



SECRET SERVICE

KIM DARE

My
SECRET VALENTINE



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Secret Service

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

My Secret Valentine



SECRET SERVICE

Kim Dare

Dedication

To everyone who has found the courage to embrace all the parts of their personality, and to all the lovers who have learnt to accept their partners for who they really are.

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Coke: Coca-Cola Company

Chapter One

Sheridan Haswell put a final touch of red paint to the heart on his left bicep. Looking himself over in the mirror, he set his paintbrush aside and straightened the red leather heart covering his cock. The only thing he had left to put on was the mask. He frowned at the strip of red leather, but there was no avoiding it.

It wouldn't do to allow his secret indulgence to become public knowledge—for his little hobby to come to Alistair's attention. Sheridan looked back to his reflection and let his gaze slip out of focus so he could imagine his boyfriend standing next to him, looking into the same glass.

Alistair was as fair haired as he himself was dark. They'd had always complimented each other that way. Perhaps Alistair, with his several inches of extra height and his additional weight of muscle, would look good with anyone. Sheridan still liked to think they looked particularly good together. They looked right. The way a couple should look.

He smiled at the imagined reflection. Then his smile began to fade away as his expression turned more serious. Sheridan knelt down in front of the mirror, letting the mental image of Alistair continue to stand over him—tall and proud, and undeniably dominant.

Lifting his hand to his neck, Sheridan traced the line of the red leather around his throat. For just a few perfect seconds, he let himself enjoy a fantasy that he knew would never be his reality. He let himself pretend the collar around his neck belonged to Alistair, that *he* belonged to Alistair. For just a little while, he indulged himself with the idea that his boyfriend just might, at any point in the future, want to be his master.

Sheridan squeezed his eyes shut very tight. He knew that wouldn't happen. He'd resigned himself to the fact months ago. But still...

When he opened his eyes again the house collar stared back at him. The vivid red leather quickly remind him who he was, where he was, and exactly why he was dressed up like a Valentine card gone wrong.

While he wore that collar he belonged to the house – to the club who owned the bar he was about to walk into. As for what he was and who he was? That was simple.

Sheridan Haswell was a born submissive, and that night he was there to serve.

* * * *

“How can anyone, even you, manage to have so little fun at a sex club?”

Alistair Landers looked at his watch. “I have a boyfriend. I’m not interested in screwing around behind his back.” He did his best to control his tone of voice and disguise just how disgusting he found his new employer’s behaviour, but he wasn’t entirely sure he succeeded.

Jarvis Kade, senior partner at Kade, Langley & Brent, the most prestigious financial consultancy in the city, laughed and slapped Alistair heartily on the back. “What your boyfriend doesn’t know won’t hurt him. It’s not like I’ll be telling my wife I’m out screwing guys tonight!”

Alistair closed his eyes and took a deep breath. Stale alcohol fumes filled his lungs and made him wish he hadn’t picked a different way to try and control his temper. Turning away, Alistair saw the firm’s most important client – another so called respectable married man – wrap his arms around a near-naked, young dancer.

Only the thought of another lung full of stench stopped Alistair taking a deep breath and letting it out as a sigh. He was missing Valentine’s night with Sheridan for *this*.

Navigating around nearly naked strangers as best he could in the crowded bar, he made his way out of the overheated space and into the cooler, higher arcade that linked all the bars in the so called “pleasure complex”.

Opposite him stood another bar. The shadowy darkness and the relative calm visible through the doorway beckoned to him, promising a safe haven where he could wait out the night in quiet peace before he had to face the wonderful prospect of driving all the drunks home.

He cast a look over his shoulder, just in time to see Jarvis clumsily clamber onto the bar to dance with one of the boys working in the club. Alistair shook his head at the state of the world, went into the opposite bar and found an empty seat.

Collapsing into a low leather arm chair, he rested his head back against the cushions. He didn't want to get drunk in some club. He didn't want to dance with half naked prostitutes. And he certainly wasn't looking to get laid with a stranger. All he wanted was to go home to his boyfriend, lock the door and forget anyone other than he and Sheridan existed.

"How may I serve you, sir?"

Alistair opened his eyes. A young man knelt at his feet, wearing nothing more than a few strategically placed leather hearts and body paint. Right then, Alistair wasn't sure what he objected to most, the reminder of the Valentine's Day that his new job prevented him from sharing with Sheridan, or the discovery that this bar wasn't any more to his taste than the last one.

Drunks or sadistic bastards? If he had any sense he knew he should go back to the other bar, but the comfort he found in the soft leather chair coaxed him to stay where he was for just a few more minutes. He'd put all of this nonsense out of his mind a long time ago. It was out of his system. Sitting in the club for a while wouldn't undo any of his hard work.

"Do you serve anything that doesn't contain alcohol?" he asked the waiter.

"Yes, sir." The young man began to recite a whole range of soft drinks, each one bracketed by the word 'sir'.

Alistair held up his hand half way through the list, impatient to stop the stream of honorifics which reminded him all too vividly of former times. "I'll just have a coke, thank you."

The man stood up. He bowed very low and stepped back several paces before he turned around and went to get his drink. Alistair looked around the room. Everyone else seemed to enjoy the attentions of the waiters. Everyone else seemed to revel in putting a smaller, weaker man on his knees, in making a stranger crawl and call them 'sir' just because they could. That's what it was, he reminded himself—a perversion that meant the strong thrived and the weak were left with what scraps they could snatch from the floor.

Any beauty he saw in the kneeling waiters was nothing more than a trick of the dim lights. Alistair turned his eyes away from them. Taking advantage of another man's weakness wasn't beautiful, it wasn't erotic and it wasn't part of his life any more. He spent

several minutes considering going back to the drunken adulterers in the other bar, but it was far easier to just close his eyes and pretend he was somewhere else entirely.

If he was at home, he could be stretched out on the sofa with Sheridan, watching one of those soppy old movies his boyfriend was so addicted to. By the time the titles rolled across the screen, he could have been buried deep in his arse, with his hand reaching around to tease Sheridan's cock. He could have been keeping his boyfriend hovering on the edge until he made that beautiful little mewling sound in the back of his throat.

He could have been enjoying a sex life that didn't need to be about hurting his lover, or dominating them or any of the bull he'd indulged in before he met Sheridan.

Quiet footsteps heralded the waiter bringing his coke. Before Alistair could open his eyes and tell him not to bother, the waiter knelt and presented the drink to him like some sort of sacrificial offering.

Alistair took the coke. "Thank you." Putting his money on the tray, he debated the suitability of adding a tip. Offering money to a man kneeling at his feet felt inherently inappropriate, but he had no inclination to treat this waiter any worse than he would any other, just because it was part of the poor sod's job to give his customers a power trip with their beverages.

Adding the same tip he would give anyone else, Alistair put his wallet back in his pocket.

"Is there any other way I can serve you, sir?"

"No, thank you. The drink is quite enough."

The man repeated the bowing and backing away palaver, each movement beautifully choreographed and stunning in its simplicity. Then Alistair was finally left in peace. He slowly drank his coke and ran over the next day's meetings in his head, wondering if any of the other men around the meeting table would have sobered up by then.

The way his luck was running, they'd be too ill to do anything more than moan about their hangovers and the deal the firm was so desperate to secure would drag on to include several more nights of 'entertaining important clients'.

Someone laughed behind him, a light, gorgeous sound that dropped straight from Alistair's ears to his crotch. Frowning, he turned in his chair and traced the sound back to its source. Another waiter stood at the bar, filling a tray with drinks. He wore exactly the same

miniscule uniform as the man who'd knelt at Alistair's feet, but for the addition of a little mask that covered his eyes.

Alistair's eyes ran over the slim, lightly muscled figure, in the vain hope his initial flash of recognition was wrong, but he knew it wasn't. The red leather covering half of this man's face had no chance of concealing his identity.

He'd know that body anywhere. Having shared a bed with it almost every night for the last two years, he should know it. He watched as Sheridan took the tray of drinks off the bar and walked across the room, passing just metres away from him, to kneel before another man.

Alistair didn't make a decision. Before a coherent thought passed across his mind, he was on the other side of the room, with his hand wrapped around his boyfriend's arm. "Careful, I..." Sheridan tried to balance the tray of drinks, but it slipped from his grasp, spilling cocktails across the floor to splash over the legs of the men around the table.

Glasses clattered and tumbled onto the hardwood floor. They shattered against the leg of the table, but each sound was muted. The whole world seemed less substantial, less real than it had a moment ago. The curses and shouts from the men around them seemed fantastical.

Sheridan looked up at him. Behind the mask, Alistair saw familiar brown eyes open wide with shock. Sheridan's lips stopped moving. He trailed off as if forgetting how to form words the moment he recognised his lover staring down at him.

Alistair's eyes ran all the way down Sheridan's body, over the ridiculous mask to his bare feet and back up again. From the red leather heart, tied over his crotch, to the body paint hearts decorating the rest of his body, he looked like a walking, talking invitation to a Valentine game of tie up and tease.

Clenching his jaw, Alistair brought his gaze back up to Sheridan's eyes. His boyfriend still just stared blankly at him, as if he had never seen him before.

He pulled Sheridan up off his knees and onto his feet. "What the hell are you doing here?" he demanded.

Sheridan said nothing.

Alistair's eyes dropped to the collar around Sheridan's neck. The moment he saw another man's mark on his lover, his temper shot up another notch. His grip around Sheridan's arm tightened.

Looking down at his hand, he knew he was holding onto him too hard. Perhaps the grip wasn't hard enough to leave a mark, but certainly hard enough to make the smaller man uncomfortable.

That wasn't acceptable. Whatever the hell was going on, hurting Sheridan wasn't acceptable. Alistair dropped his hand down to Sheridan's wrist and he forced himself to gentle his touch as much as he could. Someone said something to his left.

Alistair dragged his eyes away from Sheridan. Whatever expression showed in Alistair's face made the man take a step back and instinctively raise his hands. All the men who sat around the table were on their feet now. Seeing he had support, the wannabe dominant seemed to gain a little courage. He straightened up, thrusting out his chin in challenge.

He said something, but Alistair wasn't listening.

"Mine!" he snapped, staring the man down.

The man looked from Alistair to Sheridan and back again. He finally seemed to realise that he wasn't dealing with some drunken idiot randomly hassling the serving staff.

He said something else that Alistair didn't bother listening to. Keeping hold of Sheridan's wrist he pulled his lover across to the chair he'd been sitting in and snatched up his leather jacket.

"Put that on," he ordered, tossing the coat to his boyfriend.

Sheridan looked down at the piece of clothing in his hands as if he couldn't remember how to do that.

"Sheridan?"

Alistair spun around at the idea of any man in that bar so much as speaking to his boyfriend.

Another waiter stood behind them. He didn't back off when Alistair glared at him.

Sheridan looked over his shoulder. "It's okay, Mike," he said softly as he finally pulled Alistair's jacket on, covering at least part of his body – going some way towards concealing himself from all the strangers in the bar, the men who had no right to see him like that.

The waiter still seemed reluctant to leave.

Alistair watched his boyfriend smile at the other man as if he believed everything really was okay. "Really," he said. "It's fine."

The waiter nodded, although he seemed far from convinced. With a last suspicious glance at Alistair, he walked away.

Alistair jerked Sheridan around to face him the moment they were alone again. "Everything is not okay," he informed him.

Sheridan closed his eyes, as if he was a child who thought the things he couldn't see wouldn't happen.

"Come on," Alistair said, taking him by the wrist again. There was no way he was going looking for the other men from his office now. If their oh-so-important client wanted to have a strop and take his business elsewhere then that was fine. Right then, Alistair didn't give a damn.

"Alistair?" Sheridan whispered.

He looked down at his boyfriend. His eyes were still closed. Wrapped up in a jacket several sizes too large for him, he looked even smaller than he truly was, even more fragile.

"We'll talk when we get home," Alistair told him.

If he tried to talk there he would only end up losing his temper. That wasn't going to happen. He would get Sheridan out of there, drop him off home—nice and safe. Then he'd hit the gym and beat the hell out of a punch bag until he felt a little bit better about the world. After that, he might be capable of talking this through relatively calmly. He'd be able to explain to Sheridan exactly why he was never going to set foot in a club like this ever again.

He had a plan. Alistair took a deep breath. He had a plan. He was in control. Everything was going to be okay.

"I'm sorry," Sheridan whispered, his eyes still closed.

Alistair stared down at him. "Open your eyes."

Very slowly, Sheridan did so, but he kept his eyes lowered refusing to meet Alistair's gaze. "It's not how it looks," he told the floor.

Alistair's free hand clenched into a fist at his side. "How can it be anything other than *exactly* how it looks?" he said, before he could stop himself.

The image of his lover on his knees, serving and servicing other men filled his brain. As much as he hated the pictures, he hated the thought that rushed into his mind with them even more. He hated believing that the picture would have been perfect if he'd been the man sitting above Sheridan and ordering him onto his knees.

Alistair gritted his teeth. That wasn't going to happen. He wasn't going to treat Sheridan that way. He'd made his decision a long time ago and he wasn't going to go back on it now, not just because he was bloody furious.

"We'll talk when we get home," he told Sheridan again. Careful to keep his grip on Sheridan's wrist as gentle as he was capable of right then, he strode towards the door.

"Please, if you'll just listen. I can explain everything," Sheridan said.

"Great. I'm really looking forward to hearing you explain why you're hanging around a gay leather bar dressed like a walking, talking invitation for a cheap Valentine fuck," he snapped, as his anger fought against the harsh leash he put on it, and made a desperate bid to escape and vent the way it wanted to.

"Please just listen to me for two minutes?" Sheridan asked.

Alistair kept walking until he realised he was practically dragging the smaller man behind him. Sheridan had planted his bare feet on the floor and was trying to stay there, for all the good it was doing him. Alistair looked down at him and took a deep breath.

"You have as many minutes as you want, but not here — you have no place in this sort of bar."

"Please?" Sheridan whispered.

Alistair looked down at him. It would be so easy to just pick him up and carry him out of the bar, or to keep walking and let him stumble along behind him, struggling to keep up. It would have been so easy to use his size and strength to win — to throw away the equality he'd fought so hard to build between them. Alistair pushed his temper down as well as he could, corralling it into a tiny corner of his mind.

Giving up being dominant meant giving up getting his own way all the time, he reminded himself. It meant giving in to Sheridan's requests when he didn't have to.

"Two minutes," he allowed. He could keep his temper for two minutes if it meant preserving everything he'd worked so hard to build between them. Pulling him out of the

bar just because he was bigger than him and stronger than him would only prove he was the sort of man who belonged in this sort of bar.

Sheridan nodded. "Thank you." Then, for all his talk of explanations, he didn't seem to have a clue what else to say.

Alistair let the silence linger between them for all of twenty seconds, but even if his lover was willing to waste their two minutes, Alistair wasn't. "What the hell were you thinking, coming here?" he demanded.

Sheridan took a shaky breath, obviously trying to steady his nerves. "It's not about sex. I didn't come here to get laid," he said, picking every word very carefully.

"You just fancied a quiet drink?" Alistair snapped, looking him pointedly up and down again. He tried as hard as he could to sneer rather than admire his near naked form. He tried not to slip into his old habits and admire the way Sheridan stood so perfectly, submissively still – in spite of the obvious panic racing through him.

Sheridan looked down. "I'm just serving the drinks, Alistair."

"And is that all you're offering the men in the bar?" Alistair demanded, his voice getting louder with every word. "Do you really think I'm stupid enough to believe that?"

"Is there a problem?"

Alistair jerked around to face the speaker.

An older man stood a few feet behind him. Everything about him from his tone of voice to his posture screamed his status as a dominant. He was not some waiter that Alistair could force himself to do no more than glare at.

"Stay out of it," Alistair told him. "It's none of your business."

"Everything that happens in this bar is my business," the guy said.

Alistair turned around properly, to face the man square on, relishing a sudden challenge from a man he wouldn't feel guilty about dominating.

"Alistair, he's the house dominant," Sheridan said very softly behind him.

A damn dungeon master? That was all he needed.

"He's in charge of all the submissives in the club tonight," Sheridan whispered, as if Alistair didn't understand what the damn term meant. He couldn't stop his grip around his wrist from tightening as he turned back to Sheridan.

"Is he fucking you?" Alistair asked. It was the only thing it was safe to ask right then. Asking if he was dominant over Sheridan would make it sound like that was important – as if the lifestyle he'd left behind was important. He couldn't let himself go back to believing that, not now he had Sheridan.

His lover shook his head.

"He's a service sub," the house dominant told him. "He's not screwing anyone and if you can't respect the limits of the serving staff, I'm going to have to ask you to leave the premises."

"What?" Alistair turned back to him without letting go of Sheridan's wrist.

"Alistair..." Sheridan began.

"What limits?" Alistair demanded.

The other man looked him up and down in blatant challenge.

"Since you seem to know so much about my boyfriend, go ahead," Alistair threw at him. "Tell me what his limits are." Wrapped in those few words was the demand he couldn't bring himself to say out loud too – tell me what Sheridan let the men in this bar do to hurt him when I wasn't there to keep him safe.

The man glanced past him to Sheridan. Alistair didn't see what silent information passed in their expressions, but the dominant's attitude seemed to change somewhat.

"No physical contact," he informed Alistair. "And no submission that could in any way be seen as sexual. Apparently he's got some vanilla boyfriend he's completely besotted with and he doesn't want to screw that up."

"Are you really stupid enough to stand there and try to tell me that he's been kneeling naked at men's feet, and they aren't thinking about sex?" he demanded. "All submission is sexual – maybe Sheridan doesn't know enough about this world to understand that, but we both do. Don't we?"

He was practically nose to nose with the older man by the time he finished.

"Alistair," Sheridan called behind him, clinging to his arm and desperately trying to get his attention, trying to get him to calm down.

"If you knew anything about dominance, your boyfriend wouldn't be playing around in clubs behind your back," the house dominant taunted.

The grip Sheridan had on his arm, jerked convulsively. "I'm not playing with any of the men here. You have to believe me, Alistair. You know I wouldn't do that."

Before he'd walked into that leather bar that night, Alistair would have bet his life on the fact. But right then, that wasn't the point. The only important thing was the man challenging him.

"He is mine," Alistair growled.

"Then start acting like it," the other dominant man tossed at him.

"You have no idea how a dominant man really acts," Alistair said to him. "I know more about this world than you ever will and real men don't make the man they love crawl for them, just because they are stronger than them – just because they can."

Sheridan tried to keep up, but nothing Alistair was saying made any sense. He held onto Alistair's arm as tight as he could as everything he felt sure of crumbled around him.

"You said you weren't into anything like this," he whispered.

As quietly as he spoke, something in his voice seemed to pull Alistair's attention around to him.

"I'm not into this," Alistair growled.

He was obviously about to turn back to Mr. Reynard, the house dominant that night, until he heard Sheridan whisper the next words.

"You just said you know this world – this lifestyle."

"I know it well enough to know you have no place in it," Alistair told him.

Sheridan could feel the blood drain out of his face. He shook his head. "But you told me you weren't into this," he repeated.

Alistair looked down at him, suddenly giving him his full attention.

Sheridan looked down at their grip on each other. Alistair holding onto his wrist, and his own hand gripping the larger man's shirt. He dropped his hand away, releasing the creased material.

"It was just me," he realised.

He tugged at his wrist, but Alistair wouldn't let him go.

At any other time Sheridan would have rejoiced at the display of possessiveness, but it came too late for it to be of any use to him now.

"Let me go." He murmured, unable to put any force behind the words.

Alistair paid no attention to his demand.

Sheridan looked up at him. "All this time, you wanted this too, didn't you?" he said sadly. "You just didn't want it with me."

"You have no idea what you're talking about," Alistair informed him.

Sheridan shook his head, trying to clear the fog of confusion. "You just don't think I'm strong enough for you," he said.

It was all so obvious then. He tried to take a deep breath but found he couldn't push the air into his lungs. His head spun as he realised the truth.

"How could you...?" he trailed off.

"You're the one running off to leather bars the moment his boyfriend turns his back," Alistair told him. "Don't you dare make it sound like I'm the one who has something to be ashamed of."

"I..." Sheridan couldn't make words happen. He dragged his eyes back up to Alistair's face. "Do you have any idea what I...? I spent two years trying to be someone else for you," he told him.

Two years of trying not to be submissive of trying to repress a whole side of his self. For what?

"You..." Sheridan's voice broke. "Let go of me."

"No."

Sheridan looked up at him. "You obviously don't want me, Alistair. Let me go to someone who does."

He saw the anger flare in his lover's eyes, but Sheridan didn't care right then.

"I can't believe I tried so hard not to need this," he said, more to himself than Alistair.

"What?"

"When I realised how much you hated my submission – tried so hard not to need this," he murmured. Each moment he'd spent pushing away what he wanted, what he needed from his relationship with Alistair welled up inside him, reminding him of all the times he'd felt so guilty, so ashamed of needing it.

"Are you listening to what you just said?" Alistair demanded. "Are you really telling me that this is more important to you than us – that these stupid games mean more to you than I do?"

Sudden anger pushed through Sheridan's sadness.

"Do you think I would have put up with never having more than this, for any other man?" Sheridan demanded, his voice growing stronger and clearer with every word. "I need to submit, to serve, okay. I need just a little bit of time now and again, where I can stop being me and where I can be someone else for a while. A few hours here and there where I can stop thinking about anything or feeling like I have to make any decisions, where I can just exist and obey someone else's commands."

"Where you can run off and kneel at a stranger's feet?"

"I never wanted a stranger, Alistair. I wanted you. I asked you – damn it, I practically begged you to let me submit to you," Sheridan said. He'd begged for the lifestyle he dreamt of and when he'd realised that was futile, he'd asked for less and less until he knew he'd get nothing.

The muscle in Alistair's jaw twitched, but he didn't say a word.

"I asked you what you thought of this type of scene. Do you remember what you said, Alistair? You told me that you couldn't think of anything less enjoyable or less erotic than those perverted little games. I asked you if you wanted to try a dozen different things, things that would let me have some tiny little bit of this lifestyle with you, and you said no every single time."

"Don't you dare stand there and act like I'm the only one who knows what you're doing is wrong," Alistair said. "Why else would you wear that damn, stupid mask?"

"Because I respect *your* right to privacy," Sheridan flung back at him. "I don't give a damn who sees me serve, but I thought my boyfriend might like me to keep this side of my life private, so it didn't interfere with his life. So you never would have had to deal with the fact I need this. That's what this –" he tore the mask from over his eyes, " – is about! It's about you. Just like every other damn thing I do while I'm here."

Sheridan closed his eyes and bit his tongue to stop himself saying more things he would regret. The words hovered there, daring him to say them.

Whoever he was serving, whoever he might submit to, there was only one man he'd thought of as his master for as long as he could remember. There was probably only one man he would think of as his master for the rest of his life – the one man he knew who had no interest in being his master. The one man who he now realised didn't think he was good enough to offer him his submission.

Somehow his pride let him keep those words back, but others tumbled out in their place.

"Let me go. If you don't want me I'm going to find someone who does. I can't take this anymore."

Alistair's grip never slackened. "What did you say?"

"I said let me go. Let me go and find a master who wants me," Sheridan shouted.

Cold fury flickered in Alistair's eyes. Suddenly he turned away from him. Still keeping his grip on his wrist, he strode out of the club, almost dragging him along in his wake.

"Alistair, stop. Let go of me."

The bigger man didn't even look over his shoulder.

"What are you doing?"

"If you're so damn sure this is what you want, Sheridan, fine. I'll show you what submission is really like."

Chapter Two

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

The word rolled over and over in his head. It was a stupid thing to do, but Alistair kept walking, forcing Sheridan to half run alongside him to keep up and to stop his arm being torn out of its socket. For the first time since they'd met, Alistair refused to slow down to accommodate his shorter stride.

He strode through the crowd, pushing his way through each bottle neck of drunken revellers until he finally located the desk he was looking for, on the other side of the complex.

The lady behind the reception desk smiled politely up at him. "Yes, sir, how may I help you?"

"A room for the night."

"Alistair..."

He turned to his boyfriend. Sheridan's voice trailed off when he saw his expression.

The woman behind the desk cast a look from one to the other of them.

"A room," Alistair repeated.

Transferring Sheridan's wrist to his left hand, he signed for the key, then he took him back in his dominant hand and walked away from the desk. Sheridan didn't say a word as Alistair practically marched him up to the room. He hesitated on the threshold, but Alistair tugged him into the room and slammed the door closed behind them.

It was pretty much what he expected for a hotel that claimed to offer everything a dominant client could need for the night. It was half bedroom and half dungeon play room.

His boyfriend just stood there, looking around the room. His eyes flickered one way and another, from the St Andrew's cross, to the cage in the corner, to the opulent bed, decked out so it looked fit for a king—or fit for a dominant who needed that sort of prop to appear majestic in the eyes of a submissive.

Alistair cast a look over the room too. Not to his taste, but neither was this stupid situation. Just because the dominant inside him was howling its pleasure at finally being allowed to play with Sheridan, that didn't mean it was right. The part of him that had learnt

to hold itself in check over the last two years fought against every bit of primitive instinct surging through him. Sheridan was too good for this, the more civilised side of him said. He was too precious to play these sorts of games with.

Alistair turned back to him and his lover immediately dropped his gaze.

"Is this what you want?" Alistair asked, daring him to say yes.

If he just said no, it would be so easy. That one little word from Sheridan and they could forget this nonsense. One tiny word and he could remember why this could never happen between them.

"Yes, sir," Sheridan whispered.

Alistair saw the moment when his lover realised what word had slipped past his lips, when he tried to bite the single syllable back too late. Sheridan closed his eyes again.

"Did you call every man you've served in that bar, sir?" Alistair asked.

Sheridan nodded.

"Then that's the last time you will ever call me by that title. I am not some stranger in a bar," he snapped.

His boyfriend flinched at nothing more than a harsh tone of voice and Alistair wondered all over again how a man as gentle as Sheridan ever took it into his head that he wanted to play this sort of game.

Alistair took a deep breath. "Have you ever called another man your master?" he asked, trying his best to speak more calmly.

Sheridan shook his head.

"Then that will do for tonight."

"I'm allowed to call you my master?" Sheridan asked, opening his eyes.

"No. You're required to do so. Forget it, and I'll have you over my knee so fast, your head will spin and you won't sit for a month."

"Yes, master," Sheridan said. And he smiled.

The little idiot smiled at him as if it was all some fun little game.

Alistair fought for control of his temper. Even when he'd been playing with masochistic strangers in clubs, he'd always had the sense not to play when he was angry. This was all going to go to hell, all he could do now was pray that Sheridan would be able to forgive him when it was all over.

"Take off the jacket and get under the bar," he ordered.

"Yes, master." Sheridan shrugged Alistair's jacket off and draped it neatly over the back of a chair. As soon as he'd followed that half off the order, he walked quickly across the room and stood under a metal bar suspended by chains from the ceiling. He glanced up at Alistair, so damn innocent, so damn trusting.

It only took moments for him to secure his boyfriend in place – wrists in the cuffs attached to the bar above his head, ankles in the cuffs bolted into the floor beneath. He checked the fit of each cuff so they were all tight, but not tight enough to actually hurt Sheridan. His hands fell naturally into the familiar actions, echoing motions they had performed a thousand times over with other men, men he hadn't felt anything but a passing attraction to.

He looked into his boyfriend's eyes as he stepped back. When Sheridan looked down, Alistair caught his chin and made him look back up.

"One night," he said. "Just for tonight we will play this game. But it means nothing – understand?"

Sheridan didn't want to look him in the eye, but Alistair wasn't inclined to give him the choice right then. He finally looked up at him. Alistair saw the hurt in his eyes, but he pushed forward anyway.

"Whatever happens between us tonight, after all this is over, we will go home and everything will go back to the way it's always been between us. Nothing I say or do to you tonight reflects how I really feel about you. Understand?"

Sheridan nodded. "Yes, master," he said sadly.

Alistair just hoped like hell that his lover meant it.

"I'm not losing everything we've built together just because you've got some stupid notion in your head that you'll enjoy being used and abused like some damn toy. This night changes nothing or tonight doesn't happen," he informed him.

Sheridan glanced up and met his eye. "I won't think of you any differently after tonight, master," he promised.

Alistair nodded and turned to the whips and toys laid out on the table behind him.

"I've always thought of you as my master," Sheridan added softly.

"You don't even know what that means."

"Yes, I do," Sheridan protested.

Alistair looked down at the floggers on the table. A dominant never broke his word. He might not be inclined to unhook Sheridan from the bar so he could have him over his knee, but he'd told Sheridan not to forget.

He turned back to his lover. One smart contact with the palm of his hand on Sheridan's backside and the smaller man jerked in his cuffs. The chains rattled above them.

Alistair walked around in front of him.

Sheridan looked so damn shocked.

"While you have permission to speak, you will address me with respect," Alistair told him.

Wide eyed, Sheridan nodded. "Yes, master," he whispered.

Alistair studied his eyes. He was far less freaked out than Alistair expected. He looked almost... Alistair turned away. He looked almost happy. Back out of Sheridan's line of sight, Alistair leaned on one of the tables full of leather toys and stared down at the battered wooden surface without seeing anything that lay on top of it.

He wasn't sure how long he stayed there, trying to convince himself that he was doing the right thing, but he soon heard the chains on the cuffs rattle as Sheridan started to fidget in his place under the bar.

His words went around and around in Alistair's head — Sheridan really thought he knew what he was doing. Alistair wished he could share his faith.

"I'm sorry I spoke to you without due respect, master," Sheridan offered.

Alistair walked back around to face him. "If you knew what it meant to belong to a man, you wouldn't be here."

"I don't understand, master."

Alistair gave a bitter laugh. "My point exactly."

A blush rushed to Sheridan's cheeks — as if he thought Alistair was laughing at him rather than the absurdity of his situation. He had the man he loved strung up and waiting for him, and all he could think about was the sight of him serving the drinks back in the bar.

His embarrassment was the least of Alistair's concerns right then. "If you really thought of me as your master, why would you walk from me to crawl at a stranger's feet?"

Sheridan swallowed and said nothing.

"Well?" Alistair demanded.

"It wasn't like that, master. It wasn't the way you're making it sound."

"Oh?"

"I wasn't cheating on you!" Sheridan protested.

The loss of the title earned him another sharp smack on his other buttock.

He gasped at the impact, but he recovered more quickly than Alistair expected. "I wasn't cheating on you, master." He even made an attempt to control his tone of voice and make it more respectful.

"I wouldn't give you what you thought you wanted at home, so you rushed off to play silly little games with strangers. What do you call that if not cheating?" Alistair asked coldly.

"I didn't have sex with them, master."

"You submitted to them," Alistair yelled.

The chains jerked as Sheridan flinched away from him.

"I didn't think I was offering them anything you were interested in, master," he whispered slowly.

"You were wrong."

Sheridan looked down. "You said you weren't interested, master," he reminded him.

"And now you think I'm cruel for telling you that running off to another man is still entirely unacceptable behaviour?"

Sheridan said nothing.

"A question requires an answer," Alistair told him. "Regardless of whether you want to give one."

"I don't know what you want me to say, master." His tone of voice said it all. Sheridan really did think he should just ignore everything he'd done and act as if it didn't matter.

"Do you really think I'm going to nod and smile and say I don't care that you crept off to play the slut for the men in that bar?"

"The last man I had sex with was Mike Dayton – two weeks before I met you. I have never cheated on you. I have never wanted to cheat on you. I just served the drinks, master," he protested.

"If that was all you wanted to do you'd have got an evening job at a wine bar. Tell me why you came here, Sheridan?"

"Because..." Sheridan trailed off.

"That's it?" Alistair demanded. "Just because?"

Sheridan closed his eyes. His breaths were coming more quickly and Alistair saw the start of panic in him. He let him hang there in the chains for a few moments, waiting to see if Sheridan would snap himself out of it on his own.

When it became clear Sheridan couldn't do that by himself, Alistair took a deep breath himself. Stepping closer to his lover, he touched his cheek, very gently. "Open your eyes, love."

He blinked his eyes open very slowly, obviously confused by the sudden change of tone.

"You came here to submit to strangers, to offer them part of you that I had more respect for you than to claim as my own. I'd be lying to you if I said I didn't care about that. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't as angry as hell with you. But you don't have to be scared of me. I won't do anything that could really hurt you."

"You can if you want to, master," Sheridan whispered, so sincerely. "You could punish me for it and..."

"And what would that fix?" Alistair asked.

"Maybe it would make you feel better, master," Sheridan offered.

Alistair shook his head. "I have no interest in punishing you and even if I did — I wouldn't punish you when I was this angry."

Sheridan looked confused as hell.

Alistair walked around him. He couldn't honestly blame him for being confused. His dominant wasn't making any sense. Alistair took another deep breath. Even if Sheridan was destined to find out he didn't like submission, in his own mind, Alistair knew he would have to look back at this night and know in his own heart that he'd been a good dominant during their experiment.

Alistair looked back to his lover. He ran his eyes over the hearts painted on his body, at another man's marks decorating his submissive and he made his decision.

"Do you need anything special to get the paint off?"

It took Sheridan far too long to work out what Alistair was talking about. He felt each second he kept his master waiting tick past as if it was an hour. Finally he managed to kick his brain into action and shake his head. "Just soap and water, master. If you untie me I could..." he nodded in the direction of the en suite bathroom visible through a half open door, eager to show willing.

Alistair walked past him and out of the room without a word of explanation. The sound of water running leaked into the bedroom, but from where Sheridan stood, he couldn't see what Alistair was doing in there. He made a futile attempt to take the moment of privacy as an opportunity to calm himself down. He was singularly unsuccessful.

He'd waited so long to have this with Alistair. To have it now under this circumstance, to have everything he wanted, but still not feel entirely wanted by his lover was messing with his head.

He was still on the verge of panic when Alistair walked back in carrying a bowl of steaming water and a flannel.

He walked across to the table that ran alongside the suspended bar. Pushing the floggers and whips aside, he put the bowl down on the old wooden surface. Sheridan watched his every move as Alistair dipped the flannel into the warm, soapy water and stepped across to him.

Very slowly, very gently, he began to wipe away the painted heart high up on Sheridan's shoulder.

"You don't have to do that, master," Sheridan protested, "I can..."

"Are you saying no?" Alistair asked. "I don't believe in any of that safe word bull – if you say no, or stop, the game stops."

Sheridan shook his head. He certainly wasn't saying no. "You..." he trailed off, not entirely sure what he was objecting to, accept that what Alistair was doing went against the basic ideas of how dominants and submissives related to each other. "Are you punishing me, master?" he asked.

Alistair looked from him to the water again. "Why would you think that?"

"By being submissive, master, after everything I said about looking for a dominant..."

"I've never been submissive in my life. I doubt I could pretend to be if I tried," Alistair told him.

"Then what, master..."

"If you're going to belong to me tonight, I won't have another man's mark on you."

"They aren't another man's marks, master," Sheridan protested.

"I didn't put them there," Alistair said, giving his complete attention to wiping away another heart on his stomach.

Sheridan looked down, hating the bite behind Alistair's words.

Alistair paused in his task and made him look back up. "You can have nice or you can have this. But if you want me to be your master, don't expect me to lie and tell you I don't give a damn when you submit to another man's whims. If you belong to me, even for one night – you will belong to me completely."

Sheridan nodded. That was what he wanted after all. It was what he'd wanted from the first moment he'd seen Alistair. "Thank you, master," he whispered.

Alistair didn't seem impressed with his gratitude right then.

One by one, he gently washed the Valentine hearts away. He walked around him stroking the hot, wet material against his skin. Every time he washed a heart away, Alistair would trail his fingers over the cleansed skin as if inspecting him for any sign he had ever submitted to another man.

His touch was always fantastic, but it wasn't just Alistair's fingers against his skin that made Sheridan's pulse speed up and his breaths falter right then.

It was his master's touch, his master's possession as much as the hot water that seeped from the cloth and wound in tiny rivulets down his body that dropped straight to his cock. It was the feeling that, for the first time, Alistair really was doing exactly what he wanted with him, which made him tent the less than effective leather heart covering his cock.

He wasn't washing him to be subservient or nice – he just wanted him clean, unmarked, untouched by any other man. If he hadn't been suspended in cuffs, Sheridan knew relief would have buckled his knees right then.

Alistair worked his way around his body until all the hearts were gone and he stood in front of him once more. He could hardly fail to notice the erection straining against the leather heart, but Alistair didn't seem to care if he was turned on or not, he just undid the ties

holding the heart in place and tossed it aside. Sheridan's erection curved up toward his stomach, begging for his master's attention.

Sheridan took a deep breath and tried to push his arousal down. By the time he glanced up at his master, Alistair's eyes were firmly fixed on the house collar, still wrapped around his neck.

He stared at it in silence for a very long time. Sheridan swallowed down his nerves and waited for his verdict. He could see the anger in Alistair's eyes, feel the cold fury pouring off him, but he didn't know what to say to make it better without risking making it worse.

"Who put this on you?" his master finally asked.

"I did, master. I wouldn't let a man who wasn't my master put a collar on me."

"But you agreed to wear a collar that didn't belong to your master," Alistair said.

Sheridan stared at the floor between them. "It's just part of the uniform, master, it doesn't mean anything."

"Look at me."

Sheridan hesitated.

Alistair didn't repeat the order, he simply wound his fingers through Sheridan's hair and pulled his head back until he had no choice but to look up.

"You will never wear anything around your neck that I don't put there with my own hand. Never. Understand?"

The grip in his hair was so tight, Sheridan couldn't nod. "Yes, master," he whispered.

"A collar means *everything*," Alistair told him. "It's ownership, protection, dominance — everything."

"Yes, master," Sheridan repeated.

Alistair walked away for a moment. He came back carrying a knife from the table full of toys.

Sheridan automatically tensed at the sight of the sharp blade.

"Do you trust me?" Alistair said.

For the first time, Sheridan looked up and met his master's gaze without prompting. He stared straight into Alistair's eyes, desperate for him to believe he was telling the truth when he gave his answer. "Yes, master."

Alistair stared back into his eyes. Keeping his gaze, never letting Sheridan look away, he stepped in close to him and slid the blade under his collar.

A flick of his wrist and the metal sliced through the leather without the sharp edge ever touching his skin. The red strip fell away, dropping to the floor unheeded as they stared into each other's eyes.

Still holding his gaze, Alistair stepped back a few steps and took off his belt. Sheridan forced himself to keep his eyes up as nerves gathered inside him. A belt might hurt, but it wouldn't kill him. Alistair might be stronger than any other man he'd ever played with, but it was dawning on Sheridan that he wasn't just a man filled with natural dominance, he was also an experienced dominant.

Alistair knew what he was doing. He would never hurt his partner more than he intended to when he punished him. Looking away from his eyes for the first time in what felt like hours, Alistair's gaze dropped to the belt in his hand.

Sheridan followed his gaze and watched, fascinated, as he dipped the knife he'd used to cut away the house collar into the soapy water he'd used to wash away the paint, purifying it before he turned it on his belt, cutting the length of leather in half and finishing the end into a point.

Dropping one half of the leather, he kept hold of the end that still held the buckle and used the tip of the blade to push a hole through the leather. Then he closed the gap between them.

Sheridan held his breath as Alistair put the leather around his neck.

"Tell me this is what you want," Alistair demanded.

Sheridan had to clear his throat before he could speak. "Yes, master," he whispered.

His master fixed the makeshift collar around his neck.

"You are mine," Alistair said, leaning closer still to whisper the words in his ear.

"Don't ever forget that again."

"I didn't forget," Sheridan whispered.

A brisk smack on his bare backside reminded him that he'd forgotten the title, just as he hoped it would. "I didn't forget, master," he corrected with a smile.

"That was the one time I will ever accept you disobeying me on purpose, Sheridan," Alistair told him. "If you ever disrespect me to get a reaction again—you'll find my reaction won't be at all to your liking."

Sheridan glanced up at him.

Alistair looked back down at him, deadly serious.

"Sorry, master," he whispered.

Alistair stepped away from him.

Sheridan whimpered at the sudden loss of body heat against his bare skin. "Master?" he asked.

Alistair walked across the room and sat in the big, sumptuous armchair that faced the suspended bar. He raised an eyebrow at him.

Sheridan didn't know what to say to him.

"You look good in bondage," Alistair decided after a while.

He blushed at the compliment. "Thank you, master."

Alistair looked at him for a little while. Although his glance was admiring, Sheridan soon found himself becoming increasingly nervous and restless under it. He shifted, somewhat uncomfortably.

The chains rattled.

Alistair smiled.

Sheridan's blush deepened. "Sorry, master."

"What's the longest you've ever been tied up for?" he asked.

Sheridan shifted even more uncomfortably. "Not that long, master."

"Many years ago, someone went to a lot of trouble to separate time into convenient units of hours and minutes," Alistair said coldly. "I suggest you show your respect for their efforts by remembering those units exist."

"I don't know, master," Sheridan admitted. "Less time than..."

"No one's ever kept you in bondage for this long?" Alistair seemed amused by the idea.

No, Sheridan looked more closely at his expression. Alistair loved it. He loved the idea that no one else had held him in place for as long as him.

Alistair got up and began to circle him. "And how long could I leave you there before you asked me to set you free?" he asked.

"As long as it pleases you for me to be here, master," Sheridan said.

"Really? And what if it pleased me to leave you like this all night?"

"Yes, master," Sheridan said. Now that Alistair was actually willing to tell his lover what he really wanted, Sheridan was determined that he was never going to say anything but 'yes' to his master.

Alistair stepped in close behind him, so his whispered words caressed Sheridan's ear. "Have you any idea what that would really be like, what it would do to your body to be kept like this for that length of time?"

Sheridan couldn't answer. He could barely breathe.

"Your arms would feel it first," Alistair said. "I bet they feel it now. They're starting to burn, aren't they? That's the lactic acid building up in the muscles. The ache? That's because you're not used to holding your hands up above your head for this long. It will get worse as time goes on."

Sheridan swallowed. Every word seemed to go straight to his cock, making it swell a little further with each picture Alistair painted inside his head.

Alistair ran his hands down Sheridan's arms, caressing the muscles that Sheridan hadn't really felt getting sore until Alistair pointed it out to him. He was so tightly bound, he could barely lean into his master's touch to show his appreciation of it. The chains rattled with the small movements he managed and Alistair chuckled behind him.

"Soon after your arms, the rest of your body would start to ache too. The spreader bar is doing its job very nicely. You're perfectly accessible for whatever I want to do to you." He slid his finger tips between Sheridan's buttocks and teased his hole.

Sheridan whimpered and tried to push back, but Alistair's fleeting touch had already left him.

"Those ankle cuffs aren't going to let you move your legs, a piece of metal doesn't care if your legs start to ache." He trailed a finger up the inside of Sheridan's thigh, where the bar was already starting to test both his flexibility and his endurance.

Sheridan closed his eyes.

"And it's starting to hurt here, too. Isn't it?"

Alistair wrapped his hand around Sheridan's swollen cock. Sheridan bucked in his cuffs, trying to push forward into his hand.

"You've been hard for a long time now, haven't you?" Alistair asked him.

Sheridan nodded emphatically. It might not have actually been hours, but it felt like it.

"And it's slowly starting to dawn on you that I might keep you like that all night, isn't it? A submissive comes when his master decides it will amuse him to watch his pet come, not before. You gave up any right to control your own cock when you began to call me master."

Sheridan whimpered as Alistair's hand rapidly stroked him, taking him to the edge, only to slow down as he was on the cusp of his orgasm to hold him there with no actual chance of relief. "Please, master," he whispered.

Alistair chuckled again. "Oh, love, do you really think I'm going to let you come now? I'm only just getting started."

Sheridan groaned.

That made Alistair laugh, a deep harsh sound that went straight to where his hand was still working Sheridan's cock. He kept teasing him for several more minutes, toying with him just for the fun of it, before he let him go.

He walked back around in front of Sheridan and looked him up and down. "Enjoying yourself?" he asked.

"Yes, master," Sheridan said.

Alistair made him look up by simply twining his fingers through his hair again. Sheridan watched his master study him.

"You're not a masochist," Alistair told him, with no doubt in his voice. "You don't like pain."

"I like knowing that I am pleasing my master," Sheridan whispered. That knowledge somehow converted the discomfort of the bondage, and the frustration of not being able to reach down and finish himself off, into something that felt suspiciously like pleasure.

Alistair continued to study him for a long time. "And what about what pleases you?" he asked.

Sheridan swallowed. "It pleases me to think that I am pleasing you, master."

Alistair frowned down at him.

Sheridan lifted his gaze and met his eyes, wanting Alistair to see that he was telling the truth.

"You really do like this don't you?" he asked, sounding confused as hell and slightly in awe of the fact.

"Yes, master."

"Then let's see what else we can find for you to like," Alistair told him.

Sheridan nodded.

Alistair leaned in close to him. His clothes brushed against his swollen erection. His lips hovered a fraction of an inch away from Sheridan's mouth. He leaned up to try and steal a kiss.

His master moved just out of reach, teasing him with a contact he wouldn't allow. Knowing he wasn't going to get his kiss, Sheridan still pulled against his restraints and fought for one.

Alistair smiled down at him as if he knew exactly what was going on in his head.

"Please, master?" Sheridan asked, although he knew it wouldn't do any good.

"If you wanted me to give in to your whims you should have asked me to be your lover, not your master," Alistair told him.

Although there was a teasing tone to his words, Sheridan could hear a serious note underneath it.

"Masters are not nice men, Sheridan," he informed him. "If you want nice — end the game. One word from you and this is over — and I'll give you whatever you want."

Sheridan shook his head. "I want you to be my master," he said — shocking himself with the certainty he heard in his voice.

Alistair lowered himself to his knees and casually wrapped his lips around the tip of Sheridan's cock.

With a yelp, Sheridan dropped his head back and fought desperately to keep control of his body. He couldn't come. He couldn't. His master had made that quite clear and yet, moment by moment, Sheridan was increasingly convinced there was no way he could stop himself from doing just that.

He opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. He scrolled through the whole list of things he thought of when he was trying to last that little bit longer, but nothing came to his

rescue. Alistair's tongue swirled around the sensitive tip of his cock and, just a second before the perfect moment when Sheridan knew that no sane man could blame him for coming, Alistair stopped.

He pulled back and let Sheridan's cock slip from between his lips. Sheridan whimpered.

"Look at me," Alistair ordered.

Kneeling was submissive, Sheridan knew that. It was knowledge that had been hard wired into his brain a long time ago. Kneeling was submissive. Going down on someone was submissive. Yet Alistair knelt at his feet and looked up at him, and there wasn't a single spark of submission in him. His gaze still screamed his dominance.

"Do you want to come?" Alistair asked him.

Yes! The word screamed inside his head, demanding to be said. One look in Alistair's eyes and he knew that if he said 'yes', Alistair would let him come. He'd take him back into the perfect hot cocoon of his mouth, and he'd stroke his shaft with his tongue, and he'd do that wonderful thing where he swallowed around him, and...

Chapter Three

"Only if it pleases my master to let me come," Sheridan whispered.

Alistair watched each word drop from his lover's lips as the younger man fought as hard as he could to push aside his own pleasure and say them.

"And if it doesn't please me to let you come?" Alistair asked.

Sheridan closed his eyes. A tiny whimper escaped from the back of his throat.

It wasn't fair to push him. Alistair knew that. He knew that Sheridan, for all he thought that he knew what he was doing, wasn't trained for this. He hadn't been taught submission. He hadn't been guided in its protocols and gradually introduced to the ways submissives were expected to act and react to a dominant's commands.

Still kneeling at his lover's feet, Alistair watched as Sheridan squeezed his eyes shut very tight, obviously struggling like hell as he fought to give the right submissive response. Alistair carefully observed every detail of the war that seemed to rage inside the younger man for what felt like hours.

Part of him still wanted to leap in to rescue him, to tell him it was okay, to take him back in his mouth before he could answer and take away his lover's chance to fail. But that wasn't the way it worked. He'd promised Sheridan he'd give him one night of it and he wasn't going to stop until Sheridan either asked for the game to end or failed to keep playing.

"If it doesn't please you to let me come, I don't want to come, master." The words were whispered so softly they were barely audible.

Sheridan blinked open his eyes.

Alistair looked up at him. Damn, but he really did have the seed of a bloody brilliant submissive inside him.

"It's your choice," Alistair told him, standing up and looking down at him. He trailed his fingers along Sheridan's shaft, making him pull against his restraints.

Sheridan shook his head. "Whatever my master wants." He lifted his eyes and looked up at him.

“Very well,” Alistair said, carefully keeping his tone bored and unconcerned. “You had your chance.”

Sheridan stared back at him, gasping for breath as he blinked and made an obvious effort to push his frustration away.

Alistair unzipped his fly and released his own straining erection. He pushed his clothes aside and wrapped his hand around his shaft. Sheridan was one of the few men he had ever met who could get him off without needing an ounce of kink to help him.

Having his lover strung up and helpless – and more than that, having him that way and loving every minute of it, had him on edge before he even reached for his zip. Slicking his shaft with the pre-cum gathering on the tip, he started to stroke himself hard and fast.

He looked straight into Sheridan’s eyes until Sheridan couldn’t hold his gaze any more. His lover looked down, but that only let him watch Alistair’s hand moving faster and faster over his own erection while his remained untended.

Sheridan whimpered. The chains rattled. He looked back to Alistair’s eyes. He dropped his gaze again.

Alistair caught Sheridan’s shoulder, steadying himself as his orgasm hit him full force and he came over his lover. He looked down and watched his semen land on Sheridan’s cock in long lines, to trail and drip down his erection and onto the tight sacs below.

He kept stroking himself through it, coaxing every drop out of his shaft to mark his lover as his own. When he looked up, Sheridan was still staring wide-eyed down at his cock.

With forced calm, Alistair released his grip on Sheridan’s shoulder and tucked himself away. By the time he was finished, Sheridan was still staring down his body.

Alistair smiled at his blatant shock. He ran his fingertip up his lover’s erection and offered the tip to Sheridan’s lips.

He blinked back at him in confusion. After a moment, he seemed to catch up with what was expected of him. He dipped his head and took the tip of his finger between his lips and sucked it clean as he ran his tongue over its surface.

He obediently opened his mouth for a few more fingertips full of cum, before Alistair decided he’d had enough. For a few moments he just looked down at Sheridan, watching the different emotions flicker across his face.

Sheridan looked up at him. He cleared his throat. "How may I serve you, master?" he asked.

Arousal shot through Alistair at the request. Sheridan was so bloody perfect. It really sounded like all he wanted to do for the rest of his life was serve him in any way he could.

Reality tried to push its way into Alistair's mind and tell him that it was one night and nothing else, but Alistair turned away from that. Right then, Sheridan belonged to him, body and soul. He wasn't going to waste his time by worrying about a future that couldn't involve this particular pleasure being repeated.

Alistair reached up and undid one cuff. Sheridan lowered his arm a fraction.

"I didn't give you permission to move."

Sheridan stalled. "Sorry, master."

Alistair turned away from him and went back to his comfortable seat on the other side of the room. He took a minute or so to look his lover over again, to have one last image of him in that bondage in his head for future reference. Then he met Sheridan's eyes.

"Unchain yourself and come here. You may move."

Sheridan lowered his arm. He winced slightly, and then he blushed, obviously regretting the tiny sound.

Alistair hadn't made it easy for him. As stiff as he had to be after the bondage, as clouded as his mind was with frustration and submission, it was ridiculous to expect him to be able to free himself from the unfamiliar cuffs.

Moving very slowly, with very limited coordination, he did his best. Alistair watched him struggle to undo first the other wrist cuff and then to bend down and undo the cuffs around each of his ankles. Somehow he managed it.

The moment he was free, he walked across to Alistair's chair and stood in front of him, waiting to know how he could please his master.

Alistair picked up a cushion and dropped it on the floor at his feet.

"Kneel."

Sheridan dropped to his knees.

Without seeming to think about it, he put his head on Alistair's knee. It was a complete breach of protocol. A submissive never touched his master without absolute permission — without being ordered to do so.

However, Sheridan didn't know that. Alistair wasn't going to punish him for breaking a rule he didn't know existed. And right then, after seeing how hard Sheridan had struggled and fought to please him, he wasn't in a rush to tell him about that particular rule either.

He stroked his fingers through Sheridan's hair and let him have his moment or two of comfort. He was shaking slightly under his touch. Alistair let him rest there for several long minutes until he'd had time to get his breath back, then he took his hand off his head, dropping his touch to his neck, just below the line of the makeshift collar.

Taking that as a cue to move, Sheridan looked up and offered Alistair a little smile.

Alistair frowned slightly, wondering what the hell his boyfriend had to smile about right then.

Sheridan hesitated, dropping his gaze before he glanced up at him. He opened his mouth to speak, but stopped, seeming to wonder if he had permission to do so.

"You may speak," Alistair allowed.

"You don't understand how any man can want this, do you, master?" Sheridan asked softly.

Alistair stared down at him. "No," he said. "I don't understand why any man would want his lover to show him so little respect."

Sheridan frowned. "I don't...treating someone in a way that makes them happy isn't disrespectful, master," he whispered. It was obvious just how much a risk he thought he was taking, just how worried he was his view wouldn't find favour with his lover.

"You wouldn't be so concerned about speaking your mind to a man who you believed would respect your opinion," he told him.

Sheridan looked down. "It's not that," he whispered. "I just don't want this to end before it has to. I know you said you would only put up with my efforts to please you for one night, master, but..."

"Don't twist my words," Alistair said, unable to stop his anger showing through in his voice.

Sheridan bit his lip. "I know you don't think that I am good enough, that I am strong enough for you, master, but..."

"I never said that."

"You said you didn't want this with me, master," Sheridan said.

Alistair looked down at him. "No," he admitted. "I didn't want someone like you dragged into this sort of lifestyle."

"Someone like me?" Sheridan asked.

He could see all the possibilities racing through Sheridan's mind, each one probably worse than the last. "You're too good for this, love," Alistair told him gently.

Sheridan frowned and stared down at his feet. "Is there..." he cleared his throat and tried again. "Is there something I could do to make you think I'm not too good for it, master?"

"What?"

"If there's something I do that makes you think that...I could stop doing that, master," he offered. "Then..."

"It doesn't work like that," Alistair told him, as patiently as possible.

"Maybe—" He caught Alistair's eye as he looked up and stopped short.

"I've played more of these games than you even know exist," Alistair told him. "And if there's one thing I've learnt above everything else it's that I don't play nice. And that's okay with some stranger in the back room of a club—some idiot who likes to play rough and wants to be used that way."

"But not me?" Sheridan repeated.

"Of course not with you!"

He saw the hurt in Sheridan's eyes. "I could take it, master," he said, a trace of pout mixing in his voice along with genuine sadness.

Alistair caught his chin and tilted his head back to make the smaller man look in his eye. "A man doesn't play this sort of game with the man he loves."

Sheridan stared back at him. The truth didn't seem to make his lover feel the least bit better.

"Is that why you agreed to do this tonight?" Sheridan asked. "Because..."

Alistair forced himself to wait as Sheridan closed his eyes and tried to speak again.

"Have you already decided it's over between us, master?"

"I agreed to tonight because you were going to do this whatever I said," Alistair told him pulling his face back up to see into his eyes. "I heard it in your voice. If you didn't try

this with me, you would have ended up trying it with someone else. It was better to risk you with me than with another dominant."

"Risk...I don't understand," Sheridan whispered.

Alistair turned back to him, a sad little smile on his face. "I know you don't."

"Master?"

Alistair sighed. "Do you have any idea what this sort of lifestyle would do to a man like you?" he asked.

"A man like me, master?"

He stroked Sheridan's cheek. "You're too gentle, too eager to please, too good to belong to another man, love. You deserve to be happy."

"This makes me happy, master," Sheridan said.

Alistair shook his head. "And what is it that makes you happy – you said it yourself. You're happy because you know this makes *me* happy."

"I wanted this before I ever met you, master."

"And what did you do about that?" Alistair asked.

Sheridan looked down.

"Answer me," Alistair ordered. "Tell me the truth – this was an idea that you liked to play within your head, but you didn't do anything about it, did you? A lot of men play with ideas in their head – that doesn't mean they want to take up the whole damn lifestyle."

"I did play with the men I dated."

"What? Little games – you let them give you a tap on the bottom or wrap a few silk scarves around your wrists for half an hour. I don't play games like that," he looked sadly down at him, suddenly wishing that sort of play was in him, but knowing it wasn't.

"I didn't just do that, master," Sheridan said. "When I realised this was what I really wanted. I started looking for a master. And I found one. I found you!"

"It's far safer for you that I give the games up altogether than to try and convince myself that I can play nice," Alistair explained as patiently as he could.

"I don't want to be safe, master, I want to belong to you! All I've ever wanted was to belong to you. If you'd just give me the chance..."

"The chance to what?" Alistair snapped. "To *belong* to me. Do you know what that means, for a man like me?"

"Tell me?" Sheridan said.

"You'd end up as little more than a slave – obeying my every order – dependent upon my whims – looking to me to make every single decision for you – putting your fate into my hands."

"Yes, master," Sheridan said enthusiastically.

Alistair shook his head.

Sheridan looked up at him, so sweetly innocent, so trusting. "You'd never hurt me," he said.

"This lifestyle hurts every submissive sooner or later."

"You love me, master," Sheridan said.

Alistair looked down at him. "Yes," he said, softly. "I do." At least Sheridan still seemed to understand that – to believe that. It was something to hold onto.

"And I belong to you," Sheridan said. "I've belonged to you since the day I met you, master. You might not like it, but we both know that's the truth. I couldn't set this part of myself aside completely, but you did. You stopped doing this because you wanted to protect me, didn't you?"

Alistair said nothing.

"You'd never hurt me, master," Sheridan said, his eyes begging Alistair to believe him, to agree with him.

Alistair stroked his cheek. "And if I did hurt you, what would happen?"

Sheridan looked down.

"If I lost my temper with you, if I hurt you – not spanked you as a punishment or made you uncomfortable as part of a game – if I really hurt you just because I'm bigger than you and stronger than you, what would you do?"

"I'd leave you, master."

"I don't believe you," Alistair told him.

"I'd leave, master," Sheridan said again, looking him right in the eye. "I couldn't stay with someone I didn't trust and if you hurt me that way, then I couldn't belong to you ever again after that. Maybe...maybe you're right that I'm not strong enough to be a real submissive if..."

Alistair put his finger tips over his lips. "Hush. You're a real submissive," he said. Alistair had never doubted that, it was what scared the hell out of him.

Pleasure filled Sheridan's eyes. Alistair cursed himself for slipping up and jumping in to reassure his lover with the truth when it would have been far kinder to let him believe the lie.

Sheridan's expression turned more serious. "I'd set that sort of thing as a limit, master," he said.

"And you think the way I play these games lets you set whatever limits you choose?" he asked.

Sheridan looked up at him. "No, master. I think you would let me set *reasonable* limits. But they would be things you wouldn't do to me anyway. I think you'd only want me to tell you they are my limits because then you would know I'm taking this seriously – so you could see that I know what I'm doing."

"You do not know what you're doing," Alistair corrected him for what felt like the millionth time.

Sheridan looked down. He was trying his damndest, even Alistair wouldn't deny him that.

Alistair closed his eyes. "No submissive knows what they are doing until they are properly trained," he allowed.

When he opened his eyes, Sheridan was smiling. The cheeky little bugger smiled up at him as if someone had just given him the moon on a stick, just because he knew he'd won.

Alistair shook his head at him. "You have no idea what you're letting yourself in for."

"Tell me how it will be, master?" Sheridan asked, as if he thought Alistair was going to tell him a pretty little bed time story. He just looked up at him as if that was the most natural request in the world, a smile playing around his lips.

Alistair stroked his cheek. "It won't be easy," he cautioned.

Sheridan nodded and rested his other cheek on Alistair's knee so he could be comfortable while his master told him more. Alistair let him do that for a while.

"I'll expect you to do exactly what I say – no exceptions."

Sheridan nodded eagerly, encouraging him to go on.

"You will do as I tell you, act in whichever way I decide pleases me, be where I put you and live exactly as I want you to."

"Yes, master," Sheridan said.

"And there will be times when you don't want to do as I say," Alistair told him.

Sheridan shook his head, quickly denying that would ever happen.

"Yes," Alistair corrected, "there will. There will be times when you want to do as you want to do, when submitting to me won't be the pleasure you seem to think it will always be. And there'll be times you do your best and you still fail to do all the things I'll demand of you to the standard I'll expect. And in both cases you will be punished."

Sheridan obviously hated the idea of letting him down, of failing to be the perfect submissive he seemed to imagine he would be from the first moment he stepped under Alistair's protection. Strangely enough, Alistair noticed, the idea of being punished hadn't freaked him out at all.

"And in both cases," Alistair went on, exploring the idea of their future in his mind as he spoke. It was far easier than he believed possible to mould his idea of what they could have together to fit in with what might make it easier for Sheridan to be happy. "In both cases, once you have accepted the punishment, you will be forgiven."

Sheridan glanced up at him.

"I can tell the difference between someone who is trying to do his best, and someone who doesn't give a damn," Alistair told him. "A punishment doesn't always mean I'm angry with you – sometimes it is merely encouragement to do better next time."

"Yes, master," Sheridan whispered. "Am I allowed to ask how I will be punished?"

"That depends, love. You might be spanked, or you might have certain privileges removed. You might find yourself teased and left frustrated for days on end, or you might just find yourself writing lines as if you were back in school."

Sheridan nodded his understanding of all that. He looked at the seat alongside Alistair. It was obviously plenty big enough for two. "Can I come up and sit next to you, master?" he asked.

And the time came for the first test. "Submissives aren't permitted to use the furniture – your place is on the floor from now on."

Sheridan nodded as if that was his default action to whatever Alistair decreed. "Yes, master." But he didn't stop looking at the seat.

Alistair watched him think about that, watched him imagine how it would be to live a life where such a basic comfort was denied to him just because his lover said that it should be so.

"If I sit up on your lap then I wouldn't be on the furniture, master. And that would only mean that my place, as a submissive, is with my master." He offered him a tentative little smile.

Alistair found himself smiling back and wondering how being told to stay on the floor somehow managed to give a man more confidence to ask for what he wanted rather than less. The Sheridan who wasn't allowed to submit would never have asked for that sort of permission—even though Alistair had bent over backwards to make sure he never felt like he needed to ask any sort of permission to do whatever the hell he wanted.

Alistair tapped his knee. "Very well."

Sheridan climbed up onto his lap and wriggled around until he got into a comfortable position, with his head resting on his master's shoulder. That put his cock in a conveniently pettable place.

Alistair took him in hand.

Sheridan whimpered and caught hold of Alistair's wrist.

They both looked at his hand on his master's arm for several long seconds. Sheridan took his hand away. Alistair watched his expression flicker back and forth between different emotions. Sheridan finally glanced up at him. "I wasn't supposed to do that, was I, master?" he whispered.

"No," Alistair agreed, "you weren't."

Sheridan nodded. "Can I come back on your lap after I accept my punishment, master?" he asked.

And that was it. No excuses, no protest, no complaint, just simple acceptance of that being the way things were between them right then, that it was right for things to be that way.

Sheridan looked up at his master, and tried to work out what was going on in his head. Alistair seemed to study him very seriously for a long time before he answered his question. Sheridan wondered if he should have kept his mouth shut – Alistair might have been in a far better mood to grant the request if he'd already proved to his master that he knew how to take a punishment well.

"You can't be punished for breaking a rule I haven't set for you," Alistair announced.

Sheridan hesitated. "I knew I was doing the wrong thing, master."

"No, you suspected that I wouldn't approve of something. That's not the same as breaking a rule."

Sheridan nodded on general principle. "Yes, master."

"You're right that a submissive isn't usually allowed to touch his master without permission, but I'm not setting that rule for you."

Frowning, Sheridan shook his head. "I won't touch you without permission, master," he decided.

Alistair tapped him sharply on the bottom, just on the side which wasn't in contact with his master's leg when he leaned into his embrace that way.

Sheridan yelped, more in shock than because it really stung. He covered his mouth. At least Alistair seemed amused, not angry with him.

"I set the rules. You follow them. If there is something you don't understand you may ask for an explanation. You may not argue just because I do not decide to alter the rules I choose to set for you just because you don't like them."

"Sorry, master," Sheridan said meekly.

Alistair wasn't the least impressed with the carefully modulated tone of voice.

"I just...I was just worried you would try to make things too easy for me, master."

Alistair laughed. "That is something you really don't need to worry about, love. I set rules that are suitable – and I guarantee you won't like all of them, or enjoy following all of them either."

"Like what, master?"

His master smiled down at him, almost indulgently, but there was a spark behind his gaze that made a shiver run down his spine and his cock swell that painful fraction more.

"Like," Alistair said. "Although you are allowed to touch your master, you've lost any right to touch yourself."

He trailed his fingertip along Sheridan's cock, across the stickiness where his master's cum was drying on him. Sheridan did his very best to stay still as Alistair teased him, and more importantly as he waited for Alistair to carry on his explanation.

"From now on, you will only come when I want you to. You will never get yourself off again."

Sheridan swallowed. "Yes, master."

"Don't worry, love. It will be far easier than you think."

"It will, master?" Sheridan asked warily.

Alistair smiled as he continued to stroke his cock with an infuriatingly slow rhythm. "If you don't find it easy to remember mine are the only hands to ever touch you, I'll put you in chastity, so you won't have to worry about temptation."

The words 'you wouldn't' begged to slip past his lips. Sheridan held them back. The look in Alistair's eyes told him that his master bloody well would – and the easiest way to make sure he did would be to try and call a bluff that was just a statement of fact.

"Yes, master," was a far safer answer.

Alistair nodded his approval of it, then seemed to dismiss the whole subject from his mind as he turned his attention to casually teasing Sheridan to the edge again and again. After sending Sheridan across the room to fetch the cooling bowl of water, he wiped away the sticky residue.

Sheridan was under no illusions. Alistair cleaned him up because it made it easier for him to play with him, not for his own benefit.

"Go to bed, kneel on the floor on the left hand side."

Sheridan did as he was told, not entirely sure how the hell his legs kept him upright until he reached the side of the bed. His knees shook with arousal and frustration as he gratefully lowered himself back to the floor by the side of the bed.

"The only time you will be allowed on the furniture is when it suits me to bring you up to my level."

Sheridan nodded. "Yes, master." Inside his head he translated that to being allowed to come up when Alistair either wanted to have sex, which actually represented a hell of a lot of

time on various items of furniture, or when Alistair wanted to curl up with him for no other reason than it felt nice – which represented far more time than a dominant man like Alistair would probably ever admit to.

Alistair walked across to the bed, stripping out of his clothes and dropping them on the floor as he went. Sheridan watched each inch of his master's body being revealed to him and fought his own body – trying to make it realise that he would be in a hell of a lot of trouble if he let his hands wander towards his cock.

On the way past the two tables full of toys, Alistair selected another set of leather cuffs and a length of chain.

Sheridan fixed his eyes on them, watching his master's fingers explore the bondage as he tested the quality of the leather in his hands. The headboard, when Alistair revealed it from behind a pile of pillows, contained lots of little hooks and eyes where a chain could be fastened.

As Alistair studied the headboard, Sheridan's gaze was somewhere else entirely. Alistair was hard again. His master had bounced back more quickly than his artificially vanilla personality had ever managed. Sheridan tried not to grin at that knowledge. His master hooked the chain onto the head board and the cuffs onto the other end of the chain.

He clicked his fingers, which Sheridan took to be his cue to offer his master his wrists. Alistair put the cuffs on him, checked the fit and adjusted the length of chain to pull him up onto the bed and his hands up to just below the single set of pillows that Alistair had allowed to remain on the mattress.

The Alistair that Sheridan was used to would have stopped at that point to ask him what he felt like doing, to whisper different suggestions in his ear to find out which found the most favour with his lover. His master's mind had obviously been made up long before Sheridan was allowed on the bed.

Alistair pushed him into place on the left hand side of the bed and nudged him onto his back with his knees spread and pulled back towards his chest. Alistair had put him too far down the bed, his wrists were pulled up above his head at a somewhat uncomfortable angle. He decided it was best not to complain about that.

He was going to come. Permission granted or refused, there was no way Alistair could top him without making him come. Sheridan welcomed the chance to apologise for that by accepting a punishment, because there was no way in hell he would be able to hold back.

In moments, Alistair had prepared him, slicked his own cock with lube, and was lining up above him.

Sheridan held his breath as his master pushed into him very slowly, making him wait for each inch of his thick shaft to stretch him open a little wider, a little more perfectly. Sheridan held his breath, savouring each sensation.

"Breathe, love," Alistair ordered. "And make the most of it. This might be the last time I let you come in a very, very long time."

Sheridan nodded. The 'long time' was something he could worry about later. Right now, he was just so bloody grateful to be allowed to come right now, he couldn't think straight. He wanted to thank his master, but he couldn't find the words because Alistair already was driving into him hard and fast.

His prostate screamed its pleasure and Sheridan just gave up and enjoyed the ride, unable to do anything else as pleasure shot through him in wave after wave, crashing into him and making him lose all track of anything that might be happening outside his body. Alistair leaned down low over him, testing his flexibility to the limit as he pushed Sheridan's legs back further and further.

He kissed Sheridan, and even that was different. No gentle brushes of lips now, Alistair took possession of his mouth, just the same way he'd taken possession of the rest of his body. Sheridan was lost the moment their lips met, when Alistair thrust his tongue into his mouth, Sheridan came far too soon, without his master even reaching down and laying a finger on him.

Alistair might have noticed him coming, he might not have. It certainly didn't seem to make any difference to what he was doing. He continued to drive into his hole, taking his own pleasure from Sheridan's body as if he really didn't care about the man he was topping.

Except as Sheridan opened his eyes and stared up at him, Alistair was staring right back into his eyes, everything in him focused on his new submissive. The light in his eyes screamed that everything was about Sheridan, it was all about his submission and Alistair's dominance over the man he loved.

Sheridan stared back at him, mesmerised by the honesty he saw in Alistair's eyes, in his master's eyes. His master's rhythm went up another notch, Sheridan gasped as thrust after thrust pushed into him, stretching him open wider and wider, hitting his prostate and coaxing his cock back to life to begin to slowly harden between them.

He looked down his body, watching his master's muscles move above him but unable to reach out and touch him with his hands cuffed as they were above his head.

When he looked back up to Alistair, he saw the look in his master's eyes as he came — pure triumph, pure dominance. They held each other's gaze, each of them panting for breath for what felt like hours after he came, as Alistair continued to support his weight above Sheridan.

Sheridan looked away first, a few moments before Alistair moved and turned to lie on the bed next to him.

"You can move," he allowed.

Sheridan lowered his legs back onto the mattress, easing the ache in his thighs and he continued to take deep breaths in a vain attempt to stop his head from spinning. He turned slowly towards his master, resting his head on the pillow as he tried to find a comfortable position to put his hands in until his master summoned the energy and the inclination to undo the cuffs for the night.

Alistair looked across at him, but didn't reach for the cuffs.

Sheridan offered him his wrists in a not very subtle hint.

Alistair raised an eyebrow.

"I should go and clean up, master," Sheridan said, looking down at the trails of semen over his stomach, and up to his chest.

Alistair brushed his finger tips through the cum, scooping some of it up to offer to Sheridan's mouth.

He hesitated, frowning at his master's fingers. "It's not yours, master," he protested mildly. That would have been different, of course, but tasting himself rather than his master really wasn't high on his list of things to do, even with the thrill of suddenly permissible submission running through him.

"You belong to me. Everything that's yours is mine." He held his fingers in front of Sheridan's lips, not forcing, but not backing down either.

Trying his best to push aside his uncertainty, Sheridan leaned forward the fraction of an inch needed to lap at his master's fingers. The smile and nod of approval from his master was well worth the effort of licking everything Alistair offered him off his fingers. When Alistair's fingers and his own stomach were as clean as his tongue could ever make them, they lay in silence.

Sheridan couldn't hold his master's gaze forever, he turned his attention to his wrists, smiling at the leather wrapped around them, and smiling even more at the different possibilities for the future. All the different ideas of what could happen paraded through his mind, each one ever more beautiful than the last.

Alistair touched his cheek and turned his face towards him, a question in his eyes. He was obviously wondering what had put that smile on his face right then, and Sheridan was more than happy to share.

"It will be wonderful to be allowed to go to clubs and be allowed to submit properly. To be there belonging to you, and not just there to serve drinks to strangers."

"No."

Sheridan glanced up at him. "No, master?" he asked.

"No, you aren't going to submit to me in clubs," Alistair told him, very seriously.

Sheridan frowned. "I'll learn how to do exactly as you say – how to be a good submissive for you, master." He would make damn sure that Alistair never had reason to blush over his behaviour.

"No," Alistair repeated.

Sheridan thought through and there was only one explanation he could come up with. "For how long, master?" he asked.

Alistair raised an eyebrow at him. "Forever," he said, as if that should have been obvious.

Sheridan shifted uncomfortably. He nodded his understanding. "Yes, master." But as he laid his head more comfortably on the pillow, he couldn't help but see a whole host of new and more worrying possibilities marching across his future.

Alistair turned his face back towards him. "Tell me," he ordered.

Sheridan couldn't look him in the eye, but he couldn't lie to his master either. "You said earlier that after a punishment has finished, you'd forgive me, master," he whispered.

"Yes, I did," Alistair confirmed.

"You can't forgive me at the end of forever, master," Sheridan whispered.

"And you think that I'm punishing you by telling you that you can't go to leather bars and kneel at my feet?"

Sheridan nodded.

Alistair made him look up. "If you belong to me, you belong to *me*. No other man will ever see sight of your submission. There will be no running off to clubs, none of this nonsense you've been playing around with. There will be no wandering around rooms full of strangers half naked."

Sheridan opened his lips to protest but Alistair put his hand over his mouth.

"You wearing a gag for the rest of the night won't make *me* the least bit uncomfortable," he pointed out. "If you don't interrupt, you'll have your chance to speak when I've finished, not before."

Sheridan closed his mouth.

"You will belong to me," Alistair repeated. "You will submit to me. No one else will know. It's not anyone else's business. You said before that you know I'm possessive, you have no idea how deep that seam runs yet."

Sheridan swallowed. He nodded his understanding and looked up at his master.

Alistair took his hand away from his mouth, but he didn't give him permission to speak.

"No one will ever know you are in any way submissive towards me. No one else will ever see you wear a collar, or call me your master. No other man will ever know this side of you."

Sheridan nodded, a little sad, but realising that was the way it was going to be. He tried to tell himself that even if he only got a game his master was willing to play behind closed doors rather than the complete lifestyle he'd always wanted, it was a million times more than he thought he would ever get from his lover at the start of that St Valentine's Day.

"That doesn't mean you stop belonging to me the moment another man steps into the room," Alistair went on. "You will still follow my rules, you will still do as I say, and you will still accept the consequences for every single time you break one of those rules."

Sheridan nodded, trying to fit that into his mental predictions.

"You will still serve me to the very best of your ability," Alistair told him. He gave a slight nod, which Sheridan took to be permission to speak.

"Secret service, master," he offered.

Alistair raised an eyebrow at him. "You're not James bloody Bond, love. No, it's not secret service. You can forget that damn mask or hiding what you do from me. But you will learn to be subtle and discreet, you will learn to keep our private life private and the part of you that belongs only to your master out of other men's view."

"Yes, master," Sheridan said, lowering his eyes and doing his best to show due respect to his master's orders regardless of his own views on the subject.

As much as he loved his master's words – as much as he enjoyed the new pictures his master had painted in his head, there was something missing from them. He knew what to call the forms of submission he had seen other men perform, he knew what to call the things he'd read about on the internet, but he had no idea what to call the life he was going to live with his master, and that felt so wrong.

Alistair looked down at him for a few long moments. "Oh, very well, you may call what services you perform discreetly in public your own form of secret service if the idea means that much to you."

Sheridan offered him a shy little smile in return.

Alistair shook his head at him, but he smiled back too. His smile softened as just a hint of confusion filled his eyes for a moment. Sheridan reached up and touched his master's cheek, making his cuff chain rattle. In that moment, he saw his master realise what he'd known from the first second he set eyes on him.

Perhaps Alistair couldn't treat him the way he'd treated strangers in a club, perhaps he couldn't treat a man he loved as if he didn't care about him, but for the first time, Alistair seemed to realise that didn't mean he couldn't be his master.

Sheridan looked up at him and in his eyes he believed he saw his master start to understand something else. That loving him just made his dominance slightly different. That his love only turned an inclination to whip strangers in a club, into a dominance that allowed him turn his sub over his knee for disrespect one moment and then grant him a little turn of phrase for no reason other than he knew it would please his lover.

Alistair nodded, just once, as if to say, leave this with me, let me think about it, I'll tell you my decision in due course. "Time to sleep now, love," his master told him.

Sheridan couldn't help but fix onto the word 'love' as it fluttered past his ear, thinking that the word could mean something different now than it had before.

Alistair immediately noticed his little slip. "You know I love you, don't you?" he asked him.

The temptation to say something stupid and spoil their perfect moment almost got the better of Sheridan. Then he remembered everything he had already gained that night and convinced himself to be neither silly nor greedy when he answered his master.

"Yes, master," Sheridan said. A moment later he added, very softly. "If I'm allowed to say it, I love you too, master."

Although he accepted his declaration of love with a nod, Sheridan could see that there was something else going on in his master's head. "That wasn't your first response," Alistair said. "It wasn't your honest response."

His tone of voice told Sheridan the matter was not going to be dropped until he confessed, so he didn't even bother to try and wriggle out of it.

"All of me, master?" he asked he asked very softly. "Even this part of me?"

Alistair continued to study him very carefully for what felt like an impossibly long time. "Of course *all* of you, Sheridan. You never need to doubt that. I love everything about you which makes you the man you are. And that means I love the submissive part of you just as I love every other side of your personality," he told him very seriously.

Sheridan nodded, relief flooding through him as he heard the honesty in his master's voice. For the first time felt able to believe there really wasn't a side of him that his lover didn't hate, and that knowledge suddenly felt far more important than the whips and chains he'd dreamt of for so long.

He raised his eyes so his master would be able to tell that he believed him, and that he spoke the whole truth in return. "I love all of you too, master," he whispered.

Alistair nodded, as if he'd never doubted that was the case, as if he hadn't made Sheridan jump through hoops for two years because he'd been so blatantly convinced his boyfriend couldn't love the dominant part of his personality. Obviously, inside his master's

head the matter was already settled and what he'd thought himself in the past was no longer relevant to the debate in his eyes.

And maybe, Sheridan thought to himself, he could consider it to be a dominant's right to rewrite history, just this once. He smiled to himself and shifted along the mattress as Alistair turned him over so he could spoon behind him. As he arranged his cuffed hands as comfortably as he could, Sheridan looked across to the mask and the red leather heart that still lay on the floor in the middle of the room where they'd been dropped.

He sighed in sleepy satisfaction as Alistair nudged him into exactly the position he wanted his submissive to sleep in that night. This was it, he thought to himself, the real thing. Forget masks and hiding, forget strangers in clubs, perhaps even forget the secret services he might perform for his master in front of others. This, him and his master wrapped around each other, each of them happy in their place. This was it. The perfect Valentine's night.

About the Author

Kim is 25 years old, from a small town in South Wales.

After writing for years, Kim is finally editing some of the stories to share with the rest of the world. Kim writes both male/male and male/female stories that range from the dark and paranormal right through to the lighter, funnier side of life.

The only thing every story contains is a happy ever after for the two (or more!) characters that deserve it most. Oh, and kinky sex – there's always plenty of that too – but Kim takes no responsibility for any of that. It's all the characters' fault. Honest...

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