you won't forget again."

As Dylan had been forced to spread his ass cheeks, Jack had used a small riding crop with a narrow head of supple leather, perfect for smacking along the narrow valley between Dylan's cheeks. It had stung but the humiliation of the situation had stung more. He'd never since forgotten to keep himself groomed for his master.

He climbed into the shower and washed and shaved himself, using the fog-free mirror Jack had thoughtfully installed at cock level so Dylan could make sure he didn't miss a spot. He dried off his body and shaved his face at the bathroom sink. His cock was already half erect as he thought of the dungeon Jack had built for them.

As instructed, he put on his ankle and wrist cuffs, clipping them closed with double-sided clips. Carefully he buckled his slave collar around his neck. He put the red sleep mask over his eyes but then pushed it up onto his head for later. Just the act of putting on these emblems of his slave status sent him to that hot sweet place in his head where he longed to give himself to his master with every fiber of his submissive being.

He glanced at the clock. Jack would be arriving in about an hour. Dylan went into the kitchen and made himself a sandwich. He took it with him to the living room and sat down on the bright yellow futon, pulling the laptop from beneath the pile of papers on the table beside the couch. He opened it and clicked on to the Internet, looking as he had daily the past week, at testimonials and pictures of men with Prince Albert piercings. The rings inserted into their cocks looked so big! Some of the testimonials said the process had hurt but most had said it wasn't so bad. The worst part apparently, was the insertion of the receiving tube into the urethra – Dylan shuddered as he always did at the thought of a hollow metal tube being shoved into the eye of his penis. If he could handle that, the piercing was apparently no big deal.

As he checked his e-mail and took care of some correspondence, Dylan idly wondered what the recipients would think if they knew he was sitting naked, shaven, cuffed and collared as he waited for his master to come to him.

## Masked Submission

Jack was due in about ten minutes and he was rarely late. Dylan knew he'd better obey the rest of his instructions as it might take a while to get himself in position. He was nervous but excited as he walked into the dungeon. Jack had put five sturdy eyebolts in one wall, strategically placed to secure his slave at the wrist, ankle and throat. Short chains dangled from each hook.

He stood with his back against the wall, wondering how best to secure himself. Jack had instructed him to use the chains, which would give him leeway in case he had to let himself down. Obviously Jack would never put him at risk in the event of an emergency.

Dylan clipped his ankle cuffs first and leaned back against the wall. Grasping one of the rings of his slave collar, he managed to open the clip fastened to the chain behind him and snap it shut on his collar ring. Next he raised his left arm up to reach the eyebolt. He clipped his wrist in place. With his remaining free hand he slipped his blindfold into place over his eyes.

Now came the hard part. Grasping the clip of his right wrist cuff between finger and thumb, he reached upward, feeling blindly for the chain. After several tries and fumbles, he finally managed to clip his wrist to the wall. How vulnerable he felt, chained to the wall in an upright spread-eagle position, naked and blindfolded. The minutes ticked by. He knew less time had passed than he imagined as time always seemed to slow when he was blindfolded and left alone.

As he heard Jack's key scrape in the lock a zing of adrenaline shot through him and his cock rose to attention. In a few moments he heard the metal door to the dungeon open as Jack stepped inside. With his eyes blinded, his other senses were heightened. Jack's delicious scent assailed his nostrils and he breathed it in, as if he could take some of Jack's very essence into himself. He felt Jack's hands press against his chest as Jack's lips sought his. Eagerly he kissed his master, moaning with desire against his mouth.

Jack pulled away, grasping Dylan's hard cock in his hand. "Are you ready to please me, slave?"

Dylan nodded. Jack continued to stroke his cock until Dylan was panting and straining against his cuffs. He knelt before his tethered slave, taking his cock between his lips as Dylan gasped with pleasure. With relentless expertise he quickly brought Dylan to the edge of climax.

Remembering his standing order, Dylan managed, "Please, I'm going...may I come?"

"No."

Dylan shuddered, trying to control his willful body, not daring to disobey his master. "You come now and you'll pay, slave." Dylan gasped as he felt the sting of a riding crop smacking against his erect penis. Jack smacked him several times. While Dylan's cock remained hard, the urgent need to climax receded as erotic pain exploded through his nerve endings.

## Claire Thompson

After a moment he again felt Jack's warm lips slide over his shaft, taking him deep into his throat. It took no time before Dylan was again ready to orgasm. "Please," he panted, "I'm going to come. Please..."

"No." Again his shaft was cropped. Dylan writhed in his bonds as Jack gripped his balls tightly in one hand. "Whose orgasm is that?"

"Yours, Sir," he managed between breaths.

"Yes. You'll come when I tell you to. Not a moment before." He released Jack's balls and gave him another hard smack. Then the warm sweetness of his lips and tongue enveloped Dylan's stinging cock yet again. He felt a wet finger slide into his asshole as Jack's skillful attention to his cock again raised his need to a fever pitch.

"Oh god," he moaned, knowing he wasn't going to be able to stop it this time. "May I come? I have to -"

To his relief, as he was hurtled along a tide of orgasmic release, he heard the word, "Yes." Jack milked his cock, sucking every drop from him as Dylan sagged in his chains. He felt Jack press his still-clothed body against him, his cock hard against Dylan's hip.

Jack pulled off the blindfold and whispered, "I love you."

"I love you too," Dylan murmured, meaning it with all his heart.

Jack released him from his cuffs, unbuckling the slave collar and leaving it dangling from its hook. "Come lie down with me," he said. They moved together to the bedroom. Dylan lay down, watching Jack strip. He never tired of looking at Jack's long, lean body with his powerful shoulders, tapered waist, gorgeous cock and strong muscular thighs.

Jack pointed toward his nightstand, upon which rested a tray. Dylan knew immediately from his online research what he was looking at. There was a small hollow metal cylinder resting in a bowl of antiseptic liquid. Beside it lay a long thin needle encased in plastic and a captive bead ring of shiny stainless steel. There was a small aerosol can as well.

"Jack. I don't know if I'm ready..." Dylan trailed off, staring at the implements.

"I understand. We've agreed in theory we both want this. Perhaps this is the time, perhaps it is not. I'll let you decide. See that can of spray? That's a numbing agent. Before I insert the receiving tube, I'll spray your cock. It will help deaden the sensation."

"Oh Jack, I don't know."

"That's okay. You don't have to know yet. I just wanted to show you I have the equipment now to do the job, and this beautiful slave ring you will wear as a symbol of my ownership and your pride. If tonight's not the night, we'll wait." He sat on the edge of the bed and began to stroke Dylan's cock.

Dylan reached out, finding Jack's cock. As it hardened, Jack's hand fell away. He lay back against the pillows, closing his eyes. Dylan crouched on his knees, leaning over to take Jack's delicious shaft into his mouth. He circled the head with his tongue before

taking its length into his mouth. As Jack moaned his approval, Dylan let his cock slide out, moving down to lick and suckle Jack's heavy balls.

"I want your ass," Jack said. Dylan didn't need to be told twice. He opened Jack's nightstand drawer and removed the lubricant and a condom. With loving care he rolled the sheath over Jack's erection before positioning himself on his hands and knees. He smeared some lubricant onto himself and rested his head against the soft sheets, eager for his master's cock.

Jack moved behind him, pressing his large cock head against Dylan's tiny hole. Dylan winced at the initial pain of penetration, though he didn't pull away. He felt Jack's hand on his shaft, stroking him to a rapid erection. "Imagine the ring just here," he murmured in Dylan's ear as his fingers skimmed the helmet of his cock. "I could use the ring to lead you on a leash. I could chain you by your cock to the ceiling while I tortured you. Oh the delicious possibilities!" He slammed into Dylan's ass. Dylan held his position, lust coursing through his veins like liquid fire as Jack fucked him.

Jack came quickly, his grip strong on Dylan's shoulders as he thrust hard against his lover. Jack pulled him down to his side as they fell together against the bed. Dylan's cock was still hard as iron, his desire fueled not only by the sex but by his keen awareness of the implements awaiting him on the nightstand. His cock tingled as he imagined the needle piercing his flesh, the ring being slid into place by his master...

He felt Jack's strong, sure fingers close over his cock as he began to speak softly. "I want you to think about something, Dylan. If I pierce you now and place my ring in your cock, you will belong to me on a deeper level than we've shared until now. Think of it as a wedding ring, if you like. The commitment behind it is that real to me. What that means for you and me, in our relationship, is that you will be entering a new phase of submission with me." He continued to lightly stroke Dylan's cock.

"We'll still continue your training. You'll work on keeping your position while I cane or flog you. You'll learn to keep my cock in your throat for longer periods without so much as blinking. I'll continue to inspect, use, punish, love and adore you as before. But the dynamic will deepen. You will be less free to refuse me. If I choose to introduce elements into our play you aren't entirely comfortable with, I will expect you to trust me enough to obey without an exit door in your head."

Jack gently pulled away, disposing of his condom as Dylan turned to look at him, not entirely sure what he was getting at. "You mean I won't be able to use my safe word?" They had chosen the safe word of "pickle", a silly word guaranteed not be confused with anything else. In the event a scene or session became too intense for Dylan and Jack didn't seem to be responding to his cues of overload, Dylan was to say his safe word. If he were gagged or otherwise unable to speak, he was to open and close either hand into a fist three times in succession.

So far Dylan had had no need of his safe word. Jack was extremely sensitive to his responses, always correctly gauging just how far he could push his lover's sensual envelope without taking him over the edge of safety. As a result, Dylan had come to trust Jack so completely it never occurred to him to even think about using his safe word. Why then would Jack rescind its use?

"No, not at all. Your safe word is always available to you, though I know you appreciate its use is only for the most dire emergency. What I mean to say is, so far in our exploration it's been just between the two of us. I've led you down some new paths in terms of types of pleasure and pain, and the delicious mingling of the two. We've grown together as master and slave, but also as lovers and friends.

"I find I want more, Dylan. I want to take you further than you've perhaps considered before. Since we've been together, Tomas has disappeared from the clubs. I've had no need of that alter ego since I found you. But you should know I still find enormous erotic potential in a public scene. For you it would be an opportunity to perform a deeply submissive act. To do something that goes against your grain precisely and only because your master wishes it. That, my love, is true submission."

Dylan swallowed, understanding at last. Jack wanted to scene with him at a BDSM club. Until he'd met Jack, Dylan had always regarded the public displays while sometimes sexy, to be shallow and demeaning. Yet he recalled his own very strong reaction while watching Jack as he posed as Tomas, using the slave boy he had called James. That had been anything but shallow and demeaning. And when Tomas had used Dylan at the club, though there had been no witnesses, there was a certain element of intensity that was missing when he submitted to his lover in the privacy of his home.

Jack took the tray, setting it on the bed between them. He lifted the silver cock ring, holding it so the light caught it. Dylan stared at it, his mouth suddenly dry, his cock throbbing. Softly Jack said, "Do you wish to go to the next level, Dylan? Are you ready at last?" Gently he kissed Dylan's mouth with closed lips. He kissed Dylan's eyelids and stroked his cheek. "Know this, my love. Whatever you decide, I love you. I've never loved a man as I love you and nothing you decide or do will change that."

Dylan stared at the needle and ring. He looked back at Jack, realizing he'd already made up his mind. By not pressing him, Jack had made the decision easier. "I want it, Jack. I want to wear your ring. I want to move to the next level."

"Then you shall." Jack leaned back to retrieve the can of anesthetic spray. He sprayed the head of Dylan's cock, pressing it gently between finger and thumb to open the little eye so some of the liquid would numb his canal. The spray felt freezing cold against his skin. "Lie flat on your back. Close your eyes and try to relax. It will be over very quickly."

After donning sterile surgical gloves, Jack removed the metal needle receiving tube from its bowl and wiped it with sterile cotton gauze. The sight of the tube and the knowledge Jack intended to insert it into the eye of his cock caused adrenaline to surge in his belly.

"Close your eyes. This will be the worst part. Stay very still and it'll be done before you know it." Dylan closed his eyes, his heart beginning to pound in anxious anticipation. Jack gripped his cock, squeezing the head so he could slip the tube in until it was inserted about an inch.

"Fuck," Dylan hissed, wincing in pain. It hurt more than he had expected. He felt dizzy and was glad he was lying down. Jack quickly pushed the needle through the tube. Dylan felt a pinch on the underside of his cock just below the head as the needle punctured his flesh. Jack removed the needle and the receiving tube. He promptly threaded the shiny ring through, closing the circle with the little ball.

Dylan was surprised to realize he felt no more pain. He realized he probably would later, when the numbing agent wore off. Instead he felt a rising euphoria, no doubt induced by the endorphins his body had produced from the piercing.

Jack was smiling down at him. "It's done, my brave boy." He brought Dylan a hand mirror. As Dylan admired the beautiful jewelry piercing his cock head, Jack added with a laugh, "Now comes the worst part for a slut like you! While it heals, no orgasms for a week."

# Chapter Eleven

"You look so hot like that, Dylan. I might just have to leave you there all night." Jack stood back to admire his slave boy. He had chained Dylan to the metal bars of the dungeon door by his wrists and ankles so he formed a human X. He'd had Dylan put his feet through the bars, resting his arches on the frame so he was completely off the floor. He was facing the bars so he could see out into the living room, his back to the dungeon. Jack had placed a ball gag in Dylan's mouth. Sometimes he liked to hear his cries and moans, but today he wanted to savor the wild-eyed look of a suffering submissive, unable to beg or plead for mercy.

Dylan's piercing had healed quickly and well. It had been a month since the procedure and after careful inspection of the site, Jack had determined it would be safe to put some tension on the ring at last. Standing outside the dungeon door, he pulled Dylan's cock between two of the bars. His own cock hardened in anticipation as he fondled his slave. "You ready, baby?" Gently he pulled Dylan's jutting cock upward by the ring. Carefully he clipped the ring to a long metal leash, the other end of which he hung from a hook in the ceiling just outside the dungeon door. The leash was a special invention of Jack's. He had attached tiny bells to it at intervals of about six inches. He pulled up on the chain so the little bells tinkled.

Dylan moaned against the gag pressing back his tongue. Jack squeezed his cock, which was very hard. He pulled lightly on the leash, causing Dylan's cock to be raised by its ring. He knew the area was very sensitive. Dylan had admitted though he loved the submissive aspect of his piercing, he hadn't expected the increase in erotic stimulation when the ring moved or rotated. He had confessed with a blush he kept getting erections if he moved the wrong way while standing at his lecture podium. "Just a hazard of your status as my slut," Jack had laughed.

He stroked Dylan's cock with one hand as he continued to pull up on the chain with the other, the tiny bells jingling their approval. He could gauge by Dylan's reaction when the balance tipped from pleasure to pain. Over and over he pulled the ring up, releasing it when Dylan's face registered his suffering, all the while stroking his bonehard shaft.

When he tired of this game, Jack pulled the dungeon door open, letting it swing slowly with its weight of a chained, naked man. Entering the dungeon, he pulled the door closed again and pressed up against Dylan. Whispering in his ear, he said, "Now you will truly suffer. Not because you are being punished but because it pleases me to use you in this way. You want that, don't you, boy?"

He pulled Dylan's head back by his hair. Dylan's eyes were closed. Jack unbuckled the gag and removed the ball from Dylan's mouth. "Are you ready?"

Dylan twisted his head back, trying to see Jack. "Jack. Is this dangerous? Could this rip the piercing?"

"I have you secured in such a way no harm will come to you. Bound as you are, you couldn't rip the piercing if you tried."

"But what if –"

"Shh, stop. Trust me. I love you above all things. I would never do something to put you in danger." He kissed Dylan's lips and stroked his head. "You'll only feel the delicious tension as the ring moves inside of you. It's just an added bonus. Think of it as a built-in vibrator." He laughed and ruffled Dylan's hair. "Now turn your head forward and take what I give you. If you handle it with grace, I might let you come."

Dylan obeyed as Jack selected the cat-o'-nine-tails from the wall. He rained the leather over Dylan's back, ass and thighs to warm his flesh. At first the rhythm was steady and light. Without warning he let the whip's knotted tresses come down hard against Dylan's ass. Dylan flinched and jerked, the bells tinkling with renewed urgency.

"Careful," Jack said. "Ease into it. You know you need this." He struck him again, this time across the back, leaving myriad long thin red lines, darker at the tips where the knots were especially cruel. As the bells jingled and the ring in Dylan's cock twisted and turned, Jack whipped his slave until Dylan's chest was heaving, his body covered in a sheen of sweat, his back, ass and thighs a pleasing dark pink.

Jack dropped the whip and cupped Dylan's hot ass with both hands. How he loved to fuck a freshly whipped ass! Jack pulled off his jeans and underwear and dragged his shirt over his head. He leaned his cool body against Dylan's hot one. Dylan was breathing hard as Jack slowly swung the door open to get around Dylan. He unleashed Dylan's cock ring and released his wrists and ankles from their cuffs.

"I want you now," he said, his voice gruff with need. He pointed toward the dog bed in the corner of the dungeon. "Pull that out to the center of the room and kneel down." Dylan, somewhat unsteady on his feet, managed to obey. As he crouched, Jack pulled on a condom and squirted lubricant onto his fingers. Kneeling behind Dylan, he pressed his gooey finger into Dylan's ass. Tight muscles gripped him. Dylan's ass was the tightest and sweetest he'd ever fucked. He could never get enough of using his sexy boy like this.

Withdrawing his finger, he pressed his sheathed cock against Dylan's entrance until he moaned as he always did with the initial pain as Jack's cock forced its way past the sentinel of muscle. He draped himself over Dylan's strong body, feeling the heat emanate from his welted flesh.

Jack had never been with a man so eager to please him and so responsive to his every whim. He adored devising devious new ways to erotically torture his charge and Dylan always did his best to comply and obey.

He had become so sensitized and conditioned by Jack's constant sexual stimulation and control he could come nearly on command. A few strokes of Jack's whip followed

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by a few strokes to his cock and Dylan would shoot his seed. Jack enjoyed Dylan's erotic humiliation when he forced him to lick up his own semen.

They had talked at length about a public scene and Jack felt the time would soon be ripe to bring his plan to fruition. As he pictured in his mind's eye the scene he envisioned, he felt his balls tighten with renewed lust. Soon he was pumping hard into Dylan's ass, holding Dylan's hips and pulling him back with each thrust.

He came suddenly, his orgasm consuming him as he climaxed deep inside his lover. As his heart slowed, he reached around to find Dylan's cock. He smiled to find it still hard as ever. He loved the fact he merely had to look at Dylan's cock to make it rise to attention. With his own cock still buried in Dylan's ass, he began to stroke and tease Dylan's, moving his hand up over the head. Each time he touched the ring, Dylan moaned and arched back into him. "Yes, yes," Dylan panted. "Oh god, yes. You can't believe what this feels like. Jesus..." His words were lost in a series of moans as Jack rubbed and pulled his iron pole.

"May I..." "You may." He did.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Hello?"

"Hi there. It's me."

"Hi, you." Dylan smiled. Every time he heard Jack's voice he felt a warmth in his chest. He wondered if he would ever get so used to hearing it he would no longer thrill to the sound. He hoped not.

"Listen, I know we weren't planning on getting together tonight but I have a surprise for you. I thought if you weren't busy you might like to come over."

They had been spending more and more time together as winter set in, sometimes using the excuse of the weather, other times using no excuse at all. Dylan worried sometimes they were seeing too much of each other. Some weeks he spent as many as five nights at Jack's house. Jack had begun to talk about them moving in together. Each time Dylan had refused out of hand.

When Jack had finally pressed the issue the week before, they'd had their first fight. "Move in with me," Jack had said impulsively one evening when Dylan had called to say he wouldn't be able to make it over that night.

"Jack, we've talked about this," he had begun.

Jack had interrupted, "Yeah, yeah. I know your argument. If we give up the space, we risk losing what we have. You know what, Dylan? Life is full of risk. It's what makes it worth living. Right now you're paying big bucks for a crummy apartment you spend maybe two nights a week in. Half the time you're here you have to leave at the crack of dawn because you forgot something for work or whatever. It's crazy! We love each other, right?"

"Yes, of course. It's just –"

"And you've said to me over and over you've never felt such a connection with anyone like this before. You've said you want to belong to me in every possible way. Yet when it comes to this concrete proof of your sincerity, you balk. You want to know what I think? I think you're afraid of commitment. I don't think you're afraid we'll break up if you move in. I think you're afraid we won't."

Dylan had been struck silent by Jack's words. Was he afraid to commit? He harbored a fear if they moved in together the relationship would fall apart. Every other relationship he'd been in had disintegrated in short order once they'd taken that step. He had been telling himself he felt so fulfilled with Jack he couldn't bear the thought of anything coming between them. But was it as simple as that? Dylan shrugged, refusing to think about it.

"Dylan?" Jack was waiting for his response. If he went over tonight, it would be their sixth night in a row. Was Jack trying to trick him into moving in by default? "What's come up?" he asked, framing his refusal in his mind as he spoke.

"Marla Jacobs, an old friend of mine, is in town. She's a professional dominatrix and I thought it would very hot to put you through your paces for her. She's absolutely gorgeous and she's *very* exacting. She charges five hundred dollars an hour but she says she would love to give you a free session."

Dylan couldn't believe what he was hearing. "A woman?" he blurted. "You want me to submit to a woman?"

"To a dominatrix. The fact she's a woman is frankly irrelevant for our purposes. It's not like she's going to have sex with you, for heaven's sake. No, what I had in mind was a sensual torture session. She's known for her cock and ball torture. Listen, I've seen her in action and she knows what she's doing. She's even taught me a thing or two."

Dylan felt a sudden stab of jealousy at these words. Since they'd been going out Jack had never shown the slightest interest in another person, man or woman. An image flashed through his mind of Jack and this Marla person sharing a drink on his futon, clinking their glasses before leaning toward each other for a kiss... He shook his head. That was silly. Jack didn't have a straight bone in his body. If either of them were to kiss a woman, it would more likely be Dylan, who had had his share of heterosexual experiences before accepting his true orientation was gay.

Still, the jealous thought of Jack spending the evening alone with this "gorgeous woman" was enough to tip the balance in favor of Jack's offer. That and the thought of some serious cock and ball torture. Of all the delicious erotic tortures Jack put him through, CBT was far and away Dylan's favorite.

"You'll be there?"

"Of course."

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Dylan was quiet a moment, his mind reeling. Would he be up to this? Could he submit to a woman and with Jack watching? Jack added, "This would be an excellent test, Dylan. In preparation for your debut with me at Club Chained. You know it's only a matter of time until I decide you're ready for that ultimate test of submission."

Dylan felt his heart quicken. He had thought endlessly about the promised scene at the club, alternating between furious desire and utter terror and everything in between. He knew Jack wanted it and because of that, Dylan wanted it too. His primary fear was he would fail Jack in some way and let him down in front of witnesses. That was something he never wanted to do.

Jack was right. This could be a test run of how well he submitted in front of and for others. Maybe the fact she was a woman would be even better as there would be no sexual tension between them.

"Well, okay. Just give me about an hour to finish up some work."

"Take two hours. I want you freshly groomed and I want you to arrive naked underneath your coat. You will not use your key. When I open the door, you are not to speak. You won't speak unless or until spoken to. I want you on your very best behavior. I want to show Mistress Marla how well my sexy slave can submit. When you obey her, you'll be obeying me. Got it?"

"Yes, Sir," Dylan answered, unaware he'd slipped into submissive mode. His cock nudged his jeans, the ever-present ring twisting slightly and sending a thrill directly to his nerve endings. "I got it."

\* \* \* \* \*

Dylan pulled his overcoat more tightly around him as he stood at the door. Obviously Jack hadn't expected him to tramp through the slush in bare feet so he'd taken the liberty of wearing boots since his coat only came down to mid-calf. It had been a very strange experience to ride the subways of New York City with nothing beneath his coat but a silver cock ring. He'd had an impulse, quickly suppressed of course, to flash the other riders in his car.

When he arrived at Jack's place, the doorman, now long used to Dylan's frequent visits, buzzed him in. "Good evening," he said. "Nice coat." Dylan glanced at him, suddenly worried something was showing, but the man was smiling blandly, apparently only making small talk.

Dylan rode up the elevator and walked down the long narrow hall to Jack's apartment. He took a deep breath and knocked on the front door. In a moment it was pulled open not by Jack as Dylan had expected, but by easily the most striking woman he had ever seen. She had long shiny black hair that fell in soft waves over her bare white shoulders. Her eyes were large and emerald green, framed by thick dark lashes. Her mouth was full and sensual, the edges tipped in a devilish smile as she gazed up into Dylan's face. Her breasts were round and lush, spilling over the top of a tight black

corset, perfectly molded over her tapering waist and feminine hips. A long gauzy skirt of black flowing fabric fell to her slender ankles. She wore stiletto black heels.

"Like what you see, brazen boy?" she drawled in a slow Southern accent. Dylan flushed and looked at the ground. Before he realized what was happening, she reached in between the buttons of his coat and found his balls, gripping them hard, her long nails digging into his flesh.

He gasped with surprise and pain as she leaned forward, hissing, "Speak when spoken to, slave. Next time I'll rip them off."

"Dylan, is that you?" Dylan heard Jack call. "Sorry, I was in the kitchen. I didn't hear the door. Oh you got it, Marla. Excellent."

Marla released her iron grip on Dylan's jewels and stepped back into the living room. Sweetly she said, "Dylan and I were just making our acquaintance. Weren't we, boy?"

"Yes, ma'am," Dylan answered, stepping into the room. Jack moved forward to kiss him. Dylan knew he wouldn't tell Jack what had just happened. He only hoped Marla wouldn't. *Mistress Marla*, he silently corrected himself.

Marla turned to Jack. "He's every bit as gorgeous as you said he was. Too bad all the hotties are gay, you included."

Jack laughed and shook his head. "There are plenty of hot straight guys. Trust me on this. With ninety percent of the population straight or at least convinced they are, we gay guys have pretty slim pickings!" Dylan waited for Jack to say he of course had found the man of his dreams and was no longer out looking for "pickings", slim or otherwise. He was mildly annoyed when Jack instead added, "Though you, Marla, are lovely enough to make a gay man think twice."

"Why thank you kindly, Sir," Marla said. "You're as gallant as a true Southern gentleman." She turned to rake Dylan with her eyes. "But the wonderful thing about D/s is it really doesn't matter what orientation we are, does it? I can use this slave boy here perfectly well, no matter who he likes to sleep with. Now let's see that Prince Albert I've been hearing about."

Dylan swallowed, his face heating. "Go ahead, Dylan. Take off your coat and show Mistress Marla your piercing." Flames licked his cheeks as he unbuttoned his coat. He realized his fingers were trembling as he fumbled with the buttons. Jack moved behind him, taking the coat from his shoulders.

"Boots and a ring. Could be a new fashion statement," Marla laughed, her eyes burning a trail over Dylan's naked body.

"Well, I couldn't very well go barefoot," Dylan retorted. He snapped his jaw shut as he realized he'd just spoken without being directly addressed. *Shit*, he thought as Marla's expression darkened.

"I thought you said he was well trained," she remarked dryly, the heavy Southern drawl suddenly much less apparent.

Jack moved next to Dylan, putting his hand lightly on his shoulder. "Usually he is. This is a rather, uh, unusual situation for us."

Marla raised her eyebrows. "A properly trained slave adapts to unusual situations." She smiled. "Well, no matter. He's not mine." *Thank god,* Dylan thought. "Are we going to leave the boots on?"

"Take off your boots, Dylan," Jack said. "And kneel up." Dylan pulled off his boots, glad for something to do. How bizarre it felt to stand naked in front of a woman, a dominatrix no less! His cock was half erect as he knelt back on his haunches, his back straight, his legs parted, his hands resting lightly on his knees.

"May I inspect the goods?" Marla cocked her head toward Dylan.

"By all means. The night belongs to you," Jack answered.

Marla knelt in front of Dylan. He could smell her perfume, something exotic and undoubtedly expensive. Her lips were painted a bright cherry red against her milkywhite complexion. "Let's start over, shall we?" she said softly, the Southern accent back in play.

"Yes, Mistress Marla," Dylan replied. His heart began to hammer in his chest as she reached toward his crotch. His balls still ached slightly from their last encounter.

"Put your hands behind your head," she instructed as she took hold of his shaft, pulling the loose skin upward in a firm grip. The friction caused the ring to twist in his piercing, sending waves of pleasure to his brain. Despite the fact it was a woman holding his cock, it began to rise and lengthen in her hand.

"He's a slut, isn't he?" she said to Jack, her tone slightly derisive. "Doesn't matter who's touching him. He's easy."

Jack, who had sat down on the couch to watch, replied, "I wouldn't say he's easy. But for the right master he's a delicious slut—always ready, always willing. As a good slave should be."

"We'll see if I'm the right master tonight." Marla smiled at Dylan, revealing small white teeth. "Stand up, boy. Keep your hands behind your head."

Dylan stood as Marla released her grip on his cock. It was bobbing, fully erect, the silver ring glistening in the soft light of the room. Marla reached forward, slipping a finger into the ring. She pulled up, tugging just enough to turn pleasure to pain. Dylan blinked rapidly and held his breath, determined to make Jack proud.

"My, my," she said, dropping the ring as Dylan inwardly sighed with relief. "What a fine package this slave boy has." She smacked his shaft with her open hand and grabbed his balls, the nails again digging into his flesh. Dylan winced and almost pulled away but caught himself in time. Conflicting emotions battled in his head—submissive desire fencing with nervous hesitation and fear of the unknown. What had he gotten himself into?

Marla rubbed her hands together in an exaggerated gesture of anticipation. "Let's string him up! I can't wait to torture this sexy slave."

Jack stood. "Before we start, I just need a quick word with Dylan. Dylan, come to the kitchen with me."

"All right. I'll just check out the divine little dungeon you've built while I'm waiting," Marla said.

Dylan followed Jack into the kitchen. Jack turned and wrapped his arms around Dylan, kissing him softly. Dylan hugged him back, deeply grateful for this reprieve.

"You seem very nervous, Dylan. Are you okay?"

"I am nervous. But I think I'm okay."

Jack poured a glass of water for Dylan and handed it to him. As Dylan drank, Jack said, "She comes on a little strong. It's part of her persona as Domme. I'm very proud of you already, Dylan. You took off your coat without the slightest hesitation and I know that was hard for you." He stroked Dylan's cock. "You're so fucking sexy. I want to show you off, I guess. She's one of the best. If you still want to go through with this, she's going to give you an experience you won't soon forget, I can promise you. But if you don't feel comfortable, you may dress and leave. We won't mention it again."

Dylan thought about the imposing woman waiting for them in the dungeon. If he backed out now he would be humiliating his master in front of her. And truth be told, while he was nervous, he was also turned on and not a little curious as to what devious erotic torture Marla had planned for him. Impulsively he knelt in front of his master and wrapped his arms around Jack's legs.

"I want to submit to *you*, Sir. I want to please you. If it pleases you for me to submit to Mistress Marla, there is nothing I would rather do."

"Good boy," Jack said, smiling broadly.

Dylan followed Jack out of the kitchen, again wondering what he was getting himself into. As they approached the dungeon, Marla appeared at its door. "Ah, is our trembling young slave boy ready to submit?"

"Are you ready, Dylan?"

"Yes, Sir. Yes, Mistress Marla."

"Good. First thing is to get you into a properly submissive state of mind." Marla opened a large red velvet duffel bag and removed something packaged in plastic. Pulling it open, she tossed a medium-sized butt plug toward Dylan, who automatically reached out to catch it. "Stick that up your ass while we watch." Dylan held the item in his hand, staring blankly at it for a moment. It looked like a rounded black rubber Christmas tree. Of course he'd seen butt plugs before. His last dominant lover had favored them "as a reminder" when Dylan was to be away from him for an extended period. He'd never particularly liked them and Jack had never shown any interest either.

He looked toward Jack in a mute appeal. Jack responded by reaching into his pocket and pulling out a small tube of lubricant he tossed toward Dylan. Dylan

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swallowed, flushing with embarrassment. He wasn't going to blow this right off the bat. He unscrewed the cap and squirted a good amount of lubricant over the plastic phallus. *Oh god, I can't do this,* he thought, but he found himself bending forward as he pressed the gooey tip of the plug against his nether hole. It slipped in easily. Averting his eyes from Jack and Marla, he pressed it home, wincing with pain as the wider end slipped in, lodging it firmly in place.

"Turn around and show us," Marla commanded. His face still burning, Dylan turned his back toward Jack and Marla and bent to expose his plugged ass. "Stay that way. I'm going to warm you up a bit in anticipation of the real fun. Grab your ankles and don't move out of position."

Dylan obeyed. He had expected a spanking or perhaps a cropping. When the first blow landed with considerable force Dylan lost his grip and stumbled forward. Marla had struck him with a rectangular wooden paddle, out of which eight round holes in two lines of four had been drilled to heighten the sting upon contact.

"Back into position," Marla snapped as Dylan hurried to obey. She smacked him again even harder but this time he was ready and held his ground. In short order she had blistered his bottom with the heavy wooden paddle. From time to time she would smack the butt plug head-on, ramming it farther into Dylan's ass. He was breathing hard through his nose, determined not to cry out. When at last she decided he'd had enough, she ordered, "Stay in position." Dylan obeyed, his ass on fire, every inch throbbing from the beating.

"Jack darling," Marla crooned. "Do you have a full-length mirror we could use in here? I want the boy to see his cherry-red ass."

"I do. I'll be right back." In a moment Jack returned with the freestanding mirror he kept in his bedroom. He placed it behind Dylan.

"Look at your naughty little spanked ass," Marla instructed. Dylan stood up and craned behind himself to see. His ass was indeed red, even purple in places. Jack was rarely that rough on him and while it throbbed, Dylan felt a curious pride rising in him. He'd withstood Mistress Marla's first test without so much as a cry.

Marla's tinkling laugh distracted him. "Well look at that, Jack. Your slut is hard as a rock." Stepping behind Dylan, she touched his burning ass with her cool fingers. Lightly she tugged at the plug still lodged in his ass. Dylan couldn't help himself—he pulled away, turning a beseeching eye toward Jack.

"Go take out the butt plug," Jack said, coming to the rescue. "You can toss it."

"Thank you, Sir," Dylan said, avoiding Marla's gaze as he slipped out of the tiny dungeon and headed for the bathroom. When he returned to the living room, Jack and Marla were sitting on the futon couch. Marla had taken her velvet bag with her.

"Marla's been telling me about her experience with Japanese rope bondage. She's going to give me a demonstration, using your cock and balls."

Dylan looked down at the floor. If her bondage was as rough as her paddling, he was in for some serious torture. He didn't know Marla—he didn't trust her. He looked

at Jack, who as usual seemed to be reading his mind. "You can trust Marla, Dylan. She's a pro. Like me, she would never harm you. Think of her as an extension of me tonight. And remember, if anything gets too intense, you just say so. We'll listen to you, I promise."

He stood and approached Dylan. "You took the paddle with real grace. I know you'll continue to make me proud tonight." He stroked Dylan's chest, letting his fingers glide down to Dylan's already responding cock.

"We'll want to lie him down for this. Perhaps on your bed?"

"No," Jack said. "We'll use this futon. Dylan and I will open it while you get your ropes ready." Once they had it open flat, Jack said, "Lie down on your back." As Jack sat on the edge of the mattress, Dylan stretched himself out as ordered. He couldn't help but wince as his abraded bottom made contact with the mattress. He was glad Jack hadn't invited the dominatrix into the bedroom.

Marla sat on one side of futon while Jack cradled Dylan's head on his lap. She took out a handful of long brightly colored satin strands. Dylan's cock, which had flagged, perked a bit as he contemplated the rope bondage to come. Marla stroked his shaft with her long slender fingers, pulling him deftly to full erection as Jack stroked his cheek and hair.

"Now we begin," she announced as she set to work with precise movements, wrapping the satin threads around his balls. At first it felt soft and sensual, like a silk worm spinning a cocoon around him. But with a sudden jerk all the strands were unexpectedly tightened. Dylan sucked in his breath, pleasure shifting rapidly to pain. A moment later the pain was gone, the silken ropes loosened, though just enough.

Next she focused on Dylan's straight shaft, starting at the base and working her way up, tightening the strands as she went. "That looks really hot," Jack offered as they all stared down at Dylan's bound cock and balls, covered in intricate twisting patterns of red, gold and black.

Dylan could feel his cock ring straining against his piercing as blood flow constricted in the head of his cock. The strings were tight but not so tight as to be painful. Dylan never imagined what she was going to do next.

"Are you ready to suffer, slave?" Marla said softly. Her emerald green eyes were glittering, her pink tongue darting over her full lower lip. Dylan tensed. Jack placed his hands on Dylan's chest, pressing lightly, a silent reminder he was safe in Jack's arms.

"Yes, Mistress," Dylan answered, his voice coming out hoarse, his gut twisting with anticipation. All at once she yanked the ends of the strings straight up into the air. Dylan's penis twirled and twisted against the tightening strings. The sensation was like nothing Dylan had ever experienced. Pain and pleasure fought a fierce battle in his nerve endings as he cried out, his pelvis jerking upward, his head slamming back against Jack's legs.

He fell back, his heart hammering, his cock held taut in its bindings. Slowly Marla began to unwind the colored strands until his shaft was free. She left the strings still

tight around his balls. His cock remained hard, indentations from the threads crisscrossing it.

"Let's give him a reward for being such a good slave," Marla said with a sly grin as she pointed toward Dylan's erection.

Jack nodded, gently disengaging Dylan from his lap so he could sit next to him. Marla sat on his other side. Dylan was aware of hands sliding up and down his body – Jack's large hands and the softer feminine hands of the dominatrix. "Such a firm, hard body. What fun I could have with this buck at my farm. Jack, you really must bring him to Westport some time soon. I have a stable of slave boys. He would fit in beautifully. We could make a weekend of it. And you and I," she paused, leaning across Dylan, her plump breasts grazing his bare chest as she kissed Jack's lips. "Who knows what kind of mischief we could get into! I've been known to convert a man or two in my day."

Dylan smiled beneath them. He would have been jealous since Marla was extraordinarily lovely but she'd picked the wrong man in Jack, of that Dylan was certain. Jack laughed, pulling back from her kiss. "Next time we're in Connecticut I'll make sure to bring Dylan's saddle," he teased as he gripped Dylan's shaft. His cock was tender from the workout it had received with the satin strings, his balls still bound in the colorful bonds.

Marla began to unwind the strings from Dylan's balls, cupping them lightly in her hands as she freed him. Her long red fingernails grazed the underside of his scrotum. He felt Jack's lips closing over the head of his cock but it wasn't Jack's hand curling around the base of his cock.

"Jesus, Jack. This boy is on fire. If he were mine, I'd be all over him right now. I could come just from watching him!" Dylan was too far gone to blush or even to care what was being said about him. The combination of hands, lips and tongue sliding over his engorged member was rapidly pushing him to the brink of ecstasy.

As Marla gently pumped the lower half of his shaft, Jack lifted and lowered his head over Dylan's body, licking and sucking him like an ice pop. His hips arched up of their own accord as Jack continued his loving onslaught while Marla kept his balls held tight. Before he realized what was happening, an orgasm tore through his body. He came hard, spurting down Jack's throat before he could even ask permission.

If Jack noticed this slip, he didn't mention it. He milked Dylan's cock until it softened in his mouth before letting him go. Dylan felt his body melting into the mattress. He couldn't have moved if he tried. Jack's mouth was close to his ear. "I love you," he heard him whisper.

Dylan smiled dreamily. He opened his mouth to respond in kind but found himself overcome with a delicious fatigue. It felt as if someone had put lead weights over his eyes and despite his best efforts, his lids closed. His ass still tingled and he knew he'd be bruised in the morning. His cock and balls ached, but it was a delicious ache – he had been well used.

The last thing he heard before drifting into a deep slumber was Marla's Southern drawl. "It's like I said before, sugar. All the good ones are gay."

# **Chapter Twelve**

It felt surreal as Dylan handed his gold invitation to the doorman at Club Chained. Though he wanted to be there, he was more nervous than excited as he waited for the doorman to confirm his invitation was legitimate. He watched his breath crystallize in the cold night air as he waited, his hands shoved into his coat.

It had been a month since their play with Mistress Marla and in that time, Jack had continued to prepare Dylan for his "showing" at the club. Dylan had come to appreciate the scene Jack envisioned would be a true act of submission and devotion on his part. Jack had also promised it would be deeply erotic. "I want this for both of us," he had explained. "I want to show the world my sexy slave boy. I want witnesses to see how graceful you have become in your submission. For you, it's a chance to truly submit, since I know this will be difficult for you. You're a very private man and I appreciate that. Yet I think you'll find submitting to me in public will press your sensual envelope in such a way you'll grow as a submissive. Instead of only doing what's comfortable for you, you'll be doing something that might be scary but you'll know you're safe because you'll be with me."

And yet here he was alone! As the fateful day had edged closer, Jack had begun to discuss some of the details of their evening. Dylan was to go alone to the club with explicit instructions. Jack would meet him later.

Jack had laid out his clothing for him. "I'd like to send you naked, but the police probably wouldn't like that," Jack had grinned as he'd pulled Dylan to him by his pierced cock, cupping his shaven balls with his other hand. He selected a cashmere sweater of golden brown and dark brown wool slacks over brown leather boots.

"When you get there, you will be met by someone of my choosing. That person will hand you an envelope. Read what's inside and obey the instructions."

Dylan had waited but when Jack hadn't added anything more, he'd demanded, "That's it? That's all you're going to tell me?"

"What did you want to know, slave, other than you'll do my bidding?" Jack had smiled but his tone indicated Dylan was treading on dangerous ground.

"Well," he'd retorted, though less forcefully. "Am I going to be naked? Are other men going to be touching me? Whipping me? Am I going to be put on the rack in front of all those strangers?" He could hear the petulant whine creep into his voice even as he spoke. He cut himself off, wishing he could take back his words. He well knew a properly trained sub would not be asking all these questions with the obvious underlying reluctance beneath the words. But Jack had been patient with him. In a gentle voice he had said, "We've talked about all this, haven't we? And even if we hadn't, what is your duty to me? When you promised to submit to me, what did that entail?"

Dylan had flushed, looking away. In a whisper he had answered, "To obey you without question, Sir." Even as he felt humbled by this reminder of his status, his cock had hardened with desire. He knew it didn't make rational sense to be thrilled by Jack's very real control over him, but there it was. His submissive nature made him yearn for the exchange of power Jack offered, reveling in the reminder of his place as Jack's sexual property.

The doorman handed back his invitation. "You can go in." How strange after all these months to walk through the red door and down the narrow stairs. Dylan felt a wave of nostalgia for the fantasy of Tomas. Though he knew he'd much rather have the real man who was Jack, sometimes he felt a wistful longing for the black-haired swashbuckling Dom who had set his blood on fire with lust.

As he entered the room, many heads turned in his direction. Tall, blond and impeccably dressed, his winter coat slung casually over one shoulder, he knew he cut an attractive figure. Jack had told him to wait at the bar. There was an empty stool and he moved toward it.

As he sat down, he turned to survey the room. For a moment he imagined the scene had been frozen in time, reanimating when he walked into the room, like actors suddenly coming to life on the set of a movie. Men were huddled in groups throughout the large open space, watching naked or nearly naked men bound to posts and crosses, being whipped, fondled and used. Knowing he was soon to join the ranks of men on public display, Dylan squirmed in his seat, turning back toward the bar to order some courage in a bottle.

"Long time no see." Dylan turned to see the man who had introduced himself as Master John the first time Dylan had come to the club.

"Oh hello."

"Hello to you. I have something for you." He handed Dylan an envelope, watching with narrowed eyes as he accepted it. Dylan tried not to show his surprise on his face. Somehow he'd been expecting someone he'd never met to be the mystery man with the envelope.

Quickly he tore open the envelope and spread it flat on the bar.

Slave, you will obey Master John until I arrive. You will submit to him as if he were me. He understands and respects your boundaries and will ask nothing of you that I wouldn't expect from you myself. Remember, my precious possession, as you obey him, you exalt us both. I will see you very soon. Now look up at Master John, address him respectfully and tell him you are ready to serve him. I love you, Jack.

## Claire Thompson

Dylan turned toward John, who was smiling slightly, one eyebrow cocked. He wondered if he'd read the contents of the envelope. He took a deep breath. This felt very strange indeed. How odd to have his lover hand him over to this man, commanding him to do his bidding in Jack's stead. Dylan knew this was a test of his willingness to obey despite his trepidation. John put his hand on Dylan's thigh as he raked Dylan's physique with his eyes. His mouth curved in a sly smile. "You look like a *GQ* model in that getup. I can't wait to see what's beneath it."

Dylan forced himself to meet John's penetrating gaze. "Sir," he said, "I'm ready to serve you."

John's smile widened into a grin. "Excellent!" He looked out over the floor. "Hank! Get over here." A man extricated himself from the crowd and came quickly to them. Hank had auburn hair and slanted green eyes. He stared at Dylan with open admiration. He was wearing black leather chaps over bare legs, a black leather codpiece at its center. His bare chest was broad as a barrel, his arms powerfully muscular.

"Hank, this is our toy for the evening. Take his coat to the coat room and get back here pronto." Hank grabbed Dylan's coat and hurried away. To Dylan, John commanded, "Kneel on the floor at my feet."

Dylan hesitated a fraction of a second. While his cock responded positively to John's authoritative stance, his mind was less certain it was willing to obey in front of all these people. He didn't have to do this. He didn't have to stay here. Jack would understand if he wasn't ready. Jack would still love him. John, who was watching him, said softly, "Remember who you're doing this for, boy. It isn't for me, I know that much."

John was right. He was doing this for Jack. And for himself. He knew in all the months they'd been together, he had yet to perform a truly submissive act. Coming here tonight was his chance to prove he was capable of rising to a new level in their relationship as Dom and sub. Slowly he stood from the stool and knelt before John.

Hank returned, hovering respectfully nearby. "This boy is wearing entirely too much clothing," John said loudly, clearly performing for the small crowd already gathering around them. "Take off his shirt and his boots." Hank knelt in front of Dylan without hesitation. John said, "Don't help him. Just kneel there like a good little boy." Dylan did as he was told, though he knew his burning face was red. Hank pulled the soft sweater over Dylan's head. He wore nothing beneath, save for a gold chain around his neck, another gift from Jack. Hank moved behind Dylan to pull off his boots and socks.

"Get up," John commanded. Turning to Hank, he said, "Take off his pants." Dylan stood, his bare feet sinking into the soft thick carpet just beyond the bar. He took a deep breath and pressed his lips together but otherwise offered no protest. Hank knelt before him, opening the button at his fly. "Use your teeth to pull the zipper," John added. Hank leaned forward, lightly gripping Dylan's hips as he tugged at the tag of the zipper with his teeth.

#### Masked Submission

Despite the public scene, despite the strange men stripping him or perhaps partially because of it, Dylan knew his cock was getting hard in front of these men. Hank pulled his pants down his thighs and tapped his ankle, indicating he should lift his foot so Hank could pull the pants free of his body. Dylan was left standing in his black bikini underwear, his cock rising beneath the silk.

Hank stood and whispered something into John's ear, his eyes trained on Dylan's package. John laughed. "Not yet, my hungry boy! You'll have plenty of opportunity to worship that gorgeous body."

The throng of men now crowded around the bar ogled Dylan as if he were a big juicy steak and they hadn't eaten for a week. Where was Jack? Though Dylan knew the night was just beginning, he wanted Jack to be there to control the action. How well did Jack know John? How could he have just handed Dylan over to this virtual stranger?

"Hold out your wrists," John ordered, ignoring the press of onlookers crowding closer. Dylan hesitated, glancing around the club, straining to see Jack amidst the crowd. "He isn't here," John said, correctly interpreting Dylan's actions. "You serve *me* right now. Don't forget that. Now hold out your wrists." This time Dylan obeyed, his heart thumping, his mouth dry. John unclipped a pair of metal cuffs he had attached to his belt. He closed them over Dylan's wrists and tugged at the chain between them. "Put your arms up over your head, wrists behind your neck."

As Dylan did so, several men in the crowd whistled and hooted. "Give us a piece!" one of the men cried. Dylan's cheeks flamed as he looked at the ground. John ran his hands over Dylan's strong broad shoulders, squeezing his bulging biceps with blunt, rough fingers. He cupped Dylan's cock through his underwear and grinned. "Slut," he said in a low voice. "Blush all you want – you love this."

In a way he was right, Dylan realized with some surprise. Though he had dreaded being the center of such attention, now that he was here, he found the situation very arousing. And it wasn't as if he would be left at the mercy of the crowd. He knew at any moment Jack would appear and take over, taking control of the scene and of him as well.

John boomed, "Make room, boys. We're taking this new slave into the rack room. Sorry, by invitation only. Those of you with red tickets can line up outside the door." Hank and John stood on either side of Dylan, propelling him through the room toward the door he remembered so well. His mind was reeling as he processed what John had just said. Lining up outside the door? Jesus, what had he gotten himself into? At least Jack would probably be in there, waiting for him.

As they entered the small room where Tomas had tortured and adored him, Dylan closed his eyes a moment, memories overwhelming him. He was being pulled toward the rack by Hank and John. No one else had entered the room with him. Jack was not there.

No longer posturing for the crowd, John said in a gentle voice, "Relax, Dylan. You look like you're going to execution. This is supposed to be fun!" He unclipped Dylan's

wrist cuffs and touched his shoulder, running his hand lightly over Dylan's chiseled pecs. "You really are a gorgeous specimen of manhood, you know. Hank and I are delighted your master was willing to lend you to us for a while."

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"Where is he?"
"Your master?"
"Yes."
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"He'll be along. He wanted us to, uh, warm you up first. I was going to put you on the rack right off but Hank here is so eager to touch you he can barely stand still." He grinned affectionately at the man standing next to him. "It might relax you a bit as well, as I'm sensing you're not used to public scenes."

Dylan nodded, looking at Hank with some trepidation. He was a handsome man, a little too muscular for Dylan's taste but his face held an intelligence that appealed to Dylan. He could certainly think of worse guys eager to "touch him".

John pulled Hank into his arms and kissed him on the mouth while Dylan watched. When he let him go he said, "Go ahead, my little slut. Do what you've been wanting to do since you first laid eyes on this blond beauty."

Hank knelt eagerly in front of Dylan, dragging his silk underwear down to his ankles. "Ooo," he breathed. "Look, Sir, it's so beautiful." He fingered Dylan's silver cock ring and gazed back at John with open longing. Bending back down, he took Dylan's cock in his hand, licking the head like a lollipop, his eyes closing in bliss. He leaned forward toward Dylan's firm belly, not stopping until Dylan's cock was completely down his throat, his nose touching Dylan's pelvis.

Despite his nervousness, Dylan sighed with pleasure. Pulling back, Hank flicked his tongue over and between Dylan's cock ring, radiating spirals of pleasure from his groin. Hank grabbed his ass, fondling his cheeks and sliding a finger between the cleft. Dylan shuddered with pleasure, unconsciously gripping Hank's head in his hands. If he kept that up, Dylan knew he wouldn't be able to hold back any longer.

John, who had been watching the two slave boys closely, correctly interpreted Dylan's sighs and moans. He tapped Hank's shoulder. For a moment Hank ignored him, licking and sucking Dylan's cock with near ferocity. "Hank," John said sternly. Reluctantly Hank pulled back, letting Dylan's cock slide out of his mouth.

John smiled cruelly. "I'd say you're ready now for more serious play, eh, Dylan? Our guests are waiting."

Dylan, who had been literally seconds away from climax, took a deep breath, resisting his strong impulse to finish the job with his hand. John led him to the rack. "Step up on the foot board and face the wall," he said. Dylan's heart began to pound. The rack! How deliciously Tomas had tortured him on this rack, drawing such a strong response from him Dylan had nearly passed out with masochistic pleasure.

As John locked his wrists into place overhead, Hank knelt at his feet, securing his ankles on either side of the footboard. In a moment he was spread-eagle against the rack. He could feel his heart thrumming against the wood. He turned his head so his cheek was resting against the slats. John stood behind him, pressing his pelvis against Dylan's ass so he could feel the man's erection. John reached around, finding Dylan's cock. As he stroked it he whispered, "Remember why you're here, slave. Your master wants this for you. You're serving him through us. You were born for this."

A calmness began to overtake Dylan. He relaxed in his bonds as John continued to fondle and tease his cock. Naked and tethered to the rack, being handled by a man he barely knew, Dylan allowed himself to thrill to the bizarre situation, accepting at last he wasn't in control. He closed his eyes, letting the pleasure of John's skillful treatment wash over him.

Abruptly John pulled away, leaving Dylan to rub his cock against the rack in his sexual frustration. "We mustn't keep our eager guests waiting any longer. Hank, open the door and let them in."

Dylan strained to see the men as they entered. He'd expected to see his lover among them. "Where's Jack?" he blurted.

"Who's Jack?" John replied. John must be toying with him, Dylan realized. Jack would appear at any moment surely.

Hank closed the door behind the three men who had entered. "These lucky Doms will each have a few minutes to use you according to his pleasure. All you have to do is stand there and take it."

"Not like he has much choice," one of the men said, and they all laughed.

"True," John agreed, grinning. "Go ahead, Dean," he said. "You first." The man called Dean stepped up behind Dylan. He couldn't really see him, except to note he was tall with a receding hairline and was dressed in the requisite black. The man cupped Dylan's ass in both hands, squeezing the firm muscles. He stepped back and smacked Dylan's ass hard with his palm, the sound from the impact cracking through the room like the report of a gun.

"Nice," another man murmured as Dylan registered the sting. He smacked him again on the other cheek just as hard. Because of the way he was hardwired, the sting of the spanking twisted into pleasure, each strike snaking its way directly to his cock, which strained against the wooden slats of the rack. He felt his body easing into the rhythm of the sensual spanking and was actually disappointed when he heard John say, "Patrick, your turn."

The sting of Dean's palm was replaced with the whoosh of leather against his back. Thick braids of soft leather rained over his skin, leaving stinging lines of pain that quickly turned to pleasure in his masochistic brain. Dylan sagged in his bonds, giving himself over to the heady sensations roiling through him. When Patrick finally stopped the only sound in the room was Dylan's labored breathing.

He felt his ankles and wrists being released. Gently John and Hank helped him to turn around, repositioning him against the rack so he was facing outward. His back and ass warmly throbbed from his whipping. He couldn't help his blush, aware his erect cock was being admired by the five men standing in a semicircle around him. The third man held up a pair of Japanese nipple clamps. "My turn," he announced.

"Go right ahead, Dan. Let's see what you have planned." John waved his hand toward Dylan. Dan was of medium height with dark graying blond hair buzzed into a crew cut. Something about the way he moved and the set of his jaw said "military". He was dressed in a starched white button-down shirt over olive drab khakis, ironed into submission, black cowboy boots pointing from beneath the sharply creased pant legs.

Dylan took a deep breath as Dan pinched open the clamps and let them close, one by one, over Dylan's nipples. He sucked in his breath in an involuntary gasp as the pain registered. Dan tugged lightly on the chain between the clamps, satisfied they wouldn't fall off as Dylan winced. He pulled another chain from his pocket and, grasping Dylan's cock, clipped it to his cock ring. He attached the other end of the chain to the chain between Dylan's clamped nipples, which pulled his cock upward.

"Better be careful, Dan," John warned. "I saw someone rip the ring right out of a piercing by suspending a guy's cock like that."

"Don't worry. I know what I'm doing. As long as the slave stays still and doesn't jerk away he won't put himself in any danger. If he has no discipline, well, that's another matter." Dylan saw he held a small nasty-looking whip in his hand and felt shards of ice drag through his veins. This was the first time all night he'd felt truly afraid. Jack had tethered him by his cock but only when he was properly secured so he couldn't jerk away. Also he would never strike his cock while it was tethered—he'd only whipped him from behind. Then the experience had been sexy and erotic. This didn't feel that way at all.

He pulled at his wrist cuffs in a reflexive desire to get himself free. He wasn't precisely in pain but the ring was being pulled against his piercing in a way that wasn't comfortable. He opened his mouth to protest but before he could, John came to his defense. "I'm sorry, Dan. You should know better than that. No way am I going to let you whip his cock when he's chained like that. You must be nuts."

Dan's face darkened. "I've watched you guys all night treating this slave like he's made of china. Jesus, if he were mine I'd teach him a thing or two about suffering."

"Well, he's not yours. He belongs to—" Before John could finish his sentence the door swung open. In swept a tall man, his face obscured by black leather, his raven black hair flying, his dark eyes flashing.

"Tomas!" Dylan breathed, too stunned to say more. He had been waiting for his brown-haired blue-eyed Jack to come to him, never expecting the dashing Tomas to return in his black silk and leather. As he entered, all the men fell respectfully back. It was almost as if they were in the presence of royalty. Dylan could feel charisma radiating off the man like a pulsing force field. The ring of his cock tugged in his piercing as his shaft hardened to full erection in the presence of his lover. Even though his mind knew it was Jack in a disguise, his body responded to Tomas, to the master of control who had made him tremble and cry and fall in love during their solo sessions in this very room.

#### Masked Submission

Tomas advanced slowly toward his naked and chained slave boy. He stroked Dylan's cheek and Dylan knew it was Jack's caress, though he stared into the black eyes of Tomas. "Beautiful boy. Have you been obedient?" he said in Tomas' deep elegant voice.

"Yes, Sir," Dylan whispered, mesmerized by the glittering black eyes even though he knew the true color beneath them.

Tomas lifted the chain between Dylan's cock and nipples. "Whose handiwork is this?"

Dan stepped forward. For a moment Dylan had the impression he was going to salute. "That'd be me. I was just about to whip the slave's worthless cock with this," he held up the small whip. "These wimps here were trying to stop me. I'm glad a real man is finally on the scene. I've watched you, Tomas. You know how to put a slave through his paces. These guys were just teasing him with their little spankings and half-hearted taps with the flogger." He puffed his chest importantly toward Tomas and again Dylan had the impression of a little general. "I'd like to see what this slave is really made of. Can he take it like a man or is he just a pansy sub boy who gets off on pretend torture as foreplay for sex?"

Tomas' expression had darkened steadily during Dan's monologue, his mouth bending in a frown. Dylan couldn't suppress a smile—Dan was about to find out how badly he had miscalculated Tomas' response. "Are you quite finished, Sir?" he said, his voice cold as ice.

Dan looked nonplussed. He furrowed his eyebrows, his expression confused. Finally he said, "Well, yeah. I guess. Now if you'll step aside, I'll finish what I started."

Tomas moved to block his way. "No you won't. I misjudged you. You're no longer welcome. Get out." Dan stared at Tomas as if he couldn't comprehend his words. "I said get out." Tomas' tone was deadly. Dan paled, staring from Tomas to the other men in the room, none of whom said a word.

Scowling, he moved forward to rip the clamps from Dylan's nipples but Tomas again blocked the way. "I'll do it. I don't want you touching him." Quickly he released the nipple clamps, smoothing the engorged nipples to ease the pain he knew Dylan was feeling as blood flow reignited the numbed nerve endings. He unclipped the second chain from Dylan's cock ring and thrust the clamps and chains toward Dan. As Dan left the room, slamming the door behind him, Tomas turned to John, his anger barely controlled. "What were you thinking? Were you actually going to let him whip Dylan with that chain attached to his cock? You know the risk surely?"

"No, Tomas. I wasn't. I would hope you know me better than that." Tomas let out his breath, nodding curtly.

He turned to Dylan. "I'm sorry," he said softly, the voice for a moment purely Jack's. Turning back to the other men he said, "Would you men be so kind as to give us the room. I need to speak with Dylan in private."

#### Claire Thompson

As the men filed out, Jack turned to Dylan. "Are you okay?" As Dylan nodded, he said, "I'm sorry, Dylan. I didn't know Dan was an asshole. I made a mistake including him. I've seen him do a few scenes and while they were always on the edge, I never saw him put someone in actual danger." He released Dylan's wrists and ankles and helped Dylan step down from the rack.

They embraced, Dylan dropping his head to Tomas' shoulder. As he closed his eyes, of course he knew it was Jack who held him, his body so familiar, so right, as they nestled against one another. "Where were you?" Dylan tried to keep the reproach out of his voice.

"I'm sorry. I would have come in sooner. I couldn't get past the mob in the club. Seems Tomas has been sorely missed." He grinned at his little pun but continued. "It's fun dressing up like this and acting like the super macho elegant Tomas with his deep voice and British pretensions, but I find I don't really miss it after all. I mean, it's fun but it's nothing compared to what you and I share."

Letting Dylan go, he stepped back and gazed with loving admiration at Dylan's naked body. "You have no idea how sexy it was, to come in here and see those men, all of them staring at you, their mouths slack with lust, their cocks bulging in their pants, every one of them. But I was remiss—I never should have left you alone for so long. I thought it would be hot for you—exciting to submit to other men, knowing it was for me."

"It was exciting. I honestly didn't expect it to be as hot as it was. It was difficult too. I hope I made you proud, Jack. That's what I want more than anything."

"You have no idea how proud I am." Stroking Dylan's hair from his forehead, he said, "Were you surprised when Tomas came through the door?" Softly he added, "I know how much you've missed him."

Dylan didn't try to deny it. "I don't know how to explain it. It's almost as if you're two people. I mean, I know it's you now, but you become different somehow when you're Tomas. Stronger, more, I don't know, I guess the word is *dangerous*. But in a super sexy way."

"I think I'm freer perhaps to let out my truly dominant impulses when I'm Tomas. I don't let love get in the way. Tomas doesn't love, he conquers." He laughed with a touch of rue. He kissed Dylan lightly. "How's this. Sometimes Tomas will come to you—maybe when you least expect it. But we can keep it private. Tomas is retiring from public life, except and only as your lover and master. Let me find your clothes, baby. I'll take you home."

Dylan felt an almost desperate love surge up through him for the man behind the disguise. He knew Jack had wanted them to share a public scene. He knew not only did Jack regard it as a chance for Dylan to grow as a sub but he had wanted to show the other Doms in the BDSM community the grace his slave would show as he put him through his paces in front of them. Dylan found himself wanting the same thing—he

wanted to show those guys who had so casually used him how much more intense an exchange of power could be when love was at its core.

"Please, Sir," Dylan said, gently pulling from Jack's embrace. He knelt on the floor, bending down to kiss Jack's boot before lifting his head. "I want to submit to you in front of witnesses. To show them the difference between play and passion."

Jack slowly shook his head, smiling. "Dylan Reese, you never cease to amaze me." His voice deepened as the persona of Tomas slipped back into place. It was almost as if he changed before Dylan's eyes. Not merely the deepening voice and the change in accent, but a change in his bearing and his stance. He grew taller, his expression fierce, his dark eyes flashing with hooded lust. "You shall have your wish. Stand at attention in the center of the room. Put your hands behind your head and await my bidding."

Tomas swept from the room as Dylan scrambled to obey. A part of his brain was whispering frantically, *What the fuck am I getting myself into?* But the rest of him ignored it, including his cock, which rose to attention as he waited for Tomas to return.

## **Chapter Thirteen**

Tomas returned alone. "I'm going to take you to the main room. Together we'll teach them about grace, won't we, my love?" Dylan nodded, though Tomas could see he was nervous. He'd been truly surprised by Dylan's heartfelt insistence on remaining at the club. After his brief talk with John, he knew Dylan had already been through plenty tonight. He would have been more than happy to take him back to his place and make love to him in the privacy of his bedroom.

Yet he'd recognized the submissive passion of Dylan's gesture. He couldn't resist the swell of pride and love that surged through him as he realized Dylan truly belonged to him now. He felt a spark of unease regarding his continued masquerade as Tomas, aware Dylan was still strongly affected by the image. Yet Tomas was really just an alternate side of Jack. Perhaps, as he'd said to Dylan, he could still play the part for his lover as a part of their D/s ritual.

He had to admit as Tomas he did feel freer to express his most sadistic impulses, though even as Tomas he never forgot the cardinal rules of safe, sane and consensual. Dan had seemed to disregard this entirely and Jack blamed himself for permitting someone he didn't know well enough to have control over Dylan. He promised himself he would never again place Dylan in such a situation.

Meanwhile he had a crowd to please and a delicious slave boy waiting to do his bidding. Dylan was standing at attention as he'd commanded, his beautiful green and amber eyes fixed on Tomas' face. Tomas produced a coil of red satin ribbon. "I'm going to whip you in front of all those people. Will you submit to me with grace?"

Dylan's eyes were wide—he reminded Tomas of a frightened deer just before it bolted. Yet his cock was hard as Tomas gripped it, stroking along the underside as he pulled him closer for a kiss. "Yes," Dylan said softly. "For you, Sir. And for me."

"For us," Tomas agreed. He began to wind the ribbon around Dylan's head like a blindfold, covering his eyes. He knew it would be easier for Dylan if he didn't have to face the crowd. The contrast of the red satin was pleasing against Dylan's sunny blond hair. He clipped a long leather leash carefully to Dylan's cock ring, gently pulling him forward.

"I'll walk slowly. You follow me and I'll guide you." His voice had slipped back into that of Tomas', deep and rich. He moved out into the hallway now deserted as he had instructed, Dylan walking gracefully behind him.

They entered the noisy crowded club. Slowly the hubbub ceased as all eyes moved toward the naked blindfolded slave being led in by his erect pierced cock. Tomas felt a fierce pride knowing Dylan belonged to him and him alone. He stopped in the center of the room. There were several scenes occurring along the edges of the room but most of the crowd had begun moving toward Tomas and Dylan, leaving a small circle in the center where Dylan stood tall and proud. Tomas detached the leash from Dylan's rock-hard shaft, dropping it to the floor.

Someone handed Tomas the heavy flogger he had brought for the purpose. He held it up to Dylan's face, dragging the tresses along his cheek. He knew Dylan could smell the rich leather and recognize the flogger that had been used so often and so well on his deserving flesh. He could tell Dylan was ready for his whipping by the way his cock strained and bobbed, his lips parting in a sigh as the leather kissed his cheek.

"Are you ready?" he whispered in Dylan's ear.

"Yes, Sir," Dylan breathed, his body trembling ever so slightly.

"Hands behind your head. Make me proud." As Dylan locked his fingers behind his head, Tomas moved behind him, dragging the strands of leather over his back and ass. He was aware of the press of men just behind him as he lifted his wrist and flicked it forward against Dylan's ass. He hit him lightly at first, giving Dylan time to adjust. Slowly he increased the intensity of his stroke, covering the skin from thigh to shoulder. Dylan's flesh darkened to a ruddy pink as he stood still as a statue, the epitome of grace. Tomas walked in front of his sub, noting with satisfaction his cock remained erect. He whipped his chest and the thighs, though with less force. There was a murmur of appreciation as Tomas grasped Dylan's cock and stroked it for a few seconds, lifting it gently by the ring for all to admire before returning to his task.

"Tomas, me next!" someone cried out. Several men laughed and hooted but quickly quieted as Tomas, ignoring them all, walked behind Dylan, his flogger poised. He struck a fierce blow across both cheeks, drawing a cry from his slave at last. He hit him hard over the shoulder blades. Again Dylan groaned, his silence broken at last, though even now he kept his fingers interlocked behind his neck. Over and over Tomas struck him with great force until Dylan was trembling in his effort to maintain his position, his breathing rapid and laced with panting cries.

Then it began to happen. Dylan stopped twitching and gasping. Though Tomas continued to whip him as hard as before, Dylan's breathing slowed as his head fell back. His lips parted and his hands dropped to his sides. He looked like a marble statue as beautifully carved as Michelangelo's David.

"Yes," Tomas breathed, aware Dylan had crossed the line into submissive headspace. Now it was truly up to him to gauge Dylan's level of pain tolerance, as he knew Dylan was beyond the point of judgment. He had achieved the state where pleasure and pain lost their individual meaning, splitting and reforming inside a wider spectrum of pure sensation. Tomas felt his own power surging through the whip into Dylan's body as leather met skin. The men around them were silent as they leaned toward the pair like flowers toward the sunlight.

Tomas turned to the man who had handed him the flogger. "My cane," he said. The man reached into the duffel at his side and withdrew a long supple rattan cane, its handle wrapped in black suede. Tomas handed him the flogger and accepted the rod,

letting it cut through the air with a whoosh that made several of the men around him flinch in sympathetic anticipation, though Dylan remained still.

Tomas commanded to the room at large, "Bring me the whipping horse." There was a scuffle as several men hurried to obey. They brought over a sawhorse covered with thick, soft padding and placed it just in front of Dylan.

Dylan's head was still back – he seemed lost in a dream. Tomas stroked his cheek a moment. "Lie down over this horse, Dylan. Grip the legs with your hands and ankles." He helped Dylan to drape himself over the sawhorse and whispered, "I'm going to cane you now. You are grace personified at this moment. Let me take you where you need to go." Dylan's nod was barely perceptible but enough for Tomas.

Men who had moved closer stepped back as Tomas walked behind Dylan. Standing just to the side, he let the cane fall across Dylan's ass, leaving a line of white that darkened to pink. Dylan flinched ever so slightly but continued to breathe deeply, still caught in the net of his trance. Tomas marked his ass, covering it in parallel lines expertly placed with the flick of his wrist. Dylan took each stroke with breathtaking grace, barely moving though Tomas knew from the change in his demeanor and breathing he'd been pulled from his trance by the intensity of the pain.

Tomas knew Dylan was a second away from losing his grace. He'd pushed him to the very limits of his endurance and expert Dom that he was, he knew when to stop. Dropping the cane, he knelt beside Dylan and kissed his upturned cheek. "You did it. Listen—you can hear a pin drop. You've stunned this jaded bunch of playactors and wannabes with your perfection. I've never seen anyone take a caning with such grace."

Dylan smiled, murmuring so softly Tomas had to lean close to hear him, "I love you."

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"This is for you." Dylan held out an oblong gift box wrapped with pale blue satin ribbon in the palm of his hand. Jack, who had been grading papers, looked up from the work piled around him on the bright yellow futon couch in his living room.

He smiled up at his handsome lover. "What's that?"

"Six months."

"Six months?" Jack thought back to September.

"Six months ago today we met. Of course, you looked a little different then."

Jack laughed, recalling the first time he'd laid eyes on Dylan, leaning back against the bar on his elbows surveying the crowd while John had tried to hit on him. "As I recall, you couldn't remember your own name," he teased.

"You had me tongue-tied. At least Tomas did. The swashbuckling British pirate dressed in black leather with those flashing eyes. I remember you asked John if I was his latest boy toy."

"Yes. And if he'd said you were, I'd already planned to steal you away."

"But you didn't have to," Dylan said softly. "You had my heart from the moment I saw you."

"Well, Tomas did anyway."

"Tomas is a part of you but the whole of you is what I love." He thrust the box toward Jack, who accepted it as Dylan pushed some of the papers aside to join him on the couch.

He pulled at the satin bow and let it fall to his lap as he lifted the top off the box. Inside was a key resting on top of a folded piece of paper. "What's this?"

"It's a key. I don't need it anymore. I wanted you to have it."

"What?" Jack turned to Dylan with a quizzical smile.

Dylan tried to affect a serious expression but failed, bursting into a sunny wide grin. "I'm being dramatic," he laughed. "Open the paper underneath it. That'll help you figure it out."

Intrigued, Jack pulled out the folded paper and opened it on his lap. It was a lease to an apartment—to Dylan's apartment. Across its face in large red letters was the stamped word *CANCELLED*. Jack looked from the paper to Dylan, realization dawning though he still didn't dare seize on its meaning.

"The key..."

"The key," Dylan nodded, "is an extra. I gave back the original set. I didn't realize I still had this one in my briefcase. When I found it this morning, I thought this might be a fun gesture. You know, romantic..."

He ducked his head, that adorable blush coloring his cheeks pink. "So you want to move in with me? Is that what you're trying to tell me?"

"Yes! I mean," Dylan faltered, "if you still want me to."

Jack looked at Dylan a long while, losing himself in the green eyes, the pupils circled in amber. He could look into those eyes forever, he thought. He realized before Dylan had appeared in his life he had decided the man for him probably didn't exist. How could he have hoped to find someone with whom he could connect on so many levels—intellectual, emotional, spiritual, sensual and physical?

At first Dylan had been little more than a diversion—a fun, sexy diversion, no question about that. Yet all too soon he'd slipped past Jack's carefully devised defenses, even penetrating the façade of Tomas' disguise. As was so often the case in relationships or at least so he had found, when one lover moved forward, the other pulled back. With Dylan it had been the same—when Jack had finally admitted to the love-struck Dylan he *was* Tomas, Dylan had run.

Yes, he had returned, willing to start something new with the real man behind the mask but the love was slower to build. He had abused Dylan's trust, whether or not it had been intentional. Jack had understood Dylan's reluctance to take things to a deeper level. Moving in with someone was a big commitment—a new level of partnership neither of them had succeeded at too well in the past. He knew Dylan had been holding

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back out of fear, not lack of love. And in an ironic way, this had left Jack free to continue to press. Perhaps if Dylan had been the eager one, Jack would have pulled back in that age-old game of lover and beloved.

What a leap of trust on Dylan's part – canceling his lease, so certain was he of Jack's acceptance of his offer to move in at last. Now when it really came down to it, was Jack ready? At thirty-five was he ready at last to commit to one person for better or worse?

He sat back, Dylan's apartment key in his hand. Dylan's expression was a study in nervous expectation. Jack felt mean to keep him waiting for his answer. "Dylan," he said, quoting the Shakespeare he knew Dylan loved, "'So long as I can breathe or I can see, so long lives your love which gives life to me'."

"So I take it that's a yes?" Dylan quipped, ducking his head as Jack reached over to cuff him. They tumbled together on the couch in a playful scuffle, first one then the other gaining the upper hand as they wrestled. Finally they lay in a comfortable embrace as their breathing slowed to normal.

Their lips met for a slow, lingering kiss. Jack closed his eyes, aware he was happier than he'd ever dared hoped to be. "Are you happy, Dylan?" he whispered.

To his utter delight, Dylan answered with a Shakespeare quote of his own, the ending lines to one of Jack's favorites. "'But were you in my arms, dear love, the happiness would take my breath away. No thought could match that ecstasy, no song encompass it, no other worlds. If I should think of love, I'd think of you.'"

### About the Author

Claire Thompson has written numerous novels and short stories, all exploring aspects of Dominance & submission. Ms. Thompson's gentler novels seek not only to tell a story, but to come to grips with, and ultimately exalt in the true beauty and spirituality of a loving exchange of power. Her darker works press the envelope of what is erotic and what can be a sometimes dangerous slide into the world of sadomasochism. She writes about the timeless themes of sexuality and romance, with twists and curves to examine the 'darker' side of the human psyche. Ultimately Claire's work deals with the human condition, and our constant search for love and intensity of experience.

Claire welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at www.ellorascave.com.

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