

loveyoudivine

SAFE HOUSE

M. KING

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Safe House
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Safe House

By

M. King

Simon Preston sat on the edge of the bed and stared dismally at the patch of carpet between his feet. It hadn't happened in days – weeks, even – and he'd thought he'd be okay. He *should* have been okay. So why couldn't he even do this one, simple thing? He wanted to. Damn it, he wanted to so much. It wasn't fair. What the hell was wrong with him?

The covers rustled, crisp white cotton suiting the minimalist dimness of the bedroom. The lights were down low, a tangle of discarded clothes tracing a path from the bed to the door. In the other room, music played, obscuring the soundscape of the city buzzing beneath the windows. Cars, trains, people...a thousand little lives all filled with their own problems. Simon wished he could be one of them, that he could be anywhere else but here. From somewhere in the muddle of covers and pillows, one lean, tanned hand reached out, finger and thumb pointed together like the beak of a bird.

"Hey." Frazer pinched Simon on the thigh. "It doesn't matter, you know."

Simon looked down at the rapidly fading white mark on his skin, the pleasant but passing sting of the pinch, and then glanced to where his boyfriend lay. Frazer had rolled over, head resting on one arm, dirty-blond hair rumpled and cool amusement playing over his face. Partly swathed in the covers, he gave the impression of a half-unwrapped gift, discarded before the receiver had got to the best part.

Unfortunately, that was a pretty accurate description right now.

Simon just shook his head. Humiliation stung the bridge of his nose.

"Well, I tried," Frazer announced. With a little clench on his abs he rolled smoothly up, covers slipping from his form and bedsprings clunking at his departure. "D'you want a cup of tea?"

Simon scowled at the carpet. "No, I do not want a cup of goddamn tea!"

"All right. Suit yourself."

Simon swore under his breath. He couldn't stand to watch Frazer walk out of the room, convinced that there would be some look of disappointment or a sign of low expectations fulfilled on his face. Instead, he listened to the footfalls until they mingled with the music, and clenched his tongue between his teeth. He couldn't stay here tonight. Not like this.

They'd only been together a few months, and perhaps that was the worst of it. He still wanted so badly to give Frazer everything, to prove...what? Himself, he supposed. To make absolutely certain that he was the best he could be, worthy of the kind of relationship they were developing. Frazer was a big deal; that much had been obvious from the start. The very first day Simon saw him, down at the marina, working on his ridiculously scruffy, tiny boat, totally incongruous next to the shiny white yachts and blazer-wearing buffoons, he'd been breathtaking. He was tanned, but in that outdoorsy, salt-scoured kind of way, rather than through lotions or sun beds. His body – imperfectly sculpted by sports and not polished with long hours in the gym – spoke just as clearly of that defining authenticity of his. There was nothing fake, nothing studied or posed about Frazer and, even though he didn't seem to realize it, he demanded exactly the same honesty in return.

It was that which scared Simon beyond all measure.

Now, acting on pure pique, he stood and stalked across the floor, picking out his own clothes and shaking them free of Frazer's. He pulled on underwear, pants, shirt and jacket, patted the reassuring weight of his wallet where it banged against his chest, jammed his sock-clad feet into his shoes and groped in his pocket for his car keys.

"I'm gonna go," he called, striding through the apartment. "I'm... Look, I'll call you tomorrow, all right?"

He caught sight of Frazer through the kitchen doorway, naked and perfect and waiting for the kettle to boil. He looked up and frowned at Simon.

"What? Wh—"

"I'll call you tomorrow," he repeated, brooking neither argument or resistance. "Night."

"Simon? What the hell? What—"

He let the front door close on Frazer's voice and jogged down to his car, pulse beating a hard tattoo of guilt and regret. Walking out wasn't a good idea. He knew that, didn't he? Surely he must know that. Frazer would be pissed, and it hardly demonstrated a mature, adult attitude to anything. So he couldn't get it up. It happened. It was embarrassing, humiliating and it opened up a whole chasm of steep-sided, slippery shames, but it did happen. And Frazer understood that. He could be, when he wanted to be, extremely understanding...which Simon didn't think he could take right now.

Anything, except Frazer forgiving him, or being nice.

Simon slid behind the wheel of his Lexus and drove. Not three blocks from Frazer's place, anger started to take the place of shame and mortification, but the battle was hard-pitched. Erratic, too. Why the hell did he feel angry with Frazer? This was *his* problem.

It had started to rain, a real summer cloudburst teeming down, the road ahead outlined with a wet corona. Fat drops sliced at the darkness and bounced, yellowed by streetlamps, off his windshield. Uncomfortable with the scattered melody of rain against the glass, Simon fiddled with the radio, wanting some kind of barrier between himself and the night, the memories and the fantasies playing out in his head.

It was still reasonably early, no later than half past ten, and he could still turn around and go back to Frazer's. Apologize, even, however unappetizing the thought. Simon let the classical station he'd found wash over him, and considered his options.

If he went back now, he'd have to explain. *Really* explain, which he doubted he could. Better to go home, pour himself a whiskey, and slink into bed alone, then maybe call Frazer tomorrow and edge around an apology for being a complete ass. Probably not to say it in as many words, but let him believe the thought was there.

More likely that he wouldn't do that, though. More likely that Simon would just say nothing, pretend work kept him busier than it really did for a day or so until—eventually, when the itch got too bad or the guilt gnawed him into a dozen broken pieces—he would crack and let Frazer believe he'd

won. Just like last time, or the time before that. There would be a bottle of wine, a terse conversation riven with choked-off words, and Frazer would rub his back and tell him it honestly didn't matter and he shouldn't be so silly about it. All that 'it happens to everyone' crap.

Unfortunately, Simon knew that wasn't true. At least, not quite as Frazer would mean it. And there was absolutely no way on Earth he could tell the truth.

Not to the man he loved.

So, Simon drove home. He parked in the tenants' garage, made his way swiftly and quietly up the impersonal, neutral stairwells, and shut his door on the day with relief and dissatisfaction. His apartment was bigger than Frazer's—or maybe it only seemed that way, what with the lack of clutter—but just as stark in terms of décor. They both favored a touch of modern design, in fact their tastes seemed fairly similar in most things. Frazer had already joked that, when they moved in together, it would make picking stuff out so much easier. Simon had smiled at that. When...not if.

How far had he gone towards fucking that up tonight?

He rubbed his hands over his face and went for the bottle of rye he kept in the kitchen cabinet. Simon took it and a shot glass into his bedroom, pausing for a moment before he put the light on to survey the calm, unruffled scene. His bed, neatly made, his dresser, devoid of knick-knacks...everything in its place, and a place for everything. Even the outlines of the shadows were clean, though their shapes were filled with the flickering light of reflected rain, tossed around the room from where it hammered against the window. It was getting wild out there...more a summer storm than a passing shower.

Simon shed his damp-spotted jacket, turned on the lamp and, kicking off his shoes, climbed onto the bed. He'd been a fool. The whiskey glugged into his glass, and the burn when the first mouthful hit the back of his throat came as admonishment. He should have stayed.

The rain beat down harder, and Simon pulled his phone from his pocket, glaring at the display. Frazer hadn't called; no indignant demands, no angry scenes. Simon turned the phone off and tossed it to the nightstand. *Damn it.* He couldn't make anything easy, could he? Another slug of whiskey brought the reminder that it wasn't ever going to be easy...not if he kept acting this way. Simon sniffed. He wouldn't sleep like this. All balled up on himself with irritation, frustrated and horny, with the ghosts of Frazer's body still under his hands. Frazer part-owned a coffee shop not far from the waterfront. He worked there four days a week, and he'd wind up every shift smelling of cinnamon, brown sugar and dark City roast. Simon could have sworn that flavor was still stuck at the back of his throat, all mixed up with sea salt and sweat. So much want, so why had it all gone wrong?

He knocked back the rest of his drink. Stupid question. Just like he was stupid enough to pretend he wouldn't act on what he was thinking now. Simon peered gloomily through the bottom of his glass, gaze resting on the laptop that sat on the chest of drawers beneath the window. The rain thrummed on the windowpane, his mouth felt dry in spite of the booze, and

there didn't seem to be any damn point in anything. He hadn't wanted to end the night this way, but what else was he good for?

Simon slammed the glass down on the nightstand, went to grab the laptop and flung himself back on the bed. As the screen glimmered into life, he hunched around it like some jealous or wounded thing, determinedly focused on not thinking, not feeling.

It had started, he supposed, a long time ago. Not childhood; nobody believed in that Freudian bullshit anymore. After that, probably. The first time Simon realized what it was, he must have been about fifteen, slouched out on the sofa one weekend with his sister. Their parents were out of town and they were watching old movies while Marie did her hair ready for a party. John Phillip Law, or some other hunk of Hollywood beefcake, had found himself ensnared in the chains of an evil wizard and struggled to break the bonds before a kraken of the deep devoured him. It was laughable hokum, but the oiled, bronzed pectorals straining against the links, the bound hands...the look on his face as he mimed horror and the intense need for escape. Simon had sprung the biggest boner of his life. Mortified, he'd dashed to the bathroom, but the pictures wouldn't go away. Not just the muscles, the massive biceps sheathed in oil—he'd already known which way his taste in men ran, even then—but the actual *chains*. The way they kissed all that amazing tanned skin. The very thought turned Simon on more than he could bear, but for years he'd failed to understand it.

He'd had so much else to occupy him, so many things squabbling for his attention and his effort. And he had always put so much effort into everything. If you didn't, how were you meant to succeed? That's what his father had taught him, and to Simon they were words to live by, now more than ever. Yes, there had always been something...something to concentrate on, to stop himself from thinking. School, sports, or all the extra-curricular crap he needed to get into his first choice college, then pushing himself to drag his grades even higher. It had been important to excel, to show just how bright he could burn, and he had. Summa cum laude, then an internship with one of the city's largest and most prestigious architectural firms, finally the promotion that had snared him the poky little office and the professional respect he commanded now. So what would they say? What would they think?

He'd fought hard to push his way up the ranks, never hiding who he was, never apologizing. It had made life harder, at work and outside it, but he got what he was owed every time simply by being better than the competition. Bigger, faster and hungrier because, hell, if you didn't stand head and shoulders above somebody, you might as well just lie down and let everybody walk all over you.

Simon drew the back of his hand across his mouth. Another glass of rye had somehow found its way into his fingers, and he took a swallow of it. He found with ease the files from his pay-per-view account, the movies and favorites scenes he'd burned to that special folder on his hard drive, and he turned the volume up, selecting a particular, trusted and true friend of a flick

to view. It didn't start out as art and, dimly impatient and irritable, Simon skipped through the first few scenes of lousy, wooden dialogue, only paying attention when the camera cut to a hot young muscle boy running through leafy woodland, naked but for a pair of white briefs. Something about him reminded Simon faintly of Frazer – or perhaps the way he saw Frazer in his mind's eye – and he imagined that honed, beautiful body cloaking a slightly different frame, that blond head graced with slightly different hair.

He'd been into guys like that once: All meat, no brain. The ones he picked up at the weekends, in clubs on the other side of town. He used to take them to hotel rooms, pay his offerings at the altar of what he thought he wanted, and every single damn time, he'd needle himself with regret and shame because it never felt the way he wanted it to. It was never *right*. They were the ones whose freedom he wanted, whose unconscious, liberated joy he desired. The way they danced, partied like every night was Friday.... They were the ones he'd slap 'til their ass cheeks reddened and they whimpered for more and, if they were good, the ones he tied up and let choke on his dick before he plowed them out and made them beg.

In the morning, they were always gone, leaving him with sweet memories and sore thighs. One or two he'd seen again, but rarely. After the feast, they didn't interest him. They littered his bed like crumbs, like screwed up napkins and the last traces of rib sauce, and reminded him of his weakness...and that frightened Simon.

On the screen, the muscle boy still ran, pursued by two men in fatigues, their boots rustling through the undergrowth. Shafts of bright sun split through the leaves and dappled his body, and for a moment it all seemed realistic, and the two guys carried a real sense of menace, of urgency. Simon took another swallow of his drink. They caught up with their quarry, and struggled. He was strong but outnumbered, the so-called soldiers each his equal in height and build. Eventually, they felled him, and the scene changed.

Leaves and roots gave way to a square, blank concrete room, one bare light bulb hanging from the ceiling, along with a large iron hook. The fugitive from before was bundled into the room by his captors, body straining as they bound his hands above his head and fastened them to the hook, every inch of him stretched out so that his toes were barely in contact with the floor.

"You tried to run away, filthy little rat," one of the soldiers grunted, bringing his fist into the captive's ribs.

The dull smack of flesh on flesh echoed around the empty bedroom. Simon's breathing deepened a little, his gaze riveted on the bound body. His dick twitched within the confines of his pants. *First sign of life from you all night, you inconsiderate bastard.* Absently, he adjusted his position on the bed.

"He's a rat boy," the other soldier chipped in, and he swaggered over to a metal shelf at the far side of the frame. "We know how to deal with rats."

He came slowly back to the captive's side, a rat-tail butt plug in his hand. It wasn't massive – maybe five inches with a medium girth – but the gleaming black finish and the 'tail' that curved out from the base gave it a more imposing air. The prisoner squirmed as the second soldier lubed up the toy,

futile struggles against the ropes that bound him. He cried out when the first man ripped down his underpants — not as pristinely white as they'd been when he began his escape, smattered with mud and sweat — and revealed a tanned, hairless ass. His legs kicked, fighting the attempts of his tormentors to introduce more lube and, gradually, the plug. It entered with surprising ease, though he struggled and yelled like he'd never even had a finger up there, which Simon sincerely doubted. Nevertheless, his hand strayed to his fly, his every fiber fixated on the sight of that smooth, beautifully toned body, the plug seated hard up inside him, the plastic rat's tail curving up between those round, tanned and improbably muscular buttocks.

"Rat boy, rat boy," the soldiers chanted, but Simon wasn't focused on them, his mind instead traveling over every inch of that taut and helpless flesh, exposed in all its perfection and ripe for anything from corruption to worship.

Perhaps both.

He imagined the delicate balance of pleasure and pain; strung up like that, unable to put all his weight on his legs, his body stretched and defenseless, distended and full yet held ready for more, totally at the mercy of a man whose slightest whim could determine his fate. He squeezed himself, yearning and hardening under the touch of the fantasy, wanting and aching yet not quite able to deal with the images his mind conjured. His breath rasped harder in his chest, the cold throb of guilt long given way to a darker, crueller hunger. His cock jutted against his palm as if sleepily roused, curious to see what the fuss was all about out here. Simon bit his lip and concentrated on the figure on the screen. One of the soldiers had begun caressing the bound body, appraising it like hanging meat, though his hands lingered appreciatively on the proud planes of stomach and chest. He tweaked hard, dark nipples, eliciting groans from his captive that only intensified when he replaced his fingers with twin metal clips.

Simon's hand skimmed to his own chest, his body already responding. He pinched, tugged, closed his eyes, and tried to feel the burn of ropes that weren't there. The bite of imagined metal grazed his skin, bringing his pulse to a skittish tremor, but it wasn't enough.

"We have traps for rats," one of the soldiers said, pulling Simon out of his dreamscape, and the camera angle changed.

One of the men returned to the shelf, and came back with a selection of rodent traps, or something that looked very like them. The captive affected a little bit of resistance, for which he received three hard slaps across the face and — before Simon could find the fast forward button — the traps had been affixed to his scrotum. He yelled, but his perfectly shaved horse cock showed few signs of wilting. Though all the intelligent parts of Simon's brain protested about pills, camera angles and the dubious spring strength of those vicious little snares, he still stared, riveted and unable to look away.

The camera panned in on the head of the model's penis as his tormentors fixed the last trap to it, metal clamping down on flesh that, even crushed, remained engorged and begging. His thighs quaked and his face showed a

mirror of the same pain-pleasure dichotomy, his voice tearing out in shallow cries of pleading. The edge started to fade for Simon. His own innermost parts shied from the image of the rattraps, yet he didn't quite manage to skip past the rest of the scene. While one soldier jerked off, the second bathed the captive's body with the unending kiss of a supple leather whip, marking his back and stomach with stroke after stroke until they reddened, blush-dark and oh, so sensitive.... By the time the jerking captor splattered his victim's flesh with obligatory ropes of hot jizz, Simon couldn't have cared less about anything that had happened today. All his failings and all his screw-ups seemed to rest on the besieged skin of the bound model, and his own body felt seared with every knot, every touch.

The soldiers let him down from the hook, brusquely pushing him to the floor and exchanging the butt plug for the primed and arching cock of the second captor. With every shot of the prisoner's face — crushed to the concrete floor, his eyes screwed shut and his mouth contorted around cries of ecstatic intensity — Simon felt the roughness of it against his own skin. His clammy flesh mimicked the sweat-sheen on the man that crowded his eyes, his body aching to be used like that, to be so filled with that sense of primal, urgent want. He came almost in time with the captive, his last breaths of ecstasy sodden with remorse, and images of Frazer once more in his head.

Simon shut the laptop down abruptly, no longer caring what happened to the handsome muscle boy or, at least, no longer prepared to admit it to himself. Still light-headed, he stood on legs of jelly and went to the bathroom to shower away the sudden feeling of grubby prurience.

He couldn't explain to Frazer.

He wasn't even sure he could explain it to himself.

By the following morning, the rain was long past. Simon rose early, went for a quick run before breakfast, and marveled at how the whole world seemed washed clean. The dawn-streaked daylight touched sidewalks and buildings as if for the first time, and the ozone smell of the ocean lingered, heavy on the air. He thought again of that first day at the marina, of Frazer as he'd been then, and all the regret for the way they'd left things flooded back.

Simon resolved to call him and apologize...but maybe after work. After all, if it hadn't been for his work, they would never have met in the first place. He wasn't into boats, only ever making that trip down there to see some pretentious fool of a client about the Hobson contract. It was going ahead now, steaming on in all its glass wall and green-space glory; yet another office building by yet another architect. Strange, Simon thought, that he should have that success when he was running so close to losing Frazer. Both things had become real at the same time and, hell, given the choice, he knew which he'd pick to preserve.

That knowledge in itself came as something of a surprise to him. Nobody had ever really mattered like this before. He fought down the suspicion — only fleeting though it was — that this might not really be a good thing, and tried to concentrate on his pacing on the way back home. Unfortunately,

concentration only got Simon more wound up, his mind picking at all the cracks developing between them. It wasn't just...the *stuff* that kept happening, like last night. The inevitability of what he would have to confront sooner or later yawned before Simon, and he couldn't see a way out. Frazer had to know how he felt, didn't he? All right, so he'd never actually said it in as many words, but he must know. And, that being the case, it would be okay.

Wouldn't it?

His feet pounded on the tarmac, and he resolved not to think about it any more, throwing himself into the run. So much easier to feel, not think.

Once Simon got to work – clean-scrubbed, breakfasted and looking far less ruffled than he felt – his day passed in its usual way, full of minor dramas, pointless politics and the ever-present challenge to push himself that little bit harder. There were plans to oversee, meetings to have, a presentation or three to give...it kept him busy, kept his brain occupied. The Hobson contract could, as people kept remarking, really take his career to the next level.

Only when the light faded and he could feel the evening drawing in did he start to think properly about patching things up with Frazer. He'd got it planned: dinner, a public place where whatever they talked about could be overheard, and so wouldn't run too close, cut too deep. He'd be contrite, honestly so, and Frazer would forgive him one more time. It would have to be the last time, of course. Simon wanted it to be the last time – no more of this picking and tearing at something he so badly wanted to get right. He would take it in both hands, swaddle it up tight and bind it close to him, and it would be okay. It would, because it had to be.

"Yes?"

Simon winced. He was calling from the parking lot. Frazer sounded unimpressed, his voice tight and cold. The potential dinner-and-apology package didn't seem to go down too well.

"I don't need to be wined and dined, Simon."

He scowled at the dim outline of the lot's chain link fence, a dusty wind bowling dead leaves and city debris along its base, and tipped the phone closer to his mouth.

"Okay. But I just wanted to say –"

"Anything we need to talk about, we need to talk about on our own. Don't you think?"

Damn. Simon hadn't imagined that Frazer could know him so well. It discomforted him, made him feel vulnerable and stupid, and he mumbled an initial response, the momentary weakness making him stubborn and contrary. Frazer sighed tersely, a crackle on the line. Simon twisted his mouth, frustrated by his failure.

"All right," he snapped. "Come round tonight. My place at ten."

Frazer could either do it or not do it. His choice. Simon pretended he wasn't holding his breath, waiting for the response he wanted. Torn whispers of plastic blew past his feet.

"Okay."

He closed his eyes and breathed again. "Fine. I'll see you then."

"Yeah."

Frazer rang off, and Simon exhaled slowly. *What the hell is wrong with me?*

By the time he got home, he was already wishing he hadn't invited Frazer. He blitzed the apartment, tidying things that didn't need tidying, sweeping away clutter that he had no cause to disguise.

Frazer arrived at three minutes past ten, that very fact by itself admonishing Simon for clock-watching. He looked as tight-lipped as he'd sounded on the phone, and the distance that lingered between them felt thick and prickly. Simon made a futile gesture towards the kitchen.

"D'you want...?"

Frazer folded his arms. "What the hell's going on, Si?"

Simon crumpled a little, feeling his control of the situation ebbing away, a receding tide pulling at his feet. Frazer watched him steadily; if he saw any sign of the discomfort behind the scenes, he didn't show it. It might have been easier if he had, but Simon supposed he knew the bastard better than that. Frazer just watched, blue eyes keen and hard, his strong, lean face countenancing neither excuses nor avoidance. He should be grateful for that, maybe. That Frazer was here at all, and that he was prepared to stand there, granite-faced, and demand answers. It would have been so easy for him to give up before now, write everything off and leave Simon to stew in whatever mess he'd made for himself. Yet he'd refused that option, time and time again, and now his very silence threatened to drag all of Simon's darkest secrets out of his mouth like rotten teeth.

"I..." He bit them back, choking on an odd mixture of pride and humiliation.

Frazer just made a quiet 'tch' sound, glancing away at the walls with a slight shake of his head, as if Simon disgusted him. His body stiffened a little, those broad shoulders flexing back against the confines of his shirt. Simon's mouth felt dry, an impossibly ridiculous urge to fling himself at Frazer, fists flailing and feet kicking, just because he was so fucking composed. They were evenly matched in strength and build, but he suspected – aside from the whole it being completely wrong thing – Frazer could easily take him down. All the same, the stupid, incongruous images, just the very thought of being pinned beneath that body, roughly punished the way he deserved – needed – to be, had Simon's concentration shot to pieces and his head spinning.

The air quivered a little where Frazer's gaze returned to him.

"So?"

Just one word. Frazer's expression hadn't changed. Simon tried to speak, mouth chewing over empty sounds.

"I mean, you walk out on me without saying a thing. And that wasn't the first time. Then you call, start giving orders again like nothing happened. What am I supposed to think, Si? What is that you actually want from me?"

He couldn't look Frazer in the face. Not and hear those succinct, devastating truths. Regrets blistered behind Simon's eyes.

"I didn't... It's just that —"

"Yeah? What?"

He'd not realized Frazer had come prepared to fight, itching for it and with the lust for battle in his blood. Simon couldn't blame him. If the roles were reversed, he would have done too. He should have handled everything so differently, right from the start of this thing they had. Trying to keep a lid on things had been a stupid, stupid idea, like holding back the tide and — even if he'd succeeded — how could he be everything he wanted to Frazer when he was still a half-truth; a lie of a man cloaked with deceit?

"I...I need to tell you something."

"Really?" Frazer deflated visibly, though it was over in a fraction of a second, hidden behind renewed anger. "Is this the thing you wanted to say in front of a restaurant full of people? What? You've met some —"

He stopped abruptly, lips tight-pressed together, and Simon's gut twisted, chest threatening to split open with the suggestion Frazer could even think that. This had never been about him, yet it had everything to do with him, and Simon didn't know how to say it.

"No! God, no. I'd never...." He shied from the words, lost for how to frame them, how to explain. "It's not you, it's — I mean, the problems we've been having, I need to.... I wanna tell you that — Aw, hell!"

Simon turned from him, blinking and not entirely sure what he was doing. Frazer's voice tugged on the edges of his hearing as he pushed through to the bedroom and pulled open the bottom drawer of his dresser, rifling through the rolled up socks and underwear. Even if he couldn't say, he could show. There seemed no clearer, quicker way. Frazer followed, his shape blocking the doorway, his anger palpable.

"Si? Will you at least tell me what's going on? What do you —"

Simon's fingers closed on the shiny, deceitful pages he sought, just one — like the protected files on his laptop — of his clandestine vices, and he pulled the magazine from its hiding place. He threw it at Frazer like an insult, hardly able to watch the way he fumbled the catch, flipped the thing over in his hands and stared, uncomprehending. That the rustle of paper could be so loud seemed strange. Simon felt sick, but oddly liberated. He stared at his feet, terrified of what he might see on Frazer's face.

"Holy fuck." The words dropped like bell strikes, Frazer's voice low and hollow. "*This?* This is what you like...why you — This is what you want?"

Simon dared to lift his head.

Frazer held the magazine up in one hand, fingers scrunching the pages. "Is it?"

"No. Well, y — no. I don't...I don't know. I —"

"You can't get it up with me, but you can jerk off to kinky porn?"

"No!"

The offending item flew to the bed between them; leather-blank faces glared up accusingly at Simon, page after page of hard bodies and stiff cocks proclaiming his failure.

"What, then?" Frazer demanded. "You're staring at it right now."

Simon heard the rustle of Frazer's shirt as he folded his arms. He dragged his gaze from the magazine, but couldn't get it as far as that angry, hurt face.

"I...I don't like pain," he mumbled. "I don't want that. It's not about force or anything. I just —"

"This is hardly furry handcuffs and silk scarves, either, Simon. If you've been into this stuff the whole time, if you've been lying to me for the past —"

"I just wanna be helpless!" Simon closed his eyes. There. The words were out there now, rampaging free like spiked butterflies, clawing at the walls of the world he'd built. He wasn't sure he'd ever be able to look Frazer in the eye again. He swallowed heavily, chalked his lips with a dry and dusty tongue. Frazer hadn't said anything, and he found himself talking just to fill the silence, padding the things he wished he hadn't said with things he didn't want to reveal.

"I w-want to be completely in someone else's hands. I should have talked to you, I know, but I've never.... Y'know, I've always been this guy who does stuff; I don't get stuff done to me. Does that make sense? I...I thought you'd think I was a freak, or — I thought I could make it go away, just not thinking about it, but it's getting worse and worse. It's...I always thought I wanted to be the one in control, but it's not that. I want to...to be used," he admitted, voice dropping to a hoarse croak, "but by someone I trust. By someone I..." Simon trailed off, unable to finish the sentence and unwilling to sully the air with his efforts any more.

Frazer expelled a short, terse breath. "Shit." Disbelief tainted his face, cheeks pulled in tight, mouth drawn into a hard-set line and his eyes darker than before. "I'm gonna need to think about this one."

Simon nodded, gaze dropping back to the floor. He'd expected as much. Frazer turned and left the room, and he waited to hear the front door slam. Puzzled when no sound came, Simon started after him, surprised to find that, far from leaving, Frazer was making himself at home in the kitchen, ferreting out the bottle of rye from the cabinet and setting it on the table beside two shot glasses. Not quite meeting Simon's eye, he gestured to the chair nearest the door. Simon sat down, waiting for Frazer to take the other seat, studying the tension in his body. What was it? Disgust? Confusion?

He gave up trying to work it out and concentrated on pouring the whiskey, leaving Frazer to pace the floor behind him. Easy to almost wish he'd kept quiet and not raised this whole issue, with its ugly facets and angry corners.

"It.... Look, it was brave of you to tell me." The familiar touch of Frazer's hand came warm through the soft cotton of Simon's shirt. "I get that. But...how long? How long have you wanted to...?"

Simon shrugged, still not looking up. He felt fingers curve around his shoulder, and the solid heat of the contact struck deep into his core. "Years, I guess. Maybe always."

Frazer came to sit in the other chair, the light scrape of metal against the hard floor. He said nothing, though his face softened just a little. Struggling to express himself, the words hard to hold and their meanings devious, Simon

gradually related the story of the movie he'd seen as a kid, with the bound hero against the rock, muscles straining against the ropes. Frazer kept mainly quiet, but made the occasional small 'hm' in the back of his throat. Simon told him everything.

"A couple of years ago, I started looking into it more seriously. Not... not anything major. I had a few one-night stands, hook-ups through clubs or the net. Just experimentation. The way I saw it, I wanted to be the one in control, and that's what I... It was hot, and different. I guess I made myself believe it was seeing other guys like that – doing it to them – that got me off. Not me being... y'know. I didn't admit it. Didn't think about it."

Frazer sighed and pushed his fingers through that unruly, scrubby rabble of sun-bleached hair. His profile cut the shadows on the kitchen wall; Simon wondered how long they'd been sitting here, and if they ever would again.

"It's not something I'm into, I'll tell you that now. I mean, sure, fun and games with a blindfold and a pair of fluffy handcuffs, but.... You really need it, do you?"

"No!" Simon shook his head vehemently. "No, it's not like –"

"Cos, I thought, the past few weeks, things haven't been going so well and, y'know, I was under the impression you were going off me or something."

"Hell, no!" Humiliation boiled in Simon, with searing waves of regret and apologetic guilt. How could he ever have thought that? Easily enough, of course. Whatever had been going on in his mind, had he taken the time to talk to Frazer about it? No. Had he involved him at all, or even really considered how he might react, rather than just disappearing up his own ass in concentric circles of panic and discord? No.

"Oh."

The flicker of pride in Frazer's voice made Simon's mouth crumple into a small smile, despite how bad he felt. Simon looked up, and found less accusation in his lover's face than he'd been expecting. He exhaled, and rubbed his fingers across his forehead.

"I don't know what's been going on," he admitted. "I think it's work. Y'know, I've been pushing for that promotion, and there's all the office politics, plus the Hobson contract, and that whole deal with the Benoit building inquiry. I guess I just –"

"Feel responsible for everything?"

"Yeah. More and more, all I could think about was how it would feel to be out of it all, safe and free and.... Well, then I started thinking what a jerk I was, and how I couldn't take that attitude if I wanted to get anywhere, and then I started worrying I was taking it all out on you. You'd already complained about how snappy I got, and...from there I just kept getting worse. I couldn't separate it out any longer, and – Hell, I'm sorry. I never meant for you to think that –"

"It's not the *only* thing that gets you off, though. Right?"

Another shake of Simon's head. He didn't understand how Frazer could be so calm, so composed. "No. You know that. It's just that, recently, I....

Maybe 'cause I've been thinking about it so much. About—" He cleared his throat, snuck a sidelong look at Frazer, nerves bobbing back to the surface. "—about how you'd take it. Whether you'd think I was a total freak. I wanted to tell you, but..."

"Okay." Frazer's tone had changed. He sounded...what? Resigned? Or, maybe, was that acceptance?

Simon frowned, confused and still so damn nervous, so desperate for approval that, right now, he didn't want anything much more than Frazer's touch, just once more. Just the quick contact of a reassuring hand, a kiss, a smile that said it would be all right.

Does he know he can do this to me?

Simon glanced up, looking for signs of either dismissal or tolerance in his boyfriend's face.

Frazer took a deep breath and steepled his fingers in front of his mouth. "Pain," he said abruptly, his voice snapping Simon out of his thoughts. "That's not a—is that a part of the deal? Like, real mark-leaving, ouch-causing pain? 'Cos I'm not comfortable with the idea of actually socking you 'til you bleed."

Simon laughed; short and hoarse, mirth venting his relief. The urge to hug Frazer almost nudged his arm right across the table. He half-reached for him, but caught the twinge of unease in Frazer's face and let the seated embrace fall, unused and unfinished. Simon cleared his throat, pushing the discomfort of that broken moment aside. Frazer had been trying to lighten things, put a lighter-hearted spin on it. He ought to appreciate that.

"Nn-nn." Simon shook his head. "It's not pain. It's...submission."

Not a good word to use, he realized. He saw it in Frazer's eyes, images of sissy sluts and gimp masks, all the stereotypes and none of the understanding. Yet, to his credit, he cleared his throat and rallied.

"All right. So, you want to be tied up. To be...bound? Hog-tied?"

Frazer was still clutching at straws, grabbing in the dark and trying to make sense of it. Simon's mouth crumpled. What if they couldn't make this work? What if he ended up feeling silly and—far from anything positive—just earned Frazer's ridicule? He'd deserve it, he felt sure. No...if he'd come this far, he could make Frazer understand. He had to. It would be the only way they could work this thing out together.

"It's...it's more than that. Not the.... It's about not being in control. Not being responsible. I mean, I..." he lowered his voice, not quite sure who he wanted to keep from hearing, "I do want to be bound. I'd...like that. But I want to be in someone else's hands. Someone else's control."

Saying it again left him feeling open and exposed, especially when he saw the lingering incomprehension in Frazer's face. He shook his head slightly and, for a moment, Simon thought he was going to apologize and leave, some muttered comment about coming back later for his CDs tossed over his shoulder.

Instead, Frazer let out another long, slow breath, and bit his lip. "All right. So...what then? You're bound. He whips you? Fucks you?"

'He', not 'I', Simon noticed. He blinked, as worried by Frazer's apprehension as filled with gratitude that he was still there. "I don't know. Maybe. That's what makes it exciting. I guess maybe nothing more than...maybe being bound's enough. God, I don't know. I never —"

He shrugged wordlessly, confused and unsure. The corner of Frazer's mouth twitched.

"Well, we'll just have to experiment, won't we?"

Simon almost missed that. He did a double take, blinked owlily at Frazer, and then looked down at the tabletop, where a warm hand, callused from sailing ropes and browned by the marina sun, briefly covered his.

"You mean —"

"Why not?"

Simon stared. He'd spent so long agonizing over this, convincing himself that Frazer wouldn't want anything to do with him ever again, and he got 'why not'? He couldn't have felt more ridiculous if he'd tried. He wanted to laugh, cry, shout...he settled on a slightly wheezy smile, dashed through with disbelief.

Frazer just grinned back, and there was something of his familiar impishness in those blue eyes. He took his hand away from Simon's and, for the first time, picked up one of the whiskey shots that had been sitting, untouched, on the table. Simon took the other — so much for needing Dutch courage — and brought it to his lips. Frazer tilted his glass and winked. "To new horizons, I suppose."

Simon had no idea what to say. He swallowed his whiskey, taking the comforting burn deep into his throat, and watched Frazer over the rim of his glass. So damn full of fucking surprises.

They talked a little longer into the night, edging with a certain difficulty around the specifics of Simon's preferences. He explained as best he could, telling Frazer with a great deal of chagrin about the tentative forays he'd made into chat rooms and clubs. The brainless, meat-fleshed men he'd fucked and used, believing — or trying to believe — that it was enough, that it was what he wanted. He came worryingly close to telling Frazer how different he was — how different he'd always been — from them, and from anyone. How, right from the start, he'd been an equal, a fine, ferociously attractive and untamable thing that Simon had yearned for, had vowed to do anything to have, and anything to keep.

He thought, maybe, when the moonlight wore thin and the bottle of rye got a little emptier, that Frazer knew anyway. He seemed magical, like he could have read it in the air, or in the grain of Simon's face. They touched more, the language of hands and subtle movements taking up where words were inadequate, and Simon was almost ready to ask him to stay, but Frazer seemed to know that, too, because he silenced the question with a kiss.

"I need to go. Work tomorrow."

"Oh?"

"Yes. But...I want you to do something for me."

"All right." Simon stretched out another lazy, warm smile. "What?"

"Come by my place. Thursday night. Seven o'clock. Can you do that? Just let Hobson—or whatever his damn name is—take care of his own contract for one evening a week?"

"Mm." Tendrils of anticipation threaded their way through Simon's veins. "I guess so. I don't need to be there every second."

"Seven o'clock?"

"Seven o'clock."

"Good."

And, in that strange foggy way of time lengthening out and wrapping around them, promises and revelations leaving him so elated and shattered, Simon followed him to the door and watched him go. It seemed odd, but Frazer took with him a certain kind of comfort. As if, in his company, nothing could be quite so important as it might have seemed any other way. Nothing as cold, nothing as real...nothing as unsettling.

Thursday felt like the end of the world away.

All the same, when he sobered up again and remembered some of the things he'd said, Simon was pretty glad he had time to prepare.

Though having finally told—finally opened up to someone who knew him as something other than `green_i_guy32` in a chatroom—was an immense relief, Simon hadn't been ready to feel so exposed. Every flicker, every hint of Frazer's reaction had mattered so much more than he thought it would...he could almost wish he'd kept his mouth shut.

Yet the prospect of everything Frazer had promised by implication (seven o'clock and what?) was too intriguing to pass up. Although, once the whiskey and adrenaline faded, Simon wondered if some blind play date was really the best way to approach this, he couldn't deny his mounting excitement. He tried to call and text Frazer, wheedle out a few details, but all he got was 'wait and see'. Frustrating in the extreme. But, Simon waited. He cleared his calendar, pushed through a pile of work to see himself caught up until the beginning of the next week, and arranged to take Friday off, claiming the illness of some semi-distant relative as an excuse.

The day came, and he'd been expecting it to dawn bright, clear, and full of promise. Instead a steaming, muggy humidity clung to everything, the threat of another torrential storm looming. It made concentrating on his last few hours of work until Monday uncharacteristically difficult, and by the time the heat of the afternoon had worn into early evening, Simon's nerves were stretched fractionally beyond their last thread of tolerance. He had just enough time to go home, shower and change before heading to Frazer's. He was on his way up the stairs to his apartment when his phone beeped, relaying the simple yet perplexing message "Wear white jockeys. Tight. Suit. Tie."

Simon paused in the pale, dull stairwell and grinned to himself. This boded well for the evening, didn't it? Frazer getting into the spirit of things...his mind flickered over the possible permutations of it all, but he still had concerns. What if it didn't work out the way he hoped? What if it

screwed everything up – not just between them, though that would be bad enough – but actually rearranged all of the things Simon had barely finished learning about himself?

He pushed the thoughts away and – dressing just as he'd been told, despite the discomfort it caused in this summer heat – he climbed back into the Lexus and headed over to Frazer's place.

Simon arrived half an hour early, sure he hadn't been this thoroughly scrubbed or this nervous since the morning of his bar mitzvah. He wondered why on earth he'd thought of that now, and worried all the way up in the elevator that he wouldn't be able to get Rabbi Greenbaum's face out of his mind. It passed, though. Each footfall on the dark green hallway carpet took him nearer to Frazer, nearer to...well, nearer to what else, he wasn't yet sure.

Frazer opened the door in just his ripped stonewashed jeans. Bare feet, bare chest, tousled blond hair and great pecs. He grinned, and Simon looked him up and down, libido nudged into action and immediately picking up speed.

"Wow."

"Oh, I get a wow? That's good, we haven't even started."

Simon smiled. "No, I just.... What have you got planned, then?"

"Ah, you'll see."

Frazer grinned mischievously and Simon made to pass him and enter the apartment, but one arm shot out and blocked his path. He looked in surprise at Frazer, who shook his head.

"Not until I say."

He waited a beat, the air thrumming between them as Simon adjusted to this idea of needing permission. Up close like this, it seemed kind of silly, but Frazer's gaze was hard as it skated over him, and a slip of pleasure filtered between Simon's shoulder blades as he took a step back into the hallway.

"Please may I come in?"

His words felt thick and clumsy, the corridor stifling despite the building's air con. A smile still played behind Frazer's stern expression, then he stepped away, leaving the door open and empty.

"All right. Get yourself in."

Simon obeyed. The door swung shut behind him as he stepped into this room he knew so well, all the day-to-day clutter of Frazer's life and scattered bits of his own around the place too. Some of his CDs, his books...in the bathroom, his washbag and his razor. It had all been getting so comfortable. What if that didn't come back after today?

"Hey. Move it."

The unusual authority of Frazer's voice jerked Simon out of his fearful thoughts, and he followed obediently through to the bedroom. This had certainly changed since he saw it last – all the mess and the everyday muddle cleared away, and new sheets on the bed. Black sheets. Very unfamiliar.

The curtains had been pulled tight, and a red silk scarf (had he bought one just for a prop?) thrown over the bedside lamp, casting a dim, sultry light through the room. Simon thought he saw the corners of shopping bags

peeping out from behind the wardrobe, but he didn't get a chance to look too closely. Frazer crossed behind him, shut the door and then stepped a little closer. Simon sensed the air wrap around his lover's body, then Frazer's strong hands were at his waist, slipping around to pop the bottom few buttons of his shirt.

"Clothes off."

Simon shivered, partly in anticipation and partly at how much effort Frazer had put into this little play. For a moment, he wanted to tell him it wasn't necessary. Simon could just turn in his arms, acts and props forgotten, and none of it would matter. Yet he didn't. Beautiful shadows flickered across his mind, and he would have crawled across fire to be at Frazer's mercy.

All the buttons dealt with, Frazer kissed Simon's cheek as he pulled the shirt roughly down over his arms. "The safe word's Oberon, if that's all right with you."

"Oberon? Why?"

"Oh, I don't know. Really random ones, like 'pinochle' or 'custard', just sounded silly, and something like 'bathtub' or 'elbow' I thought you might say accidentally."

Simon wanted to ask how the heck Frazer thought he might say 'bathtub' in the throes of ecstasy, but he didn't want to break the spell and, besides, when his trousers hit the floor, revealing his starkly white underwear and the incipient hardening bulge within, it no longer really seemed relevant. Frazer patted his ass through the thin cotton and murmured appreciatively.

"Mm. Good."

Simon suppressed a shiver as Frazer's breath scraped the side of his neck, rousing the urge to do what he would normally have done, to push back at every level and give as good as he got, their coupling a constant crusade of skirmishes and attempts of each to outdistance the other. Doing nothing had never been so difficult.

Frazer reached around to touch him then, squeezing him through the white briefs. Standing there, clothes pooled around his feet, body exposed and hands hanging loosely at his side, Simon heard the breath catch in his throat as if didn't belong to him. He wanted to rock against Frazer's palm, but he stayed still, every fiber of his flesh complaining about it.

Frazer leaned over, snatched something from the floor and —before Simon had a chance to peek at what it was—he felt his hands gathered up behind his back and tied loosely together with...his tie? It felt weird, and his mood started to drop. He'd known this wasn't a good idea. He should never have tried to push Frazer into doing this—grateful as he was for the effort—when he didn't want to. It wouldn't be the kind of thing Simon had imagined at all. He wouldn't—

"Oh!"

Frazer cinched the tie tighter and whispered into Simon's ear: "Get your ass on the bed. Now."

A sharp shove in the small of his back, and Simon was moving, feet stumbling and legs like jelly. He did as he was told, sat tentatively on the

edge of the bed where Frazer directed, and spread his knees. Simon could feel the sheets with the tips of his fingers, and he brushed quizzically against the fabric. Not satin, or anything unusual. Just plain cotton. What did Frazer have in mind?

Speculation soon vanished. Frazer knelt before him, tongue hot through the cotton briefs, teasing and taunting until Simon grew hard enough for their stricture to verge on painful. He bit his lip, wrists working against the rough grain of his tie. Frazer looked up at him, wolfish smile on his face and a playful light in his eyes.

"Want it?"

"Mm." Simon rocked his hips, pleading, but Frazer shook his head, evidently taking great glee in this new role.

"When I say."

He stood and Simon bit back a groan, the sudden absence of Frazer's mouth hitting him like the dull pain of toothache.

"On your front now," Frazer said, turning from him to reach something from the drawer of the nightstand. "Do it."

With a flush of pleasure, Simon obeyed. This might just work out after all. He wriggled his body flat out onto the bed, the tie that still bound him forcing his muscles to find new ways to work, heightening each sensation. He almost didn't notice the blindfold until Frazer snapped the elasticated band around his head. He stopped, mouth open as the world turned dark. It felt... strange. Not uncomfortable, far from it, but odd all the same. Simon made out the smell and texture of stiffened velvet against his face, rubbing just at the top of his cheekbones. Finishing his adjustments, Frazer's thumb swiped down the nape of Simon's neck as he moved to remove the tie from his wrists, and the touch felt like fire.

"All right. Arms out, but not too far. Up here."

Frazer patted the top end of the mattress. Simon extended first one arm, then the other, groping sightlessly for where he was supposed to be. He twisted his head, trying to follow what Frazer was doing from beneath the blindfold, but it was difficult. The sheets smelled new, the astringent shop-floor freshness of a shirt just out of the packet. Frazer grabbed his wrist, his movement firm but a little tentative – still not sure he was doing it right, Simon realized with dismay. Yet he was... hell, he *really* was. He wondered whether he ought to say the safe word and pull out now, chalk this all up as a bad idea, but then he felt the bite of a cuff going on. Webbed fabric...nylon? And Velcro. Light, not too restrictive, but enough to hold him. Bondage sheets.

He suppressed a smile.

Clever boy.

Frazer moved to the other side of the bed and repeated the action on Simon's left wrist. He twisted his head again, trying to sneak a peek at how he was bound, and gave an experimental tug against the straps, delighted to find he couldn't break free. Much better than the loose knot of the tie, he was held,

secure and safe. An open-palmed slap resounded against his ass, and Simon's whole body tightened at the shock.

"Naughty."

Frazer stepped away from the bed and Simon squeezed his eyes shut behind the blindfold, the sting of the slap still tingling through his flesh. The feeling of being bound was all he'd pictured, and more: exhilarating, exciting, and...safe. Simon bit down on his lower lip. His legs were still free, and he kicked them, rather hoping for another punishment. Frazer's hand touched his back, not quite holding him down, but maintaining contact.

"I'm gonna do your ankles next. Same cuffs. Happy?"

Simon mumbled an assent and nodded, unwilling to let too many words spoil the picture. Frazer's strong, nimble fingers slipped down each leg in turn, cresting the swells of thighs and calves, taking and spreading them before anchoring each ankle to the sheets. Spread-eagled, naked but for his briefs, his ass tipped slightly towards the ceiling and body staked out, defenseless. The anticipation welled in him. He had no idea what Frazer would do next, and not knowing drove him crazy. Being powerless like this, too, all at once trapped and free and somehow so utterly, completely *right*. The vulnerability felt natural, like he'd always been meant to give himself over to this. Like he needed it.

Simon stifled a groan deep in his throat and rocked his hips against the sheet, chafing his hardening cock within the oppressive confines of his underwear. The first slap took him by intense surprise.

"Ah!" He wasn't sure whether it was desire or shock, but the sound that escaped him had a raw edge to it.

Somewhere to Simon's left, close by but hard to pinpoint exactly, Frazer chuckled. "Thought you'd like that. You liked it when I smacked your ass before, didn't you? It is a really, really nice ass."

Slap.

"I always loved your tan line. Have I told you that before? Way you have this...sexy brown back—"

Simon shuddered at the whisper of fingertips on his spine, his tailbone bowing out for the next resounding spank, whole body bent and taut to receive it. Nothing came. He caught the breath of disappointment before it broke from him, holding it in until it quivered in his chest.

"—and this tight, white butt."

Frazer's fingers slipped beneath the waistband of his briefs, setting a trail of flame along the rise of Simon's buttock as he began to inch the fabric clear of that tender, vulnerable place.

"Makes me want to believe I'm the only guy who's ever seen you with your pants down. But that's not true, is it?"

Slap.

First contact on bare flesh. Warmth and skin and that fleeting, pleasurable sting. Simon stiffened and let out a small moan. Not knowing when each strike would land was maddening enough, but Frazer's talent for talking dirty threatened to push him farther than he was ready to go. He rolled his

spine, aching for the next stroke, the next contact, wanting so badly to feel Frazer's body against him, the cuffs both a restraint and a shield against everything that rose up beyond his control, wild and unshakeable. The next words came almost by his ear, a supple whisper that struck right at his core.

"I bet you've been bad. Right, Simon?"

Slap.

A sudden tug, and the briefs were down as far as the tops of his thighs, his ass bare and defenseless and — as he pictured it — framed for Frazer's delectation. He breathed harder, his face crushed into the sheet and the blindfold, the damp warmth of his breath forced back into his mouth, as if he could choke on his own desire.

"Hm? Have you?"

Slap.

"Been sitting in that office at work, giving that hot little intern all kinds of fantasies? Remember? You told me how he came on to you in the men's room. You told him no thanks, warned him off hitting on guys at work. How 'bout if they all saw you now, huh? Naked and pegged down with my handprint on your ass? Loving every second of it. 'Cause you do, don't you?"

Slap.

"Don'tcha?"

"Unh...yes!" It was out before Simon could stop it, charmed like a snake by the hypnotic rhythms of Frazer's voice, and he couldn't call it back.

Slap.

Frazer's strikes grew harder and faster, his voice a low purr that buzzed against Simon's nerves.

"Good. 'Cos you look fucking hot with that pretty white ass of yours turning red." He gripped Simon's right buttock hard and rolled the flesh against the palm of his hand. "And I think I have something you'll like even better."

He moved away, the air above and behind Simon turning cold and empty. He chafed at his bonds, frustrated and a little nervous, not expecting for a second to feel the crack of a riding crop across his ass.

"Fuck!" Simon gritted his teeth, trying to hold in the holler he wanted to give, unwilling to open himself so utterly to this, to let Frazer see so far inside his every want. The word slipped out anyway, both assent and plea, desperate and tarnished with entreaty. "Yessss...."

The pain was short, sharper than Frazer's hand, but nothing really uncomfortable. It flickered over his skin and left a tingling sensation in its wake, the reminder of that brief contact and the expectation of repetition. But when?

"Oh, like that, huh? Dirty boy. You're so —" *Crack.* "—bad! Whatever would they say, hm? Simon Preston, tied down and whipped 'til his pretty lily ass turns pink?"

Frazer really seemed to be enjoying himself. The tip of the crop caressed Simon's crack now, grazing his skin and trailing the contours of his body until he could have sworn his prostate started to respond to the stimulation. He

wriggled, belly damp and frustration growing, the wait for Frazer's next move almost unbearable.

Crack. Crack. Crack.

No talking, no dawdling, just a succession of strokes snapping against his skin until Simon whimpered, ready to beg.

Trouble was, he wasn't sure for what... mercy or more.

Instead, he heard the thump of the crop hitting the ground and Frazer knelt on the bed behind him. In the brief seconds consumed by Simon wondering what the hell he was planning now, Frazer seemed to pause, and it dawned on Simon that he was waiting, seeing if he'd done okay so far, or if his prey would crack and say 'Oberon'. Simon flexed against the cuffs, one word and one word only on his lips.

"P-please?"

He was, he realized, ready for anything, up to and including letting Frazer fuck him...not something they'd done often, especially recently. That he wanted it so much surprised him, but he felt neither shame nor guilt. It seemed incredibly natural to need it right now, to exist only for how it would feel to have him, complete and absolute.

Frazer must have adjusted his position, because the next thing Simon registered was the brain-melting pleasure of his mouth. Frazer splayed his cheeks with those broad, firm hands and laved mercilessly at him, eliciting groan after shattered groan. Simon's restricted movement only heightened the ecstasy. Held just where Frazer wanted him, he could neither push into nor pull away from the intensities of each sensation. Finally, just when he thought he couldn't hold out any longer, Frazer moved back and left him arching fruitlessly against the air.

More suspicious rustling, then Simon gasped at the introduction of something slim and plastic. It started to vibrate, and he groaned. Each movement of the toy echoed a thousand-fold inside him, bouncing off all his darkest centers and leaving him nowhere to run. He squirmed and called Frazer's name. No response, and the terrible, irrational fear that Frazer would leave him like this struck at Simon, mingling with the feel of the vibe and the joy of his bindings. Yet, perhaps because he knew they were alone, he didn't care about the thought of being seen. He was, all at once, defenseless and elated, vulnerable and untouchable and he didn't give a damn who saw him like this, even though that raw freedom itself was terrifying. He wanted more, and he wanted release. Most of all, he wanted Frazer, harder and deeper than he'd ever been, taking him with such ferocity that he would cease to exist, crumble into dust and leave behind only their fused rapture. He bucked against the vibrations, the bonds for the first time uncomfortable, holding him where he wanted to be loose, and leaving him naked and alone where he wanted to be bound.

Instantly, Frazer's hand was on his back, between his shoulder blades.

"Easy, Tiger. I'm going to undo you now. I want you to turn over."

Relief sluiced through Simon, leaving him sodden and stilted. He gasped a little at the withdrawal of the vibe, hearing its low buzz disappear into nothingness.

"Y'r still here," he mumbled.

"Of course." Frazer sounded amused. Velcro ripped and the uncertain freedoms of movement returned one by one to Simon's limbs. "I'm not going anywhere. Now turn over."

Frazer pulled off the blindfold, and Simon blinked at the sudden influx of light, albeit tinted and fairly dim. He did what he was told, carefully levering himself over onto his back, and the sight of Frazer – still wearing his jeans, still tousle-headed and smiling serenely – struck deep at his chest. The corner of Frazer's lips twitched, and he leaned in to kiss Simon's mouth, just once, his scent ripe with musk and sweat. He drew the wrecked briefs fully down, pulled them off, and helped Simon settle once again on the sheet.

"On your back," he whispered, part command and part coaxing, "arms above your head. Do it."

Simon obeyed, wrists together as Frazer directed, waiting for the cuffs. Not so much anticipation this time. Just... peace. He liked being able to see, too, to take in all the details of Frazer's serious expression, the errant strands of golden hair caught outlined in the lamplight, the swells and angles of his body. He spread his legs, ready for the next set of bonds, but Frazer patted his knees.

"Nope. Up on your chest."

"What?"

"You heard."

Simon obediently lifted his legs, waiting and trusting while Frazer leaned over to the nightstand and retrieved another new toy from the drawer: a strong pair of black nylon cuffs linked by a short, black, metal chain. Simon stared, fascinated, the anticipation almost as good as the feeling when Frazer bound his raised ankles together. Knees pressed to his chest, feet never more than a few inches apart, he rattled the chain a little, experimenting with the new position, the new sensations. Frazer let him do it for a few seconds, his arousal evident – Simon found it incredibly liberating to realize he'd helped him discover something he hadn't known he enjoyed – then gave him a warning slap on the back of the thigh.

"That's enough. Keep those legs up there, all right? You drop 'em, I'll whip your ass so hard..."

He stopped, biting his lip, and for a moment the façade was almost fractured. Simon had gone beyond caring, though, the promise of everything Frazer was doing for him far outweighing how seriously – or otherwise – he took it. He stared up into those blue eyes, and everything seemed strangely tranquil. The raging of his blood, his hammering pulse and screaming nerves, all his desperation and want honed to a fine edge of lust, yet none of it touched this feeling. He wondered if Frazer felt it too, but he didn't dare put his mouth to the words.

Frazer reached between Simon's thighs, his grip all confident reassurance, and he bent down low, and then there was nothing but wet heat and ecstasy.

Simon loosed a loud, hungry growl, instantly rewarded with a stinging slap across the ass.

"Shut up." Frazer raised his head, peering at him through glassy eyes. "You don't move, and you don't make a sound. Okay?"

He blew across the wet head of Simon's cock, eliciting a strangled whimper of assent, and Simon almost wished he had the blindfold back. It seemed to go on for ages; the repeated soft slides of lips and tongue, the inevitable edging towards the climax he wanted to put off as long as he could...right up until the moment Frazer permitted it. His body stiffened at the feel of fingers, one then two, slipping and beckoning, and so much of his energy became focused on not crying out that his position grew uncomfortable.

Simon's shoulders started to ache, his back protesting at the prolonged stretching, his hips fighting every impulse to roll or drop. Frazer didn't stop, yet the thought of saying the word, of asking, never occurred to Simon. Not when it felt this good. His knees, still bent, slid out to the sides of his chest, lax as rubber bands, the ankle chain rattling and his heels resting on Frazer's broad back. Simon lifted his head, peering at Frazer through the unaccustomed frame of his own thighs.

Frazer broke away from him, unhooking Simon's legs and laying them back on the mattress. He licked his lips and just looked at Simon for a moment, something inscrutable in his expression. Then, wordlessly, he unfastened the ankle cuffs and, Simon thought, leaned up the bed to undo his wrists. Frazer paused, hand half-way to the cuffs, just looking down at him. The colored lamplight painted otherworldly shapes on his face, his gaze tracking every exposed place of Simon's body before coming to rest on his face, eyes darkened and heavy-lidded. Slowly, Frazer brought his fingers to Simon's jaw, his grip strong, his lips damp and slightly parted. Simon felt his chin cupped, his head firmly tilted, Frazer holding him just where he wanted as he leaned down and planted one long, deep kiss on his mouth. It wasn't gentle, and Simon tasted himself on the tongue that swept against his, tasted all of Frazer's want and need, mixed up with his own until he seemed to be turned inside out, thoroughly ravaged, and exposed.

Simon heard himself moan, with no idea where that sound—a sliver of shallow, broken yearning—had come from. He realized he had one leg partly raised, like a dog begging for a scratch. He'd never imagined it would be so easy to belong to anyone but, if there was a way of doing so, a sacred oath of possession or claiming, that must have been it.

Frazer unfastened his wrists, looking fleetingly embarrassed, and cleared his throat. His fingers trailed Simon's arm, waiting for him to move before Frazer seemed to remember he needed to give the word.

"Sit up." He watched the stiffness in Simon's movement, a small frown crossing his brow. "Okay?"

Simon nodded fervently. Never better...that much should be obvious. He looked at Frazer with pleading, willing him to go on and not break the illusion. Not yet. He needed completion and, strangely, he felt vulnerable without the cuffs. He shivered lightly, waiting for Frazer's next command.

"Um...right. Hands and knees. Spread your legs a little bit. That's good...I wanna see that pretty ass. And...and then I'm g'na fuck it."

The word, accompanied by the flat of Frazer's hand on his butt, hit Simon hard, a rush of desire and nervous expectation that pushed him higher than he thought he could go. Frazer pinned his wrists together, the cuffs biting hard and binding him to the sheet, his weight squarely on his forearms, elbows and knees. He rubbed Simon's back, feeling for tension under the guise of control, giving him all the time he needed to say no. In answer, Simon backed against him, greedy and impatient.

"You want the blindfold?"

Simon shook his head, staring at the wall ahead of him. The lamplight, red-washed and devilish, painted flickering patterns out of their united shadows. He heard the zipper of Frazer's fly, the sound of him finally shedding his jeans—clothes are power when you're the only one wearing them—and then the weight of him climbing back onto the bed. The springs thunked beneath them, and Simon's breath rattled hard in his chest.

He closed his eyes, opening them again in a hurry when he felt Frazer slide something beneath his hips.

"What's that?"

It appeared to be a wide fabric strap. Simon flexed against it, unsure.

"Relax. It's okay. It's a support strap, that's all. Lets me control your position, and you don't need to do a thing. It's all me. You feel that? I can get you as high or as low as I want."

Frazer lifted the strap to emphasize his point and Simon loosed a surprised moan. His legs might be unbound, but the lack of control he had over the angle of his lower body left him defenseless and exhilarated. He hadn't imagined one little piece of webbed fabric could do so much, but it gave Frazer complete control. As he raised the strap even higher, Simon's spine curved unnaturally, putting pressure on his back and shoulders.

"Ah," he gasped, the realization of how much Frazer could hurt him, should he want to, sinking in.

Simon hadn't pictured that thought exciting him, yet it did. He tugged on the cuffs, the binds digging into his wrists. He hung his head, breath coming deep and ragged with anticipation. Frazer lowered the strap, settling him into an easier position.

"Ready to get fucked?"

The words landed on Simon with the weight of one last slap on his ass, still sensitive from the treatment it had already received. He actually trembled, not quite believing his flesh could be so responsive.

"Oh, G— Yes, sir!" Where the hell had that come from?

A deep-seated chuckle rumbled in Frazer's throat. "Hm. I like 'sir'. But I want you to be sure, okay? 'Cos I'm gonna fuck you so hard...I'm going to

fuck you 'til you can't take it any more. You're gonna be walking like John Wayne so long people'll be calling you 'Duke'. All right?"

Simon laughed damply, that brief sense of the ridiculous made breathlessly urgent by how badly he wanted this. He squeezed his eyes tight shut, wishing there was a mirror so he could see Frazer behind him, his own body square on the bed, ass presented like a prize. Frazer pressed up close, the solidity of his thighs rubbing Simon's body, the crispness of his hair and his weight, his heat, all no more than a tantalizing promise until he began to push in. Bigger than ever before, by the feel of it. Simon wasn't sure if it was his imagination; he pictured Frazer's cock so hugely engorged it could split him in two, cleaving him apart like a woodblock and leaving everything—his whole soul—open to the air. A dry murmur left his throat, his natural instinct to shift his body and try to accommodate the invader disrupted by the movement of the strap underneath him, subtly altering both the angle of entry and the spectrum of how he could react.

Simon exhaled, long and slow, in time to the infinitesimal inching of Frazer's cock, inexorably but eventually buried halfway inside him. He wasn't prepared for the lift of the strap, the deliberate withdrawal and the slam back into him, Frazer's rod driving in a little further with each repeat of this new torture. Ridiculously full, then emptied so suddenly, Simon burned with the need to take all of his lover, to have Frazer do what he'd promise and let rip, erode his very existence in the white heat they'd make. He struggled against his bonds, wanting to push back and fuck himself on that hard cock, but the cuffs wouldn't allow it and the strap put him off-balance. All he could do was let Frazer take charge and set the pace, using him just as he wanted.

"Greedy. You have to be patient."

"I'm sorry." Simon's choked breaths came quick and frayed. "I'm so sorry. I am. P-promise. Patient. Please...?"

"Yeah?"

He heard the shadow of amusement in Frazer's voice, and couldn't blame him. He'd never been this deferential in bed, no matter who was on top. All this please, thank you and apologizing...his ass spanked like a naughty schoolboy. Hell, maybe that's what he'd wanted all along. To be punished and exposed for all his perverse desires. His weakness, his shame. Dirty and sinful, full of lust and yearning.

The thoughts melted away as Frazer sank right into him, the first in a pattern of deep, hard thrusts that sought out and buffeted his prostate, just the way Frazer knew would reduce him to a gibbering pile of slush. It worked. The strap held him at the perfect angle, even when he could no longer have stayed there himself, and Frazer's assault was merciless. Simon yelled, swore, groaned, and almost sobbed. He wanted to touch himself, touch Frazer, do anything...but, pinned as he was, he was at the mercy of the pleasure that ravaged him. Frazer talked as he fucked, each word twisted out of the dimness like another slap, another stroke. He liked it, didn't he? Tied up, screwed senseless, open, and begging for it like the bitch he was.

The wash of humiliation tormented and excited Simon in equal measure, unable to twist away and unable to deny any part of it. He gave in and bellowed, yelled his way through it, taking everything Frazer gave him and riding higher than ever on it.

"Come for me, baby."

One dirty whisper, one hard spank on the ass, and it was as if Frazer had flicked a switch. Simon's peak clenched his whole body in jaws of steel, grinding every possible ounce of sensation out of him before setting him to explode on the cusp of the world's edge, tumbling in freefall until he thought he couldn't possibly drop any farther. Frazer let the strap fall, his body crushed up against Simon, hands and thighs and the heat of his skin, lips pressed to his shoulder and a low stream of praise grazing his ear. How good he looked, how well he'd done, what a fucking good little slut he was.

Tears wet the corners of Simon's bleary eyes, breath so hoarse it hurt, blood pounding in his ears and drowning out everything but his own heartbeat and Frazer's presence. All the same, he gave a disappointed moan when Frazer withdrew.

"You okay?"

Simon shaped his lips around a reply, but emitted nothing more than a wordless 'uungh'. Frazer leaned over him to unfasten the cuffs, his body brushing close against Simon's, and dragging a groan from deep within him. His normal reaction, feeling like this, would have been to grab hold of Frazer and pull him close, latch on so hard he'd never get away, but even once unbound he couldn't summon the energy to move and, for a moment, there was nothing sweeter in the world than just lying there, ragged and damply satiated. Frazer's hand skated gently up Simon's arm, raising goose bumps and the molten threads of a more intense affection than he felt able to express. Frazer cleared his throat.

"You want to say the safe w —"

"Nuh-uh."

"All right."

Simon just concentrated on breathing; a far more complicated operation than it usually was. He'd barely started coming back to earth before he grew aware of Frazer's hand on his hip, pulling him over into a new position.

"Come on. You're not done yet."

Simon, limp and boneless, let Frazer manhandle him. His wrists — chafed red now, it delighted him to see — were bound out again at the upper corners of the bed, taut vertices with a pillow placed beneath his shoulders. Frazer knelt beside his head, fingers knotted in his hair, and quirked a small, dirty smile.

Simon was vaguely aware letting out a deep sigh, a low rumble of satisfaction, as Frazer filled his mouth. Bound and defenseless, he had no option but to let him control the depth and angle of each thrust, no recourse but to welcome the hard, hot flesh, unyielding and obdurate. He expected — waited — for Frazer to slide back into the stream of words, the talk he'd not imagined he'd enjoy so much, but nothing seemed forthcoming. All that

crossed Frazer's lips was a succession of small, mottled cries, rough and devastatingly honest. They spoke to Simon and he redoubled his efforts, his gift to Frazer pushing beyond the burning discomfort of his neck, back and shoulders, and far beyond the limits of pretending to be made to do this.

Frazer's hand gripped his head harder, the mask of control forgotten in favor of a lover's caresses. Simon watched him bow, flex and gasp, thinking of nothing other than how very handsome he looked, and how damn good he tasted. He had, he realized, almost forgotten about the cuffs. Finally, they parted, exhausted and drenched with pleasure. After a long moment, Frazer opened his eyes. He gazed down dreamily at Simon and smiled.

"Oberon," he said, voice rough at the edges. His fingers ruffled Simon's hair. "Titania. Whole...whole bunch o' fairies. Everything. I...hell, I can't do that again yet."

With a damp laugh, Frazer keeled over sideways and lay there, looking up at the red-tinted ceiling. Simon felt his touch skimming over one thigh, and he prodded Frazer with an affectionate foot.

"Okay. Could you get me out of these things, then? Please?"

Frazer mumbled an assent, sat up laboriously and helped him unfasten the cuffs. Simon rubbed his sore joints and protesting muscles.

"Thanks. That was.... I mean, you — You're amazing."

"It was pretty hot," Frazer said simply.

He didn't resist when Simon grabbed him for a kiss, trying to push into that one clear-cut contact all the gratitude, happiness, pleasure and joy he'd found tonight. He hoped he succeeded, and suspected maybe he had when Frazer pulled back, eyes hazy and lips parted. It could have been a moment of perfect clarity, Simon thought, but then it passed and Frazer was starting to clamber off the bed.

"We didn't even need the safe word 'til right at the end," Frazer observed, swinging his legs out of bed. "And *I* wasn't even the one tied up."

Simon blinked sleepily, stifled a yawn and reflected how good it was that neither of them had to work tomorrow.

Thing was, it wasn't a word, not any more. Not a safe word...but so much more. A whole space, a state of being, and a sacred enclave where nothing could touch him.

"Safe house," he murmured, as Frazer patted his shoulder in passing, heading off on his way to make coffee or, perhaps, to go to the bathroom.

"What?"

"Nothin'." Simon blinked, then cast a look at his partner's silhouette, receding into the hallway. With difficulty, he cranked himself on his elbows and peered after Frazer. Maybe there shouldn't be any more instances of things he didn't say, secrets he tried to keep. Too much had been left unsaid already. "You're my safe house," he added.

But Frazer kept walking; he hadn't heard. Simon smiled to himself, just as happy because of his complaining muscles as he was despite them.

Yes. Definitely as safe as houses.

About the Author

M. King resides in a damp, verdant corner of South West England, where she may usually be found behind a vat of coffee and a keyboard. She writes across a wide range of genres, often with a strong GLBT bias and, on the rare occasions she's not scribbling, enjoys long muddy walks with her dogs, playing the guitar extremely badly, and falling off horses. Not all at the same time. You can find excerpts and full details of all M. King titles at <http://lavengra.com>

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