

FYN ALEXANDER



Angel and the Assassin

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Chapter One

London, England

Kael Saunders sat in the bright, glass-walled waiting room at the Secret Intelligence Service at Vauxhall Cross, opened the black leather-bound blank book, and began to write.

I grew up poor, but I had two things in my favour; I was clever and I was ruthless. I also had the misfortune to be educated at an elite boarding school, or so it seemed at the time. Later I was grateful for it. But while I was there, it was often hell. It was an all boys' school. They came from well-heeled homes and they called me the council estate charity case.

So I beat the shite out of them.

I never did it openly. Not because I was a coward. I was anything but. I just didn't want to lose my scholarship and disappoint my mum, so I went after them quietly, one by one. I was as stealthy as a fox. I would sniff them out when they least expected it: in the change rooms after sports practice, in the toilets, in the woods behind the school.

And I would take my revenge.

I was fast and I was a dirty fighter. I always used a weapon, the belt from my trousers, or one of my trainers if we were in the change room. They never saw it coming. I'd tell them if they told anyone what I did, I'd have to come after them again. Next time it would be worse. So they had better not make me do it.

They never told anyone and they never called me a charity case again. They were terrified of me.

The boys at College Grange School were all called John and David and Charles. I was never quite sure, but I think my mum got Kael from an American soap opera. Half the kids in my neighbourhood had American soap opera names. The first thing one of the boys said to me when I arrived at the school, terrified, out of place, and angry, was "Kael? That's a type of cabbage."

I was put on detention for the rest of that week for punching him. That was when I learned to be circumspect, to wait for my moment. It served me well in my future career.

The only boy who ever spoke to me after I beat him up was Freddie Merchant. He was a fat kid. He didn't say anything at the time, but that evening he came to me with a tin of biscuits and a bottle of pop and invited me to share them with him. I accepted because I never had any spending money and my mum couldn't afford to send me packages like the others got.

While we ate the chocolate digestives and bourbon creams and drank the pop he told me he was sorry. He said the other boys were snobs and they were jealous of me because I was so handsome and I got top marks without even trying. He said, "I know you're not queer but I really like you."

I told him I was a queer.

He said that when I'd hit him with my belt he'd got a hard-on. So I offered to do it again and he accepted. After we finished eating, I flogged his bare arse with my belt until he came, and then he let me fuck him.

We were twelve years old and he became my best friend.

"Saunders, come in."

Kael stuffed the book into the inside pocket of his leather jacket and stood up. Stephen Conran watched him, holding open the door. Kael walked past Conran into his office and, without waiting to be invited, sat down in the comfortable leather armchair in front of the desk. Conran, thin and not terribly tall, with a long, lean face like the inbred upper classes that had spawned him, closed the door.

"What do you want, Conran? I usually get my orders in plain brown envelopes or coded mobile phone messages. Is there something special you want to tell me?"

"I call all our people in from time to time to have a little chat."

Conran's upper-class accent set Kael's teeth on edge. He had never picked up the accent despite the amount of time spent with people like Conran. But neither did he still have the working-class Scouse accent from his childhood in Liverpool, which had marked him when he first arrived at College Grange. He had settled into something that, while clearly English and very well enunciated, could not be readily identified, just as his job prescribed.

Kael sat back comfortably, resting his left ankle on his right knee. He did not speak but merely looked at Conran, waiting. An eloquent silence spoke volumes, and together with his height and build, he made other men nervous.

"Have you been to see your mother recently?" Conran's smile was one of those condescending ones that moved his mouth but never quite reached his eyes.

"Have you been following me, Conran?" Kael asked.

Conran sat down behind his modern oak desk, pushing the swivel chair back to give himself room. "Not me personally, no. It's good to stay in touch with family. You have a lonely job. It does not mix well with an intimate social or family life."

Kael said calmly, matter-of-factly, "You know perfectly well I went to visit my mother last week, so fuck off."

“We have to keep an eye on our operatives.” Ignoring the expletive, Conran crossed his legs, which Kael found effeminate and unappealing in a man. “Is she enjoying that smart new flat you bought her at the Albert Dock in Liverpool?”

“She seems to be, yes.” His mum loved the flat, and he had felt so proud when he handed her the keys two years before.

“You’re a good son. You never tell her anything about your work, I take it?”

Kael leaned forward in his seat, still speaking calmly. “Did you major in stupid questions? I love my mum, but she’s no Einstein. Her idea of a great time is a night out at the bingo, so why the fuck would I upset her by telling her that I kill people for a living, but don’t worry mum, it’s all legal. The government pays me a fortune to do it, so I won’t go to jail.”

“Calm down, Saunders.” Conran always looked nervous when Kael got irritated. “Are you still enjoying your work?”

“I always enjoy my work. Now what do you want?” Kael stood up and walked to the window. The office was on the River Thames side of the building and offered a stunning view when the midday sun gleamed on the fast-flowing water.

“Next week you will go to America, Cape Cod. Ever been there?”

“Not to Cape Cod.”

“You took your mother to Florida last Christmas, didn’t you? Did you visit Disney World?”

“We did, and Sea World. She’s easily amused. Get on with it.”

“There’s an arms dealer; he’s doing business with the Bosnians. He needs to be removed. We’re working with the Americans on this one. The shipment is worth millions of euros.”

Kael watched him, wondering what the hell Conran was up to. He never told him the details surrounding a target. He was never told anything he did not absolutely need to know.

Conran went to the sideboard and poured a glass of whisky. He held up the glass, offering it to Kael, who nodded but would not cross the room to get it. Conran could bring it to him.

The man poured a second glass and walked to the window beside him. Kael knew Conran was nervous of him; he always had been. Conran dealt with paid assassins every day—it was his job—so why did he always look nervous when he was with Kael? Conran handed him the glass. Kael downed the excellent Scottish whisky in one swallow and handed the glass back as if Conran were a waiter.

Conran hesitated only a second before taking the glass. He looked up into Kael’s eyes. “Would you like another?”

“No.”

So that was it. Conran stood closer than he normally did. His pupils were dilated, his breathing uneven. An ordinary person would never notice such small

physiological changes, but Kael had been trained to notice everything, and he had an aptitude for observation.

He wants me to fuck him. He's gagging for it.

"You will fly to Vienna this evening. Go to the Pension Neuer Markt—it's near St. Stephen's Cathedral, room twelve—and get rid of the occupant, Rikard Weirstein. There will be no cleanup this time. The body needs to be found, so be careful."

"I'm always careful. That's why I'm so good. What's he done?" Kael did not care, but he was amused by the conversation and the effect he was having on Conran.

"Are you becoming sentimental about your targets, Saunders, wanting to know if they deserve what they get?"

"You just told me details about the other one. That was a first." Kael smiled, but not at Conran; he looked out of the window. The day he started caring about the people he killed was the day he would hand in his weapons, return to Cambridge for his master's degree, and go to work for the UN as a translator, which is what he had planned to do ten years ago, before a more lucrative and exciting offer came along with the Secret Intelligence Service, MI6.

He turned to look at Conran. "I'll target your mother if you want me to. The only person in the world who I would not target is my own mother. Everyone else is fair game. Everyone."

Conran walked back to his desk and sat down. "You'll probably like Weirstein. He's quite handsome from what I've heard." Kael watched him but did not respond. "Is it true you're a homosexual, Saunders?"

"I thought you knew everything about me." Conran probably wanted to shock him with the question, to throw him off guard, but nothing threw Kael off guard. "You knew what I was like at school."

"I know you have sex with men, but I wondered if perhaps you were an opportunist where sex is concerned. That you took whatever was on offer, male or female. Do you like women?"

"I love women," Kael said. "I just don't want to have sex with them. What about yourself?"

"I'm married. I love my wife."

Kael crossed the carpet and stood very close to Conran. Leaning one hand on the desk, he looked down into Conran's pale, ordinary, yet quite pleasant face, and heard him swallow hard. Conran licked his lips, looking both nervous and aroused by Kael's proximity. Kael spoke softly. "I know that; it's irrelevant. Are you on offer?" Conran had had the hots for him for years, but this was the closest he had ever come to admitting it.

"Yes," he said very quietly, his cheeks growing pink.

"I see." Kael grinned as Conran fell into his trap. "If I find anyone who might be interested in a married submissive, I'll let you know. You're not my type."

Conran's cheeks turned from pink to bright red at the stinging dismissal. "You had better go. You will miss your plane."

Kael strode to the door and grabbed the handle, then turned to Conran. "Did you send for me today just to whore yourself out, or because you are genuinely concerned that I still love my job?" The smile had not left his face since seeing Conran shrink under his words.

"As I told you, I call in all our operatives from time to time. It was your turn; that's all."

Kael laughed, unable to stop himself. "I won't feel special then."

"You were a bastard at school!" Conran turned away. "Everyone was terrified of you."

"I was such a bastard you knew I'd be perfect for this job. It was you who recommended me for this, wasn't it? I was going to be a translator."

"Yes, it was me. I knew you were a cold-blooded killer the day I met you. You'd have been wasted at the UN, and you would never have earned the kind of money you've earned over the last ten years. You should be grateful to me; now get out!"

With a mock salute, Kael left, leaving the door open behind him. He was still laughing as he walked down the corridor toward the lift.

Chapter Two

Vienna, Austria

At a safe distance, Kael watched the Pension Neuer Markt as the sky darkened and the streets grew quiet around him. He stood in the heart of Vienna, Freud's city, waiting for the perfect moment to go inside the hotel and kill Weirstein. A smile crept over his face as he walked around the building to the alleyway at the rear.

Sex and death. What would Freud think?

The back door of the Pension stood propped open with a chair. A man, a waiter by the looks of his uniform, stood outside finishing a cigarette, blowing the bluish smoke away from the door. Kael crossed the wide alley quickly in a few long strides, pulling on a pair of extremely thin, transparent latex gloves. They fit like skin over his large hands.

"Filthy habit," he said in perfect German.

The man turned to see who had spoken, and as he did, Kael grabbed him from behind, pressed his arm against the man's throat, and applied his fingers to the bulging jugular vein. The man passed out in seconds, still breathing heavily.

Kael eased him to the ground and dragged him inside the dim passage. He was a big, heavy man, but Kael had no trouble dragging him to the mop cupboard near the kitchen. Inside the cramped space, Kael stripped off his clothes, stuffing them as he did into the small bag he had brought. Then he quickly undressed the unconscious man. The waiter's uniform was not a good fit, but he had targeted him because he was the biggest out of the stream of employees who had stood outside smoking over the last couple of hours.

When he was dressed, he put the retractable scalpel and a condom in his pocket for later. He opened the door a crack and looked cautiously out into the empty passage.

Drawing himself up and settling into the uniform—the aura of a waiter—he put his bag outside behind the bins to retrieve later and walked back inside, heading for the main stairs. On the way up, he passed a couple of guests and nodded respectfully, moving to the side to allow them room, but he did not look anyone in the eyes and continued quickly along the carpeted passage.

From his observations he knew Weirstein was alone, and he knocked confidently on the door.

“What?” the man asked, pulling the door open, an impatient look on his face. “I didn’t order anything.”

One side of Kael’s mouth tilted up and his lips parted, revealing beautiful, straight, white teeth. “Are you sure, sir?”

Conran was right; Weirstein was very handsome, though he was no longer a young man, well over fifty. Kael looked into his eyes and saw the pupils dilate, indicating his arousal.

Weirstein had answered the door straight from the shower, wearing only a toweling dressing gown tied loosely at the waist. With a small towel he dried his short, light gray hair.

“Come in.” He opened the door wider. “I suppose you want money?” It was obvious from his straightforward acceptance that he had paid for sex before and was more than willing to pay now.

Kael’s smile broadened, giving Weinstein the impression that he was saying yes, when in fact it was his natural response when everything fell into place. The man was going to die either way, but Kael was always happier when the target cooperated.

Weirstein walked toward the bed. “I haven’t seen you before, and I have been here two days. I would have noticed a man like you.” He did not ask why, and Kael never offered a cover story unless he had to. A trickle of water ran down the side of the man’s face, but not from his shower; it was sweat, indicating how excited he was becoming. “How old are you?”

“Thirty-two.” Kael always told the truth when he could or when it didn’t matter. He took the condom from his pocket and held it up. Then he removed his clothes, dropping them on the floor, but kept the gloves on, knowing the man was too aroused and distracted to notice anyway.

The older man watched him, still wearing the dressing gown. “You’re very handsome,” he said, looking Kael up and down. Kael took the compliment in stride, knowing he was handsome and that his muscles were well developed and rock hard from his regular attendance at the Paris Gym.

Naked, he took one step toward Weirstein and pulled the man’s belt loose, then pushed the robe off his shoulders, revealing an attractive, trim-waisted body and a jutting, hard cock.

Kael wrapped his arms around the man, pressing Weirstein’s body tight against his own. Weirstein gasped and melted into him, slipping his arms around Kael’s waist and dropping his head against Kael’s shoulder.

Kael immediately recognized the signs of a sub and patted his backside. He could spot a sub a mile away. Some Doms did not catch on until the sub dropped to his knees to lick his boots. But a slight lowering of the eyes or a defensive movement of the shoulder that many Doms would miss screamed out loud to Kael. On so many occasions his life had depended on reading body language. He could translate it as easily as he could translate German, French, or Russian.

“What if I flog your arse until it’s nice and red, and then fuck it hard enough to make you scream? But don’t scream, because that will piss me off. You are to remain silent. Do you understand?” His perfect German slipped fractionally when he said *arse* instead of *arsh*.

Just for a moment Weirstein looked at him, his brow creasing at the inconsistency. But he was already so excited that there was no going back. “Yes, please, Sir, and if you would be so good, Master, would you torture my cock and balls, please, Sir?”

“If I have time.” Kael had anticipated a fuck; the fact that the man wanted a flogging as well was a bonus. Looking around the luxurious room, he chose a velvet-cushioned, wood-framed, Regency-style chair. Grabbing the back, he swung it into the middle of the room. As he did so, Weirstein took several steps across the room and turned the light low. “Hey!” Kael kept his voice steady but harsh. “I didn’t tell you to move.”

“I apologize, Master,” the man whispered. Kael turned the light back up slightly but kept it comfortably low. He could see in pitch-dark if he needed to, but Weirstein must know that he was in control at all times.

“Kneel on the chair. Arms on the back. Stick your arse up, and if you make a sound, I will make you very sorry.”

Weirstein nodded and obeyed instantly. Overwhelmed with excitement, he knelt on the edge of the chair and leaned his arms on the back, clasping his hands together. With his head bowed, he thrust his buttocks out and up.

“*Rubenkraut*.”

“Huh?” Kael looked at the man’s buttocks, enjoying the sight and the knowledge that he would soon be whipping them.

“My safe word, Sir,” Weirstein told him.

Kael chuckled. “Of course. For a minute I thought you were hungry.” Normally he would never proceed with a flogging without first securing a safe word from his sub. But there was no word in the world that would keep Weirstein safe that night.

“I take a lot of punishment before I use it, Master.”

“Good boy.”

Kael licked his forefinger and reached between the man’s legs to press his fingertip against the dark pink perineum. Slowly, tantalizingly, he ran his finger up the crack and stopped at the puckered anus. The man gasped, his breathing becoming heavier. Kael retraced his path back down to the ball sac, watching as the buttocks clenched and quivered. Without warning he grabbed the scrotum, squeezing it until Weirstein whimpered. Releasing his tight grip, he let the balls lie loose in his hand, weighing them, rolling them in his palm.

“Nice balls, boy. Maybe I’ll let you suck on mine in a while.” He said it only to inflame; there would be no time for that.

"Thank you, Master, thank you." Weirstein's words caught in his throat; he swallowed and repeated, "Thank you, Master. Thank you, Sir." His gratitude was touching.

When Weirstein least expected it, Kael gripped the loose skin again and pulled hard, dragging the ball sac downward. The sub let out a scream. Kael leaned forward, pressing his chest into Weirstein's back. "Don't let me hear you make any more noise, boy. You'll have half the staff up here."

"I beg your pardon, Sir."

Kael stood up, releasing Weirstein's balls. Again he pressed his finger against the perineum, tracing a path upward as Weirstein's breathing increased by degrees. At the very top of the cleft, he stopped.

"Shall I whip your backside now?" It was not a question, but he liked to talk as he worked and he always enjoyed it when a boy responded with gratitude.

"Yes, please, Sir. If you would be so good, Master." Weirstein watched Kael over his shoulder.

He went to the wardrobe and opened it. A selection of the man's belts was laid out on a hanger. He took a wide black leather belt and then turned to look at Weirstein while he slapped it against his palm, feeling its weight and enjoying the smell of the good quality leather. It was an expensive belt from a high-end shop. It would hurt. He walked slowly back toward Weirstein, knowing his languid stroll would serve to arouse the man further in this vulnerable position. He watched Weirstein's chest heave, his buttocks tightening and releasing rhythmically.

"Bow your head and close your eyes, boy."

"Yes, Sir."

Kael stood directly behind Weirstein, where the man could not see him. The stance often terrified a sub and increased their excitement.

"Please, Sir, I beg you to begin." There was desperation in Weirstein's voice.

Taking his pleasure at a kill was always a risk, but the hotel was quiet and Weirstein was settling down for the night, so he was not expected anywhere nor expecting visitors. Still, there was no time to properly warm him up. "It's going to be hard and fast, so not a sound," Kael warned him.

"Thank you, Master."

Kael raised his muscular arm, bringing the belt down hard across the middle of the buttocks. Weirstein flinched but did not move more than a fraction of an inch. The leathery skin on his buttocks attested to many previous floggings, and Kael knew he could go all out. "I see you like a cane. Your backside tells the story."

"Yes, Sir, but I do not have one with me. Perhaps another time, Master."

"Perhaps." Kael raised his arm again and landed a volley of hard, fast blows.

The crack of leather against flesh and the *hiss* of the belt as it flew through the air were the only sounds in the silent room. Weirstein neither moved nor seemed to breathe. For a full five minutes, Kael belted the backside in front of him, his own

cock growing harder with every blow. When the buttocks were scarlet and deeply welted, he began on the thighs, relentlessly working his way down to the knees and back up again. When his cock was ready to explode, he returned to the buttocks, thrashing so fast and so hard that sweat ran down his neck and chest.

The rise and fall of the belt, the steady rhythm of flogging a man was hypnotic. When Kael flogged, his instrument became an extension of his arm, each blow reverberating through his body. He had to be very careful in a situation like this because he tended to lose track of time and to forget where he was once he got into the moment with a sub.

“Master, please, I beg you.”

For a split second he thought Weirstein was begging him to stop. But the man was a seasoned sub; he was begging for permission to climax. Kael had to admire the man’s ability to hold back when he was so stimulated.

“Do it,” Kael said. “You have my permission.”

Weirstein grunted out a long, slow climax, his buttocks pumping the air, reaching out toward the belt. Before he had finished, Kael dropped the belt and pulled on the condom. He gripped the man’s buttocks in both hands, prying them wide apart, and positioned his cock at the tight anus. He thrust hard and deep. Almost instantly his orgasm began to rush through his thighs and belly. He took no more than four or five violent thrusts before his hot sperm shot out, filling the condom. It was all he could do not to scream out his pleasure.

Grasping the arms of the chair, he leaned forward over the man’s back, still embedded deeply within him. His climax subsided; his breath slowed. For long minutes he rested, enjoying the tingling aftermath of a good fuck. “Don’t move,” he whispered, “and don’t speak.”

Like a good submissive, Weirstein remained immobile, still breathing heavily, bent over, vulnerable and trusting. He appeared utterly at peace.

Kael slid his limp cock free and walked over to his clothes. From the pocket of his trousers, he took the retractable scalpel he liked to use and came up behind the man again, his thumb in position on the release button. He moved back into position as though he intended to fuck Weirstein a second time, his groin pressed against the man’s hot, welted buttocks, his chest folded intimately over his back.

“Thank you, Master,” Weirstein said, gratitude heavy in his voice. “Thank you, Sir.”

“You’re welcome.” Kael pressed the safety button, and the razor-sharp scalpel shot deep into the man’s external jugular vein.

Weirstein drew in a long breath and fell silent. A hissing sound followed as blood began to gush from the vein. Kael pressed all his weight down onto the man’s back, making it impossible for him to rise. Weirstein struggled to get his hands to his neck in an automatic response to stanch the flow, but he was helpless, his blood and his strength rushing from his body.

When the struggle was over, the target dead, Kael stood up and checked himself for blood spatter. There was nothing. He took the condom to the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet, then dressed without hurrying.

At the door he looked back. A thick pool of dark blood soaked the carpet beneath the man's neck. His eyes were half-open.

Nice-looking man.

In the corridor Kael walked quickly, but calmly, back the way he had come, pulling off his latex gloves and shoving them into his pocket. The passage leading to the alleyway was empty. Already Kael wanted to be home. A short first-class flight and he would be back in London at his expensive flat on the River Thames, settling into his own bed, sleeping for hours.

"Scheiße!" he said out loud, but in German. Shite.

The man he had left unconscious in the mop cupboard had come round and pushed the door open a crack, perhaps looking out to see where he might find clothes.

His wide, frightened eyes met Kael's, and even though he had not actually seen Kael earlier, it was obvious Kael was the man who had attacked him. For one thing, Kael was wearing his uniform. He slammed the door closed, shutting himself in.

Kael grabbed the doorknob, but the man had tight hold of it. Anger flooding him, Kael yanked hard. The door flew open, and he stepped inside, his hand already on the scalpel in his pocket. Naked and terrified, the man held his hands defensively in front of him. Without taking his eyes off the target, Kael saw stacks of cloths on a shelf to his right. He snatched a cloth and with lightning-quick speed brought the scalpel up and found the man's jugular, pressing the cloth over his hand to prevent blood spatter.

Collateral damage. Why did you have to open the door? Why did you have to see me?

Gently he lowered the man to the floor. Taking a fresh cloth, he wiped the man's flesh where he had touched him and cleaned off the doorknob on both sides of the door, then closed it carefully. Outside in the cool night, he grabbed his bag of clothes and left without looking back.

If there was one thing he hated, it was collateral damage, but as they told them in training, there would always be some.

* * *

London, England

Naked, fresh from a hot shower, and hungry, Kael walked into the kitchen and opened the fridge. A carton of cream for coffee and a carton of milk for tea stood side by side. The fridge was empty. He never cooked and rarely ate at home. Sometimes

he threw a half-eaten jar of caviar in there, but today there was nothing. He could eat later.

He wandered into the extensive living room and crossed the bare hardwood floor to the picture windows that looked out onto the Thames. The sun was just beginning to rise over the water, casting it into a pure golden light.

Kael liked his flat spotlessly clean and perfectly neat. It was so perfect it look unlived in. There was not a photograph on the walls or a memento from his travels on the pristine glass-and-oak coffee table or sideboard, but there were several tasteful pieces of abstract expressionist art on the walls. He adored Rothko but doubted he would ever be rich enough to do anything but look at them at a gallery.

For a fleeting moment, his mind went back to Vienna. The sex had been excellent. God, he was tired.

In the bedroom stood the king-size bed where he always slept alone. The white sheets were crisp and perfect, the white duvet fluffed to perfection, the pillows just right. A charwoman came in twice a week, but only when he was home. Otherwise he changed the bed himself every day.

Kael slid his arm under the mattress and took out the book. He'd be in deep shite with MI6 if anyone found it, but ever since last year when Misha had died, he had been planning to make a record of his life. He threw back the duvet and piled up the pillows, then sat back with his knees up. From the bedside table drawer, he took a pen and began to write.

I met Conran at school when I was twelve and he was sixteen. I was already tall for my age and my shoulders were filling out. I matched him in strength and height, but he was my superior, or so he thought, because he was older. As a prefect it was his job to inspect our dormitory every night before bed, looking for illegal food and dirty books.

He thought he was in the army.

We stood beside these narrow, hard little beds, that the parents—not mine—were paying a fortune for us to sleep in, while a nasty teenager, who thought he was Flashman from Tom Brown's Schooldays, marched up and down looking at us like we were filth. Every night he would look at me and find something wrong. He would say, "Your bedside table needs dusting, Saunders, but what can we expect from a council estate charity case?"

Things like that.

The boys who had not yet got a beating from me would laugh. Those who had would look at Conran with pity.

Conran thought the worst thing that had happened to the British school system, and especially College Grange, was that caning had been officially banned in 1988. He was the only one I was nervous of, but I never let him know that.

I was in my second year at College Grange, thirteen years old, when the parents all came for Sports Day and my mum got on the train and came all that way to

watch me win all the races, as well as the high jump and long jump. She screamed her head off during the races, cheering me on, while all the posh mums looked at her with disgust. That night Conran sneered at her cheap clothes and Scouse accent, and my apprehension turned into rage.

I waited until lights-out and got out of bed. The boys saw me go, but no one dared say anything except Freddie. He said, "Saunders, get back into bed, you'll get into such trouble."

I told him that Conran needed a lesson in manners.

I found Conran alone in the showers wanking himself off with a porn magazine full of women with big breasts and shaved pussies. For a moment he was terrified at getting caught, until he realized it was only me and then he got belligerent, telling me to get back to bed or he would order me to have cold showers for a week. He had the power to do that.

I threw my pyjamas on the floor and raped him. We were equal in strength, but he had never in his life been as angry as I was most of the time, and after the way he had sneered at my mum, he was lucky I didn't rip his cock off.

He never told anyone what I did to him and he never spoke to me again until the day I walked into his office in Vauxhall Cross at the age of twenty-two after ten months of training with the Secret Intelligence Service. Most recruits spent a couple of years in training, but I had a natural talent for the work. He's been my handler ever since.

Kael closed the book and returned it to its hiding place. He pressed a button on the console beside the bed and watched the blinds lower slowly, cutting out the bright morning sun. In the comforting darkness he stretched out and then curled up on his side like a child. He closed his eyes and slept solidly for twelve hours.

Chapter Three

Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Angel stripped off his clothes and dropped them on the floor, knowing he would never get around to washing them. He had to leave in the next couple of days, and he couldn't carry much, just the few things he really wanted.

His mother had left early that morning, gone to live with her new boyfriend in France without leaving a forwarding address, let alone inviting him to go with her. *Boyfriend* was a stupid word; the old creep was at least seventy. Angel's stepfather had been away on business for several days and had returned just that evening, so she had made her escape. That morning Angel had gone down to the kitchen, and Maria-Jesus had said, "*Mrs. Andresen gone.*" Then she had shrugged and hugged him.

He couldn't stay in the same house as his stepfather. The guy couldn't stand him, and it was entirely mutual. They had lived in the same house for five years, and Sven had never said a kind or civil word to him. Even if Angel did not plan to move out, Sven Andresen would throw him out as soon as he found out his wife had left him.

In the en-suite bathroom, Angel switched on the light and turned on the hot water in the shower. He loved his bedroom and bathroom at the Cape Cod house. They were much bigger than at the Manhattan apartment. More than anything he loved hitching up the cape to Provincetown to look at gorgeous men on the beach. But that day, after his mother had left, he had taken one of Sven's cars and managed to dent the driver's side door against a lamppost.

Deciding he wanted a Coke he grabbed his robe to head downstairs. "On second thought," He tossed it on the floor with his clothes. Sven got furious when he left his room naked, but he no longer gave a damn what Sven thought. Sven could call him "queer little fucker" all he wanted; tomorrow he'd be gone.

Leaving the shower running, Angel padded down the stairs into the wide entrance hall, his bare feet silent on the hardwood floors. The kitchen stood on the west side of the house, and he had to pass the lounge to reach it. One side of the double mahogany doors stood open, the light from inside illuminating a small area of the dark hall. A loud voice erupted from inside.

Sven was on the phone screaming at Angel's mom. "Get your fucking ass home, bitch!" A pause. "Oh yes you are; you are coming home. Do you think you are going to get alimony out of me? You'll get nothing!"

His mother didn't care about alimony. She was still young, only thirty-four, and beautiful. She had found Gregoire St. Germaine several months before when she had taken Angel skiing in Whistler. She wanted the designer clothes and purses she had got used to being married to Sven, the expensive perfumes and trips to Europe. The new man would give her all that and more, and without the abuse Sven doled out.

Sven had a vile temper. Angel had lost count of the number of times he had listened to them screaming at each other, followed by Sven giving his mother a smack. Then there were days of bliss when they made up and cooed at each other while her black eyes healed.

He crept up to the double doors and stood behind the closed side, peeking in. Sven sat on the dark red leather chesterfield sofa, his back to the wide French windows that looked out onto the sea. The surf was loud tonight, the waves roaring in. Fists clenched, Sven shouted, "No one else will have you, whore! Get the fuck home!"

She's not coming home, and she's already found someone else, dickhead. He's richer than you and too old to knock her around.

Angel watched his stepfather, handsome and tall, always well dressed even at home. The anger on Sven's face was beginning to melt. "Please, Samantha, come home. I love you. I'll never lay a hand on you again."

Angel stepped out from behind the door and stood in the full light, waiting. It took Sven a second to see him. Hands on his narrow hips, Angel wiggled his ass while offering an exaggerated wink. Anger flaring quickly again, Sven's face contorted. He angered easily and had never had even the smallest patience with Angel. Grabbing the case containing his reading glasses, he hurled it. It landed on the rug about ten feet from Sven, missing Angel by another six feet. He ducked back behind the door, still peeking at his stepfather, a grin plastered across his face.

"How come you didn't take your fucking faggot son with you? He dented the door on my BMW today. He doesn't even have a license, and that's the third car of mine he's damaged. You should have taken him, because I'm going to kill him."

Angel shivered. He might be wise to leave tonight.

"I will, Samantha. You come home, or I'll kill your son. He's a useless piece of shit anyway."

A silhouette flitted past the French windows and was gone. Angel squinted. There was nothing there. He had imagined it.

It was back.

A very tall, broad-shouldered figure stood at the French windows, doing something to the lock. Either he was completely silent, or the surf and Sven's voice drowned him out, because he made no sound.

The next few moments were surreal.

The French windows opened a slit, and a man dressed in unrelieved black stepped inside, closing them behind him so fast that the rush of the wind and surf had no time to enter with him. He was huge and handsome, with a shaved head, and his eyes were a stunning bright blue. His jaw had that chiseled, masculine look, like he'd just stepped out of a magazine.

He must work with Sven.

Sven had no idea anyone was behind him, not even when the man stood so close that he put a gun directly behind Sven's ear and fired.

Almost no sound came from the gun, just a little *pop*. It looked like the kind James Bond used in *Quantum of Solace*, with a silencer. Sven dropped the phone and slumped to one side. Blood ran from the wound, down his neck, and onto his immaculate, white Armani shirt, creating a fractallike pattern.

As silently as he had entered, the man turned to leave. At the French windows, he froze and pivoted round again. His body as still as a statue, he scanned the room by turning his head very slowly. Angel wanted to duck out of the way—it would have taken him a split second—but he froze, just like the stranger had a second ago.

The beautiful blue eyes met his. The man put one hand on the back of the chesterfield to lever himself and sprang over the couch toward him.

Angel ran back up the stairs and along the hall to his bedroom. His heart thudded—not from running—but from fear. Pure, unadulterated, sickening fear.

In his bedroom, he turned off the light and ran into the bathroom, flipping off that light as well, until he stood in the pitch-dark. Nothing but the sound of rushing water filled his head. On tiptoe Angel crept into the shower. The water ran hot, streaming over his body. He had forgotten he had left it running, and the room was filled with steam. The man had killed Sven, and now he would kill Angel. He pressed his back to the tiles, waiting to die.

* * *

Kael stood in the bedroom in the dark. He had studied the house plan with his usual attention to detail and knew the boy was trapped in the bathroom.

He also knew the boy should not have been there. Mrs. Andresen had left her husband that morning, and he had been told by intelligence that the boy had left with her. Not only was he in the house, but he had seen Kael's face and seen him hit the target.

Only that familiar prickly sensation on the back of his neck that alerted him to danger had made him turn around. At first he had no idea what it was: male, female, child, or adult. It was not until his foot hit the bottom step of the staircase that he saw a very slender naked male figure ahead of him running through the darkened house, and knew it was Andresen's stepson.

There was nothing else to do. He had to kill the boy.

Kael stood in the bathroom doorway. His incredible night vision had always been an asset. The room was both dark and unfamiliar; added to that, it was filled with steam, and still he could see a vague outline of the boy plastered against the tiles in the big shower stall. It was one of those showers with three jets and room for an intimate gathering, bigger than his own shower at home.

From his pocket he removed the scalpel, placed his gun on the floor, and removed his clothes, smiling all the while. The blood would run down the drain, and he could rinse off any spatter. Why didn't all his kills have the decency to hop in the shower and make his life easier? He stripped off his latex gloves and shoved them in his pocket.

When he was naked, the scalpel in his hand, he flipped on the light. A whimper issued from the shower. Kael crossed the bathroom and opened the glass door. He stepped into the shower and stood absolutely still. Flattened against the wall stood a lovely and utterly terrified boy. Blond hair was soaked to his head, and his big silvery gray eyes opened wide with fear, staring straight at Kael.

The smell of warm urine filled Kael's nostrils, and he looked down at the boy's legs to see yellow piss mingling with the water. The boy also looked down, then back at Kael, shame passing over his face.

"Are you going to kill me?" The voice was little more than a whisper.

An unexpected and overwhelming feeling gripped Kael in the belly. He wanted to take the boy in his arms and calm his fears. He wanted to comfort him, not kill him. "Why would I do that?" Of course he was going to kill him, but he wanted the boy's fear to go away first. He enclosed the scalpel tightly in his hand, hiding it.

"Are you English?"

The situation was ludicrous, yet the boy's natural curiosity forced him to ask a question that made it feel almost commonplace. "Yes. What's your name, boy?"

"Angel," he said softly. "Angel Button."

"Angel," Kael repeated and opened both his arms to the boy. "Come here, Angel."

He thought he might have to repeat himself or take a step toward the boy to encourage him. He expected Angel to slide down the wall or piss himself again. Instead Angel took two or three quick steps and threw himself at Kael, wrapping his arms around Kael's broad chest. At six feet five inches, Kael stood taller than most people. Angel was barely five feet eight, so his head rested against Kael's chest. He looked down at the boy, cupping Angel's head with his hand.

"Don't be afraid of me, Angel. I won't hurt you." But that was a lie; Kael had to hurt him.

For a long time they stood with the water rushing over them, not moving. Kael could feel Angel's thudding heart begin to slow as the boy calmed down. Overwhelmed with confusion, Kael did not know what to do. All he knew was that he felt happy the boy trusted him, and angry that the poor kid was putting his trust in a hired killer.

Kael took Angel's chin in his hand and tilted it up to look into his eyes. His face was lovely—pale porcelain skin and a delicate, pointed chin. But it was his eyes that drew Kael in, wide, silver, and completely trusting. Kael had told Angel that Kael wouldn't hurt him, and the boy appeared to believe him. He dropped a little kiss on Angel's forehead, turned off the shower, and stepped out, taking Angel with him.

Secreting the scalpel in the fold of a towel, he took a couple more towels from a shelf and threw one at Angel. Kael toweled the water from his head and body, watching the boy do the same. Angel's hair got blonder and blonder as he rubbed it dry. When he was finished, he dropped the towel on the floor, looking at Kael. "Why did you kill Sven?"

Kael pointed at the towel. "Put it in the wash basket." Angel obeyed at once. That was the second time he had done as he was told immediately. He seemed submissive and eager to please, but then, what choice did he have? Avoiding the question, Kael asked, "Did you love him?"

Angel shook his head, his hair falling into long, soft spikes. It looked like it was cut to be spiky. Kael wanted to touch it, and he beckoned the boy with one finger, fully expecting him to come, and he did. He ran his hands through Angel's hair, thick and soft and very fair.

Kael usually had no idea why his targets had to be eliminated, but Conran had kindly told him. He reveled in the memory of Conran's discomfit that day. "He sold guns to bad guys," he said as if talking to a child.

"That doesn't surprise me," Angel said. "What do we do now?"

We?

He should kill the boy and leave the house at once. His instructions had told him there would be cleanup on this job, but they would probably be slow to arrive because of the location. "Come and have sex with me. I'll decide after that."

A little sigh escaped the boy, and his pale cheeks flushed with pleasure. "Yes, please, sir. But what about Sven?"

"He's not going anywhere," Kael said.

Angel issued a small laugh. "After you." He gestured at the bedroom door. Kael took him by the arm, directing him in first. He never turned his back on anyone.

The bedroom was fairly typical for a young man of Angel's age. Clothes scattered on the floor, a laptop computer sitting on the desk, a TV, an iPod with a speaker ring, an Xbox, and mess everywhere. The walls were covered with posters of idiots with guitars. A single birthday card stood on the dresser. Kael picked it up. "When's your birthday?"

"Today," Angel said.

"Happy birthday, boy." He glanced at the inscription. "Who is Maria-Jesus?"

"She's the maid."

Kael pointed at the duvet falling off the bed and the rumpled sheets. "Did you just get up?"

"No." Angel looked confused.

Sticking out from under the bed was a sliding stack of dog-eared magazines. Kael bent to retrieve a handful. "*Bear Magazine*." He looked at the boy, who no longer seemed frightened and had a very obvious erection. "Is this what you like?"

"I like really masculine men," Angel said, his flushed cheeks growing pinker.

Kael looked down at his chest, carefully waxed to remove all hair. "I don't like hair; I have it all removed, except this." He pointed at the short dark blond hair around his cock and balls.

Angel looked him up and down, saying quietly, "I like men without hair too. I just like them big and manly." He paused, looking down as if he was shy to say the next thing. "And older."

"How old are you, just so I know this is legal?" Kael said.

"You just shot a man in the back of the neck, and you're worried about what's legal?" Angel looked genuinely confused.

"Just because I killed an arms dealer doesn't mean I'd have sex with an underage twink."

"I'm twenty," Angel said. "I'm still growing. I hope I'll reach six foot."

"Good." Kael looked at the next magazine. "*Daddy Magazine*." A mature, bare-chested man on the cover smiled at him.

"That's what I want," Angel whispered. "I want a daddy."

"Are you obedient?" Kael put the magazines back under the bed. He already knew the answer.

"Yes," Angel said at once.

"Say yes, Sir."

"Yes, Sir."

"Do you trust me, boy?" He looked into Angel's face, thinking how appropriate his name was.

"Yes, Daddy."

"I didn't say you could call me Daddy," Kael said. "I'm not into the daddy thing. I'm a master. I expect obedience, instant obedience."

"I am obedient, Sir," Angel said. "And I trust you."

"In that case..." Kael pulled the rumpled duvet off the bed and tossed it onto the floor. He pointed at the bed. "Up on your hands and knees."

Angel scampered over and leaped up onto the messy sheets. Standing beside the bed, Kael laughed at his enthusiasm. "A moment ago you were terrified of me."

On his knees on the bed, Angel wrapped his arms around Kael's waist. "You said you wouldn't hurt me, didn't you, Sir?"

You just saw me kill a man, and after this I'll have to kill you.

He hugged Angel tightly. It couldn't do any harm to be the boy's daddy for a little while. "All right, you can call me Daddy. Come on, down on your hands and knees for Daddy. I want my cock up your arse."

Angel released him and obeyed. Turning round, he got on all fours, his feet hanging off the edge of the bed, knees wide, backside sticking out, and braced himself. Kael gripped the firm buttocks in both hands, spreading them wide. He poked his finger at the dry anus. "Have you got a tube of KY and a condom?"

"In the drawer." Angel pointed at the bedside table. "Should I get it, Daddy?"

"Stay put."

Kael opened the drawer and grabbed the perfect, new tube of KY. He took the lid off to find the foil seal still in place. The box of Trojans was new as well; all twenty were still there. "Large. You got my size. Were you expecting me, or were you just hopeful?" A flat silver tin drew Kael's attention, and he picked it up.

"Daddy, don't take the lid off."

The urgency in Angel's voice made Kael stop. "What is it?"

Angel laughed. "It's itching powder. I put it in Sven's underwear drawer every couple of weeks."

"Very mature." Kael tossed it back into the drawer and returned to the boy and looked at his anus, clenching and releasing involuntarily. He was a virgin, and he was nervous about being fucked. "Have you done this before, boy?"

"Yes, Daddy," he said without looking at Kael.

"Really?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"Do you want me to be gentle with you?" Kael asked very quietly.

"No, Daddy. I'm good with whatever you want."

The KY oozed in a glistening stream onto Kael's fingers. He looked at the boy's quivering buttocks and pressed his thumb down on the tube again until he had a dollop the size of a £2 coin in his hand. Tossing the tube onto the bed, he slapped the cool gel against Angel's anus. The boy released a deep, low moan as Kael pushed his first two fingers into the tight hole. He turned his fingers in a circle, massaging the muscle with long, slow movements, loosening it slowly. Angel dropped his forehead to the mattress, moaning into the sheet.

"Get your head up," Kael ordered. "Look at me."

Angel obeyed at once, looking over his shoulder at Kael, his cheeks very pink now, his eyes wide with excitement and anticipation. Kael wanted to see the boy's face to gauge his reactions.

With Angel's eyes looking into his, he drew his fingers out and then pushed all four fingers slowly up Angel's arse. The boy opened his mouth in a perfect O. A sound erupted from deep in his throat that was both soft and high-pitched like an operatic note held for longer than a breath.

Kael looked from the boy's lovely face to his arsehole. Angel tightened his anus around Kael's fingers, but Kael would go in no farther, even though fisting was one of his favorite pastimes. An entire fist would be too much for an inexperienced boy to handle. He knew if he drew back and thrust his fingers in hard, just once, that the boy would be unable to control himself. One swift movement and Angel screamed.

Looking at the bed between Angel's slender thighs, he saw white fluid shoot out and land on the sheet. A look back at the boy's face showed the lovely silvery eyes were half-closed and dreamy. A light sweat had broken out on his forehead and neck. His breath came hard and short for more than a minute until his lips pressed together and a satisfied, "*Mmmmm*," filled the air as if he were singing.

Kael withdrew his hand. "Don't move."

In the bathroom he scrubbed his hands, glancing at the towel where the scalpel was hidden. Standing behind Angel again, he tore open the foil condom packet and slid the fine piece of latex over his cock.

He pushed Angel down flat onto his belly and mounted him as if he were doing push-ups, supporting the weight of his upper body on his arms.

Angel's arsehole was still very slippery from the abundance of lubricant and Kael slid inside easily all the way to the hilt of his cock. His heavy balls burst with a hot, burning pleasure. For long minutes he fucked Angel, in and out, in and out. The boy lay completely still, allowing himself to be reamed, his face slick with sweat, his cheeks flaming pink. He whimpered softly, "Daddy, Daddy, that's so good."

When he could hold back not another second, Kael allowed his orgasm to flood his groin. His buttocks and legs tightened, forcing his orgasm upward through his flat belly and muscled chest. His nipples became tiny, hard pebbles; his cock surged with thick pulses of pleasure. He dropped his full weight onto Angel's back, pressing him down into the mattress. "Holy fuck," he moaned.

"Daddy," Angel murmured. "Daddy."

"What?"

"I just love saying that word." Angel smiled.

How can I kill you, boy?

How can I not?

Beginning to recover from his shattering climax, Kael rolled off Angel and onto his back. Angel leaned up on one elbow, looking at him. With one finger, he circled Kael's right nipple.

"Daddy?"

"What?"

"Do you have to get rid of Sven's body?" It was the last thing Kael had expected to hear. He had momentarily forgotten the man slumped on the couch downstairs

with a bullet in his brain stem. He was surprised at the boy's practicality in a situation that would make most people run for their lives.

"No. But I need to get out of here."

Kael looked at the blue numbers on the digital clock beside the bed: 2:35 a.m.

"Can't we wait till morning? The maid doesn't arrive until eight." The boy still seemed to think they were in this together. He had no idea that he should be dead by now, or that when Kael had declined to kill him earlier, it was a reprieve, not a commuting of his death sentence.

"Was he mean to you?" Kael asked. "Your stepfather?"

A sadness appeared in the lowered eyes. "He didn't love me. He only took me because I came with my mom, a matched pair. If he could have put me up for adoption, he would have."

Kael looked down at his nipples; the boy was pinching them gently, making them stand up.

"He called me mean names. That can be worse than getting smacked, you know. My mom always said it was sticks and stones. But it hurt; it really hurt."

Kael wrapped his hand around Angel's head and pressed it into his chest. "I know."

"What's your name?" Angel asked, licking Kael's nipples.

In the arena of work, he was never to tell anyone his name unless he intended to kill them. "Daddy."

Angel leaned up on his elbow again, grinning. "Daddy," he repeated, "what's your real name?"

"John Carpe. Have you ever had sex with a man before today?"

"Yes, Daddy," Angel said.

Kael reached down to Angel's buttock and pinched it hard. The boy screamed at the pain. "What'd I do?" he asked, obviously confused.

Kael spoke very calmly. "Don't ever lie to me. I always know when I'm being lied to. Have you had sex before, with a man?"

"No, Daddy." Angel's voice dropped very low. He frowned. "I've kissed other boys, but that's it. How did you know?"

Kael looked into the silver eyes. Now that Angel's hair was completely dry, it was very pale blond. He took in the delicate features and ran his hand over Angel's buttock where he had pinched him, rubbing it better.

"How did you know, Daddy?"

Kael looked at him. "A brand new tube of lubricant waiting hopefully in a drawer beside your bed." He laughed out loud. "*Daddy Magazine* hiding under the bed. A box of condoms with all twenty still in it."

"You're mean, Daddy." Angel pouted.

Kael continued, "And you came two seconds after I finger fucked you. That's a dead giveaway. A submissive is supposed to ask permission to come, but you couldn't control it."

On the bedside table, Angel's phone rang. He sat up, reaching for it. Kael grabbed his arm, forcing him roughly back onto the bed. He pinned his shoulders down and spoke into his face very close, but never raised his voice. "Don't touch it."

The look in Angel's eyes spoke with far more intensity than his words; he was terrified. The color in his cheeks drained, and his breath caught in his throat. Kael knew he could be scary, and he used the ability to great effect when need be. The phone stopped ringing. "Sorry, Daddy," Angel whispered.

Kael pulled the condom off his cock and stood up. "Let's get showered and dressed. We need to leave." He pushed Angel in front of him into the bathroom. "Turn the shower on and get in." While the boy obeyed him, he flushed the condom down the toilet.

They stepped under the rushing water. Kael squirted a lavish amount of shower gel into his palm and took Angel by the arm, turning him to face the tiled wall. He slapped the palm of his hand against Angel's buttocks and began to wash him. "Bloody hell, this stuff smells like a whore's bedroom."

Angel giggled. "It's strawberry-and-kiwi scented."

"It's not manly."

Kael soaped between Angel's buttocks, probing the boy's rectum with his forefinger. Angel moaned, but Kael carried on washing him, soaping his thighs with his big hands. He turned him around, poured more gel into his palm, and washed Angel's cock and balls. The boy had an erection before he began, and Kael's well-lubricated hand running up and down his shaft was too much for him. With an openmouthed cry, he came for the second time without permission, his legs quivering, hands clutching at Kael's waist.

"I need to teach you to control that," Kael told him, but that wasn't likely to happen. What was wrong with him? He was acting as if he had a future with the boy, when the truth was that Angel's time was running out every second.

Kael let him recover, amused at how easily the boy spilled his load. He took a sponge and began washing the rest of Angel's body, his mind in two places as he worked: the sensual enjoyment of the moment and what had to happen next. He was not often or easily confused, but he could not reconcile his enjoyment of the boy—not just his body, but his youthful sweetness and trust—against what must happen next. He could not look Angel in the eyes when he did it.

When he was happy with his work, he tossed the sponge at Angel. "Now me. Start with my feet."

"Yes, Sir, Daddy."

Angel poured the fruit-scented gel onto the sponge and dropped to his knees. He scrubbed Kael's feet and began to work his way up his legs. Kael stood with his

feet apart, looking down at the boy, who worked with a serious look on his face as if this were the most important task of his life.

When Angel reached his cock, he dropped the sponge and did what Kael had done. He poured gel into his palms and carefully, lovingly soaped Kael's cock and balls. The water running continuously rinsed off the soap, and Angel took the thick cock into his mouth.

Kael grabbed a handful of Angel's hair, yanking his head back. The cock slid out of Angel's mouth, and he looked up, shocked, as water poured over his face.

"Ask."

A moment of uncertainty washed over Angel's face before he understood. "May I suck your cock, Daddy?"

"Suck it," Kael answered.

When Angel opened his mouth, Kael thrust his hips hard while holding the back of Angel's head. The sensation of his thick organ sliding into the boy's mouth until it bumped against his throat was so intense he allowed his climax to ride over him at once. He didn't have time to wait anyway. As his sperm flooded the boy's mouth, Angel coughed in surprise. Kael pulled back, watching him. The whole thing had taken no more than ten seconds. Angel looked up at him. "Sorry, Daddy."

"Have you ever sucked a cock before?"

"No, Sir, I've never done anything," he admitted. "I didn't expect your stuff to come out so quick."

"Get finished," Kael told him. Angel stood up and took the sponge to continue bathing him.

* * *

They dressed quickly. Kael put his black trousers back on with his black round-neck sweater. He fitted his shoulder holster and gun, then pulled on his black jacket. Glancing up, he found Angel immobilized, watching him.

"Sir, you look like you're in a spy movie." He pointed. "The shoulder holster."

"Get dressed, boy." Kael sat on the edge of a chair pulling on his black socks and shoes as he watched Angel dress in tight dark denims and a leather zip-up vest. "You're almost dressed for an S and M bar. You just need leather chaps."

"Like my boots?" Angel held up a pair of German paratrooper boots, so shiny they gleamed.

"Perfect." Kael smiled. "How long have you been fantasizing about being a daddy's boy?"

"My whole life, Daddy," Angel said, sitting on the floor to pull on his boots.

"Sometimes the fantasy and the reality don't match up. Being a sub takes work and commitment. So does being a master, especially a full-time master." He had always been too busy and focused on work for a relationship of that depth. One-night stands only were his rule.

Kael stood up and went quickly to the bathroom to retrieve the scalpel, never taking his eyes off the boy. Angel laced up his boots and from his closet took a black leather biker jacket and pulled it on. He scooped up his iPod and phone from his desk, shoving them in his pocket.

"Daddy, was it cold out when you arrived?"

"It's fairly mild for September, but the jacket is a good idea," Kael said.

"Should I pack a bag? Will we be coming back, Sir?"

"Don't worry about it."

"Daddy, there's a few things I want if I'm not coming back."

Angel stood at the bathroom door waiting for instructions. Habitually tidy and careful, Kael took a small hand towel and began to wipe down the room. When he was content, he threw it in the wash basket. "A small bag."

I'm just putting off the inevitable. I must be going soft.

From the closet, Angel grabbed a black leather backpack. He quickly stuffed a few items in and slung it on his shoulder.

Switching off the light, Kael directed Angel out in front of him. The upper landing was still in darkness. In the downstairs hall, Angel stopped, looking into the sitting room. Kael put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "Don't look if it upsets you."

"It doesn't. I don't care that he's dead. My mom won't care either. She's already in France with Gregoire."

"I know," Kael said.

"How do you know that, Daddy?"

"I know everything. Where's the kitchen? I want a glass of water."

This was getting ridiculous. He should have killed Angel upstairs in the shower. He had passed up the opportunity of a clean, easy kill. There was no way in hell he could leave the house with the boy. He must die there.

Angel led the way across the wide hall to the kitchen. The light came on automatically as they entered. Instinctively Kael stepped back into the hall. "There's no one here, Daddy; it goes on by itself," Angel said. "Motion sensitive."

"Handy." Kael followed the boy into the kitchen, past the island counter, and over to the sink. Angel took a glass from the cupboard to his right and turned on the tap.

Kael came up behind him, very close, and slid the scalpel from his pocket. He placed his right hand on Angel's shoulder and his left, holding the scalpel with the blade still retracted, he brought up to the boy's neck. With his forefinger, he easily found the pulsing jugular vein. He was perfectly in position to make the kill. Angel trusted him completely. He had his back to him. Even if Angel moved at this point, Kael had his body trapped between himself and the edge of the sink. There was no escape. All he needed to do was press the release button with his index finger and the scalpel blade would flick out, cutting deep into the vein.

Kael would instantly step back to avoid blood spatter and would leave the way he had entered, through the French windows in the lounge.

Becoming conscious that neither of them had moved in almost a minute, Kael looked up. The window was bare, casting their reflections in the darkened glass above the sink. Angel remained completely motionless, looking into Kael's reflected face. Kael looked at Angel's reflection, and their gazes met.

Angel pressed his back against Kael's abdomen. His body melded into Kael's just as it had when the boy had thrown himself into his arms in the shower moments after pissing himself with fear.

"Life takes strange turns sometimes, doesn't it, Daddy?" Angel said very quietly.

Kael brought his left hand down, slipping the scalpel back into his pocket. With his right arm, he hugged Angel tightly to his chest. They continued to look at each other in the window. "Yes it does, very strange. Put the glass down, and turn off the tap." Kael did not want to touch anything else. "Have you got a passport?" There was no choice. Either he killed Angel or he took him home.

Ten minutes later they left through the French windows, the same way Kael had entered two hours earlier. It was the longest time he had ever spent in the target's location after a kill.

Chapter Four

Logan International Airport, Boston

Kael placed his maroon-colored passport on the British Airways counter. “Two first-class seats to London, England, on the next flight.”

The steward surveyed Kael appreciatively, opening the passport. “Certainly, Mr. Carpe. Does the young man have a passport too?”

Kael took Angel’s passport from his hand and offered it to the steward, who checked the picture. “Angel Gabriel Button?”

“That’s me.” There was a distinct flirtatiousness in the tilt of his head and the eye contact that lasted a fraction too long. With the back of his hand, Kael slapped Angel lightly in the shoulder. The boy straightened up and frowned. “What’d I do, Daddy?”

Kael leaned into his face, speaking so that only Angel could hear. “If I catch you flirting, I’ll slap your arse.”

“I’m sorry, Daddy.”

Kael pierced the boy with a look and moved him aside with an arm. Angel stood behind him submissively while Kael pulled out a gold credit card to pay for the flights.

“Do you have any luggage, sir?” the steward asked.

“No, I travel light.” Kael met the man’s eyes. He’d always had a killer smile and used it to distract people from further questions. “Just the boy’s bag, and we’ll carry it on.”

“Yes, sir.”

In the departure lounge, they sat looking out at the planes taking off and landing in the darkness, when Michael Jackson’s “Beat It” came from Angel’s pocket. He pulled out his mobile.

Kael snatched it out of his hand and flipped it open. Angel’s mouth opened in protest, then closed quickly. “Who’s Danny?” Kael asked.

“Just a boy. We met on the beach in Provincetown a few weeks ago. We kissed a bit but nothing else.”

“You won’t need to speak to him again then.” Kael snapped the phone in two and stood up to toss it in a nearby bin.

“Why?” Angel spread his hands, confused.

"It won't work in England."

An hour later they boarded the plane. Kael could never fit comfortably into a regular seat on a plane, and anyway, he would not dream of traveling anything but first-class. The first-class cabin was almost empty, and he was grateful; the fewer people who saw him with Angel, the better. Between airport security and CCTV cameras everywhere, they would not go unnoticed for long. He directed Angel to two seats well away from the nearest passenger and seated him beside the window so he could not get up without permission.

Shortly after takeoff, the same steward who had sold him the tickets appeared. "Would you like a drink, sir?"

"Whisky and the boy will have an orange juice," Kael said.

"I want a Coke, please." Angel looked at the steward. Anger shot through Kael. He put his hand on Angel's knee, gripping it hard until the boy winced. "I'll have orange juice, please," Angel said quietly.

Without looking at him, Kael said, "Do as I tell you, boy." He could hardly expect Angel to be grateful he was still alive since the boy had no idea he was supposed to be dead, but he had to learn quickly not to question anything Kael said or did. "Do as I tell you because it's safer for you and because I expect to be obeyed. Do you want to be a slave or not?"

"Yes, Daddy." Angel looked up at him.

"And don't call me Daddy anymore. I allowed that while I was fucking you, but now things are different. Call me Sir and obey me."

"Yes, Sir," Angel said very quietly. The slight quiver of his chin proved his disappointment, and the look in his eyes showed some small fear.

"Coke will rot your insides."

"Yes, Sir."

Excellent. If he's a little afraid, he'll be more likely to obey me.

Angel reached up a hand and touched Kael's cheek, stroking it with his fingers in a conciliatory gesture. Kael was instantly aroused by the soft touch.

The steward brought their drinks, and Kael downed his in one shot and handed the glass back. Angel put his juice into the cup holder. When the steward had left the cabin, Kael glanced around. The seats to their immediate left were empty, the nearest passengers several seats behind.

It was the middle of the night, and the cabin lights were turned low. Kael unzipped his trousers and took Angel's hand, pushing it inside his underwear. "Rub my cock," he told him in a low voice.

Angel leaned his head on Kael's chest and sighed, seeming utterly content. Kael wrapped his arm around the boy's shoulders, already catching his breath as the warm fingers grasped his hard shaft and began a slow massage up and down. A low moan escaped Kael, and he bit his lip in an attempt not to draw attention to them.

With his head resting back against the seat, Kael closed his eyes, the only reality in that moment being Angel's hand on his cock. What would happen when they arrived in London remained to be seen; all that mattered just then was his steady progress toward orgasm. As his stomach muscles tightened in anticipation, he felt around on the empty seat to his left for the discarded napkin and covered Angel's hand with it. When he felt Angel sliding his head down toward his crotch, he grabbed him by his hair, pulling the boy's head back.

"Let's not be too obvious. There'll be plenty of opportunity for you to learn how to suck a cock properly."

He looked down, meeting Angel's eyes, noticing again how beautiful they were. Angel opened his mouth, waiting, a look of innocent longing on his face. Kael rarely kissed anyone. His mum was lucky to get a peck on the cheek. There was something about kissing that was too intimate, especially during sex. Kissing took sex to another level of emotion that he never wanted to reach. He pressed his forehead to Angel's but did not kiss him, and allowed his pleasure to rise up and spill over, breathing hard, biting back the moans that wanted to escape but had to be suppressed.

Afterward they sat for a long time, not speaking. It was only when the steward returned that Kael pulled Angel's hand from inside his underwear and zipped himself up. When he tipped the boy's chin up to look at him, he saw Angel was fast asleep.

The steward looked wistful. "He's a lucky boy."

Kael took a fleeting look at the man's crotch, which bulged slightly. He could have the bloke in the toilets any time he wanted. He looked down at the top of Angel's blond head and felt perfectly content, not wanting anyone just then.

"Can I get you anything, sir? Anything at all." He looked hopeful.

"No, thank you. I'm good, but perhaps another time," Kael said and waited until he left.

Awkwardly, because he did not want to disturb Angel, he took his book and pen from his inside pocket. For an instant Misha's happy face filled his consciousness, followed quickly by the last time he had seen her, with her dark hair floating around her head as she went under, the water turning red with her blood. He began to write.

I was standing out on the balcony of the tenements where we lived. It was nighttime, but I could see the courtyard four floors below because it was well lit, supposedly to reduce crime. My mum's boyfriend, Gary Burke, was beating her up, not for the first time, and she was screaming bloody murder, cursing him, fucking this and fucking that.

He was screaming back, calling her a dirty slag between slaps and punches. A man and woman walked past arm in arm, but they didn't stop and they didn't offer to call the police.

Gary was shouting at her, "Give me your fucking wages. I've got no fucking money till my dole comes on Friday."

Gary lived on social services, one cheque to the next. It didn't go far when you were addicted to anything you could put in your arm or up your nose.

I started running down the steps. I was small for my age then and my legs felt like they were going to collapse under me. They felt like candy floss from the fairground. At the bottom of the steps Gary looked bigger than he did when I was four floors up. I was scared stiff of him even though he was skeletal from doing drugs, and not very tall. He had my mum by the hair and he was forcing her down on the ground calling her dog shite.

I threw myself at his legs, and when punching him had no effect, I bit him. My sharp little teeth sank right through his dirty, worn jeans into his calf. He screamed and let go of my mum.

He screamed, "Little fucker, I'll kill you." I ran and he started chasing me across the courtyard. I ran toward the playground where I played after school most days, unattended, while my mum went to do her shift at the launderette in the precinct.

Gary caught me when I was halfway up the steps of the slide. I thought he couldn't get me if I went up there, but he grabbed me by the back of my shirt and pulled me off. He was smacking the hell out of me by the time my mum got to us. She took off her shoe and began to clobber him on the head with it. If she had fought him like that when he was beating her up she would have won.

She screamed, "Nobody hits my son."

He had to stop because blood was pouring down his face. Mum always wore high heels, even to work in the launderette and the sharp stilettos had done damage to Gary's head. He began to stagger away across the playground. Mum grabbed my hand and said, "Come on luv."

She began to climb the steps of the slide and I followed her. At the top she sat me on her knee. From up there we could see Gary still staggering towards the road. "Fuck him. Nobody hits my Kael," she said. She hugged me tight and we slid down the slide together. It was a long slide and we went so fast that at the bottom we flew off and Mum landed on her backside, but I was cushioned because I was sitting on her. She started to laugh and I laughed too. I didn't know why I was laughing because I was only five years old and both of us were sore from being hit by Gary. I laughed because she laughed.

She said, "No more of that bastard. From now on it's just you and me." Even at that age I didn't believe her. We didn't see Gary again, but it didn't matter because there was a string of others just like him, useless, lazy, always on drugs or booze.

They were all addicted to something and she was addicted to them. She never let any of them say or do anything bad to me, but she always let them treat her like shite.

Kael put the diary away in his pocket. Looking down at the blond head resting on his shoulder, so trusting, fast asleep, without a care in the world, he kissed the top of Angel's head.

I could very easily get addicted to you, boy.

With great care he eased his arm away from Angel and settled the boy's head on a pillow. He should have gone through Angel's bag before they had left the house, but he had been concerned about the amount of time he had spent there. He stood up, opened the overhead compartment, and took down the leather backpack. Inside he found a pair of leather trousers, a few pairs of underwear, a couple of black shirts, some white T-shirts, a pair of sunglasses, and a leather cap. He smiled slightly. The boy had the paraphernalia; he must have been planning his life as a daddy's boy for a while.

Shoving his hand down to the bottom of the bag, Kael felt something soft and pulled it out. Wondering what it was, he held it up to look at it. It looked like the kind of thin blanket people wrapped newborn babies in. It was blue with little yellow crescent moons all over it, and it was ragged and worn, turning gray. For several minutes he looked at it, wondering what the significance of it was and why Angel had brought it. Unable to decide, he returned it to the bag and pushed the bag back into the overhead compartment.

Taking his seat next to Angel again, he drew the sleeping boy back into his arms and settled in for the flight.

Chapter Five

London, England

Exhausted, Kael walked into the flat at five thirty in the afternoon. Angel had chattered all the way from the airport in the taxi, driving him nuts. Like a typical teenager, he wandered straight into the kitchen and opened the fridge.

"There's no food."

Kael watched him from the door, and when he did not respond, Angel raised his voice. "John!" He looked around and saw Kael standing in the doorway. "There's no food."

"Don't call me John." Aside from the fact that it wasn't his name, he would never allow a sub that kind of familiarity. "I'm Sir to you at all times."

Instantly chastened, Angel dropped his chin onto his chest. "Sorry, Sir."

"That's better." Kael crossed the spotless kitchen and pointed into the open fridge. "Food."

"Caviar? That's not food, Sir."

Kael took the jar and put it on the counter. He opened a cupboard. It was empty but for a box of Carr's Water Biscuits, which he put beside the jar. From the glass fronted cabinet he took a plain white plate and got a shiny silver spoon from the cutlery drawer. He spooned caviar onto several crackers and lined them up on the plate. "Eat." He put one into his mouth whole. Angel took one and bit into it, screwing up his face, but he managed to swallow it.

"Sven liked caviar. My mom pretended to like it, but she'd rather have pizza and so would I. Can we order some?"

"Pizza? No. It's not good for you to eat heavy food, then lie down. We can eat later. We need to sleep."

Angel finished his cracker. "Got anything to drink, Daddy? Sorry, Sir."

From under the counter, Kael pulled a plastic-wrapped twelve-pack of water. Looking disgruntled, Angel took a bottle but remembered to say, "Thank you, Sir." He walked out of the kitchen into the open-plan living room and dining room area. Kael followed him. He was very territorial about his home and was not used to visitors.

Angel walked past the black leather couch, running his fingers along the back. "It looks like no one lives here. There's nothing out of place; everything's perfect."

"I like it this way, so keep it this way," Kael said. "Come on." He crossed the living room and walked down the passage to the bedroom. Angel followed him, tipping the water bottle to drink.

In the spacious bedroom, Kael stripped off his clothes and divided them into two tall wash hampers.

Angel wandered around looking at things, touching everything, driving Kael crazy. He had not shared a living space since he was at Cambridge, and he wasn't sure he could do it now.

"Why is everything white, Sir? Your kitchen is white and stainless steel, and the bedroom is all white. White bedding, white blinds. This whole place is black-and-white. White walls, black leather furniture in the living room. Has it never occurred to you to add a little color, Sir?"

"Has it never occurred to you to shut up, boy?"

Standing completely still, Angel looked nervously at him. "Sorry, Sir. I guess you're not home much."

"Get your clothes off, and don't leave anything on the floor." He pointed at the hampers. "That one is for dry cleaning, and that one is for the washing machine."

Angel stripped quickly. Kael pointed at the en-suite bathroom, and Angel preceded him in. They showered together in the sterile white and stainless-steel bathroom and dried off with soft white towels from the glass shelves. Kael opened the drawer under the sink. It was full of new tubes of toothpaste, containers of dental floss, and new toothbrushes in their packages. He handed one to Angel.

"Thank you, Sir; actually, could I have pink?"

Kael tossed the toothbrush back into the drawer and pulled out one with a red handle. "I do not have pink." They brushed their teeth side by side in silence.

Kael had never had much patience with people, but tired and anxious about the boy and his own insanity at letting him live and then bringing him home, he was like an angry dog, snapping at everything. "Bed," he ordered. Angel stood for another second watching as Kael wiped down the sink with a paper towel and tossed it into the stainless-steel bin.

At the bedroom door, Angel took a couple of trial paces before picking up speed and leaping into the middle of the bed. Hands on hips, Kael watched him. He had opened his mouth to tell him to behave when the boy turned round, grinning. "Which is your side, Sir?" Kael just managed to suppress a smile.

The whole bed was his; he'd never had a side before. He decided on the left and pointed.

Angel pulled back the duvet. Kneeling up like a child, he took the pillows on the left side, punching them to fluff them up. Kael stood beside the bed, waiting. With one finger he indicated that Angel should move to the other side. Angel scooted over, then patted the pillows on the other side, watching Kael's face for direction. Kael threw himself down full length and reached out to the console to close the blinds. The room fell into twilight.

Angel sat cross-legged, looking at him. His voice was soft and nervous. "Sir, are you mad at me? Are you bored with me already?"

Kael put his hands behind his head and sighed heavily. "Neither, I'm just tired."

"Sir, what's going to happen to me?" Angel's voice was filled with uneasiness, and he stuck his middle finger in his mouth, chewing on the nail.

"I don't know. Don't worry. I'll take care of you."

"Will anyone think I killed Sven? They could blame me. The cops might come after me. I don't think I'd do very well in federal prison."

"No, that won't happen." Anyone finding the body would know right away it was a professional hit, but cleanup was taking care of this one.

"Sir, where's my bag?"

"I put it in the hall cupboard. You can unpack it later."

"I just need something from it."

He got up and left, returning very quickly with the baby blanket in his hands. He pushed it under his pillow and lay down beside Kael, resting his blond head on Kael's shoulder. Kael wrapped his arm around the boy, letting his hand fall on the slender hip. He had no idea what was going to happen to Angel. He should be lying dead in the house in Cape Cod, not cuddled up in his bed in his flat in London. For ten years he had executed his job perfectly, and in one night he had screwed everything up just because he could not bring himself to finish the job properly. To take care of the collateral damage.

"Sir, are you a hit man?" Angel asked.

Kael pinched Angel's buttock until he cried out.

"Ow. Are you going to do that every time you're mad at me?"

Hit man indeed. He was a highly trained professional. "Yes, so get used to it. If anyone ever asks you what happened at the house in Cape Cod, you're to say you were out on the beach. You saw nothing. You never saw Andresen dead. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir."

Kael eased his grip. He had made his point.

"I guess Maria-Jesus will have found him by now. She'll have called the cops."

"I don't know, and I don't care." His targets existed only in the moments he spent with them. The aftermath was not his problem.

"Sir?"

"Go to sleep, boy."

"Yes, Sir. Do you want me to suck your cock?"

"If I wanted you to suck my cock, I'd order you to do it."

"Yes, Sir. Will you spank me, Sir? I've always wanted a spanking. I get hot just thinking about it."

“For crying out loud, stop talking! I’ll spank you when I’m ready. Listen to me very carefully, boy; obey me and you’ll be fine. You will not fart without my permission. Got it?”

“Got it, Sir.”

“Go to sleep.”

“Yes, Sir.” Angel closed his eyes. His mouth found Kael’s nipple, and he sucked it. Kael was too tired to get aroused and allowed the boy to nuzzle his tits until he fell asleep. It was the first time in his life Kael had drifted off to sleep with someone in his arms.

* * *

Angel woke up. Sometime during sleep, he had rolled away from Sir and was lying on the edge of the big bed facing the other way. The room was darker than when they had fallen asleep. Glancing at the clock beside the bed, he saw it was after three a.m., and he was starving. Quietly he sat up and looked at Sir. *John Carpe*. The name was very masculine, like everything else about him. “Daddy.” But he had been ordered not to say Daddy anymore.

Carefully, Angel pulled back the duvet to see him curled up on his side, naked and beautiful.

You are so fucking hot!

He moved closer and very lightly ran his hands over the muscled shoulders and back. The shaved head was elegant and smooth. He was so strong and big, and he was in control of everything, yet somehow, asleep, he looked vulnerable.

Angel pulled the duvet up over Sir’s shoulders again and patted it in cozily. Leaning down, he kissed Sir’s cheek, rough from a day’s growth. All his fantasies had come true in one strange night, except he knew this man would never love him. He was already bored with him, no matter what he said.

I’ll end up on my own again, just like I always do.

Quietly, so as not to disturb him, Angel got up and, without bothering to dress, wandered out of the bedroom, closing the door behind him. He looked about the flat for signs of exactly who John Carpe was.

Though it was spartan, he actually liked the decor. It was simple and comfortable, all black leather furniture, dark wood floors, and white walls. The living room extended into a dining room area, with a glass-topped table and leather-covered chairs set about it. It looked like no one had ever eaten there. At the window, the nighttime skyline, indigo blue dotted with lights, reminded him of New York, where he lived with his mom and Sven in the winter. The difference was that Sven’s apartment, though it was lavish, looked lived-in.

John Carpe had no magazines on the coffee table, no plants on the end tables, no pictures of family on the walls. And everything was perfectly clean. It was like a show apartment for a real estate agent, not a home.

Angel wandered through the kitchen, opening the fridge again in hopes something would appear that had not been there before. The cupboards were empty too—only dishes, but no food. The only thing he could find to drink were bottles of water and some booze he had noticed in the living room resting on the top of a long, gleaming glass-and-oak sideboard.

In the entrance hall was the coat closet with a high shelf Angel was too short to look at and several expensive coats carefully hung up. There was a spare bedroom, furnished but obviously unused. A second door along the passage revealed what appeared at first to be a home gym. Scanning the room further, he realized it was a dungeon—a BDSM playroom.

Like the rest of the place, the room was white with a hardwood floor. The windows were covered completely with very tight-fitting blinds so that no light could enter. He stood at the door and looked about him.

Hooks hung from a reinforced I beam in the ceiling, a black steel cage like the kind people used for dogs but much sturdier sat beside the wall, and beside that stood a black metal standing cage. A webbed leather sling on a strong metal frame with loops to place the hands and feet made him let out a long, soft moan. Angel had seen equipment like this on BDSM Web sites and longed to experience it.

On the far wall a series of metal shelves were attached, and on them lay towels, paper towel, jars of creams, enema equipment, and other things Angel did not recognize. Hanging from hooks on the wall were various floggers and wooden and leather paddles. In the middle of the room there was a wood-framed, leather-topped torture table and a bondage chair with leg supports to strap the legs apart. On the other side of the room were a comfortable leather couch and a small fridge.

“Holy dream come true!” he said out loud.

“Is that right?”

“Shit!” Angel jumped, realizing he was not alone. “You’ve got to stop coming up on me like that, Sir.” His heart pounded as adrenaline surged through his blood. He grabbed his cock and squeezed.

Sir looked him up and down. “Are you scared of me?”

“You think?” Angel quickly corrected himself. “Sir, you have a disconcerting habit of coming upon me unawares. If you would refrain from doing that, I would be much less likely to piss myself, Sir.”

Sir laughed. “You can be quite well-spoken when you’re not saying like and dude.”

“Thank you, Sir. Please note I did not actually piss myself this time. I only did it the first time because I thought you were going to kill me.”

Sir looked into his eyes and said, “I was never going to kill you.” He pointed across the room to where a toilet stood with no enclosure around it, and beside it a small sink and a plain shower stall. “Go and use the loo.”

Angel hurried over to the toilet and urinated. When he looked up, he saw Sir locking the door and placing the key on the top of the door frame. Being so tall, Sir’s

reach was over eight feet. Angel knew he could not get the key if he wanted to leave. He shivered, his cock growing stiff.

“What are you going to do to me, Sir?” he whispered, nervous and wildly excited at the same time.

“Anything I think you can handle, but nothing more, so don’t be afraid. This has to be fun for us both, or it’s no fun for either of us.” Sir smiled. “But I’ll push your limits.”

“Your eyes crinkle when you smile, Sir. You do look a bit scary, but your smile is kind and sexy.”

Sir laughed. “That’s how I fool people.”

“You’re scary when you get angry though.”

“Don’t make me angry then.” He pointed at the waist-high fridge beside the couch. “Fetch two bottles of water.”

Angel obeyed, hoping he would find some snacks in the fridge, but there was nothing but the water. He brought a bottle to Sir and opened the other for himself.

“Sir, I’m hungry.”

“You can wait. Waiting will make a man of you. Drink some water. You’re going to be sweating soon; you need to hydrate yourself. I am going to teach you to suck a cock. You can eat my cum.” He chuckled. “It’s full of protein.”

Angel drank, watching as Sir fetched a low, leather-topped stool that looked like a toilet seat on legs, and set it down. “This is a rimming stool, but it’s good for cock sucking too.” He sat down on it, his thighs wide apart, and pointed at the floor between them. “Get on your hands and knees, boy.”

Angel obeyed without question. He wanted desperately to learn how to please a man. More than anything he wanted to please this particular man, who both frightened and fascinated him. On his hands and knees, he waited for instructions, looking up expectantly into the beautiful blue eyes.

“Take my cock in your mouth.”

Angel reached out to grasp the thick cock, already stiff and jutting out.

“I didn’t say touch it!” Angel flinched. “Keep your hands and knees firmly on the floor.”

“Sorry, Sir.” Angel edged forward and, with his lips, reached for Sir’s cock. Between his thighs, his own cock, which had been growing hard, fell limp at Sir’s raised voice.

“I’ll help you.” Sir lifted his cock. Angel opened his mouth wide and felt the long, smooth length of flesh fill his mouth. When he thought his mouth was full and tried to begin sucking, Sir grabbed the back of Angel’s head, pulling it forward and pushing his cock in farther until the tip bumped against the back of Angel’s throat, cutting off his air.

Panicked and thinking he was about to choke, Angel struggled to maintain his position, his fingers curling, clawing at the hardwood floor beneath them. His back

rounded up like a cat when it's afraid or angry. He wanted to bring up his hands to push the cock out of his mouth, but he didn't dare.

Slowly Sir drew back, sliding his cock out, allowing Angel to take a long breath. "Good boy," he said. "Good boy."

Angel looked up at him with utter gratitude at his approval.

"Now start again."

"Yes, Sir."

This time Angel was ready. Opening his mouth wide, he took the cock inside, drawing it in deep against his throat, sucking and sucking. The long, thick shaft was smooth against his tongue. It tasted clean and slightly salty when the precum began to ooze out.

Sir moaned from deep in his chest, making Angel want to look up into his face to see the effect he was having. But the only thing he could see was the dark blond, curly pubic hair in front of his eyes and the flat, muscled belly above it. For a long time he sucked, until his jaw began to ache and he marveled at Sir's ability to hold back his climax.

Without his being aware of the moment it actually happened, his reality became the hardness of the floor beneath his hands and knees and the bright light overhead, which he wished could be turned lower. He wanted to close his eyes, but he didn't want to miss anything. The most important thing in his world became the cock filling his mouth and the smell of Sir's sweat. All his senses were concentrated in his mouth and nose.

When the gush of warm fluids shot into his throat, he was ready and swallowed its warm saltiness with more gratitude than he would have believed possible. Sir grabbed the back of his head again, pressing his cock in tighter, making it impossible to breathe for several seconds. Angel waited, hoping he had pleased him.

The cock slid out of his mouth. He took a long breath and looked up. Sir's eyes were half-closed and faraway. His chest gleamed with sweat. Angel began to rise up onto his knees. He wanted to press his face into Sir's smooth chest, to mouth his nipples and wrap his arms around him. When Sir pushed him back down on the floor, he knew he should have asked permission first and was mortified to have done something wrong.

"When you are in this room, you will not move without my permission."

"Yes, Sir."

The corner of Sir's mouth tilted, and he brought his hands down under Angel's armpits to lift him up to a kneeling position. Sir looked at him, tracing the shape of Angel's nose and mouth with his fingertip. "Pretty boy. Such a sweet rosebud mouth and delicate nose. Are you still hungry?"

Angel shook his head. He wanted to be brave and not needy or complaining. "I can wait, Sir. Like you said, cum has lots of protein. Are you going to spank me, Sir?"

“Is that what you want?”

“Oh God, yes!” His response was so instant and heartfelt that Sir laughed.

“I’ll spank you when I’m ready, boy. It’s my choice, not yours.”

Sir stood up, forcing Angel to stand up with him. He was confused when Sir took him by the arm and walked him over to the toilet. “I don’t need to go again, Sir.”

Sir did not speak, but set to work attaching a metal hose with a long, sleek, shiny steel nozzle to the tap and testing the warmth of the water and the strength of the flow. “Down on your hands and knees.”

Angel dropped to the floor at once, not wanting to be disciplined but nervous of what was coming. Watching over his shoulder, he saw Sir lubricate the nozzle with petroleum jelly “Is that an enema hose, Sir?”

Sir met his eyes. “It certainly is. Any objections?”

Actually he had lots. His fantasies had never included enemas. It took him several seconds to respond. “No, Sir.”

“Good. Eyes on the floor.” Angel obeyed and waited.

The feel of the cold, smooth nozzle sliding up his rectum made him suck in a breath. His cock rose up stiffer. When the water began to flow, warm and gentle, he dropped his head, suddenly overcome with weakness. His muscles felt like jelly, and he moaned from his open mouth.

“I want you nice and clean when I fist you,” Sir said as though he were talking about something quite mundane. “I enjoy fisting. It’s very intimate.”

Suddenly unable to support his weight, Angel slid down flat on the floor, stretching his legs out and resting his head on one arm, forcing Sir to bend lower to keep the nozzle in place. He felt weak and helpless and waited to be disciplined. Sir said nothing but continued flooding warm water into his bowel. A sudden cramp ripped through Angel’s gut, and he cried out.

“Are you cramping, boy?”

The concern in Sir’s voice brought tears to his eyes. He moaned louder.

Sir pulled the nozzle out, picked Angel up from the floor as easily as if he were a rag doll, and sat him on the toilet. “Let it all go, boy.”

Angel’s bowels opened. “Sir,” he moaned, his arms wrapped around his belly. Horrified to find himself in this humiliating position with all it entailed, he looked up at Sir, his cheeks scarlet. A tear ran down his face.

Sir reached out to wipe away the tear with the pad of his thumb. “Don’t be upset, boy; you’re doing really well.”

“Am I, Sir?” Angel asked, anxious for approval.

“Yes, really well. When you’re done, get in the shower.” Angel watched Sir walk away, the muscles in his buttocks moving under his tight skin, marveling at how handsome and masculine he was. He had spent the last couple of years

dreaming about a leather daddy, never suspecting that one so damn hot would walk into his life in such a strange way. It was like a dream.

When his bowels were empty, he flushed the toilet, stepped quickly into the shower, and soaped his backside with great care. Sir valued cleanliness; he knew that already. He stepped out and dried himself off.

Angel's silvery eyes had never tolerated light very well, and he was relieved when Sir turned the lights lower. The bright-enough-for-surgery atmosphere mellowed into a cocoon of sensual possibility. Between the hot shower and the subdued lighting Angel began to feel at peace and ready to face anything Sir chose to do.

Sir walked over to the leather sling, beckoning him with one finger. "Come on, boy; don't dawdle." Angel hurried toward him. Sir scooped him up in his arms and dumped him in the sling. Utterly content with all of Sir's attention focused on him, Angel shifted his body about until he was comfortable.

"Do you know what a safe word is?"

"No, Sir."

"It's a word you use only when you have had as much as you can take and you know you cannot take any more. I always listen to a safe word. But use it very sparingly or I lose patience. Don't play games with me."

"Yes, Sir." Angel couldn't think of one reason why he would want a safe word. He was so desperate for experience and to show Sir his worth.

"Red means stop." Sir looked into his eyes. "Yellow means slow down. Green means you are happy and to keep putting on the pressure. Understood?"

"Yes, Sir."

Sir quickly walked around the frame, lifting Angel's feet up into the loops and securing them with buckled straps. He did the same with his hands until Angel lay spread-eagled, his cock standing at attention. He allowed the sling and the loops to support him completely, letting all the tension dissolve from his body into the leather. He lay bound and vulnerable.

"Close your eyes and take long, slow breaths, boy."

"Yes, Sir."

Angel closed his eyes, completely content, utterly trusting. When he sensed Sir standing at his head, he opened his eyes to look up and saw a leather hood in Sir's hands. Panic and fear ripped through his body. He had seen hooded slaves in the magazines he had read and on the Net, but had always thought hoods looked claustrophobic and scary.

His eyes widened in horror. "Sir, no!"

"Calm down," Sir ordered. "Don't you trust me?"

"Yes, Sir, but I don't want a hood."

"I am in charge, not you, boy. You're going to wear a hood."

"No, no, really, please. I can't. Red!" His words came out as a high-pitched keening. Frantically, Angel began to pull at the restraints holding his wrists and ankles, trying vainly to free himself, but the more he pulled, the tighter the restraints drew.

"Stop it!" Sir said firmly but calmly. "You're going to hurt yourself."

Overtaken with fear and unable to focus on the words, Angel continued to drag at the restraints, wide-eyed, his heart thudding against his ribs. But there was no escape. Sir walked around the frame and stood beside him, watching him. Angel began to scream unrestrainedly until his face was scarlet. When he calmed down long enough to focus, he saw Sir kneeling beside him, one hand on his head, the other rubbing his belly soothingly. Slowly his panic subsided. He felt cradled in Sir's hands just as if Sir, and not the sling, held him.

"Look at me, Angel." His voice was so calm, Angel floated on a gentle wave of sound. He looked into the beautiful blue eyes and felt drawn into his soul.

"Listen carefully. I want you to wear a hood, but it doesn't have to be this one. I've got another one that won't cover your mouth and nose. Stay very still, and I'll get it."

A shuddering sob shook Angel's body, but he was considerably calmer. His erection had softened in his panic, and he was no longer aroused but merely thoroughly ashamed to have disappointed Sir.

Sir returned, holding up a hood. "Look at this. Nice soft leather." He rubbed it against Angel's cheeks. It felt like butter. "Smell it." The scent alone was very arousing. "It pulls over the head and covers the eyes and ears, but has an opening for your mouth and nose. It's really more of a blindfold than a hood. It doesn't fasten at the neck like most hoods. It's easy to pull on and off."

Angel sniffed at the leather. "Yes, I see that, Sir." It was much less frightening than the first hood. Sir held it up on his fist to demonstrate. Angel looked at it, his throat tight and sore.

"While we are in my dungeon, you can call me Daddy," Sir said softly.

"Thank you, Daddy." He felt instantly better and very grateful. Sir was formal, Master was scary, but Daddy? Daddy was strong and kind and protective.

"Listen and I'll tell you why Daddy wants you to wear this."

"Yes, Daddy," Angel said quietly.

Angel looked up and saw nothing but kindness and gentleness in the handsome face. "This is all new to you."

"Yes, Daddy."

"So you're anxious and distracted. You're looking around the dungeon, wondering what is going to happen next." Angel nodded. Daddy was right. "When you wear a hood, you can see nothing. So there's one distraction eliminated. This hood will not completely remove your ability to hear, but it will muffle it. There are sounds in the room you don't notice most of the time. Me moving around. The toilet tank filling. The heat coming on and going off. All these sounds can distract you.

When you wear a hood, you lose some of your senses, which gives you the opportunity to concentrate on others, like your sense of touch. What you feel will be magnified."

"I understand, Daddy." He wanted so desperately to be brave.

"Then there is the element of surprise, which always enhances pleasure. You won't know what is coming next because you won't see it. Do you see how satisfying that can be?"

Angel gazed into his face, overwhelmed with longing. "Yes, Daddy."

"You can still speak to me. There is nothing to prevent you from speaking, and I will listen, I promise you. I will do nothing that you can't handle. Trust me to take care of you. Are you ready?"

All the fear drained out of Angel, and he felt at peace and ready to give himself completely without further protest. "Yes, Daddy."

"Good boy. Give me a word."

"Green."

The hood rolled down over his head like satin, encompassing his skull and laying soft over his cheeks and forehead. His breath caught, and he panted a little, but as promised his nose and mouth remained free. The hood covered his eyes, blocking out not only sight, but every scrap of light perception. Angel sank into the most compelling darkness he had ever experienced. His eyes remained open, yet he saw nothing. He could still hear, but the sound was muffled. The smell of soft leather filled his nostrils. With one finger Daddy traced the edge of the hood where it swept up over the bridge of his nose and down to cover both cheeks. Then he pressed the tip of his index finger to Angel's lips, and Angel kissed it.

"How does that feel, boy?"

"It's fine, Daddy. I'm okay, Sir."

"Good boy."

Angel felt all the remaining tension leave his body at the words. He wanted to hear those words. He wanted to hear them over and over, and he thought he would do anything to ensure that.

As he lay completely still, unable to see, he sensed Daddy between his thighs. Little bits of barely recognizable sound became recognizable when he concentrated. The opening of a jar or bottle. A squishing sound that seemed to involve something gelatinous.

His cock rose instantly when Daddy's slippery fingers began massaging his perineum and sliding toward his anus. Without warning two fingers slid into his rectum and turned in a slow circle, then back again, tugging and stretching at the muscle, working it loose. Daddy continued to gently but firmly massage the inside of the anal sphincter until it loosened and became pliable. Angel felt himself stretched wider.

"Daddy, please talk to me. Tell me what you're doing."

“All right, boy. I’ve got four fingers up your arse now, and I’m going to keep pushing, gently, until my whole hand is in there, up to the wrist, which is probably enough for your first time.”

Daddy kept up a slow but relentless pressure, pushing and retreating alternately, going in deeper, a fraction of an inch at a time. Angel felt stretched to bursting. The muscles in his belly tightened into thin cords, he opened his mouth wide, and a long moan filled the air around him.

“That’s my boy. Let it out.” Daddy’s words soothed his burning anus and quelled his apprehension. Angel pulled on the restraints, but not to free himself; he no longer wanted to be released. This time he did it for support. Daddy’s hand slid in deeper. “That’s Daddy’s boy. Show me what you’re made of.”

Determined to live up to Sir’s belief in his capability, Angel stretched his thighs wider, accommodating the hand. There was a pause and the sound of fluid slapping. Angel could see in his mind’s eye Daddy rubbing more lubricant on his hand.

Daddy’s hand slid in deeper and deeper until Angel could not control himself and released a long scream and then panted hard.

“Just a little more, Angel. I’m almost up to the wrist. I forget sometimes how big my hands are. It must feel like you’ve got a grapefruit in your rectum.”

“More like a soccer ball,” Angel gasped, and when Daddy laughed, he wanted to laugh too.

“I like fisting almost as much as I like flogging a boy. I like it because of the intimacy of penetrating a boy into the very core of his being, controlling him, taking charge of his body and mind by one small orifice.”

Angel listened intently, all his senses focused on his rectum. Daddy’s hypnotic voice soothed and calmed him. An all-encompassing sense of security settled over him, and he knew that this big, strong, dangerous man had his best interests at heart.

“Boy, I want you to get out of your head now and focus only on what is happening to your backside. I’m fucking you with my hand. Put all your awareness into where my arm meets your body. Scream as loud as you want. The room is soundproofed. But no more intellectualizing. It’s time to feel.”

Daddy pushed his hand farther in, and Angel felt his anus close around Daddy’s thick wrist. For half a minute Daddy paused, allowing him to experience the stillness while being completely controlled, possessed, and owned.

Then it began, at a steady, uncompromising pace. Daddy began to fuck him with his fist. The screaming, burning pressure in Angel’s rectum completely overwhelmed him. The hood blocked out everything unnecessary in the world at that moment. The only thing that existed was Daddy with his thick, muscled arm, sliding his hand in and out of Angel’s rectum, always stopping at the wrist, but Angel wanted more and he knew he could take more.

“Green!” The word broke from his parched throat. “Daddy, please, I want more. Go deeper, please, Sir.”

“Good boy.”

Angel’s cock felt stretched to its limit; his balls strained at the thin sac that held them. A sensation of coolness washed over his anus, and Daddy’s hand slipped in deeper. “That’s my boy,” Daddy repeated over and over while he pushed his arm farther in, impossibly deeper. Angel had no idea how far in Daddy’s arm had thrust.

He felt impaled.

A sudden and violent climax came forth in a great rush, flooding his body. He raised his head, dragging on his restraints, and screamed. A thin stream of warm cum shot into the air. His head rolled from side to side. His arms and legs tensed until he thought they would snap. He no longer had any control over his body; it reacted without his consent or direction, arching his back, jerking violently as the spasms ran through him. The orgasm rolled on and on in great waves, and just when he thought it was over, another wave swept over him, taking his breath away, so intense he felt faint.

Slowly, tenderly, Daddy withdrew his arm. Several more mildly orgasmic contractions followed his exit and then ceased. At last Angel fell back against the leather sling, panting, sweating, knowing he would never again smell soft, warm leather without becoming aroused.

Angel sensed that Daddy had walked away, but he knew also that Daddy was there somewhere in the room taking care of him, supporting him. With infinite patience he waited for his return, knowing that if he lay restrained in the sling for the next week, Daddy would be there somewhere watching over him, keeping him safe. Without speaking or moving, he rested, waiting patiently. The orgasm had brought the most intense relief, releasing much of the fear and confusion that had been building since that surreal moment of watching Sven die, followed by the fragmented and screaming horror of believing he, Angel, would die next.

The moments in the shower before Daddy had spoken to him, assuring him he would not hurt him, had been endless, cutting through all the tenuous stability Angel had built up since going back to live with his mother after all those years away.

Angel felt accepted and absorbed into the granite presence of his new daddy.

“How’s my boy doing?” The voice came from across the room, followed by the sounds of running water.

A smile cracked Angel’s face. “*My boy.*”

“I’ll never be the same again, Daddy,” he said, knowing it was true. “I couldn’t stop myself from coming; it just happened.”

Though he did not hear his approach, he felt Daddy’s hands on his ankles, unfastening the buckles and lifting his feet out of the loops. “I forgive you, Angel.” He heard a smile in Daddy’s voice.

"Thank you, Daddy." Angel's wrists were untethered, but still he did not move, waiting for permission. Daddy walked back to the foot of the sling between his thighs.

"Give me your hands, boy."

Angel stretched out both hands, and Daddy grasped them firmly, pulling him to his feet. It took half a minute to gain his equilibrium; his legs quivered as his weight rested on them.

With both hands Daddy peeled the hood up over his cheeks and forehead and lifted it off. The soft leather had become a second skin, and when it was gone, he felt naked. Slowly Angel opened his eyes and looked up. Daddy tossed the hood onto the sling and ran his fingers through Angel's hair, rubbing hard. The sensation of the strong fingers massaging his scalp brought it back to life.

Euphoric and at the same time exhausted, Angel gazed up at him with all the love that soared in his heart. Daddy grasped him under his armpits. "Come here," he instructed and lifted him.

At the same moment Angel sprang up, wrapping his arms around Daddy's neck and his legs around his waist. He dropped his head onto Daddy's shoulder, resting there like an infant. "I dreamed of a daddy like you," he said softly. Daddy's big hands cupped his buttocks as he carried him to the door, took down the key and unlocked it, then strode out of the dungeon and along the hall to the kitchen.

"Get down, boy." Reluctantly Angel dropped his legs and stood while Daddy took bottles of water from the cupboard and handed him one. "Drink all of it. Between the enema and all the sweating you did, you'll get dehydrated."

Angel obeyed, realizing as he drank how thirsty he was. "Daddy, are you going to feed me? I'm starving now. My belly thinks my throat's been cut."

Daddy chuckled. "Yes, you've been very patient, boy, but remember what I said. Call me Sir now."

"Yes, Sir." Disappointment washed through him, but he obeyed. "Can we go out, Sir?"

"No."

"Can we have pizza, Sir?"

"No. There's a great Indian place close by. They do a nice beef curry, or you could have chicken if you prefer."

"I've never had curry." Angel looked doubtful.

"You're in England now; we eat more curry than they do in India. Go and get something on. I don't want you sitting on my furniture with a bare arse. I'll phone in the order."

"Sir, are you ever going to spank me?" Angel asked.

"I'm definitely going to spank you. It's just a matter of when. One thing at a time, boy. You've learned a lot tonight. Now scoot."

Chapter Six

It was the middle of the afternoon when Kael woke up feeling wonderfully rested. Images from the night before floated through his mind, bringing back all the pleasure and perfection of it.

Angel had shown a resourcefulness that had impressed him. The boy had courage and strength, good attributes in a slave, but also in an assassin. Kael had deliberately left him hungry to see if he would whine, and while he had reminded Kael more than once that he needed feeding, he had been patient. But the courage he had shown when Kael insisted he wear the hood, even though everything in him had cried out against it, made Kael wonder just what it would be like if he allowed himself to fall in love with Angel.

He had lost count of the number of slaves of all ages he had mastered over the years, but he had never loved them. Some he had respected when they were brave under the whip or proved their stamina by enduring pain over a long period. Others he had liked because they were funny or sweet, even if they had lacked determination and spirit. But he had never loved any of them. Not one had ever been allowed to spend the night or have his phone number, even though some had begged. If a slave got clingy or needy, he was dismissed and ignored the next time Kael bumped into him.

Rolling onto his back, he stretched out his arm to pull the boy into his chest. A moment of unease followed; all his senses went on alert. Angel wasn't there. Listening carefully, he heard the rushing of water in the bathroom and sank back with relief.

Kael got up and slid the book out from under the mattress. Grabbing the pillows that always seemed to end up on the floor by morning, he threw them back on the bed. While the boy was showering, he would take a minute to write. He was not going to end up dying in obscurity like Misha, her body never returned to her family. Listed forever as a missing person. He had never known what drove her into the work they had chosen. But she was good. As good as him. But if he died on the job, like she had, there would be something left for his mum so she would understand what had happened and why he had chosen his line of work. Kael had never thought he could be friends with a woman, but he and Misha had been mates from the first day of their training together.

I fell in love for the first and last time when I was 14 years old. Every summer holidays I went home from school. I got the train to Lime Street, Liverpool, and then

took buses to the council estate where we lived, carrying my bags all the way. When I got in my mum was out doing her shift. She was working in an old peoples' home by then, as well as the launderette. She called herself a shite shoveller because she was always cleaning up after someone.

I walked in the door and there he was, her latest boyfriend, Shawn. He got up from the couch where he was sitting watching The Crystal Maze, and grinned at me. He shook my hand and said "The genius, I've heard all about you from your mum. She's so proud of you." I put my bag down and he took me to the chippy and bought me something to eat.

We talked all the way there and all the way back like we'd known each other forever. After we finished eating he took me into my mum's bedroom and we had sex. I was 5'10" by then and I was taller than him by three inches, and much stronger.

For the rest of the summer he had sex with my mum at night and me in the daytime when she was at work. He treated me like I was a grown-up, like him, and he was thirty-five. We had such a laugh. We walked all over the place together and talked. We had sex in public places like the cemetery and the park when no one was around and laughed at what would happen if we got caught. He said he wasn't really an arse bandit and he knew I wasn't. It was just a laugh.

But I was in love with him by then.

At the end of the summer I didn't want to leave him. I asked if he would write me letters and come to see me at school. He said, "Don't be stupid, lad. It was just a bit of fun." But I kept hoping I'd hear from him.

By the time I got home for the Christmas holidays he was long gone. Fuck love! It wasn't worth it.

Kael looked at the clock as he returned the diary to its hiding place. He'd been writing for fifteen minutes, and the shower was still running.

A sudden, all-encompassing stillness descended over him. The kind of stillness that alerted him to danger and had saved his life on numerous occasions throughout his career.

Something was not right. All his senses came into play, and he inhaled deeply but smelled nothing. That was wrong; there was always a smell when someone was present, and his brain had already memorized Angel's unique scent.

He listened intently. There was only silence and the rushing of water. He lifted Angel's pillow to find the faded blue cloth secreted there. Scanning the room, he ran his hands over the mattress on Angel's side of the bed. Every vestige of Angel's warmth was long gone from it. He wasn't in the flat!

Kael reached the bathroom in five or six long strides. Steam coated everything: the mirrors, the stainless-steel fixtures. The air was thick with it. The little bugger had left the shower running on purpose to fool him. And it had worked!

Turning off the water, he listened again as he ran silently into the living room and to the front door. The inside bolts were unlocked but not damaged. Still naked,

he searched every corner of the flat: the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, the dungeon, the spare bedroom, and the cupboards.

There was no trace of Angel and no sign of a foreign entry. The boy had left of his own accord and was wandering the city somewhere unprotected. If Conran knew he was alive and had witnessed a kill, he wouldn't last the day. Someone would make him disappear, and if it was not Kael's own people, it would be Andresen's contacts who wanted the shipment they had paid for.

Resolve settling in, Kael felt completely calm.

On a mission every move had to be thought out beforehand, every emotion checked. Ignoring the desire to shower, he brushed his teeth and rinsed his face very quickly. He had a day's growth on his chin, and his head needed the attention of his electric razor, but he could take care of that later. In the bedroom he pulled on dark jeans, a black T-shirt, and black leather boots. A glance through the big window at the sky showed an overcast afternoon, typical British weather for September. Grabbing a leather jacket from the coat cupboard on his way out, he went in search of Angel.

For a good thirty minutes Kael walked the city in stalker mode, a combination of rational thought—where would a twenty-year-old gay boy new to the city and bored go on cloudy day—and the stillness that was like a sixth sense homing in on his target.

A bar? No, not at that time of day. An Internet café to send an e-mail to his mum or friends in the States? Very likely.

He walked up The Mall, busy at any time of year with tourists heading for Buckingham Palace. Without consciously thinking about it, he turned left at the east end of St. James Park and walked until he reached the Starbucks on Palmer Street.

Angel sat with another boy who had a laptop open on the table. He looked adorable, his blond hair in that strange cut, too long and flopping in his face, spiked up with gel at the back. Silver-gray eyes dancing as he laughed. The other boy, with nerdy glasses and trendy clothes, sat smiling at him.

They looked perfect for each other—same age, same slender build—and then there was him, so big half the people seated at the tables stared at him the second he walked in. He knew he looked scary with his bald head and granite cheekbones, which was why he had always used his smile to such great effect. It transformed his face, and he looked human again. Engagingly handsome instead of scary handsome.

Today he was in no mood for smiling.

The stalker-mode stillness evaporated, and rage clutched at his belly. He wanted to give Angel a good hiding on the spot for putting himself in danger and for frightening Kael because that was what he felt underneath his professional calm—scared stiff that harm had come to his boy.

Angel looked up to see him standing at the door twenty feet away. His attempt at a smile was pathetic. He must know by the look on Kael's face that he was in big trouble.

Kael crossed the space between them in a few long strides.

"Sir, I was just going to head home." Angel stood up, shoving his hands into his jeans pockets.

Apparently unaware of the tension between them, the other boy looked Kael up and down, openly appreciative. "So you're the daddy I've been hearing about?"

Kael snatched the laptop off the table to look at the screen. To his relief, they were only looking at Google maps of the gay clubs in London.

"Careful, dude." The nerdy boy reached for his computer.

Kael slammed it back down on the table. "Shut it! And don't call me dude, you little fart," he said between his teeth. The boy reared back as if afraid Kael would slap him.

"Sir, I..." Angel began.

The occupants of the nearby tables had fallen silent, staring at them. They were already drawing far too much attention. As calmly as he could, Kael took Angel's upper arm and began to walk him outside.

"Daddy...Sir, I was just sick of being cooped up."

Kael was enraged, and it was never good for the person who had annoyed him when he got like this. He needed to get Angel home and safely inside the flat.

Outside on the noisy, busy street, he looked at the traffic for a cab and at the same time began walking in the direction of home.

"You're hurting me," Angel protested.

"Trust me, this is nothing. I'm going to hurt you when I get you home."

Angel attempted to yank his arm from the viselike grip but didn't stand a chance against Kael's superior strength. Kael propelled him along the street, not caring that they were drawing furtive looks from passersby. Knowing Londoners were no different than Liverpoolians in that they would walk right past a disturbance before joining in or calling the police, he knew he was in no danger of interference.

Every cab they passed had its HIRED sign up, so Kael kept walking, his long stride far too big and fast for Angel to walk comfortably at his side. They were beside St. James Park when Angel suddenly dropped his backside to the ground. Kael had seen kids do this out on the street with tired, frustrated parents. Once they were lying on the ground, it was hard to get them up again without having to physically lift them.

"Get your arse off that pavement!" Kael said, still holding tightly to Angel's upper arm. He was forced to bend almost in two to keep his grip.

"Let go or I'll start screaming." Angel looked mutinous.

For a man who was used to taking control of every situation and who dealt with disobedience swiftly and often painfully for the transgressor, he felt distressingly out of control. He wanted Angel on his feet and out of sight or, at the very least, on his feet and not drawing attention to them. The only way to keep moving was to pick him up and carry him if he refused to walk. While that was entirely possible, it would draw far more attention than they were drawing now.

"Fine. You will get to your feet and walk quietly beside me. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." Angel looked up at him, wide-eyed, his lower lip quivering. Kael released his hold. Angel stood up and brushed his jeans off with both hands.

"Let's go, boy," Kael began, but before he could finish the sentence, Angel had turned to his left and was running hell-bent into the park.

Overwhelmed with helpless rage, Kael ran after him between trees and people. Not only was Kael extremely fit, but his legs were much longer than Angel's. It was also not the first time he had had to chase a quarry. At night in a dark urban environment, he would use speed and agility if need be, but in an open-air setting he would often take his time, allowing the target to exhaust themselves.

Now all he wanted was to get to Angel.

With a burst of speed, he sprinted and grabbed the collar of the boy's jacket, dragging him to the ground. He made every effort not to land too heavily on him. He didn't want to break any of the boy's ribs, but there was no way to get him down without at least winding him.

Angel landed on his back, and Kael threw himself on top of him. He raised himself slightly to look down at the boy, who lay unmoving. Angel stared up at him, fear, anger, and confusion mingled in his wide-eyed stare. Slowly his face crumpled. Great heaving sobs erupted, and he bawled like a toddler with his mouth open and his hands on his cheeks.

Kael sat up on the grass, gathering him into his arms. People walked past, looking sideways at them, but he neither cared nor noticed. He should be scanning the park for possible tails, but he could focus on nothing but Angel, shaking and crying in his arms, his face pressed against Kael's chest while tears soaked the front of his T-shirt. Torn between confusion and embarrassment, Kael rocked him, not knowing what else to do.

After a long time, Angel's sobs slowed to little sniffs and shudders, and eventually he fell silent, his arms wrapped tightly around Kael's chest under his jacket, his head bowed under Kael's chin. He rubbed the boy's back tenderly, continuing to rock him.

"So much has happened." Angel's voice was low, breathless. "What happened, Daddy? I don't get it. What happened?"

Kael did not correct him for saying "*daddy*." "I don't know what you're talking about, sweetheart." He spoke the endearment automatically, surprising himself. He could not remember ever calling anyone sweetheart before.

“Sven getting shot, meeting you, being here.” The words tumbled off his tongue, bumping into each other, making no sense. “I want to be a good boy for you. I want to obey you, but I’m so confused.”

Kael took Angel’s arms and held him away to look at him. “Let’s wipe your face; you’re a mess.” He rifled his pockets, knowing he never carried a handkerchief. “Here, use this.” He pulled up the hem of his T-shirt. Angel took it and wiped his eyes and his nose on it.

“Charming.” Kael chuckled, looking at the mess on his shirt. Unmindful, he tucked it back in. “Do you feel better?” he asked, wanting Angel to say yes.

“I feel scared and confused.” Angel looked at him, his long eyelashes still touchingly damp. “Sir, why did you kill Sven?”

“I told you why,” Kael said, using his thumbs to wipe the remaining tears from Angel’s eyes.

“Yeah, I know, the guns. What I mean is, why you?”

Because I’m an assassin.

“Do you trust me?”

Without pause for reflection, Angel said, “Yes, Sir, I trust you.”

“Then don’t ask me any more questions about Cape Cod. Trust that I know what I’m doing and that I have reasons for everything I do.” He looked deeply into the beautiful silver eyes. “No more questions.”

“Sir, is it like, you know, the spy movies, where the dude says, *If I tell you, I’ll have to kill you?*”

Kael’s mouth quivered. He wanted to laugh but managed to suppress it. There was something very innocent about this boy. He was awfully young for his age, or perhaps Kael had just been very old for his age at twenty. “I would never kill you, but it’s that serious, yes. You didn’t tell that boy at Starbucks anything, did you, when you were telling him about your daddy?”

“No, Sir. I just told him I have a leather daddy who is training me to be his slave. He was really jealous.”

“You mustn’t tell anyone anything, and you have to promise me you will not go outside again without permission.”

“Yes, Sir, but why? I can’t stay in forever.”

“It won’t be forever.” Kael drew the backs of his fingers across the smooth cheek, still rosy from exertion and crying. He could not tell Angel that he worked as an operative for the Secret Intelligence Service, or that Angel’s life could be in danger even as they sat there. “Slaves obey their masters and should not expect explanations.”

“Yes, Sir. I’ve read a lot of stuff on the Internet, Sir.”

“There’s a lot of crap on the Internet. The only rules that matter are mine.”

“Yes, Sir. But I’m confused because I really do want to please you and be an obedient boy for you, but then I feel rebellious and mad at you, like I did when you came to Starbucks. What’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing. You’re just human, that’s all. You’re a submissive, but maybe not a slave.”

“What’s the difference, Sir?”

“You have a desire to retain your personal autonomy, which is fine with me, but I have limits as to what I’ll accept. Right now we have to keep moving.”

Kael scanned the wide-open area around them, paying careful attention to the groups of trees, making sure no one was using them for cover. His sixth sense registered nothing.

“Come on, boy; let’s go.” They got to their feet and began walking across the grass. The sun broke through a bank of clouds and shone on Angel’s hair, making it look for a moment like gold. Angel was safe, and Kael felt like he could breathe again.

A few hundred yards ahead, a children’s playground with swings and a merry-go-round, some climbing equipment, and a big slide reminded Kael of the incident with his mum and Gary Burke.

“Sir, I want to go on the swings. May I?”

It couldn’t hurt for a few minutes. “All right, go ahead.” Angel skipped ahead, and Kael followed, thinking again how young the boy seemed for his age.

A couple of men with two little girls arrived at the swings at the same time Angel did. They were definitely not MI6 or Bosnian terrorists. One of them was overweight, with a lumbering walk, and they were both tending the children very solicitously.

Angel sat down on the swing and began to pump back and forth. Kael watched him with a mixture of concern and pleasure. What the hell was he going to do? He had got himself into the most awful mess, and now he was having feelings he could not reconcile about a boy he hardly knew.

The two men plumped the pink-clad little girls into the toddler swings and began to push them, saying, “Wheee” and “Look how high you are.”

Kael scanned the park again. It was quiet and safe. He looked at Angel, who was smiling at him. Kael waved at him and then felt like a total idiot. He had seen people wave at each other when they were on fairground rides, but could never figure out why. Now here he was doing it.

“Saunders?”

The overweight man stood back from the child’s swing, looking at Kael, shaking his head in disbelief. Round, gold-rimmed glasses rested on the bridge of his pudgy nose, and his cheeks were rosy with the exertion of pushing the swing. Even though the afternoon was overcast and cool, sweat beaded his forehead, proving how out of shape he was.

"Kael Saunders, as I live and breathe." With his hand extended, he rushed across the grass toward Kael.

Kael would not have recognized him if he had not used that old-fashioned phrase. Freddie had always loved to say things like that. He looked into a face he had not seen in fourteen years.

"Freddie Merchant?"

"Of course it's me. Who else would it be?" Freddie grabbed Kael's hand, shaking it vigorously, and at the same time looked back at the other man, who was now pushing both swings, one with each hand. "Adam, come here." His face beamed with excitement. "Who have I always talked about? My best friend from College Grange."

Adam, tall and thin, the opposite of Freddie, walked over, smiling, and extended his hand. "Kael Saunders. Yes, he has talked about you a lot over the years."

Kael shook his hand briefly.

Freddie gazed up at him. "Come here, you great big idiot," he said affectionately and grabbed Kael in a tight hug. "I can't believe it! It's been what? Fourteen years?" He was inches shorter, and he pressed his head into Kael's shoulder. More pleased to see him than he thought possible, Kael hugged him back warmly.

"It's good to see you, Freddie." Freddie's face was rounder than ever, and he was balding, thin on top with wispy, curly bits of hair at the sides.

Freddie looked at Adam. "I went to Durham University, but he went on to Cambridge. He was the cleverest boy in school and the handsomest. You're still as gorgeous as ever, Saunders. We're the same age, yet I look forty. It's not fair."

Adam smiled lovingly at Freddie, then looked at Kael. "I didn't know whether to be jealous or what when he talked about you with such enthusiasm, but now I see you, I think jealousy is definitely in order."

Kael acknowledged the compliment with a little laugh.

"Let me introduce you properly," Freddie said. "Kael, this is my dear husband, Adam, and that's Amelia in the flowery dress, the littlest one; she's three." He pointed at the children on the swings. "Next to her is Zoe; she's four."

Kael looked at the children, unsure what he was supposed to say about them. "Lovely," he said because he couldn't think of anything else. "How?"

"We adopted them," Adam volunteered. "We got Zoe when she was six months old and Amelia the day she was born."

"Are they a lot of work?" Kael asked. If he had to choose between his job and looking after little kiddies, he'd go out and kill any day.

"I'll say." Freddie grinned. "What are you doing with yourself, Kael?"

"I'm in security." It was what he always said.

"If you're in security, I bet it's Blackwater or black ops or something," Freddie said. When Kael did not answer, he nodded and did not press the matter.

"Did you end up being a barrister? That's what you always wanted, wasn't it?"

"I did indeed," Freddie said. "That's how I met Adam."

Adam's arm rested lightly around Freddie's shoulders. They looked so comfortable together, Kael would bet they finished each other's sentences. "Are you a barrister too?"

Adam shook his head. "I'm a full-time househusband now, but I was a clerk in Freddie's office."

Freddie slid his arm around Adam's waist and hugged him close. "It's a boring old life these days, Kael. Work, nursery school, dolls all over the house, doctor's visits. And I wouldn't have it any other way." He looked supremely happy.

Even though he was still very much aware of Angel and kept checking on him in his peripheral vision, Kael did not see him slip off the swing and wander over until he felt Angel's arms wind around his waist. Freddie looked at him in surprise, not realizing the boy was with Kael.

"Who's this, Kael?"

Kael had never before had a partner to introduce to anyone, and he wished the circumstances were different. If Angel were to stay alive, he might need a new identity. "This is my angel." He felt slightly embarrassed at sounding so smitten, but he couldn't think of any other way to introduce Angel without actually giving away his name.

Freddie grinned and stuck out his hand. Angel shook hands with both men. "You'll come to dinner, Kael, you and your angel." He spoke directly to Angel. "Will you bring him? Now I've found my old mate again, I'm not willing to let him go."

"It's up to Kael," Angel said. He'd heard Kael's name. Now there would be more explaining to do.

Freddie pulled out a business card. "Give me a ring and come over soon?"

Kael took the card. "I will. We'd better go. It's so good to see you, Freddie."

"Don't say you'll come if you don't mean it," Freddie warned. "Or I'll come looking for you now I know for certain you're in London."

"No, we'll come," Kael said. "I promise."

Freddie let go of Adam to hug Kael again, hanging on tightly to him. The warmth he had felt for Freddie all their years at school surged anew within him, and he wondered at the life he had chosen with no friends and no family ties. He walked away, Angel at his side, confused by a mixture of happiness and dread. Happiness at seeing Freddie after so many years and doing so well, and dread at what the future held for Angel.

"Who's Kael Saunders?" Angel asked as they walked. "Who's John Carpe?"

"No questions," Kael said.

It began to rain, but Kael was able to get a cab on The Mall and they were home in ten minutes. He decided before they walked in the door that he had to impress on Angel once and for all that he must obey him and not put himself in danger again.

“Go to the dungeon, take your clothes off, and wait for me.” He bolted the door.

“Are we going to play, Sir?” Angel asked, his voice filled with excitement.

“Do as you’re told,” Kael said.

He hung their jackets in the hall cupboard and removed his boots, entering the dungeon barefoot but still fully dressed. He locked the door, placing the key out of reach as he always did when he had a sub in his dungeon, and then carefully positioned a straight-backed chair in the open space in the middle of the room and sat down. Angel stood naked, watching him. “Aren’t you going to get undressed, Daddy? You’re Daddy in here, right?”

“Right.” Kael patted his knee. “Come here.”

“Are you going to spank me, Daddy?” Angel came to stand directly in front of him, biting his lower lip in anticipation. He looked so excited that Kael almost relented. But he couldn’t. He took Angel’s arm and guided him until he stood sideways between Kael’s thighs.

“Over my knee.”

Angel obeyed instantly, and Kael hoisted him over his right thigh, using his left to trap Angel’s legs. With his right hand he pushed the boy’s shoulders down until Angel hung with his head nearly touching the floor. “Put your hands behind your back.” Again Angel obeyed without pause, clasping his hands behind him, leaving him completely vulnerable. Kael pressed his right hand into the middle of Angel’s back, holding him down.

He cupped the small round buttocks with his big hand, then raised it and landed a great hard slap right across the cleft. Angel let out a scream, and Kael released a volley of hard spanks to both buttocks. Unable to move or even wriggle, and with no warm-up to prepare him, Angel screamed for the first few minutes as pain wracked his body; then, breathless, he cried, “Daddy, stop! Please stop, please!”

Kael continued spanking for another full minute after Angel stopped begging. Still not releasing his tight grip on the boy, he stopped abruptly, resting his hand on the scarlet buttocks where the skin was raised and inflamed. Angel released a small sob that was somewhere between pain and relief that his punishment was over. Slowly Kael opened his thighs, allowing Angel to tumble to the wood floor, landing on his hands and knees. Panting, rubbing his sore backside, he looked up at Kael, confused, fighting back tears. “That wasn’t a spanking, was it? That was an ass whipping.”

Kael reached out tenderly, taking Angel’s trembling chin. “Yes. It was an arse whipping for disobedience. What did I tell you about obeying me?” He was no longer angry but merely uncompromising.

Angel rose up on his knees. “Sir, you said don’t fart without permission.”

"That's what I said," Kael agreed. "And what did you do? You went out alone without permission after I told you not to leave the flat."

"Sir, I was bored and you were asleep. There's nothing to do here. You don't have a computer, or I couldn't find one. I couldn't figure out the TV."

"So you disobeyed me?" Kael looked at him.

"Sorry, Daddy, but I thought you forgave me in the park." No longer on the verge of tears, Angel knelt, listening, seeming to understand without feeling resentful, in control of himself again.

"I did forgive you, but that didn't mean I excused your punishment. You disobeyed me. Do you want to be my boy?" Kael asked.

"Yes, Sir, I want to be your boy."

"Then you have to obey me, even when you get bored."

"Sir, what's the difference between a daddy's boy and a slave?"

"It's a matter of degree; there's a greater level of affection and indulgence between a daddy and his boy, but a sub still has to obey his top." Kael opened his arms. "Come here."

Angel scurried forward on his knees until he was between Kael's thighs. Kael hugged him tightly. Angel cuddled in close, resting his head against Kael's chest. "I'm really sorry, Daddy. Is my punishment over?"

"Yes."

"Why can't you be my daddy?" Angel looked up into his eyes.

"Why is it so important to you?"

"I don't know, but I always wanted a man to call Daddy. I've never had one."

"What does having a daddy mean to you?"

Without hesitation, Angel said, "A daddy means acceptance and kindness and protection. Stuff like that. Teaching me things. Making me smart."

"I'll do those things anyway," Kael said. "It's the mushy stuff I can't get into. I don't do relationships. I like things cut-and-dried. I give the orders; the boy obeys. That's the sum of my rules."

"Yes, Daddy. I want to be a good boy for you." Angel tilted his delicate chin up bravely and tried to smile. "I deserved that ass whipping, Sir. I know that."

Kael tapped the tip of Angel's nose. "Yes, you did. Now I want you to go to bed and take a nap."

"I'm not tired, Sir!" he burst out.

Kael looked long and hard at him. "You still don't get it, do you? I'm the master, and you eat when I tell you, piss when I tell you, sleep when I tell you."

"Fart when you tell me," Angel said gravely.

Kael took a deep breath to prevent himself from laughing. "Right now, I need a break from you, so you are going to bed for a while. When you wake up, I'll order some food, and then when it's dark out, we'll go for a walk."

“Yes, Sir.”

“Come on; I’ll tuck you in.”

They walked hand in hand to the bedroom, and Angel got into bed. He took his blanket from under his pillow and held it to his chest, rolling onto his side. Kael sat on the side of the bed, rubbing the boy’s back. Exhausted from the last couple of days and the time change, Angel fell asleep quickly despite his protestations of not being tired. Kael sat watching him for a while. He was beautiful, lying on his side in a slender curl, knees drawn up, his buttocks still red from his punishment. He had caught on quickly. He had known he was getting a beating, and he had known he deserved it.

“What am I going to do with you?” he whispered. He pulled the duvet up over the boy’s shoulders and left him to sleep. In the living room Kael poured a whiskey and threw himself down on the soft leather of the couch.

The way things stood, Conran would assume Angel had left the house with his mother. But if Mrs. Andresen tried and failed to get in touch with Angel, she would call the police, especially when Andresen was found to be missing. But that could take weeks. In the meantime, as long as he was vigilant and never let Angel go out alone, they could have some fun while he decided what to do with him long-term.

Kael put down his empty whiskey glass and decided to do his sweep of the flat. Once a week was usually enough to make sure no listening devices or cameras had been left in his absence. He had found them on more than one occasion, and he never took it personally. Sometimes he would leave a listening device in place on purpose just to let Conran know how mean he could be to a sub and to let Conran know what he was missing out on. Everyone in his line of work was under surveillance at least part of the time, but this would not be the time to have Conran eavesdropping on his business.

Methodically he began feeling under the couches and tables and along the shelves. He had a strict procedure, and he followed it exactly every time to avoid making mistakes.

A tiny device, complete with a camera, was attached to the top of the wall-mounted wide-screen TV that he hardly ever watched. Angry, Kael snatched it off, examining it carefully. He cursed himself for an idiot for not doing a sweep as soon as he had arrived home from Cape Cod, but then he had hardly been acting rational from the moment he met Angel. The device filmed the room but had to be retrieved and played back. Thank God it was not sending out real-time images. He went to the bathroom and flushed it down the toilet.

The only thing Kael knew for certain was that he was not going to kill Angel, and he would kill anyone else who tried.

Chapter Seven

They sat in the living room eating take-out Greek food. Kael had grudgingly succumbed to Angel's begging and allowed him to sit on the couch watching TV while he ate. Even with the towel he had made Angel spread over his legs to catch anything that fell, Kael still watched him like a hawk but could not stop himself from thinking how adorable the boy looked. Sitting cross-legged, wearing only his leather trousers, his bare chest smooth, pale, and hairless, his spiky hair standing out at the back and flopping in his eyes at the front, he laughed unrestrainedly.

On the TV, Mr. Bean was behind the wheel of his little green Mini, changing his clothes. Angel had to keep putting his fork down to laugh. His giggle was infectious, and Kael found himself smiling even though he had seen it before. At one point Angel laughed so hard the plate on his lap shook precariously, and Kael was afraid it would slide to the floor, scattering Greek salad and lamb kebabs.

"Daddy, this is so crazy! I've never seen this before." He looked at Kael, adding, "Sorry, I mean Sir."

Kael almost said, *It's okay*, but he didn't. He had made his rule, and he must stick to it. "Hold on to your plate."

"Yes, Sir."

Mr. Bean ended, and Angel finished his food. He was always hungry and ate nonstop whenever there was food in the flat. Kael needed to do some shopping and fill the fridge for him. Normally he never thought about food except when he needed to eat, and then he would wait for hours if it was inconvenient.

"Sir?" Angel tipped his head to one side, then the other, sizing up the TV. "You moved the TV."

"No, I didn't; it's fastened to the wall," Kael said before remembering that he'd removed the camera.

Angel used his hands to show him. "It's been moved this way. I didn't think you moved anything, you being the way you are about everything being perfect."

Kael looked carefully. Angel was absolutely right. He had moved the TV fractionally and not noticed because he was so agitated about the camera. "Clever boy. How much would you say it was moved?"

"One and a half inches to the right."

Kael was impressed. "Very observant. I agree." Very few people would notice a minor change like that. Kael could always spot when things had changed in his

environment, especially when it was important. He got up, eyeballed the TV, and moved it back, then turned to look at Angel.

"Perfect, Sir."

"Go to the bedroom and wait. I want to try something." He was pleased when Angel obeyed without question, leaving his plate on the coffee table. Kael looked around the room for something to change. He had lowered the blinds as soon as it got dark out, and now he raised them one inch up off the windowsill. The windows were big, and the change very slight.

"Angel! Come here." He sat down on the couch again exactly where he had been before.

The boy walked back into the room and waited for him to speak. "What's different? Look around," Kael said, checking his watch.

He watched as Angel stood in one spot and began to scan the room exactly the way he would, by turning his head. "Did someone teach you to do that, boy?"

Angel crossed his arms over his narrow chest and grinned. "You did, Sir. This is exactly how you found me." Angel was a very quick study. He was doing quite naturally what Kael had been taught during training. Kael had a natural aptitude for observation and had learned at twice the rate of his colleagues, but Angel had picked it up just by seeing him do it once.

"Sir, you raised the blinds about an inch." Angel waited for corroboration, but by the smug look on his face, he knew he was right.

"Good boy! Four minutes. You can get that time down to about ten seconds with lots of practice. Do you know how many people would still be standing here an hour later? About ninety-eight percent."

Angel clapped his hands with pleasure and wiggled his hips.

Kael gave him three more trials, and Angel was right each time, and every time his speed improved. Very pleased with his boy, Kael praised him lavishly each time. Angel couldn't stop grinning, and he was holding himself so much more confidently that he looked as if he had grown an inch. Most people thrived on praise, and Kael suspected Angel had not had nearly enough of it.

More than once Kael had thought that eventually he would like to teach new recruits, to pass on his craft. Looking at Angel now, he doubted he would get nearly the same satisfaction from teaching others as he was getting from teaching his boy. He liked seeing Angel feeling good about himself, and the boy needed it after the punishment he had got that afternoon.

"Come on, boy, finish getting dressed. We'll go out for a walk."

The streets were shiny wet, but it was no longer raining as they walked over Lambeth Bridge. Angel took Kael's hand as though it was the only thing to do, apparently not caring who saw and what anybody thought.

From the day Kael came out to his mum, he had answered everyone who asked him if he had a girlfriend by saying, "*I'm gay, but I don't have a boyfriend right now.*" He had sex, just not boyfriends. It was the display of affection that terrified

him. Holding Angel in the park when the boy had been distressed was very different from walking down the street like an ordinary couple, holding hands.

"Sir, could we go to a leather bar?" Angel looked up at him hopefully.

"A real leather bar would never let you in," Kael said.

"Why not? I'm dressed for it. So are you." Angel was in leather from head to foot, including his leather cap, which Kael had insisted he wear to hide his easily identifiable blond head. Kael had worn leather trousers and a leather jacket, mostly to keep out the damp.

"It doesn't matter. You don't look the part. You look too young and too much like a novice. Too pretty. You have a lot to learn yet and a lot of growing to do." Angel sighed heavily. "Tell you what," Kael said, "I'll take you to Roughnecks. They're not too fussy about dress codes and posture at the best of times, but in the middle of the week, it's never a problem."

Angel leaped a foot off the ground and punched the air. "Thank you!"

Kael laughed at his enthusiasm. "Come on, boy. A lot of younger men go there. It's the place most likely to let in someone who looks like he's only sixteen and doesn't have a buzz cut." Under other circumstances he would use Angel's passport for ID, but that was impossible when he didn't want anyone to know who he was.

"Where is it, Daddy?"

"It's in Voho."

"Soho? I've heard of that."

"Voho. It's short for Vauxhall. The best gay nightlife is in Voho."

The lineup outside Roughnecks wasn't too bad in the middle of the week. Kael looked about at the twentysomethings in their leathers—some were even in jeans and trainers—and felt old and slightly out of place, but Angel was grinning from ear to ear, he was so excited.

Suddenly unsettled, Kael scanned the street but saw nothing out of the ordinary.

"How old's the twink?" the bouncer, who was smaller than Kael, asked when they got to the front of the line.

"I'm not a twink," Angel said.

Kael put his hand on Angel's shoulder. "Shut up." He wanted to give the boy a bit of fun without drawing attention to them. "He's twenty."

"Got any identification, mate?" The bouncer ignored Angel and spoke to Kael, who used his killer smile.

"I'm thirty-two; I promise."

The bouncer looked him up and down with a grin, stopping to look pointedly at his crotch. "I meant your boy, obviously." They exchanged an intimate look. The bloke didn't appeal to Kael at all, but he didn't want Angel to be disappointed, so he played along.

“You know me. I’ve been here before.”

The bouncer squinted at him. “That’s right; I remember you. Stephen Conran, right?”

“That’s me.” Kael pulled a £5 note out of his wallet and stuffed it into the bouncer’s hand. “He’s twenty. You’ll have to take my word for it.”

The bouncer pocketed the money. “All right, in you go.”

Young men in leather, mostly dressed for the look rather than the lifestyle, littered the place. The music was so loud the walls shook, which Kael found very irritating. The lighting was low except directly on the dance floor, where the flashing halogens he hated so much made the dancers look like they were all doing the monster mash. The place did not smell like a leather bar either, at least not the kind he liked. When Kael went to a bar, he went for the booze and the sex. He liked to smell sweat, beer, and leather, no aftershave and no fancy soaps.

With Angel on his heels, he strode directly for the bar. Standing taller than everyone else, he made easy eye contact with the barman and got served right away. He ordered a whisky and two beers. He drank the whisky in one mouthful and handed one of the beers to Angel, who took it with the glee of a small child.

The main activity at Roughnecks was being seen and dancing, though on the couple of occasions Kael had checked the place out in the past, there was plenty of sex to be had in the toilets. He leaned his back to the bar, watching the dance floor. Angel leaned up against him for a while, drinking his beer and watching. “Sir, will you dance with me?”

“No, but you go ahead. I’m not into dancing. I’m too big and awkward.”

“I don’t think so, Sir. Not the way you ran after me in the park.”

Kael laughed. “I never said I wasn’t fast.”

Angel handed him the remains of his beer and walked out onto the crowded dance floor, but stood at the perimeter where Kael could still see him clearly. Another young leather boy immediately approached and stood in front of him. Kael assumed they were dancing together, which was fine with him.

Angel was the coolest dancer he had ever seen. He was graceful and had some very sexy moves. For a long time he watched him dancing and exchanging a few words with other boys, though how they heard each other, even Kael, with his exquisite hearing, could not figure out. He had never thought he would take such pleasure in seeing a sub enjoying himself.

Through the crowd a young man in his midtwenties, dressed in leather, with long, dark hair, walked up to Kael, looking him up and down provocatively. “Wanna meet me in the bog, Sir?”

Grabbing him by the front of his leather jacket, Kael said, “If you want to talk to a master, you do this first.” He forced the boy to his knees. The shock on his face was priceless, and Kael looked down at him, laughing. That was probably the kind of stupid thing Angel would have done if he were unattached. At least the boy had the sense to do a little obligatory boot worship while he was down there.

After a few minutes, Kael beckoned him with one finger, and the boy got up, looking at him with a much deeper respect. "Sorry, Sir. I'd love to suck your cock or anything else you might have in mind."

Kael never saw him coming until Angel wedged himself in between Kael and the other boy. "He's my master; now get your ass out of here," he screamed into the young man's face.

More amused than angry, but definitely shocked, Kael took Angel by the arm and set him to one side, saying to the young man, "I've got my hands full here. Perhaps another time, but let me get you a beer."

While Angel and the young man threw filthy looks at each other, Kael ordered more beer and handed one to the boy, who took it and ducked his head submissively, then wandered back into the crowd. Kael stuck a finger in Angel's face. "Don't do that again."

Angel dropped his chin to indicate he was chastened, but his raised eyebrow and the defiant set of his mouth said, *I probably will.*

"Were you flirting out there with those boys?"

"It's not really flirting, Sir, it's just play flirting. You have to give me more instructions about etiquette." He said it so seriously that Kael decided gravity was required in response, though he wanted to laugh.

"Right, I will then." He gave Angel another beer and watched him dance for the next hour, very satisfied with the entertainment. One of the other boys grabbed Angel's leather cap and put it on. The flashing white lights lit up Angel's bright blond hair. Kael scanned the room, but nothing had changed, and he was planning to leave soon anyway.

"He's cute; where did you get him?" Kael turned to see a man dressed in a leather jacket and ordinary trousers. He was very good-looking in a conventional way and had an accent that was hard to make out with all the noise.

"I met him at a bar."

"They're adorable when they're young, but they get annoying very fast."

"Yes, true enough," Kael agreed.

"There's some action in the toilets," the man said, looking at the dance floor. "Are you interested?"

Kael looked him up and down. He was interested, but he didn't want to leave Angel unwatched. "Another time."

"I'd love to feel your dick up my bum," the man said.

"I'd love to stick it in there, but"—he looked at the man again—"just a quickie."

With a glance at Angel, who was preoccupied with dancing and chatting, he grabbed the man by the elbow, pushing him toward the narrow passage that led to the toilets. Just as they turned into the passage, the door to the toilets closed. "Busy in there tonight," the man said, looking Kael in the eyes. "You're very handsome."

“Yeah, I know.” The knuckles of Kael’s hand bumped something hard hidden under the man’s jacket where he held him by the arm. He took two more steps toward the toilets and in the three or four seconds that elapsed knew the man had a gun tucked into his belt. In one movement, Kael shoved him up against the wall and disarmed him, sticking the muzzle of the GLOCK 26 into the man’s neck. “Who are you?”

“I’m just a messenger. They are waiting for you in there.” The man looked at the door along the hall with a sign that read MEN AND BOYS. He was terrified, as everyone was with a gun in their face.

“How many?”

“Two.”

Kael knew he was telling the truth. He also knew the layout of the bathroom from the last time he was there. Two stalls, a sink to the right, and about a foot of space behind the door. So there would be one man behind the door and one in a stall. The stalls had no doors.

“Thanks for being so considerate as to use a silencer.” Kael smiled and fired two bullets into the man’s neck, then let him drop to the floor.

In a split second he had to make his next decision. Go into the toilets and kill the two other men, or grab Angel and get out of there.

Angel! Was someone in the bar taking him at this moment? Adrenaline shot through his muscles, and he knew these men were after Angel. He could not leave them alive, and now that they knew he was associated with Angel, that he was protecting him, neither of them were safe.

For no more than a second, Kael stood in the dark corridor, letting the stillness settle over him.

Now!

He kicked the door so hard it flew in, slamming into the man behind it. In the same instant Kael raised the GLOCK 26, leveled it, sighted the man in the stall, who stood in perfect view, and fired. The man fell backward onto the toilet. Kael turned and shot another bullet into the man behind the door, who was still stunned from being slammed into the wall. The whole thing was over in less than half a minute.

Shoving the gun down the back of his trousers under his jacket, he ran back into the bar. A moment of relief flooded his senses when he saw his boy still dancing. Kael wrapped one arm around Angel’s waist and propelled him toward the front door. The boy’s feet barely touched the ground.

“Daddy, I wasn’t flirting,” he said. “I swear to God I wasn’t.”

Outside, the street fell quiet about them, and it was beginning to rain again. If it had been the weekend, they could have blended into the crowd, but the street was empty. Kael kept walking quickly, forcing Angel along beside him on the slick pavement, turning and scanning the streets as he went. They came out onto South Lambeth Road, where there were more people and plenty of traffic. Kael put his

hand up at the first taxi he saw. It stopped, and he bundled Angel into the back, giving the driver an address two streets away from his flat.

Silent, eyes big in his pale face, Angel sat staring straight ahead, throwing Kael furtive glances but thankfully not speaking. Twenty minutes later they got out of the taxi and walked quickly the rest of the way home.

Kael took what felt like his first breath in an hour when he closed the front door behind them. He bolted it and walked straight into the living room, where he poured a shot of whiskey and downed it. The calm he always felt after a kill, the excitement and the high after a chase or an escape, was not there. He only felt relieved.

"Sir?" Angel stood looking at him. It was all because of Angel that he felt that way.

You are taking the pleasure out of my work.

He opened his arms. "Come here, boy."

Angel walked into them. "Sir, I wasn't flirting, I swear."

"Sweetheart, I know that. There were men following us who wanted to hurt me." He almost said *you*, but at the last second realized he could not frighten the boy. There was no question it was Angel they were after. The accent that had been so hard to distinguish with all the noise in the bar was Bosnian.

Chapter Eight

Kael left Angel fast asleep, sprawled on the bed, completely worn out from the excitement and activity of the night before. He threw on a black T-shirt and a pair of dark jeans and went barefoot to the kitchen, where he brewed coffee and stood leaning against the counter drinking from a plain white mug of very thin porcelain.

The front door buzzer sounded. Kael tensed; who the hell was it? On the way to the door, he realized it must be the charwoman. The place was in perfect order as always, even with Angel lounging on the couch and putting his feet on the coffee table. He'd received a swift reprimand for that. Still, he wanted her to dust and make everything pristine as she always did.

The CCTV camera that gave the tenants a view of their guests was positioned on the wall beside the door. It *was* the char, thank God! He hit the button. "Come up, Dragana."

"Yes, Mr. Carpe."

He stood at the open door deciding what to do. The woman smiled as she got out of the lift and crossed the landing.

"I have to go out in a few minutes," he lied. "So go round really quickly dusting and Hoovering, but don't go in the bedroom. I'll do the bedroom later."

She took her coat off as she entered and hung it in the hall cupboard. Out of habit, Kael scanned the corridor. It was all clear.

"But you always want the bed changed." She had a heavy Slavic accent but was still easy to understand.

"I can change the bed myself. I do it on the days you don't come."

"You like your bed linen changed every day; so clean for a man." She always seemed to find that amusing. "Aaahh, Mr. Carpe, you finally have a girlfriend staying over! I always say a good-looking man like you must have the ladies falling over themselves to get at you. You are a big man."

"Yes, you certainly do always say that. And I always tell you I'm too busy for that nonsense." The woman drove him nuts with her constant questions about his private life and her veiled remarks about his sexual prowess. If it were not necessary to stay in while she worked to ensure she touched nothing she shouldn't, he would leave and let her get on with it.

She wagged a finger at him, then went to the mop cupboard to fetch her cleaning supplies. Kael went quickly to the bedroom. Angel lay flat on his back, his arms and legs thrown wide like a baby. For a moment Kael stood looking at him,

thinking how adorable Angel was. Kael wanted to strip and climb back in bed with him and just hold him, running his hands over the soft, pale skin.

Sitting on the side of the bed, he took Angel by the shoulders, gently shaking him awake.

"Sir, no!" he cried, shaking his head. "I'm too tired; don't make me get up."

"Shhh." Kael looked over his shoulder at the door. "Open your eyes." Angel squinted at him. "Do not come out of the room. The charwoman's here. She mustn't see you."

"Why?" Angel mumbled, closing his eyes and rolling onto his side. He was already asleep again. Kael drew the duvet up over the boy's shoulder and patted his backside.

Retrieving his coffee from the kitchen, he topped it up and went into the living room, where Dragana was dusting the TV. He threw himself into the armchair positioned for the best view and toyed with the remote until the charwoman began dusting the coffee table and end tables.

"Why do you not have no pictures on the wall?" She had asked him questions like that before.

"I'm hardly ever home." It was what he always said, and it was true. He flicked on the TV, keeping the sound low.

"You got Sky Plus?" she asked.

"Uh-huh."

"I got Sky Plus too."

Kael went through the news channels, pretending to watch while he kept an eye on Dragana. He flipped on CNN, and his jaw dropped.

Nancy Grace started to speak, and beside her head was a picture of Angel. *"This is the face of Angel Button. He turned eighteen years old four days ago, and he is missing. His stepfather Sven Andresen was found shot dead in his Cape Cod home on Tuesday morning, and no one has seen Angel since. If you have seen this missing boy, please call your local law enforcement. He is very likely in danger."*

The picture was not a very good one. It seemed to be from several years ago, and his hair was longer. In fact he looked like a little girl; plus she had got his age wrong.

Kael shut off the TV, his heart pounding. What the fuck had happened to cleanup?

He looked at the char, who stood with her duster in her hand, shaking her head. "Very sad. Why do people kill? Where I come from in Bosnia, I saw so much death. I never want to see no more."

What the hell was going on? He had thought he would have a couple of weeks at least before someone realized Angel was missing. What was he going to do now? If he handed the boy over to Conran, no one would ever see him again. Kael would

never see him again. They would get rid of him because he knew too much. Conran would not protect him.

Kael sipped his coffee and wondered how many people from Roughnecks last night would remember Angel. Even with the cap Kael had made him wear to hide his easily identifiable blond head, someone might remember him.

His mobile beeped, and Kael snatched it off the waist clip. He had a number of phones for different uses and disposed of them often in favor of new ones. GPS was the bane of his job. The old cold war assassins never had to worry about being tracked by their phones. But Conran was the only one who had that number. "What?"

"What happened to the boy, Saunders?"

"Wait." He looked at Dragana, who was applying Pledge to the dining room table and chairs, before walking quickly to the dungeon. He shut the door, locking himself in, then went to the far side of the room. He lowered his voice to a near whisper. The dungeon was soundproofed, and he checked it often for spyware, but he was always careful. "There was no boy. You said there'd be cleanup on this job. What the fuck happened?"

"I don't know, but heads will roll over this."

"My instructions said the boy and the mother had left. I just saw the whole story plastered all over CNN with that crazy blonde woman talking about an endangered boy."

"I know. It's very embarrassing to find out via a news outlet that one's people have not done their jobs."

"I did my fucking job. Andresen's dead."

"Calm down, Saunders. No one is suggesting you did not execute your mission perfectly. The boy appears to be missing, but he managed to contact the family maid via e-mail yesterday. The local police have already announced that they think it is a ransom kidnapping gone wrong and that someone has the boy held hostage."

Kael clenched his fists and took a long steadying breath. He wanted to give Angel another ass whipping, as the boy put it. What the hell had made him e-mail a maid? "Maybe someone does have him. I never saw him."

"Just tell me you didn't leave behind any identifying evidence."

"I always wear gloves, but you said there would be cleanup at this one. That's their job, and it is your fucking job to protect me, you stupid arsehole!" He tried to moderate his voice, but he was panicked, terrified of what might happen to Angel and terrified of what he would do if he lost him. Wrapping his arms around his belly, he slid down the wall to sit on the floor. All of a sudden his stomach felt sick, and he thought he was going to bring up his coffee. In one moment of sickening fear and frightening possessiveness, he envisioned losing Angel.

A long pause followed. When Conran spoke again, his speech was measured. "Someone from the Foreign Office will get in touch with the Americans and tell them to back off, but we need to find that boy and ensure he saw nothing and knows

nothing. Are you absolutely certain he was not in that house? All we need is for him to have seen you and then fled in fear. If he can identify you—”

“He wasn’t there,” Kael interrupted.

“How can you be certain?”

“Because I know everything,” Kael said. A moment of complete stillness followed. If Kael knew Conran, and he did, the man was licking his upper lip nervously at that moment.

“And you did not leave behind any evidence?” His voice was quiet. He must be calling from home. “Sperm up Andresen’s backside, for instance? Or belt marks on his buttocks?”

“I only do them first if they want me to, and I always wear a condom,” he said, as if amused by the accusation, though if Conran had been in the room, he would have backhanded him for it.

“It’s a pity you did not possess such scruples in school,” Conran said quietly.

“Are you still stinging over that?” Kael laughed. “Even I have some morals.”

“I doubt it. Do you know what the boys from cleanup call you?” Conran’s voice sounded tight. He wanted to hurt Kael now and was working up to an insult of his own.

“I’m sure you’ll tell me.”

“The black widow.”

“Nice,” Kael said. He didn’t give a damn what they called him as long as they never set eyes on him.

“If I thought the boy was your type, I would suspect you had something to do with his disappearance,” Conran said.

“Oh yeah, what’s my type?”

“You like them mature and masculine, don’t you? Those are the ones who end up dying in compromising positions.”

It was true. He did prefer masculine men like himself. He liked men in their late twenties to midfifties, experienced subs who begged for his discipline and offered their arses and mouths willingly for his pleasure.

Angel was an aberration.

“Yes, that’s what I like. If that boy had been in the house, he would be dead by now. And if cleanup had done their jobs, they would have been taking out two bodies.”

“You’d kill a five-year-old if it got in your way, wouldn’t you, Saunders?” Conran said.

“Don’t judge me, asshole. You approved my training.”

“Do you know anything about three Bosnians found shot dead in a gay club last night?”

“Who were they?”

“Nobody’s quite sure. That lot tend to be involved in human trafficking and forced prostitution. But you go to gay bars, and the hit had your mark all over it.”

“It’s a coincidence.”

Kael hung up, trying to integrate all he had heard. Angel had used the Internet at Starbucks. So now everyone assumed he was missing and in danger, and they were all looking for him. The steward on the British Airways flight would remember them. If there was a God, the man would be on a stopover flight in Afghanistan right now. There was CCTV all over the airports, not to mention all over the streets of London. If someone chose to start looking through it, they would spot him and Angel somewhere, though it was a needle-in-a-haystack approach.

“Fuck,” he whispered, remembering Freddie. “I hope he’s too busy changing nappies to watch the news.”

The door handle turned, and the charwoman knocked. “Mr. Carpe, you want me to clean your gym?” she called.

Kael got up and opened the door. He needed the woman out of the flat soon. “No. Have you done the bathroom?”

“Not yet.”

“Do it quickly and leave everything else.” He followed her along the hall and into the bathroom. She looked at him curiously as she squeezed cream cleanser into the toilet and sink.

“You watch me clean today, Mr. Carpe?”

He was watching the door to the bedroom to make sure she did not open it. “How’s your family?” He had never asked about her family before.

“Very well, thank you.” She made short work of scrubbing the sink and polishing the big mirror above it. “The bathroom is not usually so dirty. Toothpaste splattered on the mirror.”

“I’ve been feeling lazy.”

“Is it the young lady who makes a mess?” She nodded knowingly at the bedroom door. Kael shrugged, trying to look sheepish, but he hated it when people thought he was straight.

Just as she was polishing the stainless-steel taps, the door from the bedroom opened and Angel walked in naked, heading straight for the toilet. His eyes were closed, and he walked like a blind person. He sat on the seat and urinated, his head tilted back, eyes shut as though he was sleepwalking. Kael watched him in horror. He looked at the charwoman, who was watching Angel with utter surprise on her face.

Without seeing them, Angel got up, dribbling pee onto the seat, and went back to bed. Dragana walked over and flushed the toilet. With her cloth she wiped the seat and put the lid down.

If one more thing went wrong, he was going to scream. The entire Cape Cod mission, which under normal circumstances would be something he never thought

of again, was turning into an Inspector Clouseau film, but with deadly consequences.

Kael followed Dragana out of the bathroom and watched her put her equipment away in the mop cupboard. She had seen Angel on the news, and she had seen him in the flat. All she had to do was stop at the nearest police station and tell them the missing young man was in Mr. Carpe's expensive flat on the river, and it would all be over. Conran would get him out of jail within the hour, but he would never see Angel again. Conran's office would take charge of him, and a few weeks later his body would wash up somewhere.

From the moment he saw Kael, Angel was never meant to live.

But right at that moment, there was the problem of the charwoman. Kael got her cash and handed it to her at the door. She looked up at him. "Mr. Carpe, why don't you tell me you prefer men?"

"I prefer men," he said.

"Nothing to be ashamed of. You think I gossip?" She looked into his eyes as if she knew all his secrets. "And you think I don't know what are all the strange things in the home gym? You think I was raised in Ziploc bag?"

"I suppose I did." Kael smiled.

"It's your business, nobody else."

It was possible she did not recognize Angel from the news. The picture was not good, and it was on for only a minute. "Look, why not let me drive you home. I want to talk to you about this."

"No need." She opened the door. "I won't tell no one your business."

"I want to. Hang on while I put my boots on and get my keys."

Kael hurried to the bedroom. Angel still slept like a baby. From the wardrobe he took the keys to the car he rarely used, and from a box on the top shelf, he took two pairs of the transparent latex gloves that fit like a second skin.

Chapter Nine

As soon as he returned, Kael put the TV on again and checked every news channel, starting with Sky News, but only a couple of American channels were running the story, and it was already losing steam, becoming a local story. Conran had got on it right away. He switched it off when Angel walked in wearing only his underwear.

“Sir, did you come and talk to me when I was sleeping, or was I dreaming?”

“I told you not to get out of bed. Don’t you remember going to take a piss when the charwoman was in the bathroom cleaning?”

Angel giggled. “Did I? Oh God! Did she see me?”

“Yes, she saw you.”

“Is there any food, Sir?”

Kael took Angel’s face in his hands, looking into his eyes. He had a few questions to ask the boy. “Yes, I went out and got you some croissants and fruit. Come into the kitchen; I’ll make some more coffee.”

“I thought English people only drank tea.”

He followed Kael into the kitchen and sat at the breakfast counter on the high leather-topped stool. When he grabbed for the box from the bakery, Kael took it from his hands. While Angel watched, he washed a punnet of strawberries under running water and set them out in a glass dish. He took a banana and sliced it and placed that on a square plate. All the while Angel sat with his hands folded, looking at the food, not daring to touch it. Kael served the croissants on a separate plate and then made another pot of coffee.

“All right, go ahead and eat.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Angel took a croissant and broke it in two, scattering crumbs on the counter. He ate the fruit between mouthfuls of pastry. When he picked a second croissant, he looked up. “Did you want some, Sir?”

Kael took two white mugs from the cupboard. “I’m like a dog; I usually eat only once a day.”

Angel laughed and broke the other croissant in two before stuffing half into his mouth.

“Did you e-mail anyone from Starbucks yesterday?” Kael asked.

Angel looked up, crumbs on his cheek, his silver eyes wide with innocence. “No, Sir.”

“You didn’t use that boy’s laptop to contact anyone?”

“No, Sir. We looked at gay bars in London; that’s all. There’s loads of them.”

So he thought he could get one over on his master, did he? Kael placed both hands on the counter and leaned into the boy’s face, speaking slowly and clearly. He did not use a threatening tone; he didn’t need to. Angel was already inching back. “If you lie to me, I’ll take my belt off and beat you with it. You will not like it. It will be an arse whipping.”

Angel’s cheeks grew pink, and he squirmed on the stool.

“Did you e-mail anyone yesterday from Starbucks? Tell the truth.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Why did you lie?”

The boy pulled the remaining piece of pastry apart nervously, scattering more buttery flakes on the counter. “I didn’t want you to be mad at me, and now you’re mad anyway.”

“Lying gets me pissed off every time. Do not lie to me. I insist you tell me the truth at all times. Understood?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Who did you e-mail?” He poured coffee into the cups and added cream.

“It was Maria-Jesus, our maid.”

“Why would you e-mail a maid?” Kael pushed a cup toward him.

“We were always good friends. She was kind to me. I can’t reach my mom, and I didn’t want her to worry when Sven’s body was found. She didn’t leave me an e-mail address, and I knew her phone wouldn’t work outside the US. You told me that. I had no way to contact her, so I thought maybe Maria-Jesus could help.”

“Your mum left without telling you how to get hold of her?”

Anxious to explain, he looked at Kael. “She was in a hurry. Sven was only gone for a couple of days. She didn’t want him to catch her leaving.”

“So why didn’t you go with her?”

Angel’s eyes dropped to the countertop, and he began to chew on his fingernails. “I told you; it all happened in a rush. She took the opportunity to leave while Sven was away. She didn’t have time to get me a plane ticket.”

With his mother’s money and that of her new millionaire boyfriend, she could buy all the plane tickets she wanted right at the airport. The droop of Angel’s shoulders and the increased attention to his nails told Kael he was hurting. “What did you tell the maid?”

Angel spoke quietly. “I wanted her to let my mom know that I’m alive and okay, but she probably doesn’t know how to contact her either.”

“What did you write?” Kael asked again.

“I said, I’m okay. Please let my mom know if you can. I miss you and your cooking. Someone will contact you.” He spread his hands. “That’s it.”

"Someone will contact you?"

"I meant you, Sir. I wanted to reassure her I was okay. I thought you could drop her a line and tell her not to worry. Maybe she knows where my mom is. I don't know." He tore a strip off the nail of his middle finger. "I just wanted to let my mom know I'm alive."

Kael leaned against the counter to drink his coffee. "They all think you've been kidnapped. Now everyone's looking for you."

"Kidnapped? Who found Sven's body?"

"I don't know any details, but the maid called the police as soon as she got your e-mail."

"Maybe we can get some ransom money out of Gregoire." He drank some coffee and looked at Kael. "How do you know about this, Sir?"

"Your picture was on the CNN news today as a missing and endangered person, along with Sven Andresen, who they said was shot."

"Shit." Angel looked slightly startled at the reminder that only a couple of days before, he had seen his stepfather murdered by the man who stood in front of him. "Sir, I'm sorry. Will the cops be able to find you now? You can tell them he was selling guns to criminals."

"I'm sure that'll help." Kael half smiled. "The picture they had on the news wasn't very good. It didn't really look that much like you."

Kael stopped speaking abruptly, looking closely at Angel, who looked back nervously under the sudden intense scrutiny.

Angel's face was very smooth, with no discernible beard, and he had definitely not shaved since he got to England. He had pubic hair but no chest hair, and he was very immature for a twenty-year-old. He certainly didn't look twenty. He cursed himself for not looking at Angel's passport more closely to check his birth date. "How old are you, boy?"

"The day I met you I turned twenty, Sir." Kael held his gaze, not wavering. The blush on Angel's cheeks deepened, and he licked his dry lips.

"How old did you turn the day I met you, Angel?"

"Eighteen," he whispered.

"I'll bloody murder you!" Kael slammed his cup down on the counter, spilling the contents.

Angel leaped up from his stool and dropped to the floor with a scream. Horrified at the fear in the boy's eyes, Kael strode quickly round the counter to find him cowering on the floor. He felt like a bully, not a master, and certainly not a daddy.

"No, I didn't mean it literally. Get up, you little twit." He reached down and grabbed Angel under the armpits, pulling him to his feet.

Angel fell against his chest, breathing hard. "You're pretty scary, Sir. You're really big, and you kill people."

"I wouldn't hurt you. I'll smack your arse if you need it, but I'll protect you. I promise you that. No one will hurt you while I'm alive and kicking."

"Sir, why would anyone hurt me? You're the most dangerous person I know, and you said you'll keep me safe."

Angel had no idea that he was in danger from everyone but Kael. "Do you want to stay with me, boy?" Kael looked intently at him, wanting him to say yes, yet knowing it was both dangerous and impossible.

"Yes, Sir. I want to be your boy. I want to be the one making your breakfast and serving you. I want you to show me how to be an obedient boy and how to take care of you."

Kael paused as the enormity of the idea settled in. Having someone living with him full-time meant giving up some control, and he was not used to that. The idea of the Dom being in charge at every moment was not as black-and-white as it appeared. If he was going to have a full-time boy and not just a one-night stand or playtime slave, he would have to allow Angel to take some responsibility. He would have to teach him responsibility.

More important, he had to figure out a way to keep Angel safe without keeping him hidden forever.

Kael kept his voice low. "You have to obey me. You cannot lie to me because you think you might get into trouble."

Angel looked into his eyes earnestly. "Yes, Sir. I won't do it again."

"Why did you lie about your age?"

He dropped his chin. "I thought you might think I was too young and you wouldn't want me. I'm legal. The age of consent is sixteen in England."

"Go and get in the shower while I do the dishes."

"Shouldn't I do them, Sir? I'm your houseboy."

Kael turned him around toward the door and slapped his buttocks, but gently. "Do exactly as you are told, and you do it at once."

"Yes, Sir."

"Get cleaned up and join me in the living room."

"Yes, Sir."

Eighteen years old. Bloody hell!

Fifteen minutes later Kael sprawled on the leather couch watching Angel, pink and shiny from his shower, walk naked into the living room and up to him. The boy walked very upright, with his shoulders squared. Excellent posture for a submissive.

Kael hated it when slaves looked put-upon. A boy should look confident even when he was licking his master's boots. He should be proud but not swaggering or obnoxious the way some masters carried themselves. That kind of swagger portrayed insecurity or overconfidence, which were both dangerous in the dungeon and did not lead to success in interactions with subs.

Angel pirouetted on the ball of his left foot. The beauty of his bearing made Kael's breath catch. He patted his lap. "Come here."

Angel jumped into it and sat sideways, throwing his arm around Kael's neck. "I had such a good time last night, Sir, even with our abrupt departure."

Angel kissed Kael's cheek sweetly. It was little things like that that Kael liked far more than big displays of subservience. Angel looked into his face. "Sir"—he paused nervously—"Sir, how come you have so many names?"

"I have to. I'm a secret agent." Kael grinned.

"You are not." Angel touched his face, tracing the line of his jaw with one finger. "That guy in the park called you Kael Saunders, and you knew him from when you were at school so that makes me think Kael Saunders is your real name and John Carpe is made up." Kael was impressed with the deduction. "Last night at the bar, that bouncer called you Stephen Conran."

Kael chuckled. He deliberately used Conran's name on anything to do with his interactions with the leather community. He had signed into private leather clubs all over Europe using Conran's name. "It doesn't matter to you what my name is because you have to call me Sir at all times," he said. "That's all I can tell you."

"Actually, Sir, I've figured something out."

Kael had one arm around the boy's slender waist, and his other hand rested lightly over Angel's cock and balls. "Tell me what you've figured out."

"Sir, you work for Greenpeace, don't you?"

Confused at the assertion, Kael bit his lower lip to prevent himself from laughing out loud. "Aren't they the ones that save the whales?"

"Yes, Sir, but they do other things too. Like trying to make the world a better place. I think they probably want to get rid of guns and stuff."

Kael raised his eyebrows as if impressed. "You found me out."

"Really? You work for Greenpeace?"

"Yes, but a lot of what we do is covert. That was why I told Freddie I'm in security."

"You've never done it before, have you, Sir? You know, like, killed someone?"

"No, of course not, but some people forfeit their right to live when they do bad things. Lots of people get hurt from arms sales." Kael watched Angel's face carefully to see if Angel believed him.

"Sven wasn't a nice man," Angel said. "I heard him on the phone lots of times when he didn't know I was there. If you hadn't killed him, someone else would have soon or later. Things were getting really weird around the house and the apartment in Manhattan. There were some nasty guys there recently with foreign accents. I think that was why my mom started looking for another rich man to take care of her."

"What kind of accents?"

"I don't know; a bit like that cleaning lady that was here."

"You said you didn't see her."

"No, Sir, I didn't. I had no idea she was in the bathroom, I was still mostly asleep, but I heard her singing. It was weird; she has a terrible voice. It was going in and out of my dreams." He laughed. "It was like a nightmare."

Kael laughed. "Yes, I've heard her sing too. It's bloody awful."

Angel put his hands on Kael's cheeks, looking seriously at him. "Sir, I should never have got in touch with Maria-Jesus, not without asking you first, but she was always kind to me. She told me my name is really popular in Mexico and Puerto Rico. She would say *Ahn-hel*. That's the Spanish pronunciation."

"Is it? Ahn-hel," Kael repeated. "I like Angel better. But why the maid? Don't you have family, grandparents or somebody?"

"No, there's no one else. Maria-Jesus was kind to me. She even hugged me sometimes. No one else ever did, especially not Sven, and I wanted him to. I thought he was going to be a real father to me, but I was just my mom's extra baggage to him."

Kael swallowed past the lump in his throat. His own mother had worked endless hours when he was growing up and made questionable choices in men, but she had hugged him every chance she got. She had always told him how great he was. He pulled Angel into his chest and heard him sigh.

"But what do we do now, Sir? Now that the cops are looking for me."

"You have to lay low for a while. Stay in the flat, do as you're told, and be a good little slave."

"Yes, Sir."

"Right now I'm going to spank you. Are you ready?"

Kael's hand rested over the boy's flaccid cock. At the word *spank*, it began to harden. "I've been ready my whole life for a man to take charge and make me his." Angel's eyes took on a dreamy quality.

Kael gripped the small cock tightly and squeezed. Angel's entire body shuddered, and he came in Kael's hand almost instantly, and then fell on Kael's shoulder, gasping.

"That was quick." Kael felt vaguely annoyed, but what did he expect? A memory from when he was fourteen flashed through his consciousness. He was sitting on the scruffy old couch in the living room one evening during his summer of love with Shawn. His mum was watching *Coronation Street*, slumped in the chair, worn out from back-to-back shifts at the launderette and the old-age home. Shawn—who he now saw as nothing but a lazy fucker—walked into the room, winked at him with his cheeky, handsome grin, and Kael spent instantly in his trousers.

If Angel felt about him anything like the way he had felt about Shawn that summer, he should be flattered. But Shawn was a waste of space and not worth all that love. In that moment Kael knew he wanted to be worthy of Angel's trust and submission.

“Sorry, Sir, it just happened.” Angel panted against his neck. “Are you mad at me?”

Overcome with an upwelling of feelings he did not want to analyze, Kael pulled the boy tight against his body again, rubbing his back and thighs. This boy would be the death of him. “It’s a perfectly natural reaction when you are in the arms of someone as gorgeous as me.” He grinned, and Angel laughed with pure happiness. “On your knees, boy.”

Angel slid to the floor and knelt before him. “Sir, could we go into the dungeon?”

“No, I want you in here.”

“But I can call you Daddy in there.” The look on Angel’s face was so impassioned that Kael found himself weakening.

“Look, if you want to call me Daddy so badly, then call me Daddy. Just don’t expect me to be soft with you. I’m a master. That’s who I am.”

Angel wrapped his arms around Kael’s legs and hugged them. “I think you’re a marshmallow, Daddy.”

“You do, do you?” Kael sat upright and positioned himself squarely. He took Angel around the waist with both his big hands and lifted him over his lap. He did not imprison his legs as he had the first time, but allowed them to fall freely into a comfortable position.

Angel looked over his shoulder at Kael. “Daddy, this is not an ass whipping, is it, for lying?”

“No, I have forgiven you for that. This is for pleasure—my pleasure—and if you enjoy it, that’s a bonus. Put your hands behind your back, at your tailbone.” Angel obeyed. Kael knew the position rendered the slave yet more helpless and added to their enjoyment. It certainly added to his.

“Daddy, what if I start to come again?”

“You’ll definitely come when I spank you,” Kael said seriously. He couldn’t expect too much of an inexperienced boy. “It’s all right. We are just beginning your training. You have a long way to go.”

He raised his hand and watched as Angel’s buttocks clenched in anticipation. He looked at the boy. “Stop worrying and enjoy. Give yourself to me, just like you did when you were lying in the sling. Be wide open and ready to receive.”

Angel obeyed, and Kael brought his hand down gently and began a deep massage of the sweet, round buttocks. Using all his strong fingers, he kneaded and massaged until the boy visibly calmed. Only then did he deliver a light slap. Angel issued a long sigh, and Kael could feel the boy’s erection start to push against his leg. All the tension left Angel’s body, and he lay completely limp and receptive, waiting for more. “Daddy. I’m yours,” he said on a breath.

Again Kael rubbed and then slapped the buttocks, increasing the intensity very slightly. He rubbed and slapped alternately for long minutes, and with each spank he increased the heaviness of his hand. Only when he knew Angel was

extremely aroused and his own cock bulged against the zipper of his jeans, did he let loose and begin to spank in earnest. Angel's buttocks went from pale cream to pink to scarlet beneath his hand as he worked. With one hand he held Angel's waist, securing him in place; the other worked furiously, belaboring the boy's arse.

For a long time Angel lay completely relaxed, panting hard but unmoving. Kael watched him carefully for signs that his body was beginning to tense. There it was. The long, slender legs tightened and stretched straight out.

Angel's beautiful straight shoulders began to rise as he arched his back. The sound that came from deep in his chest was no longer just panting, but a deep, long moan that seemed to emanate from his pelvis and work its way up and out of his open mouth. Kael continued to spank in great even, hard slaps, his big hand spreading out the pressure and the pain. Focusing only on the buttocks, he spanked in a circle, making sure he covered the entire backside.

Angel's legs began to twitch and jerk in spasms, his whole body wracked with a combination of pain and pleasure. The cry that finally erupted from him, simultaneously with a convulsive jerking of his body, made Kael gush in his jeans at the same moment that Angel's cum shot from his rigid cock and dripped down Kael's leg. "Daddy, Daddy," he cried over and over.

As the orgasm subsided, Angel's body collapsed as if it had metamorphosed from glass to jelly.

Kael flopped panting against the back of the couch, his hand still rubbing the boy's backside. "Good boy, good boy," he said over and over. Angel slid to his knees, lowered his head, and wrapped his arms around Kael ankles, kissing his boots fervently. Kael watched him with the beginnings of love blossoming in his heart. A love he had thought himself incapable of feeling. Of all the slaves who had kissed his boots, none had touched his heart.

"Come to Daddy, Angel." He opened his arms.

Angel climbed up onto Kael's lap, straddling him. He rested his head against Kael's chest, looking completely exhausted. "Daddy thank you, thank you." Little shudders continued to flow through him, and he panted, "Thank you, Daddy."

Rubbing his back, Kael said in a low voice, "Daddy's sweetheart, you've been through so much in the last few days. Look how brave you are. You make me want to keep you and own you forever."

Kael could hardly believe such words came out of his mouth, that his brain had formed these thoughts. The most he had ever said to a slave who had shown courage and fortitude under pain was, "*Good boy, well done.*"

Angel sat up, smiling, his face pink with exertion, and looked into Kael's eyes. "Daddy, oh my God, I've never had a come like it. It was like the whole universe exploded inside me. A spanking is the thing I always wanted most, and after you whipped my ass, I thought maybe it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, but holy cosmic orgasm, that was the best."

“Mmm, you’ve got a beautiful arse to spank. It fits my hand perfectly.” Kael marveled at the lovely naked boy in his lap. “Come on; let’s go back to bed. I’m not done with you yet. I want to fuck you now.” He stood up, holding Angel, who wrapped his legs around Kael’s waist, allowing himself to be carried.

In the bedroom Angel began to tidy the bed, smoothing the sheet and fluffing the duvet and pillows. Kael watched him as he stripped off his clothes and threw them into the wash basket. “Later you can change the bedding. Get into the habit of changing it every day. There’s several clean sets in the airing cupboard.”

“Are they all white, Daddy?” Angel grinned cheekily.

“As a matter of fact they are. Come into the bathroom.” They brushed their teeth side by side in the matching sinks, and Kael showered quickly. As Angel dried Kael’s chest, he giggled and turned his back to the mirror to admire his scarlet buttocks. Kael’s fingerprints could clearly be seen around the sides.

“I’m a slave!” Angel shouted and skipped into the bedroom. “I’m Daddy’s boy.” Kael followed him in to find him turning down the bed. He lay down, and the boy covered him, then sat cross-legged beside him.

Angel spoke very seriously. “I want to serve you, Daddy. I want to look after you. Give me your orders, Sir.”

“Get a condom from the drawer and put it on my cock.” Angel took a foil packet from the bedside table and tore it open. He spent a long time smoothing the thin latex over Kael’s shaft, licking his lips and making slurping sounds while Kael laughed. “Come here, boy; I’ve waited long enough.” Kael opened his arms, and Angel fell into them, laughing while Kael rolled on top of him. “Open your legs, boy.”

Angel opened his thighs and wrapped his legs tightly around Kael’s waist. Kael positioned his cock and began to stab at the boy’s anus, looking down into the beautiful silver-gray eyes. The condom was lubricated, and his cock began to slide in slowly. When he was in up to the hilt, he rested on his elbows. Angel gazed up at him and squeezed the muscles of his rectum hard.

Kael dropped his head and moaned as the pressure sent thick tendrils of pleasure shooting up his cock and into his hard belly.

“Was that good, Daddy?” Angel asked.

“Yes.” The word came out in a long breath. Angel squeezed again, a long, slow squeeze, building up the pressure by tiny degrees over five seconds or so. “Oh God, how do you do that, boy?”

Kael did not expect an answer nor could he focus on one. The pressure built to unbearable heights, then stopped and began to decrease. Kael remained immobile, resting on his elbows, his eyes half-closed, the sensation taking over his entire body. His mind went elsewhere; he could think of nothing. He could only experience the all-encompassing, slowly building orgasm. For what seemed an eternity but was probably five minutes at most, Kael remained rigidly in position. Angel’s legs

gripped him like a vise, his hips moving upward when he squeezed and dropping slightly as he released the pressure.

Angel squeezed over and over until a raging orgasm wracked Kael's body. The moan he released filled the room. He collapsed on top of Angel and rolled onto his back, bringing the boy with him onto his belly. Angel rested his head on Kael's shoulder and sighed. "Was that good, Daddy?" he asked almost smugly. "Did I make you happy?"

"Yes, yes." Kael could hardly speak. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"I don't know, Daddy. I just figured it out."

"Let me rest for a while, and you can do that again. That will make Daddy very happy."

Chapter Ten

Stephen Conran had spent the last couple of days in negotiation with the Americans and had found out two things. Angel Button's mother, Samantha Andresen, knew nothing of her dead husband's activities with Bosnian arms dealers. And she wanted nothing more to do with her son. In her own words, "*He can damn well look after himself. I'm sick of kids.*" Obviously the boy did not know the extent of his mother's abandonment because he had asked the maid in his e-mail to contact his mother and tell her he was safe.

The e-mail was easy to trace. It had come from a Starbucks within half an hour's walk of Kael Saunders's flat. That had been the catalyst for him ordering the laborious and time-consuming checks of the CCTV footage at Logan International Airport and again at Heathrow Airport, which had informed him that a slender young man had accompanied Saunders to London.

If Kael Saunders was anything at all, he was stunningly intelligent and utterly ruthless. It would not surprise him in the slightest if Saunders had fancied the boy for a change from his usual type and had taken him along for fun, planning to kill him in a few days or weeks.

Or did he have another plan?

Was it possible he had gone rogue and decided to hand the boy over to the Bosnians for a fee so they could use him as a pawn to negotiate for their guns?

MI6 and the Americans had been working for half a year to get rid of Andresen, seize his arms shipments, and infiltrate the Bosnian terrorist cell that was determined to reignite the war in the former Yugoslavia. The shipment was due to go through in a week. Andresen was supposed to be dead, and a doppelgänger operative was to meet the Bosnians, specifically a man named Beganovic, and go back to their headquarters, which was nothing more than a farm in the hill country of Bosnia. From there the GPS would lead in the SWAT team in order to take out the terrorists. He knew now that the three who were shot in the gay club were part of the group, and he knew Saunders had killed them, but why?

He could not blame Saunders for the balls-up by cleanup, but he had never known the man to be so stupid as to take a witness home with him. That boy must know what had happened. He had to have seen the kill.

The operative rarely if ever knew the details of why they had to take out a target. Conran had no one to blame but himself after that humiliating conversation in his office. He had always been impossibly attracted to Saunders despite hating

him. He had wanted to keep him there longer, hoping something would happen between them. If Saunders planned to use the boy as a pawn, he had got the information from him. Nobody must find that out.

The boy had to be eliminated, and Saunders needed to be brought in for assessment.

Chapter Eleven

“What are we going to do today, Daddy?”

Kael watched Angel standing at the sink naked, washing the coffee cups and the plate from his fruit salad. Steam from the rushing hot water rose up, making his face damp.

“Daddy, are we going to buy some groceries so I can cook for you? I’m your houseboy now, right? Can we get some real food in? I’m sick of fruit and ordered-in roast chicken and smoked salmon. I want macaroni and cheese. I want mashed potatoes.” When he got no answer, Angel pressed the tap, cutting off the hiss of the water.

Kael sat on a stool at the kitchen counter in his jeans, bare-chested and barefoot, watching Angel.

“Daddy? What’s that silly grin for?”

Kael’s grin widened. As mad as it would have seemed to him just a few weeks ago, he liked being called Daddy. In the past his only responsibility to a sub was to leave no long-term damage and make sure the boy had a good time, or at least got what he wanted. But Angel needed much more: protection, guidance, and affection. He didn’t know whether to feel flattered at the boy’s trust or angry at the responsibility, which he had never anticipated and did not ask for.

“You never shut up. Look at you standing there washing dishes with your bare arse.” He leaned both elbows on the counter, shaking his head, laughing.

“Do I look stupid?” Angel looked down at his pale, slender body, his hairless chest, and the golden pubic hair around his cock. He was lovely, but he didn’t seem to know how lovely he was, which made him all the more appealing. Kael hated subs who thought they were God’s gift because they were attractive. “I’ll grow big like you. I could start working out when I’m allowed to leave the apartment.” Kael continued to watch him. “Daddy, do I look stupid?” Angel repeated.

Avoiding Kael’s eyes, he snatched the tea towel off the counter, wrapping it around his narrow hips, fumbling to tie the corners. He dropped it and stooped to grab it, trying again to cover himself.

“Put that down,” Kael ordered. He had embarrassed the boy when he hadn’t meant to. “Put it on the counter, now!” Angel met his eyes as color rose up his slender neck and smooth cheeks. “Put it down!”

Angel obeyed, throwing the tea towel at the counter without looking. It landed in the sink, soaking up the hot water. He blinked rapidly; he was ready to cry, and

Kael desperately wanted to rescue the situation without being too soft. Kael grew angry, with himself mostly, but with Angel as well for thinking he would make fun of him. Playful teasing was one thing, but cruelty he reserved for Conran. Angel was an inexperienced boy who wanted only to please him. He was the easiest kind of sub for a man to abuse.

"Hands behind your back." Kael spoke firmly, keeping his tone neutral. "Chin up, eyes lowered. Square your shoulders. Come on; you know how to stand. You have excellent posture. What are you drooping for? You look embarrassed."

"I am. You're laughing at me, and I feel like an idiot." Angel's chin began to tremble.

"Look at me," Kael said.

Angel looked past him across the kitchen, then down at the floor. Finally, unable to put it off any longer, he met Kael's eyes.

"Correct your posture," Kael said firmly.

Angel stood to attention, his shoulders squared, feet slightly apart. He tucked his hands behind his back and lowered his gaze. A single tear trickled down one cheek. Kael watched him, feeling like a piece of shite.

"I'm not laughing at you. You're a beautiful boy. You're just too cute for your own good." Angel blinked away another tear. "Come here, sweetheart." Kael held out his arms.

"Daddy." It came out as a whimper. Angel ran to him in a couple of gazellelike leaps and flung himself into Kael's arms.

Kael's height meant that even sitting on a bar stool, he and Angel were face-to-face as the boy leaned heavily on him. Angel wound his slender arms about Kael's neck, and wrapped one leg around Kael's waist, then drew up the other until he sat in his lap, his legs wrapped as tightly as his arms. Kael spread his feet wider to steady himself and balance Angel's weight.

"Daddy, were you making fun of me?"

"No. I wanted to look at you, which is my right as your master, and you got all girly and shy on me. You're a beautiful boy, and you'll grow into a handsome man. You'll get taller and more confident. You'll get to know yourself, so you won't burst into tears when your Dom makes you stand naked so he can look at you."

"But I feel so skinny and stupid when you're looking at me like that."

"You were fine until I drew your attention to how goofy you looked washing dishes in the nude." Kael laughed, kissing his cheek. "As a slave you must learn to carry yourself proudly. If you look all scared and shy, you won't attract a master or a daddy. He wants a boy who's sure of himself. A boy who knows what he wants and carries out his duties with confidence. You have to decide what kind of man you want to be and then become it."

Angel leaned back to look into Kael's eyes, his face so open and trusting. "I don't need to attract a daddy. I've got you. You're all I'll ever want. I'm going to

learn to be the best slave in the world. You can teach me everything I need to know to please you.”

“Right then, let’s start with the cleaning. Houseslaves have to clean the house, so that’s what you’re going to do today. I’m going to instruct you on how to clean to my satisfaction.”

“I know how to clean, Daddy,” Angel said, as if it were the easiest thing in the world.

“Take it from one who saw your bedroom.” Kael paused for effect. “You need some help.”

“Yes, Sir.” Angel hung his head in mock shame, then laughed, hugging Kael again. “My Daddy,” he whispered close to Kael’s ear.

Kael wished he wouldn’t do that. What if he couldn’t work out how to keep Angel safe? What if he had to send him away to keep him safe?

“Come on; we’ll start in the living room. I’ll show you how to do things, and after that I expect you to keep everything perfect. I want everything cleaned within an inch of its life.”

“Yes, Sir. But what about the cleaning lady? Won’t she be coming back?”

“No, I got rid of her,” Kael said.

“I’ll get my jeans on,” Angel said.

“No, you won’t. I want to watch your tight little arse wiggle while you Hoover the living room. Slaves should always be naked in the house unless they are wearing a little leather G-string. Now get off.”

Angel unwrapped his legs from Kael’s waist and dropped his feet to the floor.

For the next couple of hours, Kael watched his boy polishing the furniture and cleaning the floors. He marveled at Angel’s grace when he moved. The determination on Angel’s face as he tackled each job was comical. A duster in one hand and a can of Pledge in the other, he went after the coffee table and sideboard, his brow creased in concentration. When he started vacuuming the living room floor, he looked to see if Kael was watching him, then turned his back quite deliberately and wiggled his hips. Looking over his shoulder at Kael, he yelled, “Like this, Daddy?”

Kael burst out laughing. “Yeah, just like that, do it again.” Seeming happy that he had pleased him, Angel played his part to the hilt, wiggling his way around the living room as he worked, and Kael felt relieved and happy to see him confident in his body again.

Kael liked his bathroom spotless and followed Angel in to give him detailed instructions on how to clean the porcelain and stainless steel. He leaned against the wall, watching him.

Bent over the side of the whirlpool bath, scrubbing hard, Angel was oblivious of being watched, but the sight of his bare buttocks slightly parted and the rosy pink anus made Kael’s cock start to swell against his zipper. His balls felt ready to

burst. Between Angel's thighs, his ball sac and cock pressed against the side of the cool porcelain.

Kael unzipped his jeans, pushed them down, and kicked them off. Standing with his hands on his hips and his cock jutting out, he said loudly, "Slave. I want some service here."

Angel stood up, still holding the sponge dripping with cream cleanser. His face broke into a smile when he saw Kael with his jeans off.

"Get over here on your knees and start sucking, boy," Kael said.

Angel's gaze traveled the length of Kael's muscled body with open appreciation. Suddenly his eyes lit up, and a mischievous grin split his face. Raising his arm, he flung the sponge. It sailed through the air, landing with a splat in the middle of Kael's chest. "You want it, Sir? Come and get it!" He ran for the door that led to the passage and into the living room.

A momentary flash of anger passed through Kael. But the sight of Angel's lean little buttocks disappearing through the door tickled him unexpectedly, and he strode after him to find him in the living room with the couch between them.

Kael could have caught him easily, but he decided not to. The shrieking of Angel's laughter as Kael followed him around the couch a couple of times made Kael laugh out loud.

"You'll never catch me, Daddy; I'm quick," Angel screamed, running into the dungeon.

Great place to trap him. Maybe this was just the place Angel wanted to be trapped. The boy stopped in the middle of the room, looking frantically about him for a place to hide. Sweat gleamed on his fair skin. Kael swore he could see the boy's heart beating against the thin muscles of Angel's chest.

It was time to catch him.

"Fe-fi-fo-fum, I smell the blood of a little Yankee slave boy," he bellowed.

One long stride and Kael grabbed Angel by the arm. Surprisingly, with a lightning-quick movement, Angel snatched his arm away and was on the run again around the dungeon. The second time Kael caught him, he wrestled him down onto the floor on his belly and threw himself onto Angel's back, his cock bursting for relief against Angel's buttocks. Angel continued to struggle, flailing his arms and legs about. It was the struggle of one who did not know how to fight, expending energy unnecessarily without achieving anything.

Kael grabbed Angel's hands, pushing the boy's arms up his back and pinning them there with one hand, taking complete control of his body. With his free hand he grabbed a handful of the soft blond hair and pulled his head back, checking Angel's face to gauge his emotions, which had been close to the surface all day. The boy's mouth was open, and his eyes wide with excitement.

When Kael forced his cock between Angel's buttocks, precum seeping out of the red tip and making his entry easy, the look on Angel's face softened to complete surrender and peace. Kael rammed his thick organ in to the hilt and fucked hard.

To support his body better, Kael released Angel's wrists after the first minute and placed his hands on the floor on either side of the boy's shoulders. He expected Angel to move his arms into a more comfortable position, but he didn't. He lay absolutely still, allowing himself to be reamed, absorbing the shock waves of the cock deep in his rectum and the heaviness of Kael's body on his.

Kael did not even try to delay his orgasm for further pleasure. He thrust hard into the yielding arsehole and came in a loud explosion of grunts, his backside tight, his thighs tensed. Hot sperm shot out of his cock, and he fell hard onto Angel's back, stretched out full length, panting while sharp needle points of sensation pierced his belly and thighs.

"Ohhh, that was good," he whispered on a long breath.

Angel didn't respond. His eyes were closed. Fear ran through Kael's muscles, and he quickly rolled off, flipping Angel onto his back. Kael was big, and he had fallen heavily on the boy after he came. "Open your eyes, Angel; look at Daddy!"

Angel's eyes drifted slowly open; his mouth was slack. Kael glanced down at the boy's cock and saw sticky white cum smeared across his thighs. He looked at the floor where Angel had lain and saw more of it. Relief swept over him. "Was it a good fuck, sweetheart?"

"Mmmmmnnnnn." Angel could barely articulate. Kael sat up cross-legged and scooped the boy tenderly into his arms, laying him in his lap like a baby. Cradling Angel's head in the crook of one arm, he stroked the boy's face with his other hand. Sweat lay damp on his skin, cooling quickly. "When did you come? I want to know what made you come. Tell Daddy."

"Yes, Sir. It was when you pushed my arms up my back and I knew I couldn't move and you were going to fuck me." So that was what excited him, being immobilized. A rape fantasy. "Daddy, can I spend some time in the cage soon?"

Kael laughed. "Yes, but I'll tell you what we're going to do now. I'll change the bed while you finish the bathroom; then I'll go out and buy some food, and you can cook for me."

Angel gazed up at him. "Yes, Sir. Daddy."

"Up you get and finish the cleaning like a good little slave." Angel scrambled to his feet at once.

In the bedroom Kael dressed quickly in jeans and a dark shirt and pulled on black socks and boots. It would take him two minutes to change the bed, and Angel could clean the floor when he was out.

He grabbed the pillows from the bed and threw them onto a chair. The ragged square of cloth Angel had brought lay bundled underneath. Kael picked it up by the corner and held it up, trying to decide again what it was. It had to be full of germs.

He dropped it on the floor and tossed the duvet on the chair after the pillows. Grabbing a clean fitted sheet and a duvet cover from the airing cupboard, he made the bed up quickly, squaring the pillows exactly as he liked them and fluffing the duvet.

From the wardrobe he took Angel's small stack of clothes—he'd have to get him some more—together with the cloth and carried them to the dungeon, where he deposited the clothes neatly on the floor before locking the door, just in case Angel got any ideas about going out without permission. The cloth he tossed in the kitchen bin and tied up the bag. Angel met him in the front hall.

"Are you going out now, Daddy?"

"Yes, is there any more rubbish? I'll take it on my way out."

"Yes." Angel dashed back to the bathroom and returned, tying up a small bag. "There you go, Daddy. Rubbish." He grinned.

"Why is that funny?" Kael asked.

"Rubbish," Angel repeated. "Englishisms are funny."

Kael smiled and headed for the door. "Behave. I'll be less than an hour."

"Daddy!" Angel yelled after him. Kael stopped and turned at the door. "Will you get me an anime magazine, please?"

"All right."

"And Daddy!"

He looked at Angel, waiting.

"You told me not to fart without permission."

"So I did."

"What if I need to fart while you're out?" He grinned.

"Hold it in till I get back." He could still hear Angel laughing as he walked toward the lift.

The supermarket was almost empty, making it easier to gather the items he wanted; still Kael had no idea what to buy to construct macaroni-cheese. In the end he bought a ready-made frozen package, then wandered around picking up fruit and salad vegetables and cheese. Angel had said he wanted mashed potatoes.

What the hell am I doing wandering around a supermarket trying to find foods a teenager will like? Chocolate digestives, milk—Christ!—he probably wants hot dogs, things like that.

At the tills, with a trolley loaded with items he would never buy for himself, he looked at the two cashiers on duty, a middle-aged man and a teenage girl with appalling makeup and dyed hair. The girl would be more likely to know. She smiled shyly at him when he strode toward her. He leaned in close, feeling ridiculous. "What's an anime magazine?"

She pointed at the racks of magazines beside the conveyor belt. "Neo. At the end."

It was the strangest thing he'd ever seen, a magazine full of odd cartoon characters with enormous eyes and spiky hair. "This?" She nodded. Kael tossed it on the conveyor belt. He couldn't wait to get out of there.

The car park was nearly empty, and as always Kael had parked his small, unobtrusive vehicle well away from any other cars. He scanned the dark, poorly lit area as soon as he walked through the automatic doors. At the far end of the yard, a dark blue four-door stood with the engine and lights off, but Kael could clearly see an occupant sitting behind the wheel. His neck prickled. Something was not right. Striding to his car, he quickly packed the plastic grocery bags into the boot and got into the driver's seat without ever looking directly at the blue vehicle, giving no indication that he had seen anything untoward.

With the rearview mirror angled to take a better look, he focused on the dark car and the driver sitting, unmoving, watching him. It was Conran. Kael's excellent visual acuity easily picked out the shape of his head and a slight movement of his hand that was uniquely Conran's. Kael drove off, watching him in his rearview mirror. Conran didn't follow, but still Kael drove around for twenty minutes to ensure he was alone before returning home, where he dumped the bags on the floor to open the front door.

"Daddy?" Angel came to the door wearing a white T-shirt that he had obviously taken from Kael's wardrobe. It reached his mid thighs and was loose and baggy. "Did you hide my clothes? I'm cold."

"Yes, take these bags. Be quick. Put everything away."

Inside he bolted the door and carried out a hurried sweep of the flat. He was on his knees running his hand along the underside of the couch when he looked up to find Angel watching him with the magazine in his hand and a "what the hell are you doing" look on his face. "Daddy, I put the mac and cheese in the microwave."

"Right." Kael got to his feet.

"This is the coolest magazine in the world." He held it up, smiling to show how happy he was. "I love *Neo*, and it's hard to find at home."

Distracted by the nagging sense of being followed, the image of the car in the car park still lodged in his mind, he continued to check for listening devices and cameras while Angel followed him. "Did anyone knock on the door while I was gone?"

"No. Why don't you have a phone, Daddy?"

"I do, just not a landline." Kael went to the wall and pressed a button. With a low humming sound the blinds dropped slowly over the windows. Worried and agitated, Kael turned on Angel. "You look like a little girl in that T-shirt."

Angel pouted. "Well, give me my clothes back then."

"Watch your tone when you talk to me! Go and set the table." Kael continued his sweep, ignoring the boy, but he shouldn't have snapped at him.

"Yes, Sir. Shall we sit at the dining room table for a change?"

"No, we'll eat in the kitchen."

"God forbid we should drop a crumb on the floor," Angel said, walking away. Already anxious, Kael's temper flared again. He was behind Angel in three long

strides, grabbing him by the arms and hauling him round to face him. "I'll give you a good hiding if you use that tone with me again."

Angel's face contorted into a confused glare.

Kael released him, watching as the red finger marks he had left behind turned pale again until they blended in with Angel's fair skin.

"What did I do, Daddy?"

"Nothing. I'm sorry, boy. I have a lot on my mind right now. Go and get the dinner out. I'll be there in a moment."

"Yes, Sir, Daddy."

"You have to be a good slave, remember? A good slave does what he's told. So be a good slave."

"Yes, Sir." Angel gave him a quick hug and went back to the kitchen, his elegant walk keeping Kael's gaze fixed to his backside. When Angel was out of sight, he finished the sweep.

They ate the macaroni-cheese in silence. Kael wanted to gag on it. It was disgusting. When he was a kid, he had loved it, but his tastes had become far more sophisticated over the years. He was no longer a kid, but Angel was.

"Daddy, what's up? You were fine when you left. Did someone piss you off? Did I?"

"Nobody pissed me off."

Right now his life was pissing him off. It had become unpredictable, and nothing distressed Kael more than unpredictability. For the past ten years, his life had depended on his ability to predict what would happen next. Even as a kid in College Grange and at home with his mum's string of boyfriends, being able to figure out what was coming had given him an advantage and a sense of control that made him feel secure.

He put his knife and fork neatly in the middle of his plate, unable to eat any more. Angel had finished his plateful and was scraping the remaining cheese sauce up with the side of his fork. The scraping sound made Kael's already ragged nerves scream. He got up from the table to grab a bottle of water from the cupboard.

He leaned his buttocks against the counter, waiting for the irritating scraping sound to stop. Angel put down his fork and looked up at him. Kael opened his mouth to say he was sorry about the bad temper when Angel stuck his tongue out at him like a naughty five-year-old.

Laughter erupted from deep within Kael. Angel looked very funny but not so funny as to leave him near hysterical. So much nervous tension had built up inside him that it had to crack. Sex always helped, and he had to admit that chasing Angel around the flat had aroused him to the point where the mock rape on the dungeon floor was the only response. He spluttered on his water and managed to put the bottle on the counter before he dropped it.

"You okay, Daddy?" Angel came over and began to pat his back. Between the coughing and laughter, neither of them heard the doorbell. In a moment of silence, the buzzer filled the room.

Without pause, Kael grabbed Angel by both arms, propelling him out of the kitchen and toward the bedroom. "Stay in here."

"What's the panic; don't you ever get visitors?"

"No, I don't." He pointed at the bed. "Sit and don't move."

Angel held up both hands as if threatened with a gun. "I won't."

The bell sounded again, making Kael feel murderous. Angel sat on the side of the bed. "In the middle!" The boy scrambled into the middle of the bed on his hands and knees, looking up at Kael. The amusement had all melted from Angel's face. "Your backside is glued to that bed. Do not come out. Got it?"

"Yes, Sir."

Kael closed the door behind him and ran on silent feet to the kitchen. He stacked the dishes and pushed everything into an empty cupboard—plates, glasses, everything that suggested two people had eaten dinner. The bell rang again as he hurried down the hall and opened the coat cupboard, reaching up to the top shelf to get his gun. He tucked it into his belt and looked at the CCTV. It was Conran, and he was right outside, not down in the lobby.

Standing behind the door, Kael opened it.

"Saunders?" The voice sounded tentative.

Kael pulled the door slightly wider.

"Saunders, what the hell are you up to?" He stepped inside. Kael closed the door and at the same time leveled his gun at Conran, who plastered himself against the door, his hands raised comically like in an old gangster film.

Kael began to laugh.

Looking both frightened and angry, Conran dropped his hands, pulling his dark gray suit jacket closer about him as if it could protect him from a bullet. "Put that thing down, and don't be an idiot."

Kael grinned. But he didn't think it was especially funny; he just enjoyed winding Conran up. He leaned across him to lock the door.

"For God's sake, will you invite me in or do we have to stand here talking?"

With the gun still aiming directly at his heart, Kael kept him waiting another thirty seconds, looking directly into his eyes. Conran could not take his eyes off the gun.

Kael took a step backward. "Go ahead, into the living room."

Still nervous, Conran sidled past him. "I see the place is spotless as usual."

Kael returned the gun to the top shelf and closed the cupboard door before following Conran into the living room. "You came to check on my housekeeping?" He pointed at the couch. "Sit down."

Glancing around him, Conran stood in the middle of the living room, obviously looking for signs of another person.

"Sit!" Kael's voice split the air. Conran dropped onto the couch at once, his face in tight lines of anger and fear. Smiling, Kael sank down into a leather armchair. "What are you bothering me for? Do you have an assignment for me?"

"Where's the boy? Angel. Ridiculous name."

Kael felt his hackles rise at once. Who the hell did the little prick think he was making remarks like that about his boy? "Isn't your kid called Rupert? Like Rupert the bear?"

Conran swallowed nervously but did not respond to the question. "Where is he?"

"I told you. I never saw him." The fucker knew. He was on to him.

Conran sat back and crossed his legs, looking at Kael. "I've seen the CCTV footage of you both boarding the British Airways plane at Logan International Airport and disembarking at Heathrow. The e-mail he sent to the maid came from the Starbucks on Palmer Street, half an hour at most from here."

It was just a matter of time before Conran found out. Kael's expression gave nothing away. He had been expecting this; he'd just hoped it wouldn't be so soon. "All right, so I brought him home with me."

Conran leaned forward. "Why? If he saw you hit the target, he was collateral damage. Why is he still alive?"

"He saw nothing," Kael said. "I found him outside the house on the beach after I killed Andresen. I wanted to fuck him, so I did, and I enjoyed it so much I brought him home for a few days to amuse me."

"You know, Saunders, I have no trouble at all believing that."

"He was willing. I never fuck them unless they're willing." He grinned. "Well, there was that one time, but you deserved it."

"You think the whole world is your trampoline, don't you, Saunders?"

"And so it is. Are we finished?"

"Not quite. Where is he? He can't stay here."

"He's not here. I killed him," Kael said. His expression and tone remained completely neutral. "I had what I wanted from him, and then I got rid of him. Don't worry; his body is not going to show up anywhere. I took care of it."

Conran's eyes flickered about the room momentarily before alighting on Kael again. "I have no trouble believing that either."

"Is his mother looking for him?" Kael asked.

"The mother doesn't give a damn about him. The maid found Andresen and called the police; they contacted Samantha Andresen in France. She admitted the boy was not with her and said he'll have to look after himself. He could have been alive or dead at that point. She doesn't want him back. She won't make any trouble."

Anger at the woman's callousness gripped at Kael's belly, making him want to snatch Angel to his chest and protect him. What kind of mother would not look for her missing son? "Are you sure?"

Conran entwined his fingers and stretched his palms as if getting ready to deal cards. "Yes. She dumped the boy in foster care for six years or so. She married Andresen when the boy was ten, yet she didn't take him back to live with her until he was twelve and the authorities tried to put him up for adoption."

"Charming." Kael suppressed the urge to go and find Samantha Andresen and put a scalpel in her neck.

"However, you were in the supermarket buying food you would never eat, and then you bought an anime magazine. Something a teenager would read. I think he's still here."

"You went into the fucking supermarket and asked what I bought?" Kael asked.

"Of course I did," Conran said.

Anger rushed through Kael, tightening the muscles in his belly. In a split second he was leaning over Conran with a fistful of his jacket in one hand and the strong fingers of his other hand pinching the man's throat. Conran slid down in his seat, his eyes wide with pain and terror, his breath coming hard and fast.

"I knew that was you in the car park. If you keep following me instead of letting me do my job, then I'll have to get rid of you too."

"You had better take your hands off me, Saunders. No one will protect you if you hurt me. You will be prosecuted." The words were brave, but his face was pale and tight with fear.

Kael leaned in closer until his face was barely three inches from Conran's bulging, terrified eyes. "I don't give a shite. You know perfectly well I don't give a shite," he said in a low voice. He was sure that, if they were still enough, he would hear Conran's heart thudding in his chest and the blood rushing through the veins in his temples. Another minute and the man would piss himself.

Kael hung onto Conran's throat for another full minute to get his point across before slowly easing his hand away. But instead of going back to his chair, he sat beside Conran, close enough to both arouse and frighten him. "Do you want a drink?" Kael asked, as though it was a social visit and he had not just had the man by the throat and threatened his life.

"No, thank you. Is that boy still here? I need some assurance that he's not."

"Don't touch anything, and don't get off the couch," Kael ordered.

He got up and went quickly along the hall and into the bedroom, closing the door behind him, his finger to his lips. Angel still sat in the middle of the bed exactly where he had been told to wait. He rose up on his knees and shuffled to the side of the bed. Kael looked at him with relief. "Good boy." He kept his voice very low and pulled Angel into his arms. "You have to stay here for a while longer, until I tell you it's safe to come out."

"Yes, Sir, but Daddy, where's my blanket?"

"Your what?" Kael was confused.

"My blankie. It was under my pillow."

That's what that rag was, a comfort blanket! Why didn't he figure that out himself? "I locked it in the dungeon with your clothes," he lied.

"Why, Daddy?"

"Are you my slave or what?" Kael asked to distract him.

"Yes, Sir."

"Then you have to obey me. There's something I have to do. There's a man in the living room who can't know you're here, at least not yet. He'll try to take you away from me. You be a good boy and stay here, not a sound, not a movement. If you have to use the loo, do not flush." Angel nodded obediently. "Good lad," Kael said. He snatched the magazine off the bed.

"Daddy!" Angel mouthed.

"I need this." Kael returned to the living room to find Conran exactly where he had left him. He looked at the way the man's jacket lay against his body and the position of his hands and feet, and knew he had remained seated as ordered. Kael tossed the magazine at Conran. "My guilty pleasure," he said. "I was going to read it in my lonely bed." He grinned.

Conran picked it up and leafed through it. Kael walked to the sideboard where the drinks tray sat and poured two glasses of whiskey. He returned to the couch and sat down beside Conran again. Conran let the magazine fall in his lap and took the glass. "What about the food? You don't eat macaroni-cheese, nor do you eat hot dogs. The chocolate biscuits, perhaps, but not the other things."

"How do you know?"

"I know your habits. It's my job to know," he added quickly. But Kael knew that as good as Conran was at his job, he would not know what his other operatives ate or read. Somebody would, but not him.

Looking down, then back up at Conran with a little grin as though he felt sheepish, Kael said, "You can take the boy out of the council estate, but you can't take the council estate out of the boy." He looked intimately into Conran's eyes. "Now why don't you admit you came here because you want me and not to look for a dead boy."

Conran's mouth twitched nervously. He took a sip of his whiskey. "Where's his body?"

"In the river, but it's weighted down. If he ever surfaces, nobody will recognize him, not after the fishies have eaten him. Now let's talk about something more interesting, like what you want me to do to you."

Sweat broke out on Conran's upper lip; his breath became suddenly shallow. He was close to getting what he wanted but was terrified of being humiliated again. "I don't know," he said quietly.

Kael sat back expansively, letting his arm fall around Conran's shoulders. Conran sucked in a quick breath. His hands began to shake to the point where his drink splashed onto his trousers, leaving little dark circles of whiskey.

"You do want me, don't you?" Kael asked.

"Are you going to humiliate me again with a last-minute refusal like you did in my office?" Conran looked bitter.

Kael laughed and swallowed a mouthful of whisky. "That was just a tease. I enjoyed playing with you. You know I'm an evil bastard, don't you?"

"Yes, I do know that."

"That's why you like me. I always intended to give you what you want. Now you just have to tell me what it is."

"I don't know," Conran whispered.

Kael turned to face him, his arm still draped loosely about Conran's shoulders. Conran's breathing became labored, and Kael lifted the magazine and looked down to see the bulge at his crotch.

"When I fucked you in the showers at school, your cum was all over the tiles when you got up afterward."

"You raped me."

"That time, yes. Would you like me to do it again? Do you want my cock up your arse?"

"Yes." Conran would not look at him.

Kael leaned in very close until he could smell the whiskey on Conran's breath and the sweat under his armpits. With his free hand he pulled open the jacket to see wet patches forming on Conran's usually immaculate white shirt. "Say it. Say the words. I may have raped you last time, but this time you have to tell me what you want. I'm not touching you unless I have your complete agreement."

"I want your cock up my arse." His voice was barely discernible.

"Shall I restrain you first? You know what I'm into. You know everything about me. I like to dominate. I like to tie men up before I fuck their brains out. I like to whip their backsides until they scream. Do you want some of that?"

Conran nodded and wiped the sweat from his upper lip.

Kael's smile was both teasing and very intimate. "You have to say yes please, Sir."

"Yes please, Sir." Conran's cheeks were scarlet.

"Finish your drink."

Conran downed the last of his whiskey, and Kael took the glasses back to the sideboard. He returned to Conran and with his right hand took the man's left hand, pressing their palms together and entwining their fingers. Conran's gaze locked on Kael's. It was bright and glassy as if he was about to faint.

"Come with me; there's a good boy," Kael said.

Chapter Twelve

Kael drew him to his feet and pointed at the passage. Passively, Conran walked ahead of him into the dungeon. Kael switched on the light but turned it low. He had left Angel's clothes by the door and had to remove them quickly, but Conran was so aroused and distracted he did not notice. Quickly Kael shoved the clothes under the towels on the shelves where he kept blankets and creams for aftercare. Then he walked over to the shelf above the sink and pressed a button.

Rooted to the spot, looking extremely nervous and aroused, Conran glanced around the room. Watching him, Kael stripped and stood, hands on his hips. His height alone was imposing, but standing magnificently naked, absolutely sure of his own strength and attractiveness, he knew he was extremely intimidating. Conran looked him up and down, breathing hard.

"Strip," Kael ordered.

Conran didn't move.

"There is one rule in my dungeon. Obey me or leave. Take your pick."

"I don't want to leave," Conran said.

"This room is soundproofed. Speak loudly at all times. Now, I'm going to lock the door, and once it is locked, you are at my disposal until I free you. Fuck safe words. Fuck pussy-arsed refusals. You get one opportunity to leave, and that is right now. Are you staying or leaving?"

"I'm staying."

"Call me Sir."

"I'm staying, Sir."

Kael smiled. "And wouldn't you like to thank me for having you here?"

"Yes, Sir, thank you, Sir." Conran got slowly to his knees. Tentatively, his lips touched Kael's right foot and then the left. He was panting hard as he pressed his cheek against Kael's feet and began to kiss and lick his way around them, crawling with his buttocks in the air and his shoulders on the ground.

Kael indulged him for a few minutes, then strode across the room and with deliberate movements locked the door and put the key out of reach, knowing that just the act of being locked in with him had been enough to make many a slave spurt his stuff uncontrollably.

"Strip!" He strode back to Conran.

"Yes, Sir."

With shaking hands Conran removed his clothes and carried them across the room to hang neatly on the wall hooks. When he turned from the wall, Kael said, "Crawl."

Dropping to his hands and knees, Conran crawled toward him, his head up, looking directly into Kael's eyes, seeming desperate for approval. "Good boy."

If only he had known when he was twelve years old and the only boy in school he was afraid of was sixteen-year-old Stephen Conran, that one day he would have Conran crawling on the floor begging to be fucked.

Conran came to a halt at Kael's feet. "Stand up. Over here." He beckoned Conran over to the leather-topped torture table. "Stand right here."

Conran obeyed, looking into Kael's eyes, then dropped his head and threw his arms around Kael's chest, hugging him, his head resting on Kael's shoulder. Conran's blood-filled cock pressed against Kael's thighs.

"I really should flog you for touching me without permission, but I am willing to accept an apology."

"I'm sorry, Sir," Conran said, his voice breathless, but even then he did not move right away. "Forgive me."

"Come on, boy; let's have you standing to attention." Kael's tone was a mixture of amusement and boredom, though in fact he was always highly aroused at having a willing man in his power, even if it was only Conran. He took two steps back away from Kael, his arms at his sides.

"Feet apart," Kael said. "More, a good eighteen inches."

Conran struggled to be exact, looking down at his feet, his breath labored.

"Good. Brace your legs. That's it. Back straight." Conran straightened his back, glancing at Kael with a certain amount of shyness.

He so wants to please me; that's good.

"Hands behind your head." Conran's arms shot up to his head. When his elbows drooped, Kael put his hands underneath them, pushing upward until they were angled out straight. "Good. Now do not move."

"Yes, Sir."

The next part was always fun. From the metal shelves along the wall, Kael began to choose instruments, bringing them over one at a time and laying them on the torture table. The effect was similar to going to the dentist, getting in the chair, and seeing that tray beside the arm with terrifying-looking probes and scrapers all laid out meticulously, waiting to be used. It scared the hell out of a sub.

The first thing he brought was a shiny steel spreader bar with leather-padded ankle cuffs attached to each end.

"Stephen." Kael stood in front of him, looking down into his eyes. He had never before called Conran by his given name. They did it the old-fashioned way at College Grange, all the boys called by their surnames. Doing it now enhanced Kael's

superiority. It was a bit like the doctor who called you by your first name, but you were supposed to call him by his title because you were not his equal.

"Stephen, have you ever been flogged?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Who flogged you?"

It came out in a whisper. "A prostitute, Sir."

"A prostitute?" Kael repeated loudly. "Male or female?"

"Female, Sir."

"Well, I'm sure she did an excellent job, but her arm couldn't have been as strong as mine."

"Yes, Sir."

Leaving him looking sideways at the table, Kael strode purposefully but slowly back to the shelves. Ball weights—they'd look good on him. He picked up the ten-ounce weight, hefted it in his hands, and put it back. It would be too much for a novice. Snatching the six-ounce weight and several condoms, he carried them back to the table and set them beside the spreader bar.

Conran's cock jutted straight out, thick and engorged. A vein stood out prominently, pulsing as Kael looked at it. "Do you know what I'll do to you if you come without permission, Stephen?"

"Flog me, Sir?"

"No. In my dungeon flogging is for pleasure only; it's a reward. If you come without my permission, I'll smack you in the face and throw you out without your clothes, and you'll have to find your way home naked." Conran's eyes opened wide with fear. He knew Kael meant every word he said. He knew what Kael was capable of.

Kael strode back to the shelves. He chose a leather cock ring for comfort. Deliberately keeping his tone kindly, he said, "This will help you behave yourself, Stephen." He slid the cock ring up the shaft and over the ball sac until it pressed snugly against his body. "I want you to behave yourself so I don't have to punish you. I want you to enjoy yourself in my dungeon."

Tears sprang into Conran's eyes, and his chin quivered. "Thank you, Sir."

Kael placed his hand tenderly against Conran's cheek. "You're welcome, boy." Conran's chest heaved with suppressed sobs, but he did not break his posture.

Continuing the ritual, Kael brought a rubber butt plug and another, shorter, steel spreader bar and a long plain bar. When everything was laid out side by side, he stood looking at it. One look at Conran showed him staring wide-eyed at the table, his breath short.

Lastly, Kael looked over at where the hoods were on display. "Oh God," Conran muttered, following his gaze.

"Do they frighten you, Stephen?" Kael asked very gently, knowing his concern would bond the other man to him in gratitude even more deeply.

“Yes, Sir.” He swallowed hard, his eyes darting everywhere.

Kael walked toward the hoods as if he planned to choose one, but he had no intention of wasting time persuading him as he had done with Angel when a blindfold would do just as well. It was less frightening and would still render Conran sightless. He took a thick leather one and put it behind his back as he walked toward Conran.

Afraid, Conran began to move his hands.

“Don’t!” Kael came to a stop in front of him. “Don’t move your hands, boy. Don’t try my patience.”

“I’m sorry, Sir.”

From behind his back Kael produced the blindfold. “Look. How scary can this be?” The relief on Conran’s face was pitiful. He actually laughed with relief. Kael walked behind him and fitted the blindfold. The smell of soft leather filled his nostrils. “Smell that? There’s nothing so exciting as the smell of soft, expensive leather.”

Like a little mouse or rabbit, Conran’s nose twitched as he inhaled the erotic scent. “Yes, Sir.”

Kael pulled the buckle very tight, fitting the blindfold perfectly against Conran’s eyeballs, blocking out every last bit of light and making it impossible to remove. “There we are,” Kael said.

Now was the moment to make him helpless.

“On your knees, boy.”

Conran obeyed at once, dropping to his knees, placing his hands on the floor.

Swiftly, Kael went to work fitting the spreader bar between Conran’s ankles and attaching the cuffs until his feet were set well apart and fixed in place.

Walking round to the front, Kael took the shorter spreader bar, fixing the cuffs to Conran’s wrists. His hands were fixed twelve inches apart, but he could still lift his hands to remove the blindfold, which must not happen. Conran must have no control at all. Kael took the long steel bar, which he slid under Conran’s body, fixing one end to the middle of the wrist spreader bar and the other to the middle of the ankle bar, rendering him completely unable to rise. As an afterthought he fetched a pair of leather bondage mitts and fitted them over Conran’s hands, fastening them tightly around his wrists.

Standing up, he admired his handiwork. “Excellent! Now I’m ready to play with you.”

The room was soundproofed for a reason. No one in the building must know what went on in his dungeon. But despite that, there was someone outside the door. Kael just knew it; he could sense it. It could only be Angel, but the boy was definitely standing outside.

Making no sound, Kael walked quickly to the door and unlocked it. Several months of his training with MI6 had involved entering and leaving buildings as

though he were invisible. Conran had no idea he was being left alone as Kael stepped outside the room, closing the door silently behind him.

"What are you doing here?" He spoke in a very low voice. "I told you to stay in bed."

"I miss you, Daddy," Angel said, his head on one side. Kael took Angel's head in both hands and pulled it toward him to kiss his forehead. "Is there a man in there, Daddy?"

Kael blew out a long breath as he came to a decision. "Yes. Do you want to watch?"

A grin lit Angel's face. "Yes!" He sobered quickly. "Yes please, Daddy."

Kael pressed his fingers over the boy's mouth. "Listen to me; listen very carefully. He must not know you are in the room. He especially must not hear your voice, or he'll know who you are."

Angel nodded.

"Not a word, do you understand? Not a sound. Don't cough, don't sneeze, and do not move from the door." He looked down at Angel's bare feet. "Silent."

"Yes, Sir."

"Good boy." Kael opened the door. The fractional change in temperature as they both entered alerted Conran that something had changed. He turned his head as if trying to look around him. "Sir, are you there?"

"Yes," Kael said. Conran visibly released the tension he was holding.

Kael indicated with a gesture that Angel was to remain by the door and stand at attention, before he locked the door again. Free once again to make noise, Kael walked to the table and took a thick tube of lubricant, squirting a blob of the gel into his palm. "I'm going to lubricate your anus, Stephen, so that it will be nice and slippery and easy to access. I like my boys completely available and exposed when I'm ready for them."

Conran's entire body shuddered involuntarily at the words as if a small orgasm had wracked it. "Yes, Sir."

Going behind Conran, Kael leaned down to look. The spreader bar held his ankles at such a distance from one another that his buttocks remained parted, the anus exposed. Kael slapped the shiny gel between the buttocks. It was cold, making Conran release a strange sound and tip his head back.

"Lovely." Kael spoke as if to himself while massaging the contracting anus. He pushed his index finger inside the muscle and massaged in a circular motion. "Oh splendid. A nice tight arsehole; there's nothing like it in the universe. I live for moments like this. A boy on his knees begging to be violated by me. His arse tight and tensed, at the ready. His cock standing to attention like a wanton soldier on the battlefield." He laughed indulgently, knowing the power every word and every sound he made had on his submissive. He drew his finger out and landed a full, openhanded slap to Conran's backside. "I'm very pleased with you, boy."

"Thank you, Sir."

"Now Stephen, since I know you are longing for my cock to ream you and since you have to wait a little longer, I am going to be kind." He took the butt plug and leaned down to push it under Conran's nose. "Smell the rubber." Conran inhaled deeply. "Feel it." Kael ran the smooth side of the three-inch plug over Conran's cheeks and forehead. "Smooth like satin. I'm going to insert it into your rectum now as a teaser for things to come. Would you like that, Stephen?"

"Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir," Conran said. He went silent and completely still while the short length of the plug slid inside him and the muscles of his anus closed around the ridge of the hilt, locking it in place.

"Is that nice, Stephen?" Kael asked, rocking the butt plug up and down.

"Yes, Sir," he gasped.

"Crawl," Kael ordered.

It was nearly impossible to move forward with the spreader bars in place, especially with the crossbar. Conran tried numerous ways to propel himself and finally managed to achieve a type of bunny hop, all the while moaning and panting. The little progress he made looked exhausting.

Kael looked at Angel, who stood with his back to the wall and his hands holding his erect cock. He was breathing hard, but Conran did not notice, he was so consumed with his own pleasure and fear. Kael shook his head very slightly, and Angel took his hands away from his cock. Kael nodded his approval, very pleased that Angel was alert to direction and instantly obedient.

Kael looked down at Conran, knowing it was time to flog him. "Stop and remain still. Stephen, when you were flogged by the prostitute, what instrument of pleasure did she use?"

Seeming very relieved that he could cease the exhausting movement, Conran became immobile, waiting, his buttocks tensed. "Sir, she used a paddle."

"Keep still, boy! Wooden or leather?"

"I think it was wooden, Sir." He began to pant heavily.

"Wood is good, but I think I'll use leather." Kael went to fetch a paddle from the wall. It was a vicious-looking instrument, thirteen inches of double thick flexible leather, beautifully stitched together, and with a good long handle to hold it by. When he had first bought it, he had ordered a sub to paddle him with it to give him a sense of its power. The pain had reverberated through his buttocks and on through his torso, creating tremors that lasted long after each stroke. It was magnificent.

"Tell me how you're feeling, Stephen."

"Grateful, Sir." He could barely speak between exertion and excitement. "Grateful that you have seen fit to take control of me and to flog me, Sir."

"Excellent," Kael said. He looked at Angel and pointed at the low rimming stool he had used to teach Angel to suck his cock. The boy tiptoed over to pick it up and brought it to Kael.

Conran began to move his head, attempting to hear better. "Sir, is there someone here?"

"Do you want there to be?"

"No, Sir!"

"There's no one here, boy, no one but you and me and all your hopes and fears."

Kael positioned the stool and sat down, his thighs wide, his crotch very close to Conran's face. Conran leaned forward to sniff him. He began to reach out with his lips, searching for the cock like an animal searches for its mother's nipple. Kael lifted his hard cock and rubbed the tip over Conran's cheeks and mouth. Conran opened his mouth, searching the air, trying to grab it with his lips. Kael rubbed his soft hair. "You're an anxious boy. I like that. Anxious to please me."

"I want to please you, Sir. Direct me on how to please you." Conran's upper-class accent was far less annoying when he was on his knees in restraints.

"Take my cock in your mouth, boy."

Conran leaned forward as if a great thirst was upon him and Kael's cock spouted the waters of life. Gasping from deep in his throat, he reached as far forward as he could, given the limitations of his restraints, and Kael kept his thick cock just barely out of reach so that Conran could grasp just the tip between his lips. His frustration was evident as he lunged, trying to draw a greater measure into his mouth. After more than a minute, he cried, "Please, Sir!"

"Of course."

Kael's tone was so filled with kindness and the gentleness of his hand as it cupped Conran's head was so encouraging, that he was unsurprised when a tear trickled from behind the tight leather blindfold. Kael inched forward on the stool, pushing his cock into Conran's mouth until he could feel the sensitive tip touch the hot, parched throat. Conran grasped it as if it were a lifeline.

"I know your mouth is dry, Stephen. You can drink my fluids." The precum leaking from the tip lubricated the parched mouth, and Conran began to suck in earnest, moaning as he did so. Kael held his head, his own pleasure rising in thick streaks up his belly and down his thighs. He could come ten times in an hour and still get an erection, but he decided to delay his own gratification and after only a few minutes drew his cock out while pushing Conran's head back.

"Please, Sir," Conran moaned as plaintively as *Oliver Twist*.

Kael laughed and tousled his hair. "That's my boy." He looked over at Angel, wondering what his reaction would be to seeing him in complete control of a willing sub.

Angel's erection was gone, his penis contracting back until he looked like a cherub in a church painting, except that he was so slender. The look on his face was

almost comical. His brow had furrowed, and his mouth twisted into a two-year-old's pout. Gesturing wildly at himself, he mouthed, *I'm your boy*.

Kael stood up, his face took on a warning, and he extended one finger at Angel, shaking his head. The boy immediately dropped his chin in submission.

Kael picked up the paddle and looked down at Conran. "Now, Stephen, I am going to paddle you. I have a fine leather paddle in my hand, and I am going to apply it to your arse until your buttocks turn red and you start screaming."

"Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir," Conran said loudly.

"You may move around if you want, though you will find it difficult, as you already know."

Conran's breathing became hard and fast in anticipation. An almost supernatural stillness settled over him. Kael stood behind him to look between Conran's thighs. His ball sac hung, blood filled and swollen. His perineum was scarlet and inflamed. The spreader bar held his feet wide enough that his entire scrotum was exposed and vulnerable, while his buttocks remained slightly parted.

Kael closed his eyes, though the light was very subdued. He breathed deeply and steadied his feet, bracing them so that he stood rock solid on the floor to the side of Conran, where his aim at the twitching buttocks would give the most beneficial effect. He raised the paddle and landed a light slap to the buttocks, flat across the cleft and very careful not to go near the balls. The slap forced the butt plug to push in deeper and then retract. Kael landed another gentle, stinging slap of the paddle, marveling at its flexibility and strength.

"Oh God," Conran moaned.

"There is only one God, and at this moment that is me," Kael said firmly.

"Yes, Sir, yes, Sir," Conran panted.

Kael landed a harder blow and another, incrementally harder still. He measured very carefully the pressure he applied, but he was relentless. He had neither the inclination nor the interest to drag this out, and he knew Conran had waited long enough and that the waiting would be far worse torture than the pain.

In under two minutes, with measured, perfectly timed strokes, he pushed Conran inexorably toward his limit, and when he reached it, Kael knew. The height of the pain was perfect, the rhythm of the blows hypnotizing. Now he was at the pinnacle of his pain threshold; Kael held him there and walloped him relentlessly. One perfectly timed and equal blow came hot and fast upon the last, with a quarter of a second between them.

The buttocks before him were no longer Conran's; they simply belonged to his sub. A sub who had handed himself to Kael as a gift for Kael's pleasure and his own edification.

Everything around Kael disappeared; nothing mattered but the paddle, the flesh absorbing the blows, and the sound—the wonderful, satisfying sound—of leather hitting flesh. A secondary but also very pleasing sound was the labored breath and the deep-throated cries that originated in Conran's parched throat.

For a split second Kael's eyes wandered to the halo of blond hair on the lovely boy by the door who stood transfixed by the scene playing out before him. Angel had become as immobile as a statue, truly a stone Angel in a graveyard. The low light caught his hair and pale skin in such a way that Kael swore for a fleeting moment that he had grown wings that spread wide about him. The moment of inattention made him falter in his rhythm, causing Conran to cry out at an unregulated blow that caught the skin of his ball sac.

Immediately Kael modulated his aim and began to bring the paddling to a halt. His arm slowed; the blows became lighter and further apart. At the last stroke his heavy breath and Conran's were perfectly synchronized as though only one man breathed.

The rush of adrenaline that flooded him when he performed a flogging began to dissipate, leaving his body tingling. His erection had deflated without orgasm, and his long, thick cock swung loose.

Tossing the paddle onto the table, Kael walked to the small fridge and took out a bottle of water. Sweat gleamed on his body, attesting to his effort and loss of fluids. He drained the bottle, tossed it in the stainless-steel bin, and took another, which he brought to Conran.

The strain of holding the difficult position for so long was taking its toll. The undeveloped muscles in Conran's arms and shoulders bulged. Veins pulsed in his face and neck. His lips were very dry, and he was having difficulty swallowing.

Pulling the small stool close to his head again, Kael sat down and took Conran's chin tenderly on his fingertips, lifting it until he could touch the bottle to his lips. "Drink, boy."

Conran began to gulp, but since Kael had control of the bottle, he allowed the flow to come slowly to avoid Conran choking. He held the bottle until Conran drained it. "That's a good boy, Stephen."

"Thank you, Sir." The gratitude in his tone was touching. Even his most basic needs were beyond his control.

"For the flogging or the water?" Kael asked gently.

"For everything, Sir, everything."

Kael bent his head and dropped a little kiss on Conran's forehead. It had the desired effect. Conran began to cry. "There now, boy, everything is good. I'm here for you."

For several minutes Kael patted Conran's back and wiped the tears that managed to escape the blindfold. "I'm going to release you from your restraints because I can see you are in great discomfort."

"Thank you, Sir."

"But before I do that, I think you need to have some weight added to your balls."

Kael rose and picked up the ball stretcher and weight from the table. At Conran's arse, he quickly removed the cock ring. Then he grasped the ball sac in one

hand, pulling downward to position the testicles and leave room for the stretcher. He wrapped the leather stretcher around the skin above the balls and adjusted the snap fastener for a tight fit. "There." He patted Conran's buttocks like he would a pony. They were deep red and heavily welted from the paddle. "How does that feel?"

"Good. It feels good, Sir."

"Of course it does, Stephen. And now I'm going to add a small weight. Are you ready?"

"Yes, please, Sir."

His enthusiasm made Kael smile. "I'm pleased with your behavior, boy, very pleased."

"I only want to please you, Sir," Conran said.

A long, deep moan rose up from Conran's chest and whistled out of his mouth as the weight descended, dragging his balls with it. The sac stretched with a frightening tension. Kael stroked the taut skin, tracing the seam down to the top of the leather ring.

While Conran continued to whimper with the heavy weight on his balls, Kael went to the shelves. "Do you know how soothing arnica cream is on inflamed skin?" Conran did not answer. Kael continued, "I am going to rub some of this into your bottom. It will help you feel better." With great care and tenderness, Kael smoothed the cream into Conran's buttocks. Between the welted, swollen buttocks and the ball stretcher and weight, all his attention would now be focused on his rear end.

"Tell me how it feels back here, Stephen. What are you feeling right now?"

"Sir, my backside feels blazing hot, like the flesh is boiling. My balls feel as if they are being dragged to the ground."

"Is it good? Do you like all those sensations?"

"Yes, Sir, yes, Sir."

"I'm going to remove the crossbar now," Kael told him, unfastening the hooks and sliding the bar out. "Keep your hands flat on the floor. You would be amazed how much support the crossbar has been giving you."

Conran rocked slightly but remained where he was. With an arm around his waist, Kael drew him up to kneel awkwardly with his knees spaced far apart. "I'm going to remove the spreader from your wrists now, Stephen; when I do, you will place your hands behind your back." He removed the bar, and Conran obediently brought his arms around behind, stretching and bending them as he did so. Keeping a careful eye on him to ensure he made no attempt to remove the blindfold, Kael brought a pair of wrist cuffs and restrained Conran's hands behind his back.

"There," he said. "Now I am going to help you to your feet." He walked around in front of Conran and took him by the waist, lifting him easily to his feet even though he leaned all his weight on Kael. "That's a good boy. Let's see if you have your equilibrium." He released Conran, who immediately lost his balance and stumbled forward, unable to catch himself because of the spreader bar holding his feet rigidly in position.

Kael caught him as he tumbled forward.

"I've got you. Let's get you over to the table."

He spoke as though his only task in the world was to secure Conran's comfort and safety, and Conran's response was unutterable gratitude. His chest heaved as Kael stood him up and pushed his upper body forward until he rested comfortably on the leather-topped table. His feet braced on the floor, pushing his buttocks out.

Kael gripped the base of the butt plug and drew it out, leaving Conran's anus contracting, as if reaching out to be filled again. "That is a lovely view, Stephen. Your red and swollen bottom, and your pink fuck hole desperate to be filled. Your scrotum is hanging nice and low, feeling the effects of the weight. It's only six ounces. I have weights up to a full pound. Could you handle that?"

"I don't know, Sir."

"Another time." Kael spoke kindly. "Will there be another time, do you think?"

"Yes, please, Sir."

Kael placed his hands on Conran's buttocks and began to massage, drawing a piercing pain from the tender flesh and making the man whimper.

"Stephen."

"Yes, Sir?"

"Tell me what you want, boy."

All the emotion and passion that had built up while he handed his power to Kael, offered himself as a gift, surrendered completely, poured out of him. "Sir, I want your cock up my arse. I want you to own me. I want you to possess me. Please fuck me, please, please, please, Sir." He was crying, shaking, his chest heaving with great sobs, laying him completely open to his dominant.

"Good boy." Kael ripped open a foil packet, pulled out the thin latex sheath, and snapped it. He positioned it at the tip of his wet cock and slid it on. Without pause, without another word, he touched the arrowhead to Conran's anus and pushed. "Boy, you have my permission to come anytime you want."

Then Kael reamed him, hard and fast, fucking Conran's backside, allowing sharp shards of pleasure to sweep up his hard belly and around his hips to engulf his buttocks. He clenched the muscles in his arse tight, thudding his groin into the man's arse. He had no idea when Conran came, he was so engulfed in the orgasm flooding his torso and making his cock feel huge. The last streaks of his orgasm pierced his thighs, and he fell forward over Conran's back, spent, panting.

At length his heart slowed and his breathing became even. "If you were a target, this is the point when I'd kill you," Kael whispered into his ear, not wanting Angel to hear, and felt Conran's body stiffen beneath him.

Kael chuckled and stood up.

Walking swiftly over to Angel, he opened the door and ushered him outside by one arm. "Go to the bedroom and wait for me," he said very quietly. "That man must not know you are here until I can persuade him not to do anything about it."

Angel opened his mouth to speak, and Kael pressed his finger over the boy's lips. "Don't speak, act!"

Kael turned and walked back into the dungeon.

Very quickly, he removed the weight and ball stretcher and then the ankle spreader bar. He unfastened the handcuffs and drew off the leather mitts. Conran pushed himself upright, and Kael led him to the leather couch across the dungeon. "Sit down."

He returned a moment later with water and a blanket, which he wrapped around Conran's shoulders. Slowly he removed the blindfold and handed Conran the bottle. "Drink." For long minutes they sat in silence, Kael's arm draped around Conran's shoulders. The sweat on Conran's body cooled fast, and he shivered. Kael pulled the blanket closer about him and drew the man against his chest, allowing him to rest his head on Kael's shoulder.

"Was that good, boy?" Kael asked after Conran drained the last of his water.

"Yes." Conran laughed, a small uncomfortable laugh. "Do I still call you Sir?"

"In here, yes you do."

"Yes, Sir, thank you. It was good. Will you let me come again, please, Sir?"

"I don't see why not."

"I never dreamed I would let you do those things to me," he whispered.

"I knew. I always knew you would come to me eventually. You've wanted this for a long time, haven't you, Stephen?"

"Yes, Sir, I have. Did you mean that? About killing me?"

Kael grinned. "I was teasing. I wouldn't kill you."

Conran turned his face up, his lips parted.

"I don't kiss slaves," Kael said. Conran ducked his head as color flooded up his cheeks with embarrassment. "Get dressed now. It's late and my magazine is waiting and I'm hungry. I might even eat some macaroni-cheese."

Within ten minutes they were walking past the living room toward the front door, Conran dressed again in his dark gray suit, the only signs of his time in the dungeon being a stiff walk and pink cheeks. Kael remained completely naked. The first thing he noticed was that the magazine was gone. Angel had taken it! He directed Conran quickly into the front hall before he noticed. To imbue some guilt, always a good distraction, he said, "You go home to your wife now, and make sure she doesn't set eyes on your backside for a few days. What's her name, Portia?"

"Yes." At the door Conran stopped to look up into his eyes. "Saunders...Sir? You won't tell anyone?"

"Our little secret." Kael stood behind the door to open it and gave Conran a shove. "Go home."

Kael returned to the dungeon and went straight to the small camera, which pointed directly at the table where he had made Conran remain for their scene. He took it down and began to play back the footage. He would edit it carefully for any

signs of Angel in the room or the moments when he looked directly at Angel, indicating the presence of another person.

“Got you!”

Chapter Thirteen

In the bedroom Kael found Angel asleep, curled up naked in the middle of the bed on top of the duvet. He watched him for a moment and then headed for the bathroom, anxious to wash off the sweat after his scene with Conran.

“Daddy.” A sleepy voice came from the bed. He turned and smiled at Angel, who started to sit up. “Has that man gone?”

“Yes, he’s gone.” Kael came back to sit on the bed.

“I guess you don’t want me now you’ve had him, Daddy?”

“Yes, I still want you. You think one fuck will put me out of commission for the night?”

Angel crawled over to sit beside him and took his hands. “Sir, who is he?”

“Someone who could make trouble for you. But I can work on him now. He thinks you’re dead, but he’ll soon find out you’re not. I’ll tell him I found you outside after I shot Andresen and brought you home because”—he grabbed Angel’s face and shook it, smiling—“you’re so sexy.”

Angel giggled. “Am I?”

“Yes, you are, and when I’ve had a shower, you can practice sucking my cock.” Kael rose and continued into the bathroom. He was brushing his teeth when Angel walked in a few minutes later. “Daddy, I found my clothes in the dungeon, but my blanket wasn’t there.”

Kael looked at him in the mirror. “What do you need that filthy thing for anyway?” He spit and rinsed his mouth.

“I don’t need it for anything; I just keep it. And it’s not filthy. It’s old; that’s all. I’ve had it a long time. Where is it, Daddy?”

“I threw it in the rubbish. It was a rag.”

“What!” Angel burst out. “You threw it away?”

Surprised at such a strong reaction to something so trivial, Kael said, “I’ll get you another one if it’s that important to you. Where do you buy things like that?”

“I don’t want another one. I want that one. It’s mine.” His voice rose as he spoke until the last words came out as a screech. “That is my fucking blanket!”

Kael threw his toothbrush into the sink and grabbed a towel to wipe his face.

“Don’t you talk to me like that, boy. Don’t swear at me, and call me Sir!”

“Sir!” Angel screamed, his face contorted. “Sir, Sir, fucking Sir!” He ran over to a stack of fluffy white towels piled up on the glass shelves and, with one sweep of his arm, knocked them onto the floor. “That is my blanket, and you had no right to throw it in the garbage.”

Anger erupted inside Kael. He had spent an hour and a half playing with a man he didn’t give a damn about, all to ensure the safety of an ungrateful teenager who should be dead. He struggled to keep his voice calm and to keep control of the situation. “Pick those up now, and put them back on the shelf.”

“Pick them up yourself, you anal-retentive asshole.” As though he were on a soccer field, Angel drew back one foot and kicked the towels, sending them flying across the bathroom and into the spotless porcelain bathtub.

Overcome with rage and afraid of what he might do in retaliation for such disrespect, Kael stood rooted to the spot, his fists clenched. If any other man were standing there behaving so badly, he would be whipped and thrown out into the street. He didn’t know what to do or how to respond, and the feelings of frustration were overwhelming. He was used to being obeyed. He was certainly not used to dealing with the emotions and raging hormones of a teenager.

The room fell silent. Angel stared at him, looking suddenly pale. He should be afraid about what he’d done and the words he’d spoken, but he didn’t look ready to give up. Kael knew he presented a scary sight. Naked, six feet five inches of muscle and anger, his jaw was clenched, his teeth bared like a wild dog. He raised a forefinger and began to wave it at Angel, but he was stuck for words; nothing came out.

“Go ahead, kill me now. That’s what you do best, isn’t it; you kill people?” Angel said, defiance making him brave. He was on the edge of hysteria, his voice shaky.

Kael should spank the hell out of him with a good heavy strap. He should have stuck a scalpel in his jugular the day he met him. “You are being an idiot. It was a ragged scrap of material. What can you possibly need it for?”

“That is none of your business. It’s mine, and it wasn’t dirty.” Angel planted his hands on his hips, leaning forward as he shouted, “You’re a dickhead! And you’re weird. In fact I’m surprised you don’t use latex gloves to pick up your cock when you piss.”

Kael remained completely immobile, stunned by the accusations and insults. Adrenaline surged through him, but he knew if he laid into Angel that he would seriously hurt him. Aside from that, he didn’t want to. Instinct made him react with anger when he was disobeyed—the instinct to control—but all he wanted just then was to repair the damage he had done.

“I can probably go and find it in the bins.” His voice was strangely quiet and calm, surprising him. It was as if the words came from someone else entirely. The anger drained slowly out of him as surely as the blood drained from the necks of his targets when he did his job well. What never happened when he killed someone was

feeling guilty. Yet now, guilt swamped him at casually disposing of something that obviously meant so much to Angel.

Angel watched him. "You're not going to whip my ass for yelling?"

"No," Kael said.

"Okay, let's get dressed. I'll come and help. It's after midnight. No one will see me."

The bins were located in the basement of the building. They were accessed from each of the four floors by a chute in the hallway that bags were dropped down. The smell of refuse was incredibly offensive to Kael's overdeveloped sense of smell as he walked with Angel into the dimly lit, chilly basement. Several large skips full of rubbish bags sat about the echoing room. Kael pointed at the skip still sitting under the chute. "It will be in that one; it's not that long since I tossed it."

"That's a fair-sized Dumpster, Daddy. Should I go in?"

"No." Even as he said it Kael put one hand on the metal ledge and leaped up to balance on it, looking down at the pile of black bin bags.

"Wow!" Angel whispered when he saw Kael leap. "You're like a tiger, Daddy."

"I bite like one too." Kael scanned the bin bags to pick out his from the rest. By sight it was impossible even for him to tell one black bag from the next. Gingerly, he stepped in among the bags. "I can't believe I'm doing this. Going through the bins at one in the morning to find a ragged bit of cloth. I should be in my bed, or at the very least lying back with your mouth on my dick."

"I'm all in favor of having my mouth on your dick, Daddy, but I want my blanket back first."

There was only one way to do this. Kael pulled a pair of latex gloves from his pocket and drew them on. He looked down at his big hands. "Amazing substance, latex. Protects you from everything from bubonic plague to STDs to getting nabbed at a crime scene."

"Daddy?" Angel's brow furrowed in confusion.

Kael took the bag nearest the chute and sniffed it. No, that wasn't it. Methodically he took one bag after the next, sniffing and tossing.

"Daddy, what are you doing? You have to open them. You'll never find it like that."

"Trust your daddy," Kael said. This was exactly how he would find the blanket. It would smell like Angel, and he had memorized exactly how the boy smelled. The blanket had probably not been washed in months, and it would emit Angel's unique scent. He lifted another bag to his nose, sniffing hard through the plastic. "Slightly fruity, clean, with a salty edge." He threw the bag at the floor and leaped down after it. "It's in that one."

One eyebrow raised skeptically, Angel looked at the bag and then up at Kael. "Ookay. Let's see." His slender, deft fingers untied the knot quickly, and he opened the bag wide. The blanket sat on top, covered in melted brie cheese rinds. Laughing

in disbelief, he pulled the blanket out, shaking off the debris. "Oh my God. You're amazing!" The smiling gray eyes and wide grinning mouth made Kael's heart leap. "One sniff through a garbage bag and you found it."

There was no other explanation; Kael had gone completely mad. All his life he had been hard to please, always wanting more—a more extreme sexual experience or a greater challenge going after a target. Nothing excited him more than nearly getting caught at a hit. He had run with bullets whizzing past his head while he laughed out loud as he dodged them, and it was never enough. Yet here he stood feeling deliriously happy watching Angel hug the filthy blanket while looking at him with unadulterated admiration.

"Daddy, you are *the man*."

The man.

He could have stood there for the rest of the night absorbing Angel's radiant smile and happiness, but he needed to get him back inside the flat. "Let's get back upstairs, boy. You owe me a really good cock sucking."

In the flat's small utility room Kael watched Angel throw the blanket into the washing machine. "Lots of soap," he said.

"Yes, Sir."

"Now get into the bathroom and pick up the towels."

Angel tidied up the towels, and they showered quickly. Despite having worn gloves, Kael scrubbed his hands thoroughly. Afterward he threw himself down on the bed, pillows piled up behind him. "Stand there," he ordered Angel, pointing at a spot beside the bed.

The boy looked slightly confused but obeyed at once, standing a foot from the side of the bed. He watched Kael expectantly. "Okay, I get it. I'm going to get my ass whipped for calling you names. I deserve it. Let's get it over with." He paused, then added, "Sir."

"You do deserve to get your arse whipped for saying such awful things to your daddy," Kael said. "But I'm not planning to do that right now."

The relief on Angel's face was comical. He raised his eyes to the ceiling while blowing hard through his lips. Kael wanted desperately to laugh. "You have to apologize though."

Angel looked into his eyes, utterly sincere. "Daddy, I want to, like, you know, totally and deeply apologize for calling you an asshole, because you are *so* not an asshole, and you are the coolest man I have ever met, and the most gorgeous."

Kael tucked his hands behind his head. "What about the other thing? Put your hands behind your back."

Angel folded his hands at his tailbone. "What thing, Daddy?"

"Chin up."

"Yes, Sir." Angel obeyed.

"Shoulders back, boy. You called me anal retentive."

Angel's silver eyes opened wide as he met Kael's. "I'm not taking that back. It's true."

Every muscle in Kael's body tensed. His breath caught in his throat. "Don't try my patience, boy. I can change my mind about that arse whipping at any moment."

Angel sighed, his face growing very serious. He spoke as if explaining something important to a young child. "I know that, Daddy. I know what you're capable of. But it's true. You are anal retentive."

Kael blew out an angry breath. "And you're a trained psychologist, are you?"

Angel maintained his posture perfectly. "I don't have to be a trained psychologist to see how obsessive you are, Daddy." He spoke so innocently, so matter-of-factly, that Kael felt his ire flame still more. "This place looks unlivable. You keep latex gloves in your pocket at all times. I know because I sort the laundry. You keep checking under the furniture for bedbugs and creepy-crawlies or something." It was all Kael could do not to reach out and swat him; at the same time he wanted to laugh. He was certainly looking for bugs, but of a different kind. "You freak out if I drop a crumb. Have you thought about getting some counseling?"

Out of the mouths of babes.

"All right. I've heard enough." He couldn't deny it; it was all true. Angel had him pegged. Nonetheless, he had to take back control of the situation.

Kael raised both knees and spread them wide. He pointed at the space on the bed between them. "On the bed." Instead of sliding into place with his eyes lowered as Kael expected, Angel jumped onto the bed, landing hard between his thighs. Kael tensed, pulling back in fear that his cock and balls would get hurt. "Idiot!"

Angel laughed and looked down at Kael's cock, licking his lips. "Mmmmmm." Nothing could spoil the boy's happiness and relief at getting his blanket back.

"Kneel up," Kael told him.

"Yes, Sir." Angel knelt as ordered but reached out a hand to take Kael's cock.

"Hands behind your back. Now keep them there." Kael lifted his cock, which had started to inflate. "Suck my cock, boy. Suck it hard."

Angel's pink, wet mouth opened as if he was about to sing a perfect *aaaa*. He leaned forward and closed his lips over Kael's cock. The warmth of the sweet young mouth was so comforting. He took Angel's blond head in his hands, forcing his cock in farther. Angel paused at the sudden pressure on his throat and almost moved his hands, but instead joined them again at his tailbone.

"Good lad." Kael rewarded him with his words. "Find your rhythm. Suck hard and evenly. Don't let me feel your teeth unless I tell you to."

Hot, thick pleasure shot through Kael, thickening his blood and banging in his head. His orgasm came fast and furious, rushing up his torso, making his nipples tighten like pebbles as his fluid spurted out and down Angel's throat. With a long exhalation, he released Angel's head and flicked his own nipples hard several times as a second, lesser orgasm swept through his thighs and buttocks. Only when the last possibility of pleasure was wrung from his body and the mouth on his cock

became painful did he lift Angel's head away and pull the boy up between his thighs to rest on his chest. Angel nuzzled into his neck like a kitten.

"I love your cock, Daddy," he said quietly. "It tastes so clean and sharp at the same time."

"I love your mouth on my cock." Kael had never been short of blowjobs. Freddie had done it frequently all those years at school, and he had offers aplenty every time he walked into an S&M bar wearing his full leather regalia. Angel was inexperienced and had a lot to learn, yet he excited Kael more than Kael had thought possible.

"I am going to be the best boy you've ever had, Daddy," Angel said.

"Glad to hear it, boy." He still felt like slapping him for calling him anal retentive. He was nothing of the kind, he was just clean and tidy, which was why he was so good at his job. "Tell me what the big deal is about that blanket."

Angel licked Kael's left nipple and took the right between his finger and thumb. "I had it from when I was little. I don't really have anything else from when I was a kid because I moved around so much."

"When did you move into Andresen's fancy homes?" he asked.

"I was twelve when my mom married him, so six years ago."

"You don't seem at all upset that he's dead."

"Oh I'm not," Angel said. "He meant nothing to me. I thought when my mom married him, he'd treat me like his son or something, but he never did. He called me faggot from the day I moved in. I'd hear him saying to my mom, 'What's that little faggot up to?' every time I was out of his sight. He always thought I was up to no good, but I never did anything much. I was a pretty good kid."

"Your mum let him call you names?" Kael's mum would have clobbered anyone who said a wrong word against him, just like she had done with Gary Burke.

"Daddy, it wasn't her fault," he said quickly. "She didn't want to screw things up. She'd only just got a rich husband and a nice place for us to live."

"Where were you living before?" Kael drew him closer, cupping Angel's small bottom with his big hand. He already knew about the foster care, but he wondered how Angel felt about it.

"We lived with my dad till I was four; then he left. I don't remember him. We never saw him again, so my mom went to work as a stripper. You should see her. She looks great, she's so beautiful, but she couldn't look after me; it got tougher and tougher for her. That's why she married Sven, to give me a nice home. She did it for me."

"Yes, of course she did." Kael rubbed his cheek. Angel didn't need to know the truth about his mother.

"So I was in foster homes from five till twelve; then she got me back."

"How many foster homes?"

"Lots, they keep moving you around. I must have been in like ten or something. The worst part about moving was you keep losing your stuff. I was always leaving toys and clothes and stuff behind, and other kids would steal your stuff too."

And I threw away your blanket. Kael wanted to kick himself.

"I always had my blankie though. I always packed it first to make sure I didn't leave it behind. I know it's kind of stupid and childish to hang on to it, but it reminded me of when I had a real home and of my mom."

Kael's throat constricted, and he swallowed hard. "Sorry I threw it away, boy."

"It's okay, Daddy. You got it back." There was no malice or resentment. "That was so cool how you sniffed it out. How come you can do stuff like that?"

"I'm more animal than human," Kael said. It was true; he was. But the emotions he was feeling for Angel were frighteningly human.

Angel looked up into his eyes. The beautiful silver irises and dark pupils were almost luminous. "Daddy, she's probably really worried about me. That was why I sent that e-mail to Maria-Jesus. It was my mom who called the police when they couldn't find me, right? Because she was worried."

No, she wanted nothing to do with you.

"Yes, it must have been. The maid got in touch with her, and she called the police and said she was worried about you. That must have been what happened."

The peace that settled over Angel's face when he heard the words almost broke Kael's heart. "I just don't want her to be worried, Daddy."

"She's bound to be worried," Kael lied. He knew perfectly well Samantha Andresen didn't give a shite about her son. "I'll make sure she gets a message saying you're safe. But do not try to contact her again, at least not until everything is sorted."

"No, Sir, I won't. When all this has settled—whatever *this* is—can we go and visit her together? She'll be so happy to see me and happy that I have an amazing man taking care of me. You'd really like her."

I doubt it.

"Of course we can." If Angel got out of this dilemma alive—and Kael would see to it that he did—who knew what the future would hold for them. In his job he couldn't keep a partner. It would be impossible to keep his profession from the boy. Anyway, he was a lone wolf; he was used to being alone, and he liked it. Angel would drive him nuts making a mess every time he walked in the door. Leaving crumbs, forgetting to put the lid down on the toilet. No, he'd soon get sick of that life.

"Daddy, how come you've got this thing about being so clean and tidy?"

Kael chuckled. "I got it from my mum. She worked in launderettes all my childhood. Can't get cleaner than that, can you?"

"Do you think there's more than that, something a bit emotional maybe? You know, psychological?"

"Emotional? Have you been watching that bloke on TV, big and bald like me, but not nearly as handsome?"

Angel laughed. "Dr. Phil? Yeah, I watch Dr. Phil sometimes. I hate dirty people, but it's so extreme with you, Daddy."

They lay quietly until Kael said, "I grew up on a council estate."

"What's that, Sir?"

"It's a big neighborhood of subsidized housing for poor people; the local councils run them. They're like ghettos. Anyway, when I went to College Grange on a scholarship, all the boys there were rich and they seemed to equate being poor with being dirty, even though my mum was the cleanest person you could ever meet. A lot of the names I got called when I first got there all started with dirty this and dirty that. Maybe that's part of my"—he paused for effect—"anal retentiveness." He had no idea why he came out with that.

Angel looked up into his eyes very seriously. "Daddy, I think you just made a big stride emotionally by realizing that."

Kael didn't know whether to laugh or what, so he nodded with great gravity. "Thanks."

"Sir, what did you do to those kids who called you names?"

"I beat them up. They never did it again."

"Somehow I knew you were going to say that." The delicate chin tilted up. "Daddy, do you think I want a daddy because I never had a father?" Angel gazed up at him expectantly as if he just knew Kael had the answer.

"I never had a father, and I don't want a daddy," Kael said. "Listen, boy, you know what you want, and that's all that matters. Do you know how many people wander through life never knowing what they want? Lots, trust me. Then there's the ones who know what they want but are afraid to go after it." He thought of Conran, who probably spent much of his time preoccupied with wanting a flogging. "Sometimes all that psychology crap just gets in the way of living the life you want."

"Daddy." Angel shook his head as if he was in awe. "You are the smartest man I have ever met."

Kael could not answer. He wanted to say something flippant or clever. He wanted to laugh, but all he felt was incredibly responsible for Angel's safety and emotional well-being. He wanted to live up to Angel's belief in him, so he stayed silent, holding him close, wanting to forget the world for a while.

"Daddy, what are you thinking? Bet I know."

"What?"

"You're thinking you'd like to spank my ass."

Kael laughed. "Yes, that's exactly what I was thinking. Come on; let's have you." He stretched his legs out and lifted Angel over his lap. The boy stretched out

flat across Kael's body with his legs extended and his head hanging off the bed. "Hands at your tailbone."

"Yes, Sir." Angel obeyed, tucking his hands behind his back and clasping them. All the tension melted out of his body, and he lay in complete submission, waiting for his daddy's hand.

"Boy, you've got the sweetest, peachiest butt cheeks and the most beautiful long, lean thighs. I don't know whether to spank you or eat you, you're such a tasty morsel."

Angel laughed, making his buttocks quiver. With one hand Kael took Angel's clasped hands and held them tightly. With the other he began to massage Angel's backside and thighs, rubbing and kneading. At once the boy began to moan softly, "Ooohh Daddy, that's so good."

The first spank wasn't heavy and didn't leave a mark, but Kael decided to build up the intensity quickly. The second slap was hard but still careful. Angel's moaning and total submission excited Kael, making him want to go in harder. Within minutes he had built up a good pace, and he was rewarded by watching Angel's body tense, stretch, and elongate.

"Daddy, I need to come, pleeease!" The words came out in a high-pitched, sharp-edged cry.

"Go ahead. When you're ready, boy."

Angel's body jerked, and he let out a scream, arching his back and kicking his legs against the mattress. Kael spanked harder and faster to accommodate his climax, feeling a great sense of satisfaction as Angel slowly became still. He continued to rub the sweet, round buttocks, which clenched and released rhythmically. "Good boy, Angel, good boy." He reached out to stroke the soft blond hair and after a while said, "Come and lie beside me, sweetheart." When Angel didn't respond, Kael realized he had fallen asleep.

"That was a hell of a good spanking. It knocked you right out." He lifted Angel tenderly into his place and drew the duvet up over his shoulders. What the hell had got into him, calling a boy sweetheart? He kissed the soft, pale cheek, put out the light, and got out of bed. He went quickly to the bathroom to wipe Angel's cum off his legs and returned to slide his book out from under the mattress. He put on his dressing gown and left Angel to sleep.

In the utility room he put the blanket in the tumble drier, no longer seeing just a rag but something that had made Angel's life easier for all those years. In the living room he poured a whiskey and sat down in an armchair. When the book was complete, comprising his early experiences and some of his many missions over the last ten years, he would put it in a safety deposit box and leave the key for his mum. She may be shocked at some of it, but she would understand.

I saw Shawn years later when I was 22 and in training with SIS. It was pouring down, a grey, cold day in London. When I first spotted him standing by

Nelson's Column in Piccadilly Circus, I stopped in my tracks. It couldn't be him. He lived in Liverpool, and as far as I knew he wasn't the adventurous type. I had always assumed he was still in Liverpool collecting the dole or living off some woman like he did off my mum.

I stood with rain pouring down the neck of my jacket, staring at him. The love that had driven me insane that summer when was I was 14 surged through me again at the sight of him. I wondered if I still loved him, if I could ever feel that excited and happy again.

I hated everyone after that summer with Shawn. Even Freddie who had become such a good friend got a smack in the face he didn't deserve and wouldn't speak to me again until Christmas.

A woman walked past Shawn and he held his hand out. The woman rooted through her bag and handed him something. He was begging! I could have died of shame for him. I walked over and stood in front of him. He held out his hand and looked up into my eyes. The recognition took a second and then he grinned, the grin that used to melt my heart. "All right, mate?" he said. He looked surprised.

"Yes, I'm all right," I told him.

He said, "You've lost your Scouse accent." He punched me gently in the shoulder the way he had that summer, like we were just mates and not having sex every chance we got. He asked if I could help him out. He was looking for work.

I said, "Come on." I walked away and he followed me the way I used to follow him. I walked him to the nearest pub, straight into the toilets and into an empty cubicle. "Up against the wall," I told him.

He said, "Christ, Kael, could you buy me a pint first?"

I said, "No." So he dropped his trousers and leaned both hands against the tiled wall. I fucked him with all the anger and frustration and resentment I'd felt towards him at the end of that summer when I had loved him and he had walked away. He kept saying I was hurting him and I was glad. I wanted to hurt him.

I finished just as another man walked into the toilets. I walked out with Shawn following. In the bar I bought him a pint and a meal and he ate it like he was starving. He asked me what I was doing these days. He kept calling me lad like he had that summer. I watched him like he was a stranger, someone I didn't recognize. I used to love it when he called me lad with that twinkly-eyed grin. Now he just looked scruffy and pathetic

"Don't call me lad," I told him.

He'd always been a messy eater but I didn't notice when I was a kid. When I loved him he could do nothing wrong. He wiped his face on the back of his hand.

I asked him what he was doing in London.

He smiled and said something about greener pastures. He said I looked like I was doing well for myself, that I was even taller.

I drank my beer and looked at my watch. I had a training session that afternoon on how to kill in public places and leave without anyone noticing. I decided Shawn wasn't worth practicing on. I told him I had to go.

"We could do this again. Where do you live?" he said. It was obvious he was homeless, but he wasn't welcome in mine.

I told him no thanks. I was busy these days.

He asked me if I was still queer.

"Yeah, I'm still still queer," I told him.

"When did you turn into such a bastard?" he asked.

I told him, "I always had the potential, and you helped."

I never saw him again.

Angel's blanket lay soft and clean in the bottom of the tumble drier. Kael held it up. It had needed a good wash, and it looked better.

In the bedroom he placed the blanket carefully beside Angel's face. Still fast asleep, the boy moved slightly, laying his cheek on the soft cloth. Kael lay down beside him and threw his arm across his waist, then kissed his head. "Sweetheart," he whispered.

Chapter Fourteen

Despite the cool September afternoon, the Princess of Wales Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park was full of children in bathing suits running through the water, screaming and laughing.

As much as Conran thought he knew everything about Kael's life, Kael knew even more about his. He knew that on Sunday afternoons Conran spent family time with his wife and three little blond children.

Sitting on a distant bench with Angel beside him, he barely recognized the stuffed shirt from College Grange and Vauxhall Cross running along beside the huge oval fountain, hand in hand with a thin little girl in a pink frilly dress and white fluffy cardigan.

The man who had crawled sweating and panting on his dungeon floor was the same man who now bought ice creams for the three children and sat them in a circle on the grass to eat them. His wife sat on the wall of the fountain watching.

Wearing sunglasses to protect his eyes from the bright white sky, Angel leaned on Kael's shoulder, watching the passersby. "Daddy, how come you let me come out today?" He had been so eager to get out of the flat he almost ran when they got to the park. Kael had to hang on to him, forcing him to walk beside him unobtrusively. He wasn't out of danger yet.

"I'm going to sort out the little problem that was making me have to hide you."

"I still don't understand why I've been hiding."

"You don't have to. You just have to do what I tell you."

"Yes, Sir. Can I have an ice cream, Daddy?" Angel gestured at the bicycle ice-cream vendor who had just sold ice creams to Conran.

Kael pulled a handful of £1 coins from his pocket. It was time he approached Conran and made his demands. "Here, get your ice cream and then walk over to the man sitting on the grass with the kids. Don't speak to him; just take off your shades and make sure he sees you, then come back to me."

A question immediately appeared on Angel's face, but he refrained from asking it and stood up. "Yes, Sir. Do you want one?"

Kael shook his head.

He's learning to obey me without question; that's good.

Angel's walk was not manly; it was like a long-legged young colt about to break into a run at any second, graceful but still powerful. Kael could not help smiling as

he watched his boy half run, half walk toward the ice-cream vendor. The pale sun shone on his light blond hair, which bounced as he walked even with the gel he put on it to enhance the long spikes that were cut into it.

Exactly as ordered, Angel bought an ice cream and, licking it as he went, walked directly to Conran, who was preoccupied with wiping a drip off the chin of one of the little boys. Angel stood about five feet away, watching until Conran looked up at him; then he turned and walked back to Kael. Recognition washed over Conran's face slowly. His eyes followed Angel until they fell on Kael. He got up and spoke hurriedly to his wife and then began walking toward them.

Angel plumped himself down on the bench, leaning into Kael's side. "Daddy, that's the guy who was in your dungeon. I didn't recognize him till I was up close. He looks different in clothes and without a blindfold."

"Everyone does." Kael laughed.

Conran wore jeans and an Aran sweater with a shirt underneath. Kael had never seen him dressed so casually. He came to a halt in front of them, looking left and right as if expecting more surprises. "What the hell is going on, Saunders?"

"Hello, Stephen. This is Angel Button," Kael said.

"I know who it is. Why is he here? You said he was dead."

Kael pointed at the fountain. "Sweetheart, go and sit over there and wait for Daddy," he said to the boy.

"Okay, Daddy." Angel obeyed at once.

Kael patted the bench. "Sit down, Conran, and let me tell you what you're going to do for me."

"Are you mad?"

"Sit!"

Conran obeyed, leaving a foot of space between them. "If anyone from the Service knows that boy is alive and knows anything about Andresen's death, they'll snatch him."

"I know, which is why I've been keeping him hidden. But that can't go on forever. You're going to protect him. You're going to get him a British passport and citizenship. You are going to make sure everyone forgets where I got him."

Conran looked directly ahead of him, refusing to meet Kael's eyes. "It's not going to happen, Saunders. The best thing you can do for that boy if you want to keep him safe is to send him back to America. Even there he might not be safe."

"What about the Bosnians who made the arms deal with Andresen? What if they go after him? He saw some of them in New York; they met Andresen at his flat in Manhattan."

"That's not my problem," Conran said. "But you are, and you're compromising yourself for some little teenage boy." He looked at Kael, bewildered. "What's the matter with you, Saunders, you who never give a damn about anyone but yourself? Now you have a teenager calling you Daddy. I never took you for a pervert."

Clenching his fist, Kael raised his hand and slammed it down into Conran's thigh. Conran almost collapsed with pain, leaning forward, gasping. "You wouldn't think of being sarcastic with me, would you, Stephen?" Kael said, his tone conversational.

"I was not being sarcastic." Conran was breathless with pain, but appeared more concerned that his wife and children should not see anything, and he watched them carefully. "You overestimate my power. I cannot arrange citizenship for that boy, and I can't protect him."

"If you can't do it, you know someone who can. You can arrange this for me, and you're going to. You want to spend more time in my dungeon, don't you?"

Conran threw a quick look around them to ensure no one was within earshot. "I don't want it so much that I will compromise my position or risk my income. There are some things that are beyond my control, and that is one of them."

Kael stretched out his long legs as though he was at home on his couch. He looked so comfortable that no one would know he was continually scanning the park, watching anyone who strolled too near to Angel.

"You have no choice. I want citizenship for the boy because he is staying here in England. I want him to have a future, just like you want for little Rupert over there." He indicated the children whose mother sat on the grass beside them now. "Which one is Rupert?"

"The oldest." Conran spoke reluctantly, not wanting to give Kael any personal information.

"What are the others called?"

He paused before saying, "Hugh and Annabelle."

"Lovely," Kael said.

"Look, Saunders, you're asking too much. You should have killed that boy. You must be getting soft."

Kael clenched his fist again. "Don't tempt me, Stephen." He said *Stephen* on purpose to remind him of their time in the dungeon. What angered Kael and frightened him was precisely that. Was he getting soft? "Nobody is going to hurt Angel, and I want him here in England to ensure that nobody hurts him."

"A man in your position cannot afford to have intimate relationships, especially not with a teenager. They're all volatile. Do you know he's only just turned eighteen?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Why didn't you kill him?"

"Because I didn't want to. Now get me a fucking British passport for him and do whatever you need to do to protect him from the boys who would come after him." Kael stuffed his hand into the pocket of his leather jacket to finger the video camera.

"It's out of the question." Conran began to get up. "And there is definitely nothing I can do about Andresen's Bosnian cohorts."

Kael looked at him. "Tell me where they are; I'll take care of them."

"I can't. There's an operation in place already. Someone is going to go after that boy as soon as they know where he is, and it could be us or them. He's not safe."

"Sit down," Kael ordered, pulling out the camera. "I want to show you something."

When he saw the camera, Conran swallowed hard and his tongue flicked out to wet his dry lips. "Oh God."

Kael waited until Conran sat beside him again and switched on the film. He had set it at the point where Conran, bent over the leather-topped table, was begging Kael to fuck him. The voice was unmistakably Conran's despite the fact that his back was to the camera at that moment. As if mesmerized, Conran watched himself being reamed, then watched as Kael removed his restraints. Conran turned to fully face the camera, naked, shaking, his cock still dripping fluids. Kael fast-forwarded to where he removed Conran's blindfold and he thanked Kael for taking care of him.

"You bastard, you evil bastard." Conran's face twisted with pain; his eyes filled with tears of frustration. "No one ever gets to win with you, do they? You're always on top."

"That's right; I always win," Kael said very calmly. The memory of Angel, hurt and angry, calling him an anal-retentive asshole suddenly filled his head. He hadn't won that scrap; Angel had. "No one need see this video as long as you take care of my boy."

"Are you in love?" Conran tried to be sarcastic, but it was obvious he was very frightened of being found out and frustrated at his own helplessness.

Anger tightened his muscles. He felt responsible for Angel. He was Angel's mentor and protector. He was not in love. "Don't be ridiculous. I've never loved anyone in my life."

The little girl got up from the grass and began a stumbling run toward them. She threw herself on Conran's legs. "Daddy, play with me." She looked at Kael, shy for a moment, and then smiled coyly. Kael never knew what to do with children. He had never wanted them. They were an alien species to him.

"You're big," she said. "Put me on your shoulders."

"You shouldn't talk to strangers," Kael said with a stern expression.

The child burst into tears and ran back to her mother.

"For God's sake, Saunders, you terrified her," Conran said.

"You should teach her not to talk to strangers," Kael said, though he wished he had not made the child cry. "If you don't protect my boy, Conran, the first thing I'll

do is take this video to the top brass at Vauxhall Cross. The fact that I'm on it is irrelevant. They know what I am, and I don't have a wife and kids to embarrass."

"Why not just kill me now?" Conran said. "At least then my family will get a good pension. This will ruin me."

Adopting the most evil expression he could manage, Kael said, "I've no intention of killing you, and they won't need a pension, because I'll kill them. If you do anything to hurt Angel, or if you let anyone else hurt Angel, I'll go after your family and I'll pick them off one at a time, starting with that little girl. The only one I'll make a point of leaving alive will be you, Stephen."

Conran began to pant, his face growing red with rage. He tried to speak, but the words seemed stuck in his throat. "You bastard," was all he could say. "You bastard."

"You know I'm a bastard; that's not news." Kael sounded very calm, as though he was enjoying himself, but the truth was he hated threatening a child and he would never hurt one. But Conran didn't know that, and Kael was unsure whether to be flattered or outraged that the man believed him capable of such an act. The video should have been enough to gain Conran's compliance. It was his own fault that Kael had to threaten his family.

The little boys ran over with their mother behind them holding Annabelle by the hand. Kael had met Conran's wife before. She had no idea he was gay, and she was very attracted to him, though she would never admit it. Her pupils always dilated when she looked up into his eyes. At the same time she knew her husband had met him at school when he was a scholarship boy from a council estate, and she thought she was too good for him. She thought he was nothing but *a bit of rough*. Kael smiled at her and watched her throat constrict as she swallowed hard. "Mr. Saunders, I believe, the language specialist?"

"That's right." She knew perfectly well who he was. "Call me Kael."

Conran threw her a nervous look. "Darling. I'm afraid I have to do a bit of business. Could you go on home with the children, and I'll be there as soon as possible?"

"Stephen!" The protest came out as a whine, making Kael grateful that he did not have a whining wife. Every time he saw couples like this, Dominant/submissive relationships made more and more sense. Someone had to be in charge.

"Sorry, darling, but I'll be home soon. I wouldn't ask you if it wasn't important."

She released a long sigh and looked accusingly at Kael, who kept on smiling at her.

When they were gone, walking across the grass toward the car park, Conran looked up at Kael. "I'll do what I can, but you had better keep the boy out of the way for a little longer until I can work on a few people. It's a good job you are so valuable, or you'd never get away with this."

Kael looked over at Angel, who sat obediently on the fountain wall watching him. He beckoned him, and the boy jumped up and hurried toward him, finishing his ice cream. "Angel, this is Mr. Conran."

Angel slid his arm around Kael's waist. "I know, Daddy; I remember."

Conran frowned at Angel. "I've never met you."

"He was in the dungeon watching," Kael said simply.

Conran's hands shook. "Did you plan the whole thing?"

"How could I? You showed up at my flat after following me to the supermarket, remember? All I did was take advantage of the situation, and let's face it, Stephen, you had the best time of your life. And if you behave yourself, we can do it again."

"I want nothing more to do with you," Conran said. "I was a fool to trust you. You've always been as slippery as an eel, always out to use everyone."

Angel stepped away from Kael and got up in Conran's face. "Hey, dude, who the hell do you think you're talking to? Don't talk to my daddy like that!"

Surprised, Kael looked at the boy, who stood with his fists clenched as if he would punch Conran in the face. "Angel, we have to be nice to Mr. Conran. He's going to get your citizenship for you so you can live here in England." He reached around Angel to take his wrists and lower them to his sides.

"Well, that's nice, but he still can't talk to you that way, Daddy. You're his master."

Kael laughed. Conran's face contorted as if he would burst into tears of frustration and rage. Two hot red spots flamed on his cheeks, and he looked around constantly. "He is nothing of the sort," Conran blustered.

"He sure was the other night. Anyway, thanks for helping me, dude. When everything is sorted out, I can go and visit my mom because she's been really worried about me. She thought I was dead like my stepfather."

"You little moron! Your mother doesn't give a damn about you. The maid called the police when she found Andresen dead." Conran was doing the only thing he could to get back at Kael. He was hurting Angel. Kael grabbed Angel and began to pull him away.

"The police told your mother you were missing, and she wanted nothing to do with you," Conran continued, louder. "She refused to return to America to help the police with their inquiries. She told them you would probably show up somewhere eventually, and even if you didn't, she was not interested. She hung up the fucking phone on them!"

"You fucker," Kael said through his teeth. "You fucker!"

Angel looked from Conran to Kael. "Daddy, that's not true. You said my mom called the cops because she was worried when she heard Sven was dead."

"He lied to you." Conran began to walk away.

Angel went very still. "No, no. You're lying."

"Conran!" When he turned, Kael raised his hand, fingers drawn into his palm, and with his knuckles struck Conran across the bridge of the nose. The crack was sickening as his nose broke. Blood flooded down onto the Aran sweater, and he bent at the waist, clutching his face.

Kael took Angel's hand and drew him away, walking quickly across the grass. "Daddy, he was lying, wasn't he?"

"Of course he was. He was a little sneak at school, and he's still at it. He was trying to get back at me, so he hurt you. He was making it up."

"Why would he do that? Why would hurting me hurt you?"

"He's jealous that you're my boy and he isn't." What he meant was, *Conran knows I'm in love with you*. But he couldn't say that. He couldn't even think it.

Three young males walked past. One of them laughed and pointed out that Kael was holding Angel's hand. The words *arse bandits* drifted over from ten feet away.

Kael released Angel's hand and broke into a run, grabbing the nearest one by the front of his jacket and backhanding him so hard he fell over backward, blood running from his mouth. With a sideways kick, he felled a second. The third began to run, and Kael could not be bothered to run after him. He walked back to Angel as if nothing had happened. He wasn't even breathing hard. He took Angel's hand again and carried on walking.

"Holy karate kid, Daddy, I'd hate to see you really pissed off. Will you teach me to fight like that?"

If Kael had gone after everyone who had called him a derogatory name over the years, he would have spent his whole life fighting, but every now and then he decided it was fitting to make an example of someone. Most of the time he didn't care. "I'm definitely going to teach you to fight like that. Come on. We're going out for dinner tonight at Freddie's house. He's really excited we're coming."

Angel smiled up at him and squeezed his hand. "Does he know I'm your boyfriend, Daddy? Did you tell him? Or did you say partner like older people say?"

Older people? Boyfriend was such a pussy word. Kael had never dated. He did not want a relationship. He wanted to keep life simple, and what was simpler than a boot in the arse and a "good boy" said with feeling. And here he was, going out to dinner with another couple. He didn't know whether to take flowers and wine or run for his life. "I didn't talk about it."

"Oh." A look of disappointment crossed Angel's face. "We'd better pick something up to take," he said, as though they had done this a dozen times before.

"What? Wine or something?" Kael asked, having no idea why he was deferring to Angel.

"You know what would be better, Daddy?" Angel slid his arm around Kael's waist, and he pulled the boy into his side as they walked toward the road.

"I've no idea."

“Let’s pick up presents for the little girls. People love you if you’re nice to their kids.”

If that was the case, Conran must hate Kael with every scrap of his being right now. “What do you buy for little girls? What do they like?”

“Barbies,” Angel said. “Everyone knows that.”

Chapter Fifteen

Kael dressed in smart black trousers, a black dress shirt, and black shoes and socks. He walked into the bathroom where Angel stood spiking up his hair in front of the mirror. "How do I look, boy?"

Appraising him with a low whistle, Angel said, "Crazy sexy but definitely like a killer." Coming up beside him, Kael looked at himself in the mirror. "Daddy, we're going out to dinner with two gay fathers and a couple of little girls. All you need is a pair of dark glasses and you could be a bouncer at a mob funeral. Have you got a nice blue shirt to match your eyes?" Kael shook his head. "Gray?"

"Yes, I've got gray." He went to change, wondering why he had asked the boy's advice in the first place. Angel had dressed in leather trousers and a black shirt. He didn't look like a killer though, just a young boy who wanted desperately to be a leather man.

Angel was still working on his hair when Kael returned in an attractive gray shirt. "That's way better, Daddy."

Kael looked at Angel seriously. "You behave yourself tonight, all right? Don't do anything to make me ashamed of you."

"Yes, Sir, Daddy," Angel said.

"Why do you do your hair like that? Have you thought of getting a buzz cut?"

"You can give me a buzz cut anytime you want, Daddy, but I do it like this to look like Cloud."

Kael squinted at him. "What cloud?"

"I'll show you. Have you got a computer?"

"Of course. I've been hiding it from you in case you do anything stupid." He brought the laptop from where he had it hidden on a high shelf at the back of the wardrobe, and booted it up. Angel joined him in the bedroom and Googled Cloud Strife.

"Here, Daddy." Kael looked over his shoulder. "That's Cloud Strife from *The Advent Children*. It's a movie and a game. I love the movie. I had my hair cut to look like him because he's my hero."

"I see that. His face looks like yours too, delicate and pale," Kael said.

"Yeah, except Cloud has blue eyes and mine are gray."

"Why is he your hero?"

“Because he saves everybody from the bad guys. He does brave things, and I always wanted to be brave, like you, Daddy.”

“I’m not brave, I’m just foolhardy; there’s a big difference. I’m a thrill seeker. I can’t help myself.”

Angel kissed his cheek. “You’re my hero now, Daddy. I should shave my head like yours.”

Kael laughed. “Let’s go, boy. We’ve got Barbies to deliver, though I’m not sure how appropriate it is to give plastic models of prostitutes to small children. If Freddie freaks out about them, your head will be on the block.”

“Daddy, trust me. Those little girls will love you for this.”

* * *

Freddie Merchant hugged Kael hard at the front door and hugged him again in the living room. Seeming unable to quell his happiness at having them there, he hugged Angel next.

He was doing well for himself judging by the size of the house and the Chelsea address, but the hardwood floor was littered with toys and books, and a white, long-haired cat strolled about as if it owned the place, shedding hair everywhere. Kael looked down at his black trousers and wished he’d worn old jeans.

“Our humble abode.” Freddie spread his arms, taking in the house.

“And his humble husband.” Adam walked in and shook hands with Kael and Angel.

“So what is your name, young man? We were never properly introduced.” Freddie threw a chubby arm around Angel’s shoulders, squashing him against his body.

“Angel Gabriel Button.” He looked at Freddie.

“You’re not serious,” Freddie said.

“I am.” Angel laughed. “Right, Daddy?” He looked at Kael, who nodded. Now that Conran was on their side—and there was no doubt that he would be—it was probably safe to tell people who he was.

Both little girls came tumbling into the room together and stopped shyly at the sight of the visitors, clinging to each other for support. “Girls, this is Uncle Kael, and this is Angel.” Freddie pointed them out in turn.

“Uncle?” Kael questioned.

“We’re trying to teach them to be respectful to adults,” Adam said.

“Are you a real angel?” the taller of the two girls asked.

“No, but I try to be sometimes.” Angel grinned at them.

Kael held out the bag with the toys. “There you go; I hope your daddies approve.”

"Girls, look. Uncle Kael and Angel brought you presents." Freddie took the bag from Kael and put it on the couch. The girls crowded up beside it and released screams of joy when the Barbies were brought out.

"Kael, how did you know? They love that stuff."

Freddie and Adam beamed. Kael looked down at Angel, who smiled back with an "I told you so" look. "It was Angel's idea. What do they do with them?" he asked.

"Oh they take the clothes off them and break the heads off, but they play with them for hours," Freddie said.

"Is it a good influence?" Kael asked. "I mean, look at those things." With Adam's help the children were ripping the dolls from the boxes.

"It's a terrible influence," Adam said, "but little girls love them. We held off as long as possible. We swore we'd never let them have such awful things, but we gave in when refusing bordered on child abuse." He laughed.

"Come on, let's get some drinks," Freddie said.

* * *

The meal wasn't bad at all. When Kael realized the children would be sitting down with them, he feared they would be served tinned beans and fish fingers, but the linguine with clam sauce and endive salad was excellent.

The little girls ate like cannibals, kneeling up on their chairs with food all over their faces and bibs, eating with their fingers more than their forks. Neither Freddie nor Adam seemed to notice. The girls chattered to Angel like he was an old friend, and Kael was amazed at his ease with them, at how he answered their questions and made stupid jokes that had them screaming with laughter.

"Girls, knock, knock."

Zoe caught on at once. "Who's there?"

"Daddy."

"Daddy who?"

"Daddy long legs."

The girls went hysterical. "That's not even a joke; it doesn't make sense," Kael said, confused. Then he saw Angel was surreptitiously pointing at him. Freddie and Adam joined in the laughter. "Very funny," Kael said grudgingly.

"You're so good with kids, Angel. Do you have little brothers and sisters?" Adam asked.

"No, sir, but I was in foster homes for a long time and there was always other little kids around, so I'm used to them."

Freddie looked at Angel and then at Kael. If he had spoken at that moment, he would have said, *Awww*.

Kael kept a close eye on Angel while they ate. The only time he had to discipline him was when Angel sat playing with the leftover clams on his plate. He

didn't like them and stirred them about with his fork. Kael nudged his elbow. "Don't play with your food." Angel kept his hands in his lap after that

"Bath time, girls," Adam said directly after they had eaten. "When you're in your nighties, you can come down for your chocolate cake."

"I want Angel to come too," Zoe demanded.

"I want Angel." Amelia joined in. She repeated everything her older sister said.

Angel looked at Kael. "Daddy, is it okay if I help them with their bath?"

"Rather you than me," Kael said.

Alone in the living room with Freddie, he sat, legs stretched out, sipping a whiskey. They reminisced about College Grange, both making jokes about Conran and what a little Nazi he was. Kael refrained from saying he worked with him now or even that he still saw him. Freddie talked about his work in the courts and his life with Adam and the girls, but Kael was closemouthed about his own career. He briefly mentioned security and working as an interpreter.

"I love you, Kael." Freddie's round glasses shone with the lamplight on them, and all Kael could see was shiny glass and a big smiling mouth underneath.

"Shut up."

Freddie laughed, his belly bouncing up and down. He drank a mouthful of his wine. "I knew you'd say that. But it's true. I always loved you to bits. I'm in love with Adam, but I love you. I've missed you."

Kael laughed too. "Yeah, all right, mate."

"You're in love with your young man. Your sweet Angel."

"I am not," Kael protested immediately.

"The way you look at him," Freddie said.

"I'm looking after him for a bit, that's all. He's too young and I'm too busy. I have no time for nonsense."

Freddie looked about the room at the toys, the cat sitting in the middle of an expensive leather chair. The remains of a snack on a patterned plastic plate sat on a small table from earlier in the day. "This, you mean? Domesticity? I grant you, it's not for everyone. Adam does a great job with the girls. He thinks it's more important to take them swimming than to clean the house, and I agree with him. We can always clean up when they've gone to uni. Don't you want a little bit of domesticity, Kael, you and Angel?"

"Angel is temporary. I'll make a man of him and send him out into the world. I'm busy with my work. It's not easy to live with another person when you're in, er"—he paused—"security. Anyway, I've never been in love. I don't have the patience for it. Well, maybe once, but that was years ago when I was a kid."

"That bloke Shawn you told me about at school?"

"Yes. I've got no time or interest now."

"I don't know, Kael; the way you look at that boy tells me you're feeling something very strong. And the way he looks at you is so full of admiration and love."

Kael felt a moment of panic. He didn't want to be in love. Conran had said it, now Freddie. "You're mistaking lust for love, Freddie. The sex is great, and I like to be in control, but one submissive will never be enough for me. I get bored easily."

"Are you still into the *BDSM* thing?" Freddie mouthed *BDSM*, making Kael laugh.

"Yes, I am. The boy likes it too. What about you? You used to enjoy it." Kael mimed wielding a belt, making Freddie look at the door to ensure no one had come in unexpectedly.

He nodded sheepishly. "Adam's not fond of that sort of thing, so it's all in my imagination these days. But the everyday sex is good." Freddie pointed at his glass, and Kael accepted a top-up.

The sound of running feet on the stairs and the girls screaming, "Angel, wait for us!" split the air. They came running into the room barefoot, wearing nighties with Tinker Bell on the front; their curly hair was shiny wet and bouncing. Angel followed them and walked over to Kael. He looked up at his boy and stretched out his arm to welcome him to his side. He had got into the habit of doing that in the evening when they sat down together to watch TV or read or just talk. Angel would bring him his glass of whiskey, then throw himself on the couch beside him, leaning into his side. Kael would wrap his arm around him while they sat.

But instead of sitting down beside him, Angel sat on the floor at his feet. Kael was surprised and disappointed, but he didn't say anything.

"Do we get the chocolate cake now, girls?" Angel asked.

"Chocolate cake!" they shouted in unison. Kael thought his eardrums might shatter. They seemed unable to say anything in a normal voice.

The girls walked shyly up to him and stood at his knee holding hands, staring at him. Zoe, the elder of the two, spoke for them, her tone very serious. "Uncle Kael, we're adopted. Did you adopt Angel?"

"No."

Zoe waited for a minute, clearly expecting him to explain. When he didn't, she went on, "Why does he call you Daddy? Are you his daddy?"

Angel looked at him, waiting for his answer just like the girls. "In a way."

"What way?" She scratched her nose and sniffed. "What way, Uncle Kael?"

Kael threw Freddie a look that said, *Help me out here, please*. Freddie just chuckled and sipped his wine.

Kael watched them nervously, unsure what to say or do.

"Are you his dadda, Uncle Kael?" Amelia asked.

Freddie piped up by way of explanation, "The girls call me Daddy and Adam Dadda."

“Uncle Kael, why don’t you have any hair?” Zoe asked.

Why don’t you go away?

Emboldened by her sister, Amelia asked, “Why are you so big, Uncle Kael?”

Freddie’s laughter and Adam’s entrance with a tray broke the tension. The girls turned and ran for their dessert. Kael had never been so relieved in his life to see chocolate cake. “Should they be eating cake right before bed, Freddie; won’t they be sick?” he asked.

“Oh they’ll be fine.” Freddie took his plate from Adam. “Thanks, love,” he said to his husband. “Anyway, if they’re up in the night, Adam will clean up the sick. He’s the best dad in the world.”

* * *

Kael got into bed, lay back on his pillow, and pulled the duvet up to his waist. He watched the door to the bathroom, waiting for Angel to finish brushing his teeth. They’d had a nice evening, very civilized despite the feral children. Angel was great with them, and Freddie and Adam liked him. But in the taxi home, Angel had sat with a good foot of space between them instead of leaning against him as he always did, taking every opportunity for closeness and affection. At home he had gone quietly to the bedroom to start getting ready for bed.

Angel emerged from the bathroom naked and crossed the room without looking at him. Almost every night he would run and leap onto the bed, but tonight he walked. He pulled his blankie from under his pillow before getting in and lying down, holding it on his belly. Kael waited for him to roll into his side and lay his head on Kael’s shoulder, but he lay on his back without a word. The king-size bed was big enough for four, and Angel lay close to the edge with a three-foot space between them.

“Did you enjoy Freddie and his family?” Kael asked, not understanding what was going on.

“Yes, Sir, it was a nice evening. Did I behave okay?”

“Yes, you were good. I was proud of you.” He turned onto his side facing Angel, waiting for him to come closer. He had not realized just how much he liked having Angel in his arms at night. Even though they sometimes rolled away from each other during sleep, he often awoke with his arm lying across the boy’s waist. One morning he woke up to find Angel, fast asleep, lying on top of him.

If he wanted Angel in his arms now, he should order him to do it, but ordering him to suck his cock was very different from ordering him to lie in his arms with his head on his shoulder so he could feel Angel’s warm breath against his neck and Angel’s heart beating against his own. He felt embarrassed to demand that kind of intimacy.

“Are you tired, boy?”

“Yes, Sir.”

And how come all of a sudden he was Sir and not Daddy? He had felt stupid at first when Angel called him Daddy. Now he liked it. He wanted it. He wanted to reach out and run his fingertips over Angel's smooth cheek, to trace a line down the bridge of his straight nose, but he couldn't bring himself to be spontaneously affectionate. He could not allow himself to be so vulnerable as to be playful and sweet with him, at least not unless Angel started it. Once the boy crawled into his arms, it was easier, but not when he was like this.

He looked at Angel's profile as he stared at the ceiling. He looked at the pale, bare chest with the tiny rosebud nipples, both his hands clutching his blanket.

Maybe it was Freddie's family, so close and loving, that reminded him of what he had missed out on spending his childhood in a string of foster homes.

He'll be all right by morning. He'll be himself again.

"Go to sleep, Angel."

"Yes, Sir." Angel rolled onto his side, facing away from him. Kael turned to face the opposite wall. His arms felt empty. He missed his boy, and he was only a couple of feet away.

Chapter Sixteen

They were finishing dinner when Kael's mobile buzzed. It was the one Conran called him on. Either he had a job for him or he had news about Angel.

"Stay there." He left the kitchen and went quickly into the dungeon. He closed the door and locked it, then crossed the room to the far side, pressing the phone to his ear.

"What do you want?"

"You have a job."

"What the hell?"

There was often a gap of a few weeks and occasionally a couple of months between assignments. In the last two months he had had one job after the next. He needed a break, and he didn't want to leave Angel right now. The boy was acting strange. He had not improved after being upset by Freddie's happy family and had grown more distant over the last week, being scrupulously obedient and respectful, but his playfulness was gone. He was no longer naturally affectionate, and he never said daddy anymore.

"What about my boy's citizenship? What about protecting him?"

"I'm working on it. These things take time."

"How's your nose?" Kael asked. Not that he cared. He simply wanted to remind Conran what he was capable of.

"It was broken, but you know that."

"I've been trained to break noses; what do you expect?" He laughed. "You can't train a dog to fight and then expect it to know when not to."

"I had to tell my wife I slipped and fell." The resentment in Conran's voice was almost comical.

"She's a clever woman; I doubt she believed you," Kael said. "And don't think for a second I am finished with you for telling Angel that shite about his mother." A thick silence followed while Kael waited. When you had made a point, it was always best to let it ferment.

"Go up to Scotland. You'll get instructions at Edinburgh Castle."

"When?"

"You'll meet your contact at nine a.m. tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" He was furious.

"You want to protect the boy from Andresen's Bosnian pals, don't you? We have an operation in the works to eliminate them; it keeps getting delayed, and now we have another problem. Another group is trying to get involved with the one Andresen was doing business with. They want a share of the ammunition. The brains behind it will be in Edinburgh tomorrow. He is your target." He hung up.

"Excellent," Kael said into the air.

Angel was loading the dishwasher when he walked into the kitchen. He was wearing a pair of the new underwear Kael had bought him, Ergowear bikinis in a zebra stripe. Kael had gone out shopping alone to buy clothes for Angel. He had eyeballed him for size, and everything fit perfectly.

"Do you want to sit in the living room, Sir, and I'll bring your whiskey?" But Angel no longer sat on the couch beside him or in his lap. He sat at his feet or alone in an armchair.

"No. Finish the dishes quickly. We're going to spend some time in the dungeon."

Despite Angel's reticence over the last week, an excited smile lightened his face at the mention of the dungeon. "Yes, Sir."

Kael had fucked him every day for the last week and given him a couple of good hard spankings that had had the desired effect, but there had been no emotional intimacy between them. This should sort everything out and at the same time keep Angel safe until he returned from Scotland. At least he didn't have to go outside of the UK this time.

But when he returned, he wanted his boy back.

* * *

Fifteen minutes later Angel walked into the dungeon naked, pink, and warm from his shower. Sir was scrupulous about being clean before and after they played or had sex. Naked and standing with his hands on his hips, Sir waited for Angel to come and stand before him. Angel stood at attention, shoulders back, feet apart, hands behind his back.

"I'm ready to serve you, Sir."

"Good lad." He pointed at the freestanding flogging post. "Every good sub should be flogged regularly by his master. It keeps his muscles supple, it tests his courage, and it gives him and his master pleasure. A spanking is fun, but you are not truly owned until you have been flogged, and I've not yet flogged you."

Angel sucked in a fast breath. He had looked at the flogging post every time he had been in the dungeon and wondered how it would feel to be bound to it. Now it was about to happen, he was nervous, desperate to show his worth. "Yes, Sir, I'm ready."

"Tell me what you want, boy, and what you don't want."

All he truly wanted was to be valued and loved. "You're the master, Sir."

Sir looked down at him. "I didn't say I'd comply with everything you want, but I'm interested to know."

Desperate to please but determined to be honest, Angel said, "I don't want another enema, Sir, unless it pleases you."

Sir nodded gravely. "All right, no enema, at least not today. But I like giving enemas. It humbles a boy like nothing else. Makes him feel helpless and vulnerable. Follow me."

Sir strode across the room to the metal shelves along the wall and took down a rubber ball gag with a leather head strap. Angel licked his dry lips, both excited and nervous. There was no question that he liked to be restrained, bound, and helpless, but with each new experience he feared he might not be up to the challenge.

"Sir, the ball part looks like a baby's binky."

"Binky? Like a baby's soother? Yes, I like this kind. The usual type of ball gag keeps the slave's mouth open, and they tend to drool, which I find very unappealing. This one allows you to close your lips around the stem, but it also presses the tongue down so you can't speak very well. Open your mouth."

Tilting his chin up, Angel opened his mouth, allowing Sir to insert the mouthpiece. He clamped his lips down over the stem and stood quietly getting used to the smooth feel and taste of the neoprene while Sir fastened the strap around the back of his head and buckled it tightly. Angel attempted to say, "Thank you, Sir," but it came out muffled and strange.

"Turn around," Sir ordered.

Angel obeyed at once, expecting Sir to restrain his hands, but instead Sir took his wrists, crossed them behind his back and held them there, his superior strength making it impossible for Angel to move them. He wrapped his other arm around Angel's waist and, with one foot, knocked Angel's feet from under him. He lost his balance and fell forward. Sir held him with his arm and lowered him very quickly and none too gently to the floor.

Instinct and adrenaline took over, and Angel began to struggle. He managed to free his hands and used them to push himself up from the floor, but Sir body-slammed him back onto the hardwood and restrained his wrists again. His erect cock pressed between Angel's buttocks.

This was going to hurt; there was no lubrication. Spurred on by excitement and arousal, Angel continued to struggle, though he knew he did not stand a chance of getting free and did not want to. His cock rose the moment Sir dropped him to the ground, and when he felt Sir's erect cock against his ass and the cold smooth floor against his own hard cock, he knew his orgasm would explode very quickly.

Refusing to give up the struggle and becoming more aroused by the second, Angel felt Sir's cock stab at his anus, attempting to gain entry. He kicked his feet and managed to dislodge Sir from his back.

"Keep still!" Sir, holding Angel's wrists securely behind his back, moved to one side and spanked his buttocks repeatedly. The spans together with being restrained brought on his orgasm.

Pleasure flooded through his groin, rippling down his thighs. He released a strangled cry around the ball gag and stretched out his long limbs. His head rose up off the floor, his neck arching.

"You little bugger, you weren't supposed to come yet. That'll teach me. You need a cock ring to make you behave." To punctuate his words, Sir let fly with his heavy hand and spanked Angel several more hard ones.

All the tension in Angel's body drained out of him. All the emotion and anger and resentment that had been building over the last week welled up in his chest. He dropped his head to the floor and let his tears flow.

You told Freddie you didn't love me. You said I was temporary.

Busy behind him, Sir did not notice his tears. He spread Angel's buttocks with his hand and fell onto his back. There was enough precum to lubricate his anus, and the entry was smoother than Angel had expected. He no longer fought, so Sir did not bother to restrain his hands but rose up behind him and fucked him hard. The length of Sir's cock and its thickness filled his rectum, and it was comforting.

The sense of being covered and possessed by his master's body was immensely satisfying, and he felt both safe and encompassed. He wanted to live forever in that moment of being overcome and owned, absorbed into the body of his master.

Above him Sir cried out his climax and fell hard on Angel's back. His tears had stopped, and his only emotion at that moment was peace. He was completely at peace with Sir's decision to make a man of him and turn him out into the world, probably sooner rather than later. He was at peace with his disappointment and the anger that had accompanied it for the last week. He was not Daddy's boy as he wanted to be. Sir had never wanted that anyway, but had only indulged him. He would be a perfect slave, and Sir would remember him well.

Slowly, Sir climbed off and lifted him to his feet. "Go and stand at the whipping post, boy. I'm ready to nudge you along the path to manhood."

Angel tried to say yes, Sir, but gave up in favor of a bow from the waist. Sir smiled at him, and he found himself grateful. He no longer expected anything, which left him free to accept all the favors bestowed on him as just that, favors, gifts. Each moment in Master's service was a gift.

Sir went to the shelves and took down several implements, carrying them to where Angel waited.

"I want to hear your safe words," Sir said. He took Angel's face in one hand. "Let me hear it."

"Red, yellow, green," came out sounding strange but recognizable.

"Again," Sir said. Angel repeated the words, and Sir nodded. "Make sure you say your word if you need to, and make it loud. Remember, the moment I hear red,

playtime is over.” Angel bowed his head to say yes, but he had no intention of using his safe word.

Sir placed his equipment on the floor. “Put your wrists together, boy, in front.”

Angel obeyed, offering his wrists, watching while Sir locked heavy leather padded handcuffs onto his wrists. He performed the task quickly and efficiently, without speaking or looking at Angel, wholly engrossed in his work. Angel looked up into the handsome face, so overcome with love for his master that he felt tears fill his eyes again but fought them back.

I'm going to be brave.

With the cuffs comfortably restraining his wrists, Sir turned him to face the flogging post and lifted his hands, hooking the connecting chain over the sturdy wooden hook that jutted out of the post above his head. Sir did not fasten the cuffs to the hook; there was no need. The hook was high, forcing Angel up onto his toes. To remove himself from the hook, he would have to jump, and that would be nearly impossible with no leverage. His feet were supple from dancing, and he stood up on the balls of his feet with no difficulty.

Sir took a metal cock ring and held it up. “This is a special kind of cock ring. This part”—he ran his finger around the circle—“will slide up over your cock, but not your balls. And this part”—he ran his finger along a three-inch curving prong with a small ball on the end—“will press between your balls, against your perineum, and the ball will go inside your asshole.”

The words alone aroused Angel, but when Sir grabbed his cock, shudders of pleasure rippled through his stretched, taut body. He moaned and bit down on the gag, afraid he would ejaculate again and disappoint Sir.

The look in his eyes must have been enough to tell Sir of his fears because he gripped Angel's cock hard and pulled it through the cold metal ring quickly, making it impossible for him to come. “There, boy, that's it.” His tone was so kind and comforting that Angel gave up all vestiges of control, even his determination to be the best slave in the world, and simply allowed himself to be directed, manipulated, and owned.

The snugness and the stretching were highly arousing. He liked the sensation of his cock being held securely in the cock ring, almost as if Sir's hand cradled it. The long metal prong pressed against his perineum, separating his balls yet cradling them also, and the cool metal ball was pushed into his anus, creating a comforting fullness. When the instrument was securely in place, Angel released the breath he had been holding without realizing it. The cock ring was now part of his body, just like the handcuffs and the gag. It grew and flowered like a vine, growing into and out of his flesh, wrapping about him, as if it had always been there, as if he had been waiting all his life for the moment when it would blossom.

Sir lowered the lights until Angel's eyes felt very comfortable, and then walked around the flogging post to face him. “How are you doing, boy?” He looked directly into Angel's eyes. Sir's eyes were so blue, so beautiful, his jaw strong, his nose straight. Angel's heart flooded with love.

Why can't you love me? Why can't you be my daddy?

He nodded.

"Are you ready to be flogged?" Again he nodded.

Angel allowed his chin to drop onto his chest. With his arms stretched high overhead, it was impossible to see over his shoulder.

Angel stopped thinking and stopped trying to predict what would happen next. He gave himself up to Sir and to the whip. What was about to play out could not be stopped. He wanted the whip. He wanted the pain. He wanted to experience the wonders he had read about and imagined for so long. He was in the moment with his master—the still, dark, comforting moment of communion.

When the first light stroke fell across his shoulders, he felt almost nothing. Quickly he realized that a flogging would be like a spanking. A slow buildup of pain and pleasure.

It began.

"Breathe deeply and slowly, boy. Let your shoulders drop."

Angel obeyed. Sir could see everything. He knew Angel had taken in a breath at the first stroke and failed to release it. Sir knew Angel needed support and encouragement.

The next stroke fell, and the next, and they stung. His body tensed momentarily, then let go. Again he tensed until the regular rhythm of the whip left him no need to tense. He knew precisely when the next stroke would come with its deliberate and perfect timing. Instead of being afraid, he could depend upon it, look forward to it, and absorb the weight and the strength of the perfectly balanced leather tail.

"That's my boy; that's a good boy." Sir's words wrapped about him, as comforting as his blanket, as comforting as the whip caressing his shoulders.

The pain increased incrementally. The strokes of the whip fell across his shoulder blades, wrapping about his sides. Master landed each lash perfectly, slightly below the last until he was midway down Angel's back where, without pause, he worked his way up again. Angel began to moan softly as the pain increased. He bit down hard on the stem of the ball gag, pressing his tongue down.

In the midst of the flogging, his eyes drifted shut, his body gave up the fight, and he felt every last bit of tension seep from his muscles. In that moment he was Daddy's boy again, completely possessed, owned, wanted, even loved. He was more at home in that moment than he had ever been in his life. He found himself in precisely the right place at exactly the right moment.

Master never paused in the rhythm of his flogging because to begin again would be impossible. Angel heard distant words filter through the haze of pain and pleasure that rivaled and exceeded the one time he had taken ecstasy. "Are you still with me, boy?"

He released a strange sound that was just barely discernible as, "Yes, Sir."

“Give me a word.”

“Green!”

Sir laughed but never paused in the lift and measure of the whip. “I heard that, boy, loud and clear.”

Angel did not want the flogging to end. He wanted it to continue in perpetuity. He wanted to live forever in the moment. When Daddy spanked him—the intimacy of lying across his knees and feeling his big hand land hard on his buttocks, cupping them, sending pain and pleasure reverberating through him—he could barely contain his arousal. All his senses were focused on his backside, all the pain, all the pleasure. It was so fucking hot.

But this was different. The whip caressing his body, sending shock waves of pain and pleasure through him, was mystical. It bordered on holy. He was in his body, and yet he was everywhere, filling the room, his molecules diffuse, blending with everything in the dungeon, with his master. They were part of each other, connected by the whip that went from Sir’s hand to Angel’s body like an umbilical cord. He did not want the flogging to end because he did not want the cord to break and set him free, floating away from Sir. They were connected in that moment in an indefinable circuit whose center was everywhere and whose circumference was nowhere.

“Speak to me, Angel.”

The sound that erupted from behind the gag came from so far down in Angel’s body, from so deep in his psyche that it sounded like a pure operatic note. The strength of the note brought his chin up from his chest until his head dropped back between his upstretched arms and the sound soared up to the ceiling.

Without warning, instead of another stroke, Sir’s arms wrapped about his torso from behind. The great strong length of Sir’s body pressed into his, lifting him off the ground, releasing the handcuffs from the hook.

Sir lifted him as easily as if he were an infant and cradled him in his arms against his chest, carrying him to the couch, where he sat down, holding him close, looking into Angel’s half-open eyes. With one hand Sir unbuckled the gag and eased it from his mouth. Angel’s head flopped against Master’s chest, where he rested, completely at peace.

“Tell me how you are feeling, boy.” When Angel did not answer at once, Sir repeated the words more urgently, taking Angel’s chin firmly in his hand. “Speak to me. Right now.”

Angel tipped his head back to look into Sir’s face, bathed with sweat and concern. “Sir, I’m fine. Thank you, Sir.”

“How come you didn’t use a safe word? It looks to me like you should have.”

“No, Sir. I didn’t need it. I didn’t need it.”

Sir pulled him close, rocking him against his chest. “Good lad. Now I know what you’re made of.” He allowed Angel to rest in his arms for some time before saying, “Can you walk?”

“Yes, Sir.”

With Sir’s help Angel got to his feet. Sir led him to the leather-topped table and helped him climb up and lie down on his belly. The smell and buttery softness of the leather aroused Angel immediately, but lying flat on his belly on a jutting cock held up by the metal cock ring was a challenge. He shifted his body about to find the most comfortable position.

Sir returned with a blanket and a bottle of something. “This is arnica gel. It will help your muscles recover.” Master shook the warm, soft blanket over Angel’s legs and ass. A squirting sound followed, and the feel of the cool gel and Sir’s big, strong hands massaging his muscles was so comforting Angel felt every bit of pain leave his body and travel upward through Sir’s hands and arms. “You’ll be sore tomorrow but maybe not so bad as some slaves because you didn’t hold yourself tense.”

“Did I do good, Sir?” He craved words of approval and acceptance.

“Yes, boy, you did good.” Master squirted more gel and continued to massage the muscles of Angel’s back from his shoulders to his backside. “If you are stiff tomorrow, I’ll give you another rub. I like my slaves happy. I want them coming back for more.”

Slaves? “Do you have other slaves, Sir?”

“I take care of other boys I meet at bars, but no permanent slaves, no. There are a few I’ve seen more than once. No matter how much Conran thinks he hates me right now, he’ll be back. I’m addictive.” He laughed.

You’ve got me hooked.

“Sir, this cock ring is deeply cool, but it kind of hurts my dick now that I’m lying down, because it’s making it stick out against the table.”

He heard Master’s warm, quiet laugh. “Stick your arse up.” Angel obeyed, keeping his shoulders on the table but raising his backside in the air. Master pulled the butt ball out and removed the cock ring quickly.

He put the cock ring in the sink and returned with a small hand towel, which he spread under Angel’s groin, then pulled on a latex glove. Angel looked over his shoulder to see Sir squirting lubricant onto the fingers of the glove. He slipped his fingers between Angel’s buttocks and began to rub a circle round his anus with the tip of his forefinger.

Angel began to moan at once as pleasure shot through his thighs and buttocks. He pressed his forehead into the leather table. The smell brought back his first time in the dungeon with the hood on his head. “Oh God!” he moaned. The circular motion was punctuated by the finger slipping inside his anus and out quickly to resume the circle. Sir’s other hand rested on his tailbone. His legs felt as if they were melting, and his breathing became labored. Master slid one finger all the way in, feeling around. “There it is.”

Angel gripped the sides of the table, moaning loudly. A sudden rush of pleasure took over his body. “Oh my fucking God, what are you doing to me, Sir?”

"That's your prostate gland. It feels very healthy." Angel could hear a smile in Master's voice. "You can come anytime you want, boy."

With a firm motion Sir began to massage the prostate with his finger in a back-and-forth motion, working his way methodically over the walnut-sized gland from the top to the bottom and back up again repeatedly. Angel stretched his head up, arching his back. The sensation was more intense and deep-rooted than anything he had ever experienced. His entire body was consumed with a radiating pleasure that tore through his insides, emanating from his rectum. He let out a high-pitched scream and felt his sperm flood out and onto the towel.

His rigid body softened, and he collapsed onto the table, moaning softly. Every part of his body radiated pleasure. He was on fire. He was in love. His love would never be realized. He wanted to sob.

Master slipped his finger out and patted Angel's buttocks before covering him warmly with the blanket all the way up to his neck. "Rest for a while now, boy."

* * *

Kael dressed quickly in dark jeans and a black round-neck sweater. He pulled on his socks and laced up the black leather shoes he walked softly in, in case he had to go directly into a kill situation. In the dungeon he found Angel asleep on the leather-topped table. With a gentle hand on his welted shoulders, he shook the boy awake. "Angel, wake up."

Angel's eyes fluttered open. "I'm awake, Sir." He sounded groggy.

"Get up."

Angel rose at once, looking at him. "Are we going out, Sir?"

"I have to meet someone. You are staying here. In fact I've decided to lock you up, not because I don't trust you." *Though I don't.* "Take your pick. The dog crate or the standing cage?"

A sweet, dreamy look came over Angel's face. Kael had observed him looking longingly at the cages. "The dog crate, Sir."

"Excellent choice." He pointed at the toilet. "Go and take a piss."

"I don't need to go, Sir."

Impatient now, needing to get on the road, Kael took him forcefully by the arm and drew him across the room to the toilet, forcing him to sit. "Take a piss."

"Yes, Sir," Angel said quietly.

Kael strode quickly across the room, gathering the blanket and several bottles of water. He carried them to the dog crate and put them inside while Angel watched him. When Angel stood up, Kael walked toward him and checked the toilet to make sure he had gone. "All right, good boy."

"How long are you going out for, Sir?"

"Don't question me, boy."

"Sorry, Sir." Angel walked ahead of him to the heavy steel crate and dropped to his knees to crawl in. He squashed the crate pad with his hands to feel its thickness.

"You should find it comfortable. I've had boys spend the night in there before. They've always thoroughly enjoyed it."

The smile on the boy's face as he looked around him, grabbing the bars and pulling on them, showed his excitement. Kael closed the crate and padlocked the gate. It was a combination lock. That should keep Angel safe until he returned.

He stood upright and looked down at Angel. The crate was too small to lie down full length and impossible to stand up in. He hoped he would not be more than twelve hours. Perhaps he should move him to the standing cage. No, he'd be fine.

"Be a good boy," he said.

Kael had reached the door when Angel called out, "Sir, can I have my blankie and some food?"

Kael released a long sigh and went quickly to the bedroom. The bed had been made neatly by Angel as he had done every day. The blanket was under his pillow. Kael grabbed it and went to the kitchen. He'd never had so much food in the flat before. He took a packet of HobNobs and a bunch of bananas and carried them to the dungeon. He had to open the combination lock again because the food would not pass through the bars. "There, bananas and biscuits, now be a good boy. I'll be back soon."

"Sir, what if I have to go to the loo again?"

"You've been. You're fine." He closed the dungeon door.

From the box on the top shelf of the hall cupboard, he took the leather tool roll. He selected a scalpel and put it in his pocket, and a gun with a silencer, which he slid into the shoulder holster and fastened it on. He pulled on a leather jacket and locked the flat carefully behind him. Outside he hailed a taxi to take him to King's Cross Station.

* * *

The train to Edinburgh was almost empty. Kael liked the Virgin trains best. They were cleaner and almost always on time. He sat down in a seat with a table in front and took out his diary.

If the summer I spent with Shawn was my summer of love, my 16th year was my summer of sex. Lots of sex with lots of different blokes.

I always went home for the holidays, but after that summer with Shawn I couldn't stand the thought of going home to my mum's flat in Liverpool with her out working all day and me roaming the streets or working at some part-time job I would hate. Every holiday Freddie invited me to go to his house and I never went. My mum missed me and I missed her, but that summer I took Freddie's offer and spent a month with his wealthy family in Devon.

Freddie was always available for sex as long as I flogged him with my belt first. But there was a boy working in the gardens who I couldn't take my eyes off. He was older than me, at least 19, and gorgeous, with golden brown eyes. I hung around him for half a day, chatting him up, before I offered to fuck him. He looked at me with a nasty scowl and smacked me across the head and called me a poofter. That was all it took to make me want to kill him. I was 6'1" by then, and while I was still thin and undeveloped, I was already very strong. I went after him like a mad dog and threw him to the ground. I got him pinned on the grass, sitting on his chest, with his wrists in my hands.

Then I didn't know what to do.

I didn't want to rape him, though I probably could have. That was when he arched his back and threw me off and we started wrestling which got me really excited. After we exhausted each other and both had bloody noses, he offered to fuck me and I told him that I did the fucking. We sat up, wiped our noses and discussed our next move.

I had to be on top, I couldn't let anyone but Shawn fuck me and I'd never let him do it again. So he let me fuck him, then afterward I whacked him off with my hand and we were both happy.

We spent the next four weeks having sex in the gardens, the greenhouses, the woods. Freddie was as jealous as hell and when his dad caught me at it with the gardener I actually suspected Freddie of telling on me, for about five minutes. But Freddie loved me and he'd never do that.

Freddie and I went to the village and to the beach, and everywhere we went I made passes at men, from my age up to men in their 40s. A good half of them took me on. It's a miracle I didn't catch something or get the shite kicked out of me.

That was the summer Freddie told his dad he was gay and his dad tried to blame it on me. In the end he understood it wasn't my fault and I went home to spend two weeks with my mum before school started again. Taking Freddie's cue, I told my mum I was gay. She said, "You can't be. You're such a big lad, all manly the way you are."

I said, "Mum, trust me, I'm gay."

She asked if it was the school, all those boys sleeping in the same room. Because if it was I could come home.

I said, "I'm queer. Deal with it." She gave me a hug and said she loved me, and that was that.

Aside from the sex that summer I learned which fork to eat with, what a fish knife was and how to stand up when a lady walked into the room.

Kael sat on the wall at the entrance to Edinburgh Castle trying to look like a tourist. There were people from all over the world, so even a man of his height did not stick out too much. He had practiced an expression that made him look apologetic for taking up so much space. It always worked when he had to be out in

family-type locations on a hit. It made him less memorable than if he unapologetically took up all the space he needed.

A middle-aged woman, frumpy looking, in a dark twin set and tweed skirt, walked past. She pulled out a cigarette from a silver case. "Have you got a light, dear?"

"I don't smoke; it's a filthy habit."

A couple walked past as the woman said, "I know. I mean to give it up, but life gets in the way." When the other tourists were gone, she said, "Edinburgh High Street, the Old Duke Pub. There's a patio outside. Be seated there just before eleven o'clock." She walked on.

Kael was hungry. The last food he had eaten was with Angel at about eight o'clock last night. But he never ate when he was on a job. Hunger made his mind sharper, his reaction time quicker. If he was hungry, Angel would be starving before long. The kid ate up a storm, just like he had at that age. He hoped the bananas and biscuits would last him. A month ago he would never have believed he'd be out on a hit wondering how his boy at home was faring without him.

The High Street was very busy. Kael wandered through a few shops to pass the time. He had bought Angel some new jeans and leather pants earlier that week, and some new shirts and T-shirts, but he kept seeing things he wanted to get for him.

Crossing the road, Kael heard a car horn blast. He looked up, realizing he had walked into traffic without noticing. He had to get his mind off Angel; he was on a job, for Christ's sake, but he should not have left him locked up. What if there was a fire? What if something happened and he never returned to his flat? He had never once failed to complete a mission, but he had been badly delayed some years ago in Saudi Arabia when he was dragged off the street into a van by a gang and had the living shite kicked out of him before getting dumped in the desert. The stupid thing was, it was nothing to do with his mission; he'd simply been mugged. But he was five days late getting home.

Stopping on the street, he did something he never did. He pulled out his mobile and dialed Conran.

"What the hell?" Conran burst out. "Are you in position? Why the hell are you phoning me?"

"I left Angel locked in the dungeon. If I don't return, you make sure he's safe."

"If you don't return, there's nothing you can do about it."

"I'll fucking haunt you, that's what I'll do." Kael hung up.

At eleven o'clock sharp, he sat in the fenced-in patio of the Old Duke Pub. The waiter strolled over and smiled at him. "What can I get you, sir?"

Kael's look said, *Your arse, but I'm too busy right now*. "Lager." He would not drink it, but he needed to look like he belonged there. The waiter returned promptly with his drink. "Enjoy your beer, sir." He leaned in, smiling as if to say something private. Kael kept his eyes on the glass.

“Directly ahead of you is a man in a black jacket with a blue shirt underneath, wearing a black flat cap. There is another man sitting with him. The man in the cap is your target. Back of the head, two bullets.”

Kael handed him a fiver and sat back, watching the street while keeping the target in his peripheral vision. Coming to a quick decision, he carefully eased his gun from the shoulder holster, keeping it under his jacket. He rose and stepped outside the fence. Exactly five paces brought him to their table. In the split second that he stood there, he caught the harsh-edged consonants of the Bosnian language. He could speak no more than a few words, but he knew what he was hearing.

In the space of less than five seconds, he feigned a slight stumble, and as he apologized, brought the gun around the back of the man’s head, fired twice, and walked quickly away. The silencer muffled the shots, and he was around the corner before the man slumped forward onto the table, blood running from his mouth.

Chapter Seventeen

Angel woke up cramped and angry. No daylight penetrated the dungeon. Sir had left the light on low, but he knew it was morning, it must be. He needed to pee, and he always needed to pee in the morning.

“Sir!” he screamed, knowing the room was soundproofed. Angel sat listening very closely. There was no sound, but even in a soundproofed room, there had to be something. No one could use the toilet without the sound of water running. The pipes that connected the toilet and shower across the room were all plumbed into the same lines as the bathroom. Even he knew that, and he knew nothing about household maintenance.

“Master! Sir!”

Sir wasn’t there. He had gone out and not returned.

Angel looked at the standing cage beside the dog crate. He should definitely have picked that one; his legs wouldn’t be so stiff. What if Sir never came back? What if he had left Angel there to die because Angel saw him kill Sven? There was something very odd about Kael Saunders. People called him by different names. The cleaner had gone missing after she saw Angel. He didn’t seem to have any family or friends, except Freddie, and Sir admitted he had not seen Freddie in years.

Taking one of the empty water bottles, Angel positioned his penis at the neck and held it firmly with his fist over his dick and the bottle neck to create a tight fit. The relief he felt as he filled the bottle was very comforting. Afterward he screwed on the lid and placed it outside the cage.

Reaching through the bars, he hefted the combination lock. It was a heavy one. He glanced around for something to pick it with, but there was nothing in reach and he had no idea how to do such a thing anyway. Randomly, he began trying combinations. After ten minutes he was frustrated and angry, knowing there were a million possible combinations.

The humiliating bottle of urine sat on the floor outside the crate. He wanted to take off the lid and spray the room with it, he was so irritated, but that would definitely make Sir mad. He was such a prissy fuck about everything being clean. His stomach growled. On top of everything else, he was hungry.

Angel looked down at his cock, realizing how little time he had spent masturbating now that he had a man in his life. It had been his favorite pastime when Sven locked him in his bedroom, which he did frequently when Angel first went to live in Sven’s house.

Gripping his cock with both hands, he massaged it up and down. His mind drifted back to the evening before. The incredible flogging, the finger fuck on the leather-topped table. He looked at the table, and the sensation of his prostate being rubbed returned, tingling through his cock, which rose and thickened in his hand.

Angel let his thighs fall wide until he sat like his mom when she was doing her yoga. His head fell back against the bars of the cage, and he rubbed his cock fast. The friction was hot and sexy. An image of Sir naked and huge made him rub harder. Sir digging through garbage to get his blanket back. Sir kicking those dudes' asses in the park because they had called him and Sir names.

During his flogging, he had experienced a great acceptance, a sense of being at peace with his situation. In that moment he could live with not being loved, with being temporary, with being a project. *"I'll make a man of him and send him out into the world."* All the things Sir had said to Freddie while having no clue that he sat out on the stairs listening to every word. But Angel was not at peace with Sir not loving him, not in the cold light of morning. He was angry and resentful.

Tears streamed down his cheeks as cum shot out of his dick. "I love you, you mean fucker!"

Bent at the waist, his forehead pressed into his blankie, he wept hard for several minutes. When he had cried himself out, he sat panting, getting his breath back. A slight soreness in his shoulders reminded him of the flogging he had taken last night. He hadn't cried then. He'd been brave and resourceful, and he would be that now.

Angel took the padlock in his hand. "What would you do if someone locked you up, Sir? You'd get out and kill them."

Images had always been easy for Angel to conjure. He turned, positioning his body as if he was outside the cage with the lock in his hand. He pictured Sir turning the combination when he had opened the padlock to give him his blanket and snacks. Quickly he turned back, holding the image in his mind, and found the numbers without consciously knowing what they were. The lock fell away in his hand, and the gate opened.

"Totally, deeply sweet!"

He crawled out of the crate and went straight to the toilet, carrying the bottle, and poured it down. Afterward he took a shower and pulled on a pair of his new underwear. He really liked the plain black ones; they were so sexy and accentuated his basket, making him look bigger. He primped for a while in front of the mirror, flexing his biceps.

"Now, let's find out exactly who you are, Sir, because there has to be some information here." Angel began going through drawers in the living room and the two bedrooms, searching thoroughly, and carefully replacing every item exactly where it had been. He searched the closets and felt under tables and furniture the way Sir did.

There was nothing.

In the hall he opened the coat closet. A couple of Sir's coats and Angel's leather jacket hung there together with a nice new jacket Sir had bought him the other day that he had not had the chance to wear yet. He went through all the pockets, not expecting to find anything, and he didn't. He looked up at the top shelf, which was well above his eye level and reach, and ran to the kitchen to bring a chair from the table.

Standing on the chair, he examined the shelf, feeling around until his fingers found a crevice at the back and pulled. The shelf lifted on a hinge, and underneath it was a box. Jumping down with the box, he sat on the floor and opened it.

A bundle of passports fastened together with an elastic band was the first thing he pulled out. Angel pulled the elastic over his wrist and began flipping through the passports. "John Carpe, English; Markus Muller, German; Louis-Philip Laurent, French." He looked through several more, one Russian, one South American. Another UK passport. Kael Saunders. "Every one of them has your picture, Sir."

More papers lay in the box, birth certificates for the different names, work visas for different countries. At the bottom lay a small handgun. In another smaller box lay syringes and sealed vials of liquid he could not identify. A small leather tool roll lay there also. Angel took it out and unrolled it. A row of identical but different-sized instruments with one missing were neatly lined up in narrow pockets. Angel removed one and flicked the switch. Gingerly he touched the blade; it was very sharp. He flicked it in and out experimentally. "It's a scalpel."

He's either a serial killer or a professional killer. Either way, it would not be good for Angel to get caught with this stuff. Quickly he began to pack everything back in the box. He would return everything to its exact place, and Sir would never know he knew.

A footstep outside the door made him freeze. When he heard the key in the lock, he nearly pissed himself. Dropping the box, he leaped up and ran through the living room, into the bedroom, and threw himself under the bed.

I found his stash. He's going to kill me. The scalpel or the gun, but either way, this time, I'm dead.

* * *

It was four o'clock in the afternoon when Kael put his key in the front door. Angel would be hungry and dying for the toilet.

Opening the door, Kael stepped inside. The first thing he noticed was the cupboard door standing ajar. He closed the front door behind him, scanning the hall. The box containing his passports and weapons sat on the floor, open. A chair from the kitchen stood beside it.

He drew his gun and leveled it.

Angel! Someone had come after him.

On silent feet he began to search the flat, keeping his back to the walls, listening intently. All his senses came into play when there was danger. He sniffed the air, but the only scent was Angel's. Was he there? Was he hurt? He couldn't smell an intruder.

Eyes everywhere, he took in the living room. Nothing was out of place. Moving on to the kitchen, the only thing wrong was the chair that had been placed in the hall. Kael walked silently along the hall. With one finger he pushed open the dungeon door and stepped inside, his back to the wall.

The dog cage was empty, and Angel's blanket lay on the floor outside. Someone was in the flat and had taken Angel out of the cage. He knew the boy was there somewhere and someone was with him. Could it be Conran? He had not got out of the cage by himself. He scanned the room and moved on to the bedroom. Just as he pushed open the door, the bathroom door across the room closed.

He stood for a second with his hand on the handle, then in one swift movement, turned it and stepped inside. Keeping his gun level with his gaze, he scanned the bathroom and sniffed the air. Again, the only scent he picked up was Angel—his sweet perspiration, a delicate undertone of something boyish yet masculine. There was nowhere in the bathroom to hide. The glass shower stall was empty. The airing cupboard was the only place with a solid door, but only a very slender person could fit between the shelves and the door, which was closed.

Crossing the room, Kael stood at the door, paused, took a breath, and opened it. He pressed the muzzle of the gun to Angel's chest and in the same instant grabbed him by the neck. He looked quickly around him, thinking he had made a mistake.

"You stupid boy, I could have killed you! Who else is here? Why the hell are you hiding from me?"

Angel stood with his hands up. "Next time try the decaf, for God's sake."

Angry at the sarcasm, Kael released him so roughly he fell to the ground. He was confused, and that always enraged him. "Who was here? Who got you out of the dog crate?"

"I got myself out."

"No, you didn't." He took Angel's arm, pulled him to his feet, and forced him down the hall to the cupboard while the boy protested all the way. "Who did that?" He pointed at the box on the floor, realizing it had to have been Angel. That was why he had needed the chair; he wasn't tall enough to reach the box. "Who's been here?"

"No one." Angel began to struggle to free his arm. "Get off me."

Kael released him and began to put away his passports and weapons. "We need to talk. Go into the living room and wait for me."

"I'm getting something to eat; you tried to starve me." Angel turned toward the kitchen. Kael was after him in an instant. With an arm around Angel's waist, he

scooped him up and carried him to the living room, where he tossed him on the couch. "Sit! Do as you're damn well told."

Angel sat cross-legged and his tone was confrontational, but he made no attempt to get up. "Have you got your scalpel in your pocket? Why don't you just kill me now?"

How the hell did Angel know he carried a scalpel? "What are you talking about, boy?"

"Kael Saunders, John Carpe, Markus Muller. Who the hell are you? You kill people for a living, don't you? I just want to know why you were going to kill me. What the hell did I do? I don't sell guns to bad guys."

"I was never going to kill you."

"Maybe I was imagining it then." Angel spread his hands, casting his eyes up to the ceiling.

Kael stopped in front of him and removed his jacket and gun holster. "Would you like to share with me what you are talking about, boy?" He tried to sound calm, but he was hungry and tired, he had not slept all night, and he wanted Angel to be happy to see him. He had expected him to be a little grumpy at being left caged so long, but he never expected to end up chasing him around the flat and shoving a gun in his chest. He had expected Angel to open his arms and be grateful to be let out of the cage like a good slave.

Angel spoke quietly, but his gaze never wavered from Kael's. "The night we left Cape Cod, we stood in the kitchen. You said you wanted a glass of water."

Christ, he's known all this time that I was going to kill him.

"You came up behind me, and you had a scalpel in your hand. I didn't know what it was at the time, but I saw your stash in the box and figured out that's what it was. You were going to slit my throat."

"I never slit throats; it's far too messy." *That was a stupid thing to say.* "And I didn't hurt you. I brought you home."

"Because you wanted to fuck me?"

"Actually you're not my type. I like men, not boys. I've never been into twink." He watched as Angel shriveled under the words. His chin dropped onto his chest, and his pale cheeks grew hot and red. Kael could have kicked himself. He needed to shut up right now, but he hated being confronted. And Angel was right; Kael did want him. He just couldn't admit it. "I just felt sorry for you."

"Guess I should be grateful for that. I'm still alive." He wrapped his arms around his chest as if he was suddenly embarrassed to be nearly naked and so small and skinny. "I don't need British citizenship. I've got my US passport. I can leave anytime and go to my mom in France. She'll be relieved to see I'm okay. That Conran dude was lying about her, right?"

Kael wanted to take Angel in his arms and rock him until he felt better. Instead he stood there like a big ape, doing nothing. "Yes, Conran lied about your

mum. He can be a mean bastard. But you can't leave yet, not until a few things are sorted out. Let's get some food. I'm starving."

Angel stood up as though nothing had happened. He forced a cheerful tone. "I'll make you a sandwich, Sir. You want a sandwich?"

"That would be fine."

In the kitchen Kael sat on a stool at the counter watching Angel take food from the fridge. The boy grabbed a bottle of water from the cupboard and set it in front of him. "Sir," he said, like a waiter in a restaurant.

Kael grasped the bottle. "Angel." The boy watched him but carried on working. "In Cape Cod you saw something you weren't supposed to see, and because of that your life has been in danger. That's why I have been keeping you indoors, to keep you safe. I had to blackmail Conran. I videoed that scene in the dungeon, and I threatened him with it to get him to make things right with the right people to keep you safe. I'm responsible for you. I won't let anyone hurt you. I promise."

Angel's eyes met his. "Were you supposed to kill me that night, Sir?"

"Yes, because you were a witness," Kael said very quietly. "But I couldn't. I'd never hurt you. Don't ask anything else. I have already told you far too much. I promise you, I will never, never hurt you."

Angel placed a smoked salmon sandwich in front of him, and he began to eat.

Half an hour later, completely exhausted, Kael went into the bedroom. His diary was still in his pocket, and he tossed it into the bedside table drawer before stripping and falling into bed. Angel came in quietly.

"I have to sleep; I was up all night." He could go for long periods with no sleep when he needed to, but when he crashed, he crashed. "Promise me you will not do anything stupid. Do I need to put you in restraints? Restraints you can't get out of."

Angel sat cross-legged beside him, holding his blanket in his hands, fingering it. "No, Sir."

"How the hell did you get out of the cage? That was a really good combination lock. It needed eight numbers."

"I saw you open it when you brought my cookies and bananas, remember, Sir?"

"But I opened it only once, I did it fast, and you were looking from the opposite side. How did you remember the numbers? How did you even see them?"

"I pictured it in my head. I've always been good at that kind of thing," Angel said.

"Really?" Kael looked at him. This boy would make a really good operative, given the right training. Kael had met agents who were good because they worked hard and had the desire to do the job. But they were never as good as those who, like himself, had a natural talent for the work. Angel might just have that same talent. He definitely had potential. Kael shoved the duvet down below his waist.

"You want me to suck your cock, Sir?"

“A slave waits for instructions.” He was tired and impatient. More than anything he wanted Angel in his arms. It had been his only thought on the train home. “Give me a handjob.”

“Yes, Sir.” Angel lay down beside him, their bodies touching, resting his head on Kael’s shoulder. The touch of his skin was like water to a thirsty man; he felt bathed in the softness and the suppleness of his boy. But Angel wasn’t his boy. He was waiting to go and visit his bitch of a mother who would probably reject him again. He wrapped his arm around Angel’s shoulders, wanting to hold him there forever.

Kael’s cock rose and grew red with blood the moment Angel’s cool hand wrapped around it and began sliding up and down the thick shaft. He turned his head to the side, grabbed the back of Angel’s head, and kissed him. The boy responded at once, moving in closer, his hand tightening on Kael’s shaft. He opened his mouth to receive Kael’s tongue and pressed his groin into the hard muscle of Kael’s hip, rubbing his cock against it. They both came quickly, gasping into each other’s mouths. Angel rolled on top of Kael and lay panting.

Sleep swept over him while he held Angel against his chest, hoping that whatever had caused a rift between them could be healed.

Chapter Eighteen

“Sir, am I old enough to have a beer?”

They sat having lunch in the Quebec Pub in Old Quebec Street, where Kael had arranged to meet Conran. It was an older crowd for the most part, men in their fifties and up, and Kael got many admiring glances.

“Yes, you only have to be eighteen in England, and only sixteen if you have alcohol with food.”

“So can I have one, please, Sir?”

Angel had seemed happy when they were walking through Hyde Park, but his moods were up and down, and his spirits seemed to have slumped again during the meal.

The waiter walked over. “Can I take your plates? How was your meal?”

“Great.” Kael looked him up and down. He was in his midtwenties, dark and attractive, though a little less in shape than he should be. “I’ll have another beer and one for the boy.”

“Anything else, sir, anything at all?” The intimate smile the young man gave Kael obviously irritated Angel, and his careful obedience broke down.

“He’s my master, so you can take your tarty ass somewhere else.”

Since the only thing Angel had talked about for the last week was going to France to visit his mother, Kael was taken by surprise at his possessiveness. But he would not allow him to be rude to a waiter. He leaned across the table and jabbed a finger into his chest. “That was not polite; say you’re sorry.”

A mutinous look that was almost comic twisted Angel’s face, but he looked up at the waiter obediently. “I’m sorry.”

“Give him a beer to mellow him out,” Kael said.

“Are you American?” The waiter looked at Angel.

“No, I’m Japanese,” Angel said under his breath, looking away.

The waiter brought the beers over and placed a half-pint of lager in front of Angel. “For the Japanese gentleman.”

Kael laughed, and Angel looked furious. “I’d watch out if I were you,” he said to the waiter. “My master carries a gun, and he kills people.”

From the incredulous look on the waiter’s face, it was plain he did not believe Angel. He walked away without another word. “That was very stupid of you.” Kael

grabbed Angel's arm, deliberately hurting him. "This is why I can't trust you with information. What's got into you? I thought you were an intelligent boy."

"I don't like being treated like a kid, and I didn't like that waiter smiling at you and making fun of me." Angel took his glass and finished the whole beer in one slug, then set it on the table with a *thump*, looking at Kael for a reprimand. He refused to rise to the bait.

Obviously disappointed at the lack of reaction, Angel crossed his arms and looked around. "Oh my God, what's he doing here?" He pointed at the door.

"He's meeting us."

Looking as if he had walked into a lion's den, Conran stood at the pub door. Kael waved him over. He hurried to their table and sat down. "When you told me to meet you here, you didn't say this was a gay pub, Saunders."

"It's a gay pub," Kael said as though Conran were stupid. "Everyone in London knows that. What's wrong with you?"

"Yes, that's fine for you, but in my position it could cause difficulties being seen walking in here."

"Still got a rod up your arse, Conran? But no, that was my dick, wasn't it? What have you got for me?"

Conran looked quickly around to see if anyone had heard, but he was far too ordinary to draw much attention. From his briefcase he pulled a large manila envelope, removing a maroon passport and some papers. "This is everything he needs." He passed them to Kael. "He's good to stay in the country now."

Kael thumbed open the passport to the photo page. "Where did you get the picture? It's adorable."

"We can get our hands on anything when we need to," Conran said.

"This is your British passport." He handed it to Angel to look at. "What about the big boys at Legoland?" Kael asked, referring to the nickname given to the building at Vauxhall Cross.

"They won't touch him. They know what you're like, and they accepted that he saw nothing and you wanted him for amusement." Angel looked at Kael, then at Conran, biting his lip. Kael wanted slap Conran. "Aside from that, they don't want to lose you. You're too good at what you do."

"What about the Bosnians?"

Conran glanced at Angel, saying quietly, "It's under way. Another day or two and it will all be over. You have all you need. Don't compromise yourself anymore. What about that video?"

"No one has seen it, and no one will as long as Angel is safe."

The waiter walked over, and Kael put his hand on Conran's thigh. "Do you want a drink, love?" he asked loudly.

Conran froze, his cheeks growing rapidly pink. "No, I have to go." He got up, shaking Kael's hand off his leg, and walked out without looking back. Kael laughed

as he watched him go. He loved embarrassing Conran. He held his hand out for the passport, and Angel gave it back. "Come on, boy; you are officially safe. Let's go and buy you some more clothes. And I found a shop on the Internet that makes Irlen lenses. We're going there first."

* * *

It was after dark when they arrived home. Kael was relieved and happy that Angel had citizenship and that he was deemed by SIS not to be a risk. The boy had been marginally enthusiastic about his new clothes, but he really enjoyed trying on leather hats and was very happy with his leather rebel cap. "Take your hat off in the house, boy," Kael said when Angel entered the kitchen still wearing the cap.

"Yes, Sir."

Kael took a bottle of water and drank half of it. "What's the matter with you? You should be ecstatic; everything is falling into place."

"I'm okay, Sir."

"Is it what Conran said? That I brought you home for my amusement?"

"Why would that bother me, Sir? I'm a slave. That's what I'm for, right?" He took an apple from the fridge and bit into it.

"Even slaves have feelings."

"Is it true, Sir; did you?"

I love you more with every day that passes.

"You're here because I want you here," Kael said.

"What happens when you don't want me anymore, Sir?"

"You've got all your papers, and I have an assurance that you're safe. You just need to wait another couple of days."

Why the hell did I say that?

"Can I go and visit my mom?"

"I already said I'd give you the money if you want to go so badly. There's money in the drawer in the bedside table. I always leave cash in there at the back. But do not go anywhere without telling me first."

"You'd worry about me?" He sounded skeptical.

"Yes, I would. Are you hungry? An apple's not much food."

"No, Sir, I'm fine. I'm going to lie down if that's okay."

"Go ahead."

In the living room Kael stood at the sideboard and poured a whiskey, downed it, and poured another. *I should go in there and tell him I love him.* He drank the second whiskey in one mouthful and poured a third. *He's an annoying teenager with stupid habits, but I love him. I want him to stay and be my boy. I want to come home from a job and find him here, waiting for me, happy to see me. I want to make a man of him.*

Grabbing the bottle, he walked to the couch and threw himself down. He poured another whiskey and drank it immediately. *I hate feeling like this; it makes me feel weak and scared.* He put the glass on the coffee table and drank from the bottle.

Angel, I love you. Why have you turned cold on me? What the hell did I do? I'm no genius when it comes to feelings and being sensitive, but I know how I feel about you. From the moment I saw you, I felt something I've never felt before.

He took a long swig from the bottle, held it up to his eyes, saw there was an inch left, and finished it.

I'm going to tell you how much I love you. I'm going to tell you right now.

Unsteadily, he rose and walked into the bedroom. It took a lot to make him drunk, given his size, but it was eight o'clock, he had not eaten since lunchtime, and he had drunk three-quarters of a bottle of whisky in less than ten minutes. Angel lay on the bed, hugging his blanket. Kael sat down heavily beside him, working up the courage to speak.

"Sir, are you drunk?"

"Not yet, but another bottle should do it." He laughed.

Angel raised an eyebrow. "I think you're drunk now."

"I am not drunk, and don't get snotty with me, boy."

"Sir, you stink of whisky."

Kael stood up, rocking on his feet, his finger extended to give him a telling off.

"Don't fall on me. You could kill me," Angel said before he could speak.

"Would you stop accusing me of trying to kill you!" He had gone into the bedroom to tell Angel he loved him, and now he wanted to slap his arse. Oh for Christ's sake! Why couldn't the boy just shut up and listen? He wanted to say he loved him. Didn't he know how hard it was for Kael to say that?

Why am I getting angry when I'm supposed to be professing my love?

"I'm going out to get drunk."

"Sir, you're already drunk! Maybe you should stay home. You'll get into a fight, and then someone will end up dead. Though I doubt it will be you."

"Don't tell me what to do, boy. There's only one master in this house, and that's me."

Angel scrambled off the bed and left the room. Furious that the boy had walked away from him, Kael went after him. He caught him in the living room about to put the TV on, and grabbed him by the arm. "Don't walk away from me."

Angel looked up at him, his lower lip quivering as though he was about to cry. "You don't care about me, Sir."

"I do. Why do you think I didn't kill you!"

That was a stupid thing to say. What's wrong with me?

Angel made a sound that was a cross between a laugh and an expression of disgust. "That's how Kael Saunders shows he cares; he doesn't kill you."

"You little fuck!" He grabbed Angel and raised his hand to slap him, then thought better of it. In the hall he pulled on his jacket and shouted from the front door. "Don't go anywhere." He slammed the door behind him.

* * *

Frustrated and angry, Angel leaped onto the couch and punched the cushioned back relentlessly until his knuckles hurt and he was exhausted. Violent sobs shook his body, and he lay down on the couch and cried himself to sleep.

When he woke up, it was the early hours of the morning, and he went into the bedroom to see if Sir was home. The bed had not been slept in, and he crawled across the bed to Sir's side and opened the drawer to find the money. His mom was settled by now with Gregoire. As long as she knew he was only visiting, she would probably be happy to see him.

At the back of the drawer, he found a wad of £50 notes and sat cross-legged on the bed counting them. It was plenty to get over to France. He would go to an Internet café and e-mail Maria-Jesus to find out where his mom was living.

Angel stuck his hand into the back of the drawer to see if there was any more money and grasped a book. He pulled it out, flipping open the front cover. It was a diary, and it belonged to Sir. *I grew up poor, but I had two things in my favour—An hour later he had read every word.*

Looking inside the drawer again, he found a pen and began to write after the last entry.

Daddy I love you. I never loved anyone like I love you and you can say it's because I have no experience with men and that's true but it doesn't take away from how much I love you. I heard you telling Freddie I was temporary and Freddie said you loved me and you said you didn't, you said you had no time for me. I was on the stairs listening to everything, so I know what you think. You don't love me, you never wanted me. It's just lust because you told Freddie that. I'm going to stay with my mom until I find a Daddy who will love me. I know that fucktard Conran was lying and my mom really wants me. You are the hottest dude I ever met, but you are seriously fucked up. You are nuts about everything being perfect and you are a total control freak and I know you kill people for a living. I don't think you would kill me but even I know a relationship has to be based on more than just—would I kill this dude or not?

From your Angel.

PS I love you so much.

He decided to stay in what he was wearing, his jeans and the leather vest shirt he had worn the day he arrived. He sat on the side of the bed and laced up his

German paratrooper boots. The only present he would take was the rebel cap Sir had bought him in the West End.

In his leather backpack he stuffed his blanket, the money, and one change of clothes and headed out into the dark, cold early morning. A damp drizzle began to fall as he walked away from the flat. He missed Daddy already.

Chapter Nineteen

Kael was so drunk he could hardly stand up. Part of him rebelled against being out of control to the point where he could not defend himself if he needed to, and part of him wanted to obliterate all the feelings of vulnerability that being in love gave him.

The man who stood with his back to him, facing the toilet wall with his trousers around his knees, meant nothing to him. This was much safer than being responsible for a lovely boy who might even love him back given the chance. "Ready when you are." The man, older than himself and attractively masculine, looked over his shoulder.

When he had left the flat, already drunk, he was still wearing the dark gray trousers and gray shirt he had worn that day. He was not dressed for a leather bar so he went to a gay pub to finish getting drunk and see how many men he could fuck in one night. By this time he had lost count and lost interest. At least he was not so drunk that he had neglected to use a condom, but he had started the night with a handful in his pocket and he was down to the last one.

In a gentle, longing voice, the man said, "Come on, gorgeous, let me feel the size of you. I haven't had a fuck in weeks."

"I don't think I can." Kael patted the man's shoulder. "No offense, mate, but I'm too drunk."

"Come back to my place. We'll sober you up and try again."

"All right." Kael followed the stranger out of the pub.

* * *

He awoke the next morning lying in a bed he did not recognize. The man beside him was still asleep, and he couldn't remember if he'd fucked him or not. With the stealth he used on a job, he dressed and left without making a sound. At home he went directly to the bathroom without going through the bedroom so as not to disturb Angel, and took a long, very hot shower.

Christ, my mouth feels like the bottom of Gandhi's sandal.

He scrubbed his teeth vigorously and gargled with mouthwash, then went naked to the kitchen and drank two bottles of water. This was insane. He'd had a horrible time last night, drunk more than he had drunk since his early twenties, and fucked at least a dozen strange men.

What he really wanted was to lie in bed with Angel and hold him and ask him why he had stopped being affectionate and spontaneous. He wanted to tell him he missed being hugged and leaned on. He missed Angel sitting in his lap on the couch and chatting about unimportant things. He missed Angel walking up behind him and hugging him around the waist. He missed being called Daddy.

I'm going to make this right.

Picturing Angel curled up with his blanket, he quietly opened the bedroom door. The bed had not been slept in. Kael scanned the room for signs of his boy. After taking in the big details—the blinds had not been drawn, the bed was still made—he looked at the smaller details. Angel had sat on his side of the bed. There was a small flattened area in the duvet. The drawer in his bedside table was fractionally open.

A sudden panic gripped Kael's belly. Had Angel taken him up on that stupid, careless offer of money and gone to France?

He sank down onto the bed and opened the drawer, feeling in the back for the wad of notes. Gone. As he felt about, he touched his leather-bound diary and snatched it up. God, he hoped Angel hadn't read the trivialities he had written there.

He thumbed through the book to the last entry and saw childish, unfamiliar handwriting. *Daddy I love you. I never loved anyone like I love you... I heard you telling Freddie I was temporary... I was on the stairs listening to everything...*

Shite! That was why he had withdrawn, because he heard Kael say he did not love him and never would. He sank his head into his hands. How could he have messed up so badly? The clock read 9:30. Angel could be in France by now. Would his mum welcome him? He'd be heartbroken if she didn't.

Suddenly he needed his own mum. He went to the bathroom to pick up his clothes and get his mobile from his pocket. He bought new ones regularly, always getting different numbers and disposing of the old ones so he could phone his mum. She had never seen his flat, never had a number to reach him. When he brought her to London, he stayed in a hotel with her. She liked that better anyway; it was a treat for her. He lay down on the bed on top of the duvet and pressed her number.

"Hello?" She sounded sleepy.

"Hello, Mum, how are you?"

"Kael, love! You haven't phoned me in weeks." The instant pleasure in her voice made his eyes prick with unfamiliar tears.

"Sorry, Mum, I've been busy. Were you sleeping?"

"I'm awake now. How are you then? You sound upset." She always knew.

"Yeah, I am."

"What's up?"

"Mum, I'm in love," he said very quietly.

"Awww, that's nice, son. So"—she paused—"is it a fella?"

"Of course it's a fella. You know I'm gay."

"All right, love, don't get annoyed with me; I'm just asking. You told me you were like that, but then you've never said you were seeing anyone. So what's he like then? Tell me all about him."

"He's lovely. He's really sweet, and he loves me."

"What are you so upset about then, love?" she asked.

"He's left me, Mum."

"Left you?" For a half a minute neither of them spoke. "Kael, don't take this the wrong way, son, but were you kind to him?"

He sat up. "What do you mean, kind?"

"It's the way you come across, Kael. You can be very"—he waited while she considered her words—"very stiff."

"I'm not stiff."

"You are, Kael," she said firmly. "You can be very distant, a bit 'don't mess with me or I'll smack you one,' that sort of thing."

"I see." He did see. He was beginning to see more and more what he was like.

"Were you sweet with him and lovey-dovey? Did you make him feel special? Because fellas are no different than women that way. They like to feel special, like they're important to you."

He got up and went to the kitchen for another bottle of water. "He is important to me, Mum, very important. I don't think I was stiff and distant. Maybe I was. I took care of him though. I bought him lots of presents."

"Presents are lovely, but you know what I like from a man? Not that I've got one right now, because I haven't."

"Mum, your record with men is not that great. Though come to think of it, mine's no better."

She laughed. "I don't need you to tell me that, love, but what I like is when a man holds me in bed and says, I love you because...and then he tells me all the nice things about me."

"Mum." His voice dropped to a whisper. "I love you because you're kind and you've always loved me for who I am. You were always a great mum, even though we had no money and we moved around a lot. I love you because you never let any of your stupid, useless boyfriends say a wrong word to me."

He heard her sniff and blow her nose. "Kael, what's his name, your boyfriend?"

"Angel."

"Aww, that's lovely. Why do you love him?"

He walked back to the bedroom and lay down on Angel's side of the bed. He took Angel's pillow and sniffed it. The gentle sweet-boy smell filled his head. "I love him because he's spontaneous and affectionate. He holds my hand on the street, and he doesn't care who sees. He says I'm the hottest dude he's ever met."

“Son, go and get him back. If you love him, fight for him. God knows, you’ve never been afraid of a fight.”

He stood up and began to grab clothes from the wardrobe. “I’ll talk to you later. Thanks, Mum.” He hung up.

* * *

Halfway to the airport, Kael stopped the taxi and made the driver turn round. “Go back to where you picked me up.”

Something was niggling at him. Something wasn’t right. When he realized Angel had left, he had panicked. After speaking to his mum, he was emotional and not thinking straight. Sitting now in a taxi, driving through the usual heavy London traffic, his mind had begun to calm, like it did when he was on a hit.

He knew Angel had left the flat on his own two feet and unafraid. Kael could smell and sense fear, and he knew that no stranger had been in his flat. What he had neglected to do was reconnoiter the area outside on the street for anything that might not make sense.

Home again, he began to walk the streets, observing carefully and trying to think like an eighteen-year-old who was probably hurt, perhaps angry, feeling unloved and maybe unappreciated. Kael should have praised him more. Angel had been keeping the flat spotless, all without instruction. Instead of keeping his mouth shut, he should have told him how great he was and maybe even thanked him.

It was almost half past eleven; the city was very busy, the noise and smell of traffic as oppressive as ever. Kael walked on, thinking like Angel. He had money, so he could easily have taken a taxi and gone straight to the airport, but Kael knew he had headed off to buy a present for his mother, something to make his unexpected visit more palatable to her. Where would a woman who had acquired expensive tastes like to shop? *Harrods*. Kael kept walking. With his fast-paced, long-legged stride, he could cover large areas quickly.

Harrods on Brompton Road was crowded with shoppers and tourists, as it always was. He walked quickly through the ladies department, the perfumes and makeup department.

The Food Halls.

I bet he bought her chocolates; that’s something a kid would buy for his mum, and he said she liked caviar.

He began to ask the shop assistants at the various sweet counters if they had seen a boy fitting Angel’s description, but no one remembered him. If only he had taken a picture of Angel at some point, but he was always so preoccupied with not creating evidence.

At the Godiva counter, he looked straight at a young woman. She responded at once. He could be very charming when he needed to be, despite being stiff and distant. He was stinging a little from that one, but he knew it was true. “Did you

serve a young man this morning with blond hair, probably wearing a leather cap? He's American."

Recognition lit her face. "Yes, I remember him. He said he was going to see his mum. He was really cute."

Kael smiled; he certainly was. He was getting closer. "When was that?"

"Right when we opened at ten o'clock."

He glanced at his watch. It was near noon. Angel was probably still in the country, maybe still in London. "Did he say anything else?"

"No. Would you like a sample?" She offered him a chocolate with a pair of silver tweezers.

"No, thank you. Which way did he go?"

She pointed. "He went that way, but it was already busy. That's all I can tell you, sorry."

Kael walked in the direction she had pointed and out into the street through the nearest exit. Instinctively he walked toward Knightsbridge Road and into Hyde Park, scanning the environment as he went.

At over 350 acres, Hyde Park would take hours to search, but Kael knew he was in the right place. It took him a full hour of walking the park and standing still, scanning wide areas before he spotted the boy wearing the leather rebel cap and the leather backpack. But he knew well before he reached him that it wasn't Angel.

Five or six males between sixteen and perhaps twenty years old stood together, their name-brand athletic wear and loud behavior marking them as chavs. Kael walked up behind the boy with the backpack. He had to secure the target at once if he didn't want to chase him, and he was in no mood for that. There was also a good chance the youths had weapons, probably knives.

Pretending to walk past, Kael turned at the last second and grabbed him by the arm. The boy swung round, belligerent and ready for a fight until he saw the size of Kael. Kael snatched the cap off his head and grabbed the backpack. "Where did you get these?"

"That's my stuff; who the fuck are you?" The others gathered around like a pack of dogs, fearless when in a group.

"You fucking failed medical experiments," Kael said to the group in general. He shoved Angel's hat into his pocket and took the youth by the throat, squeezing until the boy's eyes bulged and his face grew scarlet. With his free hand he rammed a fist into the nearest pimply youth.

"Where did you get that stuff, you little fuck?" he said to the boy he held. "Tell me now or I'll drag you to the nearest toilets and fuck your arse until my dick comes out of your throat."

If these useless, mouthy thugs had hurt Angel, he would torture them one by one and enjoy every moment of it. Another boy came up behind him, thinking he could take Kael unawares. But Kael knew exactly where each one of them stood. He

had already gauged the strength of each, and his brain raced, forming moment-by-moment plans of what to do if he was attacked. He kicked backward sharply, and the boy crumpled forward, clutching his knee.

"Let's get out of here. He's a fucking nutter." The voice came from somewhere to his left. The chavs scattered quickly.

"Where did you get the bag and the hat?" Kael eased up the pressure on the boy's throat so he could speak.

"I found it. Swear to God, mate."

Kael released the boy's throat and took a firm hold on his arm. "Show me where."

The boy began walking toward Park Close, with Kael holding him tightly by the arm. At the street, the boy pointed at the pavement. "The bag and the hat were on the street, right there."

"Just lying there?"

The boy nodded vigorously, terrified now that his friends had run off. "Yeah, like they'd been dropped."

"Are you having a laugh?" Kael said, his face inches from the boy's.

"No! Swear to God, mate. The bag was there on the flags, and the hat was in the gutter." He pointed again. Kael pictured the positioning of the items.

Angel had been snatched off the street into a car; there was no question in Kael's mind. If Conran was behind this, Kael would carry out every threat he had made against him.

"You see how easily I could have killed you?" The boy nodded frantically. "I'm going to let go of you, and you will stand right there. If you make me chase you, I'll definitely kill you, and I promise you, I will enjoy it. Now stand there and don't move."

Taking his hand off the boy, he opened Angel's bag and saw a jar of caviar sitting on top of Godiva chocolates in a heart-shaped box. His throat constricted at the sight of the chocolates, and he remembered being about ten years old and buying his mum a heart-shaped box of chocolates for Valentine's Day because he had thought she would love it, being a woman. Angel must have thought the same thing.

In the bottom of the bag under a change of clothes were Angel's blanket, folded neatly, and his British passport. "Where's the money?"

The boy almost started to lie but knew he would never get away with it. He went into the pocket of his low-slung trousers and pulled out the cash. Kael put the cap and the money into the bag. "Tell me exactly when you found these."

"About an hour ago."

"I said exactly."

The boy was shaking, dying to get away from him. "I don't know, mate. Maybe more than that, not more than two hours."

Kael assessed his face to see if he was lying, but the boy was too afraid of him. "You can go." The boy took off running without looking back. Kael stood for a long time looking at the street, forming a picture of what had happened. When he was satisfied, he hailed a taxi.

At home he put Angel's bag in the bedroom and changed quickly into black clothes with the black shoes he always wore on a job. In the hall he took down his weapons box and put on his shoulder holster. He loaded a magazine into his GLOCK 26 and put his small handgun in his pocket. He selected two scalpels and took the passport with the name John Carpe, then pulled on his leather jacket before heading out.

It was Wednesday, and it was almost two o'clock. Conran left his office every day around one o'clock and went for lunch to a sandwich shop on the Albert Embankment, always the same place. When Kael sat down opposite him in a little booth in the window, he looked up, his face growing pale.

"Why do you look so nervous, Stephen; it's just me, your old schoolmate, Saunders." Kael's mouth stretched into a smile, while his eyes remained narrowed and angry.

Conran looked quickly around him, like he had in the Quebec Pub. "What do you want?"

"Why are you always checking to see who's watching when you're with me? Are you ashamed to be seen with me?" Kael tapped the table, waiting. "Afraid people will think you're a queer? Do I look like a queer, Conran?"

"Only when you're dressed in leather. Now if it's about that bloody video—"

Kael grabbed Conran's wrist very tightly, making him look around again. He tried to pull his hand free but stood no chance against Kael's superior strength. "It's not about the video. It's about my boy, Angel." He leaned across the narrow table into Conran's face, dragging him closer by his arm. "Where the fuck is he?"

"I don't know." Conran's face began to redden. "Take your hands off me. People are watching."

"Look at me."

Conran looked into Kael's eyes, his breath short. He was telling the truth; he didn't know. Kael released his wrist. "He's been snatched off the street, and you are going to help me find him."

"I don't know anything about this. I made it right with my people. The boy is not in danger from our people."

Conran looked incredibly relieved when Kael stood up, but that passed quickly when he realized Kael wasn't leaving without him. "Get up. We're going to your office, and you are going to start making phone calls until you find out where he is."

* * *

It was early evening, and the sun was beginning to decline as Kael stood at the window of Conran's office watching the river. He had felt sick to his stomach with

worry from the moment he knew Angel had been abducted. The fact that he had not eaten did not help, but he would not eat again until he found Angel.

All afternoon Conran had been on the phone to members of the Secret Intelligence Service and been back and forth across the river to Westminster Palace, talking to various politicians. Kael had followed him everywhere, not allowing him out of his sight. Now Conran paced back and forth across the expensive rug, waiting for a call from the foreign minister.

"Get me some water," Kael ordered.

Conran glanced at him briefly before obeying. He went to his desk and pressed the intercom. "Bring some bottled water in please."

A few minutes later Conran's stout, middle-aged secretary walked in with several plastic bottles of water, which she placed on the desk. Kael strode over and took one, smiling his thanks at her. "Mr. Conran, the foreign minister will phone you in about five minutes. He asks that you be ready to take his call. He is very busy."

Conran went at once to his desk and sat down. Kael went back to the window and stood looking out, drinking water from the bottle. When the phone rang, he walked over to stand beside Conran. After a brief conversation, Conran looked up at him.

"The Bosnians have got him, the group Andresen was selling guns and rockets to. A man called Beganovic is in charge. The three in the gay pub, Roughnecks, were part of the same group. I know it was you who killed them, and now I know why. They were after the boy then, weren't they?"

"Yes." Kael felt extremely calm. His heart rate did not change, nor his pulse. When he was frightened, he went into a state similar to suspended animation. Right now he was terrified. "Where is he? Where have they taken him?"

Visibly relieved that Kael had calmed down, Conran sat back in his desk chair and crossed his legs. "They are located in a remote farming area in the hill country, in the northwest of Bosnia. They are either there or on their way there. They appear to have access to a small plane, so they may well be there by now."

"What do they want Angel for?" But he already knew.

"They have already attempted to ransom him. They must have been planning to take him for days because as soon as they snatched him, someone began making phone calls."

Kael sank down into the leather chair in front of Conran's desk. Now that he knew what was happening, he felt tranquil. He would get Angel back or die trying. "How the hell did they know Angel was in London?"

"I have no idea. They have intelligence, just as we do—not as sophisticated obviously, but they seem to manage," Conran said.

"Tell me everything you know," Kael said.

"They got in touch with his mother and her septuagenarian boyfriend, Gregoire St. Germaine, but those two've refused to cooperate."

Kael sat up and leaned forward. "They won't pay a ransom? His mum won't pay a ransom for her own son?"

"No, and the man is a millionaire. The Bosnians have threatened to kill the boy, but they still won't budge." The last phrase jarred Kael like a heavy blow, but he did not lose his composure. When he was in a threatening situation, all he focused on was the solution. "They've also contacted the American government asking for ransom money from them since the boy is an American citizen, but they won't play."

"What about us? Angel has British citizenship now."

Conran went to the sideboard and poured a whiskey. "Do you want one?"

"No."

"We won't play either. No one is going to make deals with Bosnian terrorists over a boy with dual citizenship, which you insisted he have. The foreign minister said let the Americans take care of him. The American's are saying he's a British problem now. No one is going to do anything politically. Aside from that, the stepfather was an arms dealer and the Bosnians are terrorists. No government will go to bat for the boy without someone lobbying publicly for him, and the mother won't. She wouldn't even cooperate with the police when she thought he might have been killed."

Kael drank some water. "Get out a map, and show me where you think Begonovic and his people are. I want a plane, an all-terrain car at the other end, and a translator in case I need one. I've never picked up that language."

Conran walked over and sat on the edge of his desk looking at Kael. "Our people won't give you anything to go after this boy. They will not help."

"Then you must make them, Stephen." Conran sighed, looking beaten. Kael stood up and put his hand on Conran's shoulder almost kindly. "I'll let you figure out how. Then we won't have to go through the ritual of me threatening the lives of your family or threatening your personal integrity with erotic videos and you won't have to tell me I'm an evil bastard and you always knew I was a killer."

"I never thought I'd see the day." Conran looked up at him. "Kael Saunders in love and willing to risk everything."

"That's right. I love Angel, and I'll do whatever it takes to get him back."

"You're actually more concerned about someone other than yourself? That is a turnup for the book."

Kael gave him a gentle, almost kind look. "Wonders will never cease. You know, Stephen, you really have very attractive eyes." Conran issued a nervous little cough as Kael leaned in very close and spoke into his ear. "A plane, a car, and a translator, now. And you, Stephen. You are coming with me in case I need to use you as a bargaining chip. I want my boy back, and I'll happily kill to get him."

Chapter Twenty

Banja Luka Airport, Bosnia

By the time Kael arrived in Bosnia with Conran, Angel had been in the hands of his captors for at least thirty-six hours. Kael had tried to keep a professional distance, but on the way to the airport, he could not stop himself worrying, not just about the basics of whether or not Angel was injured or still alive, but if he was hungry or cold or tired. The thought of him being frightened and lonely, of thinking nobody cared about him or would not come to get him back, made Kael's stomach tighten painfully.

Daddy's coming, Angel. Sit tight; Daddy's coming.

The wind blew viciously cold as he and Conran climbed down from the small plane on the dark, deserted runway of the tiny airport. They hurried toward the decrepit old army jeep waiting for them. It had a canvas roof and plastic windows. "Nice vehicle. Let's hope we don't come under fire," Kael said. "I'll drive."

"I'm happy to hear it." Conran looked the jeep over nervously. "I haven't a clue where I am, and this thing looks like it will crap out at any moment."

Fastening the zipper on his leather jacket against the cold, Kael saw the interpreter waiting in the backseat of the darkened vehicle. When he opened the door, she said, "Mr. Carpe, what a pleasure to see you again."

Kael eased his big frame into the driver's seat. "Dragana." He smiled. "The last time I saw you, I was ready to kill you."

"Why doesn't that surprise me?" Conran's teeth chattered as a gust of freezing wind nearly blew him over. "Is there anyone you haven't thought of killing at some point, Saunders?"

"Only my mum." Kael looked at Conran and thumbed over his shoulder. "In the back. I want Dragana in the front."

Conran did as he was told, and Dragana got into the front seat. "You could have picked better weather to visit my country, Mr. Carpe," she said.

"And better circumstances," he added. "Call me Kael."

To his relief, the engine sounded smooth, and they headed for the road going west. He had read and memorized the map on the plane, and he no longer needed it to find his way to the countryside outside of Sasina, where intelligence told them Beganovic and his group planned and practiced their attacks.

"I didn't know she worked for you, Conran. You got one over on me. That should make you feel good. She saw Angel the day after I brought him home. I thought she'd go straight to the police when she left my flat. But we had a little talk in the car."

Hanging onto the sides of her seat, Dragana turned her head to look at Conran as Kael drove well above the speed limit on the rough road. "I got suspicious when he pulled over in an industrial area and he began to pull on latex gloves."

"Latex gloves and Saunders are a deadly combination." Conran also hung onto his seat as if he were on a fairground ride.

"Then she explained to me that she was with your office and part of her job was keeping an eye on me," Kael said.

"So why the hell didn't you report the boy?" Conran raised his voice over the noise of the engine and the wind whistling through the plastic windows that would not close properly. "You could have saved me a lot of time and trouble."

Dragana smiled at him. "It was not my job to report on Mr. Carpe's companions, but only to plant bugs. Anyway, I like Mr. Carpe...Mr. Kael Saunders. I was just so happy to see him with a partner. He always seemed so lonely. Besides that, he said he would come after me and kill me if I told you, and I believed him."

Kael laughed out loud and drove even faster.

* * *

Sitting on the dirt floor of the farm outbuilding, Angel was freezing cold. From the moment he was snatched off the street, he had been hooded, his hands bound behind his back, and now they were fastened to something on the wall behind him, making it impossible for him to rise to his feet. Hunger gnawed at his stomach, and his tongue was beginning to stick to the roof of his mouth, he so desperately needed some water. His jeans and underwear were wet because he had not been allowed to unfasten them to pee. He had no idea where he was, but he knew the men who had taken him were Bosnian. He recognized the language from the men who had visited Sven in New York.

It could be day or night, but he suspected it was night. He could no longer hear the noises of animals he had heard hours ago. The hood blacked out the light and was fastened around his neck with a piece of string so that even though his body was cold and stiff, his face sweated. The leather hood Sir had made him wear was a good preparation for this. He might have panicked and choked had he not experienced it that night and learned how to stay calm and breathe with it.

Footsteps on the gravel path outside alerted him that someone was approaching. Angel used all his senses to understand what was happening. That's what Sir would do. The door was loose on its hinges. It scraped across the ground when it was opened, and he tightened his muscles against the wind that swept in with the footsteps. He knew the roof overhead was low because all the sounds were loud despite the hood muffling everything.

Someone spoke, a man. Angel raised his chin as if he could look up at him. The words made no sense, but the man was unfastening the hood, tugging it up so that his mouth was free, and he was immensely grateful. He gulped in cold, fresh air and saw a small amount of pale light, probably from a flashlight.

"Could you give me some water, please? Water."

A bottle was pressed to his lips and tilted. Angel drank so quickly he began to cough. "More," he said when his coughing stopped. Again he drank, and relief settled over him. Food he could live without for a while longer, but not water. He began to feel calmer now that he knew they would at least give him the basics to stay alive.

"If you ask my mom for money, her boyfriend will give it to you. He's rich."

When the man spoke, his accent was very heavy and he sounded impatient. "We have contacted Gregoire St. Germaine and his new girlfriend, and they are not interested in you. Maybe the British government will pay for your release. If not, you will die."

"Did you ask my mom? Maybe she doesn't know where I am. She'll get Gregoire to give you money."

"Your mother knows. She will not pay." He pulled the hood down again but did not tie it. Angel heard his footsteps recede. The door opened with a gust of freezing wind and scraped closed again.

Mr. Conran had told the truth about his mom, and Sir had lied about it. But why would he do that? To protect Angel? Why would Sir want to protect him? He didn't love Angel. Sir gave Angel the money to get out of his way. It didn't make sense.

Grateful for the water and utterly exhausted, Angel let his chin drop onto his chest and drifted off into a stiff, uncomfortable sleep.

* * *

About a mile from where the farm should be located, Kael pulled off the road into the woods. Taking out his compass, he looked at it carefully. "That way, through the woods. It should take us about twenty minutes." He looked at Conran. "You stay here and be ready to drive the minute we get back. Dragana, you come with me. What weapon have you got?"

"XD subcompact—nice and light. But Kael, I am forty-two years old, and a little plump. That's why I am in surveillance now. Maybe Mr. Conran be better to back you up?"

"Conran's a useless prick; that's why he's in an office job," he told her, ignoring Conran's glare. "I wouldn't trust him with my back, but I'd trust you. You didn't flinch when you thought I was going to kill you." He chuckled. "Though you did start talking very fast."

"I have strong belief in God. I have think when my time comes, there is nothing I can do." They got out of the Jeep and started into the woods.

* * *

The farm consisted of a small farmhouse, a barn, several cowsheds, a pigsty, and open fields to the southeast. The woods added excellent cover and extended right up to the thatch-roofed outbuildings on the northwest side. The only building with electricity appeared to be the farmhouse. Thank God, Kael thought, for a nearly full moon lighting the surrounding area and for the near cloudless sky.

"How's your eyesight?" he asked Dragana.

"It's good." She was out of breath but faring well.

"We have to search the outbuildings. If we can find Angel and get him out quietly, that's plan A. If that's impossible, plan B is kill everyone."

"Of course."

"You approach the farmhouse, see how many are there, and find out what you can. Do not go inside. Angel may be in the house. If he is, come back here; I'll get him out of there. I'm going to search the outbuildings. Meet me back here at this exact spot."

Dragana listened carefully and left with no questions. Kael began a methodical search of the outbuildings, all of which were open and unsecured. Silent and unobtrusive, he walked quickly through the stone-and-mud buildings using a low-beam flashlight only when he absolutely had to. The animals resting under the thatched roofs did not stir. Kael was intensely alert for guard dogs and carried his GLOCK 26, with the silencer, in his hand.

Through the filthy, broken window of a cowshed, lying unmoving against the damp stone wall, he picked out a slender figure with a black hood over its head, and went completely still, fear grabbing his belly. He took a couple of steadying breaths and allowed a silent emptiness to settle over him until he was able to move again. Every emotion—fear, horror, anxiety, love, protectiveness—all drained from his mind and body. Angel was a target for rescue, nothing more. He'd been on rescue missions before; it wasn't all about killing.

Kael pushed the door open and approached the body. A thin stream of moonlight managed to filter through the grime on the window, but Kael's eyes were so attuned to light and shadow that it was enough to assist him in the way a floodlight would assist an ordinary person.

Angel leaned against the wall, his chin on his chest. From the position of his arms, it was plain he was secured from behind. Kael gently took his shoulders. He was freezing cold and completely still. Behind him a heavy iron ring was hammered into the wall, probably to tie up a bull, it was so strong. Police-grade steel handcuffs secured Angel to the ring.

Taking a breath to steady himself, Kael lifted Angel's chin and tugged off the hood. A long sighing breath from Angel's pale lips sent relief reverberating through Kael's body. "Angel," he whispered.

Angel's eyes opened, unfocused for a moment; then the boy looked directly at him. "Sir." His voice was faint. "I'm so cold."

"Are you hurt?" Kael asked.

"Not really hurt, just a bit knocked around. I don't know where they brought me."

"It's a farm in the Bosnian hill country."

The harsh bark of a dog cracked the air. "Dragana," Kael whispered. A foot ground on the stones outside the shed. Kael slipped the hood back over Angel's head, and when the boy protested, he hissed, "Shut up; don't move. Be a good slave."

Silently, he stepped back and dropped to the floor behind a rotting wooden fence separating the cow stalls. A short, barrel-chested man in a greasy sheepskin jacket shoved open the door and approached Angel. He kicked at Angel's foot and, when he got no reaction, checked to ensure he was still tethered to the wall. Satisfied, he turned to leave.

Without a sound, Kael stood up, raised his gun, centered it at the man's heart, and fired. The silencer muffled the sound, and the man dropped heavily to the floor. Quickly Kael stepped out of hiding, fired another bullet into the man's skull, and went through his pockets for the key. "How convenient."

Again he tugged the hood from Angel's head and unlocked the handcuffs. Angel fell into his arms. Kael stood and lifted him up, cradling him against his chest. Outside the gusting wind muffled any twigs he stepped on or stones he kicked as he ran unheeding toward the woods, looking out for Dragana.

Hidden among the trees, Kael watched the farmyard, still cradling Angel to his chest. The man who had come to check on Angel had been gone from the house for more than five minutes. When he did not return, someone would come looking for him. Where the hell was the woman? Kael watched intently for any signs of a person moving through the darkness. His excellent hearing blocked out the gusting wind to focus only on extraordinary sounds.

Christ!

Across the farmyard two men walked with Dragana between them. The bright moonlight reflected off the barrel of the gun one man held at her head. Words flew back and forth between them. They headed toward the cowshed and would find in a minute that Angel was gone and one of their own was dead.

"Angel, look at me. Look at me." Angel met his eyes. They were more focused now. If he had stayed asleep much longer in the cold, he may have died. "How many men are there?"

"Five, I think, but I was hooded the whole time. I never saw any faces. But I heard five different-sounding voices. I couldn't understand what they said, but I'm sure there's five."

The pride Kael felt at Angel's deductive abilities made him smile despite the circumstances. This boy could be so good if he was trained right.

I shot one, there are two there, so that means only two more should be in the house.

Dropping Angel's legs, Kael set him on his feet and steadied him. "You have to remain here, hidden. I have to go and get Dragana."

Angel looked up into his eyes. "Sir, don't get hurt."

Kael grinned. "I'm indestructible. Do you know how to use a gun?"

"No, Sir."

Kael took out his GLOCK 19 compact and released the safety catch. Carefully he positioned it in Angel's hand. "Stay here and use this only if you need to, but if you do, don't hesitate. Aim carefully. If anything happens to me, run that way, straight through the woods." He turned Angel and pointed in the direction of the jeep. "Conran is waiting with a car."

"Yes, Sir." Angel threw his arms around Kael's waist, hugging him more tightly than he ever had before. "Sir, don't do anything stupid. I know what you're like when you're pissed off." Angel looked up at him, his big eyes full of wisdom. "You have nothing to prove. Do not take risks."

"Thank you, Yoda."

An old plough and a tractor stood in the yard. Kael ran silently toward the plough, using it for cover, and then the tractor, which stood closest to the cowshed. Inside, voices were raised as they discovered the dead man and their hostage gone. Through the broken window, Kael aimed his GLOCK 26.

The man with the gun on Dragana screamed something at her and struck her hard with the side of his pistol, making a sickening crack as the gun made contact with her head. She stumbled to the ground, and he kicked her in the side, continuing to shout. The other man came to stand over her and aimed his gun, ready to shoot.

Kael made the split-second decision to take out the second man first and felled him with one bullet to the head. The other man showed his lack of training by how slowly he turned and the surprised look on his face. When he fell, he landed on top of Dragana, accidentally discharging his own gun.

The woman let out a strained cry. Kael entered quickly and dragged the man off her. "Are you injured?"

"My foot, just a graze, I think. There are two men more in the house, and they have a fucking great big Alsatian dog."

He helped her up. "The gunshot will bring the others out. Angel is waiting in the woods. We have to hurry. Did they take your gun?"

"Yes, I'm sorry. The dog alerted them there was someone outside the window. I couldn't run fast enough." Dragana took a step, and her foot collapsed under her, causing her to stumble to her knees. Kael pulled out his flashlight and shone it on the foot. It was more than a graze. The metatarsal bones were shattered where the bullet had pierced them. Adrenaline masked the pain to some degree, but she was beginning to go into shock. "Try to stand up; I'll carry you."

"That could be harder than you think. I weigh thirteen stone, but I am planning to join Slimming World if we get out of this alive." Pain made her voice weak, while fear brought out her sense of humor.

"I'm a big fucker; I can do it."

Not wanting his gun too far out of reach, Kael stuffed it into the pocket of his leather jacket rather than his shoulder holster. He pulled Dragana to her feet, but she was no more than five feet three inches and could barely reach up to put her arm around his neck.

"I think I'm going to have to do the fireman's lift." He positioned her and began to lift just as the Alsatian bounded into the shed, barking. The dog had been trained to corner people, but not attack until ordered. Kael managed to hang on to Dragana, but both were pinned to the wall. His hand was in his pocket on his gun when the other two men entered the cowshed with weapons drawn.

One man shouted at the dog, which lay down quietly.

Even in the darkness, Kael recognized one of the men as having been the man sitting with his target in Edinburgh. A flashlight shone in their faces, blinding them. Kael's eyes adjusted almost instantly, but Dragana was still blinded. "He says he saw you in Scotland," Dragana interpreted.

"Do they speak English?"

"Maybe a little but I don't think much."

The taller of the two men, the one who had been in Edinburgh, came closer and stuck his gun in Kael's chest, speaking loudly. "He says sit on the floor."

Kael slid down, taking Dragana with him, attempting to ease her pain. Again the man spoke, his voice raised, the words unintelligible, but somewhere amid the harsh consonants he heard the word *Angel*. "They are asking where the boy is."

"Like I'm going to tell them," Kael said. They were sitting on the damp dirt floor with two men leaning over them, but all the time Kael scanned the cowshed looking for a means of escape or a distraction so he could pull out his gun. Any minute the men would search him for weapons. He hated giving up his gun. He'd rather give up his cock.

The two men began talking to each other without taking their eyes off them.

"They are deciding what to do next. The tall one wants to try to negotiate using us; the other wants to kill us now."

When a face appeared in the window, ghostly pale in the moonlight, Kael watched it for a split second, his heart thudding suddenly in fear.

Get back to the fucking woods and do as you're told. You're supposed to obey me.

Angel leveled the gun, his hand completely steady, and fired twice in very quick succession. Both men fell to the ground. The dog leaped up and began barking loudly at the gunshots. Kael had his gun out in an instant and fired a bullet into its midsection just as it leaped on him.

In the silence that followed, Angel walked into the shed and stood utterly still, looking down at the men he had shot. One of them began to move, cursing with pain as he tried to rise. In one step Kael stood over him, pressed his gun to the back of the man's head, and fired. The man slumped to the ground, unmoving, and he repeated the action on the other.

Kael looked at Angel. "Good boy."

"Sir, I feel faint."

Kael caught Angel as he wavered on his feet. "It's all right, sweetheart. The first kill is always the hardest."

"No, Sir. I think it's because I'm hungry. Those guys didn't give me anything to eat."

Kael's laughter rang to the low rafters. Dragana began a low chuckle, but she was bleeding freely from her foot and in increasing pain. Taking Angel's face in his hands, Kael looked into his eyes. "We have to walk a mile to the jeep. I'll carry Dragana, but you'll have to walk. Can you manage?"

"Yes, Sir," Angel said.

"Good lad; let's go."

The jeep stood waiting with the lights and engine off. About five hundred yards away, Angel stopped. "Sir, Mr. Conran's not in the jeep."

Struggling under Dragana's weight, Kael stopped to focus. Even he had trouble seeing something in the dark and through fairly dense woods from that distance. "Are you sure?" The boy did not answer at once. "Angel, what do you see?"

"Sir, he's across the road and in the woods on the other side."

"If he's taking a whiz when we need him to drive, I'll cut his dick off," Kael said through his teeth.

"Sir, there's two men with him, and they've got guns. One of them's got one of those big machine gun-type thingies. It's really cool."

Dragana must have passed out. She was not even trying to help support her own weight; she was slumped on Kael's shoulder, and he was beginning to hurt. "Are you sure? How can you see them? I can't see them."

"I have difficulty in bright light, but in the dark, I'm like a bat."

"You certainly are." Kael was very impressed. "Can you drive?"

"Not legally, Sir. I don't have a license, but I wrecked two of Sven's cars, which made him hate me even more, and the day you came I damaged his BMW."

"Could you drive that jeep?"

"Yes, Sir, I think I could."

"This is what we are going to do. Very quietly we are going to get Dragana into the jeep. You are going to start driving as fast as you can. Keep your head down because those guys will fire on you. Don't stop until you've driven for at least fifteen

minutes, then double back. They'll be so busy firing at the jeep they won't see me going round behind them to get Conran. Follow my orders exactly."

"Yes, Sir."

* * *

In spite of the freezing wind, sweat ran down Conran's face and back. He had not seen the men come upon him until they dragged him out of the jeep and into the woods. Their English was very hard to understand, but they seemed to understand him, and they did not believe him when he tried to explain that he was a tourist who had got lost.

Neither he nor the men saw Saunders come out of the woods across the road. They knew nothing of his presence until the jeep began to drive away at breakneck speed. By the time they aimed their guns and fired, the jeep was too far away to hit.

Saunders had left him all alone, and he would never see his wife and children again. He doubted his body would ever be found. If he'd had a gun in his hand at that moment and Kael Saunders in front of him, he'd shoot him in the chest and walk away with no remorse whatever for getting him into this and then abandoning him. He'd gone out of his way to help the man get his teenage boy back, and this is what he got for his trouble. He'd had a spotless career, and it would end without fanfare in a dark wood in a foreign country.

The man to his right crumpled to the ground, and a split second later the second man fell. "You didn't think I'd leave you to die, did you, Stephen?"

Conran whirled around to see Saunders silhouetted against the bright moon, larger than life, just as he always was. Conran wanted to drop to his knees and kiss his feet. As enraged as he had been just two minutes ago, he now felt the most overwhelming love and gratitude toward the man. "That's precisely what I thought."

"Who would I torment if I didn't have you?"

Saunders opened his arms, and Conran threw himself at his chest, wrapping both arms around him. Saunders kissed the top of his head, and he was unutterably grateful. "Thank you, thank you, Sir."

* * *

Kael did not feel safe until the small plane was in the air heading west. There were four seats facing each other with a small table between. Dragana sat with her injured foot elevated on a box in the narrow aisle and her eyes closed. They had bound it up as best they could with the small first-aid kit the plane carried.

Angel sat beside Kael, his head resting on Kael's shoulder. "Sir, I wet my pants."

"I know; I can smell it," Kael said.

"Just so you know, I didn't piss myself." Angel looked very serious. "Those guys wouldn't unzip me so I could pee. There's a big difference between wetting your

pants and peeing yourself. I just wanted you to know that I was definitely scared, but not piss scared."

Kael laughed.

"Don't laugh." Angel grinned. "The only guy who ever made me piss myself with fear is you."

"A great basis for a relationship," Conran said, crossing his legs.

"Shall we talk about your relationship with me, Conran, and what that's based on?" Kael asked.

Conran looked exhausted. "Haven't I done enough for you to stop blackmailing me? You've got your boy back. That's all you wanted, him back alive and unharmed."

He was right; it was time to be fair and back off. "I'll get rid of the video. You have my word. And thank you for the part you played in getting my boy back. I'll make it up to you."

Conran licked his upper lip, a blush rising up his cheeks.

"Is there any food, Sir?" Angel said.

"Call me Daddy," Kael said quietly.

"I thought you didn't want that. I thought I was only temporary. You said that to Freddie."

"I was an idiot," Kael said. "I was afraid."

"You? Afraid?" Angel looked skeptical.

Kael leaned in very close so the others could not hear. "I was afraid of what I was feeling for you, but we'll talk about that at home."

"Oh Daddy." Angel rubbed his cheek against Kael's.

"Will you stay with me and be my boy? Will you let me be your daddy?"

A sweet, boyish, almost shy smile transformed Angel's face. He was exhausted and he had been through hell, but he looked at peace in Kael's arms. "Yes please, Daddy."

Kael lowered his head until his lips met Angel's, and he kissed him long and gently. Then Kael kissed the tip of his nose, and his cheeks, and lastly his forehead. Angel reached his hand up to rest on Kael's neck.

"Aren't they sweet," Dragana said through her pain. Conran had given her several paracetamol, but it had barely made a dent in the pain of shattered bones and she was a bit spacey from the combination of drugs and pain.

"Daddy, you know what I was thinking about when I was in that cowshed freezing my ass off all that time?"

For a moment Kael was afraid of what he was going to hear. "Were you wondering if I was going to come and get you?" He hated the thought that Angel might have felt abandoned. "Were you scared that I wouldn't?"

"Actually, it was a bit more basic than that. I couldn't stop thinking about a Big Mac and a large fries. I was so hungry."

Relieved, Kael laughed. "I'll get you a Big Mac and a large fries as soon as we land."

Conran broke in. "We will be taken directly to Vauxhall Cross for debriefing."

"You can do what you want, Conran. I'm going to feed my boy; then I'm taking him home." Conran looked away and closed his eyes.

"So you weren't thinking about me at all?" Kael looked at Angel.

"Yeah, I was thinking about you, Daddy, all the time."

"Did you think I wasn't going to come and get you?"

"I wrote in your journal that I was going to France, so I thought you'd just think I was there. Anyway, after that fight we had and what you said to Freddie, I didn't know what you'd do."

"I would never have left you to die. I would never let anyone hurt you if I could possibly prevent it. As soon as I knew you were gone, I went looking for you."

"Did you sniff me out, Daddy?" He looked deadly serious, making Kael laugh.

"Yes, I did."

"Daddy, I'm sorry, but I lost my new rebel cap and my passport when those guys took me off the street. My blankie was in my bag too. I want it back."

"I found your bag," Kael said. "Everything is at home. Our home."

"Daddy, you're my hero." Angel looked across at Conran. "Mr. Conran, you were right about my mom. She didn't want me."

"No, it's not true, is it, Conran?" Kael glared at him.

"Daddy, it's okay. I know." Angel looked up at him. "One of those guys told me. He could speak pretty good English. I told him to get a ransom for me from my mom and Gregoire, and he said they already asked them and they refused. She knew those terrorist dudes had me, and still she wouldn't get involved." Angel looked at Conran. "How did you know that other stuff about her not taking me out of the system even when she was already married to Sven?"

"It's my job to know." He looked out of the window, unable to meet Angel's eyes. "But I shouldn't have said it; it was cruel."

"It's okay. I knew already. I'm not stupid. When I finally moved in with them, it was obvious she'd been there for a while. I just asked the staff a few questions and they told me how long my mom had been there."

Kael hugged him tighter. "You're my boy now."

Exhausted with pain, Dragana watched them under half-lowered lids. Attempting to distract her, Kael said, "Tell Conran how fearless Angel was when those blokes had us trapped."

She struggled to speak. "He was very professional. He shot them from about twenty feet away. Got them both through the chest. They were going to kill us. That boy saved our lives."

Conran looked at Angel. "How do you feel about killing those men?"

Angel shrugged. "It was them or us. I don't feel anything in particular." He rested his head on Kael's shoulder, his eyes drifting shut.

Kael kissed his forehead, then looked at Conran. "The chest is a big target, but he's never fired a gun before, so he showed remarkable precision. His hand never wavered. He's good. Firing a gun at a living target is hard under any circumstances, but to have such a good aim when you've never done it before... He's not afraid of much, and he's got exceptional senses, like me. I don't want him in danger ever again, but he would be excellent at espionage or undercover work that does *not* involve getting shot at."

"We can assess him at some point. I'm glad he's unharmed," Conran said.

Chapter Twenty-one

"Daddy, how long did I sleep?"

"Eighteen hours."

Angel stood in the bathroom, naked, brushing his teeth. He had fallen asleep the moment they got home, still covered in dirt and urine from the cowshed. Kael looked at the bruises coming out on his pale arms from being manhandled by his captors. The welts from his flogging were gone.

"You need a shower, boy."

Kael took off his dressing gown and threw it over the side of the tub, where it slid to the floor. Angel looked at it. "Daddy, you didn't hang it up."

"I know; what's wrong with me?" He grinned and put his arms out to Angel. The boy walked into them, put his hands on Kael's shoulders, and jumped, wrapping his legs around Kael's hips.

Kael held him and stepped into the shower. He hit the control allowing hot water to gush over them and stepped up to the wall, pressing Angel's back against the tiles.

"Daddy, we met in the shower; do you remember?"

"That's right; we did, and not that long ago."

"It seems like ages."

"I know." Covering Angel's mouth with his own, he probed his tongue into the boy's receptive, wet warmth until his cock grew hard and long and he felt Angel's cock pressing into his belly.

"Let's soap up my cock; I don't want to hurt you until I'm ready to," he said against Angel's mouth, blindly grabbing the soap from the shelf. Supporting Angel with one hand under his buttocks, he lathered the thick length of his cock until it was slippery.

He slid both hands underneath Angel's buttocks, cupping and spreading them at the same time, positioning the tip of his cock against Angel's anus. "Lift your hips; help me out, boy."

Holding on tight to Kael's neck, Angel raised his hips. The muscle of his anus gave way, and Angel slid down, releasing a loud cry. "Daddy!"

With Angel's back pressed against the wall for support, Kael released his buttocks and took him by the hips, raising him up almost to the tip of his cock and slamming him down hard to the hilt. They fell into a swift, fierce rhythm. The hot

water pouring over Kael's head and down his back added to the pleasure wracking his body. He became one with the water, strong as a waterfall as he reamed his beautiful boy. Angel's forehead fell onto Kael's shoulder, and Kael turned his head to mouth and suck on Angel's neck and bite his shoulder.

"Daddy, Daddy, I have to!" Angel cried as his orgasm flooded him, and his body jerked against Kael's. His grip on Kael's neck tightened, and his cry became a long, low moan as warm cum shot onto Kael's belly and ran off with the rushing water.

Kael grabbed a handful of Angel's hair to pull his head back, and covered his mouth, pushing his tongue deep inside. When his orgasm flooded his hips and legs, and his sperm flowed up Angel's rectum, he feared for a moment that his legs would collapse beneath him. His knees began to shake, forcing him to brace his feet. The orgasm took a long time to subside while they clung to each other, leaning against the wall.

"I've missed you, Angel," Kael said against his neck.

"Daddy, I was only gone a couple of days."

"You stopped being affectionate with me the day we went to Freddie's. I've been missing you ever since."

Slowly he stepped away from the wall, allowing Angel to drop his feet to the floor and stand up. Neither of them spoke. They soaped each other and rinsed off. Kael turned off the water and stepped out onto the mat. He took a towel and wrapped it around Angel's shoulders, and with another rubbed his hair. "We have to talk. In the bedroom."

He watched Angel walking away, his buttocks red from the hot water and the pressure of Kael's hands and cock. "You have a beautiful arse, boy."

Angel looked over his shoulder, a cheeky grin lighting his face. He winked and wiggled his hips into the bedroom, making Kael laugh out loud.

By the time Kael walked into the bedroom, Angel had changed the white fitted sheet and pillowcases and pulled a fresh, crisp, white cover over the feather duvet. "Daddy, we really have to get a bit of color in this place." He threw the duvet onto the bed, straightened it, and leaped into the middle.

Kael lay down on top of the duvet, propped up on his pillows, and stretched out his arms. "Come here, Angel; come to Daddy."

The boy crawled into his arms and fell against his shoulder. "Daddy, I love you," he said, his voice suddenly shaky as if he would cry.

"Sweetheart, you may be in a bit of shock from what you went through." Kael kept his tone gentle. Angel may look fine on the surface, but he had been through a hell of a few days. And he had shot two men.

"Daddy, I don't have to be in shock to tell you I love you." Angel rested his hand on Kael's flat belly and slid it down to toy with his pubic hair. "I love you. I wrote it in your diary."

"Yes, I saw that. You also wrote that I was incredibly fucked-up."

Angel frowned. "I was mad at you."

"You must have learned a lot about me from reading that diary."

"You and your mom. I wish my mom was like yours."

The words of wisdom Kael's mum had offered when he spoke to her about Angel returned. He had to tell the boy how he felt.

The words came out in a whisper. "Angel, I love you."

"Daddy?" Angel said.

"No, don't speak. Listen." Kael felt almost panicky. Angel fell silent, but he sat up cross-legged to look directly into Kael's face. Kael wished he would lie beside him again because he knew his cheeks would go pink and he hated feeling so vulnerable, but he wanted Angel to understand how much he was loved.

Despite the urge to look away, Kael met the trusting young eyes and took in the hopeful expression of the half-parted lips and the boyish tilt of the head as Angel waited expectantly. Angel grasped Kael's hand as if encouraging him to speak. Kael took a deep breath as though he was about to jump into the sea without a life jacket. "I love you, Angel."

The boy's straight back and shoulders softened as if he had released a long-held breath. A soft sigh escaped him. He nodded but did not speak.

"I love you because you're sweet and loving. I love how affectionate you are, how you hold my hand, the way you put your arms around my waist." He was afraid that if he stopped, he would not be able to begin again, so he kept speaking, all in one breath. "I love how intelligent you are. The way you trust me so easily makes me feel so responsible, like I have to keep you safe and protect you, and I want to do that. I want to be worthy of your love and trust."

He stopped, not sure what else to say, knowing there was more but unable to drag it out of himself. His cheeks burned, but he would not back down from this any more than he would back down from a man with a loaded gun in his face. "I want to make you into a man. A man I'll be proud of and a man you'll be proud to be."

"Daddy?" Angel whispered, waiting for permission to speak.

Kael nodded.

"You said you have to decide what kind of man you want to be and then become it. I want to be like you, Daddy, strong and certain like you. I know you're a good man. I have figured out more or less what you do for a living, and I want to do what you do."

"There are careers in intelligence that don't involve going into dangerous situations." Kael knew Angel was capable of doing the same work and doing it extremely well. "I'll teach you how to be observant, how to spot a minute change in an environment, how to scan your environment for possible threats. You're already good at it. You have natural talent, and I'll help you hone it. I'll teach you to defend yourself, just in case you need it." But he had no intention of letting Angel do anything dangerous ever again.

Angel raised his slender, undeveloped arms, bent at the elbow, and tightened his biceps while looking at Kael's heavily muscled, very lean body. "I doubt I'll ever be as tall as you, but I want muscles like you, Daddy. I want to be strong."

"We'll start you at the gym very soon," Kael said.

Now that he was talking about concrete things that he knew inside out, the tension in Kael's body drained and he became animated instead of stiff and nervous. His mum was right; he made people nervous and gave them the impression he would smack them if they irritated him.

"Daddy, I feel kind of bad that I don't feel anything much about killing those dudes in Bosnia. They would have killed me, and they were definitely going to kill you and Dragana. They weren't going to just let me go if they didn't get the cash they wanted from somebody in exchange for me. That one guy who could speak English told me they were going to kill me if they didn't get what they wanted."

"That's true; they would have killed you. When you do a job, you can't look back. You have the right attitude, boy. I'm proud of you. Don't lose any sleep over them."

"I won't, Daddy."

Angel took Kael's hand again, playing with the fingers. "Daddy, why is Mr. Conran so nervous of you?"

"Conran's a drama queen." Kael shrugged. "You read the diary; you know what I did to him when we were at school together. He had it coming. He made fun of my mum. That's almost a death wish in my book. Conran's problem is he thinks I'm capable of more than I am." He paused, chewing on his bottom lip for a second. "No, that's not quite what I meant. I'm capable of anything, but he thinks I'd do things casually that I wouldn't do except in very extreme circumstances, and that's good. It keeps him and men like him nervous of me."

Angel curled up on his side and laid his head in Kael's lap, his cheek resting against his flaccid cock. He turned his face into the warm, soft flesh, sniffing. "I love the smell of you, Daddy. I love the taste of you."

Kael stretched out a hand and stroked Angel's cheek. "I love the softness of your skin, boy, and I love the way you laugh."

"I love the way you spank my ass; it feels so intimate and warm. Daddy, tell me when you knew you loved me."

With Angel's face in his groin rather than looking into his eyes, Kael felt more able to speak. "I don't really know the exact moment. You grew on me, but you started the second I met you in the shower. I looked into your beautiful eyes and then you pissed yourself and I thought, how can I kill this lovely boy? I could no more have hurt you than I could hurt Freddie's little girls or Conran's kids."

"I was so scared. I can't tell you how scared I was when you got in the shower with me, naked and so damn big. I was so scared, and I was so excited at the same time because you were the most smokin' dude I had ever seen outside of *Daddy Magazine*."

They lay quiet, Kael looking down at his boy, thinking how lucky he was. Angel gazed up at him with unadulterated adoration in his eyes. "Daddy, why did you say those things to Freddie? I know you said it was because you're an idiot, but you're not an idiot."

"I was scared."

"Daddy, I can hardly hear you," Angel said.

"I was scared. I was scared to love you, so I told myself I was looking after you for a while, keeping you safe until I sorted things out with Conran."

"Why were you scared, Daddy?"

Kael sighed. "Because the last time I was in love, it hurt too much, so I thought love had to hurt. That it would end in pain. But I was just a kid then. I wasn't taking into account that I'm older now and it's different. I've always been rather black-and-white in my thinking."

"I know; I can tell by the decor," Angel said.

"Hey!" Kael began to laugh. He grabbed Angel and pulled him up onto his chest, laughing. Angel's laughter drew more from Kael, and they rolled on the bed together, hysterical.

When at last their mirth drained slowly from them, they lay still in each other's arms. "Time for the dungeon," Kael said.

Angel's eyes opened wider, and a slow smile crossed his face. "Yes, please, Daddy."

* * *

Angel walked into the dungeon and directly over to where the hoods were lined up, three of them on wooden heads to keep their shape. He leaned down to sniff the soft leather. When he looked up, Daddy was locking the door and putting the key out of reach. His cock hardened just watching.

"Daddy, tell me the rules, your rules, not just for the dungeon, but your house rules."

Kael stood with his hands on his hips. "The rules are simple, boy. Daddy is in charge. Obey me in everything. I'll never lead you astray, and I'll never let you down. I'll always have your back." He smiled and winked. "In more ways than one."

Angel returned his smile.

"On a more detailed note. You have been keeping the flat clean, and I'm very happy with the job you've been doing. Clean everything within an inch of its life. Change the bed every day. Do the laundry. I'll help with cooking, but you do the dishes. Obey me; you'll do just fine."

Angel stood up straight, his posture perfect. "Yes, Sir, Daddy."

Kael crossed the room and stroked the leather hoods. "Everyone should have a role in a relationship, whether it's parents and children, husbands and wives, gay partners, slaves and masters."

"I agree, Daddy. A role makes you feel secure. You know your place and what's expected of you."

"That's right."

"Daddy, you making me wear that hood helped me when those men had me. They put that black bag over my head and tied it around my neck. I would have panicked and maybe vomited and choked if I hadn't had that experience. I knew I could breathe as long as I stayed calm and took it slow."

Kael tousled his hair. "Good lad. You're brave."

Angel's heart soared at the words. "I want to be braver. I want you to be proud of me, Daddy."

"I'm already proud of you. Now, aside from the spankings you like so much, what's your fantasy?"

Angel sighed. "Sir, I'm living it. I've got a daddy who's drop-dead gorgeous, who loves me, and I get to live with you and be your boy every day for the rest of my life."

Every time Daddy smiled, Angel found himself smiling in response. He loved to make his daddy happy. He loved the way his beautiful blue eyes narrowed and the way he smiled more with one side of his mouth than the other, as though some sexy, funny thought had just occurred to him. A dimple appeared in that one side, which was an amazing transformation considering that in repose his face could have been chiseled from granite, and it could be frightening despite how handsome he was. But when Daddy smiled, his face became mobile and open.

Angel wrapped his arms around Daddy's waist and dropped his head to first one pink nipple, then the other, biting gently, then sucking hard. Daddy moaned from deep down, and Angel felt Daddy's cock rise until it stabbed his lower belly.

"All right, boy, I know what you'll like." He pointed at the hoods. "Pick one, your choice."

The hoods no longer looked scary, but exciting. The one Angel had worn the first time, which left the mouth and nose free, was the first one he picked up. The soft leather melted in his hands while he looked at the next, which covered the head closely with nose, mouth, and eye openings that had snap covers to enclose the head completely. The third hood laced tightly into place over the head with no openings.

"This one, Daddy." Angel chose the hood he had worn the first time. Daddy took it and pulled it over Angel's head where he stood.

"Don't move, boy."

Angel stood completely still and utterly at peace, waiting and trusting. Daddy had saved his life. Daddy had come to rescue him. Daddy would never hurt him, but only give him pleasure, both bearable and sometimes unbearable. Either way, he wanted to experience it.

Unable to see, his acute hearing slightly muffled by the close-fitting leather over his ears, Angel knew Daddy had moved away from him, though he heard

nothing. Daddy could walk making no noise at all. In shoes or barefoot, he was as silent as a ghost.

An indescribable emptiness settled over him when Daddy was not beside him. When he returned on silent feet, Angel knew at once he was there. He felt something cool against his neck, along with Daddy's warm hands. A collar was being fitted and buckled in place.

Angel's breathing increased its pace. He was not afraid, but he could see nothing and had no idea what was coming next. The anticipation and the tension it created were so stimulating that all his senses were on alert. His cock rose. His mouth became dry, and he licked his lips.

Again Daddy was gone. Like a blind person, Angel stretched his hands out in front and felt the air. He almost laughed when his wrist was grasped.

"I'm back."

"Daddy," he whispered.

He moaned when Daddy's strong hand grasped his cock and balls and gently pulled downward. A ring of metallic coldness encircled him, trapping his cock and balls below it. The cold metal cock ring settled into place, squeezing his parts firmly, its upper edge pressing into his flesh. Angel tilted his head back, sighing with pleasure.

Anticipation and a slight but very pleasurable fear set his heart beating faster.

"I'm going to take you for a little walk on a leash now."

"Yes, Daddy."

In an instant, before he could think or know what was happening, a leash was clicked into place and Angel was tugged forward. The leash was not attached to the collar on his neck as he had expected, but to an O-ring on the cock ring. "Surprise!" Daddy said, tugging him forward. Angel had no choice but to follow. The cock ring was so snug around his cock and balls that had he not walked when he was led, the pain would have been excruciating.

Angel walked, led by his cock and balls. The first few steps he took were tentative, his hands out in front, feeling the way. But still he walked like a dancer, leading with his toes, his breath coming faster. The experience was both disorienting and very arousing.

"Daddy, please speak to me." The words tumbled out, and he almost regretted them, afraid he had shown weakness when he wanted to be strong. But when Daddy replied, the understanding in his tone brought tears pricking Angel's eyes.

"You're safe, sweetheart. Daddy will keep you safe. Walk proud. Hands behind your back."

Angel obeyed, clasping his hands at his tailbone, but even as he spoke, Daddy increased his pace, forcing Angel to walk faster and faster until he ran lightly on the balls of his feet. The more he ran, the more he trusted. Daddy would not let him trip and fall. Round and round the dungeon they went for long minutes.

At last Daddy said, "Slow down, boy."

With relief he slowed down and came to a stop, panting, his face and neck hot, wondering if he had looked elegant while running or awkward, which he would hate. Warm hands gripped his cock and balls as the leash was unfastened. "There. You did well." Daddy removed the collar from his neck.

Standing still, sweat cooling on his body, he felt Daddy's warm hands flatten against his chest, and his strong fingers and thumbs took Angel by the nipples and pinched hard. Streaks of pain shot through his chest. "Oww!"

Daddy laughed, a deep, indulgent laugh. "Brave boy. Follow me."

Angel reached out his hand, expecting Daddy to take it and lead him, but he did not; he walked away. In a moment of confusion Angel stood still, waiting for help. When none came, he focused his hearing, sniffed the air, and turned sharply to his left. Ten paces and he stopped, reached out a hand, and felt the hard wall of Daddy's chest. A little high-pitched laugh escaped him. "I found you."

The words "clever boy" said with such deep admiration made his heart soar. "Come with me."

Erect, proud, Angel followed closely on Daddy's heels, paying careful attention to the heat emanating from Daddy's body and the movement of air around them to know he followed closely.

"The torture chair." Daddy's hands on his waist guided him between the leg rests, lifting him so that he could position his buttocks on the seat. With relief he rested back comfortably against the leather. "Lift your legs, boy."

Angel positioned his legs wide on the leg rests. Daddy fastened the buckles around his ankles, securing them in place. Another belt tightened around his waist. Standing to the side, Daddy fastened his wrists above his head to the steel ring attached to the top of the backrest. Spread-eagled, vulnerable, and excited, Angel's breath came in short, sharp bursts.

"Are you frightened, Angel?"

"No, Daddy, I trust you."

"Good boy. You can ask questions if you want to, talk to me."

The smell of alcohol permeated the air unexpectedly. It was not booze but the kind used to clean things with. A cold, damp pad pressed against his left nipple, rubbing roughly, then the right. The strong fingers and thumbs of both Daddy's hands pinched hard at both tiny pink nipples at once, pulling them until Angel moaned.

"Do not try to move, do you hear me, boy?"

"Yes, Sir, Daddy."

"This is going to hurt, so I want you to be brave."

At first Angel felt only a bright, sharp pain flash through his left nipple as it was pinched and pulled extremely hard by something metallic. "This is a forceps squeezing your tit," Daddy said.

"That hurts." Angel's voice was breathy.

The pain that came next made him moan from deep in his belly. It filled his head with bright light and made his bowels feel watery. A screaming, hot pain tore through his nipple. "Daddy, I think I'm going to shit."

"No, you're not, sweetheart." The gentleness of his voice together with the endearment softened the pain and allowed Angel to accept what was happening and ride it out until all that was left was a hot throbbing sensation in his left nipple radiating out across his left pectoral. He breathed through the pain, blowing air hard between pursed lips.

"That wasn't so bad, was it?"

"No, Sir."

"Do you know what I did, Angel?"

"No, Daddy."

"I pierced your nipple and put a bar stud through it. Now I'm going to do the other one."

"Oh my God," Angel whispered. Unable to see, he had no idea what had happened. All his senses had become focused on the light in his head and the sharp edges of the pain. Nothing differentiated; it was all one.

Knowing now what was coming, his body melted into the leather seat, neither moving nor wanting to move as the procedure was repeated. Again he breathed through the intense, thick, pinching pain of the forceps pulling his nipple, followed by the screaming, white light pain of the bar stud being forced through the tender flesh. But the pain was not nearly as strong as the first time. It was almost disappointing. "Why didn't the second one hurt so much, Daddy?"

"Your body had already learned the feel of it. Our bodies are very clever that way."

The heady, harsh smell of alcohol filled Angel's nostrils again, and he tightened his stomach muscles as he waited for Daddy to wipe his tender nipples with it. Pain shot through his pectorals again when the alcohol pad was rubbed over each piercing in turn.

"Breathe through it, boy. The pain will subside after a while. It will be very sore for the next few days. Have you got control of your bowels?"

"Yes, Sir, I'm okay."

"I'm going to release you."

One by one Daddy loosened the straps holding Angel to the chair and helped him stand. He led him across the room, directing him to sit on the toilet. Blindfolded, Angel felt less inhibited than the last time and released a long breath, letting his bowels open. When he was finished, he reached behind to flush the toilet.

"Stand up."

"Daddy, I need to clean my butt."

"You're getting in the shower."

Daddy grasped him firmly by the upper arm, directing him, still hooded, into the shower. Angel heard the showerhead being lifted down from its hook. Steaming water began to rush over his legs, and he felt Daddy's hand, slick with soap, washing his backside. The combination of the warm throbbing pain in his nipples, the hot water, and Daddy's hand sliding over his buttocks and thighs made his cock harden painfully under the restraint of the cock ring. With one arm leaning high on the shower wall for support, Angel pressed his forehead into his arm, his legs spread, buttocks jutting out, letting the water and all the overwhelming sensations wash over him.

Daddy parted Angel's buttocks and slid two fingers up his rectum, the soap making the entry effortless. Twisting his finger around in a circle, he scoured Angel's rectum. "This will make you nice and clean, boy."

Daddy pulled his fingers out and turned off the water. "Stand still in the shower and wait."

Hooded, his body wracked with sensation, every inch of his skin tingling with heat and pain, Angel waited for Daddy's instruction and direction. This was where he wanted to be. This was the life he wanted. Being controlled, loved, swept up in the love and service of a man he admired and respected.

He is everything to me, and everything he does to me is good.

Again his buttocks were spread wide, and a nozzle inserted into his anus. "Is it an enema, Daddy?" Angel felt utterly at peace with anything Daddy wanted.

"No, just a bulb douche full of warm water. You should be empty. This will rinse you out." Daddy squeezed hard, sending a shot of warm water up Angel's rectum. It was no more intrusive than a shot of cum but less emotionally satisfying. The nozzle slid out, and the water poured out after it. The shower was turned on again, rinsing his legs. "Good boy, you're done. Take my hand and step out onto the towel."

Angel grasped Daddy's hand and held on as if he would never let go. "Daddy, hug me," he said on a sob. He wasn't crying; he was filled with an overwhelming sense of being loved and owned. Daddy pulled him against his body in a very tight embrace, rubbing his back and buttocks roughly. "Are you feeling upset, boy?" Daddy's voice was gentle.

"No, Sir. I'm yours to do what you want with. I want everything you want to do to me, Daddy."

Daddy kissed the top of his head. "I want to fuck your arse. I want you on the spanking horse so I can fuck you hard."

"Yes, Daddy, but can I look at my nipples? I want to see how they look."

"Yes, you can, sweetheart." Angel allowed himself to be led by the hand across the room. "Close your eyes, boy."

Angel closed his eyes against the light as the hood was peeled like a second skin from his face and up off his head. "Open your eyes slowly; the light is turned dim but still bright enough to see by."

The image reflected back at Angel made him sigh with pleasure. Naked, his skin pink and rosy from the hot water, his face flushed, he looked into his own eyes, wide and bright with excitement. Scanning his image downward, his nipples stood out, red and swollen with a silver bar stuck through each, and on the ends of the tiny silver bars were little red jewels. "They're beautiful, Daddy!"

"I bought those studs for you a few weeks ago. I've been planning to do this for a while. How do they feel?"

"Like they're on fire, Sir."

A smile transformed the raw emotion he had been feeling. The nipple rings made his long, slender body look exotic. His eyes traveled lower to the steel cock ring. "Owned," he whispered. "I'm yours, Daddy." Beside him Daddy stood, towering over him. "Daddy, this is the life I dreamed of."

"Did your dream include cleaning and cooking?"

"Yes, Sir." Angel's expression became very serious. "Service is in the details. I may have read that somewhere, I don't know, but I agree with it. It's in all the everyday little things a boy does for his daddy or master—the boot polishing, the bed making—the attention to the details. Making everything perfect for Daddy so his life is easier. That's what I want to do for you, Daddy."

Daddy pulled him close to his side and kissed the top of his head. "That's my good boy. Now get your arse over the spanking horse. I want to fuck you."

Angel walked quickly toward the leather-topped spanking horse. "How do you want me, Sir?"

Daddy came up behind him and positioned him against the long side of the horse, forcing him over it, bent at the waist. "Spread your legs wide. Now keep still." In that position the horse was slightly too high, forcing Angel onto his tiptoes. His feet arched high, but they were strong and he felt secure.

Reaching between his thighs, Daddy grasped the cock ring and pulled hard, sliding it off. The edge scraped over Angel's taut cock and swollen balls, creating a friction that almost made him orgasm. "Oh God, Daddy, that was a close call. I almost lost my stuff."

Daddy grabbed a tube of KY and squirted the gel between Angel's buttocks. He slapped them several times, hard enough to sting. Angel let the tension drain from his body until he melted against the leather horse, opening himself completely.

Fuck me, Daddy; fuck me until I see stars.

Angel waited, all his senses on alert. Now that he could see, he didn't want to. He closed his eyes against the dim light to focus on the feel and sounds of Daddy behind him. Daddy's hands flattened over his buttocks, lifting and cupping them. His thumbs spread them apart until his anus stretched. The tip of Daddy's penis bumped against his tight hole, and he sucked in a long breath, flooded with excitement, desperate to feel Daddy's cock filling him, his weight pressing him down. The intense love Angel felt for him cried out for the deepest intimacy possible. A flogging, a spanking, the agony of the nipple piercing all brought him

closer to Daddy. But being fucked, entered, joined to the man he had come to love more deeply than he thought possible was a communion without comparison.

Daddy's cock pushed against his anus, the lubrication making the breach easy, the entry slow and controlled but relentless. It went on and on. Angel began to pant. His cock hardened and pressed against the leather horse. "Daddy, Daddy." There was a desperate edge to his voice. "Sir, I can't hold back."

"Come when you want to, boy."

The kindness in Daddy's voice, the sense of being enfolded in great wings of love and protection, together with the intense excitement of the cock in his rectum, sent Angel over the edge as soon as the words were out. A surge like an electric current soared up his torso, blending with the hot, burning pain in his nipples. From his crotch it spread downward like a wave, washing through his thighs and buttocks. A stream of cum shot out on a cry that reached the ceiling and echoed back to him.

Angel's body jerked, and his legs stretched out longer still, his toes leaving the ground, held in place by Daddy's hands gripping his hips and the cock impaling his ass.

As his orgasm subsided, Daddy got into his rhythm. Angel's long, slender body hung limp, used, spent over the spanking horse. His arms dangled. He no longer supported his own weight on his toes. He became a vessel to be filled. Even though his cock lay soft, a second orgasm began to build slowly. The steady friction deep inside his rectum caused a tightening of the skin of his ball sac, and prickly gooseflesh erupted over his balls and thighs. He made no movement but lay passively being fucked.

Just as a second, softer, slower orgasm began to spread like seeping warm water through his groin, Daddy expended a deep, long cry, then pumped wildly, ramming Angel's buttocks with his hips, his cock thrusting impossibly deep. The gush of hot fluid was so comforting that Angel wanted to cry, and he orgasmed with slow, creeping tendrils of fire spreading through his body, burning deep, becoming one with Daddy.

"Daddy, Daddy." He sounded like a small, lost child. Yet he knew he would never be lost again, never be longing for love and acceptance again.

Little sniffling sobs shook his body. Then he was lifted, cradled in Daddy's arms, against his chest, held safe and secure. Daddy strode to the leather couch and sank down with Angel in his arms. Without knowing why or questioning himself, he turned his head and nuzzled the nipple closest to his face. With his lips he tugged on it. Daddy had hard muscles with no fat over them. Angel opened his mouth wide, taking in all he could, his tongue lapping at the nipple as he sucked firmly and steadily. When at length he opened his eyes and looked up, he saw Daddy gazing down at him, his expression puzzled and yet without judgment. His voice was soft when he asked, "What are you doing, sweetheart?"

"I don't know, Daddy," Angel said. "I'm sorry."

“I don’t want you to be sorry. It’s fine. It’s all right. You’re my boy. Daddy’s boy.”

Chapter Twenty-two

“Angel, be careful; you’ll end up in the water!”

Angel looked over his shoulder and grinned at Kael and his mum. “Daddy, I’m fine. Stop worrying.”

“Kael, leave him alone, love. You’re his boyfriend, not his headmaster. He’s a clever boy. He won’t do anything stupider than you did at his age.”

“That’s what I’m worried about.” Kael said. They sat on a bench near Tower Bridge watching Angel leaning over the railing to look at the fast-flowing water of the Thames. After the New Year’s party at Conran’s house, they had got out of the taxi to walk along the river.

“I don’t want to be nosy, Kael, but why does he call you Daddy?”

“Because I take care of him.” He’d known his mum would ask that at some point, but he had no intention of going into any details. They had had a wonderful Christmas together at Kael’s flat. His mum loved Angel, just as he knew she would. In the morning she was going back to Liverpool, but he wanted to tell her about a decision he had come to. “Mum, I’m not going to be traveling so much in the future. I’m going to start teaching so I can spend more time with Angel and we can visit you more often.”

She looked at him, surprised. “That’s lovely, son; what will you teach?”

“Languages,” he said. *And how to kill with your hands and to withstand torture if you get captured.*

“You were always good at that, son.”

Kael had never told his mother he worked for SIS, but she was not stupid. She knew he worked in some covert capacity, but she never questioned him. He had made the decision not to go into the field anymore, and he had insisted even when Conran pointed out that he would never be happy or satisfied unless he was putting himself in danger. As the weeks had passed, he felt more protective than ever of his boy. He would never allow Angel to be put in danger again.

“Sharon, look at me!” Angel called. He had climbed up on the railing and was waving at her. Kael leaped up and ran over to grab him by the arm. “Get down.” He leaned in close to his face. “After what I went through to get you back, do you think I’m going to let you kill yourself?”

Angel met his eyes. “So that’s what this is all about.”

“What?”

"Daddy, you have been acting like I'm made out of glass for the last few months."

"You nearly died," he whispered. "You could have been killed."

Angel grinned, wrapping his arms around Kael's waist. "Do you love me, Daddy?" he asked in a teasing voice.

Impatient, Kael took his arms, pushing him away. "You know perfectly well I love you; now stop acting like an idiot." They must both look like idiots standing beside the Tower of London in tuxedos under a bright moon. Kael looked at his mum, who was laughing at them. Angel walked over to her, grinning, and she stood up. They began walking toward home.

"Angel, what are you going to do with yourself now you can live here with Kael?"

"I'm going to be a secret agent." He laughed.

Kael hated it when Angel skirted round the truth and made jokes. Sharon laughed with him. "Will you go to university or get a job?"

"I can't go to university because I never went to high school," Angel said.

Kael had been shocked when Angel admitted that he had never gone to school after he went to live with his mother and Andresen, and nobody had made him. "We are going to work on his education first. Then he can think of a career." Kael threw Angel a look that said, *No more crap. Keep your mouth shut.*

They were exhausted by the time they kissed Sharon good night and got into bed.

Kael watched as Angel climbed in beside him. His blanket was tucked under his pillow, but he hardly ever held it anymore. "Daddy, what did you mean about my education? I took the tests for SIS, and my training is supposed to begin as soon as the holidays are over."

"I've changed my mind. I spoke to Conran before Christmas about teaching so I can stay home more with you. You're going to sixth form college to get your GCSEs. You're a bright boy. You won't have any trouble. Then you can get your A levels and go to uni."

Angel sat up. "I don't want to. Daddy, I want to do what you do. You said I'd be good at it."

"That was before you almost got killed. I've changed my mind, and you'll do as you're told. Now go to sleep."

"Daddy! I thought it was all decided. You're the best there is. You'll keep me safe."

"I can't spend my life rescuing you." He'd be sick with worry every time Angel went on an assignment. No, it would not work. He had made his decision. Angel was going to sixth form college, and Kael was going to teach. "End of conversation."

Angel curled up against his side.

"I love you, sweetheart; I can't risk losing you again."

I had no idea how lonely I was until I wasn't lonely anymore.

THE END

Loose Id Titles by Fyn Alexander

Angel and the Assassin
Precious Jade

Fyn Alexander

I grew up in Liverpool, England, with a great love of books and the English language. As an adult I moved to Canada, but I return to England to visit every few years to remind myself of my roots. I love writing and I love romance, so bringing the two together is a perfect fit. *Precious Jade*, my first published book, was inspired by a visit to the Royal Pavilion, Brighton, in early 2009. I have always had a fascination with assassins and could not resist writing about one in my new book, *Angel and the Assassin*.