



A STRONG HAND

CATT FORD

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by Catt Ford

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A Strong Hand
by Catt Ford

Dedicated to my dearest friends Liriel and Kennedy, who believe in me, love me, and are always in my corner.

To Liriel, who asked for the story because without her utter belief that I could do it, this story would never have been written.

And to Kennedy, who encouraged me and held my hand all the way through, even though this is not his cup of tea.

And to E.N. Thank you.

Prologue

At the sound of the crash, Damian rolled his eyes heavenward and wondered for the hundredth time whatever had possessed him to hire such a clumsy, surly, irritable, annoying, immature, and inexperienced assistant.

Taking a deep breath to quell his irritation, he raised his voice to ask, "Are you all right, Nicholas?"

"Yeah," came the muffled reply. Even at a distance Damian could tell that the boy was frustrated and angry.

"What was it *this* time?" he asked.

Ashley's eyes crinkled in silent laughter as he sat, perched on the stool, where he'd been watching as Damian set up the shot.

"Nothing breakable," came the defensive answer.

"Have it cleaned up by the time I get out there," Damian instructed, before muttering, "to save me from having a heart attack."

The response was indecipherable, but the resentful tone was clear.

"Why do I put up with this?" Damian sighed to himself.

"Why do you?" Ashley asked, chuckling. He was quite sure he knew the answer; after all, the hapless assistant was by far the most beautiful young man that Damian had ever hired. They never seemed to last long, but Ashley was certain that all of them had "skills" outside the arena of photography.

"He was better than the rest of the lot that applied after Derek left," Damian grumbled, his gaze fixed on the viewfinder of his camera.

Today's shot was just a still life, but it still took Ashley's breath away. There was no better photographer at work in London today; Damian Wolfe could make the simplest object compelling and exquisite.

It had taken forever, and all the weight of a long friendship, for Ashley to convince Damian to shoot his catalog. Although Damian was American by citizenship, with a French father and Italian mother he was fairly cosmopolitan; he and his parents had lived all over the world before he finally settled in America as an adult. After a case in which his work had been taken to the Supreme Court in America as an example of indecency but was vindicated as freedom of expression, Damian had found it more comfortable to work in Europe.

He was fond of saying that although the Supreme Court was on his side, the U.S. was simply too young a country to appreciate erotica. They preferred sentimentality to beauty. Treacly calendars with ivy-covered cottages and flowers in vases, or even worse, babies in animal costumes were all that some Americans deserved in Damian's opinion.

He was welcomed to the London art scene with open arms, the much-publicized court case having made him an instant celebrity. Although he disdained the renown, he did appreciate the fact that it brought his work to the attention of collectors such as Ashley.

Working almost exclusively in the area of his own personal interest, Damian created beautiful male erotica; he could photograph a nude with all the delicacy of a rare orchid, and yet use the same model to produce a shot of graphic sexual power, so raw that it raised disturbing doubts in the minds of men who had never considered another man's body as sexually arousing.

Of course, that just amused Damian to no end.

Ashley Winthrop was an entrepreneur in high-end erotic toys and a noted patron of the arts; he was also a connoisseur when it came to erotica. He had already purchased several of Damian Wolfe's pieces before he had finagled his way into meeting the artist at a gallery opening.

Recognizing their similar interests, they soon became friends. Ashley wasn't shy about badgering Damian to shoot several of the items he offered for sale, and when he'd seen the results, he continued to pressure the artist until he'd agreed to photograph the entire catalog.

Already, Ashley knew that this catalog was destined to become a collector's item. Taking an ordinary item such as handcuffs, Damian had created a simple but elegant set and lit the cuffs so that the metal dazzled with a seductive promise that Ashley knew no submissive would be able to resist. He could hardly wait to see what Damian could do with a whip.

Damian moved forward to adjust the angle of one of the cuffs, donning a pair of sleek black leather gloves to ensure that he transferred neither fingerprints nor dust to the highly reflective surface.

Ashley's groin tightened as he watched the sure, graceful hands stroke the metal. The first time Damian had picked up a crop in Ashley's office, running the braided leather absently through his fingers, Ashley had recognized a fellow Dominant. He had no desire to feel the bite of the whip himself, although he found the photographer extremely attractive, but he greatly desired to see Damian in action, with a slender submissive body drooping in front of him, eagerly surrendering to whatever delicious punishment he was sure Damian could devise.

Damian returned to his stance behind the camera, completely oblivious to the other man's train of thought as he took the shot. He was somewhat pleased with it. He wasn't sure it was the best he could do, but at least it was a starting point.

"I don't know why you badgered me into this," Damian grumbled, pushing back his shoulder-length hair while still looking through the viewfinder. "I've got to be at least twice as expensive as any product photographer, and three times as slow."

"Four times slower and five times more costly," Ashley said gleefully, rubbing his hands together. "I've worked it all out, Ian, but the cost-benefit ratio is on my side."

He couldn't see the photographer's face, hidden behind the curtain of his glossy hair, but that wasn't where he was looking anyway. Damian really had a lovely body: broad shoulders, narrow waist, and quite a fine arse, if he did say so himself. Ashley knew that he would never get his hands on it, but a man could dream, couldn't he? Although the charm of

demanding the submission of another man would be lost with Damian, Ashley still rather fancied him. Holding him back was the fact that he was not at all sure that he might not end up in the encounter with his own arse in the air, awaiting either the kiss of the whip or the surge of what looked to be a massive cock, if Damian's package was anything to go by.

"How can that possibly be a good thing?" Damian asked, exasperated by his own slowness. His standards were incredibly exacting but ordinarily he didn't have a client hanging over his shoulder; he simply worked out his own vision to his satisfaction.

"Not only will people in the lifestyle be fighting to get their hands on this catalog, they will pay for them," Ashley said. "And they'll buy. Those handcuffs have been a staple in my line for over five years and even *my* mouth is watering over them. I would buy them from me right now, if I had someone to put them on."

Damian laughed. "Surely you have *someone* awaiting your ... *kind* attentions." His eyes raked insolently over Ashley's body.

The tawny-haired man shivered under the intense scrutiny of an alpha Top, but the little smile that curled his lips didn't change; Ashley was experienced enough to know how to stand his ground.

"I can't imagine that you haven't ... ahem ... *tested* these items thoroughly before offering them for your customers' consideration."

Ashley grinned, his teeth gleaming white under the modeling light. "I know what they're all used for, yes."

"I'll bet you do." Damian smirked, before going back to concentrate on his shot. He was perfectly aware that Ashley was an enthusiastic player, not merely a dabbler who sold toys. Not that Damian himself played anymore; he'd grown weary of demanding subs who misbehaved in order to earn whatever punishment they desired. He'd decided that empty was better than half full and had lived a celibate life in the five years since he'd come to live and work in London: ironic for a man who made his living creating erotica. An irony that he fully appreciated, but by now he had convinced himself that he was more suited to the purer gratification to be derived from the visual stimulation provided by his models.

At that moment, Nick pushed the studio door open, letting the light pour in just as Damian was about to release the shutter.

"Fucking hell, Nicholas, can't you remember to knock?" Damian snapped without looking up.

Nick pushed the door shut hurriedly, irked at being berated when the studio lights were still on anyway; he'd checked for the sliver of light under the door, not that he was going to mention that. In a sullen voice, he asked, "Just wanted to know whether you wanted your tea now."

Ashley watched with interest as the boy's velvety dark eyes flicked nervously between the photographer and the glittering handcuffs, displayed like a jewel on a bed of soft dark feathers.

"Turn off the modeling lights, Nicholas."

Dragging his feet, the tall, slender young man made his way to the power pack, crouching beside it to press the

button. There was a click and the room was plunged into darkness. In that moment, the erotic tension in the room roared in Ashley's ears. Everything was silent. Not one of them made a move in the dark, but he felt strongly that at least one of the people in the room really *wanted* to.

Then the sudden flash of Damian's lights split the darkness with a series of soft explosive pops. The photographer took several shots, bracketing, Ashley remembered him calling it.

"Okay, Nicholas. Lights," Damian ordered tersely.

A click and the modeling lights were back on. Ashley had continued to look in Nick's direction to avoid being blinded by the lights, so he was in the perfect position to observe the soft, liquid look in the boy's eyes as he gulped in some air and stared avidly at the cuffs before his usual impassive mask slid back into place.

Ashley glanced at Damian to find that he was still fussing with his camera. Finally Damian stood upright. "I think that's it for today," he said in a dissatisfied tone.

"Tell me again why you were shooting in the dark?" Ashley asked.

"Star filter," Damian said. His laugh lines sprang into being as he smiled and reached up to sweep his hair out of his face. "We're going to make your old police standards sparkle like diamonds." He suddenly seemed to realize that Nicholas was still crouched by the pack. "Why are you here?" he demanded bluntly.

"Came to ask if you wanted your tea, yeah?" The husky voice was soft and yet still communicated Nick's insolence clearly.

"Go boil it, or buy it, or whatever you do with it," Damian said, losing interest.

"What would you like in yours, Mr..." Nick asked Ashley, with a bare modicum of politeness.

"Winthrop," Ashley supplied amiably, although he had told Nicholas his name at least twice before. "*I am in the mood for a bite of something sweet, perhaps an éclair or a napoleon. And get me a latté, large, cinnamon decaf. With whipped cream. Low fat!*"

Before he slouched from the room, Nick muttered, "You really think that's going to help?"

Damian chuckled under his breath at Nicholas's jibe, still standing with his hands on his hips, glaring at the handcuffs as if they were a recalcitrant model, refusing to hold a pose.

"Dreadful baggy trousers," Ashley muttered fastidiously, looking after Nicholas. If he had the dressing of the young man, he'd be wearing something tight and form-fitting, depending on what kind of arse he had. It looked as if it might be quite a pert one, but those loose jeans were so deceptive, as Ashley knew to his cost. Not only had Damian's last assistant Derek turned out to be a tad on the pudgy side, but he didn't even like to play.

"What was that?" Damian asked abstractedly.

"I asked your boy for something sweet," Ashley said, grinning inwardly at his choice of words. Sure enough, they caught Damian's attention and he smirked appreciatively. "He seemed a bit dismayed."

"That'll be because I don't usually run to cakes for tea. I expect he'll have gotten into the petty cash and gone down

the street to the pastry shop," Damian replied in resignation. "Well, come along. The young twit has either put the kettle on with no water or forgotten it altogether. I'd better check on it."

Ashley slid off the stool and followed Damian out of the studio into the kitchen area, his eyes bright with curiosity. Something was brewing here, even if it wasn't the tea, and he was interested to see how it all played out.

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Chapter One

Nick raced up the stairs of the tube station two at a time, hoping he wouldn't be late for work yet again, but the train had been held up and he had to run for it. He pelted along the street, stopping in front of the warehouse building that housed Damian's studio to try to catch his breath. It would never do for his boss to know that he'd hurried so as not to be late. Bad for his image.

He pushed open the outer door and took the lift to the top floor instead of the stairs, hoping he would have caught his breath by the time it arrived.

"Late again?" Damian asked sardonically when he heard the loft door open. He didn't bother to turn around so he didn't see the guilty look that flitted over Nicholas's face.

The voice was surly as usual, with no trace of the regret that shadowed the large dark eyes. "Not very late."

"Well, it hardly matters; the model is even later," Damian fumed.

"What do you want me to do?" Nick asked, dumping his backpack in the doorway where anyone coming in would be sure to trip over it.

"See if Gabe needs anything after you move that damned bag," Damian said. "I'll be in the studio."

Nick kicked the pack out of the way and went to the makeup room, well fitted out with lights for the stylist to do his work. The man was short and bald, dressed in a frilly pink shirt, tight shiny jeans, and high-heeled, pointy-toed boots.

He was sitting in the makeup chair reading a magazine and looked up at Nicholas with teasing eyes when he entered.

"Hey, beautiful. Come to cheer a lonely girl's vigil?" the makeup stylist lisped.

Nick shook his head. "Not bloody likely, Gabe. Need anything?"

"How about a flute lesson?"

Nick looked puzzled and then flushed when he caught the import of the comment. "Fuck off, wanker."

"I wouldn't have to, if you helped a girl out," Gabe called after him and snickered as Nick scuttled away quickly. He did so enjoy tweaking the pretty little straight boys.

After a few phone calls to the agency and another half hour's wait, Damian finally emerged from his office to dismiss the stylist. "Sorry, Gabe. You might as well go home. The model seems to be lost or something. He's a no-show."

"You know I get paid for the time just the same, right?" Gabe said, beginning to return his brushes to his kit. "I canceled another shoot to do this one."

"Yeah, I know. I'll make it good with the client. We'll have you back again next time," Damian promised.

Gabe nodded and packed up his case. Damian signed his voucher, and Gabe said, "Thanks for understanding. Some people in the biz—"

"I know," Damian said. "Say no more; not your fault."

"Ta *ta* then, love," Gabe said, returning to his usual manner.

Damian watched the studio door swing shut quietly after the stylist left. He jumped when he heard Nicholas fling open

the door to the bathroom, letting it smack against the wall. "Fuck it all to hell! You don't *have* to break the fucking door, do you?"

"Sorry," Nick said, and he flushed to the roots of his hair. His eyes dropped, and Damian suddenly noticed how very beautiful he looked when he was ashamed.

"Come into the studio," he commanded, striding into it without looking back to see whether Nicholas was obeying him.

Nick complied, following the photographer silently, hoping desperately that he would know how to do whatever Damian told him to do next.

A strong hand landed on the small of his back and propelled Nicholas forward to where Damian had set up a painted canvas backdrop and what looked to be a ballet bar. "Just kneel there for a minute, will you? I need to check the lighting."

Sighing, Nick got to his knees and crossed his arms, scowling defiantly at the camera.

Ignoring the defiant expression, Damian called out, "Turn around. No, all the way. *Away* from me, you dolt."

Nick shuffled around on his knees until his back was square to the camera.

"Back toward me. To the left. *Your* left! Your *other* left!" Damian sighed in mounting frustration as Nicholas first turned to his right, away from the main light, and then back into his original position. He strode quickly forward and took the boy by the shoulders, jerking him into the position he wanted.

"There! That's where I want you. Stay right there and don't move."

He raced back behind the camera, cursing softly to himself. He wondered why he'd never noticed the sculpted cheekbones and elegant jawline of his young assistant. Damian had noticed his eyes, of course; they were hard to miss with their long lashes, but somehow he'd become fixated on Nicholas's nose, directing all his irritation with his incompetent assistant at his nose. The slight asymmetry seemed to take up Damian's entire vision when he looked at Nicholas, but something about the way the lights were caressing the young man's face made his beauty spring to life for him for the first time.

"Nicholas," Damian said softly in a moment of recognition. How could he have been so blind?

"Yeah?" Nick responded, not daring to move from his position.

"The model bailed. And I have this idea, a concept; it's gnawing at me. I want to take the shot. I *need* to," Damian started to explain.

Nick swung around to face him and nodded. Damian was startled. It looked as if Nicholas understood just what he was saying about his need to create the image in his head and was agreeing with him! What did he study at university again? Whatever. Damian couldn't remember ever asking him.

"I need a model to pull this off. Can I use you?"

"What do I need to do?" Nick asked, his voice interested and bright for the first time in Damian's memory.

"I need to work out the pose, and it'll be cheaper to use you than a model. Just with some of these things of Ashley's," Damian said, waving a careless hand at a table holding various whips and strappy-looking things.

"All—all right," Nick said faintly, looking at the table full of implements with nervous fascination.

"Right. Get up and out of your kit, then," Damian ordered. "I need your bare skin."

He grinned impishly, expecting to have to convince the young man when he refused, but was surprised as without hesitation, Nicholas started stripping right there in the set, tossing his T-shirt off to the side. He stood up to toe his sneakers off and unzipped his pants, only to realize that Damian was staring at him. His hands hesitated. "Am I doing it wrong?"

Damian laughed. "There's no wrong way to get undressed. Especially if...." He trailed off, thinking it might not be wise to bandy racy comments with his assistant. On the other hand, the way things were going, Nicholas wouldn't be around that long anyway. "Especially with a tight little ass like yours," he resumed, figuring it didn't make much difference if Nicholas ran screaming into the night. No model, no shot, at least for today. "Green socks?"

"Oh. I thought maybe I shouldn't be throwing my clothes on the floor," Nick muttered, ignoring the comment on his brightly colored socks.

"Throw them wherever you like, other than in the set," Damian said generously, excited by the prospect of a compliant model to play with for a couple of hours. This way

he could get his idea worked out before the expensive model arrived.

Nick continued to strip, feeling a bit flustered, but Damian was no longer looking at him, so he made short work of it. He stood there naked, waiting for the next instruction.

Damian came over and took him by the arm, leading him to a lump under the canvas. "Kneel on that; I put some packing foam under there. It'll be easier on your knees."

"Away from the camera?" Nick asked.

Damian rolled his eyes. "Yes, away from the camera. Right there." He pointed insultingly.

Nick dropped to his knees, grateful for the soft cushioning under the backdrop. His knees were bony, and the concrete floor had hurt when he knelt there earlier.

Damian came back to him making a clanking noise, and Nick darted an anxious glance at the photographer. He was carrying black leather restraints of some kind, linked together by a length of silver chain.

"Give me your hands," Damian ordered.

Silently, Nick held out his wrists.

The leather cuffs were long, almost like a gauntlet, running nearly to Nick's elbows. Damian fastened the various buckles on the right arm, passing the chain over the bar in front of Nick. It was quite high, almost to Damian's shoulders, and Nick had to raise his arms for Damian to attach the second restraint.

After Damian had him securely bound to the bar, he stroked the smooth, honey-toned skin of Nicholas's bare shoulder. "Okay?"

"Yeah."

Damian thought Nicholas's voice had sounded a bit breathless, but he was so excited to see his artistic vision come to life that he paid it no heed, bounding back behind the camera to check angles and lighting.

He suppressed a gasp, swallowing it when he saw the lithe form, lean muscles taut in the slender shoulders, buttocks round and tempting, and the glossy dark curls shining under the sole light source. He really was blind, Damian marveled. It was a mercy that the insipid blond model actually hired for the shoot hadn't turned up. Nicholas was perfect for this. Damian enjoyed the sight of the muscles in Nicholas's thighs twitching slightly as he fought to remain still.

Damian checked his focus and snapped off a couple of quick shots. "You doing okay?" he called out.

"Yeah, fine," Nick said, turning to look back over his shoulder just as Damian snapped the shot.

"Now don't do that again if you don't want a recognizable shot of you naked in handcuffs. Stay ... fucking ... still," Damian snarled.

Nick turned away quickly. His heart was beating so hard and loud; he was surprised that Damian couldn't hear it. The thought of Damian owning a shot of him, naked and restrained to a bar, made his cock twitch, and he wasn't even gay! Was he? No, Nick thought resolutely, he wasn't and he wasn't going to be converted. He was just helping his employer. Nothing more.

His heart slowed when nothing more happened and the lights didn't flash again. It was quiet so long, he wanted to

turn around again and see what Damian was up to, and he was just about to when he felt something chilly at his ankle.

"Wh—what's that?" Nick asked nervously, flinching as he felt cold metal close around his ankle.

Without answering him, Damian pushed his legs apart with his foot. Nick suddenly felt very vulnerable and exposed, his cock swelling but not hard yet, his balls dangling where he was sure Damian could see them. Hell, Damian could probably see everything that was to be seen about his arse!

Nick jumped when Damian spread his legs even further and a cold cuff was clamped about his other ankle. When the strong hands released him, Nick tried to move his legs together but found he couldn't.

"No need to worry; it's just a spreader," Damian said in a very pleased tone of voice. "Excellent. You were born to wear one. You look great in it."

Faint sounds told Nick that Damian had retreated behind the camera once more. It made him feel a tiny bit safer, but not safe enough. Trussed the way he was, he could barely move. Nick had never been able to please Damian before and hearing approval in his employer's voice was ... heady. On the other hand, he had also never had his legs held apart and trapped before, and it was disturbing. He was just trying to calculate whether he could manage to get to his feet with the spreaders on when the lights flashed, practically blinding him because he wasn't ready.

"You could warn a person!" Nick yelled with an energy that surprised even him.

"Sorry," came the distracted reply.

Somehow Nick knew that Damian wasn't going to remember to warn him the next time either. He squirmed uncomfortably; wearing these restraints somehow made him feel more naked than when he'd just taken off his clothing. He wondered how long Damian—

The lights blinded him again, but he didn't say anything this time.

"Stick your ass out a little. No, back, toward me. More. No, too far, go back to where you were. Okay, back it up again. There! Hold it right like that!"

The lights flashed in quick succession, and Nick's hip twinged. He hoped he'd be able to hold the pose as long as Damian wanted without his back cramping up.

"What's the scar from?"

"Oh, sorry," Nick muttered. "Uh, an accident. Had to have an operation."

"It's beautiful," Damian responded.

Nick was outraged; how dare Damian say that? He knew it was ugly, and it sure as hell hadn't been beautiful acquiring it. "Har fucking har," he retorted sarcastically.

"Shut up," Damian said, in his dreamy, crazy-artist voice.

Nick shut up accordingly. He knew Damian wouldn't hear whatever he had to say anyway. His arms were falling asleep as the blood drained from them.

"Okay, straighten up a bit. Now turn your head to the left slightly. Oh, *very* good, you remembered which way left is. I want the light to just catch the edge of your cheekbone and the line of your jaw. Right there. Hold it."

Again, the flurry of lights. By now Nick knew to close his eyes, seeing as Damian wasn't shooting his face anyway. When the sequence of flashing lights ended, he pulled on his arms to stretch his back, trying to ease the building tension in his shoulders.

"Will you stop wiggling around? Just stay where I put you until I say you can move," Damian demanded irritably, striding forward and pushing Nicholas back into position. "Do as you're told, boy."

"Yes, *sir*!" Nick hissed angrily.

"And stop talking, or I'll swat you," Damian instructed.

Nick froze into position, except for his cock, which rose in a slow steady swell of blood. The heat pooled at his groin made him fidgety but he didn't want to know whether Damian was serious about his threat. He *sounded* as if he would do it.

Nick jumped as he felt warm hands land on his hips. Something brushed across his arse and he yelped, even though it hadn't hurt at all.

"Stay *still*, dammit!"

Fuck, Nick thought, *he sounds serious*. He concentrated on keeping his body positioned exactly as Damian had left him.

Finally his back and hip were signaling dire distress and Nick had to move, letting out a little groan. He yelped and flinched as a hard hand cracked against his arse, sending a burst of heat through his left cheek.

He turned instinctively just as the flash went and heard a click.

"Will you hold still now, or do you want me to swat you again?"

Damian's voice came from almost directly behind him, where he was standing with the cable release in his hand. Nick fell silent and turned away from the camera again. He could see the handprint in his mind, red against the whiter skin of his arse. He was suddenly very embarrassed and humiliated to know that Damian had taken a picture of him that way and wondered what insanity had led him to yank off his clothes and kneel here unresistingly while Damian took more photographs. Not that he had much choice now that he'd let Damian tie him up. The words alone sent a shiver of arousal over his bare skin.

"Got it," Damian breathed, when he'd captured the final shot. He came to himself then and chuckled as he took in the slim body of his assistant, stretched and bound, muscles moving under the smooth skin as he strained to remain still; a picture of sensual promise.

"Sorry, Nicholas. I got a little caught up in my vision," Damian apologized as he came forward to release the young man. He chuckled as he saw the palm print on the boy's round, enticing cheek. Had he really done that?

He knelt behind Nicholas, leaning just a little closer than necessary to take in a whiff of the faint vanilla scent that clung to the boy as he released the ankle cuffs on the spreader bar.

Nick shivered and the fine hairs on his back stood up as he felt the heat of Damian's body so close to his. For a moment, the man was kneeling behind him and Nick was trapped there, cuffed and spread. If Damian were to try something, take his pleasure, Nick wouldn't be able to do a thing to

defend himself. He was terribly frightened, and yet his cock was betraying him by remaining achingly hard.

Damian noticed that the boy was trembling and gently released one arm, hanging on to the other one, sensing that Nicholas was about to bolt with the restraint still buckled onto his wrist. Once he had set the boy free, Nicholas sprang to his feet with a coltish grace, keeping himself turned away from Damian. He ran for his clothes, scooped them up, and headed straight for the bathroom, slamming the door shut behind him.

Damian remained where he was, running the leather restraints through his fingers, still warm from Nicholas's heat. He could smell a hint of arousal on the air. So the boy had been turned on by this? Until now, Damian had been so involved with making the shot in his head a reality that he hadn't even considered the ramifications of having the beautiful young man, naked and bound, kneeling before him.

He heard the outer studio door slam shut violently and smiled. Probably that meant he'd seen the last of Nicholas, but damn, the boy *was* delicious. His cock was pressing uncomfortably against his zipper, so Damian unzipped to relieve himself a little. When he pulled his cock out, the air was cool against his heated flesh, and his hand felt good. He closed his eyes, kneeling there, right behind where he'd had Nicholas restrained and spread, and he stroked himself off, gloating over the beauty that they had created together. He came with a stifled groan, shooting onto the canvas right where Nicholas had knelt.

* * * *

Never had Nick been so grateful that he followed the fashion of his peers. It was one thing to be an independent thinker and go against the tide, but sometimes it was better if one wore baggy pants, giving one a fighting chance of hiding a raging hard-on.

He could feel his erection sway with every step he took, his boxers softly rubbing against the swollen head of his cock. He hoped he wouldn't come in his pants before he got back to his shabby little cold-water flat.

He took a seat in the train, because the tube was fairly empty at this hour. And then he stood right back up again when he saw how his erection tented his pants. Only a blind man could miss it. Soberly, he studied the advertisements over the windows, willing his prick to go down, but with minimal success.

He usually had several hard-ons and jacked off a minimum of once over the course of a day, but now he was hard enough to pound nails. When he got off at his station, every step was an effort. For the first time he wondered whether briefs might not actually be better. Surely they'd be more ... restrictive when one was in a state? Nick groaned; just thinking the word "restrictive" made his cock jump again.

There was nothing for it but to hurry. He made it to the outer door of his building and raced up the stairs. At least that effort made his erection go down a bit. By the time he unlocked his door, he was in hopes that he had it under control because he was not going to give in to this—whatever it was.

He went into the tiny bathroom and lowered his pants, pulling his boxers down with them. He stood on the edge of the tub, twisting and craning until he could get a glimpse of his own arse in the mirror, with a handprint blooming rosily on his cheek.

"Blooming idiot, Nicky," Nick muttered and then laughed at himself. "What the hell was I thinking? *If* I was thinking."

But there it was, a blush-red mark with a paler edge all around it. As he looked at it, the palm print began to throb, sending a rhythmic pulse straight to his groin. His cock rose up again, hot and hard, pointing to the ceiling. He couldn't remember ever being this hard before, and it was killing him.

He tried to think of his last girlfriend's breasts, or failing that, the girlfriend before as he stroked himself, rubbing his thumb over the head slippery with his precum. He panted as he stroked faster, adding a little twist with each pass, but he couldn't quite.... Suddenly the sound of Damian's hand cracking against his arse filled his mind and he imagined how the other man must have looked when he delivered the smack, and then he was coming with a hoarse cry, harder and longer than ever before.

He was on his knees when he recovered his senses, one hand clutching the sink, the other wetly wrapped around his limp dick, gasping at the memory of what had happened between him and his employer.

"Holy fuck," he whispered.

* * * *

After Damian had cleaned up and put himself tidily back together, he took his camera into the darkroom to unload the film. He shot digital on occasion, but he still preferred the older, manual single-lens reflex; it gave him so much more control over lighting, depth of field, and focus.

He couldn't wait to develop these shots and see what he had.

Patiently he mixed a batch of chemicals and got the developer up to speed. He fed the film into the spooler and waited at the other end to see what came out. When the leading edge of the negative appeared, he bent closer, getting a nose-full of the acrid smell. He lifted the end to peer at it against the red light and began to smile.

Once the entire length of film had rolled out, he took it to the light box, although it was still damp. Even without a loupe, he could tell this was the perfect pose to show off the spreaders, with the added benefit of the chained cuffs. Ashley would be thrilled.

The lines of submission in the bound body coupled with the undeniable elegance of the curves and planes of his form made Nicholas the perfect model for this job.

Except, Nicholas wasn't a model. In fact, Nicholas was most likely not going to be coming back at all. Damian smiled ruefully as he surveyed the rest of the shots. He paused, arrested when he came to the shot where he had spanked Nicholas.

He licked his lips as he looked at it. It was delicious. The camera had caught the moment when Nicholas looked back over his shoulder, his lips parted with surprise, his eyes wide,

showing fear, shock, and an arousal that Damian felt sure he would have preferred to hide.

The way his body was angled revealed one dark nipple, large and luscious, begging to be pinched. Nicholas had managed to twist his body enough that his cock was barely backlit, outlined against the backdrop, a cock that was hard and standing upright, hungry for attention.

Damian's hand brushed over the bulge in his jeans when he saw his own handprint on Nicholas's ass, like a brand of ownership, the reddened skin contrasting with the pale, subtly curved flesh.

"I must have a print of that one," Damian muttered. No matter what, that shot was going to be a permanent and prominent part of his own private collection, the one he never showed the world.

He reached for his cock and stroked himself to another massive orgasm, his gaze glued on the best shot he'd ever taken, until he closed his eyes as ecstasy washed over him.

* * * *

Nick woke up with a start. The alarm hadn't gone off but he had. He smiled ruefully. After jacking off in the bathroom, he'd settled down to study, only to have to yank his mind back to his books every two seconds.

Now he was lying in a puddle of his own rapidly cooling cum. And yet his cock was still half-hard.

"Dude," Nick said out loud, but softly. "You're going to have to stop thinking about it."

Instead, he thought about it some more, his stomach fluttering with the thrill that rolled through him whenever he went over the entire afternoon, step by excruciating step. He thought he knew what he was doing when he took his clothes off. He was an art student, and he'd modeled for pay before; besides, he'd watched Damian at work, and the man never laid a hand on his models.

It must be something about him, he thought miserably. Something that he didn't know about himself but that Damian could see that would make the man tie him up. No, not merely tie him, but put those leather restraints on his wrists, stretching him to trap him at the bar. And then the spreaders. The cold metal had contrasted with the enticing warmth of Damian's fingers, barely brushing his skin as he locked Nick into them.

He rolled onto his knees. Without realizing it, Nick's left hand was fondling his balls as he stroked his cock with his right. He thought about Damian's hands on him, caressing his arm gently, and finally that strong hand chastising him with a hard swat to the arse.

And then Nick cried out as he came yet again, arching his back so his throbbing backside was raised up, offered to the man he imagined to be standing behind him.

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Chapter Two

Ashley was impatient. "What, the little bugger didn't show up?"

"No, and his agency can't seem to locate him. We'll have to book a different model," Damian said. He was a little distracted. Nicholas hadn't come in either, and he himself had had a restless night. Every time he tried to fall asleep, he'd found himself rolling over to turn on the light, gloating over the one print he'd made of Nicholas, staring at him in shock.

He resolved that he would burn the negatives. After all, the young man hadn't agreed to this so it wasn't right for him to keep them. He would definitely burn them.

Just not yet.

"So who d'ya fancy? A blond, a brunet?" Ashley asked looking through a number of headshots. "We'll have to see them in person, won't we?"

"Of course. You never can tell from their card. Hell, they even lie about their measurements," Damian said.

"They list their measurements?" Ashley asked with excitement, peering at the card.

"Height and weight, Ash, not length," Damian said with a smirk.

He turned at a slight creak of the door. Nicholas was standing there, neatly placing his backpack in a corner, out of the way.

"Hi, Damian, Mr. Winthrop. Do you want a coffee?" he mumbled, looking at the floor. He didn't dare look at

Damian's face, for fear the other man would make fun of him. Or even worse, Damian might know just by looking at him that he had spent the entire night jacking off thinking about him ... and, even more humiliating, *doing* things to him.

"Yes, please, go down and get three, and some muffins," Damian said happily, handing over some money.

"Latté for me," Ashley piped up. "Large, cinnamon—"

"I remember, Mr. Winthrop. Large, cinnamon decaf, whipped cream, nonfat." Nick took the bill, carefully not touching Damian's fingers, and vanished to the café that his employer favored.

Ashley looked after Nicholas in disbelief and then at Damian, who was grinning stupidly after his assistant. "What did you do to make him behave?"

"Oh, I just gave him a little spanking," Damian said.

Ashley laughed heartily. "If only, but in this day and age of lawsuits, we can't do that to employees anymore. Pity, really. Lots of boys would be improved by a strong hand. Well, whatever you said to him, it seems to have worked."

Damian laughed, wondering what Ashley would say if he knew what had really happened. "Brunet," he said.

"What, what—oh, the model. Yes, I tend to agree, except for some of these black leather bits. They always go better on a blond," Ashley said, bending his head to scrutinize the cards again.

"I was thinking of maybe using Nicholas for a few shots," Damian said casually.

The carefully noncommittal note in his voice alerted Ashley that something was up. He decided to tease Damian. "I don't

know, my dear Damian, you can't just pitchfork an innocent into something like this," he said, stroking his chin. "He would be shocked. Very shocked."

Damian grinned, remembering how easily Nicholas had stripped for him. "I wasn't thinking of the out-and-out kink shots. I was just thinking he might do well for some of the leather clothing."

Ashley considered. "All right, he *is* a pretty boy, if annoying. We'll ask him. Pay him the base model rate?"

"If he does well. I'll need to do a test shot first, of course."

"Of course," Ashley agreed, amusement twisting his lips.

The door opened, and Nick came in, carefully balancing a box containing a selection of pastries and three coffees. He set everything out on the small table in the kitchen, bringing napkins and paper plates. He retrieved the cream from the refrigerator and placed spoons for the sugar.

"Sit down with us, Nicholas," Damian said.

Nick glanced up through his lashes, without raising his head, startled into silence. He wondered if he was about to be fired or propositioned as Damian pushed one of the coffees across to him.

"Ashley has a proposal for you."

Nick blushed furiously, wondering if Damian had told the attractive blond man what had happened the night before. He started to get up, but a hand clamped around his wrist, holding him in place.

Damian pitched his voice soothingly, to calm the boy down. "It's not that scary, Nicholas. He just wants to know if you'd be willing to show off some of these clothes."

Ashley pushed an older catalog across the table, and Nick could see ordinary leather trousers, such as he might wear to go dancing in a club if he had the money for either the pants or the club.

He looked up to find Damian smiling reassuringly at him. "I'd want to take some test shots, to see if you're suited. After all, Ashley will need to see you on film before he comes to a decision."

Nick nodded slightly and sighed in relief. He understood that Damian was telling him that Ashley hadn't seen the shots from yesterday. "Okay, I guess ... I could do that." Very faint stress on the "that."

Damian smiled broadly in satisfaction. If he got Nicholas to agree to that much, he had no doubt he would soon be able to convince him to model some of the more outré oddments. Considering that he had photographic evidence of how much Nicholas had enjoyed himself, he figured it was a sure thing if handled delicately.

Ashley licked the whipped cream off his straw, watching the byplay between the two of them. Damian was up to something; Ashley was sure of it. He'd enjoy watching this play out, because yesterday, Nicholas had been defiant and rude. But today, he was polite and wary. *Something* must have happened between them.

"Nicholas, call the agency for these boys and arrange a cattle call for tomorrow. When you've done that, join us in the back. We'll find a pair of those leather trousers to fit you and snap a couple of shots," Damian directed.

He got up and strolled into the studio with Ashley, without checking to see whether Nicholas was following orders.

"Come on; you can tell me," Ashley said persuasively.

"Tell you what?" Damian asked.

"What happened between you and the boy? You didn't really spank him ... did you?" Ashley unconsciously adjusted himself in his shrinking pants.

"If I did, would I be likely to tell you?" Damian teased.

"And if I didn't, maybe I'd lie to impress you."

Ashley guffawed at that, bending over so far, he slid off his stool. Damian stretched out a hand to steady him, smiling to see his friend so amused.

"As if you give a damn about impressing anyone," Ashley gasped.

Nick came in, watching silently until Damian had nudged Ashley into good behavior, and asked, "All set?"

"Yeah, the agency has most of them set up for nine to twelve, but a few models can only come in from one to five. Is that okay?"

"Yeah, sure," Damian said. "What size waist and inseam?"

Nick mumbled his size, and Ashley quickly sorted through the stacks he'd brought, pulling out all the trousers in Nick's size.

Nick reached out to stroke a pair of dark, wine-red trousers, made of the softest leather. "I like these."

"They'll go with your coloring, kid," Damian said, remembering the smooth, honey-toned skin that had been exposed fully to him the night before.

Nick looked up guiltily, wondering what Damian was thinking. He hoped that nothing of his arousal was showing, unaware that his wide eyes and parted lips spoke volumes to both men.

"Put this on with it," Ashley said, tossing a white shirt at Nick.

Nick caught it, his fingers sliding against the silky fabric.

"Go get dressed, boy," Damian urged. "We'll take a few shots so Ashley can make a decision."

Nick went to the bathroom to change while Damian set up his digital camera on the tripod standing right where he'd left it the previous evening. It amused him to direct Nicholas to the same set, and he wondered maliciously how uncomfortable it would make the young man.

Ashley gave a wolf whistle when Nicholas emerged from the bathroom. The silk of the shirt was thin and the flat dark circles of his nipples showed dimly through the fabric. The leather pants clung to his slim hips, outlining each cheek of his arse, the smooth lines telling the two older men that he was going commando.

"Nicholas," Damian said, his husky voice purring with power, "go into the set. Put both hands behind you and lean on that bar."

Nick felt his cock twitch at the tone in Damian's voice; the slow drawl was commanding, but promised a rich reward for obedience. Automatically, he walked to the canvas, shivering from the cold of the painted concrete floor under his bare feet. The canvas was a little warmer, although he stumbled as he tripped over the forgotten lump of foam under the cloth.

When he reached the bar, Nick faced Damian, not fully, but turned into the light, his eyes flicking questioningly to the photographer to see if he was posed correctly.

"Hands behind your back. Lean on the bar," Damian directed encouragingly.

Ashley moved abruptly to stand behind the cart that held Damian's computer monitor tethered to the camera, in order to hide his burgeoning cock. At Damian's order, Nick had put his hands behind him, grabbing the bar, making him arch his chest out, the buttons pulling a bit. His nipples were hard and the little peaks were shadowed as the white silk pressed against them.

"Good boy," Damian said softly.

Even from where Ashley stood, he could see how the soft leather outlined every ridge and vein of Nicholas's cock as it stood erect in sharp relief. Damian's voice had had its effect on Nick. No matter how he tried to make it go down, Nick's erection continued to grow.

The pose he had taken had the effect of making him look as if his hands were bound behind him, but his eyes were defiant and his mouth sulky. His dark curly hair swept almost to his shoulders.

Damian strode onto the set and tousled the boy's hair, making him look as if he'd just rolled out of bed. He pulled out his own lip balm, smearing it onto the pink curved mouth until it glistened. Damian pretended not to notice how Nicholas jumped whenever he touched him, panting softly through parted lips. As a final touch, he opened one button of the shirt, dragging his fingertips deliberately over the exposed

skin to pull the shirt slightly open. He smiled right into Nicholas's eyes as he heard a small groan of desire, inaudible to Ashley.

"Good boy," he said again, and he returned to his camera.

Nick was acutely aware of every feather-light brush of Damian's fingers against his skin, the thumb smearing the salve on his lips, fingers drawing along his chest, and hands on his shoulders positioning him just so. He forgot that Ashley was even in the studio with them.

"Damian," Ashley said in a breathy voice. "That looks good."

"Good enough to eat?" Damian asked softly, so Nick couldn't hear the words, only his voice.

"Good enough to beat," Ashley concurred, laughing as Damian frowned at him. Having got his cock back under control, he sauntered up behind Damian. "Don't worry; he's yours. You have first dibs."

"Mine?" Damian was shocked. "I don't want him. I'm done with all that."

"No, you're not," Ashley said confidently. "Besides, this one's yours, whether you want him or not. He jumps to attention when you speak. Watch." Raising his voice, he called to the boy, "Nicholas, turn to your left just a bit."

"All right," Nick called back confidently, moving as Ashley had requested.

"See? Nothing. Now you try."

Damian looked up and smiled at Nicholas. "Slide down the bar camera right."

"Yes, sir."

Ashley smirked as the boy who'd been so defiant yesterday slid obediently and unerringly in the correct direction, anxiously watching Damian to make sure he was doing right.

"Thank you," Damian said courteously.

Nicholas looked as if he'd just opened his Christmas present.

"See? He's yours," Ashley nudged Damian.

"Don't want him. Don't want anyone," Damian grumped as he started shooting.

Sure you don't, but someone wants you even if he doesn't know it yet, Ashley thought shrewdly. *And I don't think you're going to have much to say about this one.*

Out loud, he said, "Quit acting such a hermit, Ian. You're only thirty-two! You have many years left to you. Do you want them all to be empty?" He held up a hand to forestall the photographer's hasty retort. "I know; you have your *art*. But are you really going to turn down a chance to bed that lovely creature?" He licked his lips as he turned to look at Nicholas.

"Unbutton the shirt all the way," Damian called out harshly. He cringed at the wounded look on Nicholas's face as he started to unbutton the shirt.

Damian strode forward and pulled at the shirt so it lay open over the boy's chest. He muttered, "Sorry, Ashley's taking the piss with me."

"It's all right," Nick said softly.

Damian patted the young man's hip absently, looking straight into the questioning brown eyes when he heard the sharp intake of breath. "Take it easy, kid. Not now."

Nick nodded, his pupils dilated and his breath panting from him. He just knew his cock was outlined by the tight leather for the two men to see, but he didn't dare to look down to check.

Damian was all business as he went back to shooting. "Okay, Nicholas, take off the shirt now."

Nick did so, his dark skin gleaming under the lights like dull silk with the slight sheen of sweat.

"Nice tattoo, Nicholas. When did you get that?" Ashley called out.

Nick glanced at the bird partly visible on his hip, noticing all at once that the dark trail of hair leading down from his navel was very noticeable in the low-slung pants. "When I came to London to go to school," he answered, and then his gaze flew to meet Damian's.

The older man was smirking. "Need to take a break, Nicholas?" he teased, but his eyes were serious, questioning whether the boy was really in distress.

"No!"

Well. That came out stronger than he'd intended. Nick averted his gaze and realized Ashley was laughing at him too. When Damian ordered him to turn around, he did so gratefully. He glanced back over his shoulder to see both sets of eyes glued to his arse, but at least turned this way, they couldn't tell how turned on he was when he obeyed Damian's orders.

Ashley was hard-pressed to keep his hand off himself. The way the pants cupped the two perfect globes, hugging the taut flesh and creeping into the valley between them, made

him very sure that he needed to visit one of his favorite clubs and soon. Preferably this afternoon.

"Stick your butt out, Nicholas," Damian said.

Ashley glanced sidelong at his crotch. Damian always looked tightly packed, but surely, surely, he was a little bigger than usual? He would have to be superhuman to resist a lovely boy like Nick. He was a born sub if Ashley had ever seen one, and his hands itched to have the training of him.

But he was an honorable man, and he really liked Damian. He'd invited him to his favorite club and tried to set him up with some cute boys, but Damian had always smilingly refused. Ashley suspected that he had now met his match. The boy had spirit, but he needed a responsible person to look after him, and he seemed to have attached to Damian for some reason. It might take time, but he was sure that Damian would eventually succumb to the boy's charms.

"Uh, I have to get going, Ian," Ashley said, shifting impatiently.

"Wait. Let me download these shots, and you can take a look. This was all for you to decide whether you wanted to use him," Damian insisted. "It'll only take a moment."

Oh, I'd have a use for him, Ashley thought, but he followed Damian to the computer.

"Come on over, Nicholas. See what you look like."

Nick approached the other two men, curious to see how he looked on film in these clothes.

"Fuck," Damian said, low and husky, when he saw the images enlarged on his screen. "Nicholas, you're a natural."

Natural sub, Ashley thought, but he said, "Good job, Nicholas. I think we can use you; that is, if you agree?"

Nick wrapped his arms around himself, feeling a little exposed to be standing so close to the other two men without his shirt. He was uneasily aware of Ashley's eyes, which seemed to be drawn to his nipples as if they were targets. He looked up through his lashes at Damian for approval.

Damian was nodding and smiling. "I'd very much like to photograph you, if you're willing."

"Okay," Nick said, his eyes sparkling, although Damian did not understand why.

"Well!" Ashley clapped his hands together, startling the other two, who were lost in their examination of each other. "I'll be off then. Later, Ian, see you tomorrow. Thank you, Nicholas. You'll be an asset, I'm sure." He bustled to the door, heading gratefully to his club, which was located not too far away. He needed a little relief.

Nick stood with his arms wrapped around himself, wondering if he should go and change.

"Well, go take those off," Damian said, pointedly looking at the bulge distending the front of the pants. "We don't want you stretching them so they're too baggy for the shoot."

Nick blushed hotly and ran for the bathroom, unaware that Damian was pressing a hand over his own crotch at the sight of those perfect buttocks flexing under the thin leather.

When he was safe in his own baggy clothing again, Nick came out and hung the leather trousers on the rack Damian had provided.

Hearing some noise in the darkroom, Nick went to the door, looking in questioningly. "Anything else today?"

Damian whirled around guiltily, hiding something behind him. "Oh! No, I don't think so. You can go, Nicholas."

"Okay, then. See you tomorrow?"

Damian smiled, enjoying the answering hopeful smile on the boy's face.

"Tomorrow. Don't be late."

"Yes, sir!"

Damian looked after the slim figure, startled. Maybe Ashley was right.

Both he and Nick slept very little that night.

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Chapter Three

Nick went through agonies of jealousy the next day, although he didn't recognize it enough to call it by name. Damian and Ashley were ensconced on stools in the studio, leaving it to Nick to check the names off the list as the models turned up. They were almost all good-looking enough to be considered beautiful, Nick thought sadly, wondering how a regular guy like him could hold a candle to some of these men. Almost all were taller than he, most had awesomely muscular bodies, and their faces were uniformly handsome.

Gloomily he crossed his eyes, trying to get a glimpse of his nose. He couldn't remember exactly what it had looked like before he broke it, but even if it had been perfect, he was still nothing compared to the professionals.

He got to watch as Ashley poked through the boxes of his products, selecting various items for the men to model for test shots. All of the models seemed to feel supremely comfortable walking around completely naked, and they were not embarrassed in the least by the collection of manacles, leg irons, cock cages, and masks that they wore for their various shots; most of it made Nick blush, although he couldn't turn away from the sight.

And yet, he wondered if Damian would like to see him in any of those items. He'd heard about this kinky stuff, of course; with the Internet being what it was anyone could see things that would shock their mothers, but he'd never given

any thought to ever being in the same room with any of these items, let alone wearing them. The leather trousers he had worn yesterday were tame compared to most of the "clothing" he saw today.

Ashley and Damian teased and joked with the various boys, who all appeared quite at ease. Only two had stalked out indignantly when they'd seen the kinky gear, refusing to audition for the job. Nick had to wonder why they'd even shown up; the agencies had been informed just what type of project this was.

He slipped surreptitiously into the bathroom twice, unable to keep his hands off himself; once when Ashley had laughingly smacked a willing blond model's arse red with a leather paddle, and the other time when Damian had helped a young man into a leather harness, complete with a cock cage and ball spreader. The blond had appeared to enjoy his paddling, but it was the mere sight of Damian's hands on the model and imagining them against his own skin, strapping him into that harness, that made Nick cling to the towel bar, gritting his teeth to remain silent when he came.

It was even worse when the female models arrived in the afternoon, as they were a complete shock to Nick. He hadn't even known that Damian intended to shoot women as well. If he'd known enough to give it any thought, Nick might have assumed that most men fantasized about women in the submissive role, but the two girls selected to play dommes terrified him. Once in costume they seemed to take entirely too much pleasure in snapping their whips around as if they had some experience behind them.

It was all very confusing. Nick would have thought that the sight of shapely women in kinky, revealing costumes might have turned him on, but his most fervent hope was that he not be paired with any of them for his shots.

When the models had all gone for the day, Damian and Ashley sat down to analyze the test shots with Nick hovering in the background, trying to compare them to his tame photos from yesterday. Despairingly, he decided that now that the pros had shown their stuff, Damian would most likely forget about using him.

Ashley and Damian sorted through the shots quickly, discarding some, putting some in the maybe pile, and others into the final.

"Do you like this boy?" Ashley asked, contemplating the blond he'd paddled. "He would look well in the black stuff, I think."

"Yeah, he'll do," Damian said, contemplating a muscular black man with dark hair on his chest. "You don't mind a bit of fur, do you? It would make a nice contrast to Nicholas."

Nick jumped at his name. Maybe Damian still meant to use him after all.

"Yes, and this blond as well. Then we can mix and match, dark with light, or two darks and two lights," Ashley said.

"Yeah, that works for me. What about this guy as a backup?"

"Red hair?" Ashley said dubiously. "Always makes me think of Carrot Top. Not hot at all."

"But he'd be a contrast. And Crispin likes gingers," Damian teased gently.

"That's true, and we have to keep Crispin happy, don't we?"

"No," Damian said. "*I don't. You do.*"

"Touché." Ashley laughed.

"And these two girls in the *domme* outfits worked out rather well, I thought."

"That dark one reminds me a bit of Bettie Paige," Ashley commented.

Nick made a note to himself to Google Bettie Paige when he got home, hoping it might shed some light.

"She's got the bangs right, but she doesn't have that innocent joyousness that Bettie Paige had," Damian said regretfully.

"Pity, really. I'd love to have seen what you could have done with the original."

"Yeah, but I was born too late. Bettie recently passed away. She'll be missed." Damian shuffled through the Polaroids. "What about this blonde woman with the faux tits? She looked right at home as a submissive."

Ashley gave the Polaroid a brief glance. "You know I've no interest in the female of the species. Do we really need to include ladies in the catalog?"

"Their money is just as good as a man's," Damian said. "You're cutting off half your potential buyers if you leave them out."

"Very well. Choose the ones you like, and I'm sure you'll be right. They all look the same to me." Ashley got up and stretched, and then realized Nick was still hovering behind them and clapped him on the shoulder. "I shall be hoping to

persuade you to model more than just those leather pants, my lad. You're more beautiful than all the rest of these boys put together and most of the girls. Between you posing and Damian doing the photography, this catalog is certain to go down in history."

"Th—thanks, I think," Nick stuttered, bewildered at this turn of events.

"You're still at uni, correct? I expect you're the poor student type; otherwise you wouldn't be working for this maniac," Ashley said, smiling at his friend. "I shall expect to pay just what I pay the others, provided you put out your best effort." He named an hourly sum that made Nick gape at the munificence of it. That was almost enough for him to quit his job and focus on his studies. Only he didn't want to quit his job now.

Nick nodded weakly, and Ashley clapped him encouragingly on the shoulder before leaving. "Excellent. We'll see you tomorrow then."

"So are you going to let me see you in any of these wicked costumes?" Damian asked with a grin.

"Well, some of them are a bit ... a bit..." Nick floundered, at a loss for words.

"Extreme?"

Nick nodded.

Damian smiled. "You'll get used to it. The human animal is the most adaptable one on Earth. What shocks you today will be commonplace tomorrow. You'll see." He nodded encouragingly.

"I wouldn't want my mum to see me in any of these," Nick blurted.

"Somehow I doubt she's on Ashley's mailing list. And if she is, she probably won't mention it. But if it's any comfort I could show you the shots I took the other day. You'll see; no one will see enough of your face to recognize you," Damian said matter-of-factly, hoping it would calm the young man. "The allure of the unknown is always more powerful than dull reality."

"I would like to see them," Nick said boldly. "I didn't think you'd show them to me."

"You need to learn to ask for what you want," Damian scolded gently. "How will anyone know how to please you if you don't make your needs known?"

Nick didn't know what to say to that, but luckily Damian had placed his hand on his back, guiding him into the darkroom.

"Have a seat," Damian said, turning down the lights. "I haven't shown these to Ashley, in case you're wondering."

Nick blinked as his image flashed up onto the large plasma screen. Damian must have scanned in all the images. He nearly jumped up and ran when he was confronted with his own naked body. It was one of the early shots; he was naked and only his hands were bound to the bar.

He gulped quietly. He had no idea he could look like that, every curve and dip of his muscles taut under his skin, glowing like burnished gold under the artful lighting. His face was turned far enough away to be concealed in shadow, yet

enough light played over it to reveal the shape of his cheekbone and the defined line of his jaw.

Damian started the slide show, watching Nicholas's reactions carefully as the photographs became progressively more graphic. Damian had been holding the cable release while he locked Nicholas's ankles into the spreaders, accidentally pressing the button while he worked. He heard an audible gasp when Nicholas saw the shot; the photographer, biceps bulging the short sleeves of his black T-shirt, bending to spread Nicholas's legs.

Nervously Nick flicked a glance at Damian, flushing when he saw the older man looking straight at him. He returned his gaze to the screen, thankful for the darkness.

"Fuuuuck," Nick let out on a slow breath when the last shot came up. The expression on his face, showing shock, submission, and hope, combined with the reddened print of a hand on his arse, made his cock hard in seconds. His arse started to throb again with the memory of it.

He jumped when he felt hands press down on each of his shoulders, holding him still in his seat.

A husky voice whispered in his ear. "Do you know how hot that photograph made me, Nick? I couldn't sleep that night, thinking about you. About your tight little ass, about you, naked, kneeling in front of me.

"That's what you want, Nicky, isn't it? You want to be naked in my presence, on your knees. You'd like it if I just took my pleasure of you, used you any way I liked. Are you wondering what it will feel like when I kiss you, take your mouth, and fuck it with my tongue?"

Damian was pleased with the low moan that answered his words. Nick was facing away from him, so the tension in his shoulders and the quickened sound of his breathing were Damian's only clues as to how his verbal seduction was being received.

"What if I found your nipples and pulled on them with my fingers, twisting and pinching until those dark circles were pointed, aching little peaks, 'til you thought you couldn't take it any longer? Do you like it when someone plays with your nipples? Do you like having them bitten?"

Nick's entire body shuddered.

"And if I told you I was going to take down your pants and warm your bottom for you, would that give you a thrill? Did it make you hard when I spanked you, kneeling there, tied and bound into a spreader, completely at my mercy? Only able to move if I moved you, only able to do what I gave you my permission to do? Does that excite you?"

"Yes," Nick whispered. For a moment his body became malleable in Damian's hands, his rigid spine relaxing enough for him to lean back against the hard, solid body behind him. He felt Damian's arms move to circle him, and he panicked.

He ran.

Damian heard the outer door slam shut and closed his empty hands, smiling as he gazed, mesmerized, at Nick's image on the screen. "You'll be back, boy," he said.

* * * *

After tossing and turning all night, Nick got up in the morning, exhausted and with dark circles under his eyes. He

had jacked off six times during the endless sleepless night, replaying that sultry voice making sinful suggestions hotly in his ear while he looked at his own debauched image, and two strong hands held him in place.

He knew that Damian had let him go; the man was strong enough to hold him against his will if he so desired. It was the very fact that Damian had allowed him to escape that made Nick trust him all the more.

He had never even had fantasies like this before, but Nick admitted to himself that it turned him on unbearably to think of Damian holding him down, turning him over his knee and spanking him. He even wondered how that leather paddle might feel.

He had never even suspected that he might be harboring a desire to go to bed with a man, but all he could think of was his desired reward, of being on his knees, under Damian's control, with the other man's hard cock filling his mouth.

Nick dreamed of the scent and taste of the other man. He knew Damian was big; he filled out his pants very adequately, and he wasn't the type of guy to stuff. Had a nice arse too. Nick awoke to the fact that he was, yet again, stroking his poor sore dick, and stopped himself, horrified that he'd taken notice of another guy's arse. The thrill of the unknown was turning him on like he'd never been turned on before, even through the succession of girls that he'd pursued and dated; even after the visual stimulus of the beautiful female models clad in S&M outfits.

But there was no question about not going to the shoot. Nick didn't consider himself unusually brave, but there was no

way he could run away from this. He had to know. He had to face Damian again.

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Chapter Four

Damian was surprised when Nick arrived a little bit early, reflecting that his assistant's punctuality had certainly improved since that memorable night, but today the young man was walking taller, proudly looking Damian in the eye for the first time in a week.

The makeup artist arrived with his assistant, stopping any confidences that might have been forthcoming as Nick helped Gabe carry his gear in. Then Nick was occupied with organizing the models to get them ready.

Ashley arrived, and Nick was sent to fetch coffee and pastries for breakfast.

"Don't you think you should hire a temporary assistant to help Nicholas?" Ashley asked, looking after the young man. "I'll stand the nonsense; I don't want him so tired he falls over asleep whilst we're shooting."

Damian looked at Ashley with his mouth open. "I never thought of that."

"Dense," Ashley quipped, knocking Damian's head. "I'll have someone sent over from my office. Don't want the lad thinking that he's being replaced. We'll have *my* assistant over."

"You mean my *former* assistant," Damian sniped.

"Ah, you're not missing much, trust me," Ashley said breezily. "Derek doesn't even fancy a little spanking. I've moved on. But he is an efficient assistant, and I don't have to hide anything from him."

"Good," Damian laughed. "Glad to hear Derek can schedule your kinky appointments for you without hindrance."

Nick kicked the door open, his hands full, and Ashley sprang forward to help. "Let me get those, lad. I'm calling my assistant over to help out for the duration, so perhaps you'd better get into the makeup chair now."

Nick realized the first two models were already in the studio and hesitantly went to the makeup room, relieved that none of the female models were scheduled to arrive until the stylists were finished readying the men.

"Take off your shirt," Gabe and his assistant chanted to him. The assistant looked very similar to Gabe, except he was a little shorter, rounder, balder, and even more flamboyant in his wardrobe choices.

Gritting his teeth, Nick stripped to the waist, knowing that Gabe was just loving this. "Keep your hands off me," he told the shorter man.

"Oooh, honey, don't worry. I don't want a spanking from *your* master," Gabe taunted.

Nick blushed in agony; the mere words turned him on and embarrassed him. And Gabe was the last person he felt safe around now that he had this huge secret.

Gabe swept a plastic cape around Nick's neck and patted his shoulder gently. "Don't mind me, honey. I just like to tease a bit. Your virtue is safe with me," he said quietly, so the other model couldn't hear.

Nick was surprised at the sincerity in the other man's voice. "Thanks, Gabe. I'm just ... a bit nervous. I've never done anything like this before."

"Don't worry, sweetie. I've shot with Ashley before. If you don't play, he won't use any of his toys on you. And I doubt Damian would allow you to be hurt anyway."

"Why?" Nick asked, hoping that maybe Gabe knew how Damian felt about him, because he certainly didn't have a clue.

"Lawsuits, honey. Can't let the models get hurt on the job," Gabe simpered. He nudged the other model with his hip, raising his voice. "Unless they beg for it, of course."

"Did someone mention begging?" the blond asked, smiling. Nick recognized him as the one that Ashley had given a play spanking to at the cattle call. "It's my specialty."

Gabe bent to whisper in Nick's ear. "Markie will be going home with Ashley tonight, if I know Ashley, and he'll show up tomorrow with some lovely stripes on his arse. Fancies the cane, and Ashley's an expert with it. Probably ride him screaming 'til dawn."

Suddenly Nick wondered if he were making a terrible mistake.

* * * *

Modeling was made up of long boring stretches of time, Nick decided, except for the exciting bits. And the terrifying bits. After starting the week out positive that he was straight and never even having heard of some of the devices he'd seen modeled today, Nick had been held in another man's arms for the first time.

And enjoyed it.

But perhaps it was more because of the fiercely possessive look that ignited in Damian's eyes as he watched the two models twine themselves together. Ashley had been right; Nick's dark beauty was positively exotic next to the larger blond, whose tawny good looks and pale skin made a perfect foil.

Markie was taller and more muscular than Nick, who looked almost delicate in his arms. Both wore black leather chaps over a black thong to cover their genitals. Nick had been turned away from the camera while the blond man held him in position, gripping his upper arms, so that his face was mostly hidden, but his arse fully exposed except for the single strand of silk emerging from between the curved spheres.

Usually Damian had no trouble with these kinds of shoots—he'd done so many; but seeing Nick in various revealing outfits with other men's hands on his body was a horrible tease for him. He was careful to isolate Nick from the female models, and at least he managed to ensure that none of the males touched Nick's ass; that belonged to *him*.

He caught himself short, thinking furiously. Where had *that* come from? Was he really ready to make himself emotionally vulnerable again, let alone to someone ten years younger, and a boy who had never been part of the scene and didn't know the first thing about playing?

It was probably just passing curiosity on Nick's part, he reminded himself. Even if something did develop, he would not get emotionally involved with the younger man. The inevitable parting would be so much easier that way.

Ashley walked onto the set to make some slight adjustment and called ready to Damian when he finished and skipped out.

Damian looked up and growled; the blond had dug his fingers into Nick's luscious ass, pulling the slighter man against him so their crotches were ground together. Nick was twisting slightly, leaning his upper body away, his hands pushing at the other man's bare chest, as if he were an unwilling participant.

It was a great picture, so Damian shot it, his mind clearing as he worked. Nick was unwilling, with anyone but him. As if to provide confirmation, when Nick was released by the blond model, he staggered slightly in his haste to get away, and for the first time he wasn't filling out the soft cup that covered him.

Damian strode over to Nicholas and grabbed his arm to steady him, handing him a towel to cover himself for modesty. "Last shot for the day. Go get dressed."

Nick nodded in relief and whispered, "Sorry. I didn't know he was going to do that."

Damian nodded and gave him a little push in the direction of the changing room. "Get dressed. We'll talk later."

When Nick and Markie had left the room, Damian turned on his mischievous client, eyes blazing. "What the fuck did you do that for?"

"I didn't do anything, dear boy. I wasn't in the shot," Ashley said airily. He picked up a rattan cane and swished it through the air, making it whistle threateningly.

Damian caught his arm, stopping the larger man's swing. "You told that blond model to grab Nick's ass. Tell him to keep his hands off my—" He stopped short, shocked at what he was going to say.

"Don't worry, Ian. Despite looking the part of a top, Markie is strictly a bottom. And tonight he's going to feel *his* bottom, trust me," Ashley said, swinging the cane again. "It's about time you came to your senses."

"I came to—what are you talking about?" Damian asked angrily.

"He wants you. You want him. Nick's curious. Claim him before someone else does. He's an innocent, and he could easily get hurt. He'll never be a heavy player, but he's so beautiful, if you don't train him, he'll stumble into some seedy club and get torn to pieces," Ashley said seriously. "You have a responsibility to him."

"Why me?" Damian sighed, rubbing his hands through his sandy hair. "I don't want this."

"You're lying, and you're most generally an honest man," Ashley pointed out. "Look, Ian, you don't have to tell me a thing, although I'd love to hear every juicy detail, every moan and groan, with a full description of what his arse looks like nicely reddened, but you own him. Even worse, he's beginning to own you."

"That's what I'm afraid of," Damian agreed with a sudden rueful smile.

Ashley laid a hand on Damian's shoulder. "We like to think we're in charge, but we poor Tops are the real slaves. We have to do all the work and still deliver the sensations the

bottom is looking for, or they complain and we're drummed out of the life in disgrace," Ashley ended dramatically.

"Poor Ashley," Damian mocked.

The blond came into the studio in his street clothes and slipped his arm around Ashley's waist. "Ready, lover?"

"That's sir to you," Ashley said sternly, before giving Damian a big grin. "Duty calls. This arse will be nicely striped tomorrow for the cane shots."

"Keep them even," Damian teased.

"I always do," Ashley boasted, squeezing Markie's arse and then giving him a brisk swat. "Get going, you."

"Yes, sir," the blond said meekly, but he winked at Damian before he followed Ashley out.

Nick was standing there in his usual baggy jeans, his mouth agape as he watched the two men leave.

"Lock the door, Nick," Damian said.

Silently Nick went to do as he was told. He came back and waited quietly for Damian to say something more.

Damian pattered around, taking no evident notice of Nick's discomfiture. Finally he led the way to his office, saying "Follow me."

Nick complied, walking quietly behind the older man.

Although the office was designed in a spare and modern style, there was one old-fashioned, wooden straight chair. It always stood in the corner, and Nick had wondered what sentimental associations it held for Damian, because it clearly did not go with the clean, modern lines of the other furnishings.

Damian pulled the chair to the middle of the room and sat on it. He pointed at the floor and instinctively Nick dropped to his knees, awaiting whatever might come next. His heart started the trip-hammer beat again, and his breath came faster. He looked up at Damian anxiously.

"Eyes down, boy," Damian ordered.

Obediently, Nick dropped his eyes. His hands were trembling, and Damian said, "Clasp your hands behind your back."

Nick did so, hoping that would still them.

"What is it you want from me, Nicholas?"

Nick nearly looked up at the odd, almost pleading note in Damian's voice. "I'm not sure."

"Sir. You will address me as sir when we are alone like this," Damian instructed, the tremor in his voice gone now. "Last night I asked you some questions. Do you remember what they were?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said docilely enough, but his quickened breathing betrayed him.

"I want an answer to each one of them."

Nick drew a deep breath. If he was ever going to *know*, he would have to own his own desires, speak them out loud. And he trusted Damian; he might hurt him, but somehow Nick knew that no matter what he asked for, Damian would know how much he could bear.

"I don't know how hot that photograph made you, but I hope that it did. I do want to be naked in your presence, on my knees. I want to give you pleasure. I want you to use me

any way you like. I've dreamt about what it would feel like for you to kiss me.

"No one has ever bitten my nipples, so I don't know if I'd like it. I want you...." Nick gulped and breathed hard. "I want you to ... to ... take down my pants and warm my bottom. I think it would give me a thrill."

"Bravo, you remembered," Damian said slowly. "But you didn't answer the last one. Does it excite you to be under my power, to surrender your pleasure to me, to trust me to give you enjoyment when you deserve it, to be under my control?"

"Yes, sir." That answer was little more than a breath, but Damian had no trouble hearing it.

"What is the most populous city in the EU?" he demanded next.

"London," Nick answered, startled.

"How would that be for a safe word?" Damian asked.

"What's a safe word?"

Damian was shaken at how nearly he had decided to ignore Nick's obvious interest. Perhaps Ashley was right; Nick did need someone to take him in hand. The innocent kid didn't even know what a safe word was.

"Look at me, pet," Damian said, raising Nick's face with a finger under his chin. "Listen well now. You're telling me that you're ready to take a step into the world of kink, and you don't even know what a safe word is. If I'm doing something to you and it's too much for you, you give me your safe word, and I'll stop whatever we're doing to make sure you're okay. It's not safe to play with *anyone*, no matter how safe they

may appear to be when they're negotiating with you, without a safe word."

"If I spank you, you can moan and squirm and say no, and I won't stop until *I* decide that you've had enough, but if you say 'London' I will stop whatever I'm doing at once. Do you understand that?"

Nick nodded, his eyes shining with fear and excitement.

"Ask me for what you want," Damian said, releasing Nick's chin.

Nick squirmed but remained silent.

Damian stood up and walked to a window, looking out at the lights of London in the night. "If you don't learn to ask for what you want, you will not get it, pet."

"But it's embarrassing!" Nick exclaimed.

"Sir," Damian reminded him with a feral grin.

Nick suddenly wondered if he'd gone mad, kneeling on the floor with his hands clasped behind him in front of this man who had a body as sleek and muscular as a panther. A dangerous glitter in Damian's eyes reminded him of his lapse.

"Sir, it's embarrassing," Nick said earnestly.

"Then you don't want it enough yet," Damian said dismissively. "You may go."

Nick squirmed desperately; if he didn't ask now he might never get up the courage to come back, and he didn't want to end this flirtation with danger or whatever it was they were doing.

He took a deep breath, and blushing awfully, he managed to whisper, "Sir, would you please ... please ... spank me?"

"What have you done to deserve a spanking?" Damian teased.

Nick looked dismayed and confused. "I don't know, sir?"

"Perhaps I'll just spank you because I feel like it then," Damian mused. "I haven't yet given you any rules, but I would have hoped that you would know better than to let Markie grab your ass like that."

"I didn't know he was going to do it!" Nick protested.

"Then it'll have to be just because I feel like reddening your sweet little behind," Damian said silkily. He returned to the straight chair and sat down. "Stand up."

Nick scrambled awkwardly to his feet, embarrassed that his cock was again tenting his jeans in a most obvious way. Damian's lips twitched when he noticed it, but he preserved his severe expression.

He grabbed the loose waistband, sliding his fingers inside, pulling Nick closer to stand at his right.

"And now," Damian said, his husky voice drawling the words out slowly and deliberately, "I'm going to take your trousers down and put you over my knee and give you a real ass warming. Obviously you need a good spanking, and you're due one, my pet. Have you anything to say to that?"

"Please ... sir ... please..." Nick whispered incoherently. He was so excited that he was trembling, hoping that Damian meant what he said about taking down his pants. He was quite sure he would not be able to undo them himself.

Damian reached out and slowly unbuttoned the top button and slid the zipper down, relishing the little hiss of the metal. The pants fell to Nick's knees as soon as Damian let them go,

allowing Nick's cock to rise even higher, confined only by his plaid boxers.

"This spanking will be on bare skin, pet," Damian continued. He edged the waistband of Nick's boxers down a little, circling the small tattoo now exposed on the boy's hip with a gentle finger. "I wonder if I should have you count each swat? But this is your first spanking, and you might forget, and then I'd have to start from the beginning again. I think we'll wait on that. But I will tell you that I may give you ten swats, just enough to warm up those cute little buns nicely."

Nick thought he might pass out from anticipation as warm fingers inserted themselves into the elastic waistband of his boxers, sliding around his waist before pulling the boxers down to his knees. He was in an agony of embarrassment at the thought of Damian looking at his dripping cock.

"That won't last too much longer," Damian said mockingly. He pulled Nick over his knees by his arms, tipping him over to arrange him so that his ass was presented high in the air, with the boy's head down by the floor, his feet off the ground, so he could get no leverage to push himself up. He pinned Nick's left arm between their bodies and grabbed his right wrist, twisting it up behind him and holding it at the small of his back.

Nick squirmed, feeling both humiliated and excited. Damian had not touched his cock, but when he guided Nick's body down, he had trapped it between his muscular thighs. The rough denim rubbing his cock as Nick pumped his hips slightly was almost enough to push him over the edge.

He waited, not knowing quite what to expect, but suddenly feeling quite safe being held tightly in place by the older man.

"Remember, I'm just spanking you for my pleasure. And I will spank you whenever I like," Damian announced.

"Yes, sir," came a muffled voice from close to the floor.

Without any warning, Damian's hand cracked down on his arse, and Nick yelped in surprise.

"Ow!"

"Yes, spankings hurt, pet," Damian said calmly, surveying the lovely handprint he'd left on Nick's right cheek.

His hard hand swatted Nick's left cheek firmly, and he watched as the rounded flesh flattened for a moment, before bouncing back into shape. Damian felt his own cock stir. This was even more exciting than he had fantasized it would be. The sight of that incredibly beautiful body squirming over his lap, ass reddened with two symmetrical handprints, made him harder than he'd been when fantasizing about this. He must really remember to thank Nick for this exquisite pleasure.

His hand came down again, and Nick jumped, feeling his erection begin to fade. He was beginning to think that he really didn't like this nearly as much as he'd thought he would. He jumped as the fourth crisp swat landed.

"You're looking nicely warm around back," Damian observed. "I think I had better make sure to distribute the heat evenly over your entire seat or you might find it a bit sore to sit down tomorrow."

Nick was suddenly terrified that tomorrow his arse would still be flaming hot, as it was already, and everyone would know he had been spanked.

As if he'd read his mind, Damian said quietly, "Don't worry. No marks. No one will know, unless you tell them."

Why would he ever tell anyone about *this*, Nick wondered, as he squirmed under the next hard swat. Damian was working his hand all over his bottom, even in the crease at the top of his thighs where it really stung. Nick kicked reflexively as Damian swatted him on a particularly tender spot.

He hadn't thought he would be able to concentrate on counting, but he had, and when the tenth swat had been administered, he relaxed over Damian's knee, thankful it was over.

He yelped in shocked disbelief as Damian delivered two harder slaps, one on each cheek.

Damian laughed. "So you *were* counting, pet. I'll remember that. I did say it *may* be ten, remember?"

Nick relaxed as the hard hand that had punished him began to stroke his heated skin, soothing away the sting. He was aware of the throbbing warmth of his backside starting to flow toward the front, and his cock slowly filled again. Nick couldn't understand why, but now that the spanking was over, suddenly he was getting hard again. He shifted surreptitiously, trying to hide his arousal from Damian.

Damian tipped him off his lap, onto the floor, before pulling Nick up to sit on his knees, his sore bottom hanging

safely off his thigh. He wrapped his arms around the younger man.

"You did very well, pet. For a first spanking, you bore it well, and you didn't cry. Now, would you like a little reward?"

"Yes, please, sir," Nick said meekly, not altogether sure that his and Damian's ideas of what constituted a reward would be the same.

He stiffened and gasped when he suddenly felt Damian's hand on his rigid shaft. The hand was warm and rough, slightly calloused, but Damian stroked him as if he knew just what Nick wanted.

Nick spread his thighs helplessly, allowing Damian better access, moaning when a thumb swiped firmly over the head of his aching cock, sliding in the precum that dripped to the carpet.

Damian's hand sped up, and Nick's hips started to pump, thrusting into the fist that surrounded him. It had been a long time since a mere hand job thrilled him, but this one did. Whether it was because it was a man holding him or the spanking or a combination, Nick didn't know.

His climax hit him like a freight train, dwarfing his efforts at home when he couldn't sleep for thinking of Damian. He spurted high, catching Damian under the chin, although he never realized it, for his eyes were screwed shut with the almost painful pleasure as he cried out helplessly, feeling like a ragdoll in the strong hands holding him.

Damian smiled, watching his beautiful boy as he gave him the first orgasm. He decided that it would be one of many if the boy proved willing; Nick was incredibly sensitive and

responsive. Besides, there was something else about the young man that struck a chord deep within him. Nick's eyes were still closed when Damian wiped off his chin, sucking his fingers sensuously to enjoy the taste.

He held Nick, cuddling him through the aftershocks of his orgasm, smiling when the liquid eyes opened, glittering when Nick turned his eyes to him, full of wonder.

"That was fucking phenomenal, sir!" he said enthusiastically.

"I'm glad you enjoyed it, pet," Damian said, amused. "But now there's a little matter of my satisfaction."

"What do you want me to do, sir?" Nick asked uneasily.

Damian gave him a soft kiss on the mouth, and Nick leaned into him, parting his lips, but Damian kept his tongue to himself. Nick would have to earn that privilege.

"I want you to kneel. I'm going to jack off on you. I want to mark you, pet," Damian directed. While it amused him that Nick had actually marked him first without knowing it, it was only right that he stake his own claim.

Obediently, Nick slipped off his lap, kneeling on the floor.

"Take off your shirt."

Nick obeyed, allowing his shirt to slide off his arms to the floor.

"Hands behind you," Damian reminded him.

"Yes, sir," Nick said in his soft voice, clasping his hands behind him, resting them above his flaming arse.

Damian stood up and opened his pants, easing his erection out. It was such a relief that he sighed, and heard the

echoing sigh from his young protégé. Nick's eyes were fixed on the awesome tumescent organ.

"It's so big," he breathed.

Sensing the fear in his voice, Damian sought to reassure him. "We'll take it slow, Nicholas, and you have your safe word if I do anything that scares you."

"Yes, sir."

Damian kept his eyes on the beautiful face. Nick clasped his hands behind his back, kneeling with his torso naked, his pants pulled down to his knees, and his face upturned to watch.

It didn't take long; Damian stroked himself to a quick release, anxious to see his cream on Nick's body. When he came in three long spurts, the white fluid covered the boy's chest, glistening on his smooth skin. Nick gasped at the heat of Damian's release, leaving a burning trail as it slid down his chest.

"Very good, pet. Stay there for a moment." Damian went to the bathroom and wet a small towel, using it to mop himself off. He put himself back together and went back to Nick, wiping his body clean.

"Okay, baby, stand up," he said, pulling Nick to his feet. Now that the excitement that carried him was spent, Nick staggered. His knees hurt, and he'd stiffened up while on the floor.

Damian led him to the desk and pushed him down so his chest was flat against the surface. Nick knew his arse was exposed to Damian's view, and he trembled nervously. One hand on the small of his back held him in place.

"Nice and hot," Damian observed, placing his hand on Nick's flaming bottom. Suddenly Nick felt sure his face was equally red.

"There is much you need to learn about submission," Damian said. He took his hand away and said, "Stay right where I put you, pet."

Nick remained in position and relaxed.

"You like that, don't you? When I give you an order?" Damian asked. He picked up a tube of cooling gel and squeezed some onto his hand. Nick jumped at the chill when Damian smoothed it over his arse.

"Yes, sir," Nick admitted humbly.

"Do you know why?"

"Because you're so hot?" came the naïve answer.

It startled Damian into laughter. "Well, that isn't quite what I was thinking of, but thank you. You may stand up now."

Nick stood and his hands went to his pants, but he looked at Damian questioningly.

"Go ahead, get dressed," Damian encouraged him. "So was it what you hoped for?"

"I didn't like the spanking while it was happening; it hurt," Nick said. "But I liked how it felt afterwards. And I like when you tell me what to do."

"Have a seat, if you like. Not that one," Damian said, hastily moving the straight chair. "Preferably something more cushioned."

Nick sat on the couch and bounced up again. "I think I'll stand."

"We need to talk, Nicholas," Damian said. "If you got all you wanted and satisfied your curiosity, say so, and we'll never speak of this again." He waited but Nick slowly shook his head, while a satisfied smile spread over his face.

"I don't think so," Nick said. "I want more."

"Then we need to have some rules. We'll set them up together as we go along, and see how they work for us, okay?" Damian sat behind his desk. "I like to play. All those toys of Ashley's out there, I've worn every one of them, used every one of them, had them used on me. I'll want to take you deeper into this, and I hope you'll start to want more when I show you different things.

"Right now, some of those implements scare you. We'll be trying them all, and if you truly don't enjoy something, we won't do it again. Just because other people like something doesn't mean you will. Understand?"

Nick nodded. "Yes, sir."

"You can stop calling me sir. I only require that when we're in a scene. Do you want to continue working for me?"

"Well, yeah, sir, Damian, I mean," Nick answered in honest bewilderment. "I still have to work my way through school."

"Very well. I won't embarrass you in front of clients or the other models, but I'm probably going to surprise you; that's a part of this. And I may require your submission in places and at times that you're not expecting. If I push you too hard, your safe word is...."

"London," Nick said promptly.

"Good. I think we'll get along just fine," Damian said, privately wondering where this was going to lead. "Now you'd

better get off home. We have a full day of shooting tomorrow, and I have work to do yet."

"Yes, sir," Nick said submissively. "And thank you."

"You're very welcome," Damian said kindly. He waited until he heard the outer door close and went to lock it. He turned off the light in his office so Nick wouldn't see him if he looked up, and then he waited.

The younger man did look up, and Damian took a quick step backward, not wanting to be seen. Nick turned and started to jog to the tube station. Suddenly he gave an exuberant leap, jumping up to tap a hanging sign in triumph. Then his hands went to his rump, giving himself a comforting rub.

Damian laughed softly. Ashley's little trick that afternoon had alerted him to the fact that he was going to have to be very careful. His own fierce possessiveness when the blond model had grabbed Nick and pulled him close told him that some part of him had already laid claim to Nick, probably right at the moment of that first swat he'd aimed at the boy to keep him still. Something had sparked a fire deep inside, when for so long Damian had remained resistant to arousal, and now he wanted to keep the young man by him always.

He sighed. It was unlikely that Nick could ever love an old fart like him, even though he was only in his early thirties; Nick was young, he had his whole life ahead of him. He was curious and wanted to experiment. Damian reminded himself to keep his heart under wraps; this could be a very nice liaison for a while, and then when Nick had learned all he

needed to know about himself, he would move on and Damian would no doubt be in for another dry spell.

Driving home, Damian found himself wondering what Nick was studying and why he'd never asked before. He'd have to find out.

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Chapter Five

Nick was exhausted emotionally and physically when he arrived at his flat. He brushed his teeth hastily and fell into bed, wincing as his arse made contact with the lumpy mattress. He turned onto his stomach.

For the first time in a week, he was deeply asleep in seconds, never waking until the alarm went off the next morning.

He balanced precariously on the edge of the tub, trying to see what his arse looked like in the medicine-cabinet mirror. Despite what Damian said, he was afraid that it would still be as red as a signpost and everyone would know. He wished that he'd thought to look at it the previous evening, but he'd just been so tired.

Damian was right: not a mark. His skin was the same shade as usual. Nick was almost disappointed when he took his cold shower. Experimentally he aimed his bath brush at his arse, giving himself a swat. "Ow!"

He'd forgotten that it hurt and didn't do a thing for him to swat himself. "Why the fuck do I want to do this again?" he grumbled, and then he hoped desperately that he hadn't left a mark on his own. He checked and relaxed when he found only a faintly pink area, knowing that it would fade by the time he got to work.

Hitting himself didn't work at all. He thought it must be something connected to Damian. When his handsome boss gave an order, it sent a thrill throughout Nick's body, and he

hastened to obey. There was something unbelievably exciting about being on his knees in front of Damian. He would have to ask why it was.

* * * *

Ashley was amused to see that some of Nick's brashness was back, although he was no longer sullen. In fact, he seemed to be glowing with satisfaction, like a cat who'd gotten into the cream, and the dark circles under his eyes were gone. So he could only suspect that Damian must have made some kind of move on him last night.

Ashley looked forward to coaxing details out of Damian but first he hovered in the doorway of the makeup room, wanting to see Nick's reaction to the decorations he had left on Markie's arse last night before fucking him to their mutual satisfaction.

Gabe seemed to catch on to what Ashley was up to, and he turned the makeup chair Nick sat in to give him a good view when Markie dropped his pants. Nick paled when he saw the six evenly spaced stripes of a purplish hue.

Markie looked back over his shoulder and wiggled his arse. "Ask me if I got lucky last night?" he said provocatively.

"I don't need to ask, you lucky dog," Gabe said. "You look like a happy man."

"I am." Markie sighed, and he winced as he sat on a towel in the other chair.

Ashley walked away, laughing quietly to himself.

Damian was in the studio waiting for the models to be readied when Ashley came in still chuckling. "What did you do now, Ash?"

"Nothing at all. I just ... er, watched when Markie dropped his drawers and gave Nick an eyeful," he laughed.

"How many?" Damian asked with a wry smile.

"Six of the best. How many did you give Nick?" Ashley asked irrepressibly.

"If I had, I wouldn't tell you, and if I hadn't, I would lie," Damian said.

"You are so frustrating," Ashley complained. "I tell you about all my conquests, while you've bored me to tears these last five years. At last you get—"

"Shut it!" Damian ordered. Ashley swung around to see Nick come in, clutching a towel around his waist, following Markie, who was naked and strutting proudly, showing off his marked bottom to the shocked young man.

Ashley busied himself dressing Markie in a mask and ball gag. He led the blond to a spanking bench, securing his ankles and bending him over to cuff his hands to the front legs.

He found a pair of tight, low-cut leather pants and handed them to Nick. "Put those on, pet, will you?" His practiced eyes saw the little flinch Nick gave, and he smirked with satisfaction.

Damian called out, "You weren't very even with your spacing, Ashley. One of the stripes is a little too close."

His pride stung, Ashley turned around, sulking. "Markie jumped at the last minute. It wasn't my fault." He came to stand by Damian's shoulder, behind the camera.

"I'm warning you, Ashley: no tricks," Damian said with quiet menace.

Ashley shivered, remembering that Damian, for all he was a bit shorter, was by far still the more powerful, and he could force Ashley to submit if he made him angry.

"I didn't do anything."

"You called him pet. You don't call boys 'pet'; you were fishing. Stop it. I won't have him scared or embarrassed," Damian said firmly but quietly. "If you do that again, I won't shoot your catalog."

Ashley squirmed but he knew Damian was right, and he honestly liked Nick. He didn't really want to humiliate or hurt him. Besides, all that could safely be left to Damian if he was already taking Nick in hand.

"Just tell me this: are you claiming him?" Ashley asked seriously.

Damian drew in a huge breath. "Yes," he said, realizing he was committing himself.

"Good," Ashley said. "I really don't want to see him get hurt. Well, you know what I mean."

"I know," Damian said with a slight smile.

Ashley smiled in relief. "I won't tease your boy, but *you* are fair game."

"Just not when he's around. Deal?"

"Deal."

Nick emerged from the bathroom, the light reflecting off the tight leather pants creating a burnished gleam on his thighs as he walked. He looked at Damian. "Is this okay?"

"Very okay," Damian answered, catching his breath. "Ever handle a cane before?"

"No, I've never touched one," Nick said, stretching his hand out to touch it with anxious fascination.

"Look here, Nicholas, I need you to hold this cane and be standing here in the shot," Ashley said. "I want it to look like you've just laid these stripes on Markie's arse and you're giving him a right hiding."

Nick took the cane awkwardly, handling it as if it were a snake that might bite him.

"Nicholas!" Damian said. "You're supposed to look as if you're a Dom, so straighten up and think about the power you wield over this man who is bigger than you, but is bent over begging for you to punish him. It's like acting. You don't have to actually hit him. In fact, I'm quite sure that everyone here would vastly prefer that you didn't. Just pretend he's made you angry or betrayed you, and you're quite justified in punishing him."

"I'll do my best." Nick dragged in a deep breath and took up a commanding stance. When Ashley had showed him how to hold the cane, he said, "I'm ready."

Damian snapped some shots, but he wasn't satisfied. He was shooting digital, instead of Polaroids, trying to get his idea to work, but something wasn't gelling. Ashley remained silent. He would have been satisfied with the first shot, but he respected Damian's expertise. That's why he collected

Damian's work: when it was right, it wasn't merely a beautiful picture; the image sent a visceral charge through viewers, and that intensity was what Ashley was after for this catalog.

"This isn't working," Damian said. He was scowling at the monitor.

"Can I see it?" Nick said.

"Sure, knock yourself out," Damian said in surprise. Nick rarely spoke up like that during a shoot and he wondered if their little encounter had made him feel a bit more sure of himself.

Nick walked to the monitor, and Damian growled softly as he noticed Markie watching the roll of his buttocks in the tight leather pants, although the young man was completely oblivious of both he and Ashley.

"So what do you think?" Damian asked when Nick had studied the image.

"Well, if you don't mind my saying so...." Nick hesitated.

"I wouldn't have asked if I did," Damian said sardonically.

"I think it would be more effective if I weren't in it, for a start. I'm wearing what he is, practically. I think you should use Ashley's arm, dressed as he is, but only show his hand, holding the cane. And if you put a rim light there," Nick pointed, "it would highlight Markie's, um, ars—uh, backside, uh—"

"His ass. We get it. Go on," Damian interrupted as Nick floundered around, flustered for a moment.

"It would provide separation from the shadows in the background," Nick finished.

Damian studied the frame and turned to look at the set. "I'd have to cut a hole in the backdrop."

"Not if you had a small slave," Nick pointed out.

Ashley was looking back and forth between them as if at a tennis match, his mouth hanging open, but at that comment, he burst into laughter. "Would that small slave be you, Nicholas?"

Nick flushed angrily, but Damian ignored the interjection. "That's exactly what this needs. Nick, you know where I keep the small lights?"

Nick nodded, already moving. He thrust the cane into Ashley's hand as he passed him, causing the older man to laugh even harder.

"So now I'm to be a model as well?" he asked. "What shall I wear?"

Nick called back over his shoulder, "Just what you have on. Markie is naked, but your dark suit and white shirt will lend a contrast that should give it—"

"Erotic tension," Damian finished for him. He dragged Ashley to the set. "If you stand just here, most of you will be out of frame. We'll see only your arm. I'll add a spot so that your hand, the cane, and the stripes on Markie's ass are the focus of the shot, highlighting the product and the desired end result."

Loving the pun, Ashley started laughing again, while allowing Damian to push him into position. "Fancy that. I'm going to be featured in my own catalog, after all these years!"

"Think of it as a cameo, like Hitchcock," Damian suggested.

Nick carried the small light onto the set, carefully positioning it where Markie's legs would hide it, making Damian consider the practicality of always having his assistant dressed that way while he worked.

"Get a C-stand, Nick," Damian called out, uncoiling the cord on another small light with barn doors. Together they set up the spot and tested to make sure the slave light went off at the same time as the other lights.

Nick stood behind Damian as he verbally guided Ashley into the proper position. Damian was acutely aware of the younger man's scent and warmth, but his attention was focused mostly on his shot. He clicked the shutter and the image came up briefly on the screen on the camera. In that split second, Damian saw that he'd captured what he'd envisioned.

"Okay, Ashley, stay right where you are. Nicholas, the other camera!"

Damian started shooting, directing Ashley's arm to be angled several different ways before he let out a satisfied sigh. "Got it."

Ashley let his arm down and sighed with relief. The way he'd had to stand, with his body out of the shot but leaning forward so that his arm was in the frame, had strained his back a bit. Suddenly he had a whole different slant on how painful it could be to model. "You all right, Markie?"

"Mmmph," the blond said around the ball gag.

"I'll take that to mean *'I'd like to get up off this bench, if I could'*," Ashley said sympathetically. "Let me just check with Damian. Oi, Ian! Can I let Markie up?"

"Sure," Damian said. "We'll get set up for the next shot." He turned to look at Nick, who was standing slightly behind him and to the right. "Can you stay after work for a bit?"

Nick nodded, his lips parted and stars in his eyes.

* * * *

The models were gone, Gabe was packing up, and Ashley was speaking with Damian when Nick emerged from the bathroom, clad once again in his own clothes. He found some busy work to do, wanting to look occupied with something rather than slaving for Damian's attention when Ashley went to leave.

Ashley kept going to the door and coming back to say one last thing to Damian, but finally he made it out the door, holding it open for Gabe to pass through.

"Everyone gone?" Damian asked.

"I'll check." Nick made a sweep of all the rooms and came back to report. "All clear."

"Good. Lock the door. Go to my office and wait for me, pet."

"Yes, sir," Nick said quietly, but his heart started pounding and his breath came quicker with anticipation. He was standing in the middle of the room staring at the wooden chair when Damian came in and closed the door behind him. He was holding a black velvet bag, which he set on the desk.

"Are you mine, pet? Do you belong to me?"

Nick looked a little alarmed, but he ventured an answer. "Yes, sir?"

Damian chuckled. "You don't sound very sure. Let me put it this way: do you want to do any of this with anyone else?"

"No, sir," Nick breathed.

"Strip!"

Nick started panting at the command thrown at him in the husky voice. He pulled his clothing off hastily, as if this opportunity might never come again, throwing each item onto the couch behind him.

"Kneel."

Nick dropped to his knees, automatically clasping his hands behind his back and lowering his eyes, although he wanted to watch Damian. The devilish smile when the older man had ordered him to strip was very arousing, and yet very frightening. Nick wasn't sure whether it was the arousal or fear that got him going the most.

His cock slowly filled out, and he tingled with desire as he knelt. The fact that he was completely bare in front of Damian, who was fully clothed, sent a thrill to his groin and his stomach fluttered with anxiety.

"Look at me," Damian said. He sat on the edge of his desk, swinging one foot. "What are you studying at school?"

"Um, art, sculpture," Nick answered, surprised.

"What year are you in?"

"Senior. I graduate this summer," Nick said, with a little shiver. He didn't know exactly how things would go after that; he would need to keep this job, or at any rate, a job until he figured out how to sell his work. That was something they didn't teach you at uni.

"I wondered. That lighting idea of yours today, that must have been your training in form, light, and shadow kicking in. The shadows were very sculptural with that extra light. I expect it'll be a great shot." Damian's eyes raked over the boy kneeling naked in front of him. He had more questions, but he decided to inspect his new acquisition at the same time. *Always multitask when you can*, he thought.

He got up and slowly circled Nick. Beautiful skin, flawless really, smooth and warm and altogether delectable. Amazing ass, round, firm, pert; begging to be spanked. Every outline and angle, perfectly formed and elegantly refined. Nick's hair was thick and shiny, and from here Damian could see that he barely needed to shave. His chest must be naturally hairless.

"Will you be coming in tomorrow?" Damian asked.

"I have school tomorrow. It's one of my full days," Nick responded.

"Sir," Damian reminded him. He decided there and then that he would schedule most of the work with the female models for days when Nick wasn't there. He'd already noticed the Bettie Paige lookalike giving his assistant the onceover.

"Sir."

"Have you been keeping up with your homework?"

"Um, actually, I have an assignment due tomorrow, sir. A paper on Picasso," Nick muttered.

"Then you should get to it," Damian said briskly.

"You mean, we're not going to...." Nick faltered.

"I'm not going to spank you, if that's what you mean. But I am going to tell you exactly what you're going to do because I know how you like it when I give you an order. Right, pet?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said breathlessly.

"Stand up. Hands clasped behind your head."

Nick rocked his weight back and rose smoothly.

Damian looked at him in surprise. "Very nice. Did you practice that?"

"Um, yes," Nick blushed, shuffling from foot to foot in embarrassment. "I thought you might not like it if I staggered around when I got up."

"Initiative. I like a little of that in a sub. Just not too much. Head up. Close your eyes."

Nick jumped as he felt Damian's hands stroke the length of his thighs. He shuddered as he felt warm breath on his cock, wondering if Damian was kneeling in front of him! And then Damian's hands, handling him, fastening something onto him. Nick's cock was hardening until he felt a tug on his balls; it was uncomfortable but not really painful, although it had the effect of making his erection wilt.

Damian's hands gave him one last pat and he said, "Open your eyes, pet."

Nick did so, staring at Damian for a moment before dropping his head to look down at himself. His cock was barely visible for all the black leather and silver buckles strapped around him and he felt a stirring at his groin. A moment later he groaned as his hardening member was constricted by the leather.

"It's a cock cage," Damian announced with satisfaction. "You're not to come until I permit you, pet. This will keep your mind on your studies and off your dick." He lifted Nick's

trussed penis and stroked his balls, allowing Nick to see that there was a strap dividing and surrounding them as well.

Damian's breath was hot in Nick's ear. "Remember how you enjoy it when I give you an order?"

"Yes, sir," Nick gasped.

"And that you have agreed to submit yourself to me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Go do your homework. I'll see you Friday." Damian turned and sat behind his desk, swinging his feet up onto it. "Scene over. You may go."

"Sir!" Nick exclaimed, outraged. "I have to wear this until then?"

"I believe I warned you that you weren't always going to like everything I require of you, or didn't I?" Damian asked mildly. He was enjoying the sight of his young assistant, indignantly taking him to task, having completely forgotten he was standing there naked, with his hands behind his head.

"No, you didn't," Nick gritted between clenched teeth.

"Well, that's the deal. I might tell you to bend over or I might tell you to wash the dishes," Damian smirked.

Nick dropped his hands and turned to pick up his clothing, while Damian ogled his round buttocks. "What if this thing causes major significant damage?" Nick grouched as he dressed.

He straightened up and squeaked in alarm as Damian swung his feet off the desk and lunged at him. The man was unbelievably fast and Nick didn't have time to react before Damian's forearm pinned him against the wall.

"I would never do anything to harm you permanently, Nicholas," Damian said, his eyes intense and commanding. "I didn't even lock it. If it causes you pain, you may phone me and I may, *may*, allow you to take it off. If you can't reach me and you're in dire straits, you take it off yourself and explain it to me later. You have a brain; use it. What I expect from you, however, is that you will control yourself. I'm trying to make that order easier for you. You will not come until I allow it. Understood?"

"Y—yes, sir," Nick squeaked. He could barely breathe with Damian's arm across his chest and yet the sensation of being pinned, not being able to free himself, was unbearably erotic. He could feel his cock pushing at the cage, but the constriction kept him from getting hard.

"Fine." Damian dipped his head to take Nick's mouth for the first time and thrilled to feel the boy submit eagerly to him before he released him. Nick's eyes were dazed and his lips swollen and wet, parted as he tried to catch his breath.

"Go home and do your homework. Attend your classes and pay attention. Those are my orders. Go!" Damian stepped back, watching the boy's hands search blindly for the wall to steady himself.

"Yes, sir," Nick muttered and ran for it.

Damian heard the outer door close quietly and sat at his desk for a quiet laugh. Only one week and Nick's manners had improved immeasurably already.

* * * *

That evening was torture for Nick. He kept starting to get hard whenever he thought of kneeling naked in front of Damian while the other man inspected him. The sensation of firm hands stroking his thighs lingered but each time he had an erotic thought, the discomfort to his dick had the effect of refocusing his mind.

Finally, he gave up thinking about Damian at all and applied himself to his homework. He was surprised at how quickly his paper was written. He proofread it, but he'd made remarkably few errors. He printed it out and put it in a report holder.

The moment he was finished, thoughts of Damian's hands on his cock came surging back. "Ow, fuck, ow," he complained out loud.

He decided to go to bed early, hoping his usual dreams weren't going to make the night a misery. In fact, he did have to get up several times to piss, but that seemed to relieve the pressure a bit and he was able to get back to sleep.

Why do I want to do this again? he wondered, but the thrill of not knowing what Damian would do next was too alluring to resist.

Once at school, he found it easier to concentrate in his lectures, but trips to the restroom made him nervous. Obviously he couldn't use a urinal out in the open with that device strapped to his dick, so he had to use a stall.

The cage made him conscious of his penis all the time, the way it felt when his trousers brushed over it while walking frustrated him. He couldn't remember speaking to anyone at

school; his thoughts were firmly fixed on the symbol of his submission to Damian and his own cock.

By the time he arrived home, Nick was so tired, he didn't even eat; he simply went to bed.

* * * *

Friday morning, Nick was waiting for Damian outside the locked door, fuming and pacing.

"Take this fucking thing off me!" he demanded.

"Good morning to you too, Nick," Damian said mildly. He unlocked the door without haste and went to his office, Nick dogging his every footstep.

"Did you—?"

"I didn't touch it or myself. Take it off right now!" Nick said angrily.

Damian sat down and motioned Nick closer. "We're going to have to have a talk about topping from the bottom. I don't allow that, pet."

"Yes, sir," Nick gritted, without knowing what Damian was talking about. He sighed with relief as Damian unbuckled him and rubbed at his limp organ.

Damian inspected him; a few reddened areas, but no damage. "If it bothered you that much, why didn't you just take it off?"

"You said not to," Nick said, as if that was self-evident.

Damian nodded. "I'm very proud of you. You did well."

Nick's lips curved in a tremulous smile. "Thank you, sir."

"Go make me a coffee," Damian said, and gave him a little swat.

Nick's eyes darkened with desire but he turned obediently and made for the door.

* * * *

Ashley arrived with a young man in tow, with tufty dark hair and amazing green eyes. His voice was noticeably colder as he ordered, "Make yourself useful, Derek."

"Sure," the young man said agreeably, although his gaze was resentful. "How's it hanging, Damian?" he asked the photographer with a familiarity that stunned Nick and also made him jealous.

Then Derek came up to Nick and asked, "Are you one of the models?"

"No, I'm just the assistant, but they asked me to model a couple of things for this catalog," Nick answered modestly, wondering if he would ever be able to talk to Damian with such familiarity. "My name is Nick Sayers."

"Oh, the assistant. You have my old job. I'm Derek Stearns. Boy, you wouldn't catch me dead wearing any of that gear," Derek declared, glancing over his shoulder to see if Ashley was within earshot. "Eyeball those chicks. Man, they're tough."

"You fancy the birds then?"

"Not really. I'm more of a man's man, if you get my drift."

"You're an American, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Came over to get some life experiences before I buckle down to real work. I've traveled all over Europe; it's a real lark over here. Hey, doesn't this stuff of Ashley's give you the willies?" Derek asked curiously.

"No, not at all," Nick lied boldly.

"Well, better you than me then," Derek shrugged. "Want me to do that?"

"No, I know how Damian likes his coffee, but you could go downstairs to get the pastries, and Ashley usually takes a latté," Nick suggested.

"Yeah, I know. Okay, where do I go and how many do I get of what?" Derek asked.

Nick told him and handed over some money. After Derek left, Ashley came into the kitchen and said, "I hope you don't mind wearing something a little unusual today, Nick. I had it made just for you. I'm starting a new line, and I think it'll be a hit."

Damian strolled in and said, "I think perhaps you should have consulted me first on that, Ashley."

Ashley nodded vigorously. "You're right, but I was sure you'd agree. I had this one made especially for Nicholas, in his color."

He led the other two men to a carton he'd dumped in the studio. He took out a red leather box, opening it reverently.

Nick peered in to see a supple red leather collar. It didn't look like a dog collar, as most of them did. This one was designed to lie flat at the base of the neck.

Ashley was speaking to Damian. "I find that a collar is mostly a symbolic accessory; depending on one's tastes, it doesn't need to withstand much force, such as a dog tugging at his leash. I thought for the discriminating master, one who wishes to enhance the beauty of their sub, rather than yank him around, this would be eminently desirable."

Ashley lifted the collar out of the box. "Nicholas, turn around, please."

He buckled the collar onto the boy, smoothing it into place. The front of the collar formed a "V" that nestled in the little hollow at the base of Nick's throat.

Nick reached up to touch the soft leather with one slender finger, his eyes fixed on Damian's.

Ashley smiled with delight. "You look lovely in that, Nick. Look at yourself." He drew the younger man into the makeup room to look in the mirror. It took Nick's breath away to see how he looked with the deep red of the collar next to his glowing skin.

"Nicholas, follow me," Damian commanded tersely.

Apprehensively, Nick followed Damian to his office and stood, shifting from one foot to the other.

Damian said sternly, "You've not earned that collar, not from me. You may wear it for the shot, but it's not yours, understand?" He unbuckled the collar and took it off, laying it carefully on his desk.

"Of course," Nick burst out, not taking Damian's meaning at all. "None of this stuff is mine. I wouldn't steal anything!"

Damian laughed, his nerves a bit unsettled by the sight of his beautiful boy with the collar that he longed to make permanent. "I'm glad you realize that but I didn't really think you would steal it." In order to divert Nick from his own overreaction to the symbolic scrap of leather, he continued. "I like to see my sub in jewelry, and you don't wear any. So let's try these on for size. Unbutton your shirt."

Nick's fingers flew to undo his buttons, pulling the turquoise striped shirt open. Damian walked over to him and pointed to the floor. Nick dropped to his knees uneasily, aware that although the office door was closed it was unlocked.

"Close your eyes, pet."

Nick did so and gasped as warm fingertips circled his nipples. He trembled as he felt the delicate caress make his nipples harden.

"Very responsive, my pet," Damian crooned softly. He pulled gently at the dark nubs held between thumb and forefinger, watching Nick's head fall back and his mouth open.

Nick suppressed a squeak as Damian began to pinch and twist his nipples, the little frisson of pain skittering along on the edge of his nerves, making his cock stand up and take notice. Blood rushed to his nipples and his groin, setting him awash in a sea of pleasure.

Damian tugged firmly on the dark peaks, deciding that they were as hard as they were going to get. He was extremely tempted to kneel in front of Nick and take them in his mouth, to see if they tasted as sweet as they looked, but he had a different plan.

Nick shook as Damian's hands left him and he swayed forward, as if searching for the sensuous touch that kept him so on edge. Then he yelped quietly when he felt one nipple pulled and captured in something cold that pinched. He almost opened his eyes, but remembered in time that he was to obey Damian. The older man hadn't said that he might

open his eyes, and he didn't want to get a spanking with everyone just outside the door where they could hear.

A pinch at his other nipple, and Nick felt something cool brush his ribs.

"Open your eyes, pet," Damian said, sounding extremely pleased with himself.

Nick did so and looked down to see two small silver clamps glittering on his chest, with the chain that linked them swinging slightly between his nipples, brushing against his torso. "What is it, sir?"

"Nipple clamps," Damian said with a wicked grin. "We're shooting them today. I didn't think you'd want Ashley or Gabe to put them on you."

Nick shuddered in horror. "No, I wouldn't. Thank you, sir."

"That's a good pet. You must remember to thank me for whatever I give you: pain, pleasure, or both," Damian said, holding Nick's chin, caressing his jaw with his long, slender fingers. "How does it feel?"

"Pinched just at first. Now it's kind of numb," Nick answered after a moment.

"It will hurt a great deal more when they come off, understand?" Damian said. He was pleased with the look of apprehension that sprang into Nick's eyes. "But you will be able to bear it. In fact, I'm sure you'll enjoy what I have planned for you. Now put your shirt back on. It'll be a while before we get to this shot."

Nick buttoned his shirt and remained on his knees, waiting for Damian to release him.

"You may go, pet. Scene over."

A Strong Hand
by Catt Ford

"Thank you, sir," Nick said, and got to his feet.

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Chapter Six

Nick went to the makeup chair, refusing to take his shirt off. "Damian's orders," he explained to Gabe, who smiled knowingly and proceeded to powder the shine off the young man's face.

"Well, we mustn't disobey *him*, must we?" Gabe teased.

"He's the photographer," Nick said, hoping not to betray his uneasiness.

By the time Damian was ready for him, only he and two blond males were still in the studio, with Nick to be sandwiched between them. The other two men wore only leather pants, and Nick couldn't drag his fascinated gaze from their nipples. They wore clamps like his, and he wondered if their nipples were throbbing like his, keeping time to his pulse.

He was given black leather pants to wear and came out to the set barefoot with his shirt hanging over them, thankful that Ashley had ordered the female models to bugger off. They'd wanted to stay and watch, but Ashley had teasingly claimed that they were trying to hold him up for a higher fee.

Damian positioned the three men in the set, with a blond model standing to either side of Nick. He adjusted the lighting, so that the lower half of their bodies fell into shadow, with just a tantalizing hint of shine reflecting off the leather.

He caught Nick's gaze, and in a measured tone commanded, "Take off your shirt, Nicholas."

It was his Dom voice, and Nick shivered with the illicit thrill of obeying his orders in front of other people who didn't know. "Yes, sir," he said huskily. He took off his shirt, expecting gasps of surprise, but the other two models were completely blasé about the clamps on his chest.

"All right, Markie, I want you to grab Nick's hair and pull his head back, so that only the lower half of his face is in the light. Right, like that. And you, Craig, grab Nick's wrist and hold it right about there."

Damian guided the other model to hold Nick's arm back and slightly away from his body. "Now Markie, when I tell you, reach over and take the right clamp off. Let your hand leave the shot very slowly. I'm shooting film with a motor drive in tandem with the digital so that I can catch the exact moment I'm after. Understand?"

All three nodded their understanding. Nick felt Markie's fingers thread through his hair, getting a firm grip.

Damian looked through the viewfinder. "Craig, can you hang onto Nick's other hand as well, so he looks trapped?"

"Sure thing," the blond called out cheerfully.

Nick did feel trapped, and so did his cock as it started to grow under the tight leather. He couldn't see beyond the lights, but he knew that Damian and Ashley were looking directly at him, and he bit his lower lip nervously.

"Don't you *dare* bite your lip, Nicholas!"

Nick released his lip and licked it nervously.

"Good, and action," Damian directed.

Nick's body jerked when Markie's hand landed on his stomach, sweeping smoothly up his torso until his fingers

found the clamp. His head was pulled back, and he swallowed hard. Then Markie released the clamp and the combination of a rush of pain along with the knowledge that Damian was watching flooded Nick's senses. He cried out as the explosion of blood returning to his nipple sent shockwaves throughout his body, and his cock got hard enough that he was afraid he might come right there, in front of everyone.

Damian stopped shooting when Nick was sagging limply in Markie's arms.

Ashley exclaimed, "That was brilliant! Fucking brilliant!"

"Let's see if I caught what I wanted. Otherwise we have to do it all over again," Damian said wryly.

The blond models released Nick, Markie patting him on the back as he staggered. "First time with those?"

"Yeah," Nick admitted, although he had the impulse to lie and imply that this was nothing new for him.

"Don't worry; you'll soon be a pro like me," Markie assured him before swaggering off to stand beside Ashley to look at the monitor.

That only made Nick writhe even more; was everybody in on what was happening to him? What made them think he wasn't merely modeling this shit?

Nick walked over to stand behind Damian, feeling incredibly self-conscious as the chain swung from the clamp still attached to his other nipple, bumping the loose one against his body as he walked. He wanted to remove the remaining clamp, but he was afraid of yelping again in front of everyone.

He watched the monitor as Damian set up the series of digital shots to flip through automatically like a little movie. When Markie pulled his head back, Nick saw how the light fell mainly on his neck and chest, leaving his face in shadow.

Damian stopped the slide show at the exact image he'd been trying to capture. "That's it. That's what I wanted."

"Brilliant," Ashley breathed in an aroused voice.

Nick stared at himself, every muscle standing out in sharp relief under smooth skin as his body arched and strained against the hands that imprisoned him. His mouth was open, contorted in pain and pleasure. His hands were in shadow, but you could see just enough detail to know that he was being restrained.

Markie's hand cast a dark shadow over his chest while a pinpoint of light danced on the metal of the clamp.

"It's that moment, that exact moment when the sub knows who controls his body," Ashley gloated. "This is going to be the best catalog ever!" Gleefully, he slapped Markie's arse in congratulation, and the blond jumped and yelped, his stripes throbbing anew under the assault. Then Ashley grabbed Nick and hugged him. Nick squeaked as his clamped nipple was crushed to Ashley's chest.

"Sorry, lad," Ashley said, with a grin and an evil twinkle in his eye. "Forgot about that."

Nick noticed that Derek was gazing at him with awed respect, but he turned pleading eyes to Damian. How the fuck was he going to get this other one off? He couldn't do it in front of everyone, especially after they had all seen his reaction, captured forever on film.

Damian came to the rescue. "Come with me, Nick."

Nick heard a couple of snickers behind his back, but he was too desperate to get the damn thing taken off to care whether they were laughing at him. He hurried after Damian, praying that the older man wasn't going to send him home with this new torture device still affixed to him.

Damian led them to his office and closed the door. "Come here, Nick," he said kindly.

He turned Nick around and backed the boy up against his chest, clamping him with one arm around his waist, pinning both his arms to his side. "You know this will hurt."

Nick nodded. He arched and yipped when Damian released the second clamp, grateful for the other man's warmth against his back. Damian tossed the clamps onto his desk with a clatter and soothingly massaged both reddened nubs.

Nick relaxed against him, feeling a solid warmth nudging his buttocks. Had Damian been turned on by watching? His own cock was pulsing in time to the throb in his nipples, and he was beginning to enjoy the sensation of Damian's fingers rubbing him.

A husky whisper assured him. "We'll play later, babe. Have to get back to work now."

With one last caress, Damian pushed Nick gently away from him, chuckling quietly at the lust-glazed look on his face. "Pull yourself together and come out when you're ready. We have one more shot for today."

He bent to swipe at one reddened nipple with his tongue before he walked out, and Nick's hand went right to his cock, rubbing himself through the leather trousers.

The door opened, and he jumped, snatching his hand away, fearful of being caught.

"Don't come until I permit you," Damian ordered, and he vanished.

* * * *

The studio was quiet at last. Nick sat at the table in the kitchen, feeling a bit limp. He'd worn the cage for more than twenty-four hours, which had kept him from having an erection, only to be followed by a day of heightened arousal and dread, where he'd been kept hard more or less continuously.

He was hungry. He was tired. And he was horny as fuck.

Damian came out of the office, glancing at his assistant. "You look tired. Do you want to go home?"

"What are my choices?" Nick asked. "If I go home can I jerk off?"

Damian laughed. "If you like. Or I could do it for you."

Nick sat up, looking a bit more alert. "Would you?"

"Not right off the bat," Damian teased. "I'm hungry. Feel like Indian takeout?"

"Yeah," Nick agreed eagerly. "Want me to go round and collect it?"

"No, we'll have them deliver. I'd like to talk to you anyway." Damian turned and walked into his office. After a moment, he stuck his head out. "Well?"

"You didn't say to follow you," Nick pointed out, hurrying to join his boss.

Damian rolled his eyes. "Unless I call a scene, you can just act regular, Nick." He shuffled the menus in the drawer and pulled one out, picking up the phone to place his order. Then he leaned back, stretching both arms over his head. "What's bothering you?"

"You're—you're my boss," Nick said uneasily, "And also, my ... my ... what are you?"

Damian smiled compassionately. "I see your problem. We've switched gears a little too fast. But I didn't want to just lay down a set of rules all at once. However, we'll have a few now. First of all, as your boss, I can ask you to go for coffee or takeaway, and that's reasonable. I can't tell you what to do with your body; that would be illegal. I won't force you into anything or to have sex with me. You're of age and you have the right to leave at any time, if you wish. You're also working for me as a model for a sex toy catalog. In that capacity I can direct you to strike a pose, but you still have the right to refuse to do anything that makes you uncomfortable."

"It was a little close out there today," Nick muttered.

"I know. I shouldn't have done that to you, and I apologize. From now on, I'll let you experience whatever it is and let you make the call on whether you're willing to do it on film."

"You're sorry?" Nick breathed, his eyes wide.

"Yeah. What?" Damian asked, bewildered.

"Are you supposed to say you're sorry when you're a ... a ... master?"

"I prefer Top, and certainly I'm supposed to if I've done something wrong." Damian laughed at the ludicrous look of

surprise on Nick's face. "Look, remember the other day when you suggested the slave and Ashley's arm when Markie was over the bench?"

"Yeah."

"We were working together then, creating a shot that was not only beautiful, but it showed the products off while evoking a specific mood. It did the job it was supposed to do. It was both of us collaborating to create one special image."

"You're saying we're in this together," Nick said slowly.

"Exactly. You want to get spanked, I like to spank. Without you, I have no cute little ass wriggling around on my lap. We're making a deal here. I want you to get what you're looking for, and I certainly wouldn't do it to you if I didn't like it."

"You like spanking me?"

Damian almost laughed again at the amazed expression on Nick's face. "I like it very much, Nick, and I hope you do too. I was hoping that you might wish to stay late tonight so that I could show you something else."

Feeling suddenly energized again, Nick said, "Yes, sir!"

* * * *

After a companionable dinner, where Damian talked over his ideas for Ashley's catalog, Nick washed up while Damian dried and put away. Nick wondered why he'd always found Damian so stern and unapproachable, while Damian was surprised by his young assistant's creativity and sense of fun. It wasn't often in Damian's experience that a young man so beautiful was also willing to be silly.

"Go into the office. Wait for me there, pet."

Nick no longer needed Damian to call him pet to tell when their relationship shifted; the slow commanding drawl was enough to alert him to the change. He went to the office and then worried about whether he should kneel or stand or just what he should be doing. He was frowning when Damian came in, making the other man's lips twitch.

"What's wrong, pet?"

"Am I supposed to be kneeling or what?"

"Does it calm you when you know what to expect from me?"

"Sir, I want to please you," Nick said simply.

Damian was surprised at how much that touched him. "If you wish to please me...."

"Yes, sir?"

"Take everything off."

Damian watched as Nick stripped with shaking fingers. He appreciated every movement; the boy was unusually graceful in the awkward moments, getting his trousers off without hopping or tangling himself in the legs. At last he stood, submissive in front of Damian, completely exposed.

Damian stroked the aureole of one nipple and caught the shuddering breath. "Are they sore?"

"Not really, sir, just ... a little ... tingly."

"Did you like it when I had you tied to that bar, restrained for my pleasure?"

Nick gulped and managed to answer, "Yes, sir."

"I liked it too, and yet, if I wished to restrain you just with my voice, would you obey?"

Nick nodded, mesmerized by the deep blue eyes.

Damian circled behind Nick, noticing the slight stiffening of his spine. He turned off the overhead light, so that the room was lit only by the desk lamp, casting a warm glow over the naked boy. He pulled the leather couch slightly away from the wall and picked up a blindfold. He said, "Turn to face me."

Nick did so, his breath coming quicker. Damian could see the thump of his heart fluttering the golden skin of his chest.

"I'm going to blindfold you. And then I'm going to touch you however I wish. You are mine until I release you. Are you mine?"

Nick nodded slowly.

Damian blindfolded Nick, making sure that the young man couldn't peek. He took him by the arm and led him to the couch. "Kneel on the couch for me, pet. Hands on the back." He guided Nick to kneel on the cushion, pushing him to bend over so that his hands were resting on the back.

Slowly Damian ran his hand down the length of Nick's spine, noticing the slight shudder as he neared the swell of the boy's ass. He positioned himself so that his left hand rested on Nick's back, leaving his right free to roam.

Nick wondered what Damian would do next. He had said he would touch him however and wherever he wished, and there were parts of Nick that no one had ever touched. He felt vulnerable and uncertain, and his blood was pounding with the thrill of it all.

He felt calloused fingertips pinch a nipple and his cock surged in response. It made him think of the clamps Damian had used on him earlier.

He felt something tickle his ear and Damian said, "Don't come until I permit it."

"Yes, sir," Nick said hoarsely.

He felt a palm cupping his arse, rubbing slowly over the curve, and then a slap. It stung and heat rushed to the site, but it didn't really hurt. Nick had to control himself when he pictured how this must look, him kneeling with his naked bum hanging out, accessible to the other man's explorations while Damian was completely dressed, touching him as he pleased.

He jumped when he felt teeth nibbling at the nape of his neck. Damian's hand left his back, leaving Nick disoriented and alone in the dark. The next touch was to the inside of his thigh, nails lightly scratching up from his knee to just next to his balls. He shivered and moved his legs together.

"Shall I get the spreaders?" Damian observed the flush that spread over Nick's backside in response to his words. Slowly he pried the boy's legs apart and held them. "Perhaps I will. I like how you look in them, helpless and vulnerable."

Nick listened to his footsteps fade and return. This time he was prepared for the chill of the ankle cuffs as Damian locked his feet to the bar.

"Try it, pet. You will not be able to close your legs. The bar is keeping you spread open for me."

Nick shifted but he couldn't close his legs. He was very aware of the cool rush of air on his balls, swinging slightly with his movements.

"Keep those hands right where they are. I would prefer not to restrain you fully. Why will you leave your hands there?"

"Because you told me to, sir," Nick answered.

"Very good," Damian said. Nick's body was incredibly beautiful bent over compliantly, glowing in the dim light with a light sheen of sweat.

He ran a hand down the back of one thigh and then threaded his fingers through Nick's curls, pulling his head back as Markie had done earlier. He saw the tendons stand out in the boy's neck as he held him in place. Finally Damian bent to claim the beautiful mouth, biting the lower lip gently before driving his tongue inside. He explored the sweet mouth thoroughly, mapping the teeth and lips, meeting Nick's tongue and conquering it, establishing his dominance. Finally he released the boy's lips, and took the tiny moan of desire as his tribute.

He let Nick go and the curly head dropped forward to rest on the back of the couch while the young man panted softly, trying to recover his breath.

Nick arched up and howled when he felt warm lips close around one of his nipples. Teeth tugged on the delicate flesh while Damian's tongue moved rapidly, stimulating the nipple to a sharp peak. He had taken care not to touch Nick in any other way, so that when he released him, the young man was disoriented, not knowing where to expect the next touch.

Damian stood up to prowl around the beautiful boy again, aiming four swift smacks at the defenseless ass. He was delighted to see Nick raise his bottom to meet each slap after the first one.

"Arch your back. Lift up your ass to me, pet," Damian whispered, his quiet voice a contrast to the crisp blows.

Nick did so and felt Damian's hands slide along the curve of his ribs, spanning his waist.

"So slender and beautiful. I could break you. But I won't. I'd rather keep you for a while," Damian mused. "Am I making you hard?"

"God, yes, sir," Nick groaned. His neglected cock was standing up to his belly and his balls were quivering with sensory overload. Both of Damian's hands were sliding over his skin, sending little electrical jolts of pleasure through him. He hadn't realized that every part of him was an erogenous zone, but the tender caresses, sharp pinches, sudden smacks, and the occasional warm softness of Damian's lips or tongue had him completely aroused, and yet the man hadn't even touched his cock or balls yet.

Damian nipped at the back of Nick's arm and felt the muscle tremble, as if it could no longer hold the boy in position.

He slid his hand over the curve of Nick's buttock and asked, "Shall I spank you? Perhaps I shall, just because I can. Just because I want to. I like to see you jump and wiggle and squirm when I'm making your bottom smart. I'm going to spank you so hard you won't sit down tomorrow. Is that what you'd like?"

"If it would please you, sir," Nick whispered. His heart was pounding. He *remembered* that it hurt, but his cock was aching now, throbbing with the desire to feel Damian's hand on his heated flesh. He *wanted* this badly.

And then the hand met his arse with a resounding snap, and it stung and smarted, but Nick wanted more. He raised

his arse up to meet the next smack and felt the warmth blossom over his backside. Damian gave him a brisk spanking, covering every inch of his bottom until he was on fire, gasping with the heat of it.

And then the hand was stroking him again, caressing him, soothing him, taking the sting away although the warmth lingered.

"You look so beautiful like that, red and hot, bent over for me to do as I please." Damian watched the responsive quiver run through Nick's body. "I'm going to cool you off just a bit now, Nick. Stay right there."

He stepped to his desk and opened a drawer, finding a tube of lubricant that he'd purchased that week in the spirit of hope. He squeezed some onto his hands and smoothed it over both red cheeks. "You're glowing, pet. I like to see you like that. One day, I'll take pictures of what I do to you, so you can see how alluring you are when you've just had a spanking."

Nick felt the sting diminish as Damian's hands soothed whatever it was he was using over his cheeks. He squeaked when Damian's hands swept between his thighs, smoothing the lube on them, the backs of the photographer's hands brushing his balls.

The hands swept up again and Damian's fingers dipped closer to his cleft with each pass. Feeling uncomfortable at the nearness of the hands to his most secret spot, Nick tried to squeeze his legs together, forgetting that his ankles were trapped in the spreader.

Damian laughed at Nick's futile attempt to protect himself. "You are at my mercy, Nicholas. I'm going to touch you precisely where I wish to, and there is nothing you can do to prevent me."

Nick gasped and threw back his head as Damian slid a finger along the valley between his buttocks, passing over his arsehole. "Don't, please ... don't ... touch me there..." he begged, although it felt incredibly hot.

Damian's other hand found his rigid shaft and stroked it gently. "Your mind says no, but your body is saying yes, Nicholas. And I *will* touch you wherever I like."

"Please ... don't..." Nick pleaded.

"But you forget: you belong to me, and I will touch my property as I choose. Every part of you is beautiful, pet. Tell me the truth. Do you like it when I touch you *here*?" Damian asked, massaging the puckered skin of Nick's entrance.

Nick remembered that he had to tell the truth. He felt that this was very gay, but it felt so sinfully good. "I do ... I like it..." he admitted.

Damian saw the tension drain from Nick's body as he expressed his desires. "Then I shall show you how much pleasure I can give you. You look so beautiful, pet, kneeling there open for me with your backside reddened by my hand, eager for me to explore you."

Nick arched his back, raising his arse into Damian's hand. The finger that had been rubbing his hole was now pressing against it. He gasped and moaned as Damian pushed it slowly inside him.

"It burns..." he moaned.

"It will get better, my pet. You'll see," Damian promised, his voice husky. "You're doing this to please me, remember?"

"Yes...."

Damian penetrated Nick more deeply, sliding his finger in and out gently, gaining ground with every thrust.

Nick jumped when Damian's finger slid over something buried deep inside him that sent the most amazing sensation straight to his cock. He was panting he was so hot. Damian's finger was moving more easily inside him and he moaned with the loss when it was removed.

One hand patted his back. "You liked that."

Two fingers entered him, and Nick pushed back, even as he moaned in pain, wanting that feeling of fullness even though the stretch of the tight ring of muscle hurt. But he wanted that feeling deep inside enough that he was willing to ride out the sharp cramping to earn that pleasure.

Damian fingered Nick's hole gently, thrusting inside and twisting occasionally. The boy was like an inferno inside, blazing hot and so silky smooth. He wanted nothing more than to bury his cock deep inside and stake his claim by leaving his seed, marking the young man as his.

But he knew he needed to take this slowly; he wouldn't fuck Nick tonight. Soon, but not tonight. Instead he reached for Nick's hard length, wrapping his slick fingers around it.

Nick groaned with the intensity of the pleasure; he thrust into the hand surrounding him and each time he rocked back, he drove Damian's fingers even deeper inside himself. It felt almost as if Damian was stroking his cock both from the

outside and the inside. He'd never felt such pleasure and his ecstasy spiraled upward as he rocked faster.

Damian bent over and whispered in Nick's ear, "Come. Now!"

With a hoarse shout, Nick drove into Damian's hand, shooting over the leather couch in long spurts, his body trembling with the effort. His orgasm roared in his ears and he collapsed forward, hanging limply over the back of the couch.

Damian smiled and withdrew his fingers. He left Nick kneeling and went to wash his hands and get a damp washcloth, wiping Nick clean. He removed the blindfold, and the young man opened his eyes and smiled blearily at Damian. "Thank you, sir. That was...."

"I'm glad you liked it, even though you thought you weren't going to," Damian teased.

"What about you, sir? What can I do to give you pleasure?" Nick asked anxiously.

Damian was delighted that Nick was already offering to serve him. He hauled Nick to his feet, mindful of the limited range of motion with the spreader bar and set him on his knees on the carpet.

He stood in front of the naked young man. "Take out my cock."

With trembling fingers, Nick opened Damian's jeans and pulled them down a bit, not wanting to rub him against the teeth of the zipper. He found that Damian also wore boxers. He looked up for permission and Damian nodded.

Nick pulled Damian's cock out the slit and gasped. He'd forgotten that Damian's cock was so big. He noticed it was dripping and without stopping to think, he leaned forward and tasted the drop with his tongue. It was salty and bitter, with an underlying sweetness. He wasn't sure he liked it.

"Use your hands. Bring me off," Damian ordered.

Nick licked his hands and eagerly explored the hard manhood he held. Tentatively, he flattened the swollen vein that ran underneath and looked up as Damian gasped. Emboldened by his success and feeling empowered that he was able to give pleasure to the older man, Nick increased the pressure of his hands, wondering if he dared touch Damian's balls without direct permission.

He realized that kneeling in his position, he couldn't get enough leverage; the angle was wrong. He leaned forward and tentatively licked the head of Damian's cock.

Damian's hips jerked forward as he felt the warm, wet swipe of the boy's tongue. He watched as Nick stared at his hard length with fascination.

Then Nick closed his eyes and inhaled, the lush lashes fanned over his cheeks. Damian smelled of arousal and musk. He leaned closer and rubbed his cheek against the proud flesh in his hands, relishing the sensation of Damian's hard flesh against his face. He opened his mouth, sucking the head inside, swirling his tongue slowly around the ridge, learning the feel of it.

Damian almost came right there, watching Nick take his cock in his mouth. He never would have thought the boy was ready for this, so he would not have demanded it, but the

blazing wet heat and soft lips were so enticing, he couldn't bear to push Nick away, in spite of the fact that he was not following Damian's actual orders.

Nick tried to take the entire length into his mouth and ended up gagging when the tip hit the back of his throat. He felt Damian's fingers slide soothingly through his hair, tugging the curls gently.

"Take it easy. You don't have to deep throat your first time, pet. Relax, slow down. Taste me; discover what it feels like to have a hard cock in your mouth."

His own cock twitched and started to fill again. Nick wondered if he would ever manage to be in Damian's presence without being half-hard. Just his voice turned off Nick's brain and went straight to his groin. Nick couldn't think anymore; he could only feel the soft skin covering the rigid muscle that filled his mouth so satisfyingly. He suddenly realized that he loved the weight of Damian's cock on his tongue, and he wanted more of it.

Worshipfully, he swirled his tongue around the head and slid it under the ridge, noticing the tiny leap of arousal in response. He'd become accustomed to the flavor of the drops that leaked copiously from the tip, relishing the salty taste. He held the base of Damian's shaft steady with one hand while he groped for the older man's balls with the other, allowing them to roll between his fingers. It was the first time he'd actually gotten to touch Damian, and he wished the other man would remove his clothing so he could see the rest of his body.

The tiny movement of his hips had become a rhythmic drive as Damian rocked into his mouth with increasing speed. Nick opened his mouth, letting his tongue ride along the older man's shaft as he thrust inside. He felt the balls in his hand tighten and draw up, while the shaft seemed to enlarge, stretching his lips as he tried desperately not to let Damian break free.

"I'm close," Damian said, his voice sounding strained. "You don't have to—"

Nick started to hum and the vibration pushed Damian over the edge. His abs clenching, he thrust hard, one hand on the back of Nick's head to hold him in place, the other gripping one ear. The young man swallowed, not sure about the consistency or texture, but quite sure that he liked the power of making Damian come so hard.

Damian froze in place and Nick felt him give one last quiver before his body relaxed. After a moment he withdrew gently and ordered, "Lick me clean, pet."

Obediently Nick licked the cock, holding the limp member in his hand reverently.

Damian stepped away and Nick felt a sense of loss as the contact between them was broken. The photographer put himself together and zipped up his jeans, his eyes fixed on the naked young man looking up at him so hopefully.

"Thank you, pet. That was very ... lovely." Damian sighed. It had been more than lovely; it was sublime to feel his cock in Nick's mouth, especially knowing that he was the first to venture there. Damian groped for the key, and freed Nick's feet from the spreader.

"Come here."

Nick struggled to his feet, stiff from kneeling so long, and staggered toward Damian, who laughed and caught his arm, turning him away to look at his bottom. His hand smoothed over Nick's ass. "Still warm and pink. Scene over. Now go get dressed."

Feeling suddenly cold, his cock limp, Nick turned his back, pulling on his clothes. He stood quietly, expecting to be dismissed.

Damian sat in his large leather chair behind the desk and opened his arms. "Come sit with me, Nick."

Nick rushed to him, grateful when he felt strong arms close around him, pulling him down to sit on Damian's lap. The older man pulled his head down onto his shoulder and turned off the desk lamp, so the only light came from the hall.

"Did you like that?"

"Yes. I loved it," Nick barely breathed. He wasn't sure what to do with his hands but took a chance and slid them around Damian's torso, thrilling to the feel of hard muscle moving under his palms. It was comfortable sitting in the dark, where for once, he wasn't on display.

"The blindfold didn't scare you?"

"Not really. Not once I figured out why you did it," Nick answered.

"Why did I do it?"

"So that I would feel, not think," Nick said. He admitted, "It was also kind of hot not knowing what you were going to do next."

Damian chuckled and the vibration was comforting to Nick. "Did you like it when I finger-fucked you?"

"Is that what it was? I didn't think I would, but I did," Nick said honestly. He was beginning to see what Damian was up to with all these questions. "It *did* feel good."

"And the spanking? I swatted you harder than the first time, and longer, but you seemed to enjoy it."

Nick hid his face in the crook of Damian's neck. "Yes," came his muffled reply.

"There's nothing to be embarrassed about, Nick," Damian said, stroking his back. "What disturbed you earlier in the day?"

"I guess it wasn't so much Markie taking the clamp off in front of everyone; it was my reaction. I was so close. I didn't want them to know how much I enjoyed it," Nick said, struggling to put his feelings into words. "Ashley doesn't know ... know that you're spanking me, does he?"

"He knows something is going on between us, but not the specifics," Damian answered, wondering what the right answer was. His boy started to tremble in his arms.

"How? How does he know?" Nick whispered fearfully.

"Babe," Damian raised Nick's face with a finger under his chin. "Ashley is a player. He knows I'm a player and a Dom. There's no way I'd let a boy like you Top me; therefore he knows you're a bottom. He doesn't know exactly *what* we're doing, but he asked if I was claiming you. He's afraid you might go elsewhere and get hurt."

This was all a bit too much information for Nick to process, so he seized on the most important part. "And ... and *are* you claiming me?"

"I already did. Whenever we're in a scene, you belong to me and you do as I say," Damian said, his voice dropping into the husky drawl that haunted Nick's dreams.

He felt a little disappointed that Damian was only claiming him during scenes, but he wasn't sure that he really wanted more himself. Did he want to belong to Damian all the time? And what would that mean for the rest of his life?

Damian instinctively knew that something was going on in that busy brain, but he just held Nick on his lap and stroked his back.

"What else are you going to do to me?" Nick asked hesitantly.

"If I told you, I couldn't surprise you, now could I?" Damian laughed.

"Is what we're doing ... gay?"

Damian frowned. "Is that a problem? I'm giving you pleasure, you're giving me pleasure. Do you want a woman doing any of this to you?"

"No, oh no!" Nick said earnestly, shuddering at the thought of the attractive women who played dominatrixes during the shoot doing ... *anything* to him. "I was just wondering—"

"Does it scare you to suspect that you're gay?"

Nick nodded and then shook his head. "Yes. No. I don't know."

"If you find women attractive also, you're probably bi. I'm gay," Damian said. "I only want to fuck beautiful boys like you," he added, cuddling him. Nick stiffened in his arms.

"You're ... you're going to fuck me? You'll never fit!" he exclaimed fearfully.

Damian pushed Nick off his lap and pointed at the floor. Nick scrambled to kneel, gripping his hands behind him. He hadn't pissed Damian off, had he? The thought of losing all this when he'd only started exploring this side of himself scared him.

"I will do whatever I want to you. I don't have to discuss it. I will decide what will please me and then you'll do it. Is that clear?"

Nick nodded, swallowing convulsively.

"Will you submit to me?"

"Yes, sir," came the soft answer.

"Am I frightening you, Nicholas?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." Damian relaxed, taking in the deliciously submissive lines of the body drooping in front of him. "Do you trust me?"

Without needing time to think, the answer spilled out of his mouth, surprising even Nick. "Yes, sir."

Damian stood up and stretched, his mouth gaping open in a yawn. "We're shooting tomorrow, even though it's Saturday. Are you busy or can you come?" He smirked at the double meaning.

"I'll be here, sir," Nick said, his soft voice hopeful.

"Be here at nine. Don't be late. All right. Get off home and have a good night's rest."

Nick stood up, his head awhirl.

On the tube he crossed his legs as he stood, hanging onto the strap, trying to keep his unruly dick under control. There was just too much to think about. Ashley was worried about him getting hurt, even though he was doing things that did hurt. He had sucked a man's cock for the first time, on his knees. He'd been spanked and had fingers up his arsehole, fucking him while Damian had jacked him off. He'd worn a collar briefly and had clamps attached to his nipples.

And Damian was planning to fuck him! And he'd agreed to it! *What* was going on with him? The only thing he was sure of was that he was more aroused and yet more satisfied than he'd ever been in his life, now that he'd given himself to this man.

He wondered what the next day would bring.

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Chapter Seven

"I don't think so, dude," Derek said, shaking his head. "It looks ridiculous on you."

Nick popped his head into the bathroom and giggled at his reflection in the mirror. The collar he was wearing looked as if it was designed to restrain a ferocious Rottweiler, not him; it was thick and sturdy, studded with silver spikes, ridiculous around his slender throat.

"Let me see," Ashley called out, while he adjusted another around Markie's neck.

Nick turned around and Ashley laughed. "No, that one's not for you, lad. Take it off him, Derek."

Derek went to unbuckle the collar. "Ashley had some other ones made, lighter ones. He said they were for you. Know where they are?"

"I think Damian has them," Nick murmured, his face flushing. He didn't meet Derek's eyes.

"So, are you two dating?" Derek asked bluntly.

Nick blushed harder but he looked Derek in the eye and asked, "Are you dating Ashley?"

"Nope," Derek answered cheerfully. He tossed the collar into the box with the others. "We did for a while, but he's into all this S&M crap and it scares me like fuck."

"Really? Did he insist on using it on you?" Nick asked, surprised. Somehow Ashley's sense of humor was such that he couldn't see him acting quite the way Damian did. Even today, he was a little uncertain around the photographer.

Remembering their encounter the night before, with him bent over naked getting his arse spanked and then sucking Damian's cock, made him feel bashful while still sending shivers of delight through him when he thought about it.

"No, not at all. When he told me he was into all this, I kind of ... lost it and screamed at him and dumped him," Derek mumbled shame-facedly.

"You mean you didn't even try it?" Nick asked, wondering if he was just extremely weird for agreeing to all that Damian had done to him so far.

"No! Why should I?" Derek asked defensively.

"You won't know if you like something until you try it," Nick pointed out. "I thought you were more adventurous than that. You sure talk a good game."

It was Derek's turn to flush. "Well, maybe I'm not. Are you telling me you've tried this?"

"I'm not telling you anything, but if I really liked a guy, I think I might give him the benefit of the doubt," Nick said. He watched as Derek's eyes followed Ashley, who was joking with Markie, leading him to the set on a leash. "He must have thought that you didn't trust him."

"Shit," Derek said. "I didn't mean to hurt his feelings. I just freaked."

"If you have a safe word, you can use it to stop someone," Nick explained, suddenly feeling much more secure talking to the boy he'd thought was so worldly and experienced. At least he knew *something* Derek didn't. "Besides, Ashley doesn't seem like the kind of guy that would just hurt you without stopping to check if you were enjoying what he was doing."

Derek sighed. "Enjoying! Besides, it's too late now, anyway. He's all over that blond bloke."

"If you really want him, if you ... love him," Nick said hesitantly, "maybe you should talk to him."

"I was kind of hanging around you, hoping he'd get jealous," Derek said with a laugh. "You're fuckin' gorgeous and if he thought I could get you, then maybe he'd ... he'd be interested in me again."

Nick smiled. "Not going to work, Derek. I think he knows about me and Damian."

Derek's eyes flew to meet Nick's and he chortled triumphantly. "So you *are* dating him!"

Nick glanced at Damian uneasily and the photographer looked up at him at that moment, smiling warmly. "Yeah, I guess I am," he muttered.

"Cool!"

* * * *

Derek nudged Nick in the ribs as they stood behind the lights, watching Damian as he set up the next shot. "Dude, have you noticed that you're never in a shot with any of the girls?"

Nick had noticed it and wondered uneasily if Damian thought he couldn't hold his own with the beautiful girls, but he wasn't about to explore that thought with Derek. "Nah, no big deal."

"Ashley said this shot might end up on the cover," Derek said, nodding toward the sensuous tableaux.

The way Damian had lit the models twined together, Nick could not actually see what they were doing, but the tangle of masculine and feminine, the golden gleam of light on bare skin shining with droplets of sweat, the hint of restraints and whips, muscles tensed with power or soft in surrender, left plenty to the imagination. He longed to be a part of what he was witnessing, even though the ephemeral emotion created by the glimpses of bodies was just an illusion, nothing real, nothing solid.

Yet it felt real to him. It called to him like a siren of yore as the flash of Damian's light froze the continuously moving mass of silken flesh into slivers of time, one moment after another.

And then it was over.

"All right. You can take a break now," Damian called out.

The models giggled and joked as they unwound themselves from each other and became ordinary people again, instead of seductive gods and demons with the power to entice Nick out from his safe position behind the lights.

He looked over at Derek to find that he had been likewise affected by the scene. Derek's mouth was open and he looked rather gobsmacked as he stared. He swallowed and turned his head toward Nick slowly, as if just coming awake. "Dude, that was ... something else."

"Yeah," Nick agreed. "Something else." He couldn't remember ever feeling jealous when any of his past girlfriends had mentioned other guys to him, but he felt it now as he watched the Bettie Paige girl flirt her way over to Damian, chatting with him and laughing, her eyes wide and

innocent. Damian seemed to find her amusing, looking down at her and speaking with animation, gesturing with both arms.

Nick turned away abruptly; he had no right to object to Damian doing whatever he liked. He went into the little kitchen, trying to find some task to distract himself. There were several used mugs left sitting in the sink and Nick began to run hot water so he could wash them.

"Well, well, so you're the little elf that keeps this place clean," the Bettie Paige girl said, standing in the doorway with both hands on her hips, clutching a crop in one of them. "Or should I say fairy?"

"I work here," Nick said, feeling inane and ineffective.

The girl strolled toward him, her sleek hips rolling lusciously in her tight leather outfit. As she drew closer Nick could see it wasn't trousers after all; she was wearing a bustier with boots that reached to her thigh, with heels so high and pointy that her slow deliberate walk was more of necessity than for effect. "With your looks, I thought you were a model."

"I model part time," Nick muttered. Her perfume seemed to take him into a conspiracy of closeness with her and he wrinkled his nose with distaste.

"So are you a homo like all those other pretty boys?" she inquired impertinently. "Or are you only a queer part time as well?" She raised the crop and tickled his chin with it.

Nick lifted his chin to disengage from the crop. "None of your business."

"What if I make it my business?" she said with a slow smile. "I like to play and you might learn something. Even if you are gay."

"Thanks, but no thanks," Nick said, scowling at her and crossing his arms defiantly.

"You can't say no to me. How can you resist me when I'm dressed like this? I give the orders, you follow them." The girl raised the crop playfully, as if to give him a swat.

Nick stepped forward and grabbed the crop, staring down into her eyes, for even with her six-inch heels, he was still the taller. The tone of command that in Damian's throaty voice melted him into submission had no effect coming from this girl. They froze in place for a moment, struggling for possession.

"Rawrrrr," Gabe purred from the doorway.

Mistress Bettie looked up, startled, and let go of the crop, which sent Nick staggering back a step, but in triumphant possession of what had almost become a weapon between them.

"Look at your bad self, bebe, disarming the big, bad dominatrix."

The girl giggled and Nick suddenly saw the humor in the situation, his lips starting to twitch. "Yeah, that's me, brave as a lion."

Mistress Bettie put her hand out. "May I have my whip back? Pretty please?"

Ashley and Damian came up behind Gabe, crowding the doorway, and Nick felt a little foolish to be caught this way.

Ashley smirked when he took in the scene, but Damian's eyes lit up with creative fervor.

"Technically that's a crop, but hold that thought. Gabe, get Nick ready, would you?" Damian directed. He didn't enjoy watching Nick laughing with Mistress Bettie, but he was torn; once he'd seen them struggling for possession of the crop, he *had* to capture the dynamic image. He would deal with his own feelings later.

"Pretty please with a cherry on top?" Bettie pouted prettily at Nick.

"I don't know. I might feel better hanging onto this myself." Nick grinned. "I might need protection."

"We're waiting for you for the next shot, Bettie," Ashley said deliberately.

Bettie pouted prettily for the two men. "Nick and I were just getting acquainted. Where have you been hiding him? He's a very cute boy and I haven't noticed him in any shots."

"With you?" Ashley laughed.

"Yes, with me. We're the best two models you've got. I think we belong together." Bettie gave Nick a sidelong, appraising look, as if she was still trying to figure out his sexuality.

"That can be arranged," Ashley agreed silkily. He seemed amused, glancing between Nick's face to Bettie's flirtatious one. "It could be very interesting."

"Nicky sweetie, come give mama some sugar," Gabe said, grabbing Nick's wrist and dragging him bodily into the makeup room. "Sorry, bebe, it took me a minute to get in there. What was that bitch saying to you?"

Nick stared at him in disbelief. "What are you? The cavalry, coming to the rescue?" He giggled at the image of Gabe, who was wearing a purple silk poet shirt with ruffles today, prancing about in the role of hero, even though he was touched by the other man's concern. He'd no idea that Gabe felt anything toward him other than a desire to taunt him until he blushed and ran.

"Why did you let her get to you like that?" Gabe asked, serious for once.

Nick couldn't bring himself to confide in Gabe that he didn't like watching her flirt with Damian. "I don't know; she just got to me."

"She calls herself Mistress Bettie but don't get misled by the window dressing," Gabe said, starting to powder Nick's face. "Where's that eyeliner?"

"I don't wear eyeliner." Nick spoke absently, his mind consumed with the new information. "I just assumed that she—"

"You will for this shot, honey." Gabe pulled the skin taut near Nick's right eye with his thumb and started smudging the liner into the lash line. "Just because she wears that *fetching* leather bustier and those *killer* heels doesn't mean a thing. She's a wannabe."

"How well does Damian know her?" Nick could have bitten off his tongue at how that came out. Jealous didn't even begin to describe it. He found his fists clenching around the forgotten crop.

"He doesn't have to know her; he knows how to read people." Gabe smiled as Nick writhed uncomfortably,

remembering how well Damian had read *him*. "It comes with the territory."

"Are you into this S&M thing too?" Nick asked before he could stop himself.

Gabe smiled secretively. "Maybe it's better that you not know."

"Maybe," Nick muttered. He suddenly remembered that if Gabe answered his question, perhaps the stylist might be asking the same thing of him. And Nick was quite sure he was not ready to share.

* * * *

When Nick came out to the set, Mistress Bettie's face was prettily flushed as she flirted outrageously with Ashley, who was being most courtly with her, considering his lack of interest in the fairer sex.

Damian took in a quick breath when he saw Nick, his eyes dark and mysterious ringed with the black liner. Nick was still a bit uncertain about being hauled out here to be in a shot with Mistress Bettie. He wasn't afraid of her; she wielded none of the erotic power over him that Damian did. But that didn't mean he had to like her ragging at him or having to pose with her.

"Come over here, pretty boy, and get on your knees," Bettie called enticingly to Nick.

Nick opened his mouth to retort but Damian forestalled him. "If anything, I might put you on your knees to him."

"Oh no, I think—"

"But you're not the photographer and we will do this my way," Damian said, his eyes still on Nick.

"Bunch of fucking poofers," Bettie muttered.

Damian turned to look at her and she lowered her eyes, biting her lip.

Ashley was laughing at her. "Now it's not really wise to insult the client, is it, my dear?"

"I took that as a compliment," Damian said. "Nick, please go stand next to Bettie."

"*Mistress* Bettie," the dark girl corrected, obviously starting to get riled with the needling.

"Face each other, please," Damian said, ignoring her retort. "Bettie, lift up that crop, as if you're about to strike him. You hate that you have to look up to him. Nick, you're not going to let her get away with threatening you."

Her eyes narrowed and Nick, his temper a bit on edge since their earlier confrontation, grabbed her wrist, the muscles of his bicep bulging against the black T-shirt he wore as they strained against each other.

The two dark models glared at each other, startled when Damian said, "Yes! That's exactly what I want. Hold it right there. More! Push against each other. I want to see those muscles work. Yes, that's it! You can stop now."

Both models let go of the crop at the same moment, causing it to fall to the floor. Nick bent to pick it up at the same time as Bettie, and they banged their heads together smartly.

Bettie rubbed her head and giggled. "This isn't over yet, pretty boy. I'll get you somehow."

"Not if I get you first," Nick retorted. "Well, *that* must have looked brilliant. Thank fuck Damian didn't get a shot of that."

"Who says I didn't?" Damian said.

"Blackmail material," Nick said accusingly. He shivered slightly, remembering that Damian actually owned photos of him that could be used for that purpose.

As if he knew just what Nick was thinking, Damian shook his head slightly. "Why don't you two get ready for your next poses?"

He frowned as he watched Nick walk off the set with the pretty girl hanging onto his arm, wondering why he had thought to pair them. When he first saw them glaring at each other and struggling over the crop, he was inspired by the combative chemistry, but watching them laugh together now reminded him of Nick's doubts about being gay.

"Let's see it," Ashley demanded, coming up behind Damian and interrupting his reverie.

Damian went to the computer and downloaded the shots, setting them to view in slow rotation.

"Revolt of the sub," Ashley said. "Damned fine shot!" he exclaimed, looking at the two lithe bodies braced dynamically against each other, struggling for control.

Damian stopped the slide show, examining the best shot. "But which is which?"

"Why, Nick, isn't it? No, it's hard to tell really," Ashley mused. "He looks a bit of a switch there, not cowed by her at all."

"I suppose there's a little switchery in all of us," Damian answered, chuckling at the look of horror on Ashley's face.

"My dear Ian, there is absolutely no truth to that rumor at all!"

"You were born holding a cane then? How pleased your mother must have been."

"Yes. That's my story and I'm sticking to it." Ashley peered more closely at the screen, where both model's faces were clearly visible, unlike all the other photos. "Did you take this for yourself or the catalog?"

Without answering directly, Damian brought up the shot in Photoshop and cropped it in all around, to where it still revealed the stubborn set of Nick's mouth and chin. He cut off the sides, keeping the angular attitude of their bodies, but the new framing completely altered the emotive quality of the photograph. Instead of two angry people struggling for a whip, the image took on the aura of a dangerous dance of seduction, as if a couple were doing some kind of dissolute tango around a whip for a maypole. There was no telling who was in control, but the way the light fell on the taut muscles of both model's arms led directly to the gleaming crop, making it the focal point of the picture. "The play of masculine and feminine, showing the intrinsic power of each."

"I don't know how you see these things," Ashley said, shaking his head. "That is far more seditious than actually seeing that crop strike the flesh. Dammit, I was *there*, and I want to know what happened next between this pair."

"Now that really *is* a compliment," Damian said. "Thank you."

"Best catalog ever," Ashley murmured. "What are you going to do to top this next year?"

Damian looked startled. "This was a one-time project. You said so yourself."

"And you believed me," Ashley said, smug with pity. "Even after all this time, how little you know me."

* * * *

Two black male models flanked the blond sub woman, all wearing the same leather collar, with square steel studs and a large ring in front. Black leather set off the woman's fair skin, while the two men wore red collars, contrasting with their dark skin.

Unlike other purveyors of erotic toys, Ashley's company offered a wider array of colors, rather than just the usual black.

"Black is so dull," Ashley declared, watching as Damian worked with the three models. "I like a bit of color."

"At both ends, no doubt," Damian teased.

Ashley laughed. "You know me too well. On some issues."

It was gratifying to see Damian joking about the subject; he'd been alone for a long time. And now Ashley realized he'd been right to wait. No casual encounter would have satisfied him like whatever it was he was doing with Nick. Ashley could tell that he was a special young man. Not merely beautiful on the outside, but with a sweetness and naïveté about the life that suited the photographer's style. Without ever having played with him or seen him in action, Ashley intuited that Damian preferred the mental aspect of dominating another man, rather than taking pleasure in the technical mastery required to leave the marks that he himself enjoyed.

Damian straightened up and stretched his back. "That's the regular collars done. Now for that new line you've got. Who's going to show those off?"

"Nick for sure in that wine number. And I think Markie for the black. I do like a blond in black," Ashley declared, rubbing his hands.

"Why not use Derek?" Damian asked mischievously. "He's got a lovely, vulnerable throat," he said, privately thinking that Nick's was much more tender and sweet. And he couldn't help but notice how Ashley and Derek eyed each other whenever they thought the other one wouldn't catch on.

Ashley's lips thinned to a straight line and his green eyes grew cold. "He thinks I'm a complete pervert. A sadist," he said grimly. "I'm sure he wouldn't be interested."

"What happened between you two?" Damian asked. "Why do you keep him on if it's such a sore subject between you?"

"He's free to leave if he likes," Ashley shrugged. "I'm sure I don't care."

Sure you don't, Damian thought. "Well, *I* have a sub to put into a collar."

"Sorry about that. I rather jumped the gun yesterday." Ashley had the grace to look abashed.

"Trying to force my hand, Ash?"

"I actually don't know what I was thinking, but I apologize for taking liberties with your sub."

Damian thought Ashley was sincere; he sounded confused, which was unusual for the ordinarily brash man. "If you can't be happy, you want me to be? Vicarious romance?" he asked, curling his lip sarcastically.

"So it's a romance, then?" Ashley pried gleefully.

"You bounce back too easily," Damian laughed. "It most definitely is not a romance. I'm just helping him discover himself, and that's *all* you're going to get out of me."

"Don't be too sure of that," Ashley called after him.

"Nicholas, may I see you in my office, please?" Damian asked, aware of Derek's big green eyes fixed on them.

"Sure, sir," Nick said cheerfully, but he turned immediately to follow Damian.

The photographer closed the door and pointed to the floor. The thought of kneeling to the Bettie Paige girl was just ... distasteful, but Damian had only to point and Nick couldn't get on his knees fast enough.

Damian stood motionless, staring at the boy kneeling in front of him. It was a distinct possibility that Nick might want to move on from him, now that he'd seen for himself that there were women who were into the scene. Damian had no problem imagining Bettie bending Nick over a table and spanking him, and it was eating him up that Nick might prefer it that way. The boy seemed to be struggling to come to grips with the fact that he was engaging in kinky sexual acts with another man.

"You were standing very close to Bettie, pet, and you let her touch you," Damian said sternly.

"You posed us, sir," Nick said in confusion, not sure what he'd done wrong. Damian couldn't possibly be angry about what happened out on the set, could he? After all, it was only for the photograph.

"I did," Damian agreed. "But are you sure that's all it was? Perhaps you find Bettie attractive?"

Nick looked up in shock, and then quickly lowered his eyes once more, gripping his hands tightly behind his back to still their trembling, afraid that Damian was going to use Bettie as an excuse to end what they were doing together.

"Perhaps you'd rather it were Bettie bending you over her lap and warming your bottom?"

"I don't want that, sir," Nick muttered, with a shiver of distaste. "I don't want anyone else to ... do what you do with me."

Damian stared intently at Nick's bent head, as though he were trying to get into the boy's mind for absolute confirmation that Nick wasn't interested in Bettie at all. He hadn't missed the shudder Nick gave, but wasn't quite sure if it meant disgust or arousal.

"Sir?" Nick said anxiously, afraid to ruin what he had with Damian, but determined that he would let the man know something of how he felt.

"What is it, pet?" Damian asked.

"I ... I didn't like it when you were talking and laughing with Bettie," Nick admitted.

"What didn't you like?" Damian asked curiously. "That I was talking to Bettie, or that she was talking to me?"

"It wasn't that you were talking," Nick replied. "It was ... you looked like you were having fun with her and I thought maybe ... you might want someone more ... more—"

"Experienced?"

Nick nodded miserably, certain now that Damian was going to tell him that he would prefer someone he didn't have to explain things to.

Damian chuckled and shook his head, amused that they'd both been consumed by the same jealousy. "Bettie and I were talking about riding, pet, that's all. I have no interest in her outside of a shared love of horses. You've said yourself that you don't know if you're gay. I merely thought perhaps it might be more comfortable for you with a woman."

"I don't know if I'm gay," Nick agreed, "but I do know that I really enjoy when you ... spank me and ... other stuff, sir. I don't want anyone but you to do that stuff to me."

"Then I will keep spanking you and showing you pleasure, pet, because that gives *me* pleasure," Damian said with satisfaction.

Damian picked up the red collar he'd taken off the boy the previous day. "I'm going to put this on you, but you haven't earned it yet. However, once I have placed any collar around your neck, I shall expect you to do exactly as I say. In effect, we are in a scene once this is on, although no one out there will be aware of it. Are you ready for that, pet?"

Nick's mind was spinning out of control. Did this mean that he would be required to kneel at Damian's command? Would Damian call him pet in front of the others? Despite his confusion, there was just something about the older man that compelled his compliance. He nodded slowly. "I'm ready, sir."

Damian's fingers were very gentle as he fastened the collar and smoothed it into place. Nick arched into the tender caress

like a cat, rubbing his face unconsciously against Damian's wrist.

Damian suppressed a shiver; the boy was really getting to him. The wine red collar against the burnished golden skin made him aware that he wished that he really were collaring Nick. He controlled the urge to stake his claim and pushed it away. They were too different. Hell, they were ten years apart in age. Nick would get his jollies for a while and then he'd leave. Damian was not prepared to hand his heart to the boy so easily.

He pulled his hands away and crossed his arms in front of his body. "Go to Gabe. Have him use some of that shiny stuff on your body. I want your skin to glow in this shot."

"Yes, sir," Nick said softly and got to his feet. He opened the door and paused, looking back, touching the collar with one finger. "Thank you, sir."

"You're welcome."

Damian stared at the closed door and wondered what he was doing. Playing with fire, that's what, he decided.

* * * *

"Did you know one of the male models is ... *heterosexual*?" Ashley demanded.

Damian smirked at Ashley's outraged face. "You can't ask their sexual orientation before you hire them, Ash. You know that. And it's not a dirty word."

"I know, but I'd been having the most delicious fantasy about him," Ashley mourned. "Now it's all ruined."

"Which one?" Damian asked, curious despite himself.

"Ruben, the black guy with the shaved head and the long—
"

"I know the one," Damian interrupted hastily, seeing the model in question emerge from the makeup room, escorting Mistress Bettie. They appeared to be having a good time with each other, laughing and even holding hands, which instantly aroused his suspicions. "Playing Cupid again?"

"I merely asked if anyone was straight," Ashley asked smugly. "He volunteered that he was so I put him on to keep Bettie entertained."

"Thanks, Ash, but I think we've got it worked out now," Damian said, touched by his friend's good intentions.

"I'm sure you do, but a little extra insurance policy never hurts."

"You look good in wings, Ashley."

"Wings!" Ashley cried out. "Brilliant! I must get that into development for next year!" He took out his BlackBerry and started punching buttons furiously.

* * * *

Nick was on his knees, wearing only tight leather pants and the red collar. Markie stood beside him, further back obscured in the shadow, where just a gleam reflecting off his leather pants revealed his presence. Nick had his hands clasped behind his back. A glittering silver leash was swaying between his collar and Markie's gloved hand.

Nick looked at the floor, his lashes veiling his eyes, wondering exactly how this looked. He could sort of picture it, and he now knew enough to realize that his aching knees and

the twinge in his hip didn't show up on film. Instead, quite surprising things, secret revealing things showed up, a testament to Damian's mastery of his medium and his models. Nick was incredibly relieved that the female models had been sent home, especially Bettie. He could only imagine her avid interest in this pose.

Markie shifted slightly in response to Damian's orders and Nick was relieved that the photographer spoke to each of them in exactly the same tone. Of course, he didn't realize that Damian automatically addressed Markie the same way, seeing as he was also submissive, but at least he didn't feel as if his secret had been revealed.

When he was satisfied with his shots, Damian released the two models. Markie dropped the leash and took Nick's arm, hauling him groaning to his feet. "People always think modeling is so glamorous," he commented wryly. "They should try holding a pose for a long stretch sometime."

Nick laughed, allowing Markie to hang onto his arm as he worked the kinks out of his knees, unaware of jealous eyes watching them. "Thanks," Nick said, before going to the monitor to see the shot.

Ashley was struck dumb. "That is fuckin' brilliant, Ian. That shot alone, shit, *this* has got to be the cover."

"I thought you liked that group shot," Damian teased.

"Back cover. This wins the front, hands down," Ashley said, in a voice that sounded as if he was falling in love. Or at least in the grips of a deep crush. It made Nick giggle.

Damian looked pleased with it himself, and Nick could see why as soon he glanced at the screen. His face was in

shadow, except for a triangle of light that gleamed over his parted lips, widening to reveal the new collar on his throat. His skin shimmered with the luminous oil that Gabe had smoothed onto him (taking entirely too much pleasure in it, to Nick's discomfort), highlighting the muscles in his shoulders, pectorals, and abdomen. Fuck, his nipples looked wet as if someone had just licked them.

The other model was barely visible, emerging from the shadows just enough to personify menace, towering over the slim boy, the leash wrapped around his black gloved hand, making Nick's submissive pose all the more palpable.

Therefore Nick was unprepared for the frown that Damian turned on him. The photographer unhooked the leash from his collar and tersely commanded, "Go get cleaned up."

The two models walked to the makeup room together, while Ashley, Derek, and Damian examined the shot.

"Damian, this is a masterpiece. I want to buy a print," Ashley said soberly.

"I'll think about it," Damian said in a surly voice.

Ashley studied his friend's troubled face. "Look, let's go out to dinner. Someplace nice, my treat. We've been pushing to get this finished, and you're tired. I want to show you how much I appreciate your artistry and care. We'll make it an early night, we'll take Sunday off, and you'll feel better by Monday."

Privately wondering if Sunday without Nick might not drive him crazy, Damian agreed with a strained smile. "Sorry, Ash. I guess I am bushed. Dinner sounds good."

"We'll have Nick and Markie along as well," Ashley said hospitably. When he followed them to the makeup room to extend the invitation, Damian noticed how Derek's shoulders slumped in defeat.

"Ask him if you can come along. He'll invite you too. I'm sure he just wasn't thinking," Damian said.

"I couldn't," Derek said, in an uncharacteristically quiet voice.

Ashley emerged from the makeup room, saying "Nick said yes, if you're okay with it, Ian, and Markie can't come, so it'll be just us three."

"Four," Damian said. "I invited Derek."

"Oh. All right then," Ashley said nervously.

"Excuse me. I need to speak to Nick," Damian said, basely abandoning the other two to work things out for themselves.

Nick came out of the makeup room, considerably less shiny and buttoning up one of his atrocious shirts, still wearing the collar.

Damian grabbed him by the wrist and dragged him into the office, locking the door behind them. "You're still wearing it."

"I didn't think you'd like it if you put it on and I let Gabe take it off," Nick responded nervously.

"Good instincts, pet." Damian's fingers stroked over the leather. "I think we'll leave it on for a while."

"You mean, I'm to go to a restaurant wearing a collar?" Nick's voice rose uncertainly.

"Yes, that's precisely what I mean. I will enjoy knowing that you're wearing it under your shirt, where no one else can

see it. A sign of my ownership." Damian slowly buttoned the boy's shirt all the way to the top, patting his chest when he was finished. "Let's go."

Nick wanted to check to see if the collar was showing, but Damian didn't allow him any time for that. He simply unlocked the door and pushed Nick out ahead of him. Ashley and Derek were waiting by the outer door, so the young man had no chance to ask any questions, like, was he still under Damian's control?

Nick decided to be safe rather than sorry later, so he went with yes.

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Chapter Eight

The restaurant that Ashley chose was expensive and good. The food was excellent and the two older men spent time over the wine list, choosing a different one to go with each course.

Even if he hadn't been wearing the collar, Nick would have been on his best behavior, subdued by the elegance of his surroundings. And yet the restaurant was comfortable, just noisy enough to not feel conspicuous if one laughed out loud and the wait staff were friendly and prompt. It was a relief for once, to have someone waiting on him. Unbeknownst to him, the restaurant was part of the club that Ashley belonged to, explaining the high quality of service.

The atmosphere was soothing and luxurious. Even Derek and Ashley seemed to relax a little with each other, speaking civilly and taking part in the conversation.

Ashley, however, noticed that the dangerous glint in Damian's eyes had increased, rather than diminished. He was wondering if the other two had had a squabble, but Nick seemed to be most attentive, watching the photographer for approval.

Then Ashley realized that in spite of the baggy pants and incredibly ugly shirt, Nick's beauty was attracting no little attention from the other guests. Men and women alike were watching Nick, recognizing him as an inexperienced sub, and Damian didn't like it one bit. Ashley was wondering what

Damian was going to do about that, because he wasn't the kind of man to let that kind of threat go.

In fact, Damian was fuming. Everything seemed to be rubbing him the wrong way that day: first Ashley offering Nick the collar, the misunderstanding over Mistress Bettie, and now the older man at another table who had met his eyes more than once, staring insolently at him in a clear challenge. The older dominant emanated a subtle aura of power and he made it obvious that he wanted Nick. A young man of Nick's age, impressionable, just starting to take a few tentative steps into this lifestyle, could be blind to the real dangers that lurked out there, and Damian wanted to keep him from that. But most of all, Damian meant to show that man and anyone else that they were not going to simply take his boy away from him.

When Nick went to the restroom, he went alone, declining Derek's offer to accompany him; he never had been able to pee when people were watching him. He was amazed by the elegance of the restroom. It was lined with gleaming marble, dark and masculine. There were mini halogen lights suspended over each trendy vessel sink, making the glass sparkle, and real linen towels. Nick was washing his hands when Damian came in, catching his reflection in the glass. His smile faded when he saw Damian lock the outer door behind him.

Damian's eyes glittered dangerously at Nick's questioning look. He stepped up behind him and slid his hands under the boy's shirt, stroking his supple skin.

"I don't like how people are looking you, pet. I'm going to put my mark on you," Damian growled.

"Huh?" was Nick's highly intelligent reply. He was completely unprepared for the other man's possessive attitude. "No one was looking at me."

"Shut up. Take down your pants. I'm going to mark you as mine."

Nick squeaked and held onto his belt, fighting Damian for possession of it. "Here? Everyone will hear. They'll know!"

"I want them to know," Damian said, winning the wrestling match for the belt as was inevitable that he would.

"London!" Nick gasped. "London!"

Damian stopped, his eyes clearing as he noticed how terrified Nick looked. After a long minute, he pulled him into a hug. "I'm sorry, baby. I didn't mean to scare you. I thought you'd like it." He rubbed his hand ruefully over Nick's back, feeling the boy's heart pounding against his chest. "You're trembling. It's okay. I'm not going to do it."

Nick laughed weakly and pushed himself away to look into Damian's eyes. "I guess I *can* trust you."

Damian cupped his chin. "You can. That wasn't brilliant of me, but if you found out for sure you can trust me, it wasn't totally in vain."

Nick smiled and asked in a small voice, "Were people really looking at me?"

"They weren't just looking; they want you," Damian growled, his ire rising again at the thought of someone taking his boy.

"And you want to mark me?" Nick asked, tilting his head and smiling provocatively.

Damian was stunned; his boy was teasing him? "Let's not forget who's boss here, pet," he threatened.

"I was just thinking, you could mark me a different way," Nick said. "Give me a hickey."

Damian stared at him and started to laugh. "Why you little ... I *will* give you one, just to teach you. You'll regret stealing my thunder, you scamp."

Nick started to giggle. "Scamp? Is that a time-honored title for a sub?"

"No, but you are one," Damian said. He pulled Nick closer and unbuttoned his shirt, opening it and turning his boy to face the mirror, pressing Nick back against his chest. "You're *my* scamp and I don't mean to let you forget it."

Nick watched Damian's hands roaming possessively over his body, cupping his groin and coming up to tug meaningfully on the collar exposed now that his shirt was open.

"Mine," Damian growled. He thumbed Nick's nipples as he bent to bite the tender throat right above the collar. He sucked furiously, making a mark that would last for several days. When he was finished, he raised his head to inspect the wet red bite mark in the mirror, taking in Nick's dazed eyes and parted lips as he panted softly.

Damian spun the boy in his arms and bit his chest, just above his right nipple, leaving another sign. "Now you're marked as mine. And everyone out there will know it. Return to the table after you button up."

With that he grabbed the boy's hair, pulling him closer, and kissed Nick bruisingly hard, not giving him a kiss so much as demanding possession of his mouth. And then he was gone.

Nick looked after Damian in a trance, wondering what had just happened between them. For sure, it had been interesting. And he felt infinitely relieved that he'd been able to stop Damian, merely by using his safe word.

He buttoned up, noticing that the mark Damian had sucked on his neck peeked over the collar of his shirt. He drew a finger over his swollen lips in wonder that he could arouse that passion of possessiveness.

Damian returned to the table wearing a feral grin that put Ashley on alert. He was having so much fun watching Dominant Damian come out to play that he hadn't even quarreled once with Derek during the time they'd been left alone at the table.

Damian watched with pride as certain persons in the room recognized the mark of ownership he'd set upon Nick's neck, watching him weave his way through the tables. There was acknowledgment of his claim and the one Dom who'd challenged Damian discreetly lifted his glass in capitulation.

Ashley noticed the slightly bewildered look and reddened lips, and watched to see whether Nick winced as he dropped to his chair. As he didn't, Ashley concluded that something different than he anticipated had happened in the restroom. He was dying to ask, but he knew that Damian would never tell him.

Derek's eyes flicked between the other three men. He recognized the look of a successful hunter on Damian's face, the confused lust on Nick's, but what surprised him most was the expression of longing in Ashley's eyes when the older man looked at him. He smiled tentatively and wondered if perhaps he'd been too hasty in refusing a spanking from the handsome man.

* * * *

Nervously Nick followed Damian upstairs to the studio when Ashley had dropped them off after dinner, driving away with a rather silent Derek beside him. Nick and Damian were quiet as well, the tension between them simmering just below the surface.

Balked of his intention to mark Nick in the restroom at the restaurant, Damian was determined to possess him tonight. It was all very well to leave a hickey and growl *mine*, but he wished to take what no other man before him had enjoyed. It annoyed him that he was unable to control his own impulses, but he pushed the thought away.

"Go to the makeup room. Wait for me," Damian commanded tersely.

Nick was beginning to realize that he was not going to get off with a mere hickey. Tonight Damian was determined to mark him in some more visible way. He felt a thrill of fear, not knowing exactly what Damian had planned for him, but knowing that he was going to be feeling something different on his arse tonight. He started when Damian reappeared in the doorway.

"Follow me."

Nick walked meekly behind Damian into the office, realizing that all of their scenes had so far taken place here. He wondered if he would ever see Damian's home, and concluded that probably the older man didn't want him prying into his private life. For some reason that thought upset him and he kept his eyes down, so that Damian couldn't see the sudden tears he was trying to hide.

"Hands behind your back. Choose two."

Nick surveyed the desk, where Damian had laid out a selection of implements. He shuddered; so far Damian had used only his hand. Now he was asking Nick to select from a crop, a whip, a strap, something with two tails, a paddle, and what he now knew was called a flogger. He shivered, wondering how each one would feel connecting with his arse.

"I don't have all day. Choose or I'll choose for you," Damian said sharply.

Hesitantly, Nick asked, "May I point, sir?"

Realizing the boy didn't know the names of everything, Damian said, "You may."

The younger man pointed to the tawse and the crop.

"Good choices," Damian said maliciously. "You'll be feeling this for several days. You'll be eating your breakfast standing up."

Nick wondered what had happened to the man who had held him in the restroom, apologizing for scaring him.

"Pants down. Bend over," Damian ordered. "You're going to feel this tomorrow and the marks may last a couple of days."

Hesitantly, Nick undid his pants, pushing them down to his knees, and bent over, feeling that his arse made far too conspicuous a target. He was nervous and his mouth was dry.

"Grab your ankles."

Nick bent further and grabbed his ankles, feeling a twinge of discomfort in his hip. He tensed up, uncomfortably conscious that in this position, his cheeks were stretched to the point that his hole must be clearly visible to Damian.

He felt Damian place the crop on his backside, just touching it, as if trying to get the range. Suddenly his hip was seized with pain, and he let out a groan.

"Nick? Nicky!"

The young man dropped to his hands and knees, panting, with his head dropped to the carpet, trying not to scream with the pain.

Damian dropped the crop and knelt beside Nick in alarm, running a soothing hand over the trembling back. "What is it, babe? I didn't even touch you!"

"My hip," Nick groaned. "Muscle spasm."

"Oh fuck," Damian muttered. "Can you move?"

"No." Nick gasped in pain.

"Okay, sweetheart. You just hang on. I'll do all the moving; you just let me take control."

Damian couldn't tell whether Nick could even hear him; he was panting and sweat was pouring off him as he shivered, frozen in place on his hands and knees.

Damian ran for a blanket from the studio, spreading it over the leather of the couch. Then he gently lifted Nick's body, straightening his back. He got the young man to his feet and

lifted him in his arms, carrying him to the couch, laying him down on the unscarred side.

He hurried to the kitchen, nuking a microwavable heating pad and snatched up a towel while he waited for it to be ready.

He ran back to the office, wincing as he saw Nick's shoulders shuddering as if he was crying. "Where does it hurt?"

"Scar," Nick moaned. It was becoming harder to keep the tears in and he didn't ever want to cry in front of Damian. He wanted Damian to think he was brave, even though he knew he wasn't.

Damian put the towel over Nick's hip and laid the heating pad on it carefully. Nick let his breath out on a low moan. Damian rubbed his shoulder comfortingly.

"Take it easy, babe. Try to relax."

"I'm sorry—" Nick began, almost sobbing.

"Shhh, calm down, take deep breaths. Your hip will feel better if you can relax."

"Is that an order, sir?" Nick whimpered.

Damian was startled, and then he laughed, unable to believe that Nick could still crack a joke when he was in such pain.

"Yeah, it's an order." He went to his private bathroom and got some lotion, warming it on his hands. He pushed up the ugly shirt and started to massage Nick's lower back edging toward his hip, finding the knots of tension and working them out. He continued to stroke down the curve of the younger man's hip, moving the heating pad and towel. The skin along

the scar was hot from the pad and Damian dug his fingers in gently, listening to the gasps and moans as he loosened the tight muscles.

Nick sagged in relief and his fists unclenched as Damian's hands worked their magic, releasing him from the prison of his rigid muscles.

Damian backed off on the pressure, merely stroking the slender back gently, offering what comfort he could to the boy. He heard the sigh of relief as Nick sagged even deeper into the couch.

"Okay, babe?"

"Yeah, I—I'm okay," Nick said shakily. He tried to push himself up but Damian's hand kept him pressed to the couch.

"Does this happen often? Do you have any pain pills?"

"Not too often. I have pills at my flat," Nick said in an exhausted voice.

"Would you trust me with your keys so I can go and get them?" Damian asked anxiously.

"No, I'll just go home. I don't want to be a bother."

"I'll take you home. Let's get you dressed. Let me do all the work; don't try to sit up by yourself. You might tweak it again," Damian ordered.

Nick was feeling rather limp and he was more than happy to allow Damian to maneuver his pants up. Damian hoisted him to his feet and slid an arm around his waist. How he managed the doors and locks, Nick didn't know; he was too out of it to take notice.

The next thing he knew Damian had buckled him into his car and was getting in the other side.

"Nick? Nicky? I need to know where you live."

Nick rested his head against the back of the seat and closed his eyes wearily. He hadn't had an attack this bad in a long time. He managed to give his address before lapsing into a dazed state.

When he felt Damian searching his pockets for his keys, Nick realized the car had stopped.

"Right front pocket," he whispered.

Damian found the keys and got out, locking the car. He hated leaving Nick there alone in a neighborhood renowned for being very seedy. From the look of the building it was unlikely that there was an elevator, and even though he was strong and fit he didn't fancy carrying Nick up an unknown number of stairs.

He found Nick's name on the mailbox and ran up the stairs two at a time, puffing by the time he reached the fourth floor. His instinct was right; he was not going to be carrying Nick up four stories. If worse came to worst, he would take the boy home with him.

He unlocked the door and stopped, appalled by the poverty that made the tiny flat cold and ugly. It was only a single room, with a bed and a tiny bathroom. No place to prepare food, no luxuries. Apparently Nick did not own a TV or radio, although he had a laptop. And he was a slob. Clothing covered every surface, mingled with books and papers.

Damian's lips tightened; now was not the time, but he would make sure Nick changed that or they would never be able to live together in harmony. Fuck! Where had *that* come from?

Damian stood motionless in shock as he worried exactly when he'd decided that Nick would be moving in with him. Then he remembered that he had left the semi-conscious young man in the car and resumed his search. At least Nick had left his pills in a sensible spot, in the medicine cabinet.

Damian locked the door behind him and leaped down the stairs. He was relieved to see his car intact and Nick apparently asleep.

He got in quietly and started the car. Nick's head rolled to the side and he opened his eyes to slits. "Find them?"

"Yes. See if you can get some sleep. We'll be home in fifteen minutes," Damian said soothingly.

Home. The words echoed in Nick's groggy mind. It had a nice ring to it. He spent as little time in his flat as possible. He didn't think of it as home; that was where his parents and his sister were, in the house where he grew up.

But if he wanted to study art he had to be in London, and his parents couldn't afford to send him so finding this flat was actually a stroke of luck. It was cheap and it was close enough to school that he could walk, saving him the tube fare.

When Damian turned the car into the circular drive and slowed to a stop, Nick pried his eyes open to see a charming Tudor cottage, two stories with a garden that looked enchanting even under the moonlight.

Damian ran around the car, opening the door and extracting Nick from the seat. He pulled Nick's arm over his shoulder and supported him to the door, unlocking it and kicking it open.

He guided Nick down a short hallway to a room with a fairly large bed. "I'm going to get you into bed. Let me do all the work, right?"

"Yeah."

Damian lowered Nick down onto the bed and stripped him, making short work of it. He lifted the slight body to pull the covers out from under him and tucked him in. "I'll be right back."

He fetched a glass of water and sat on the bed, leaning back against the headboard. He raised Nick to lean him against his shoulder and gave him one tablet and the water.

Nick swallowed and let his head drop onto the comforting shoulder, nuzzling into Damian's neck.

"Do you need two?" Damian questioned him.

"No," Nick managed.

"Okay. I'm just going to lock up and I'll be right back," Damian said. He arranged Nick to recline comfortably and went to secure the car and house.

He grinned ruefully. He was about to violate one of his own rules—having someone sleep beside him in the same bed. He had taken Nick to his guest room; he hadn't felt good about strong-arming him up the stairs to his own room, but he wanted to be sure that if the boy awoke in the night in pain, he was on hand to help.

Nick was asleep when Damian returned, only a faint line between his brows betraying the pain that still lingered. Damian wondered why he'd refused the second pill.

He undressed, slipping nude under the covers. Shifting in his sleep, Nick tried to get closer to the source of warmth.

Carefully Damian pulled him closer, allowing the boy to nestle close and wrapping his arms around him.

Nick's breathing slowed and Damian prepared for a very disturbing night.

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Chapter Nine

Nick swam to the surface with the typical hazy feeling he experienced after taking a painkiller. He also had to piss. Slowly, he pushed himself up to sit and squinted blearily. He didn't recognize his surroundings, but dim light emanating from a partially open door reflected off a tile wall allowed him to deduce that was where the bathroom was. Nick slid out of bed cautiously and in stages, stretching his back with both hands clutching his hip, as if trying to hold himself together. He was a little stiff, but the pill had done its job.

He managed the short distance to the bathroom without trouble, and peed. While washing his hands, he looked at himself in the mirror; as was typical after a spasm attack he was pale, with purple shadows under his eyes. He lowered his head to drink directly from the faucet, and dried his hands and face on a towel when he was finished, still without recognizing his surroundings.

Walking a bit more easily now, he returned to the bed and slid under the covers, shivering a little from the cold air on his bare skin. The bed was nice and warm, and he snuggled closer to the center. He gasped with surprise when his hand brushed naked skin, and he sat up, his heart pounding in his chest.

In the gray light of dawn sneaking through the windows, he recognized that he was in bed with Damian. What had happened last night? Why was he in bed with the photographer? Self-consciously he tightened his arse, but

nothing hurt so he concluded that they hadn't fucked and Damian hadn't spanked him either.

He sank down under the covers. It was chilly in the room and he had to assume, although he had no very clear remembrance of the night before, that Damian had gotten them both into the same bed and so presumably it would not surprise the older man to find him there.

As he cuddled closer, he realized that Damian was naked. He had never seen the other man naked before and Nick couldn't resist. He lifted the covers to look and his cock hardened immediately at the sight of the older man's body. "Fuck," he breathed. His sculptor's eye was delighted with the outline of Damian's form: completely masculine, hard muscle, not an excess ounce of fat. Every angle elegantly chiseled, every flat plane distinctly male, the carved abdominal ridges, hard pectorals, long firm thighs, all were more than he'd could have dreamt. For a man older than he (all of thirty-two, had he but known it) Damian was in phenomenal shape.

Cautiously Nick touched the light covering of hair on Damian's chest; it felt so different from his own hairless skin and he liked it. He ran a finger around one nipple, enthralled when he felt it harden in response. Drawing the finger down the dip in the center of Damian's body, he skirted the crisp curls to detour to the pronounced line between the torso and top of Damian's thigh, stroking along it to feel the tendons tense under his caress.

He looked up to find Damian's eyes were open, watching him as he explored. "You're so beautiful," Nick breathed,

unable to stop the utterance but unsure as to whether his behavior was acceptable.

"Thank you," Damian said softly. "How do you feel?"

"A little stiff, but all right," Nick responded guiltily, taking his hand away.

"Do you want to touch me?" Damian asked, without moving.

"Oh, yes," Nick whispered.

"Go ahead."

Nick leaned forward eagerly; it hadn't sounded like a command at all, more like a request. He could hardly believe he was being given free rein to discover the other man's body.

He inhaled, sniffing the clean, natural scent of the older man; there was something about Damian's essence that made him feel safe. The first thing he wanted to do was dip his tongue into the hollow at the base of Damian's throat; it had fascinated him since he'd first been hired. From there he explored the photographer's neck and chest with lips and tongue, tracing the swell of each pectoral.

Damian arched under the slow journey, taking in a sharp breath as Nick's mouth closed over his nipple, teasing him instinctively with little nips and slow, torturous circles around the aureole. He suppressed his urge to grab Nick's head and guide his tour, controlling his movements; for some reason, it just felt right to allow the younger man the freedom to find his hot spots.

Nick experienced taking the lead for the first time in their relationship and enjoyed the voyage, sensing that he held the

power of arousing Damian in ways that he didn't fully recognize as yet.

He ran his tongue over the soft hair on Damian's chest, moving downward toward the rigid shaft that lay on the older man's stomach. He licked over the head and felt strong hands stop him.

Damian rolled Nick onto his back and smiled at him. "My turn."

Holding the younger man in place, Damian explored the pliant body that lay under him with his mouth. He licked over the marks he'd made on the previous evening, soothing away any lingering sting. He didn't regret making them; in fact the sight of them filled him with pride.

"So beautiful and all mine," he murmured. He looked up to see the curve of pink lips, and the heavily lidded eyes, soulful with arousal and some softer emotion.

"Yours," Nick echoed. He gasped when Damian's mouth found his cock and swallowed him whole. He'd never felt anything like that and that was the last coherent thought he had, bucking wildly into the wet heat surrounding him.

Ever since their first encounter together, Damian had yearned for the taste of his young lover and now he indulged himself, licking, sucking, nibbling and nuzzling. He ran his tongue delicately along the underside of Nick's cock, noting each spot that made the boy whimper and squirm. He sucked in his balls, one at a time, lavishing his tongue over each one until Nick couldn't keep still. Finally Damian relaxed his throat and took the boy's cock in to the root, his nose nuzzling the curls at the base. He allowed his throat muscles to work

around the hard length, his hands holding the slim hips in place as Nick cried out and tried to thrust as he came, releasing himself into Damian's mouth. At last Nick stopped moving, his chest heaving with exertion.

Damian smiled as he crawled up to take his lips in a tender kiss, sharing the flavor with his young lover. Nick opened his eyes and stroked Damian's cheek.

"I want to be inside you, Nick, to take you completely and make you mine," Damian whispered.

"Please ... I want to feel you inside me," Nick answered breathlessly.

Damian smiled to feel Nick widen his legs, welcoming him between them. "Your hip—are you sure you'll be okay?"

"I'm sure," Nick said, although his voice quavered uncertainly. "I'm just stiff."

Damian groped and found the boy's cock was more than half-hard again already, in spite of his release. "I guess you are," he teased.

Nick laughed, and Damian delighted to hear the carefree sound.

Dropping a kiss on the laughing lips, he said, "It will be easier for the first time if you're on your stomach. You can relax and let me do all the work."

"Yes, sir," Nick said acquiescently.

Damian kissed him one more time and carefully rolled him onto his stomach. He stroked the firm rounded buttocks with pleasure, enjoying the way his palms fit around the curved mounds. He tapped one gently, saying, "Lift up, babe."

Nick raised his hips and Damian slid a pillow under him.
"Okay?"

"Yeah," came a sigh in response.

"I'll go slow," Damian promised, although the sight of the beautiful bottom just made him want to bury himself inside in one quick thrust. He pressed the base of his cock to slow himself down and resumed his sensuous massage.

He squeezed and molded the round globes, noting how Nick spread his legs wider in response, as if inviting him to have his way, which he fully intended to do. He allowed his thumbs to wander closer to the cleft with each pass, dipping further inside.

Nick moaned as Damian gently pulled his cheeks apart and brushed over his hole for the first time. He was grinding into the pillow beneath him and he felt his entrance throb with desperate anticipation, barely able to wait for a firmer touch.

Damian reached for the lube that he kept in every room of the house, chuckling inwardly at the forlorn hope that had led him to supply the drawer some years ago. His lack of sexual activity resulted in completely unused supplies; he just hoped condoms didn't expire with age.

Slicking his fingers, he pressed one to the pulsing opening, feeling it yield to his pressure. He slowly slid his finger inside, feeling Nick spread his legs even wider to give him more access, lifting his bottom to meet his hand. He stroked the boy's back with his other hand, soothing him through the first penetration.

Slowly thrusting his finger in and out, Damian bent to press his lips against the scar. "That's right, open for me,

baby. Open so you can take my cock inside your tight little hole. You look so beautiful, spread open for me, wanting me to take you."

He withdrew to add another finger, easing inside as gently as he could. The boy was very tight and Damian knew that he was longer and thicker than average. His primal instincts had kicked in but he controlled them, not wanting to hurt Nick. He added yet another finger, twisting to find the sensitive center of the boy's pleasure, stroking over it to see the slender body shudder in response to the delicate stimulation.

Damian pulled his fingers out and tore open the foil packet, smoothing the condom over his cock with trembling hands. He paused to squeeze the base again. The sight of Nick lying there spread open, his fists working in the sheets, his hole glistening from Damian's preparation, was almost enough to make him come from his own touch. And he wanted to make this first time wonderful for both of them, to give Nick pleasure and to claim his mate.

Damian moved between Nick's thighs, stroking the velvet skin as he bent to whisper again in his ear. "Submit to me, Nick. Take my cock deep inside you. Let me give you pleasure that you've never dreamed of. Let me claim you."

Swept away with emotion and the physical sensations that only Damian could create with that commanding, husky voice, Nick gasped, "Take me, Damian ... please ... I want to feel you ... claim me...."

Damian closed his eyes, almost overcome by the broken response. He claimed Nick's lips with one last kiss and shifted to line himself up. Gripping the slender waist in his strong

hands, he pushed, knowing that the first penetration of the head would be the hardest for the boy.

Nick cried out as he clenched automatically against the large intruder, and then surrendered to the older man's greater strength. Finally the head popped inside and Damian paused, stroking his back soothingly.

It burned, and his guardian muscle cramped sharply as Nick struggled to relax.

"You're so tight. So hot," Damian crooned as he stroked the boy's tense back. He could feel the moment of submission as he entered him, when Nick choked in a deep breath and forced himself to relax.

Damian started to rock his hips, slowly inching his cock into the hot, narrow sheath, holding onto his control by sheer willpower. "Talk to me, Nick. How does it feel?"

"So full," Nick said in a tight voice. "There's so much of you."

"Yield to me, baby. Let me inside," Damian ordered and his voice seemed to soothe the boy. He could feel the inner muscles ripple around him, almost pulling him deeper inside. The blazing heat of the channel gripping his erection sent sparks of fire dancing up his spine. He looked down to see Nick's pink hole stretch around his cock, accepting him inside, and growled with dominance.

Once Nick had surrendered to the inevitable, the burning invasion melted into pleasure. He'd never realized he would feel so full, so complete with Damian buried deep inside him. It was as if a missing piece of the puzzle had fallen into place and he knew what he'd been yearning for, without ever

realizing it. He sighed and relaxed even further as the brush of Damian's cock over his prostate sent shivers of bliss throughout his body, his consciousness centered on that point of contact. Heat blossomed within him with each thrust as Damian drove deep inside him. Nick felt claimed, valued, as if he was precious in Damian's eyes.

Unconsciously he ground his own erection into the pillow beneath his hips, raising his arse to meet each thrust. With every stroke, Damian brought him nearer to release until at last he cried out, his orgasm rolling through him, curling his toes and fingers with ecstasy.

Damian smiled as he felt Nick clench around him. He gripped the slender hips and hauled the boy to his knees, holding him there as he pounded into him, chasing his own release. He uttered a wild cry as he spasmed into the condom, wishing that he could plant his seed deep within the boy, but even without that, he owned Nick now. He thrust one last time, freezing in place as the last ripple of pleasure rolled through him.

He sank down, pushing Nick flat beneath him, taking pleasure in covering the slender, pliant body with his own. "Mine," he growled softly and bit the velvet shoulder, but not hard enough to leave a mark. He had claimed the boy as his own; his mark was indelible now. He was satisfied.

Both men drifted off to sleep, Damian still buried deep within his boy.

* * * *

Nick woke and felt around the cold sheets before his eyes were open. He wondered if he'd dreamt it, but he thought he remembered that Damian had fucked him. He flexed his arse and the soreness told him it was no dream.

He shifted in bed, wanting to just lie there and let his mind drift. He stretched on the luxuriously soft bed, wondering if Damian expected him to get up.

"Hey, Nicky," Damian said, calling him again by the diminutive that only his mother and sister ever used. He came in bearing a tray, which he set on the bedside table. "How are you feeling?" he asked, feeling Nick's forehead as if he'd had a fever.

"I'm fine," Nick answered nervously, unsure as to how things stood between them now.

Damian went to the closet and retrieved an old plaid flannel shirt. "Slip this on, so you don't get chilled. I brought you breakfast."

Obediently, Nick pulled the shirt over his shoulders. Damian fluffed pillows, placing them against the headboard for the boy to lean against.

"What did you bring me?" Nick asked expectantly.

Damian chuckled. "Only coffee and toast. I'm afraid I don't eat here very often and there isn't much in the house."

"That's okay," Nick said, sniffing deeply at the steaming cup that Damian handed him. He was surprised at the first sip to see that Damian had remembered how he took his coffee. He raised glowing eyes to the older man and accepted a slice of buttered toast.

They ate the simple meal in silence and Nick yawned when he was done. Damian took the empty cup from his lax fingers.

"How's your hip?"

"It's fine, Damian, really," Nick said with a smile.

"Tell me why you only wanted one pill."

"Two knock me out forever. One doesn't work on the pain quite as fast, but it doesn't leave me so groggy," Nick explained. "And you rubbing my back so quick helped me relax, so it didn't get as bad as sometimes."

"Why don't you go back to sleep and take it easy today?" Damian asked.

Nick yawned but shook his head. "I don't want to be in your way. You must have things to do."

There was no way that Damian could tell Nick how empty it made him feel to think of taking him home. He couldn't admit that he would miss the boy, even to himself. "No, I plan to take it easy myself. Can I get you anything from your apartment?"

Nick blushed deeply, remembering the state he'd left it in. He'd been so anxious to see Damian lately that he hadn't bothered to put anything away at all. "Uh, that's okay."

Damian laughed. "I've already seen the worst. If you wanted your laptop and a change of underwear...."

Nick turned redder. "I don't think there *is* any clean underwear. But I could use my laptop."

Damian kissed the silky curls. "Lie down and get some rest. I'll be back soon."

A Strong Hand
by Catt Ford

Nick slid down in the bed and snuggled against his pillow, feeling cared for. It was a nice feeling after being away from home for four years. He hoped ... but then he pushed the thought away. Damian could never love him; he would just have to make do with what the photographer was willing to offer.

* * * *

Sunday was a lazy day for both men. Nick slept most of the day and Damian kept tiptoeing to the doorway in his socks to watch him, not wanting to be caught. He told himself it was simply because the boy was so beautiful. The slight smile on Nick's face as he hugged his pillow and restlessly moved his hips made Damian feel lonely somehow, no matter how he tried to talk himself out of it.

Whenever Nick sighed or turned in his sleep, Damian would run for it.

Between sightseeing excursions, he ran the washer, doing his own laundry and a pile of Nick's that he'd gathered from every horizontal surface in the untidy apartment. He even folded it, smiling as he thought how the tables had been turned a bit. Here he was, the Top, doing chores for his sub.

When dusk's shadows crept into the rooms Damian called for Chinese takeaway, ordering whatever he thought might tempt his boy.

* * * *

Monday morning found Ashley tapping his foot impatiently, arms crossed as he leaned against the locked studio door.

When the lift doors opened, he started to drawl sarcastically, "So you finally decided to come to work. What's wrong?"

Damian was walking slowly, his arm around Nick, who was still a bit stiff and limping. "Nick's hip went out on him Saturday night, after we got back from dinner. He's just a bit out of it. He had to take another pain pill this morning and I didn't want to leave him alone."

Ashley strode forward, holding his arms out. "I'll take him; you open up."

Damian grinned. "Nice try. Take the keys and unlock the door."

Ashley grinned back. "It was worth a shot."

Nick smiled groggily, not quite understanding the byplay between the two men. "Sorry, Ashley, I don't think I can do much today."

Ashley looked back over his shoulder. "Not a problem. We'll work around you. Get some rest, lad." By then he had the door open and the three men went inside, Damian leading Nick to his office. The blanket was still on the couch so he swept it back, settling the boy so he was on his side with a pillow under his head and another between his knees.

Damian bent to tuck the blanket around him. "Go to sleep, babe. Don't worry about anything. We'll be right outside if you need anything, okay?"

"Yeah," Nick sighed, relaxing as his pill started to kick in again, once he'd stopped moving. He had hoped that perhaps Damian might want to fuck him again, but the older man had

left him alone in the guest room last night after they had eaten dinner together.

After spending the solitary night tossing and turning, racking his brain to discover what he'd done wrong, or what he had left undone, Nick had finally awakened in the morning, twisted into an uncomfortable position with his hip sending warning signals to his brain.

Ashley watched as Damian ran his hand over the glossy curls. Nick's eyes drooped shut and he fell asleep, obviously under the influence of whatever painkiller Damian had given him.

"Is he okay?" Ashley whispered.

Damian backed out, closing the door behind him. "He had some kind of accident, a few years ago. Had an operation and as far as I can tell, he's mostly quite sound. I don't know the whole story, but if he's under stress or in the wrong position, apparently he has muscle spasms."

"You need a nice spanking bench," Ashley advised judiciously. "Padded surface, adjustable in height, sturdy ring bolts...."

Deciding attack was the best form of defense, Damian ignored this sage advice and asked, "How're you getting on with Derek? Where is he?"

Ashley coughed and answered. "I sent him to the office for a few things. He'll be here soon."

"That wasn't much of an answer," Damian teased.

"We're talking," Ashley answered slowly. "Apparently Nick told him that he hadn't given me much of a chance to explain

myself. That he'd hurt my feelings by not trusting me to take things slowly."

Damian was very amused. "Nick? Giving advice to Derek?"

"Well, whatever you've been doing to him, and I do still want details," Ashley said, salaciously licking his lips, "it seems you at least have won his trust. I just hope you're worthy of it."

Damian turned away, pretending to inspect the display of whips. *I hope so too*, he thought.

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Chapter Ten

Nick would have been quite happy to take his pile of clean, folded laundry and gone home at the end of a day during which he'd napped almost constantly. He had drifted out of the office once to observe the shoot, dismayed to see that Mistress Bettie was working her wiles on Damian again. He turned so pale that Derek and Ashley had both exclaimed at him and Damian had sternly ordered him back to the couch.

Feeling limp and weak, he went without bothering to protest. He didn't protest later either when Damian took him to his flat. He was hoping that perhaps he would be invited to Damian's bed, but instead he was dropped off in front of his apartment block and told to get some rest.

Damian was polite and considerate; he hadn't given a single order since Saturday night and Nick felt that he had become extremely remote. He had no idea how he had offended the photographer and no idea how to regain the ground that they'd lost.

Nick had classes the next day so he wasn't rostered for work at the studio. He'd hoped Damian would call his cell but it remained silent all day, except for one text from his sister. That night, alone in his small, cold, uncomfortable apartment, with the spring that poked through the mattress sticking him in the ribs, he cried himself to sleep.

* * * *

Meanwhile, things were on the up for Ashley. He'd driven Derek home from the restaurant on Saturday night, recognizing the younger man's efforts to keep the conversation going. When Derek invited him in for coffee he'd accepted, and they had managed to get along rather nicely.

Ashley's mood was one of hopeful optimism when he arrived at the studio the next morning. Therefore he was a bit dismayed to see that Nick had reverted to his antagonistic, surly manner while Damian was remote and snappy.

After the promising atmosphere of Saturday night and the tenderness with which Damian had tended to the boy when he was hurt, Ashley couldn't imagine what had gone wrong. It was absolutely none of his business whatsoever, and therefore he fully intended to pry and poke until he had the full story. Then he would set it to rights. Top he might be, but he was also the CEO of a large and successful company and this was merely an example of employee discord. Or nearly so, he thought with a grin. All analogies were imperfect.

He decided to tackle Nick first; the boy was inexperienced and obviously confused, and therefore an easier mark than Damian. Ashley wasn't his Dom, but he had no doubt that he could bring the boy to his knees. Literally.

After watching Nick shrug and snarl at Derek, Ashley had an even more potent reason for stepping in. No one dissed *his* boy. Even though Derek technically hadn't agreed to anything yet, Ashley had hopes in that arena.

Waiting for Damian to be otherwise occupied on the set, Ashley meandered into the kitchen area. Damian had nixed all his suggestions for using Nick in any shots that day, and

therefore the boy had been demoted once again to assistant. Privately Ashley thought perhaps it was because they were shooting short shorts and Damian didn't want Nick's arse on display, but whatever the reason, the boy was drooping about over his task, aimlessly wiping the countertops free of crumbs from morning coffee.

"Hello, Nicholas. How is your hip today?" Ashley asked kindly.

"Fine," was the terse, one-word answer. Nick didn't even look up.

That would have to be remedied; the boy wasn't *his* sub, but he *was* a sub, and Ashley was a Top. Time for the boy to learn that there were manners in this world!

"Boy!" Ashley said crisply, in a voice that snapped with power.

Nick looked up, his eyes wide with apprehension. Ashley pointed to the floor and automatically, without thinking, Nick went to his knees and clasped his hands behind him, wondering what had compelled his obedience.

"Better," Ashley said. "Boy, I am a Dom. I may not be your Dom, but I require respect. If you behave like that again, I'll put you on your knees no matter who else is in the room. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Nick responded miserably. There was no sexual charge for him in obeying Ashley but his position on his knees reminded him of how much he'd lost. He looked down at the floor, blinking to keep his tears from spilling over.

"What happened between you and Damian?" Ashley said in a kinder voice. "Things seemed to be going so well, both of

you mooning about with stars in your eyes and a sting in your bottom, no doubt, and then suddenly Damian is surly as a bear and you're acting the brat again."

Nick suppressed a sob, his Adam's apple bobbing, and merely shook his head speechlessly.

He felt long fingers cupping his jaw, and his head was tilted back. "Look at me, boy," Ashley instructed, his voice still gentle. "What happened after your hip went out?"

Nick gulped nervously. "Damian took me home; he took care of me."

"And?"

"He ... uh ... he...." Nick struggled, not knowing quite how to put this into words.

"He took you?" Ashley helped.

"Yeah," Nick nodded miserably, not meeting Ashley's eyes. "And then, he just ... um ... he never ... he only ... uh...."

"Ah, I see," Ashley said, as comprehension flooded over him. "He was kind to you."

"Yes. No ... he's always kind ... he just..." Nick floundered.

"He's treating you like you're made of glass and you might break."

"I guess," Nick agreed miserably.

"Have you talked to him? Asked him why?"

"I couldn't!"

"You could, and you'd better learn to make your needs known, Nick, or you won't learn how to get what you want. However, I think in this case perhaps you'd better leave this to Uncle Ashley," the older man said. "Do you need a hand up?"

"No, I'm fine," Nick quavered.

"Up you get then, lad," Ashley said, "Go and dry your pretty eyes. You don't want Damian to know you were crying on my shoulder."

Nick rose seamlessly and Ashley marveled at his grace; truly a natural sub.

"I wasn't anywhere near your shoulder," Nick said, looking up at Ashley from under his lashes. "Sir."

Damn, the boy was dangerous and he hadn't the least idea of his own provocative allure. "Get off with you, boy. And you might locate Derek for me. He should have been back an hour ago."

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir." Nick ducked into the bathroom, wiping at the tear that threatened to spill from his left eye. That one always teared up first.

In fact, Derek had returned, and he'd witnessed only the two men's positions. He couldn't overhear what had been said, but he was feeling oddly jealous to find Nick on his knees in front of Ashley.

And he had not been the only witness. Ashley wandered out into the studio, to find Damian had sent all of the models off for a change and was slamming sandbags around at the back, behind some unused flats. He chuckled to himself; he'd hoped that Damian would see him command Nick to his knees. Jealousy was an emotion he could work with.

"Damian, I was just thinking—" Ashley began, his voice innocent and unconcerned, as if he hadn't been caught.

Damian turned and swept Ashley up against the wall, trying to brace his forearm across Ashley's throat, but the

larger man was prepared. He allowed Damian to commit his weight and followed the sweep of his momentum, turning them so that Damian ended up with his back against the wall with Ashley pressing his weight against him to keep him motionless.

"Get off me," Damian demanded, struggling against the larger man.

In spite of himself, Ashley felt his cock stir when he felt the fine body pinned under his, writhing fruitlessly. "What's the matter, Damian? Since when can't you throw me off?" Ashley taunted.

Damian's face darkened and he doubled his efforts but Ashley kept him pinned. No matter what tricks he tried, it seemed Ashley was one step ahead of him and all Damian managed to do was wear himself out.

"What're you trying to pull, Ashley? I thought you were supposed to be my friend!" Damian hissed.

"I'm doing this because I *am* your friend," Ashley grinned, his teeth white and gleaming. Damian was almost afraid. Almost.

"You're acting like a complete git. I asked if you were claiming Nick and you said you were. You put your mark on him in a public place and then you abandoned him. How do you think he's feeling right now?"

Damian struggled weakly and subsided, Ashley's words echoing in his brain. "He'll be all right. He's better off."

"How do you know? Did you ask him what he wanted? Or did you just decide that it would be dangerous to let this go any further?"

"I didn't—I didn't ask," Damian admitted.

Ashley shook him. "You're a complete twat. How long have you been playing?"

"Twelve years."

"And you still haven't learned that the bottom is the one with all the power?" Ashley shook him again. "What are you thinking?"

"Thinking with my dick, I guess," Damian laughed.

"Believe me, your dick doesn't even come into it. If your dick had been doing any thinking whatsoever, Nick wouldn't be moping around here as if his pet dog died and you would have had me on my back on the floor, instead of sucking air with my knee in your gut," Ashley claimed, disgusted. He let Damian go and cuffed him lightly on the back of the head.

"You're suffering from Top Drop."

"I am *not*! I've never—"

"Yes you are. You're questioning your own instincts. Trust yourself."

"What if I hurt him?"

"You're an experienced and attentive Top. Are you trying to make me believe that you would ignore Nick's reactions and cause him an injury?"

Impotently, Damian clenched his fists, glaring at Ashley. "You don't understand."

"I understand perfectly," Ashley said. "You're afraid that *you're* the one who's going to get hurt. And there's no evidence for that. The boy adores you."

"He's too young," Damian muttered.

"No, he's not." Ashley paused, studying the other man. "I think you've found the one you've been looking for all your life and it scares you to death."

"You're right about that last part at least," Damian said, trying to pin Ashley to the wall in his turn. "So your advice is for me to claim him?"

"You already did that," Ashley said, disengaging with ease. "Listen, you're the only Top who would play with that sub who had lost his leg. Everyone else was afraid of hurting him and wouldn't touch him. You had the patience to go slow with him and discover his limits. When you two parted, he felt like a man again."

Damian seemed startled. "You think I'm insulting Nick's manhood?"

"Just because he's a sub doesn't mean he's not a man," Ashley said gently. "He may enjoy submitting to you, but he's still your equal in this. It's not like you to forget that, Ian. Now that you know he has a liability, work with it."

"Fuck me," Damian murmured.

"Oh, believe me, I would like to, but I've blown my only chance out of the goodness of my heart," Ashley mourned. "Now that you've regained your sanity, I'll never be able to overpower you again. You're a Top's Top, and I'm merely a kinky bastard with a cane." He reached over and gave Damian's bottom a squeeze. "Mmm, I'm a fool, passing up my chances to do the lad a favor. But I'm a sucker for a boy with beautiful eyes."

"He asked you to talk to me?" Damian asked, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

Ashley rolled his eyes. "Damian, I had to force a few stammered 'ums' and 'uhs' out of him. Is it likely that he came to me for confessional?"

Remembering Nick's largely inarticulate and tentative responses, Damian chuckled. "No, I guess not. How did you put him on his knees?"

"Pointed at the floor. You've trained him well," Ashley said smugly. "He's missing you badly, or I doubt very much it would have worked. And take my word for it; the AW 2001 is the spanking bench for you. It would provide ample support under his chest; no chance of his hip going out on you or an awkward position leading to an injury. I'd be happy to give you a good price on a demo. Nick would look simply delicious bent over one with his pink little arse raised at just the right height for fucking."

Damian shook his head, smiling ruefully. "And I suppose you'd like to watch."

"If only. That would be payment enough for me," Ashley said, a glazed look of lust coming over him. "And perhaps you'll bring him round to the clubs. I've never seen you in action and now that you're playing again—"

"No, no, I'm over all that," Damian said hastily. "Though perhaps we might come round one day to watch you raising cane."

Ashley laughed at the double entendre. "My competitive days are over. I only do demonstrations now, usually at conferences. But you never know."

"Things looking up with Derek?" Damian asked slyly.

Ashley snorted with laughter. "Some things, yes. We're talking. I don't think he quite understands the call of all this kinky stuff yet, but he's trying to keep an open mind."

Damian nodded. "That's a good first step."

* * * *

Meanwhile Nick emerged from the bathroom with his eyes suspiciously red, but dry. He saw Damian and Ashley emerge from behind the flats and hoped that whatever Ashley had done hadn't ruined everything. Already he regretted having confided the little that he had, but Damian looked to be in a better humor and Ashley was waving his hands with animation as they talked. Nick sighed. He wasn't good at waiting, dammit, and he wanted some kind of sign that he was back in Damian's good graces.

He didn't notice Derek's hurt expression, nor Markie sighing regretfully as his eyes flicked between Ashley and Derek. He went into Damian's office to collect the coffee cup that the photographer had carried in there earlier and turned to find Damian standing in the doorway, regarding him with a wicked smile. He froze, mercifully not dropping the cup.

Damian closed the door, and Nick heard the click of the lock, his heart starting a slow pounding in his chest. The older man prowled toward him with a proprietary gleam in his eye. "Put that down, pet," he drawled.

Instantly, Nick's cock responded to the husky command, rising steadily, creating a visible bulge in his jeans. He set the cup down a bit hard.

"Bend over."

Automatically, Nick started to bend right where he was but Damian grabbed his shoulders and spun him so he was facing the desk, pressing his chest down onto the surface with a hand flat on his back. "Hands over your head. Keep them there."

Nick stretched his hands over his head and waited.

Damian smoothed his hand over the tight little ass, pulling the baggy jeans taut. "This will dampen the sound a bit." He brought his hand down on Nick's backside with stinging effect, but he was right, the sound was only a muffled slap. Nick hoped there was enough noise in the studio to cover it because he didn't want it to stop.

The hand continued to rain down hard blows, creating a welcome glow. Nick made a small sound, like the mowl of a kitten, and wriggled, causing Damian to pause and press his hand over the bulge in *his* pants.

"Now we'll have your trousers down and have a look," Damian murmured.

Nick could barely keep still; the photographer's hands at the closure of his jeans were unbearably arousing. He was aching hard. He had wanked during the days when Damian was ignoring him, but his efforts had been useless; he'd only succeeded in making himself sore. He hoped that perhaps Damian might be willing to remedy that.

He wiggled when he felt his jeans lowered to his knees. Damian's hands slid inside his boxers, teasingly squeezing his buttocks before he pushed those down as well.

"You're a lovely color round back," Damian observed. "Hot and pink. Peachy smooth," he said rubbing his hands all over

Nick's ass. "I think I might have to keep you this color all day; it's most becoming. Say a little swat every hour or so, work permitting."

"Yes, sir," Nick agreed. The warmth in his seat was quite pleasurable.

"I hope that you've missed this, me smacking your little bottom. Have you missed me here, filling you?"

A finger followed the line between his buttocks and Nick shivered as it caressed his opening.

"Yes, sir. I want you to fill me," Nick gasped, achieving his first direct request without prompting.

Damian swallowed the lump in his throat; his boy had courage, more than he did. Nick had no clue as to what was going on between them, and yet he was still brave enough to take that step off the edge of the cliff into freefall. Damian resolved that he wouldn't betray his boy's trust.

"And you want me to fill you now, don't you, my pet?" he inquired silkily, his voice giving no clue of what was going on for him internally.

"Yes, please, sir."

"Very well." Damian grinned and pulled something from his pocket. He lubed his fingers and stroked over the tiny pink portal, watching Nick try to remain still. He heard the gasp as he pushed his finger inside, spreading the lubrication, making the way easier. The boy was so tight Damian felt his cock harden against his belly and gave silent thanks that he was in the habit of dressing up; he hated getting hard with his cock at a weird angle.

When he had Nick gasping and squirming all over the surface of the desk, he withdrew his finger and said, "Are you ready for me, pet?"

"Yes ... please ... fill me ... sir," Nick stammered, desperately trying to keep his voice down.

He gasped and jumped when he felt something cool but hard stretching his hole, pulsing around it while he tried to figure out just what it was. He clenched around the invader and stirred, as if to look back, but Damian's hand held him flat on the desk. "What is that?"

"No peeking," Damian chastised him. He pushed another bead in, watching with pleasure as Nick's entrance pulsed with the penetration. The boy was writhing now, but Damian proceeded as if nothing unusual was happening.

Teasingly, Damian put the entire string of beads up Nick's ass, one at a time. The tiny yips that the boy made when they rubbed over his prostate were delicious, but Damian anticipated that by the time he removed them, Nick would be very hot and bothered indeed.

The beads were graduated in size and the final one stretched Nick fully. He gasped and ground his cock against the hard surface of the desk, wondering what the fuck Damian was stuffing up his arse.

Finally the hand holding him down was removed and with a final pat to the pink cheeks, Damian said, "You may stand up, pet."

Nick pushed himself up from the desk, feeling a curious full feeling, but not like when Damian had fucked him. "What are they, sir?"

"Anal beads," Damian said with a wicked grin. "Pull up your pants."

"You mean, you're not...?" Nick reluctantly pulled his jeans up and fastened them around his hips.

"Shh, pet, let me demonstrate," Damian said, and pulled a slender plastic remote out of his pocket. He flicked the switch and Nick froze when the vibration started inside him.

"Fuck!" he cried out, unable to control the exclamation. The effect on his prostate was startling and arousing. His cock strained upward in response and he clutched at himself, pressing on the bulge.

"Ah, ah. Hands off, pet," Damian crooned. He pulled the boy closer and outlined his cock by drawing a finger around the bulge. "This belongs to me. You only touch this when I say you may."

"Please, sir, please," Nick pleaded.

"You are so very pretty when you beg, pet," Damian observed, watching Nick's hand stray toward his crotch again. He turned off the remote and Nick sighed in relief. "I see you need your backside warmed up again to remind you to keep your hands off."

He pulled the wooden chair away from the wall. "Bend over, hands on the seat, ass out."

Nick obeyed and flinched as Damian's hand met his arse sharply, giving him four swats.

"Now remember, you are not to come without my express permission, pet," Damian said. "Stand up."

Nick stood up shakily, eyeing Damian suspiciously. "You're not going to set that thing off out there, are you?"

Damian hadn't actually planned on it, but that was none of Nick's business. "Feeling nice and full, pet?"

Nick gasped as Damian's hand went into his pocket and the beads started their evil dance inside him. "Yes sir, thank you, sir."

"Very pretty manners, pet. Well, I have product to shoot. And don't worry. This remote has quite a range. I don't actually have to see you in order for you to feel the effects, so perhaps you'd better be on your best behavior, pet. Carry on."

Damian left the room and Nick leaned weakly against the desk. Then his lips curved in a satisfied smile. Uncle Ashley must have been true to his word; his Top was playing with him again. He pulled downward on his balls, hoping to calm himself to the point where he could walk straight again.

* * * *

While Damian and Nick were getting reacquainted, Derek had approached Ashley with tragic eyes, but said nothing, merely handing him the box he'd been sent to bring.

Ashley knew something was wrong right away and he meant to establish at once whether Derek could accept being in a D/s relationship.

"Well, boy?"

Derek shook his head, but answered, "Nick was kneeling to you."

"And?"

Derek struggled with his own feelings of jealousy. "I didn't like it."

"Because he was in your place?" Ashley asked quietly. "Is that what you want, Derek? To be on your knees to me?"

"I—I don't know," Derek confessed.

Ashley said, "Look here, in every relationship, power flows back and forth between the partners, but usually one person takes the lead. In the lifestyle, the roles are just more clearly defined. In some ways, it's easier to get what you want. There's a vocabulary, a ritual to the exchange of power. I don't know that I can give it up, but I haven't the right to order you to try all this out. I think you would enjoy it, but I won't force you."

"Why? What makes you think I'd like ... being spanked?" Derek spat in disgust.

Ashley sighed. "Derek, do you find it easy being gay?"

"Well, it depends. Around you and Damian and Nick, it's not difficult at all. But out there," he waved his hand, "the hatred, the lack of understanding, the prejudice—"

"Exactly," Ashley agreed. "That's what you're doing to me. You're judging without experience, deciding based on no evidence at all, that I'm a sadist. Believe me, I don't like hurting people against their will. That's not what I do."

"You mean, people enjoy being hit with a whip?" Derek asked in disbelief.

Ashley laughed. "It depends on how your nerve endings are wired. The line between pain and pleasure is a narrow one. Remember that day I swatted you?"

Derek nodded.

"You had a reaction, you can't deny that. I saw it and you saw me see it. You were disgusted by yourself, not me,"

Ashley explained gently. "So you ran. You made me the demon."

Derek sighed. "Perhaps I did. Would you be patient with me? Go slow 'til I can figure this out?"

"Of course," Ashley said, his eyes warm. He pulled Derek closer for a hug. "Thank you for being willing to try."

* * * *

The afternoon was torture for Nick. Every time Damian's hand hovered near his pocket, the boy tensed, anticipating that perhaps the photographer was going for the remote. The wicked gleam in the older man's eyes kept him jittering nervously around the studio.

For a short time he decided to hide out in the makeup room, but the sudden tremor against his prostate made him leap to his feet and rush to the studio, staring at Damian with imploring eyes. Without turning to look at him, Damian's hand went to his pocket and Nick drooped with relief when the beads went still.

Whenever his cock started to relax a bit, Damian would hit the button, sometimes only for a few seconds, and Nick would spring to attention again. And as the day wore on, he became more aware of the feeling of fullness. He decided that perhaps, in self-defense, he might want to study up a bit on the items in Ashley's catalog.

He was very grateful to Ashley for setting things right, although the private part of him squirmed at some of the other man's comments. The thought that Ashley knew precisely what was going on between him and Damian made

Nick blush. The facts that he had allowed Damian to fuck him and spank him weren't exactly ones that he wanted to be common knowledge; he still wasn't entirely sure about the whole gay thing, gnawing it over in his mind. He only knew that when Damian told him to bend over, all the confusion in his head went away and he was happy to obey.

He was very relieved to be sent for takeaway for lunch; at least he'd be out of the range of that deadly remote.

* * * *

It had amused Damian to flick the button of the remote at random intervals during the afternoon, whenever he decided that Nick was getting a bit too comfortable. He'd almost forgotten just how enjoyable it was to toy with his pet.

At the same time, he was aware of currents passing between Ashley and Derek even while he composed his shots. Damian had to force himself to shoot with his usual care, he was so impatient to reestablish his ownership of Nick.

Ashley lingered at the end of the day, beautifully unconscious except for a wicked glint in his eye, knowing full well that both men wanted him far away. At last he could no longer ignore the pleading look in Derek's eyes and took himself off chuckling, pleased that he had managed to annoy at least three people in one masterful stroke.

He popped his head back in, startling both of them, to whisper in a sepulchral tone to Damian, "The AW 2001, don't forget."

"Beat it, Ashley!" Damian ordered with a grin.

"Yes, sir!" Ashley said and shut the door smartly.

"He calls you sir, sir?" Nick inquired in surprise.

"Just his little joke," Damian said. "And now," he advanced on Nick purposefully, "I have something I'd like to show you, but you'll have to pay for the privilege. Strip."

Nick's eyes immediately glazed over and his cock twitched. "Yes, sir." He still couldn't believe how that single word from Damian had the power to make him hard and eager to obey any command. He pulled his clothing off and dropped to his knees, clapping his hands behind his back.

Damian circled the trembling young man, pausing behind him to push his knees apart with his foot. The string tail of the beads still inside Nick was visible between his legs and Damian licked his lips. He would have to exercise his self-control to make it through the scene he had planned for the younger man.

"On your feet and follow me," he ordered.

Nick rose to his feet, eyes downcast, eagerly following the photographer into the back of the studio. Damian pulled some tall stand-reflectors out of the way, revealing a black leather harness of some kind, suspended from sturdy hooks in the beams by steel chains.

Nick eyed it nervously, but so far he had enjoyed the fearful anticipation that Damian knew so well how to build, leading him inevitably to pleasures he had never dreamed of.

"That is a sling, pet," Damian said. He pushed the shaped leather platform with a finger, setting it swaying. Padded leather cuffs were attached to each chain, swinging with the motion of the apparatus.

Nick couldn't take his eyes off it; he wondered how it would feel, to be spread apart and bound into the sling, helpless and available for whatever Damian desired to do to him. A delicate shiver passed through his body even while he wondered how one got into it.

He jumped when he felt Damian's strong hands at his waist, and then he was being lifted and almost tossed into the sling like a ragdoll. Damian grinned as Nick grabbed at the chains to steady himself.

"Slide down toward me, pet."

Damian's hands closed around each ankle, yanking Nick forward until his arse was hanging over the edge of the black leather. It felt cool and slick on his skin, causing him to shiver slightly.

Damian held Nick's gaze and ordered, "Watch me as I bind you into the restraints."

Nick nodded silently, watching as one of his legs was lifted and strapped into the cuff on the nearest chain. The cuff was quite long, reaching halfway up his calf, the black leather supple against his skin. Damian gave his thigh a little pat after his ankle was buckled in.

Leaving the other leg free for the moment, Damian circled to Nick's head, to place a pillow under his neck. Nick was grateful for the support the sling afforded his hip. He wished he knew what Damian was planning for him although he dared not ask. Once the scene had started, he knew that he had the power to stop it with a word, but he didn't want it to end prematurely by questioning his Top's intentions.

He watched as first one and then the other slim wrist was secured in similar cuffs. Nick twisted his hands slightly, but there was no way to free himself; he was well and truly bound. He felt his heart start to pound in his chest, thundering in his ears with the thrill of being helpless.

He felt Damian's hands on his free leg, raising his ankle to secure it into the final cuff. The effect made him swallow convulsively; even locked into the spreaders, he had not been so widely spread open, so exposed, so ... accessible.

Damian paused to admire his handiwork. Nick was beautiful when spread wide and restrained, his caramel skin contrasting with the dull gleam of the leather, his long limbs immobile, his eyes wide with apprehension. Damian stroked the soft skin of Nick's vulnerable inner thighs, watching the boy's hips buck in response.

Nick moaned at the sensuousness of the fingers tickling the skin in the crease of his groin but avoiding touching his balls or cock before drifting away.

"So luminescent, like polished gold," Damian gloated, finally allowing his hands to roam over the globes of the bottom exposed to him, his to punish or take, as he desired. Knowing that Nick would permit him to do what he wanted was exhilarating and terrifying. The weight of the power resting on him almost made Damian back away, but he couldn't resist Nick's enticing helplessness.

Nick's muscles tensed slightly, expecting to feel the sting of a swat from the hard hand. Available on tables all throughout the studio were paddles, crops, whips, floggers, and many other implements of pain. Nick couldn't help but

realize how accessible he was in his position, spread-eagled and unable to move.

Damian ran his nails up the inside of one silken thigh. He pinched the soft skin and Nick quivered in response, feeling even more vulnerable. He cried out and arched up off the leather base of the sling when Damian started the beads vibrating again. His cock filled out in response, bobbing with his thrusts in search of some direct stimulation.

Damian chuckled and scraped his nails gently over Nick's balls. Nick felt the muscles in his stomach tense and his hips flexed in surprise as he felt Damian's hands fasten something around his hard shaft. He lifted his head and watched as Damian wound a flat ribbon of leather around the length of his cock, leaving only the head visible. Damian twisted the leather around Nick's balls, and the boy squirmed, feeling the stretch of the restraint on his delicate skin.

"You are not to come until I permit it, pet. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said, his voice shaking with the vibration from the beads. He sighed with relief when they were turned off, only to realize that now the throbbing of his bound cock and balls was that much more insistent.

Damian used his nails to flick at the younger man's nipples, running his fingers lightly over his chest and stomach, right along the iliac furrow and down long legs to the ankle cuffs, massaging the arches of his feet.

Nick jumped when he felt the first bead pulled out of his arse, his hole clenching before allowing the bead to pass through. He moaned as the rest of the beads moved in concert inside him, brushing over his prostate.

"Keep squirming like that, pet, and I might have to have you before I finish taking these out," Damian observed, watching the rounded cheeks wriggle. He was thankful that he'd thought to wear a cock ring himself; otherwise this would not last long.

Mischievously, Damian reached for the remote.

Nick squeaked and groaned as the vibration took him by surprise. His hips thrust convulsively, driving his leaking erection up at the ceiling as he raised his arse off the sling, setting it swinging gently.

"None of that, pet," Damian said reprovingly. "I didn't tell you that you could come, now did I?"

"No, sir," Nick gasped. "But please, I don't think I can—"

"Of course, you can, pet. I'll help you," Damian said. Leaving the beads vibrating, he brought his hand down on Nick's ass smartly, the sting countering the stimulation from the beads. After four swats, he turned the beads off.

Nick sagged limply in the sling, panting for air. With agonizing slowness, Damian pulled on the string until another bead popped out. Nick's hips bucked and he groaned at the sensation of the beads moving inside him, stretching him.

Damian reached for the boy, finding his hard cock and wiping drops of precum over the engorged head with his thumb. At the same time, with his other hand, he slowly pulled the string of beads free one by one. The feeling of the beads passing against the sensitive inner walls and the stimulation of Damian's hand on his cock was too much for Nick. He bucked impotently, setting the leather platform

swinging; with the restraint wrapped around his cock his groin tingled with need but he couldn't come.

Damian observed the helpless thrusting of Nick's hips and said, "Your pleasure and your pain belong to me, pet. I will decide which you feel and when. Your only thoughts should be how you might please me, how best to submit to me."

Nick was almost past speech. "Yes, sir," he gasped, his lashes fluttering rapidly.

Damian moved away and Nick took a deep breath, bracing for whatever might come next. Damian had mentioned pain more than once and Nick was a little afraid of what the older man had planned for him. He clenched his buttocks, feeling hollow after having the beads inside him most of the day.

"Feeling a little empty, pet?" Damian asked as if he'd read Nick's mind. "Could I persuade you to let me fill you another way?" Damian asked, his voice rasping with promise.

"I'm not sure you deserve to after teasing me all day, sir," Nick said, almost primly.

Damian was stunned into silence for a moment and then he couldn't help but laugh. "You don't say no to me, pet. Who makes the decisions here?"

"You were mean to me all day," Nick pouted.

"Perhaps I didn't make my point clearly enough, pet," Damian said, slapping the boy's glowing butt. "Perhaps you need another spanking?"

"No, no thank you! You're in charge, sir. What you say goes," Nick said hastily, knowing the correct response although he longed to scream, *Fuck me! Fuck me hard and right now!*

"Very nice, pet," Damian approved. "Very polite and submissive."

Nick jumped as cool fingers, slick with lube, circled his tender hole, and moved to impale himself, but Damian teased him, always moving just out of his reach, now pinching a nipple, now stroking his thigh, always with that maddening smile of his.

When Damian thought Nick had been inflamed enough he pressed a finger inside the small opening in one steady thrust, listening with pleasure to the moans that greeted him. Nick writhed as much as his restrained limbs allowed, the warm fingers feeling so good after the cool, unyielding plastic of the beads.

He gasped, unable to simply relax to the intruder, fighting the slow advance until he felt Damian's hand on his thigh, stroking soothingly up to his hip.

"Relax your muscles, pet. Let me slide in nice and easy."

Finally Nick was able to relax when he became accustomed once again to the feeling of being filled, the fingers sliding in and out of him, stroking over his secret spot. When the fingers slid free, he moaned at the loss.

Damian walked to stand behind Nick's head, lowering the strap supporting his neck so the boy's head lay further back.

Unzipping his jeans, Damian pushed his erection between the boy's lips, and Nick gasped for air as his mouth was filled by Damian's cock.

Damian grasped the chains, gently swinging Nick away from him. "Relax your throat, pet. Open wide and flatten your

tongue. You can take me all. Use that sweet mouth, suck me. You've got it all now."

Nick relaxed his throat, concentrating on the husky voice directing him. The feel of Damian's hard hands holding him still, combined with his helpless position, made him aware of how badly he needed to come, but he couldn't until his master allowed it. Nick focused on giving Damian pleasure although he was almost dizzy with conflicting sensation. All at once something shut off in his brain and his only reality was Damian, giving him pleasure. He licked eagerly as the cock was thrust in and out of his mouth with every movement of the sling.

Damian saw the moment of peace and submission on the beautiful face, and gently pulled his cock away from Nick's lips. He raised the boy's head again, wanting him to be able to watch as he fucked him, before he went to stand between Nick's wide-spread legs, watching the smooth chest, shiny with sweat, heaving with exertion. Damian watched the tense and pull of lean muscle under velvet skin as Nick strained at the cuffs binding him.

Damian pushed the sling, allowing his hands to smooth over Nick's exposed skin, teasing the pulsating opening with his cock whenever the movement brought Nick near enough.

With a quick thrust of his hips, Damian pushed inside Nick's hole, feeling the flutter of the inner muscles adjusting around him. He set the sling swaying again, a slight movement that allowed him to penetrate Nick anew with each swing. He released his own cock ring, his teasing of Nick

having been prolonged enough that he himself was aching with need.

Every time Nick swung away, Damian's cock would slip out of his well-lubricated arse, and with each return movement, he was penetrated anew. The feeling of being breached repeatedly by the hard shaft was deliciously arousing, causing his cock to strain against the leather, leaking pearly drops from the tip.

Nick watched between his outstretched legs, fascinated with Damian's face as he felt himself penetrated again and again, the warm, living cock feeling so good after the unyielding plastic. Dimly he remembered that he had worried about being gay, but now that he knew the intensity of the sensation of being fucked, having his prostate stimulated by this man taking him while his cock was stroked, he couldn't care less. He only wanted more.

He watched Damian's hand, strong, slender, as long fingers slowly unwrapped the leather from his cock. Pain skittered along the edge of pleasure as the blood in his cock began to circulate freely again. Finally he was free and panting with the slow build of ecstasy.

Damian grasped the chains in his hands and changed the motion of the sling, thrusting into Nick with short, hard strokes. Nick watched the intent look on the photographer's face as he chased his orgasm until finally Damian gasped an order. "Come with me!"

At that moment Nick felt the hot burst of seed jetting into the condom and Damian's hand on his cock; he clenched his

arse hard, spraying streamers of cum over his stomach, and crying out loudly with his release.

Damian sighed, watching the slender boy tremble with the aftermath of his climax. He felt his own knees wobble, but the long tease had been worth it.

Presently a hoarse voice from the sling asked, "Can we do that again, sir?"

Damian laughed shakily. "Yes, baby. After a long rest." Under his breath, he added, "You're going to be the death of me and then the joke will be on Ashley."

When he was able to control his legs, Damian pulled out gently and started to fumble at the restraints, slowly setting Nick free.

Nick's numb limbs dropped from their cuffs as he dreamily watched the older man chafe his arms and legs to restore the feeling to them.

Damian swept Nick up into his arms and stood, holding him that way for a moment, before letting him down to stand. Gently he kissed the boy, taking possession of his lips, delving deeply to conquer the sweet mouth.

"I don't want to hurt your hip again," he whispered. "How about if I take you home and fuck you there?"

"That would be good, sir," Nick whispered back, before kissing Damian.

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Chapter Eleven

Nick's skin was shimmering with sweat as he knelt, his hands gripping the headboard where Damian had placed them. The older man knelt between his legs, his knees spreading Nick's, keeping him splayed open.

The boy's ass was still pink and warm to the touch as Damian's hands roamed over his round cheeks. He sat back on his heels, letting his thumbs brush over the boy's entrance. "Still so tight," Damian marveled. "So beautiful."

He watched the boy writhe with each soft touch, his hole pulsating under the gentle attention. He had it in mind to draw this out, teasing Nick further, but his own need to sink his cock into the tight sheath drove him to hasten his preparation.

He didn't stretch Nick but he made sure he was well lubricated before rolling a condom over his shaft. He slicked his erection with lube and positioned himself at the entrance.

Nick grunted and strained as Damian pushed him forward, entering him in one forceful thrust, sinking fully inside him. He felt that the other man's cock owned him, and had done so ever since the first time he'd been taken; he arched his back, submitting to Damian's control. His skin tingled all over, tiny bolts of electricity running through him with the bigger body covering his.

He felt Damian's hand on his erection and mindlessly rocked back and forth, fucking the hand that held him, while Damian fucked him in turn.

Damian marveled at how well they fit together and then he had no thoughts to spare as the tight heat sucked him inside, the muscles rippling around him as if they would never let him go. He thrust faster and deeper, pounding Nick's ass without a thought but for his own pleasure.

The speed of each drive set Nick on fire, the warmth inside his arse spreading through him, inside and out. He braced himself, eager to receive Damian's cock, thrilled to be giving his lover such pleasure. He lifted his arse higher and Damian's cock reached even deeper, finding a better angle.

He moaned as Damian pushed inside him a final time, his hands gripping Nick's waist as he came with a low sigh. After a few moments, the photographer sank back onto his heels, taking Nick with him so the younger man was settled on his lap, still impaled on his cock.

He held the boy against his chest, one hand on his throat. He could feel Nick swallow and the pulse throbbing under the velvet skin as his other hand stroked him gently, caressing his rampant cock. Damian ran his hand over Nick's rigid flesh, whispering, "Come for me, baby. Come now!"

He could feel the slim body in his arms tense and the pearly fluid spurted from Nick's cock as he arched and jerked against Damian. From memory, the photographer replayed the look of ecstasy on the beautiful face in his mind's eye, holding Nick tightly against him, soothing him through the tremors of his orgasm until the boy was completely relaxed.

Gently he turned the boy's face, kissing him softly. "You're so beautiful when you come for me, Nicky. So responsive."

"You make me feel like I'm flying when I come and you're holding me like this," Nick whispered, without opening his eyes. "I never thought ... it could feel this way ... this good."

Damian held him silently, feeling his heart slow down and his breaths become deeper. His softening cock fell out of Nick with a rude sound and the boy giggled. Damian kissed him one more time and said, "Let me get a washcloth, and then you can go to sleep, babe."

He washed his hands and came back to clean off Nick's stomach and chest before sliding under the sheets to take his boy in his arms

Nick cuddled close to Damian, possessively draping an arm and a leg over the other man. Damian smiled in the dark. Ashley was right. Nick might think that Damian owned him, but he had taken possession of the older man, filling his senses with his beauty and sweet nature. As Nick was discovering himself through Damian's domination, Damian was realizing that he himself was lost. He tightened his arms around Nick, who let out a contented snort, which made silent laughter bubble up inside Damian.

Better to have had Nick for a brief time than never to have known him at all, Damian told himself, hoping it was true and it wouldn't hurt too horribly when his beautiful boy eventually left him. They all did, in the end.

* * * *

The next morning in the shower, Nick found out how much a spanking could sting on a wet bottom before Damian pinned

him to the wall and fucked him until he screamed with pleasure.

His awareness of his own pleasure was increasing, along with their mastery of each other's bodies. But still, Nick could not help feeling that it was all transitory ... and that soon Damian would wish for a new toy to begin with all over again. Surely there was a limit to how good one could feel in this world, and how long it could be sustained without boredom settling in?

But for now all he could do was keep his worries to himself and enjoy the time he had with the man who was rapidly consuming his very body and soul.

* * * *

"Restraints," Ashley said with relish. He held up a pair of cuffs made from pink leather and studded with silver.

Damian reached for them and laughed. "Velcro closures? Ashley. Come on."

Ashley beamed at him. "Something for everyone, from the lazy to the disabled. They should be able to practice bondage in the privacy of their own home even if they can't manage a buckle."

"Very true," Damian admitted. "I hadn't thought of that." He touched another set, made from soft, wine-red glove leather, and lined with black velvet. Solid metal buckles were joined by silver D rings. They were sleek and wide; he imagined how Nick's wrists would look in these, joined together behind his back.

"Look at this set," Ashley said. "It's a belt that goes around the sub's waist, and then his arms are crossed behind him in cuffs at the waist. An optional attachment leads to a collar. And it can be adjusted to fit the thighs, with the wrists cuffed to them."

"Very creative," Damian approved. His eyes got a faraway look as he started to compose a shot in his mind. "Perhaps Markie in black again; he might do well with the collar and belt."

"And red for Nick?" Ashley asked slyly.

"Green for Derek?" Damian sniped back.

"Perhaps, in time," Ashley said, his eyes softening as he went to join the younger man in the kitchen.

Markie sulked as he waited to be given his next costume. He had rather hoped that Ashley might take a fancy to him after the first night they spent together and then this short, pudgy kid with the amazing eyes had come along, ruining everything.

Damian took in the signs of an incipient brat attack and quietly said to Markie, "Don't even think about it. You're being paid to model, not get your rocks off. Save it for a club."

Markie nodded, but couldn't help adding, "Not many can swing a cane like Ashley."

"Left you smarting and sighing for more, did he?" Damian asked, nodding sympathetically. "I don't think you want to make him angry with unprofessional behavior though. That might have a more lasting impact on your wallet than your backside."

"You're right," Markie sighed. "A hard Top is good to find."

Damian laughed. "Go get into your costume and right back out so we can truss you up."

Markie flashed him a rueful smile. "You have no idea how hard these types of shoots make me."

"We have cages or rings, if you need a little help," Damian said with a grin.

"It's okay. I can hold out." Markie went to change.

"Anything for me today?" Nick asked, his mouth watering as he watched Damian slide the supple leather cuffs through his slender fingers.

"I think I'd like to see you in these," Damian said thoughtfully. "Get Ashley to find you a pair of those low-rise leather trousers. Black is fine."

"They only come in black," Nick sighed. "So unimaginative."

Damian laughed. "What color would you like if you could choose?"

"Well, yellow is my favorite, but even I don't think I'd like to prance about in bright yellow leather trousers," Nick grinned. He reached to touch the wine leather cuff. "Perhaps that dark red might be nice."

Damian brought himself firmly under control. "Well, better get changed. Markie's ready and I have to buckle him in. Good thing I own horses, what with all this harness to deal with."

Nick almost snorted his water through his nose. "It is a bit ... horsey, isn't it?"

"Wait'll you see what I can do with a riding crop, pet," Damian purred, watching Nick's lashes flicker quickly. "Go! Get dressed or—"

"I'm going," Nick said, twitching his backside away from Damian's hand and sticking out his tongue. He wondered pleurably what Damian would do to pay him for that later.

Markie sighed again as he came up to Damian and turned around, crossing his hands behind his waist.

"Bright red?" Damian asked dubiously. "Ashley gave you fire-engine red PVC shorts?"

"No, Derek, that assistant guy, but he said these are the ones Ashley wanted."

Damian strapped the blond's wrists behind him and patted him on the shoulder. "Sorry, Markie, but it wouldn't have worked if Ashley was thinking of someone else all the time."

"I know. It's a bumner but I'm over it." Markie shook his head as though banishing the thoughts of what might have been. "Where do you want me?"

"Just there," Damian said, guiding him into a pool of light. "I'm going back behind the camera and I'm going to ask you to take baby steps forward until the light is right, okay?"

They got back to business, resuming their roles on opposite sides of the camera.

* * * *

The scent of male arousal was on the air by the time Damian released Nick's wrists from behind his back, where they'd been linked together with a silver chain that wrapped around his waist, leading upward to connect to his collar. Nick

knelt in a pool of light against a dark red mottled canvas. The soft box had illuminated his bent head and the angular line of his shoulders, as he knelt, facing away from the camera, his elegant back narrowing to a slim waist. The lush roundness of his buttocks was highlighted by the reflection from the leather pants.

Damian helped him to his feet and ran his hand down the boy's spine. "Hip okay?"

"Yeah, thanks," Nick said, sighing with relief as his wrists were freed.

"Get changed," Damian said casually. Leaning in close, his lips brushing Nick's ear, he breathed an order. "Leave the cuffs on under your shirt, pet."

"Uh, yes sir," Nick responded stupidly. He felt his blood flow south; his cock started to swell and his brain disengaged. Damian smirked as he turned away, knowing just the effect his voice was having on the boy.

Ashley observed dispassionately, "You really shouldn't do that to him, Damian. We need him alert and ready."

"Oh, he's ready," Damian said smugly.

"So, are we going for dinner?" Derek asked brightly, knowing he was interrupting something, but not sure quite what. At this point, he was jealous of Markie, Damian, and Nick, in that order.

"Down, boy," Ashley said, watching the little quiver that ran through the boy. Keep them off balance; maybe Damian was on to something with his mind games. "Let's get the models sent off and we'll see."

Derek trailed after him, as if unwilling to trust Ashley alone with the models, and Damian laughed at his sheepdog attitude.

Nick came to help him shut down the power packs, pulling at his sleeves to hide the cuffs. Damian stopped him, laying his hand over the boy's. "Leave it. I like seeing them on you. It makes me think about what you would look like, spread over one of those benches, naked and quivering, while I mark your ass."

Nick sucked in a sharp breath, dizzy with the picture Damian had just painted for him out of thin air, using just his voice and his wicked imagination.

"Look at those, pet. I'm going to use every single one on you," Damian said, nodding toward the table where Ashley had laid out a variety of paddles, whips, and crops for the next day. He stroked over Nick's backside and whispered, "I can make the whip sing for you if that's what you desire, pet."

He watched the effect of his words. "And then when this beautiful little bottom is red and hot, I'll take you, bent over that bench, bound and spread, so hard that you'll feel me inside you the next day. You'll remember to whom you belong whenever you sit down. Would you like that, pet?"

"Yes, please, sir," Nick said urgently through trembling lips.

"Perhaps, later then, if you're very good," Damian promised and threaded a finger through the ring of one cuff, leading Nick to the door.

* * * *

After dinner, a dinner during which Nick didn't say very much but just watched Damian with restless anxiety, Damian led the way into the darkened studio. He locked the outer door and turned to survey his sub.

"Strip."

One word, and his cock was hard and aching as he hastened to strip off his clothing. Finally he stood naked before his Top.

Damian pointed at the floor. Nick sank down gracefully, clasping his hands behind him.

"Pet, so far we have been playing at this. I'm going to take you a bit further. A play spanking can be erotic but I am going to take you flying, so high you'll never have felt anything like it." He paused and strolled around the kneeling boy. Damian pulled his hands together behind his back and linked the D rings on the cuffs. "Feel how helpless you are, on your knees to me, waiting for me to decide what to do to you?"

Nick shuddered and took in a thrilled breath, waiting for whatever would come next. Damian surprised him then, leaning down to stroke his aching cock gently, before slipping a cock ring onto him.

"That will keep you safe, pet," Damian said smugly.

Nick groaned with frustration.

Damian chuckled. "There will be no release for you tonight, pet. Instead, tonight you will serve me. Tomorrow, I'll have you over that bench and I'll set your pretty little bottom on fire. That will give you something to look forward to."

Damian circled the boy, standing behind him to stroke Nick's curls, running his fingers through the thick glossy hair. "Have you missed the taste of me, pet? Because I have missed the warmth of your mouth around me."

He unbuckled his belt, drawing it out of his pants, doubling it and making it snap. He smiled as he saw Nick's buttocks flex involuntarily at the sound. "Not tonight, pet. Tomorrow. Make love to my cock with your mouth."

He walked in front of the boy, lazily stroking the proud flesh, standing out from his body. Nick's gaze was fixed on the photographer's cock, licking his lips. Damian smiled to see the eagerness of his boy.

"I'm inclined to be merciful tonight, for tomorrow you will taste the whip," Damian said throatily. "So I won't make you beg to taste me."

He stepped closer and Nick sighed happily as he was able to reach the other man's erection with his tongue. Tentatively he swept his tongue over the head.

Looking up he saw Damian looking at him with an intense expression that he couldn't quite read. He sucked the head of Damian's cock into his mouth, gratified to see the look on the older man's face change to one of unconstrained lust.

Being bound, naked, and on his knees paradoxically made him feel free. He had only one obligation: to fulfill his master's desires. Nick tried to remember everything that had pleased him in the few blow jobs he'd received in his life and applied his experience. He found the swollen vein on the underside of Damian's cock, pressing it flat with his tongue and feeling it refill. The little moan that accompanied his

action told him he had found a sensitive spot. He swirled his tongue around the head, sucking hungrily.

Varying the speed and tempo, Nick opened his mouth and shielded his teeth with his lips, bobbing his head on the hard length.

The effect of the mere sight of Nick, his lips glistening as he concentrated on providing him with pleasure, caressing his cock with his lips curved so prettily around it, took Damian by surprise. He groaned and cupped the back of Nick's head, thrusting into his mouth.

Nick could do nothing but submit, holding his mouth open and relaxing his throat to receive Damian's thrusts.

The older man lost control and came with a sharp cry, emptying himself into the hot mouth. His trembling hands caressed Nick's hair, keeping him in place until Damian had himself back under control.

He patted Nick's head. "Thank you, pet." Damian turned away to arrange his clothing, uneasily aware that although he was fully clothed and Nick was exposed, that somehow he was the one feeling vulnerable.

He turned back. "If you were an experienced sub, pet, we would negotiate our encounter for tomorrow. But you don't yet know enough to set limits for yourself. What is your safe word?"

"London, sir," Nick said softly. His face looked serene, at peace.

Damian crossed his arms. "I would like to mark you tomorrow, nothing permanent. Just a welt or two, that would be gone within a week. Do you object?"

"H—how much would it hurt, sir?" Nick asked nervously, wondering what he was letting himself in for.

"As much or as little as I decide," Damian said. "It's not the implement; it's how you use it. I can use a whip to set your nerves tingling or break the skin with my belt. I'll teach you to reach for the pain and ride it to the peak, if you like. To surf the pain like a wave in the ocean. Do you trust me?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said, looking him right in the eyes. "I trust you."

"Good." Damian smiled. "I hope the anticipation will be pleasant for you."

He bent to free Nick's wrists and helped the younger man to his feet. "Wear these until tomorrow," he commanded, touching the wrist cuffs. "We'll need them."

"But ... I have school tomorrow."

"I know," Damian said with a wicked smile. "Have fun."

* * * *

Damian had released Nick from the cock ring before sending him home, but directed him not to touch himself. To his surprise, Nick found his wrist cuffs drew no attention at school. At first, he kept trying to pull down his sleeves, but so many kids wore leather wristbands of some kind, only the color set his apart.

All day at school, he flushed and chilled intermittently, sometimes terrified of what Damian might do to him, sometimes so excited he had to find a restroom and squeeze his cock to calm himself down.

The studio was empty, but the door unlocked when he arrived. There was a pool of light spilling over a spanking bench in the studio. Nick shivered when he saw that, imagining himself naked, helpless, bound to it, waiting for whatever Damian decided to do to him.

He stood silently, wondering if he was ready for the next step.

"Nicholas."

He turned to see Damian standing behind him. For the first time, Damian was dressed, not in his usual T-shirt and jeans, but in tight black leather pants. His chest was partially covered by a leather vest, laced loosely across the front, showing his cut shoulders and muscular arms.

Nick shivered in fear but at the same time his cock slowly filled, swelling with arousal at the sight of the beautiful man into whose hands he had delivered himself. Damian seemed to tower over him, powerful and remote. Nick wondered if he was making a mistake even while he knew that he would go through with it.

Damian took a step closer and took Nick's face in his hands, staring at him. He kissed his lips tenderly. "Thank you for your trust, Nicholas. Thank you for submitting to me."

Nick closed his eyes against the sting of his tears. "You are my master."

Damian's hand cupped his chin. "I will never hurt you, do you hear me? Never."

"I know," Nick said very quietly.

Damian turned away and took a breath. When he turned back, he was smiling, and the devilish smile that told Nick he was in for a ride.

"Right then, pet, strip for me."

Nick ripped off his clothing and dropped to his knees automatically, clasping his hands behind his back. His cock stood out, pointing at Damian, straining at the master of his pleasure.

"So beautiful," Damian murmured. He stroked Nick's throat, circling it with his hands. "This is yours now," he said and brought the soft red collar out of his pocket, buckling it snugly around the slender throat. He attached a leash to the buckle. "Up now, pet."

Nick rose to his feet, keeping his hands clasped behind him, following Damian out into the studio.

Damian led him to the spanking bench and detached the leash, urging the boy closer to the bench. He widened Nick's stance with his booted feet and bent to strap the sub's ankles into cuffs attached to the bench legs.

He stroked over the boy's buttocks gently. "So beautiful, my pet." Damian went to a nearby table, where he'd laid out various implements of punishment but returned with only a cock ring. "I think we'll have this on until I permit you release."

A hand on the middle of his back pushed Nick flat, so that his chest was supported by the padded surface.

"Give me your wrists."

Silently Nick held his hands up, allowing Damian to stretch them out onto the padded armrests, attaching his cuffs to the ring bolts.

Damian ran his hands over Nick's naked back, lightly caressing the taut muscles flexing slightly under smooth skin. He felt every bump of the boy's spine, almost overwhelmed by the perfection given into his control. He cupped both buttocks in his palms, feeling like offering a prayer to whatever deity had created such beauty.

And then he stepped back, breaking contact between them.

"And now, my pet, allow me to further your education." Damian selected a light flogger, with strands of suede. "Pain and pleasure are balanced on the edge of a knife, different sides of the same blade. London is your safe word, but you need another word. If you want me to slow down or change what I'm doing, what will you say?"

"Yellow, sir," Nick said, his voice trembling his body was shaking so.

"Yellow for slow down, London for stop. Don't forget."

Stepping away from the bench, Damian extended his arm and swung the flogger to get a feel for its balance. Nick flinched as he heard the hum of the strands singing through the air, but felt nothing.

"This is a flogger, pet. I think you'll enjoy this," Damian purred.

He swung it and watched the strands land with a dull thud on the firm buttocks.

"It's soft, sir," Nick said, surprised.

"Yes, pet. I'm going to warm you up a bit."

The flogger came down repeatedly, the strands just caressing Nick's skin. He could feel a tingle start to warm his arse.

Damian aimed several blows at Nick's back, listening for the pleasurable hiss of the sub's breath as they landed. Damian stepped forward and ran his hand over the pale skin that had started showing a little pink. He caressed Nick's ass gently.

"This one is a bit heavier," Damian said. He picked up a medium flogger, applying a steady rain of light blows that made the boy's buttocks flush a hotter pink. Damian ran his hand over the warm skin, assuring himself that Nick was okay.

Nick was floating in a sea of sensation, the nerves in his arse dancing. It barely stung; Damian had spanked him harder than this, but the sensuous assault was warming his bottom most pleausurably. His balls were full and aching, his cock hard, demanding release from its leather prison.

Damian smiled at the slight movement of Nick's hips. Bound as he was, and spread for his master's pleasure, he didn't have much freedom of movement, and the cock ring would prevent early release in any case.

He picked up a riding crop and flicked it through the air. Nick flinched involuntary at the cutting sound it made.

"This is a riding crop, pet. We'll see how you like this one."

"Yes, sir," was all the boy said. Damian smiled at the fear in his voice. One last pat on the upturned waiting bottom and he stepped back.

Nick tensed, awaiting a slash, but instead he felt a sharp nip, as the end of the crop was flicked against his arse. Tiny smarting stings landed all over his ass, making his cheeks warm with a slow burn that reached lazily for his groin. He gasped as the pain turned to pleasure, when Damian ran his hand over his heated skin.

"A little harder this time," Damian said. He positioned himself carefully and landed a sharp blow in the middle of the firm flesh.

Nick yelped as a line of fire erupted across his arse, setting him ablaze. It hurt and yet he wanted more; he panted as the endorphins kicked in and a rush of adrenaline shot through him, as if he'd just run five miles. He dreaded the next sharp strike and yet he yearned for it, lifting up to meet it. Damian laid it precisely above the first, listening for the purring cry of the sub.

He was sweating now, as was the boy, glowing under the light, with two red welts across his bottom.

"One more, pet."

Nick's muscles flexed in anticipation, but Damian waited until the boy had relaxed before he struck the third blow, catching him on the under curve of his backside. Nick jumped and cried out, his voice a curious mix of pain and ecstasy.

The pain rolled through his body like waves, in ever-diminishing intensity, the burn melting into the most exquisite pleasure. He hummed, flying on a pain-induced high that thrummed throughout his body.

Damian caressed the welts with his fingertips, dragging his nails lightly over the abused flesh. Nick wriggled and sighed.

"What do you want now, my pet? Tell me!" Damian commanded.

"Please, let me come, sir," Nick begged, his voice husky. He bucked slightly when he felt something wet and warm trace the lines of fire across his arse, finding his valley and sliding downward to his pulsating hole. He moaned incoherently, unable to do much more than raise his arse slightly.

Warm hands held his hips, fingers digging into his flesh while Damian's tongue found his opening, licking it softly. Nick had never felt anything to match the feeling and he pleaded for more inarticulately, his voice more of a keening song than anything.

The tongue probed at his hole, pushing at the tight ring, and Nick felt himself yield under the tender invasion. The slick muscle of Damian's tongue entered him, delicately penetrating and exploring, flicking in and out.

Cool slippery fingers smoothed gel over the burning welts on his bottom, sliding to his hole and pushing inside next to the tongue, twisting and opening him. He had nothing to do but submit, bound as he was.

He felt Damian's fingers on his inner thighs, sliding up to cup his balls and caress them. And then something large and blunt, pressed to his opening, stretching his hole to his limit. Nick surrendered to the invasion, feeling the hands that controlled his pleasure and his pain moving over his body, finding his cock, holding it.

Damian entered his boy slowly, pushing all the way in, and withdrawing with equal slowness, until only the tip was held

inside by the tight opening. He thrust hard then, sliding back in one powerful glide.

Nick was moaning constantly, unaware that he was making a sound. He struggled to impale himself, pulling against his restraint, not wanting to free himself but rather to feel the reassurance of the bonds that anchored him. The pain was but a burning memory now, drowned in the pleasure that flooded his body. He was flying, higher than Damian had ever taken him before, a slave to the cock driving inside him. A touch of that shaft brushing over the seat of his pleasure drove his orgasm to blossom slowly inside him. He was so relaxed, he didn't strain for it; he allowed it to come to him, slowly building until the crescendo of ecstasy echoed through his body like an unearthly note of music.

Damian released the ring of leather from around his cock, and Nick convulsed as he felt the surge of his master's release inside him, even through the condom. And then he was falling into darkness with an orgasm more intense than he had ever experienced.

* * * *

Damian collapsed, sweaty and panting for air over the slender body beneath him. Nick had clenched around his cock with such power that he'd had no control over his own climax, helplessly pouring his seed within the boy as they came at the same time. The warmth of the body under his, pliant and supple, was comforting as he floated in his own post-orgasmic haze.

He stroked the boy's slender flank, his palm cupping the curve of Nick's scarred hip, thinking, *The conquerer and the conquered, but who is playing which role?*

He stood up, pulling his cock free from the unconscious boy and disposing of the condom. Quickly Damian released the cuffs and caressed the beautiful face, lips curved in a satisfied smile while Nick's chest fluttered shallowly with each breath he took.

Damian picked the boy up and carried him to the office, wrapping him in a soft blanket and holding him in his arms, rocking Nick as he drifted in the afterglow.

Nick opened his eyes and smiled sweetly.

"Flying high, baby?" Damian asked softly.

"Oh, yeah," Nick purred and snuggled closer. "I've never felt anything like that."

Damian said simply, "I'm glad."

"Thank you, sir," Nick sighed.

"Nicky, the scene is over. I'm Damian and you're Nick now," the older man said, cuddling his boy.

"Thank you anyway, Damian," Nick said drowsily.

"Come on, baby. Let's get you dressed and home," Damian said, raising Nick to a seated position.

Nick winced as his backside met the couch. "Ow."

Damian chuckled, amused. "You've got three beautiful welts to remember me by."

"No danger of me forgetting you." Nick shifted to lean on the arm of the couch, exploring the raised flesh gingerly with his fingertips, a bemused expression on his face. "Why did I agree to this again?"

Damian turned his face, holding his chin in place while he gazed deep into his eyes. "To live on the edge, Nicholas. Isn't that what you've always wanted? To feel the rush, the thrill of fear, that moment when pain turns to pleasure and you're free."

"I was free," Nick said slowly. "I was tied down and completely at your mercy, and yet I was free."

"That's why we both do it," Damian whispered and kissed him.

Nick clung to the older man, sensing the desperation in his kiss. He tried to reassure Damian with the fervency of his response, ending up straddled on Damian's lap when the heated kiss ended.

"I'll never hurt you, baby," Damian said, caressing the sculpted cheekbone.

"I know," Nick whispered.

* * * *

Damian had led the trembling young man into the restroom and applied a cooling gel to his backside, before helping him dress.

The adrenaline rush abandoned Nick, leaving him drowsy. Damian was afraid of his own impulses; it would be far safer for him to simply put the boy on the train and send him home, but somehow he needed to feel that warm body wrapped safely in his arms tonight.

And on a practical note, Damian wanted to make sure there were no aftershocks, physical or emotional. So he took Nick to his home once again and into his bed.

He made Nick drink a glass of orange juice and soothed the welts with gel once more, before leading him to the bedroom. Nick accepted all of his orders, cuddling close as soon as Damian was under the sheets with him, falling asleep easily, feeling safe and secure in the older man's embrace.

Damian smiled at the irony; Nick had complete faith in him.

So why couldn't he trust himself?

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Chapter Twelve

Nick opened his eyes to see Damian, his head propped on his hand, leaning on his elbow, watching him with a smile. He smiled back and stretched, wincing when his sore ass flexed against the mattress.

"Ow."

"One to ten, how much does it hurt?"

"Maybe a two," Nick hazarded.

Damian smiled smugly. "Damn, I'm good. Probably won't even bruise."

"You're fucking kidding me," Nick exclaimed. "I probably won't be able to sit down for a week!"

Damian laughed. "Go check yourself out."

Maneuvering carefully and groaning loudly with every twinge, Nick made it out of bed and went into the bathroom, turning to look over his shoulder, trying to see his arse.

Damian came in after him, saying, "Very dramatic, but I happen to know that it doesn't hurt *that* much. Here, look." He opened the door to the linen cupboard, revealing a full-length mirror on the inside. Nick studied the pink lines on his arse, looking absurdly proud of himself.

Damian stepped in front of him, their bodies just touching, and drew a finger lightly over each welt. "Swelling's going down; you'll be fine tomorrow. Not a mark. If you had paler skin, you might have bruised, but I wouldn't have whipped you the same way."

Nick took a tiny step forward, sliding their chests together seductively. Damian circled his arms around his boy, and Nick slid his hands over the older man's muscled shoulders. Their lips met in a languorous kiss and Nick could feel his cock start to harden. The hands that had hurt him last night were sliding over his back, pulling him closer, the restraint holding him in place made of flesh and bone this morning rather than leather, the touch even more welcome.

"Did you like it?" Nick murmured between kisses.

"Very much," Damian responded softly. "Did you?"

"Yeah. Just remembering it makes me hot."

"I had noticed that," Damian said, insinuating one leg between Nick's and rubbing their erections together.

"Were you going to do something about it?" Nick asked provocatively.

"Why is it always my job?" Damian complained facetiously.

"You're the Top," Nick pointed out. "Besides, you like doing things to me."

"I do," Damian confessed. "But I had other plans for today. I was going to go ride my horse."

"I don't think I could do much horseback riding today," Nick said ruefully, wiggling his arse, knowing that Damian was watching in the mirror.

"Maybe you could ride something else?"

"What did you have in mind?" Nick whispered.

Damian slid his hands over Nick's buttocks, patting them gently. "I could give you a hint."

"Surprise me," Nick said and kissed the older man.

Damian broke the kiss and took the boy by the hand, leading him back to the bed. They fell onto the mattress with Damian on top.

"Ouch!"

"Sorry." Damian didn't release Nick, but he flipped them over so that the boy was on top.

In the ascendant position for the first time with Damian, Nick attacked his mouth, kissing him aggressively and grinding his hips so their cocks rubbed together. He moved so that the light hair on Damian's chest tickled him. The memory of the previous evening's activities combined with the visual evidence left on his buttocks made him burn for release. His hips moved faster as his excitement built.

"Baby, please, ride me," Damian whispered. "Take control."

Nick paused to consider what he'd been offered. "How—"

"Kneel over me," Damian ordered. "I'll get you ready." He reached for the lube as Nick balanced on his hands and knees.

His back arched sensuously when Nick felt fingers caress his hard shaft, fondle his balls, and finally find his secret opening. He arched his back, rocking to encourage the fingers. "Oh yes," he hissed with pleasure as they entered his tender hole.

"God, you look so hot fucking yourself on my fingers," Damian muttered.

"Wait'll you see me fuck myself on your cock," Nick gasped.

Damian looked up startled, to find a wickedly provocative smile on his young lover's face. "I think maybe I created a monster," he said.

"No, I was always a monster," Nick said. "Just ask my mother."

"Can it wait 'til after I fuck you senseless?" Damian asked somewhat breathlessly as Nick positioned himself above the older man's cock, and Damian finished rolling on the condom.

"I think that might be better," Nick agreed. He lowered himself, freezing at the first moment of penetration to allow himself time to adjust. "I want you to concentrate ... on what you're ... doing."

Damian moved his hands to support Nick's trembling thighs. "I'll do my best, babe."

"I guess that's all I can expect of you," Nick teased. His eyes rolled back in his head as he allowed himself to slide further down on Damian's cock. He groaned when the hard shaft rubbed over his prostate and he was fully impaled. In this position, Damian was buried deeper inside him than he had ever experienced. Having the older man inside him was unbearably arousing and for a moment Nick gave himself over to exploring the ability the man had to make him feel as if he was submitting even when he was on top.

He leaned forward to kiss the other man, pulling himself off, until the head of Damian's cock bumped at his entrance, before he plunged down again on the hard flesh, feeling Damian penetrate him a second time.

"Ride me, baby," Damian ordered and Nick hastened to obey, raising himself and letting gravity sink the large intruder deep inside.

Damian held him still and thrust up powerfully inside his young lover, fucking him hard and fast, until the boy was panting, his eyes wild with need. Damian braced his feet, slapping their flesh together.

"Stroke yourself for me," he commanded, and Nick leaned his weight on one hand, using the other to jack himself in time to the powerful thrusts, moaning as he started to come, spurting over Damian's chest, the glistening fluid matting his hair.

He clenched around the older man and the tightness and heat made Damian come with a shout, driving up hard inside Nick.

His hips fell back on the bed and Nick fell forward limply, resting his forehead on Damian's shoulder. "Fuck," he groaned.

"Give me a little time to reload, baby, and I'm your man," Damian joked weakly.

"Yes," Nick breathed and Damian wondered what he was agreeing to.

Damian realized that Nick had gone to sleep when he heard a faint snore. Straining, he lifted the boy up and off him, settling him on his side. Exhausted, he dropped the condom on the floor by the bed, figured the hell with it, they'd just have to be sticky when they woke up, and curled up protectively around his slender lover.

* * * *

They spent a lazy Sunday napping, eating, watching television, sometimes with the sound off, and talking.

Cupping Nick's scarred hip in his hand, Damian asked, "How did you get that scar? You said it was an accident."

Nick closed his eyes briefly.

"I'm sorry." Damian bit his lip. "You don't have to tell me if it makes you feel uncomfortable to remember it."

"It's not the accident. I really don't remember much about it," Nick said soberly. "It was my mother's face when I woke up in hospital. You see—" He cut himself off when his voice trembled and looked up at the ceiling. "They said I might not walk again."

Horried, Damian took Nick's hand in his and gave it a squeeze, trying to convey his sympathy without words.

Nick gulped a few times and laughed shakily. "I was lying there looking up, wondering if I was going to be staring at ceilings for the rest of my life."

"What happened?"

"I was riding my motorcycle; too fast, the police said." Nick shrugged. "They're probably right. I always liked speed. I went down on a curve. I don't remember why. Smashed the bike up as well as my hip."

Damian sucked in a breath. "I'm sure your mother was more concerned about you."

"Yeah, she and my dad. Internal bleeding, broken hip that had to be put back together; two plates and sixteen screws. Months of physical therapy to get me back on my feet." Nick

shook his head. "My sister was pretty pissed at me too, but she was always there for my sessions."

"Sounds like you have a nice family," Damian offered tentatively.

"That was the worst part," Nick said. "I never meant to make them worry about me."

Intuitively guessing what the young man left out—the fear that he'd end up in a wheelchair, the pain he'd endured through his recovery, the regret for hurting his parents and sister through his own carelessness—Damian turned the subject.

"And the tattoo?"

Nick looked down at the bird, with its wings raised in flight, each feather tipped in flame. "When I knew I was going to walk again—"

"A phoenix," Damian said softly.

"That's me. Crash and burn, and then rising up from the ashes," Nick said, his tone mocking.

"It takes courage to do that, Nicky. I think it was a good way to commemorate winning what must have been a very difficult challenge."

"Thanks." Nick looked gratified, as if he had never thought he'd done much worthy of admiration.

"So you liked motorbikes."

"And surfing, skydiving, dirt biking, snowboarding," Nick said regretfully.

"Skateboarding?"

"I used to shred, man."

"You're an adrenaline junkie. How come you don't do any of that anymore?"

"I promised my parents I wouldn't worry them like that again." Nick sighed. "No more motorcycle."

Damian chuckled.

"It's not funny. I miss doing all those things. I always managed some kind of part-time job to pay for them."

"I wasn't laughing at you," Damian explained. "I was just thinking if you hadn't made that promise, you might never have found your way into my clutches."

"What do you mean?" Nick asked, although he was beginning to feel he might have a clue.

"Nothing gets the adrenaline rushing like this, does it?"

Nick stared at him, his mind racing.

Damian stared back, wondering if he was nothing more than a substitute for high-octane sports. Perhaps when the novelty began to wear off, Nick would be gone, looking for new thrills somewhere else. He sighed and looked away, wondering if the novelty of getting to know this fascinating, complicated young man would wear off for him too.

"I never thought of it that way."

Damian began to laugh.

"What's so funny?"

"I was just thinking about what your parents would say if you told them about the new hobby you've found to keep yourself occupied." Damian grinned at the stricken look on Nick's face.

"Yeah, I'm sure they'd be thrilled." Nick's horrified expression faded as he laughed, gleefully adding, "They'd

probably want to meet you, make sure you played safe. Wouldn't you if you had a kid?"

"My son is a little young for this yet, but yeah, I would want to be sure he had good enough self-esteem to keep himself safe. I wouldn't feel like I'd done my job if Wyatt stumbled into this and got hurt," Damian said seriously.

"You have a kid?" Nick sounded amazed and drew away a bit. "I thought you were gay."

"I am, but I didn't always know it," Damian said. "My ex and I married young. I was seventeen, she was eighteen. I thought I'd found the perfect woman. She was a tomboy and an athlete, lanky and tall. Kind of boyish." He shook his head regretfully. "She was the one who figured out I was gay, and broke the news to me."

"That must have been ... devastating," Nick said tentatively.

"Especially since we'd just had our son. She thought she couldn't get pregnant because of all her running, but surprise." Damian looked out the window and took a deep breath. "The hardest thing was not being able to live in the same house with my son, watching him grow and change every day."

His voice soft with sympathy, Nick asked, "How do you deal?"

"You just do." Damian seemed to realize his voice was harsh and softened it. "It wouldn't have been good for Wyatt anyway to be known as my son. My work was beginning to attract attention and I never wanted to subject him to the kind of publicity that goes along with being sexually

controversial. That kind of attention can be unhealthy for a kid. That's why I changed my name also."

"Damian isn't your real name?"

"Neither is Wolfe. I thought it gave me an aura of menace." Damian laughed, sounding anything but menacing.

"So what's your real name, then?"

Damian groaned. "Thomas Reynaud."

"I like that," Nick said thoughtfully.

"Doesn't pack quite the punch as Damian Wolfe, though."

"No, but it's nice. And your son's name?"

"Wyatt Reynaud," Damian said, his voice softening. He held out his arm so that Nick could see the initials W.R. tattooed on the inside of his wrist. "He's a great kid. Very creative, very sweet."

"You must miss him."

"I do. I go to the states at least once a month, or he comes here. Right before I hired you, he'd been with me for several months while his mother was doing circuit races." Damian got up and brought a framed photo back to Nick. "That's him."

Nick chuckled as he took in the typical school portrait against a blue backdrop, having expected something a little more artsy from the famed photographer. "He's a cute kid."

"He's great." Damian took the picture back and stared at it as if he could feel his son's presence through the medium of the photograph. "I've been meaning to take some shots of him myself."

"I bet his mum would like that," Nick offered. "A chance to see her son through your eyes."

"Yeah, I bet she would." Damian set the photograph back on the bookshelf, surprised at Nick's insight.

"Does she...? How do you two—" Nick paused, unsure of how to phrase his question.

"She was amazingly great about it and we're still friends. Turns out, she'd already fallen in love with someone else so she had it easier than me. I had to adjust to a whole new way of thinking of myself. A gay man."

"Who likes to spank people."

"Not people. Men." Damian gave Nick a wicked grin. "After working out that I was gay, the spanking part was easy."

"Easy for you," Nick grumbled, rubbing his arse.

"Come here. I can help with that." Damian drew Nick to lie face down over his lap and pushed his pajama bottoms down.

"You're not going to spank me again, are you?"

"Of course not. I'm just putting some gel on it." Damian reached for the tube and asked, "What are you going to do when you graduate?"

"I would like to continue to work for you, if you'll have me," Nick said tentatively. "I have to have some kind of job. And maybe find some studio space. It costs a lot to have your own kiln, so maybe I could share with someone."

"Can I see some of your work?" Damian asked, guilty that he'd never thought of asking before.

"Are you really interested or are you just asking because we're ... fucking?" Nick asked, blushing. "I'm not in your league at all. I'm just a student."

"I'd like to see your work. I already like your aesthetic, and I think you have good instincts," Damian said. He decided

that from now on, he would do what he could to ease Nick's path, feeling a little guilty that in his desire to bed the boy, he'd forgotten to take any interest in the rest of his life.

Nick was a good sub, but he was also a complex, interesting, and creative man. If he were talented as well, Damian would do what he could to help him; it was difficult enough to find one's path as an artist, particularly if one wished to earn a living that way.

"How do you know?" Nick asked suspiciously.

"The things you react to in my work. The suggestions you've made, problems you've solved for me," Damian explained. "Art is subjective. If it speaks to only one person, then it's a success."

"I don't know much about art but I know what I like," Nick quoted sarcastically.

"Yes," Damian said seriously. "In this case it's true. That's all it takes for a piece to be a success. I'm doing what I love, and I've been lucky enough to find other people who love my work and want to look at it every day so they buy it."

"So it's just doing what you love?" Nick asked, twisting onto his side to look up at his lover. He raised his hand to stroke the stubble on Damian's jaw.

"If you don't love what you do, you'll just be miserable, so why do it?"

"I think that's a trick question. I'll have to work on it."

Damian looked down at his beautiful boy, more relaxed than he'd ever seen him. *Of course*, he thought humorously, *I'm not terrifying him right now*. "I don't think we've ever talked this much before."

Nick laughed. "I think I pissed you off too much before, always dropping stuff and falling over your equipment. How come you didn't fire me?"

"There was something about you, Nicky, always something that spoke to me," Damian said.

"You mean, you knew that I was ... am submissive ... right from the start?" Nick asked uneasily.

"No, of course not, although you were kind of a brat," Damian chuckled. "Are you embarrassed about wanting to submit to me?"

"Not when we're alone, but I don't think I'd want anyone else to know," Nick said hesitantly.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, Nicky. It takes a strong man to surrender to another person," Damian said, stroking the thick glossy hair. "You should be proud that you're brave enough to claim your desires instead of cowering in fear."

"You don't think it's weird, what we do?"

"Human behavior comes on a spectrum. We're just a little more towards one end than most people," Damian said. "Like being gay, we're a minority. But we're not hurting anyone—"

"Other than me," Nick joked.

Damian laughed. "You're always surprising me."

"You always surprise *me*," Nick claimed. "That's part of what's so ... so exciting."

"Believe me, I can tell you're going to keep me on my toes," Damian said ruefully and an awkward silence fell between them when he realized that his comment intimated that they had a future together.

"I hope to," Nick said quietly, turning his face away so that Damian couldn't see his eyes.

Damian rushed into speech, saying "Even if you decide you would prefer not to continue with the spanking, I think I would always end up dominating you in bed. It's just how I am. And I think it feels natural for you to let me take the lead."

"Yeah, it does, but...."

"But?"

"I liked what you said about this being a collaboration," Nick said, not sure he was quite expressing what he felt.

"It's a partnership. I could do nothing to you without your permission." Damian stopped short, realizing he had almost addressed Nick as "my love." Pet wasn't appropriate in this situation and baby felt too casual. But he wasn't ready yet to declare himself; he needed a little time to know his own heart.

"That's good to know," Nick said thoughtfully. He picked up the remote and started flipping through the channels on TV.

Damian wondered if Nick just didn't want to talk about it anymore, even though the conversation felt unfinished to him. "What the hell are we watching?"

Nick set the remote down out of Damian's reach. "*Laura*."

Damian peered at the screen doubtfully. "It's a chick flick."

"It's a noir classic!" Nick declared. "It's fabulous!"

"Fabulous is such a gay word, and it's still a chick flick."

"Guess it proves I'm gay after all then, doesn't it?" Nick grinned.

"No one just turns gay overnight." Damian didn't know quite what he was hoping Nick would say in answer to that. "Did you ever date a guy before?"

"Never really thought about it," Nick admitted. "I went out with a lot of girls, but I never saw stars, you know. Sex was fine, it was pleasant—"

"Pleasant?" Damian groaned. "That's tragic. Sex should be amazing, stupendous, earth-shaking—"

"Well, I didn't know any better." Nick paused to think for a moment. "Somehow it never worked out with any of them either. And some of them were nice girls."

"Beautiful?" Damian teased.

"I nailed my share," Nick said crassly. "But I never felt that sense of connection, like I wanted to be around them all the time."

Damian was too afraid to ask if it was different with him. He acknowledged his own cowardice with a rueful smile, but he didn't want to hear it if the answer was no. "What do you think your parents would say?"

"As long as I'm not risking my life, they'll be fine," Nick said. "Funny how a major life-threatening accident can put things in perspective."

"That's true. I'm sure they'd rather have you gay than not at all." Very casually, Damian asked, "Any regrets about all this?"

A slow smile spread over Nick's face. He pulled Damian down for a kiss. "What do you think?" he whispered against Damian's lips.

A Strong Hand
by Catt Ford

As their tongues met, all thought fled from Damian's mind and he forgot to doubt.

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Chapter Thirteen

"Come on, Nick. We're late already," Damian said, looking at his watch with impatience.

Nick looked regretfully at the pillow he'd carried around with him all day on Sunday. "If I weren't afraid that Ashley would demand to see my arse, I'd take that lovely soft pillow with me."

Damian chuckled. "You're right about Ashley. He'd adore any hints at all, but I'm quite sure you'll be fine without the pillow. Just choose a padded chair, and don't flop down."

"Easy for you to say," Nick grumbled, wincing as he slid into the seat in Damian's car. "I don't think I can be in any shots today." He had stiffened up and it wasn't so much surface pain as deep muscle soreness that plagued him now.

"No need," Damian said lightly. "I'm not shooting today. We need to present all the shots to Ashley and his business partner this evening. So you get to keep your clothes on."

Nick breathed a sigh of relief. He wasn't comfortable with making this public while he was still grappling with the implications for himself. At times he felt completely at ease with what was happening, while at others he would study Damian's face as if the man was a complete stranger to him rather than someone with whom he'd shared his body in ways more intimate than merely sexual.

If he thought it would be a relaxing day without Ashley around, Nick soon found out differently. Damian directed him to set up tables along the length of the studio. Nick pulled out

the tables and together they wrestled them into place, creating a long surface where Damian could set up printouts of the various shots.

It was even more incongruous that the collection of toys, benches, restraints, and whips were strewn on other tables opposite, making a narrow walkway down one side of the studio, where one could turn to look at either the photos or the implements.

Before Ashley was due to turn up, Damian found Nick and held him for a moment. "How's your butt?" he asked, rubbing that part of Nick's anatomy soothingly.

"A little achy," Nick admitted, resting his forehead on Damian's shoulder.

"Yeah, you've been moving around a lot. I'm sorry about that," Damian said, "Why don't you sit down and take some aspirin?"

"*Sit* down?" Nick teased.

Damian laughed. "Right. Well, suit yourself, but I warn you, if you eat dinner standing up tonight I'm sure you'll hear about it from Ashley."

"I'll take some aspirin right now," Nick said firmly. He shuddered at the thought of Ashley snickering at him all evening and headed for the bathroom.

Damian opened the door to a knock and found Ashley standing there with his business partner, a tall, dark man with a large, muscular build. "Crispin," Damian acknowledged the taller man, shaking his hand.

"Damian! Good to see you again," Crispin said jovially. "Ashley's got me all worked up, anxious to see what you've got."

He shook Damian's hand while Derek sidled around Ashley to find Nick. "Hey, dude. How are you? Isn't he crazy wicked? He makes Ashley and Damian seem like pussy cats."

Nick nodded, aware of the power emanating from the cheerful-looking man. His face was pleasant and his nose incongruously pert, giving him a friendly expression that belied his menace. "How do you know? What did he do?"

Derek shivered. "What wouldn't he do? But you just wait 'til his ... his boyfriend gets here. He's meeting us here later."

"What's he like?" Nick asked, wondering if all the people he now knew were gay.

"You'll see," Derek said, nodding smugly, feeling that at last he had one on the other boy.

Crispin accompanied Ashley and Damian into the studio. He inspected the photographs laid out on the tables in silence, finally turning to shake Damian's hand.

"You are a true artist," he said solemnly. He turned to Ashley and shook his hand as well. "And you were right; this is amazing stuff. This will set us apart from every other maker of kinky gear." He laughed suddenly. "My old dad would be spinning in his grave if he knew that the leather harness company he founded had branched out into this stuff."

"But he'd probably enjoy the profits," Ashley interjected slyly.

"No doubt," Crispin agreed. "This earns far more money than the horse division."

The three men started as the outer door swung open violently, the knob crashing into the wall.

Nick and Derek peeked cautiously out of the kitchen to see a very fit and muscular man, clad in jeans and a tank top. He was good looking in a rough sort of way, with dark auburn hair that stuck up all over his head, thick eyebrows, and stubble on his chin.

"Hey, you two little fairies, where the fuck is Crispin?"

Nick frowned and stepped forward, clenching his fists. Derek hung onto his arm and answered, "In the back," pointing the way.

"Where does he get off—?" Nick started angrily.

"Shut it. Let's go watch," Derek said soothingly. "Besides, you couldn't take him in a month of Sundays."

"I'm just as tall as he is," Nick sputtered.

"It's not the height, it's the bulk. Eddy's a construction worker," Derek explained in a whisper. "Wait'll you see how Crispin handles him. It's a treat."

The two boys watched as Eddy swaggered into the back, ignoring the many implements and all the photos.

"Crispin, how's it hanging?" Eddy asked and laughed at his own crudeness.

Crispin kissed him lightly and said, "Hello, Eddy, love. That's one."

"Oooh, scary. And who are these fucking poofers?" Eddy leered.

"Eddy, behave," Crispin said sternly, slinging his arm over the shorter man's shoulders. "You know Ashley perfectly well, so don't pull that crap with me. This is Damian Wolfe, our photographer."

"Heard of you," Eddy grumbled, but he shook the hand that Damian held out to him. He squirmed away from Crispin's hold and peered at the photos. "Fucking smut, this is, yeah?"

Crispin rolled his eyes but ignored him for the moment. "Let's go over these from the start. Ashley, where's your layout plan?" He bent over to inspect one of the shots that featured Nick, and lifted his head to peer at him. "And is this the model?"

Nick nodded, and smiled shyly.

Damian said, "This is my assistant, Nick Sayers. Ashley and I decided he'd be a natural for this and asked him if he wouldn't mind stretching the job description a bit."

Crispin straightened up and came to shake Nick's hand. "Good to meet you, Nick. I'm Crispin Merrick. I'm Ashley's silent partner. I make the goods and keep my mouth shut whilst he runs the dog and pony show."

"Nice to meet you, sir," Nick responded.

The sound of slow clapping made both of them turn around. A twisted smile on his face, Eddy sneered, "How very fucking polite. La di *da*, and *oh*, Mr. Merrick, I'm so fucking happy to kiss your fucking arse! *May* I bend over and lick your balls?"

Nick flushed with anger and dropped his hands to his sides, clenching his fists, wondering what it was about this

guy that had him fantasizing about beating him into the ground. Normally, he wasn't that aggressive.

Crispin turned and crossed his arms, saying softly, "That's two, Eddy. Don't try my patience any further."

Eddy gave him a cocky little smile, but didn't say anything more at the moment. Nick was startled to see Eddy giving him a wink with an apologetic shrug. He turned to Derek, who merely shook his head, whispering, "You'll see."

Ashley reclaimed Crispin's attention by pointing at his favorite shot, the one of Nick kneeling in the red collar, his leash wrapped around a shadowy man's hand. "I was thinking of this for the cover, Crispin. What's your feeling on that?"

"I do like it. I'd like to consider all these shots before we make a final decision, but you know I trust your instincts," Crispin said, looking at the shot. "It's damned fine."

Eddy edged closer to his boyfriend and started nudging his hip. "I'm hungry, I want to eat. And how come you didn't ask me to model?" He looked at Nick with hot, jealous eyes. "Why not put me on the fucking cover?"

"Edward, shut up," Crispin muttered, shoving the younger man away gently.

"NO!" Eddy yelled defiantly. "You've been working late all fucking week, you said we would have dinner out tonight, and I find you hanging out with these faggots pretending they're better than me. Make believe you're the great businessman all you want. I'm off!"

Crispin rounded on Eddy, knocking him flat on his back on a table covered with crops. "That's three! You don't defy *me*, slave. On your knees!"

Nick and Derek watched with wide eyes as Eddy scrambled off the table and hit the floor, with the crops he'd dislodged falling around him, his head bowed down and his hands clasped behind him.

Crispin reached for the nearest collar, which happened to be a heavy one, studded with silver spikes, and buckled it around Eddy's throat. He attached a leash and yanked. His voice was commanding but calm when he ordered the construction worker, "Head on the floor. I don't want to hear another word out of you or you will wear a ball gag out to dinner."

Eddy bent and touched his forehead to the floor. Nick had to admire his control; he didn't topple over. He simply obeyed in one smooth movement, his hands stretched out in front of him, his ass in the air.

Crispin continued to walk next to Ashley, keeping Eddy's leash short as they strolled the length of the tables, examining every photograph and discussing them intently. Eddy crawled along behind Crispin without making a sound.

"Gives me the creeps," Derek whispered.

"What's he doing that for?" Nick asked. He was feeling very uncomfortable with this display of power from Crispin, and the uncharacteristic obedience of the other man.

"He's a *slave*," Derek said, his eyes glowing with arousal and fear. "Crispin is his master and he can do anything he wants to him."

"Why would he ever agree to *that*?" Nick wondered, aghast.

"I don't know, dude, and it makes me think twice about what I'm doing with Ashley," Derek said, giving no details. Nick was afraid to ask, and besides, he wasn't ready to swap confidences.

Damian, Ashley, and Crispin had reached the far end of the tables and stood talking, with Eddy still in his position of obeisance.

"I'd like a night to sleep on it," Crispin was saying. "May I take these printouts with me?"

"I can e-mail them to you if you'd prefer," Damian said.

"Yes, do, and copies to Ashley as well. They're numbered, correct?" Crispin checked the back of several prints. "Great. Then when we talk on the phone, we'll all be on the same page. And now, would you care to join me for dinner? Your boys, too, of course."

Nick blushed, wondering how Crispin knew and uncertain whether he was okay with being called Damian's boy.

Damian said, "That's very kind of you, Crispin. I'll just check to see what Nick's plans are for tonight."

He and Ashley came toward the two boys, still standing in the doorway to the kitchen.

Crispin turned to Eddy. "Up. Trousers down. Over the table. Twelve of the best. Six for rudeness, six for attempting to manipulate the situation."

Obediently Eddy stood, dropping his pants and leaning over the nearest table. Nick was amazed to see that he wore some kind of cage, similar to the one Damian had put on him, but Eddy's had a belt, with chains leading to a plug inserted in

his arse, while around the front the chains disappeared under his shirt.

When Eddy's chest hit the table, he gave a little grunt, but gripped the edge with both hands.

Meanwhile, Crispin had picked up a cane, and stood swishing it through the air. He put his hand on the middle of Eddy's back. "What is this for?"

Eddy's muffled voice sounded perfectly respectful as he answered, "Six for being rude to the others, six for forcing you to punish me, Master."

"You are not forcing me, slave, this is for my pleasure and your punishment. I could just chain you and leave you here while I go to dinner. Is that clear, slave?"

"Yes, Master," came the subdued voice.

Crispin walked away from the man bent over the table. Taking three running steps forward, he struck Eddy's arse with a mighty wallop. Eddy gasped, but made no other sound.

Nick shivered; he was quite sure he couldn't take anything like that, and the thought of being punished in front of other people, people he had never met before, made him feel a little sick inside.

"Thank you, Master. May I have the next one?" Eddy said in a remarkably steady voice.

Crispin wound up for the next strike and Nick turned, stumbling away to the outer door. Damian noticed and followed him at once. He let the door close behind them, muffling the sounds of the scene in the studio.

"Are you all right?"

"How could he...? Why does he...?" Nick shook his head, hugging his arms around his body, feeling very cold.

Damian stepped closer, noting the boy's flinch, but wrapped his arms around him anyway. "Eddy is a slave, Nick. It's a very different thing from what we're doing. Eddy is a troubled man; he drank, did drugs, and got into fights. He bratted his way through practically every Dom at the club Crispin belongs to, until he took Eddy in hand. Eddy needs someone to master him, force his submission. That's how he finds peace."

"Peace!" Nick exclaimed. "That's fucking hysterical. Twelve hard strokes with a cane? That doesn't seem like a peaceful way to spend the evening!"

"And it wouldn't be for you. It is for him. It's *his* choice, you know." Damian wondered how he could explain it.

"Remember how you felt Saturday night?"

Nick nodded dumbly.

"Most people wouldn't consider that to be fun either, but you were flying at the end," Damian pointed out. He had a terrible feeling that Nick was slipping away from him and savagely wished Crispin weren't so fucking dominating that he never thought to ask if it was all right to cane Eddy the way he had. "Crispin has a fantasy of being some kind of knight on horseback, swooping in to save Eddy from himself. And Lord knows, Eddy needs someone to answer to; he can't seem to master himself, so perhaps he's better off as a slave. It wouldn't work for me, but it seems to work for them. They've been together for three years."

"Are you saying ... Eddy wanted to be ... to be ... caned in front of all of us?"

Damian chuckled but his smile faded as he realized how shaken Nick was. "He was pushing for it from the moment he came in. He knows better than to slam doors and mouth off like that."

"Fucking hell," Nick said softly, relaxing and leaning into Damian's embrace, having completely forgotten that he was standing in a hallway, where other tenants of the building might see him.

The door opened and Ashley poked his head out. "Crispin sends his apologies for forgetting to ask your leave to do that, Damian. It's all over and he's hoping you'll both still allow him to buy dinner for you."

Damian looked at his boy. "What about it, Nick? Are you up for it or would you prefer to be taken home?"

"Home, please, I think," Nick said, closing his eyes briefly. He was hoping that he hadn't just caught a glimpse of his own future.

Damian was disappointed but he hoped that maybe Nick just needed some time alone to think. "I'll just run Nick home and then I'll meet you, Ash. Where are you going?"

Ashley gave the name of the restaurant and Damian nodded. "I'll join you later. I'll just lock up first." He gave Nick one last comforting squeeze. "Come on, babe. Let's get everything shut down and I'll get you home."

Nick followed Damian inside the studio, wanting to see how Eddy was. He felt as if he was looking at an accident: horrified, fascinated, but unable to look away.

He was surprised to see Eddy kneeling by Crispin's chair. The older man was stroking his hair and Eddy's face was peaceful, dreamy almost. He'd dropped the truculent voice and his replies to Crispin's questions were inaudible.

Nick followed Damian's orders shutting down the studio and soon found himself in the older man's car. He sat huddled in on himself, staring straight ahead.

Damian sighed. "Talk to me, Nick. Don't just shut me out."

Nick shook his head. "I can't right now. I have to think."

Damian said firmly, "That will never be you and me. I would never choose to hit you like that with a cane. I will never punish you either. I don't do this for disciplinary reasons. You're an adult, and you're in charge of your own life. You will never find yourself in Eddy's place with me."

Nick's cold hand sought Damian's. "I know. And thank you for bringing me home."

"See you tomorrow?" Damian asked hopefully.

"I have school tomorrow. Thursday," Nick said.

For a moment Damian feared that he would get out without even a kiss, but Nick turned and kissed him briefly. Then he was out of the car, running up the stairs of his building two at a time.

Damian sighed and put the car in gear. Master or not, Crispin was going to hear his opinion of what he'd done that night. He hoped that maybe yelling at Crispin would take his mind off the boy he feared he had lost.

* * * *

Nick fluctuated between missing Damian desperately and wondering if he was insane for trusting the man. He had to admit that although he had pissed Damian off frequently before they started *doing things*, the older man had never showed any signs of wishing to punish him; he was just sarcastic about his shortcomings.

He realized with dismay that he had been a little turned on by watching Eddy's unquestioning obedience once Crispin had pulled him up short. What had disturbed him was watching him bare his arse, bend over the table, and agree to the punishment Crispin decreed. And when the first red line appeared across Eddy's arse Nick wondered what it felt like. That bothered him more than anything Damian had done to him.

He wondered....

* * * *

Damian had called Nick several times during the day, but the younger man had never answered his phone. So his anxiety was assuaged when Nick showed up for work as usual on Thursday.

"Come here, babe," Damian said, relieved when Nick walked into his arms. "I was afraid you weren't coming back."

"I'm sorry, Damian," Nick apologized. "I just ... it was just so ... I don't know."

"Confusing, I know. I didn't know Crispin was going to do that, or I would have stopped him. As it was, I gave him a piece of my mind," Damian said, his lips grim.

"What did he say?"

"He said he was sorry but that you'd have to get used to it sometime if you're going to play this way," Damian said apologetically.

Nick wrenched himself out of Damian's arms and went to the window. "How the fuck does everyone know?"

"Everyone doesn't know, but people in this lifestyle do," Damian said. He sighed, wondering how to explain it. "There's just a look in a sub's eyes. I guess if you're interested in finding one, you start to recognize them. There weren't that many clubs not so long ago, so you had to be able to spot them."

"Would you cane me?" was the next unexpected question.

Damian gasped and said, "No! Not like that!"

"You don't know how?"

"I know how; I just don't care to. And especially you! Eddy is a tough guy," Damian said, knowing it was the wrong thing the minute it was out of his mouth.

"You're saying I'm not tough?" Nick challenged him, his arms crossed.

"You're different is all that I'm saying. People's nerves are hardwired differently. You're more sensitive." He groaned, realizing he'd put his foot in it again.

"I want to feel it. I want to feel what the worst is like," Nick said stubbornly.

Realizing that his boy was terrified, Damian took a step forward to take him in his arms again but Nick backed away from him. "I mean it. I want to feel it."

"I promised I would never hurt you—"

"I want to feel it," Nick insisted, his lower jaw working pugnaciously.

Surprising even himself, Damian grabbed Nick by the upper arm and dragged him into the makeup room, shoving him at the table in the center of the room. "Bend over that, pants down!" before he whirled around, storming into the studio.

Nick was scared, but he'd asked for this. With shaking hands he took his pants down and leaned over the table.

Damian came back into the room and Nick turned his head to see the evil cane in his sensitive, artist's hands. For a moment he regretted asking the older man to do something that he clearly did not want to do.

Damian looked very stern and sad. "Nicholas, I don't permit my subs to top from the bottom. I can see you've got something going on in your head and I can't shake it loose unless you tell me what it is. We can talk this out; it doesn't have to be this way."

Nick turned his head away from Damian, refusing to meet his eyes or answer him.

"Very well. Maybe this will help clear your mind. This is your one shot. Grab the table. Don't move. You'll be getting three."

Nick started to shake but he grabbed the table so hard that the edges cut into his hands and tensed, waiting and wondering if Damian was going to run at him the way Crispin had done with Eddy.

He felt the cane tap his arse lightly, as if Damian was measuring the distance. He realized suddenly that usually the

older man touched him elsewhere on his body before spanking him, but this was not playing.

First he heard the whistle of the cane cutting through the air, and then the stunningly agonizing pain when the cane cracked across his behind. All the air rushed out of his lungs and he reared up silently, hands still gripping the table, frozen with pain. He gasped and the air suddenly returned to his lungs, making his chest heave frantically. Slowly he toppled back onto the table, panting and sweating.

Nick wanted to use his safe word, but he felt honor-bound not to, after forcing Damian into this, and Damian had said he would be getting three. Nick shivered as the pain seemed to multiply, radiating through his body until he was just one giant ache. He didn't think he could take two more.

The silence was almost more torture than another stroke would have been. He heard the noise and flinched, before he realized that he hadn't felt anything.

Damian dropped the cane and bent over his boy, his tears falling onto Nick's shirt. "I can't do this, Nicky. This isn't what I'm about." He placed his hand gently on the small of Nick's back. "I'm sorry, I never meant to hurt you."

Nick went limp at the comforting touch and he started to tremble, but there were no tears in his eyes as he painfully pushed himself up. "I'm sorry, Damian. I shouldn't have made you do that."

Damian pulled him into a tight embrace. "I was so afraid of what was going on in your head. I've never let a sub push me like that. I promise if you ever try that again, I'll spank you

until you won't sit down for a week, you'll be so sore. But no canes."

"I won't, I won't," Nick whimpered. "I don't know what got into me...."

Damian rubbed the abused bottom soothingly. "Let's get some gel on this. I should have forced you to talk to me. I should know what's going on in my sub's head." With a sudden flash of intuition, he said, "You were afraid that you'd like it."

"Not just that, the humiliation, the way Crispin pushed him around...."

Damian was shaking his head. "Not for me. I don't go for public or private humiliation. I'm a Top. I want a sub, not a slave."

"What's the difference?"

"Come home with me so I can take care of you, Nicky," Damian murmured, holding his boy tight. "I'll try to explain it."

"Okay," Nick said on a sigh. It felt so good to be in Damian's arms again.

* * * *

Nick lay on his side. He squeaked as Damian's hand smoothed more gel onto his sore bottom.

"Serves you right," Damian said with a grin. "I didn't even hit you as hard as I could. That was only half speed."

"And Crispin *ran* at Eddy," Nick groaned. "How could he take it?"

"Nick, this is not a competitive sport, with medals for the one who takes the most pain. Eddy is not you, and you don't have to withstand the same kind of treatment he can take. He has demons that seem as if they can only be silenced by the punishment that Crispin metes out to him."

"You'd think he'd just go to therapy."

"He does," Damian said, and grinned at the look of astonishment on the boy's face. "There are therapists who understand the lifestyle and Crispin sends him to one. But it seems like the pain from the caning releases the emotions that build up inside him. You probably should have come to dinner with us."

"Did Crispin tell you all this?" Nick demanded.

"No, Ashley did. Later. But Eddy was perfectly well-behaved afterwards. He's actually a pretty likable guy."

"How did Derek take the whole thing?"

"Wide-eyed and taking it all in," Damian laughed. "I happen to know that Ashley has promised him that he's not looking for a slave either."

"Good." Nick sighed in relief. "I'm not sure I'd want to think about that."

"Actually," Damian said, leaning over to brush a kiss on Nick's forehead, "I think it's terribly bad-mannered to visualize other people's sex lives, so no more of that. I think you need a nap anyway, pet."

"Yes, sir," Nick said and yawned. He smiled sleepily. "I guess I should have talked to you."

"Yes, you should. Now go to sleep, baby. We'll talk more later." Damian ran his fingers through Nick's curls, knowing how the sensation put him to sleep.

He sat and watched the younger man sleep, wondering if what had just happened between them would inevitably spell the end of everything.

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Chapter Fourteen

Nick rolled onto his back and groaned. His arse was on fire and he suddenly remembered why.

Damian came into the room and pulled back the curtains, letting the golden afternoon sun pour in. Nick squinted at him and asked, "Why does every muscle in my body hurt?"

"You were bracing on that table as if a tsunami was going to hit you," Damian said cheerfully, turning him onto his stomach and tracing the single line that colored his butt. "This one *is* going to bruise. I'm sorry, baby. I should never have done it."

Nick felt terribly guilty. "It was my fault, Damian. You would never have done it if I hadn't been acting so—"

"Stupid?"

"Well, yeah," Nick said reluctantly.

Damian grabbed the tube of gel and started applying it. Nick sighed with relief.

"Listen, Nick. I'm a Top, a Dom. I like to play with a sub, *play* being the operative word," Damian started. He rubbed the excess into his hands and got onto the mattress, lying on his back. Nick crawled over to rest his head on Damian's chest, wanting his arms around him.

"You are a sub, and not a slave," Damian continued. "I could require that you were always naked in my presence, on your knees, and that you never speak without my permission, but that's not the way I like to play. I also told you that I

don't tolerate a sub who tries to tell me what to do to him. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said softly, snuggling into the security of Damian's embrace.

"I have never hit anyone while I was angry but I came dangerously close today," Damian admitted. "And that's not safe. I've told you that you don't know enough to set limits for yourself. This isn't a contest where you have to compete with someone else's sub to get my attention. I want to teach you what you need to know; that way you'll never get into trouble."

Nick heard that and his heart sank. Obviously Damian didn't want to keep him around for too long; he thought that he was responsible for teaching him and then Nick would be on his own.

Damian sensed that something was bothering Nick and wished the boy would speak up. He ran his hands up and down the boy's spine slowly. "You have a lovely stripe on your backside," he offered consolingly.

"Can I see it?"

"Later. It's not going anywhere. I'll even take a picture of it for you, because it's the only one you'll ever get from me," Damian said, nuzzling the boy's ear. He heard the slow sigh that heralded the start of arousal.

"Can I...?" Nick asked, slipping his hand under Damian's shirt. He loved the slightly rough feel of his hair under his fingertips.

"Feels like you're recovering, baby," Damian chuckled as his lover's erection poked him in the stomach.

Nick unbuttoned the older man's shirt, laying his chest bare. He bent to suck a pink nipple into his mouth, delighted with the gasp of arousal from Damian. His hands wandered lower, unfastening Damian's jeans and pushing at them. The older man obligingly lifted his hips, helping Nick to reveal his boxers, the front a little damp.

Damian pulled Nick on top of him and the younger man ground his hips down with a slow rotation. The feel of the boy's bare skin against his chest made him wish he could take him right now. But he had already hurt Nick enough today and he couldn't think of a position that wouldn't put pressure on the boy's bruised ass.

Nick groped between them, feeling the head of Damian's cock break free from the elastic waistband of his boxers. He heard an aroused hiss and felt the buck of the older man's hips under him when he stroked the dripping head. He pushed at the boxers, wanting to see everything.

Damian held him in place with one strong arm, lifting both of them to yank his boxers down. Nick gasped as their silky hard flesh slid together when Damian exposed his cock.

The arm around his waist restrained Nick, making him feel safe and secure once again. He opened his legs, allowing Damian to thrust up against him. He kissed the older man, wanting to feel his tongue inside his mouth, sucking on it desperately as they moved together, gasping and moaning.

Damian felt the sharpness of Nick's teeth, biting on his lower lip. The boy was moving urgently on top of him and it felt so good to hold the writhing body, desperate for his touch. In one of those sudden moments of insight, Damian

knew that Nick needed this to reestablish their closeness. He ran his hand down the slender flank, working it between their frantically moving hips, and pressing both their cocks together, stroked them to a shattering climax.

The wet heat spilling onto his stomach made the boy slide away and Damian held him even more tightly as they came down from their orgasmic high.

Nick continued kissing Damian, only now it was soft open-mouthed kisses, until he came to rest, their open lips just touching, a breath shared between them.

"Go to sleep," Damian whispered.

"You too?" Nick asked.

"Yes."

But Damian couldn't find solace in the oblivion of sleep. He watched Nick's beautiful unconscious face, lips curved slightly in a replete smile, and wondered at the trust the young man still had in him.

He had made many mistakes with Nick, but none that seemed as irretrievable as giving in to Nick's request to be caned. Damian groaned quietly, wondering what had gotten into him. Normally he played the responses of a sub like a virtuoso, always stopping well within their limits, while carrying them to the heights of satisfaction for both parties. Now he had shown that he could not trust himself to take proper care of Nick, and that meant that for both their sakes, he would have to end it. If he could find the strength.

"I want too much," he whispered to himself.

* * * *

"I must have been crazy," Nick said, peering at himself in the mirror in the bathroom.

"It looks very pretty on your cute little butt," Damian leered, patting him lightly on that portion of his anatomy.

"I'm stiff." Nick twisted to look at himself the other way.

Damian laughed. "You are so fucking proud of yourself. Look at you, preening over it."

Nick protested, "Well you said this was my one and only. I have to appreciate it while I can. And I lived to talk about it!"

Damian stepped closer, allowing their half-erect cocks to duel lightly. "I promised that I would record it for posterity and I will. I think tomorrow it will be at its peak, the most beautiful dark plum color. So if you have time to come to the studio and let me get a shot—"

"This isn't for the catalog." Nick scowled in embarrassment at the thought of his marked arse on someone's coffee table for the ogling.

"No, this is only for me. To always have and look at when—" Damian stopped short, not wanting to say *when you leave me*.

"Are you going to show it to anyone?"

Damian was startled at the stab of jealous pain that shot through him. "No! No one will ever see it except you and me."

"Okay, then." Nick smiled with satisfaction and then sighed. Maybe Damian would remember him after he dumped him for whoever caught his eye next. He wished that he was good-looking enough or smart enough or *something* enough that Damian wouldn't get bored with him, but that was too much to hope for.

"Get dressed. I'll order a pizza. And don't forget your pillow," Damian teased, and ducked out of the bathroom before Nick could find something to throw at him.

* * * *

Nick came to the studio after school the next day, walking stiffly. He'd told his mates that he'd done extra workouts and had charley horses. Luckily none of them was the swat-on-the-butt type, and so he'd escaped any extra stimulation of his sore bottom.

He pushed the door open and Damian heard him. "Nick?" he yelled from the back.

"Yeah, Ian, it's me."

"Lock the door and come and look at this."

Nick locked the door and went into the studio. "What the fuck?"

Damian had set up a platform with a large bed, draped with a swathe of lustrous red silk. He smiled triumphantly at Nick. "Strip and get in bed."

Nick's hands went automatically to his jeans, but he said, "I don't think I can—"

"Not for sex, Nicky. This is for your photographic record of the one lick you are going to experience from the cane. Hurry up; get undressed." Damian turned and went to his camera, surreptitiously pressing a hand to his crotch. Just the anticipation of seeing Nick exposed and he was starting to get hard. He shook his head over himself.

Nick took off his clothing, draping them on a nearby chair. He walked slowly to the red, running a finger over the iridescent shimmer of the silk. "This is for me?"

He felt warmth on his back and knew Damian was standing behind him. "All for you, baby. Just think of how that silk will look against the sweet honey of your skin."

"What do you want me to do?" Nick turned and laughed at the mischievous look in Damian's eyes. "Maybe I shouldn't ask that?"

"Oh, you should," Damian assured him. "But for right now, climb up on that bed and be prepared to stop when I say so."

Nick got onto the bed, kneeling on his hands and knees. A flash of light blinded him and he yelled, "You didn't!"

"Yes, I did, and it's a perfect shot of your ass, with that line right across it," Damian said smugly. "Just for me, remember that."

"Fine. You're a pervert," Nick grunted as he crawled further onto the bed.

Damian laughed, relieved that Nick had recovered enough from his funk to even make a joke like that. "Okay, hold it. Lie on your stomach, yeah, just like that. Let me do a couple tests, for exposure."

Grabbing the light meter, he passed it over Nick, taking readings from head to foot. He adjusted the level on the power pack and tested again.

"Okay, lie there just like that. Let me do all the work."

Nick remained still, feeling a ticklish whisper on his skin as Damian worked with the silk, draping it around him. He felt the warmth of the other man's hands as they brushed over

his skin occasionally, wondering what he looked like to Damian.

He felt the caress of the soft fabric on his back, arms, and one leg and shivered at the sensuous feeling, and the thought of the other man looking at him lying there completely exposed, bearing his mark.

"All right, now, don't move," Damian warned as he backed away. He checked the viewfinder and gasped at the image he'd created.

As he'd expected, the red silk emphasized the luster of Nick's warm skin. The play of light and shadow concealed the boy's face, sending just a hint of reflection off his thick, glossy hair.

The silk wrapped around the slender body with graceful folds, but no less graceful than the splay of the relaxed form in its nest of red. Most of Nick was covered, save for a shoulder and one slim strong leg that was highlighted in a golden glow from the light, leading the eye to the two perfect mounds rising over the silk like twin moons in a dark sky. The bruised line left by the cane was subtly shadowed, so that when one first glanced at the photo, one would see only the naked body of a beautiful sleeping boy. The bruised line added a sinister, yet sensual, element to the composition, a hint of danger.

It was easily the most erotic photograph that Damian had ever taken, and yet Nick was mostly covered. If not for the stripe on his bottom, it was a photo that could have been exhibited anywhere, but Damian had no intention of ever letting anyone else see this one.

Damian took the picture and then directed Nick in a series of movements, but none of those photos captured the pleasing abandon of that first sprawling pose.

Nevertheless, Damian was satisfied. "Okay, I've got it," he called out.

Nick moaned sleepily and snuggled further into the silk. "I could get to like this," he murmured.

"Come on. I'll take you home," Damian said, running his hand lightly over the perfect naked buttocks.

Nick was dismayed when Damian pulled up in front of his flat, but he didn't say anything. He kissed Damian and got out, standing on the sidewalk, watching the car pull away. It seemed he didn't know what the hell was going on with anything anymore.

* * * *

Without either man explicitly saying anything about it, Damian gave Nick a ride home on those days when he was scheduled to work. Nick wondered if the entire caning incident had disgusted Damian to the point that the older man couldn't bear to look at him while he still carried the mark. He checked his arse every day, tracking the colors as the line went from purple to yellow, wondering how he could announce when the mark was gone. And if it would mean that Damian would play with him again.

He smiled sadly as he pictured himself walking into Damian's office and dropping his pants, saying, "Good as new, boss! Let's saddle up again!"

In fact, he was beginning to wonder whether they were ever going to play again. Or go to bed. He missed being filled, feeling Damian's hard cock inside, claiming him. He missed being on his knees, breathless with anticipation to find out what Damian was going to do to him next. At work, Damian was considerate and he never once gave Nick an order, instead making gentle requests, which depressed Nick enormously.

Once again, he feared that he had ruined everything without quite knowing what he had done.

* * * *

"Ashley, can I have a word?"

"Well, finally!" Ashley threw up his hands in exasperation. "You've come to your senses at last."

"What are you talking about?"

"Ashley Winthrop, Counselor to Tops in Trouble. I should get a card printed," Ashley said with a smug smile. "What did you do to fuck it up this time?"

"It wasn't just me," Damian said defensively.

"You're the Top, therefore it's mostly your fault."

Damian glared at his friend, nettled by the utmost confidence with which Ashley laid the blame at his door. Even though he was right. "I mishandled a scene. And now we're drifting apart."

With his usual humor and discerning judgment, Ashley put his finger on the problem right away. "Do you still want to play with him?"

"Oh, yes," Damian said, hanging his head miserably. "But I'm not sure he still wants to play with me. How could he trust—"

"Only one way to find out," Ashley said robustly. "And you're the Top. He's a sub, granted, but he's so new to this, he doesn't know yet how to act out to get what he wants. You've got to take the lead on this. It's up to you to make it right."

"But I could have hurt him."

Ashley's expression softened and he put an arm around Damian. "You could have, but you didn't. You controlled yourself enough to pull back before you did any damage."

"I've never fucked up this much with a sub before. I don't know why he affects me this way," Damian mumbled.

"Don't you?"

"Do *you*?"

"You love him." Ashley sniggered at the look of stark terror that crossed Damian's face. "Didn't you know?"

"How the fuck do *you* know when I'm not even sure?"

Ashley took a moment to weigh his response. "You've heard the expression, you only hurt the one you love?"

Damian nodded, looking away from Ashley's piercing gaze.

"When you love someone, you give them power over you. You've been in control for so many years, simply by keeping your heart locked away, that now you don't know what to do with yourself. Does Nick love you?"

"I haven't dared to ask. He may think he does now," Damian said in a troubled tone. "But he's too young. He doesn't know—"

Ashley rolled his eyes in exasperation. "He's old enough to recognize a good man when he sees one. Granted, you're a good-looking fellow, but he's smart enough to see past that to the real qualities that make a man. And being a Dom in this lifestyle, if you're a good one, and you are, one becomes very attuned to the other person. With your ability to read a sub's response, you lessen the chance that you'll grow apart in time."

"How do you know all this?" Damian sounded as if he only needed to be convinced.

"If Nick had any kind of self-destructive tendencies, he would have chosen me over you." Ashley laughed. "I'm a handsome devil, and a snappy Top, but I wouldn't be good for him."

"You think I'm good for him?"

Although Ashley wouldn't show it, his heart was wrung by his friend's need for reassurance. "You two were made for each other. Now if only you could get your heads out of the sand."

"You think I should say—"

"Go slow. Let it develop." Ashley laughed at his little photography joke, even though Damian didn't seem to notice. "Don't just dump him off at his flat. Give him an invitation to play. I assure you, he'll leap at the chance."

"Thanks, Ash."

It was all Damian said, but Ashley felt well repaid as he saw the renewed confidence in Damian's step. He rubbed his hands together in satisfaction. "Ashley Winthrop, purveyor of

kinky toys and a surefire cure for Top Drop. I really must have a new card made."

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Chapter Fifteen

That night after Damian finished some pick-up shots for the catalog, Nick was expecting nothing to happen between them, nothing more than some instruction for the next day when the older man called him to his office.

Damian was sitting behind his desk, stroking the polished surface of a wooden paddle with his slender fingers, a wicked smile on his face.

"Strip!"

Nick gasped, arousal sparking through his veins like wildfire and melting his knees. His hands were trembling as he ripped his clothes off, dropping to the carpet without even waiting for an order.

"Very good, pet," Damian purred, rising to his feet. "I think I told you that I don't permit my sub to dictate to me. Tonight, you have a choice. You may get dressed and leave, or," Damian paused to appreciate the tiny shudder that passed through his sub's body, "or, you may agree to anything I want to do to you. I'm not going to warn you or ask your permission. Your only purpose will be to please me."

"Yes, sir," Nick agreed hurriedly, not wanting Damian to think there was even a moment of hesitation for him in this choice.

"You understand, you've agreed to be under my control until I declare that the scene is over, pet," Damian reiterated. He was enjoying the delicate pink flush that suffused the

boy's entire body; he was shaking like a puppy about to be taken out on a walk.

"Please, sir, do whatever you want, just ... just ... do *something*.... "Nick ran out of words.

Damian closed his eyes in relief for just a fleeting moment. He had held off as long as he could to guard against his own questionable impulses, he had resolved never to spank Nick again, but he could no longer resist his alluring sub. He had made so many mistakes that fateful day: acquiescing to his pet's demand to be caned, not setting the scene for him, promising three and then not delivering the stated number. If he'd been able to tell Ashley everything that happened, he was sure that the other man would have yanked his status as a Top, if it were possible to do such a thing.

Damian was filled with gratitude to his friend; without his advice, he was sure he would never again have seen the beautiful sight of Nick, naked and on his knees, vibrating with need.

"Oh, I will, pet. I will do whatever *I* want." Damian pulled the straight chair to the center of the room. "Over my knees, pet." He had to suppress a laugh when he saw how quickly Nick scrambled to his feet and flung himself over his lap.

Nick winced when the hard hand came down on his arse. He was completely healed from their session with the cane, but it was like getting back on the horse that threw you. However, Damian didn't allow him a long time to ponder; he warmed Nick's arse thoroughly with a series of swats, making a random circuit over the entire bottom, ensuring that he did not miss an inch of the quivering flesh.

Damian paused to stroke over the smooth skin, just blooming pink as the result of his attentions. "I'm going to warm your bottom tonight, pet. You're going to be squirming, I'm going to make you so hot. I doubt you'll find it very comfortable to sit tomorrow, but that's what you've agreed to so it's my pleasure to spank you as much as I like."

Nick wiggled around on Damian's lap under the hand that stroked him, pleased to feel the hard bulge under him, but only gasped, "Yes, sir."

Damian pushed Nick to his knees onto the floor. "Kneel, pet."

Nick assumed the position, waiting with outward patience, but inwardly quivering with arousal. The short spanking had served only to whet his appetite.

Damian stepped closer and cupped Nick's chin in his hand, forcing the boy's head up to look at him. "Look up." Nick obeyed, surprised when Damian went to his knees, but then he felt the man's hands at his cock, putting something on him.

Damian stood up. "All right. Eyes down."

Nick looked down to see a cock ring secured at the base of his organ, circling his balls.

"Just in case you can't control yourself," Damian said with an evil grin. "On your feet."

Nick stood and Damian led him to the wall. "Hands against the wall. Back your feet up, ass out where I can reach it, pet. I'm going to paddle your cute little behind until you're begging for more."

When Nick was in position, he felt Damian's hands running all over his arse, reaching between his legs to find his balls, rolling them between his fingers.

"I'm going to warm you up a bit more before I cool you down, pet," Damian commented. "Keep those eyes facing front."

He picked up the paddle and stroked the polished surface in his hands before he stood by the boy's side, sliding his arm around the slender waist to anchor him, watching the flex of the perfect buttocks. "Ten to start with, pet. We'll have this little bottom nice and red."

Nick would have squirmed away had the arm around him not restrained him. He tensed, waiting for the first blow. He flinched as the paddle connected with his backside, anticipating a sharp blow, but Damian brought it down lightly. The snap sounded worse than it felt, each stroke increasing in firmness that sent tingles dancing through his arse.

After ten strokes, Damian ran his hand over the firm buttocks and said, "You're pinking up nicely, pet. Another ten, I think."

Nick would have agreed to anything, if only Damian would touch his cock, straining in the ring, begging for attention.

The next ten strokes were harder, snapping against his arse. The sensation vibrated through his body and he wanted more. "More ... more ... please, sir," Nick begged.

Damian smiled, well pleased with his pet's response, enjoying each whimper and moan. He ran his fingers over the heated skin between blows to check that the boy was okay. Nick wriggled as the mixture of pain and pleasure combined

into a stinging warmth that throbbed in counterpoint to his trapped cock. All his fears melted away, and he could only feel. He moaned when Damian's arm released his waist.

"Time to cool you down, pet."

Nick nodded, unable even to ask what Damian meant. He pushed his arse back, hoping to feel that intense sensation again but instead he gasped with shock when he felt a piece of ice on the back of his neck, trailing slowly down the line of his spine.

"Your bottom looks very hot, pet. And I have so much more planned for you tonight."

Nick shivered as the ice moved down his back, cold droplets sliding along the curve of his ribs as it melted. He arched his back and hissed as the ice hovered at the top of his cleft. He felt Damian's feet, pushing his legs wide, opening him for the inexorable progress of the ice between his cheeks. He whimpered as the ice cube cooled his entrance and moved further down to his balls. Damian's hand held the ice there, lightly cupping his balls, rubbing the melting cube against his delicate skin.

Then the return journey began, moving upward to tantalize the valley between his cheeks.

"You're so hot, my pet, you've melted the ice," Damian said, sounding very amused. "Perhaps I'd better get you another piece. I'll just deal with this one first."

Nick groaned as the blunted sliver of remaining ice was carefully inserted into his arsehole, with a chilling effect. Damian chuckled as he watched his sub squirm in response.

"Your bottom still looks very hot, pet."

Nick jumped when he felt ice applied to his flaming cheeks, and then sighed with relief. The blaze of heat inside and out was quenched by the ice and it was almost a relief. The contrast was definitely invigorating.

Damian smiled as Nick shivered. "I'm afraid you are too cold now, my pet. Time to set this bottom on fire. You've had your paddling; now you'll get the strap."

"Please, sir," Nick pleaded, suddenly afraid.

"Very good. You're eager for it. Ten with the strap, pet."

Nick trembled with apprehension, wondering how much this was going to hurt. The first snap of the leather against his arse was a surprise; it landed with a duller thud than the paddle, smacking his flesh with a firmer kick but less of a sting.

Damian was delighted to see Nick push his ass back, as if eager to meet each coming stroke. He continued to deliver every blow that he'd promised, building the boy's arousal skillfully, caressing his skin between every slap. Nick arched his head back, gasping as the tension, the need to come, coiled more tightly inside him with every opposing sensation. The contrast between the pleasure and pain set every nerve dancing under his skin and his cock ached with need. The last three strokes landed with a blistering effect, reigniting the burn caused by the paddle.

Dimly he felt Damian's hand caress the sting out of his arse and the Top's voice saying, "What a pity. You're burning up again."

Nick gasped and writhed as his nipples were attacked, one hardening instantly under the application of more ice, while

the other was enveloped by Damian's hot mouth, sucking and nipping until it was painfully erect.

His Top's hands moved over his body, and Nick felt more ice on his backside. The contrast of hot and cold was almost too much for him.

Damian watched him carefully, every gasp and wiggle assuring him that Nick had been teased almost past bearing, but just enough. The boy's cock was erect and swollen, standing up against his belly. And Damian was aching himself, aching to be buried deep inside his boy.

Grabbing the lube, he set to work preparing Nick. The ice had long since melted, consumed by the flame of arousal inside him. Damian stroked between the reddened cheeks, finding the boy's opening and pushing firmly inside. He brushed over the seat of pleasure simply to enjoy watching Nick squeeze his eyes shut tightly and moan, pushing back into his hand.

With his other hand, Damian teased and pinched each nipple in turn, while he spoke to Nick in a low, husky voice. "You have such a beautiful behind, my pet. So lovely and warm. I love a freshly spanked bottom. Do you know what I like to do after I've spanked you hard, pet?"

"Fuck me..." Nick moaned. "Oh, please ... please...."

"I'm so glad you agree." Damian's fingers were trembling as he inserted another into Nick's tight hole, watching the puckered skin stretch to accommodate him. He could wait no longer. Withdrawing his fingers, hoping he'd prepared the boy adequately, Damian turned Nick away from the wall.

"On your hands and knees, pet. I want that cheeky, little red ass high in the air for me."

Nick obeyed, dropping to the floor, his head cushioned on his hands, elbows on the carpet, arse in the air. "Oh, God, oh please ... fill me ... take me...."

Damian struggled to open his jeans, his eyes delighting in the beautiful sight of Nick begging for him, his ears filled with his boy's pleas and moans. He remembered the condom, thanking his stars it was habit, and knelt behind the beautiful sub, gently stroking the red-hot buttocks. He could wait no longer and drove his cock hard into the boy, watching as Nick arched and lunged back to meet him. He grabbed the lean hips, pulling the boy back against himself, seating himself as deeply as he could in the narrow passage.

Nick was delirious with joy; he loved being on his knees, feeling the other man filling him, feeling Damian's weight on his back, dominating him. He felt safe and secure feeling the older man enter him in one, long glide, stroking over the spot that gave him so much pleasure.

The heat and thrust of Damian against his warm bottom transmitted the burn inside him. He wanted the other man to use him for his own pleasure; it was so erotic to be spread and impaled by his Top. He rocked back to meet each powerful thrust, lost in the pleasure that Damian brought to him.

The inner muscles rippled around Damian, clutching his cock with a velvet fist. He was lost in the sensations of Nick's tight channel closing around him as he buried himself as deeply as possible with every stroke. The heat and

constriction made him quicken his pace until he was pounding into Nick, angling to hit the secret spot with every thrust.

Nick was overwhelmed with every sensation: the sharp nip of Damian's teeth on his shoulder, the strong hands holding him in place, fingers digging into his hips, the smack of Damian's thighs against his. Every stroke against the sensitive spot inside drove him higher, every nerve in his body was on fire. The submission to the other man's dominance forged a connection deeper than Nick had ever felt before and he gave himself over to it completely. He felt Damian's hand, fumbling at his groin, releasing him from the cock ring. He'd forgotten it was even there, but the instant relief made him cry out with pleasure.

Damian held him tighter, thrusting ever more deeply before he came with a growl. It was enough to push Nick over the edge, and when Damian gasped, "Come now, come with me," Nick gave in to the lightning bolt of ecstasy that flashed throughout his entire body, wailing with his climax.

And then he collapsed to the carpet, Damian's weight bearing him down. His last thought before he passed out was, *Don't leave me.*

Damian lay panting, aware that he was crushing Nick into the carpet, but unable to move. He felt as if every bone in his body had been surgically extracted; he'd never come that hard before in his life. After several moments, he managed to pull out and rise to his hands and knees, still panting for air.

He laughed at himself quietly and staggered to his feet. In the bathroom he got rid of the condom and cleaned himself off, rinsing his heated face and staring at himself in the

mirror. "What the fuck am I going to do without him when he leaves?" he muttered out loud, before physically shaking off that awful thought. "Face that later. Got a boy to take care of."

He returned to the office and rolled Nick onto his back. His eyes were barely open and unfocused. "Baby, are you okay?"

"Kiss..." Nick managed.

Damian smiled and bent to kiss him tenderly. "Can you stand up? I need to get you home."

Some expression he couldn't quite read flickered over Nick's face and veiled his eyes. "Yes, sir."

"Scene over, baby. Come on; on your feet." Damian pulled Nick up to sit, allowing the boy to lean against him. "All the way now."

He stood and pulled Nick up, catching him around the waist when his knees buckled.

"Sorry," Nick muttered. His face still looked blissed out, and Damian chuckled. He bent to slide his arm under Nick's knees.

"I think I fucked you silly, baby," he said.

Nick wrapped his arms around Damian's neck and rested his head against the strong shoulder. "Mmm-hmm," he slurred softly in agreement.

Damian carried Nick into the studio where he'd pushed the bed from their last photo shoot against the wall. "Here, rest a little while, baby, and then I'll take you home after a breather."

Nick murmured something indistinctly, his lashes fluttering shut.

Damian rolled onto the mattress next to the younger man, laughing as his boy curled into his embrace. "Nick, you have to wake up."

"Mmm," Nick sighed again, snuggling closer.

"Aw, fuck it," Damian said. They were on a bed, and he was tired too. He pulled Nick into his arms and fell asleep.

* * * *

Nick opened his eyes groggily and remembered where he was and what had happened the previous night. He sighed and stretched, rubbing his arse against the sheets to enjoy the lingering soreness.

"Hey, Ian," he said softly, when the photographer appeared, dressed in jeans, toweling his damp hair.

"Take a shower now, pet, and join me in the office," Damian ordered.

Nick sat up, startled. So the scene wasn't over. Uneasily, he wondered what Damian had in store for him; he didn't think his arse could handle any more today.

"I gave you an order. There's no need for you to think it over." Damian's voice was silky but threatening; accordingly, Nick hopped out of bed and hurried to the bathroom. He showered quickly and looked around for his clothing, remembering that he'd undressed in the office the night before.

He paused in the doorway, warily looking around for his clothing.

Damian pointed to the floor, and Nick knelt uneasily. Damian stalked toward him, his walk more of a dangerous

prowl than a stroll, and ran his fingers through the damp curls.

"You're looking very beautiful this morning, pet," Damian said huskily. He pulled Nick's collar from his pocket and buckled it around his neck. "Give me your hands."

Obligingly, Nick brought them up and watched as Damian fastened cuffs on his wrists, made from the same wine-red leather that matched his collar.

"Stand up."

Nick rose to his feet, watching as Damian put matching ankle cuffs on him.

"So beautiful," Damian repeated, drawing a finger along Nick's collarbone to his throat where the collar lay flat. "I have decided to enjoy your submission all day today. So you will remain naked and on your knees in my presence unless I give you another order."

He pointed to the floor and Nick settled to his knees again, feeling embarrassed and exposed to be wearing only his collar and cuffs in daylight while Damian was completely dressed. And what if someone came in!

Damian circled his desk and sat down, pulling out some paperwork. He worked steadily, occasionally glancing up to gloat over the sight of his beautiful pet. After an hour, he said, "Please make some coffee, pet."

Nick hurried to the kitchen to follow Damian's orders.

He cowered in a corner when he heard a knock at the outer door. Surely Damian didn't mean for anyone to see him like this. He sighed in relief when only Damian appeared in the doorway, holding a box.

"Sit down, pet. I had breakfast delivered," Damian said.

Nick poured them both coffee and sat next to Damian, silently eating his breakfast.

When Damian was finished, he said, "Clean up the kitchen and report to me in the office when you're finished."

Nick grumbled silently to himself. He remembered the day when Damian had ordered him home to do his homework, adorned with the cock cage, and said that his obedience might consist of doing dishes. *At least I'm not wearing that damn cage*, Nick thought, and then he had to pause to control his unruly cock, which insisted on getting hard when he thought of it.

Damian chuckled at the expression on Nick's face when he entered the office and went to his knees. It was only to be expected that he would struggle with the less sexual aspects of submission at first. He had never been required to obey for such a long period, and Damian was amused to watch him squirm.

He strolled over to his kneeling sub and stroked both enticing nipples, pulling and twisting them until they were erect, causing each breath to come more quickly through Nick's parted lips.

Damian fetched a pillow and lifted Nick by the arm, dropping the cushion on the floor.

Nick gave a little sigh of relief; even with the carpet, this position was hard on his knees after a while. Then he jumped as Damian passed his hand over his arse.

"Still a little pink and warm. Be grateful I'm not making you sit on your ass all day, pet." Damian chuckled.

"Thank you, sir."

Damian smiled at the rebellion in his sub's voice. "What are you doing on your knees, naked, wearing my collar and cuffs, pet?"

Nick opened his mouth and paused, thinking before he spoke. "Pleasing you, sir?"

"Very good, pet." With a final caress to the shining curls, Damian returned to his desk and appeared to forget Nick's presence entirely, applying himself to his paperwork.

* * * *

Nick's mind churned, racing between anger, discomfort, embarrassment, and finally acceptance. He realized when he stopped fighting his desire to submit, he felt much more at ease. He achieved an almost Zen-like state of mind when he focused his attention on Damian, studying the ruggedly handsome face and fine physique.

The look of proud admiration in the deep blue eyes helped reconcile him to his position. And the office was warm enough that he was comfortable.

The photographer spotted the release of tension from Nick's body the moment that he accepted that he was Damian's for the day. He was breathing more easily, and his muscles relaxed.

Damian got up and patted Nick's head, feeling the boy lean against his leg. "Very good, pet. You begin to understand. Let go of all your considerations and give it all up to me."

He bent to stroke gently up the inside surface of Nick's thigh, watching the boy's cock stir with the caress. "You may take the pillow and sit on that chair."

Nick stood up shakily, grateful for Damian's hand on his arm, helping him to his feet. His knees were creaky and his arse was stiff from maintaining his position. He sank onto the chair, grateful for the pillow, and crossed his legs.

"No, pet. Open your legs. I want to see everything."

A flush spread over Nick's face. It wasn't as if Damian hadn't seen him naked before and in much more embarrassing positions, but being told to splay himself open, so that all his bits were exposed to Damian's glance, simply reinforced his submission.

It dawned on him that this was exactly what Damian wanted. It was difficult for him, but he managed to do it.

"Very pretty, pet," Damian praised him, and Nick arched imperceptibly, proud that he'd pleased the older man.

Nevertheless, it was shaping up to be a long day for Nick.

* * * *

After a delicious afternoon of teasing his pet with random touches and an occasional swat, Damian wrapped up his work and was surprised to discover that he'd actually accomplished more than he'd hoped to.

"Well, pet," he drawled. "Today was quite a treat for me. And tonight I have a treat for you. Please put these on. Leave the collar and cuffs on."

Nick was instantly quivering with apprehension, wondering what Damian was going to require of him next.

"Yes, sir," he said softly. He rose to pick up the pile of clothing Damian had set on the desk. His eyes flew to Damian's questioningly. "I'm supposed to wear this out?"

"Sir," Damian suggested firmly.

"Sir, I'm supposed to wear these out?" Nick repeated. He really didn't want to go anywhere public dressed like this. And in the collar and cuffs!

"Yes, pet. And why do you suppose that is?"

"Because you say so, sir," Nick said with anxious resignation.

"Get dressed."

Nick pulled on the dark red leather pants he had modeled in the catalog. He'd forgotten just how low they sat on his hips and how tight they were. He buttoned the thin, white silk shirt to his throat, remembering when Damian had made him wear the collar under his shirt to the restaurant. He started to tuck the shirt into the tight trousers when Damian came over to him.

"No, pet," he scolded. "Not like that."

Damian pulled the shirt free, so that it hung loose over the trousers, and unbuttoned most of the buttons, exposing the collar and the smooth, golden chest. He left two buttons intact, just at Nick's waist. Nick didn't want to look down, afraid that when he moved, the dark trail that led down to his pants would show. Damian rolled each sleeve twice, exposing the cuffs encircling Nick's wrists.

"You look beautiful," Damian purred, stroking Nick's bare chest with the flat of his hand. He slid his hand under the shirt, finding a nipple easily and pinching it hard. Then he did

the same to the other, smoothing the silk against the erect peaks. "Lovely. I'm almost tempted to add jewelry, but not tonight, I think."

Nick let out the breath he'd been holding with a huff. Damian chuckled. He turned Nick around and ran his hand over the tight leather stretched over the taut curves of his ass.

"The boots, pet. Wait for me here," he commanded and vanished.

Nick sat down to pull on the boots. The leather was soft enough to fit over the ankle cuffs, hugging them so he could feel them when he took a step.

He gasped in admiration when Damian reappeared in the doorway. He was wearing the black leather trousers and a black leather shirt, molded tightly to his body, cut in a deep V which showed off the hair on his chest. The dark leather enhanced his naturally commanding masculinity and Nick felt his cock swell with desire, trapped as it was in the tight confines of his pants. A strap dangled from Damian's belt and he held a leash in his gloved hands. Nick swallowed with fear and arousal; he wanted to feel those gloved hands on his body, sliding over his skin, bending him over, spanking him.... At the same time he was terrified that Damian was going to take him out in public at the end of a leash.

He considered saying one of his safe words, but hesitated, wondering if he really wanted this to stop.

Almost as if he'd read his mind, Damian approached Nick, letting the leash slide through his gloved fingers. "Your words, pet?"

"Yellow for slow down, London for stop," Nick repeated.

Damian hooked the leash to the ring in Nick's collar.

"Come along, pet."

Nick hesitated, pulling back against the leash. "Wh—where are we going ... sir?" he remembered to add.

"You will find out in good time, pet. I believe I gave you an order," Damian said with slight menace.

Nick followed Damian, praying that the other tenants of the building wouldn't see this. He was relieved when no one got onto the elevator with them. Damian punched the button for the basement, leading Nick into the garage beneath the building.

There were a few other cars parked there, but Nick couldn't see anyone as he peered around nervously.

"Sir?"

Damian didn't respond, merely leading Nick to his car.

"Sir?"

"Shh. No questions, pet."

Damian pushed Nick forward, so he was bent over the hood of the car. Uneasily Nick shifted, all too aware of his arse presenting a too tempting target for the Top, hoping Damian wasn't planning to spank him in the garage. He shut his eyes, imagining the echo of each slap bouncing off the concrete walls. If the other owners of the cars happened to come down, they wouldn't be able to miss what was happening.

He was very relieved when Damian opened the passenger door and tugged on his leash. "Up, pet. Get into the car."

Nick did as he was told, sedately buckling his seat belt with trembling hands. He realized that at night, through the tinted windows, even if people did look in, they would probably not realize he was wearing a collar and leash.

Damian got in and started the car, pulling out of the garage. "We are going to Crispin's club tonight, pet, as his guests. I've decided that you should get a glimpse of how other people play as part of your education."

Instantly Nick panicked, terrified that Damian would order him to undress or even punish him in front of other people. He panted, desperate for air, unable to even say his words.

Damian pulled over and stopped the car, putting a comforting hand on Nick's thigh. "Deep breaths, babe. Breathe for me. And then tell me what brought this on."

Nick gulped for air, trying to calm himself. This was Damian, he reminded himself, whom he'd been able to stop with his safe word. "You're not—not going to make me—spank me in front—of ... of...."

Damian reached over and pulled Nick into a hug. "Of course not, baby. I'm not doing this to torture you. I want you to experience another aspect of this lifestyle and see if you enjoy it. You will remain fully dressed, and I won't spank you in front of anyone."

"Thank you," Nick said faintly, going limp in Damian's arms.

"Did you think I hadn't noticed that you don't enjoy that kind of display?" Damian murmured. "I want you to see what you're getting into, Nick, not make you miserable. Don't

worry. Remember, you're in control here. You can stop me with a word."

Nick nodded, getting his breathing back under control. "Thank you, Damian."

"Just let me know if you want to leave, and we'll go immediately," Damian promised. "Think you can live through this?"

"Yeah," Nick said nodding. "Let's just get it over with."

Damian laughed. "It won't be that bad, Nick. You'll see. You might enjoy going out to the club every now and then. And now I think perhaps you'd better get back to calling me sir."

"Yes, sir," Nick said, feeling immensely relieved.

"That's my good pet."

* * * *

After Damian parked the car, Nick realized he was facing the walk into the club. Wearing a collar and leash. A very obvious leash. The silver links glittered under the streetlights like diamonds.

"Uncomfortable, pet?"

Nick nodded slowly, not turning to look at Damian, but the older man cupped his chin and turned him so their eyes met.

"The collar is my protection in there, pet. Do you understand?"

Nick's eyes dropped, and he said nothing.

Damian sighed. "I'm not doing this to upset you. You are a very beautiful boy, Nick, and a submissive. If I let you walk in there alone, with no sign that you have an owner, you might

not like what would happen next. You wouldn't be hurt, but you might have to fend off a number of offers from some persistent admirers. I'm not going to put you in that position, understand? This way the other Tops will know that you already belong to me, and you'll be safe."

"Yes, sir," Nick said quietly.

Damian was frustrated; the connection they had while fucking seemed to disappear when Nick became speechless and uncomfortable.

"Talk to me, baby."

The endearment seemed to signal a break of scene for Nick and he was more able to speak. "Can't we just go home?"

"We won't stay long, babe, but Crispin invited us and Ashley will be there with Derek. I said I would bring you along. I'd like us to go in and say hello. Can you do that much for me?"

"Yes, sir," Nick said dejectedly.

"Good boy. Come on then." Damian got out, resigning himself to leading a sullen pet into the club, but knowing that no matter what his attitude, Nick would attract a lot of attention and he would be the envy of many of the Doms. Not that he was desirous of raising envy from others. He was far more concerned with Nick's discomfort.

He led the boy down the sidewalk briskly, not wanting to subject him to the stares of the curious when passersby caught a glimpse of the leash.

He opened the door and the burly security guard recognized him, allowing them to pass with a respectful, "Good evening, Mr. Wolfe. It's good to see you again."

Damian nodded back and paused to allow Nick to look around the club. The kinkier scenes took place in private rooms in the back, so there were no slings, no slaves being fucked from both ends, and the stocks weren't visible.

However, two Doms appeared to be having some sort of competition, their subs bent over two tables receiving a counted number of strokes from the weapon of choice. Each Dom was whipping the submissive owned by the other, the idea being to see which sub cried uncle first.

A number of men were receiving discreet blow jobs in darkened booths and unclaimed subs were standing or kneeling against the wall, waiting to see if they would get lucky tonight.

Nick looked very shocked and a little scared. Damian put his mouth close to the boy's ear and said, "You belong to me, pet. No one will do anything to you."

"Thank you, sir," Nick whispered.

"When we get to the table, stand behind my chair, unless I tell you to sit, okay?"

Nick nodded and gave Damian a tight, uncomfortable smile. His face brightened though, when he caught sight of Ashley and Crispin sitting at a table. Crispin was most awesomely clothed all in leather, but unlike Damian, it was a tawny hue, suited to his coloring. Ashley wore dark blue leathers, tailored perfectly for him.

Damian almost laughed when Nick's face fell as he caught sight of Derek. The other boy was kneeling by Ashley's side, collared and leashed much like Nick, but his body was crisscrossed by leather straps. He wore leather pants, and a shirt unbuttoned like Nick's, and smiled cheerfully at Nick when he caught sight of him.

Ashley looked down and stroked Derek's hair. "You may say hello, puppy."

Nick was extremely grateful that Damian had chosen to call him pet, rather than puppy. He thought he might puke at that title, but Derek seemed very at ease and chatty now that he'd been given permission to greet his friend.

"Hey, Nick, isn't this cool? I never knew this club even existed, and I must have walked by it every day on the way to work. Exciting, isn't it?"

For all his protestations, Derek seemed to have embraced this new lifestyle with a cheerful enthusiasm that Nick envied.

Nick glanced at Damian, almost relieved when the older man shook his head slightly, denying him permission to speak. He took up a position behind Damian's chair, aware of the leash swinging between his collar and the older man's hand.

Ashley smiled at Nick but didn't speak to him, continuing to stroke Derek's head. It was Crispin who examined him closely, smiling at the look of embarrassment on Nick's face under his scrutiny.

"You are one lucky man, Damian. I can't remember when I've seen a submissive more beautiful. The collar and cuffs truly heighten his desirability. Good thing you have him

leashed; he'd raise quite a ruckus if he were let loose in here uncollared."

Damian laughed easily. "Thank you, Crispin. I do feel lucky."

"I know that it's your boy's first time here; I'll have my slave get us some drinks." Crispin snapped his fingers, and Eddy knelt up. Nick hadn't seen him at first, prostrated on the floor in the darkened club.

Now his face blanched as he took in the full glory of Eddy's rig; the well-muscled torso was well displayed as Eddy was wearing very little else. Nipple clamps were linked to his wide studded collar and to a leather belt buckled around his waist with chains. He wore a cock ring, also attached to the clamps with chains and his erection looked purple and angry. The chains wrapped between his legs and Nick surmised that he was wearing some kind of butt plug again.

Crispin told him to get five beers at the bar, and Eddy nodded, unable to speak because of the ball gag in his mouth.

When he rose to his feet, Nick could see that his hands were cuffed behind his back, and he was indeed impaled with a large butt plug. Weights swung between his legs and Nick realized with shock that they were attached somehow to his balls. He felt a little faint and decided that he didn't want to know exactly *how* they were attached.

Eddy's buttocks were well-marked with red lines crisscrossing over the muscular globes. Despite that, his eyes were peaceful, almost as if he were on some kind of high. He went to the bar, leaving Nick wondering just exactly how he was going to order with a gag in his mouth and bring

everything back to the table with his hands pinned behind him.

"Eyes down, pet." Damian gave him a little reminder and Nick gratefully lowered his eyes, not wanting to see any more.

A server came to the table with a tray, unloading the mugs of beer, while Eddy knelt again behind Crispin's chair.

Crispin was still studying Nick, and the young man began to realize that although he felt his clothing exposed him provocatively, his outfit was actually quite demure compared to most people in the club.

"Have you traded him yet?" Crispin asked Damian casually.

Nick hoped desperately that his comment didn't mean what he thought it meant. Submitting to Damian was one thing; he had never considered that his submission might mean that Damian would give him to someone else to use.

He turned pleading eyes to Damian, receiving a little swat as a reminder. "Eyes down. Perhaps you'd better kneel, pet," Damian said under his breath.

Nick lowered his eyes and took in a shuddering breath, dropping to the floor.

Ashley spoke up. "I'm afraid that Nick is a one-man sub. He belongs to Damian only, and he wouldn't obey anyone else."

"He could be broken," Crispin said. "But I'm not surprised that you don't want to trade him. He is peerless. Tell me, is every part of him as gorgeous as what shows? Is he beautiful in his submission?"

"Is Eddy?" Damian retorted.

"As you can see," Crispin shrugged. "Eddy is never more beautiful than when he's suffering. Kneel up. Isn't that right, slave?" He tugged on the chains attached to Eddy's nipples, and the construction worker moaned and shut his eyes.

Crispin appeared to take that as acquiescence. Derek seemed to shrink behind Ashley, as if not to attract the other Dom's attention.

Nick felt like crying, but he couldn't shame Damian that way so he blinked rapidly and looked at the floor.

Damian recognized the acute discomfort on Nick's face. "He's bright too," he told Crispin. "What's the most populated city in the EU, pet?"

Nick looked up, his eyes meeting Damian's. "*London*, sir."

Damian nodded. "Excuse us, Crispin, and thank you for inviting us. We forgot to take care of something."

Crispin laughed. "Don't be too hard on him, Damian."

Damian merely smiled politely and tugged on the leash, watching Nick rise gracefully to his feet as he had taught himself. "Are you sure?" he whispered.

"Yes, *please*, sir," Nick answered, the urgency of his voice telling Damian that he was almost in tears.

Nick tried to school his face to remain impassive and he looked at the floor, afraid to meet anyone's eyes. He bumped into Damian as someone's hand brushed his arse, and he jumped away from the touch.

Ordinarily that would have earned him at least a reproof, if not a swat, but Damian merely walked faster, opening the outer door and leading Nick out onto the deserted sidewalk.

Nick drooped miserably, following behind Damian, not realizing he'd stopped until he bumped into him again. "Sorry, sir," he mumbled.

"Nicky. Look at me. Scene ended."

Nick looked up, trying to blink back his tears. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I know you wanted to ... you enjoyed it in there ... I ruined it..." he stammered.

Damian raised his hand and thumbed away the tears on Nick's cheek. "The whole point of this is to enjoy what we're doing. I'm not going to have fun if I know you're miserable." He felt almost helpless. "I want you to be happy."

Nick sniffled, hoping snot wasn't running out of his nose.

"Here. Blow," Damian said, handing his handkerchief to the boy.

Nick blew and then shrank into the shadows as a couple passed by, their attention drawn by the glittering leash that was still in Damian's hand.

"I guess you really aren't an exhibitionist," Damian said, unhooking the leash and rolling it up to stash it in his pocket. He reached to unbuckle the collar, but Nick stopped him with a hesitant hand.

"Please, sir, please leave that on," he begged.

"You don't have to, you know. It's no disgrace not to like something. We tried, and now we know you don't care for the club," Damian said reassuringly. "You don't need the collar out here."

"I like it, sir. It makes me feel like I belong to you," Nick said shyly.

"You belong to me whether you're wearing my collar or not, Nicky," Damian said, sweeping his boy into a ferocious hug, unable to withstand the sight of Nick's distress any longer.

"Thank you," Nick said, his arms coming up to circle Damian hesitantly.

Damian turned his head and kissed Nick, the sweetest, most tender kiss he had yet bestowed on him. "You're trembling, baby. Do you want me to take you home?"

Nick shook his head no, but his eyes were shadowed and Damian couldn't read his desires as he had so often before.

"No, I want you to ... to take me ... take me to your bed ... and ... and...." Nick gasped, as if frightened by his own boldness. "Make love to me. Sir," he added hopefully.

Damian crushed Nick close to his heart. He was frighteningly happy; Nick wanted more than his dominance; he wanted his love.

"Do you love me, Nick?" he demanded harshly.

"Yes, oh yes," Nick answered breathlessly.

Damian drew him under the street lamp and searched his face. "Look at me carefully, Nick. I'm older than you, and you are just starting your life. I have wrinkles, and aches that plague me. Sometimes I'm only able to come once a night. I may not be able to fulfill you sexually forever. And I'm a kinky old buzzard. I will always thrill to the sight of you bent over my knee getting your ass warmed up. I can't promise that I'll ever want to stop spanking you."

"You're not old!" Nick cried indignantly. "And I'm not that young. You are beautiful to me, and my hip aches sometimes."

You may be able to come only once a night, but you know how to last and I don't. You take care of me. And I like it when you warm my arse. I don't want you to stop."

"You know what you're agreeing to, don't you, baby?" Damian asked anxiously. "I'm fine just playing, but when I pledge my heart, it's forever. You're agreeing that you'll be mine 'til death do us part. No one else gets to see this ass but me."

"I know what I'm agreeing to, Damian," Nick answered, his eyes shining. "I don't want anyone else to see my arse. And you belong to me as much as I belong to you," he ended proudly.

"I do," Damian admitted. "I'm a sad shell of a man, Nicky. This is what you've done to me. Beaten me at my own game. I'm afraid I can't do without you any longer."

"I love you, Ian," Nick said bravely.

Damian shook his head ruefully. "Ashley was right. It's the Top who's the slave."

Nick laughed confidently. "Right then. Take me home, slave."

"I'll take you home and fuck you 'til you scream," Damian said.

"No, just make love to me," Nick said, touching Damian's face with gentle fingers.

"I can do that," Damian said, smiling to see the hopeful, happy look in his boy's eyes after the pinched, miserable expression in the club. "Promise me that you'll never agree to anything again just to make me happy."

"I promise, sir," Nick vowed solemnly.

"I love you, Nicky, more than I can say," he said, tightening his hold on Nick.

"I love you too, Damian," Nick said, smiling.

"Let's go home, baby."

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Epilogue

Damian unlocked the door and pulled Nick into the house, closing it behind them and pushing the boy up against it, attacking his lips as if they had never kissed before.

Nick opened his mouth, dueling for dominance against Damian's tongue, demanding his share more hungrily.

Damian grabbed his hair and held his head, breaking the kiss to look into the beautiful dark eyes. "In spite of everything, you still love me?"

Nick asked boldly, "Do you love me?"

"I have from the moment I saw you. I was just lying to myself," Damian admitted. "I wanted you so bad—"

"You have me," Nick said. "Take me. I'm all yours."

"Not here. In my bed," Damian said. He led the way quickly upstairs, not bothering to turn on any lights until he got to his bedroom. He released Nick long enough to light a few candles.

Then he turned to Nick, lifting him with his hands cupped around each cheek of the boy's ass. Nick wrapped his legs around Damian's waist and bent to kiss the older man as he was carried to the bed.

He giggled as Damian tossed him onto the mattress, and he almost bounced off the other side.

With mock severity, Damian said, "I can't have my sub giggling at me. You'll have to be taught a lesson."

"Yes, teach me a lesson, Master," Nick said, his voice throbbing with desire. He held out his arms to Damian, who bent to kiss him savagely.

He caught Nick behind the knee and yanked him to the edge of the mattress, his butt barely hanging off the edge. Damian undid the leather trousers and struggled to strip them off the long, slender legs. Nick wriggled to aid him in his struggle with getting the pants past his boots. With a cry of triumph, Damian rid him of both at once.

He simply ripped Nick's shirt open, disregarding such niceties as buttons, and bent to claim each tempting nipple in turn, nipping and tugging at the tender flesh until his lover was begging and writhing with arousal.

Damian released him to strip off his own clothing, growling, "This is why I don't like to wear leather. It's so fucking sticky, especially when you'd kill to be naked! Get the supplies!"

Nick giggled with delight, watching his lover hopping around with one sweaty leg stuck inside his pant leg until superior strength won out. Nick held out the lube and their fingers touched when Damian took it.

Their eyes locked, and the smile died away from Nick's face at the intensity of the look Damian was giving him.

"I will always love you, Nicholas."

"I'll always love you, Damian. I always loved you."

Damian pulled one slender leg over his shoulder and Nick let the other fall to the side, opening himself fully to Damian's gaze. "So beautiful and all mine. Forever mine," Damian

murmured, delighting in the golden body lying there, eager to be claimed by him.

He slicked his fingers, stunned to realize they were trembling as if this were the first time he was taking Nick.

Damian worked his fingers into the boy's entrance, stretching him gently, although he was shaking with the need to bury his neglected cock deep inside him. Withdrawing his fingers, he put his right knee on the bed alongside Nick, bracing his left on the floor for leverage. He leaned over the boy, carefully working his cock into the tight heat. Nick pushed his arse up to meet the invasion, running his hands up Damian's arms, his eyes fearlessly open, looking up at the man who was taking him.

Damian marveled that during sex Nick hid nothing, his eyes like mirrors in which every feeling could be read. He was shaken by the boy's trust; not only to have allowed Damian the freedom of his body for his dominance but also for his lovemaking. He wanted to give Nick a different kind of pleasure tonight, to assure him that they would find many ways to make love.

Slowly Damian pulled back and braced himself to sink deeply inside, finding the cluster of nerves that made Nick arch and moan. With great care, Damian thrust deeply, changing his motion to rotate his hips, caressing every inch of the inner walls, finding and stimulating every sensitive spot.

Nick was in heaven, wrapping his free leg around Damian's waist and using it to pull the older man deeper inside him. He ran his hands up and down Damian's arms, feeling the rock-hard muscle flex and release as his lover thrust inside him.

He had never felt so filled, or so claimed before.

"Touch yourself, baby. Touch yourself for me."

Nick watched his love watch him as he stroked himself in time to Damian's thrusts, the cock inside him fucking him to even higher arousal. Damian's eyes flicked between Nick's hand and his face as he worked himself toward his climax, sweat rolling off him as he moved.

Nick cried out as Damian changed his rhythm suddenly, brushing forcefully over the seat of pleasure. He arched his back and closed his eyes, pearly drops of cum splashing over his stomach and chest.

The sight of his boy lost in rapture and the tight little hole clenching around his cock drove Damian into a frenzy of lust, plunging deeply with all the strength in his legs, their flesh slapping together as he came. "I love you!" he cried as he froze, rigid with the last tremors of release, and then relaxed.

Nick slowly brought his leg off Damian's shoulder, clasping his legs behind the other man's waist. For the first time, he'd felt the fire of the other man's cum filling him and he wanted to keep Damian seated inside him forever.

"Come here," he said softly, holding out his arms.

"I forgot the condom," Damian groaned as he lowered his weight onto the slender body.

"Doesn't matter," Nick said. "I wanted to feel you come inside me from the start. And I won't ever be fucking anyone else, so it's okay."

"Love you, baby," Damian mumbled. He fell asleep, in the comfort of Nick's arms.

Nick lay awake, tears sliding from the corners of his eyes and rolling into his hair. He had never felt this happy in his life.

"You are mine," he whispered, and kissed Damian's cheek.

Damian sighed in his sleep and wrapped his arm snugly around Nick's waist.

* * * *

Six months later

Nick slammed the door open and raced to find Damian, finally tracking him down in the room they called the library, mainly because most of the books lived there.

"I got a show!" he cried out, waving a piece of paper frantically, so that Damian couldn't see it. "In a real gallery!"

The older man looked up with a fond smile. "You've got a show all to yourself?"

"Of course not, silly," Nick said, landing in Damian's lap with a leap. "I'm only one of six 'Up and Coming Young Artists,' but isn't it great?"

"It's wonderful," Damian agreed. "When is this show?" he asked, trying to capture the piece of paper from his young lover.

"In six weeks. I'm going to have to work like a fiend," Nick declared. "Don't I deserve a reward? You said—"

"Yes, I did, and you do deserve a reward, my love," Damian answered, much amused. "Go get your paddle, and we'll see what we can do to make this young artist up and coming."

Nick jumped off his lap and ran up the stairs two at a time. Damian chuckled at his eagerness and pulled his chair out from behind his desk.

When Nick reappeared, paddle in hand, Damian said, "All right, pet. I'm going to take those trousers down and give you a paddling like you've never had before. I'm going to make that beautiful bottom so hot and red you won't be sitting on it for a week."

Nick squeaked with excitement and hurried over to his lover, handing him the paddle and standing submissively to his right. Damian's fingers undid his trousers and pushed them down, leaving him with only his boxers to cover him. He tipped the boy over his lap and pushed the boxers down to his knees to join his jeans.

Damian stroked over the pale beautiful globes with the smooth acrylic paddle. "And now pet, what do you say?"

"Thank you, sir," Nick said. "I love you."

"Love you too, baby."

Whack!

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A Strong Hand
by Catt Ford

Catt Ford lives in front of the computer monitor, in another world where her imaginary gay friends obey her every command.

She likes cats, chocolate, swing dancing, sleeping, Monty Python, Aussie friends, being silly, spinning other realities with words, and sea glass. She dislikes caterpillars, cigarette smoke and rude people who think the F-word (as in faggot, or bundle of sticks) is acceptable.

A frustrated perfectionist, she comforts herself with the legend about the weavers of Persian rugs always including one mistake so as not to anger the gods, although she has no need to include a mistake on purpose. One always slips through. Writing fiction has filled a need for clever conversations, only possible when one is in control of both sides, and erotic romances, where everything turns out happily ever after, for the most part.

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