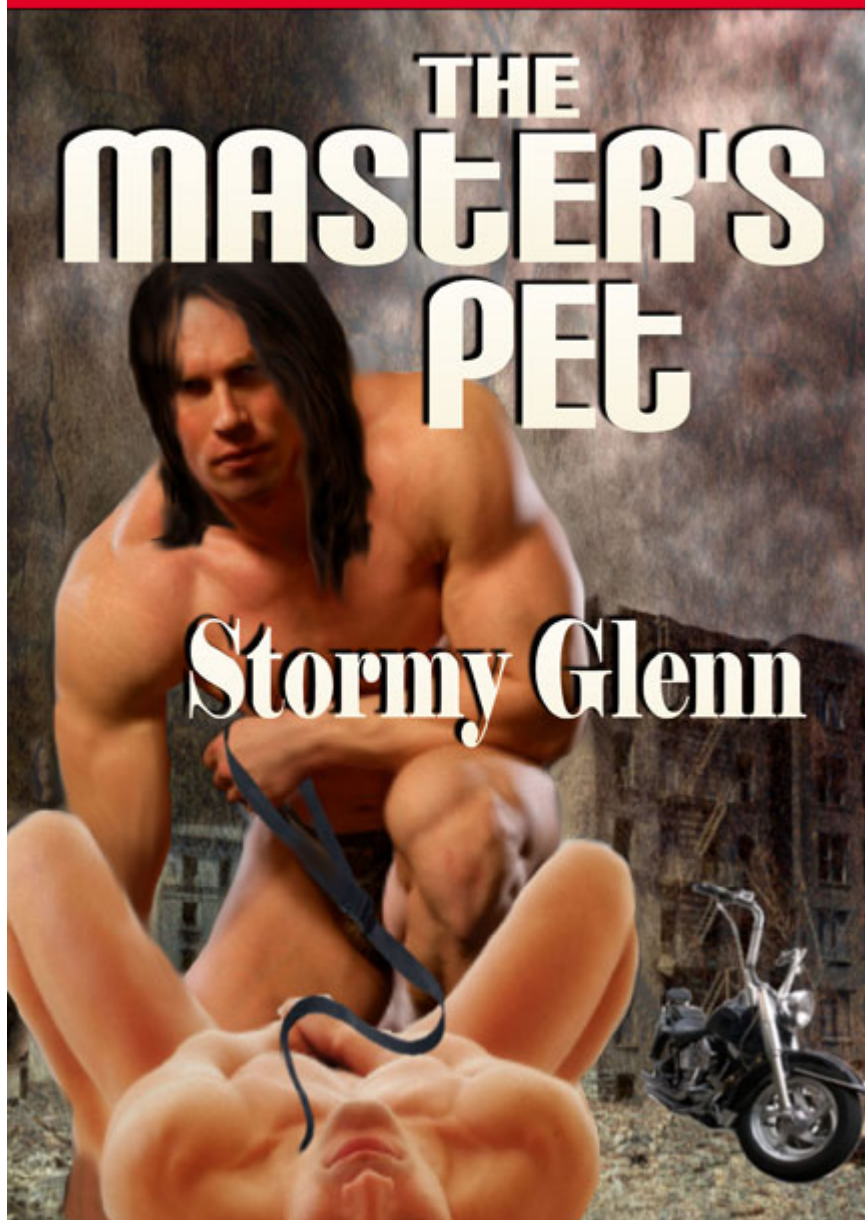


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THE MASTER'S PET

Stormy Glenn



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EROTIC ROMANCE



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A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK

IMPRINT: Erotic Romance

THE MASTER'S PET

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DEDICATION

To Pooky, maybe one day you'll master your own pet.

THE MASTER'S PET

STORMY GLENN

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Chapter 1

The end of the world as we knew it did not come as everyone expected. There were no wars, no conflicts, no great battles. Instead, it started with a simple virus. Before anyone knew what happened, millions were infected and had died.

The world had never seen a sickness like this. Most died within a few hours of contracting it, but not all. Some became the monsters seen only in Hollywood movies. It seemed their sole purpose in life was to create death and mayhem.

Some became carriers of the disease, infecting others with their blood. They looked normal, behaved normally, but they were deadly. Still others seemed to be immune to the disease, not getting infected no matter what. For all of those that survived, life was changed forever.

Chaos and destruction reigned over the earth until almost nothing was left. Cities were destroyed, entire cultures erased as governments tried to eradicate the virus, but to no avail.

The orderly societies of the early twenty-first century were no more. Those who survived banded together in small groups littered throughout the world and tried to survive as best as they could. But everything had changed...

A loud thud outside of his room woke Jiri from his troubled sleep. He sat up, hanging his legs over the side of his small cot. Wiping a

hand down his face, Jiri tried to remember what day it was, but nothing came to mind.

He wasn't even sure if it was day or night. There were no windows in the small room he inhabited. Just a door, a small army cot, a crate Jiri used as a nightstand, a lamp, a cardboard box that housed what clothes he had, and a sink with a mirror. It wasn't much, but it was his.

Jiri stood up and walked to the small sink in the corner. He turned on the cold water and cupped some in his hands, bringing it up over his face. Turning off the water, he looked at himself in the mirror above the sink.

Lifting his hand, Jiri gently touched the soft purple color around his left eye. Well, at least the swelling had gone down a little. His lower lip was another matter. It was cracked and swollen, dried blood on the corner.

He'd looked worse, but that didn't mean it hurt any less. He was tired of getting beaten up. Of course, he was also getting used to it. Maybe that's what he had such a problem with. He was getting used to being knocked around by his stepfather and his buddies.

If that didn't say how sad his life was, Jiri didn't know what did. A person should never get used to being beaten up. Jiri just didn't know what other choice he had. He had nowhere to go and no money to get there. Larry had taken all his money last night, right before he and his buddies beat the crap out of Jiri.

He was stuck living in hell with Larry. He lived in what was once a storage closet in Larry's auto repair shop. He worked from the time the sun came up until it went down, repairing cars and working the gas station out front.

Jiri didn't intend to be here forever. He'd run the first chance he got. He had even been saving up his tips until last night. He had to because Larry didn't pay him anything for the work he did. Oh, Larry provided just enough food and personal supplies to keep Jiri alive, but just that.

Shaking his head at the sad condition he was in, Jiri reached into his cardboard box and pulled out the cleanest shirt he had to wear and pulled it on. He buttoned up his pants and pulled his shoes on.

He was just reaching for the door handle of his small room when he heard another loud thud outside of his room. Turning the handle slowly, Jiri eased the door open and peered out. He really hoped Larry and his buddies weren't still around. He so didn't need to run into them again, at least not until he healed up from the last little party they threw for him.

Peering out, Jiri couldn't see anything. The garage was unusually dark. Maybe it was nighttime? Jiri was a little confused by that. If it was night, Larry must have let him sleep in and Larry never let him sleep in.

Jiri looked around the door, but he still couldn't see anything. A small shaft of light was coming from Larry's office, which meant Larry was still around. Just perfect. Jiri hoped he could avoid him, but knew he probably couldn't.

Closing the door behind him, Jiri made his way toward the far door. To get to it, he would have to pass by Larry's office, but if he were really quiet, he might be able to make it without Larry hearing him.

As Jiri inched his way past the smoky glass window of Larry's office, he saw shadows move out of the corner of his eye. Jiri froze, trying to even out the breath that was rushing rapidly in and out of his chest.

It was only when Jiri heard the voices coming from Larry's office that he realized the people in Larry's office were not Larry's buddies. He didn't recognize their voices, but he knew that they were angry.

"You cheated me, you son of a bitch," someone yelled.

"I didn't mean to, honest, Zane. It was a mistake!" That was Larry. Jiri would recognize that simpering voice anywhere.

"You're damn right it was a mistake!" the other voice shouted. "Now, how do you plan to rectify it?"

“Rectify?” Larry asked. He sounded confused, the moron. Jiri seriously doubted Larry even knew what the word meant. He was big and beefy and as dumb as the day was long. “Rectify” would be a word he wouldn’t understand.

“Fix it, you dumbass. You owe me, and if you don’t pay up, I’m going to let Slash here take it out of your hide.”

Jiri quickly covered his mouth with his hand as a giggle threatened to escape. He would love to have a ringside seat to someone handing Larry his ass. He’d even pay for seats, if he had any money.

“I don’t have anything, I swear,” Larry cried out.

Jiri could see enough shadow coming through the smoky glass to know that Larry was cowering back in his chair. A much larger man bent over him. Several more shadows moved throughout the small office.

“I don’t believe you, Larry,” the large man replied. “I want what’s mine!”

Jiri’s eyes widened as the man picked Larry right up out of his chair by a hand at Larry’s throat. He barely had time to scramble out of the way before Larry flew through the window to land on the floor at Jiri’s feet, glass spraying everywhere.

Jiri stood there, stunned to see his stepfather, the man who had made his life a living hell, lying on the floor covered in blood and broken glass. Jiri’s eyes slowly made the track back up the wall to the shattered window.

Shock held Jiri immobile as his eyes landed on the biggest man he had ever seen. He leaned out the broken window, staring down at the floor where Larry lay groaning. Jiri could just make out several more large men standing behind him.

Jiri knew that the shadows he stood in hid him from view. He also knew he hadn’t made a sound, not even a whimper, but the man’s eyes suddenly moved up to look right at him as if he knew exactly where Jiri stood.

The man's dark green eyes seemed to pierce the darkness and see right into Jiri. It was enough to give Jiri the willies and make him turn and run. His heart beating frantically in his chest, Jiri ran for the side door and what he hoped was freedom.

Pulling at the door, Jiri cried out as a large hand landed on his shoulder, stopping him from leaving. Jiri struggled, hitting out with his hands as large hands lifted him into the air and threw him over the man's shoulder.

"What did you find, Zane?" one of the leather clad men called out, causing the others in the group to laugh.

"Find yourself a toy, Zane?" another man called out.

"Naw, Zane found himself a pet," yet another man said, laughing.

Jiri continued to pound on the back of the man holding him, but it was like hitting at a bulldog with a napkin. The man didn't seem to feel any of it. He didn't even stop his stride across the room.

The air in Jiri's lungs suddenly left him as the man dropped him onto his back on the floor. Jiri took a moment to breathe, his chest rising and falling rapidly. Then he looked up at the man that had caught him.

Just as quickly as he had regained his breath, it left again as Jiri realized how big and menacing the man actually was. He had to be at least six and half feet tall, maybe taller. His shoulders were so broad, Jiri was surprised he could even make it through the doorway without turning sideways.

The man crossed his massive arms over his chest and stared down at Jiri. Jiri gasped, a shiver of panic coursing through his body when he saw the skull tattoo on the large man's arm. He knew that tattoo. Everyone knew it. It was a Death Dealer's tattoo.

The Death Dealer's were the scariest, deadliest motorcycle gang on the West Coast. They made the motorcycle gangs of the 1970s look like a kindergarten class. No one messed with them and lived to tell about it.

Jiri glanced over at his stepfather, still lying on the floor groaning. He wondered how stupid the man could possibly be. Jiri knew the world had gone to hell, but cheating the Death Dealers was just asking for trouble.

“What’s your name, boy?”

Jiri looked back up at the large man standing over him. A wave of apprehension swept through him as he realized that the others had moved over to surround him. He sat in a circle of hell and he was about to die. Jiri just knew it.

“J-Ji-Jiri,” he stammered.

“Who are you?”

Jiri suddenly felt like every brain cell in his head had left. He couldn’t understand what the man was asking. He had just said who he was. Was there some other answer? “Jiri,” he repeated.

The man abruptly squatted down next to Jiri, grabbing his chin with strong fingers and tilting Jiri’s head up. Jiri quickly lowered his lashes, afraid to look the man in the face directly. He tilted Jiri’s face to one side, then the other as if he were appraising him.

“Who gave you these bruises, boy?” he asked.

Jiri couldn’t keep his eyes from straying over to his stepfather, but he quickly brought them back when the man grunted harshly. Jiri’s eyes widened. He could see anger in the man’s eyes. He silently prayed it wasn’t directed at him.

Just as suddenly as he had squatted down next to Jiri, he stood up and walked over to stand over Larry. “You cheated me, Larry, and I don’t take kindly to being cheated. So, you and I are going to have a little conversation about what you owe me and how you’re going to pay me back.”

Jiri didn’t like the look in the man’s eyes as he glanced back over at him. Something was about to happen and Jiri knew he wasn’t going to like it one bit.

“Slash, go with Jiri and get his belongings,” the man ordered. Before Jiri could even protest, he was hauled to his feet by a large beefy hand on the back of his shirt and propelled out of the room.

“Where do you bunk, boy?” Slash asked.

Jiri pointed to the storage room that had been converted into his living quarters. The man holding his arm pushed him toward the door, pulling it open and shoving Jiri inside. Jiri stumbled forward then stopped, looking over his shoulder at him.

“Well? Get to it, boy. Get your shit together. Zane doesn’t like to be kept waiting.”

Zane? Was that his name? Wasn’t that the name of the leader of the Death Dealers? Jiri’s mind was a whirlwind of questions and fear as he grabbed his clothes and shoved them into his pillowcase. What was going to happen to him? Why did Zane want him to gather all of his belongings together?

Jiri grabbed the one picture he had of his mother off the nightstand and pushed it into the bag, then looked around the room to see if he forgot anything. Shaking his head, Jiri realized that everything he owned fit into a standard size pillowcase. *How sad was that?*

“Is that everything, boy?”

Jiri looked up to see Slash leaning against the door frame, his arms crossed over his chest as he watched Jiri. He tightened his grip on the bag in his hand and nodded his head. Yep, this was everything he owned in the world, if he didn’t count the money Larry had stolen from him the night before.

“Come on, boy, Zane is waiting,” Slash said as he grabbed Jiri by the arm again and escorted him back into the main room.

Jiri quickly noted that Larry now sat in his office chair when he walked back into the room. The man Slash had referred to as Zane leaned back against the wall, his arms crossed over his chest. The moment Jiri stepped into the office, Zane’s eyes zoomed in on him.

The way that Zane looked at him made Jiri nervous. It was like Zane could see right into him, know what Jiri was thinking, what he was feeling. Jiri felt naked and exposed under the man's intense gaze.

Leaning forward slightly, Zane motioned with his hand and pointed to the floor. Jiri's eyes drew together in a frown. He didn't understand what Zane wanted. A sudden push to his back made Jiri stumble across the room. The solid body he ran into stopped him.

"Sorry," Jiri whispered as he tried to push himself away from Zane. He wasn't brave enough to look up into the eyes of the man holding him. He just knew if he did, he would see his own death in them.

"Stay," the man simply said.

Then Jiri did look up. Stay? What? Was he a dog or something? Jiri wanted to ask what Zane meant, but the other men in the room captured his attention. They had all started to encircle Larry. They looked very menacing.

"Have we come to an understanding, Larry?" Zane asked.

Larry remained silent for several moments, then reluctantly nodded his head. Jiri knew he wasn't going to like what Larry had to say the moment his stepfather turned to look at him. There was too much enjoyment in his eyes.

"You belong to Zane now, boy," Larry said. "You'll go with him and do what he says."

Jiri tilted his head a little, his eyebrows drawn together in a frown as he tried to make sense of the words that had just come out of his stepfather's mouth. "What?"

"You heard me, Jiri," Larry replied.

"You can't just give me away."

Larry jumped to his feet and started toward Jiri, his hands fisting at his sides. "I can do any damn thing I want, boy."

"No, I won't do this," Jiri said. He knew he wasn't going to like what Larry had to say and he was right. After all the things Larry had

done to him, he had never expected this. Larry had given him to the Death Dealers?

"I don't remember asking, you little shit!" Larry spat out. "I owe Zane money. Money I don't have. He's agreed to take you instead."

"You sold me?" Jiri asked in horror. "I'm your son."

"You ain't my son, boy," Larry yelled. "You're just the whelp your mother saddled me with before she died, the stupid bitch. And you've never been good for anything but costing me money. It'll be a relief to finally have you off my hands."

Considering the dire situation he was in, Jiri should have used his head to try and get himself out of trouble. But the anger he felt toward the man who had been his stepfather for nearly fifteen years overcame whatever common sense Jiri had left.

Growling out his anger at Larry's smug face, Jiri dropped his bag on the floor and leapt across the space between them, his hands going toward Larry's neck. He wanted to wring the very last breath out of his slimy body.

Large hands wrapped around Jiri's waist, holding him off the ground and away from Larry. Even if he couldn't reach him, Jiri had the satisfaction of seeing Larry jump back in shock, and maybe just a little fear.

"Whoa, Zane, looks like you have a spitfire on your hands," Slash laughed.

Several of the other men in the room laughed along with Slash. Jiri could feel his face heat up with embarrassment as the chest pressed against his back rumbled with laughter. It was only then that Jiri realized Zane held him.

"I like a little fire," Zane said.

"He owes me money," Jiri ground out between clenched teeth. "He and his buddies took it from me last night before they beat me up, and I want it back."

"That right?" Zane asked, looking over at Larry. "You holding out on me, Larry?"

“No, no, of course not, Zane. The boy’s lying, I swear.”

“Third drawer down there’s a gray lock box. He keeps the key on a string around his neck,” Jiri said. He pointed to the drawer.

Jiri was surprised when Zane set him down on the floor and released him. Zane didn’t have to say a word. Jiri walked over and pulled the drawer open. He grabbed the little box, setting it on the desk.

He turned to Larry and held out his hand, waiting for Larry to hand the key over. Larry glared at Jiri for several moments before reaching up and pulling a string over his neck and handing it to Jiri.

“You’re gonna pay for this, boy, mark my words. You’re gonna pay for this,” Larry sneered.

“You first, you fat pig!” Jiri said. He reached down and unlocked the box. He could hear several astonished exclamations from those standing around him as he lifted the lid to reveal several stacks of cash.

Jiri counted out the one hundred and eighteen dollars that Larry had stolen from him the night before, all the money he had in the world. Once done, Jiri shoved the money into his pocket. He closed the lid and locked the box.

“I just want what is mine,” Jiri said as he glanced up at Zane. “What you do with the rest is up to you.” A satisfied smirk on his face, Jiri picked up the box and handed it and the key to Zane.

Jiri pushed past Zane and walked over to stand next to the wall. Grabbing his bag off the floor, he leaned back against the wall, turning to watch what Zane would do with Larry and the remaining money.

Jiri tried to show disinterest, but knew he had been caught looking when Zane chuckled. He could feel his face heat up again and wondered if that was going to be a regular thing in his life now. Zane seemed to have the ability to make him feel very embarrassed.

“Slash, since Larry here was so forthcoming with his finances, you and the boys may divide up what remains in the box between you,” Zane said as he set the box down on the table and unlocked it.

“You don’t want a cut, Zane?” Slash asked. He was already reaching into the box to pull the money out.

Zane shook his head. He glanced over at Jiri. “I have what I want.”

Chapter 2

Zane glanced down at the head resting back against his chest. He shook his head in wonder at all the golden, white blond hair covering Jiri's head. His hair was so light it looked like each strand had been spun in sunlight.

It had captured his attention the moment he spotted Jiri standing in the shadows of Larry's garage. If a sudden stream of light from Larry's office hadn't chosen that exact moment to hit Jiri, Zane wasn't sure he would ever have seen the man, and that would have been a damn shame.

Zane had come to Larry's garage after discovering that Larry had cheated him. The motorcycle parts Larry had sold to the Death Dealers were inferior parts, breaking down before they could use them. No one cheated the Death Dealers and got away with it. Zane had gone to Larry's garage, determined to teach Larry a lesson.

Instead, he had discovered Jiri. Zane couldn't even think about how excited he had been the moment he had learned that Jiri belonged to Larry. Once that had been established, Zane had no guilty feelings about taking Jiri as payment for Larry's debt.

The bruises on Jiri's face alone told Zane that he could offer Jiri a better life than he had with his stepfather, even if it was only as Zane's pet. Jiri could never be anything else. The life that Zane led was a harsh one.

Jiri wasn't strong enough to be a Death Dealer. It took strength, experience, and just a bit of madness to be a Death Dealer. Zane doubted Jiri was even big enough to ride a motorbike by himself.

But Jiri was just perfect for what Zane had in mind for him. Jiri's ethereal beauty had enchanted Zane the moment he had seen him. The golden blond hair and deep sky-blue eyes had only added to Jiri's allure.

What had really sold Zane on the idea of having Jiri was the way the little man had attacked Larry. Jiri had been so fierce even when facing a man that was vastly larger than him and one that had beaten him, probably on numerous occasions.

Jiri hadn't even hesitated. The moment he had realized that Larry had sold him, Jiri had gone crazy. The only reason that Zane hadn't let Jiri attack Larry was because he didn't want Jiri hurt again. But Zane felt strangely proud at how ferocious Jiri behaved toward Larry. It showed that Jiri had a backbone, even if it was a small one.

Jiri was sure to need it in the new life he was about to have. Even though Zane had claimed Jiri and the rest of his gang would protect him, there was always the chance that someone would try to hurt Jiri, or take him.

As pretty as Jiri looked, Zane knew it would be the latter. Jiri could garner a lot of money on the open slave market. The long dark lashes covering Jiri's sky-blue eyes alone could bring a grown man to his knees.

Zane would have to keep on his toes to protect Jiri from the riff raff that inhabited the world around them. There weren't too many places left that were safe for anyone, not since the plague had taken over the world and killed most of the population. What was left almost wasn't worth protecting. After the dust had settled, so to speak, the people who were left in the world had banded together in small groups for safety.

Zane had lost his family long before the plague hit. His mother died from working three jobs, his father from alcoholism. When the plague hit, Zane's life didn't change that much. He joined the Death Dealers, working his way up until he became the leader.

And there were a lot of perks to being the leader of one of the most feared motorcycle gangs on the West Coast, the least of which was being able to claim Jiri as his. Zane was pretty sure that special perk was going to quickly become the most important one.

Zane looked back down at the head resting against his chest. Jiri had his eyes closed as if he didn't even perceive that they were speeding down the highway at nearly a hundred miles an hour. He hadn't said a word since they had left the garage. He hadn't even put up a protest that he now belonged to Zane. Jiri had just gathered up his stuff and followed Zane out of the building.

Turning the bike, Zane pulled onto the main road that ran the length of the little town the Death Dealers claimed as their own. It was nothing more than an old ghost town now, but they had made it theirs. Zane had discovered the old ghost town several years ago. When he had become the leader of the Death Dealers, he had moved them from the big city to this little plot of land.

Zane was proud of the fact that his little town had a grocery store, schoolhouse, barber shop, bike repair shop, mercantile store, a small café, and even a jail. The biggest building in town was the hotel. It also doubled as his headquarters.

As the leader of the Death Dealers, he had the largest accommodations in the hotel. His quarters were on the second floor of the hotel, taking up the entire front of the building. From his balcony Zane could oversee the entire town. He also had a large office on the main floor with a walk-in safe.

Zane pulled into his reserved parking spot in front of the hotel. He looked down at Jiri. He hoped Jiri liked it here because he wasn't leaving any time soon. Zane also hoped that Jiri would adjust to being Zane's pet.

It wouldn't be easy, not for either of them. Zane lived in what was essentially a master/slave world. Those who were stronger protected those who were weaker, but that protection came at a price.

The masters protected and cared for the slaves. In exchange, the slaves provided the masters with comfort and entertainment, including seeing to their sexual needs. In the world they now lived in, it was an equal trade.

Zane had resisted taking a pet in the past. He didn't want the added responsibility. He already had an entire gang and town full of people to care for. But there was just something about Jiri that called to Zane. He had to have him.

"Hey, little one, you ready to go in and see your new home?" Zane asked.

Jiri shrugged his shoulders.

Zane reached down and tipped Jiri's head back so that he could look down into his sky-blue eyes. "It's going to be okay, Jiri. I won't let anyone hurt you anymore. You belong to me now, and no one messes with what's mine."

Jiri didn't look like he believed Zane. He had a sudden desire to feel Jiri's soft, pink lips against his and leaned down to kiss him. It was everything Zane had hoped for and more. Jiri's lips were so soft and lush. Zane couldn't contain his deep growl as he pulled Jiri closer.

When Zane finally lifted his head, Jiri's face was flushed. He watched Jiri's eyes dart up to his, then fall down just as quickly. Jiri clearly looked embarrassed, but the hard bulge in his pants told Zane Jiri had enjoyed their kiss.

"What's wrong, little one?" Zane asked softly. He rubbed his thumb down the side of Jiri's face that wasn't bruised. When Jiri shrugged his shoulders again, Zane chuckled. "Uh uh, little one. That won't do. I asked you a question and I want an answer. What's wrong?"

Jiri's eyes came back up to meet Zane's. "I'm not supposed to like that."

"Like what?"

“Whe—when you kissed me. It’s wrong and I’m not supposed to do it.”

Zane’s brows drew together as he frowned. “Who told you that?”

“La—Larry,” Jiri replied.

“And you believe him?” Zane chuckled. “This is the same man who beat you to a pulp and took all of your money, then sold you to me. Somehow, little one, I don’t think Larry is the authority on anything. Besides, now that you belong to me, what I say is what matters, not Larry.”

Zane was thrilled when Jiri let out a small laugh. “I guess,” Jiri said.

Zane tilted Jiri’s face back up to his. “No *I guess* about it, Jiri. Would you rather believe me or your stepfather?”

Jiri was so quiet that Zane was almost afraid that he wasn’t going to answer him. When he did, though, it wasn’t the answer Zane was expecting, but it thrilled him just the same.

“It’s okay to like kissing you?”

Zane laughed. “It’s very okay. In fact, I prefer it. Just as long as you remember that you’re only allowed to kiss me. I catch you kissing anyone else and what Larry did to you will be a cakewalk. Got it?”

Jiri quickly nodded. Zane watched several emotions move across Jiri’s face, wishing he could read the little man’s mind. He seemed to want to ask something, but Jiri was either afraid to or embarrassed.

“What do you want to ask?” Zane asked, trying to set Jiri at ease.

“When I was with Larry I worked in the repair shop. I fixed whatever cars Larry told me to fix, cleaned up the shop, and stayed out of Larry’s way.” Jiri glanced up at Zane. “What do you want me to do? Am I supposed to fix your bikes?”

Zane shook his head. “No, Jiri.” He realized that Jiri really had no clue about what was expected of him. While Zane hoped that Jiri wouldn’t fight him too much when he found out what his duties were, Zane wasn’t going to give him up.

“Your only duty is to me,” Zane said. “You answer to me and only me. If you behave yourself and do as I tell you, I’ll reward you. If you misbehave, though, I will punish you. I’d really prefer not to have to punish you, Jiri, so you need to listen to what I tell you.”

Jiri gulped, then nodded. “Yeah, I think I’d prefer that, too.”

Zane chuckled. He lifted Jiri to his feet and climbed off his bike. Zane reached down and opened his saddlebag. He pulled out a small leather collar attached to a length of chain. He could see Jiri’s eyes widen considerably as he stood back up.

“Until I can get you permanently marked, this will have to do,” Zane said as he wrapped the length of black leather around Jiri’s neck and clicked the collar closed. “This tells everyone that you belong to me and if they mess with you, they’re messing with me.”

Jiri’s fingers slowly moved down the length of silver chain, then his eyes came up to meet Zane’s. “I’m your pet?”

Zane could hear the worry and confusion in Jiri’s voice. He could see it in Jiri’s trembling fingers. Zane wished that there was an easier way to introduce Jiri to his new life, but there just wasn’t time. Jiri had to be wearing Zane’s mark before they went inside or someone would try to claim him and then Zane would have to hurt them.

“In a sense, yes.” Zane nodded. “Remember, I told you. You belong to me now. You’re my possession, my pet. You do what I say when I say it. If I tell you to strip off all of your clothes in a room full of people, I’d expect you to do it without protest.”

Zane didn’t think it was possible, but Jiri’s eyes widened even more. This time, though, a pale face devoid of color framed them. It made the blue of Jiri’s eyes stand out even more, making them look huge.

“You—you want me to take all my clothes off in—in a room full of people?” Jiri whispered, the horror thick in his voice.

“If I tell you to, yes. I won’t, though. What belongs to me is for my eyes only.” Zane reached over and flicked a length of golden

white hair off of Jiri's forehead. "You'd do best to remember that, Jiri. I don't share. Ever."

"I don't understand any of this," Jiri murmured.

Zane knew that Jiri had spoken to himself, that he hadn't meant for Zane to hear him. Zane reached over and patted Jiri on the back. "I know you don't, baby. I'll try to make it as easy for you as I can. Just remember to do exactly as I say and you'll be fine."

Jiri didn't even nod. He just clutched his pillowcase closer to his chest and looked at the floor. Zane took a deep breath and let it out slowly. This wasn't going to be easy for either of them. Zane had never had a pet before, and Jiri obviously had no idea what a pet was. They would just have to muddle through.

Zane grabbed his saddlebags off the bike in one hand. In the other, he grabbed the end of the chain attached to Jiri's collar. "Come on, baby, let's go get you settled. I'm sure you could use a hot meal and a warm bath."

Zane pulled Jiri behind him as he led him into the hotel. He could see people staring. He could feel their curiosity about Jiri and see the instant arousal Jiri inspired in nearly everyone that looked at him. He wasn't surprised.

Jiri was beyond beautiful. Zane was almost afraid to see what Jiri would look like after a few good meals and a hot bath. A little more flesh on his fragile bones, some soap and water, and Zane was positive Jiri would be breathtaking.

He couldn't be anything less. The delicate bone structure of Jiri's face alone made him seem elf-like. The golden, white blond hair that fell in waves down to Jiri's small shoulders and the big, blue eyes that dominated his face made Jiri seem unreal.

As much as Zane knew he would have a fight on his hands for possession of Jiri once he cleaned up, Zane still couldn't wait to see him. He also desperately wanted to explore all of the pale flesh hidden behind the baggy jeans and dirty shirt that Jiri wore.

Zane knew he needed to establish his claim to Jiri. He just needed to find the right person to make an example of. He didn't want to take anyone out, just rough them up enough to give everyone the clear knowledge that Jiri belonged to him.

"Nice pet, Zane," someone said as Zane led Jiri into the building. *Yeah, yeah, Zane already knew that.*

"Is he going to dance for us?" someone else yelled out. *Dance? Yes. For everyone? No. For Zane? Definitely.*

"I'll trade you for him, Zane." *Nope. Not going to happen.*

"You gonna share him, Zane? I wouldn't mind getting my hands on his hot little ass," yelled another voice. *Bingo!*

Zane stopped so fast Jiri ran into him. He reached behind him and steadied Jiri with his hand as he turned to look at the offending voice. Pug. He should have known. Zane never liked Pug. The man was a slime ball that enjoyed hurting other people. Zane just couldn't figure out how to kick him out of the gang.

Maybe he could kill two birds with one stone. He could show everyone that Jiri belonged to him and only him. At the same time, he would have an excuse for getting rid of Pug. Everyone who knew Zane knew he wouldn't accept disrespect from anyone. Zane prided himself on it.

"What did you say, Pug?" Zane said quietly. That should have been Pug's first clue. When Zane was truly angry, he became very quiet.

"I asked if you were going to share you little pet, Zane," Pug replied as he took a few steps closer. He peered past Zane's shoulders to where Jiri huddled, a sneer crossing his lips. "I have a nice pet, too. I'll trade you for the night. Billy can give you a good time."

Zane watched with disgust as Pug yanked on the chain in his hand. A small man, just a bit taller than Jiri, stumbled forward to fall at Pug's feet. The fading bruises on the man's face attested to the bad treatment Pug gave his pets.

Some people were like that. They saw their pets as just that, pets. They didn't see them as human beings that were trading themselves for the protection masters offered.

Pug reached down and grabbed a handful of Billy's hair, yanking his head back. "Billy's very obedient and if he's not, you can always punish him."

Zane wasn't surprised when he heard a low growl from behind him. He knew without looking that it had come from Slash. Pug and Slash often fought over Pug's treatment of Billy. Zane suspected that Slash had a thing for Billy even though he had never said anything.

Maybe he could kill one other bird here. Zane reached out for Billy's leash. He could see the glee in Pug's eyes as he quickly handed over the leash to Zane. Before Pug could reach Jiri's leash, Zane handed them both to Slash.

"Hold these, Slash," Zane said. As he turned back to Pug, Zane clenched his fist and shoved it into Pug's face. He had the satisfaction of hearing the cartilage in Pug's nose crunch under the power behind his punch.

Pug was so stunned by the sudden attack that Zane got in three more strikes before Pug began to resist and fight back. Zane felt one punch hit him in the face, but he shook it off, going after Pug with renewed vigor.

Several more hits, a few kicks, and a couple of body slams later, Pug lay on the floor in a pile of blood. Zane stood over the top of him, his chest rising and falling rapidly. His bloody and bruised fists were still clenched at his sides.

Zane lifted his head and let his furious gaze roam over everyone standing in the room. "Jiri belongs to me. He is my pet," Zane bit out harshly. "I don't share. I will kill the next person, man or woman, who even thinks about taking him from me."

There were several nods and few quiet chuckles. Not many people liked Pug. They put up with him because he was here. That was about

to end. Zane turned back to Slash and held out his hand for Jiri's leash.

When Slash went to hand Billy's leash to him, Zane shook his head. "Billy belongs to you now, but I expect you to care for him better than Pug did. I don't want to see any more bruises on him. Is that understood?"

Slash's mouth dropped open in surprise, then quickly slammed shut as he nodded. The look Slash cast down at Billy told Zane that Billy was in good hands. Slash would care for him and treat him as a pet should be treated. Zane had an inkling that Billy's life was about to change in a big way.

"You can't do that," Pug yelled as he climbed to his feet. His hand came up to wipe the blood from his lips. "Billy belongs to me. I claimed him fair and square. You don't have the right to take him away from me."

Zane turned back to face Pug, anger filling him and making his muscles tighten as he prepared for the fight he knew was coming. "I have every right. I am the leader of the Death Dealers. I can do any damn thing I want to."

"Then I challenge you for leadership of the Death Dealers."

Big surprise there. Zane reached his hand back behind him, holding Jiri's leash out to Slash. "Slash, take care of Jiri until I'm done with this asshole."

"Zane?"

Zane turned back to look at Jiri. He reached out and caressed the side of Jiri's face. "It's okay, little one. You just do what Slash says until I'm done here, and then we'll go up and have that bath."

Jiri's wide eyes dominated his pale face as he nodded. Clutching his bag of possessions closer to his chest, Jiri stepped over to stand next to Slash. Zane nodded, sending Jiri a small reassuring smile. Jiri learned quickly. That boded well for their future together.

Jiri had a lot to learn about was expected of a pet, especially the pet of the leader of the Death Dealers. Zane was encouraged by Jiri's

quick obedience that they could come to an understanding faster than he had initially thought.

Once Zane was confident that Slash would take good care of Jiri, he turned back to face Pug. He wasn't surprised by the smug look on Pug's face. Pug always felt that he was better than everyone else. It was one of the many reasons the others in the gang hated him.

"Once I'm leader, I'm going to have fun with your little toy, Zane."

Zane lifted an eyebrow at Pug's insistence that he was going to win. "Slash," Zane said. He didn't even turn his head to look at him. "If something happens to me, Jiri belongs to you. The moment you think I'm losing, you're to take Jiri and leave. Pug is not to have him. Understood?"

"Yes, Zane," Slash replied.

Zane nodded, grinning at the rage that filled Pug's face. No matter what happened, Pug now knew that he would never get his hands on Jiri. The moment that it looked like Zane might lose, Slash would leave and take Jiri with him.

However, he had no intention of losing. He had too much to look forward to. Zane motioned with his hands for Pug to bring it on. He was gratified when Pug's face burned even redder.

Pug was thoughtless when he was angry. He made stupid moves. He didn't think things out, just reacted. Even before Pug took his first swing, Zane knew the fight was over. Pug was going to lose.

Zane dodged Pug's swing and brought his fist into Pug's ribcage. He winced a little at the force of his knuckles hitting Pug, but he had accomplished what he set out to do. He had heard Pug's ribs crack. Zane landed another punch in Pug's kidneys.

He was just about to swing his legs around behind Pug and push him onto his back when he heard someone yell out and he felt a sudden sharp pain in his side. Before Zane could even step back, he knew that Pug had stabbed him.

Just went to show how unqualified Pug was for leadership. He liked to cheat, especially when he wasn't winning. And no matter how much blood dripped out of the small wound in his side, Zane was still determined to win.

Zane swung around and grabbed the hand holding the long silver knife with one of his. His other hand wrapped around Pug's throat, slowly squeezing. Zane didn't want to actually kill Pug, but he knew he was angry enough right now to do it.

He tried to regain control of his temper even as his fingers continued to tighten around Pug's throat. He was momentarily unsteady when Pug fell back onto the floor. Following him down, Zane straddled Pugs body.

He forced the hand with the knife up toward Pug's throat, grabbing it with both hands. The closer to his throat that the sharp blade got, the wider Pug's eyes became. He started to struggle wildly.

Just as Zane got the blade pressed against Pug's throat, Zane looked down at him. "Do you yield?"

Zane knew it was uncommon for a gang leader to be lenient when challenged for their position. Many people thought Zane was too soft, but he didn't actually like killing. That didn't mean he wouldn't when he had to. What was his, stayed his.

"I'm going to kill you," Pug snarled. "And then I'm going to fuck that little pet of yours until he bleeds."

Well, that tears it, Zane thought. Pug had to die. He shoved the knife into Pug's neck. No one threatened his pet and lived. It was as simple as that. Zane watched the light in Pug's eyes slowly fade as blood flowed from the large wound in his neck.

Zane closed his eyes for a moment, taking several deep breaths. The smell of blood overwhelmed Zane and reminded him of his own injuries. He needed to get upstairs and see how bad the damage was. But first...

Standing to his feet, Zane glared out over the crowd surrounding him. “As I said before, no one touches Jiri except me. He belongs to me and I will kill anyone that touches him. Is that understood?”

As soon as everyone had nodded, Zane dropped the knife in his hand to the floor. He stepped away from Pug’s body and reached for the leash Slash held out to him. Zane pulled on the leash just enough to get Jiri over next to him.

He started toward the stairs, stopping to glance back over his shoulder at Slash. “Get that out of here,” Zane said as he pointed to Pug’s body. “And get someone to clean up the mess, then come to my quarters. Jiri is hungry and he needs a hot meal. See to it.”

“Sure thing, Zane,” Slash said, a slight smile gracing his lips.

Zane hadn’t even taken two steps before he heard Slash directing people to clean up the mess and get rid of the body. He knew Slash would take care of things until Zane could. In the meantime, he needed a bath and some rest.

Chapter 3

Jiri followed Zane up the stairs. His eyes kept straying back to the bloody body on the floor. He couldn't believe that Zane had just killed someone right in front of him. It made Jiri wonder what kind of man Zane was.

There just seemed to be so much violence here. It made Jiri shiver. There had been a lot of violence living with Larry, but Jiri was always pretty sure Larry wasn't out to kill him. Larry needed him to work on the vehicles. Here, Jiri had no purpose. There was no reason really to keep him alive.

"You okay, Jiri?"

Jiri looked up at Zane. He wasn't quite sure how to answer that. Technically, yeah, he was probably okay. He felt scared and unsure of what was going to happen. Zane had said that he just needed to do as he said and he would be fine. Jiri hoped that Zane meant that he wouldn't kill him.

Jiri's life might not be perfect, but he didn't want to die. He knew the best thing he could do to ensure his continued survival was to do exactly what Zane told him to do, and nothing else. Maybe that's what being a pet meant.

"I'm okay," Jiri answered carefully. He didn't want to make Zane angry.

"You hungry?" Zane asked as he unlocked the door they stood in front of and opened it. Jiri followed Zane into the room, looking around cautiously.

"I could eat," he replied.

The sheer size of the room amazed Jiri. It was much larger than the little storage closet he lived in. The main room sported a large couch and a couple of overstuffed chairs sitting in front of a fireplace along the wall to his right.

Directly across from the door was a set of double doors. Just beyond them, Jiri could see a wood railing, so he assumed the doors led to a balcony. To the left was a single wooden door. Jiri wondered what was beyond that door, but he was afraid to ask.

“Go ahead and look around if you want, Jiri,” Zane said as he walked through the door Jiri was looking at. “This is your home now. You might as well get acquainted with it.”

Jiri hesitated just a moment, then followed Zane through the single door. His mouth nearly dropped open the moment he spied the large bed centered against the far wall. Jiri wasn't sure he had ever seen a bed that big.

It made sense, though. Zane was huge. He'd need a bed big enough to accommodate his large body. Still, Jiri was pretty sure at least five people his size could fit into the bed and still have room to move around.

Other than the massive bed, Jiri could see two dressers against the wall, two nightstands on either side of the bed, a large overstuffed chair that could have doubled as a bed for Jiri alone, and a simple desk with a chair. Bookshelves lined the entire wall behind the desk.

Jiri briefly wondered if Zane had actually read any of the books on those bookshelves. Jiri himself had never finished school. He had been needed in the garage too much for Larry to let him finish school. Jiri could barely read.

When Zane walked out the door on the left side of the room, Jiri looked over at him. This time, his mouth did drop open. Zane had taken his shirt off before he came back into the room. Jiri was awed at the sheer masculinity Zane exuded. The bandage he applied to his side didn't even distract from his virile good looks.

Zane had a tight, sculpted chest, tons of definition and muscles from the top of his broad shoulders down to his flat abdomen. In a word, Zane was hot. Even his thick thighs, which were still encased in tight jeans, were hot.

“Well,” Zane asked, bringing Jiri back from his drooling, “what do you think?”

Jiri stared at Zane for a moment in confusion. Then it dawned on him. “Oh, it’s very nice, much bigger than my room.”

“Jiri, this *is* your room now. There’s a dresser where you can put your stuff,” Zane said as he pointed to one of the dressers against the wall. “Through here is the bathroom.” Zane indicated the door behind him.

Jiri just nodded.

“Look, why don’t you put your stuff away in the dresser while I make sure our food is coming. Go jump in the shower and clean up. I’ll get you something clean to wear. Whatever of yours is dirty just leave in the bag and we’ll get it cleaned tomorrow.”

“Uh, okay,” Jiri replied. He stood there and watched Zane walk out of the bedroom before heading over to the dresser. He wasn’t sure anything he had was clean so there didn’t seem to be any point in putting anything in the dresser.

He took out the picture of his mother and set it on the back of the dresser leaning up against the wall, then carefully arranged his stuff. There wasn’t much, just a couple personal hygiene items and a small black bag.

Pulling the money he had taken from Larry out of his pocket, Jiri pushed it into the bag and tightly closed the opening. He looked around the room, wondering where he could hide the black bag so no one would find it.

Before he could find a place, Zane walked back into the room. “I thought you were going to go take a shower?”

Jiri clutched the small bag tightly to his chest. “I was just...uh...finding a place for my stuff.”

“What do you have there?” Zane asked nodding toward the little bag Jiri held in his hands.

Jiri looked at the bag for a moment then up at Zane. Would Zane take his money like Larry had? Jiri didn’t want to tell Zane what he had. He hoped that Zane had forgotten about the money. But he also didn’t want to make Zane angry.

“My money.”

“Oh, well, you should probably keep it in the safe. People don’t usually go through my stuff, but you can never be too careful.”

Jiri almost cried out when Zane reached over and took the small bag from him. It was all he really had in the world. He had worked hard for every cent. If Zane took it from him, he had nothing.

Jiri watched Zane walk over to the bookshelf and remove a few books. He was surprised to see a small safe built into the back of the bookshelf. He tried to see what Zane was doing when Zane looked up and motioned him closer.

“Come here and I’ll show you how this works.”

Jiri walked over to stand next to Zane, watching as he turned the dial this way and that until there was a distinct clink and he could turn the handle. He opened the door and put the little black bag inside, then closed the door.

“Did you see how I did that?” Zane asked.

Jiri nodded. Yeah, he had seen it. He wasn’t dumb and he resented Zane treating him like he was. Jiri was about to open his mouth and say something, but Zane started speaking again.

“You can’t give out the combination to anyone, Jiri. Only you and I know what it is. Slash doesn’t even know. Okay?”

Jiri’s eyebrows went up in surprise, but he nodded his head anyway.

“If you forget the combination, just ask me. It’s 37-44-32,” Zane continued. “Also, I know that money is your nest egg and I don’t want you to have to use it if you don’t have to. If you need any money for

anything, you can either ask me or get some out of the safe. Just don't go overboard."

"I can use your money?" Jiri asked, astonished.

"Well, I can't think of anything you need to buy that I won't provide for you but, yeah, if you need money for something, it's here for you to use."

Jiri didn't know what to say. No one had ever offered to share anything with him. Well, there was that one time Larry's buddy, Frank, had offered to share his cot. Jiri had turned him down as fast as he could and locked the door. Frank was just as big a pig as Larry.

"Bath time, baby," Zane said as he unlocked the collar from around Jiri's neck and pulled it off. He pointed toward the bathroom. "I don't mean to be rude, but you stink."

For the first time in a long time Jiri felt like laughing. It was a very unusual feeling for him, one he hadn't experienced a lot. Without a word, just a small smile, Jiri headed into the bathroom.

He quickly took his clothes off and turned on the water. Climbing under the hot spray felt wonderful. Jiri couldn't remember the last time he had bathed in hot water. Larry wouldn't allow it. He said it cost too much money, especially since Jiri was just going to get dirty again working on the cars in the garage.

Jiri just stood there letting the hot water drain the tension from his shoulders. Finally, he lifted his head and reached for the shampoo on the small shelf in the corner. Pouring a good amount into his hand, Jiri washed his hair.

Several moments spent with a washcloth and a bar of soap and Jiri finally felt clean. He rinsed off, then reluctantly turned the water off and climbed from the shower. A folded towel sat on the counter next to a large cotton shirt.

Jiri quickly dried himself off, then his hair, before hanging the towel on the towel bar. He grabbed the shirt and pulled it over his head, laughing when the shirt fell all the way down to his knees. It must be Zane's shirt.

When he was all done, Jiri looked for his dirty clothes, but they were gone. He was pretty sure Zane had been the one to take them, but he wanted to ask anyway. As he had said earlier, he could never be too careful.

It was sad that they lived in a world that was that way now. Jiri still remembered what life had been like before the plague hit. He lived in a nice house with his mother in a quiet neighborhood.

He went to school every day and came home to his mother and a home cooked meal. Life was simple. People were simple. Then the plague hit. Jiri's mother tried to make do to keep them both safe from the evils that roamed the streets.

It hadn't been easy. In desperation, she had married Larry, hoping that he could keep them safe. It had worked until she had been killed by the Night Dwellers six months later. Then Jiri's hell truly began. He found out what life was like in the real world.

Everyone was out for what they could take, steal, or swindle. People killed over a simple piece of bread. Jiri supposed he had some relative safety living at the garage. He did have food every night, such as it was. He also had a roof over his head when many people didn't.

And then there were the monsters that roamed the streets, the Night Dwellers. Jiri never actually saw one, but he had heard stories. The virus that had taken out most of the world's population didn't kill everyone. There were those that caught the virus and didn't die. Those were the worst.

They killed for the joy of killing. They couldn't infect others with the virus, but they were bloodthirsty monsters that came out at night to kill any and all they could find. They also destroyed anything they could get their hands on.

Jiri lived most of the last few years in fear that the Night Dwellers would attack the garage and kill him. Strangely enough, they seemed to not be interested in the little repair shop, attacking the surrounding area instead.

Larry always said it was because the Night Dwellers knew he was an important person and that attacking him would be paramount to slitting their own throats. Jiri wasn't so sure.

He didn't know why the Night Dwellers didn't attack but he was grateful that they didn't. The stories he heard about what they could do curled his toes.

Jiri truly hoped that he never faced one. He knew he wasn't strong like Zane was. He didn't know if he would even know how to defend himself if he had to. Jiri knew how to fix vehicles. That's it.

Of course, maybe he could be of some use to Zane in that department. There didn't seem to be an engine that didn't purr for him. Larry used to say he had the magic touch where vehicles were concerned. Maybe that was something he could use.

"Jiri? You done yet?"

Jiri hurried out of the bathroom when Zane called, only to come to a halt when he saw Zane lounging on the bed, a tray of food beside him. "I was just cleaning up," Jiri quickly said when Zane looked up at him, one of his dark eyebrows raised in query.

Zane nodded. "Come eat before it gets cold."

Jiri felt self-conscious as he climbed onto the bed to sit next to Zane. Standing up, the shirt he wore fell down to his knees. Sitting down, it was just a bit shorter. Jiri felt like he was on display. The strange look in Zane's eyes as he looked down at Jiri's bare legs didn't help.

When Jiri yanked on the edge of the shirt and tried to pull it farther down his legs, Zane raised his eyes to look at him. Jiri knew his face burned red. He could feel it. Jiri rolled his eyes when Zane just laughed.

"Eat," Zane directed again, holding up a piece of chicken. Jiri took the chicken and bit into it. He was surprised at how good it tasted. Not too dry, not too juicy, and the flavor came right through. Jiri quickly took another bite and chewed it.

“Who cooked this?” he asked before taking another bite, then another.

“Harvey is our resident cook. Why? Don’t you like it?”

Jiri shook his head. “No, it’s very good. I just wondered. Does Harvey cook everything?”

Zane nodded. “Yeah, Harvey was a chef before the plague hit. I think he loves cooking just for the sake of cooking. He’s always coming up with something new for us to eat. If you have anything you won’t eat or you’d prefer, just let me know and I’ll pass it along to him.”

“I can’t think of anything I won’t eat. Food is food and you eat what’s put in front of you.” Jiri took the last bite of chicken and laid the bone down on the dish. He eyed Zane for his reaction as he picked up another piece. When Zane didn’t protest, Jiri quickly began eating it.

On his third piece of chicken, Jiri heard Zane laugh. He looked over to see Zane smiling at him, a twinkle in his eyes. “What?” Jiri asked.

“It’s good to see a strong appetite on you. I’ll have to tell Harvey you like his chicken.”

Jiri felt his face heat up again. He really wished his skin wasn’t so pale. Every time he became embarrassed his face turned beet red. A symptom of having an Irish mother, he supposed. “It’s good chicken.”

“Is there anything else you like? Steak? Potatoes? Hamburgers?” Zane asked.

Jiri shrugged his shoulders. “I’ll eat whatever you give me.”

“That’s not what I asked, Jiri. Is there anything you’d like to eat?” Zane’s voice sounded more severe this time.

Jiri suddenly wasn’t so hungry anymore. What if he said the wrong thing? Would Zane punish him? Would he kill him? Jiri set the half-eaten piece of chicken back down on the plate. He picked up a napkin. Using the excuse of wiping his face, he wiped away the tears threatening to seep out of his eyes.

“Jiri? I asked you a question and I want an answer.”

“I—I like homemade bread,” Jiri quickly said. “My mother used to make it three times a week when I was a child. I remember coming home and the whole house smelled of homemade bread.”

Zane nodded. “Anything else?”

Jiri shrugged. “I don’t know. Larry used to give me rice.” Jiri looked down at his hands as he nervously twisted them together in his lap. “I don’t much like rice.”

“Okay, so no rice. What do you like then?”

“I’ll eat whatever is—” Jiri started only to be interrupted by Zane.

“Put in front of you,” Zane finished for Jiri. “Yeah, you said that, Jiri. What I want to know is what you would like to eat. What have you been dreaming about eating? Anything?”

“I don’t know. Larry—”

“Jiri!” Zane said loudly making Jiri jump. “Larry is not here. Larry is never going to be here. You need to forget about Larry.” Zane scooted up farther in the bed, leaning back against the pillows. “Now, answer my question, Jiri.”

Jiri’s eyes darted frantically around the room as he tried to think of some food that he could tell Zane he wanted. He knew Zane was angry with him. He wasn’t giving Zane the answers he wanted, but Jiri couldn’t think of any foods that he wanted. He was just happy to have food.

When Zane reached for him, Jiri cringed. “I don’t know,” he cried out as he fell sideways onto the bed and closed his eyes. He curled into a fetal position and covered his head with his arms. “Please don’t kill me.”

When silence reigned in the room for several moments, Jiri opened his eyes and peered through his arms up at Zane. Jiri was stunned by the look of horror on Zane’s ashen face. He looked truly troubled by Jiri’s words.

“Jiri, what makes you think I’d kill you?” Zane asked quietly.

“You killed that other man when he made you angry,” Jiri squeaked. He lifted his arms from his head and pushed himself up, making sure that there was plenty of space between him and Zane. While Zane seemed horrified by what Jiri said, Jiri wasn’t taking any chances. He didn’t know him.

“Baby, he tried to take you away from me. He challenged my leadership. I didn’t want to kill him, but he left me choice. I had to do it.”

When Zane sat up more, Jiri scooted away from him, getting a stiff glare from Zane. Jiri didn’t know what to do, what to expect. Zane admitted that he was a killer. Jiri knew he had every right to be terrified of him.

But the sad, resigned look on Zane’s face made Jiri wonder if Zane was a killer because he had to be, or because he wanted to be. Larry wouldn’t have had any guilty feelings about killing someone. Maybe that’s what made Zane different from Larry.

“I don’t know what I like to eat. Larry gave me rice every day. Once a week, he put gravy over it. If I was really good, he’d add some meat. It’s been too long since I had anything else,” Jiri said quickly, nearly stumbling over his words. He nervously drew circles in the blanket beneath him with his finger as he waited for Zane’s reaction.

“So, I guess rice is definitely out, huh?” Zane chuckled.

“It’s really gross,” Jiri laughed nervously. His eyes suddenly widened and he looked up at Zane. “But I’ll eat it. I’ll eat whatever you—”

Zane held up his hand to stop Jiri. “Okay, I get it. You’ll eat whatever I put in front of you and you won’t complain. But I think that we need to try a few different things and see what you do like. Maybe I can have Harvey make a variety of dishes for us to try.”

Jiri couldn’t help but smile even as his face heated up again. “I’d like that.”

Zane was quiet after that. The look on Zane’s face as he watched him made Jiri fidget. Jiri wasn’t any good at reading the expressions

on people's faces. Zane was no different. Jiri had no idea what Zane was thinking. But from the way Zane's mouth opened, then closed, Jiri suspected he was about to find out.

"Jiri, I would never hurt you. I hope you know that," Zane said. His eyes fell down to where Jiri was fidgeting with the blanket, then roamed around the room. "I'm sure that all of this is rather scary to you."

Jiri nodded. Hell yeah, it was scary. His situation wasn't that much different than where he had been before. A different roof over his head, a different set of rules, but he was still under someone's thumb.

"I promise to do everything in my power to make sure you're safe, Jiri."

"Larry always promised things when he wanted something, too," Jiri countered. He wanted to believe Zane, he really did. Jiri just didn't hold much belief in promises. People only made them when they wanted something. Jiri wondered what Zane wanted from him.

"Fair enough," Zane replied. "I guess that trust can only come with time."

Well, that made sense to Jiri. He was just surprised that Zane understood that. Jiri was also surprised that Zane agreed with it. Jiri would have thought that the leader of the Death Dealers would be uncompromising. Guess not.

"So, how about you and I make a deal, hmmm?" Zane asked. "I'll try and prove to you that you can trust me, and you give me a chance to prove it."

"Why?"

"Why what?" Zane asked.

"Why do you even care if I trust you? You're the leader of the Death Dealers," Jiri cried out. "You can have anyone you want, do anything you want. Why me?"

"You're cute."

Jiri's eyebrows shot up to his forehead in stunned amazement.
"I'm cute?"

Zane nodded his head.

"You bought me from Larry, then killed a man, because you think I'm cute?"

Zane nodded again, a small smile starting to cross his lips.

"You're out of your fucking mind," Jiri laughed. He couldn't do anything else. Zane was certifiable. Jiri laughed until his sides hurt, tears streaming down his face. When the laughter finally started to fade away, he looked up at Zane. "So, what now?"

"If you'll come up here, I'll explain it to you," Zane said as he gestured to the spot between his legs.

Jiri watched Zane for a moment, then climbed over the breakfast tray and settled down between Zane's legs. He slowly leaned back against Zane's chest until his full weight pressed against Zane's.

Even knowing he was nearly sitting in Zane's lap, Jiri still jumped when Zane wrapped his strong arms around him.

"Shh, it's okay. I'm not going to hurt you," Zane whispered into Jiri's ear. "You're going to have to get used to me touching you, Jiri. I plan on doing a lot more than that. By the time I'm done with you, you won't know where you end and I begin."

"Wha-what do you mean?" Jiri stammered.

"You remember that kiss outside?" Zane asked.

"Yes." Boy, did he. It had made Jiri's toes curl. He was hoping there were a few more like it in his future. No one had ever kissed him like Zane had. Hell, since his mother, no one had ever kissed him, period.

"That's just the beginning of the things I'm going to do to you, Jiri. You're my pet now. My duty is to protect you and provide for you. Your duty is to provide for me as well."

"Provide what? I don't know how to do anything except repair engines," Jiri said, raising his face up to look at Zane in confusion. "You said that wasn't my job anymore."

“It’s not. I’ll teach you what you need to know. For now, the only thing you need to know is that you belong to me and you need to do exactly as I say. The other stuff will come with time.”

“What other stuff? Is Harvey going to teach me to cook or something?” Jiri was totally confused.

“No, baby,” Zane chuckled. He ruffled the side of Jiri’s head. “Although, if you wanted to learn to cook, I can arrange that.”

“Zane, you’re really confusing me. I’m really not trying to make you mad or anything, but could you please just explain what you want from me? If you’re willing to protect me and provide for me, there has to be something you want in return. People just don’t do things like that for free.”

Jiri felt Zane take a deep breath and let it out slowly. He knew Zane probably wasn’t happy with him right now, but Jiri needed to know what was expected of him. One, he didn’t want to be sent back to Larry. Two, he was kind of beginning to like it here. He didn’t want to leave.

“Please, Zane?”

“I don’t want to scare you, Jiri,” Zane admitted.

“You’re scaring me more by keeping things from me.”

“I protect you and keep you safe. Provide whatever it is you need, like food and shelter.”

“And in exchange?” Jiri asked.

“You provide comfort for me,” Zane replied quietly.

From his tone of voice, Jiri almost had the impression that Zane was embarrassed, but that couldn’t be right. Zane was the leader of the Death Dealers. Nothing could embarrass him...could it?

“Comfort?” Jiri hedged.

“That’s what being a pet means, Jiri. You see to my needs while I see to yours. Since you’re not big enough or strong enough to protect yourself, I do that for you. In exchange, you provide for me what I can’t provide for myself.”

“What could I possibly provide you that you can’t provide for yourself?”

“Sex, okay!” Zane shouted. “You provide me with sex.”

Chapter 4

Zane knew the conversation wasn't going well even before Jiri went still in his arms. It wasn't easy to explain to someone that they had just become a sex slave. Especially to someone like Jiri, who Zane suspected had never been touched like Zane desperately wanted to touch him.

"I'm a sex pet?"

Zane rolled his eyes. "Not exactly how I would put it, but essentially you are correct. I provide you with protection and whatever else you need. You provide me with comfort and companionship, including sex."

Jiri was so quiet, Zane was afraid he had silently freaked out. Zane wondered if Jiri would be able to accept the things he wanted from him. Zane had a large appetite for sex. He liked it a lot. Jiri was very small and delicate compared to him. What if he was asking too much?

"And it's okay for us to do that?"

"For us to have sex?" Zane asked in astonishment. "Yes, of course. Why wouldn't it be?"

"Larry always said it was wrong for two men to be together like that."

"I thought we already discussed this. Larry is off his rocker. He doesn't know anything. Besides, here I am leader. What I say goes. And I say it's okay for two men to be together if that's what they want."

Zane waited while Jiri thought about that. He hoped that given time, Jiri would understand that the things Larry said were wrong. It only mattered what they wanted.

“Zane? I have another question,” Jiri murmured.

“Go ahead,” Zane replied. He could feel Jiri’s fingers plucking at the edge of his shirt. Jiri seemed nervous, anxious even. Zane mentally crossed his fingers, hoping for the best, but expecting the worst.

“Does that mean you’ll kiss me like you kissed me before, because I really liked that.”

Zane’s head fell back against the pillows as he groaned. “Damn, Jiri, you’re going to kill me.”

“No!” Jiri cried out. He quickly turned and grabbed the front of Zane’s shirt pulling on it frantically. “I would never kill you, I swear.”

Zane lifted his head as he pulled Jiri down to his chest. He pushed Jiri’s head against his neck then wrapped his arms tightly around his shaking body. “No, of course not, Jiri. I never meant to say that you would. You misunderstood me.”

“Then what—”

“I meant that sometimes the things you say are very...arousing to me.” Zane reached down and grabbed Jiri’s hips and pushed them down against his own so that Jiri would feel Zane’s hard cock.

“See? This is what your words do to me. This is what being close to you does to me.” Zane was gratified to hear Jiri gasp. He wasn’t massive, but he felt that he might be somewhat impressive in size. He just hoped he didn’t scare Jiri too much.

“Can I see it?”

“Uh...okay,” Zane choked out. He reached down between his body and Jiri’s to unzip his pants. Grabbing the sides, he pulled them apart and pushed down until his hard cock popped free. Zane tried to keep his eyes on Jiri to see his reaction, but Jiri’s head was bent down, his hair falling over his face as he looked down.

“Does it hurt?” Jiri asked, his voice almost a whisper.

“Not like you think,” Zane chuckled.

“But it hurts?” Jiri asked, quickly looking up at Zane.

Zane was mystified by the lower lip caught between Jiri’s teeth. He looked agitated, worried. “It’s okay, Jiri. It doesn’t hurt the way you think. It’s not painful, exactly. More like, uncomfortable.”

A sudden thought came to Zane. His brows drew together as he looked down at Jiri. “Jiri, haven’t you ever had a hard on before? Been sexually excited? Masturbated even?”

Jiri shook his head rapidly, his cheeks blossoming red. “Larry said it was wrong. He punished me every time it happened.”

“Oh damn, baby, I’m sorry.” Zane pulled Jiri back against his body and caressed his back as he wondered what kind of hell Jiri had been living in. Zane had half a mind to go back and beat the crap out of Larry for the things he had done to Jiri. “Having a hard on is not wrong. You can not control the way your body responds. Do you understand that?”

Jiri sat back slowly. His eyes were anxious as he glanced up at Zane. “This isn’t wrong?” Jiri asked as he grabbed Zane’s hand and pressed it against the hard bulge in his pants.

Zane briefly closed his eyes before opening them and looking back down at Jiri. “No, Jiri, it’s not wrong. In fact, I think it’s great. I’m hoping it means that you are attracted to me. It will make things between us a lot easier.”

Jiri looked so confused that Zane felt the need to explain. He hoped he didn’t sound like a complete moron. He was swimming in uncharted waters. Explaining to someone like Jiri about sex wasn’t going to be easy. He had been taught that it was wrong.

“When someone is attracted to someone else, as I am to you, our bodies react in certain ways. You make my cock hard and I want to touch you all over, to kiss you. I’m hoping since your body has reacted the way it did that you are just as attracted to me.”

Zane nearly laughed when Jiri's face turned red, but refrained. Jiri didn't need Zane laughing right now. He needed reassurance and understanding.

"I like it when you kiss me," Jiri admitted.

"How about when I touch you?" Zane asked as he squeezed his hand around Jiri's cock through his pants. "Do you like that?"

"It feels, it feels really good," Jiri moaned.

"It's supposed to feel good, Jiri. That's why we like to do it." Zane squeezed Jiri again, rubbing his hands up and down a little until Jiri began to fidget. His hand went to the button on Jiri's jeans. "It would feel a lot better if I didn't have to touch you through your clothes, Jiri."

"Okay."

Zane quickly unbuttoned, then unzipped Jiri's pants before he could change his mind. The moment Zane's hand wrapped around Jiri's length and gave it one simple tug, Jiri cried out and spilled himself all over Zane's hand.

Zane continued to stroke Jiri for a few more moments until Jiri's body stopped shuddering and he collapsed against Zane's chest. Zane wiped his hand on a napkin then wrapped it around Jiri's neck.

"See, baby, it feels really good, doesn't it?" Zane whispered against Jiri's hair.

Jiri just nodded. "What happened?"

Zane chuckled. "You had an orgasm, baby. That's what happens when people have sex."

"That's sex?"

"No," Zane laughed as he wondered how anyone could be so naive in this day and age. "That's not exactly sex. That's part of it. There's a lot more to it than that. What you just got was called a hand job. There are also blow jobs, rim jobs, intercourse, making out. A lot of stuff."

"Do they feel just as good?"

"Yeah, some of them feel even better."

“Oh, I want to try those.” Jiri tilted his head back to look at Zane.
“Can we, Zane?”

Zane groaned. Jiri *was* going to kill him. Maybe it was a plot by Larry to torture him first and then kill him. Zane knew that Jiri had no idea what his words were doing to him and he prayed Jiri never found out. Zane was strangely afraid that if Jiri discovered his power over Zane’s body, there’d be no question who was the master and who was the slave.

“Zane?”

“Yeah, Jiri, we can try them.”

“Now?” Jiri asked.

Zane nearly jumped out of his skin when he felt tentative fingers wrap around his cock. He couldn’t hold back the groan that broke free from his lips. He was sure that Jiri had no idea how good that actually felt.

“Harder, baby, squeeze harder and move your hand up and down,” Zane encouraged. The moment Jiri began moving his hand, Zane knew he wouldn’t last long. Jiri might not be experienced, but he more than made up for it with enthusiasm.

“I’m going to come in a minute, Jiri,” Zane groaned. Hell, he was going to come any second if Jiri kept doing what he was doing. Jiri had one hand wrapped around Zane’s cock. The other hand was gently stroking Zane’s ball sac.

“Jiri,” Zane cried out as his body went stiff and his cock erupted. Like Zane had done to him, Jiri continued to stroke Zane’s cock several times as Zane’s cock shot out ropes of pearly white cum. He felt Jiri buck against his leg, then warm liquid covered him.

“Enough, Jiri,” Zane said as he reached down and grabbed Jiri’s wrist. He was very sensitive now. Zane grabbed Jiri around the waist and pulled him up to lay against his chest.

“Is that supposed to happen?” Jiri asked.

“What?”

“You didn’t even touch me and I...I...”

Zane chuckled. "It happens, but not all of the time. Personally, I think it's great that you got excited enough to come again. Maybe after we rest we'll see if we can get you to do it again, huh?"

Jiri laughed. "I'd like that, Zane."

"Me, too," Zane said. "I also think we should get out of these wet clothes and get into bed. This stuff gets a little sticky after awhile."

Jiri nodded and climbed off the bed to pull his shirt over his head and drop it on the floor. Zane watched him getting his first good look at Jiri's nude body. Oh hell, he was right. Jiri was breathtaking. *He was so doomed.*

Rolling to the side of the bed, Zane quickly pulled his clothes off before crawling underneath the covers. He held the edge up for Jiri, smiling when Jiri climbed right in and laid down, one leg thrown over Zane's, head tucked under Zane's chin.

Zane wrapped his arms around Jiri and settled back against the pillows. He realized that he was suddenly content, something he hadn't felt in a long time. Maybe having a pet wasn't such a bad thing.

"Zane?"

"Yeah, Jiri?"

"I don't have to do this with anyone else do I? It seems kind of personal and—and—well, I just don't want to do it with anyone else," Jiri explained. "You won't make me, will you?"

"No, Jiri, you only do this with me. You're my pet and I don't share. Remember what happened to Pug when he wanted me to share?"

"You killed him."

"And I'll kill anyone that tries to do this with you. This is only for me, Jiri. I'm the only one that gets to see you like this or touch you like this. I'll be very upset if you do this with anyone else. Got it?"

"Got it, Zane," Jiri laughed.

"Now, close your eyes and go to sleep, Jiri. We are both going to need our rest if I'm going to teach you about sex."

“I’m already asleep.”

* * * *

Zane opened his eyes, not quite understanding what the warm body curled around him was doing in his bed. He lifted his head and looked down at the man pressed against his side, gasping as the previous night’s events flooded back.

“Jiri,” he whispered. Zane let his head fall back against the pillow. It was Jiri in his bed. Not some stranger he had brought home. Not some nameless man that he would never see again. It was Jiri, and Jiri belonged to Zane.

That thought alone had Zane’s arms curling around Jiri’s body. He pulled him up until Jiri was splayed over his chest, his head nestled in the crook of Zane’s neck. A low groan fell from Zane’s lips when Jiri’s legs separated and fell to the mattress on either side of Zane’s body. It pushed Zane’s cock right up against the underside of Jiri’s soft nut sac.

He reached down with his large hands to palm Jiri’s ass cheeks. Damn, such a perfect little ass. Each rounded globe fit neatly into the palms of Zane’s hands as if they were made for him. Not an inch wasted.

Zane lifted his hips. He let out another low groan as his hard cock slid up the crease of Jiri’s ass. He again briefly thought of his theory that this was all a plot to kill him after slowly torturing him. The more time he spent with Jiri, the more he wondered if he was right. Jiri just seemed too perfect to be real.

Just then, Jiri began to stir. Zane watched with amusement as Jiri rubbed his face with his hand then turned to look down at Zane.

“Morning, baby. Did you sleep well?”

Jiri’s eyes darted around as if confused, then came back to Zane’s. “Did I sleep on top of you all night?”

“No,” Zane chuckled, “but it would have been okay if you did. You hardly weigh anything at all. Besides,” Zane said as he pushed his hips up again, “I kind of like this position. It has lots of possibilities.”

Zane could barely contain his grin as Jiri’s eyes widened. “Za–Zane,” Jiri croaked. His hands clenched against Zane’s arms, fingernails digging into Zane’s flesh. “You–you–your...”

Zane nodded. “My dick is in your ass.” Well, it wasn’t, not yet, but Zane had every intention of it being there soon. Zane pumped his hips again. His eyebrow went up in surprise at the hiss that slid out of Jiri’s mouth, Jiri’s eyes closing.

When Jiri’s eyes opened back up and looked down at him, Zane was surprised by the arousal burning in their blue depths. “Is this okay? Are we allowed to do this?” Jiri asked hesitantly.

“Yeah, we’re allowed to do this,” Zane chuckled.

Jiri was silent for a moment, his lower lip caught between his teeth. Zane thought Jiri looked absolutely adorable.

“Is there more?”

Zane grinned. He couldn’t help it. On one hand, he was amazed that someone could be so completely sheltered from the realities of life, including sex. On the other hand, he was thrilled that Jiri had been sheltered.

It left the teaching of the intimate relationship between two people up to him. That was a daunting task, but one Zane looked forward to with great enthusiasm. Jiri seemed innocent and naïve, but the curious look on his face told Zane that he might be interested in learning.

Jiri was giving Zane his trust, even if he didn’t realize it. Zane had to make sure that he didn’t betray that trust by doing anything that Jiri might object to. And he wouldn’t know what that might be until he tried.

“Get the bottle of lube out of the nightstand drawer and I’ll show you.”

Zane watched as Jiri climbed over him to reach the nightstand. He pulled the drawer open and searched around until he found the bottle of lube, holding it up in his hand and looking over his shoulder at Zane.

“This?”

Zane nodded, his eyes already straying down Jiri’s naked body with great interest. He held out his hand for the bottle, taking it from Jiri and dropping it on the mattress beside him before reaching up for Jiri.

“Climb back on, baby,” Zane directed.

Jiri climbed back on Zane, straddling his body. Zane grabbed Jiri, one hand around his neck, the other hand grazing his ass. He pulled Jiri down and took his lips. Zane explored, took and gave, as he kissed Jiri until Jiri squirmed against him, kissing back.

Zane pulled Jiri further up his body, then grabbed the bottle off the mattress beside him. Popping the lid, he poured some out on his fingers and dropped the bottle back onto the mattress. As Zane started spreading the lube between Jiri’s ass cheeks, Zane saw his eyes widen and his face flush.

With a little grin of knowledge about what was to come, Zane pressed his finger against Jiri’s tight entrance. Jiri was so tight Zane wondered if he was going to be able to loosen him up at all. He didn’t want to do anything that would hurt Jiri.

“Relax, Jiri. Take a couple of deep breaths and relax. We won’t do anything you don’t want to do.”

“It just feels weird,” Jiri whispered.

“Yeah, now it does, but wait until I have you loosened up a bit. I promise you, it’s worth it,” Zane replied.

“You’ve done this before?”

Zane nodded. “Many times. It gets better, I swear,” he chuckled.

Finally, after several deep breaths from Jiri, Zane was able to press one finger in. He moved it up and down, side to side, and in and out. After a few minutes, Zane felt Jiri relax even more.

“Ready for another one, baby?”

“Another one?” Jiri squeaked. “You’re putting in another one? How many are you going to put in there?”

Zane chuckled. “No less than three, baby. I have to stretch you out enough to take me without hurting you.”

“Okay,” Jiri said. He squeezed his eyes closed and stiffened his body as if he was bracing himself.

“Jiri, we don’t have to do this if you don’t want to,” Zane said.

Jiri popped one eye open and looked down at Zane, then the other. “No, I want to do this. I’m just—I guess I’m scared. I’m afraid this is going to hurt.”

“That’s why I’m preparing you first, so that it doesn’t hurt. Although, it would be better if you were on your hands and knees.”

Jiri shook his head rapidly. “No, I like it where I am.”

“Jiri, it really would be easier if you were on your hands and knees, or even your back. This position,” Zane explained as he slapped Jiri on the hip, “is not the best position for your first time.”

Jiri shook his head again. “No, I don’t want to be on my hands or knees or my back. I need to be able to see you.”

“Jiri, you can still see me if you’re on your back,” Zane reasoned.

“No!” Jiri nearly shouted.

When Jiri started to pull away, to climb off of him, Zane wrapped his arms around Jiri and pulled him back down to lay against his chest. “It’s okay, Jiri. If it’s that important for you to be on top, we can do that.”

Jiri was silent. Zane could feel Jiri’s chest moving rapidly against his own. Zane smoothed Jiri’s golden hair back from his face. He ran his hands down Jiri’s back and over his ass, then back up. His intent was to soothe Jiri, but he felt another reaction pressing against his abdomen.

“You ready to try this again?” Zane asked.

Jiri was slow to nod, but a small smile played across his lips. Zane took that as a good sign and moved his hands back down to Jiri’s ass.

He reached down and grabbed the bottle of lube again, pouring more onto his fingers before dropping the bottle on the bed.

Spreading Jiri's ass cheeks, Zane pressed his fingers into him again. Zane could only assume Jiri felt more at ease because he didn't have far to stretch Jiri before he could get a third finger in.

Zane spent a few minutes stretching Jiri, moving his fingers around. He couldn't tell if Jiri was enjoying what he was doing because Jiri's face was buried in his neck. Zane just hoped that the soft mewling sounds he made were good ones.

"You ready for me now, baby?"

Jiri lifted his head to look down at Zane in confusion. "Ready for what?"

"Remember? I told you I was going to have my dick in your ass?" Zane watched Jiri gulp, then nod. He looked like he was starting to tense up again, bracing himself. Zane couldn't have that. "Kiss me, Jiri," Zane demanded.

Jiri immediately leaned down and pressed his lips against Zane's. Once Jiri was occupied kissing him, Zane grabbed Jiri's legs and spread them further apart, pulling them up until Jiri was kneeling over the top of him. Jiri's knees hugged Zane's chest, his ass hovered over Zane's thick cock, right where Zane wanted him.

Zane grabbed Jiri's ass and pulled the cheeks apart. Slowly, he lowered Jiri down, pushing his body back a little. As Jiri's body began to take him, inch by slow, aching inch, Zane pressed his hands down on Jiri's hips.

By the time Jiri was fully impaled on his cock, Zane was in heaven. Jiri was so tight, so perfect. And Zane didn't think Jiri even realized that it happened. But, he could be wrong, Zane realized a moment later when Jiri reared back into a full sitting position, taking even more of Zane's cock into him.

"That's—that's unbelievable," Jiri stammered. "I can feel you in me."

Zane chuckled. "It gets better."

The astonished look on Jiri's face said that Jiri didn't believe him, but Zane was determined to prove it. Grabbing Jiri's hips, Zane began pushing himself up into Jiri. Over and over again, he thrust.

He watched Jiri the entire time. A kaleidoscope of emotions crossed Jiri's face, everything from wonder to desire to complete fascination. Zane thought he might have created a monster.

Jiri's hands had moved to rest on Zane's chest. His fingers clenched against Zane's pec muscles. Once again, Jiri's lower lip was caught between his teeth. Zane absently noted that Jiri seemed to do that a lot. It was still adorable. "Lean back, baby," Zane ordered.

As Jiri leaned back, Zane grabbed Jiri's hard cock and began stroking it to the rhythm he was creating with his hips. Within seconds, Jiri's head had dropped back, his neck arching, as he cried out.

Zane felt Jiri's muscles tighten around him at the same moment that warm seed shot out of Jiri's cock. Zane continued to stroke Jiri even as he roared out, light flashing in his eyes as the world around him exploded.

When Zane came back to his senses, he realized that Jiri had collapsed down onto him. Jiri murmured softly against Zane's neck. His hands gently kneaded the muscles on Zane's chest.

Zane also realized that he still had Jiri's cock in his hands. Giving it one last stroke, Zane released Jiri and brought his wet hand up, licking the seed off of it. Damn! Even that was good. Shaking his head at his folly, Zane tilted his head down to look at Jiri.

"You okay, baby?"

Chapter 5

Okay? Was he okay? Jiri lifted his head to look up at Zane, wondering if Zane had lost his mind. Of course he wasn't okay. He had just had sex for the very first time in his life. And he liked it a lot.

No wonder Larry had kept him sheltered from this. If Jiri had known this delight was out there waiting for him, he would have left Larry ages ago. He had no idea it could be this way between two people.

Jiri wanted more. "So, how often can we do that?"

Jiri smiled at the deep chuckle that came out of Zane's mouth. "We can do that as much as we want. However, my little sex maniac, we need food first. Not enough food means not enough fuel. Not enough fuel..."

"Yeah, yeah, I get it. No fuel, no go," Jiri replied as he sat back up. "I am a mechanic, you know."

"Not anymore you're not. Now you're my pet," Zane reminded Jiri as he carefully pulled out of Jiri and rolled them onto their sides.

"Put sex in front of that and I might agree to it."

Jiri grinned when Zane's eyebrows shot up. Jiri was realistic. He knew he now belonged to Zane. There wasn't much he could do about it, even if he wanted to. He just didn't see the need to protest.

He was in a good position with Zane and he knew it. Zane was big enough and strong enough to protect him from just about everyone and everything. If all he wanted in return was someone to take care of him and give him *comfort*, Jiri was all for it.

That didn't mean he was going to be a mindless slave, however. Zane needed to learn that right from the beginning. Oh, Jiri had no

doubt he'd be as obedient as he could. He still had misgivings about Zane killing the man downstairs.

"You might agree?" Zane asked.

Jiri shrugged. "I think sex pet sounds better. Gives me a definite designation, don't you think? I mean, anyone can be a pet. If I'm a sex pet, I'm more than just a regular pet," Jiri reasoned. It sounded plausible to him.

Zane stared down at him, silent for so long, Jiri wondered if he had overstepped his bounds. He was kind of joking around. Jiri did want to mean more to Zane than just a pet, but he wasn't totally serious about being called a sex pet. Maybe Zane didn't have a sense of humor.

"Sex pet, huh?" Zane said as he rolled to the side of the bed and swung his legs over the side.

Jiri pushed himself up to his elbow as he watched Zane sit up. "You don't have to call me a sex pet if you don't want to. I just thought—" Jiri stopped speaking as Zane stood to his feet and walked into the bathroom, leaving Jiri by himself without a word.

Okay, so Zane didn't have a sense of humor. And obviously, Jiri was going to remain a pet and not be elevated to sex pet. Maybe he hadn't earned the right to be considered Zane's sex pet.

And maybe Zane hadn't been satisfied with him. Why should he be? What did Jiri know about sex? Everything he knew he had learned in the last few hours from Zane. That wasn't nearly long enough to learn how to please the leader of the Death Dealers.

As Jiri rolled himself to the side of the bed and sat up, he really wished he had kept his mouth shut. He shouldn't have said anything at all. It was obvious Zane was upset with him. Zane might not be outright angry, but he didn't seem pleased, either.

"Get dressed and I'll take you downstairs to meet Harvey."

Jiri looked up to see Zane walk back into the bedroom. He watched him cross the room to his dresser, grabbing a black shirt and

pulling it over his head. Then he grabbed a clean pair of black jeans and some socks.

“Yes, Zane,” Jiri replied quietly as he got up and walked over to his bag of dirty clothes. Reaching into the bag, Jiri pulled one item out at a time, smelling each to see which was the cleanest. Finally settling on a dark brown shirt and a pair of faded jeans, Jiri got dressed.

Jiri turned to look at Zane, his eyes instantly falling to the collar and leash Zane held in his hand. He didn’t want to wear it. They were heading downstairs where everyone would see him, everyone would know what he was.

“You don’t need that,” Jiri said quickly. “I won’t run.”

“I’m not worried about you running, Jiri. Until I can have you permanently marked, you have to wear the collar when we leave the room.”

Jiri rolled his shoulder a little. He eyed the collar and leash with distaste. “Can I just wear the collar?” Maybe that wouldn’t be too bad. Jiri’s spirits fell when Zane shook his head. He closed his eyes briefly, praying for the courage to get through his new life with some dignity.

Opening his eyes, Jiri stepped over to Zane and turned around so that the collar could be attached to his neck. The black leather felt cold against his skin as Zane wrapped it around his throat and clicked the latch closed.

Jiri ran his hands along the edge of the collar, pulling it away from his neck a little. He felt ridiculous. He wore a collar and leash like a dog. Maybe that was the interpretation of *pet*. Jiri had thought it meant companion or something.

As Zane pulled the leash and led Jiri from the room, Jiri realized that he had been wrong. He wasn’t Zane’s companion. He wouldn’t be sharing stolen moments with him, or companionship, or anything else Jiri might have fantasized about. He was a pet. He was Zane’s possession, like Zane’s motorcycle.

Jiri even doubted that he would have any say in his future from now on. Jiri felt tears prick the edges of his eyes as he realized that once again he was at the mercy of someone else, and there didn't seem to be any way out.

His life, his wellbeing, even his ability to breathe, were all in Zane's hands. Jiri wondered what would happen if he misbehaved. Would Jiri be punished for not pleasing Zane? Killed like the man from the night before?

Jiri suddenly felt miserable. He dropped his head down, watching as he put one foot in front of the other. He didn't look up to see where they were going. He didn't really care. He just followed behind Zane, stopping when Zane did, walking when Zane did.

"Harvey," Zane said, bringing Jiri out of his gloomy thoughts. "This is Jiri. We need to get a little more meat on his bones. He's been eating nothing but rice and gravy for quite a while. I'm hoping you might be able to interest him with your fine cooking."

Jiri looked up when a short, thick, bald man walked up to him. He stood several inches shorter than Zane, almost as short as Jiri, but he seemed very intimidating. Jiri took a step back, closer to Zane.

"What do you like to eat, boy?" Harvey asked.

"Oh, you don't even want to go there, Harvey," Zane chuckled. "I can tell you right now, the answer would only drive you batty. Just provide him with a variety of dishes until we figure out what he does or doesn't like."

Harvey reached over and grabbed Jiri's chin, tilting Jiri's head from one side to the other. He dropped Jiri's chin and grabbed his arms, squeezing his hands around Jiri from wrist to shoulder.

"Uh huh," he murmured. He turned to look at Zane, nodding his head. "Well, it may take a while, but I can get him fattened up for you."

"I just want him healthy, Harvey," Zane replied.

"I can do that, too," Harvey said as he walked back over to his stove and picked up a spatula. "You can start him out on breakfast."

Harvey waved the spatula in his hand toward the doorway. “Go sit down and I’ll bring you out something.”

Zane chuckled as he led Jiri into the dining room. Jiri followed slowly behind, pulled along by the leash attached to the collar around his neck. The noise level in the room they walked into stunned him enough to look up. What Jiri saw surprised him.

It seemed to be just like a regular restaurant. Tables and booths littered the room. The level of noise in the room came from the multitude of people sitting here and there. Some chatted, others ate. Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves immensely.

What truly stunned Jiri and made him very uncomfortable were the men and women sitting on the floor. The collars and leashes they wore looked similar to his and they all seemed to be sitting at the feet of others. Jiri knew instantly that they were pets, just like him.

With that thought in mind, Jiri followed Zane across the room to a large half-circle booth sitting close to the back wall. When Zane stopped next to the booth, Jiri glanced around the room again, then at the floor next to Zane’s feet. He knew what was expected of him.

With a great deal of trepidation, Jiri started to kneel at Zane’s feet only to feel a hand grab him around the arm. Halfway down to the floor, Jiri looked up at Zane.

“No, Jiri, you sit up at the table with me.”

“But,” Jiri waved his hand around the room at the other pets sitting on the floor, “the other pets are sitting on the floor.”

Zane pulled Jiri up and pointed to the booth. “Regular pets sit on the floor, Jiri. Sexy little men who have been elevated to the status of sex pet sit at the table.”

“Sex pet? Really?” Jiri whispered.

Jiri couldn’t keep the grin off his face when Zane nodded. His previous sullen mood suddenly flew away, replaced with delight. He stepped over to the booth and scooted in to sit down, making room for Zane to sit next to him.

He felt like jumping up and down with joy. Zane had heard him and had agreed to consider Jiri a sex pet. Yes, he was still a pet. Yes, he was still a possession. But now, he was more than that, too.

“Hungry?” Zane asked.

Jiri nodded. He suddenly felt ravenous. He folded his hands together in his lap as he waited, anxious for their food to arrive. He found it hard to sit still.

“I thought after breakfast we’d go talk to DJ about your mark,” Zane said. “How does that sound?”

“My mark?” Jiri asked curiously.

He felt Zane’s hand brush against his neck. “Yes. When a protector claims a pet, the pet is given a permanent mark, like a tattoo, that says you belong to that protector. Each protector’s mark is different, unique.”

Jiri’s eyes roamed around the room. He began to notice what he had missed before. Several pets wore collars and leashes but even more had just marks on their necks. Some wore all three.

“How come not everyone has a mark?”

Zane shrugged. “Pets usually aren’t marked until the master has decided to keep the pet permanently. Until then, they wear the collar and leash.”

“You’re going to keep me permanently?” Jiri asked in surprise, and a great deal of delight.

Zane smiled. He reached over and caressed the side of Jiri’s face. “I’m definitely keeping you, Jiri.”

Jiri couldn’t help ginning. He knew he must look like a fool but Zane’s words thrilled him all of the way down to his toes. “Will I still have to wear the collar and leash if I get this mark?”

“Sometimes, but not usually. My mark should be enough of a deterrent to most to stay away from you.” Zane looked a little sheepish, which Jiri found endearing. “There will be times when you will have to wear the leash and collar, Jiri, for your own safety. I’m sorry.”

For some reason that Jiri could not fathom, he believed Zane. “Okay.”

Zane looked surprised. “Okay? That’s it? You’re not going to argue with me?”

“What good would that do me? I’m a pet, remember?” Jiri wished he could take the words back the moment they left his mouth. A blank wall fell down over Zane’s face as he turned away from Jiri.

Jiri scooted over until his body pressed against Zane’s. He leaned up a little to whisper into Zane’s ear. “I’m sorry, Zane. That didn’t come out like I wanted it to.”

Zane turned to look back at Jiri, his face still guarded. “Then how did you mean it?”

Jiri shrugged. “I just meant that I understand. There will be times that I have to behave like a pet, even if it means I have to wear a collar and a leash.” Jiri waved his hand over the table they sat at. “Other times, I get to be a sex pet.”

Zane stared at Jiri for several moments as if trying to gauge Jiri’s truthfulness. Finally, he wrapped an arm around Jiri’s shoulders and pressed him close. He tucked Jiri’s head under his chin.

“This is not always going to be easy, Jiri. I know how to have a pet about as much as you know how to be a pet.” Zane chuckled quietly. “I suspect that we’re going to have to muddle through this together.”

Jiri smiled against Zane’s neck. He reached behind him and grabbed Zane’s hand, then tilted his head back to look up at him. “As long as we do it together, right?”

Zane grinned. “Right.”

Jiri jumped as a loud clank sounded behind him. He turned to see a slim man setting several dishes of food down on the table beside him. Jiri felt disappointed when Zane dropped his arms from around him, but turned anyway to look over the food.

It all looked so delicious and the smells alone made Jiri almost groan. Harvey seemed to have cooked a lot of food. Jiri wondered if

there was anything left in the kitchen, but he wasn't about to complain. He had never seen so much food in his life.

"What looks good, little one?"

Jiri shook his head. "Everything?"

Zane chuckled. "How about we start off with one thing and go from there?"

Jiri nodded, still eyeing the food set out before him. He wasn't even sure what everything was.

"What would you like to try first?" Zane asked as he grabbed an empty plate.

Jiri shook his head again. "I don't know. It all smells so good," he replied getting another chuckle from Zane. Jiri could feel his face heat up.

"How about you just sit back and relax. The food is not going anywhere. We'll try a little bite of everything and see what you like, okay?"

Jiri nodded, letting out a relieved breath. That sounded like a good plan to him. With so much food before him, he couldn't decide what to try first. He couldn't remember the last time he had so many choices.

Jiri watched with great anticipation as Zane pulled a plate closer and cut a small bite with his fork. His mouth was already open when Zane turned and offered him the bite. A moment later, Jiri's eyes closed in ecstasy.

He chewed slowly, savoring the sweet tastes cascading over his tongue. When he was done, he opened his mouth again, hoping for another bite. He heard Zane chuckle as he cut another bite with the fork.

"Well, I guess it's safe to say that you like waffles."

"Waffles?"

Zane nodded as he placed another bite in Jiri's mouth. "Harvey's specialty breakfast, waffles with strawberry compote and whipped

cream. The side dishes are fried eggs, hash browns, sausage, and toast.”

Jiri had no idea what those things were, but they sounded wonderful. If they tasted anything like the waffles, Jiri felt positive he would love them. Jiri opened his mouth for another fork full of food.

Twenty minutes later, Jiri sat back in his seat and rubbed his stomach. He groaned. He felt so full he could burst. He couldn’t ever remember eating so much. Zane must think he was a complete glutton.

“Get enough to eat?”

Jiri turned wide eyes to look at Zane. “Seriously? If I eat another bite I might burst.”

Zane reached over and patted Jiri’s thigh. “Good. Let’s hope you like lunch as much as you did breakfast.” Zane scooted out of the booth and stood up. He reached a hand back for Jiri. “Now, it’s time to get down to business.”

“Business?” Jiri asked curiously as he grabbed Zane’s hand and scooted out of the booth. He felt his leash drop down behind him. Knowing that he had to be tethered right now, he reached back and pulled the leash around to the front of his collar, then held the long length out to Zane.

Zane grimaced as he took the length of leash. “Yes, we need to go see about your mark.”

Jiri nodded. “What type of mark will I have?” Jiri asked as he followed Zane out of the dining room. Suddenly, he stopped. He saw Zane pause to look back at him.

“Jiri?”

“Can we—is it okay if we go thank Harvey for breakfast?”

Zane stared at Jiri long enough to make him feel anxious then nodded his head. “I suppose that would be okay.”

Jiri clenched his hands together nervously as he followed Zane into the busy kitchen. He probably should have kept his mouth shut. Jiri was pretty sure that thanking someone for something instead of

just taking what you wanted would be seen as a weakness by just about everyone here.

He couldn't help it. His mother had drilled into his head that he should have good manners, no matter what the situation. Good manners and a kind heart separated the men from the monsters, even the human monsters.

"Harvey? My pet has something he wants to say to you," Zane said as he stepped back, his arms crossed over his chest. He had a strange sort of smirk on his face as if he knew something that Jiri didn't.

Jiri glanced over at the cook, wondering if he was once again going to make an ass out of himself. He usually did when he tried to be polite to people. They all thought he was out of his mind, especially in this day and age.

Gathering together all of his courage Jiri smiled over at Harvey. "I wanted to thank you for breakfast. I haven't tasted anything so delicious since before my mother died when I was a small child."

Harvey just stared at Jiri for several moments then nodded his head. "You're welcome, boy. Now, get out of my kitchen so that I can cook your lunch. You'll be having hot roast beef sandwiches with dipping sauce and homemade potato salad." Harvey shook his spatula at Jiri. "And I expect you to eat every last bite. I'll make you something special for dessert if you do."

"Yes, sir," Jiri said. "I will."

Jiri turned back to follow Zane out of the kitchen only to find him staring over his head at Harvey with his mouth hanging open in shock. Jiri glanced back over his shoulder to Harvey. He was surprised to find a small smile on Harvey's rugged face. Jiri was pretty sure that Harvey didn't smile often.

"Good manners are always appreciated, Zane. You might want to remember that," Harvey said as he turned back to his stove. "You're little pet might be able to teach you a thing or two about that."

Jiri felt a small thrill shoot through him at Harvey's compliment, at least until he looked up into Zane's face. He didn't look happy. It was only then that Jiri realized that by complimenting Jiri, Harvey had insulted Zane.

"Zane works really hard to take care of everyone," Jiri tried to say to Harvey as he turned to face him. "He doesn't need to have good manners if he—"

"No, Jiri," Zane said as he settled his hands on Jiri's shoulders, "Harvey is right. I haven't thanked him enough for all that he does for us. He was just reminding me of that, weren't you, Harvey?"

"Of course." Harvey chuckled. "Zane is a good leader, boy. You'd do good to listen to him. He takes good care of us, but sometimes he forgets the little things. I think you also might do well to remind him of what he forgets."

"Oh, no, I couldn't—" Jiri stammered.

"He protects you well, Zane. That is a rare quality in a pet."

Jiri had no idea what Harvey meant by that statement. He couldn't protect Zane from a stiff wind. He briefly wondered if Harvey had lost his marbles. He seemed to talk in riddles that Jiri didn't understand.

"Come along, Jiri. Harvey needs to get back to work, and you and I need to go see about getting you marked."

Jiri nodded, a little dazed and totally confused as he turned and followed Zane out of the kitchen. He still felt confused about what had just happened and he certainly didn't like the strange little looks Zane kept giving him. He didn't know what they meant.

"Zane?" Jiri asked when they came to a room that looked as much like an office as Jiri had ever seen. There was a large wooden desk in the middle of the room with chairs in front of it. Bookshelves lined one wall and a couch sat against the other. This was where they were going to get his marking done?

Zane simply closed and locked the door behind them, then turned to look at Jiri. The gleam in Zane's eyes made Jiri nervous. He felt

like prey before a hunter. Jiri took a couple of steps back until the desk bit into his thigh.

"I thought we were going to go see about my mark?" Jiri asked as Zane advanced on him.

"We are but we have something else to do first," Zane drawled just before his hand wrapped around Jiri's neck and he lowered his mouth to press his lips against Jiri's.

Jiri whimpered as his body melted against Zane's. Oh, he really loved it when Zane kissed him. He loved it when Zane did anything to him. He felt like his body went from okay to hot and bothered in seconds.

As Zane's lips moved to his neck, Jiri let his head drop back on his shoulders. His hands clenched around Zane's arms. "Oh, Zane," he whispered. Jiri was so intent on Zane's lips on his neck that he didn't realize Zane had unzipped his pants and pushed them out of the way until he felt the cold air pass over him.

Before Jiri could say anything, Zane had turned him around and pressed his body down over the desk. Jiri felt the hard wood bite into the palms of his hand as he tried to grip the edge of the desk, his breath coming out in great gasps.

"I'm going to fuck you now, Jiri," Zane growled into Jiri's ear.

Yeah, Jiri had kind of gotten that idea just about the time Zane had thrown him down on the desk. He wasn't complaining. He just wished Zane would hurry up and do it. A long moan fell from Jiri's lips when he felt Zane's lubed fingers press into him, stretching him.

A moment later, Zane replaced his fingers with his hard cock. Jiri grunted as Zane thrust into him, sinking all of the way in. Zane had been so careful with him the last time they had done this. Jiri hadn't been aware that it could be so...so...so animalistic.

He released his grip on the desk and tried to reach for his own aching cock, but every time Zane rammed into him, it shoved Jiri further across the desk. Jiri just had to hold on for the ride, but it was

killing him. He could feel his hard cock pulsing, aching for one small touch.

Suddenly, it was there as Zane leaned close over Jiri's back and wrapped his large hand around Jiri. He began stroking Jiri's cock to the same rhythm he thrust into his tight ass. Jiri went out of his mind with sensation.

"You going to come for me, baby?" Zane whispered heavily into Jiri's ear as he rubbed his thumb over the small slit at the top of Jiri's cock.

"Yes! Oh, God, yes!" Jiri wailed. His hands dug into the hard wood of the desk as the tingle at the base of his spine wrapped around his body and spiked in his cock. Jiri's cock throbbed, then seed shot from him as he let out a loud cry.

Even as his vision swam before him, Jiri felt Zane's body stiffen behind him, then warm shots of liquid filled him. Zane continued to thrust into him for several moments before collapsing down over Jiri, holding his larger body up by his arms.

Jiri panted heavily, his breath coming rapidly from his chest. He was quickly coming to like this sex thing. Zane could throw him over a desk anytime he wanted as far as Jiri was concerned.

When Zane sat up and pulled his softening cock from him, Jiri groaned in disappointment. He liked the feeling he got from being connected so intimately with Zane. It made him feel special, as if Zane might really care about him.

"You okay, little man?" Zane asked as he handed Jiri a napkin to clean up. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Jiri laughed, shaking his head as he stood up. "No."

Zane turned Jiri and cupped his face. "You'll tell me if I do?"

Jiri could feel his face heat up even as he nodded his head. He dropped his eyes down, embarrassed to be talking so openly about what they had just been doing. He wasn't used to being so matter of fact about sex. Hell, he wasn't used to talking about sex at all.

“I’m serious, Jiri,” Zane said as he pulled his pants up and zipped them. “I’m a lot more experienced than you are. I also have very big appetites.”

Jiri zipped his pants. He looked over at Zane in confusion. “Appetites?”

“That means I like to have sex a lot.”

Jiri nodded his head. Okay, that made sense. Jiri couldn’t really blame Zane. The feeling he got from Zane when they had sex was amazing. If it was like that all of the time, he’d have a large appetite for sex, too.

“I’m not sure that’s going to be a problem,” Jiri said, laughing.

“Oh? You don’t, huh?” Zane chuckled. He walked over to the door, waiting for Jiri to join him.

Jiri cursed his pale skin again as he felt his face heat up again. “No, I don’t.”

Zane grabbed for Jiri’s leash, chuckling. He unlocked the door and opened it. “Ready to go get your mark now?”

Jiri nodded. Well, he was pretty sure, anyway.

Chapter 6

Zane chuckled as he walked out of his office. Jiri was a constant surprise to him. He took to sex like a duck to water. Zane felt a little leery about that, though. It concerned him that Jiri might want to try sex with someone else.

If Jiri became too interested in sex, he might want to know what sex with someone else felt like. Zane already knew he couldn't allow that. He had known it last night the moment his lips had met Jiri's.

He wasn't going to share. Anyone who tried to touch Jiri would seriously be taking their life into their hands. Zane wasn't known for playing well with others, but Jiri put a whole new spin on that.

The mere thought of Jiri with anyone else made Zane's muscles tense as if he was getting ready for a fight. He didn't realize he broadcasted his feeling so much until he felt Jiri's hand on his back.

"Zane?"

Zane reached behind him and grabbed Jiri, pulling him closer to his side. "It's okay, little one. I was just thinking of some stuff."

"Anything I can help with?" Jiri asked as he smoothed his hand down Zane's chest. Zane knew Jiri was just trying to soothe him, but all it did was make him want to drag Jiri into the nearest room and fuck him again.

Zane knew he had to get over this obsession he had with Jiri before he couldn't function properly. It wouldn't do for the leader of the Death Dealers to be so wrapped up in his little *sex pet* that he couldn't think of anything else.

The best thing he could do would be to get his mark on Jiri, then leave him in their quarters. At least if he didn't have Jiri following him around constantly, he might be able to get some things done.

"Zane?" Jiri asked, reminding Zane that Jiri had asked a question.

"No, there's nothing you can do, Jiri. I just have some stuff I need to do around here. We'll go get your mark done, then you can go back to the room for a nap while I do what needs to be done."

Zane could see the disappointed look on Jiri's face before he nodded. He felt like a heel, but he couldn't think of anything else that he could do. Being too intrigued with Jiri was dangerous to both of them.

If his attention centered on Jiri, he couldn't be an adequate leader for his people. Besides, someone might try to take over while he wasn't looking. The other problem was that someone might think they could get to him by hurting Jiri.

They'd be right, and Zane couldn't chance it. He was becoming too attached to Jiri in just the few hours that they had known each other. He liked having him around too much, liked the sex too much. No, he needed distance from his little sex pet.

With that thought in mind, Zane led Jiri out of the hotel and down the street to the tattoo parlor operated by DJ. He walked in and waited for DJ to look up, smiling when DJ just shook his head and gestured to a seat.

"Go sit down in that chair, Jiri," Zane ordered as he unclasped the collar from around Jiri's neck. Jiri looked hesitant, but went to sit down, anyway. Zane walked over to stand next to him.

"So," DJ said as he reached for his tattoo gun, "what sort of tattoo are we getting today?"

"Mine," was all Zane said. He crossed his arms over his chest and stared at DJ when DJ looked up at him in surprise.

"Seriously, man? You've taken a pet?" DJ asked.

Zane just raised an eyebrow at him.

“Okay, okay, don’t get your panties in a bunch.” DJ leaned over Jiri, his eyes intent on Jiri’s skin. “Where you want it?”

“Where do pets usually get their marking tattoos?”

DJ shrugged. “Depends on the master, really. Some get them on the arm, some on the neck. I even had one master get his mark tattooed on his pet’s forehead. Pretty much anywhere you want it.”

Zane saw Jiri’s eyes shoot to his in panic when DJ mentioned the forehead tattoo. As much as he would like to have a visible tattoo for anyone to see, he would never do that to Jiri. It just seemed too cruel.

“The neck, I think,” Zane said as he leaned down and brushed his fingers at the bottom of Jiri’s throat, “just here.”

DJ nodded. “Okay. Color or old fashioned?”

“Color, I think,” Zane replied. “It will fit Jiri’s personality more than black and white.”

“Okay, dude,” DJ replied as he reached for a marking pen. “This shouldn’t take more than a couple of hours.”

Zane nodded as he stepped back to let DJ get to work. He watched for a while to see how Jiri would handle it. When Jiri seemed to be okay, Zane decided to head out and get some work done.

“I’ll be back in an hour or so. If you finish before I get back, just send Jiri over to the hotel,” Zane said. “He’s to go back to the room and take a nap.”

“Sure thing, Zane,” DJ replied.

Zane heard a small whimper behind him as he turned and walked toward the door. He chose to ignore it, leaving and shutting the door behind him. The quicker he became less attached to his little pet, the better for both of them.

* * * *

Jiri couldn’t believe Zane was leaving him here alone to get a tattoo. Hell, it wasn’t even a tattoo. It was Zane’s mark. And Zane was just leaving him here all alone with some stranger.

He knew something was wrong. Things had seemed so perfect when they had been inside the office, but the moment they had left, Zane had changed. Jiri couldn't put his finger on what had changed, exactly, but something had.

It was like Zane couldn't wait to get away from him. Jiri had no idea what he had done wrong, but it was obvious that he had done something. Maybe Zane really had been mad at him for what Harvey said.

Or maybe it had been the way he had reacted when they had sex in the office. Jiri didn't know the proper etiquette for sex between a master and his pet. Zane had said it was supposed to feel good and they were supposed to enjoy it. Jiri certainly had.

But there was so much he didn't know. He had just lain there and taken what Zane had done to him. Maybe that's where he had gone wrong? Jiri knew he was there to provide entertainment and comfort to Zane, not the other way around. Maybe that was the problem? Jiri hadn't been doing his job and Zane was disappointed in him. That had to be it.

Jiri resolved to try better. He would take better care of Zane so that Zane wasn't disappointed in him again. Jiri winced as the inking pen moved over his skin. He hoped this didn't take long. He had a master to care for.

It took longer than Jiri expected to finish the tattoo, but it hurt just as much as he thought it would. Jiri wished that Zane had stuck around for moral support, if nothing else. Jiri would have preferred to be holding Zane's hand during the procedure, but he knew that would be seen as weak.

He couldn't help it. He hated pain. He always had. If he had to go through a needle sticking into his skin like a million times, Jiri wished that he could have at least been able to hold Zane's hand so that he had something else to concentrate on.

Jiri felt like a wimp, but he was grateful when DJ finally sat up. "Okay, pet, you're done. Do you want to see it?"

Jiri nodded. He climbed out of the seat he sat in and walked over to the mirror hanging on the wall that DJ pointed to. His hand moved up to slowly stroke over the colored tattoo that was forever embedded in his skin.

It didn't look so bad. In the middle was a whitish cream colored skull with red eyes. Just in front, and a little below the skull, were two playing cards. One was the king of hearts, the other the ace of hearts. Both were in color. Below that was Zane's name in big bright red letters. Light blue lightening bolts ghosted out from each side of the skull giving the entire tattoo an eerie, not quite real feel to it. Jiri was impressed.

DJ had given the tattoo a three-dimensional look. Jiri wasn't sure how that had been done, but Jiri felt like he could see the letters moving every time he swallowed. There would be no mistaking the mark. Everyone who saw the tattoo would know that Jiri belonged to Zane.

"Well, what do you think, pet?"

"Jiri."

"Huh?"

"My name is Jiri."

"Uh huh, whatever." DJ nodded toward the door. "Zane expects you to go back to the hotel and take a nap, remember?"

Jiri rolled his eyes. "Yeah, I remember."

"Then I suggest you get to it, pet, before Zane gets mad."

Jiri knew there was nothing he could do. He took the small tube of ointment that DJ handed him, listened to the directions DJ gave on caring for his tattoo, then left. He could feel people looking at him as he made his way back to the hotel.

As Jiri made his way up the front steps of the hotel, he wished that Zane were with him. The looks he received from people gave him the creeps. He couldn't remember feeling like this since Frank tried to share his cot.

Jiri quickly made his way inside the hotel and up the stairs. He wanted to get away from prying eyes as fast as he could. As soon as he shut the door to his new quarters, Jiri leaned back against it. He took several deep breaths, trying to calm his rapid heartbeat.

A knock on the door a moment later made Jiri nearly jumping out of his skin. He turned around, one hand flat on the door, the other grabbing the door handle. "Yes?"

"I have your lunch for you."

Jiri's eyebrows drew together in a frown. His lunch? Jiri opened the door to see a young man from the kitchen standing there, a tray of food in his hands. The young man pushed past Jiri and walked into the room. He set the tray down on the side table and promptly left.

Jiri shut the door and walked over to the tray. He lifted the lid to find just what Harvey had said he would make. A hot roast beef sandwich, dipping sauce, and potato salad. There was also a soda and a glass of cold milk.

But there was only enough for one. Jiri knew at that point that Zane would not be joining him for lunch. He was still alone. Jiri suddenly didn't feel much like eating. In fact, his stomach felt kind of queasy.

Jiri placed the lid back on the tray and made his way into the bedroom. He pulled his clothes off and folded them neatly before placing them on a chair near the bed. Pulling back the covers, Jiri climbed in.

There didn't seem much else for him to do but take a nap like Zane had ordered. Jiri closed his eyes and snuggled deeply into the covers. He tried to pretend that someone, somewhere, cared about him and wanted him. It was obvious Zane didn't.

It was a fantasy that had gotten him through many long nights while he lived with Larry. Jiri thought he had been done with that fantasy when Zane came into his life. He now knew that he was wrong.

* * * *

Zane felt exhausted by the time he let himself into his quarters. Darkness had already fallen outside. Glancing at the clock on the wall as he closed the door, Zane realized that he had been gone a lot longer than he had anticipated.

He planned on being back in the room to see Jiri several hours ago. He hoped Jiri wouldn't be too upset with him. Zane started to make his way through the room when he spotted the tray on the sideboard.

He walked over and lifted the lid, frowning when he saw the uneaten food. Jiri hadn't eaten. Zane didn't like that. It was his duty to provide for Jiri. If Jiri didn't eat, he wasn't doing his job properly. Besides, Jiri needed the nutrition.

Zane dropped the lid back down on the tray and made his way into the bedroom. At first, he didn't see Jiri. He started to get concerned until he heard a small whimper come from the bed and noticed the small lump under the covers.

He reached down and pulled the edge of the cover back until he could see Jiri's face. Zane's breath caught in his throat. A shaft of moonlight streamed through the open window casting light right down on Jiri's face.

The moonlight illuminated Jiri's face, highlighting his ethereal beauty, his delicate features. The moonlight also shone on the tearstains on Jiri's face. Zane knew he was the cause of those tears.

Zane's heart felt heavy as he pulled the covers back up over Jiri. He wasn't doing this right and he knew it. Every turn he made he seemed to mess up where Jiri was concerned. Zane wondered why anything couldn't ever seem to be simple.

It seemed that the harder he tried, the worse he made things. If he didn't try at all, he still made things worse. Maybe he needed to give up on the idea of having a pet at all and just let Jiri go, but the very thought made him sick to his stomach.

Zane walked back into the main room and went toward the liquor cabinet. It most likely wouldn't help his situation any, but at least it might make him feel a little better. Zane poured himself a small glass of whiskey.

Grabbing the glass, he made his way over to the balcony that overlooked the front of the hotel. He easily pushed open the double doors and stepped out onto the wooden planks of the balcony.

He liked it out here, especially late in the evening after almost everyone had gone to bed. It was quiet, peaceful. A man could really think sitting out here. Zane made his way over to his favorite chair and sat down. He could hear the occasional voice down below, see the occasional shooting star up above. Mostly, though, it was quiet and dark.

Except for a few lights here and there, the town was dark, as their main source of energy was solar powered. That had been one of the things he had brought into the town after he founded it, electricity.

During the day, it provided what they needed to survive. At night, the stored electricity kept food cold and lights going, even if there was a limit on how much people could use. But, it ensured that their little town functioned.

Still, on nights like this, Zane was glad that there was a limit as to how much power could be used to light the town. He preferred the darkness at night when he came out to the balcony for some peace. It just wouldn't have been the same if the town had been lit up.

"Zane?"

Zane turned when he heard a small whisper at the door to see Jiri standing there wrapped in a blanket. He held out his hand to him, gesturing to Jiri to come over. "Hey, baby, did you have a good nap?"

Jiri seemed hesitant as he walked over and knelt down on the floor at Zane's feet. He nodded his head.

"You didn't eat."

"I fell asleep."

“Guess you needed your rest, huh?” Zane asked. He reached down and ran his hand through Jiri’s hair. Zane was amazed by how soft and silky Jiri’s blond locks felt.

“It’s so quiet out here,” Jiri said.

Zane looked around. “Yeah, I like it. I come out here by myself a lot in the evenings after everyone has gone home or to bed. It gives me time to think.”

“You want me to go back inside?”

Zane shook his head. “No, little one. You can stay.”

Jiri was silent for several moments. Zane knew he was thinking hard. He could almost hear the wheels turning in Jiri’s mind. Zane just waited, letting Jiri gather his thoughts and speak when he was ready.

“I read a book today,” Jiri finally said.

“You read a book?” Zane asked. He thought Jiri couldn’t read very well.

“Well, I looked at the pictures,” Jiri said. “Want to know what I read about?”

Zane leaned his head back against the side of the building, smiling to himself. “Sure, Jiri, tell me about this book you read.”

“I’d rather show you what I learned.”

“Okay,” Zane replied, a little confused. A moment later, Zane nearly jumped out of his chair when Jiri scooted over to kneel between his legs and reached for his zipper. Before Zane knew it, Jiri had his pants undone and his cock pulled out of his pants.

“Jiri!” Zane exclaimed as Jiri’s lips closed over the head of his cock. “Oh, God!” Zane’s hands clenched in Jiri’s hair as Jiri’s mouth and tongue began to torture him.

His mind reeled. Zane had his share of blow jobs in his time, but never one like this. He didn’t know if it was due to Jiri’s enthusiasm or his inexperienced touch, but Zane was going out of his mind.

When Jiri pushed against his thighs, Zane spread his legs wider, allowing Jiri to move closer to him. Hesitant fingers pushed into his

pants and brushed against his balls, dragging a deep moan from Zane's throat.

When Jiri sucked him all of the way in, his nose settling in Zane's pubic hair, Zane felt his balls draw up tightly against his body. He knew he was mere seconds away from blowing his load. Jiri's mouth felt like heaven.

"Jiri," Zane groaned, tugging on Jiri's hair, "I'm going to come, baby."

He tried to hold off too, to give Jiri the time to pull back, but the feel of Jiri's tongue brushing over the top head of his cock blew Zane's control away. His hands tightened in Jiri's hair as he thrust himself deep into the warm, wet haven surrounding his aching cock.

"Aaahhh," Zane cried out as he came, shooting stream after stream of hot seed into Jiri's mouth. Zane's mind fuzzed as lights danced in front of his eyes. His entire body seemed to stiffen, every muscle tense, as Jiri continued to suck at his hard flesh until Zane wasn't sure he would ever breathe again.

Finally, the air returned to Zane's lungs and his mind came out of the haze of lust it had sunk into. Zane realized that his hands were still clenched in Jiri's hair holding him in place. Feeling like a heel once again, Zane let Jiri go.

"Sorry," he whispered when Jiri dropped his cock and looked up at him. "I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Jiri grinned, shaking his head. "Nope."

"Where in the hell did you learn to do that, Jiri?" Zane asked. He tried not to growl as he thought about where Jiri might have learned to give blow jobs. He had been under the impression since meeting him that Jiri had no sexual experience at all. Had he been wrong?

"I told you. I read it in a book."

"What book?" Zane shouted.

He regretted it as soon as the color drained out of Jiri's face. His head slumped forward and he ran his hand down his face. Great! Now

he had made Jiri upset. He heard Jiri moving, then the slight padding of his feet as he left the balcony, but he didn't raise his head.

A moment later, Jiri came back. Zane tried to rein in his precarious emotions. He had loved the blow job. It had been wonderful. He just couldn't help be suspicious of where Jiri had learned it. The thought of Jiri with anyone else made Zane so angry he could feel the heat moving into his clenched fists.

"Zane?" Jiri whispered softly.

Zane took a deep breath and released it slowly, then looked up at Jiri. He was surprised to find Jiri standing before him holding a book in his hands. When Jiri held it out to him, Zane took it, looking at Jiri in confusion.

"Page twenty three," Jiri instructed. The soft blush that filled Jiri's face intrigued Zane. Interesting. He opened the book and flipped it to page twenty-three. Zane's mouth dropped open at the pictures he saw.

A man was lying on his back on a nondescript bed. A blonde woman knelt between his legs. One picture had her leaning toward him. The next had her taking the man's penis into her mouth. Close up pictures showed the woman's mouth moving over the man's penis. There were nine pictures in all, each one more descriptive than the last one.

"I know it's a man and woman, but I figured the mechanics were pretty much the same," Jiri said quickly.

Zane glanced up to see Jiri standing before him, twisting his hands together. His eyes kept darting around as if he were afraid to look Zane in the eyes. Jiri's face burned red. He looked so nervous, so uncertain.

"This book was on my bookshelf?" Zane asked as he looked back down at the pictures.

"Yes," Jiri whispered. "I know you didn't say I could read them, but I got bored and—"

"It's fine, Jiri," Zane said. He closed the book and handed it back to Jiri. "Go put it back on the bookshelf now and then we need to talk."

Jiri hesitated for a moment, shifting from one foot to the other. Zane could see his hands gripping the book so hard that his fingers were white. "Did I do something wrong?"

"Go put the book back, Jiri," Zane said again. He needed a moment to compose himself. He had been so worried that Jiri had been with someone else that he had never considered that Jiri might have learned something from a book, especially since Jiri could barely read.

Zane knew he should have had more faith in his pet, but what did he actually know about him? They had known each other all of twenty-four hours. Granted, they had lived a lot in those twenty-four hours, but still...

Hearing a soft snuffle next to him, Zane turned to see Jiri standing in the doorway of the balcony. What light came from their quarters shined behind him, illuminating Jiri's slim form. Zane still couldn't see Jiri's face.

Zane held out his hand to Jiri. "Come here, little one."

* * * *

Jiri took the hand Zane held out to him. He didn't want to. He wanted to run and hide. He knew when he had looked at the pictures that it was wrong. The pictures showed a man and a woman, not two men.

He had just wanted to please Zane, to make him feel good. Zane had done so much for him. He had taken Jiri away from his horrible stepfather and given him a whole new life. Zane had taught him about being intimate with someone. He provided food, safety, and companionship.

Jiri had just wanted to repay Zane and make him feel good. Now, he had fucked it all up. Jiri let Zane pull him down onto his lap. He curled himself up and rested his head on Zane's chest.

"Okay, first things first," Zane said. "Thank you."

Thank you? "Huh?" Jiri mumbled.

"For the blow job?" Zane chuckled. "Thank you. It felt wonderful."

"Really? You're not mad?"

Zane shook his head. "No, I'm not mad."

"But you—" Jiri stopped speaking when Zane placed a finger over his mouth. He lifted his head and looked up at Zane.

"You need to understand, Jiri, I've never had a pet before. I'm learning through this thing as much as you are. I'm going to make mistakes."

Jiri didn't say anything, just watched as Zane seemed to be gathering his thoughts. He didn't know what to say at this point. Zane had said he wasn't mad that Jiri had given him a blow job, but Jiri knew that wasn't all that was going on.

"I told you early on that I don't share well, Jiri, and I meant it. Just the thought of you being with anyone else makes me want to kill something."

"But I wouldn't...I'd never—" Jiri stammered. He felt Zane pat him on the back.

"I know, baby. But when you did what you did, and knowing that you don't have a lot of sexual experience, well, you can see where my mind went."

"You thought..." Jiri suddenly realized that Zane thought he had been with someone else. He was so shocked that for a moment, he couldn't move. His shock was quickly followed by hurt that Zane would think he would ever want to be with anyone except him.

That quickly rolled into hot, uncontrollable anger. Jiri was incensed. How dare Zane assume he had been unfaithful because he

had tried to show Zane a little pleasure. He had thought that the mark on his neck meant something.

Jiri pushed himself away from Zane and jumped to his feet. His hands landed on his hips as he glared down at Zane. He couldn't ever remember being this angry before, not even with Larry.

"I thought you were different, but you're not. You're just like the rest of the assholes out there. You just want to take from me and not give back. When I don't do what you want, you get angry with me. You don't remember that I'm a person. I'm just a thing to you."

"Jiri!" Zane exclaimed.

"Oh, that's right, I'd better not make the big bad leader of the Death Dealers angry. I might be punished or killed," Jiri yelled. He leaned over to get closer to Zane. "Well, go ahead. Punish me. Kill me. It won't be any worse than what you're doing to me right now."

Jiri refused to step back when Zane stood to his feet. He just tilted his head back and glared up at him.

"That's enough, Jiri."

"No, it's not." Jiri pointed to the tattoo on his neck. "I thought this meant something, that I was special."

He finally stepped back, his emotions overwhelming him. Jiri shook his head and spoke almost to himself. "I thought I was more than a pet to you, that maybe you would start to care for me."

Jiri swallowed to get past the tears clogging his throat. "I should have known. You didn't even stay around while it was done. You just left me there to be branded as your possession."

Suddenly, the fight went out of Jiri. What was the point? Zane would never understand. He was big and strong. He could have whatever he wanted with a crook of his finger. He didn't have to fight for every scrap of food, for every kind gesture. He didn't need a protector just to keep from being assaulted and used.

Jiri had felt such hope when Zane had begun to explain their relationship to him. When Zane had agreed that Jiri was a sex pet and

not just a regular pet, Jiri had been elated. He had even looked forward to wearing Zane's mark.

"I—" Jiri stopped speaking. He wanted something that wasn't meant to be his. He needed to resign himself to being just Zane's pet. That's all he would ever be.

"I apologize for yelling at you," Jiri whispered. He stared at Zane's feet not quite able to look him in the eyes. "It won't happen again."

"Jiri—"

"May I go to bed now?"

Zane was silent for a moment before answering. "Yeah, go ahead."

Jiri refused to look at Zane as he walked past him into their quarters. He made his way to the bedroom and climbed into bed. He grabbed the covers and pulled them up over his head, wishing that today would just go away and tomorrow would never come.

* * * *

Zane watched Jiri walk away, not quite sure what had just happened but knowing something had. The life had seemed to drain right out of Jiri. Zane could swear Jiri's golden hair wasn't even as shiny as it had been.

He knew he wasn't an easy man to understand. He never had been. After losing his family so many years ago, Zane learned to keep his emotions close, to not let anyone in. He just didn't realize how good he had gotten at it.

His position in the Death Dealers didn't leave much room for tender emotion and it wasn't like he had experienced it much growing up. His mother was always working and his father was always drunk and off screwing one of his floozies.

Zane had quickly learned that he could only rely on himself for anything. He wasn't sure if he could open up enough to let Jiri in and he knew that was exactly what Jiri wanted.

Shaking his head at his own misgivings, Zane walked into the room, shutting the balcony doors behind him. He made sure they were locked, then shut off the lights before heading toward the bedroom and Jiri.

He dropped his clothes on the floor and crawled into bed, snuggling up to Jiri's back. He didn't think Jiri was asleep. His body was too tense. Zane rubbed his hand up and down Jiri's side until he began to relax.

Once Jiri started snoring softly, Zane cuddled him closer and closed his eyes. He hoped that sleep would take him soon and he could forget that today had ever happened.

Chapter 7

Zane slammed the bedroom door and stalked across the room to the balcony. If he didn't get away from Jiri he didn't know what he was going to do. The man was driving him nuts.

The last two weeks had been hell for Zane. Jiri seemed to be doing every damn thing he could to drive Zane out of his mind. And it was working. Zane was going nuts.

Nothing he did seemed to make Jiri happy. Zane had tried everything he could think of. He had taken Jiri out for rides on his motorcycle. He had arranged special dinners for them. He had even tried to get Jiri involved in the running of the town.

Nothing worked. It was like Jiri was in a continuous depression. Oh, he smiled whenever Zane looked at him. He smiled so much Zane was afraid Jiri's face might freeze that way. It just wasn't a real smile.

Jiri did whatever Zane asked immediately when he asked. He never protested anything Zane wanted him to do. As much as he had protested when they first met, Zane was pretty sure he could order Jiri to strip off his clothes in a room full of people and he would do it.

Jiri did everything Zane asked of him. He just no longer asked for anything in return. He didn't protest anything. He never told Zane no. He had even eaten a bowl of rice Zane had given him without protest. Zane had been sure that at least would get a rise out of Jiri. It didn't.

Zane was at a loss about what to do. He wanted his Jiri back, the arguing, protesting, questioning Jiri. While Zane wanted Jiri to be agreeable, the way Jiri acted now, it was like he had no mind or thoughts of his own. He was just a vessel.

Zane was deeply afraid he had created the Jiri he now had and he wasn't sure how to change it. Jiri wanted something from him that Zane wasn't sure he had to give.

It wasn't that he didn't care about Jiri because he did, a lot in fact. The little man had wormed his way into Zane's affections without Zane even being aware of it until it had already happened. Zane just didn't know how to show Jiri that he cared.

Zane pushed his hand through his hair and tried to regulate his rapid breathing. He needed to go back into the bedroom and talk with Jiri, to get this thing between them settled so that he could have his Jiri back. Before that happened, Zane needed to get his raging emotions under control. He didn't want to say the wrong thing and send Jiri even further away from him than the man already was.

Zane turned when he heard the bedroom door open to find Jiri standing there. He watched him for a moment, once again stunned by the sheer beauty the man was. Zane wasn't sure he would ever get used to the way Jiri looked. Jiri took Zane's breath away each time he saw him.

"Did you need something, Jiri?" Zane finally asked to break the silence in the room. Jiri shook his head but Zane could have predicted that. Jiri never seemed to need anything from him anymore. Zane was beginning to wonder if Jiri ever did.

"Are you feeling okay?"

Jiri smiled and nodded. It infuriated Zane. He hated that stupid little smile. It wasn't real. Jiri didn't mean it.

"Stop smiling, damn it!"

Jiri looked confused, his eyebrows drawing together in a frown. "You don't want me to smile?"

Zane rolled his eyes. He counted to ten before answering. "Yes, I want you to smile but I want it to be a real smile. Not this fabricated shit you've been giving me for the last two weeks. You don't mean it, so why do it?"

Jiri looked flustered. "I don't—"

Zane walked across the room toward Jiri, his fists clenching at his sides. “Don’t give me that shit, Jiri. You know exactly what I’m talking about,” he shouted. He came to a stop directly in front of Jiri, his fists landing on his hips as he glared down at the smaller man.

“No one is as happy as you’ve tried to pretend to be, no one. I swear your face is going to freeze like that. You never do anything but smile, smile, smile.”

“You don’t want me to be happy?” Jiri asked.

“Christ!” Zane shouted. “Yes, I want you to be happy but this isn’t happy, Jiri. This is sad. I’ve tried every damn thing I can think of to make you happy but nothing seems to work.”

A sudden thought came to Zane, a thought that brought a great pain to Zane’s chest. “Would you be happy if I let you go, Jiri?” Zane asked quietly.

“You don’t want me anymore?” Jiri’s voice was low, almost a whisper. His face had drained of all color and he looked like he was about to fall down.

Zane reached over and cupped the side of Jiri’s face, softly caressing Jiri’s cheek with his thumb. “I’ll always want you, Jiri, but I want you to be happy too. If being free is what will make you happy, I’ll let you go. You just have to say the word.”

Zane watched Jiri’s fingers move over the tattoo on his neck. He tried not to let on how much Jiri’s answer meant to him. He didn’t want Jiri influenced in any way. But Jiri had the power to break him or make him the happiest man on earth.

Zane found it somewhat amusing that his happiness lay in the hands of a man considered by most to be a pet, a possession. Zane knew differently. Jiri was everything Zane has always needed but didn’t know he did.

“Do you want me to go?” Jiri finally asked.

Oh, how to answer that one, Zane thought. If he told Jiri he wanted him to stay, would Jiri stay because Zane wanted him to or

because that was what Jiri wanted? If he didn't answer, would Jiri take it as a rejection? Zane was torn by either choice.

"I want you to stay if that's what you want, Jiri," Zane said. "I don't want you to stay if you're doing it because you think you have to or for any reason other than because you want to."

Jiri frowned. "Well, that's not an answer."

Zane chuckled. That sentence was the first real thing Jiri had said in days. He was elated. "No, I suppose not, little one, but it's the only one I have for you right now."

"I feel funny telling you what I want when I don't know what you want," Jiri said, his face flushing red.

"Kind of a catch-22, huh?"

Jiri nodded.

Zane wrapped his arms around Jiri and pulled him into a hug. He rested his cheek on Jiri's head. "I don't think either of us are very good at showing what we really want, Jiri. While that can be a plus in my line of work, it doesn't work so much with someone I care about."

"You care about me?" Jiri whispered.

"I do, Jiri," Zane replied. "I know I'm not very good at showing that. I pretty much suck at it. I warned you in the very beginning that I wasn't any good at this master/pet thing."

"Oh, no," Jiri corrected, "you're very good at the master/pet thing. It's the Zane/Jiri thing that I'm interested in."

Jiri's words were a balm to Zane's tired soul. He closed his eyes, hugging Jiri closer. "I'm pretty sure that I suck at that even more, little one. Maybe you can show me how to do better."

"If I decide to stay, you mean?"

Zane flinched and opened his eyes to stare down at the top of Jiri's head. He blinked back the sudden tears that had appeared in his eyes. "Yeah," he murmured, "if you decide to stay."

* * * *

Jiri started to tell Zane that he wanted to stay but a loud alarm sounded making Jiri jump. Jiri glanced around wildly as the alarm blared. He could hear voices yelling suddenly, coming from several directions.

“Zane?”

“I want you to go inside the bedroom and lock the door, Jiri. Don’t come out until I come for you,” Zane said. He grabbed Jiri by the arms, giving him a little shake. “Do you understand me?”

“What’s going on?”

“The Night Dwellers have breached the perimeter,” Zane replied.

“Night Dwellers?” Jiri asked frantically as Zane pulled him off the balcony and toward the bedroom. “There are Night Dwellers here?”

Night Dwellers were bad. They were monsters. It seemed their sole purpose in life was to create death and mayhem. They weren’t even human anymore, but twisted, scarred monsters with deep fanged teeth and yellow tinted skin.

Jiri stumbled as Zane pushed him into the bedroom. He turned to see Zane pulling the bedroom door closed. His heart clenched in his chest. “Zane! Wait, Zane,” Jiri cried out.

Jiri ran to the door and pulled until Zane opened it up again. Jiri reached up and wrapped an arm around Zane’s neck and pulled his head down for a quick kiss. He tried to convey to Zane how he felt. Yes, he was still unsure of things, but in the face of the danger outside, he was also worried.

“Be careful, Zane,” Jiri whispered as he stepped back. “I’d be very upset if anything happened to you.”

Zane cocked his head to one side, giving Jiri a strange look, then nodded his head. He pointed his finger at Jiri. “You remember what I said. Don’t leave this room or open this door until I come for you. And lock the balcony doors, too.”

Jiri nodded, his eyes staying on Zane until the door closed behind him. Jiri ran forward and locked the door, then ran and locked the balcony doors. Coming back to the bedroom door, he pressed his ear

against it and listened. The alarm still blared in the background, but Jiri could hear Zane talking and someone replying.

“Jiri, open the door,” Zane said.

Jiri quickly opened the door to find Zane standing there. Slash and his pet, Billy, stood behind him. Zane turned and motioned to Billy, who quickly came forward. Jiri lifted an eyebrow in curiosity when Billy walked into the bedroom.

“Billy is going to stay here with you while Slash comes with me. Slash is worried about Billy being on his own.” Zane reached over and ran his knuckles down the side of Jiri’s face. “You’re in charge until I get back.”

Jiri nodded, overjoyed that Zane had confidence in him. “Yes, Zane.”

Once again, Jiri watched Zane until the door closed, then leaned forward and locked the door. Turning back to look at Billy, Jiri was surprised to see Billy sitting on the floor next to the bed, his eyes glued to the door.

“Billy? Are you okay?” Jiri asked softly.

Billy nodded his head, but his eyes never wavered from the door. He had his knees pulled up to his chest, his arms wrapped around his legs. Jiri could see small tremors rocking his small-framed body.

Jiri could see that Billy wasn’t okay, no matter what he said. He walked over and sat down next to him. Jiri looked toward the door, watching just as Billy did. Billy was looking at it so intently, Jiri wondered if the door was going to pop open.

After several moments, Jiri could still feel Billy trembling next to him. The cold from the hardwood floor began to seep into his butt. Jiri stood to his feet, reaching his hand down to Billy.

“Come on, Billy, this floor is cold. At least come wait up on the bed.”

When Billy looked up at him, Jiri had the feeling that Billy hadn’t even realized he was in the room. Jiri smiled down at him. “Come on, you’ll be more comfortable up on the bed.”

Jiri held his hand out until Billy took it and climbed to his feet. Jiri led him over to the bed and climbed on. He settled back against the pillows, then gestured to the spot next to him. Billy climbed onto the bed and sat down. The moment he leaned back, his eyes went to the door again.

“Does this happen often?” Jiri asked after a few moments of silence between them. He could still hear the alarm blaring outside. A few shouts here and there. Inside the room, however, the only sound was his and Billy’s breathing.

“What?” Billy asked.

Jiri waved his hand around. “The alarm, the Night Dwellers?”

Billy shook his head. “We haven’t had any problems with them in months. Slash says that they’re getting braver, though. He thinks we’re going to see a lot more of them. He said the pickings are getting slim out there and the Night Dwellers are getting hungry.”

Jiri was mildly surprised. That was the most he had heard from Billy since he had met the other man. Billy seemed more like the quiet type. He also seemed nervous as hell, which made Jiri nervous as well.

Living with Larry, he had never really been bothered by the Night Dwellers. Jiri wasn’t exactly sure why not, though. They seemed to attack humans almost anywhere that they congregated.

“Have you ever seen one?”

Billy nodded. “They killed my family before the Death Dealers rescued me. I was the only one that survived.”

Jiri laid his hand on Billy’s arm. “Oh God, Billy, I’m sorry.”

Billy just nodded again.

Jiri pulled his hand back. He pulled his legs up to his chest and wrapped his arms around them, resting his chin on his knees. “My father died before I was born. My mother died from the plague.”

“No other family?” Billy asked, looking over at him.

“Besides Zane?” Jiri asked. “I have a stepfather out there. He’s the one that sold me to Zane. He owed Zane money.”

“You really consider Zane your family?”

Jiri smiled. He could hear the doubt in Billy’s voice. “Sure. Zane belongs to me as much as I belong to him.” He turned and looked at Billy. “Isn’t it that way with you and Slash?”

Billy was quiet for a moment, then shook his head. “I want it to be, but ever since Zane took me from Pug and gave me to Slash, he barely talks to me. Hell, he barely acknowledges that I’m alive.”

“Do you want him to?”

Billy’s face flushed as he dipped his head. “Yeah,” he murmured.

Jiri laughed. “Then have I got a book for you.” Jiri quickly crawled from the bed and walked to the bookshelf. He instantly found the book he was looking for and brought it back to the bed, crawling on.

“I found this book a while back,” Jiri explained as he started leafing through the pages. “I can’t read much, but the pictures kind of tell the story. Zane really liked this one.” Jiri pointed to page twenty-three and tilted the book toward Billy.

Billy’s face flushed even redder and he pushed the book away.

“What’s wrong, Billy?”

“Pug made me do those things. It was horrible.”

“Oh.” Jiri thought about it for a moment. He didn’t exactly know how Billy felt, but he could imagine it. If anyone had forced him to do the things he did with Zane, he’d be horrified, too.

“Have you ever done any of that with Slash?”

“Once. Pug traded me to Slash for the night when he lost a bet.”
Double oh!

“Did you like it? With Slash, I mean?” Jiri didn’t think it was possible, but Billy’s face got even redder. He did, however, see a small smile move across Billy’s lips.

“Yeah.”

“Well, then,” Jiri chuckled, “there you go. Pug’s dead, so he can never hurt you again and since Zane gave you to Slash, and you liked

doing those things with Slash, you should have nothing to worry about.”

“That’s assuming I can ever get Slash to touch me.”

“So, tease him.”

“Tease him? How?” Billy looked totally confused. Jiri knew how he felt.

Jiri shrugged. “I’m probably not the one to ask about that. Until Zane showed me, I wasn’t very knowledgeable about these things. However, I’ve seen the way Zane watches me. If I wanted to get his attention, I’d walk around naked in front of him, or at least in something really skimpy, like one of his shirts.”

Suddenly, Billy chuckled. “I see where you’re going with this.”

“Thought you might.”

“Let me see that damn book again.”

Jiri laughed as he handed over the book. He started flipping through the pages again. “I haven’t tried this yet, but the stuff on page forty-five looked interesting.”

“Oh my God! Is that even possible?” Billy whispered in awe as Jiri showed him page forty-five.

Jiri laughed, feeling his face heat up. “I have no idea. But it sure would be fun to find out.”

* * * *

Jiri jerked awake. He opened his eyes and glanced around the room, trying to figure out what had woken him. The room was nearly pitch black. It took him a moment for his eyes to adjust to the darkness.

He could feel the press of Billy’s body next to his. Billy’s soft snores filled the silence in the room. Jiri wondered how late it was. He couldn’t hear the alarm anymore, but it was still dark outside.

A faint squeak of boards sounded to the right of him. Jiri’s eyes swung to the right side of the room. His heart suddenly beat faster in

his chest. Jiri could just make out a dark figure moving past the balcony doors.

Moving as quietly as he could, Jiri rolled over and covered Billy's mouth with his hand. "Billy," Jiri whispered as quietly as he could into Billy's ear. "Billy, wake up. There's something outside."

Jiri felt Billy jerk awake. For a moment, there was panic in Billy's eyes until he realized that Jiri was next to him. Jiri instantly felt Billy's body relax, but his eyes shot around the room, still panicked.

Jiri pointed to the far side of the room close to the bathroom. "Go," he whispered almost silently. Billy rolled to the side of the bed and lowered himself to the floor. Jiri watched as he quickly crawled across the floor and curled into a ball on the corner next to the dresser.

Satisfied that Billy was sufficiently hidden, Jiri rolled to the opposite side of the bed. His eyes glanced around the room as he tried to find something to defend himself with. Zane had told him that he needed to care for Billy. That's exactly what he was going to do.

Spotting a fireplace poker, Jiri crossed the floor to the fireplace and grabbed it. He weighed it in his hand. Hard, uncompromising, lethal, the long, round iron would do perfectly. With the poker in one hand, Jiri grabbed the iron fireplace tongs and carried them over to Billy. They wouldn't do much, but they were better than nothing.

After handing the tongs to Billy, Jiri held his hand up, gesturing for Billy to stay put. Once Billy nodded, Jiri made his way over to the double doors that led to the balcony. He positioned himself to one side, poker raised to strike, and waited.

Jiri's heart pounded. He prayed that whoever was outside of his door wouldn't hear it. Taking slow, even breaths, Jiri tried to slow his heart rate down. It wouldn't do to give his position away. He needed the element of surprise in order to overcome whatever opponent stood outside the door.

Jiri glanced once more across the room to Billy. He held his finger up across his lips for Billy to be silent. Looking back at the door, he was surprised to see the handle begin to turn. Jiri could have sworn he

had locked the door when he had come in. He'd have to ask Zane about that later, much later.

Right now, he needed to defend himself and Billy from whoever was opening the door. Jiri held the poker over his head as the door inched open, ready to bring it down on the head of the person sneaking into the room.

The moment a head appeared, Jiri swung with every bit of strength he had. He heard a loud grunt as he swung. Even as the body began to fall to the floor, Jiri swung again. He wasn't letting anyone get to him or Billy.

The body dropped to the floor, not moving. Jiri stepped forward, the poker raised over his head as he waited to see if the body would move again. When it didn't, he motioned for Billy to come over.

"Hold this," Jiri said as he handed the poker to Billy. He grabbed the fallen body by the arms and pulled it into the room, then stepped over it to lock the door again. Turning back to the unconscious man, and he could tell it was a man due to the size, he wondered what to do with it.

He knew that the smartest thing would be to tie the man up until Zane returned and then Zane could do whatever he wanted with the intruder.

"We need something to tie him up, Billy."

Jiri and Billy both looked around the room. Jiri spotted the curtain strings. He hoped Zane wouldn't get mad at him as he ripped them off of their rods. Coming back to the body, he tied the man's hands together behind his back, then tied his feet.

Once he was all done, and feeling a whole lot safer, Jiri rolled the man over. He didn't need any light to tell him who he was looking at. He'd know that face anywhere. It was his stepfather, Larry.

Chapter 8

Zane's body hurt so much he was surprised he could even walk. He had felt exhausted before the alarm had gone off. The adrenaline that shot through his body carried him for the next several hours, but now that battle was over, he could feel his bones ache. He wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed with Jiri and sleep for a week.

As Zane thought about his little pet, he prayed that he had remained safe. The battle had been a bloody one. They had lost three fighters, even more had been injured. Zane still couldn't figure out why they had attacked the town.

They hadn't had trouble with the Night Dwellers in several months. It wasn't that the Night Dwellers didn't want to attack them, but rather that they were afraid to. Zane had made it his business after taking over the Death Dealers to make sure that everyone knew not to attack them.

What was his remained his, and Zane was merciless to those who tried to take anything from him. Zane considered every member of his gang, master and pet alike, as his. That included every inch of the safe zone that they had established as their haven from the world.

Zane walked into the hotel. He grimaced at the injured bodies lying everywhere. It looked like most of the injuries were superficial. A few, though, seemed life threatening. He hoped that everyone pulled through.

"Hey, boss, you need to get that looked at."

Zane turned to see Slash standing beside him. Slash looked as bad as Zane felt. Blood caked the side of his shirt. There was a small cut on his face near his right eye, which was swollen and purple.

“Have you been looked at?” Zane asked as he gestured to Slash’s wounds.

Slash chuckled. “Oh, this?” he asked as he gestured to his face. “It’s not too bad. Nothing that a soft bed and a cold beer won’t fix. How about you? That’s a pretty nasty-looking cut on your side.”

Zane glanced down at the cut on his ribcage. Acknowledging that it was there seemed to make it hurt more. It was a small cut in comparison to others, just a couple of inches long, but it was deep enough to still bleed.

“I guess I could use a needle and thread.”

“Come on over here and let me fix you up real quick, and then we can go upstairs and reclaim our boys.”

Zane sat down in the chair Slash pointed to and held his arm over his head. He could hear the worry in Slash’s voice when he mentioned Jiri and Billy. Zane felt pretty much the same. He was concerned for their safety, as well.

“Slash, can you think of any reason that the Night Dwellers might attack us now? We haven’t had any trouble with them in months,” Zane asked as Slash went to work on his side. He hissed, his body jerking as Slash sewed him up. *Damn, that hurt!*

“Not really, but it’s not like these things really need a reason to attack anyone. They live for that shit,” Slash replied.

“I think we need to double the guard for a while. Maybe they attacked because we’ve become too complacent.”

“Maybe,” Slash said. “And maybe they attacked because that’s what they do. Don’t try and second-guess yourself, Zane. They’re pretty much mindless monsters. They kill and they destroy. You didn’t do this.”

“No, but I’m still responsible. These people trust me to protect them. I let them down.”

“Fuck man, no you didn’t. If it wasn’t for you, a lot more of us would be dead right now. You gave us a home here, a place where we could have families and live in peace. Try to remember that.”

Zane scoffed. "Tell that to the families of the three men who died tonight."

"Get over yourself already," Slash chuckled. "You're a man, Zane. You're not God. There's only so much you can do, and you do it. The Night Dwellers are going to attack, whether you like it or not. And no matter how hard you train us or try to protect us, some of us will die. It's a fact of life now."

"Well, it sucks!"

"True, it does. Unfortunately, it's our reality now." Slash patted Zane on the shoulder. "Okay, you're done. Try not to do anything that might rip the stitches out, no matter how much Jiri wants you to."

Zane chuckled. "Yeah, you wouldn't believe what he showed me just before the alarm went off. Damned if he didn't see it in a book, too."

"Oh, yeah?" Slash looked intrigued.

Zane just shook his head. No way was he going to tell Slash about the blow job Jiri had given him. There were just some things he didn't share with anyone. He might share the book with Billy, however. "Come on, let's go see our boys."

Zane and Slash made their way up the stairs. Each step brought Zane closer to where he wanted to be. By the time he reached the top, he practically had a spring in his step. He raced down the hallway and opened the door to his quarters.

All looked good, he thought as he glanced around the room. Zane made his way over to the bedroom door and tapped lightly. "Jiri? Open the door, baby, it's me."

He heard footsteps pad across the room, then the lock clicked. Zane had a wide smile on his face for Jiri as the door slowly opened, only to be surprised by Billy's face. "Oh, hey, Billy. Where's Jiri?"

Billy pointed over his shoulder before pushing past Zane to wrap his arms around Slash's waist. Zane heard Billy say something to Slash, but it was muffled. Zane ignored it and made his way into the room.

“Jiri?” he called out when he didn’t immediately see his pet.

“Zane?” Jiri called out. “Oh, thank God you came back.”

Zane turned to see Jiri racing across the room. He barely had time to catch him as Jiri threw himself into Zane’s arms. He wrapped his arms around Jiri, holding him close to his chest, closing his eyes briefly as a strange calmness overtook him.

It felt so good to hold Jiri in his arms, to know that someone cared about his wellbeing, for him and not because he was the leader of the Death Dealers. Zane knew that Jiri really couldn’t care less what Zane was in charge of. He just seemed to want Zane for himself. That thought gave Zane a warm feeling deep inside.

Zane opened his eyes and leaned back a bit from Jiri. He wanted to look down into his face, to assure himself that Jiri was safe. It was only as he looked up that he noticed the bound man lying on the floor by the balcony doors. “Jiri?”

“It’s Larry,” Jiri explained as he turned to glare across the room. “He tried to break in here when you were out fighting the Night Dwellers.”

Zane glanced down at Jiri in surprise, raising one eyebrow at him. “Larry? Your stepfather, Larry?”

Jiri nodded. “I hit him with this,” Jiri said as he held up the fireplace poker. “Then Billy and I tied him up.”

“Slash?” Zane called out. “You better get your ass in here.”

Zane heard the bedroom door slam against the wall, then Slash stood beside him. Glancing sideways, Zane could see the shock on Slash’s face.

“Isn’t that—”

Zane nodded. “Jiri’s stepfather. Seems he tried to break in here while we were busy elsewhere. Jiri and Billy beat him up, then tied him up.”

“How in the hell did he get inside the town, let alone the hotel balcony?”

"My thoughts exactly," Zane said as he crossed to room to glare down at Larry. He could see Larry's hands tighten into fists even though his eyes were closed. "I know you're not asleep, Larry, so you might as well open your eyes."

Zane watched as Larry opened his eyes, turning his head to glare up at him. "Want to explain to me why you broke in, Larry?" he asked as he squatted down next to Larry.

"I didn't break in."

"Then how did you get in?"

"I wasn't doing anything. I just...I heard that the Night Dwellers were headed this way and I wanted to make sure that my son was okay. When I saw everyone fighting, I came here to check on him."

"Uh huh, and how did you know where Jiri was?" Zane asked. He could see the lie shining in Larry's eyes. The man was sweating so much it dripped down his face to puddle on the floor.

"I didn't. I was just hoping that I had the right room."

"He's lying through his teeth," Jiri said as he came to stand beside Zane.

"Jiri," Zane admonished.

"Oh, I'm sorry." Jiri crossed his arms over his chest and smirked. "He's lying through his tooth. My bad."

Zane smothered a chuckle. Jiri didn't look the least bit sorry. In fact, he looked pretty pissed. This side of Jiri intrigued Zane. It didn't come out often. Usually, Jiri was compliant and obedient, never even raising his voice.

Every once in a while, however, this *alternate personality* of Jiri's came out to play. Actually, it usually seemed to come out when Jiri was pissed. Zane wouldn't mind seeing this side of Jiri a little more often. It could be interesting. Right now, however...

"Jiri, please, let me do this."

Jiri rolled his eyes. "Fine."

Zane watched Jiri walk back across the room to stand by Billy. He shook his head in wonder. Jiri really was something. Zane knew he

needed to show Jiri how much the little man was coming to mean to him, but first he had to deal with Larry.

“So, Larry,” Zane said as he stood to his feet, “why should I believe you? Jiri obviously thinks you’re lying, and he’s known you a lot longer than I have.”

Zane reached down and pulled Larry to his feet. He chuckled when Larry went to take a step and tripped over his tied feet. Zane pulled a knife out of the sheath at his side and leaned down to cut the ties holding Larry’s legs together.

Standing up, he glanced over to find Jiri glaring at him. He gave Jiri a slight shake of his head, then looked back over at Larry. “So, Larry, I asked you a question. Why should I believe you over Jiri?”

“He’s lying.”

Zane felt a little nonplused. *He’s lying* was all Larry could come up with? “You have to do better than that, Larry.”

“Well, of course he’s lying,” Larry stammered quickly. “I sold him to you. He had a pretty good setup where he was at. He’s angry at me for ending that.”

Zane’s eyebrows shot up. Larry thought Jiri had a pretty good setup? Seriously? “Go on.”

“He pretty much had free run of my place. He could come and go whenever he wanted,” Larry explained. “I’m sure here he can’t do that.”

“True.” Zane reached down and grabbed Larry’s bound wrists. He felt Larry jump just a little as he brought the knife down and cut through the rope tying his wrists together. “I’m listening,” Zane said as he put the knife back into the sheath at his hip.

“That money you found on him?” Larry continued as he rubbed his wrists. “He made that by selling himself to customers. He was always selling himself. I tried to stop it, Zane, I swear I did, but that damn mother of his put it into his head that he could make money that way and there wasn’t anything I could do about it.”

Zane heard Jiri growl even as he tried to control the one fighting to get out of his own mouth. He couldn't believe what he was hearing from Larry. "Are you telling me that Jiri had sex with strangers for money?"

"All the time, Zane. Sometimes he did it with two or three people at the same time." Larry glanced over at Jiri. "He's just like his whoring mother."

Zane quickly turned when he heard a cry from across the room to see Slash's arms wrapped around Jiri, holding him back. Jiri's hands curled into claws and he looked like he wanted to rip Larry's face off.

"So, if all of this is true, why would you feel the need to come check on Jiri? Obviously you're better off without him."

Larry turned to look at Zane, shock on his face. "Well, I...I..." he stammered.

Zane shook his head. "Somehow, Larry, what you're telling me just isn't ringing true."

Zane watched as Larry's face paled. His eyes shot around the room as if looking for a means of escape. Larry took several steps back until his back hit the wall behind him. He looked terrified, and justly so.

Zane could tell he was lying and Larry knew that Zane knew. Zane could see it in Larry's face. Larry had come onto his land and had tried to attack what belonged to him. Larry knew that he faced his death. Zane was not a merciful man.

Zane turned to tell Slash to get some men to come take Larry away. He saw Jiri cry out and break away from Slash. Before he knew what happened, Jiri had thrown himself in front of Zane, his arms tightening around him as the loud shot of a gun reverberated through the room.

Zane looked into Jiri's eyes. He could see the shocked surprise in their sky-blue depths. Unimaginable pain filled Zane as Jiri gave him a shaky smile. "Zane," he murmured quietly just before his eyelids slowly fell down over his eyes and Jiri's body slumped against him.

“Jiri,” Zane whispered. He heard a loud sound, a struggle, breaking glass, someone screaming, and a thud. He didn’t care. The only thing that mattered to Zane was the unconscious man in his arms. His mind tried to comprehend what had happened to Jiri, but it just didn’t seem to want to make the connection.

If he made the connection, if he understood that Larry had shot Jiri, then it would be real, and it couldn’t be real. Jiri couldn’t be hurt. It just wasn’t possible. Nothing bad could happen to his little sex pet. Zane wouldn’t let it.

“Zane? Come on, man, we need to get Jiri over to the bed.”

Zane lifted his head to look over at Slash in confusion. Bed?

“Come on, buddy,” Slash encouraged. His hand pushed against Zane’s back ushering him toward the bed. “Jiri would feel much better if he could lie down, I promise.”

Zane carried Jiri over to the bed and carefully laid him down. He crawled up beside him. His hand went to Jiri’s face, softly caressing his cheek. Zane could hear voices in the room. He knew that someone left, then a few people came back a few moments later. He still didn’t care.

“Jiri? Open your eyes, little one,” Zane whispered near his ear. “Come on, baby, open your eyes for me. I want to find out what you read in your book while I was gone.”

For long moments, Zane stared down at Jiri waiting for him to open his sky-blue eyes and laugh at him for being worried. At this point, Zane wouldn’t even be mad at Jiri. He promised.

“Zane?”

Zane turned to see Billy sitting on the bed on the other side of Jiri. “Hey, Billy.”

Billy smiled. “Zane, you need to let the doctor look at Jiri and make sure he’s okay. Can he do that?”

Zane thought about it for a moment, then nodded his head. He should have had the doctor look at Jiri the moment he brought him home. Jiri’s health was very important.

“Slash needs you in the other room. He needs to talk to you about doubling the guard.” Billy glanced down at Jiri then back up at him. “I promise I’ll stay with Jiri.”

Zane nodded. He leaned down and kissed Jiri on the forehead. “I’ll be right back, little one. Billy’s going to stay with you, okay?”

Zane leaned back and watched Jiri for a response. When none came, he hesitated to leave. Maybe he should stay. Jiri needed him.

“Zane? I need to speak with you. It’s really important, man,” Slash said.

Zane took a moment longer to stare down at Jiri, then rolled to the side of the bed. He got up and walked out of the bedroom to talk with Slash. The moment he passed through the door, it slammed shut behind him.

Zane twirled around to stare at the door in shock. He rushed toward it, trying to open it, but it was locked. Zane pounded on the door. “Open this damn door right now,” he shouted as his fists hit the hard wood.

Jiri was on the other side of the door and someone was keeping Zane from him. Zane felt tears well in his eyes as he pounded on the door. He had to get to Jiri, to protect him. Jiri needed him. He needed Jiri.

“Zane, man, calm the fuck down,” someone shouted. Zane felt arms grab at him, pulling on him. “You’re going to scare Jiri. Calm down.”

“Jiri!” Zane yelled, ignoring the people behind him. He didn’t care if he was making a fool of himself, if people saw him losing his mind, because he was. If he didn’t get to Jiri, he knew he would go mad.

Suddenly, the door flew open. Zane looked down to see Billy standing in the doorway. Billy glared at him for just a moment, then stepped out of the way, his arm waving toward Jiri. Zane rushed into the room and over to the bed.

The moment he sat down on the mattress, Jiri reached his hand out for him. Zane gratefully took it, holding it tight in his. “Jiri.”

“You’re being very rude right now, Zane,” Jiri whispered without opening his eyes. “You shouldn’t shout so much.”

Zane cocked his head to one side as he stared down at Jiri’s closed eyes. He suddenly realized that everyone in the room watched him, waiting for his reaction to Jiri’s words. Zane felt his face flush.

“Sorry, Jiri,” he said quietly. Jiri grunted, but he did give Zane’s hand a small squeeze. Zane looked over at the man hovering on the other side of the bed. “Well? What are you waiting for?”

The doctor smirked, then sat down on the side of the bed. “Pull him over onto his stomach, please. I need to see his injury.”

Zane grabbed Jiri around the waist and rolled him over onto his stomach. He could feel Jiri’s body tense. A small groan of pain escaped from his lips. Zane glared at the doctor.

The doctor just shook his head and grabbed a set of scissors. He cut the edge of Jiri’s shirt, then up the middle of his back, parting the material to reveal a red, puckered, and bloody wound in Jiri’s back.

Zane inhaled deeply. It was real.

Chapter 9

Jiri rolled his eyes as Zane held up another forkful of food for him. Zane was really starting to drive him crazy. It had been almost two weeks since Larry had shot him. In all that time, Zane refused to let Jiri lift a finger. He wasn't even allowed to feed himself.

Another week of this, hell another day, and Jiri just might strangle Zane. It wasn't Zane's fault that Jiri had gotten shot. That responsibility sat squarely on Jiri's shoulders. He should have searched Larry after knocking him out.

By not doing so, Jiri had endangered Zane's life. Jiri could still feel the terror he felt when he had looked across the room and saw Larry pointing a gun at Zane. He had been so sure he wouldn't reach Zane in time to save him.

Thankfully, he had. In the process, he had also gotten himself shot. No, the sole responsibility for getting shot lay with Jiri. He just wished it had hurt a little less. Jiri's shoulder still ached. He hated pain.

"One last bite, baby, I promise," Zane said when Jiri turned his head away from the next forkful of food. "Please?"

Jiri turned and took the last bite of food, chewing it carefully even as he glared at Zane. He watched Zane set the plate down on the table, giving Jiri a little sigh. Jiri smirked. Zane was pretty good at giving Jiri the guilty treatment to get what he wanted.

Jiri reached for Zane's hand with his, only to let it fall back to his lap when Zane turned away from him and began cleaning up. Zane seemed to be doing that a lot lately.

“How about we go outside today? Maybe go for a walk?” Zane asked.

Jiri shrugged. He would much rather stay inside with Zane and fool around, but Zane hadn’t been near him since before the shooting. He could think of nothing he’d rather do than to curl up with Zane and while away the afternoon in bed with him.

As far as he could tell, though, Zane didn’t seem to be interested. No matter what he did, Zane only touched him to help him. Jiri had started to wonder if Zane would ever touch him sexually again.

Jiri had even tried walking around in just a shirt. When that hadn’t worked, Jiri had walked around naked. Zane had just told Jiri to get dressed and left the room. Jiri was close to giving up. He didn’t want to beg for Zane’s affections if Zane didn’t want to give them.

The only thing Jiri could figure is that Zane believed the words Larry had said to him about Jiri sleeping with strangers for money. Zane had always said that he wouldn’t share Jiri. Maybe he meant before they had met, too.

It wasn’t like anything that Larry said was the truth, but Jiri didn’t think Zane would believe him if he tried to defend himself. And maybe there wasn’t much point in defending himself.

If Zane had so little faith in him that he believed someone like Larry over him, there wasn’t much hope for their relationship, whatever it might be. Jiri could hear Zane droning on about the weather outside and how nice it was. The weather, yeah, like he cared about that when his world was falling apart.

Jiri got up from the table and walked over to stare out the window. He could see people coming and going from his vantage point. Men, women, children, they all seemed to be having a good time.

He wished he could be down there with everyone, enjoying himself. He wished he were anywhere enjoying himself. He was tired of not knowing where he stood with Zane, of not knowing if they had something together or not. He wanted answers.

“Zane?”

“Yeah, Jiri,” Zane replied from across the room.

“Am I still your pet?”

“Of course you’re still my pet. That will never change.”

“Am I still your sex pet?” Jiri held his breath while he waited for Zane to answer. How Zane replied could make or break him. When Zane didn’t answer, Jiri’s heart sank. He turned around to face Zane. “Well?”

“Oh, Jiri, how could you...”

Jiri knew what Zane was going to say before he said it. Shock and disbelief were written all over Zane’s face. Jiri braced himself as he felt his heart begin to crack. Zane didn’t want him anymore.

“...want me after what I did to you?”

What? Jiri stared at Zane in confusion as his words sank in. “What are you talking about? You didn’t do anything to me.” He waved his hands in the air in an exasperated gesture. “Hell, you haven’t done anything to me in days.”

“Jiri, you got shot because of me.”

Jiri’s head shot back in surprise. “What?”

Zane sank down to his knees. His head dropped into his hands. “I’m supposed to protect you, take care of you. Instead, you almost lost your life because of me.”

Jiri was shocked to see tears in Zane’s eyes as he looked up at him. “How could you want me to touch you after that?” Zane said.

Jiri crossed the room to stand in front of Zane. He had no idea that Zane had been avoiding him out of some misplaced sense of guilt. It explained so much and at the same time didn’t explain a thing.

He wrapped his hands around Zane’s face and tilted his head back so that he could look down into his moss-green eyes. “Zane, you didn’t do this. Larry did. You did everything you could to protect me.”

“But you—”

Jiri quickly covered Zane’s lips with his finger. He shook his head. “No, you didn’t do this. If anyone is at fault, it’s me for not

searching Larry when he was tied up. Besides, I'm fine, almost as good as new, in fact."

Zane leaned forward and buried his face in Jiri's stomach. His arms wrapped around Jiri in a near death grip. "You never should have been shot in the first place."

"I agree. That still doesn't mean it was your fault. You were doing what you are supposed to do. You were out protecting me from the Night Dwellers, as well as everyone else. Isn't that what you're supposed to do?"

Zane nodded. "Yes, but—"

Jiri continued as if Zane hadn't spoken. "Did you know at the time that Larry had made a deal with the Night Dwellers?"

Zane shook his head.

"Did you know that the Night Dwellers were supposed to keep you occupied so that he could get to me?"

Zane shook his head.

"Did you know that Larry knew which room was ours?"

Zane shook his head.

"Did you know that Larry had a gun?"

Zane shook his head.

"Did you know that if you don't kiss me in the next five seconds I'm going to kick your ass?"

Zane started to shake his head again then stopped, looking up at Jiri in surprise. "What?"

"Kiss me, Zane," Jiri whispered as he leaned down toward Zane. "I've missed your kisses."

"Jiri," Zane groaned.

Jiri didn't give Zane a choice. He pressed his lips against Zane's even as he pushed his body back against the floor. The moment Zane's back hit the floor, Jiri threw his legs over him, straddling Zane's waist.

Even with his lips plastered to Zane's, Jiri wasted no time before pulling Zane's shirt up to his neck, then going to work on Zane's

jeans. He had every intention of having both of them out of their clothes as fast as possible.

“Jiri,” Zane whispered as he pulled his mouth away from Jiri’s. He grabbed his hands. “Slow down, little one.”

Jiri shook his head. “Don’t want to slow down. Want to feel you inside of me.”

Zane looked at Jiri for the longest moment. “Are you sure, Jiri?”

“Oh, yeah.” Jiri grinned. He was more than sure. He was ecstatic!

“Then get up.”

“What? No,” Jiri cried out as Zane pushed him up. Jiri thought Zane was rejecting him again so he was surprised when Zane got to his feet and picked Jiri up in his arms, carrying him into the bedroom.

Zane set Jiri on his feet, grinning down at him. “First one naked gets to be on top.”

Jiri’s eyes widened. His hands quickly reached for the hem of his shirt. He pulled it over his head and tossed it across the room before reaching for his jeans. He started laughing as he watched Zane peeling off his own clothes just as quickly.

Jiri was dressed in jeans and a shirt. Zane had on a shirt, jeans, socks, and boots. Jiri was sure he would be the first one naked. At least, until he saw Zane push his jeans down his legs, his hard cock bouncing as it was freed from his pants.

The long lost sight froze Jiri in place, his jeans halfway down his legs. He could only stand there and stare, licking his lips. He so wanted to feel that cock in his mouth again. Dropping to his knees, Jiri leaned forward and wrapped his lips around Zane’s jutting flesh.

Oh, damn. It was as good as Jiri remembered. Zane tasted like heaven, rough, dominant, and all male. Jiri groaned. He smirked around the cock in his mouth when Zane’s groan immediately followed his.

“That’s cheating, Jiri.”

Jiri pulled back long enough to look up at Zane. “Want me to stop?”

“Hell no!”

Jiri grinned, then wrapped his lips around Zane again. He lavished Zane with his tongue, licked and caressed him. He sucked until Zane’s hands tightened in his hair, holding him still. Jiri glanced up. Zane’s jaw was clenched, his eyes closed, as air hissed out between his teeth.

“Enough, Jiri,” Zane growled. “I want to be inside of you when I come.”

Jiri was all for that. He quickly got to his feet and pushed his jeans the rest of the way off of his legs, then climbed onto the bed and rolled over onto his back. He watched eagerly as Zane pulled the rest of his clothes off and climbed onto the bed to kneel between his legs.

“You were naked first, Jiri. That means you get to be on top.”

Jiri shook his head. “We did that already. I want to try it another way.”

Zane chuckled. “Get the lube.”

Jiri rolled over and reached into the nightstand drawer to grab the lube. He handed it to Zane and started to roll back onto his bed when a hand in the middle of his back stopped him. Jiri looked at Zane in query.

Zane winked. “On your hands and knees, little one. I want to play.”

That plan was fine with Jiri. He climbed back into the middle of the bed and positioned himself on his hands and knees, burying his head in his hands.

He could hear Zane squirting lube out. His body trembled in anticipation. It had been so long since he had been with Zane and he had been so afraid he would never feel it again. The waiting was almost more than Jiri could take.

“Zane,” he pleaded.

“Slowly, baby,” Zane chuckled. “I don’t want to hurt you.”

“You won’t, I swear.”

“We’re going to do this at my pace, Jiri, or not at all.”

“Fine,” Jiri huffed. “Just—oh, God!” Jiri nearly came there and then as he felt Zane press a lubed finger into him. Oh yeah, this was what he had been missing. Only a couple of times with Zane and he was hooked for life. But he couldn’t imagine being this way with anyone else.

Jiri thought he might go out of his mind when Zane pressed another finger in. It seemed like weeks since Zane had touched him this way. He would never go without again if he had anything to say about it.

“Zane,” Jiri groaned. He pushed his hips back against Zane, impaling himself on Zane’s fingers. He could feel the tip of his cock brushing against the comforter. Each pass teased him, aroused him.

Jiri didn’t know what to do. He wanted to push down and hump against the comforter, but if he did that he couldn’t push back against Zane. The indecision was killing him. Jiri whimpered.

“I’ve got you, baby,” Zane crooned. Suddenly, fingers were replaced with a long, thick cock. Jiri groaned again as Zane sank all of the way in. This was what he needed, what he wanted.

“Hold on, baby, this is going to be quick and rough. It’s been too long,” Zane said as he grabbed Jiri by the hips and thrust into him.

“And whose fault is that?” Jiri spat out, softening his words by grinning at Zane over his shoulder.

“Yeah, yeah, now shut the fuck up.” Zane chuckled. “I’m trying to concentrate here.”

“Far be it for me to interrupt you,” Jiri said

“Jiri!”

Jiri laughed. He turned back to face the front of the bed and grabbed onto the comforter. It felt like Zane was trying to pound him into the headboard. Each thrust was filled with all of Zane’s strength.

If Jiri didn’t know better, he would think Zane was trying to push his cock so far into Jiri it would never come out. Jiri knew he would at least be feeling this tomorrow. He couldn’t be more thrilled with the prospect.

A sudden smack to his hip made Jiri jerk. He looked over his shoulder at Zane in surprise. "What'd you do that for?"

"Roll over, baby. I want to see you touch yourself," Zane replied as he pulled free of Jiri's body, much to Jiri's regret.

Okay, Jiri could do that. He quickly rolled over to his back and spread his legs wide. He grinned up at Zane, one hand moving down his body to grab his hard cock and stroke it several times. His other hand moved up to tug at his nipple. "Is this what you wanted?"

Jiri felt delight spiral through him as he watched Zane's eyes glaze over. A small tic throbbed in his square jaw as he growled down at Jiri. He loved knowing that he could arouse Zane to this point.

Jiri yelped in surprise, realizing that he had unleashed a monster, when Zane grabbed his legs and pushed them up to his chest. A moment later, Zane's cock thrust back into him, filling him to the brim.

Zane began a rapid pace, thrusting into Jiri, then pulling out. Each movement jarred Jiri's body until Jiri had to let go of his cock and grab onto Zane's arms just to keep from being moved up the length of the bed.

"Close, baby, I'm so close," Zane growled.

Jiri let go of Zane's arm to grab his cock. He wanted to come with Zane. But the force of Zane's thrusts instantly pushed him up the bed. Jiri quickly grabbed onto Zane again. His eyes shot up to Zane's in desperation.

"You're going to come with me, Jiri," Zane spat out through gritted teeth as if he understood Jiri's dilemma. "You're my sex pet. You belong to me. I am your master. You do as I say and I say that you're going to come with me."

Well, there was no arguing with that logic. Besides, Zane's forceful words seemed to be having the desired effect. Jiri could feel his cock start to throb, drops of pre-cum dripping from the top. A tingle began at the base of his spine and slowly worked its way up

until it wrapped around Jiri's cock and held him, suspended, as if waiting for Zane's permission to erupt.

Zane's hands tightened around Jiri's thighs as he thrust into him once more, his body stiffening over the top of Jiri's. Zane's eyes bored into Jiri's.

"Come for me, my Jiri," Zane demanded.

As if that was all his cock had been waiting for, Jiri cried out, his head falling back against the mattress as an orgasm shot through his body unlike any he had ever experienced before. It hit every nerve ending in Jiri's body, then shot out the top of his cock.

"Zane!" Jiri screamed as his power to breathe, to think, to feel anything but the press of Zane's body against his dwindled down to the powerful green eyes gazing down at him. He was mesmerized, captured by the intense emotions on Zane's face.

"Zane," Jiri whispered, in awe over the love he hoped he was seeing in Zane's eyes. He reached his hand up to caress the side of Zane's face. Zane captured Jiri's hand and pressed a kiss against the palm.

Dropping Jiri's hand, Zane leaned down, pressing his body against his. His hands captured Jiri's face, holding him still. Jiri's breath caught in his throat as Zane lowered his head and kissed him.

He felt the kiss all of the way down to his toes. Zane devoured him. Jiri's hands clenched against Zane's waist as Zane's tongue brushed against his, hard lips nipping at him. When Zane finally lifted his head to stare down at him again, Jiri let out a groan of protest. He didn't want the kiss to end.

"Guess you're keeping me, huh?" Jiri asked after a moment.

Zane chuckled. He brushed a blond curl back from Jiri's face. "Yeah, I'm keeping you."

"No more thinking that my injury was your fault?"

"Jiri—"

"No more thinking my injury was your fault, right?" Jiri repeated as he tapped Zane on the chest with his finger.

Zane chuckled. "Okay, no more thinking it was my fault, but only if you promise me not to get shot again."

"Well, I sure as hell am going to try not to. That sucked."

Zane pulled away from Jiri and rolled to the side of the bed. He reached back and patted Jiri's leg. "You still want to go out for that walk?"

"Yes!" Jiri exclaimed as he quickly rolled to the side of the bed to join Zane. "I've been cooped up in this damn place forever. I'm going out of my mind."

"You know you still can't go outside unescorted, right?"

Jiri shrugged. He had figured as much. He hated the rules that he had to follow to belong to Zane but if that's what he had to do, he'd do it.

Jiri leaned into the hand Zane cupped around his cheek. He loved it when Zane touched him, even if it wasn't sexual.

"I'd let you go outside if the Night Dwellers weren't such a problem, Jiri, I swear I would. I just can't let anything happen to you, and until we know that we won't have any more dealings with them, I can't take that chance."

Jiri smiled. He could see worry in Zane's eyes. He patted the man's cheek. "I get it, Zane. I won't ask to go outside without an escort until you give me the all clear."

Zane let out a heavy sigh. "I'm sorry, baby."

"I'm not," Jiri said. "While this whole situation has been horrible, besides finding you, I mean, we've learned a few things."

Zane grinned. "What have learned then?"

"Well, for one, no matter how safe we think we are from the Night Dwellers, we're not. We always have to be on guard. While that is a horrible way to live, it beats being dead."

"True," Zane replied.

"We also learned that there are some people that may seem harmless but in reality they are the ones we need to be the most watchful of."

“Larry?”

Jiri nodded. “I knew he was a slime ball, but I never thought he would sink low enough to make a deal with the Night Dwellers.” Jiri shuddered. “He was giving up other people to keep himself safe. It was disgusting.”

“Now, Jiri, we don’t know that for sure. We’re just guessing.”

Jiri shook his head rapidly. “No, I know he was. It just makes sense. The Night Dwellers never attacked us, ever. But they attacked everyone around us. I always thought it was because we didn’t have anything they were interested in.”

“Baby, they don’t rob people. The Night Dwellers kill people. That’s all they do. If Larry made a deal with them it was to save his own skin and nothing else.”

“That’s what I’m saying,” Jiri said. “Larry made a deal with the Night Dwellers, not only to leave him alone but to get at you and me. Think about it, if the Night Dwellers could get into your compound they had all sorts of things to go after.”

“All sorts of people, Jiri, people.”

Jiri grimaced. “Yeah, that too.”

“Come on, little one, wipe the sad look off your face and go get cleaned up,” Zane said. “We have a walk outside to go and enjoy.”

* * * *

Zane shook his head, chuckling, as he watched Jiri race into the bathroom to clean up. Jiri practically bounced with anticipation. Zane thought he looked cute. If taking Jiri outside for a walk made him that happy, Zane was all for it.

He was still a little hesitant to take Jiri anywhere. After Jiri had been shot by Larry, it had been all Zane could do to hold onto his sanity until Jiri healed. Zane wasn’t so sure he hadn’t lost it somewhere along the way.

When he met Jiri, Zane had no idea that Jiri would come to mean so much to him. Zane would gladly give up leadership of the Death Dealers for his little man. Hell, he'd even give up his own life if it meant Jiri remained safe.

He still couldn't believe that Larry had made a deal with the Night Dwellers so he could get to Jiri. If Jiri hadn't made the connection that the Night Dwellers never attacked Larry's garage but everything around them, Zane never would have figured out that Larry was in cahoots with them. Zane figured Larry hated him for humiliating him and saw killing Jiri as a way to get rid of his stepson and have his revenge on Zane at the same time. It would have worked, too, if Jiri hadn't fought back.

Larry was dead, his neck breaking when he landed on the ground after being thrown off the balcony. The Night Dwellers had disappeared as quickly as they appeared, leaving behind a lot of mayhem. Jiri was alive and safe and for Zane, that was all that mattered.

Zane stood up and reached for his clothes. His mind reeled with thoughts of Jiri's near-death experience as he got dressed. He never wanted to go through anything like that again. If that meant he doubled the guard or kept Jiri by his side every second of every day, so be it.

Jiri was his to protect, and no matter how much he bitched, Zane would do everything he could to ensure that Jiri was protected. In the small amount of time Zane had known him, Jiri had become the center of his world.

"Hey, are you done in there yet?" Zane called out when Jiri didn't come out of the bathroom for several moments.

"I'm coming," Jiri said as he walked out of the bathroom.

Zane's breathing stuttered as his eyes landed on Jiri. He didn't understand it but every time he saw Jiri, his beauty awed Zane. Jiri was without a doubt, the most beautiful man he had ever seen.

Jiri wasn't merely pretty or handsome. He was breathtakingly beautiful. And he was all Zane's. He had no more doubts that Jiri was his and always would be. Jiri had put down any doubts Zane might have had when he had jumped in front of Larry's bullet to protect him.

No one that had designs on someone else, let alone thoughts of being with someone else, would try to protect someone by throwing themselves in front of a bullet as Jiri had done. And, while Zane wasn't happy about Jiri being hurt, he would forever be grateful that Jiri cared about him enough to want to save him from harm.

"Ready?"

"Just a minute," Jiri replied as he hurried across the room to the small table by the bedroom door. "I need to get my collar and leash."

"Jiri," Zane said softly.

"Yeah?" Jiri asked as he pulled open the drawer and searched for the leather collar and leash.

"You don't need them."

"Of course I do. I want to go outside." Jiri opened another drawer and searched through it.

"Jiri."

"Uh huh?"

"Jiri, look at me," Zane ordered.

"I can't find them, Zane," Jiri said. He turned to look at Zane. "Have you seen them?"

Zane crossed over to Jiri and grabbed his hands. "I said you don't need them, Jiri."

"But...I want to go outside, Zane. You said we could go for a walk."

Zane smiled. "And we will, little one, but you don't need the collar and leash anymore. I got rid of them."

"What? Why? You said I couldn't leave the room unless I was wearing them." Jiri looked totally confused.

“I also said that pets only wear collars and leashes until they get a permanent claiming mark from their masters.” Zane brushed his hand over the tattoo mark on Jiri’s throat. “You’re wearing my tattoo, Jiri. That’s all you need.”

Jiri raised his hand and stroked his fingers lightly over the tattoo. His face flushed as he began to grin, looking more beautiful than Zane had ever seen him.

Zane kissed him gently on the lips. “I’m keeping you, Jiri, for always.”

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stormy believes the only thing sexier than a man in cowboy boots is two, or three men in cowboy boots. She also believes in love at first sight, soul mates, true love, and happy endings.

Stormy live in the great Northwest region of the USA, with her gorgeous husband and soul mate, six very active teenagers, two boxer/collie puppies, two old biddy cats, and three fish. When she's not being a mother to her six teenagers or cleaning up after her two 70 pound lap puppies, you can usually find her cuddled in bed with a book in her hand and a puppy in her lap, or on her laptop, creating the next sexy man for one of her stories.

Stormy welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website at www.stormyglenn.com.

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