



A Torquere Press Single Shot

Persistence
PAYS
Mara Ismine

Persistence Pays **by Mara Ismine**

The doorbell rang. I scowled at the book I had been immersed in. It was nearly nine at night; who would be disturbing me? It should have been too late for salesmen, evangelists, or charity collectors. It was probably someone for one of the other apartments; I've never understood why people feel a need to ring all the doorbells if their friends don't answer.

Maybe I really should look for another apartment. I could probably afford one with a doorman, or whatever they were called, to screen callers and direct them to the right apartment. I looked around my living room. I liked this apartment. I was comfortable here. If I moved, I was unlikely to get another with enough space for my books and swords. The swords might even be a problem in these security conscious times.

It wouldn't hurt to look around, though. I could afford to pay a bit more rent. Looking didn't mean I had to move. If I didn't like anything, I could stay here. I would have to check the papers at work and see if anything looked worth a closer inspection. I nodded to myself, satisfied with that solution.

I found my place in my book and settled back to continue reading. Some of Rodman's theories were ridiculous by modern standards, but his factual descriptions were excellent. I was enjoying re-interpreting his observations in light of modern belief and my own theories. The rather stilted style of his writing, *de rigueur* for his era, was charming in its own way.

The doorbell rang again. Two short blasts and one long. Damn. I sighed and slipped a bookmark between the pages. I had been nicely comfortable. I put the book on the end table, uncurled from the corner of the couch, and padded over to the intercom with another scowl.

"Yes?" I used my this-had-better-be-important voice, perfected over several years dealing with university students. It usually worked; one spineless girl had even burst into tears when I spoke to her and avoided me for the rest of the year.

"Let me in, Asa." The expected voice whined in reply.

"Why?" I scowled at the intercom as though Tan could see me.

"Because I've come to see you, Asa, and save you from the eternal boredom of whatever book you are reading tonight."

"You mean you are bored," I snapped. I pressed the entry button and unlatched the front door before stomping off to the kitchen to dig out the coffee maker and start it brewing. I put the kettle on for tea, thinking I might as well join him in a hot drink. It was the second time Tan had dropped by for a visit in a week. I would have to move the coffee maker to a more accessible cupboard if he was going to make a habit of it.

Not that Tan would make a habit of visiting me. He would have another relationship to keep him amused soon enough. Tan had relationships like other people had meals -- with regularity and variety. I refused to dwell on this flaw in his character again. He was a sometimes-amusing friend, if annoyingly persistent, and I could live with the faint regret his presence caused. I had never been casual about physical relationships, and he had never been serious about them.

"Asa?"

I heard the front door shut and the sound of shoes hitting the floor. Tan was never slow to make himself at home.

"In the kitchen," I called unnecessarily. Where else would I be? The bitter, burnt smell of the coffee I kept only for him was surely enough of a clue.

"You're wet!" I scowled at the bedraggled figure lounging against my doorframe and dripping on the floor. Tan had lounging down to a fine art. He always seemed to know the best way to display his rangy body to advantage. Even soaking wet, he looked too good for my personal comfort.

"It *is* raining." White teeth flashed against golden skin as he grinned at me, green eyes sparkling and water trickling down his cheek. Even with his hair plastered darkly to his head and hanging in stringy rat-tails past his collar, he was breathtakingly attractive.

"Hn." I threw him the kitchen hand towel and stalked past him as he applied it to his face and hair. As I expected, there was a trail of dirty water from the front door to the kitchen. I dug an armful of towels out of the hall closet and dropped them one by one along the wet trail on the polished wood floor. I shoved one into Tan's arms and pointed him in the direction of the shower.

I had the floor dried, with towels under his dripping coat and soaked shoes, by the time I heard the shower stop running. I made my tea and poured him some coffee. I had made it, so he might as well drink the vile stuff. I took the mugs into my living room and discovered Tan sprawled on the couch and wearing my bathrobe, which was two sizes too small for him.

He was still damp. I found myself watching a droplet of water run down his chest from his collarbone into the gaping neckline of the bathrobe, and noticing the way the light caught the stray droplets on his lightly haired legs. Which would not do at all. I put his coffee firmly on one end table and my tea on the other. I refused to enjoy the scent of my shower gel on his body.

"Where did you leave your wet clothes?" I demanded.

"Strewn all over the bathroom, of course!" He grinned at my automatic scowl.

I stomped off to the bathroom. He had tidied up after himself, despite his comment. His clothes were in the bathtub and the damp towel was on the towel bar. The towel wasn't folded, but at least he had made an effort. His wallet and phone were on the top of the toilet tank. The

bathroom seemed to smell better than it did after I showered, but I am sure that was only my imagination.

I wrapped his wet clothes in the damp towel and took the bundle to the washer. It felt uncomfortable patting down his pants to make sure he hadn't left anything in the pockets; it seemed like a very intimate thing to do for some absurd reason. I threw all the wet clothes into the washer, added detergent, selected the low temperature, fast wash, and set the machine going.

There was a chance that I could get his clothes washed and dried so that he could go home tonight. I had a sinking feeling that my plan wouldn't work, though, and I would be stuck with him staying the night on my couch. Which meant having him wandering about the apartment half naked until I could throw him out.

I watched his clothes tumbling in the foaming water for a moment before shaking myself and stalking back to the living room to see what my uninvited guest was doing. I occupied my mind with checking the time and figuring out whether I could wash all the dirty towels as well.

Tan didn't appear to have moved, but the TV was on and he had the remote in one hand, flipping through the channels, and his coffee in the other. I shoved his feet off my end of the couch and sat down. Determined not to spend the evening checking out the gaping bathrobe, I busied myself with my tea.

"Why have you got that on?" I waved at the TV.

"I knew you would forget! That's why I came over tonight," he said. "I knew I'd have to remind you."

"Remind me about what?" I turned my scowl on the TV, which had settled on a channel, but was showing ads.

"That special I told you about? The one that you admitted sounded interesting? The sword thing?"

"Oh. That's tonight?" I blinked at the TV. I did remember him telling me about a program he thought I'd like to watch, when he turned up on my doorstep a few days ago.

"Yes, it's tonight. Thursday. You said that you could watch all of it because you didn't have to work this Friday?"

Tan was still framing everything as a reminder in an annoying sing-song voice. I scowled at the TV harder. I did remember the conversation. I had just forgotten about the program since then. The cable subscription came with the apartment, so I had connected it, but I rarely turned the TV on. It was an irritating intrusion into my peaceful evenings. Much like Tan.

"It had slipped my mind," I said carelessly, in the hope that the admission would shut him up.

"That's why I came out in the rain especially to remind you!"

"You could have called," I snapped. "Or used an umbrella."

"I did try to call, but you've turned your phone off again," he explained patiently. "And it wasn't raining much when I left home."

I frowned. I had the impression that it had been raining fairly heavily all day, not that I really paid that much attention to things like that. I noticed if I got wet going to or from work. I noticed if students returned wet books or dripped on the library floor. Other than that, the weather was irrelevant.

"Shh. It's starting now," Tan said unnecessarily. I hadn't been going to comment anyway.

It wasn't as though I thought he had come out without an umbrella just so he could get wet enough to stay here. He might have done that for his current obsession, but not for me. I had refused to be another one of his conquests when we first met and, after a while, he accepted my decision. I was surprised that he was still around a couple of years later. People tended to be plentiful and fleeting in Tan's life.

The first program was a comparison of different swords and the techniques of using them. The narrator was irritating, but the action shots and some of the historic re-enactment were excellent. The detailed description of the different types of armor developed to protect against the swords was good.

The second program was about the different forging methods used for different swords. Most of it was about the complex multi-layering of the katana. It never failed to amaze me to watch the moment the blank metal drew itself into the characteristic curve of the blade. The program was fair enough to admit that other cultures had their own complex methods of producing the best sword they could. No decent sword was forged by simply heating a lump of iron and hammering on it for five minutes.

The third program was a Godzilla-meets-King-Kong contest, in Tan's words. They compared the Japanese katana, the European broadsword, the Roman straight sword, and the Ottoman scimitar. The action shots were enhanced with slow motion and computer animation marking the sword's path. They used freshly slaughtered pigs to demonstrate cutting strokes and amount of damage caused. It offered some interesting insights.

The fourth program was about the incursion of pigs and rats on Polynesian islands and their effect on local ecology. Apparently, no one had thought of using the pigs for sword practice. In fact, there didn't seem to be any reference to swords at all.

"Sorry, Asa, that's all the sharp and shiny things for tonight." Tan laughed as he pointed the remote at the TV and shut it off. "I thought you would enjoy it. I take it that the documentaries were fairly accurate? You weren't muttering or giving the screen death glares, most of the time."

"There were some interesting points made," I admitted with a sniff. "And they had actually found real experts to demonstrate the skills needed."

"And now you want to go and try some of those moves, don't you?"

I glared at Tan. I didn't like being that transparent. I had forgotten that he was semi-naked in my too-small bathrobe. His hair had dried to its usual, almost golden brown. It was slightly fluffy, and stray strands stood out around his head, catching the lamplight and giving him a golden halo. He looked like an angel with his smooth skin and wide green eyes. He was beautiful rather than handsome, and he knew it.

"Go on," he urged. "Go and play. I know that lust on your face isn't for my sexy body."

I sniffed again and got up. He was wrong. The lust was for his sexy body, his beautiful face, and his charming personality. But it was better that he didn't realize that. Better for both of us.

Or certainly better for me. I could not give in to my attraction to him and not suffer the consequences. I wouldn't be satisfied with a few nights of mind-blowing sex. I wanted much more from Tan than that. More than he was capable of giving anyone. It was better not to know exactly what I was missing than to know and regret it for the rest of my life.

I headed for my workout room. It was the largest room in the apartment and should have been the living/dining room. It was the main reason I had taken the apartment. I lived alone and didn't entertain. As soon as I moved in, I had turned it into an exercise room. The larger bedroom became my living room and the smaller bedroom stayed as a bedroom, my bedroom. I had a small table in the kitchen that was large enough for me to eat at.

I did want to try a couple of things I had seen the experts on the TV programs doing. I went through my warm-up routine automatically while I was thinking about what I had seen on the TV, and not thinking about what I had seen on the couch beside me. Tan did not have a place in my workout routine. I needed to clear my mind and concentrate.

I chose my katana and lifted it from the rack with proper respect. I let my body flow through the kata until I was moving smoothly, the sword an extension of my arms. My muscles adapted to the familiar weight with the ease of years of practice.

I thought about what I had seen on the TV and my arms and body followed the thoughts. I could feel what was possible, and what wasn't, in the awkward, unfamiliar movements. The new movements would not flow smoothly. I could feel that some would, with sufficient practice. Others would never be much better than jerky, string-puppet amusements.

The katana would follow some patterns, but not others. The weight and balance of the sword, coupled with muscles trained in the traditional strokes, did limit what was possible. Or, rather, what was possible with any grace and degree of control or accuracy.

Curiosity satisfied for the moment, I replaced the sword and worked through my cool-down exercises and final stretches. I closed my eyes and stilled my body, allowing myself a few minutes of meditation. My mind was clear, my body pleasantly relaxed after the intense exercise.

I opened my eyes and raised my head, not surprised to find Tan propped in the doorway, watching me. The smell of cologne and cigarettes drifted toward me, although he wasn't actually smoking in my apartment. I didn't think he would; I had made it plain that I did not approve, and he had been to enough of my martial arts demonstrations to know that my threats weren't idle. Not to mention that I had a sharp blade to hand.

Tan had an odd expression on his face, which disappeared as soon as he saw that I was looking at him.

"I don't know how you do that," he said, shaking his head as he walked over to me and handed me a small towel he had draped over one shoulder. "You wave three feet of sharpened steel around and make it look beautiful and graceful, rather than deadly and dangerous."

"The katana is beautiful and graceful," I said as I took the offered towel and stood up. "The fact that it is deadly and dangerous only adds to the beauty and grace."

"I think it has more to do with the person waving the sword about." He cocked his head slightly and looked at me through narrowed eyes. "The fact that you're half naked and sweaty might have something to do with the fascination."

"Asshole," I snarled. I could feel my skin betraying me and heating up in a blush that ran from my waist to the tips of my ears. I hated my lily-white skin that flushed brightly at the slightest excuse. The curse of the redhead, my mother always called it.

I stared around the room looking for my sweatshirt. I vaguely remembered taking it off because I was too warm and it was restricting my movements. I hadn't even thought about Tan being in the apartment. I wasn't an exhibitionist like he was, and I wasn't comfortable.

"This what you're looking for?" Tan held up my sweatshirt.

I snatched it out of his hand, pulling it on as quickly as I could, which, of course meant that it curled up and fought back. Tan chuckled softly and helped straighten the fabric, his fingers brushing over my chest, back, and sides. I could feel my blush heating more at the faint touches. I glared at him as soon as I got my head free, daring him to make any comment.

"This is one of my favorites." Tan grinned and tweaked the neckline of the sweatshirt. "The heather tones make your eyes more violet."

"My eyes are a dark blue. Nobody has violet eyes." I glared at him some more, with little noticeable effect. "Isn't it supposed to be very gay to notice colors and tones?"

"You have violet eyes," Tan insisted before chuckling at me. "You make me want to kiss you on the tip of your nose when you pout like that, you look so adorable."

"Adorable?" I was tempted to do something violent, but Tan had stepped back out of reach.

"Mm. Would you find me more attractive if I swished more?"

"What?"

"Swished. You do know what swishing is, don't you?" Tan cocked his hip and waved one hand languidly.

"I know what swishing is," I snarled.

"So, would you find me more attractive if I swished?" Tan fluttered his long, naturally dark eyelashes at me and shimmied in place. The bathrobe gaped farther, exposing more of his smooth, golden chest almost to the dark brown nipples that I knew were under the toweling.

"No!" I pushed past him and headed for the kitchen. He had effectively distracted me with the TV, and I hadn't remembered to put his clothes in the dryer. I certainly wasn't going to tell him that I didn't think he could do anything to make me find him more attractive without killing me with frustration. I knew he would be more than willing to help me relieve any frustration that I admitted to him.

Sometimes my decision to refuse shallow, meaningless sex with him seemed very foolish. Usually when I had spent more than two minutes in Tan's company. It was past time to get his clothes dry and send him home.

The washer was still running. I checked the time and winced. It was two a.m. -- why was the washer still running? And why did it appear to have towels in it now? I hadn't put the towels in. I had left it running with Tan's clothes and gotten distracted. But if the towels were in the washer, where were Tan's clothes?

"I'm not totally useless, you know!" Tan complained from behind me. "I can work a washing machine and tumble dryer. Even antiques like yours."

"If your clothes are dry, why are you still wearing my bathrobe?" I turned around to glare at him again.

"It's nice and comfy." Tan considered my glare for a moment before continuing, "And it didn't seem worth putting the clothes on only to take them off half an hour later when we go to bed."

"We go to bed?" I asked, hoping the edge in my voice sounded dangerous. Never let them see you're afraid.

"Well, I'm not going to stay up when you go to bed, so I thought we'd be going to bed about the same time."

"What time I go to bed is irrelevant. You are going home!"

"You'd throw me out in the pouring rain?" Tan made his eyes go round and tragic. "After I risked pneumonia to come and remind you about the programs you enjoyed so much? You won't even offer me a bed for the night?"

I closed my eyes and counted to ten. I had known that this was going to happen. I had just known it.

"You can have the couch," I forced out between gritted teeth.

"Thank you for that kind and generous offer." Tan grinned at me. "I know how hard you work to keep your soft center hidden. I won't tell a soul that you showed a moment of weak human kindness!"

"Hn." I turned away from him to fetch bedding. His playful words had a cutting edge. I was feeling hurt. Completely stupid reaction. Tan was such a manipulative bastard. He could have the scratchy blanket for that *and* the lumpy pillows.

I shoved the bedding into his arms and grabbed my last clean towel for myself. I needed a shower before I went to bed. I ignored Tan's offer to scrub my back and locked myself in the bathroom.

It was a good thing that I'd taken tomorrow off; I wasn't going to get much sleep. I never did sleep well when someone else was in the apartment. My parents had stayed once or twice; the downside of having them a sensible four hours away was longer visits with overnight stays. I let them have my bed and I slept on the couch, which was why I thought I hadn't slept well when they were here. But I'd found that I didn't sleep well in my bed when Tan was sleeping on the couch, which must mean it was having someone else here that was the problem.

Tan hadn't stayed very often. I tried to discourage the habit, but he had slept over before. I had a suspicion that he was like a stray cat -- one act of kindness and you were forever labeled as a free meal ticket.

I lay in bed and thought about other ways that Tan was like a cat, when I should have been peacefully sleeping. Apart from his love 'em and leave 'em sex life, Tan made himself at home anywhere. He expected everyone to like him and shower him with attention. He always landed on his feet. The list went on and became more ridiculous as I finally drifted off to sleep.

The bleeping of my alarm woke me at the normal time. I slipped out of bed almost thankfully. My sleep had been restless and full of images of Tan curling around me like a very large cat. The lack of sleep made me feel sluggish and just a bit grumpy. Even after I remembered that I didn't have to go to work, I didn't feel much better.

I washed and dressed automatically. My stomach felt a little bit unsettled, I had probably forgotten to eat the previous night, but a light breakfast would fix that. I made myself some toast to go with my morning tea and sat down at the table to eat.

Tan's dry clothes were draped over the back of the other chair. I had been doing a good job of ignoring the fact that he was asleep on my couch until then. I scowled at the clothes, since their owner wasn't available. Tan didn't like getting up early, so I had plenty of time to think about his presence before I actually had to deal with it.

I realized that my bathrobe had been hanging in the bathroom, something so normal that I hadn't consciously noticed it when I was washing. That meant that Tan was sleeping naked on my couch. The thought didn't help settle my stomach. I hadn't offered him pajamas or anything to sleep in, a guilty little voice reminded me. I hadn't asked him to stay, either, a much firmer voice overrode the guilty one.

Remembering that Tan was here reminded me that I had a load of clean, wet towels in the washer that needed to be transferred to the dryer. I finished my tea and toast before I set the first batch of towels to dry.

I had a couple of hours before I could go to the new exhibit at the museum, the reason I had today off from work. The museum didn't open very early for some reason. I tried to think of something to keep me occupied that didn't involve going into my living room and waking Tan. I wasn't quite ready to deal with the naked man on my couch.

My current book was still in the living room. The flyer for the new military history exhibit at the museum was in there. My laptop was in its bag behind the couch. My options for entertainment were severely limited.

I calmed myself with an extended morning workout. The familiar routines were always soothing, even when I knew that there was a naked Tan close by. I wasn't sure why the fact that he was naked loomed so large in my mind.

I swept and dusted the workout room once I had finished my exercises. I took one load of dry towels out of the dryer and put the next load in. Folding the towels and putting them away took up some more time.

I decided to clean the bathroom while I was waiting for the rest of the towels to dry. I could treat myself to a shower with a nice warm towel waiting for me when they were done. I liked living alone. I didn't have to justify or explain these little moments of pampering. Warm, fluffy towels were one of my secret indulgences.

I cleaned and showered quickly before pulling on my bathrobe. It smelled of Tan, which was ridiculous. He had showered and used my bath products before he had used my bathrobe. It shouldn't have smelled like him. I was probably just letting my imagination run away with me again.

I hurried from the bathroom to the dryer, intent on getting my nicely warm towel. I pulled a towel from the dryer and buried my face in it, inhaling the freshly laundered scent and enjoying the heat on my face. I could feel my faint stubble catching on the nap of the towel. Perhaps a shave would be in order, even though I wasn't going to work today.

I was drying my hair when the door bell rang. Again. My door bell doesn't ring that often. I scowled and rubbed at my scalp as I marched over to the intercom with the intention of letting the idiot who was disturbing my morning know just how I felt about it.

"Yes?"

"Good morning, Asa, I told your father that it wasn't too early to call!" My mother's voice issued brightly from the speaker and then continued with less volume as she turned to speak to my father. "See, dear? I knew he would be up."

I heard my father mutter something in reply as I numbly pressed the entry release. What were my parents doing here? It was Friday morning. They never visited on weekdays. They had my schedule and knew when I would be working and when I was off. Today was a scheduled work day; I just happened to have taken it off as vacation time. Dropping in was rather foolish if they really wanted to see me, not to mention the four-hour drive they'd have to make before they could drop in.

I was still standing there trying to make sense of their visit when there was a light tap on the door. I hastily opened it to let them in.

"Caught you at a bad time, did we, son?" Dad looked me up and down and chuckled.

"What?" I suddenly realized that I was standing in the hall in my bathrobe, still rubbing a towel over my wet hair. I could feel the inevitable flush building. "Come in. I'll get dressed."

"No rush, dear." Mom kissed my cheek and patted my shoulder. "I'll just make some tea."

I escaped into my bedroom, ignoring my parent's cheerful bickering as they headed for the kitchen. Dad was claiming that he'd been right and they shouldn't have dropped in like this, and Mom was saying that it didn't really matter because we were family. I groaned and shut the bedroom door.

I scrambled into my clothes and headed back to the kitchen to find out what they were doing here.

"Asa, dear? Did you know you have a naked man on your couch?" Mom asked as soon as I stepped into the kitchen. She was bright red, and I could feel my face heating to match. I had forgotten about Tan. Somehow.

"I told her she shouldn't go poking around," Dad said with a straight face, but I could see his eyes dancing with amusement. I shot him a glare that just bounced right off without effect.

"Do you think your young man would like tea?" Mom asked without waiting for any reply from me about Tan's presence on my couch.

"I'll be your slave for life if you made some coffee," Tan spoke from right behind me, his morning voice rough and gravelly. I whirled round to glare at him and found myself glaring at his rather impressive and very naked chest.

He wasn't even decently draped in the blanket! There was a squeak from somewhere. I breathed slightly easier when an involuntary glance down showed that Tan was at least wearing his briefs. Not that they left much to the imagination, but at least they were better than nothing, I hoped.

"Morning, Asa." Tan put his hands on my shoulders and turned me back to face my parents, who were looking very interested. "Aren't you going to introduce me to your parents?"

"Eep." There was that squeak again and it seemed to have come from my mouth.

"Hmm. Obviously not. You really aren't a morning person, are you?" Tan chuckled from behind me. I could picture the smile. He still had both hands on my shoulders holding me in front of him. That might be a good thing. Maybe Tan did have some modesty after all.

"Good morning, Mrs. Hartvigsen, Mr. Hartvigsen." Tan used his grip on my shoulders to move me aside and step past me as he held out his hand to my parents. "I'm Tanqueray Gordon, a friend of Asa's."

I should have known better than to even suspect Tan of modesty. He was completely shameless. I was left staring at his broad shoulders. His *naked* broad shoulders above the nicely muscled vee of his back, the taut waist, and the swell of his ass, lovingly outlined by clingy jersey.

"Tanqueray? That's a rather unusual name." Mom was smiling at him.

"Please call me Tan, everyone does."

"Someone in your family was fond of gin?" Dad chuckled as he asked the usual question.

"My mother had a strange sense of humor." Tan chuckled back. "I don't think she was particularly fond of gin. Although she did say that if I had had a little sister, she would have been called Tonic."

Tan was chatting to my parents as though he weren't virtually naked in my kitchen. He was perfectly at ease; there wasn't even a hint of heightened color anywhere I could see. No hint of a tan line on hips or thighs, either, just an expanse of golden skin.

"If you'll excuse me," Tan was saying, "I'll just grab a quick shower and get dressed while the coffee is brewing." He walked across to the dryer and helped himself to one of the still-warm towels inside it. "Mm. Nothing better than a warm towel, is there?" He turned his high-wattage smile on my mother and winked at my father before gathering up his clothes from the chair and sauntering out of the kitchen. He gave me an evil smirk as he passed.

I was sure my face had gone beyond red and was probably approaching purple. There was a high-pitched whine in my ears and I felt rather dizzy. I wanted to punch Tan for that little scene. I probably would have if I hadn't been staring at his ass when he bent to pull the towel out of the dryer. I was concerned that his briefs would slip, and I didn't want him mooning my parents. Or me. But when he turned around, that left my eyes on an area where the jersey didn't cling so tightly.

Tan would think I'd been checking him out and would be unbearable, until I convinced him that I wasn't interested. Again.

"He seems like a very nice boy," Mom commented.

"He's thirty-one," I protested, scowling at her. She was watching the empty kitchen door at ass level very thoughtfully. "That's hardly a boy!" I snapped. My mother couldn't really have been watching Tan's ass. I was imagining things. I was just stressed by having so many people in my peaceful apartment at once.

"Only two years older than you, then." Mom nodded to herself.

"He's a very confident young man," Dad offered more diplomatically, his eyes still laughing. "Rose, you really shouldn't ogle Asa's young man like that."

"You'd have been doing the ogling, Jorge, if he was Asa's young woman," Mom snapped, finally dragging her eyes away from the door.

"Maybe, but I hope I wouldn't be quite as blatant about it." Dad shrugged and grinned when she smacked his arm.

"He's not *mine*," I pointed out, without much hope of them listening. "He's just a friend I met through work."

"A friend who sleeps on your sofa." Mom smiled sweetly at me. "Did you have a tiff or something?"

"A tiff?" I couldn't believe what she was saying. Or what she was obviously assuming.

"I know you can be prickly," Mom continued, absently elbowing Dad when he snorted. "But you really should try to be more tolerant with your boyfriend! You don't want to drive him away, do you?"

I opened and shut my mouth a few times as I tried to decide which insult to deal with first. Mom bustled off to the coffee maker and searched through the cupboards to find the mugs, tea, and coffee.

"I am not prickly, just because I'm a little bit particular." I glared at Dad, daring him to contradict me. Mom just sniffed without comment. "Tan is just a friend. He is *not* my boyfriend."

"Hm. I know that things like that are more casual among gay men," Mom said, keeping her back to me and fussing with the coffee maker. "I've been reading about it. I had hoped you might not be satisfied with one-night stands. I've always hoped you would find someone of your own and settle down."

"What?" My mother had been reading about gay relationships? My mother?

"Sit down, son, before you fall down." Dad patted my shoulder sympathetically and steered me to a kitchen chair.

"Reading?" I wheezed, staring at him in the hope he would tell me I had misheard.

"I'm afraid so." Dad grimaced and sighed. "You know what she is like when she gets a bee in her bonnet. As soon as you told us you were gay, she was off."

"Wanting to understand my own son's lifestyle choices is not having a 'bee in my bonnet.'" Mom turned around to glare at us.

"Piles of books. Websites. Pamphlets. Help lines." Dad muttered. "Believe me, son, I really was quite happy not knowing any details."

"Details?"

"We needed to know what sort of risks were involved." Mom sniffed. "Parents need to know that sort of thing."

"She has a copy of *The Joy of Gay Sex*."

"Jorge! Stop teasing the poor boy!"

"I'm not teasing." Dad frowned at her. "I am sharing the trauma. It's the healthy thing to do!"

"Aarrgghh!" I covered my face with my hands. I didn't want to think about my mom and dad reading the het version, let alone the gay version. "Why couldn't you be normal parents and disown me for being gay?" I didn't really mean to say that, it just sort of slipped out. I didn't want them to disown me. Not most of the time.

"Sorry, son, you just aren't that lucky," Dad said in a commiserating voice. "You are stuck with us. I'll pay for the museum and lunch, if it makes you feel better."

"You're coming to the museum?" I lifted my head and blinked at him.

"You did mention the exhibition and say you thought I'd enjoy it."

"You told me last week that you were taking the day off to go to the official opening." Mom added. "So we thought we would come and join you. Is that nice boyfriend of yours coming too?"

"He is not my boyfriend!" I snarled. If I said it enough times, maybe they would listen.

"I can smell coffee!" Tan sauntered back into the kitchen looking clean and alert.

"Tell them I'm not your boyfriend!"

"Hmm?" Tan blinked at me looking confused.

"Tell my parents you are not my boyfriend!" I spoke slowly and clearly as I glared at him.

"Thank you!" Tan said, fervently grateful as Mom handed him coffee. "I take it as it is. I don't need any extra sweetening."

"Tell them!" I poked him in the ribs to emphasize my demand.

Tan flinched and rolled his eyes before obediently repeating the words. "I am not his boyfriend." The tone was not exactly convincing, though, and the tragic face he turned on Mom was ridiculous. "But I'll keep trying. The pain of rejection is hard to take, but it isn't as great as the pain of being cast out of his presence entirely!" He flattened one hand across his heart as he spouted the nonsense at Mom.

"He's good, isn't he?" Dad said admiringly. "I think you should make an effort to keep him. Would you like to borrow some of Mom's books?"

"Asa, go and do something with your hair!" Mom shooed me from the kitchen. "You can't go out looking like that!"

"I think it looks rather sexy," Tan drawled, leaning against the counter next to Mom, both of them staring thoughtfully at my head.

"Run! Now!" Dad mouthed silently when I glanced at him. I took his advice and left the kitchen. My hair was a mess. I hadn't finished drying it properly when Mom and Dad arrived. It took me a few minutes to sort it out. I shaved as well, while I was safe in the bathroom.

I dropped the used towel in the hamper to wash later. Tan's briefs were sitting right there when I lifted the lid, which meant that Tan was going commando today. That was a piece of information

I really didn't need. At least I would be rid of Tan soon and would just have Mom and Dad to deal with at the museum.

Or so I thought. By the time I got back to the kitchen, Tan had been invited to join us, and he had accepted, the devious traitor. I was reminded of my thoughts about feeding stray cats and never being able to get rid of them again.

Tan already had Mom wrapped around his little finger, and Dad seemed unreasonably taken with him, too. I felt like the guest when we all climbed into Dad's car for the drive to the museum. Tan and Dad had bonded over tobacco before we started out. The three of them were deep in a discussion about what and where for lunch. I stared out of the window and watched the traffic. I should have been pleased that my parents got along with my best friend. Shouldn't I?

The exhibition was a pleasant distraction. Dad and I browsed happily. Dad was a military buff and could spot an interesting detail at twenty paces. I got into a discussion with one of the history professors from the university, who was wandering around in samurai armor as part of the opening celebration.

Mom and Tan seemed to be having a good time, too. Whenever I noticed them, they had their heads together and were chattering away. Mom was hanging on to Tan's arm the whole time. I thought I heard her giggle a few times, but I am sure that was one of the young girls in the crowd. The idea of my mother giggling was disturbing.

There was a crowd, which surprised me. I knew the opening had been well publicized -- I'd never have known about it if it wasn't -- but I hadn't expected this sort of response. The crowd wasn't just university students, either. There seemed to be a lot of older adults wandering the marble floors.

"Have you seen enough for one day, dear?" Mom asked when she and Tan cornered me between exhibits. "Jorge really needs to eat soon and take his medication."

I had been going to say no, but that last comment made a refusal impossible. Dad insisted that there was nothing really wrong with him. Mom made those little insinuating remarks that suggested she was humoring Dad's belief, but knew that things were more serious than he let on. Short of talking to Dad's doctor myself, I wasn't sure how I could find out the truth.

We tracked Dad down and headed for the restaurant they had decided on. Tan had phoned for a reservation, apparently. We were met and greeted like old friends and led to a prime table by the window. At least I could look at the view while they all chatted.

Tan was spinning tales of freelance journalism and the places it took him. Mom and Dad seemed enthralled. Tan had already worked in requests to interview them for some articles he wanted to write on spec. Dad's military history expertise was an obvious choice. I decided not to ask what he was going to interview Mom about. I didn't need to know. I really didn't.

"You haven't told us how you met," Mom said as soon as the orders had been taken and our drinks served.

"He came to the library."

"I was researching the current interest in edged weapons." Tan spoke over my simple explanation. "I use the university library for specialist research like that. Asa was really helpful. He knows the subject so well. He suggested several very good books and let me pick his brains, too."

"He should know the subject well." Dad rolled his eyes. "The amount we spent on lessons for him."

"Jorge! You know the money wasn't important. Asa was so passionately interested it would have been a crime not to encourage him!" Mom protested.

"We did encourage him." Dad complained. "Thousands of dollars' worth of encouragement..."

"Jorge!"

"... and worth every cent," Dad finished innocently.

"That might be a good article." Tan nodded thoughtfully and pulled his notebook out of his pocket.

"The cost of martial arts training?" Dad asked. "I can tell you all about that!"

"That would be part of it, maybe an article in its own right, but I was thinking of what parents pay out for their children's hobbies." Tan tapped his pen against the notebook and stared out of the window. "There have been plenty of articles about the cost of designer clothes, the latest toy craze, computer games, and things like that. Most of which more or less openly say that the parents are crazy to spend that sort of money on frivolous stuff. But what about the parents that support their child in a sport, or music, or art? You know, something not so frivolous, something important?"

Tan was breathtaking when he got into one of his article inspirations. He glowed with the ideas fizzing through his head, and he forgot to act like such a brainless idiot. He had a remarkably good brain hidden under that stylishly shaggy, not-quite-blonde hair. Something he usually kept a secret. Maybe he was as taken with my parents as they were with him.

The rest of the meal focused on possible details for his article, or series of articles by the time we got to dessert. It was approaching book proportions before we finished the coffee.

Tan's enthusiasm just carried everyone along with him. Ideas sparked and flowed in a creative firestorm. I loved being part of it. I loved seeing Tan like this, so alive, so focused. So totally irresistible.

Dad dropped us off outside my apartment. He and Mom had booked a hotel for the night. They promised to drop by tomorrow before they went home. Or maybe that was threatened to drop by. I could tell that Mom was going to be grilling me about Tan, one way or another.

Tan followed me up to my apartment, still talking about the book he could write. Mom and Dad could get him a few more parents their age to interview, but he wanted my help to find some parents who were paying out now. And he wanted me to help him interview them. He steered me into the living room after we had removed our coats and shoes.

I didn't think I was the ideal candidate to talk to people, but Tan wouldn't listen.

"I'm sure some of your fan club would be more than willing to volunteer their parents, if it meant getting you in their house for an hour or so!" Tan grinned at me, dropping down on the couch.

"You expect them to do something useful?" I didn't argue about having a fan club. I did have this group of young teens following me around and giggling if I spoke to them -- not all of them were girls, either. They hung around when I did demonstrations. They were always at the dojo when I was training there. Some of them even took the occasional martial arts lesson I taught. I found them irritating and embarrassing.

I decided to turn the gas fire on. It was a very good imitation of a real one, with flickering flames and glowing coals. It would even warm the room. I was feeling slightly chilled for some reason. We hadn't been outside long enough for me to get cold. It must have been because I was tired.

"They're all dying to do something to get you to notice them." Tan laughed.

"Most of them want to marry me." I shuddered. "I'm not going that far to get you interviews."

"That's why we'll go together." Tan grinned. "I'll protect your virtue from the horny teenagers."

"If you're there, most of them won't even notice me! You'll have them drooling on your shoes in five seconds," I muttered, trying to hide my smile as I sat down beside him.

"Ugh. They're way too young. You'll have to be my jealous boyfriend!"

"Huh?"

"Or I could be your jealous boyfriend." Tan tapped his chin and leered at me. "That would work."

"You don't think that the parents might have a problem talking to an openly gay couple?" I snickered at the thought. "Although that might discourage some of the fan club."

I blame the lack of sleep and the busy day for that foolish statement. I would never have said anything like that normally. I would have killed any speculation about us acting as boyfriends before it had gotten started. Normally.

Nothing about today had been normal.

"Do you think you could keep up the pretense of being involved with me for months?" Tan asked, something flickering through his eyes that I couldn't make out.

"Isn't that a question I should be asking you?" I was suddenly tense. "You're the one with the active and varied sex life."

"I told you that I would give all of that up without regret for the right person." Tan was very serious, not even a hint of his normal grin.

"I know you said that." I rolled my eyes and snapped at him. We had discussed that a long time ago. That conversation had hurt. I had admitted to myself that I wanted to be that special person for Tan. But obviously I wasn't or he would have said so. Wouldn't he?

"You didn't believe me?" Tan was looking hurt. Not blatantly, in one of his flamboyant acts, but as though he really was hurt and trying to hide it.

"I believed you. But we aren't talking about your special person," I said evenly, determined not to show any weakness of my own. "We're talking about you pretending to be in a monogamous relationship with me and acting monogamous."

"You don't think you are special?"

"What?"

"Nothing. I know I can give all that up, it was getting boring anyway. I'm not so sure that you can act as though you like me, let alone are in a relationship with me."

"I do like you," I said stupidly. "Why do you think I'd have a problem acting like it?"

"Because most of the time you act like you barely tolerate me, never mind want me around." The hurt was closer to the surface in his face and voice.

I sighed and stared at the floor. He was right. I did treat him like that. I didn't think he had really noticed. He was just so confident and sure of his welcome that he ignored me trying to push him away. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you by it."

"So, why do it?"

I shrugged, not willing to answer that question in case it revealed more than I wanted him to know. "Habit?" I offered after a short silence.

"It isn't a very nice habit."

"No." I couldn't deny that. "But it keeps people away, usually. Keeps me from getting hurt." Why had I tacked that bit on? Had I lost my mind?

"You think I'd hurt you?" Tan sounded even more hurt.

"Not deliberately." I refused to look at him. I didn't want to see anything in his face and I didn't want him seeing anything in mine.

"Well, that's something, I suppose. But you don't think I know you well enough or care enough to try to avoid hurting you?"

I didn't answer. I knew he didn't know me well enough. I deliberately hadn't let him know me well enough. I wasn't sure he cared enough, either. I had never really thought that he cared at all. Not the way I wanted him to, at least.

"Come here." Tan picked me up and sat me on his lap. I should have protested, pushed him away and made some cutting comment, but instead I just let him wrap his arms around me and hold me tight.

"Maybe I didn't make things clear enough for you," Tan said softly as he tucked my head under his chin. "When I told you that I would willingly give up casual sex for the right person?"

"It was pretty clear," I muttered. I could feel my muscles tense slightly as I remembered how painful that conversation had been. I had decided there and then that I wouldn't let him any closer. I didn't want to hurt even more when he found the right person. I had expected him to give up and leave me alone when I refused to fall into bed with him.

He hadn't. Somehow he had made himself into my friend instead. I still wasn't sure how that had happened. It made me particularly nasty to him every time he mentioned any of his conquests more than once. Because I was still too close. I would be hurt badly when he found that person he was looking for. That person who wasn't me.

"Hm. I don't think so." Tan's arms tightened around me slightly, as though bracing for something. "I told you I would give it up and be faithful to the right person, didn't I?"

"Yes."

"But I didn't tell you who that person was, did I?"

"No. How could you when you were still looking for them?" I felt very cold all of a sudden. Had he met that person now? Did he know who he wanted? Why wasn't he with them? Why was he holding me so tightly? Which of us was trembling?

"Ah. That's where it went wrong," Tan said almost to himself. "I should've realized that subtle hints wouldn't work."

"Subtle hints?"

"Yes. I was trying to be subtle and protect myself. I don't like being hurt either, you know?" Tan almost chuckled, but the sound was painful rather than happy.

"Nobody likes being hurt." I scowled at his shoulder. "But you have a pretty thick skin. I don't think many people could hurt you."

"I don't think many people could hurt you, either. You don't let anyone close enough." Tan took a slightly shaky breath that I could feel where I was pressed against his chest. "Neither do I, as a rule. But I let you close enough. I think you've let me close enough to you, too."

I nodded reluctantly, unwilling to admit that out loud, but I felt I had to make some response. Tan had just said that I could hurt him. I didn't want to do that, either.

"That's what I thought." Tan snorted softly. "If I'd been a bit smarter back then, we could have avoided a lot of hurt."

"I don't understand." I frowned. My heart was hammering because I thought that I did understand what he was saying in such a roundabout way. I just didn't believe he might be saying it.

"I think you do." Tan's chuckle was amused this time. "You are the right person I was talking about back then. It hurt when I thought you didn't want to be my right person. You made some snarky comment and changed the subject. I thought you didn't want me. And you thought I was talking about someone else. That hurt you, didn't it?"

"Yes. I didn't want to be another casual amusement while you waited for the right person to come along." I paused to gather my courage. "Did you really mean that I am the right person?"

"Yes. I was pretty sure of it back then. I'm certain of it now. You still willing to pretend to be my boyfriend?"

"No." I felt him stiffen in shock at my cold, curt answer. I'd hurt him again, but this time I hoped to fix it. "I am not willing to *pretend* to be your boyfriend." I twisted in his hold and put my hands on either side of his face as I looked at him. "I am willing to be your *real* boyfriend. And if I catch you sniffing after anyone else, I'll kick your ass so hard you won't be able to find it for weeks." I slammed my mouth into his with very little grace or finesse.

Tan didn't seem to be bothered by that. He kissed me back eagerly. His mouth gentled mine and his tongue lured mine into a wet tangle. It felt even better than I had dreamed, and I had dreamed about this a lot.

"You mean that?" Tan pulled away long enough to ask.

"I'll really kick your ass," I confirmed, hiding my smile.

"Not that, although I do understand the threat." Tan shook me gently. "I meant about being my real boyfriend?"

"Yes. I meant it. But you better demonstrate that you can do more than talk..."

Tan's mouth stopped my words in a very effective demonstration of more than talk. I wanted to enjoy the kissing, but I wanted to enjoy all that skin he had been flaunting in my kitchen just a few hours ago. And the few inches that had been almost concealed. I was very interested in enjoying those few inches.

I worked my hands under his shirt and spread them across his back. His skin was hot and faintly damp under my touch. If he was too hot, I needed to help him get more comfortable. I pushed the shirt up, and he struggled to unbutton it with one hand.

His other hand was buried in my hair, holding my mouth to his. I worked his shirt off, leaving it dangling from the wrist behind my head. I hummed approval at all the skin I could reach. I remembered a very important fact that hadn't been far from my thoughts all day. There was only one layer of fabric between even more of his skin and my hands. I slid one hand down and tried to push under the waistband of his pants. I growled when I found that they were too tight.

Tan chuckled and his free hand moved between us, The fabric eased and my hand slid down to cup the ass that I really had been admiring this morning. It felt even better than it looked. I groaned into Tan's mouth as his busy hand slid inside my own suddenly loose pants and fumbled my underwear out of the way.

My hand clenched on Tan's ass as his hand wrapped around my cock and pulled. I arched my hips into his. I could feel his cock rubbing against my belly. I wanted to touch him the way he was touching me. I had one hand in his hair somehow and one on his ass. I dithered for a moment about which one to move. His hair lost.

My whole body shuddered as I felt the slick heat of his cock in my hand. It was thick and wonderfully hard as I squeezed.

"Careful, or this will all be over in two seconds," Tan warned.

"You're only good for once?" I snarked back. "I thought you'd been training for the sexual Olympics?"

"I was trying for quality rather than quantity." He shook with suppressed laughter.

"Fuck quality. We can try that tomorrow or next week."

"I'd rather you fucked me," he said, sounding hopeful.

"Not going to last long enough for that this time." I moaned loudly as his hand worked my cock faster.

"Okay. I'll hold you to that." He panted as he laughed.

"You're holding me fine right now." I managed a breathless reply before diving back into the kiss. And trying to drive him mad with my hand before I lost all coordination.

I was fighting a losing battle, but I wasn't that concerned with winning it. I snapped my hips up into his hand and lost it. Big time. I writhed and moaned and pulsed for what seemed like forever, vaguely aware of Tan doing a lot of moaning and pulsing of his own.

An eternity later, I became aware of my surroundings again. I didn't remember when we had moved, but Tan was slumped on top of me, still panting raggedly. My own breathing wasn't exactly steady. I still had one hand wrapped around the now-soft weight of his sticky cock. He was holding me gently.

"Wow," I said softly, unable to come up with anything better at the moment.

"Uh." Tan grunted what I took to be an agreement.

I decided that I could take the prize for more coherent speech after all. I just had to decide what the prize would be. The ass clutched in one hand or the cock clutched in the other. Maybe both? Mmm.

"Good thing you washed all those towels," Tan said after a long silence. "I think we're going to need them."

"Might need to get some more." I nodded in agreement. "And some wipes would be good, too."

"Is that a hint for me to get up?"

"Maybe. Eventually. This is good right now."

"We could finish getting undressed, clean up, and then find out how messy we can get in your bed," Tan suggested after another silence.

"Sounds like a plan." It sounded good, but I wasn't sure I wanted to move in case this really was just a dream.

"Mm. Have you got supplies?"

"Supplies? Oh. Yes. I think so. I know I have lube." I frowned at the ceiling. "I think there are some condoms in the bathroom. Er..." I could feel myself blushing.

"Er?" Tan lifted his head and grinned at me.

"They might be weird ones."

"Weird ones? Can you get weird condoms?"

"They were a present from Mom and Dad," I admitted, closing my eyes.

Tan fell off the couch laughing. I didn't help him much. I'm sure the elbow in his side didn't have that much force behind it.

My door bell woke me from one of the best dreams I'd ever had. Who would be ringing my door bell at... ten o'clock in the morning? I'd slept through my alarm! Who... Parents! Argh!

I stumbled out of bed and headed for the intercom. I shivered and realized that I was naked. Why hadn't I put on my pajamas last night? I frowned at the bed, where my pajamas should have been sitting on the end of the comforter. They were on the floor. I snatched the pants and hopped around trying to pull them on as the bell pealed again.

The bed groaned and the covers moved in protest. I stopped hopping and stared at the heaped comforter. There was someone in my bed? I hadn't been dreaming? I staggered closer to the bed and stared at one golden shoulder left bare between the pillow and the comforter.

Tan Gordon was in my bed! Probably as naked as I was. The bell rang again, reminding me why I wasn't naked in bed with Tan. I pulled the pajamas up and padded to the intercom. All I could think was that Tan was in my bed. Tan really was in my bed.

"Morning, dear, did we disturb you? You weren't in the shower again, were you?" Mom's voice sounded very bright.

"Asleep." I blinked at the intercom for a moment before remembering what button to press.

"Sorry. I'll be right up and make you something. You'll feel better after a shower and some breakfast."

"Kay."

They must have run up the stairs, because they were tapping on the door before I'd taken my finger off the release button. Or it seemed that quick, but my head was full of things that would make me feel better. None of them involved showers or breakfast. Most of them involved crawling back into bed with Tan. If Tan really was in my bed.

I opened the door automatically and Mom breezed in, followed by Dad. Mom was concerned, and Dad just looked even more amused than usual. I let Mom push me into the bathroom and shut the door in her face. Maybe I could cope with this after a shower.

I had a very quick shower and didn't bother shaving. I headed back to the kitchen in my bathrobe. Maybe I could persuade my parents to say goodbye and get on their way quickly.

"There you are, Asa," Mom said as I wandered into the kitchen. As if I would be anywhere else. "I'm disappointed in you. You overslept, and there isn't a naked man on your couch this morning."

I couldn't see how those two facts were related. Yes, I had overslept, but why would the lack of a naked man on my couch be disappointing? If the naked man had been on my couch, I wouldn't have overslept. Unless I'd been on the couch with him.

"Leave the poor boy alone." Dad leapt to my defense. Well, it was more of a saunter than a leap, but it was helpful, sort of. "You know you can't use so many long words on him when he's just woken up."

"Hmph." Mom sniffed, but didn't ask any more questions.

I sat down and let her feed me tea and toast while I tried to get my brain in gear. Maybe Tan would stay asleep and I wouldn't have to make any embarrassing explanations for his presence, so obviously not on the couch.

I heard the shower running. So much for that idea. A quick glance at the speculative look on Mom's face ended the hope that she hadn't noticed the shower.

Maybe...

"Good morning Rose, Jorge. Nice to see you again." Tan strolled into the kitchen wearing just a towel. "Morning, love." He dropped a possessive kiss on my head. "I wondered where the bathrobe had gone."

"Nice to see you, too, Tan," Mom said, studying the fresh hickeys on his neck as well as blatantly admiring his chest.

"Tan." Dad nodded and worked on not really looking at anyone.

"I didn't think we would see you today, Tan," Mom said with an evil smirk. "You weren't on the couch."

"I got upgraded to the bed," Tan replied without the hint of a blush.

"So I see!" Mom smirked more.

"I have to thank you for your help in that." Tan smirked back at her.

"Yay!" They shared a high five.

I glared at the pair of them. Dad patted my shoulder sympathetically.

"You know she means well," he muttered. "Are you really unhappy with the results of her meddling?"

I huffed a sigh of resignation and scowled at my toast. I was deliriously happy with the results of her meddling, but it just didn't seem right to admit it. Who wants to thank his *mom* for the dramatic improvement in his love life?

Tan didn't seem to have the same problems. He even thanked her for her thoughtful Christmas gift. I groaned and hid my face in my hand. Dad patted me some more but couldn't suppress the occasional snicker.

"Look on the bright side, son; we live four hours away," Dad said. "You don't have to put up with her popping in every day. Long-distance meddling isn't as bad."

I just groaned again.

"I'll get those books in the mail as soon as we get home," Dad continued. "She made me look at the illustrations." He shuddered.

"I think it would make a great magazine column," Mom said loudly.

Dad and I flinched in unison and looked up.

"It might," Tan said thoughtfully. "I can do the necessary research now and have a consistent viewpoint."

They were both studying me with identical calculating expressions.

"On second thought," Dad muttered as he prudently put some distance between us, "maybe I'm the lucky one to have Tan living four hours away from us."

"What do you think, Asa?" Mom asked brightly, with an evil glint in her eye.

"About what?" I wanted to run now. I was sure I should run right now. Tan sauntered over and straddled my lap.

"Your mom suggested I do a 'Position of the Week' column for gay news sites and papers."

"Position of the Week?" I gulped and stared at him in horror. He couldn't mean...

"I have a copy of the *Gay Kama Sutra* I can send you," Mom said happily.

"Illustrated," Dad added.

"What do you think, Asa?" Tan smiled at me. That sultry smile I hadn't seen before last night. The one that had my cock sitting up and begging. Even first thing in the morning with my parents in the room.

"I'll think about it," I growled. I took a firm hold on the knot of Tan's towel. He wasn't getting off my lap right now.

"Can't ask for more than that!" Tan winked at me.

"Just wait until you see the illustrations!" Mom said.

I was glad I couldn't see the expression on Mom's face if it was anything like the tone of her voice.

"I really didn't need to know that much detail," Dad insisted.

"Asa is a scholar," Tan spoke over his shoulder. "He needs to study things in detail!"

That was true enough. I had a whole bunch of things right here on my lap that I wanted to study in very close detail. Just as soon as my parents left the building.

Persistence Pays

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