



JACK L. PYKE

HIS

Love's Landscapes

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Love's Landscapes

An M/M Romance series

HIS

By Jack L. Pyke

Introduction

The story you are about to read celebrates love, sex and romance between men. It is a product of the *Love's Landscapes* promotion sponsored by the *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* and is published as a gift to you.

What Is Love's Landscapes?

The *Goodreads M/M Romance Group* invited members to choose a photo and pen a letter asking for a short M/M romance story inspired by the image; authors from the group were encouraged to select a letter and write an original tale. The result was an outpouring of creativity that shone a spotlight on the special bond between M/M romance writers and the people who love what these authors do.

A written description of the image that inspired this story is provided along with the original request letter. If you'd like to view the photo, please feel free to join the [Goodreads M/M Romance Group](#) and visit the discussion section: *Love's Landscapes*.

No matter if you are a long-time devotee to M/M Romance, just new to the genre or fall somewhere in between, you are in for a delicious treat.

Words of Caution

This story may contain sexually explicit content and is **intended for adult readers**. It may contain content that is disagreeable or distressing to some readers. The *M/M Romance Group* strongly recommends that each reader review the General Information section before each story for story tags as well as for content warnings.

This story is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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Photo Description

Two men spoon together on a white mattress with blue swirls. One man (the Dom) wears nothing but black work boots as he shapes the other man. The Dom is caught kissing at the sub's neck whilst the sub holds onto the Dom's hand. The Dom looks fully sated; the sub, with eyes closed, shackles around his ankles, and a soft smile, looks fully claimed. Both look completely at ease. Tattoos circle the sub's navel.

Story Letter

Dear Author,

He offers such a pure, unfettered submission to the man strong enough to tame him; he's the best thing that ever happened to this powerful (read: spoiled) Dom. Still... even the best of Doms aren't infallible, and this one almost lost his beautiful boy. He straightened his head out quickly enough, but by then his boy wasn't quite so forgiving. If his stubborn sub is so damn resistant to reason, drastic measures are called for... right? What choice does a desperate Dom have but to resort to a tiny bit of kidnapping, and a wee touch of restraint and, well... I'll let the author decide what else it'll take to get them to their HEA.

Please no cheating or third parties, and a HEA is a must. Beyond that, author, push our boundaries as far as you dare. And yes, you may take that as a challenge.

Sincerely,

Kim Alan

Story Info

Genre: contemporary

Tags: BDSM, medical profession (psychiatric), visual arts, fetish, abduction, captivity, tattoos, reunited

Content Warnings: dubious consent, extreme BDSM

Word Count: 25,855

Dedication

To Kim Alan and her exceedingly tempting photo and Dear Author letter. It was stunning. And thanks as ever to my dark content editor, Vicki Howard, my BDSM consultant, Dilo Keith, and all the hardworking people at the Goodreads M/M Group who put this all together.

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Chapter One

Daniel rested against the doorframe as he watched the two men work quietly in the confines of the private room. The hustle and bustle of voices across the psychiatric corridors and floors around him said visiting time was nearly over, although the tiredness in his body had already called quitting time for him ages ago. Yet with the late evening sun filtering through the window onto the younger man's face, Dan couldn't find the mind to disturb the quiet of this particular room.

Sitting there, neither of the two men spoke. Occasionally the scratch of pencil would drift over as the younger of the two men changed to a lighter shade of colour, his shift of pencil seeming as willing to change with the soft shadows that moved across the room. He sat with a sketch pad on his lap, leg drawn up, a glance flickering over every now and again to the older man who sat on the bed. That same scratch of pencil on paper was echoed by the older man, along with the same level of concentration, but where one artist worked a sketchpad, the other took to a child's colouring book. Crayons were exchanged for pencils, an experienced sweep of an artist's hand for nothing more than scribbles and scratches. The younger man didn't seem to mind. He was caught watching the changing lifelines on the older man's face, and his pencil would map each different route that he was given to follow.

Like so many visits before, frustration started to set in the older man's eyes, and the colouring book cried it out as a light blue colour became black, the tip of the crayon leaving dark imprints that dug into the food tray angled across his bed. The drawings and paintings over the psychiatric unit mapped the older man's decline, how the fine detail to landscapes had dwindled down to paint by numbers, then picture book colourings where blacks and greys were the only colour to the world. The signatures beneath the latest offerings were the younger man's, both ability to mirror talent, signature, and hazel-eyed look of the older man more than showing their relationship.

Father and son. Although time had done a good job of reversing those roles over the years and left the son doing nothing more than watch a child play out his frustrations.

"Enough." The old man folded his arms, then let his anger settle on the view outside of the windows. "No." His Scottish accent came in thick with just that one word. Dan had often had difficulty translating, even when the older man's

son had offered scraps of information on how to do just that. But the “no” carried the same sting it always did.

“Mr McKendrik,” said Dan, calling over quietly to the younger man. “Time.”

The soft hazel colouring to his eyes caught the sunlight as Tom looked over and nodded. He put his sketchpad aside, then started tidying his father's things away. When he was done, he leant over and kissed gently at his head. “No. Not now, Faither,” he repeated quietly, the Scots just as heavy on that last word, then he took time packing his own things away. His sketchpad went in a canvas folder, pencils slipped back into a specially made cloth that he could wrap up into a bundle once done. But one particular haggard HB pencil had its own slim, wooden case. It always came with Tom, and was put out at the beginning of every visit, next to his father's crayons. His father never picked it up, and Tom would slip it back into his case once visiting time was over, that same frowned look of the son becoming as frequent as the father's refusal to touch the pencil.

Tom looked after himself almost as much as he took care of his father, and it showed as he moved now. He had two years on Daniel himself, putting Tom older at thirty-four. Tanned and with the contours of his body disguised beneath loose jeans and shirt, Tom's look was also brought from earlier years spent hiking both high and lowlands, giving him that extra little bit of muscle tone. Dan's had been spent training for the stresses and strains that came with working in nurse psychiatry, but he preferred the freedom and the weathered look of Tom's to his any day. There was strength there in the slightly older man, in his body, but a flick up of a look from his sketchpad of a night as his time was disturbed carried most of his heat, and it was a heat that would have Dan on his knees every time he saw it.

With everything packed away, Tom came over and cast one last look back over his shoulder before pulling the door to behind him. “Who's on duty tonight?” he said, the strong Scottish lilt easing into almost zero accent. Dan held back a smile. Tom could chase the BBC crying back across the borders with his impression of Received Pronunciation, kilt in tow, if he'd ever wear it. A use of a softer blend of the two accents, English and Scots, could also come into play, his ability to slip between different styles a mood enhancer of its own. Dan had spent many a night privy to a softer blend of accent that was reserved solely for long nights spent in bed, Tom's breath running along the back of Dan's neck and bringing an addiction all of its own.

“Nick’s on,” said Dan as they headed down the hall towards the nurses’ station. A discreet brush of hand came against his. That was Tom’s touch: a claim in the work place, albeit quiet, but definite. “I’ve just got to finish up here,” said Dan, needing to return it but unable to as the corridor started to fill with patients and relatives. Tom’s dad wasn’t under his care, but seducing a client’s named relative and primary carer could still look awkward and unprofessional to those who wanted to cause trouble. And some did, especially when pound signs could be earned. “If it’s okay with you, I’ll meet you at yours.”

“You have a lift sorted?” Tom’s glance at the bustle of bodies around them said he understood his touch not being returned, but there were moments when gentle reminders were given to show Dan that he was Tom’s. Although his touch was very much controlled now as he held the door open for Mr Carson and his daughter to pass them by.

“I’ve got the changeover paperwork to handle,” said Dan, once they were out of earshot. “I’ll be another hour yet. I need a shower before I leave too.”

Tom shifted his art folder from one hand to the other, letting Dan go first. “Take care.” The concern was clear enough as Tom glanced back down into the psychiatric unit. “I’ll make sure something’s on—”

“A kilt, Mr McKendrik?”

“—to eat,” said Tom, giving him a raised brow, and Dan buried his smile. It was something he shouldn’t be bringing up and Tom’s look let him know that.

“You know,” added Tom, causing Dan to try and let the image go of seeing Tom in nothing but a kilt. “Management really needs to get this shit sorted with staff leaving. Upping their wages would be a damn good place to start.”

“Shush, please. I told you that in confidence,” said Dan, giving him a warning glance. Then his stomach groaned and Tom eased off.

“Food,” said Tom, patting Dan’s stomach. “You need food, boy.”

Dan nodded. “Hot, with lots of meat.”

Tom gave a wicked smile as he glanced back over his shoulder and winked at Dan. “Meat it is.”

“Tom?”

“Hm?” he called back as Dan scratched at his head. “Have you managed to book this weekend off for the Edinburgh job?” added Dan.

He got a nod as Tom reached his van. "I'm working Saturday morning, though, so lunch? Here? Before I go?"

Dan would have preferred to have been going with Tom to the Torture Garden and catch something to eat afterwards at the hotel, but... He glanced around the car park, grateful it was empty, then frowned briefly behind him. *Lunch in a psych unit.* "Heck. The art of romance is dead up here, I see," he said, only to have Tom chuckle at him again.

"My home, Kershaw," called Tom. "And make it quick. You need a reminder, I think."

Chapter Two

Tom threw the peelings from the potatoes onto the coal fire and listened to the hiss as damp skins hit hot flame. His home was one of the few that still had coal fuel. There was always the option of central heating, but he'd been brought up with coal fires, and it was the one thing he didn't feel there was any need to miss. Although his elder brother's habit of sitting there licking at the coal was the one memory he did want to try and bury.

In tune with the peelings baking on the fire, the roast made hissing noises from the oven and Tom gave it one last basting before slipping it back in. The tidying around was done and beers were cooling in the fridge. Over the years, Tom had watched Dan take care of his father plus handle all of the roughness that came with working in an understaffed psychiatric unit. He'd made it clear enough from the beginning that Dan wasn't expected to then come to his home and start looking after him too. Tom wasn't the type to need his every footstep followed and picked up after.

A key twisting in the latch had him tilting his ear in its direction. "In the kitchen," he called through to Dan, reaching into the fridge and pulling out two beers.

"Smells really good." Dan padded in from the hall. His long coat was already off, and he'd paused to hop around and take off his trainers. "We could have had this at mine." Dan winced. "Well, your other place."

After putting the beers on the unit by the stove, Tom went over and waited for him to finish shaking off the winter chill. For the past ten years, he'd rented out his father's bungalow to Dan, although they'd only been dating for nearly five years now, give or take a few weeks. The trip up from where Dan had lived in Birmingham had seemed too long, so the offer of a halfway house had been put forward. Tom had never claimed a penny of rent off Dan in all those ten years, not with Dan also caring for Tom's father at home, too, but nobody needed to know about the no-rent policy. He'd convinced himself at first that it was just to help out with Dan's living costs, and he'd made damn sure that the arrangement was kept as platonic as possible, but it had killed him not to touch Dan for so long due to work complications. That wasn't an issue now, not in private.

"Let me see," Tom said quietly.

Dan frowned for a moment, then tugged his jumper over his head and let it drop onto the radiator. He did the same with his T-shirt, and Tom caught the bruise on his left shoulder. It sat close to a tattoo of a snake that curled around the upper arm. Tom brushed the back of his hand against the bruise, wincing.

“From the seclusion room?” he asked gently. It was where patients could go if life got too stressful. But Dan also had to put them there if they didn't have the sense to see it was a safe place to rest their heads.

“Just a standard takedown with a patient in his bedroom,” said Dan, quietly. “He thought someone had stolen his change.”

“Shaun?”

Dan nodded, not breaking patient confidentiality. Tom had been there often enough to know who caused the most threat. A takedown meant physical restraint, with Dan and other staff taking Shaun to the floor and calming any internal chaos Shaun would have been going through. Dan was good at his job, and Shaun didn't mean to cause any physical damage, but it meant that Dan took a lot of hurt in the crossfire.

“Anything else I need to know about?” he asked gently. He followed the swirls of a tribal tattoo that curved over one of Dan's hips. The ink itself ran a tantalising path around to his ass cheek, and Tom traced a lazy path over the material to Dan's jeans instead, knowing each twist and turn of the ink as it hid almost playfully beneath the covering.

The sound of a clasp and zip being undone drifted over, then jeans and boxers came off. Both were then toed aside, leaving his full nakedness on display and Tom quiet as he witnessed it. The tribal tattoo marked Dan's left ass cheek, claiming the flesh, and Tom brushed a hand over it, loving the toned feel under his touch. Dan's soft sigh came over as Tom traced the small of his back, catching the smooth dip of dimple as he looked for any more physical signs of stress. No bruising darkened his hips or sides, and as Dan glanced back, Tom brushed a kiss at his shoulder. “You look tired,” he said to Dan, eventually.

Dan seemed to fight back a yawn as his hand found Tom's. “More than, Sir,” he said just as quietly, then Tom felt the softest kiss feather-play his lips. “I'm back on at six in the morning,” Dan breathed against him.

Tom traced a touch down to Dan's cock and brushed the back of his hand along the length. “In this state?” His dick was semi-interested, swelling to a

nice *good to be home, Sir, size*. A Prince Albert piercing ran through the underside of the penis shaft, the thick captive bead just asking for chaining to a post somewhere. A play along it won a soft sigh. Then as Tom withdrew his touch, Dan eased down to his knees.

“Yours, Sir.”

Tom ran his hands through Dan's hair. “Thank you,” he said, then waited for Dan to find his feet again.

“How was your day?” mumbled Dan, now level with Tom and moving in close, both hands now finding Tom's. Tom kissed at his cheek, loving all of Dan's nakedness and how he pressed into his fully clothed form, stirring more heat.

“Good, boy.” It was a distracted reply, barely spoken as he backed Dan up to the long kitchen table. A hand on Dan's shoulder made sure he eased down, and eyes and body relaxed as he fully stretched under Tom's watchful gaze.

Tom let the anticipation play, every whip and chain scenario questioned in a gentle gaze, offer of a seductive smile, and a drift of hand that moved down to a hard cock. Table-play meant serious one-on-one time; Dan knew that.

Rope came from the cupboards, thin blue Shibari rope chosen specifically to show Dan's lighter skin tone. Tom hadn't been to any specific classes to learn the art of rope bondage; the rope was simply another material to paint onto the canvas, this one being the only canvas that would ever matter. Rope to this body came as naturally as paint to palette. Tonight he needed it simple. Three turns around each thigh, then with Dan more than willing to ease the flat of his feet onto the table, three layers around each ankle. Knotting each thigh to heel, it made sure Dan kept those knees bent and his cock and balls on full display. He was already enjoying his rope time, shifting against it and letting the rope breathe out just how much he wanted to feel the burn of play. But a shake of head discouraged him from reaching down and stroking at his length. Instead more lengths of rope were looped around the table legs, then slipped around each ankle to ensure Dan would keep himself open, no matter what was done tonight.

Hands came next. Another length of rope went through a hook on the floor that Tom had screwed down by the table when he'd come home. As Dan offered his hands above his head, Tom leaned in for a kiss, albeit an upside down one, and one that tasted of all the winter wonderland outside. Giving a grin, Tom bit slightly at Dan's lower lip, loving the taste.

“Fuck, Sir,” groaned Dan as Tom lifted his head slightly, allowing Dan to kiss and nip at his throat.

“You asking, or demanding?”

“Asking...” Another bite came at Tom’s throat. “Always. Please.”

Giving a final kiss at his lips, Tom then pulled back and bound Dan’s hands above his head.

Dan always had a habit of playing his body down, blushing at how Tom sometimes liked to watch him writhe naked on the bed. As always, Dan seemed able to play even light and shadow to his advantage, how it ran over his body, shading each muscle and bringing heat to life depending on the angle he writhed within. Tom followed shadow and muscle now, letting a lighter touch trace from Dan’s jaw, over his pecs, all to come to rest on the flat of his stomach just above where Dan’s cock wept in anticipation.

A shift of stomach muscle came under his touch as Dan tried to tilt his hips up and push his cock against Tom’s hand. And when he failed, growls of frustration had Tom finding a small smile.

“It keeps you still for a reason. Make sure you do just that,” murmured Tom, watching Dan’s body cry out for more, feeling it under his touch.

Inches from where his hand lay, the Prince Albert piercing seemed to shift on the head of Dan’s cock, asking in its own way to join in the kink. Tom flicked hard at it, watching Dan jolt as the thickness of the ring was forced to move inside him.

“Fuck,” groaned Dan.

“Looking good there, boy,” said Tom, flicking it again so Dan’s ass shifted and ground into the table. “Although,” said Tom, pulling back, “not exactly the reaction I need just yet. Cool it down.”

“Huh?” Dan’s head was up off the table, trying to trace Tom’s movements as he went over to the cupboard and pulled out a black case. Taking a chair with him, Tom set the case on the seat as he took position between Dan’s legs, eyeing up the view. As he eased some thin latex gloves on, Dan let out a soft—

“Christ. Please.”

“Please?” Tom picked up some antiseptic wipes, and another jolt ran through Dan as Tom wiped his cock clean. Dan knew the signs of what was to come. “Safe word, boy. What is it?”

“Monday, Sir.”

It still made Tom smile. Mondays were enough of a passion killer for everyone, it was fitting Dan would opt for that. “Are you pussy enough to call it before I’ve even started, Brummie?” Dan was Birmingham bred, so that made him a Brummie in Tom’s eyes.

“The machine? You’ve got it, haven’t you, Sir? It’s not medical play tonight?”

“No, it’s not medical play. And you’ll know when I’m ready to use the equipment,” he said quietly, picking up a blueprint with a drawing he’d stencilled on carbon paper. Tonight wasn’t about doctor and patient, it was about lover on lover. Gently easing the print into place on Dan’s cock, he rubbed gently over it, loving how Dan’s cock danced under the pressure. Skin was already damp, and the drawing itself transferred over with next to no effort.

“Practice as well for the Edinburgh job too, Sir?”

“Not quite,” he murmured, his concentration set.

“Please...” breathed Dan.

“Seems your favourite word tonight, boy.” Tom smiled, and after resting the blueprint to one side, he studied his work.

The single link to a chain matched the four others he’d ringed around Dan’s cock over the years. Each ring had a specific significance, with tonight’s being no different. All links were small, discreet, not quite circling Dan’s cock in true collared fashion. That would come next year. A touch of petroleum came next, just a slight sheathe to cover the link, although from the soft groans and moans off Dan, anyone would have thought he was being fully lubed and was about to be jacked off to high heaven.

“Calm it,” said Tom, quietly, as he reached back into his case.

The shader tattoo machine was already set up. Usually a liner could be used, but for an ink job this small, and on the cock in particular, the shader offered less trauma to the skin. The final touches to the ink machine were set up, and he leaned down, only to have Dan tense and hiss before the needles touched skin.

Tom kissed at the base of Dan’s cock. “How many times have I inked you here, boy?”

“Four, Sir,” mumbled Dan.

“How many times have I inked your body in general?”

“Eight,” Dan mumbled quietly. “Hip, ass, around the navel, arm...”

“Did you trust me with each of those?”

“Fuck, yes.” Hips arched up into his kiss, and he feathered a light touch on Dan’s inner thigh. Then as Tom flicked the machine on, allowing the coils to work the needles, vibrating slightly in his hand, he pressed the flat of it against Dan’s cock, letting him feel the vibration.

“Christ, yes,” drifted down from Dan, and he gripped the ropes, pulling hard, angling his hips up so his cock shifted against the tattoo machine, the needles missing his scrotum by inches.

The needles looked worse than they actually were, coming out a good three and a half millimetres. But resistance from Dan’s cock and a very careful hand would see it kept safely within the dermis. Tom knew his craft, especially when it came to marking Dan—always when it came to marking Dan.

Dan seemed to naturally calm and control his body, knowing Tom needed him to be still now. Then as the first touch of the needles came, Dan bit into his shoulder, groaning.

“All that fancy art training, Sir,” breathed Dan, adding a chuckle, “and, Christ—if only the father could see the son work his art now.”

Tom grinned as he wiped away excess ink, then held Dan’s cock. The dancing it was doing wasn’t helping.

“Please tell me I’m not the only one who gets hard having you tattoo their dick,” groaned Dan. “It’s embarrassing, Sir.”

“No. It’s not embarrassing: it’s you, and I love how you react,” said Tom, now well into shading the link, “and despite popular belief, I don’t ink that many cocks. A few dickheads, but not that many cocks.”

“Only mine?”

Tom shifted his touch, gently tugging at Dan’s balls. He didn’t have to do that, but he liked the look of Dan’s heat too much to let his cock soften. His dick didn’t need to be hard for the ink job, but—“Only you,” he mumbled, and it was almost lost to the soft vibration of the tattoo machine.

Dan was back to bruising his arm, eyes screwed shut as he was left panting on the table. Tom kept flicking a look up to him, keeping a close watch for any

stresses that said it was beyond even his pain-pleasure levels. Dan looked more than fuckable, but Tom controlled his own need. The change from jeans to loose jogging bottoms was done to deliberately take into account just how much he needed to keep a cool head and unconfined cock. One slip into the sub-dermis of the skin and major damage would be done. So Tom controlled his breathing and kept a very steady hand and heartbeat with how the needles played his sub's cock.

“Done,” he said eventually, easing back and looking at how the links almost joined together. He kissed just below the artwork and Dan groaned and writhed into the rope.

“Happy anniversary for next month,” Tom murmured quietly, knowing this had to be done early to really enjoy their time together in a few weeks, “and all the sappy shit that comes with it.”

“Fuck.” Dan was still hard as he writhed into the rope, now given full permission to move. “Love the sappy shit that comes with this, Sir,” he breathed. Eyes were still screwed shut and a heavy blush touched his cheeks.

Tom cleaned away his things, making sure he took care of Dan's cock first, grinning at how he was lost to the havoc riding his shaft in the wake of the needles. The petroleum jelly would make sure he healed quicker, as would a good ink job in the first place. Then Tom eventually settled back between Dan's legs and took in the full view.

He had a thing for a fine ass, and Dan's offered such a pale and toned ride—a gorgeous small tight hole, any offer of finer hair shaved away. Tom swiped his thumb against the sensitive hole, watched it shiver, then eased in with a finger, not stopping until he was knuckle deep. He made it hard, fast—quick, his fingering hitting prostate and ensuring Dan fought and cried on the table.

The redness around Dan's cock tattoo would be driving him wild to reach down and touch, to soothe, but the need to come would also have him stroking roughly along the shaft, overruling all sense for a recovery without trauma to the skin—hence the rope, and how they were doubled at every turn to stop him playing. Tom would let him come, eventually, but it wouldn't be through any touch to his cock.

One finger became three, and Dan shouted Tom's name, forcing Tom to cup his own cock.

“Sir... fuck. Please. Let me come.”

He pulled his touch free, forcing out a grunt off Dan, then Tom gripped at Dan's hips and dragged his ass a little more over the edge of the table. No condom needed, Tom eased his jogging pants over his hips and teased his tip against Dan's hole, loving how the thickness tapped to gain access to such a tight muscle. Not waiting on ceremony, he pushed in, feeding his cock through all of that first resistance that Dan's ass offered.

Dan was tight, slipping over Tom's cock like the tightest silk—the ultimate return bondage, and Tom took him hard down to the root, now up on his tiptoes as he ground in deep.

“Christ, fuck me hard, please,” cried Dan.

Tom gripped onto Dan's balls, using them to pull him in as he took him rough. With each hard slap of hips into ass, the table tried to scramble away in protest under the onslaught.

Dan shouted a warning, stomach muscles crumpling in as the first traces of his come added its own paleness to his stomach. Seeing it only made Tom fuck him harder as he cried his name, making sure the remainder of the come was fucked out of them both with no touch to Dan's cock.

“Fuck... fuck,” cried Dan, back arching.

Breathing hard and fast, Tom came down on Dan, his cock still deep in his ass and crying out its own release deep into him.

“Sir?”

He looked to see Dan watching him. His breathing was just as heavy, just as hard, and Tom kissed, then licked at the pull in of Dan's pale stomach muscles. Whatever his sub was going to say was given up as he dropped his head back on the table, groaning out contentment. Tracing a gentle touch up Dan's thigh, Tom then found a towel that came from his case next to him and started to towel them both dry. He kept his cock in Dan for as long as possible, loving the feel of being in him, before he then regretfully eased out and started untying him.

He took his time, pausing while tasting Dan's lips, or gently biting at his hip, an inside thigh—it didn't matter where, so long as Dan knew that where he lost the safety of the rope, Tom was still there.

“Kay,” said Dan after he was pulled up to sit on the table. “That was... kinky.” He scratched at his hair, roughing it up some more, sounding as though his head was in bed already, he just needed his body to follow.

“Exhausted?” whispered Tom, moving in to kiss at his neck. Dan rested against his shoulder and nodded.

“So bad, Sir.”

“Hm? All taken here too, huh?” He brushed the back of his hand over Dan’s cock, again catching the piercing and making Dan jolt a touch. As he did, a bite came at Tom’s shoulder, causing shivers.

“Mm,” breathed Dan. “Fully spent, sore, and more than taken.”

“Then let’s say, if I asked you to go and choose a riding crop, you would feel the sting from it a little more across your inner thighs now?”

A hand found Tom’s neck as Dan eased away a touch.

“The kilt comment?” said Dan.

Tom pursed his lips, nodded, then saw Dan try to bury a chuckle.

“What have I asked you not to do?” said Tom.

“Ask about the kilt. Not in public, not in private.”

“And what did you do?”

That hand on his neck slipped down to Tom’s side, all to join the other and start gently digging and pulling at Tom’s ass. He was asking for mercy.

“I tried to go kink in kilt.”

“Aye,” said Tom. “You wanted to go kink with the kilt.”

“Go fetch the riding crop, should I?” Then there was the softest chuckle.

“Problem?”

Dan stopped palming at Tom’s ass. “Maybe now’s probably not the best of times to mention what I’ve got you, Sir.”

Tom smiled and kissed at his shoulder. “The art of romance... You’ve got another kilt, haven’t you?”

Dan shook his head a little too quickly, then—“Wouldn’t do that. I mean, it’s our anniversary, not just a special time to spoil the sub, but—”

“But?”

“But buying one is just showing how much your ass is in my thoughts all day, is all, Sir. Surely you can’t punish me for having you constantly in my thoughts?”

Giving a sigh, Tom eased back a touch.

“The crop?” said Dan.

“The biggest one you can find. Maybe accompanied by a gag. Anything just to—”

The heat of a kiss stopped him, and Tom returned it, pulling Dan in, tongue fighting tongue as he gripped at his hair.

“Thank you,” breathed Dan against his lips. “For always showing how romance isn’t dead, true rough Scot’s style.”

Tom let his kiss turn gentle. “Always, boy,” he said quietly. Whether Dan was angry, sad, or just downright playing up this sexy part, mercy could be so easily won from the best. The soft smile there in Dan’s eyes called every Dom out within fifty paces on that flaw too. And with Tom...

He caught the soft growl coming from Dan’s stomach. “We eat first.” He looked him up and down, also catching the “gotcha” fire in Dan’s eyes. “Then I might just find the biggest butt plug to go with that crop,” he added coolly.

Dan tried to make his smile fade, but his whisper of *Promise, Sir?* was still caught there in it.

“You think you’ll enjoy it once I turn my hand to punishment?”

Dan eased away from the cheek quickly enough and pushed off the table. A kiss found Tom’s mouth again despite the punishment that was coming up.

“Gonna miss you this weekend, Sir.”

Tom slipped an arm around Dan’s waist. “I’m back Sunday evening.” He gave a heavy sigh. “Sunday morning, if I can.”

Dan nodded, then pushed away a touch. “I have ways to welcome the weary back.” The look lowering his eyes as he traced down Tom’s body was already listing them.

“Aye?” Tom raised a brow. “Then come tell me about them, lad, and I might just make it a small butt plug.”

A shine came to Dan’s eyes. “Well...”

Chapter Three

Having allowed a good few days for the redness on Dan's tattoo to ease, come Saturday morning, Tom woke on the settee with his arms wrapped around Dan. Content that he was healing as he should, Tom pulled Dan's nakedness snugly into him, loving the ass-to-groin contact. Last night, a quilt had been dragged down from upstairs just before they'd settled down with a movie. Dan was exhausted from the heavy work week, but that wasn't obvious this morning. From the flicker of flame in the hearth, Dan had already been up at some point to get the fire going. In the distance, the sound of a coffee machine bubbled away, and the fresh smell of coffee beans added to the familiar scent of the fire. After hanging up his tattoo machine for paint and airbrushes, it was always the same when he worked body art at different venues away from the tattoo studio. Despite Tom not needing it, Dan made sure that the day was started off with fresh coffee and a fried breakfast as the warmth of the fire was taken in.

The alarm hadn't gone off yet, but he had that feeling that it was due. He still had half a morning's work to get through at the tattoo studio before heading to Edinburgh. Dan wasn't due in at the psychiatric unit until dinnertime, so for now it was just good to feel Dan against him for as long as possible before work took them both away.

Dan was awake too. He'd been awake for a while now, but both seemed unwilling to disturb the quiet of the morning and the distance it would bring.

Giving a soft sigh, Dan eventually eased around, making sure Tom found his back with how his body came down and blanketed his. A sleep-filled kiss touched Tom's lips a moment later.

"Morning, Sir," mumbled Dan, his hands sneaking under Tom. It was a distracted greeting as bodies started a quiet bump and grind greeting all of their own.

"Morning, bonnie bairn," he murmured back, hands sliding down to Dan's butt and encouraging a little more contact as he pushed and pulled at his toned ass.

Dan sucked in a breath, head bowing as he dipped his hips hard into Tom's. "Say that again, Sir," he said quietly. "Please."

He did, and kisses traced down his neck, to a nipple. "I'd like to touch you, Sir."

Tom smiled. "You're already doing that, boy."

Dan kissed lower, and Tom stretched his body as a kiss then came at his shaft. The softness of a brown gaze found his. "One for the road," he said quietly, then a rough bite came at Tom's inner thigh, Dan taking time to stake his own claim as his hands slipped under Tom's ass, almost lifting him up into the hunger.

Tom found the softness of Dan's hair, just stroking through it. "You're still on restricted touch because of the ink job on your cock a few days ago—" *Christ*. A hand massaged his balls as the fine wet silk to Dan's mouth slipped over his tip. "You're too sore," he managed to mumble, back arching into the slow burn slicking his cock.

His dick thudded against his abs as Dan looked up. The same kiss went to Tom's stomach where pre-come mapped his own need, then another kiss came at the root of his cock. "All you this morning, Sir." Fingers traced down to Tom's ass as a nip went to his sac.

"Christ." Tom eased an arm over his face, almost hiding from the heat that rushed up from his groin. Dan worked long strokes down his shaft, occasionally swiping his thumb over the slit to catch the pre-come. But it was how he brushed fingers against his hole, just suggesting at the intrusion, that had Tom groaning. He didn't bottom often, usually hating how long it took his body to get used to having a cock in him. Dan knew that, and kept his touches just to enquiring nudges against him, ones that had Tom gripping at the arm of the settee and fighting the need to flip Dan over and fuck him senseless.

"Still hurts to touch my cock, Sir," said Dan, and Tom heard the smile that played across his sub's lips. "I need it gentle... slow. But not until tomorrow."

"Tease me, boy?" Tom shifted to his side, making sure Dan went with him and stayed there level to his cock. He took control, a grip to Dan's hair making sure he stayed still for every hard pace he gave into his sweet mouth. The position gave a gorgeous view of his cock slipping between lips, and Tom continuously wiped at Dan's cheek, feeling him take what he had to offer. It wasn't a time to play around, and Dan met every hard taste with a grip to Tom's balls. Tom came hard and lost track of how Dan swallowed everything he had to give.

After a few moments, Tom came down enough to realise that Dan had eased up level to him and was coming in for a kiss.

He claimed one before Dan touched down. "Morning, bonnie bairn," said Tom softly, tasting himself. "I can't touch you until tomorrow," said Tom, giving a gentle nibble at Dan's ear. "But I will." He made the promise clear enough. "Then I'll fuck you until you can't cry out my name."

Dan pulled his body in closer, seeming to want to disappear inside and really mess about. "Say that again, Sir," he murmured. "Please."

The alarm clock beat Tom to it, and they both chuckled, Dan now dropping his head to Tom's shoulder.

"I'll lay some items out by the bed for you to use tonight," said Tom, kissing at Dan's shoulder. "Love how you touch yourself when I'm not here, Dan."

Dan seemed to shiver. "Let me come, please?" And he seemed to draw closer, wrapping his arms around Tom and saying how he needed to come with how his hard shaft rode Tom's thigh.

"Sore cock, Dan. Leave it alone, or I'll give you another sore ass to match it. C'mon." He smacked at Dan's ass. "I need to get to work. I'll be back in time to pick you up for the psych unit and go grab some lunch. I need to let my faither know I won't be here."

"I'll get your case packed."

Tom frowned at him. "It's already done. But can you sort out my personal art case for this afternoon?"

Dan eased into a smile. "You're going to stay around long enough to do some drawings with him?"

Tom nodded.

"You wouldn't be stalling for time, now would you, Sir? I mean, you do want to go to Edinburgh tonight?"

Tom stole another kiss. "Less of the cheek," he murmured, although there was a truth to Dan's words. He really didn't want to miss home tonight. Dan made leaving hard.

Chapter Four

Any thoughts of lust were knocked and bumped out of Dan by the time they reached the psychiatric unit at dinnertime. Tom's van wasn't the most comfortable of rides, leaving Dan rubbing at his ass as he climbed out. Tom had picked the van up on the cheap, needing the space in the back for his art supplies, both for his personal use and those needed at the tattoo studio.

Tom had pulled around the back of the psychiatric unit, avoiding the staff car park and whoever might be watching. He knew Tom hated hiding what they had as much as he did, but give the staff half an inch, and they'd make damn sure his job would go out from underneath him for sleeping with a client's son. Being gay didn't come into it, but seemingly buttering up the son to get at the father's inheritance would see someone stick the knife in somewhere. So they kept to parking around the back, away from the main staff and relatives' car park.

"I'll go and see to the staff changeover," said Dan, shutting the van door, then reaching over the bonnet and passing Tom a bag with some sandwiches. Neither of them were fancy eaters, just a simple ham salad sandwich, some Coke, and a few bags of crisps, and they were happy.

Tom took it off him, then ducked back in the van and pulled out his art case; he'd leave from here in an hour.

"You manage to get free," said Tom, now looking over the van, "try and find me."

Dan nodded. "The ham and tomato are mine. Don't let your father get hold of them." Checking he had his beeper on and that it was working, he headed on in after winking at Tom.

Baz, his shift manager, was in the staff room, already running through the change of shift, and Dan took the medication sheet off him and started to thumb through it.

"We've got three clients on fifteen minute checks," said Baz, finishing up writing on the board. "No rest for the wicked, eh?"

"Heard that," said Dan, and he smiled over before making his way to Chris McKendrik's room. Dan had clocked on early, so he had a few minutes to spare before he started his rounds upstairs.

The art equipment had already been set up but Chris didn't seem interested, looking a little on edge. His back was pressed against the wall, watching Tom as he picked up the sketchpad off the floor.

Giving a frown, Dan went in. It looked like Chris had knocked the pad away. "How's it going, Mr McKendrik?" He flicked a look at Tom.

"Said you'd keep him out," said Chris, arms folded, gaze not moving from Tom. "He needs to get out. Not want him here."

"It's Tom," said Dan, keeping his voice calm and friendly but aware of just how quiet Tom had fallen. "You remember Tom, don't you, Chris?"

"Not my Tom." Chris pointed to the door, and Dan looked back with a frown. "That's Tom. He's a good boy." Nobody stood by the door.

Tom wouldn't look at either of them. He'd been lost so many times now in his father's eyes, his gaze said he didn't know the old man sitting there anymore than the father knew the son at that moment.

"How about I get you a drink, Chris?" said Dan, gently. "I can throw in some toast too, if you're hungry?"

"Not hungry. Tired. Need sleep." Chris pointed at Tom. "He has to go when I need to sleep. You said so."

"It's okay, Faither," said Tom, finally glancing back. "I didn't mean to stay so long, I—" His mobile phone cut him off, and he tugged it out of his jeans, holding up his hand in apology to Dan. Dan was already cringing. There was a firm "No mobile phone" policy for a reason. And in reply, a shout went up from another room, followed by Baz's call of "I got it."

Tom winced another apology, then he came over, mouthing, "Five minutes. Just keep an eye on him for five minutes with my art material, yeah? This one's about the venue tonight."

Tom knew the no-phone rule better than anyone, and with it being left on, it showed Tom's concentration was slightly off track with going away for the weekend.

Chris seemed to sense it, watching Tom's every move and following his footsteps out of the room, even craning his neck to make sure he was gone, then—"Toast?" he said to Dan, a smile lightening up his big face. "Cut into squares?" He counted on his fingers. "One, two, three, four. Four squares." He

tried to count backwards and frustration set in his eyes when he found himself stuck on three.

“Four squares,” said Dan, giving a smile. “Coffee or juice to wash it down?”

“Juice. Black with currants.”

“Okay, bud, blackcurrant it is. I’ll—” His beeper went off at his side and, after giving a glance down and catching the code, he shifted from Chris’s room and made it up to the second floor. In Shaun’s room, Baz was on his knees behind Shaun, trying to get him to choke something out. Two other staff members had already made it in there, and Dan turned two more away now there were enough on scene.

“He’s chewed the protecting covering off the pipe in the bathroom,” said Baz, quickly, flicking a look over.

“It’s nontoxic,” said Dan as the call came up that the ambulance was on its way. He went on through to the bathroom and picked the pieces up. Everything here had protective covering to stop this, but you couldn’t put protective covering on protective covering. By the time he made it back into the main room, Shaun had calmed down a little, his face not looking so red.

Dan went over and crouched by him. “It’s okay, mate.” Sweat covered the younger man’s face. “We’re just going to get you looked at over at the hospital and—”

“Wankers,” cried Shaun, before choking again. “Some wanker’s taken my coins. I keep them safe in there.”

Dan wiped the blond hair from Shaun’s face, the heat obvious under his touch. “I know, I know.”

Paramedics pushed their way through into the room, and Dan moved out of their way.

“I’ll go with him,” said Baz. “Can the rest of you fill in your end of the paperwork?” he said quickly, stepping out of the way when a wheelchair came in. Dan nodded. “He’ll need an X-ray,” said Baz, his gaze going between him and the paramedics. “Get in touch with the named relative too, and let them know he’s being taken to hospital.”

“Will do,” said Dan, handing Baz the plastic bag with the bits.

He remembered Chris's toast and juice at the last moment and cut back to the staff room. The paperwork came first, then a call to Shaun's named relative. A fax also went to the hospital in question, just noting all of Shaun's medication.

With life settling a little more, Dan put some fresh bread in the toaster and finished making the juice. A coffee for Tom came next, just to make sure he had something warm before he left. They were lifted onto a tray; then he headed back for Chris's room.

Again talking drifted over, and Dan eased in, grateful to see Tom back in the room and talking to his dad. Tom always came back no matter how much it hurt, there was always that patience there, that understanding that Tom could walk in on a different day, and Chris would know exactly who he was.

Yet when Dan saw them, Chris was shuffled further up into the corner, knees pulled up tight as he wrapped his hands around them, hugging them closer.

"Chris?" he said, going over. "Are you okay?"

"Out, he needs out now," said Chris, not taking his gaze off Tom. Tom was crouched by the bed. With the covers pulled up, he was looking for something under there.

"Didn't lost it," Chris said quickly, head banging gently against the wall. "Told him. Gave it Good Tom. Good Tom took it."

"Took what?"

"Faither—" Tom gave a hard sigh, tossed the covers back into place, then got to his feet. "Where...?" He shrugged, looked at his dad, then wiped a hand over his face. "Where have you put it?"

"Tom?" Dan rested the tray on the bedside unit. "What's gone on?"

Tom flicked a look over but didn't really see him, more through him as he moved Dan aside and took hold of his art case. Half of it was already on the bed, the rest of the spare paper and crayons he'd brought for his father messing up the covers and causing Chris to scurry further into the wall.

"Tom?" Dan pulled at his jacket only to find Tom pull away.

"He lost it," mumbled Tom.

"Lost what?"

"*The pencil*," snapped Tom, going back to the bed and ramming his things in. "Fuck's sake." The zipper closed on the art case. "Five minutes. I needed him watched for five minutes, Dan."

Dan glanced at the bed and noticed he hadn't seen the pencil that was always tucked away in the slim wooden box. "Chris," he said quickly, going over and shifting the covers about. Tom's dad had used it through the years for special occasions: Tom's birth, Christmas holidays, days at the beach. He'd given it to Tom when he'd felt his mixed dementia slipping in, and Tom had taken over, only using it on special occasions too, the last being the sketch of the link that was tattooed to his cock. "What did you do with the pencil, Chris? You didn't chew on it, did you?"

Chris shook his head. "Tom," he said, coming out from under the covers he hid beneath. "Gave it Tom. Told Tom's mum that little Tom—"

"*There is no fucking little Tom, Dad.*" Tom gave a groan, tugging the art case off the bed. "I'm Tom. I've always been Tom. I—"

Chris was suddenly off the bed, not looking as though he meant to go for Tom; Tom just stood in his way. Dan saw the signs as soon as the older man shifted, and he managed to catch Chris by the arm. As Tom came in to help, Chris cried out, swinging a fist at Dan.

"Fuh—" The thump of fist caught another target, and Tom was forced back a step now it split his lip. "Shit."

"Has to get out," shouted Chris as Dan tried to keep him still. "Get him out."

"Tom." As he put a hold around Chris that soaked up his struggles, Dan's heart went out to Tom seeing his split lip. "Wait outside. Okay? I need—"

"*Out, out—out,*" cried Chris over and over again.

"Tom, please."

Tom gave Dan and his dad the strangest look, then wiping at his lip, he turned away and left.

"Easy, easy," soothed Dan in Chris's ear. "He's gone. You're on your own, and in your own room. See?"

Breathing heavy and almost clinging onto him, Chris nodded, although his gaze never shifted from the door.

“Tom,” said Chris, now edging back towards the bed. “Gave it little Tom. Wouldn’t listen. Wouldn’t just listen.”

“Okay, okay,” said Dan, helping him back onto the bed. After waiting for signs that Chris’s breathing was returning to normal, he took hold of the tray and gave Chris the toast and juice. “Hungry, right?”

Chris nodded, just the once.

“Okay,” said Dan and he laid them out. “We don’t usually bring food into the bedrooms but—”

Chris gave a huge smile. “Dan said it’s okay for me.”

He nodded and returned the smile, seeing him relax a little more. “I’ll check back in a minute. I just need to see if Tom’s okay. Then find his pencil. What we don’t do is hurt people who visit, though, do we?”

“Accident.” Chris nodded, but he was already lost to the first bite of his toast as he sat there munching slowly at it. “Sorry.”

“You need to say that to Tom, okay?”

“Sorry, Tom.”

Dan gave a small smile. “When he’s here, Chris.”

“Oh-kay,” but that was lost to how he took a long drink of juice. Giving a frown, Dan glanced back to the door. After heading out into the corridor, he went over to where Tom stood resting against the nurses’ station. “Hey,” Dan said quickly, seeing how he rubbed at his head. “Let’s get you into the medical room and—”

Tom pulled away as he tried to take a gentle hold on his arm. “Five minutes,” said Tom. “I asked you to look after him for five minutes. I asked—”

“There was a call out,” said Dan, not understanding why Tom shifted away from his touch.

“There’s always a call out, there’s always—” Tom went to snap something else, then seemed to lose his thread of anger, looking more torn as he wiped more blood from his lip. “He lost it, Dan.”

Dan needed to ease the hurt playing in Tom’s eyes, both from taking the blow and the loss of the visual history surrounding both pencil and case. “We’ll find it,” he said quietly, but his concentration was more on the cut. “Your dad doesn’t know what he’s doing. You know that.”

Tom shrugged. "But he does like the occasional dig. It's why I never leave him on his own with my artwork. *You* know that and..." He bit it back, looked away. "Five minutes, Dan," he said eventually. "I only asked for five minutes of your time."

"You have it 24/7," he said quietly, but then he was suddenly aware that Baz was watching them from behind the nurses' station. "I'll find the item that was taken and get it to you as soon as possible, okay, Mr McKendrik?"

"McKendrik." Tom frowned a touch, something working there in his eyes, then—"My name's fucking Tom. It's been Tom to you for the past ten years, or do you have problems remembering as soon as you come here too? How fucking convenient, that. Well run along, then; go sort your priorities out. I'll hide out in the car park until you need me to nurse your wounds, shall I?" Saying nothing else, Tom turned and headed for the exit, leaving Dan frowning, then shifting to follow. "Hey—"

"Dan." From over by the nurses' station, Baz shifted his head towards the staff room. "A word, please."

His heart sinking, Dan was forced to change direction and follow Baz through to the staff room. Tom had understood. Over all of the years Dan had been working here, Tom had understood the complications of falling for a patient's son. Dan had meant no disrespect. In fact, *Mr McKendrik* was the agreed safety address that would warn Tom staff was around. That had been the first time that Tom had ever given any indication that he had an issue with keeping their relationship private and away from work. But then today had been the first time that his father had hit Tom, and it seemed a sharp reminder for both of them. It's what he'd seen in Tom's eyes, not hurt for Tom himself, but the fear that this is what happened here sometimes. Dan knew his safety worried the hell out of Tom, and part of him was gutted that for the first time when Tom had been caught in the crossfire, he hadn't been there to brush the back of his hand over the hurt he'd seen. Calming Chris down had been the priority. Any other time, any other moment, Tom would have understood that, but with the loss of the pencil and its case...

"Take a seat," said Baz as the door shut. The staff room was empty and Dan made his way over to the leather settee and sat down.

He frowned at Baz. "I thought you went to the hospital with Shaun?"

A chair was pulled over from the table and Baz sat down by him. "Dr Stanshead went with him," he said, rubbing at his eyes. "She owed me from a few weeks back."

“Ah,” said Dan, easing back and closing his eyes.

“Dan—”

“About Tom, I’m sorry—”

“Don’t be,” said Baz, “it gets tough on relatives and we’ve both known Tom a long time. He doesn’t snap easy. What happened?”

Dan told him and Baz frowned. “Are they both okay?”

Dan nodded, but it was all he could manage.

“I heard that Chris had lost something, too. What was it?”

“Tom’s pencil. The one in the wooden case.”

“Oh...” said Baz, and he fell quiet for a good few moments. “We’ll do a search, see if we can find it, yeah?”

“Chris said he gave it to little Tom,” said Dan, wiping a hand over his face, but not finding the courage to ask Baz just what else he’d heard.

Baz raised a brow. “We don’t allow children into the unit.”

Dan nodded and Baz sighed heavily. “Okay, c’mon, let’s go take a look. We’ll see if Chris has calmed down and can remember. Then we’ll make sure young Mr McKendrik is really okay. I think you need to know that more than anyone.”

Dan looked at him sharply, but Baz was already over by the door. “None of my business, Dan,” he called back over his shoulder. “It’s not even this unit’s business. You’re damn good at your job.”

Chapter Five

Dan looked down at his mobile phone as he sat outside Tom's. Baz had given him a lift during dinner time break. A part of him had hoped that Tom had cried out of going up to Edinburgh, but seeing no van sitting there on his drive now, Dan closed his eyes, his grip tightening on his mobile phone.

C'mon on, Tom. Call.

The frustrating part for Dan was the pencil. If Tom had stayed around for just a few minutes, just popped into the room next to his father's and spoken to Mrs Johnson's daughter...

Lizzie had been sitting in there talking to her mother, and conversation had drifted around to Lizzie's youngest boy. Dan had taken her to one side and asked if she'd seen Chris at all. He'd got a nod, then Lizzie had pulled the slim wooden case from her handbag.

"Said my Thomas should have this," she'd said, and Dan had bit back a sad smile. Lizzie never brought her little boy with her, but she was always talking about him to Chris, how he was into drawing matchstick men. So true to his words, Chris had given the pencil to little Tom, albeit at the expense of hurting his own. "I was going to find Chris's son," Lizzie had added afterwards. "I remember Tom mentioning that his mother had bought it for his father just before she'd left them."

Lizzie had handed it over with every apology going for not getting it back sooner. Since then, Dan hadn't been able to call and let Tom know, not with how his rounds had been delayed. He thought, maybe hoped, that Tom would have called him, but since his phone had remained quiet, Dan had come over to Tom's house, hoping to catch him here. There would have been no peace of mind for Tom not having found it; for the past ten years he'd brought it with him on his visits to his father, not so much for his father to use, but just his quiet reminder that he wouldn't leave his dad like his mother had when the dementia had really set in.

But as Dan got out of the car and looked at Tom's house, even Tom's fully shuttered windows seemed to want to deny the rest of the world's existence.

Giving a sigh, he stopped by the front doorstep and looked down at the slim wooden case he held in his other hand. For the trouble it had caused, the pencil slept safely enough, its gnarled edges still just as gnarled. Dan smiled, running

his fingers over it. He'd seen Tom take this out only a few times over the years, mostly sketching some of the BDSM positions Tom had put him in.

Slipping the mobile phone under his arm, he then reached into his pocket and pulled out a piece of paper. After a moment, he used it to blanket the pencil. Tom had left, and he marked the loss the only way he knew how.

His artistic skills were probably closer to Chris's: no higher than a kid colouring a book, but he'd drawn the single link to a chain, shading it the best he could, finishing it off with the single message:

Missing, link...

Him and Tom, they were parts of the same chain, and it meant he felt Tom's hurt no matter in which city or within which bed he tossed and turned.

He left the slim case just inside the porch. The door was always kept open for the morning paper, and making sure it was shut behind him, Dan turned away and tugged his phone free of his arm.

Even though the phone was quiet now, Tom was due to call around seven and let him know that he'd arrived and was about to start work. There were a number of reasons why Tom hadn't answered Dan's calls; just like with the psychiatric unit, Tom could be working: setting up at the venue, talking to clients, working body art, which is why they had these designated times to talk to each other. And Tom had never missed one of those calls in all the years he'd known him.

Chapter Six

The call came in the early hours of Sunday morning, jolting Dan awake not long after he'd finally managed to find some peace in sleep. Hearing the familiar ring tone, he instantly eased the bedcovers off him, flicked the lamplight on, and picked up, as panic hit. "Tom?"

A lot of commotion came through on the other end: the heavy bass of music, laughing, talking—breathing—

"Tom?" he tried again, his finger going into his ear and his raised voice setting off a neighbour's dog.

There was more laughter, Tom's, then—"Letting you know I got here." Dan frowned as the merriment died from his voice, then looked at the time that flashed on his bedside unit. "You're a bit late doing just that," he said quietly.

"Aww," said Tom, but it was cut off as he spoke to someone else on the other end. "Yeah, beer. Thanks, Ian."

Dan eased his knees up, feeling the chill a little more now. Ian?

"Work," said Tom, now obviously back with him. "You know what it's like, right? I was distracted."

"Tom—"

"I'll be back Sunday night, about eight." Thoughts drifted back to how Tom had said he'd try and make it Sunday morning. "I'm drinking with some friends," added Tom as if catching on to his silence, but the slurred voice and lack of him not giving a shit about how he had walked and not phoned to talk was clear enough.

Rubbing at his head, Dan pushed away the niggling concerns that edged in. "Sir, how's your lip? I—"

"Tomorrow," said Tom, and he even sounded like he was already where he needed to be as he laughed and spoke to someone on the other end, then—"If you can manage it, be at my house when I get back, yeah? Wear an overcoat if you have to."

And that was it; the line went dead, leaving Dan staring into the light of the bedroom.

The second call came just a few hours later. Rubbing tiredly at his eyes, Dan reached over and picked up. "Tom?" he managed. The daylight outside was enough to lighten the shadows in the bedroom. "That you?"

"Who the fuck else are you expecting to call at this hour?" Something else was said from the other end, some shouts, a hand over the phone, a muffled "Fuck you," then—"you still there?"

Dan stilled in the covers, now fully awake.

"Dan."

"I'm here. What's going on?"

"Good. Who the hell were you expecting to call, Dan?"

Dan frowned. "Look, Tom—"

"Yeah. Forget it." Again the line went dead. Again Dan was left staring down at the fading light on the screen.

Not managing to catch anymore sleep after that, Dan shifted through Sunday a little numb. Close to eight p.m., he made the walk around to Tom's a little slowly, for the first time with hands dug in his pockets and hating the hard bite in Tom's voice. The calls last night had been out of the blue, with Tom fully aware that Dan had an early morning shift to get through. It's why Dan hadn't been able to go up to Edinburgh in the first place. Now he just needed something decent to eat, a warm bed, and for Tom to snap out of this shit and talk.

Up ahead, Tom's detached house was in darkness, and Dan made his way over. The pencil case still slept in the porch, a newspaper helping keep it warm. Dan picked both up and went inside, putting the newspapers and wooden pencil case on the table before flicking on the lights. The kettle came on first, then two mugs were pulled out and heaped with coffee. Dan needed coffee. Letting the kettle boil, he padded on through to the living room and switched the TV on. One of the padded chairs took his weight and Dan pulled his legs up under him, settling in. Tom was due back soon, but he hoped he could pinch a few moments first just to catch up on some much-needed sleep.

He woke to the cold of the room and chill biting at his arms. The TV had settled into a movie, the late night sort that only the drunk would be awake to watch, and it forced Dan to give a long stretch. Checking his watch, he frowned and glanced around.

“Tom?”

His watch touched close to one, Monday morning, and the quiet of Tom's house called it out too. Giving a rub at his eyes, Dan went over to the bay window and shifted a blind. The drive sat empty, a light dusting of snow showing a virgin touch free of tyre tracks. Giving a scratch at day-old stubble, Dan then sorted through his pockets, looking for his phone.

Thumbing at a few buttons, he saw there'd been one missed call around ten and Tom's number flashed up. Flicking a look out at the empty drive again, Dan pressed call. It rang for a few minutes, then—“Hello,” said a voice.

The female voice caught him off-guard.

“Hello,” came the same voice again.

“I—” He paused. “Is Tom there? I'm Dan.” It sounded like such a stupid reply, but it was all he could manage.

“Dan?” She sounded just as confused. “Oh, Dan. Tom's boyfriend. I'm Linia. Linia Morgan.”

Dan frowned. She'd said that as though he should know it. “Is Tom there?” *Why is Tom there?* “He called and—”

“He's staying here tonight.”

“I'm sorry?”

A cough was given. “He's... he's at mine for the night. Just for tonight.”

Dan couldn't get his head around the conversation. “Why? Who are you?”

“Linia Morgan. Look,” a tired yawn was given. “Sorry I missed you earlier. Just wanted you to know that Tom was here, and he's safe.”

“Why the fuck wouldn't he be safe?”

“He had too much to drink. That's why.” And he eased a touch, hearing how she sounded about as happy as Dan felt. “He'll call in the morning.”

“He should have called tonight.”

“Not my problem. That only happens when he walks out of venues like the one last night.”

“He *what?*”

“Long story. One I'm too damn tired to go over again now. Sorry I didn't catch you earlier. Listen, I need to sleep, Dan. I'll get him to call you in the morning.”

“Hang on. Wha—” That was it, she was gone almost as quickly as Tom last night. Dan was left shrugging into the night, his hand and phone dropping a little too dejectedly down by his side. He needed to know what the hell Tom was playing at.

Dan ignored his mobile phone, for the third time, as it went off on the table. He sat in Chris's bungalow, staring down at his uneaten breakfast, happy just to chase the odd, few malted wheat around the bowl and also ignore how it was now nearly lunchtime. He'd left Tom's shortly after Linia's call this morning, with the walk home the safest choice for all concerned. He didn't want to be there when Tom decided to finally drag himself back home.

After that, the hours seemed to bleed through a drip as he waited for work to roll around come lunchtime.

The other two calls he'd missed, he assumed came from Baz. The first had been to ask if he'd cover a later shift today. He'd texted yes, but only if Nick, another colleague, could come and give him a lift. He didn't want the walk today. The calls after that he knew would just be letting him know the pickup time, but he already had a rough guess that Nick would come over during lunch break, so ignored the phone altogether. He hadn't had much luck with phones over the weekend, and he was a little sick of looking at it.

The “safe” call from Linia had wound him up no end last night. He'd be the first to know if Tom was laid up in some hospital anywhere. Tom was Chris's named relative, and he carried a card with him to let emergency crews know that the psychiatric unit was to be contacted if he was hurt in any way.

And that's what pissed him off. The safe call seemed to put him firmly in his work place: always the staff member looking in on a family, with Tom's bite of:

Wear an overcoat, if you have to.

And just what had Tom's lesson been by using Linia? Had it come on the back of:

Who the fuck do you expect to be calling at this hour?

Dan groaned and threw the spoon in the bowl. That was a damn stupid thought; Tom was pure male on male. Pure male on male solely on him. And he knew Tom better than that: he wouldn't play games like this. He just hated the

hell out of Tom for putting the doubt there. For not bothering to pick up the phone and—

The sound of a horn drew his attention, and his anger missed a beat thinking, *Tom*. But seeing Nick's Ford Fiesta through the window sent life back into a weighted grey, and Dan picked up his work bag from the table and made his way out. Baz might have just caught on about his relationship with Tom, but Nick had known for a while.

Monday rounds at the psychiatric unit took on a calmness to it that Dan couldn't shake into him. Night staff said they had a calm night last night, and it showed. Most patients were in the midst of waking, eating, and going to recreational games or classes when Dan got there.

He was the only one who seemed out of place, and he hated the people for it as they breezed by, smiling. He'd played cards with Duncan, but hadn't felt the cards under his touch; he'd thrown a few bowls with Aimee, but hadn't heard the balls strike hard against each other; then he'd spent an hour talking to Shaun over a conversation he couldn't piece together now. Where even the evening meal rush seemed sedate, his own irritability saw Dan slip into the staff room with Baz just to escape reality for a while.

Baz and his team usually took care of the downstairs floor, where Chris's room sat, leaving Dan and his team in charge of the upper floor. But to keep faces constant and not break routine, both teams sometimes swapped over halfway through the month to keep up with patient familiarity.

After packing his uneaten tea away and ignoring the frown Baz gave him, Dan made his footsteps slow as he moved away from the safety of the staff room. It hadn't helped that Chris had fallen just as quiet too. The old man knew something was wrong, that something in his life was missing, but he just couldn't quite put his finger on what. It had gotten to Dan eventually, enough to call a time out yesterday as he took a walk outside the grounds.

Yet as he neared Chris's room, and the soft sound of the old man's voice filtered over his footsteps, Dan paused outside of Chris's door, giving a frown at how lively he sounded. The door had been left off the latch, Chris long since not allowed a key to lock his door, unlike some of their other clients.

After Dan eased the door open, he caught the soft hazel tint of eye colour off Tom as he looked over. Tom's gaze was soon back with his father as he

eased up out of his chair and kissed at his father's head. "I'll be back in a minute, okay?"

Right, thought Dan. *There you are. Why, happy afternoon to you; and by the way—fuck you.*

He'd obviously missed the note saying Tom was back. He'd also missed the memo on Tom visiting, and how Tom and his father had made up over the pencil incident. It was a kick in the balls for Dan. The reminder of being staff, of being on the outside looking in, overcoat hiding his face—not even worthy of a decent fucking phone call from his lover.

Bastard. Dan turned away and left them to it.

"Hey." A hand on his arm tried to make him look back. "Hang on—"

"Working," snapped Dan, not looking back and pulling away. "Book a fucking appointment at reception. Y'know, my receptionist to yours, no overcoat fucking needed." Pushing through into Mrs Johnson's room and catching Tom's frown, he gave Tom the fuck you finger.

"Dan. Thank you."

The sincerity behind that made Dan pause and frown back.

"For the pencil," said Tom, quietly. He'd caught the sun despite the winter chill, making those forest eyes shine a little more. The cut to his lip still shone through, and the need was there to instantly ease a touch over it and take away the sting. *Fuck*, thought Dan.

"But mostly for the note," Tom added. "I loved the note."

Dan kept his nod brief. "No overcoat needed when it was delivered either."

"It was a shit comment," said Tom, face creasing slightly. "I was—"

"A fuck?" said Dan. "Glad we agree." And he stopped Tom when he went to say something else, the hurt over being put in his work place still stinging deep. "Regarding personal items like your artwork, I recommend that you leave valuables at reception in future. Or not bring them at all. You're less likely to upset yourself, your father, and other residents that way. And please take note of the no mobile phone use in here in future too. There are clients who risk fits and seizures from anything that is outside of their comfort zones."

"Dan—"

He let the door shut behind him and was pissed off at how closing it didn't take away an ounce of the anger or hurt of Tom just walking back unscathed into his reality like that.

Chapter Seven

Tom watched the door shut behind Dan, leaving him alone in the quiet of the corridor; then he looked away, tensing his jaw. He'd deserved that, and a whole lot more. Digging his hands deep in his pockets, he headed back into his father's room.

He'd missed the first call to Dan purely because he wasn't in a good place to talk, that and Linia had kept his ass run ragged with body art. The call he did manage to make? He'd just started drinking, and catching Dan asleep, he'd had that sexy sound of just coming out of a deep sleep, and it had riled him how easily Dan had found sleep after what had happened. It hadn't helped with the second call, when Dan had asked who was calling. Who the hell else *would* be calling at that hour?

Add all of that to the fear over Dan getting hurt?

Despite the fear over the physical abuse to Dan at work, Tom wasn't the sort to ask him to walk away from it. This was Dan's career choice, and he was good at his job. Being his Dom, Tom then just made sure he was looked after in every sense when Dan came home. He'd just gotten so used to seeing the bruises themselves that seeing someone physically hit out with Dan there had been a real kick between the balls. All staff there was good enough to stem any risks pretty quickly, and without an audience. Yet Dan had slept on that night. Tom had been as scared as hell for him, and Dan had slept on.

Saturday night up in Edinburgh had been one disaster after another. Too much to drink at the Torture Garden saw him walk away from the body art jobs Linia had lined up for him, and he'd gone to the hotel to try and sleep the anger off. That's when he'd made the second call to Dan, and a hotel porter had tried to get in on the conversation and give him all of his eighteen years' worth of advice. Tom had shouted, the porter had cried, and then the hotel had revoked his stay.

He'd slept in the van that night, then had been dragged over to Linia's when she'd tracked him down to see why he'd cut and run from the venue. Another half-hour lecture on why a cut lip wasn't exactly what she wanted from artists on her book hadn't helped lift the dark cloud either. He had to remind her that she'd borrowed him from someone else's books for tonight, and he was just standing in, even though he was having great difficulty just standing up at that

precise moment. Linia liked her control, even down to what was painted on the body. If she could hold the brush, she would have done.

He didn't drink often, not that heavily, and Linia hadn't been too impressed with it either, confiscating his keys and taking him home. Maybe she would have been better off letting him risk the journey home, because when one of Linia's brothers had come over and sat drinking with Tom, then decided to say how sick he was of British parliament ramming down his throat how same sex couples should be allowed to get married, Tom had gotten into a drunken brawl the likes of which he'd not let rile him since school. He didn't fight that often either, and it had pissed him off with how easily he'd lost his temper.

Linia hadn't called in the police, but she had taken his phone. Dan was all he'd thought about, and the one time he really needed to call, he hadn't been able to. He'd had enough of being away, pissed off, and on his own when he knew he needed just to talk to Dan now. Shutting down and backing away from everything when it really hurt wasn't going too well for him, and whoever had suggested it helped in the first place needed screwing to the wall in Tom's eyes. Tom's brother had paid his way out of any responsibility to their father; his mother had just walked one day and hadn't come back. Tom had done no better himself, then realised it just hurt more when he did walk, especially away from Dan. So after the fight, he'd just... had another drink, then another, maybe followed by another. Come seven Sunday night, he'd crashed on her sofa again.

It hadn't surprised him that Dan hadn't picked up his call earlier today. Dan was right: he'd been a fuck, but he'd seen that long before Dan had called it.

"Tom," said his father as he went on through to his room. "Didn't you bring *The Scotsman* with you?" His father was sitting in the chair Tom usually took, almost signifying a switch that put Tom back in his teens on the bed as he watched his father flick through his latest drawings. These days were few and far between lately, his father having last asked about *The Scotsman* over a month ago. He didn't even remember losing the pencil or splitting his lip in the crossfire.

Tom eased onto the bed and looked towards the door. He'd given up bringing his laptop and letting his father catch the news from *The Scotsman*. He'd usually sneak in and borrow Dan's from the staff room if need be.

"No," said Tom, watching the intensity on his father's face and loving how the lines changed shape with each sketch that was taken in.

A tut came over followed by the flick of paper. “No matter.” A gaze settled on his. “What’s wrong?”

“Hmm?”

“I know that look. And the cut lip says you’ve been fighting.”

Looking down, Tom bit back a smile. He missed this; being known in his dad’s eyes. “Nothing,” he said quietly.

“Your face tells a different tale, boy.” Another flick went at the sketch pad. “So too does your drawings. What’s—” He waved a hand at the pad. “What’s this?” He turned it over and held a drawing up. On the paper, shadows covered the pencil case as it sat there on the kitchen table, but it was blacked out almost to the point of non-existence.

“Bad weekend,” said Tom, wiping a hand over his face.

A steady gaze flicked up at him. “A good woman would cure you of that.”

Tom reached over and took the pad off him. They’d done the gay talk fifty thousand times over. His father’s reaction mostly accepting, sometimes saying Tom just needed a decent woman to shake him out of it, but always forgotten by the next visit.

“Yeah, Faither,” he said quietly, putting the sketchpad away. “A good woman.”

“I forget.”

As he went to stand, a hand gripped his arm, and Tom jerked slightly, looking at his dad.

“Don’t forget, lad.” A tear fell. “Black.” A look went to his picture, then it found him again. “It’s going black, lad. Do you feel it, too? Do you miss the links that bring back all the memories?”

Tom eased his grip away, then crouched by his father. No. He’d made damn sure over the years that he’d remember the links and keep the memories. “You need to get some sleep,” he said gently. “Tired... you’re looking really tired, Faither.”

His father eased into a smile. “I am, lad. Do you mind?”

Tom shook his head and took the slippers off his father’s feet. After helping him out of his dressing gown, he pulled back the covers and watched as his father settled down.

“Do you want the light out?” he said, as he stopped by the door.

“No, lad. It’s dark enough in here.”

Giving a frown, Tom looked at the bright light through the window, then shut the door behind him.

He made it out to the courtyard a few moments later, then pulled out his mobile now he’d managed to charge it up.

Talk? he thumbed in.

He gave it a few minutes to see if there’d be a reply, then frowned when nothing came back.

“C’mon, baby. At least hear me out now.”

The sound of a car pulling up onto the gravel courtyard took his attention, and Tom stepped away from the entrance seeing a young couple get out. He gave a nod, recognising Lizzie and her husband. After they’d gone inside, Tom stopped by his van’s passenger side and pulled something out.

Looking down at what he held, he gave a soft smile. “Know you, Kershaw,” he said quietly.

Chapter Eight

After finishing a hard shift and finally making it to the bungalow, Dan finished drying up the coffee mug and put it to sleep on its hook next to the others lined up by the kettle. With the tea towel thrown onto the unit, he padded barefoot through to the living room, rubbing tiredly at his eyes as he went. His shift had run into another long one, with barely enough time to chase his own ass after he'd seen Tom at the unit.

He counted himself lucky the psychiatric unit was within walking distance. A drive to and from work in this state would have him yawning his way through knocking over a few pedestrians, saying *Ah, s'cuse me, thought you were Tom, mate*. No doubt Baz would be questioning whether he'd opted for pinching a few happy pills in order to get him through the past few days.

Instead the full offer of comfort from Chris's bungalow was on order tonight, and he slumped down on the settee, taking the remote from the table with him and flicking the TV on. The news threw up the latest debates on Scotland's independence referendum, and living on the borders of bonnie Scotland, yet the not so bonnie backstreets of Gretna Green, he'd had enough of hearing about it.

Scottish independence.

Dan snorted a bitter smile and wiped a hand over his face as he dropped his head back into the cool of the leather settee. The chuckle he gave was far from happy, and he screwed his eyes shut, letting the quiet of the bungalow creep up on the tiredness and hurt.

Scottish Tom and all of his finely shaped ass had all the independence he needed now; no politics, no bullshit or backwards debates that ranted on for hours in Parliament, no overcoats... just quiet. He knew Tom's house mirrored the bungalow, where winter bit at the fingertips and gloves were the only option to keep the bitter at bay, even indoors.

Dan closed his eyes and shut it out. Hell, it seemed to have worked for Tom.

Dan couldn't even tell what woke him, he just knew the chill was gone from the living room, leaving warmth wanting to drag him back under for a few more hours. Warmth was unusual for the bungalow, but heat blanketed his

body, and the softness of a cushion was under his head. A wall lamp over on the corner cast a soft light that chased long shadows and danced with them over the walls and furniture. He'd kept the old beaten settee and matching chair when he'd moved in. After ten years, he still hadn't had the time to decorate the old-man feel to the place, just like his dating before he and Tom became serious was only half-hearted attempts at company, with not being able to get close to Tom. But here, echoes of tobacco could still be caught in the leather he lay on, and if he listened hard enough, he still swore he'd hear the tap of a pipe on a table to clear it out for use. He hadn't had the heart to change a thing. Somehow it didn't seem right, not with who this place belonged to.

A look at his watch told him it was getting on for *you should have moved your ass into bed hours ago* o'clock, and he stretched into the warmth of the quilt, content enough to leave his cold bed as just that. Settling back down, he closed his eyes to how he didn't want his day to start all over again.

Quilt.

Easing up, Dan pushed the thickness down his body and let it rest in his lap, staring hard down at how the softness curled up a little too comfortably there. Then the lamp took his attention.

He'd gone to sleep in darkness, sitting up, and damn well knew the cold had been biting at his fingertips and nose as he'd sat there content with feeling it do just that. He'd felt so much of it lately as he'd waited by the phone, he wore it like a second skin. Only now...? Life was thrown back into a warmth he didn't want to feel.

"Fuck." Tossing the quilt aside, he was up, then heading into the kitchen. The darkness going on outside the back door agreed that it was too goddamn early in the morning for any decent soul to be walking the streets, but the folded up tea-towel on his unit suggested a different sort. Dan grabbed the handle, opened the back door a touch, then slammed it shut.

"Fuck," he snarled out, making sure the lock was set in place as dogs barked disgust at the break of usual quiet. Kicking at the door, then grabbing at his toes and biting a cry as he danced the hurt away, Dan added a few more curses, then hobbled over to the table.

He hadn't seen it at first, but from the windows, silver light fell on one item that sat there on the old table.

Giving a frown, Dan picked up the piece of paper.

The single link was shaded and drawn to such precision that the close-up acted more like a microscope showing all of the imperfections in the metal despite its obvious strength. Writing circled the link and Dan felt his heart slip.

Missed, link.

“Christ.” He closed his eyes for a moment, then screwed the paper up and threw it towards the bin. Standing there staring at it for a moment, he then went over and picked it up before heading off to bed.

Dan had been awake for a few hours, just watching the light ease away the darkness on the walls. He hadn't slept much all night, and that coldness was back biting at his shoulders.

Living on the Scottish borders hadn't exactly been his choice for working his ass off in private psychiatric care, but after graduating with his degree and then moving into the nursing programme, he'd taken a week's trip to Edinburgh, then spent most of his time with a few friends, roaming the backstreet pubs to celebrate moving to the next stage in his career. He'd regretted being the British student who had thrown up in the streets, but it had been needed. On the fourth or fifth day, and having fallen in love with the Scottish accent, he'd taken a trip to Gretna to check out the new psychiatric facility they were building just a few acres back from Gretna Golf Club. The unit was private and had been state-of-the-art back then. It had taken one cheeky smile to win him a look around the basics.

And those basics had run him smack bang into one Tom McKendrik.

Dan closed his eyes, his grip tightening on the pillow.

Tom had been visiting that day too, seemed he'd been visiting there ever since Chris's mixed dementia had worsened. Chris McKendrik was usually under the joint care of Tom himself and the local nursing home just a few miles away in Carlisle. But when times were at their most chaotic and depression hit the dementia hard, Chris would be booked into the psychiatric unit for a few months to handle the darker periods. That's how it had been for the last ten years, Chris spending up to six months out of the year playing pinball between the psych unit, the care home, and the few rare occasions, at his home here, where Dan slept. Tom stayed close; he was always close.

Dan frowned as he let his gaze wander around the bedroom. Tom had offered him his dad's place just a few months after Dan had started

volunteering at the psychiatric unit. He'd shifted training on the nursing programme up to Scotland too, and Tom had said it would cut down on travelling time to and from Birmingham if he made it a permanent move. Dan had agreed. Against all professionalism, he'd agreed, even though he knew full well that the main reason for taking the offer had been because he'd fallen for Tom from the offset. They'd both just kept their distance, especially with Dan's training moving up a few gears.

Now, part of knowing this was Chris's home hurt to the core, how Dan had let himself become so deeply involved with his son, the whole family. But there, at that deeper level there was a part that didn't hurt, that just wanted to hold on to how right everything felt.

Or how right it *had* felt.

Giving an unsteady sigh and pushing away the creeping coldness, Dan eased the covers off and headed on into the bathroom. The alarm hadn't sounded yet, and another part cursed at how his body was still set automatically to Tom's, even though he wasn't here.

He kept the shower short, then set his mind to changing his shift at work to avoid Tom for a few days. He needed time out to think now too.

The walk to work took him thirty minutes, just a left at the end of Rosebank Court, through to Victoria Avenue and right onto the B721. He bypassed Gretna Golf Club and a few more lanes, but the walk helped clear some of Tom's bruises.

Baz was already there in the courtyard of the psychiatric home, and Dan gave him a wink then paused, hearing his mobile let him know he had another message. He winced, flicking a look over at Baz as Baz tapped the *Turn Off All Mobile Phones* sign by the entrance. He waved over, watching Baz head on in, then he thumbed at the message box.

Talk?

He clenched his jaw. Same message as yesterday.

No. He didn't want to fucking talk. Not yet.

Tom turned the engine off to his van and stretched into the morning sun. The clouds had decided to shift their moody ass and let the sun through, giving his bare arms some much needed warmth. He'd managed to sneak away from

the tattoo studio for lunch, which gave him about an hour's visiting time with his dad. His visits at the psychiatric unit were no doubt going to get more frequent, even Baz seemed to offer a raised brow as he came out from the psychiatric unit with his cigarettes in hand. But he needed to talk to Dan, and as Dan seemed to be ignoring the hell out of him, he had to take what he could, when he could.

"Lunch again with your father, Tom?" said Baz, nodding over as he took a smoke. "We'll be setting you up with a room the way you're going," he added friendly enough, and Tom offered a smile.

Seeing Dan come out with Shaun, the cigarettes in Shaun's hands suggesting he was after some smoke time too, Tom let his smile fade. Instead, he opted to look away as he reached them, now a little caught out with Baz and Shaun in between them.

"Shaun," said Baz, seeming to sense the awkwardness from all sides, "you were out with me this morning, and now you're dragging Dan out too?"

Blowing smoke through his nose now he'd lit up, Shaun offered a grin. "I'm trying to see if he'll let me inch closer to the gate so I can leg it out of here."

"In your pyjamas?" said Baz, looking Shaun up and down, and the ease to Dan's smile held Tom in silence as he witnessed it.

"I've got my jeans and T-shirt on underneath." Shaun paid Tom no notice. "As soon as I'm around that there corner, I'm de-clothed and off, mate."

"You'll need shoes for that," mumbled Tom, and Shaun rolled his gaze at him. "Always someone around to spoil the fun."

Baz patted Shaun's shoulder, then, flicking a look at Dan, he pushed on by and went inside.

As Shaun took long breaths in off the smoke, Tom dug his hands deeper into his pockets, trying to find a way to broach this without going in feet first. "Dan, can we—"

"No." Dan looked every bit as uncomfortable talking with Shaun there as he indicated with a flick of his head for Shaun to go back in.

"Already?" said Shaun.

"There's plenty of room to hide out in the back gardens," said Dan, opening the door. Then he flicked a look at Tom. "Stay out of the bungalow whilst I'm there," he said flatly. "I'll start paying you rent at the end of the month."

“That isn’t needed,” Tom said gently. “That place is yours as long as you—”

“Yeah. Whatever. C’mon, Shaun,” said Dan through his words. “Let’s get you out back.” And Tom was left staring at the door, grinding on his jaw as Dan closed it behind them.

Giving a look back to his van, Tom gave a hard sigh.

This was getting him nowhere fast.

Chapter Nine

Dan hadn't managed to change his shift, but as the texts, calls, and midnight visits had eased from Tom over the past few days, he'd forced relaxation a little more. Tonight helped too, with how he'd managed to finish on time at eleven. Baz had also sent out a huge cheer to mark that he was clocking off too; he was back on at six. A while back, though, Dan had managed to book two free weekends off for his and Tom's anniversary. This was the first. He'd nearly called it off, not wanting to wallow in the silence. But his body was ready to call it quits even if his mind was still willing to hide—

Not hide.

Turning his collar up as he made his way down the courtyard in the darkness, Dan pushed that away. Hide. Maybe he was; he was certainly throwing more into work lately than he should. But being back at home, even now, kept his footfalls on gravel slow and heavy, in no rush to get there. It was part of the reason why he'd decided to walk tonight. The half-hour journey would probably last more like fifty minutes, but at least the warmth in the air kept everything else at bay.

A car pulled alongside, jolting him slightly as the window wound its way down. "You sure you don't want a lift, Dan?"

"No thanks, Baz," he said, glancing down.

"Okay, see you Monday," called Baz. He was older, touching his late forties, but it didn't show as his boy-racer side kicked in. It took only a few moments for him to reach the end of the road up ahead, the yellow indicator on his car signalling right as brake lights barely blinked. Then lights and the sound of his car engine disappeared into the darkness.

The quiet calmed Dan, only the sound of his footsteps on concrete went with him as he reached the end of the road and took the right turning. The small lane it took him into would eventually lead him to a crossroads, then past Gretna's golf course.

Only one more car passed him by, and Dan stepped aside to give it room as it slowed down, then sped back up again. He always used his High Visual Jacket, which was just as well considering just how dark it could get in these lanes. Again, lights disappeared into the distance as Dan hitched himself up

over a gate and into a field that would cut his journey by half. Dangerous in the dark, but he'd taken this route for the past ten years and knew it by heart. Cows and sheep used to graze here, but the recession had hit everyone hard. The little farm over the back had gone out of business, leaving the field itself free for corporate gain. Long grass had been cleared and the dirt under his feet cried out the latest housing development patch.

He soon found the opposite gate and hitched himself over. It took him close to the turning for the B721 and the golf course, but not quite in any part of Gretna that had street lamps.

A look to the left made sure no traffic came from there, then as he glanced right, he frowned as he caught the van that slept on the side of the road.

Tom rarely let his van out of sight, always pulling it onto the drive of a night and making sure none of his equipment was stored in the back. The stereo would come out and a lock would be clipped around the steering wheel just to make sure wandering minds would have a job on their hands stealing the ride. It was in contrast to his house and how he'd leave the porch door open for the newspaper delivery.

After checking the road again, Dan then went over and made the driver's side his first stop.

Nothing.

"Tom?" he called into the darkness, having seen the keys inside. That was even more damn unusual.

What if Tom had been involved in a crash? Dan slipped his phone from his pocket as he went around to check the bonnet. No dents kissed the front. In fact, as he went around to the back, there was nothing to say damage had been done there either. That just left an electrical fault, and Tom's patience didn't extend much to waiting on the roadside for breakdowns.

But the keys were still in the ignition, the house keys attached to it too.

He thumbed Tom's number, then pressed call. The phone on the other end started to ring, and Dan pulled it away from his ear, not quite understanding why the silence of the night was cut in two with the ringing of Tom's mobile phone from behind him.

"Tom—"

Something hit his back hard enough to push him into the back door of the van, jolting his ribs a touch and nearly punching the wind from him before he'd even had chance to turn around.

Then a strong grip came at the back of his jacket as a voice whispered—

“Calm it down, boy.” Tom made sure Dan found the floor, the hold on his leather jacket controlling the fall and making it look more violent than it was. Dan's cry still carried that startled fear into the night, and Tom quickly shifted down, easing a knee into Dan's back, then pulling the cuffs from his own pocket. “Easy, easy.”

“What the fuh—” Dan put up a good struggle, trying to twist around, kick out—shout loud enough to alert people beyond the golf course if Tom didn't move quickly. Hands were wrestled behind Dan's back then cuffed, before Tom shifted and pulled out a gag. Slipping the gag into place sent the night into muffled grunts and groans as dust and dirt was disturbed on the road.

He knew he didn't help issues when a white silk blindfold sent the world even darker for Dan. The blindfold had been kept long for a reason as a tug on the knot and a pull under Dan's arm had them both up on their feet.

Before Dan could push back, Tom made sure he kissed the van again, shifting in quick behind him, but placing his body side-on to stop any kickback between the legs. A rough grab at his hair made sure Dan got the message that this wasn't a game, as Tom then forced his head against the cold and damp of the van. “Hush,” he said sharply.

Dan stilled, but only for a second or two before kicking off his struggles again. Tom opened the other door and pushed all of his fight inside. Dan landed on his side and Tom caught his legs, forcing them up. He'd pulled out some ankle cuffs just before he nearly caught a boot in the ribs. Pulling back a touch, he caught hold of the assault before it touched down, diffusing the damage as he then cuffed one ankle, then the other.

Another shove on Dan's ass made sure he was far enough into the van to shut the door, then Tom locked it and headed back around to the driver's side. After easing in, he flicked the engine into life, his glance at the dashboard seeing the struggle had only lasted a few minutes. Then the road had his attention as kicks and muffled cries came from behind.

Ten minutes later, the van slid up onto his drive, and Tom killed the engine. From the flickering light and chuckles coming from the window next door, Max and his girlfriend were watching TV, the sound clear enough from the drive. They had no children, and it showed. A BMW sat next to Kaylee's soft top convertible, both owners so wrapped up in their own worlds that life didn't exist beyond their nights at the gym, health shakes, and early morning runs. That left Mr Jefferson off to the left. Touching eleven, he'd be heading off to bed and switching on his sleep apnoea machine. Nothing would be heard past his own Darth-Vader breathing, that and the stray pull out of the oxygen pipe that sent a huge whistle into the night. A car pulling up at this hour wouldn't be out of the ordinary for either household as Tom had picked Dan up many a time at this hour after work.

The unusual part would come with pulling into the garage, but setting the garage doors to open would be a specific sign to Dan.

Once he'd pulled the van inside, then got out and smacked on the side of the van to stop the abuse coming from inside, Tom closed up behind him, then went on into the house. The stereo came on first, nothing too loud, but enough to hint at routine. Then leaving the lights on, he let the garage take every ounce of his attention as he passed back through his kitchen. A door to his left just off from the kitchen had been left open deliberately, but that was ignored for now.

Thumps and bumps met him as he made sure the lights were flicked off in the garage, the undeniable sound of boot pushing out panel and leaving slight dents crying out Dan's abuse. The van stood there and took it, occasionally shuddering, but otherwise a silent witness that held its cargo happily enough.

After waiting for the next boot off Dan to hit home into the side panel, Tom tugged both back doors open.

Dan seemed to anticipate it and kicked out, albeit blindly. One foot caught Tom's hip, winding him a touch, but it had been a blind hit, just scuffing hipbone with the side of a soft trainer. Grabbing the ankle cuffs, then pushing down to keep the feet as still as possible, Tom picked out the keys to the cuffs from his pocket and flicked one lock free.

Dan fell quiet. He seemed to sense that the cuffs were being undone, and he could kick and put the boot in twice as hard with both feet now free. Snorting a smile, Tom grabbed at the collar to his jacket and dragged him out.

The instant his feet touched the garage floor, Dan went to twist around and knee Tom where it would really hurt. But fighting against the distress in Dan's breathing, Tom slipped a knife from his pocket, exposed Dan's throat with a

pull of hair, then ran the blunt edge along the entire length, just tracing the side of his windpipe. It was only a kid's toy knife, a good replica, but Dan didn't need to know that.

Dan instantly stilled, only his heavy breathing kissing the garage.

Which was how Tom needed it. Keeping the grip tight on Dan's hair, the knife stilling against Dan's throat to allow a comfortable arm-hold that exposed the soft curve, Tom made sure Dan took very careful steps out of the garage, into the kitchen.

The door next to the pantry still stood open, and Tom forced Dan through, then down a set of stone stairs. Lights here had been kept low for a purpose, and Tom found life instantly calm as he stepped into familiar surroundings.

Dan didn't have that luxury, so Tom made it quick. A nudge at the back of the knee more than encouraged him to move, and Tom made sure he went over to the wall. A choker chain was tethered to a thicker, longer security chain just a few inches away, just above Dan, and Tom grabbed at it, then let it fall into place around his neck. Dan was already trying to pull away, but the chain was kept short to quell everything but the huffs and grunts that would come out in the next hour or so.

He pressed his body in close, making sure Dan was pushed face-first back into the wall, then after tugging the gag off, he smothered a hand over Dan's mouth to stop his obscenity. He'd also found the knot of the blindfold, forcing Dan's blinded gaze up as he came close to his ear.

"Two things are going to happen tonight," he said heatedly, and Dan stopped struggling, trying to tilt his ear. "One." He forced Dan's head back against the wall. "You're going to learn to close your mouth and open your ears when I say I need to talk to you." Tom eased back a touch, the grip at the back of Dan's head easing, all to drift down his throat. "Two. When I'm done, I'm going to say sorry for what I've just done, and all of the shit I've put you through over the past few days. I'm hoping you'll let me say sorry my way, but for now, you learn to behave."

Dan went to shout out something and Tom shook his head, snarling, "No." He forced Dan's head back against the wall. "That's not you listening, is it?"

"Humph." There was a swear word in there, Tom could hear it, and he gave a hard sigh.

"Fair enough. The hard way, Dan."

Tom had everything he needed already laid out. A thicker collar, nestled on the unit, came first, one that sat on top of the choker around Dan's neck. It wasn't quite a posture collar, but it was one that would more than hint this was a training session. As he culled Dan's abuse with a hand smothering his mouth, Tom flicked at the clasp to Dan's trousers, then inched them and his boxers off his hips a touch to expose his ass.

"Humph."

"Shush," said Tom. He needed both hands free for the next part, and as soon as he released his hold on Dan's mouth, he set his jaw, tensing, hearing the abuse roll free.

"Knife? You used a fucking knife? For fuck's sake, a fucking knife..."

He let the anger play, as he pulled a butt plug out from the electro kit open on the unit. Slicking the slim model up with lube, Tom rubbed it against Dan's exposed ass. Dan went very quiet, very quickly, but only for a fraction of a second, before he snarled and writhed, now trying to shift his ass.

Closing his eyes just briefly, Tom kissed at the back of his neck.

"Goddamn it, Tom," snarled Dan, the anger there in his voice, also in his body, as he tried to pull away. But as Tom slipped his free hand around Dan's hip, then eased Dan's shirt aside to stroke at Dan's cock, the butt plug slipping gently at his ass, the swelling in Dan's cock won another kiss off Tom.

"Yeah," snarled Dan, the hurt there more in his voice now. "Well fucking done. You getting me hard never was the problem, you fuck. You get a kick out of forcing it now?"

"Shush, shush, shush. I'm not here to hurt you." Exchanging lip for nip on Dan's neck, Tom effortlessly eased the slim butt plug in, just the tip first, then through the resistance of the tight muscle until it rested root deep in him.

Dan was up on his toes, body pressed hard into the wall, groaning out "Fuck," then crying out as Tom kept a slow pace along his cock, even though Dan tried to hide by pressing his body into the wall.

"Tom, for god's sake. Please."

Pulling back, Tom reached up and messed with something on Dan's collar. With not replying to him, Tom's silence had Dan calling him all the fucks under the sun. But the multi-wire-cord hooked up to the quad electrode on the butt plug was already in place and set up to react to the collar for this exact

reason. Because the moment Dan started on another round of abuse over just why he wasn't going to listen to a thing Tom had to say, it was punctured by—

“... ah—ah—”

Tom eased back, watching as Dan danced the sudden volts that rode his ass.

The vibrations from his own vocal chords met with the collar, then kicked the voltage into gear in his ass, the louder his cry, the higher the voltage. Nothing too severe, just enough to distract thought from sensation.

“Ah... fuh—fuh—” Dan was reduced to soft groans, writhing there against the wall. Silence didn't allow much of a respite and gave him the softest ride in his ass as a constant low pulse came every few seconds. It was enough to keep his cock hard, but also to remind him he was here to listen, nothing else.

Even with his hands cuffed behind his back, there was the risk Dan would pull the multi-wired cord free. After taking hold of some rope, Tom wrapped it around Dan's waist, making sure he threaded it through Dan's handcuffs. Hands were pulled to the side, away from his ass and the hope of pulling out any wires; then they were tied firmly into place. A quick shift of hand, Tom found Dan's cock, at first palming the head and piercing—the Prince Albert had been changed to a full captive ring, which Tom loved. He twisted—played it—ensuring his touch had Dan writhing, as well as the combination of collar with butt plug in his ass. Then as he jacked him hard enough to force him onto his toes, Dan cried out, forcing another shock up between his legs.

“Fuh—” he tried to say, only to find he couldn't.

Satisfied, Tom left his cock alone, then lengthened the chain tied to Dan's choker. He couldn't afford to leave Dan on his feet for this. Pulling Dan's boxers and trousers back up over his ass to help keep the butt plug in place, Tom gave a nudge at the back of his legs to encourage Dan to find his knees, still facing the wall, but all done to ensure he wouldn't fall and strangle himself in the rush. Wires were safely allowed to shape Dan's butt as his trousers forced them close to the toned curves of his ass. The thin strips of red and blue cord escaped out of the trousers themselves, and Tom nodded, making sure he didn't get too lost on the image of having Dan bound and on his knees. This wasn't about sex.

A stroke went to Dan's hair as Tom eased to his feet and soft moans and groans filled the studio, most times still broken by a defiant cry as Dan knelt there, riding the volts running his ass.

“Yeah,” said Tom. “You get that attitude out of your system, boy. Then we’ll talk. Until then, you stay on your knees.” He turned away and headed over to his work desk and the latest sketches he’d been commissioned to draw. With the angered grunts getting wilder as Tom walked away, Tom then sat and opened his sketchpad and set to work, leaving all the heat over there to grunt and groan against the wall.

The angle of the desk allowed him to keep an eye on things so Dan didn’t come to any harm, and a timer kept him company, one he made sure he kept his eye on as much as Dan.

Dan still writhed and twisted as he faced the wall, hips occasionally digging into the smooth plaster to escape the kickback in his ass against his own cries, others, sometimes just to grind hard into the wall, giving every sign his sub was trying to ease a serious ache between his thighs.

Tom was content to let him try and do both. They both knew there wouldn’t be any release for Dan until he cried all anger and frustration out of his system. It remained to be seen just how long that would take.

It took longer than Tom thought it would, and a deep part of him loved Dan’s determination and will. He wasn’t here to break him, just let him cry the hurt out of his system. Flicking a look over, he eased his pencil down and started packing away his sketchpad before giving a long stretch in his chair. Dan now sat against the wall, having groaned his way there a few moments ago. Panting came heavy, pained, but even that seemed done so as not to set the collar off on a higher voltage. For now, he squirmed where he sat, head back against the wall, eyes still hidden in the white silk blindfold, a swipe of tongue over lips taking away the perspiration dampening his body. Visible under the hem of his jacket, his shirt had long since been tugged free of his jeans, exposing part of his cock. The hardness there was full, swollen, looking painful—pissed off. Pissed off, but in desperate need of release.

Palming at his eyes for a moment, Tom eventually pushed out of his chair and made his way back over.

Crouching down, he made sure Dan found blinded focus with the grip that went under his jaw. “You ready to hear me out now, or do you need something bigger in your ass, boy?”

Dan went to speak, even opened his mouth, but with muscles set tensing in his jaw, he shook his head, showing he’d had all he could take, the air blown out hard as nostrils flared and called out the anger and tension in his body.

“The collar will stay on whilst I untie your feet. Kick out again, I’ll put you back here with a bigger plug in your ass. Clear?”

Harder breathing, a short, sharp nod was given.

“Good.” Tom undid the foot cuffs after slipping the key from his pocket. Dan kept his body rigid and Tom kept a wary glance on him as he made sure circulation returned. He helped Dan find his feet, then let him take some water from a bottle that went back onto the table once finished. It still left both collar and choker in place, hands bound at his side, and the butt plug in place with the threat of a charge if he spoke. Dan knew it, and the way he squared his body on to Tom said he was biding his time to bite back, nothing more. Which was fine by Tom. He needed Dan to listen; he didn’t want him to break.

With the silk blindfold also still in place, Tom stepped up and kissed at Dan’s lips, just a gentle brush of lips against lips, nothing more. The tenderness behind it had Dan jolting as though his collar had kicked into life. Tom smiled sadly. He loved the blinded look on Dan, where gentleness became as much a torment as whip on skin, especially when it wasn’t expected.

Tom hooked his thumbs under the blindfold and eased it off Dan’s face, letting the fine silk eventually drop to the floor.

The look in brown eyes as they instantly levelled on Tom was all his, every ounce of anger, hurt, and the need just to understand—but also not give a damn in the same breath—it was all there in that single, locked-on look. Dan went to snap something out, but a jolt in his ass stopped him and his frustrated cry only won him another.

Shaking his head, Tom denied him any attention and looked away.

As he did, Dan came in, forcing Tom to back down a step as Dan’s hard breath on his face snapped out *I can’t do anything but listen, you fuck. So speak, and make it fast before I fucking hit you.*

Tom still kept his gaze away, his look now on the far wall.

Dan snorted air hard through his nose, then followed and saw what kept Tom’s interest. When he did, Tom finally gave Dan all the attention he needed.

The confusion creasing Dan’s brow was obvious. Brown eyes took in one wall, then another, then, twisting around slightly, another and—

Dan went to speak, his face screwing up a touch, but it wasn’t the collar that stopped him this time as he looked back at Tom.

The walls had been stripped bare a few days ago, given a fresh white coat, making the perfect blank canvas. But after that...

Sketched to such fine precision around them, six links made a huge border around the studio walls. Each link came with a single word, followed by a floor-to-ceiling painting behind it.

"Scotland" etched its way around the first link, then "Greymere" graced the second. Country and home; where they'd first met, then where they'd spent their first night together: here. The image behind each link captured the place, day, and time of year of each meeting, snow in the one then effortlessly blended into fallen autumn leaves of the next. The third cried "Grief", marking the year Dan lost his father. A life-size sketch of Dan and his dad sitting on a bench claimed its rightful place for that link; then the fourth moved back into winter in true "Edinburgh" fashion. It had been the first year Dan had seen Edinburgh Castle alive at night during Hogmanay, most other New Year's Eves having been spent back in England with his father. The castle itself was caught in an array of fireworks despite its moonlit setting. But where there should have been crowds of people, and there had been hoards of people that year, only two had been drawn sitting on a hillside with their backs to the two onlookers watching them now.

The fifth link that Tom had let his gaze wander to, softly called "Burn". It caught Dan naked and bound mid-heat as he'd arched on the kitchen table, taking the fifth anniversary link to his cock just over a week ago.

That left the upcoming sixth year. Tom didn't need to look to see Dan's confusion. Etched in the silver-grey of the chain was the single word:

His?

No picture sat behind, just a shaded area of fog that seemed to move and twist with the shadows and light of the studio. It hid the answer to the question being asked.

"My faither taught me a valuable lesson," said Tom, quietly, and he glanced around the paintings, finally resting on the lack of art in the last. "Blackness," he mumbled. "How there's nothing worse than having the tools in your hands, to only then be confronted with a black pit where memories should have been." Tom managed a shrug as he looked at the fog. "It's what frustrates him, Dan. How having all the tools there in front of him won't bring back the missing links and the memories those links spark."

He looked back to find Dan watching him.

“It scares the life out of me, how I can draw every moment we’ve spent together, but when it comes to looking at life without you...” Tom found the last link, the black mist behind it. “That’s all I see.” He frowned. “I lost sight of us for a moment, but only for a moment, how a fight over a goddamn pencil cost me you.” He gave a sigh. “I wanted to say sorry. That I know I hurt you, that I needed some time out that turned out to be such a bad idea. I just needed you.”

Dan started to say something, then frowned angrily when the electro kit kicked in, making him wince and dance. Tom again shook his head, this time going in close, then untying the rope at his side. Letting the rope fall to the floor, he kissed at Dan’s throat, then moved behind him, pulling out the keys to the handcuffs and unlocking them.

Dan rubbed at his wrist, finishing by tossing the cuffs to the floor, but when Dan went to pull the collar off and stop the kick in his ass, Tom backed Dan up against the wall, giving a slow shake of head, his hands slipping into Dan’s and taking them high up above his head.

Lips now to neck, Tom kissed gently, earning a hiss off Dan.

“Let me say sorry,” he mumbled against the curve of Dan’s throat, nipping gently at the skin. “Let me take you down to the floor...” He kissed his way up to Dan’s ear, feeling the body beneath take heavier breaths, body now pushing against body. “Let me tie you up, fuck you until you have nothing left,” he whispered. “Then let me take you to bed. Christ, Dan, I’ve missed just holding you in the aftermath.”

He released Dan’s hands, now resting his palm flat just next to them. Dan was hard against his hip, so fucking hard; it matched Tom as he pulled his own body in closer, cock brushing against cock through the thickness of jean on the bare flesh of Dan’s exposed dick as it topped Dan’s trousers.

Bodies were already there, moving, grinding, wanting what came naturally; yet in that moment where he knew he needed to take Dan down to the floor, Tom cooled all heat, just breathing against Dan’s ear. Waiting.

After a moment, Dan slipped his hands back under Tom’s, locking fingers with fingers. Permission... granted.

Tom frowned, dipping his head into the curve of Dan’s throat, and he let out a soft breath against his damp skin. “Thank you,” he mumbled, quietly.

His own touch drifted down Dan's arms, over the play of jacket, to his sides, then Tom inched Dan's jeans off his hips, finishing by digging his palms and a rough grip into Dan's ass cheeks. "Fuck," mumbled Tom, sick of missing this as he pulled him in and crushed hips against hips. "Missed you, boy," he said, tracing a hand down and taking out the butt plug. The wires came off next, leaving everything resting on the unit by them, except for the collar around Dan's throat. Tom kissed at it, then at the tender throat just above it. "So sick of having to miss you."

A soft groan came from Dan. Allowing the smallest frown to creep in, Tom tugged him away from the wall.

"Strip."

The stillness in Dan's levelled gaze stayed with Tom for longer than usual, almost a challenge, Dan's breathing giving all of his fight, life. Then making it slow, he unfastened his jacket and slipped it from his shoulders. As it fell to the floor, the buttons on his shirt came next, but a slight crease of brow also crept in. The shirt was eased off his shoulders next, and as it landed on the floor, Tom let his own look darken seeing the new bruise on Dan's upper arm.

The teeth marks were clear, leaving the beginnings of the bruise around them.

Tom went in, brushing the back of his hand against the mark. "Anything else I need to know about?"

Quiet, then after a moment, Dan shook his head.

Tom kissed at the bite, then, hand resting briefly on Dan's hip, he took him away from the wall and made a slow circle around him, taking in every shift and change of light on his skin, fingers marking his route on Dan's ass.

Satisfied no more damage had been done, Tom came nose-to-nose with Dan and he let his touch trace down to Dan's cock.

Dan looked away, the anger still there in his eyes a touch, and it caused Tom to kiss at his jaw as he stroked hard at his cock, once, twice. The third won a groan, then Dan looked down at Tom's hand playing his cock.

"Knees," said Tom, quietly. "You find them, boy."

It killed Tom when it came. The ease with how Dan knelt, hands in his lap, grace and decadence found so easily in the drop of his head to chest, Tom saw everything here he could still so easily lose and it battled with how he wanted to claim back everything that was his.

Chapter Ten

“Hands behind your back.”

Dan heard the command, and fighting everything from lust to anger, he complied, easing his hands into position. He didn't look up—he couldn't, not yet. All life was caught and frozen around him, on the walls, in the words, the drawings—the touch belonging to the man who now cuffed his hands, then in the soft voice that went over what happened at the weekend. He thought that being ignored by Tom had hurt, but the impact of being known, of being seen and remembered, it cut so much deeper.

He knew why Tom had needed his time away. This was Dan's career, and he saw the stresses and strain on families play out every day. He also knew that time out sometimes didn't help. Everybody had their flaws and breaking points; it angered him more that Tom had felt as though he'd needed to walk over admitting he needed to break, then getting caught up in the drink and not finding a way to call when he'd needed to find his way back. They'd been together for so long, home should have been Tom's first stop, not his last. It shouldn't have taken all of this for Tom to finally open up and allow himself to bleed. Or maybe it had needed this: for it to really hurt before he could heal.

Use of the knife had made sure he had every right to walk away. Yeah, he knew Tom, too, how it had been done to ensure pure focus was given to blinded steps, no fight, no resistance, not in the garage where damage could really be done if they had fallen over. And those garage doors going up and the oil needed to the left hinge had proved beyond a doubt where Dan had been taken, but it still scared the life out of him. Tom had still scared the life out of him with the intensity of all of his “Please, just listen.”

It left Dan needing to trust the sub in him, the Dom in Tom. He needed to see the Dom, let himself respond and use the trust he had with Tom to help him erase the hurt and mistrust that had been caused elsewhere in their life.

Black work boots on wood moved away from him, and Dan glanced up to see Tom slip his own T-shirt over his head, then off his shoulders. He wanted to squeeze his own cock seeing it, seeing him down to just jeans and work boots, the relaxation of tension in those shoulder muscles was more than obvious now Tom had been given permission to breathe his natural role. This was Tom. This was them.

He came back with a chain, some fine blue rope, and a strong metal ring, the latter he screwed into the floor just a few feet away. The hook to the chain went over the metal ring, then Tom came and knelt in front of Dan. A moment later a breath brushed against his ear.

“The piercing in your cock.” The bite at his ear had Dan fighting to get a hold of his cock and just ease the bleed of pre-come he felt dampen his abs. “You had it done for a reason. Remember?”

Dan caught his breath as a finger hooked inside the captive ring he wore in his tip. Tom knew where to hit hard and fast. A twist came, gentle, then a tug quickly enough to the other side had Dan up and jerking his hips forward, crying out as his tip wept in true *fuck yes, there*, fashion.

Tom rose up with him, chest against chest, his crush into Dan's balls and stopping him from easing back down. Tom had added the crush and cold metal of the chain to his balls, and it had Dan groaning as metal was ground against his scrotum.

Dan doubled over. As he did, a bite came hard at his neck, the grip on his balls and twist of piercing of his cock making sure he stayed still as Tom bit and marked at his leisure, marking... claiming...

“Please,” breathed Dan, tasting sweat on his lips.

“Back to your favourite word, I hear, boy. Good start,” murmured Tom, kissing at his jaw. Then all touch was withdrawn as he unhooked the thin blue rope from his belt. The chain now slept in Tom's lap for a moment as another grip went to Dan's balls, tugging them to the full and making him cry out. Tom knew his art well, wrapping the silk tight around the base four times before knotting it, forcing out a grunt from Dan. Palming came at how the ropes defined the full shape of his sacs, fuelling the need to close his legs and shield against the onslaught. But hands were tied firmly behind his back and Tom wouldn't let him close his legs.

Then as Tom picked up the chain that ran away over to the metal rung, he went still as the fine hook was attached to the piercing in his cock. He felt it slip over, the thickness of the hook screwing for a moment with his tip as the coldness brushed against it.

“Fuck.” That was a little louder and a ghost of a smile haunted Tom's lips hearing it.

This was what the piercing was for. Keeping him chained by the cock. There never were any idle threats to any of Tom's words. Dan couldn't shift his

gaze, how the hook slipped around the captive piercing, leaving the chain to fall down his cock, over to the rung screwed into the floor. The chain itself wasn't thick, just this thin collection of links that shifted the piercing in his tip, making Dan ease out a breath.

Tom was in again, wrapping the rope around his balls, but this time catching the chain and making it so if he fell any tug would come on his balls before his tip.

"Christ," mumbled Dan.

Tom found Dan's cock, and Dan tried not to squirm as he played the length so teasingly slow. Any movement from Dan's hips would come with a tug on his balls, and the look shining there in Tom's eyes wanted just that, to hear him cry out.

"Bastard," he hissed, and the smack of hand came at his cock, making him double into Tom.

"Bastard... who?"

Dan was left shivering against Tom, and he screwed his eyes shut, trying to control it. "You, Si—" he nearly snarled the "Sir", biting back anger as heat raced his body. Tom was back stroking at his cock, biting gently at his ear. But on those last words, a grip came to his hair and Dan's gaze was forced up level with Tom's.

The demand of entry into his mouth was heated, Tom's tongue clashing with his, making the rules, ensuring he followed the play as the strokes on his cock heated up between his thighs. Dan cried out into the kiss as his rutting of hips forced a hard tug on his balls. "Fucking bastard," he groaned.

"No. Not my name," said Tom, hiding a smile as he pulled back. Shifting slightly, a finger now hooking around the D-link in Dan's collar, Tom took him face-first down to meet the chain kissing the floor. A third hook was set in place and was hooked over Dan's D-link ring on his collar, keeping him doubled and on his knees.

He groaned, not realising Tom had moved until he felt a single tail whip cut across his ass.

His cry was instant, then lost to another cut across his ass that had him dipping his hips to escape it. Two more hits, then another, soon followed by the crush of hands into stinging cheeks, it forced the whip lashes to slipstream out

of focus in that moment. The tug on his balls was constant, and kept him grounded as his own dodge of the whip shifted the hook in his captive ring.

Tom knelt behind him, and the threat of his cock was there, pushing against the material of his jeans and into Dan's ass as his hips were gripped, pulling him back. Tom rode him like that for a while, just torturing body and mind with the gentlest of tugs at his body. But because of his chained cock and balls, added hurt exploded from his groin outward. Dan bit back his cries and downright refused to cry out how he needed to be fucked now.

"Holding back on letting me hear that pleasure, boy?" A finger breached him first, just the one, slicked up from the pre-come off Dan's own cock. Then fingering came hard and fast. Two more fingers had him writhing, shifting his hips to meet the ferocity and willing the pull on his balls to hurt more, so his body hurt more, just—"More."

Panting hard, Dan was left swearing on the floor as the touch withdrew. His knees had inched fully apart to allow the deepest penetration without even realising, a beg in its own right, and Tom denied it. He would deny it. A kiss came at his ass cheek, then, hearing the sound of a zipper, he arched when the tip of Tom's cock demanded access to his ass.

"More?" breathed Tom, sounding out of breath, need and heat there in the constant grip-release of finger digging into his hips, how the hold threatened to pull Dan back as Tom forced everything he had forward into him. "Let's see if we can extend that vocabulary of yours a touch, boy."

The tip pushed in, forcing a cry out of Dan as every muscle in his body tensed, then instantly relaxed, allowing Tom to take him root deep.

"My name, boy, what is it to you?"

"Fuck." Dan bit at the chain to stop himself crying it out, and his silence brought him the hardest fuck into his ass before Tom held himself in root deep again.

"Not my name, boy. What is it to you?"

His groan made sure he took more hard fucks up into him, then he grunted at the sudden loss of Tom's cock. Hands drifted over his ass for a moment, drawing trails in the fine perspiration. Another kiss came where one had played, fingers instead gently brushing against the hole where Tom's cock had rough-played.

"Still holding out on me?" breathed Tom.

Dan shifted into the dirt, into the touch playing against his ass. "Please."

"Please who?"

Again he denied the Dom his title and the touch withdrew. As Tom stood, the rattle of chain came from overhead.

The sound was distinct: a ceiling hoist, and Dan tried to pull his hands free and stroke at his cock knowing what that signified.

A gentle push came at Dan's hip, enough to encourage him to lie on his side. Hands were untied from his back, then when another tug encouraged him onto his back, his hands were taken above his head and cuffed to the metal ring. Awkward considering the chain ran down through his collar, over his body, and kept his cock chained and balls hurting.

All of that tension was added to as he saw the leg spreader chained to the ceiling hoist. Tom pulled it down, then taking the leather cuff, he slipped it into place around one of Dan's ankles, then the same care and attention came to his other. It spread Dan's legs wide and left his ass on display to Tom. Tom took it all in, his gaze running from ceiling hoist, down to between Dan's thighs, all to rest on Dan's gaze, and the look there in Tom's eyes...

Dan groaned.

Tom gave a simple tug on the ceiling hoist and Dan's ass was lifted up off the floor, now resting snugly against Tom's groin. The chains rattled in applause with being allowed to watch Tom stake a full claim.

Only Dan's shoulders touched the floor, the hoist's angle kept low to the floor to account for how his cock and balls were still bound by the chain running up over his body and through his hands.

Tom nestled into place, tracing touches down Dan's legs. His stroke to his own cock came with a cocky smile, Tom's *now you'll cry my name, boy*, then as he gripped into Dan's hips and pulled him into his lap, the hard grip said exactly the same.

"Fuh—" Dan started to cry out.

Tom's thick cock breached him hard and fast, forcing him more onto his shoulders and making him writhe as he arched his body. The threat was there with a vicious tug on his balls each time he tasted Tom, then as a hand took his cock, matching the rough pace in his ass, Dan stopped all fight, now just taking

everything Tom had to give, crying out how much he loved taking everything Tom had to give.

Slaps of hips against ass punctuated the scramble of dirt as Dan rode the heat in his body, the shockwaves from the brutal pace were felt as high as his shoulders as hands were able to do nothing but hold onto the metal ring.

“Fucking come on, boy.” Tom made sure Dan found the tips of his shoulders. “Cry my fucking name.”

Still he refused, biting back the sir tag despite his balls hitching high and crying out the need to call enough and come despite being bound.

In reply, his ass hit the floor hard, leaving Dan panting heavily and fighting confusion as he tried to figure out just when Tom had left his ass alone and released the ceiling hoist. The chains to his leather foot cuffs were taken off the hoist, leaving cuffs still around his ankles but now free as he tried to scramble back and find some comfort on the mattress Tom always kept down here. A hard pull on his balls warned him to keep still when the chain on his balls was pulled to the full, almost making it really hurt. The rope was untied, then the hook taken off his piercing just before another hand into his balls made him try to close his legs with how circulation rushed back into his groin.

“Easy, boy,” breathed Tom. But Dan had been pushed too far, his hips now punching up, demanding more, wanting—“Fucking more.”

A hand under his jaw kept him still.

“Calm. Down.”

Breathing heavily, finally giving a smile, he eased up, kissing at Tom's lips. “Please. Fucking finish it. Sir.”

Something changed in Tom, all control now drawn to a single point. Dan found he was caught in a tussle that ended up with a mattress beneath his ass. Tom sat behind him, and an arm was around Dan's neck, a hand on his cock.

“Need to come, boy?”

“Sir, fuck yes, please,” breathed Dan, trying to find some footing with his heels and push his hips up to allow his cock to play in Tom's hand. The moment he did, a smack came at his tip, forcing him to cry out and close his legs. “*Bastard*,” he shouted.

Kisses came at his neck, then hard bites, then a harder grip on his cock that jacked him off hard enough to make him shift and writhe into the hard pace. “Fuck... fuck.”

“Come on, boy.”

He couldn't hold back anymore and Dan came, every muscle in his body stretched to the full as he arched up, his cock pushed up into Tom's touch for the last time, tip fully exposed. Come hit his abs and he forgot the basics of breathing as Tom stroked each stream out of him.

“Christ, Christ...” mumbled Dan, nearly crumpling in on himself as he came down. He let his head drop back onto Tom's shoulder, all of his weight taken by Tom. Talk was impossible, breathing and getting air back into his system being the basics now.

Tom was still hard, his cock full and digging into the small of Dan's back.

Dan squirmed slightly, feeling it, loving the feel of how Tom pushed his own need back in order to take care of his. “Let...” mumbled Dan, at first just seeing the ceiling come back into focus. “Let me go.”

Dan sought the comfort of the mattress as he was laid down on his side. Tom came down, shaping him from behind. The question was there, just when had Tom taken his boots and jeans off, but he struggled to find the words as he shivered into the comedown.

Tom eased away, then the sound of boots being slipped back on and him walking into the distance drifted over. A moment later, the sound of heating kicking into life drifted over, Tom always preferring a cool place to play, then he found his natural spot behind Dan again. Hands were un-cuffed, then an arm slipped just above Dan's hand, almost offering to shelter his head where Tom's body failed to.

Dan locked his fingers in Tom's and closed his eyes. Gentle kisses came at the back of his neck, Tom's hard cock still demanding attention, but all control, with lust held so carefully in check to allow Dan to calm.

“Sorry, Brummie,” mumbled Tom against his throat. “I mean that.”

“It's okay,” he murmured back, then let a smile creep in, “although you could have just kissed me and said sorry, y'know?”

“Hmmm,” said Tom, shifting behind him as if to ease the ache in his cock. Dan bit back a groan with how he loved the feel of it digging into his ass. “Thought about that,” mumbled Tom, “but kissing up here usually comes with two options, and it looked like you wanted to go Glaswegian Kiss on me. I didn't fancy a headbutt.”

Dan choked a chuckle. "Said the guy who kidnapped me at knifepoint."

A hand snaked his waist, pulling him closer. "I know I scared you. But you could have stopped me. You knew it was me. I would have listened. And in my defence, the knife was fake."

"Fake?" he choked. Then Dan let his hand rest against the arm around his waist. He "could have" stopped it, but hadn't. He knew that too and tried to bury how he hadn't wanted Tom to walk away. Dan had never once said stop. Giving a sigh, he stretched his body to the full before letting life rest again. "That link drawing on my table was damn sweet."

Kisses still laced the back of his neck, but Tom whispered another apology. Giving a sigh, Dan turned over and eased on top of Tom. The cut lip was still visible, and he brushed his thumb against the hurt, easing out his own hurt on a sigh now he was able to touch Tom. A gentle kiss replaced where his hand played, then another.

Tom offered a smile, hands brushing distractedly at Dan's hips.

Taking hold of some discarded rope, Dan eased up so that he straddled Tom's hips. Keeping his gaze on the lust lowering those hazel eyes, he took hold of one of Tom's wrists, wrapped the rope around it, then brought the other in, again wrapping the rope around that one. No knot was tied, the Dom in Tom always respected, but Dan let Tom's hands rest against his chest, then he leaned down and kissed at his lips, loving having how all of this control was here with him. Giving a glance over to the last link on the wall, where no drawing sat behind it, to the word "*His*?" etched into the finely drawn metal with obvious flaws, Dan pulled Tom up, then eased his bound hands over his own head, down his body, to rest on his ass.

"Yes," he mumbled, kissing at Tom's lips again as he found his cock. "You're mine all right, Sir."

He made the ride slow and easy down onto Tom's cock, and Tom's hands instantly came up, tracing Dan's back, the rope grating skin in his wake.

Tom held on, marking, claiming at Dan's throat, whispering Dan's name, and all the quietest sorries that came with it as he was taken.

Breathing heavy, arms resting on Tom's shoulders, Dan smiled, then kept his whisper so light. "Or a kilt, Sir."

Tom mumbled something against his throat, all the need to take control buried in that sigh, barely, as he let Dan ride him. "Hm?"

Dan lifted Tom's gaze up to meet his. "Or you could have just worn a kilt for me, Sir."

Tom's chuckle was so soft, then suddenly lost to how he gripped at Dan's back, biting into Dan's shoulder, all to bury how his orgasm tore through his body. "Fuck," he breathed. "Might have to bring in a discussion about that," he managed, still caught in the rush. "Maybe wear it just the once."

"Just the once?" Dan raised a brow.

"Aye, lad. Just... the once."

The End

Author Bio

Jack L. Pyke blames her dark writing influences on living close to one of England's finest forests. Having grown up hearing a history of kidnappings, murders, strange sightings, and sexual exploits her neck of the woods is renowned for, Jack takes that into her writing, having also learned that human coping strategies for intense situations can sometimes make the best of people have disastrously bad moments. Redeeming those flaws is Jack's drive, and if that drive just happens to lead to sexual tension between two or more guys in a D/s relationship, Jack's the first to let nature take its course.

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