

# Wooing Master Jones Amber Kell

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# Chapter One

Stephen was sitting in his brother's office doodling ideas for his Master's Fine Art project, when movement on one of the cameras pulled his attention away from his sketchpad. Normally it would take an act of god to distract him, tsunami, tornado, raining men, but today his entire body twitched anxiously, like he was waiting for something.

Or someone.

His focus went to a corner of the club where a large group had formed.

He wondered briefly if there was going to be a scene, but the stages were on the other side of the club. Curious, he watched the security monitor, waiting for the crowd to part.

Then he saw him.

The most gorgeous man in the universe.

Well, everybody might not think so, but to Stephen the dark-haired man's high cheekbones, square jaw and kissable looking lips made it all on his top-ten list. It didn't hurt that the man was wearing black leather pants, no shirt and leather armbands in all the right ways. If this was a leather daddy, Stephen wanted to know where he needed to sign up for a spanking.

Flipping to a fresh page, Stephen sketched a fast outline of the man. His nimble fingers filled in details as he flashed his gaze from monitor to sketch book and back again. As he continued to stare at the screen, Stephen worried he was going to lose the subject of his fascination in the crowd. He let out a sigh of relief when the man settled in a chair close enough to one of the cameras that he was able to continue his sketch.

The office door opened letting, Ralph, one of club bouncers, into the room. He was big, tattooed and looked like he could eat nails for breakfast.

"Hey Stevie boy, how are you tonight?"

They bumped fists. Ralph's touch was gentle against Stephen's hand, always careful of his strength. Of course part of it could be that Stephen's brother and the club's owner, Greg, would break the bouncer into little pieces if the other man damaged Stephen's hands.

Greg was his biggest fan.

"Wow, nice sketch of Master Jones," Ralph said, crowding closer to look at the picture.

"Is that who he is?" Stephen asked, trying to make his tone as detached as possible. "He has an interesting face."

And a hot, hot, body.

"Hey, what about my face. What's wrong with it?"

Stephen looked at the bouncer with an artistic eye. "Nothing. That's why you're not an interesting subject. While your face is perfectly symmetrical, you're not particularly interesting artistically."

Ralph laughed. "I don't know if I should be offended or not."

Stephen's cheeks burned. Sometimes he really needed to think before he said stupid stuff. "Sorry."

"No problem, dude. I'm just playing with you. Your bro said to tell you he's going to be another hour or so, but to have you sit tight and he'll send you something up to eat."

Stephen rolled his eyes. "I could just wait for him in the club. I am twenty-two you know."

Ralph shook his head, his dark eyes going serious. "No way, dude. They'd eat up a tender thing like you, not to mention your brother would kill me."

Looking back at his drawing, Stephen couldn't help saying as he looked at the monitor, "I wouldn't mind if *he* ate me up."

"I'd stay away from Master Jones if I were you. The man's bad news."

"He's dangerous?" Stephen frowned; irrationally disappointed in a man he hadn't even met.

"No. He's the best Dom in town and he knows it. He breaks all the little subs' hearts because they all fall in love with Master Jones. He never takes the same sub more than once or twice and he's never offered a contract to any of them. I've heard he's never even gotten close to collaring anyone."

Stephen shrugged off the warning. "Maybe he hasn't met the right man."

Ralph laughed, not unkindly. "Honey, you're sweet, but don't build any romantic dreams around Master Jones. Men who do that always get hurt."

Stephen decided to ignore the negative bouncer. There was something about the Dom that called to him and Stephen always followed his heart. Absently, he worked in the shading and finished off the sketch. It was rather well done if he did say so himself. He put his initials at the bottom with a flourish.

Looking around he spotted a manila envelope he knew would fit his sketch without bending.

"Would you do me a favor, Ralph?" Stephen looked up, giving the bouncer the full benefit of his baby blue eyes. A look that never failed to bend anyone to his will.

The bouncer looked nervous. "If I can and it doesn't get me fired."

"Would you give this to Master Jones? Don't give him my name. Just tell him it's from an admirer."

Ralph laughed. "Aren't you the little man of mystery? Give it here. I'll get a real kick out of this." He held out his hand and Stephen passed the envelope over.

Minutes later Stephen watched in anticipation as Ralph approached the table.

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"Master Jones."

Victor looked up to see one of the club's bouncers standing above him.

"Is there a problem?"

The bouncer smiled. The man was a handsome devil but definitely not his type. He liked his men more slender and delicate.

"I was instructed to give this to you; it's from an admirer."

Victor accepted the envelope to the cooing and kisskiss noises of his companions. The bouncer immediately departed, making Victor wonder what he was hiding.

With a look around the table at his friends, Victor shrugged. Opening the envelope he pulled out a sheet of paper and stared.

Inside was a sketch of Victor so lifelike, despite being done in pencil, that he almost thought he'd be able to feel the bristles of the hair on his chin.

"Wow, I want one," Carlyle said, leaning over to see the picture.

"Get your own admirer." Victor scanned the room, trying to see if anyone was watching him or holding a pad of paper. The page was obviously torn from a sketchbook.

Everyone was looking at him, as usual, but there were no strangers and he was pretty certain he didn't know anyone with this kind of skill.

"Let me see." As the owner of several galleries, Lindi considered himself an art connoisseur. He let out a low whistle when he saw the sketch. "I wonder what this person could do with a little more time. This is obviously just a quick sketch. I'd love for whoever this is to sketch William."

William was Lindi's long-time sub.

Lindi tilted the picture down so his sub, sitting on the floor, could see it.

"What do you think, pet?"

"It's very lifelike," the sub agreed, giving his master a loving look.

"Don't get it all wrinkled," Victor snapped. He snatched it back. Oddly, he didn't want his friends to touch his gift. It felt too personal to share. Smoothing out invisible marks, Victor slid the picture back into its envelope. "Anyone see where that bouncer went?"

His friends shook their head.

"Well, he's a bouncer," Carlyle said logically. "He's probably by the front door or wherever there's a scene."

Victor snapped his fingers at a passing waiter. The server wore tight, white leather shorts, some interesting swirls of body paint and nothing else.

"I'm looking for a bouncer. The one with long brown hair, tattoos and an eyebrow piercing."

"That's Ralph. He's gone for the night."

"Shit."

Victor let the server go after placing an order for drinks.

"I guess you'll have to ask him next time you come," Carlyle said, not unsympathetically.

"Yeah. I guess so." The evening had lost some of its glamour though. Now all he wanted to do was find out more about his insanely talented admirer.

The next Saturday night Stephen was back at his brother's club. It was one of the few days of the week he didn't have classes, and Greg liked to use that time to catch up with what was going on in Stephen's life.

Since Greg was a good, if somewhat controlling brother, and kept Stephen in food and lodging while his scholarship paid for classes, supplies and books, it was a system that worked for them both.

After catching up on the events in their lives, Greg left Stephen alone in his office with all its lovely security cameras. Stephen generally spent most Saturdays finishing up his homework and having dinner with his brother. He never got into the party scene like his classmates. He'd worked too hard to get his scholarship to ruin it in an alcoholic haze. If he had a date it would be a different matter, but he was currently single and the only man who held his interest was right here at his brother's club. Stephen absently glanced at the monitors from time to time as he worked on his English homework. When he finally got a glimpse of Victor again, Stephen was ready.

He'd spent all week with his buddy, Eddie, who specialized in leatherworks, to help him make a proper whip. His friend enjoyed the challenge and Stephen paid him back by doing a portrait of Eddie's girlfriend that earned him mega boyfriend points, if the smile on his face was any indication.

Pulling the velvet bag out of his backpack, Stephen called down to the bar phone and asked for Ralph.

The bouncer sounded breathless when he answered the phone; he must have rushed to take the call. "Yeah, dude."

"Could you come to Greg's office?"

"Sure."

A moment later the bouncer was at the door.

"Whattcha up to?"

"I made Victor another present. Could you give it to him please?"

Ralph accepted the bag. "Can I look at it?"

Stephen blushed. "Sure. You can let me know if you think it's good enough."

The bouncer opened the bag and slid out the whip. "Fuck, that's a thing of beauty. Victor is going to cream his pants. I'll go give it to him now." Ralph gave him a curious look. "How did you know Victor was master of the whip?"

Stephen blushed. "I heard some people talking when I left last week."

"Don't let Greg see you talking to Victor," the bouncer warned.

Stephen let out a sigh. "I doubt that will be a problem." What were the odds a gorgeous man like that would want a skinny artist? "Promise me you won't tell him who I am," he pleaded.

"I promise," Ralph said solemnly. "Now keep an eye on the monitor. You don't want to miss this."

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Victor sat at his usual table drinking a glass of scotch. Idly he wondered if he would see his admirer today.

"Master Jones," a familiar voice greeted him.

"Don't look now, Vic, but I think you have another present from your admirer," Lindi teased.

"He asked me to bring this for you," the bouncer said handing over a dark velvet bag that was at least two feet long and a foot wide.

"At least I know it's a man," Victor said. One of his greatest fears was relieved. He'd been concerned that he had some woman on his trail.

It wouldn't be the first time.

Ralph gave him a short bow. "I've gotta get back to work."

"Wait." Victor grabbed the bouncer's wrist. "You're not my admirer are you?"

Ralph laughed. "No, sir, I'm not. Besides, I've seen the kind of guys you like and I'm not your type."

"True," Victor laughed as he stroked the velvet bag. He cleared his throat as the bouncer stood there patiently. It was ridiculous to feel nervous, but he didn't want to blow his opportunity to ask questions. "Since you know my type so well, is my admirer my type?"

"Oh yeah, but he's out of your league." The bouncer left before Victor could ask the other man what he meant.

A lean man with big brown eyes approached. Without a word he sunk to his knees beside him. "Master I would be honored to be your sub for the evening."

"No thanks, maybe next week." He shooed the kid off with a wave of his hand as he turned back to the bag. He didn't have time for ordinary men when he was trying to solve a mystery. He loved puzzles. Whoever was his secret admirer unknowingly took away the growing dullness of his visits.

"Are you going to open it?" Lindi asked.

Victor looked up to see Lindi and Carlyle looking at him like schoolgirls waiting for their friend to open a love note. "You do know it's ridiculous for three hardened Doms to act like schoolgirls with a crush," Victor said to his friends.

"Uh-huh." "Open it."

With a sense of anticipation Victor couldn't remember feeling in recent years, he slowly pulled open the drawstring top and reached inside. Feeling leather increased his anticipation. Pulling out the gift, the Dom who was known for his emotionless mien let out a gasp.

In his long years as a whip handler he'd never seen a more beautiful whip. The bullwhip had a foot-long handle intricately braided with three different colored leathers instead of the traditional solid black or brown. The leather strips formed an incredibly complicated braid out of red, white and black dyed leather.

"Whoever he is I want to marry him," Lindi said. "Ouch. You pinched me." He glared down at his sub, who glared right back.

"Behave children," Victor said running his hand across the whip, feeling the freshly oiled surface.

Carlyle reached out to touch the whip. Victor slapped his hand. "Mine."

"I just wanted to see it," Carlyle pouted.

"Didn't your mother ever tell you to look with your eyes and not with your hands?" Victor chided.

"Didn't yours ever tell you to share with your friends?"

Both men started laughing.

After a few minutes Carlyle wiped the tears from his eyes. "I can't remember the last time I laughed so hard. Now let me see the whip."

Carlyle used his commanding tone and Victor knew his friend was serious. "Remember where you got it."

Examining the whip Carlyle ran his fingers over the unusual design. "Remember? I want to order one."

"And I still want my picture," Lindi sulked.

Victor took his whip back. "Well neither of you are going to get your wish if we can't figure out who he is.

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The burns on Stephen's fingers still hurt from the molten glass, but he was proud of his accomplishment. It had taken three days of instruction, several singed fingers and a few days in the kiln, but he was finally able to give his favorite Dom a blown glass vase. Over the past eight weeks he'd sent Victor a series of gifts, from a pair of handforged iron shackles to an intricately embroidered silk blindfold. This one was his favorite yet.

Looking at the piece, Stephen hoped Victor would accept it in the spirit in which it was given and not think it too girly. He'd gotten white lilies of the valley and combined them with thirteen lavender roses.

He was glad Greg was too busy to look for him yet. Stephen almost had a heart attack when the door opened.

Luckily it was Ralph.

"Wow. You don't do anything by half measures, do you? Did you make the vase?"

"Yeah. You don't think it's too feminine, do you? I mean lavender roses are supposed to mean love at first sight and enchantment and the lilies of the valley mean humility and devotion. According to the internet thirteen roses mean secret admirer, but I'm worried he might think the lavender roses are too girly."

"Breathe man," Ralph said, giving Stephen a little shake. "I'll tell him all that crap you just said and if the man isn't smart enough to appreciate all the work you did, then fuck him."

"I'd rather he fuck me," Stephen said with a sigh.

"How's he going to do that if you won't even meet with him?" Ralph pointed out.

Stephen shrugged. He could feel his face heating. "I know. I know but I'm not ready."

"All right." Ralph patted him on the back. "Write that flower stuff down so I don't forget."

Stephen grabbed a pad of paper from his brother's desk and wrote it all down carefully so Ralph could read it. Penmanship wasn't one of his talents.

"Thanks, Ralph. I made you something too. To thank you for all you've done for me."

"Hey man, you didn't have to do that," Ralph said, but the smile in his eyes said he was pleased that Stephen had.

He pulled out his drawing pad and handed over a sketch of a thin blond with a wide smile. It was Master Jones' friend Carlyle. "I saw you watching him."

It was Ralph's turn to blush. "I know. I should follow my own advice, but he's out of my league."

"Hey." Stephen nudged his friend. "Don't say that. Besides you're not going to know unless you try."

"Let's get you fixed up and then we'll work on me," Ralph said, smiling. "Thanks for the picture though." He carefully folded it up and put it in his pocket before hefting the vase. "Fuck, this is heavy."

"You're a big, buff bouncer. You can handle it," Stephen teased.

"That I am," Ralph said, puffing up his chest, "that I am."

Stephen watched the monitor avidly hoping his present was well received or at least Victor appreciated the glass of scotch he was sending over. Maybe in the dim club lights the Dom wouldn't realize the roses were purple, but the traditional red hadn't felt good enough.

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"Do you think he'll send you something this week?" Carlyle asked, watching Victor bite his nails.

"I don't know, but I'm getting tired of this crap. He'd better show himself soon or I'm going to hunt him down myself." Victor didn't want to admit the extra effort he put into looking nice this evening, hoping he'd finally get to meet his secret admirer. How long would this last? Was he ever going to meet this guy? He hadn't even touched another man since he started receiving the gifts. It felt wrong to have sex with someone else while his secret admirer was watching. He didn't want to break the man's heart, not at least until they'd met in person.

A waiter stopped by his table with a glass of scotch, placed it on a perfect white napkin and promptly left. It wasn't until the waiter was gone that Victor noticed there was a little sketch of a stick man holding a whip in one corner. It was whimsically done and made him laugh as he took his drink.

Carlyle looked at the napkin. "Well it's not as elaborate as his other gifts but it's kinda sweet."

"Master Jones."

Ralph stood before him holding the most exquisite glass vase he'd ever seen. The bouncer placed it before him and pulled out a piece of paper.

"He's worried you'll think the flowers are too girly so I'm instructed to tell you the meaning of them."

Victor listened to the bouncer's speech as he touched the smooth glass. The vase had a clear glass base but mixed into it were swirls of other colors, blues, greens and a wide swathe of sparkly gold that caught even the muted lights of the club. Victor didn't own any pieces of art glass and had never thought of owning any before, but he knew he was going to place this piece right in his entryway.

"Did he make it himself?" This was important to Victor. Anyone could go out and buy something, but his secret admirer went to great lengths to personally make all his gifts. His devotion to making Victor gifts made him feel special even as he was frustrated by his admirer's secrecy.

Ralph laughed. "Yeah, and he has the burn marks to prove it."

"He was injured?" Concern shot through Victor. "Bring him out here and let me see him."

"He's fine," Ralph said. "And he's not ready to meet you yet."

"Why not? What's wrong with him?"

"There's nothing wrong with him, Master Jones. Don't you get it?"

"Get what?"

"He's wooing you."

Victor barely resisted the urge to punch the bouncer in the face. "I'm tired of being wooed. I'm ready for a face to face meeting."

"Is there a problem here?" Greg, the club's owner, approached the table. The man was massive, with arms bigger than most people's thighs. His eyes lit up when he saw the vase. "Wow that's gorgeous." He gave a laugh. "It is way better than the stuff my baby brother's been bringing home. I don't know why he just doesn't stay within his medium, but lately the kid's been all over the place. Hell, last week he was embroidering crap, saying he wants to 'expand his knowledge'." Greg said with air quotes.

Ralph froze beside him.

Victor smiled.

"And how old is your baby brother?" Carlyle asked.

Apparently Victor wasn't the only one who figured it out.

"He just turned twenty-two. He's amazing. Got into a snooty art school on full scholarship, the only one in the family with any talent."

"What's his specialty?" Victor tried to sound calm while his heart thundered in his chest.

"Huh?" Greg asked. His eyes were glued on a hot twink's ass as the man passed in a pair of tight leather pants.

"Your brother, you said glass and embroidery weren't his specialty," Victor reminded him. "What is?"

"Oh, drawing. He's an amazing artist. He prefers pen and ink, but he can use anything, even paints. He's going to be famous some day. I just know it." Greg almost glowed with brotherly pride as a wide smile crossed his face.

"Does your brother ever come to the club?" Lindi asked in a casual tone that didn't fool Victor at all.

"Lord no! I'd never let him in here." Greg rubbed his chin. "Well on Saturdays he comes and does his homework, but I don't let him in the club proper. He only gets as far as my office. Our schedules don't really connect well during the rest of the week since he has early morning classes and I'm gone by the time he returns." Greg shook his head as if remembering what he was talking about before. "But that's enough about me. Why do you have flowers?"

"They were a gift from an admirer," Victor said with a smile. An admirer he was going to meet very soon.

"Well, they're beautiful." Greg turned to Ralph. "Back to work, boy."

"Yessir." Ralph left like the hounds of hell were on his heels.

Greg gave a polite nod and, after bidding them good evening, left to check on his other customers.

Victor lifted his glass in a toast to the security cameras.

"Now that we know who your boy is, how do we catch him?" Carlyle asked.

"Easily." Victor gave Lindi a smile. "Didn't you want to arrange a showing of local student artists?"

Lindi choked on his drink. "Warn a fellow next time." He caved beneath Victor's stare. "Fine, but only one gallery

and there has to be a competition or something so I don't get crap."

"Fair enough. We know you should get some amazing local artists because someone talented taught my boy."

"Who said he's your boy?" Carlyle asked. "You might not even want him after all of this."

Victor couldn't explain how he knew he was meant to be with this amazing man who sent him such thoughtful gifts. "Trust me, anyone who goes to so much effort to make a Dom, who isn't even his, happy will make an amazing sub."

# Chapter Two

In the end it didn't take an art show to meet his admirer.

Victor was at the club drinking and chatting with his friends, when he realized his usual present had yet to appear.

"Maybe the boy didn't come today?" Lindi said when he noticed Victor looking around.

"Why wouldn't he?"

"Could be sick," Lindi offered. "Or too busy to bother with you. Or he could just decide he's bored with making extravagant gifts for a total stranger."

"Shut up," Victor said. Concern churned his stomach. He couldn't shake the idea that something was wrong. Catching Ralph's eye he crooked a finger at him. The bouncer walked over, a grim expression on his usually cheerful face.

"He's not coming today," Ralph said by way of greeting.

"What happened?"

"He's at home with pneumonia."

"Shouldn't he be at a hospital?" Victor felt a shiver as if ice encased his body. He'd never even met the man and yet he was desperate to make sure his admirer was okay.

Ralph shrugged. "Greg said he's on medication to help clear out his lungs. Mostly he just needs rest and to keep his fluids up."

"Where does he live?"

"I can't give you that information, it could cost me my job," Ralph said. The bouncer shifted from side to side looking nervously around as if hoping someone would quickly demand his services so he could escape the Dom's glare.

Victor stood up, towering over the bouncer. "This is *my boy* hurting and I'm going to go and take care of him. Where is he?"

Ralph caved and gave him the information he needed. "Please don't tell Greg I gave you his address."

"He lives with his brother?"

Ralph nodded. "To save on expenses."

"Just one more thing," Victor said.

"What?"

"What's my boy's name?"

Ralph laughed. "Stephen, his name's Stephen Carter."

"Thanks." Victor patted Ralph on the back, amused when the bouncer took the opportunity to rush off in the opposite direction.

"Good luck," Carlyle told him. Victor saw his friend was eyeing Ralph's departure with interest. It wasn't the first time he saw the other man giving the bouncer a look. Maybe more than one couple would be matched through this experience.

"Give him a kiss for me," Lindi said.

"I don't think so," Victor said, pulling on his jacket. "But I'll give him a kiss for me."

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Victor felt oddly nervous walking up the stairs of the neat townhouse. The building was white like all the others on the block, except this one's door was painted like Monet's water lilies.

It wasn't difficult to figure out he had the right place.

Swallowing his nerves, Victor rang the doorbell, holding his package carefully so it didn't spill.

A few minutes passed and he was starting to think maybe he had found the wrong place after all, when a palefaced young man with baby blue eyes opened the door. He stood there for a moment staring at Victor while he shivered beneath a thick blanket he had wrapped around his body like a cape.

Despite the ratty hair, sweaty brow and clammy white complexion, Stephen was adorable.

"Poor baby, let's get you back inside." Without giving the kid a chance to object, Victor stepped forward, wrapped an arm around the sad looking creature, and gently guided him back inside the townhouse, shutting the door behind them.

"M-Master Jones, why are you here?"

"Not going to pretend you didn't recognize me?" Victor hid his concern beneath an amused tone. He didn't want Stephen to know how worried he was. It was a Dom's job to stay calm.

"Seems pointless since you're at my house."

"Let's get you back to bed and then you can eat some of my soup."

"You made soup?" Stephen asked as he headed down a hallway.

Victor laughed. "No. I'm not much of a cook, but I bought it from the best soup maker in town."

"That's good. I like to cook but I sometimes forget I'm cooking. Greg always yells at me to pay attention." Stephen

gave a rough laugh that turned into a round of hacking coughs that hurt Victor's lungs to hear.

"Shhh. Take it easy, baby." Victor rubbed Stephen's back trying to soothe the younger man. "Let's get you back to bed. Any other time you can take that as a come on but right now I think you need rest and hot soup more than you need someone flirting with you."

The bedroom was a mess, clothes on the floor, a trail of tissues covering the bed and the blankets were rumbled, a testimony to the kid's restless state.

"Hop on in there." He pulled back Stephen's bedding. Once the younger man slid onto the bed Victor tucked them back across his body.

After making sure the younger man was sitting comfortably upright, Victor removed the cup of soup out of the paper bag along with the little plastic spoon. The smell was amazing as he pulled the lid off the container and scooped a spoonful up, holding it to Stephen's lips.

Stephen opened his mouth to take the spoon. After a cautious sip he gave Victor a small smile. "That's really good," he said. "You didn't have to bring me anything."

"It was the least I could do after all your wonderful gifts."

A blush brought some color to those pale cheeks. "I'm glad you liked them."

Victor tilted Stephen's face up, forcing him to meet his eyes. "I loved them. You are an amazing artist."

Stephen's smile lit up the pale, thin face and brought him from adorable to breathtaking. "Thank you," he said.

"You're welcome." After feeding Stephen several spoonfuls Victor noticed the artist's eyes were drooping between bites.

"Now give me a kiss, and then lie down and get some more sleep." Victor patted the pillow.

"You shouldn't be here. I don't want you to get my cold," Stephen protested.

Victor didn't hide his smile. The kid was so fucking sweet. "I doubt you're still contagious, honey. Now lay down. Don't make me repeat myself."

"Sorry, Sir," Stephen said. Victor could tell the artist said those words automatically, his naturally subservient nature coming through his exhaustion.

"That's all right. You just listen to me and I'll make it all better."

Stephen gave a watery chuckle. "I don't know why you're here but thanks for coming."

He re-tucked the blankets around the sub and placed a kiss on his forehead. "You have to get better soon so I can properly show my appreciation of your presents."

With a sigh, Stephen snuggled further into his blankets. "I'd like that," he said in a quiet, sleepy voice.

"I'd like that too," Victor agreed. He sat on the bed for a long time watching the kid sleep. The sound of a door opening brought him to his feet. Walking out of the bedroom, Victor came face to face with Greg.

"Victor, why are you here?" The man's gaze raked over Victor's body, interest lighting his eyes.

"I brought Stephen some soup. I heard he was sick and wanted to check on him."

Greg crossed his arms over his chest. "And how would you know my little brother?"

This was where it got tricky. "We just met actually. He's been sending me presents for the past few weeks and I wanted to return the favor when I heard he was ill."

"What kind of presents?" Greg asked. Then his eyes widened. "Oh, no please tell me that he isn't your secret admirer."

"Yep."

Greg's reaction was everything Victor would expect from a protective older brother.

"He's too young for you," Greg growled. "I don't want you ruining him. He's a sweet kid who's more talented than most people ever dream of being. Leave him alone and go back to your one-night twinks."

Victor didn't blame Greg for his concern, but it still stung. "I can't. It would hurt him too much if I ignored him now. He's gone to a lot of trouble to get my attention. I can't tell him that it was all for nothing. I won't hurt him like that."

"Get out of my house!" Greg shouted.

"What's going on?" Stephen appeared in the doorway wrapped in his blankets, his skin glowing paler than the white walls.

"Shit," Victor rushed over to wrap an arm around Stephen to give him some support. "You need to go back to bed, honey. This is between your brother and me."

"If it has to do with whether we're going to date or not than it has more to do with me than Greg." Stephen glared at his brother. "I know you're trying to protect me and be my big brother and all that crap, but I'm tired of being alone."

"Then get someone your own age." The expression on Greg's face told Victor the other man wasn't swayed by his brother's words.

"I don't like men my own age," Stephen said in a soft voice. Victor had a feeling the kid always talked in that smooth, quiet voice. It was the voice of a dreamer who was already thinking of his next idea and not necessarily the conversation.

"Focus, baby."

Stephen's exhausted gaze turned to Victor. "I'm tired. Would you take me home?"

"You are home," Greg said in a stern voice.

"No. I'm in your home." Stephen's voice lost some of its musical quality as it filled with anger. "I thought we shared it until you told the man of my dreams to get out."

Victor was torn between being flattered that Stephen was sticking up for him and appalled that he'd started a fight between two brothers, who were from all appearances, extremely close.

"Stephen, you aren't feeling well enough to make any decisions right now. You need to get some rest," Greg said, glaring at Victor.

"He's right," Victor agreed. "I don't want you getting sicker. It's cold outside and you could get worse. Let's tuck you back into bed. We can get to know each other better once you've healed."

"Not if I have anything to say about it," Greg growled.

"Well, you don't," Stephen said.

"Come on. You need your rest." Victor wrapped an arm around Stephen's slight form and led him back to the bedroom. The kid felt too thin but since he didn't know the younger man's body from before, he didn't know if Stephen was naturally thin or if it was caused by his illness. He tucked the younger man into bed, making sure the covers surrounded him.

"Do you want to be my submissive?" he asked the poor, sick boy.

Stephen nodded with a sniff. "I'd like to try."

"Have you ever been a submissive before?"

Stephen shook his head.

"Than how do you know you want to be one?"

"Because I want to be yours."

Victor didn't have a response to that. He'd never had someone just want to be with him before. He'd had men infatuated with his reputation or wanting a strong Dom

controlling them, but he'd never had anyone want to be a sub just for him.

Warmth filled him as he looked at the younger man.

"Why don't we wait and see after you get better. I'll agree to a trial. We can try a few things and see if we're compatible. What do you say?"

Stephen's sad eyes looked Victor over. "You won't go and get another submissive while I'm sick will you?"

"You want to be exclusive?"

Stephen nodded as if he was afraid to mention his wish in case Victor laughed at him. Victor had never had an exclusive relationship in his life but looking at Stephen's hopeful expression he didn't have it in him to deny the kid.

"All right. If either of us wants out we can discuss it then." The thought of someone else touching the sweet boy sent anger rushing through Victor. This man was his. He could feel it. He just had to slay the fire-breathing dragon hovering outside Stephen's door.

"I'm going to go so Greg doesn't lose his temper. We will start your sub training at my house. I won't be secondguessed by your brother. Do you understand? You are mine to order around, not your brother's."

"I understand," Stephen whispered, but his eyelids were already lowering and Victor knew the cold had gotten the better of him for the moment.

He placed a kiss on Stephen's forehead and walked out the door, forcing his body to move away from the adorable man on the bed behind him.

Greg stood in the hall, his arms crossed over his chest.

"I don't approve of this relationship," he said.

"Then you can be the first in line to say 'I told you so' if it doesn't work out, but I'm not going to tolerate any interference. Stephen is mine and I'll take care of him. If he

weren't so ill right now I'd take him home and start his training. He won't be under your care for much longer."

Greg's face flushed an angry red. "He's my baby brother. He'll always be under my care. Whether he decides to go with you or not."

Victor nodded. "True. In some ways you'll always worry about him, but as soon as he's able I'm moving him to my condo so I can do proper training."

"We'll see. He might come to his senses when he's feeling better."

Victor laughed. A kid that determined wasn't going to change his mind. He didn't share that information with Stephen's overprotective brother. He just nodded and headed out the door. "I brought him some soup. See that he eats more when he wakes."

He let the door slam behind him when he left.

Stephen would be his!

#### \*\*\*\*

It was three weeks before Stephen felt better. He'd promised Greg he wouldn't go to Victor until he could stand on his own two feet without wobbling. His brother was concerned that if he weren't strong physically he would be more likely to give in to Victor's demands.

What Greg didn't know was that Stephen was willing to give Victor anything he wanted, ill or not. His brother didn't understand his obsession with Victor, and he wasn't going to explain it to him. Some things you didn't discuss, especially with your older, psychotically protective brother.

Victor had left his number with the soup. Stephen hands trembled as he clutched the piece of paper.

He wanted the man so much it was an ache in his chest, but what if he screwed up? Shit, what did he have to lose? Despite his innocence, Stephen was an old hand at taking

chances. After all it took a lot of determination to make art a lifelong career.

Despite his determination, Stephen's fingers were shaking as he dialed the phone.

"Feeling better, babe?" The shock of Victor's deep voice almost made Stephen drop the phone. He'd expected to get voice mail, not the man of his dreams.

"Um, h-hi," he said. He could've bashed his head against the wall at the lameness of his response. He was an idiot, an infatuated idiot, but an idiot nonetheless.

"Hello," Stephen could hear the amusement in the Dom's voice, the sound of paper rustling, and voices in the background.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I never thought I might be disturbing your work. Of course you're going to be busy at one in the afternoon."

"Shhh. Stop." Victor's voice held the edge of a Dom expecting instant obedience.

Stephen stopped babbling. He didn't even think. It was an automatic response to a stronger male.

"I want you to pack a small bag of whatever you need to survive the weekend and meet me at my condo," Victor rattled off an address while Stephen quickly scribbled it down. "I'll call the doorman and tell him to let you in. When you get there I want you to make yourself comfortable. I'll be home at five. Think about how I'll want to be greeted. I'll see you then."

The connection ended.

"Shit!" That was both better and worse than Stephen expected. He thought maybe they'd get to know each other better over the phone or maybe email. He didn't expect to be ordered to Victor's place for an overnight stay. If his nerves were shaky before, they were twice as jumbled now.

Stephen grabbed a satchel from his closet, throwing in a couple of pairs of jeans and a few T-shirts he'd hand painted. He didn't bother with underwear since he never wore the stuff.

His only down side was that he didn't know how Victor would want him. He worried about that as he called a cab to come and get him.

#### \*\*\*\*

Victor couldn't get through the rest of his day fast enough. The thought of finally getting his hands on his new sub made it difficult to keep his mind focused on business where it belonged.

His staff was surprised when he didn't have a fit when one of their clients canceled a meeting at the last minute.

"These things happen," he soothed the client. Normally he wouldn't give the man another chance at his services. Victor's company provided business troubleshooting for corporations having difficulty. With an unparalleled reputation he could cherry pick his clients and there was a long waiting list to access his services. Most of the time he didn't give customers a second chance, but the man on the phone had a family emergency and he could imagine Stephen's expression if he told him that he'd cut off a man who had to take time off to care for his sick daughter.

After he hung up, his assistant, Janie, rushed into the room with wide eyes. "Did you seriously just tell Mr Cooper he could reschedule?"

"Yes."

"But why? You never reschedule."

He didn't want to say, but Janie had been with him since the beginning of the company when they both brownbagged it to save money.

"Because I can't go home and tell Stephen I let a man's company go to ruin because he had to take care of his sick daughter."

"Who's Stephen and how can we keep him around so you're more human?" Janie asked, innocently blinking her eyes.

Victor gave a mock growl. "Stephen is…" He didn't really know how to explain Stephen. He wasn't even officially his boy yet. "Don't worry about Stephen. Just make sure I don't have any interruptions this weekend."

With a final glare at his assistant, Victor left the office.

\*\*\*\*

Luckily, traffic was oddly light and before he knew it Victor was pulling into the garage of his condo. His hands shook slightly as he turned on his car alarm and headed for the elevator.

"This is ridiculous," he told his reflection in the mirrored elevator doors. He gripped his briefcase tighter as anticipation grew. How would Stephen prepare himself? Would he be naked and kneeling by the door? He didn't dare to hope he'd walk in to find Stephen spread eagle on his bed so he could examine every luscious bit of flesh. The brief look he got of the adorable artist wasn't enough.

When he reached his condo door, Victor took a deep breath before unlocking and opening the door. Smells of garlic and rich tomato sauce filled the air.

"Stephen?"

His call brought no response.

After setting down his briefcase and pulling off his jacket, Victor went further into his condo. Turning the corner, he was greeted with the strange sight of a slim man sitting on his kitchen counter, legs crossed and head bent over a pad of paper propped on his lap.

Completely dressed.

The scent of smoke drew Victor's attention to the oven.

"Shit."

Victor ran over, grabbed a kitchen towel and ripped open the oven door. A smoking loaf of garlic bread sat inside. With a curse he pulled it out and set it on top of the stove.

The fire alarm went off. Its piercing screech filled the condo with deafening noise.

"Oh, damn." Stephen jumped to his feet on the counter, leaning up he pressed the button to shut off the alarm. Victor saw the younger man's eyes widen as he took in the scene. "I-I'm so sorry Victor. I didn't hear the timer for the bread go off."

Stephen looked paler than when he was sick.

"Hey, it's okay."

The artist walked over and peered into the pans on the stove. Luckily he'd placed them all on the right side so Victor didn't knock them over when he put down the cookie sheet. Stephen looked at the pasta with disgust. "I guess that's ruined now too." He bit his lower lip as he blinked back tears.

Victor turned off all the burners and pulled Stephen into his arms, hugging the younger man close. He was touched that Stephen's first instinct was to take care of him.

Any other sub he sent to his house to wait would've been stripped naked and bent over his couch when he arrived. The fact that Stephen's first instinct was to feed and take care of him instead of just getting off warmed Victor more than a hot stud in his bedroom ever would. He could get anyone to fuck, he'd never had anyone just want to take care of him. As a sub, Stephen's instincts were excellent.

The sound of a sniffle brought him out of his musings. "You did warn me you get distracted when you cook," Victor reminded him, kissing the caramel colored head.

"Maybe you should keep your creativity to art and I'll get you a stack of delivery menus." He rubbed his cheek against Stephen's hair. It felt nice to stand and cuddle the man.

Nothing had ever felt that good before.

He tilted Stephen's chin up and placed a kiss on his soft mouth.

Fire burned through him like a tsunami of flame.

Moaning against Stephen's lips, Victor wrapped his arms around the smaller man, pulling him closer. The slim form melted against him, accepting Victor's dominating kiss and making him harder than rock.

He wanted to strip off the man's jeans and take him against the counter. Breathing heavily, Victor pulled back, pleased when he saw Stephen was also having problems catching his breath. Stephen's growling stomach set the men laughing.

"Let me order us some pizza."

Stephen gave him a wide smile. "I'm sorry about the food, I have another surprise after pizza, though. Hopefully this one won't catch fire."

Victor laughed. He liked the humor in Stephen's eyes. The more he looked at the artist the more attractive he became. The blond had rather ordinary features, but that was before you looked into his eyes. Eyes, a startling blue, shone with intelligence and an otherworldly knowledge, like he could see things outside of everyone else's ability. That reminded Victor.

"What were you working on?"

"Oh." Stephen's blush was charming. "I thought your walls looked a little bare. I was just sketching out an idea for a painting."

"Can I see?" Victor didn't know if Stephen was one of those people who didn't want his work looked at until he was done, but he was curious what he'd drawn. Stephen shrugged. "Sure."

Victor noticed Stephen didn't meet his eyes when he handed over his sketchpad.

It took him a moment to understand the abstract sketch. Two men were wrapped in an embrace, their features indistinct, their bodies blending. It wasn't erotic so much as romantic and it told Victor everything he needed to know about his new lover.

Stephen was a romantic.

For the first time in his life Victor felt pressure not to let another person down. He was a loner who went through lovers with frightening speed. No attachment to his sexual partners meant no one could hurt him.

Looking at the picture Victor knew Stephen, with his shy smiles and dreamy eyes could destroy him entirely, because he didn't just want to have sex with Stephen. He wanted to be the focus of those beautiful eyes, to be the center of Stephen's universe.

The impulse to promise anything shook Victor to his core.

"I-I'll order the pizza. Is there anything you don't like?"

"I'm not really fond of mushrooms," Stephen confessed.

"No mushrooms, got it." He handed the pad of paper back to Stephen. "Why don't you work on your piece while we wait for the pizza. Would you like some wine?"

Stephen shook his head. "I'm not big on alcohol. It makes me silly."

"I'd like to see you silly some time," Victor said with a smile. "Go sit on the couch, I'll join you in a minute."

The artist gave him a sad nod before turning away. "I'm sorry about dinner."

"You already said that. You can clean up the mess after we eat our pizza. Now don't make me tell you again." He used his best Dom voice and was pleased when Stephen immediately obeyed.

Taking a deep breath he dialed the number of his favorite pizza place. Pouring a glass of wine, he loosened his tie and headed into the living room. For the first time, seeing an attractive man didn't make him immediately think of sex. When he saw Stephen on his couch all he could think of was how his place now felt like a home.

#### \*\*\*\*

The pizza was hot, bubbly and delicious. Stephen hummed as the rich tomato flavor hit his tongue.

"This is so good."

He turned to see the gorgeous Dom watching him.

"Take your shirt off," Victor demanded.

Stephen's heart leapt in his throat. Nerves shivered up his spine. Setting down his pizza he stripped off his shirt.

"How much experience have you had?"

"Umm. I've touched other men before, but I've never gone all the way."

Victor's wide smile told Stephen everything he needed to know.

The Dom was pleased.

"Let's see how you taste."

Dipping a finger in his pizza, Victor swiped a fingertip full of sauce across Stephen's newly bared chest. He jerked as the warm sauce spread across his skin.

Before he could quite register what was happening Victor's hot tongue followed, lapping up the sauce and raising bumps across his skin. The scent of garlic, tomato and hot male filled the air.

Stephen couldn't hold back a moan.

"Oh, God." Shivers followed every talented lick of Victor's tongue. Stephen's body went so hard so fast he felt light-headed from all the blood going south.

"You taste delicious," Victor moaned against his skin. The Dom's teeth grazed Stephen's nipple. The sensation had him bucking against the hot mouth commanding his body.

"Oh."

"Take off my shirt," Victor demanded.

Taking a deep breath, Stephen reached for Victor's tie. He slipped it off the Dom's neck and settled it loosely around his own.

With unsteady hands he unbuttoned Victor's sleeves, then his shirt, carefully sliding it off the other man's strong shoulders.

Fuck he was gorgeous. There was something so sexy about undressing another man. Stephen leaned forward and pressed his nose to Victor's neck, drawing the scent of the other man into his lungs.

Yumm.

"You're a sensual little thing, aren't you?" Victor's voice penetrated the lusty fog filling his brain.

"Only for you," Stephen admitted. He'd never felt this level of attraction for another person it was as if they were meant to be together.

Victor leaned forward, swiping a missed splatter of sauce with his hot tongue and spiraling Stephen into another wave of lust. He was so hard, his body ached with need.

A snap and air flowing across his bare cock drew Stephen's attention back to his lover as Victor lowered his zipper, revealing the fact that Stephen hadn't put on any underwear that morning.

"Do you always go around like this?"

"Yes." He didn't like to feel confined.

"I'll keep that in mind whenever I undress you." Victor looked down at what he'd exposed. "Very nice."

Stephen's cheeks burned under that stare. "I'm glad you like it." He was about average size but he kept the hair trimmed and tidy around his cock. He wasn't too proud to manscape.

"Oh, I like very much," Victor said, sliding off Stephen's jeans. He'd removed his shoes when he came into the condo. He didn't want to drag any dirt onto Victor's pristine carpet. The Dom's home had a sterile feel that dared you to put a carpet fiber out of place.

He hoped eventually his paintings would liven the place up. Otherwise maybe he'd take Victor home with him. Greg usually wasn't there during the week because of his club. If Stephen were forced to stay at Victor's he'd eventually lose control and start painting murals on the scary white walls.

"Focus on me," Victor demanded.

It was as if the Dom knew when his mind wandered.

A hard nip at his nipple snapped Stephen to the present. The combination of pain and pleasure almost pushed him over before the older man had even really done anything.

"Oh, you are going to be so much fun." Victor's mouth slid up Stephen's neck, his five o'clock shadow scraping against Stephen's tender skin sent tingles up and down his spine.

An unmanly whimper escaped his throat.

"If you keep this up I'm going to shoot before we get to the good stuff."

"Ah, baby. Don't you know? It's all good stuff. Every touch, every kiss, it's all good. Since you're virtually inexperienced we are going to take things slow. Today we are discovering your sensitive spots."

Victor slid his rough cheek against Stephen's exposed stomach causing a full body shiver.

"Fuck."

"Not tonight," Victor said before nipping at Stephen's hip.

"What!" Surely he must have heard wrong. His new lover didn't just say they weren't going to have sex.

Victor pierced him with a serious look from his liquid brown eyes. "As my sub you belong to me. I will teach you to control your body. I will tell you when you can come. You are not to touch yourself or take pleasure with your body, it is now mine."

"What about other men?"

Victor's fingers bit into his skin.

"Ouch, you could've just said no."

"There will be no other men for either of us as we are exploring our boundaries. Other people at this point would complicate things." Victor watched him carefully as he spoke. "Is there another person you're interested in?"

The words were said with a hard inflection. It didn't take a genius to figure out that the correct answer was 'no'.

"No one but you," Stephen promised. He wasn't a complete idiot.

"Good boy."

Victor's touches, bites and kisses were going to drive Stephen out of his ever-loving mind.

"Your skin is so soft."

"It's because I sit inside all day and draw." His pale skin burned easily. When he was outside he had to use half a bottle of sunscreen to avoid sunburn.

"Hmm, keep up the good work."

A wet kiss was placed on Stephen's stomach right before Victor's tongue invaded his belly button.

Stephen squealed.

"Ahhh, a sensitive spot."

"I hadn't thought so," Stephen muttered once he caught his breath, but then no one had ever licked his stomach before either. The few encounters he'd had were hurried affairs just to get each other off.

"Before we're done, I will know every inch of you."

Stephen wasn't sure he was going to survive Victor's exploration. They'd just started and he was ready to explode. Pre-come dribbled from his cock like a bubbling fountain and his skin was overly sensitive to the Dom's every touch.

\*\*\*\*\*

Victor enjoyed Stephen's reactions. He'd spent so much time with experienced subs over the last few years that he'd forgotten what it was like when it was brand new. His talented artist may be a disaster in the kitchen, but he was a sexual dream. Cooking skills could be taught, natural reactions to another man's touch wasn't a learned skill like kneeling properly, or calling your Dom 'sir'.

Stephen threw back his head, exposing his tender neck. Victor felt an odd longing to decorate it with a collar. He'd never felt the urge to collar someone before and this sudden need made him extremely nervous, even as the thought was tantalizingly exciting. Swallowing hard, he went back to torturing his young man while the idea of a silver chain around Stephen's pale white neck made him harder than granite.

#### Shit!

He was in deep, and for the first time, Victor was scared. What if his romantic darling got tired of Victor's dictatorial demands and went looking for someone new? He wasn't stupid, he didn't get where he was by underestimating his competition. There were many men out there, wealthy men, who would be more than happy to be

Stephen's sugar daddy, ecstatic to give this beautiful, empathic creature a good home.

Possessiveness surged through Victor.

Stephen was *his*!

Looking down he was pleased to see Stephen's reaction to his touch. The beauty of having sex with men, they couldn't hide their attraction. He'd heard from colleagues of the pussy-loving persuasion that they'd had girlfriends who faked it.

There was no faking here.

"So beautiful," he whispered against Stephen's silky skin. Nipping his way across the thin body, he relished each cry and moan. "You are not to come until I tell you to."

"Yes, Sir." Stephen's voice was rough with passion, but his instincts were good. He wondered if the young sub would be able to hold his control. Victor would push him harder another time. Today was about giving the young artist a taste of submission.

"Come."

Stephen's body convulsed as streams of white liquid pumped out of his cock in a fountain of excitement.

"Ahhh."

"That's it, sweetheart. Come for your master. Show me how much you want me."

Ragged breathing filled that air as Stephen tried to regain his composure. Confused blue eyes turned towards him. "You didn't come."

Victor could feel embarrassment staining his cheeks. "Yes, I did, and if you tell anyone I came in my pants like an awkward teen, I will whip you until you can't sit down for a week."

He tried to sound threatening, but the twitch of Stephen's kiss swollen mouth told him he didn't do the job very well.

"I'll be good." Long lashes came down to hide those brilliant blue eyes but not before he saw the sparkle of amusement in their depths.

"Mmm hmm," Victor said, not convinced. "Let's shower and then we'll go to bed. Your brother said you have early classes."

"Yeah, I have one at 7:30."

Victor smiled. "Great, then you have time to work out at the gym with me before going to school."

The expression of total horror on the artist's face sent Victor off into gales of laughter.

"Umm. I'm not really good at the gym thing. I get distracted and bored."

It didn't take a genius to figure out what distracted Stephen. A room full of hard bodies was difficult to ignore, particularly if you weren't into the workout to begin with.

"I'll wake you at six. It will teach you better discipline." He didn't leave room for arguing in the tone of his voice.

Stephen swallowed...hard.

"Yes, Sir."

Victor beamed at his sub. "Excellent."

With a firm hand he steered Stephen toward the master bedroom and the luxurious bathroom within.

## Chapter Three

"Wake up, honey."

A rich voice whispered in Stephen's ear. The sound soothed something deep within him. The man who spoke represented everything Stephen wanted in a man. He just had to be careful not to show it. It was too early to become so attached. Only a few months passed since Stephen first saw the sexy Dom and only a few weeks passed since Victor knew about him.

He shouldn't feel this way.

Like Victor was home.

Swallowing back his nerves, Stephen slowly opened one eye. The vision that filled his sight made his halfhearted morning erection twitch to full length.

"Morning."

"Morning. It's time to go to the gym."

Stephen groaned earning him a slap on the ass. "No excuses. A healthy body encourages a healthy mind."

"Is that what you tell yourself to get up at this godawful time of the morning?" Stephen muttered. A terrible thought invaded his mind.

"You're a morning person," he accused.

Victor laughed. "Don't look so horrified, it isn't the end of the world."

Stephen pulled the blankets back over his head. It was almost comforting to discover his perfect lover had one irredeemable flaw.

"Why are you still in bed?"

Shit. Victor was using his Dom voice.

Groaning Stephen pulled back the covers and looked Victor in the eyes. "You aren't going to let this go are you?"

"Nope."

Victor leaned over and kissed him on the nose. "Don't even think about trying to beguile me with your beautiful eyes either."

"How about a blowjob?"

Victor laughed. "As tempting as that is, I have some control. Get dressed."

"Fine." Stephen wasn't enjoying this game. He hated exercising. It was boring and he always hurt for days afterward.

#### \*\*\*\*

Victor smiled as Stephen entered the gym, his gaze looking everything over with bright interest. Despite his denial of liking exercise, he could see his lover's hands twitching for a pencil. He loved this gym. It was large, had a nice group of regular members and was right across the street from his apartment.

"Maybe I could do a gym series of sketches while you work out," Stephen offered, his bright eyes glowing with enthusiasm.

"Sure, right after you exercise."

The scowl he got was delicious. He walked up to the counter where Karen, the receptionist, sat.

"Hello, Mr. Jones," Karen said with a wide smile. It widened even larger when she saw his companion. "Stevie,"

she squealed. Running around her desk she threw herself into Stephen's arms.

Victor wasn't pleased when his sub picked her up and spun her around, showing a surprising amount of strength in that skinny body.

They separated right about the time Victor was about to say something.

Karen turned to him. "Stevie's in my English Lit class. He's the sweetest thing. He drew me a picture for my boyfriend, Tom's, birthday."

Victor nodded though he didn't really give a damn as long as Karen stopped touching Stephen. He'd never felt this level of possessiveness before and it was freaking him out a little.

"I need to sign Stephen up with a membership."

"A membership!" Stephen's eyes went wide. "Shouldn't we see if this works out?"

"It will." Victor wasn't allowing a chance for doubt.

"Umm." Karen looked from one to the other.

"I'm Stephen's new man." He wasn't going to use the word "boyfriend". There was nothing boyish about him and he wanted Stephen to be comfortable with their relationship.

Karen's eyes went wide as she looked him over. "If you live at the same location I can give him a discount on a couples' membership," she offered.

"We don't live together," Stephen choked out.

"Not yet," Victor agreed. A fact he was going to change very soon. He didn't care about the discount; he liked the look of panic on Stephen's face. He wanted to see it again, in a sexual situation. Victor's body hardened at the thought. Taking a deep breath he tried to think of unsexy things. He didn't want to work out with a hard-on. Luckily he didn't need to change in here. The gym was close enough

he showered at home. He'd rather enjoy the luxury of his decadent shower than the mildew scented bathing stalls.

Karen reached into her drawer, pulled out some papers and attached them to a clipboard before handing it over.

Stephen gasped at the price. "I can't afford this."

"You don't have to. I'm making you work out, I'll pay."

With a sigh, Stephen quickly signed the papers and handed them back over.

Looks like he won the gym round now he had to work on the moving in portion.

Within minutes they were approaching their first set of machines.

"I think they had medieval torture devices they modeled this after. I'm taking European History and this looks familiar," Stephen declared.

Victor laughed. "Stop whining and get on. I'll set your weights."

"Set them to wimpy."

Shaking his head, Victor set the weights at what he thought was a reasonable amount and Stephen claimed was ridiculous.

"If I can't lift a pencil later I know who to blame," he warned.

Anywhere else and Victor would've taken him to task for talking back to his Dom, but they couldn't play those games here. There was more than one muscled asshole who would be willing to beat either of them to a pulp if they hinted at their relationship.

#### \*\*\*\*

After a series of rounds with the weight machines, Victor went to get them some water. In his rush to get Stephen to the gym he'd forgotten his usual water bottle.

Stephen leaned against the wall trying to catch his breath. A man in a wife beater shirt lifting dead weights caught his eye.

A stylized sun decorated the back of his left shoulder.

Fascinated, Stephen walked over to the man. The man dropped his weight seconds before Stephen's fingers slid across his skin.

"What the hell?" The man spun around, bringing Stephen out of his creative fog.

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry. I-I was looking at your tattoo and I didn't even think about it being on a person." Stephen blushed. "I sound like an idiot, but I'm an artist and I was thinking of the art, um, not about the fact it was on you."

He looked up into the confused gaze of the weightlifter.

"Stephen Carter," he offered, holding out his hand.

"Dylan Jenner." The weightlifter took Stephen's hand and shook it carefully, as if aware of his greater strength. "So you like my tattoo?"

"Um, no. I mean it's not that I don't like it, but I was thinking of something different."

The weightlifter tilted his head to one side. "Like what?"

Stephen glanced around. "I'll be right back." He rushed over to the receptionist desk, "Hey, Karen, do you have a pen and some blank paper?"

She grabbed a piece of paper out of her printer. "Will this do?"

"Yeah." He accepted the black sharpie she handed over with a smile. "Thanks, I'll get this back to you."

He scurried back to the weight lifter, who was still where he'd left him.

"I was thinking of something like this."

Within a few minutes, Stephen drew the original sun then added the image in his mind to transform the picture.

"Wow." Dylan looked at the tattoo with wide eyes. "That's fucking beautiful."

"Thanks." Stephen blushed. He knew he was a talented artist but it still embarrassed him to be complimented face to face.

"I designed the sun," Dylan confessed, "I'd really like to give this to my tattoo artist and have him redo mine. How much for the design?"

Stephen shook his head. "It's yours for not punching me out when I started groping you."

Dylan laughed. "You can grope me anytime." His eyes looked Stephen up and down in a slow sensual examination.

"Ready to go?" Victor came up behind Stephen startling him with a tight grip on his shoulder. He could hear the annoyance in the Dom's voice.

"Hello, Victor. I was just talking to your friend. He designed me a new tattoo." The bodybuilder waved the piece of paper at Victor.

"How nice of him," Victor said. "However, it's time for us to go home."

Stephen didn't know how to react to the proprietary tone of his lover's voice.

"It was nice meeting you, Dylan." Stephen snatched the paper from Dylan's hand and wrote down his number. "If you need a simpler design for your tattoo, call me and I'll be happy to redraw it."

He had doubts a copy would come out well on the lined paper.

He heard Victor make a sound behind him, but when he turned the Dom wasn't looking in his direction.

"Gotta go."

Victor might not be looking at him, but his body screamed disapproval.

Without a word, Stephen followed his lover across the street and into Victor's building. It wasn't until his lover was slamming the door to his condo behind them, that he spoke.

"You are never to give your number to anyone without clearing it first with me."

"Don't be ridiculous. I am an artist, I might only be a student, but I have to give my number out or I will never be contacted for commissions.

Victor took a deep breath as if he had to release his anger or lose it completely.

"I want you to go get your art stuff and work on your project for a while. I need a moment to calm down. Then we are going to discuss the boundaries of our relationship."

Stephen walked away to fetch his sketchpad and his artist supply box. He settled in a corner of the couch, glancing at Victor from time to time. Maybe giving Dylan his number was a mistake since the guy looked interested in him, but he had to drum up business. If the man used his sketch for a tattoo maybe he could send some business Stephen's way. As an unknown artist, the more things people connected to his name the better.

Gritting his teeth, Stephen whipped to a new page and started a rough outline. It was difficult to concentrate with anger burning his gut, but he wasn't going to give Victor the satisfaction of knowing he was disturbing him.

He might be a submissive, but that didn't mean he didn't have pride.

Some might argue he had enough for a couple of people.

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Victor watched Stephen's bold angry strokes and knew he hadn't handled that very well. If Dylan hadn't given him a victorious smile when his lover wrote down his name and number he probably wouldn't have overreacted, but he couldn't stand the thought of anyone touching what was his.

He had to keep reminding himself that Stephen was new to all this and was still learning the rules. Obvious guidelines like not handing out his number weren't so obvious when it fell under the venue of his art. Stephen was a free spirit. If Victor tried to pin him down too much he might balk.

"I'm sorry if I got angry over such a little thing." Victor pressed his hand to the back of Stephen's neck for reassurance and comfort. "Most subs would know not to hand out their number to strangers." Stephen's grip on his pencil tightened. "In your case I can't stop you because it could mean a commission." Victor stroked Stephen's skin, trying to soothe both of them through touch. He couldn't lose control in their relationship so quickly.

Finally Stephen's back relaxed and he gave a reluctant nod. "I understand." He offered a shy smile. "I guess we need to get used to each other."

"Yes. That would be good. In the future I want to know all the commissions you are working on and I need to know where you are when you leave home. It doesn't matter if you are just going to class. I need your schedule."

Stephen nodded. "Okay. I can do that."

"You will work out with me in the morning since most of your classes don't start until later. You need to practice exercise like you do your art until it comes to you automatically."

It looked for a moment like Stephen was going to argue, but the artist changed his mind.

"Good boy," Victor praised. He needed Stephen to know there was nothing he could or even should try to hide

from Victor. There could be no secrets between them. "Your life will be an open book to me. I demand nothing less from my boy."

"I will do my best." Stephen offered. The look in his eyes told Victor that his boy hoped he would completely forget about exercising.

Victor couldn't resist smiling. It was hard to remember he was a hard-assed dominant when he had a feeling his sweet new lover could wrap him around his little finger in a heart beat.

## Chapter Four

This was the world's worst day. His morning bus was late, his painting project was giving him problems, and the strap on his backpack broke halfway between classes, spilling everything to the ground and breaking his favorite bottle of ink. To make matters worse, Victor wanted to meet at Greg's club and face his brother together.

Greg's phone calls were getting more demanding and he was beginning to recruit the rest of the family to convince Stephen of his poor choice in lovers. The stress was affecting his sleep and Victor said he had enough. They were going to settle things with his brother and move on in their relationship.

He approached the club door with butterflies whipping around his belly in a frenzied dance. His nerves settled some when he saw Ralph was at the door.

"Hey, buddy," Ralph said with a wide smile. "Are you sure you should come in this way?"

Stephen nodded. "Master Jones is waiting for me."

"Greg said the two of you were seeing each other." The bouncer's face went solemn. "Be careful there. I don't want you to pin too much hope on Jones. He's not known for keeping the same boy."

Swallowing the lump in his throat, Stephen gave his friend a weak smile. "I'm trying not to, but so far he doesn't seem to have lost interest."

Ralph gave him an awkward one-armed hug. "Go on in. Just remember what I said."

For the first time, Stephen entered the club by the front door. He gave his pack and his shirt to the girl at the checkin station. The necklace Master Jones gave him the night before felt cold against his skin. It was a thin leather strap looped through a silver link holding a silver rectangular stamped with the Japanese symbol for eshi, a painter supported by a patron on one side, and the word Jones stamped on the other.

The smell of men and leather filled the room as Stephen moved through the crowds. He spotted his lover at his usual table but as he got closer his heart stuttered in his chest. A thin man in black leather pants and a leather harness kneeled beside Master Jones.

Stephen stopped in his tracks ignoring the dancers moving around him. All he could focus on was the sight of another man kneeling in his place. His spot. Betrayal was like a knife in his chest. Gasping, he blinked back tears even as anger burned in his chest.

Marching up to the table the whipped the necklace over his head and threw it at his lover.

"Enjoy your evening, Sir," he spit out before turning on his heels and marching back through the crowd.

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Victor watched his young lover stomp away, shock keeping him seated. He wasn't going to run after him, not with the entire club watching. He had a reputation after all. With his foot he shoved the kneeling man over.

Laughing, the sub got to his feet. "Shit, Victor, I didn't know you had a boy coming. I just wanted to say hi." Sparkling eyes looked up at Victor as he glared at his old friend.

"Rain, if you've ruined my relationship I will take a whip to your ass and it won't be to relive old times."

Rainier Lemmon gave him a contrite look. "I had no idea you were in a relationship of any kind." The sub pulled up a chair and sat beside him. "How did that happen?"

"He sent him presents," Carlyle piped up. "He's an amazing artist."

"You should see his drawings," offered Lindi.

"Shut up." Victor glared at his friends.

"Are you telling me that you were romanced?"

The look of astonishment made Victor want to shove his friend to the ground again. His heart ached as he remembered the look in Stephen's eyes.

"Yeah, I think he's the one."

"You could send him flowers," Lindi offered. "He's a romantic. It might appeal to him."

"Or candy. I know a good candy maker," Carlyle said.

His friends bantered about the various things he could send his young lover, from edible underwear to flavored condoms. Some of the suggestions had him rolling his eyes even as concern churned his gut. He had no doubt he could get back in his young lover's good graces but the pain he caused Stephen hurt him deeply. He didn't ever want to see that look again.

Greg marched up to the table and glared down at him. "What did you do to my brother? He just called me and told me not to bother to meet with you because it's all over and I was right. I can't tell you how much I didn't want to be right." The muscular man shook his phone at Victor. "Tell me what the fuck is going on right now or get the hell out of my club."

The rage in the other man's eyes was brilliant. He heard Rainier sigh beside him right before the sub stood up and approached Greg.

"I'm sorry to say I've caused all of the commotion," Rain purred. With slinky grace, he kneeled with flawless control before the club owner. "I was kneeling beside Victor, having a chat for old time's sake. I'd only been there a second before Vic told me he was meeting someone. I was going to leave and talk with him later when your brother arrived and saw me in his spot. He assumed the wrong thing, probably because of Master Jones' reputation." Rainier flashed him a taunting look from beneath his lashes before bowing his head in a mock submissive fashion.

Greg leaned down and tiled Rain's head up. "You like to cause trouble, don't you, beautiful one?"

"Sometimes," the sub admitted.

"Well this time you went too far." Greg wrapped a hand around Rainier's arm and yanked him to his feet. Jones was certain it would leave a bruise and he was equally certain Rain wouldn't care. "Because the one person I love in this world is my baby brother. Angst might be good for artists, but he doesn't need that kind of drama. You're going to come with me and tell my brother all about your misplaced submission and if you're a good boy I'll spank your ass until you're properly repentant for your sins." Greg turned his gaze to Victor. "I'll call you when we get this all settled. He probably doesn't need to see you until then. He'll be embarrassed."

Victor nodded. "I'll explain to him the virtues of trusting his Dom. Have him meet me at my condo. Tell him to bring everything he owns. I want him moved in and settled when I return."

Greg gave him an approving smile. "I might have questions about the two of you lasting but I could tell he has strong feelings for you. Stephen never does anything halfway."

"I know." Victor fingered the pendant his lover had thrown at him. "I'm unusually devoted to him too." When his boy had ripped off the necklace and tossed it at his head, a bit of his heart had broken off. He never wanted to reenact

that scene again. Stephen would know his place in Victor's life, one way or another.

With a nod of mutual understanding, Greg dragged off a willing Rain, who was going to have an interesting night, if the club owner's expression was anything to go by.

"What are you going to do?" Carlyle's expression was solemn, but Victor could see amusement curling the corner of his old friend's mouth.

"You think I've finally gotten my comeuppance, don't you."

"It did occur to me."

Victor sighed. "Maybe you're right but I'm not going to give up on him. He's mine. He started this thing between us and I'm far from ready for it to end." If he had his way their future would involve matching rings...maybe even on their fingers.

## Chapter Five

Stephen's hands shook as he carried his bags to the elevator. He didn't have any furniture so the two bags pretty much contained everything he owned. There were a few canvases that his brother promised to bring him later when he was done with Rain.

He was glad he was getting out of the townhouse. Stephen had no desire to be around to hear his brother have sex with anyone. It was the first time Greg had brought anyone over, and from the heated looks they were exchanging, it was going to be a long night.

He'd rather have a long night of his own.

Standing in front of Victor's door he wondered if he should knock. It felt stupid since he would be living there, but it felt too informal to just walk right in. He was still debating when the door swung open and Victor was looking at him with a familiar exasperated expression.

"Were you going to stand there all night?"

"Possibly."

Without another word, Victor relieved Stephen of his bags and walked back into the condo. Not knowing what else to do, he followed.

Victor walked the bags into a room Stephen knew was the spare and his heart fell to his shoes. Maybe he misunderstood his purpose. Maybe Victor didn't really want

them to be together as a couple, maybe the man was going to train him as a sub and then set him free. It wouldn't be the first time he did that if rumors were correct.

Heart sinking, Stephen followed the Dom carrying his things.

"Is this my room?" he asked, watching Victor set his bags beside a neatly made bed.

Victor shook his head. "This is going to be your art studio. I'm putting your bags in here so we don't trip over them in the middle of the night. I've cleared out half my dresser for you and there is space in my closet for anything you want to hang up."

Relief shook Stephen. "I-I wanted to tell you how sorry I am."

"Are you?" Victor's handsome face held no expression for Stephen to determine his emotions.

"Yes."

"Strip."

Startled, it took him a moment to realize his lover was serious. "Um, okay." With shaking hands he removed his clothing.

"Fold them and put them on the bed."

Stephen followed the directions obediently.

"Stand properly," Victor barked in a hard tone.

Placing his feet shoulder-width apart, Stephen clasped his hands behind his back. He grew hard beneath the close examination of his lover, as Victor circled him like a big cat stalking his prey.

"You are to listen and only speak when asked a direct question, do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir," Stephen responded in a soft voice. He was scared of ruining this further. He wanted to be with Victor and he was willing to do just about anything to keep him.

"I blame myself for what happened in the club. If you were more secure in my affections you wouldn't think for a second that an old friend was a current lover. If you knew how I felt, there would be no doubt in your mind that no one, and I mean no one, has ever affected me like you." Victor's brown eyes bored into him. "I have had many lovers, I won't hide that from you, but there was never one I loved. Only you. I've always thought it was just how I was made. Indifferent. Unfeeling. But now I know it is because I was waiting for the perfect person." The Dom cupped Stephen's face between his large hands. "You were fated to be mine and I will never let you go."

Some people might worry about that level of possessiveness; Stephen felt it sing along his spine and make him harder than he'd ever been before. He didn't want to be let go, so he didn't see anything wrong with the plan.

"Stephen Carter, do you promise to be mine and only mine."

"I do."

Stephen blinked back tears as Master Jones slipped his necklace back over his head. "This necklace symbolizes to our friends that you belong to me. Do you accept it in the manner it is meant?"

He knew Victor was asking him if he agreed to stay his sub. There was no doubt in his mind about the answer. "Yes."

"Good." Victor kissed him with surprising tenderness for a man who was so large and tough.

As he was still recovering from the kiss, Victor reached into his pocket and pulled out a heavy gold band. "Give me your left hand."

Stephen held out his suddenly shaking hand.

"Stephen Carter, I want you to wear this ring as a universal symbol that you belong to me. When we are ready we will have a ceremony to invite our friends and family

but until then I am not willing to wait to claim you. I want everyone to know that you are mine. Do you accept this ring as a sign that you belong to me and only me for the rest of our lives?"

Stephen let out a sob as his throat filled with tears. "Yes." That was all he could get out as Victor slid the ring on.

With a whoop of glee he threw himself into the Dom's arms. Victor wrapped him in a tight embrace and held him close.

"You are probably the worst sub ever," he said in a rough voice, "but I'm going to keep you anyway. I doubt you'll ever be a proper submissive but you'll be perfect for me."

Stephen vowed to try harder. He didn't want Victor to have to settle.

"Let's go to bed."

Before he could say anything, the Dom swept him off his feet and carried him out of the guest room and into the master bedroom with its big bed.

"I'm going to have to paint your walls," Stephen confessed.

"They're our walls and you can paint them however you want."

For an artist that was a better gift than the ring that still felt odd on his finger. He looked at Victor's empty finger. "Do I get to give you a ring too?"

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Victor looked at his sub, shock going through his system. It never occurred to him that Stephen would want to mark him back, but it made sense.

"If you'd like you can get me a ring but I don't want you spending a fortune."

A wide smile crossed Stephen's face. "I'll be right back."

Before he could stop him the younger man scrambled off the bed and raced through the doorway.

Victor sighed. He would have to give up on having a proper submissive. They always bored him anyway. One thing about Stephen, he was never boring. He took the time during his lover's absence to remove his own clothing. He was leaning against the headboard when Stephen rushed back into the room. Victor was pleased to see the artist still hadn't lost his erection.

"I found it." With a pleased smile, Stephen flopped onto the bed.

Victor had to smile at his exuberant youth until his artist opened a ring box and took out the most gorgeous ring he'd ever seen. Small rectangular sapphires surrounded a large diamond on a heavy band of aged gold. It looked to be worth a small fortune.

"You can't give this to me," Victor protested.

Stephen looked at him with confusion. "But you said you wanted to keep me."

"But this is too valuable. Where did you get it?"

He received a brilliant smile. "My great-grandfather gave it to me. It was his. He lived to be a hundred and five. He knew I was gay and he told me to give it to the man I chose to spend my life with." Stephen plucked the ring out of its tattered box and slid it onto Victor's finger. It was the one thing he had left from *his* father and I wanted to give it to the man I love. That would be you."

Stephen said it with such bright-eyed simplicity that Victor sat there stunned as the ring was slid onto his finger. It was a gorgeous piece worth a small fortune but after that declaration it would have to be cut off his cold dead hand before he gave it up. "I love you too." Wrapping his arms around Stephen, he pulled the younger man down on the bed until he lay on top of him. "I will be happy to wear your ring."

Rolling them until he lay on top, Victor leaned down and took Stephen's mouth in a commanding kiss, trying to put all of his need and love into that one embrace. He lifted his head when the lack of oxygen started making him lightheaded.

"You are mine," he said looking into his favorite pair of blue eyes.

Stephen smiled happily back at him. "Yes, I am."

"I received my test results. I'm disease free."

"Me too. I had one done at Student Health."

"Good boy."

Victor reached for his side table and grabbed a tube of lube. "Then we can forego condoms." There was no doubt in his mind that Stephen would never cheat. "Turn over, I want to get you ready."

Stephen gave him a steamy smile. "I could get myself ready and you could watch."

Victor's cock twitched at the thought. "Later." He didn't want Stephen to know how much he wanted to take care of his boy. It was sappily sentimental and he had to keep some control or the cute artist would know how easily he brought the tough Dom to heel.

With excruciating slowness he prepared Stephen until the younger man was moaning with frustration and desire.

"Fuck me!"

"Patience." Victor smiled. He was glad his lover was turned away from him so he couldn't see his expression.

"I won't be any good to you if I come before you get in me."

"You won't or I'll spank you." His cock gave another twitch. He sped up his preparation. He didn't want to be the one who came before his lover.

"I'm ready."

He slapped Stephen's ass. "I'll be the one who decides that."

A whimper made him smile again. Without warning he grabbed Stephen's hips and flipped him over.

"Now, you're ready."

Stephen lifted his hips for Victor to easily slide inside. Their eyes met in perfect rapport and he saw all the love he could ever want in his partner's gaze. Gripping Stephen's hips he pounded into his lover, seeking to merge their bodies as well as they meshed their souls.

Leaning down he nipped at the artist's nipples pleased when the other man squirmed and shot come between their bodes.

"Shit," Stephen muttered.

"Don't worry, baby, you're young, you can probably go again."

The smell of come filled the air, adding to the raging need that consumed Victor as he continuing to slide across his lover's prostate. He was pleased, but not surprised, to see Stephen's cock rise again. The sexiness of his lover made him clench his teeth together and concentrate on mundane business spreadsheets so he wouldn't shoot before he was ready. Wrapping his hand around the artist's cock he fisted his lover as he pounded inside.

"Come," he demanded as liquid poured from his body into the willing vessel of his sweet lover.

"Victor!" Stephen shouted seconds before the smell of spunk filled the air again.

Pleased with the sub's reaction, he bonelessly collapsed on the bed, remembering just in time to slide to one side and not crush his slim lover.

The weight of the ring distracted him for a moment. He lifted his hand to look at it again. "I'm surprised it fit," he mused looking at the exquisite ring.

"I'm not." Stephen said in a smug tone beside him.

Victor turned to face his lover. "Why not?"

"Because I knew we were meant to be together as soon as I saw you on the security monitors."

"You did, huh?"

"Yep."

Victor would've argued but who was he to say his lover was wrong. After all what were the odds that a young artist and a crusty businessman would get together and fall in love.

Placing a hot kiss on his lover's cheek, Victor smiled. "Who am I to rail against fate. I love you."

"I love you too," Stephen said with one of his sunny smiles. "And now I am going to prove my love by taking a shower so I'm not crusty and gross tomorrow."

"Aww. I can't let that sort of devotion go unnoticed. I will come and let you scrub me."

Stephen laughed. "You are too good to me."

Victor smacked him on the ass as he got out of bed. "And don't you forget it."

Laughing, the two men raced to the bathroom to take a shower and start their lives together.

## About the Author

Amber likes to spend the day dreaming of hot men doing steamy things to other hot men. With that in mind she has written several m/m books in the fantasy and contemporary genres. She lives in Texas with her husband, two sons, two cats and one extremely stupid dog. For more information on other books by Amber, visit the author at her official website: <u>http://www.AmberKell.WordPress.com</u>

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