



*Lust Bites*

**GAY LIKE YOU**

**Kim Dare**

A Total-E-Bound Publication



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Gay Like You

ISBN # 978-1-907010-39-2

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Edited by Christine Riley

Total-E-Bound Publishing

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Published in 2009 by Total-E-Bound Publishing 1 The Corner, Faldingworth Road, Spredlington, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, LN8 2DE, UK.

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

# **GAY LIKE YOU**

**Kim Dare**

## *Dedication*

To every family that accepts all its children for who they really are.

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## Chapter One

"I thought we agreed we weren't going to do this anymore." Tristan Fielding pressed a kiss to his mother's cheek as he whispered the words in her ear.

She stared up at him with such startled innocence; he could almost believe she didn't have an ulterior motive for inviting an absolutely gorgeous man to have dinner with them. Since this was the sixth stunning man she'd introduced him to in as many weeks, Tristan no longer felt obliged to fall for the act.

"Tristan, dear," she said, not the least affected by his attempt to appear disapproving. "This is Cody. He's Mr. and Mrs. Sadler's son. You remember them, don't you?"

"Of course. Cody." Tristan turned to face the man he'd been admiring out of the corner of his eye since he'd walked into the restaurant. "How are your parents?"

Cody offered him a slightly strained smile as they shook hands. "They're fine, thank you."

"I'm sure you two will get along famously," Tristan's mother said as she sat down. "You have lots in common."

Cody's gaze darted towards her. He offered a politely curious smile.

"Tristan's gay, like you," his mother announced.

Someone switched off the light behind Cody's eyes. He dropped Tristan's hand, as if he'd suddenly acquired some contagious disease.

Tristan gave a mental sigh. The saying was wrong. All the best ones were almost invariably *straight*. But the denial he expected didn't come. Cody remained silent as they took their seats around the quiet table in the corner of the restaurant.

"Cody's telling us about an award he just received for his art," his mother said. "Why don't you tell Tristan about it, dear?"

The younger man did a remarkable impression of a rabbit caught in the headlights. Tristan idly wondered if he was the only man on the planet who could make that panicked

expression look appealing. Wide eyed, with his lips slightly parted as if he was offering them up to be tasted, he was glorious.

Finally Cody pulled himself together. "It's nothing," he murmured, pushing a hand through his hair, disordering the neatly combed style.

The gesture appeared more nervous than flirtatious. It still made Tristan imagine himself tangling his fingers in the thick blond strands as he held Cody still to be kissed.

"Now, that's not true," his mother cut in – completely derailing Tristan's train of thought. "It was in the papers last week."

Cody hesitated. "The Harman Legacy," he finally said, very softly – as if he wasn't sure he wanted anyone to hear what he had to say.

"The award is for art?" Tristan checked. "You're an artist?"

Cody gave a jerky nod.

Tristan studied him carefully. He was probably just nervous. His family could be intimidating – especially when in hot pursuit of someone they thought ought to be set up with one of their own.

Doing his best to push aside thoughts of anything other than setting the other man at ease, Tristan tried to think of something Cody might be more comfortable talking about. It wasn't easy to think at all, when Cody called to something inside him more strongly than any man he'd ever known.

"I haven't seen you around for..." Tristan scrolled through his memories. He held a vague recollection of a pale, blond boy a few years younger than himself, but that was way back before he'd found out there were games more fun than football to be played with other boys.

Cody didn't fill in the gap. If anything he withdrew further into his shell.

"Since we were children," Tristan finished off, as he did the math. If Cody was the year or two younger than him that he remembered him being, he'd be twenty-three now.

The conversation, such as it was, died.

"The newspaper article didn't mention if you had a boyfriend," his mother said, never one to beat about the bush.

"No, I don't," Cody replied.

For the next half an hour his reserve and preference for one word answers continued to appear sweetly shy. As the evening wore on it became far harder for Tristan to see it as anything other than downright insulting.

Yes or no. That was it. The guy didn't even ask anyone to pass the salt. Tristan found himself getting more annoyed with Cody as each attempt his parents made to coax the younger man out of his shell proved unsuccessful. He'd never known his mother to fail to take someone under her wing, but by the end of the meal, he was wondering if she'd met her match.

Cody's expression stayed blank, but the strain was starting to show around the older lady's eyes. Still, she rallied when they all stood up and began to make their way out of the restaurant.

"Tristan, dear, why don't you walk Cody home? It will be a lovely stroll across the park at this time of day."

"That's really not necessary, Mrs. Fielding," Cody began, no longer even attempting to hide his reluctance to be within several miles of Tristan. "I'm fine on my own."

"Nonsense," Tristan cut in. "The company will do you good." It would certainly do Cody's manners a world of good, to hear what Tristan intended to say to him en-route.

Cody glanced up and looked Tristan in the eye for the first time since they shook hands. He nodded his acceptance. As they said goodbye to his parents outside the restaurant, Cody at least had the decency to shake their hands and say thank you for the meal. Then, the moment they turned to go, he was off in the other direction. Tristan muttered a curse under his breath and marched after him.

"If you're trying to outpace me, it's not going to work," Tristan informed him as they stepped into the park that lay between the restaurant and Cody's house. "I'm half a foot taller than you. I've got longer legs."

Cody spun around to stare up at him in blatant challenge. "You don't like the speed I walk at, you're more than welcome to go in the other direction. In fact, I'd much prefer it if you did."

When he tried to turn away, Tristan caught hold of his arm. "Oh, no you don't. I held my peace through that meal, now you're going to listen."

To his surprise Cody didn't struggle. He stood there, leaving his arm in Tristan's grip, obviously not the least intimidated by squaring off against a far larger man.

"Would it really have killed you to make polite conversation for a few hours?" Tristan demanded. "Well?"

Cody stared back at him with that same blank expression he'd worn throughout the meal. "Is that it?"

"No, it's not!" Tristan snapped. "I know damn well that you were raised to have better manners than that. What would your parents have said if they saw the way you acted at that table?"

Cody jerked his arm away so suddenly, Tristan's grip failed him. Expecting the smaller man to take to his heels, he suddenly found himself face to face with someone who was entirely furious with him and who had no problem standing his ground to say so.

"I was raised to think you and I are a sin against God and nature," Cody spat out. "There is nothing that could make me sink any lower in my parent's opinion than I already am."

He spun away and strode off faster than ever. Tristan mentally cursed himself and hurried after him. With each step, he played everything that was said at dinner over inside his head. Suddenly the mild embarrassment of having his parents try to pair off their last unmarried offspring took on a different light.

Cody didn't even glance to his left as Tristan fell into step with him.

"When you said that your parents were fine," he began cautiously.

"They were fine last time they spoke to me," Cody said.

"Which was...?"

"I came out when I was fifteen. They made it quite clear they had nothing to say to me after that."

"Fifteen," Tristan repeated.

"Yeah," Cody sneered. "Strange how you haven't seen me around the last few years, isn't it?"

Tristan gave a mental sigh and wondered how many other times he or his parents had accidentally put their foot it during the meal. "Did you move away?"



Cody shook his head. "No, I just dropped down out of the sort of polite company you and your family keep."

He stopped walking. Tristan was several paces ahead before he realised that and looked over his shoulder.

As suddenly as he stopped, Cody started walking again, at the same double pace he seemed so fond of.

"I'm sorry," Cody said. "That was uncalled for. Your parents were really nice. I'm sorry if I made them uncomfortable."

"It's not a problem."

"I'm just not used to strangers discussing my sex life as if it's... as if it's..." Cody shook his head and sighed, wondering why the hell he thought he had to explain himself to Tristan anyway.

"Do you always walk this fast?"

"Yes." Cody pushed his hands a little deeper into his pockets and kept going.

"I know we didn't get off to the best start, but —"

"But you still want to screw me?" Cody finished for him. "Yes, I know."

The simple statement seemed to throw Tristan entirely off balance. He started three different sentences before he finally settled on — "*You know?*"

"If you were just annoyed with me because you thought I was rude to your parents, you wouldn't be half as pissed off as you are," Cody pointed out. "But, realising I'm an ignorant jerk and still spending half the dinner imagining me underneath the table sucking your cock — that must have really messed with your head."

Cody turned off the main avenue through the park and led the way down into a shadowy little section of woodland walk.

Tristan kept talking, but Cody wasn't bothering to listen. He didn't need to hear all that 'niceness' the 'nice guy' was spouting right then. When they were a suitable distance from the main path he scanned the side of the trail for an appropriate tree.

The older man might have been a lot taller and stronger than him, but grabbing his arm and pushing him back against an old oak was easy when he obviously wasn't expecting it. Cody dropped to his knees and reached for Tristan's belt.

"What the hell!"

"This is what you want, isn't it?" Cody asked, as he began to undo Tristan's fly.

When he glanced up a few seconds later, Tristan was looking around as if he expected half the world to suddenly parade through the park for the chance to glimpse his cock. "Are you crazy?"

Cody gave a mental sigh. So moral. So proper. So bloody *nice*. "No one walks through here at this time of day unless they're looking for a quiet spot to do exactly the same thing," he reassured with all the patience he could muster.

"That wasn't what I was about to say."

As if Cody gave a damn about what he intended to say. He slipped a hand inside Tristan's trousers. Pushing past cotton boxers, he deftly extracted Tristan's shaft. Cody quickly wrapped his fist around him, working his fingers around his length, coaxing him harder with each well practised caress.

"This isn't why I agreed to walk you home." Tristan reached out as if to stop the imminent blow job, but his hand somehow ended up resting on Cody's shoulder, keeping him there rather than pushing him away.

"No, I'm sure you told yourself you were only here to deliver a lecture," Cody said, not bothering to hide his amusement. "I'm sure that made you feel very superior, very principled."

As Tristan's cock hardened within his grasp, Cody leaned in and wrapped his lips around the head. Lapping at the tip, he took it a little further into his mouth. Within moments a trace of pre-cum leaked onto his tongue and Cody relaxed enough to settle into his normal routine, slipping a hand into Tristan's boxers to cradle his balls in his hand as he swirled his tongue.

Looking up in the shadowy half light, he saw the confusion and the pleasure mingle in the other man's expression.

Tristan's grip on his shoulder tightened for a moment, then disappeared. Knuckles nudged at Cody's cheek. He hesitated for a moment, not knowing what the other man wanted him to do differently.

The touch was gentle, but insistent. It was soon impossible to believe it was anything other than a demand to stop what he was doing. Frowning, Cody pulled away and let Tristan's cock slip out of his mouth.

He looked up and waited for the order. He waited for Tristan to take a firm grip on his hair so he could hold him still while he thrust into his mouth however he wanted. He waited to be pulled to his feet and turned to face the tree so Tristan could have his arse rather than his mouth.

Nothing happened.

Cody looked down as he realised Tristan was just stopping and that would just be the end of it.

"You've got a little while in you yet." He rushed the words out so quickly, they slurred together.

"What?"

"If you're afraid you're going to come embarrassingly soon, don't bother. You're not even close, yet. When you've done this as many times as I have, you'll learn to read your own body better," he added, making sure his tone of voice was as patronising as possible, inviting Tristan to keep going, if only to prove him wrong.

Tristan's hand clenched into a fist.

Cody tilted his chin back, knowing what would come next. Tristan unfurled his fist. Cody watched, baffled, as the larger man flexed his fingers, as if the fist had somehow been about pushing his temper down rather than letting it loose.

"Call me old fashioned, but I do not have sex with strangers in parks," Tristan said, still obviously trying to sound like a good, upstanding citizen.

"Very nice, very gentlemanly. If I wasn't an inch away from your hard-on, I might actually believe you don't want me kneeling exactly where I am. And drop all the strangers bullshit too."

"You think you know me?" Tristan asked.

"I know you're gay. I know you're a top. I know you're a dominant. And I know you want to have sex with me. What else do I need to know?" Cody asked.

Tristan frowned down at him. "You don't want this."

Cody raised one eyebrow. "Do you really think this is the first time I've 'walked home with a man' through this park? I know what I'm doing."

And he knew he needed to be exactly where he was right then. It had to be that way, he reminded himself. Because, if he let himself start to believe things could be different then he'd end up imagining the connection he'd felt in the restaurant was something other than the natural attraction of a submissive to a dominant.

Tristan shook his head. "This is not going to happen," he announced.

Cody hesitated. Tristan started to speak, but Cody couldn't stick around to listen right then. He couldn't kneel at Tristan's feet and hear the guy explain why he wasn't even considered good enough to suck Tristan off in the damn park.

He wrenched himself to his feet and spun away before Tristan could stop him. Racing down the path, he only just managed to keep his pace less than a full out sprint. But he wasn't running away, he reminded himself. He just wasn't sticking around. It was different.

"Cody!"

As soon as he was out of the dominant's sight, Cody turned off the path and slipped in the shadows under the trees. By the time Tristan had done up his fly and followed him, Cody had acquired a vantage point where he could see but not be seen.

He tracked Tristan's progress until the older man was out of sight, and told himself he wasn't losing anything he needed. What he'd said outside the restaurant was true. He was better off on his own.

## Chapter Two

Tristan sighed and looked at his watch. Folding his arms, he leaned against one of the cabinets in his mother's kitchen and tried to be patient. He also made a concerted effort not to feel too pathetic.

He was not a grown man asking his mother to get him a date. He could get his own date. He just needed a little bit of help tracking the guy down so he could do that. It was not the same thing.

There was no Cody Sadler in the telephone directory. No Facebook. No Myspace. No website. No blog. No contact details for an artist by that name existed anywhere on the planet. After what Cody had let slip in the park, it was obviously pointless to try to track him down through his family. That only left one person who might just have some way of contacting him.

Tristan sighed and pushed a hand through his hair. His mother was going to have a field day. His father was going to do a very bad job of pretending he wasn't amused by his turning up on their doorstep and begging for help to track down his soon-to-be boyfriend.

It would be still be worth it if —

Tristan's mind went blank. He might be well on the way to being besotted with a man he'd barely exchanged half a dozen sentences with, but he wasn't at the point of hallucinations. That fate still had to be at least another five minutes away.

Nevertheless, Tristan watched someone who looked very much like Cody walk up his mother's garden path. Hallucination or not, he was turning around and walking away. That couldn't happen. Tristan was out of the kitchen, along the hallway, and out of the house in seconds. The apparition turned as the front door slammed. Tristan caught hold of its arm.

The arm was solid. Cody was real. He also looked shocked as hell and not the least pleased to see him.

"You are bloody difficult to track down," Tristan informed him, trying to sound calm and sane when he didn't feel either.

Cody tried to shake his hand off. "I didn't come here to see you."

Tristan tightened his grip on Cody's arm. "No, you don't. You're not running away again."

"I didn't run away. I left. It's different," Cody snapped.

Tristan didn't care. He wasn't going to let him out of his sight until he knew where he could find him again. "Where do you live?"

Cody somehow managed to look down his nose at a man several inches taller than him.

Tristan smiled at his offended expression. "Last weekend you got down on your knees for me, now you won't answer a civil question?"

"You said no – to a man who was down on his knees for you," Cody hissed. "You really think that gives you the right to play twenty questions?"

Tristan winced. His great idea to stop and take it elsewhere obviously looked rather less magnificent from Cody's point of view. "If you'd stuck around for a few seconds, you'd have found out why," he said.

Cody looked him up and down like something he'd scraped off his shoe. "You want me to tell you what you can do with your explanation?"

"No, I want you to come inside so we can talk."

"If you're ashamed to be seen with me, there's a very easy solution," Cody said, glaring at Tristan's grip on his arm.

"I have no problem with the neighbours seeing us together, or with them seeing me picking you up and carrying you inside for that matter," Tristan informed him, entirely honestly.

Cody jerked his arm away so hard. Tristan couldn't keep hold of him without hurting him. He grudgingly let him go, quite ready to keep up with him when he ran if that was what he needed to do. The younger man strode up the path and stood by the front door, waiting to be let in, evidently not willing to be accused of running away again. His foot actually tapped impatiently against the paving slab at his feet.

Tristan pushed the front door open and Cody stepped inside. About to follow him, Tristan saw the gift bag laid neatly in the parcel store next to the doorstep and brought it in with him.

"That's not for you," Cody snapped.

Mild curiosity hitched up twenty degrees. The label read *Mrs. Fielding*. Peeking into the bag he saw a picture frame.

"And you have the bloody nerve to comment on my manners," Cody muttered.

It wasn't addressed to him. It was wrong to take advantage of the fact he found it first. Tristan took the frame out of the gift bag anyway.

"It's beautiful," he said.

"It's just a sketch." Cody shrugged, dismissing it just as easily as he'd dismissed his parents' praise for what Tristan had discovered was an incredibly prestigious artistic award.

*Just* didn't do the sketch justice. The pen and ink caught the moment perfectly, showing Tristan and his parents sitting around the table in the restaurant, all laughing at something one of them had said.

"We look happy," Tristan said. Happiness practically leapt off the page, grabbed him by the throat and shook.

Cody shrugged again. "I draw what I see."

Tristan glanced across at Cody. A happy family. That's what he'd seen that evening...

"My mother will love it," he said.

Cody ignored him.

Tristan's fingers brushed against another piece of paper as he put the frame carefully back into the bag. He scanned the note, also addressed to his mother.

*Mrs. Fielding,*

*With my apologies for making you and your husband so uncomfortable at dinner last Saturday. Thank you once more for the invitation. It was a very kind thought.*

*Best wishes,*

*Cody Sadler.*

He put the note back in the bag without comment and turned his attention to Cody. "I've been looking for you all week."

Cody met his gaze and then looked quickly away. Not down, Tristan noted. He made a point of looking away — of appearing dismissive rather than submissive.

"Do you want tea or coffee?"

Cody rolled his eyes. "I'd forgotten how much time guys like you waste before they get to the point."

"Guys like me?"

"Nice guys," Cody sneered. "Drop the act. Just tell me what you want."

"You said you knew I was a dominant," Tristan said. The words had been swirling around in his head ever since. "So, you're a submissive?"

"Asking a question you already know the answer to still counts as wasting my time."

"I know you're a submissive," Tristan clarified. "I've yet to see any sign that *you* know it."

"Submission is nothing more than a sexual preference," Cody shrugged. "I don't see why that should define anything other than my sex life."

Tristan stepped forward, closing the gap between them until their bodies were just inches apart. He stroked his finger tips along the line where he knew a piece of leather would one day lay around Cody's throat.

"Has anyone ever collared you?"

"I've worn collars."

Tristan had no doubt Cody knew just as well as he did, that it was nothing like the same thing.

"You've never been under a dominant's protection?" he asked more gently.

Cody brushed Tristan's touch away. "I can look after myself."

"Tristan, dear, is that you?" His mother's voice floated through from the front door.

"In the kitchen," he called back.

She appeared around the corner, smiling at the delight of having her son home for an impromptu visit. Her smile widened when she saw Cody. Tristan saw the light in her eyes—Success!

Temporarily forgetting about her son's existence, she homed in on Cody. "How are you, dear?"

Cody managed a smile. The expression stiffened as she pressed a kiss to his cheek as she walked past to put down a shopping bag. She absentmindedly repeated the gesture with Tristan, but he was under no illusions. He was an afterthought right then.

"Are you staying for the party tonight, dear?" she asked Cody.

"Yes," Tristan said.



"No!" Cody said at the same time. He glared at Tristan. "I have to go now." He edged towards the door.

"Cody brought a thank you gift for inviting him to dinner," Tristan said.

"Oh, that really wasn't necessary, dear," she said, spotting the gift bag.

Tristan relaxed slightly, sure that he didn't need to worry about Cody escaping from the house any time soon.

True to his expectations, after ten minutes spent admiring his sketch – Cody was firmly defined in his mother's mind as part of her extended family. Two minutes after that he was helping unpack the shopping while Tristan was shooed out of the way and ordered to make the tea.

When the last of the shopping was stored away, and they settled around the kitchen table with their cups of tea, Mrs. Fielding brought them neatly back to the most important topic of the day.

"You really should stay for the party," she informed Cody

"I'm sorry, but I wouldn't be very good company. I was up half the night working on a new commission."

He'd had time to work out his answer. It was as polite a refusal as any could be. Tristan took a sip of his tea and wondered how far he could push Cody without making him completely flip out.

"You could always catch an hour or two's sleep in my old room," he suggested.

Cody's cup froze half way to his lips. "And no doubt you'd be happy to lend me a suitable outfit too. It's a pity you're four sizes bigger than me."

"I wasn't born at six foot four. I was your height at some point," Tristan said.

He decided, very diplomatically, not to point out he'd been about twelve when he'd last been Cody's height and build. Cody's eyes narrowed as if he could work that much out on his own.

"It's just a family barbeque," his mother cut in. "You'll be perfectly fine as you are."

Tristan picked up his empty cup and carried it over to the sink. On the way past, he leaned over Cody to collect his cup and took the opportunity to whisper in his ear. "Give up now. It will save time."

Cody ignored him and his advice. It took another half an hour's negotiation with his mother before Cody finally gave up and accepted the offer of a bed to rest in, followed by an invitation to the family barbeque.

\* \* \* \*

"I'll rest a lot more comfortably if you'd bugger off and leave me in peace," Cody snapped, still not entirely sure how he'd ended up agreeing to any of this in the first place.

Tristan stepped into the bedroom behind him and turned the lock on the door. "I thought I might get a few hours rest too."

Cody crossed his arms, trying to force himself to not to fidget. "If I'd known you were going to be in the bed, I wouldn't have agreed to use it."

Tristan lifted his hand. Cody tensed, only just controlling the instinct to flinch. The older man froze, studying him carefully before he stroked his fingers down his cheek.

"Your family lives here," Cody reminded him. "Your mother's downstairs. If you've finally decided that you want to screw me, you can pay for a hotel room the same as anyone else."

"Or walk through the park with you?" Tristan asked.

"If that's supposed to remind me that you're better than me, then —"

"I never said I was better than you," Tristan cut in.

Cody dropped his gaze, knowing the other man didn't need to say it.

"You shouldn't have done this," he said. "Twisting everything so I had no choice but to stay. We can meet up for sex somewhere else. Here, like this, it's wrong."

"We aren't going to do anything wrong," Tristan said.

Cody looked down. Everything already felt wrong. And it was all Tristan's fault. He wasn't making sense. He wasn't acting the way a dominant acted. Worse still, there was something about Tristan that called to Cody's inner submissive without even needing to issue an order, and that just wasn't fair.

"What do you want from me?" Cody demanded.

"These will get creased if you rest in them," Tristan said, stroking his hand down the sleeve of Cody's shirt.

"The order is to strip," Cody said. "You're supposed to be a dominant. If you know what you're doing – start acting like it." Please, start acting like it. If he would just start acting like everyone else, everything would be okay.

"You're a submissive. Does that mean you'll do as I say?" Tristan asked. "Will you start acting the way a submissive is *supposed* to act?"

"No. I submit as and when I choose, not whenever some fool clicks his fingers." He wasn't quite sure who he was trying to convince.

Tristan smiled as if he had the whole damn world worked out and running exactly as he liked. "Strip."

Cody turned away. Taking refuge in following the order, he unbuttoned his shirt and placed it neatly on top of a chest of drawers. Shoes and socks, jeans and boxers all followed, until he stood naked in front of the other man.

Staring straight ahead, he tried to work out what sort of scene Tristan had planned. He felt the other man's eyes trailing over his skin, but even that felt different to the way other men looked at him. He found himself unable to guess what would happen next.

Tristan stepped forward. He touched his cheek again, guiding him to tilt his head back and look up as he brushed their lips together. His hand stayed on Cody's cheek, keeping him still when he would have turned his face away. It was just because Tristan liked to think of himself as a nice man, Cody reminded himself. Nice men kissed their lovers.

At some point the scene would start and this would be a distant memory. All he had to do was remember the kiss didn't mean anything. But, as Tristan coaxed him to part his lips and let him explore his mouth, his memory faltered. Cody's eyes dropped closed. He stopped thinking.

When Tristan stepped back, Cody blinked and dropped his gaze, not willing to let the other man to see how much he liked the sweetness of that lost moment.

"On the bed," Tristan ordered.

As he got onto the mattress, Cody heard the rustle of clothes being shed and guessed that he wouldn't be the only naked man for very long.

"Turn the covers down first," Tristan corrected.

Cody retreated from the mattress and did as he was told, wondering if Tristan was going to knock the lights off and put them under the covers before they had sex too.

The room dimmed as Tristan closed the curtains. Sitting in the middle of the turned down bed, Cody watched him make sure that no stray shards of light sneaked past the fabric.

Tristan turned to the bed, his smile just visible in the dimly lit room. Cody glared back at him, nowhere near ready to play nice. If he was as good a dominant as Cody suspected, then no doubt there would come a time in the game when he would enjoy becoming more compliant with his dominant's demands, but that was still a long way off.

Tristan got onto the bed and tucked his feet under the folded back blanket. Cody studied him suspiciously as Tristan turned over his pillow and made himself comfortable.

"Lay down."

It was a reasonable order. Cody lay down and watched, rather fascinated, as Tristan covered both their naked bodies, pulling the blankets all the way up to their necks.

"Come here."

Not wanting to comment until he was sure what Tristan had planned, Cody silently moved across the bed. Once he was within reach, Tristan arranged him to spoon in front of him, but when he expected Tristan to reach for the lube and the condoms, he just cosied up closer to his back.

The larger man's flourishing erection pressed against his buttocks. Cody tensed. Tristan still didn't reach for supplies. If Tristan didn't know that condoms and lube went without saying, he wasn't waiting around for him to work it out with trial and error.

Someone had to take the initiative, Cody decided. He wasn't so submissive it couldn't be him. Pushing back the blankets he swung his legs out of the bed. Tristan's reactions had improved since that night in the park. His hand wrapped around Cody's wrist before his foot touched the floor.

"I'm only going over there," Cody said, pointing to his clothes.

Tristan looked from the door to Cody's clothes and seemed to recognise the fact they were on opposite sides of the room. He nodded his permission.

Cody quickly dug his wallet out of his jeans pocket. Aware of Tristan's eyes following his every moment, he found his just-in-case stash and tossed condoms and the lube on the mattress in front of the dominant.

Tristan didn't reach for either of them.

"No."

Cody frowned. "I don't do bareback."

"I'm not asking you to. We're not going to have sex."

Cody hesitated.

"I want to hold you while you rest. Is that so strange?" Tristan asked.

"Yes, it bloody well is," Cody snapped. "I don't know what sort of game you're playing, but if you're trying to mess with my head, it won't work."

"No games," Tristan said. "I don't know if you were working on a new commission last night, but you are obviously exhausted. Get back in. Rest with me."

"I am not a child. I do not need an afternoon nap. Look, we both know why you invited me up here. Just get on with it."

"I invited you up here to rest."

"Grown men don't just get naked and cuddle!" Cody protested.

Tristan tapped the mattress next to him. "Come back to bed."

"To rest?" Cody checked.

"I have no intention of having sex with you this afternoon."

Embarrassment coursing through him, Cody snatched up the supplies and pushing them back into his jeans pocket, he scrambled to extract his boxers from the rest of his clothes so he could get dressed.

A second later, Tristan was pressed up close against his back once more. Reaching around his body, he caught one of Cody's wrists in each of his hands.

"Drop," he ordered.

Cody struggled against the other man for a moment, but it was soon obvious it would be pointless to get into a contest of strength with him. He dropped his boxers and stilled within Tristan's hold.

The larger man pulled him closer, so his back was pressed tight against Tristan's chest. The dominant pressed a kiss onto the top of his head, as his erection nudged against Cody's backside.

"Hush," he whispered.

The soothing noise only made Cody more tense.

"You know I want you." He rocked his hips, letting Cody feel his erection press against his skin for emphasis.

Cody stared straight ahead. Biting his lip, he wished more fervently than ever that Tristan would decide to play a game he knew the rules to.

“I want you,” Tristan told him again.

“So what’s stopping you?” Cody asked, far more softly than he intended.

## Chapter Three

The younger man cleared his throat and pushed irritably at Tristan's hold on him, but he couldn't take back the confusion and the uncertainty Tristan heard in the softly spoken question.

"I want more than a quick tumble with you," Tristan whispered in his ear. "I want so much more than that."

"We could go somewhere else," Cody offered. "You could do whatever you want with me, and still make it back in time for the party."

Tristan turned the smaller man around in his grip. "If we have sex like this, you'll disappear and I'll never see you again."

He had no doubt about that. Something about Cody screamed his need to belong to a man who *didn't* screw him at the first opportunity. Even if Cody didn't know it was what he needed, Tristan knew he had to prove that he knew Cody was more than a convenient screw.

"You think I'll stick around to be turned down again?" Cody snapped. "Thanks, but humiliation isn't one of my kinks."

"Nor is it one of mine," Tristan said, holding Cody's wrists firmly against his chest so he couldn't wriggle away.

When, and only when, he seemed calm enough not to bolt at the first opportunity, Tristan let go of Cody's wrists and stroked his hair back from his face. Cody pointedly ignored him.

Tristan smiled and tilted Cody's face back to brush their lips together. His tongue teased at the other man's mouth, asking very politely for admittance. Cody tried to turn his head away, petulant in his confusion.

Not the least bit worried by that, Tristan put his hands either side of the younger man's face, holding him still to be very slowly, very thoroughly kissed. Finally Cody responded.

Pressing their bodies together, he thrust his tongue into Tristan's mouth, challenging his control, pushing him to dominate in what was obviously the only way Cody understood.

Tristan backed off instead and Cody immediately tried to turn away, taking it as a rejection. Tristan's hold kept him in place as he took another sweet brush of lips from him.

Cody stared up at him, so beautiful, but so confused, and so angry with the whole world for making him feel that way. Taking him by the hand, Tristan led him back to the bed and spooned behind him on the mattress once more. The younger man lay quietly in his arms for far longer than Tristan expected, no doubt giving him the chance to make the position about sex before he had his temper tantrum.

At the first sign of panic, Tristan was ready. He rolled the smaller man onto his back and pinned him against the sheet. "You are going to lay quietly and rest," Tristan told him.

"I've never given you any reason to expect obedience from me."

Tristan had to admit that was true. He might have even made a joke out of it at his own expense if he hadn't seen the quiet desperation in Cody's eyes. He wanted exactly what Tristan was offering. Tristan would have bet the world on it. But he couldn't make the leap. The ability to trust a man who offered not to act like a complete bastard just wasn't in him right then.

"You are not going to come," he informed the younger man.

Cody made no comment, but the fact the order was at least vaguely sexual instantly seemed to sooth some of the fear in him.

"You are going to rest," Tristan repeated. "That's not up for debate, but I will give you a choice."

The younger man swallowed. Tristan took that as a tiny indication that there was something going on behind his eyes, that some part of him was reacting to the offer of dominance, even if he wasn't confident enough in his submission to share those reactions with his new master right then.

Cody waited rather than asking what the choice was, allowing Tristan to control the flow of information, to control his ability to make the choice he was offered. Inside, Tristan grinned his approval.

"You can invite your master to rest with you." He whispered the words as softly as he could, making Cody focus on each syllable in order to hear them.

Cody waited without complaint for the next option.

"Or you can invite your master to play with you," Tristan said.



Cody studied him for a long time before he gave his answer. "Play," he eventually decided, projecting far more confidence than Tristan believed existed in him right then.

"I'm not giving you a safe word," Tristan said.

"I didn't ask for one," Cody snapped, tensing at the perceived insult.

"Because no still means no," Tristan finished off. "If you want to stop, you just have to say no."

Cody made no comment.

"If I can't trust you to say stop when you need to, you lose your second choice," Tristan informed him.

Cody looked away for a second. Tristan held his breath, wondering if Cody was strong enough to give in to what he wanted, wondering if he was able to give Tristan the right to give and remove privileges right then.

"I'll say no if I need to," Cody finally whispered.

Tristan nodded his approval and brushed their lips together. Pulling away, he sat back on his heels and looked the younger man over. Lacking an order to do anything else, Cody lay passive under his gaze. He deserved a reward for that. Tristan trailed his finger tips over Cody's cock. He was already stiffening beautifully for his new master.

Every muscle in his body tensed, but Cody stayed still under his touch. Tristan lay down next to him again, continuing to offer teasing finger tip touches, sexualising their play just enough to make Cody relax, without going so far as to let him believe it was entirely about sex.

"Do you know what I'd like to do with you?" he asked after a while.

"Don't tell me, just do it," Cody ordered.

Tristan took a leap of faith. He took his hand away.

Cody lifted his gaze to look him straight in the eye.

"Have you ever played with a real dominant before?" Tristan asked.

"Of course, I have!"

"Did he ever tell you that being submissive involves being polite to the man you offer your submission to?"

"He didn't waste time talking," Cody snapped.

For one brief moment, he closed his eyes. It was only just too long to be called a blink, but it screamed to Tristan that his new submissive was trying his best. Cody was acting as appropriately as he knew how. He just hadn't been taught anything different.

Tristan touched his cheek, resting a finger tip on the slight hollow below the bone. Applying the slightest pressure, he ordered Cody to face him, but did nothing to force the issue.

Eventually, Cody turned towards him, anger and confusion warring in his eyes.

"I know you're doing your best," Tristan said. "But you need to be aware that I won't let you act like a brat forever. I don't demand instant perfection, but I expect to see progress."

Cody spun away, swinging his feet off the side of the bed.

Tristan lay exactly as he was, just watching him, trusting the younger man wouldn't bolt right there and then.

"Lay back where you were, and I'll touch you. Stay over there and I won't."

"What the hell makes you think I want you touching me? You said I wasn't going to come. You won't let me get you off. What's the point?"

"You enjoy being touched," Tristan pointed out. "You enjoy having another man's hands on your body, feeling that connection with another person. That sort of connection's a lot harder to find than sex, isn't it? You're stunning. Men must be queuing up to screw you."

"Everyone except you," Cody said. The end of the last word was bitten off, as if he fought to keep them in, but he just couldn't manage it.

The younger man obviously hadn't spotted the mirror on top of the dressing table. With his back to Tristan, he closed his eyes, hiding from the world. Tristan watched Cody nip at his bottom lip, as he tried to stay under his own control, tried not to give too much to a man he wasn't sure he could trust.

"Lay down, Cody. There's no shame in returning to your master's side," Tristan offered.

Cody's eyes flickered open, but his gaze didn't rise from the carpet. He wanted to come back to him, Tristan could almost taste his desire hanging in the air.

"Do you have any idea how much I hate you?" Cody asked.

"Yes, I believe I do," Tristan said, sure there'd be a lot more hate on the way before Cody could learn to trust him.

Minutes passed.

Tristan waited.

Just when he was half convinced he'd demanded too much too soon, Cody lay down. He kept his head turned away from Tristan until a touch to his cheek eventually convinced him to turn and glare at him.

Holding his gaze, Tristan began to explore Cody's body again. He ran his hands over the pale skin, testing the depth of muscle under his finger tips, memorising the curve of Cody's ribs and reassuring Cody with every touch.

Circling his nipples, Tristan found him to be pleasingly sensitive, and beautifully embarrassed at anyone else discovering that fact. Resting his hand, palm flat on his stomach just below the line of his lowest rib, he felt the air being dragged into Cody's lungs, felt life pumping through him.

Innocent touches made him tense far more than sexual ones. Spacing out one with the other, Tristan wrapped his fist around Cody's erection. Satiny skin slid through his finger tips. Pre-cum leaked onto his palm. Cody lay very still as Tristan deliberately built up the younger man's frustration.

"Do you want to come?" Tristan asked.

"Yes," Cody said. "But I know I'm not allowed to."

His tone of voice made it clear he wasn't at all impressed with the question, but Tristan had no doubt it was a hell of a lot politer than the answer he'd have given an hour earlier. The way Cody's gaze darted away from him, convinced him that wasn't just a coincidence.

"Good," Tristan told him softly, doing nothing to hide how proud he was of Cody for trying to achieve the standards he set for him. "That's much better, love."

"Bloody stupid thing to call a man you barely know," Cody snapped.

Tristan made a mental note that praise made Cody panic and forget his manners and hid his smile as he continued to run his hands slowly over Cody's body. If the younger man had any idea how close that endearment already was to the truth, then he really would have something to panic about.

\* \* \* \*

Cody pulled his jeans on, struggling to do up the uncooperative denim over his aching erection. Tristan had that damn, *I'm pleased with you, I'm proud of you*, look on his face again. Cody turned his back on him, wishing he didn't care, wishing he wasn't pleased to think he'd pleased the other man with his efforts to play nicely.

As Cody finished pulling the rest of his clothes on, Tristan walked to the door and held out his hand. Cody stared at his hand as if he had never seen one before. Tristan's other hand settled on the door handle. He didn't need to say anything, Cody understood. Until he put his hand in his master's hand, the door would stay closed.

"Your family will get the wrong idea," Cody said, folding his arms across his chest.

Tristan continued to hold his hand out. "My mother will have introduced you to everyone as my boyfriend long before we get downstairs if you stand around for much longer."

"I'm not your boyfriend," Cody said quickly. "I'm just a guy you had sex w—" Cody cleared his throat. "I'm just a guy you... rested with for a while." For some stupid reason, that didn't sound half as casual as it should. Covering up his confusion as best he could, Cody put his hand in Tristan's.

"Good boy."

Cody glared at him. "I'm still not your boyfriend."

Tristan smiled and squeezed Cody's hand. He didn't argue. Cody had the horrible suspicion that was because in Tristan's mind the issue was already settled.

Cody's return grip on Tristan's hand tightened as they walked through the house. There had to be close to a hundred people there already. Half a second later, he tried to pull his hand away, realising he was making a fool of himself, holding on as if he needed support.

Tristan wouldn't let him go. Short of scuffling with him in front of everyone, there was nothing Cody could do to retrieve his hand. Tristan kept hold of him as they made a slow circuit around the room and introduced him to everyone.

Finally, Tristan let him go. "I'm going to get us a drink."

"I don't drink," Cody said quickly. He was stupid enough around Tristan sober, there was no way in hell he was going to find out what sort of fool he would make of himself after a few drinks.

Tristan brushed their lips together. "I'll get you a Coke."

He didn't give Cody time to object before he walked away.

Five minutes later, Cody knew why Tristan was so weird. It was because his entirely family was crazy. As he walked away from yet another conversation where he'd unsuccessfully tried to explain that he was just Tristan's friend, he still couldn't work out what the hell he was doing wrong.

His explanations that he was not Tristan's boyfriend or his fiancée were not 'sweet', they were accurate. So were his statements that there was no reason for them to look for a house or a venue for a commitment ceremony or anything else. There was no sane reason why everyone kept smiling and nodding and completely ignoring everything he said.

Cody stood on tip toe and scanned the faces in the room. He wasn't looking for his master. Really he wasn't. It was pure coincidence that he'd gone in the same direction as Tristan disappeared.

After he failed to find the man he wasn't looking for in three different rooms, Cody gave up pretending. He wanted Tristan—but only because he was useful for fielding questions and false assumptions.

"Don't adopt him."

Cody hesitated on the threshold of the kitchen as he recognised the voice. Tristan stood on the other side of the room talking to his mother. It looked like he'd been roped in to helping to make sandwiches.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," Mrs. Fielding said.

"I'm serious," Tristan said. "That thing where you take someone under your wing, and mother him, and make him part of the family. Don't do that with Cody."

"Why ever not?" she asked.

Cody didn't need to stick around to hear the answer. He didn't need to hear anyone else tell him he was no longer considered good enough to be part of a family. Everything he'd felt that day in his parents' house, everything that had been brought bubbling back up to the surface by Tristan's family, collided inside him. He took a step back. His elbow hit the door.

The noise made Tristan turn around. "Cody!"

Cody turned away from him, from the whole stupid situation. He was out of the back door and half way down the path leading towards the front of the house within seconds. Footsteps rushed behind him but Cody couldn't go any faster and believe in his own heart he wasn't running away. He was almost at the corner of the house when Tristan caught hold of his shoulder and spun him around.

"Let go!" Cody tried to push him away, but only succeeded in pushing himself back against the wall.

Tristan put one hand against his chest and held him there.

"You're hurting me!"

"No, I'm not," Tristan said. "And you bloody well know it."

Cody glared at him.

"And we both know you're not scared of me too, so don't even bother to say it."

"Of course I'm not scared of you," Cody snapped.

"Where were you going?"

"Back to what I deserve," he said, not quite able to keep the words back.

Tristan stared down at him for a long time before he spoke. "If it came down to a choice. If you could have me or my family, who would you pick?" he asked slowly, as if he was working out the sentence in his head as he spoke.

Cody pushed against him.

"Pick," Tristan demanded, holding him easily against the wall. "Me or them."

Cody looked away, hating the other man for making him say it out loud, but quite prepared to believe he would keep him there however long it took. Of all the times for the guy to start acting like a real dominant...

"You," Cody whispered. "There I said it. If I could have had either, I'd have picked you and let the idea of being part of a family go to hell. Happy now? Let me go."

"You don't have the choice," Tristan said.

Cody closed his eyes. "Yeah, I heard. Don't explain. Just let me go."

"I didn't tell her not to adopt you because I don't think you're good enough to be part of my family, or whatever other damn stupid notion you've taken into your head."

Cody pushed irritably at his grip on him.

"But, really love, the last thing I want you to feel towards me is brotherly."

Cody glanced at him for a very brief second, before he turned away again.

"You'll be just as much part of the family as a son-in-law as you would be if you were an adopted son," Tristan whispered in his ear.

"You don't feel brotherly towards me?" Cody asked, latching on to that because it was the only bit of what Tristan said that sounded vaguely believable right then.

"Anything but," Tristan agreed. "In fact, I'm pretty sure I'm half way in love with you – a very un-brotherly, un-platonic love."

It was hard to ignore those words, no matter how unbelievable they were. "It's genetic," he whispered to himself.

"What?"

"You're just as crazy as the rest of your family. You. Do. Not. Know. Me." Cody said, very firmly. "You are not in love with me. I am not your boyfriend, or your fiancée, or anything else. You have to go back in and tell them that."

"I'd be lying."

"You're insane," Cody flung at him.

"I'm decisive," Tristan corrected.

Cody gawped at him as he tried to keep a finger-tip grip on reality.

"Decisive," he explained, as calmly as possible, "is instantly knowing if you want tea or coffee. Planning out an entire life with a man you've barely met is stark raving bloody bonkers. There's a difference!"

"I know what I want," Tristan said with a smile. "And you wouldn't be half as scared as you are if you didn't want me just as much as I want you."

"Oh, and on top of it all, you're modest too!" Cody rolled his eyes heavenward, a moment away from giving up on the whole human species.

"I want you," Tristan whispered in his ear.

"Well you can't bloody well have me. You had your chance – two chances actually, in the park and upstairs. No more chances. It's over. I'm going and you are going to go back to your family and you're going to tell them that –"

"I want to collar you," Tristan murmured, pressing a kiss against his ear in punctuation. "And care for you. And possess you. And look after you. And screw you. And –"

"I get the idea!" Cody pushed against the larger man's chest again.

Tristan didn't budge. "Mine," he growled.

Cody swallowed, trying with all his might to believe he didn't want that.

Tristan stood right in front of him, blocking any idea of escape with his body as he reached up and took a chain from around his own neck.

"This will do until I can get something more suitable," he said. "I know it doesn't look like a traditional collar, you'll just have to use your imagination for now."

Cody tried to keep up. He took a deep breath. Collar. Not just a playing about one. A real one. "You don't need to do that," he said, proud of himself for sounding reasonably calm right then.

"To put my mark on you?" Tristan asked. "Yes, sweetheart, I really do. You're mine."

"You don't need to collar me," Cody repeated. "What's the point when you know damn well I'll do whatever you want without one?"

"For one thing," Tristan told him, "I'm pretty sure collaring you is the only thing that's going to stop me giving into temptation and screwing you against this wall. And after spending the whole day forcing myself to be patient, I'm not going to ruin it now."

"I think I've made it quite clear that I'm completely incapable of failing to do exactly what you want," Cody said, quite disgusted with himself over the fact. He looked at the St. Christopher hanging from the chain, then looked quickly away. "You don't need to collar me."

Tristan looped the makeshift collar around his neck. Against all logic or reason, Cody tilted his head to the side to make it easier for the dominant to do up the fiddly little catch.

"You're not to take this as permission to go wandering off," Tristan told him. "St. Christopher might like travellers, but I want you close to your master, where you belong."

Cody gave up and just nodded his understanding of the order if nothing else.

"Say it," Tristan demanded.

"It."

Tristan's lips twitched into a smile at the petty childishness of it. Cody couldn't bring himself to care. Only when the dominant made it quite clear he would wait however long it took to get a real answer, did Cody give in. "I'll stay with you until you give me permission to leave," he admitted.



Tristan brushed their lips together. "Do you have any idea how much I want to strip you down, pin you to this wall and screw you?"

"Should have done that when I gave you the chance in the bedroom," Cody told him, not overly inclined to be sympathetic.

Tristan smiled. If he'd had a go at him in return, it would have been so much easier to keep the sarcasm going.

Cody looked down. "If there's somewhere private, I can make a blow-job quick if you don't hold back."

"And what would that teach you?" Tristan asked.

"It might show me that my master wants me," Cody said, with a forced lack of emotion.

"Your mother's looking for you."

Tristan's attention snapped to one side. Cody stared straight at Tristan's shoulder, not really wanting to know which member of his master's family had been watching and listening for god only knew how long.

"We're on our way," Tristan said. He tilted Cody's face back and pressed a sweet, chaste little kiss onto his lips. "Later," he promised.

Tristan took him by the hand and led him back into the house. It seemed pointless to fight against it when he felt Tristan and his family all wrapped snugly around him, as if they were all somehow intent on welcoming him home.

Cody rolled his eyes at himself. He was getting as crazy as the rest of them.

Someone offered him a baby.

Cody blinked and wished he'd been paying attention to the conversation going on around him. He automatically took the baby anyway, cradling her awkwardly in his arms. He glanced at the baby's mother, who didn't seem to have any hesitation in handing her little girl over to be held by a gay man, and tried not to remember he had a niece that age who he'd never been allowed to hold that way.

Tristan put an arm around his shoulders as he reached over and stroked the baby's cheek. "You're adorable, aren't you?" he whispered to her.

"Marlings," the woman said.

"Pardon?" Cody asked.

"The adoption agency we used. You really should think about them when the time comes."

Cody waited for Tristan to say something, but it was the baby's father who actually came to his rescue.

"Darling," he chuckled. "Don't you think you're getting ahead of yourself?"

Cody breathed a sigh of relief. Finally, someone who understood the rest of them were crazy!

"They'll want to make everything official and settle in somewhere before they think of children."

"Make everything official," Cody repeated blankly.

"You really should think about booking a venue for the ceremony as soon as possible."

Cody forced a smile and tuned out the rest. So much for there being another token sane person at the meeting... Everyone in the entire house seemed to think it was natural for Tristan to meet a guy and instantly decide to spend the rest of his life with him. Surrounded by those people, it was crazily tempting to fall into their way of thinking.

When he handed the baby back, Cody took advantage of a brief moment when Tristan wasn't at his side to try and force his mind into sanity and rubbed at his palm.

Hand holding was supposed to feel pathetically romantic. It shouldn't make his skin tingle with unwelcome heat. He was just so damn possessive, that was the trouble. When Tristan held on to him, Cody couldn't help but feel owned. A moment later, Cody found his fingers seeking out the pendant. Not wanting to draw attention to the collaring, he forced himself to let it go and pushed his hands into his pockets.

"Tristan has a St. Christopher just like that."

Cody cursed himself for leaving the damn thing outside his shirt as his fingers once more wrapped protectively around the pendant.

"His grandfather left it to him," one of Tristan's uncles went on. "I don't think he's taken it off once since."

In the blur of names and faces, Cody wasn't entirely sure which name attached to this particular man. He also had no idea what to say.

"I wonder where he is?" the man said. "I'm sure yours is exactly the same..."

Cody looked around, glad that for once that Tristan was out of sight. "I'll go and find him," he offered. Tucking the pendant back into his shirt so no one else would see it, he made his way out of the crowd and managed to acquire a little bit of breathing space in a quiet corner of the garden.

Just as he suspected, he didn't actually have to go and find Tristan...

## Chapter Four

"There you are!"

Tristan's pulse dropped to a far healthier rate. Possessing Cody was going to put his blood pressure through the roof if he wasn't careful. Catching his hand, Tristan led him back into the house.

He'd intended to behave himself for the whole evening and simply make sure Cody knew he was welcomed as part of the family, he really did. Still, walking through the temporarily deserted kitchen an hour later, he couldn't help but give in to temptation. Chuckling at his new submissive's startled expression, he cornered Cody against the cabinets and tried to steal a kiss.

Cody pushed at his chest and turned his face away. "Not here. And, you can bloody well stop groping me in front of your extended family too."

"I'd hardly call it groping," Tristan said with a chuckle, quite proud that he'd somehow managed to keep his hands to innocent locations when there were other people around.

An arm around Cody's shoulders while they spoke to the other men around the barbeque. A hand resting on his waist as they talked to his cousins on the patio. A hand on his knee while they sat in the living room. Somehow he had survived on those innocent little touches in front of his family.

"When I'm the guy who's spent the best part of the last hour trying to hide an erection from a room full of people, I'll call the way you touch me whatever I damn well please. And, I'm calling it groping."

Tristan dropped his eyes to Cody's fly.

Cody turned away, a touch of colour highlighting his cheekbones, making Tristan aware Cody wasn't used to such casually affectionate contact with another man.

"I'm sorry, love," he said, coaxing Cody to turn back to him.

Cody shrugged the apology away. "Just keep your hands to yourself."

"I'll be good," Tristan promised.

Cody made a disbelieving sound in the back of his throat. Tristan smiled, realising the younger man had no intention of looking up until he was one hundred percent sure that the blush was gone.

Closing the gap between them, he put his arm around Cody's shoulders, and dropped a kiss on the top of his head.

"They can be a bit overwhelming until you're used to them," Tristan observed, looking through the doorway at his family as he encouraged Cody to tuck his face into his neck so he wouldn't see everyone watching them.

"I'm not some child who's scared of crowds," Cody snapped, but there wasn't a lot of force behind the words.

Tristan waited him out, letting him slake the need to protect himself with sharp words until he found the confidence to say more important things.

"Everyone keeps hugging me," he mentioned, after several minutes' silence.

Tristan smiled over the top of his head. "We're a friendly family."

Cody made a frustrated, disapproving little sound.

"You don't like being hugged?" Tristan asked, wrapping his arms a little more firmly around him, in case the question made him bolt.

Cody tensed. Tristan felt him struggle against the instinct to push him away. "It's not so bad when it's you," he finally admitted.

From a man like Cody, it was practically a declaration of undying love. Tristan grinned and pressed a kiss to his temple.

After a few seconds, Cody started fidgeting. He slid his hand between them to find the St. Christopher. "You shouldn't have given me this," Cody said. "One of your uncles saw it. He said it belonged to your grandfather."

"That's right."

"It's too precious," Cody said, reaching back to locate the clasp.

Tristan caught his hands. "You know better than to take a collar off, Cody."

"I don't need a collar to..." he stared at Tristan's collar bone for over a minute while he fought to say the words that obviously didn't come naturally to him.

Tristan stroked his back through his shirt, doing his best to soothe without offering any touch that might be too intimate.

"I know who I belong to," Cody finally said. "I don't need expensive gifts to tell me that I belong to you. I'm a submissive, not a whore."

Tristan pressed another kiss to his temple, biding for time while he forced his temper down. It was fear and not disrespect, he knew that. When Cody glanced up and met his eyes, Tristan could tell that Cody knew his nerves had made him overstep the mark too.

"It was a beautiful gesture," Cody whispered. "If you want me to wear a collar I will, but not something that means this much to you. Take it back and keep it safe. Please?"

Tristan ran his finger tips along the chain. "You're under my protection. It's safe where it is."

Cody frowned. "I can look after myself."

Tristan stroked his hair back from his face. "That doesn't mean I can't look after you too," he said.

Cody said nothing.

Tristan let him think about it for a while.

"She was wrong," Cody said eventually.

"Who was wrong about what?"

"Your mother. In the restaurant. When she introduced us, she said I was gay like you. I'm not. Being gay for me is nothing like it is for you. Somehow you managed to step out of the closet and keep your family and your life and everything intact. It wasn't like that for me."

Tristan stroked his fingers through Cody's hair, knowing there was nothing he could say that would make that fact any easier for Cody to deal with right then. Knowing there wasn't a way to show him he could have the family he obviously wanted without forcing him to deal with the loss of his biological family.

"You like being gay," Cody observed after a while.

"Yes," Tristan said.

"I'm not sure I do," Cody whispered. "If I had the choice, I think I'd..." He risked a quick glance at Tristan.

"It's okay to have doubts, love."

Cody glanced up. He seemed so scared right then, and so bloody determined not to show it.

"Everyone has doubts sometimes, even me."

He didn't seem entirely sure he was being told the truth.

"My family accepts me. But I've lost people I thought were friends. I've heard all the sarcastic comments and the bitter little whispers. Knowing my family is there for me helps, but it doesn't change the fact some people hate me just for being who I am."

Cody only met his gaze for a moment. Tristan still saw the shame in his eyes.

"Wanting to know someone else understands how that feels isn't the same as wishing it on them, love. There's nothing wrong with wanting to not be alone in it."

The younger man still didn't look him in the eye.

Tristan let Cody just rest against him for a little while. It seemed he'd had as much of his new family as he could take. "Ready to go?" he asked.

Cody nodded, just once. He didn't ask where they would go. When Tristan led Cody out to his car, he got in without comment. The journey passed without sarcasm. They walked through the underground car park in silence.

Inside his apartment, Tristan closed the door behind them, wondering when the bubble was going to burst. Cody without any sarcasm, without any bite, wasn't really Cody.

"What do you want?" Cody asked when he obviously couldn't bear the silence any longer.

It was a good question. An even better question was what did Cody need? There was one thing Tristan was certain of. Cody needed to be committed to this from the start. He needed to admit, to himself if no one else, that he was exactly where he wanted to be. He needed to open up his mind to the idea he was with a man he could fall in love with and spend the rest of his life with. And he needed to know that submitting to his new master would introduce him to a whole new way of belonging to another man.

Tristan's head swirled with all the different things his lover needed. He stayed on the other side of the hallway, just watching Cody, until his mind settled on a course of action. When he was sure he knew what he was going to do, Tristan crossed the narrow space and brushed their lips together.

Cody parted his lips, inviting a deeper kiss, but Tristan couldn't take up his offer right then.

"If you want this, you're going to have to prove it," he informed him as gently as possible.

Cody's eyes flashed. "I don't beg."

Tristan stroked his cheek, welcoming the real Cody back to him.

"I didn't ask you to," he said, although in truth, he had no doubt that Cody would beg. When he hung on the edge and was desperate to come, he would beg and curse and threaten everything he could think of to get his own way. Tristan was equally sure he'd look his master in the eye and deny any of it happened afterwards.

Cody studied him for several long moments. His fingers crept up and wrapped around the St Christopher, as if reassuring himself by the collar's presence as he nodded his acceptance of the correction.

"Are you going to tell me what you want me to do?" he hinted, but the snap he usually spoke with wasn't quite there. He sounded more like a man who needed to know he'd receive clear orders.

Tristan took him by the hand and led him into the bedroom.

"Take your clothes off. Leave the collar on."

Cody did as he was told.

Tristan waited for him to finish, using the time to run the scene over in his head and work out what would be needed.

"Hands behind your back. Feet shoulder width apart," he ordered when Cody was ready for further instructions.

Tristan shrugged his own clothes off and stood in front of him. Cody glanced up, then down, then in a completely different direction.

"Look up, look me in the eye."

Cody looked up.

"I don't know what things have been like for you with other men, so I'm going to tell you how I run my scenes and what I expect from my submissive. Understand?"

Cody nodded.

"There are rules I expect you to obey. You won't date other men, submit to them, have sex with them or anything else. You will belong to me – you will only be with me from now on."



Another nod.

Tristan stroked his fingers through Cody's hair. "And the same goes for your master. I might not wear a collar, but you can trust me not to screw around behind your back."

The younger man closed his eyes. "I didn't ask you to say that."

Tristan translated the words inside his head.

*I didn't ask you to make it okay to want something better than other men have offered me.*

"I'm telling you how things will be. That point is not open to debate."

Cody eventually nodded his acceptance.

"You will have the opportunity to set limits, and a safe word."

Cody shook his head.

Tristan put his finger against his lips. "Not open to debate."

Cody swallowed.

"I take no pleasure in hurting a man any more than he enjoys," Tristan went on. "But I will establish a standard of behaviour that you'll be expected to maintain, and that standard will be enforced. And while a certain amount of sarcasm is acceptable, bad manners designed to push your master away from you are not."

"You don't need to say all this," Cody objected. "You're bigger than me and stronger than me. If I do something you don't like, you'll punish me until I do as I'm told. Why do you have to complicate all that? Why do you have to make it something it's not supposed to be?"

Tristan looked sadly down at him. It was pretty much the thought process he'd guess Cody had been taught. He pressed a kiss onto his forehead. "Submission, dominance, it's so much more than that, love." The sooner he learnt that the better.

Cody looked up at his new master, trying to make sense of things that didn't make any sense at all. Tristan touched his cheek and coaxed him to look back up at him.

"Maybe that's how it works for men who are gay like you," Cody whispered. "But for men like me..."

He looked down.

"Maybe it's because I'm a submissive or a bottom, or maybe it's just *me*. I don't know. But pretending I'm like you isn't going to change reality. Asking me to pretend along with

you is..." Cody closed his eyes, hating himself for the weakness in the request, but unable to prevent it. "Please, don't ask me to do that."

Tristan wrapped his arms around his shoulders, encouraging him to lean into his master's body and take strength from his strength. Cody formed his hands into fists behind his back, as he fought not to need the other man's reassurance.

"There's no pretence about it," Tristan told him. "If you tell your master you don't want something to happen or that you want something to stop, I'll respect that. But right now, I need you to trust me. I need you to try to do things my way for a little while. Can you do that?"

Cody shook his head.

"Your way isn't making you happy, is it?"

Cody shrugged. "Maybe I'm not supposed to be happy."

"Well, that's too bad, because I'm completely committed to making sure you are happy, regardless of whether you want to be or not."

Staring up at him, desperate to find some way of keeping himself safe from all the ideas Tristan wanted to put in his head, Cody searched his expression.

"What are you looking for?" Tristan asked.

"There's an expression men get in their eyes," Cody said. All he had to do was find it. Seeing that Tristan looked at him the same way all the other men did, that Tristan thought of him the same way all the other men did, that would keep him far more safe than all of Tristan's pretty promises.

Tristan stared straight back at him, letting him look. After a long time, Cody looked away.

"It wasn't there, was it?" Tristan asked.

"When you actually get around to screwing me it will be," Cody predicted. That had to be it. That was why it seemed like Tristan looked at him differently all day.

Tristan made him look back up. "You really believe that, don't you?"

"It makes far more sense than anything you've said."

Tristan nodded slowly to himself. "Then we should test your theory."

Cody nodded. If they could just move on to the bit he understood, everything would be so much easier.

Tristan kissed him, very softly, very gently. It wasn't what he needed to be reminded of, but Cody forced himself to just accept what the other man gave him right then. Knowing it was probably the last time he'd feel that sort of kiss, he concentrated on every detail.

The dominant deepened the kiss. His hands slid into Cody's hair, cradling his head, keeping him where he wanted him. Behind his back, Cody clenched his fists tighter and tried to enjoy each moment without falling into the trap of believing those moments would last forever.

One of Tristan's hands trailed down Cody's spine and settled on his backside, pulling him closer so bare skin brushed against bare skin, and their erections rubbed against each other's bodies.

The larger man pulled back, breaking the kiss. "We're going to keep everything nice and simple. Your safe word is 'stop'."

Cody nodded. "Yes, sir."

Tristan shook his head, refusing to let him put the honorific between them. "You know my name, love. I expect you to use it."

Cody closed his eyes as the one thing he thought might help him remember reality was taken away. "Yes, Tristan."

Tristan turned away. Opening the top drawer in a big cabinet on the other side of the room, he took out a pair of leather cuffs. Another drawer yielded a spreader bar attached to more leather restraints.

Cody relaxed slightly at the sight of the familiar.

"Up on the mattress. On your hands and knees facing the foot of the bed."

Cody got into position, presenting himself as the dominant requested. In moments his wrists were wrapped in leather and the cuffs were locked onto a hook screwed into the wooden bed frame. Seconds later, Tristan had the spreader bar between his thighs, pushing his knees far apart on the mattress, leave him exposed and accessible.

A metallic rattle and a glance over his shoulder informed Cody a chain had been clipped to the spreader bar and fastened to another hook at the other end of the bed. He wasn't going anywhere.

Cody took a deep breath and closed his eyes. It was just bondage. He liked bondage. The fact that it was Tristan tying him up didn't make any difference.

The leather just held him in place so the dominant could do whatever the hell he wanted with him. It wasn't marking him as belonging to Tristan, it wasn't helping him stay where his master wanted. The leather wasn't comforting. Such stupid ideas couldn't be allowed into his head.

Tristan got off the bed again. Cody looked to the toy cabinet, wondering what would come next. After the way he'd pushed and snapped at him all day, he wouldn't have blamed Tristan for taking a whip to him, but Tristan didn't go to the cabinet. An old-fashioned free standing mirror occupied one corner of the room. Tristan carried it across and set it in front of Cody.

Cody made the unfortunate mistake of looking himself straight in the eye. Desperate confusion and an even more desperate desire to fully submit shone in his eyes.

"So, you like to watch?" he said, when the silence filling the room, and the swirling thoughts filling his mind, became too much for him.

"Sometimes," Tristan said, taking something out of the bedside drawer and getting onto the bed behind him. "But tonight, *you* are going to watch. You are going to look into my eyes, and your own eyes, and you're going to tell me exactly what you see there."

Cody instinctively turned away from the mirror and the idea. Tristan settled himself between his spread knees. Reaching forward he put one hand either side of Cody's face and turned him back to the mirror.

Knowing he was being childish, Cody closed his eyes.

"Keep facing forward. If you don't, I'm sure I can rig up some sort of restraint to keep you in place."

Cody closed his eyes even tighter.

Tristan made no comment on that. A moment later, Cody felt slick fingers stroking down the cleft between his buttocks. He tried to pull his legs together and jerk away, somehow not expecting that touch right then.

Another hand settled on the small of his back. "Hush. Nothing going to happen unless you want it to."

Cody bit his lip, feeling like a fool. He closed his eyes even tighter. Tristan's palm stroked the small of his back, reassuring him as his other fingers trailed across his hole. Cody

pushed back, not wanting the other man to think he was unwilling just because he'd been surprised by the touch.

Tristan hushed him again, as he stroked slow circles against the tightly puckered muscle, coaxing him to relax and welcome him into his body. Cody's head dropped forward as Tristan finally stopped teasing and slid one finger inside him.

The digit stilled. "Head up, Cody. Face the mirror."

Cody lifted his face but he'd have been damned before he'd open his eyes. The finger began to work in him again. A few moments later it slid away and came back with a friend. Two fingers stretched him wider as they sought his prostate. Struggling to hold back a whimper, Cody pushed back, eager for more.

"Do you like that, love?"

He wanted to say it didn't matter. Tristan was the dominant. He shouldn't care if his submissive enjoyed himself or not. But he knew Tristan would stop if he said that. The only important thing right then was to make sure those fingers stayed inside him. Cody nodded.

"Good boy." Tristan added another finger, making Cody murmur his pleasure.

When the fingers left him, he struggled to turn and look over his shoulder.

"Mirror, Cody."

It was easy to follow the order when he'd seen that Tristan was already rolling a condom on. Closing his eyes again, he faced front.

Blunt pressure pushed against his hole.

"Open your eyes now."

Cody shook his head.

Tristan rubbed the tip of his erection against his hole, but he didn't push into him. Hands gripping Cody's hips, he held them both still and refused to move no matter how encouragingly Cody wriggled in his grip.

"Open your eyes. You don't have to look in the mirror right away. You can keep your gaze lowered."

Cody didn't make a decision, his eyes blinked open without inviting his brain to cast a vote. He stared at the carpet at the base of the mirror. As simple as that, Tristan began to rock his hips, working his way into him inch by inch, until he was buried balls-deep inside him.

"Close your eyes and everything stops, understand?"

Cody nodded. A moment later, he clenched his fists and pulled at his bondage as he fought to keep control of his body when Tristan began to thrust into him in earnest. Each movement sung into his prostate. His whole body came alive until every sensation collaborated in pushing him closer to the edge.

Tristan's cock buried deep inside him. His master's hands holding him still. The air caressing his cock as the force of Tristan's thrusts rocked him back and forth on the mattress. The leather around his limbs. The St. Christopher swinging from his neck. Even the friction of the sheet under his hands and knees. Every detail called to something inside him, begging him to really submit, to open his mind and give everything to his master.

Tristan pushed him to the edge of his orgasm and to the edge of insanity and then held him on both tipping points.

"Look up, Cody. Look in the mirror."

Cody shook his head.

Tristan thrust into him again. Cody whimpered his pleasure, but stared stubbornly at the floor.

"Look up and I'll let you come."

He didn't need to explain the alternative. If Cody didn't look in the mirror, he could well believe Tristan would somehow manage to hold him on that edge forever.

Cody shook his head, knowing he wasn't strong enough to follow the order, no matter what the reward. But Tristan repeated the order, over and over again until the words pushed every other idea out of his head, until it seemed like there was no other possibility in the world.

Cody looked up and met his own gaze.

Panic spiked inside him. Too much submission. Too much love for the other man. Too much trust. Too much willingness to risk too much. He looked away, struggling at his restraints.

Tristan leaned forward until his chest rested on Cody's back.

"Cody!"

He gasped at the force of the order. His gaze jerked back to the mirror. He met Tristan's eyes. He had to look away. He had to escape from all the crazy ideas in his head.

His eyes wouldn't move. Gaze locked with his master's, Cody found himself trapped by far more than leather.

"That's right, love," Tristan whispered, rocking his hips, rubbing their whole bodies together. "Tell me what you see, Cody."

Cody shook his head, still unable to look away.

Tristan stared back at him. Cody whimpered. In that moment, it was impossible to believe that the dominant was anything like the other men he'd known.

"What you were looking for earlier, love?" Tristan asked. "Is it there?"

Cody shook his head.

"Give me the words, darling."

"Not there," Cody managed.

As simply as that, Tristan reached underneath Cody and wrapped his hand around his straining erection. It barely took more than a few strokes before he came into his master's hand. His pleasure seemed to pull Tristan's orgasm from him too. He came just a second after Cody, thrusting deep inside him, holding onto him as they both half collapsed at the bottom of the bed.

Cody's whole body shook.

Tristan wrapped his arms tighter around him. "Hush. It's okay. I've got you now. Hush."

Cody didn't even know what Tristan was protecting him from, but the soft soothing sounds eased some of his panic. By the time Tristan moved away from him to dispense with the condom, the shaking had eased. By the time Tristan had undone the leather restraints, Cody had to struggle to remember exactly what was wrong or what he was supposed to be afraid of.

Right then, with afterglow singing through his veins, even cuddling after sex wasn't scary enough to make him hide behind bad manners. He let Tristan guide him to lay in his arms as the older man wrapped the blankets around them.

"I know you don't believe it, but I do love you," Tristan whispered in his ear some time later. "My family's like that. We don't waste time when we meet the right person. My parents were married a month after they met. My sister got engaged the same day she met her husband. We all just know when we find the right one."

"You're all insane," Cody muttered against his master's chest.

"They're all still together," Tristan corrected.

"You know what's even crazier than all that," Cody asked after a long time. "I've been gay my whole life, but today was the first time I realised I could actually fall in love with a man." He closed his eyes very tight, not quite able to believe he'd actually just said that out loud. The insanity was catching.

Tristan pressed a kiss onto the top of his head, holding him tighter, as if he could make everything okay that way. "Scary?" he asked.

Cody shook his head. "I'm not scared!"

Tristan didn't argue, he just stroked his fingers through Cody's hair.

"It's just... new?" Cody suggested, trying to think of something that would please his master without making himself sound like a fool. "Different?"

"Learning to trust yourself enough to love another man. Learning what being gay like me is actually like, it's a lot to take in," Tristan offered.

Cody ran the idea around in his head. He wasn't scared. He was learning. That was different, better. He might actually be able to admit to that, to do that.

Tentatively nodding his acceptance, he glanced up and offered Tristan a small, almost shy smile. His master leaned down and kissed him very gently on the lips.

Cody closed his eyes, and he started learning.



## About the Author

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

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

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

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Kim loves to hear from readers. You can find her contact information, website and author biography at <http://www.total-e-bound.com>

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