



Perfect Timing

BI NOW,
Gay Later
KIM DARE

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Bi Now, Gay Later

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

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Kim Dare

Dedication

To accepting people for who they really are.

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Coke: Coca-Cola Company

Chapter One

"Do you reckon he spends a lot of time thinking about having sex with women?"

Denton Greenwood's lips quirked into an amused little smile as he turned to his friend. "I have no idea who you're talking about. But, since we're in a gay bar, I'll go out on a limb and guess that no one in here spends a lot of time thinking about doing anything with a woman."

"Jerry's not gay though, is he?" Peter pointed out. "He's bi."

Denton's fingers tightened around his glass as his eyes automatically sought out a blond head of hair in the crowd. Someone stepped to one side. Jerry came into view. "He's not bi."

"He says he's bi." Peter drained his glass and put it clumsily on the little table between their leather arm chairs. "Do you think that means he thinks about screwing women as often as he thinks about screwing men?"

Denton clenched his jaw as he watched Jerry nod his agreement with whatever the man standing next to him was saying. "He's gay."

Peter shook his head. "He says he's bi. He should know."

"I am his master," Denton snapped. "I know which way my lover swings, and Jerry is as gay as any man in this bar."

Even on his eighth pint, Peter seemed to realise he'd hit a nerve. "How's it working out between...?" he trailed off.

Denton continued to watch his lover speaking to some of his friends, all of them other collared submissives, on the opposite side of the room.

"Everything's fine," he snapped. It didn't sound like it when he bit the words out like that, but it was the truth.

In the months since Jerry had come under his protection, the younger man had turned out to be a damn near perfect match for him.

"He seems to have come into his own since you gave him his permanent collar," Peter offered.

Denton nodded. That was true too. He'd never guessed that the stunning, if rather tentative, submissive who had first come to his attention would thrive so well under his rules and discipline, but Jerry had a way of wrapping rules around himself as if they were a comforting blanket, and taking every limitation his master put upon him as a gift. And, more than any of that, he had a way of throwing himself so wholeheartedly into his submission that the idea of letting him go had quickly become unthinkable.

As loath as Denton was to act soppy for anyone, even Jerry, he could just about admit that the submissive was the only one of his lovers he had ever actually fallen in love with. As long as they were alone and not doing anything overtly romantic at the time of any such admission, of course. A dominant had to hold on to some sort of standards. He wasn't so far gone that he was willing to shout it from the roof tops or let heart toting teddy bears worm their way into his life.

Denton held back a sigh. Damn near perfect, was all well and good. But knowing his lover could be *completely* perfect if he would just admit he was gay just made it all the more difficult to accept the younger man's stubborn insistence that he was bisexual with every day that passed. To feel perfection there, waiting just out of his reach, it was like a persistent itch at the back of Denton's neck.

Trying to push the issue out of his mind, the way he had so many times before, he ran his eyes down Jerry's body. It wasn't an easy task when so much of his lover's skin was concealed from him. For an absolutely gorgeous man, he was sweetly shy about his skin being put on display before anyone but his master. His inclination to hide himself away behind jeans and a long sleeve t-shirts whenever Denton hadn't made a point of ordering him into something different was damn near a fetish.

Right then Denton couldn't manage to smile indulgently at Jerry's bashfulness the way he usually did. Jerry was his – all of him, and he wasn't inclined to accept any part of his lover not being visible and available to him at that moment. He wasn't about to just sit around watching while Jerry's attention moved from one submissive to another and never once turned towards his master.

Rising from his chair, he left his friend sitting with the other dominants as he marched across the room. The moment he put his hand on Jerry's shoulder the younger man tensed.

As he turned to face Denton, he realised exactly who was laying a hand on him and his expression morphed into a welcoming smile.

"May I serve you, master?"

"We're leaving. Is there anyone you need to say goodbye to?"

He saw Jerry cast a brief glance at the man he'd been speaking to. A silent understanding passed from one submissive to the other. Jerry shook his head. "No, master."

"Fetch our coats."

"Yes, master." Jerry turned and walked away through the crowd.

Denton watched him until he stepped out of sight before he turned his attention back to the man Jerry had been speaking to. He had something of the look of Jerry about him, the same blond hair and blue eyes, the same lightly muscled frame. He looked up and met Denton's eye, before looking quickly down again.

"You belong to Phillips." Denton cast around for a name. Phillips went through a hell of a lot of submissives in very quick succession. It made it bloody difficult to keep track. "It's Michael, right?"

"Yes, sir," the man said, after a tiny hesitation.

Denton raised an eyebrow, sure he'd managed to dredge up the right name.

"I'm still under his protection, sir, but Mr. Phillips is looking for a new master for me. He's decided that we do not suit well enough to make his arrangement with me a permanent one."

Denton caught Michael's eye as he risked another glance up. For all the submissive's carefully worded language, it was obviously a mutual decision. Denton had a vague memory of Peter saying something about them deciding to part ways because Michael wanted a more old fashioned style of mastery. Or maybe not. After a while all his friend's gossip blurred together.

Jerry came back to his side, holding their coats and neatly saving him from having to think of something suitable to say to Michael. Denton nodded his dismissal to Phillips' submissive. "Tell your master I send him my regards."

"Yes, sir," Michael said, smiling his goodbye to Jerry as he turned his attention to another of his friends standing nearby.

Denton took his coat from his submissive. By the time he shrugged his shoulders and felt his leather jacket settle comfortably around his body, he was already on his way out of the club. Jerry seemed taken off guard by his sudden departure. He was still pulling his smaller jacket on when he caught up with him at the door to the club.

If Phillips' lover had been anything other than a perfectly unobjectionable submissive, Denton knew he would have latched on to Jerry's conversation with him as an excuse. As it was, he gave no reason for the tight grip he took on his pet's wrist as they stepped into the night air.

Striding briskly across the car park, he only just shortened his stride enough to let Jerry's shorter legs keep pace with him. As they stopped by his car, Denton heard the change in his submissive's breathing as it sped up in anticipation. The younger man had obviously recognised his master's altered mood and what it meant. His pulse fluttered faster under Denton's grip around his wrist. He glanced up at his master, waiting for the first order, for the scene to start in earnest.

"Strip."

Denton let go of his wrist and stepped in front of him, shielding him from the sight of anyone else who might choose that moment to leave the club. Jerry didn't even glance towards the club door before he shrugged his jacket back off. All his attention was focused on his master. Knowing that soothed Denton's instinct to display his possession of his lover a fraction, but it wasn't near enough to quell it.

Jerry looked to him for further instruction. Denton held out a hand to receive the jacket. The moment his hands were free, Jerry reached for the hem of his long sleeve t-shirt. Pulling the thin material over his head, he folded it neatly and handed it over. Lowering himself to each knee in turn, his pet began to pull his boots and socks off.

Denton managed to look away from his lover for long enough to scan the rough concrete and check there was nothing on the ground that might cut his feet, but his focus reverted entirely to Jerry as the younger man gave up his footwear to his master. Without any sign of doubt or hesitation, Jerry's hand went to his fly. The black denim was soon pushed down, taking his boxers with them. He folded and surrendered them without comment.

As Denton studied him, a shiver ran through the younger man's body. If Denton was any judge, that had far more to do with nervous excitement than the cool air filling the car park. Jerry was already starting to harden very pleasingly for his master.

Opening the car door, Denton tossed his pet's clothes onto the back seat. Slamming the door again, he turned back to his lover and looked him over very slowly. A simple hand gesture ordered the submissive to turn around.

"Hands on the back of your head."

Jerry raised his hands and laced his fingers on the back of his head, presenting himself for a thorough inspection as he made another slow revolution in front of his master.

Only a tiny patch of Jerry's skin was hidden from him now, that little strip that lay under his collar. Denton tucked his fingers under the black leather and ran his knuckles all the way around Jerry's neck so no bit of him remained unexamined, untouched by his master's hands or eyes .

A door banged behind them. Men called to each other, laughing and yelling their goodbyes as they left the club. Jerry looked up and met Denton's eyes, making a point of not looking at the other men, of not trying to work out if he was exposed to them or not.

A sweet little blush crept to his cheeks, but his hands stayed on the back of his head while Denton kept his fingers tucked under his collar and held his gaze.

Somewhere at the other end of the car park, someone started a car and drove away. A minute later another car drove off. Denton kept Jerry standing there as silence filled the air once more, daring him to object, to look away, to do anything other than follow his master's orders.

He waited for any sign of weakness from his submissive, any hint of disobedience. He searched for any indication that Jerry didn't belong to him in every way one man could belong to another, that he didn't trust him to take complete and perfect care of any man under his protection.

"May I serve you, master?" Jerry asked softly, his eyes flickering here and there as he searched Denton's face for any indication of how he could please him.

A man couldn't find sign of disobedience where it didn't exist. Denton nodded, just once, allowing his submissive a tiny moment of praise before he opened the front passenger side door. "Get in. Keep your hands where they are."

Jerry got carefully into the seat, his hands still glued to his scalp. Denton slammed the car door and quickly strode around to his own side of the vehicle.

Sliding in behind the driver's seat he spared a quick glance at his submissive, debating the merits of letting Jerry move his hands to do up his seatbelt, over doing the job himself.

The question faded from his mind as the brief glance turned into a more detailed study. He looked his pet over very slowly, taking in every gorgeous detail.

It was always easier to smile at Jerry's persistent inclination towards modesty in public when they were alone, when he'd been stripped down to be admired in private. There was a part of him that loved knowing every bit of Jerry's body belonged to him and no one else, that no one else even got to look at him. But, for once, abstract knowledge of possession wasn't enough to satisfy him. As pretty as they were, displays of physical possession didn't feel like enough, either.

"Legs wider," he ordered, automatically correcting his lover's posture while he searched his mind for something, anything, that might fix the uncontrolled spiral of emotions whirling inside him.

Jerry spread his knees as far apart as he could while still allowing room for his master to change gears once they set off. Denton looked him over again. His pet had hardened further. His erection was starting to rise and curve back towards his stomach. Denton nodded to himself, pleased that Jerry was so quick to enjoy a scene that was far more to his master's taste than his own.

"Mouth open."

Jerry licked his lips and parted them slightly.

Fully exposed, fully accessible, offering himself freely to his master to do with as he pleased, he looked just as fantastic a submissive as Denton knew he was. It wasn't fair to treat him as if he was anything less than that, just because he was annoyed with a situation that was just as much his fault as Jerry's. If he wanted him to be perfect, it was his job as the master in their relationship to see that his pet came out of the closet properly.

Tucking a knuckle under his pet's chin, Denton guided him to turn to face his master. Although he was still hard, Jerry also seemed wary now, as if he knew something was wrong in his master's world, but couldn't work out what.

Leaning across the car, Denton brought their lips together. He'd intended it to be a quick moment of reassurance, just to let Jerry know that his master had realised what the problem was, and would see that it was fixed. That idea disintegrated the moment their mouths touched.

Denton slid his other hand into Jerry's hair, brushing his pet's hands away from the back of his head so he had free reign to tangle his own fingers in the thick, blond strands and tilt Jerry's head back so he could taste his parted lips properly.

There was no room for pretence. He took possession of the younger man's mouth, dragging a whimper out of him as Jerry instinctively acknowledged his master's ownership of him.

Denton tightened his grip, pulling Jerry forward until he knew his pet would realise his master no longer expected him to maintain the position he'd ordered him to assume less than a minute earlier. Jerry got the hint. He leaned into the kiss, offering everything to his master as easily and as instinctively as anyone ever could.

Even with need to possess and dominate pounding through him, part of Denton was still in control enough to study the scene as if from the outside looking in. That part of him which always tried to watch each scene from a distance so he could make the tough decisions objectively, nodded its head as it realised a tipping point had been reached.

Every bit of Jerry belonged to him. There could be no more doubts about that. There could be no more half measures or half labels. Complete perfection wasn't going to wait any longer.

Denton felt something click into place inside him. The uncomfortable feeling that had grown within him every time he heard the word bi began to ease. In hindsight, the sensible half of him could only conclude that it was a miracle that the other side of him, the side of him that wanted to own, to possess, to love without boundary or restraint, had managed to pretend that Jerry's insistence on the bi label was only a *mild* annoyance for so long.

Denton broke the kiss as suddenly as he'd initiated it. Pulling back, he stared down at his lover. The world inside his head might have changed, but his pet was the same as ever. Jerry blinked and stared up at him, his breaths coming in pants as he licked his lips and stole a final taste of his master's kiss.

Their gazes locked together and Jerry didn't seem to be able to look away. He looked so wide-eyed and dazed, so flawless. And he was flawless, Denton reminded himself. All Jerry had to do was finish coming out, and it would be official.

Minutes passed. Jerry dropped his gaze. His hands had been free to do as they pleased since Denton pushed them out of his hair. He reached out to his master and put his hand on his thigh, very close to the bulge of his erection behind the denim. "May I, master?"

The words hung in the air between them.

His first instinct was to say no, he wanted his pet back in their apartment. He wanted everything settled between them once and for all, and there was no way in hell he was going to play out that scene in his car.

Jerry's tongue flicked out to moisten his lips again. He hadn't lifted his gaze from his master's erection. Denton held back a moan at the sight of him so eager and ready to please.

For once, it was the sensible, objective part of him that put up its hand and voted for immediate sex. There was no point rushing home for a serious scene when his brain was settled so firmly below his belt. Trying to have that particular conversation when he couldn't focus on anything his lover said because he was too busy fantasising about all the other things his submissive could be doing with his mouth was a sure way to send the scene to hell.

It was far better to take care of his lust right there in the car park than to muddy the situation when they got back to the house. Coming was important, but having a clear head to take care of Jerry in the scene he had planned was vital. That realisation made the decision for him.

Denton nodded his permission. He was tall. The driver's seat was already pushed back almost as far as it would go. He adjusted the settings and let it slide back the last inch, giving Jerry as much room as he could.

His pet didn't waste any time. He reached for his master's belt the moment Denton straightened in his seat. A second later he had his fly undone. His hand slid past the tangle of material to guide his cock out from between the layers of cotton boxers and denim.

Pre-cum leaked from the tip. A dainty swipe of Jerry's tongue and his pet swallowed it down, murmuring his approval as he rubbed his lips back and forth over the head. Vibrations shot straight up Denton's spine. His hand moved to rest on the back of Jerry's

neck. It lingered there for a while, enjoying the feel of the leather under his palm as Jerry's collar shifted with each movement of his throat.

His pet dipped his head further, taking the topmost inches of Denton's shaft into his mouth. Liquid heat surrounded the glans, quickly followed by delicious suction. Jerry's tongue swirled around the head, gathering up more pre-cum as it leaked into his mouth. He tilted his head to the side, letting Denton know that his pet remembered how much his master loved to see every detail.

The dominant stared down, watching his lover's lips thin into a pale pink line as he slid his mouth down his erection. The suction increased as Jerry pulled back, his tongue danced against Denton's cock as if his lover was more determined than ever to do anything and everything he could think of to offer his master pleasure.

No man in his right mind could watch the way Jerry went down on him and still believe his pet wasn't gay. Denton dropped his head back against the head-rest as his pet pulled a groan of pleasure from deep within him. He reluctantly let his eyes fall closed, eager to watch, but needing to make it last too.

A noise from outside the car made him open his eyes again and turn his attention to the view out of the windshield.

The club door swung open. Several men walked across the car park. If Jerry heard them, he gave no sign of it. Denton took a slow deep breath and tried to study the impromptu little scene objectively.

Jerry was bowed down out of sight of the other men, perhaps a few of them would wonder why he was just sitting there in the car park. One or two might even guess why Jerry wasn't in sight. But that wasn't important right then. Other men were irrelevant. There was no need to change anything.

Peter waved as he walked across to his car, faithfully steered by his own submissive, Benedict. The collared man offered Denton slight smile as he guided his drunken master into the passenger seat of their car before he got in to drive them home.

Denton stroked his fingertips up Jerry's bare back. His pet sucked harder around his shaft as he arched into the contact. Willing to indulge his lover's desire to feel his master's touch, to feel a *man's* touch, Denton repeated the action with the palm of his hand, stroking

the skin down along the line of Jerry's spine until his fingers dipped between his lover's buttocks.

Jerry whimpered and scrambled to shift his position and move his legs further apart in offering. Out of Jerry's line of sight, Denton shook his head. It was bad enough feeling like a teenager who couldn't control his cock well enough to wait until he was out of the car park. There was no way in hell either part of him was going to agree to scramble around in the confined space trying to find a way for a man his height to top his lover properly.

"When we get home," he said, his voice rough with arousal. "If you're good and do as your master says, you might be allowed to come then."

Jerry moaned his approval around his cock. His efforts to please his master redoubled. The hands resting on Denton's thighs to steady the submissive tightened their grip. He sucked hard and fast, his head bobbing over his lap more and more rapidly with each moment. Maybe he was in a rush to finish his master off so he could have his own turn, but it felt more like a simple need for a submissive to know he had pleased his master—for a gay man to know he had pleased his lover.

Denton tangled his fingers in Jerry's hair. His hips thrust forward. He buried himself deep in his lover's mouth as he came across his pet's tongue. Muscles worked rapidly around his cock as Jerry sucked and swallowed as fast as he could, never missing a drop.

His yell when he came seemed to echo in the close confines of the car. By the time the silence came back, Jerry's mood seemed to have changed. If there had been any inclination to rush before, all sign of it disappeared the moment the submissive tasted his master's pleasure.

He sucked slowly and gently around Denton shaft as it softened in his mouth. For a few minutes, Denton found his own rush to be back at their apartment and starting the important scene of the night wasn't so urgent either.

He stroked his fingers through the younger man's hair, absentmindedly smoothing down those locks that stood up at strange angles after he'd taken hold of it. He let a few more minutes pass in peaceful silence before he prompted Jerry to lift his head.

His lover let his shaft slip from between his lips with obvious reluctance and looked up at him. Denton slipped his fingers into the younger man's collar and pulled him close for a deep kiss.

There was a reason why the sensible part of him existed. Denton felt the taste of himself in his pet's mouth ease his desire to rush in and damn the consequences a fraction more. For the first time since they left the club, he truly felt sane enough to drive, sane enough to lead the scene properly when they got home.

He unhooked his fingers from Jerry's collar and nodded his approval.

"As you were."

Jerry immediately sat back in his seat and resumed the position his master had ordered him into when they first sat in the car. As the last little detail fell into place and Jerry let his lips fall apart in offering, Denton felt his control over the world around him come back into complete focus.

Tidying up his own clothes, he put on Jerry's seat belt before clicking his own into place. Practical considerations taken care of, he nodded once more. Decisions made. Brain back above belt. They were ready to tackle the important issues.

Putting the car into gear, he steered them out of the car park, trusting the tinted windows to take care of Jerry's inclination towards modesty on the journey home.

As they drove through practically deserted streets, his lover's breathing failed to settle into a proper relaxed rhythm. He seemed to be stuck on the edge, only needing a word to push him over, but lacking the permission he required before he could come. By the time Denton pulled into the car park under their building, Jerry's eyes were dropping closed as he began to completely lose himself in the depths of his submission.

Denton left him sitting in that same position as he got out of the car and walked around to the passenger side. Jerking the door open, he studied Jerry very carefully. He still hadn't moved a muscle.

"Move freely. Get out. Put your jeans on. Carry the rest."

It would be a million to one chance if they ran into someone on the short journey up to the fifth floor at this time of night. The jeans were concession enough to make. Given the emotions still pounding through him right then, Denton was quietly pleased with the objective side of himself for remembering that jeans should be considered necessary.

Taking his pet by the wrist the moment he'd done up his fly, Denton walked him barefoot across the car park. He slowed his pace just enough to scan the floor in front of them for anything that might cut an unshod foot, but that was still the only allowance he was

capable of right then. His grip around Jerry's wrist remained firm until they stepped into their apartment.

When he finally let go of him, Jerry hesitated, suddenly looking a little lost and unsure of what was expected of him. A second later, he lowered himself to his knees at his master's feet. One glance and Denton knew that his lover still sensed something off in his mood.

An orgasm might have given him back a little of his control, but hadn't been enough to clear his need to get everything settled between them that night. Jerry obviously still sensed the tension running through his blood.

"I'm going to tie you up," Denton told him, automatically offering his submissive a piece of concrete information to centre himself on.

As easily as he said the words, Denton saw Jerry relax. "Yes, master."

"In the playroom. I want you naked and ready to stay in bondage for several hours by the time I enter the room. Offer your wrists and ankles to the central shackles. Leave your clothes here."

"Yes, master."

Jerry removed his jeans and went quickly into the playroom that had been created out of the apartment's second bedroom. He left the door ajar behind him the way Denton's rules demanded, as if it no longer even occurred to him that he could ever be closed in there without his master.

Seeing his willingness to obey every rule he'd ever set for the younger man once more eased Denton's rush to start the game immediately, or at least made him remember that Jerry's submission was too precious to be dealt with hastily. Forcing himself to be patient, he made a conscious effort to bring his emotions even further under his control before he walked into the scene.

Pacing across to the window, he looked down over the street outside. It was late and quiet. Not a thing moved. There was nothing to distract him from his desire to have the issued settled once and for all.

Denton took a deep breath. Tonight had been a long time in coming, but it was definitely time. That was one thing that every warring side of his personality could agree on. His reaction to Peter's casual mention of the subject was all the proof he need. Anything that

made him feel so out of control couldn't be tolerated. It wasn't fair to either of them. Jerry deserved a master who was in control of every aspect of their lives.

He looked across to the playroom door as he considered the scene ahead of them. All sounds of Jerry moving about within the room had already ceased. Denton had seen him under the shackles often enough to know the picture he would present. Standing in the middle of the room, wrists touching the outer edge of the padded leather restraints hanging from the ceiling, ankles likewise touching those bolted to the floor at his feet. His pet would wait there, bound by nothing more than his master's command, for as long as Denton demanded – his body and his submission laid out for his master to view at his convenience.

Denton let him wait a little while longer, while he ran the scene he wanted to conduct over and over inside his head, looking for things that might go wrong. It was essential that he be able to deal with any problem that might arise in the scene calmly and efficiently, without any hint of weakness – perhaps more so on this occasion than ever before.

It was a master's responsibility to look after his submissive. He couldn't let the scene hurt his pet. But Denton reminded himself it was also his responsibility to challenge the man under his protection, to encourage him to grow and to make progress in his submission as well as within his life in general, to help him be as perfect as he could be.

That's what he was doing, Denton repeated to himself. He was helping Jerry to take a leap forward. He was acting exactly as a good master should. He was doing this for Jerry. His own feelings on this particular topic had to become irrelevant now that the scene was going to start in earnest. It could only be about being a good master to the man he loved.

Denton nodded to the view out the window. It was time.

Chapter Two

Jerry Clarke took a deep breath and let it out very slowly, forcing his body to bring itself back under his conscious control as he stood in the centre of the playroom and waited for his master to bind him to the cuffs.

His master would be there soon, the worry inside him would settle and he would feel safe in his submission again. He knew that. It always happened that way. Knowing it didn't make it any easier to stand there and wait. His teeth worried his bottom lip as his eyes fell closed.

Nothing was wrong.

He hadn't done anything wrong. His master wanted to play, not punish. He hadn't done anything that would warrant a punishment, and his master was always scrupulously fair about such things. The same line of thought ran around and around inside his head, looping in circles, but it didn't change the fact that his master's mood wasn't one of those he was familiar with.

Something was wrong.

The playroom door closed with a click. Jerry's eyes sprang open. He stared across at his master. Denton wore the same serious expression that had lingered around his eyes since he'd announced they were going to leave the club.

He walked across to him without a word and stood close in front of him as he buckled the cuffs around his wrists and his ankles. His master's clothes brushed against Jerry's naked body, tempting him to hope for real contact, but the moment the restraints were in place, Denton stepped back.

"Submission isn't always easy," his master announced.

Jerry lowered his gaze, not sure what to say in response.

Denton threaded his fingers through his hair and tugged gently, making him look up. It was such a familiar touch, such a familiar action, it calmed Jerry's worries a little.

When Denton's hand was buried in his hair, it was easy to let his mind slip back to the car park when his head was bent over his master's lap and he knew exactly what his master

expected of him and exactly how he could please the older man. He licked his lips and swallowed down the lingering taste of his master's pleasure.

Everything was fine.

"You understand that it is your master's place to make sure that you make progress as a submissive and as a man?"

"Yes, master," Jerry whispered.

Denton stared down at him for a long time.

Jerry cleared his throat as nerves built inside him all over again. "If I've done something that has displeased you, master —"

The dominant cut him off with a shake of his head.

Jerry stared up at the taller man, pushing the scene in the car out of his head as he tried to read what his master wanted from him now. "I can learn to be different, if I —"

Denton smiled slightly and stroked his cheek with the back of his knuckles while his other hand remained firmly tangled in his hair. "You don't need to be different. I am very pleased with you, just as you are. But it is well past time you faced certain facts about yourself."

Jerry frowned, annoyed with himself for not being able to understand. "Master?"

Denton's hand dropped from his cheek to his collar and trailed along the line of the leather. For one horrible moment, Jerry imagined his master would take the mark away. It was a groundless sort of panic, but that didn't make it any easier to push the sudden rush of emotion aside. He swallowed again, just to feel the reassuring movement of leather around his throat, reminding him who he belonged to.

His master's hand trailed lower, caressing his skin along his collarbone before stroking back up his neck to touch his face. Leaning into his master's touch the way he always did, Jerry stared up at him and once more tried to work out what was going on. A frown creased between Denton's dark brows, but he seemed to be deep in thought rather than genuinely displeased with his pet.

Jerry swallowed again as his master stared back at him. "Master?" he asked.

Denton's lips twitched into a smile. "You're a fantastic submissive."

Jerry offered him a tentative smile at the unexpected compliment.

"But a tendency towards submission can make a man somewhat less than certain about some parts of his life."

Until that evening, Jerry had been pretty damn sure he was certain about every part of his life. Since he'd come under his master's protection, his life had been all about that concrete sort of certainty that he loved. "I'm sure I want to belong to you, master," he offered.

A smile flickered over Denton's lips again. "I've never doubted that. This isn't about me."

Jerry looked down, sure that he should understand what his master wanted from him, but unable to follow the older man's thoughts.

"How long has it been since you had sex with a woman?"

That made Jerry raise his gaze for a moment, but he quickly looked away. His master knew the answer full well. "Three years, master."

"And have you missed having sex with women in those three years?" Denton asked, his hand stroking down his neck and along his collar bone again.

Jerry shook his head as the skin under Denton's touch began to tingle with pleasure at being the focus of so much unexpected attention.

"Real answers," his master ordered.

"No, master, I haven't." For a large part of that time he'd belonged to Denton. "I haven't missed having sex with other men ei —"

Denton touched his lips, silencing him as effectively with one fingertip as anyone else could with their whole hand, easily stopping him from saying that he didn't miss having sex with *anyone* but his master.

"We're not talking about how you think about men," Denton corrected. "We are speaking, specifically, about how you may or may not feel about women." He took his fingertip away and trailed it down Jerry's body until it brushed across his nipple.

Jerry bit his lip, not sure if he was allowed to respond to his master's touch freely in the middle of this sort of conversation.

"You like a man's touch, don't you?" Denton asked.

Jerry nodded. "Yes, master."

"More than a woman's touch?" He dropped his hand further to brush the back of his knuckles up and down his stomach, teasing his abs until they twitched under the all too gentle caress, making him sway within his bondage.

Jerry shook his head. "I...I like my master's touch more than anyone else's."

"More than you would like a mistress's touch?" Denton pushed.

Jerry looked down his body and watched Denton's hand tease his skin. "I don't want anyone but you touching me, master."

"Answer the question," Denton said, a sudden snap lending force to the order.

Jerry closed his eyes. "I like a woman's touch just as much as a man's touch, master," he admitted, since it was obviously what his master was trying to get him to say.

"You've been telling yourself that for a long time, haven't you?"

"Master?"

Denton smiled at him, but the smile didn't quite reach his eyes. "You're not the first man to use the label as a stepping stone on your way out of the closet, Jerry. But it's time to take the final step now."

"I don't understand," Jerry said, although he had a horrible feeling that he knew exactly what was coming next.

"It's time for you to accept that you're gay," Denton announced.

"I'm bi, master," Jerry whispered.

The half smile disappeared. Denton's eyes turned very serious. "No, you're not."

"Master, I..." Jerry trailed off, not sure what words might help the situation and what might make it worse.

"I'm not denying that this whole situation is partially my fault for having humoured you for so long," Denton told him. "Perhaps if I'd made you face facts earlier, this would be easier for you. But either way, it's time you accepted the truth properly."

Jerry dropped his gaze and watched his master's hand as it moved lower again and wrapped around his aching erection.

"Master..."

Denton began to flex his fingers around his shaft, not jacking him off, but making it very hard to ignore the fact his master literally held him in the palm of his hand. "You're gay."

Jerry shook his head.

"You like men. You find men, desirable, sexually attractive." His thumb stroked back and forth across the tip of Jerry's cock, spreading the pre-cum over the head.

"I..."

"You find me attractive," Denton added, as he began to slowly stroke him, smearing the pre-cum down as shaft and making full use of all he had learnt about his lover's responses over the years. He knew what being jacked off in that slow calculating way did to him. After the blow job in the car, he had to know that it wouldn't take much to push him over the edge.

Jerry gasped and tried to make words happen. "Yes, master," he finally managed to bite out.

"There's nothing wrong with liking men, pet," Denton whispered in his ear.

He stepped closer to him, offering his shoulder for Jerry to rest his head on as he spoke softly to him, the way he only ever spoke in private. Jerry leaned into him, taking strength from the approval and comfort his master offered him. Each breath his master took made the muscles in his shoulder shift under Jerry's forehead. The easy rhythm soothed him just a fraction.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of," Denton said.

"I'm not ashamed, master," Jerry whispered back.

"Good boy," Denton praised, speeding up his strokes along the length of his shaft as reward.

"I'm not ashamed of liking women either, master," some foolishly honest part of Jerry forced him to add.

His master stepped back, taking away the supporting shoulder and the caressing hand.

"How often do you think about having sex with a woman?" he asked, his tone cooling with each word.

Jerry swayed in his restraints, pulling at them as he instinctively tried to regain his master's touch and follow him across the room. Denton didn't seem to notice that as he retreated to lean against the wall opposite him.

"I don't think about that," Jerry said. "I think about my master."

"Don't you think a genuinely bi-sexual man, if such a person should ever exist, would think about women more often?"

Jerry frowned. He knew it was the height of stupidity to mention a previous owner to a current one, but there seemed to be no way to avoid it. "When I belonged to Miss Stephens, I..."

Denton pushed himself away from the wall and strode around him. Jerry tried to turn his head to follow his master's progress, his words trailing off as he felt the anger pouring off the older man.

"I don't think about anyone other than you, master," he said again.

"You're gay," Denton stated.

Jerry said nothing. As Denton paced around behind him, he stared across the room at the empty white wall opposite him.

"There is no such thing as bisexuality."

Jerry picked a random point on the painted surface and fixed his gaze on it, as he tried his best not to listen—just as he always did when his master spoke on that particular subject. Denton saying it didn't make it true. Denton saying it didn't really mean anything at all.

His master loved him. Jerry knew that. Denton told him that, out loud and far more often than came easily to a man of his temperament.

His master loved him. Just because Denton didn't understand one part of him, that didn't mean he didn't love the rest of him. Jerry bit his lip and focused on that knowledge, doing his best to ignore his lover's words as they turned harsher and more dismissive of his sexuality by the moment.

Denton stopped in front of him. Jerry imagined that he could still see the same spot he'd been staring at on the wall. He did everything in his power to look through his master, to focus on a point in time and space that existed beyond this conversation.

The older man seemed to know what he was trying to do. He made him look up and look him in the eye instead. The hand in his hair failed to offer any comfort right then. While Denton demanded he hold his gaze, he had no choice but to focus on his master and take in every word he said.

"I've been very patient with you, Jerry. But the time has come for you to get out of the closet and make a real commitment to who you really are."

Jerry shook his head, not so much in answer as trying to deny this was happening, that his master could say all the words that echoed around inside his head.

"There is no such thing as bisexuality. It's time you faced up to that and stopped pretending otherwise. I'm sure it was easier when you first came out, but you don't need the crutch any more. You're gay."

Jerry closed his eyes. "Please, stop saying that," he whispered.

"It's the truth," Denton snapped. His hand ran down Jerry's body. For the first time, Jerry hesitated before he finally leaned into the touch, accepting it and welcoming it the way he knew a good submissive should.

Coming face to face with this side of his master's personality had softened him, but not so much that it took Denton more than a dozen strokes with a firm grip to have him aching to come all over again. His body found it far easier to ignore his master's words than his mind did.

"You like a man's touch," Denton whispered in his ear. He kept Jerry's cock in his fist, he kept up the strokes, as he moved around behind him. "You like the feel of a man's body against yours."

Jerry nodded when Denton pressed his body against his back, letting him feel his renewed erection through the material that separated them. His master still wanted him. Whatever he said, Denton wanted him. That was the important thing. "Yes, master."

"You like the feel of a man inside you too, don't you Jerry?"

Jerry pushed back against his master's fingers as they trailed down the cleft between his buttocks, teasing him with possibilities.

"You like the feel of your master's cock in your arse."

Jerry nodded.

His master's fingers disappeared for a second and came back coated in lube. Jerry murmured his pleasure as his master stroked his fingers around his hole. His whimpers quickly turned frustrated when they failed to enter him.

"Please, master?" Jerry whispered.

Denton slipped two fingers inside and immediately sought out his prostate. As one hand worked his cock and the fingers of the other hand thrust deeper inside him, all Jerry

could do was hang from the chains and accept it all, enjoying every burst of pleasure that fired through him.

Each touch, each kiss his master applied to his neck wiped away some of the words his master had said. He just didn't understand, that was all. And dominants often had a tendency to be harsh when they dismissed those things that confused them. His master was a good man who loved him. A good submissive should be able to look past a few hurtful comments made by someone who couldn't possibly know how heartbreaking they could be for a man in his position.

Jerry caught up every ounce of submission inside him and held it tight, clinging to anything that might help him forgive his lover. It was practically impossible to think properly while Denton was still teasing him, but he somehow felt a little of his disappointment in his master drain away.

Groaning his approval of his touch if not his earlier words, Jerry tried to move between his master's hands, but no longer able to decide if he wanted to push back against one hand or thrust forward into the other.

"Do you like that, pet?" Denton asked him.

"Yes, master," Jerry murmured.

"Louder." Both his master's hands worked him faster, his right hand tightened around his shaft.

"Yes!" Jerry said. The half shout echoed around the room as Denton pushed him to the edge but refused that little bit of stimulation that would let him topple over into real pleasure.

"Do you want to come?"

"Yes!" It came out as another yell. Whimpering, trying to get himself back under control, Jerry tried again. "Yes, master," he rasped. "If it pleases you to let me come, I..."

Denton pressed another kiss to his neck. "It pleases me a great deal. You just have to do one thing for me."

Jerry nodded quickly, as ready as he ever was to do anything his master wanted, especially eager right then, to do anything that could bridge the gap Denton's words risked causing between them.

"All you have to do is say you're gay," Denton said.

Jerry blinked and tried to make his mind process the order. "Master?"

"Three little words and you can have whatever you want," Denton whispered in his ear. "All you have to say is, I...am...gay..." With each word, the fingers inside him rubbed against his prostate, tempting him to give in and just answer automatically.

Jerry shook his head.

"Jerry," Denton prompted.

"Can't."

"Yes, you can, Jerry. You're stronger than you think you are."

Jerry shook his head. It wasn't a question of strength, just honesty, and he couldn't lie to his master, not about something that important. "I can't."

"Yes, you can. Now, say the words for your master."

Jerry closed his eyes as tight as he could, trying to block out the idea he was failing Denton with his silence.

"If you say the words you can come," Denton coaxed as his hand moved over his erection again. He kissed his ear. "You can come in my mouth," he offered.

As simply as he said the words, Jerry's head was filled with the idea of Denton taking him in between his lips. For all his dominance and preference for topping, when he was in the mood, he gave head better than anyone Jerry had ever known.

Rough, demanding lips could turn into molten velvet when Denton wanted them to. Jerry whimpered and strained against his bonds as he imagined those lips wrapping around his cock, as he imagined his master's tongue running over his shaft as he suckled around the head.

"You can come in my arse," Denton whispered. "Would you like that, pet, would you like to top your master? Say the words for me and you can. Three little words and I'll give you anything you want."

Images swirled in his mind of Denton letting that happen for the first time. Jerry moaned as Denton held him on the edge and tempted him to jump and damn the consequences.

A huge part of him wanted to lie. His master would be happy with him if he lied. But when he parted his lips he knew what words were going to come out. "I'm bi, master."

Every muscle in Denton's body tensed. His hands stilled. He stepped away from Jerry, leaving him hanging alone and naked in the middle of the room as he slowly walked around to face him.

"You won't come until you learn to be honest," Denton informed him.

Jerry hung his head, feeling ashamed of who he was for the first time in so many years. Right then, as hard and as aching as he was, he couldn't make himself care about coming. All he wanted was for his master to cross the room to him and accept him, to hold him close and tell him that he was safe with the man who loved him. "Master?"

He somehow found the strength to lift his head and look his master in the eye. Denton knew what he wanted. His master had always been able to read what he needed in his expression, but he made no move to come closer to him, to reassure him.

"When you're ready to say the words," he told him.

Jerry dropped his gaze as he realised that they weren't just talking about an orgasm anymore. His master had no intention of truly accepting him in any way, shape or form, not until he said he was gay.

When he heard his master step forward, he thought he might have read him wrongly, that his panic had got the better of him the way he knew it sometimes did. He looked up at his master as Denton came within an inch of him. Their lips almost touched. Then he saw the look in his master's eyes.

The kiss would come as a reward when he said what his master wanted him to say. When he became the man his master wanted him to be. Jerry closed his eyes and took a deep breath, knowing there was only one option left open to him.

"Alcatraz."

Chapter Three

Denton stared down at his submissive. It took a full minute for the word to sink in to his mind and register as Jerry's safe word.

He took a step back, trying to find some mental space. A second later, he cleared his throat, trying to pull himself out of the scene and pull the objective side of himself to the surface so he could deal with the word properly.

"Did you cramp up?" he asked, looking up and down his submissive's body for any hint of a problem serious enough to make Jerry panic and invoke his safe word.

Jerry shook his head.

"Then what's wrong with you?" As much as he wanted to speak softly and tenderly to him, as much as he wanted to show the younger man that he knew how much courage it had taken for him to say his safe word, anger at Jerry's persistence was still pounding through him. The sensible side of him lost the battle. The words came out far more harshly than he intended.

Jerry flinched.

The movement was enough to remind him why such moments required patience and gentleness no matter how he felt within himself. Denton stepped forward and reached out to touch his pet's cheek, hoping to gentle him down enough that he could tell him what was wrong. Jerry jerked his head away from his hand.

"You told me that if I ever said my safe word, you'd stop, you'd let me go."

"Yes," Denton agreed.

Jerry's throat muscles worked rapidly as he swallowed several times. "I said my safe word."

Denton stared down at him, still trying to work out what was going on. "Jerry?" Stepping closer again, he stroked his fingers through his lover's hair. Jerry tried to pull away from his touch, but there was only so far he could go in his restraints.

Frowning, Denton touched his cheek again, signalling that his master wanted him to look up so he could look him in the eye. Jerry stopped fighting against his master's instructions, but he didn't look up, he just seemed to go limp within his restraints.

"Jerry?"

Jerry stared straight ahead as if he didn't even see his master standing in front of him.

"Jerry?" Denton prompted again.

"Please, wear a condom."

"What?"

"We both know that even if I wasn't bound, I'm still no match for you. All I've ever been able to do is say my safe word and hope that you'll respect it. If you're not going to stop when I ask you to, then I'm asking you to wear a condom when you...when do whatever it is you intend to do next."

Denton snatched his hand away from his lover as if Jerry's skin had turned into hot coals under his hand. "I have *never* done anything to make you say that."

Jerry closed his eyes. "I said my safe word," he repeated.

Yes, he had. Denton looked at the cuffs still wrapped firmly around his lover's wrist. In a moment, the leather was gone. Denton crouched down and undid the restraints at his ankles. As soon as he was free, Jerry stumbled away. His retreat only stopped when his back hit the wall.

Denton stood in the middle of the room, watching his every move, trying to work out what the hell was going on.

"I'm sorry, master," Jerry whispered. "I have to go now."

"What?"

Jerry looked to the door, then back to him. Caught between moving to block his escape route and stepping aside to give his lover the freedom to do what he wanted, Denton stayed where he was by the cuffs.

"I have to go now," Jerry repeated, seemingly as much to himself as his master.

"Where?"

"Somewhere that isn't here," Jerry said.

He'd wrapped his arms tight around his body, as if he was trying to comfort himself. He held himself close the way Denton had been more than ready to hold him, before all that bull about him being about to force Jerry fell from the sky.

"You're not making any sense, pet," Denton said, trying his best to make sure there was one man in the room who didn't sound like he was panicking. A pet might panic, a master couldn't.

"Please don't call me that," Jerry said. He lifted his hand to his collar and traced the leather, the way he so often did when he was nervous. Then his hand dropped away from the mark. "You should take this back."

"No!" Denton hadn't meant to shout, hadn't meant to make Jerry jump and press himself back against the wall, but the word echoed around the room, pushing Jerry even further away from him.

His lover closed his eyes. "Please, don't make me take it off myself. If I don't have any other choice I will, but please just..."

Denton stepped forward. "Jerry, you need to try and stay calm for me. If you tell your master what's wrong, I can help you, but you have to talk to me so I can do that. Understand?"

Jerry shook his head. "I have to go," he whispered. "You have to take the collar back and I have to go."

"Why?"

Jerry looked down. "I have to," he said again. "I...I can't wear this anymore."

He ran his fingers around the leather, looking for the buckle that would free it from his neck. His fingers scraped against his throat, scratching his skin as he scrabbled at the leather.

Denton didn't think. Objectivity went out the window. He stepped forward and took hold of Jerry's wrists before the younger man could hurt himself. Jerry gasped and flinched away as if he thought Denton would strike him.

Gentling his grip, Denton let go of Jerry's wrists. "I have no interest in hurting you. But if you pull at your collar like that, you are going to hurt yourself. I can't let that happen."

Jerry looked up at him. Their eyes met. Desperation swirled in the deep blue eyes. "Please, take it off," he begged.

Denton stared down at him. No matter how much the idea of taking the collar away turned his stomach, he couldn't refuse him right then. Everything else aside, Jerry had said his safe word. Denton knew he didn't have the right to refuse him whatever he asked for. He undid the buckle and took the collar away, hoping to earn a little of his lover's trust back, hoping Jerry would calm down enough to talk rationally and that would let them get the collar back on him as quickly as possible.

"Thank you," Jerry whispered. He seemed to bite back the honorific that naturally wanted to slip into the sentence. Denton's hand tightened around the collar in his hand as he realised Jerry wasn't calling him his master because right then he wasn't his master. The realisation made it impossible to think calmly and logically about anything.

The younger man looked past Denton to the door. "I have to go now."

"Where?" he asked, for what felt like the millionth time.

"I don't know," Jerry whispered. A frown gathered between his eyebrows as he said it, as if it really hadn't occurred to him that he needed to choose a destination.

"Don't you think you need to decide where you're going before you leave?" Denton asked, as gently as he could, hating himself for not being able to keep his impatience out of his voice entirely.

Jerry looked to the door again. He shook his head, dismissing that idea, as if Denton was the one who wasn't making any sense. Denton reached out to push the younger man's hair back from his face without even thinking about the familiar little gesture. Jerry flinched away from him again.

Denton lowered his hand. Jerry stepped around him, heading for the door. Unable to touch him and see that expression in his eyes again, Denton had no choice but to let him walk past him and out of the playroom.

Any slight hope that moving to a different room would break Jerry's panic disappeared as Jerry turned immediately towards the front door.

That snapped Denton into action. "Jerry!"

He hesitated, looking warily over his shoulder. "I have to..."

"You can't go anywhere stark bollock naked!"

Jerry looked down at his exposed body. "I haven't got any clothes," he said to himself. He cleared his throat. "Could I borrow some, please? I'll...I'll pay you for them as soon as I get a job."

"Jerry, you have a whole wardrobe full of clothes," Denton reminded him, struggling to keep anything like tolerance in his tone while his lover seemed to become less and less rational about everything by the minute.

Jerry shook his head. "They all belong to you. The same way I used to belong to you. They aren't mine."

"They're all four sizes too small for me. They're yours, you know that."

Jerry looked towards the bedroom they'd shared ever since he'd moved into his master's home. His gaze fell on the clothes he'd been wearing that night, where Denton had tossed them in the general direction of the chair in the corner.

"If I could just borrow them until I—"

"Put them on," Denton ordered.

Jerry quickly pulled his clothes on and headed for the door again.

"Jerry?" Denton called after him, not able to do more than that while every move he made towards his submissive made him panic even more.

For a moment, the younger man stopped with his hand on the door handle. "I'm sorry," he whispered. A moment later the door was closed behind him and he was gone.

Denton raced across to the window, grabbing his mobile phone off the hallway table as he went. By the time he stared down into the street below, he'd hit speed dial and the phone was ringing.

He didn't wait for the man on the other end to speak before he started issuing orders.

Jerry stood on the pavement outside his former master's apartment building. He looked both ways along the deserted street and bit his lip as he tried to work out what the hell he was supposed to do now. He wrapped his arms tight around his body, wondering if it was actually as cold as it felt or if he was going into some sort of shock. A shiver ran through him. His hands wouldn't stop shaking.

Turning, he looked up the lines of windows that filled the side of the building, but he stopped short of his master's window. It was stupid to think that his master...that his former

master...would be there watching him. Jerry closed his eyes. Denton was probably glad to be rid of him. All things considered, he couldn't blame him.

He had to go somewhere further away from his master. Standing there on the pavement, being so close to him, that would only tempt him to run back into the building and beg the other man to take him back. Right then, it felt like it would be worth any price, any lie, if it meant he could have that collar back around his throat, if it meant he was allowed to belong to his master again.

No. That couldn't happen. Jerry repeated that fact to himself several times. There were things that were far more important than getting what he wanted. Some prices were too high.

Things were as they were now. They couldn't go back to the way they were before. He had to go to...to a homeless shelter, he guessed. He was homeless after all, without the security of a master or mistress for the first time in his adult life. Jerry stared at the crack in the paving stones under his feet and tried to remember the names of some of those charity buckets he'd thrown coins in over the years.

A car came around the corner. Jerry stepped back closer to the building, not wanting to draw attention to himself. The car stopped alongside him. Jerry ignored it, hoping whoever was driving it would ignore him too. It wasn't as if they lived in the middle of a red light district. There was no reason to think that any man stopping alongside him wanted anything more than directions from him. The panic boiling though his blood still made it impossible to really believe that right then.

Jerry closed his eyes. If the guy in the car wanted more than that, then it might pay for a bed for the night if he could find his way to a cheap hotel after the guy was done with him. His eyes scrunched closed even tighter.

The car door opened.

Someone stepped out.

Jerry forced himself to look up.

Peter Vickery, his master's friend, stood on the pavement in front of him.

"My master is—" Jerry cut himself off, unable to hold back a flinch at the out of date honorific. "Mr. Greenwood is upstairs, sir."

"And what are you doing out here?"

"I don't belong to him anymore, sir," Jerry whispered.

"Do you want to stay with us?" Mr. Vickery asked, not showing the slightest surprise at the announcement, possibly because he didn't sound incredibly sober.

Jerry shook his head.

"Benedict's in the car. You're welcome to use the guest room until you work out what you're going to do next."

Jerry looked from him to the car and back again. Benedict, Mr. Vickery's submissive, sat behind the wheel. He smiled encouragingly when he caught Jerry's eye.

"You know Benedict would have my balls on a platter if I laid a hand on another submissive," Mr. Vickery said with a rueful smile. "I'm just offering you the room, I'm not asking for anything from you in return."

Jerry swallowed, looking at the familiar face in front of him before turning his attention back to the deserted street. "I can work for my keep, sir."

Mr. Vickery nodded his acceptance, as if he never doubted it, and stepped back to guide him in to the car.

"You're not going to visit my...Mr. Greenwood?" Jerry asked as Benedict pulled away from the kerb and drove past the entrance to the visitor's car park attached to the block of apartments.

Mr. Vickery seemed to hesitate. "No, there wasn't anything important. We were just...uh...driving past and I thought we would..." he cleared his throat. "Are you hungry?"

Jerry shook his head, thinking he would be doing well if he made it to Mr. Vickery's house before he threw up. "No, thank you, sir."

When they got to the house, Mr. Vickery disappeared into his study to make a phone call, leaving Benedict to show him into the guest room.

"There's an en-suite through there and there's spare blankets on the shelf in the wardrobe. Do you want to borrow some pyjamas? We're about the same size. I've got a spare pair I've never worn."

Jerry looked down at his clothes, at the clothes that his master had bought for him. He ran his fingers along the edge of the shirt. "I'm fine in these, thank you."

Benedict hovered just inside the doorway.

"Thank you for letting me stay here tonight. If...I can find somewhere else tomorrow if..."

Benedict shook his head. "Don't be daft, you can stay here for as long as you want—until you and your master sort out things."

Jerry stared at the carpet. "Things aren't going to be sorted out," he whispered.

"Maybe..." Benedict began.

Jerry shook his head. "What's that thing they say—permanent and irreconcilable differences? I don't belong to Mr. Greenwood anymore. He took his collar back, and I left and...and I don't belong to him anymore."

* * * *

"He must have said something!"

Denton stood up and began to pace around his friend's living room. Peter and Benedict watched him go back and forth. He saw them exchange a glance.

"He must have told you what this is all about," Denton accused, swinging around to Benedict.

The submissive looked to his master for guidance.

"If Jerry's given you any explanation for his...for his breakdown, you should tell his master," Peter said.

"He says Mr. Greenwood's not his master anymore," Benedict pointed out.

Denton clenched his teeth and fought to be polite and rational about it all. The man had information. Venting his temper wasn't anywhere near as important as finding out what that information was.

Benedict saw his expression and seemed to realise he'd made a tactical error. He cleared his throat. "He hasn't said much, sir. And I've never been able to make much sense out of the things he does blurt out sometimes. He said that he didn't handle the situation very well, that he panicked."

Denton nodded for him to continue and tell him something he didn't know already.

"He said that a man like him couldn't belong to a man like you anymore." The submissive gave a frustrated sigh. "Practically the only thing I know for sure is that it all has something to do with him being bi."

Bi, gay or straight be damned. The only things that were important now were those things that would help him get Jerry back with his master where he belonged. Anything else could be sorted out later. Every part of the dominant agreed with that.

"Practically," Denton said, latching onto the word. "There's something else?"

Benedict looked to his master again and received a nod to continue. "He's still in love with you, sir."

"He said that?" Denton demanded, for once not caring if the other two men saw how desperate he was for that to be true.

Benedict gave one nod. "I don't think he meant to say it, it just sort of slipped out."

"You still don't know what went wrong?" Peter asked.

Denton collapsed back into one of the arm chairs opposite the sofa his friend sat on. "We were doing a scene and he just freaked out." He frowned, running the scene over in his mind for what felt like the millionth time. "I was pushing him hard, taking him out of his comfort zone. But I didn't touch on any of his hard limits. None that he'd ever told me about anyway..."

He took a deep breath. He'd known that challenging his pet that on the label he was so attached to would be difficult for him, but it didn't feel as simple as that when he looked back on the night. Jerry hadn't been angry, he hadn't been resistant or stubborn. It seemed to go far deeper than that, but his own memories were so clouded with his own emotions, it was hard to be sure about anything. He'd been ready to have that conversation with Jerry, yeah, right...

"He didn't have a mark on him," Benedict observed.

"And you know that how?" Denton demanded, eyes narrowing as he glared at the submissive.

"Because I made sure I accidentally walked in on him in the shower, sir," Benedict said, perfectly calmly. "He ran away from his master. He looked so terrified, like he was in so much pain. I wasn't going to take the risk that he was hurt and was either too scared or too ashamed to tell either me or my master that he needed to see a doctor."

Denton stared across at him. Benedict met his eyes without hesitation, obviously sure that he had done the right thing and not about to apologise for it.

Denton sighed. "Jerry would have done exactly the same thing in your place," he acknowledged.

"And what are you going to do now?" Peter asked.

The answer was obvious. "I'm going to fix this." That's what masters did. Denton didn't know exactly how he was going to do it, but he did know he was going to fix it—whatever it took.

Chapter Four

"I don't play games. If you're going to belong to me there will be no half measures."

Jerry forced himself to stay very still, sure the dominant wouldn't be impressed with a submissive who couldn't even kneel at his feet for two minutes without fidgeting. "I understand, sir."

Mr. Denton Greenwood stared down at him for several long seconds. Reaching forward he tucked a knuckle under his chin and tilted his head from side to side, examining him.

Jerry lifted his gaze and met the other man's eyes.

"Fullerton has explained the situation to you."

"Yes, sir." He'd been aware that Mr. Greenwood and his current master had been discussing the possibility of him moving under Mr. Greenwood's protection when they parted ways. He'd been aware of every damn second of that time, while he waited as patiently as he could to be brought in on the discussions.

"And what have you found out about me?" Mr. Greenwood asked.

Jerry blinked at him. "I trust my master's judgement, sir."

"And I trust you've had the sense to speak to the other subs," Mr. Greenwood said, a touch of amusement in his eyes.

Jerry dropped his gaze. The men he'd spoken to had been right. Mr. Greenwood obviously knew the way things really worked. "You're a good master. You respect safe words and limits. Your punishments are harsh, but fair. Your previous submissives speak very highly of you, sir," he recounted.

Mr. Greenwood nodded his acceptance of all that. "And you're in favour of the arrangement?"

Jerry nodded. He hadn't found any reason not to be in favour of it. "Yes, sir."

Mr. Greenwood looked past him, to where his current master stood behind him. He nodded his approval to the other dominant. In mere seconds, Fullerton had taken his collar off.

His new master took a new collar out of his pocket and put it around his neck. Leaning back in his chair, the older man studied the collar for a long time. "It will do until we decide if the arrangement will be permanent," he announced.

Jerry swallowed, testing the feel of the leather around his neck. It felt good. He hadn't enjoyed those seconds where his neck was bare at all. "Thank you, sir."

"Master."

"Yes," Jerry agreed. "Thank you, master."

His new master stood up and led him out of the club. He was aware of the dominant's eyes on him, watching to see if his new pet had the sense not to look over his shoulder at his previous master now that he belonged to another man. Jerry kept his eyes forward, never looking to anyone other than his new master.

Thirty minutes later, they were in his new master's apartment, standing in a very well equipped playroom. Shackles hung from the centre of the room. Toys were arranged in neat rows of hooks along one wall. A spanking bench stood in one corner. Jerry didn't have time to take in a great deal else before the first order came.

"Strip."

Jerry took his coat off. He was sure he'd hid his hesitation, but he couldn't stop a touch of colour rising to his cheeks. He knew it would get easier to strip down in front of the other man once he was more used to him, but no matter how many times he moved from the protection of a new master or mistress, the first time with a new dominant always left him blushing.

"Shy?" Mr. Greenwood asked.

Jerry felt his blush deepen.

"Look up."

He did as he was told.

The older man looked quietly amused. He brushed a knuckle over his cheek bone. "By the way you blush, no one would believe that you'd ever had a master."

Jerry was about to apologise, then he placed the tone of voice. Mr. Greenwood liked that idea. Suddenly mentioning that he was as experienced as any man who'd had over half a dozen previous masters and mistresses dropped to the bottom of his list of priorities.

His new master walked around him a few times while he stood in the middle of the room. Jerry took a deep breath and tried not to be nervous as he waited for a reaction. If the man made a fuss over him the way some masters were inclined to, he knew the blushing would just get worse.

Mr. Greenwood merely offered him a single nod of approval.

"Over the table."

He stepped forward without any hesitation and bent over the table that stood in front of the window. Automatically shifting his feet just over shoulder width apart so he was accessible to his master, he settled his hands behind his back.

"Neatly done," his master said, stepping up behind him.

He ran his hands across his shoulder and down his arms. When he reached his wrists, he moved them into a position that pleased him more. Jerry made a mental note of that as he began to push the details of the submission that had pleased his former master out of his head and replace them with those that would please Denton.

Slicked fingers slid against his exposed hole. No preamble, no hesitation. Complete confidence in the knowledge that neither was necessary. He was left in no doubt that he belonged to the other man. Jerry rested his cheek on the cold surface of the table as he felt a new sense of peace settle over him. He'd always had been quick to get a good sense of the men and women he submitted to. Denton felt different.

No, not just different – better. That sort of certainty of exactly who belonged to whom in the relationship was rarer than people thought. Jerry swallowed rapidly as his master's fingers rubbed against his prostate.

He bit his tongue but he couldn't hold back a whimper.

"Silence isn't required," Denton informed him.

"Thank you, sir."

The fingers slid away, three came back in their place, stretching him open wider. He wasn't in so much of a rush to settle them into their new roles that he wasn't taking the opportunity to get to know him. He wasn't rushing to top a body he wasn't familiar with.

Jerry wanted to feel his master inside him. He wanted that connection so badly he could taste it. But he lay exactly where his master wanted him and let the other man explore his body as he pleased.

Twenty minutes later his breaths were coming in pants, his eyes were closed so tight he could see stars behind his lids. Or maybe that had nothing to do with his eyes and everything to do with the fingers that were still playing inside him, along with the hand that had wormed its way under his stomach to wrap around his cock.

"Please, master," he whispered, unable to hold on to any sort of control.

Denton took his touch away. Jerry held his breath until he thought his lungs would explode with his need for oxygen, until he thought his mind would disintegrate with his sudden and overwhelming need for the other man. His desire to please and serve the other men and women he'd belonged to paled in comparison.

When his master's hand returned, they settled on his flanks and held him still. A blunt pressure pushed against his lubed up hole. Jerry took a deep breath, relaxing as his master pushed into him, slow and steady.

A few thrusts and Jerry knew there was no way he would be able to last long enough to impress the other man. There was only one thing he could do to at least show that he understood the sort of obedience that a master could rightly expect.

"Permission, master?" he stuttered out.

Another hard thrust set his prostate on fire. His teeth drew blood as they cut into his bottom lip as he scrambled for control. Another thrust and he knew it was a lost cause. Then, just in time –

"Come."

No master had ever given him any order that was easier to follow. Jerry came, hard and fast against the top of the padded table. His master must have been close to the edge too. As Jerry clenched around him, the older man buried himself deep inside him and yelled his own pleasure as he jerked and tightened his grip on his sides.

His master didn't rush to pull away from him, he stayed inside him as they caught their breath. When he eventually pulled away, he left him bent over the table while Jerry listened to the sounds of him tidying up his clothes.

"Up."

Jerry straightened up on command. His master steadied him as he turned him around to face him.

"I think this might work out very well, Jerry," Denton said after a while.

Jerry smiled up at the other man, "I'd like that, master. I – "

"It's Jerry, isn't it?"

Jerry blinked and did his best to focus back in on the real world. Tugging at his shirt collar he automatically tried to pull it further up his neck so it would cover the skin left bare since Denton took away his collar.

A quick glance at the posture and dress of the man standing next to him confirmed his status as a dominant. Jerry nodded. "Yes, sir."

"You used to belong to Denton Greenwood."

Used to...Jerry swallowed. A collar failed to shift around his wind pipe. He looked down. "Yes, sir."

The dominant frowned at the place where he'd scratched his skin in his haste to try to take his collar off. He reached out to touch the marks, as if trying to work out if they were serious and how they might have been inflicted. Jerry stepped back, a shot of alarm going through him at the unexpected contact with a stranger.

The man raised an eyebrow at him when he glanced up.

"I'm sorry, sir. I don't mean any offence, I..." He trailed off, having no idea how to explain that he wasn't pulling away from him in particular.

"If you're not ready to look for a new master, perhaps you shouldn't be in this sort of club tonight," he said. His tone was kind, as if he was worried about him rather than annoyed with him.

Jerry could only nod his agreement. If Mr. Vickery and Benedict hadn't insisted that he join them at the club, he would never have set foot in the place. Going to a leather bar without a collar around his neck was...he closed his eyes for a moment and suppressed a rush of emotion.

The older man looked down at him somewhat regretfully. Jerry hesitated, not sure what to say to him.

"Whose protection are you under now?" he asked.

"I'm staying with Mr. Vickery and Benedict until I..."

The man took out a business card and wrote something on the back of it. "For when you are ready to begin your search for a new master."

"Thank you, Mr. Nolan," he said, looking down at the small rectangle. Along with the name, the card indicated man was a barrister, evidently a very successful one if the address on the card was anything to judge by.

Mr. Nolan offered him a small smile and walked through into the lounge at the back of the club. Jerry stared blankly at the business card. He'd have to start looking for a master again at some point. A few years ago, he knew he wouldn't have hesitated to take Mr. Nolan up on his offer. When Mr. Fullerton had introduced him to Denton, it had never occurred to him that he should need to wait and try to clear his head before he could change his allegiance from one dominant to another.

If he hadn't been under the dominance of a man he loved for so long then...Jerry sighed and slipped the card into the back pocket of the jeans he'd borrowed from Benedict.

"You okay?" Benedict asked.

Jerry nodded and forced a smile as he turned towards the other man. "Are you having a good time?"

"Sure, I'm having a great time. Everyone seems to have crawled out of the woodwork. Caught up with a few guys I haven't seen for months." Benedict studied him carefully as he said it all, his mouth apparently working on automatic while his mind was on something else. "I noticed you were talking to Mr. Nolan for quite a while."

Jerry pushed his hands into his pockets to resist the temptation to reach up and rub his neck, to brush away any touch that didn't belong to his real master. He shrugged away his conversation with Mr. Nolan.

Benedict looked from him across to where Mr. Vickery stood by the bar. "There's someone else who wants to speak to you."

Jerry cleared his throat. "I'm not really...I mean, I haven't started looking for...I don't think I'm ready to..." he pushed his hands further into his pockets and wondered if there was somewhere quiet he could slip away to, so he could lose himself back in his daydreams.

Benedict continued to study him, no doubt waiting for him to actually finish a sentence at some point.

"I swear I'm not taking up permanent residence in your spare room. I'm looking for work, and I've got an interview next week, and I'll get my own place as soon as my first cheque comes in. I'm just not ready to start looking for a new master yet," he blurted out.

Benedict shook his head. "No! That wasn't what I meant. You know you're welcome to stay with us for as long as you want. We love having you with us. Trust me, having someone in the house who actually knows how to cook is fantastic!"

Jerry smiled slightly. Everything else might have fallen apart but the working for his keep part of the plan had proved wonderfully easy once he'd tasted Benedict's attempt at a home cooked meal.

"But I think you should at least hear this guy out," Benedict added. "No pressure or anything, I promise. Just listen to what he has to say?"

Holding back a sigh, trying to look at least vaguely interested in doing what the other submissive asked of him, Jerry nodded and let Benedict lead him towards the back of the club.

“He’s in room seven.”

Walking along side Benedict, Jerry hesitated when he realised that he was heading towards a private room and not into the lounge as he supposed. “I...” he trailed off as he realised what he was about to say made absolutely no sense. It was pointless to say his master would have a fit if he went into one of the clubs private rooms with another man. He didn’t have a master.

Hurrying away from that thought, brought him quickly to a door with number seven marked on the front. He tapped on the door. It swung inwards a few inches. He looked across at Benedict, who nodded encouragingly. Seeing nothing else to do, Jerry pushed the door open a little further. A curtain hung over the doorway on the inside. Jerry tentatively moved the material back far enough to slip through the gap he created and step into the private space. The door swung nearly closed with the weight of the curtain.

“Hello?”

The room was almost pitch dark when the curtain dropped back into place behind him, sealing out the light from the ajar door. Only the shadowy outlines of a few pieces of furniture were visible in the muted light that made it in from somewhere. A few years ago he would have loved that sort of drama. Right then, he could have cheerfully done without it. His nerves were already shot. He didn’t need anything making them worse.

Jerry cleared his throat and tried to hide his anxiety as he wondered if he was allowed to look for a light switch. “You wanted to speak to me, sir?” he asked the darkness, trying to make out the shape of a dominant somewhere in the room, but not even able to find the lines of the walls.

A bulb burst into life overhead. Blinking at the sudden explosion of light, Jerry’s eyes went straight to the person kneeling in the floor in the middle of the room.

She was very beautiful, very naked and very...there. Jerry stared at her for several long moments trying to work out what the hell was going on and what Benedict could have been thinking.

The door clicked properly closed behind him. Jerry spun around. His throat closed up as he saw his master leaning against the curtains. Black material covered all the walls of the room hiding the door from anyone who couldn’t remember where it was.

Jerry stared blankly at his former master. “I don’t...” he whispered. “Benedict said...”

Denton looked him up and down, but made no move to approach him. "He and Peter have been taking good care of you?" he asked.

"They were driving past when I—" His gaze flashed up to meet his master's eyes. "You asked Mr. Vickery to take me in," he realised for the first time.

"Did you really think I'd leave you standing on the kerb?"

Jerry dropped his gaze to Denton's shoes. He stared at the polished leather for a long time before he could bring himself to speak. "I don't belong to you anymore, Mr. Greenwood. I don't expect you to ask your friends for favours on my account."

"You really think it ended as simply as taking off a collar?" Denton said. "Some things run even deeper than leather, Jerry. You should know that by now."

Jerry closed his eyes as he turned away from his master. When he opened his eyes again, they fell on the naked woman still kneeling with her head bowed in the middle of the room.

He looked back over his shoulder to his master for an explanation.

"She's for you," Denton said.

Jerry looked from him to the woman and back again.

"I can't belong to my master any more. I'm bi, and my belonging to him and being bi is just not possible anymore," Denton quoted at him, in a blank, emotionless tone of voice Jerry had never heard from him before.

Jerry looked to where he remembered the door being, wondering if Benedict was still on the other side of it, and if he could strangle him for repeating to his master what he'd told another submissive in confidence.

Turning his attention back to the woman, he tried to think of what he could say to her to explain this whole mess. Failing to find any words at all, he looked back to his master.

Denton never had learnt how to do things by halves. If he intended to accept that he was bi, he obviously wasn't going to play about with it. "I didn't ask you to find me a girl, master," he whispered.

"I may be far more besotted with you than a dominant should be, but I'm still your master, Jerry. If you occasionally have to have a woman in your life, perhaps I can learn to tolerate that. But she won't be a mistress. I won't hand you over to another dominant, male or female."

Each word was perfectly pronounced as Denton made an obvious and conscious effort to control his temper. It was also a lie. Jerry knew that, even if his master seemed able to fool himself. He wasn't tolerating anything. He hated the idea of anyone else laying a hand on his submissive just as much as Jerry did.

"I asked around. I spoke to men who've seen you with women. She's your type where women are concerned," he said.

Jerry shook his head looking from the naked woman – who was indeed his type – to his master and back again. "I didn't mean...I never asked you to find any sort of woman for me, master. I never said I wanted anyone but you."

Denton caught the woman's eye and nodded his dismissal, obviously not exactly heartbroken that Jerry wasn't going to take him up on the offer of her services for the rest of the night.

"Master! You can't just..." Jerry chided without thinking. He hurried across to the woman but he wasn't sure how to help her up without ending up putting his hands where he shouldn't. "Please get up. This is all just a huge misunderstanding. I'm really sorry. Where are your clothes?"

The woman looked past him to Denton then back to him. As she lifted her eyes and met his gaze, Jerry saw unexpected amusement shining in her expression. He studied her carefully, wondering if she was trying to hide some other emotion, but she didn't seem to be the least bit surprised or offended by the abrupt dismissal.

He looked back to his master, trying to work out if he was playing some sort of game with him. Denton looked equally surprised with her reaction once he focused in and noticed she was expressing anything at all.

"Peter told me you wouldn't be interested. Pity..." she said, looking Jerry up and down. Taking his hand to get to her feet she absentmindedly dusted off her knees as she continued. "You're sweet. He's hot. We could have all had some fun together."

Stepping over to a bit of curtain covered wall that didn't look at all different to the rest, she nudged the material aside and opened a door leading into a small storage space. Taking out a long coat and a pair of high heels, she put them all on.

Looking them both over one more time, she turned around and walked out of the room, finding the door through the curtains without the slightest hesitation.

Jerry took a step towards the door. "I should make sure she has cab fare or —"

Denton closed the door behind her and let the curtain fall back into place. "She's fine. Peter will no doubt see she gets to wherever she wants to go."

Jerry took another step towards the door anyway. "Then I should go back to Benedict and Mr...."

Denton stayed in front of the piece of curtain covering the door. He didn't appear to have any intention of moving out of his way.

Jerry shifted his weight back and forth from one foot to the other. He pushed his hands into his back pockets. A small rectangle of card stabbed into his palm. He snatched his hands away from it as if his master would somehow see that he'd taken a card from another man. Blushing bright red, he crossed his arms in front of him.

Denton was still studying him very carefully, the way a man might observe a frightened animal that might spook and run at the slightest sudden movement.

Jerry bit his lip, wondering what he should say. "How are you, sir?" he blurted out, as the silence demanded he fill it with something — with anything. He looked down, not sure if that sort of question was allowed now. It had been intended as a polite little query. It sounded more like a plea to be told every detail of everything his master had done since he'd taken his collar away.

Denton ignored the question. "Tell me why you left."

Jerry looked to the door behind the curtain. Denton didn't take his eyes off him.

"I had to go," he said.

"No!"

Jerry was shocked into meeting his master's eyes.

"No," Denton repeated more calmly. "I've heard that much before. I need to know *why*."

Jerry swallowed. "I couldn't stay," he said. Too late, he realised he'd only re-worded the answer that had annoyed his master so much before. "My staying with you was hurting you and —"

Denton stepped forward, he reached out to him, but he stopped just short of actually touching him. Jerry stood stock still, unable to bring himself to close that final little gap between them.

"You've never hurt me," Denton said, certainty about that fact clinging to every syllable.

Jerry looked down. Denton was always very certain about everything. He'd miss that certainty so much. He cleared his throat. "Owning me was turning you into someone who... With me being who I am... I just couldn't... I had to..."

"Damn it, Jerry!"

He looked up at his master, eyes opened wide with shock. Denton closed his own eyes for a moment and Jerry could see how hard he was fighting to keep his temper.

"Whole sentences," the older man said, with obviously forced calm. "I know you find it hard sometimes. But if I'm going to understand whatever it is that you're trying to tell me, I need you to focus, and I need you to give me whole sentences. Okay?"

What he said was true, they had talked about it. Right at the start, before he'd even been given his permanent collar, let alone before he'd lost it. His master liked him to speak in whole sentences, even when it was difficult. Blushing when nervous was acceptable. Confusing his master was not.

Jerry turned away from the other man and paced around the room, trying to form his thoughts into something that would make sense outside his own head.

"Have you ever met someone who was homophobic, not just a prat who thinks those sorts of jokes are funny, the real thing?" he asked, as his pacing brought him to a stop in the middle of the room, his back to his master.

Denton frowned. "Of course."

"Someone who said things like homosexuality doesn't exist, or that it's a phase or it's a choice? Someone who told you it's wrong for you to be the way you are, that they thought less of you for not being straight?"

Denton's frown deepened.

Jerry turned back to his master, but he couldn't look him in the eye when he said it. He closed his eyes. "That day in the play room, you were one step away from picking up a placard calling me a sin against nature. And I know you're not that sort of man, master. But a bi man belonging to you was turning you into that sort of person and —"

"Jerry," Denton began.

Turning his back to his master in an effort to force himself to finish what he started saying, Jerry realised that Denton did deserve a real explanation and that he couldn't stop until it was given.

"You'd never have said those things before I belonged to you," Jerry whispered. "I couldn't stay to watch you turn into that sort of person. It would have been hell enough to watch the man I love turn into some petty minded bigot, but knowing I was at the root of it all. I just couldn't do that. I had to go. I had to."

Denton stopped within inches of touching Jerry. He stared down at the back of his bowed head and tried to think of something to say to take the hurt out of his lover's voice. He tried to think of the right words that would show Jerry the truth behind the things he'd said to him that night. It took far too long to bring the side of his personality that could talk about the situation rationally to the surface, but he finally managed it.

"I don't care who any man or woman wants to screw. As long as they're legal and consenting, I don't give a damn," he said, carefully.

Jerry continued to keep his back to him.

"Turn around, look at me."

He did as he was told, probably more from the habit of obeying his master than anything else, but Denton was willing to take what he could get.

"Look up."

He did that too. He looked so confused, so scared of everything. Denton's fingers twitched as he fought the instinct to pull him close and wrap his arms around him. He no longer had the right to do that. Jerry had made that quite clear when he stated that anything that happened between them would take place without his consent. The primitive, possessive part of Denton still wanted to do it so badly he could taste it.

"I can't let you turn into someone like that," Jerry whispered again, his eyes pleading with him for understanding. "I love you too much to let that happen, master."

Denton stared down at him. In all the reasons he'd dreamed up explaining Jerry's sudden departure, it had never occurred to him that he could believe he left for his master's benefit.

It never occurred to him that he might say he was bi because it was true either. But, as he listened to the emotions hanging on every word Jerry said, it became impossible to believe that he was clinging to a lie that made him feel better about being gay. It hadn't made him feel better. It hadn't made it easy. But, he still hadn't lied.

Denton closed his eyes for a moment as he realised his pet hadn't actually told him anything new. Everything he'd needed in order to see what Jerry said was the truth must have been there in his submissive from the start, but he'd never been willing to listen before. It had taken Jerry's panicked flight to scare the primal dominant inside him to admit the possibility Jerry could actually be telling the truth when he claimed the bi label.

Denton took a deep breath. If Jerry could calm himself enough to explain himself, it was about time he learnt to do the same.

"I'm your master."

Jerry went to speak. Denton silenced him with one raised hand. "You've had your say. Now it's your master's turn."

Jerry nodded his understanding. His lip would start bleeding if he didn't stop biting it soon.

"Sit down, and just listen." Denton directed him to the edge of the bed with a look. Jerry did as he was told, sitting down without trying to speak again.

Denton crouched in front of him, blocking any sort of escape route without actually touching him.

"Everything I said to you was about you and me, no one else. I don't give a damn about anyone else. Do I like the idea of *you* being bi? No." Denton sighed and looked down at his hands.

Jerry stayed silent and motionless. Denton was half sure he was even holding his breath.

"But none of it has bugger all to do with bi-phobia, pet. I'd be just as irrational if you announced a secret fetish for Australians or blonds or submissives or... or astronauts. The rest of the world can screw who they want. But I don't want *you* to want anything your master isn't."

Jerry dropped his gaze.

"You belong to me, Jerry. And I'm hellishly possessive – you must know that by now. So, no, the idea that you could suddenly take it into your head that you want to run off with a woman – it doesn't sit well with me. Are you really that surprised?"

Jerry didn't raise his eyes.

Denton mentally rolled his eyes at himself. This was why dominants shouldn't fall in love with their submissives. Not only did it let them convince themselves they were in control enough of their own emotions to lead a scene when in hindsight they blatantly bloody well weren't, it also led to far too much sopiness, and to far too many situations that called for embarrassing confessions too.

Knowing all that, Denton pushed on regardless, thankful that he'd found a way to have this conversation with Jerry out of the earshot of the other men in the club if nothing else.

"Even if I wasn't in love with you, you're my ideal, pet – everything about you. Knowing that you can't say the same about your master is –"

"It doesn't work like that," Jerry cut in. "I know I'm supposed to wait my turn, master, but, please, it doesn't work like that."

Denton nodded once, giving him permission to continue.

"I'd love you just as much if you were a woman," Jerry blurted out. The words rushed together in his haste to have them heard, but they were whole words, whole ideas, which was always a welcome surprise when his pet was stressed. "The part of you I love isn't male or female. I'm not in love with the part of you that makes you a man."

Denton couldn't help but raise an eyebrow at that.

Jerry seemed to realise what he'd said, and in spite of everything, he blushed. "I'm not saying I don't like your cock. You know that. I've begged for it often enough that you must know I..." He cleared his throat. "What I mean is, I belong to the bit of you that's you. I love the bit of you that is *you*. It's not about wanting men and women, I'm attracted to people – they happen to be men or women, but I really don't care one way or the other."

Denton stayed still and silent, wary that any move might spook his lover and stop the steady flow of words. If he could just keep Jerry able to offer up full sentences, and himself able to keep a lid on his anger, they might have a chance.

"I don't think of you as a man, master. I don't think of you as a dominant or British or someone who's tall or dark or anything else. You're you. You're my master and I love you. Nothing else matters. I can't change any of that. I can't lie about it."

Denton met his eyes and he saw the truth in them, not just in those words he'd said out loud, but in the words he kept back as well. He heard the desperate need to be understood, to have that part of his psyche recognised and accepted.

Jerry swallowed rapidly, as if his emotions were about to get the better of him. Denton nodded his understanding, releasing him from the pressure to try to explain anything any further.

He knew what he needed to know now. He knew what had to happen next. For once, every part of his mind agreed easily on one course of action. He stood up and Jerry rose to his feet too.

It took more strength of will than Denton was aware he possessed to take a step back from him.

"Master?" Jerry asked. He reached out. He offered himself to him, but he stopped short of actually touching him, giving his master the right to reach out and make the final contact as and when he chose.

Denton stared down at him for a long time before he could make his throat work and be sure his words would come out slow and steady and dominant. "You should go and find Peter and Benedict. It's getting late. No doubt they'll want to go home soon."

"I..."

For several long seconds, Jerry looked up at him, hope burning then dying in his eyes. His gaze dropped to his hand as it fell back to his side. A moment later his hand rose to his throat, sliding against his bare neck, following the line where his old collar had caressed his skin. He laid his hand over the side of his neck as if trying to protect the suddenly vulnerable skin from further damage.

He looked up at Denton again, so hurt and obviously so embarrassed to have said all that only to be turned away. If Denton had any doubt over how many people Jerry had given that explanation to, they evaporated. He knew he was the only one Jerry had said those words too. In spite of all that, Denton forced himself to stay perfectly still.

Jerry pawed at the curtains until he found the door and left the room in silence, closing the door quietly behind him on the way out. Denton leaned against the wall next to the door and stared at the empty room without really seeing it.

It was better for Jerry that his master should send him away. He knew that. It still didn't stop him feeling like a complete bastard.

Chapter Five

"I really don't mind staying here by myself," Jerry tried again.

"It will do you good to get out of the house." Benedict took a shirt out of his wardrobe and held it in front of Jerry, checking the tone against his skin.

Jerry didn't need to check. He knew it was the perfect colour for him. His master had bought him an almost identical shirt, and he'd never failed to quietly nod his approval every time he saw him wearing it.

"You and Mr. Vickery should go by yourselves," Jerry suggested. "I know it must be hard for both of you, having a stranger in your house all the time, and..."

Benedict brushed that aside. "We both love having you here." He considered the colour of the shirt again and laid it out on the bed before he extracted a pair of jeans and a pair of boots from the wardrobe to go with them.

They were all almost indistinguishable from the clothes his master had bought him to wear while he lived with him. Jerry was sure Benedict meant it for the best, trying to give him things that were familiar, but it didn't help. It just made it all the harder to push away the memories that constantly threatened to over-power him. There were days when he got dressed and he was sure he could smell his master's aftershave on clothes that had never been anywhere near his master.

"We'll have to do something with your hair," Benedict said.

"My master never liked me to—" Jerry cut himself short. His master had made it quite clear that he liked to be able to run his hands through his hair without getting stabbed by gel spikes or tangled in some complicated style. Jerry shook his head at himself as he tried and failed to convince himself that Denton's opinion wasn't important any more. "Whatever you think is best."

Benedict hesitated. "It looks great as it is."

Jerry closed his eyes. Benedict was being nice. Mr. Vickery and Benedict were both being very nice and very kind to him, which just made him feel even worse for not being at all inclined to go out to a club with them that night. "Benedict?"

The other submissive made a noncommittal sound as he fussed about setting the things on Jerry's bedside table straight.

"You and your master haven't...you're not trying to set me up with anyone, are you?"

"Why would you think that?"

"Benedict..." Jerry began. Just because he knew that Denton had no intention of taking him back, that didn't mean he could just flip a switch and be ready to look for a new master or mistress.

Benedict fixed a bright smile onto his lips. "Why don't you just get ready? You'll feel much more cheerful when you get to the club and see everyone."

Jerry pinned an equally fake smile to his own lips and nodded.

* * * *

"You like that, don't you, pet?"

Jerry nodded as the blush raced to his cheeks. He'd long ago given up on the idea he would ever be able to submit to his master without seeing the older man's lips quirk in amusement at his heightened colour. At least at that moment, his head was bowed and, although Denton would inevitably guess it was there, he couldn't actually see it.

His master's hand came down on his other buttock. Jerry closed his eyes. An image flashed up before his eyes of stark red hand marks on pale skin. His collar shifted around his throat as he rocked forward. He let out a whimper.

Denton stroked his palm over the heated skin on his backside. His hand disappeared for a second before it connected first to his right cheek then to his left in quick succession.

Sharp spikes of pleasure raced through Jerry's body. He arched his back, pushing his backside out for more as his master went back to stroking him very gently. His movements made no difference to his lover's touch. He received exactly what his master wanted him to – no more, no less.

"I remember someone telling me that he didn't like to be spanked," Denton mused.

Giving up on getting a firmer touch until his master was quite ready to provide one, Jerry squirmed forward again. The restraints built into the spanking bench didn't allow him much freedom. He couldn't obtain even the slightest friction against his aching cock. All he could do was wait upon his master's pleasure.

Two more quick spanks and Denton's knuckle stroked down between his buttocks and across his hole. Jerry bit his lip to hold back a plea. It felt like months rather than days since his master had let him come.

His legs were held apart, each knee resting on its own padded support as his upper body lay across another leather covered surface. It might have been labelled 'spanking' but it always seemed to Jerry that the man who designed it had never intended the submissive strapped to the beautiful structure to be available just for that.

He knew it would be hours before Denton would likely make use of the inviting position the bench placed him in. He liked to build up the heat slowly. His master liked to watch him squirm and hear him beg before he gave him what the spanking made him crave more than anything – a hard cock pressed against his hole rather than a bare knuckle.

Just as he expected, his master's attention didn't linger there very long. His hand dropped further down between his legs. His fingers stroked his balls.

"You haven't answered my question."

Jerry frowned, trying and failing to pull the scattered pieces of his mind together and focus on anything that wasn't the warm hand palming his testicles.

"Master?" he managed to stutter out.

"You told me you didn't like being spanked."

Jerry whimpered again. He swallowed rapidly as he scrambled for control. "That was before, master."

"Before what?" Denton asked, still manipulating the tight sacs.

"Before you," Jerry whispered.

Denton was silent for a few seconds, but Jerry could feel his mood change and he knew his master was pleased with the answer. He liked being spanked by his master. Denton was the only man or woman he had ever belonged to that could make it feel like it wasn't a punishment. With Denton it felt perfect.

No other words were spoken on the subject. Denton released his handhold on his sacs and went back to stroking his buttocks. A few seconds later his hand struck. This time it was different. No more teasing. His honest answer had obviously earned him the pleasure of a proper spanking. Denton set up his rhythm, alternating between cheeks, coating the skin with an even layer of heat that soaked into his body and sent pleasure shooting through his veins.

Ten minutes later, he was half sure that his master was determined to make him come from nothing more than his hand striking his arse. But, he was only half sure. If he was wrong, Denton might be angry with him for spoiling his plans for something else.

Jerry whimpered at the idea. With his master's approval still strong in his mind, the last thing he wanted was for Denton to suddenly be disappointed in him.

"Permission?" he whispered. "Please?"

"Permiss – "

"Hello again."

It took Jerry several long seconds to focus back in on reality, but his smile for Mr. Nolan was slightly more genuine than it had been for any of the dozens of other men who approached him that night and pulled him from his memories. "Hello, sir."

The older man smiled down at him rather sympathetically. "Come and sit with me." It was definitely an order not an invitation.

Jerry hesitated for a moment before he followed the other man. When Mr. Nolan sat on one of the stools that lined the bar, Jerry didn't immediately hop up onto the stool next to him, and not just because he hadn't received an order to do so.

"Sir, I don't mean to be impolite," he began.

"I'm not suggesting you should offer me your submission."

Jerry hesitated again.

"You're obviously not ready for anything like that. But I've been watching you for over an hour, and as the evening wears on, it's increasingly painful to see you trying to nod and smile politely at all the dominants hitting on you. No one will bother you while you are speaking to me."

Jerry looked at the stool.

"You don't need my permission."

"Thank you, sir." Jerry slipped up onto the bar stool, placing his Coke on the dark wooden surface. He stared into his drink not sure what an uncollared submissive was supposed say to a dominant who he wasn't hoping would be his master.

"When was the last time you were without a master?" Mr. Nolan asked him.

"The day before I turned legal," Jerry whispered. "I've never really been without a dominant." He held onto his glass very tightly, trying not to give in to the temptation to cover his bare neck, trying not to retreat into the memories he'd hid in more and more often over the last few days.

"It must be hard."

Jerry swirled his drink a little. "I never realised how hard it would be," he whispered. "How lost I would feel. Maybe it's...I cared for my other dominants, but I wasn't in love with them, sir. Not like with my...with Mr. Greenwood."

"That's why you're taking some time before you look for a new master this time around?"

Jerry nodded. "Maybe I should look for a mistress instead," he mused.

"You're bi then?"

He nodded again. "I wish I wasn't, but..." He sighed and wished he had a stronger drink in front of him, too. His master had let him have a drink or two now and then, not enough to get properly drunk, but just the right amount to get a bit happy on it. "Mr. Vickery said that I wasn't to drink anything with any alcohol in it."

He glanced across and saw that Mr. Nolan was watching him with obvious appreciation and no small touch of amusement.

"I'm sorry, sir, I really don't know how to talk to anyone when I'm like this."

"You're doing fine."

Jerry turned his attention back to his drink.

"Tell me about Greenwood."

"Why?" Jerry asked, suddenly unsure he should be talking to the dominant at all.

"Because you're obviously still in love with him."

"He doesn't want me anymore, sir," Jerry said.

"Does he know how you feel about him?"

Jerry nodded. "I told him," he whispered. He must have said it a dozen times in that back room as he struggled to make his master understand.

"And what did he say?"

Jerry shook his head, unwilling to let memories of that night in the club back into his head. Happier memories were allowed to linger as long as they wanted, but nothing to do

with that night when he'd finally had to admit to himself that it was over forever. He couldn't think of that and stay sane.

"Why are you being so nice to me, sir?"

"Because you seem to need to talk to someone who isn't trying to screw you. And because you remind me of someone," Mr. Nolan said.

Jerry turned to him, latching on to the hope that talking about someone else's memories might push that night out of his head. "Who, sir?"

"His name was Frank."

"Was?" Jerry asked.

"He died last year."

"Oh...I'm sorry, sir."

Mr. Nolan nodded once in acceptance of his sympathy, but he seemed to have reached the stage where he was resigned to the facts of the matter.

"He belonged to you?" Jerry asked, cautiously.

"Yes, for the best part of a lifetime."

"Was it...?" Jerry trailed off. A tendency to blurt things out when he was nervous really didn't excuse some questions.

"AIDs?" Mr. Nolan asked. "No, nothing like that. A car accident. He was sober. The other driver wasn't."

"I'm sorry, sir," Jerry said again.

"He was very like you."

Jerry nibbled at his lip. "Would it make you feel better if I—?" He cut himself off, not even knowing what he had intended to offer the other man. Before he'd belonged to Denton he wouldn't have thought twice about offering such a dominant whatever he wanted. Now, it was different.

Mr. Nolan smiled half sadly, but still with a touch of amusement in his eyes. "I think that this is one of those times when it's best for misery not to take advantage of its company."

Jerry nodded and turned back to his drink. In a weird sort of way sitting with Mr. Nolan was comforting. The older man didn't expect him to be happy. He didn't expect him to be able to cope or to be able to bounce back into the game and find another master as easily as he would pick out a new book from the library.

For the first time since he'd left his master's protection, Jerry felt a tiny bit of peace settle around him. For a few moments, the whole mess seemed survivable. If Mr. Nolan had survived losing Frank, then maybe there was hope for him yet.

"Gentlemen, your attention, please!"

Jerry turned towards the small stage at the other end of the room, where public announcements and punishments were conducted. Every other man in the room did the same. The ripple of chatting voices hushed to a murmur. The bartender got down from the stage to let the man who'd requested the opportunity to make a public announcement, get up onto the raised platform in his place.

All the blood drained from Jerry's face as he watched his master's head and shoulders appear over the top of the crowd. From the far side of the room, he automatically tried to make out the head of another man waiting to step onto the platform with him.

There was only one reason why his master would step up there that night – to give a new collar to a new submissive, to make Jerry's replacement official. All the air rushed out of the room. Jerry wanted to close his eyes, but his body wasn't obeying his orders. His eyes stayed wide open, staring across the room at his master.

He scrambled at his store of memories, trying to latch on to some happy moment and pull it tight around him like a protective little shell. It didn't work. Blocking out the rest of the world was one thing. He couldn't ignore his master.

"Jerry," he heard someone say to his left.

He couldn't remember who was sitting there. He couldn't tear his gaze away from his master to look. Standing up, he took a shaky step forward, not sure where he was trying to go. All he knew was that he couldn't sit there and watch his master fall in love with someone else right there on the stage in front of him.

A hand gripped his arm, stopping him short. Jerry followed the arm attached to the hand until he reached a pair of concerned blue eyes. He took a step away from Mr. Nolan, because the older man wasn't his master, and because that's what a submissive was supposed to do when a man who wasn't his master took hold of him.

He didn't bother to take a second step away, by that time he'd remembered there wasn't any point. "It's really over," he whispered.

Mr. Nolan looked sadly down at him, obviously not sure what to say. Jerry stared back up at him. It could be worse. If he had to find a new master, he could do a lot worse than accept a collar from Mr. Nolan. He would make a kind, and probably an indulgent, master. Jerry was sure the dominant would give him time to get over Denton before he expected anything more than quiet companionship from him. Filling the gap that his previous submissive's death had left in Mr. Nolan's life would be —

"I have an announcement to make." Denton's voice cut through every sound in the room and every thought in Jerry's head, calling Jerry to his side. He turned back towards his master, staring at him through blurry eyes as he looked across the room.

He swayed slightly and felt Mr. Nolan put his arm around his shoulders, supporting him in case he should buckle completely before this horrible charade was over.

"The way gossip spreads around this place, I'm sure you're all well aware that, as of two weeks ago, Jerry Clarke was released from my protection."

A murmur went through the crowd. Jerry lifted his hand to cover his neck as the men closest to him turned to stare. Mr. Nolan's arm tightened around him, silently offering him his support.

"It wasn't a break or a trial or any of that bull. It was a permanent separation."

Jerry's hand rubbed at the skin on his neck. It burned all around where his collar should have been.

"I've always believed that it's a master's place to possess, and it's a submissive's place to belong to his master in every way one man can belong to another. In *every* way," he stressed.

Jerry dropped his gaze and stared at the floor just in front of his feet.

"Love doesn't come into it. That's best left to the vanilla boys who don't understand what leather really means. Love doesn't come into it, until you're fool enough to actually fall in love with the man under your protection."

Jerry closed his eyes. Denton always did things at a far faster pace than the rest of the world. If he was able to bounce back into the game this soon, there was no reason why he shouldn't have already found time to fall in love with his new submissive, too.

“And then possessing is not enough, controlling a man is not enough. Suddenly it’s vital that you fill the other man’s entire world, and to make a complete bastard out of yourself in the process.”

For a few moments, silence filled the room. Denton ran his eyes over the crowd, as if wanting to be sure that everyone was giving him their complete attention before he continued.

“I live in a world that’s black and white. Dominant and submissive, top and bottom, gay and straight. I never expected to fall in love with a man who didn’t see the world in the same way as me.”

The first time his master had ever said that he loved him out loud in front of anyone else, and it was only to tell everyone he wasn’t a good enough submissive to keep that love. Jerry lifted his eyes and looked at all the men staring at him. Everyone was going to think that Denton had disowned him because he’d forgotten his place as a submissive, that his submission wasn’t good enough to keep.

Jerry turned his back on his former master, on the man standing up on that stage and neatly destroying his chances of ever finding another good man to belong to. He looked up at Mr. Nolan, hoping his master’s words hadn’t already put the older man off.

“If your offer is still open, sir, I’d be honoured if you’d let me belong to you.”

Mr. Nolan smiled slightly and stroked his cheek with the back of his knuckles. When he saw the look in his eyes, Jerry knew he was making the right decision. Mr. Nolan would be a good master. Mr. Nolan wouldn’t make him stay there and listen to any more of what his previous master said to the rest of the room.

Chapter Six

Denton scanned the crowd for what felt like the thousandth time but he still failed to catch sight of the reason why he was standing up on that little stage making a damn fool of himself.

All his well rehearsed words ran around in his head swirling together so fast, he was half sure that nothing he said made any sense at all. He wished like hell he hadn't been too proud to write out some cue cards. He wished he'd managed to catch a glimpse of Jerry so he could be sure that Peter and Benedict had succeeded in dragging him to the club that night.

Swallowing down any stutter before it could make itself into his words, Denton pushed on.

"But sometimes the best things in love aren't simple. They aren't black or white. And sometimes the best men aren't simple either. Sometimes they aren't even straight or gay."

Another sweep of his eyes across the room and he still couldn't see him. He'd assumed Jerry would have been well visible by this point. He'd imagined that his lover would have been right at the front of the crowd and he would have been able to look into Jerry's eyes while he made such a soppy, bloody fool of himself.

It never occurred to him that he would have had to make his confession to a room full of men and not even be able to judge how well his apology was going down with his lover.

Denton took a deep breath. Feeling more foolish than he ever had in his life, he forced himself to keep going.

"I've only ever had one idea of what my perfect submissive would be like. Jerry is my ideal in every way. My ideal lover. My ideal submissive. My ideal man. He's the only man I've ever really loved. That's why I'm up here asking him to forgive me. That's why I'm asking him to come back under my protection, even though I don't fulfil the same single simple ideal for him."

Taking a length of black leather from his back pocket, he held it up so the silver buckle could catch the light of all those shining bulbs pointing directly at the stage. The leather felt

stiff and unfamiliar in his hand. For a moment he had the horrible feeling that those in the front row might notice his fingertips tremble as he held the collar out for everyone to see.

"Jerry, if you accept my protection, come back to your master," he said.

The room was deadly silent. Every one of the men in the club, dominant and submissive alike, seemed to stare at the collar and hold his breath as they all waited for Jerry to step forward and give Denton his answer.

The silence stretched on. Men began to look around, whispering to their neighbours. Denton stayed frozen where he was, waiting in front of the whole club for any sign of Jerry.

Another minute passed, and Denton started to wonder what the worst case scenario was. That he'd just said all that to a crowd of men that didn't actually include his submissive, or that Jerry was there, but wasn't able to forgive him.

The idea of Jerry being there but having no interest in joining him on the stage made a cold sweat break out on his skin. He could live with making a fool of himself for someone who wasn't there. Hell, Denton was pretty sure he could even get back up on the stage and do this bloody stupid stunt again on another night when Jerry *was* there.

But Jerry had to forgive him once he saw it. He had to, because Denton had no doubt that Jerry would have taken him back while they stood in the back room of the club a week ago.

Denton looked out over the men again. They were starting to get restless and nervous on his behalf now. Denton cursed himself for a fool.

He should have collared Jerry back there, when they were alone in that room together. Any sane man would have brought a man like Jerry back to his heel at the very first chance that came his way. But no, he had to get some stupid idea that Jerry needed to see his master pay his penance, that he needed to hear him say his apology as publicly as he'd dismissed bisexuality so many times in the past, and now...

At the back of the room, a man looked over his shoulder and stepped to one side. Another man did the same. Like dominos, the men down the centre of the room parted as someone smaller than them nudged his way through the crowded space. By the time the ripple had reached half way down the room, the men ahead of the wave were ahead of the game and stepping back to make way.

Jerry stepped between the men, the club lights illuminating every inch of his naked body. Eyes lowered, he walked barefoot across the floor, and knelt on the edge of the stage in front of his master.

The murmur of voices cut back to silence. Denton stared down at the top of Jerry's head. Still frozen in place, he didn't know how to reach out to him. Right then he wasn't sure he had the courage to risk his lover pulling away from him as he had that horrifying night back at their house.

Jerry silently bowed down in front of him until his head rested on the floor barely an inch in front of his master's feet, filling the gap in proceedings when his master fought to pull himself together as if it was all part of some perfectly choreographed scene worked out months in advance.

"As you were," Denton said. The words seemed to echo around the silent room.

Jerry rose once more to his knees, his hands hanging idly at his sides, his head still bowed.

"Look at your master."

Jerry slowly tilted his head back, letting his master see his face and look directly into his eyes. They were so full of emotion, Denton reached for him without thinking about anything more than a need to comfort the younger man.

"Good boy," he whispered.

The hand holding the collar up seemed to come back to life. Denton lowered the leather to his pet's neck.

"This is what you want?" the objective part of his brain forced him to ask.

"Yes, master," Jerry whispered back, his voice almost cracking with pure relief.

The possessive side couldn't wait any longer. The leather was fastened in place in seconds. All sign of nervous tremble gone from his fingers, Denton smoothed the blackness into place around his pet's neck, checking the fit.

Jerry swallowed and let out a deep breath as he closed his eyes. A small smile made its way to his lips just before his teeth caught the tender skin and nibbled at it in an effort to keep his emotions in check.

Denton stroked his hand through Jerry's hair tugging him forward a little so the younger man could rest his head against his hip. Jerry leaned eagerly into his touch in a way Denton had been convinced he'd lost forever.

Tearing his eyes away from the beautiful sight kneeling at his feet, Denton looked at the crowd of men, catching the eyes of the dominants, making sure that everyone was nice and sure Jerry belonged to him again. Slowly the crowd started to dissipate and turn back in on themselves as they realised the show was essentially over.

"Up you get," Denton ordered after a while.

Jerry rose gradually to his feet. Not willing to let him go, Denton kept his fingers tangled in Jerry's hair. A moment after he reached his full height, Jerry was firmly wrapped in the circle of his master's arms, with his face tucked into the crook of his neck. The small man held on to his shirt so tight, the fabric cut into Denton's skin.

Smiling, Denton pressed a kiss onto the top of Jerry's head. "Good pet, that's right. I've got you."

Jerry nodded but didn't lift his face to speak. He pressed a kiss onto Denton's neck instead.

The hand he'd buried in Jerry's hair dropped down to his neck, to stroke the leather encircling his skin.

Jerry pulled away the tiniest fraction, just enough that he could quickly look up into his master's eyes before dropping his gaze again. "It's new, master," he observed softly, lifting his hand to join Denton's on the stiff leather.

"Yes," Denton agreed.

Jerry nodded and stopped short of actually questioning his decision to replace the old collar.

"A new start," Denton clarified.

Jerry nodded again and burrowed back closer into his master's arms.

"Cold, pet?"

Jerry shook his head. "It just feels like everyone's staring at my arse, master," he murmured into his shoulder.

Denton chuckled. "You stripped naked and got on stage in the middle of a leather bar, Jerry. Of course everyone's staring at your arse." He ran one of his hands down the

submissive's back and cupped the firm, round muscle in the palm of his hand. Something eased inside him as Jerry accepted his touch without protest or comment. Denton smiled as his possessive side gloried in the simple pleasure that came with the freedom to touch his lover however he wanted.

Someone cleared his throat. Denton looked over Jerry's shoulder and saw an older dominant set a small pile of clothes – of Jerry's clothes – on the corner of the stage.

Jerry turned to look over his shoulder too. "Mr. Nolan," he said. "Thank you, I..."

When he would have turned around, Denton's hands on his neck and his backside kept him in place.

"Mr. Nolan let me sit with him," Jerry said softly. "He was very kind to me."

Denton looked across to the other man. A flash of recognition hit him, and he remembered seeing a man who looked very much like Jerry with him on a great many occasions in the past. Jerry tugged slightly at his shirt. Looking down into his eyes, Denton saw the sympathy there.

He pushed the instinct to make it clear who Jerry belonged to away. "Thank you for looking after him until I could bring him back to me," Denton said instead.

Obvious relief flooded through Jerry. He rested his head on his master's shoulder as Denton exchanged a few more words with the other man. Mr. Nolan didn't linger for very long before he made his excuses and walked away.

"Car accident," Jerry whispered.

Denton pressed another kiss onto his temple. "Yes. Frank. I remember. He was a good man."

"Do you think Michael looks like me?"

Denton managed to call to mind a young blond man Jerry had been speaking to on the same night everything went to hell for them. "A little like you," he said. "But more like Frank. Playing match maker for Nolan, pet?"

Jerry looked up at him and, when he'd confirmed that his master was definitely teasing, smiled. "Do you think Michael would make a nice submissive for him, master?"

"Perhaps," Denton allowed. "I'll mention Nolan to Phillips next time I see him. If he thinks they'll suit each other, he'll see that they are introduced."

"Thank you, master."

"But first, you're going to tell me exactly what he was doing with all your clothes?"

Denton told him, making sure Jerry would hear the teasing note linger in his voice. He was so lightheaded with relief at having Jerry back where he belonged, he couldn't help but tease.

Jerry bit his lip. "I didn't want to come to you wearing clothes another man gave me," he whispered. "I'm sorry I made you wait. You could punish me for that, and for everything I said to you that night, and..."

Denton put a fingertip to his lips. "There's no punishment. But I swear if you do this to me again, I'll turn you over my knee so quickly, there wouldn't be time for you to mutter anything about 'having to go' without giving me a damn good reason first."

Jerry nodded.

Denton stared down at him. "I'll respect your safe word, Jerry, but I won't let you leave again without actually telling me what the hell is wrong—never again, understand."

He nodded once more. "Maybe I should put my clothes on now, master?" he suggested.

"No."

Jerry glanced into his eyes and nodded his acceptance of his decision.

"And on that subject, there will be no more of this bull about it being my apartment, your name's on the bloody lease right next to mine. And I'll be damned if I'll spend half my time fetching and carrying all the clothes you're so damn convinced that I own back and fore to you, if you happen to spend a few days away from our house again."

Jerry looked at his clothes, still piled on the edge of the stage.

Denton chuckled. "They didn't seem more than a little familiar?"

Jerry blushed and stroked his fingers along his master's shirt. "Take me home, master?" he asked.

Denton wrapped his hand around Jerry's wrist, studying his face to see his reaction. The younger man closed his eyes as if he was savouring the moment.

"We're going home now," Denton informed him.

Jerry nodded. Denton only stopped for the briefest moment to let Jerry pick up his clothes before he led him briskly out of the club.

In the car park he put Jerry into the passenger side of his car and strode quickly around to the driver's seat. He had neither the patience nor the inclination for anything

fancy. "Put your belt on. You have until the car stops to put on whatever clothes you want to wear on the way up to our apartment. I'm not waiting for you once I turn the engine off."

"Yes, master."

Jerry put his seatbelt on and quickly began to sort through his clothes. As far as he remembered he'd just dropped them on the floor where he'd stood, but Mr. Nolan had put them in a nice neat little pile for him when he collected them.

They weren't far from their apartment, and Denton was putting his foot down. At that time of night, there wasn't much traffic to get in their way. Jerry thought he could just about get everything on if he hurried, and the traffic lights went his way.

Holding his jeans in one hand and his shoes in the other, he hesitated. An idea started to form inside his head. He looked across at his master's profile. It wasn't in him to ask for anything from Denton right then. He was back with his master, wanting anything more than that would be greedy. But his master had never been slow on the uptake and he couldn't help but drop a hint about his idea. Jerry pulled his jeans on and put everything else, shoes and all, in a neat little pile on his lap.

Denton glanced across and raised an eyebrow at him.

Jerry stared straight ahead and took a deep breath, realising that he was inviting a hell of a lot of trouble to fall down all around him if this went wrong.

In the car park, Jerry waited as his master walked around to his side of the car and took hold of his wrist once more. His master didn't turn around and look at him until he closed the apartment door behind them.

"You really do believe in second chances, don't you, pet?" Denton asked.

Jerry stared at his master's shoulder, not able to tell his master's opinion of his conduct from his tone of voice.

"Playroom," he whispered in Jerry's ear. "Naked. Central shackles. Go."

Jerry hurried into the play room and got himself ready for his master. He was soon standing exactly where he had stood on another Saturday night a whole lifetime ago. Denton made him wait again. Standing under the shackles, Jerry could only hope like hell he hadn't made the biggest mistake of his life by suggesting a rehash of the one scene that had come so close to ruining him.

His master finally pushed the door open. He strode in as if he wasn't the least bit nervous about repeating the scene. His confidence soothed Jerry a little.

"I'm not playing games tonight. If I ask you a question I want a full and honest response. Lies and omissions will both be punished harshly," Denton announced.

"Yes, master," Jerry whispered.

"When was the last time you thought about having sex with someone who wasn't your master?" he demanded.

Jerry watched his master pace. He hadn't put the shackles on, but he didn't seem to be aware of that neglected part of the procedure. Jerry wasn't sure if there was a polite way to bring that to his master's attention.

"Thinking time is acceptable, day dreaming time is not."

"I thought about it a lot over the last few weeks, master," Jerry whispered. "But not the way you mean."

"Oh?"

"I wasn't thinking about it to enjoy it. I thought I'd probably need to—to find a new master," he looked down. Honesty. He couldn't deny his master that. "I thought I might need to for money at one point, too."

Denton moved closer him, stopping barely a foot away from contact. "You thought I'd let that happen?"

Jerry couldn't lift his gaze. "Everything had fallen apart and I didn't have a master and I...I was scared. I always imagine the worst when I'm scared, master. I try not to, but I can't help it."

"Like imagining that I'd force you?" Denton asked.

An embarrassed blush raced to Jerry's cheeks. "I didn't really mean it to sound like that. I knew I wouldn't leave if I got too close to you. I had to push you away as hard as I could, or I would have stayed, and I thought staying would make you think like that and..."

Denton stroked his cheek, gentling him down as his words began to tumble out too quickly to be understood. "And now you know differently, don't you, pet?"

Jerry nodded.

"I can accept that you're bi, Jerry."

Jerry nodded again, holding the words close and savouring them.

"Although the part of you I'm in love with isn't bi."

As quickly as embarrassment had coloured his cheeks, Jerry felt the blood drain away. It couldn't happen again. It couldn't...

"Master?"

"Look at me," Denton ordered.

Jerry looked up at his master. Denton stroked his hair back from his eyes in a familiar gesture. Jerry accepted it, just as he always welcomed his master's touch. Denton smiled slightly as if he'd suddenly won something amazing.

"The part of you that I'm in love with is the part of you that's *you*. And that isn't gay or bi or straight or anything else."

Jerry closed his eyes at hearing his own thoughts quoted back at him. Blood began to move through his veins again. His lungs dragged another dose of air into his body.

"If I can accept that the part of me that you love isn't male or female, you'll just have to face the fact that the part of you that I love isn't gay or bi. Although, you'll also have to learn to live with the fact I'm still bloody glad that no part of you is entirely straight. I'm not hetrophobic either, pet, but I think I'm well within my rights in expecting my lover to have at least a passing interest in men."

Jerry nodded his agreement, relief making him smile.

As he spoke, his master had lowered his head. His lips were just a fraction of an inch away from offering him a kiss.

"Please, master?" Jerry whispered.

"First you have to do something for me," Denton whispered. "Three little words."

Jerry closed his eyes and took a leap of faith. "I love you, master."

Denton lips brushed against Jerry's as he smiled. "Technically that's four words, but I'll let you off this time."

He touched their mouths together, very gently. Jerry parted his lips and his master slowly accepted his invitation, gradually deepening the kiss until Jerry couldn't help but whimper and moan into his master's mouth.

Jerry couldn't remember the last time a kiss, even one from his master, made him honest to God weak at the knees. He dropped his hands from their place next to the shackles and wrapped his arms around his master's neck, holding on, both for support, and just for

the joy of feeling his master holding him close in return. If he got turned over the other man's knee for moving without permission, he didn't care. It would be worth it.

When Denton broke the kiss he looked at Jerry's hands resting on his shoulders and raised an eyebrow.

"Sorry, master," Jerry gasped. "I forgot to ask you to put the shackles on me."

"If I'd wanted them on you, you wouldn't have had to remind me."

Jerry hesitated, not sure if he'd done something wrong or not.

"If bondage is the only thing that keeps you where I want you, your inability to stand on your own two feet while you kiss me is the least of our problems."

Wrapping his hand around Jerry's wrist in what Jerry was quickly coming to think of as the best hold anyone could ever take on him, Denton led him into their bedroom and nudged him towards the bed before he could think of anything to say in response.

"Make your choice, Jerry."

"Master?" Jerry frowned his confusion as he automatically got onto the bed and waited for another order.

"I made you an offer a few weeks ago. I'm a man of my word. Make your choice."

"I never said I was gay," Jerry blurted out as he watched his master drop his clothes on the floor by the side of the bed until he was just as naked as his submissive. His eyes flickered all over the older man's body. It felt like decades had passed since he'd seen him that way. The fact he was hard and obviously ready to remind Jerry exactly who he belonged to was just the icing on the cake.

Denton shrugged. "You told me that you'll never belong to a woman again. It's close enough as far as I'm concerned."

Getting up onto his knees, Jerry knelt right on the edge of the bed, but he was still not quite within touching distance of his master.

"Anything you want," Denton reminded him stepping closer so he stood right in front of Jerry.

"Honest," Jerry repeated back his master's earlier order. "No omissions."

"That's right."

"I want you to do whatever you want with me, master," Jerry said. "I'm not trying to be difficult, I just...All I want right now is for my master to want me."

Denton stared down at him for a long time.

No omissions. Jerry cleared his throat. "I'd quite like to come too, master, but I can wait a bit longer for that, if you say that I should."

He stared at Denton's shoulder as he waited for his verdict. For a long time his master stood very still, looking down at him. Finally, Denton reached out to him. He ran his fingertips over his collar. Jerry's own fingers twitched as he fought the urge to reach out and protect the mark.

Denton spotted the move. A moment later, he turned and walked away. He left him there on the bed as he walked out of the room without a word. Straining to hear the sounds of his master walking around the apartment, Jerry tracked his master's progress into the playroom.

Dropping his gaze, Jerry stared down at the blanket. His master had ordered him onto the bed. He was to stay there until he received another order, he knew that. But not rushing after his master right then was just about the hardest thing any dominant had ever asked him to do.

Pulling his knees up in front of him, Jerry wrapped his arms around them and held himself together while he waited for his master to come back to him and tell him everything was okay.

When he returned, Denton was carrying toys. Habit made Jerry look across at him and try to guess what the other man intended to do with them. Toys meant fun, guessing how they were going to be used on him was all part of the game. But in truth, he didn't really care right then. He turned his full attention back where it belonged – to his master rather than the things he brought into the room with him.

Denton dropped his stash on the bed. He didn't waste any time once his hands were free. Tossing the pillows to one side, he located a strong eyelet they'd screwed in the wall right above the mattress. Denton deftly padlocked one end of a thick chain to the eyelet. He pulled at it, checking the strength. Then he yanked at it again, harder than Jerry would ever be able to. Seemingly satisfied with that end of the chain, he unwound the rest of the length until several yards of chain lay on the bed next to Jerry.

Another padlock was taken from the little pile his master had brought in with him. Denton sat on the mattress next to Jerry. In moments the second padlock linked the other end

of the chain to his collar. Denton gave a gentle tug on the chain, just hard enough for Jerry to feel his collar's protection pull against his skin.

"You have free use of the bedroom and the en-suite. If you want to go further than that, you'll have to ask. If I think it's in your best interests to go there, I'll put you on the lead and take you there myself. If I decide you don't need to go anywhere, you'll stay right here."

Jerry nodded.

"You're going to stay very close to your master, where he can keep an eye on you."

He nodded again. "Thank you, master," he whispered.

Denton stroked his hair back from his face and tilted his head back to brush their lips together. "You are mine. You belong to me. Forever. Understand?"

Jerry nodded. Easing out of his panic, he remembered his manners. "May I serve you, master?"

Denton stroked his hair again and slid his hand down Jerry's back so his arm encircled his body. "Since when do you consider having sex with your master a service to perform — a chore to be done?"

Jerry's lips twitched into a smile at the idea. He leaned into his master's touch, nuzzling slightly at his skin. That sort of teasing could always be considered to be blatant permission to play, permission to be silly without worrying his master would take him seriously or think that he wasn't submitting the way he should.

Jerry pressed a kiss onto his master's shoulder, then another one higher up against the ticklish spot on Denton's neck, right on the little patch of skin that could make his master howl with laughter when he got it right.

Denton brushed away another attempt to kiss to that spot, as a reluctant chuckle broke through his struggle to stay serious while he teased. "Brat!"

One push had Jerry flat on his back. A second later Denton had him pinned easily to the mattress. Jerry closed his eyes and took a deep breath, savouring the closeness and the strength of the other man, glorying in his master's love. When he blinked his eyes open, Denton was looking down at him more seriously, studying him for signs of hurt and happiness the way he always did when he was worried about him.

"Let me kiss you, master?" Jerry asked, feeling like a fool for asking, but suddenly realising that was exactly what he needed right then.

Denton let go of one of his wrists and offered his hand to Jerry's lips as if his request made perfect sense. Jerry pressed a kiss against his master's fingers then his palm. He ran his lips over his skin, savouring every taste, like a famished man who'd suddenly stumbled on a feast and couldn't quite believe it was all for him.

His master rolled away from him, letting go of his other wrist as well. Jerry whimpered and followed him. He pressed another kiss to his master's forearm, before quickly brushing another on the inside of his elbow.

"Hush," Denton soothed, tangling one of his hands into Jerry's hair. "There's no rush, pet. Your master's not going anywhere."

Jerry nodded his understanding. He trailed kisses against Denton's skin as his master lay comfortably back on the bed. His lips traced line after line along the older man's muscles, not even seeking out those parts of his master's body that would bring him more pleasure than others.

He brushed his cheek and his forehead against him as he re-explored his lover's skin, just needing the connection, just needing to know he was back with his master. Denton's fingers continued to stroke idly through his hair, keeping them in contact even when Jerry's lips weren't touching him.

He pressed a last kiss against his master's chest and rested his forehead against the other man's ribs.

"Good boy," Denton whispered.

Jerry smiled at the reassurance and pressed an extra kiss against his skin in thanks. Another deep breath and he began to slide his way down his master's body. Just because his master was in a tolerant mood, that didn't give him the right to tease the other man forever.

Denton stopped him short. Jerry glanced up at his master.

"You still need to make your choice, pet."

Jerry frowned. "This was what I wanted, master." His fingers traced the same line along as master's thigh as his kisses had followed.

Denton coaxed him up the bed until they were eyelevel with each other.

"I made my decision weeks ago, Jerry. This is going to happen. All you have to decide is if you want my mouth or if you want to top me properly."

"But you..." he looked down at his master's cock. He was hard and leaking pre-cum after all the kissing and teasing.

"I can wait."

"Will you top me afterwards, master?" Jerry blurted out.

Denton smiled and stroked his cheek as he nodded his agreement. "Make your choice now," he prompted.

Jerry tentatively reached out and touched his master's lips.

Denton nodded his acceptance. He didn't wait around once the choice was made. He easily rolled Jerry onto his back. The friction against Jerry's lips while he kissed his master had all morphed into pleasure as it descended to his cock. He was already achingly hard. Not coming since his master had last topped him pushed him to the edge all too quickly.

There was no teasing. Denton took him straight into his mouth. Jerry gasped and grappled at the sheets as he fought against the very real possibility he would come that first second. Denton hadn't ordered him not to. There would be no punishment if he did. But it would be such a waste.

If his master noticed his struggle against the overload of sensations, it made no difference to his technique. In moments, Jerry was right on the edge of coming again.

Just when he began to tip over the edge, Denton pulled back, letting him slip from between his lips for a moment allowing him to regain control of his body. His lips gentled and caressed his shaft as he bobbed his head lower into Jerry's lap before retreating to tease the glans with his tongue.

Jerry bit his lip and closed his eyes, quickly losing himself in the hot, wet heat that surrounded his shaft, stroking and sucking around him until he was sure his brain would melt.

Denton's grip on his hips tightened. Jerry looked down. His master was looking up at him, studying him intently. Jerry swallowed and licked at his own lips as he gasped for breath. Denton held his gaze as his mouth continued to work his shaft.

Jerry dragged a shaky breath into his lungs. His master lowered his head until the tip of his cock nudged the back of his throat, then he dipped his head further still, until Jerry's cock slipped a little way into the impossibly tight chamber. Denton swallowed, working the muscles around him.

He took him to the edge and backed off. Then he did the same thing again, and again. A blow job that would have satisfied him in seconds, somehow was stretched out and dragged on until Jerry lost all track of just how long Denton's lips teased him. He seemed determined to make it the longest and best blow job Jerry had ever...

Jerry met his master's eyes again. The best blow he'd ever had. A better blow job than anyone else could ever give him – than any woman could ever give him.

Denton seemed to register the fact that Jerry had finally got the point. He could be as bi as he wanted to, as long as he acknowledged that his master was better than any other man or woman on the planet.

Apparently his master was ready to declare himself satisfied with his pet's new level of understanding. He sucked firmly around him. A final flick of his tongue against the most sensitive spot just below the head, and Jerry was finished.

His master kept him in his mouth, sucking around his shaft as he swallowed down his semen, until there was nothing more for him to take. He let Jerry slip from between his lips and stared down at him for several long seconds.

Jerry blinked his eyes open as he finally remembered how to breathe, and why breathing was generally considered important. His whole body seemed to have disintegrated into something so relaxed and sleepy, he could barely raise the energy to keep his eyes open and return his master's gaze. Denton's eyes glittered with success. Jerry smiled.

When Denton leaned over and took a tube of lube from the bedside table, Jerry summoned up the energy to tug at the other man's wrist. Denton turned back to him, looking for an explanation.

"Kiss, master?" Jerry murmured.

Denton smiled and gave him what he wanted, letting him taste the residue of himself in his master's mouth with a slow, deep kiss. Jerry gave a soft, sleepy sigh as his master finally pulled away and nudged him onto his side so he could spoon behind him.

Slicked fingers slid against Jerry's hole. He turned slightly, shifting his legs to give his master better access. Denton pressed a kiss against his shoulder. It didn't take long for Jerry to be ready.

Denton's fingers disappeared. A moment later, the tip of his cock pressed against him. Jerry murmured his pleasure as his master slid inside him. His master had to want to come right away, but he took up a rhythm as slow and sleepy as his submissive felt.

His master pressed another kiss against his shoulder and pushed a little deeper into him. Jerry rocked back against him, letting his master know he didn't have to be so gentle on his account.

Denton put a hand on his hip to still him. "Hush."

Jerry nodded. It was his master's show. He was perfectly free to do whatever he wanted with him. What he seemed to want right then wasn't what Jerry had expected. The need to possess, to mark out his territory didn't seem to be there. Or maybe it was there, just different.

Denton pushed into him again, setting little fireworks off in his prostate with each thrust. Possession—like making sure that Jerry lost any sense of a time when he hadn't lain in his master's arms with his master's shaft buried deep inside him, until Jerry couldn't imagine ever being anywhere else.

It felt like a lifetime later when Denton's hips thrust just that fraction harder, that tiniest bit faster, and his master came inside him. There was a moment when Denton turned away from him to tug the blankets up from the bottom of the bed, but his arms were soon wrapped around him again.

Jerry sighed his sleepy contentment with the world. He shifted as he settled for the night. His fingers brushed against the chain attached to his collar, the metal rattled.

Denton's fingers twined with his, guiding him to hold onto the chain and remember his master's promise, remember that he was safe—back where he belonged. Any tinge of panic that lingered in his mind up until that point disappeared.

"Yours, master," Jerry whispered.

"Yes, pet."

"Always."

"Yes, pet, every bit of you."

Jerry smiled against the pillow, knowing what his master was trying to say without actually blurting it out and being soppy about it. The bit of him that was bi belonged to Denton just as much of every other part of him.

Jerry closed his eyes and let that security wrap tight and perfect around him. "I love you too, master."

About the Author

26 years old, from Wales, UK, Kim writes about kink, love and happy endings. If a story doesn't have those three things, it's not going to be written – at least not by this writer!

Apart from that, Kim likes to write a little bit of everything. Male/Male, Male/Female, ménage, vampires, werewolves, ghost, time-travel – that sort of variety always keeps life interesting.

A firm believer that there is no “One True Way” for people to kink, Kim also likes to let the characters in each book pick their own ways to dominate and submit to each other. As long as they stay safe, sane and consensual – Kim’s happy to let them live their lifestyle 24/7, or just open the toy box on weekends – whatever’s right for them.

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