



His Boy Next Door: #40

Common Ground

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Category: LGBT+

Description: Why can't you have your cake and eat it too?

Channon belongs to Jack—that's just a fact. But they aren't an island, and if Channon's going to get the happy-ever-after he wants, Jack's going to have to bury the hatchet with (and not in) the one other person in Channon's life whose disapproval matters.

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Chapter One

If Jack Nash were to list the many pleasures of having a handsome, obedient boy at his beck and call, showing him off would be in the top ten. Clothed, naked, bound in rope—Jack loved to put Channon somewhere people could admire him knowing that he belonged entirely to Jack.

Of course, Jack had a voyeuristic streak a mile wide, so this was hardly surprising. That Channon did not, and found being on display deeply embarrassing, only made Jack's enjoyment of it all the sweeter.

“Arms up,” Jack said, running his hands over Channon's sides. Channon did as he was told, of course. Jack continued winding rope around his chest and checking the tension as he went. He ran a line in front and came around to smile at Channon. “Comfortable?”

Channon nodded. “Yes, Sir.” His gaze flickered from Jack's face to his own reflection in the wide glass of their bedroom mirror and back again, as if the sight of himself being tied up was too dangerous to look at for long.

He did look lovely. Normally when they did this, Channon would be naked, but tonight he was dressed to go out in black slacks and a fitted, black button-up. Jack was tying the rope over his clothes so it would be visible. Where they were going tonight, it wouldn't be out of place at all.

Jack had chosen to bind Channon in a hishi karada—a basic diamond-patterned body harness. For contrast, he'd chosen a length of moss green jute (matching Channon's

eyes) and another in gold (matching Jack's tie) to create a symmetrical, alternating pattern. Now he tied off the karada in the back and wove the ends in to keep them out of the way.

"Arms down," he said, picking up Channon's collar. He tapped Channon's shoulder with two fingers, and Channon went obediently to his knees.

From the floor, he looked up at Jack with a hopeful, almost innocent smile. He was a handsome young man, all of twenty years old, with strong shoulders and thick-muscled thighs. His dark hair and pale, sun-shy skin put Jack in mind of a young Henry Cavill circa *The Count of Monte Cristo*.

And Jack loved him very much.

"Good boy," he said, smoothing a hand over Channon's hair. He buckled the collar around Channon's neck. The collar was strong, black leather with brass D-rings and a solid buckle. Jack fastened it and, as always, checked the fit. Channon had been wearing this collar for two years now, and the tongue of the buckle dropped easily into its well-worn hole, but Jack checked anyway. He liked to be thorough. Who knew? Channon might have bulked up.

He was certainly muscular. One of his chores was to keep up the fitness regime Jack had approved for him. This was not solely for aesthetic purposes; it was one of the many ways in which Jack reminded Channon what they had agreed to, who Jack was to him, and to whom Channon belonged.

Because Jack was Channon's Sir, and Channon was Jack's boy, and what was between them was special, almost sacred. For Channon, reminders of his position with regard to Jack were a kind of worship, which was exactly how Jack liked it.

Jack smiled, picking up another length of jute. "Are you excited about tonight,

sweetheart?”

“Yes, Sir,” Channon said, sitting on his heels and resting his hands, palm up, on his knees. He seemed perfectly comfortable on the floor at Jack’s feet. “Are you?”

“It should be interesting,” Jack said, as he began to knot and cord a leash. “Nate and Ewan are going to be there. What do you think the chances are that Ewan will cause a scene?”

“Sir,” Channon said in a low protest. “That was one time.”

It had been only one time, but what a time. Nate had dragged Ewan off by his hair to discipline him loud enough they could be heard from outside the house. And sure, later Nate had told Jack that Ewan had been given special permission to act up that day for exactly that purpose, but Jack was always conscious that Ewan might do it again.

If he were honest with himself, it was because he wasn’t sure how he would handle it if Channon ever got the same idea. Once upon a time, with a different sub, Jack would simply have shut it down. With Jack, bratty behavior got you cut off. It wasn’t a punishment; it was a hard limit. Jack wasn’t interested in playing with someone who wanted to defy him. That Nate enjoyed it puzzled him, but then again Nate had always been a touch more sadistic than Jack and relished an opportunity to dispense painful correction.

With Channon, things weren’t as simple anymore. Jack loved him far too much to just cut him off. Still, if Channon started to get bratty...

Jack frowned. There were some punishments he knew Channon would hate, but in reality, the worst thing Jack could ever do to him would be to say, I’m disappointed in you. This behavior is unacceptable. That was the relationship they had. Channon

was good and Jack took care of him, and in between they did some very kinky things, to their mutual satisfaction.

He reassured himself that Channon would never act out like that. That wasn't in Channon's nature. And Ewan? Well, Ewan wasn't Jack's problem.

He looped the leash through the D-ring at Channon's throat and tugged it, wrapping it around his hand until his fist was hard up under Channon's chin. Channon swayed into the grip, his tongue coming out to wet his lip, eyes bright with anticipation. Jack ran a thumb over that lip and smiled.

"Let's go, sweetheart."

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The Ball and Chain was a ramshackle old theater out on Parliament Street that had been part of the Santa Rita kink scene since the seventies. The owner was a friend of Mr White's and sometimes hosted kink shows that skirted the boundaries of what was both legal and moral. But tonight there wasn't anything particularly risqué going on, just some predicament bondage with a side of impact play. The stage had been set up with a suspension frame, a stool, and a table bearing a number of interesting items. Jack tried to guess what might be coming by the tools laid out, and then gave himself up to the mystery of it. He ushered Channon to the front of the stage, one hand in the small of Channon's back, the end of the leash wrapped around it.

The audience area was mostly made up of rows of theater seating, but at the front there were several wide, vintage couches. Jack had reserved two, and Nate had already taken one, sitting on the inside end with Ewan in his lap.

They were an unexpected couple, Jack thought. Nate was effortlessly handsome, with all that untamed gold hair and lazy stubble. He was dressed in leather tonight, sky-

high fuck-me boots and trousers with a lot of intriguing zippers. Somehow, everything he wore looked good on him in a way Jack envied a little. Nate seemed not to care. Was that his secret? Lack of fucks to give?

Ewan, meanwhile, looked like trouble. He had black liner smeared around his eyes, and the collar he wore tonight wasn't his play collar but a viciously spiked thing more suitable for a punk club than a kink club. He was wearing skinny jeans and a tank top, although 'wearing' was perhaps an overstatement in the case of the tank—it hung off him, cut in a way that made it seem about to fall off at any moment to expose his pale, fragile chest. He looked, in short, disheveled and dangerous.

Jack inhaled, exhaled, and reminded himself that he was 'being nice' to Ewan.

"Ooh," Nate said when Jack led Channon over to them. He reached up to touch the rope knotted around Channon's torso, running his fingers down to where it disappeared between Channon's thighs. No one else was permitted to touch Channon uninvited; Nate had special permission. "Well, aren't you pretty, all wrapped up."

Jack saw Channon duck his head in shy embarrassment. "Thank you, Mr Scott."

Ewan made a disgusted noise. "You don't have to call him 'Mr'," he said caustically. "He don't deserve it."

Instead of being annoyed by this, as Jack would have been, Nate casually grabbed Ewan by the earlobe and twisted. "Behave yourself," he said mildly. "Channon can call me whatever he wants."

Ewan scowled and pressed his face into Nate's neck like an angry kitten. Jack wondered if Ewan bit, and what Nate would do to him if he did.

He settled onto the couch, tugging Channon down alongside him. Channon curled up

against Jack's arm, a little clingy. It made Jack smile. This was because of the leash, he suspected, Channon probably self-conscious about it because they hadn't done much of that in public before. Jack tucked that arm around him, squeezing him comfortingly.

"No Victor tonight?" Nate asked with a wicked smile.

Jack shook his head. "I think predicament bondage might be a bit much for him. He's still fairly innocent."

"That won't last," Nate commented. "You know what it's like. He hasn't run screaming, so it's just a matter of time until he finds the thing that blows his socks off, and the next thing you know he'll be up to his eyeballs in it."

"True." That was often how it went. One taste of the right kink and you threw yourself in hard. Too hard, sometimes. "I don't see him as a bondage and discipline type."

"Maybe he's a service sub," Nate suggested, grinning.

Jack didn't think that sounded right either, but you never knew. "Speaking of service, Mr White's having a dinner party in a couple of weeks." Jack said. "On the Thursday, I think. You'll come?"

"Can't," Nate told him cheerfully. "I'll be in Dallas for that DevSecOps conference. I'm giving the keynote," he added, waggling his eyebrows. "You'll have to have fun without me."

Jack felt Channon twitch under his arm and looked at him. Channon had been paying attention to what they were saying, though he ducked his head when Jack caught him at it.

“Something wrong, sweetheart?”

“No, Sir,” Channon said.

But Ewan was wriggling in Nate’s lap, glaring at Channon like he was trying to set him on fire. Jack saw Channon give Ewan a meaningful look. So something was wrong.

“You’re not lying to me, are you?” he asked mildly, pulling the leash taut against Channon’s collar. “Hiding something?”

Channon’s eyes flickered up, widening in horror. “No, Sir. There’s nothing wrong. Just...when they sent out the conference details to the team, I thought it looked interesting. But we’re going to Mr White’s,” he added quickly, “so it doesn’t matter.”

Ah. Channon wanted to go to the conference but equally wanted to serve Jack however Jack ordered him. Good boy.

Jack was torn between the desire to show Channon off at Mr White’s and pleasure at the evidence of Channon showing interest in his professional development. In the end prudence won out.

“All right, then,” he said aloud. “You’ve been extremely good—”

“As always,” Nate breathed, smirking.

“—so you can go to the conference,” Jack continued smoothly, “if Nate agrees to take care of you,” Jack added just to see how Nate would react.

Nate laughed. “Oh, sure. We’ll have fun, won’t we, angel?” He winked at Channon, who blushed a bit. Then he turned his grin on Jack. “And you can take care of my

brat while I'm gone."

Jack stiffened, his eyes sliding sideways to where Ewan was scowling from the cage of Nate's arms. Take care of Ewan? Jack had no idea where to start.

But what he said was, "Sure, I can walk him and feed him," because sometimes he couldn't help himself.

This made Ewan scowl harder, but all he did was bury that scowl in Nate's neck, his eyes glittering over Nate's shoulder.

"You could take him to Mr White's," Nate suggested. Ewan made an indignant noise, clearly as displeased by the idea as Jack was.

Ewan at Mr White's for a high protocol dinner? He'd managed it once before, Jack knew, but that had been with Nate's hand on his collar. Ewan did behave for Nate in public sometimes—more often than not, to be fair. But there was no way in hell Ewan would behave himself for Jack. And Jack refused to embarrass himself or Mr White by trying to make Ewan come to heel, only to watch him make a scene.

No. He would not be taking Ewan to Mr White's. If he couldn't show Channon off, he'd rather skip it entirely. He'd have to find some other way of 'taking care' of Nate's brat.

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Predicament bondage was one of those things that made Channon feel very weird. A hot and sexy kind of weird, but the kind that he didn't quite know what to do with. Seeing someone else in a predicament sparked a low-grade anxiety in him—he winced when they were put into restraints and forced to do something or else something worse would happen. But then again, the idea of it happening to him...

Channon shuddered and leaned into Jack's arm as the woman on the stage squealed. She'd been restrained with her arms behind her back, bent over, standing on her tiptoes. There were clamps on her nipples, tied off to long threads leading behind her to a pillar with a rough-bristled brush set up between her legs. Her panties were too thin to provide any protection, and it was obvious that the brush was torturing her intimately. But if she pulled away from it, the clamps tugged painfully at her nipples, and so she was stuck.

Her Dom had just pulled out a feather and was beginning to tickle her with it. Channon squirmed in discomfort. She looked so distressed. And yet, all he could think was, If that was me...

He tried not to picture it, but the image came too easily. Channon pressed his legs together, but that didn't help, because tonight Jack had run rope between his thighs, and squeezing just made the rope squeeze his balls. He could feel the knot Jack had tied right between his cheeks, rubbing him through his slacks. Sitting on it didn't help. It just reminded him that he was wearing lace panties, and that later...later Jack was going to take them off him.

Oh, no, this wasn't helping at all.

It got worse. Then the Dom brought a man out onto the stage and proceeded to restrain him too. Channon watched, transfixed, as the man and the woman were restrained together, so that if he moved, it would push the brush harder between her legs. At the same time, his balls were leashed so that if she pulled away from the brush, not only would it tug on her nipple clamps, but yank on his balls too.

And then the Dom stroked the male sub's back, very tenderly, and began to flog him.

Channon watched with a mouth gone dry, his breathing short and shallow. He couldn't bear this, watching this delicate, drawn-out torture. The rope around his junk

constricted him mercilessly, his pants now too tight. He couldn't look away.

If that was me...

God, if it were, he didn't know if he could stand it.

But then he imagined Jack's hands on him, and Jack's voice saying, You can do this, sweetheart. I know you can, and he knew what would happen.

When the scene was over—both subs released and wrapped up in blankets—there was an intermission. Channon hunched over, thinking about what he'd seen, the vision of it replaying in his head like a looping gif.

"Having fun, sweetheart?" Jack asked.

Channon startled. "Yes, Sir!"

Jack smiled, stroking Channon's hair. "You look a little pink. Do you want to kneel for a bit?"

Channon nodded, his face hot with embarrassment at having been caught out. Jack took a cushion off the couch and dropped it at his feet. Channon went to his knees and leaned his cheek on Jack's thigh while Jack gathered the leash around his hand until his fist was at Channon's throat. It felt good. Secure. Safe.

Channon sighed and leaned into Jack, closing his eyes. The predicament gif in his mind played over and over. He knew he should probably tell Jack how the show was affecting him. Jack would love to hear that. Jack was into stuff like that, so Channon should just tell him. But for now he enjoyed the illicit thrill of being secretly turned on.

There was a thump beside him, and he opened his eyes to see that Ewan had flopped onto the floor next to him. Ewan didn't bother kneeling, he just leaned messily up against Nate's leg.

Above, Jack and Nate were talking over the arms of their sofas. As Channon watched, Nate absently slid a hand into Ewan's hair and gripped it tight. Ewan bit his lip and then relaxed, as if this were perfectly fine. He lifted his eyebrows at Channon in greeting.

"You good?"

Channon shrugged, ducking his head to hide his blush. "It's okay."

But this wasn't going to be enough. Ewan knew Channon pretty well, after all, and was especially keen every time he thought Channon was hiding a dirty secret. "Okay? You sure?" Ewan slid a combat-boot over to poke Channon in the leg. "Not having some kind of kinky awakening?"

"We've done predicament bondage before," Channon said. "I'm not being awakened."

"Oh, aye? What have you done?" Ewan wrinkled his nose at the stage. "It's all so fussy. People always gotta make contraptions and stuff. I'm not into watching it."

That was a statement with a big hole in it. "But you like doing it, right?" Channon guessed.

Ewan gave him a narrow look. "Maybe." He gave Channon a once over and smirked. "I'm guessing you like it a lot. You're all flustered."

"No I'm not," Channon protested, which probably only made him seem more

flustered. “I just...they’re mostly-naked people on stage. Everybody likes that.”

Ewan’s grin was wicked. “Oh, sure, you like looking at a naked woman, all of a sudden.” He went to lean in but winced as the movement tugged his own hair against Nate’s grip. “Naw, I bet I know what you like. You like thinking about Daddy taking you home and predicamenting you. Am I right?”

“No,” Channon lied.

“Don’t pretend. You’re gonna write about it in your kinky fantasy journal, aye? Show your old man what you want him to do to you?”

Channon should never have told Ewan about the fantasy journal. He opened his mouth to protest, but then...then he wondered why it mattered. Ewan was just as kinky as he was—kinkier, even. He didn’t care what Channon did with Jack, so long as it was safe, sane, and consensual. Ewan just liked to tease.

And Channon...kind of liked being teased.

He blinked, startled by the realization. Ewan was taunting him the way he always did. It was a mild form of humiliation, really, and Channon found to his surprise that knowing this did not make him hate it.

Ewan was paying attention to him, needling him like usual, and it was in a way quite flattering to be the focus of Ewan’s attention. Ewan was his best friend, and a friend that came with benefits. Some of those benefits were kinky.

Was this kinky too?

Sometimes, Channon felt like Ewan and Nate were almost an extension of him and Jack, a sort of added bonus to their relationship. They had played together before, and

the way they ended hanging out in a group at events like this felt like they were their own private club. Channon had overheard someone at a play party joke that the four of them were an item, and while Jack had laughed it off at the time, Channon wasn't sure, really, how far that was from the truth.

Now Channon looked at Ewan, unsure what to say, and settled on honesty. "Okay, so sure, the thought of doing it is hot. Like you don't think it's hot too."

Ewan grinned like he'd won. "Never said it wasn't."

Oh. So Ewan liked predicament bondage? An image flashed into Channon's mind, overwriting the previous predicament. Something like what had happened on stage, but instead of the man it was Channon. And instead of the woman...

The thought of Ewan crying out like she had was so intense that Channon had to force it away before Ewan saw it all over his face. He stuck out his lip in a mock pout. "Be nice to me," he said, pretending to be stern about it. "I'm gonna spend two whole days alone with Nate in Dallas. Who knows what'll happen?"

This caught Ewan for a moment, but then he grinned. "Your Sir, for one. You won't do anything with Nate he doesn't tell you."

"You know the kinds of things he orders me to do," Channon countered, lifting his eyebrows to invite Ewan to speculate.

Jack did order Channon to do a lot of things, and on more than one occasion he'd ordered Channon to submit to Nate, or at the very least be fucked by him. Ewan had seen it once when all four of them had played together. Ewan had seen Channon on his knees with Nate's dick in his mouth. Ewan had said he didn't mind, but it was one thing when Ewan was there and another thing when he wasn't. Channon wasn't sure where Ewan stood on it now.

Ewan seemed unconcerned by the possibility of this, however. “Oh, aye, your Sir can order you to do whatever he wants, and you’ll do it, I’m sure. But my Sir does what I tell him to, and—”

He yelped as the hand in his hair tugged hard. “Sorry, what was that?” Nate said in a sweetly dangerous tone. “Did I just hear you talking shit about me?”

Ewan came up on his knees, trying to get some slack in the grip Nate had on his hair. “Ah! No, I just—”

“Because it really sounded like you were talking shit about me,” Nate said in that same, dangerous tone. “And if you’re talking shit about me, I think that deserves a demerit.”

Ewan twisted toward him, wincing painfully. “No! I weren’t, I promise!”

“So what did you say?” Nate demanded.

Ewan looked caught. “I said...my sir does what I tell him to—but!” he added quickly as Nate’s grip tightened. “I meant you don’t...you won’t...you won’t fuck other people without making sure I’m okay with it first.”

Nate’s expression was mixed. He seemed to find this amusing, anyway. “Oh, is that what you meant? I see. Well, that’s true. Carry on,” and he shoved Ewan back onto the floor, harder than Channon would have liked himself.

Ewan tossed a scowl in Nate’s direction and rubbed his scalp. “Anyway. See?”

If Channon had ever been chastised like that by Jack, he’d not have been able to shrug it off so easily. Especially in public. The idea was mortifying. But when he looked up, he saw Jack smiling at him faintly. Jack’s thumb rubbed up under

Channon's ear, and Channon knew he, at least, wasn't in trouble.

"I don't care if you play with him," Ewan went on, unfazed. "Like...I know you can't take what he hands out like I can. So I know you're not gonna get flogged the way he flogs me." He blinked at Channon, suddenly looking a little shy. "I don't mind if you, you know, need to kneel at his feet and get told you've been a good boy."

Channon was startled. Ewan was...offering him Nate? He didn't know if he even wanted that.

"Anyway, shouldn't you be more worried about me and your old man?" Ewan flashed him a wicked grin, all teeth and sass. "Reckon I could get your mister raging."

For a moment Channon thought Ewan meant in bed. His brain rejected the thought like it was spitting out something bitter. But then he thought about it. Nate had said Jack would have to take care of Ewan. And Ewan was...Ewan. A brat. Someone who liked to push a Dom's buttons to get a reaction.

With Channon, Jack's patience seemed endless. No matter what, so long as Channon tried as hard as he could, and Jack could see it, he wouldn't ever be angry with Channon. He wouldn't punish him unfairly (unless the whole point of what they were doing was that it was unfair) and he never, ever lost his temper.

But with Ewan?

"I could get him to crack in twenty-four hours," Ewan said, seeming pleased with himself. "Twelve, if I put my back into it."

Channon wasn't sure if it was the idea or Ewan's wicked grin that made his spine tingle.

But then he shook himself, feeling ridiculous. They were both adults. They could be mature about this.

Ewan and Jack, stuck with each other for a couple of days. What was the worst that could happen?

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Chapter Two

“Did you enjoy the show?” Jack asked in the car. He’d enjoyed it himself, as far as it went. But for him, going to these kinds of events was generally more social than kinkily satisfying.

Channon nodded. “Yes, Sir,” he said, his gaze drifting out the window. He was distracted. Jack reached over the center console and tapped Channon’s knee, which got his attention pretty smartly. “Sir?”

“Tell me what you liked about the show,” Jack prompted.

Channon leaned against the passenger side door, chewing his lip. “I liked...I think I liked thinking about what it would be like if it was me having all of that done to me.” He looked down at his hands, his fingers squirming together. “I liked it when the one guy had to hold still so he didn’t hurt that woman. I...I liked that.”

Jack shouldn’t have been surprised by that, yet somehow he was. “Who did you want to be in that scenario? The person who had to hold still so the other one wouldn’t hurt them, or the one getting hurt when the first one failed.”

“Either,” Channon said, looking up owlishly.

That surprised Jack even more. “I wouldn’t have thought you’d like the responsibility of having to work hard not to hurt someone. There’s so much capacity for failure. It’s built into the exercise. And I know you hate failure.”

Stopped at the light, Jack reached across to stroke Channon's hair off his brow. His handsome boy, who wanted only to be the best he could, always.

"That's true, Sir. But...I think if it was Ewan, I..." but he trailed off, looking embarrassed.

Ah. Now it all made sense. Jack pulled into the garage under their apartment building and parked the car before responding. "You want to do predicament bondage with Ewan."

Channon gave him a startled look. "Is that okay? I'm just thinking, it's not like I wanted to actually—"

"It's fine," Jack took Channon's hand and squeezed it. "I don't think Ewan would let me do that to him, though."

Channon seemed puzzled by this. "I mean, but Nate would be there."

"Oh, in that case." Jack got out of the car. He tucked Channon (already bundled in Jack's coat to hide the rope crisscrossing his torso) under his arm and walked him into the elevator. "I like that you're thinking about this. How does it go? Nate and I tie you and Ewan together and torture you both? I could get behind that."

This was apparently too direct; Channon hid his face in Jack's shoulder. "I don't even know if Ewan would be into this."

"We're fantasizing, sweetheart, just let your imagination take over."

It was wonderful, watching Channon overcome his natural reticence to think and say very filthy things. Jack loved it, and now he got to watch Channon squirming over what he actually wanted. The elevator had almost reached the top floor before

Channon came up with a response.

“I don’t think Ewan can do it,” he said slowly. “He can’t be the one trying to keep me from being hurt. He just...I don’t think he has the stamina.”

Oh, that was almost boasting. Jack took Channon by the shoulders and turned him around, gleeful.

“Sweetheart. Are you claiming you do have the stamina?”

Channon flushed, digging his teeth into his lip. “I’m stronger than he is,” he said with quiet embarrassment. “And, like, I do resistance training. So I have a better chance than he does,” Channon went on, looking Jack in the eye. “That doesn’t mean I have enough stamina not to mess up, Sir, but I think you want me to. I think that’s the whole point of this.”

Oh, how Jack loved him. “That’s right,” he said, wrapping Channon’s leash around his hand and walking Channon out of the elevator. Once they were safely inside the condo, Jack pushed Channon back against the wall and held him there, taking a moment to admire his boy. “So. You don’t want Ewan to be hurt in this scenario.”

Channon shook his head. “No, Sir.”

Jack smiled, pressing his knee between Channon’s thighs to pin him in place. “You know, you’d be the only one in that room who didn’t want Ewan hurt.”

Because Ewan was a masochist. Ewan, by all accounts, needed pain to keep him grounded, to rage against, to force him to submit. And Nate, a conscientious sadist, enjoyed pushing the limits of what Ewan could tolerate.

Jack enjoyed hurting people too, but not like Nate did. For Nate, there was a savage

joy in the infliction of pain, something wild and dangerous. For Jack, it was all about control. When he hurt Channon, it was because Channon belonged to him, was his to do with as he liked, and if that included pain then so be it. But Nate just liked to hurt pretty things. Ewan, he said, was beautiful when he hurt.

But Channon did not like pain. He endured it as a sign of submission, to please his Sir, as a means of showing his dedication to Jack. When it was Ewan being hurt, Channon liked it even less, despite knowing how Ewan got off on it, needed it to help him let go. That was the difference between them. Ewan had to be forced to submit. Channon gave himself to Jack with every breath he took.

Jack knew which he preferred.

“On your knees,” he said, releasing Channon and stepping back.

Channon slid to his knees with the ease of practice. Jack’s coat pooled on the floor around him. He looked up, eyes wide and green, his lips parted in anticipation. “May I take your shoes, Sir?”

“You may.”

Jack watched him work. Channon was careful in the way he served, unlacing Jack’s shoes and putting them aside neatly. Later, Jack would have Channon clean and polish them for him, but for now there were more important things to do.

Jack pushed his fingers into Channon’s hair, gripping it tightly. “You’ve been a good boy tonight,” he said quietly. He loved the way Channon leaned into the grip, listening to Jack’s voice no matter how low he pitched it. Channon’s attention was a thrill in itself. “I’m going to give you a choice. You can come tonight, or you can wait until our playdate on Tuesday.”

He watched Channon struggle with this choice, those green eyes tilting up to examine Jack's expression for a hidden trap. "But you're going to come—right, Sir? Either way?"

"Oh yes," Jack said, smiling down at his clever boy. "I'm going to fuck you every day, and I won't be depriving myself of the pleasure of coming in you." He stroked Channon's hair as Channon absorbed this information, watching as Channon's pale cheeks colored in the soft light of their condo. "You'll just have to wait."

All that stimulation and no payoff. Could Channon handle it? Jack knew he'd try. He trusted Channon to always try his best to do what Jack demanded of him. Channon would no doubt be a squirming mess by the time Tuesday came, with a hair-trigger Jack would have to be careful of if he didn't want Channon breaking at the first touch. But that would be fun in itself.

Channon wet his lip, his eyes flickering as he thought. "But if I come tonight...what's the catch?"

"Nothing, sweetheart," Jack told him fondly, winding his fingers in Channon's hair again to watch him wince. "But if you can wait until Tuesday, I will be very, very proud of you."

Channon groaned, closing his eyes. It was unfair, really, because Jack knew Channon well enough to know what he was going to choose. Jack could have just ordered Channon not to come, and Channon would have accepted it as law. But it was fun to make him do this to himself.

"Then...then I'll wait, Sir," Channon said, his face twisted in resignation. "I'll do it."

Jack felt his mouth stretch into a gleeful grin. There. Exactly what he'd wanted. "That's my good boy. Now." Jack stood, towering over Channon on his knees. He

wrapped the cord of Channon's leash tight around his hand until his fist was under Channon's chin. "Take me out."

Obediently, Channon reached for Jack's belt. He unfastened Jack's trousers and opened them, pulling Jack's boxer briefs down to expose him. He looked up, his hands still on the band of Jack's underwear, and licked his lips like he'd already guessed what was coming.

"Hands behind your back," Jack said. "Open your mouth."

It was gratifying how quick Channon was to obey. With one hand, Jack held Channon in place with the leash, and with the other he slid his fingers over his thickening cock. Channon's eyes were fixed on Jack's hand as Jack slowly pumped himself. Jack pressed the head of his cock to Channon's lip, smearing it with precome.

Channon was so beautiful like this. Obedient, eager, ready, willing. Jack rested the head of his cock on Channon's tongue. "Close," he said. Channon's lips closed on him, his eyes turned up to watch Jack's face. Worshipful.

Jack didn't have to tell Channon not to suck. Channon knew by now that sucking Jack's cock was a privilege he had to be granted. Instead, Jack pushed into him, holding him in place with the leash, feeling the hot thrill of using Channon's mouth, knowing how excited Channon would get and how much he'd ache later when he didn't get to come.

I should make him hold off for a week, Jack thought, slowly fucking Channon's face. Two weeks. A month. See how long it takes him to spill in his sleep. See how anguished he gets over failing me.

Because he would get upset about it, and then Jack could either punish or console him, and then make him start over. Maybe the punishment could be too many

orgasms. Jack could tie him up and strap a magic wand to him, wring Channon dry until he was pleading for Jack to stop.

Jack closed his eyes, imagining Channon's tearful begging, and buried a hand in Channon's hair, forcing himself deeper into Channon's mouth, into his throat. Channon made a strangled sound—Jack let him have a little breathing space. He looked down again, and Channon was still gazing up at him like Jack was a hero or a god.

It felt right.

This was what Jack wanted, his obedient angel taking everything Jack gave him. The power of it thrilled him, spicing the pleasure of fucking Channon's mouth, of stroking as deep into Channon's throat as his boy could handle.

“Go on,” Jack commanded roughly. “Suck me.”

The sudden tightness of Channon's mouth sent jolts of sensation through him. He let go of Channon's hair to reach down and grip his balls, pressing hard behind them. And then he came, flooding Channon's tongue with the only reward Channon was going to get tonight. Jack groaned, pulsing into Channon's mouth, feeling his knees quake with the force of it. He went up on his toes, relief spreading through him in a beautiful lethargy.

He looked down at Channon, whose lips were still wrapped around his cock. Water gathered in the corners of Channon's eyes. “Swallow,” Jack said. He felt Channon do it, sparking another throb in Jack's dick. Then Jack slid out and ran his thumb over Channon's wet, swollen mouth. “Good boy,” he said, smiling, and Channon smiled back.

“Thank you, Sir,” he said, sounding honestly grateful, despite the forced abstinence.

Jack believed him.

Perfect boy. Jack wouldn't have him any other way.

Chapter Three

Channon liked flying. He didn't care for airports, particularly, but that feeling of the plane taking off, the sudden change between 'plane on the runway' and 'plane definitely in the air' made his gut tingle.

When he expressed this to Nate on their flight to Dallas, however, Nate said, "You could take flying lessons."

Channon stared at him. "Me? Why?"

Nate grinned. "Because you can afford it and it sounds like fun. You could buy a Cessna."

It sounded absolutely ridiculous. Channon's chest ached at the thought of it. "Ewan would make fun of me forever."

"Sure, but he's not the boss of you." Still, Nate let it go. "Excited about the conference?"

"Not excited, really," Channon confessed. "Nervous, I guess."

"About what? Worried people won't like you? Won't make any friends?"

It gave Channon an involuntary shudder. "Well, I wasn't before," he said. But then he shook his head. "I just...sometimes I want to ask questions, but I don't want to risk sounding stupid. You know."

Nate nodded. “Relatable.”

“I can’t imagine you ever worrying about that,” Channon said, eyeing Nate sidelong. “You don’t seem worried about anything.”

“I have absorbed a lot of California chill, that’s true,” Nate said, seemingly unaffected by this statement. He’d stowed his phone and laptop, and now his fingers tapped restlessly on his leg. “But I remember the first few times Jack and I tried to talk to investors, way back when. I was worried they’d think I was a hack, or a fraud.”

“So what happened?”

Nate flashed him a white, shark-like grin. “I realized I wasn’t the only one. It’s like masculinity,” he went on, absently doing hand stretches Channon recognized from the OSHA card at his own desk. “We’re all out here putting up this front, terrified of being found out. But if everyone’s pretending, there’s no use in worrying about it. Anyway, now I let Jack do all the blustering. He enjoys it.”

It didn’t seem like bluster to Channon, but Jack certainly projected a sort of confidence that was bigger than any one man could really be. Channon couldn’t deny that he found that attractive, but more than that, Channon loved seeing the Jack that existed in private, a different sort of confidence. Sir, Channon thought, smiling to himself over it. His Sir, and his alone.

Or not entirely his alone. There was a part of Jack that belonged in some way to Nate. Channon was aware of this though he couldn’t fully articulate it—Jack and Nate were a unit, an entity that existed in conjunction with what Jack and Channon were together. Channon tried to picture a Venn diagram of it, but it didn’t quite work. Still, it was true. Nate had access to parts of Jack that Channon didn’t.

He wondered if that should bother him. The fact that it didn't felt oddly unsurprising. In much the same way that Jack encouraged Channon to have sex with people who weren't Jack, Channon realized that he wanted Jack to have this thing he had with Nate, a closeness and understanding that was different from the one between Jack and himself.

And it was fine because Nate wasn't a threat to him. Channon couldn't imagine Nate ever being a threat to what he had with Jack. But then, Channon couldn't imagine himself being a threat to what Jack had with Nate, either, so that seemed fair enough.

When they landed in Dallas, there was a driver waiting for them. Nate chatted breezily with the guy, finding out all the best places to eat or drink or see live music as if he really was on holiday. Channon played Yankai's Peak on his phone, not really listening.

At the hotel, after check in, Nate said, "Are you headed to the dinner tonight?"

Channon shook his head. "Isn't that for, like, VIPs?"

"It's for whoever can afford a ticket," Nate told him, grinning. "But I guess you're on a budget, huh? Maybe you don't have a nice enough suit."

"Oh, sure," Channon said, trying to keep a straight face. "Yeah, I can't afford stuff like that."

Nate nodded sagely. "Too bad. But I'm guessing you aren't allowed to eat half the things on the menu anyway."

This was actually true. "I hear room service has green juice," Channon said, which made Nate chuckle.

They were on the same floor, but when Channon went to go on down the corridor, Nate stopped him.

“Jack wanted me to give you this,” he said with a wolfish grin. ‘This’ was a long box with a plain, black exterior. It felt hefty and sort of solid, nothing rattling inside.

Foam padded, Channon decided. He eyed it doubtfully. “Do I even want to know what’s in here?”

Nate laughed. “Oh, I bet you do. Don’t open it yet,” Nate warned, mock serious. “I was told you had to have permission.”

A familiar prickle of anticipation sparked in Channon’s belly. Whatever it was, Nate knew. And Nate thought he’d like it. Or hate it. Either way, it wasn’t going to be something insignificant. Channon had his suspicions, but he just nodded and asked if Nate needed him for anything.

Nate dismissed him with a wave. “No, you go have fun.”

That really didn’t ease Channon’s suspicions. He took the box to his own room and set it on the bedside table, where it taunted him.

Channon’s room was a suite of rooms, actually. Not fancy enough to make him super uncomfortable, but enough that he called Jack straight away, while he was still unpacking.

“Hey, sweetheart. How was the flight?” Jack asked.

“Good. They had kale chips,” Channon told him, hanging up his jacket to keep it from wrinkling.

“A-plus service,” Jack said with amusement.

Channon went to the window and looked out. The sky was dark already, but the city was lit up like Christmas. “Sir,” he said deliberately. “When you said Cynthia would book my room for me, did you get her to upgrade it?”

“Do you like it?” Jack asked, a smile clear in his voice.

Channon picked up what he thought might be a fig and sniffed it. “There’s a fruit basket.”

“You’re allowed to eat fruit.”

It deserved an eyeroll. Channon bit his lip. “I don’t think fruit baskets are, like, a standard part of the employee training accommodation package.”

This made Jack laugh softly. “No, they probably aren’t. Send it back if you don’t want it.”

Well, Channon wasn’t going to do that, even if he wasn’t sure how to eat fresh figs in the first place. “I’ll keep it. Thank you, Sir. Um...” He hesitated.

“Yeah?”

“Nate gave me something. He said I had to ask you for permission to open it.”

This time, Jack’s laugh was deeper and a fair bit more suggestive. “You don’t have permission yet.”

Oh god, that made it so much worse. But Channon knew better than to argue. “Okay, Sir.”

“What are your plans for this evening?” Jack asked.

“I was going to have a shower, get a chicken quinoa salad from room service, and, um, maybe watch something?”

“Wanna watch a movie with me, sweetheart?”

Channon really did. “Yes please,” he said.

“Okay, well, go order dinner and get ready, then call me back. I’ll see what’s good on Netflix.”

“Yes, Sir,” Channon said, grateful and satisfied.

?

Day one of the conference passed almost entirely without incident. It was like all the other conferences Channon had been to before, slickly corporate and tending toward snobbish. Being a tech conference, however, the attendees were a mix of conservative office types, tech bro entrepreneurs, and programmers in jeans and graphic tees. Channon had worn a blazer and jeans. Nate looked disarmingly casual in a button down with the sleeves rolled up. Everyone treated Nate like royalty, which Channon found amusing because Nate hadn’t even shaved for this.

They were offered coffee and pastries—Channon refused a croissant because it was a not-without-permission food—and then Nate had to shake hands with a lot of people who seemed to think Channon was his PA.

Nate didn’t let them get away with it for long. He introduced Channon as, “One of our juniors. Channon started out as an intern, but he’s a fully fledged member of the team now. Our internship program has an excellent retention rate,” he added, going

into a well-rehearsed spiel about JNNS that Channon guessed Jack had had a hand in.

For himself, Channon shook hands, smiled politely, and pocketed business cards. Jack had told him to photograph and annotate the cards at the end of the day to remind him who he'd met and why they might be useful in the future. While this seemed like good advice, Channon had to wonder if it was really necessary. When was he ever going to call any of these people for a favor?

Nate wasn't speaking until after lunch, so he kept Channon company for the morning. Or maybe it was the other way around; Nate suggested Channon come with him to the elective sessions he'd chosen, and Channon was happy to oblige. Two of the sessions were interesting enough, and Channon took notes. One seemed very impressive until Channon noticed Nate had got his phone out and was furiously texting. When he saw Channon watching he angled the screen so Channon could see: it was to Ewan, outlining the basic premise of what the presenter was saying in blunt, dismissive terms. Ewan's response was a lot of angry cursing. This seemed to have been the point, because Nate smiled indulgently and tucked his phone away again.

There was a buffet lunch. Nate silently handed Channon a single piece of lettuce with a pair of tongs, which Channon accepted with equal solemnity. When Nate saw how much actual food Channon put on his plate, he laughed at himself.

"Well, you're not starving," he said.

"Protein," Channon told him, "is important for building muscle."

Nate grinned. "Mmm, well, whatever you're doing is working, so I'll mind my own business."

And then it was time for Nate's keynote, which meant they had to split up.

Nate handed Channon his phone. “Hang onto this for me, will you? It’s on silent, but I have this recurring dream where it starts ringing in the middle of a speech, and then I realize I’m wearing assless chaps.” He grinned. Channon didn’t know if this was actually true, but he pocketed the phone and found a seat in the back of the hall where he was out of the way.

It was one of those typical conference halls with a stage at one end and round tables ringed with chairs. Channon’s table slowly filled with people he didn’t know, which meant he had to introduce himself.

He did it the way Jack had drilled into him: eye contact, firm but not jerk-ish handshake, confident smile. “Channon Beaumont, JNNS Tech.”

“JNNS?” said one of the women, perking up. “Do you work directly with Nate Scott?” She had the program of events open to the page with Nate’s corporate headshot on it.

“Not directly. But he’s at the top of the reporting chain,” Channon clarified.

The woman seemed disappointed. “So there’s absolutely no chance you can introduce me?”

“Uh...I mean, what for?” Channon asked, a little confused.

The woman gave him a wry look. “Networking,” she said. “Isn’t that why you’re here?”

“I’m fulfilling my professional development hours,” Channon told her. “HR gives us a quota to meet every year, so I’m trying to get it out of the way.”

The woman leaned in, smiling. “Ooh, tell me more.”

It was clear that she was interested in working for JNNS. Channon gave as good a summary of what that was like as he could.

“Does Jack Nash ever come down to the dev pen?” she asked eventually.

Channon felt his face heat. “Not often. But he drops by sometimes. He’s, uh, pretty busy.”

“I’ll bet!” She looked like she was about to say more, but then someone stepped up to the mic and began welcoming them all to the conference.

Channon was used by now to dull or trite industry speeches. He braced himself for the potential tedium. The man at the lectern was reproduced at 10x scale on the screen behind him, and Channon found his attention distracted by the guy’s novelty tie. It had little colorful computer chips on it. The computer chips had big cartoon eyes. Channon tried to imagine Nate or Jack wearing it and couldn’t. Ewan, though...

He had to wipe the smirk off his face. Ewan would hate that tie. Channon should get him one for Christmas.

The guy at the lectern was now introducing Nate, listing Nate’s history and accomplishments. It was nothing Channon hadn’t heard before, but there was a kind of pride in hearing it again. Not quite the pride he felt when someone did the same thing for Jack at one of his speaking events. But still, there was a sort of possessiveness in hearing it now, about Nate. Our Nate, Ewan called him sometimes, and while Channon was fully aware that (as much as Nate belonged to anyone) Nate belonged to Ewan, Channon still felt some kind of satisfaction in hearing him lauded like this.

When Nate walked out onto the stage, the room erupted into applause. It made Channon smile a little, because Nate looked...well, he looked good up there. He was

handsome, well-groomed, his gold stubble rakish rather than sloppy. He'd had a haircut recently. And he matched the audience's energy with a bright, white grin.

"Wow," Nate said into the mic. "Thanks, Dave. You know, whenever someone introduces me by listing stuff I've done, it feels like they're talking about someone else. Because, sure. I did all that, it's true. But it's in the past, and honestly, I find it hard to live in the past. I'd rather focus on the future."

Channon dutifully made notes. Nate seemed to be a good public speaker, for all he claimed to leave that kind of thing to Jack. He had a nice voice. Channon imagined Nate would make a good narrator. Maybe reading dirty books. He grinned down at his notes; he could suggest it as a backup plan in case the billionaire thing ever fell through.

His pocket began to buzz angrily—not the single buzz of a message but the persistent throb of someone calling. He tried to ignore it, but then he realized that wasn't his phone. That was Nate's phone.

He hesitated. Should he check? Was that invasive? What if it was important? An emergency? What could either of them do if it was an emergency? Nate was on stage. Whatever it was would have to wait, right?

Thankfully, it went still. Channon breathed out.

The phone started buzzing again. This time, he couldn't ignore it. He pulled it out of his pocket to check the caller ID and...

Ewan? Why would Ewan be calling right now? Didn't he know Nate was busy?

A shot of cold dread lodged in Channon's gut, and he pushed himself up from his seat, quietly slipping out of the hall and into the corridor outside. He made apologetic

eye contact with the staff at the door and picked up the call.

“Ewan?” he said.

“Channon?” Ewan sounded upset. “Why the fuck do you have Nate’s phone?”

“He’s giving his speech right now,” Channon said, walking away from the doors to a large window overlooking an ornamental lawn. “What’s wrong? Did something happen?”

“Fuck!” There was a sound like something thumping into something soft, like Ewan had just thrown himself onto a couch. Where was he right now? Nate’s office? That would make sense.

Channon tried to sound calm and confident, the way he figured Jack or Nate would. “What happened? You can tell me.”

“Nothing. It’s nothing. It’s just...just an email.”

“What, like, from the IRS?”

Ewan made an exasperated sound. “Christ, no! From my ex.”

It took a moment for Channon to make sense of this. “Your evil ex?”

“He weren’t evil,” Ewan said miserably.

Channon privately thought that he really was but didn’t say it because Ewan never liked to be told that. “What did he want?”

“Just to catch up,” Ewan said, and Channon could hear the strain in his voice.

Whatever the evil ex had actually said, it was hurting Ewan. Channon clenched a fist, his impotence in this moment painfully obvious.

What could he do? Ewan needed Nate, and Nate was going to be on that stage for another forty-five minutes. Channon took a deep breath. “What did he really say?”

“It doesn’t fucking matter,” Ewan said acidly. “God, I don’t...I’m gonna just...”

“Don’t hang up!” Channon gripped the frame of the window, trying to think. “Please don’t hang up.”

“I’m not a fragile fucking flower,” Ewan snarled. He sounded off kilter, falling out of orbit. Angry, miserable, frightened. Channon remembered what Ewan had been like that time he’d bumped into one of the evil ex’s friends, how distressed he’d been then. Channon had had to call Nate for help.

But Nate was on stage, and after his speech he had a panel, and Channon needed to come up with something quick before Ewan hung up on him.

“Okay, just hear me out.” Channon licked his lips. “Can you go see Jack?”

There was a deathly silence on the phone. “What,” Ewan said flatly.

“I’m serious, just...go talk to Jack. You don’t have to tell him what happened, but just tell him...tell him you need to...I don’t know.” Channon took a deep breath. “He’ll help. He always helps me.”

“You’re his fucking sex toy,” Ewan said with so much venom that Channon recoiled. “Of course he helps you.”

Channon took a moment to respond. “I’m gonna give you a second to walk that

back,” he said firmly.

Ewan made an anguished sound. “Sorry. You’re right, I’m sorry.”

“I mean, it’s true,” Channon said as casually as he could. “But, like, say it nicely.”

This seemed to break the tension. Ewan laughed, a strangled sound. “Aye.” Channon heard him breathing, shallow and ragged. “I can’t just waltz on up to the top floor and knock on your old man’s door like I’ve got any right. What if he’s busy?”

Channon relaxed. Ewan was coming around, he could feel it. “Just ask Cynthia if you can see him.”

“Who?”

“Jack’s PA.”

“What if she says no?”

“Then you’re right back here again, and you can call me to bitch about it,” Channon said. “But Jack said he’d take care of you, so...so you do have the right.”

It would take some guts, Channon thought, but Ewan was all guts. Too much guts, sometimes.

After a moment Ewan said, “All right.”

Channon relaxed, letting go of a breath. “Okay. Text me?”

“I’m hanging up.”

The call went dead. Channon stared at Nate's phone for a long moment and then tucked it back in the pocket of his blazer. He pulled out his own, tapping out a short message.

Whatever Jack did, it could hardly be worse than Ewan brooding by himself. Right?

?

Client meetings had their irritations, but something Jack particularly enjoyed about them was forcing a certain kind of man to show him respect. Today he'd met with exactly that sort of client: an older man with old money and old-fashioned values, exactly the kind of person who wouldn't have given Jack the time of day had things been different. But instead, he'd had to play the game, had shaken Jack's hand and thanked him for his time with all the sincerity Jack could have asked for.

Even after all these years, that was extremely satisfying. Respect was something he felt particularly important, vital to his sense of self. He'd worked so hard for it, after all.

Which was probably why he found Ewan so aggravating.

Ewan McKinney was the least respectful submissive Jack had ever met. Not content merely to be a smartass masochist, Ewan was an out-and-out brat. Apparently, Nate loved this—it meant he got to beat the sass out of Ewan. Jack found it grating and tedious.

And, of course, there was the fact that Ewan had stolen Nate's attention.

No, that wasn't fair. Jack's own attention had already been firmly fixed on Channon by the time Ewan slunk into their lives like a stray cat. Nate had simply found a way to occupy his time, and then discovered that Ewan was, somehow, as vital to his

happiness as Channon was to Jack's. If Jack wanted to keep Nate's friendship, then he was going to have to get along with Ewan. He knew this. He just didn't know how to make it work.

Now, with Nate and Channon away, Jack wondered if he ought to seek Ewan out. Nate wanted Jack to take care of Ewan. Should he then take Ewan out to dinner? Make sure he was eating properly? Sleeping? It wasn't immediately obvious what Jack should do with him. What did caring for Ewan look like, in this case?

Jack thought with amusement that he would have had a better idea of what to do with Ewan if he really were a stray cat, hissing and spitting and hiding under the sofa.

He had to do something. He feared there had been a distance growing between Nate and himself for some time, and he'd missed it. He hadn't felt Nate pulling away, and now there was this...tension. Jack's first instinct was to blame Ewan for that, but when he was honest with himself, he knew who was truly to blame.

I did that to him. I pulled away first. I just didn't realize I was doing it.

Jack considered this on his way back from the client meeting, and thought, Fine. Let's get this over with.

He would take Ewan out to dinner. With any luck, Ewan would say no, and he would himself be absolved of all responsibility.

Jack resolved to find Ewan just before the end of the work day to issue the invitation, and then he put the whole thing out of his head, settling in at his desk to go over the operational reports. Generally, he only needed to read the executive summary, but he liked to skim the rest just in case anything jumped out at him, and he was about halfway through when the intercom chimed. Jack hit the speaker button.

“Go ahead, Cynthia,” he said.

The crisp tones of his PA’s voice seemed a little strained. “I have Ewan McKinney here to see you, if you have a moment.”

It was so unlikely that Jack needed a moment to parse the request. Ewan? To see him?

On the desk, his cell phone buzzed. Channon had messaged him.

sorry 2 bother u Sir but ewans freaking out n I told him 2 go c u sorry

And then: please can u take care of him Sir?

Well. Jack told Cynthia, “Sure thing. Send him in.”

With an air of tense reluctance, Ewan slunk into the room. He closed the door behind him and leaned on it, grimacing at Jack miserably.

“I don’t want to be here,” he said. Then he shivered, folding his arms tight across his chest and scowling. “You’re busy. I should...fuck this, I’m gonna just—”

Jack stood up. Ewan was...disheveled, certainly, but at work he always resembled a diminutive Columbo with his ill-fitting, rumpled suits and equally rumpled hair. Today, however, he looked almost ill, too pale and tight-lipped for everything to be all right.

What could have gone wrong to make him brave the elevator to the top floor and present himself to Jack like this? Why would Channon have suggested it?

“What happened?” Jack asked, lowering his tone to something he might have used on

Channon at a time like this.

Ewan shook his head violently, like he was trying to shake off a persistent fly. “Nothing. Just. Nothing.”

The thought of trying to drag it out of him made the back of Jack’s neck itch. “It can’t be nothing or you wouldn’t be here. I imagine you’d rather eat glass than come to me for anything.”

As he said it, Jack realized there was more truth in the joke than he’d intended. This had to be serious.

In any case, it made Ewan laugh, a sour, bitter sound. “Oh, aye,” he agreed, rubbing his upper arms like he was cold. Jack examined him and tried to look past his prickly exterior. (“He’s like a cactus,” Nate had said once. “You can’t grab hold of him, but behind the spikes he’s all soft, gooey center.”)

Jack beckoned him over with one hand. “Sit down,” he said, pitching it like a firm suggestion rather than an order. As much as he wanted to gain control of the situation, he suspected Ewan would respond poorly to orders from him.

After a long pause, Ewan pushed off the door, slouching across the carpet to throw himself messily into the chair facing Jack’s desk. He hunched his shoulders and ran his hands through his hair. “This is fucking daft,” he muttered. But then he looked up, and Jack could see he was upset and trying to hide it. “I got an email from my ex,” he said, almost sarcastically. Jack nodded, expecting him to go on, but he didn’t.

“Not a good ex, I take it,” Jack said, and the sound Ewan made was dismissive, but the way he looked...Jack realized he was more than rattled. Ewan seemed almost frightened. Or lost, perhaps, untethered from his usual self.

“The ex you remind me of,” he said. It sounded like it was supposed to be an insult, so Jack read it as such.

“A very bad ex, then.”

Ewan nodded. “The worst.” Then he seemed to reconsider. “I mean, he could have been worse. He wasn’t...you know. Abusive.”

Jack thought about some of the things Channon had hinted at with regard to Ewan’s past. The math was pretty easy to do. “Are you sure about that? Abuse can look like other things when you’re too close to it.”

Ewan made a frustrated noise, scrubbing his hand through his hair and curling his fingers into a fist to tug against his scalp. “Christ, you sound like Nate.”

So Nate, at least, thought Ewan’s ex was abusive. And I remind Ewan of him. It was an unflattering thought.

It also put some things into perspective.

“What did the email say?” Jack asked, low and quiet.

“Oh, fuck, it just...he asked how I was doing, if I was seeing anyone. If I wanted to catch up next time he’s in town.” Ewan dragged a hand over his face and pressed his knuckles against his teeth to chew on them. “It’s nothing. It’s fucking nothing, but...”

Jack waited, watching Ewan’s agitation and feeling strangely displeased.

Eventually Ewan said, “It’s just that he said, ‘next time I’m in Santa Rita’. And he sent it to my work email. So he knows where I am. He knows I’m here, and that I work here, and...I don’t know how he knows that.” Ewan looked up again, and Jack

could see his chest rising and falling too fast, his breath too shallow. Distressed. He was distressed, and the part of Jack that knew the difference between a sub under stress and a sub in trouble kicked in automatically.

“It’s okay,” he said, crouching down so he was eye level with Ewan. He held out a hand but didn’t touch him. “Take a deep breath. Then let it go, slowly.”

Surprisingly, Ewan did it, inhaling deeply and holding the breath for a count of five before letting it go. Then he did it again, unprompted, and fixed his eyes on Jack.

For a moment, neither of them said anything. Then Ewan made a grumpy noise. “I’m not having a panic attack.”

“No, you’re not,” Jack agreed. “But you’re obviously upset. Your ex isn’t supposed to know where you are, then?”

Ewan shook his head. “No fucking way. I thought...I never thought I’d hear from him again. Not after the way he ditched me.”

He sounded hurt. Usually, Jack would have enjoyed seeing Ewan hurt, but this wasn’t the way it was supposed to be. Ewan tied to a Saint Andrew’s cross and bawling his eyes out because Nate had flogged him to breaking point was a different creature than Ewan looking like his world had been upended.

Jack itched to do something about it. It’s what Channon would want. Nate told me to take care of him.

So he had to. “How do you think he found out where you are?”

“I don’t know.” Ewan scrubbed a hand over his face, visibly calmer now but still distressed. “I must’ve...left clues.”

“You tweet a lot.” Jack didn’t follow Ewan on Twitter, but Channon did, and sometimes Channon showed Jack the tweets. Ewan wrote them in an incomprehensible dialect that Channon found hilarious. Jack didn’t get it. Anyway, it was possible that Ewan had left clues to his whereabouts on social media. “Do you have Instagram?” Ewan nodded warily. “Maybe you geotagged something or posted a photo with a traceable landmark. And I know Nate has his dev team listed on the company website. It wouldn’t be hard to google.”

Given that employee emails were their first and last name at the company domain, it also wouldn’t take a genius to work out how to contact Ewan that way.

Ewan shuddered, rubbing his eyes. “Fuck. Fuck. I saw one of his friends last year. That fucker probably told him...Christ, I don’t even know what.” He gave Jack an anguished look. “He works in tech. He’s probably got contacts here.”

Jack put his hand on the arm of the chair, close to Ewan but still not touching him. “What’s his name?”

It took Ewan a moment to unstick his teeth from his grimace. “Gary Caldecott.” The name seemed to make him feel sick, he was so pale.

“I’ll tell security not to let him into the building,” Jack promised.

Ewan’s face scrunched up. “Fuck, it’s not as bad as that, is it?”

“Probably not, but better safe than sorry.” Jack hesitated, thinking about the implications of everything Ewan had said. “Are you worried about your physical safety?”

He watched Ewan’s expression crumple and had to force himself not to lift his hand from the arm of the chair and wrap it around Ewan’s shoulder to steady him.

“No...no, that’s not it. I just wish he didn’t know anything about me at all.”

Jack made a mental note to make sure the concierge of the building Ewan lived in also knew not to admit Ewan’s ex. Then he focused. Ewan was the most important thing right now, and Jack felt compelled to care for him in the ways that he could. “We can block his email. We can scrub you from the website, and anywhere else you are online for that matter. There are services to handle this.”

“You don’t have to,” Ewan said miserably.

“I do, actually.” When Ewan looked up, surprised, Jack fixed him with a serious look. “Nate asked me to take care of you, so I intend to do exactly that.”

It seemed to shock Ewan out of his misery. He blinked, looking around Jack’s office as if for the first time. Whatever he saw, it made his lip curl—whether from disdain or discomfort, Jack couldn’t tell. “Naw, you’re too busy for this shite. You don’t hafta do anything for me.”

“I know I’m the last person you’d want to help you,” Jack said, unable to keep all his frustration from his voice, “but I’m what you’ve got right now. You can hate me all you want, but I’m going to do this anyway.”

Ewan looked shocked. Then he frowned. “I don’t hate you.”

“Strongly dislike, then.”

This made Ewan shake his head. “No. You’re, you know, you. Channon likes you enough.”

It was better than Jack would have expected. “Faint praise, but I’ll take it.” He leaned away, wondering how hard Ewan would bite if Jack offered him a hug. “I’ll make

some calls. How are you feeling?"

Ewan took a shuddering breath. Then he shrugged. "Like pish. Better than before."

"Good." Jack stood up and leaned back against the desk. "I'd like to check up on you later. Have dinner with me."

Ewan's eyes just about bugged out of his skull. "What, at some fancy fucking restaurant?"

He sounded so scandalized. It made Jack smile. "Or at my place."

Ewan made a face. "Is this a come on? I'm not sucking your dick."

God, he was so...prickly. "It isn't. We can go to Nate's if that makes you feel better." Jack had a key, after all, and he was pretty sure Ewan did too.

Ewan regarded him suspiciously, but in the end he said, "All right."

"Good. I'll meet you at your desk at half past five." Jack regarded Ewan narrowly. He looked better, a little less like he might be going to faint or puke. Still, he'd clearly been shaken. "You can stay here as long as you like. But if I get a phone call, I'll need you to be quiet."

This triggered a sound halfway between a snort and a snicker. "Naw thanks." Ewan shoved himself out of the chair and backed away, eyeing Jack as if Jack were the feral one. "Uh...see you at half five."

And he went, closing the door behind him with a soft snick instead of a bang.

For a moment, Jack simply wondered at the universe for putting him in this position.

Ewan. Relying on him. What were the odds?

But he had to do this. He had no choice.

He reached for his phone to message Channon back. Don't worry, sweetheart. I'll take care of him.

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Source Creation Date: July 18, 2025, 3:03 pm

Chapter Four

Your old man's buying me dinner. Is that code for sucking his dick? I'll not do it!

Channon read the message again to make sure he understood it. Jack was obviously taking Ewan's freak out seriously. Well, that was good.

Jacks not gna let u suck ne thingChannon sent back. dnt get ur hopes up

He got back a bunch of black hearts in response which he figured was the emoji equivalent of a 'fuck you'.

he might make u eat kaleChannon added, smirking a little at the idea.

After a moment, Ewan replied with a single vomiting face emoji. Well, at least he was feeling more himself. Things couldn't be that bad, then, could they?

Don't worry, sweetheart,Jack had texted, and later, Call me when you're in bed.

Channon could do that. But that was hours away.

Meanwhile, Nate was impossible to get at, even when the conference broke for lunch—he was whisked off for some VIP thing Channon wasn't invited to. It wasn't until they wrapped for the day that Channon was finally able to restore his phone and let him know what was going on with Ewan. Nate ducked out to make a call and came back looking amused more than anything.

“So, I hear Jack and the menace are hanging out tonight,” he said cheerfully. “Want to speculate on how badly that goes?”

Channon wrinkled his nose. “Uh. It might go fine? Jack promised he’d take care of him.”

“Yeah, but Ewan hasn’t promised to be good,” Nate countered with a wicked grin. “I can’t help wondering what Jack’s going to do to him if he acts up. I told Ewan,” he added casually, “that Jack had permission to use anything on the left side of the toy cupboard.”

The thought made Channon inhale sharply. Jack wouldn’t actually punish Ewan, would he? Jack always said he wasn’t interested in playing with other subs. But if Ewan needed him...

Except Ewan didn’t need him like that. And it would be all wrong for Jack to punish Ewan because he was frustrated with Ewan’s bratting. Channon hated the idea intensely.

Some of that must have shown on his face, because Nate patted him on the shoulder. “Don’t worry, I didn’t tell Jack that. Just putting a thought in Ewan’s messy little head. Jack won’t lay a finger on him.”

It was a relief, but Channon still felt a little anxiety at the thought of Jack and Ewan alone in a house with a toy cupboard.

“So, since that’s happening,” Nate went on, cocking his head and grinning handsomely, “why don’t you let me take you out to dinner? We can pretend we’re having an affair.”

Channon grinned. As if. Then again, he had sucked Nate’s cock for him, and Nate

had fucked him raw, several times now. But Jack had always been in charge of that. So it wasn't like the thought of sex with Nate was ridiculous, just the idea of doing it behind Jack's back.

"I'll ask," Channon said, already messaging.

may I have dinner w mr scott pls Sir?

"Is it Jack who likes that, or you?" Nate asked. "The way you always ask him for permission for things." He sounded vaguely curious, not interrogatory or judgmental, so Channon felt comfortable being honest.

"Both. He likes being asked permission, and I like, um. I don't know. Being sure I'm not doing something wrong."

Nate looked thoughtful. "Huh. I can see the appeal. Ewan would absolutely hate that," he added, smiling sharply. "He'd go nuts."

"You like making him nuts," Channon pointed out.

Nate grinned. "I really, really do."

Channon's phone vibrated. You may. Take a cheat day. Have fun, sweetheart.

He showed the message to Nate, and Nate flashed him a thumbs-up. "Awesome. Does a cheat day mean I can stuff you with carbs and fat?"

"Uh, pretty much," Channon said, kind of relieved Nate had asked and wasn't making fun of him. People always wanted to comment on the stuff he ate, and it was hard to explain without telling them that Jack controlled his diet because Jack controlled him. Nate already knew Jack owned Channon. It made it easier to breathe around him.

Nate grinned. “Next question: Tex-Mex or steakhouse?”

“Tex-Mex,” Channon said after a moment of hesitation. Cheese was normally a forbidden food, after all.

“Attaboy,” Nate said, clapping him on the shoulder. “I know just the place.”

They ended up at an airy, cheerful, family restaurant with burgundy vinyl booths and adobe-rendered walls. It felt comfortable. Nate asked the staff to bring them ‘some of everything’. Channon relaxed, feeling like this was something he could manage.

“How’s Ewan?” he asked. Nate had been texting on the way over, and Channon assumed he knew who the messages were for.

“Grumbly,” Nate said, putting his phone aside and leaning back in his chair. “But when he’s grumbling, you know he’s all right. It’s when he’s quiet you have to worry.”

Channon nodded, knowing this to be true. “I hope...whatever the problem is with his ex...” He broke off, unsure how to finish that thought.

“It’ll be fine,” Nate reassured him. “Jack can keep him out of the hospital. That was a joke,” he added, obviously seeing Channon’s dismay at the idea. “He’s not in any danger. Except, maybe, from Jack.”

The server began bringing out tasting plates, mini tacos and empanadas and something that was supposed to be nachos, but each chip was individually loaded like an elaborate cracker. Channon said thank you and got a brilliant smile from the server in return.

Everything looked and smelled amazing. Spicy, cheesy, the tang of fine-sliced raw

onion. Cheat day, he reminded himself, eyeing the vibrant guacamole. Jack said.

“Dig in,” Nate prompted, smiling a little. “You don’t have to wait for permission from me.”

Channon shook his head, reaching for one of those loaded nacho chips. “I can’t help it,” he said, and then he put the chip in his mouth and bit down.

Oh god. Maybe it was all the salad and steamed salmon and quinoa he’d been having lately, but the richness of cheese and refried beans that filled his mouth was overwhelming. There was something to be said about Jack’s whole self-denial thing—you really did appreciate things more when you got them.

He must have made an obscene noise, because Nate grinned. “Oh yeah. There we go. Good boy.”

Praise from Nate wasn’t the same as praise from Jack, it couldn’t possibly be. But Channon enjoyed it all the same.

As they ate, Nate kept up a casual conversation. Channon told him about the code he was working on, about his new unlock puzzle game and how he’d gotten it to generate new levels that had actual solutions instead of making them manually. Nate told Channon about a houseplant Ewan had bought for him that was doing its best to die, and how Nate had hooked up a raspberry pi to monitor temperature, light levels, moisture and pH, and was adding something to measure nitrogen when he got back to Santa Rita.

“The menace thinks it’s hilarious,” Nate said with amusement. “It’s like the plant is bratting for him. He’s outsourced his bratting. Automated it.”

“You could just let it die,” Channon suggested with fake innocence.

Nate gestured dismissively. "I know. I could. When I'm ready to hear about how much it means I don't love him."

Channon didn't think he'd ever heard Nate admit he loved Ewan. "But you do," he said, pleased.

"For my sins," Nate agreed. "You'd do the same. So would Jack."

Channon thought he probably would try his hardest to keep the plant alive and be very sorry when it inevitably died. Jack, meanwhile, would blame the plant, buy a replacement, and pay someone to take care of it for him. Or get Channon to do it.

When he said this aloud, Nate laughed. "Oh man, he would too. Ewan would hate that so much. This," Nate said, reaching for his margarita, "is why they don't get along. I hope neither of them are killing the other right now."

He sounded fond, but Channon frowned. "They could get along. If they wanted."

Nate shrugged. "I wouldn't hold your breath for that. Jack has his control issues and Ewan...has his out-of-control issues. There's no changing Ewan to suit Jack, and Jack won't change for anyone." He paused, and then his eyes slid to Channon, his expression thoughtful. "I used to think that was true anyway. But I guess he has changed, for you."

"What was he like before?" Channon asked, unsure what Nate meant.

"Impossible to pin down. Jack didn't do relationships. He was untouchable." Nate looked away, at a past Channon couldn't see. "I was the closest thing he had to a partner, but even that wasn't really...real."

There was something in the way he said it that made Channon feel sorry about it.

“But you’re still...I mean, you two are like...I don’t know. Kind of more than friends.”

Nate’s attention returned to him. “A little more than friends. But hey, you know all about what that’s like, right?”

He must have meant Ewan. Channon supposed it was similar, though in others completely different. “That first time you came over, and you and Jack, um.”

Shared him. They’d shared Channon between them. It had been the first time Channon had been with someone who wasn’t Jack, and he’d liked the way it felt. Dirty. But in the good way. And Nate had been nice to him. Nate had never used it against him, had always stayed within the boundaries of this whatever it was they were doing.

What exactly were they doing?

Channon tried to form the question, but it wouldn’t come together in a way that made sense. In the end he asked, “Is there a word for when a couple kind of dates another couple?”

Nate’s eyebrows went up. “Consensual non-monogamy? Swinging? Poly?”

“I meant, more like how it is with me and Jack, and you and Ewan. Like, Ewan says you two don’t play with anyone but us. It’s kind of...exclusive.”

This seemed to amuse Nate. “You and Jack aren’t exclusive, though. Weren’t you dating someone not that long ago?”

Channon’s face grew warm. “That wasn’t, um. I mean, it wasn’t romantic or anything. It was just sex.” And really, that had been why it ended. Because Victor

had wanted more than sex, and Channon hadn't been able to give it to him.

"Isn't it just sex when Jack invites me over to fuck you?" Nate said, low enough that no one could overhear.

"Yeah, but it's different. I don't know how. It's just not like it is with other people." Channon looked down at his food, trying to put this huge thing into words. "You two feel like part of us. Victor was just for me."

"Victor?" Nate leaned in, grinning wickedly. "Wait. You were dating Victor Ruiz?"

Oh god. "I wasn't supposed to tell anyone," Channon said quickly. "Please don't—"

"I won't say anything. No, I'm just...wow. Jack said you were topping someone, but I never imagined it would be Victor." Nate leaned back in his chair. "He's hot. Nice one."

Channon felt his face getting pink. "I like him. But not like that."

There was a moment of silence as Nate looked Channon over like he was puzzling something out. "You don't like me 'like that' either," he said eventually.

"I don't know," Channon said, frustrated and unable to put this into words. "I don't want things to change. I don't want you and Ewan to stop coming over for stuff just because Jack and I get married. I want..."

But he trailed off because he wasn't sure what it was he wanted.

"You want to keep playing with us," Nate said calmly. His expression was even, unreadable. "You want to have your cake and eat it too."

Channon blinked. That phrase had always sounded as if the person having the cake was being unreasonable and selfish, and now he wondered. “Is that greedy? Jack said things didn’t have to change after the wedding.”

“Jack also wants to have his cake and eat it too,” Nate said with a faint smile. “I’m being unfair, but Jack, well. Jack likes to have things his own way and rarely takes other people’s feelings into account.” Nate gestured with his glass. “Like Ewan’s, for example. How do you think Ewan would like being in some kind of kink quadrangle with Jack?”

Channon thought privately that Ewan already was. “Didn’t he have fun last time?”

Nate gave Channon a wry look. “Angel, Ewan was only there for you. He would have put up with anything to get your hands on him.”

It made Channon feel strange. On the one hand, he was disappointed. The idea of some kind of arrangement where Nate and Ewan were still part of their play seemed slippery and impossible to hold on to. But on the other, it was flattering to think that Ewan had been really that into the idea of Channon fucking him.

The thought occurred to him that it might be weird to think these sorts of things about your friends, and Channon hunched his shoulders. “I think I might be some kind of pervert,” he said, embarrassed to admit it.

Nate laughed but not unkindly. “Well, you’re in good company. Look,” he said, his eyes crinkling in a way that only highlighted how handsome he was. “I get that you don’t want things to change, but you’re getting married. That just changes some things. That’s the point.” His tone softened. “Maybe we’ll get together sometimes and have a little fun, but I wouldn’t hold your breath on Ewan discovering some sudden urge to let Jack work him over. They’re like oil and water. They don’t mix. Be satisfied when they tolerate one another, okay?”

It was not at all satisfying. Channon didn't like the idea that his two favorite people could both like him but not each other. And sure, maybe it was na?ve to think everyone could just get along, but that didn't stop him wanting it anyway.

Chapter Five

“Tell me about Gary,” Jack said, watching Ewan carefully.

Ewan snorted. “He used to beat me up for fun. I liked it. What’s to tell?”

Jack held his breath, counted down from five, and reminded himself that Ewan was a brat, and therefore some brattishness was to be expected. Jack didn’t have to respond to it. In fact, not responding to it might be the best way to contain it.

So far Ewan had been alternately sullen and silent, except for the part immediately after work when he’d tried to tell Jack that he’d be fine and he didn’t need Jack’s help, actually. Jack had asked him if he’d spoken to Nate. Ewan had shrugged, which Jack took for a yes. He’d asked what Nate had said.

“That I should go with you,” Ewan admitted, looking grim about it.

Jack had arched an eyebrow at him, the one that usually got Channon to sit up straight. It did not have the same effect on Ewan. “So what are you going to do?”

Ewan had rolled his eyes in a way that would have gotten Channon a rough smack on the rear at the very least. “Go with you, I guess?”

So here they were at Nate’s kitchen table, eating Indian takeout. Ewan had ordered something called phaal that Jack had taken a polite spoonful of and was now ignoring completely. He was secure enough in his masculinity not to need to prove it by burning out his taste buds, thank you very much. He’d settle for Vindaloo.

Now he considered Ewan, wondering how best to go about prying him open. What would tempt Ewan to talk about his ex?

“Why do I remind you of him?” Jack asked. It wasn’t just a tactic—he was morbidly curious.

Ewan looked up, his expression guarded. “You just do.”

“You must have specific reasons. Do I look like him?”

To this, Ewan shook his head, snorting derisively. “Naw. You’re a handsome fucker.”

Which meant that this ‘Gary’ was not. Jack wondered if he ought to be flattered. “What attracted you to him in the first place, then?”

Ewan tipped his head back with a groan. It looked like he was rolling his eyes again, but Jack realized that, instead, he was blinking hard. He wondered if Ewan was in fact having an emotional reaction.

“He said I couldn’t handle him,” Ewan confessed to the ceiling. “I wasn’t gonna back down from that.”

“And could you?” Jack asked, watching him closely.

Ewan exhaled and tipped his head to the side, avoiding Jack’s eye. “I don’t know.” He made an angry sound and jammed his fork into his rice. “I thought I could take anything. I did take it. Everything he dished out.”

And yet, Jack thought, part of Ewan hadn’t wanted to, or had only done it to prove something. To Gary, or to himself? It wasn’t clear. And it still wasn’t clear what part of Gary he saw in Jack. “Even when you didn’t like it?”

“I wasn’t supposed to like it,” Ewan spat. He glared at Jack. “Right? Isn’t that the whole point?”

“He was a sadist, then,” Jack said evenly, ignoring the outburst. “He enjoyed the fact that you didn’t. That was what was in it for him.”

“Aye,” Ewan said, still glaring daggers. “He liked taking ugly things and breaking them.”

It struck Jack that Ewan might really think of himself as ugly—a toxic, little, radioactive thing that had deserved to be broken.

Jack had never thought of him that way. Ewan was striking, strange, not conventionally attractive. But he wasn’t ugly. And for all of his irritations, Ewan did not deserve to be broken like that. Even if he had been ‘ugly’ (whatever that meant), no one deserved that.

“How did it end?” Jack asked, feeling on the precipice of something.

Ewan’s mouth twisted. “He got a job in Norway. Took the collar back and left the country.”

And left Ewan behind. It was clear that Ewan felt he’d deserved that too. “He’d collared you?”

“I was his slave,” Ewan said with bitter relish. “I’m lucky he didn’t brand me.”

He sounded so hurt by this, as if part of him had wanted that brand. No, he’d wanted to belong to his Dom, to be precious to him. To be owned and cherished, in a very particular way.

It made sense. Jack understood now why Ewan hated him so much.

“What he did to you. You think I’m doing the same thing to Channon.”

He watched as Ewan’s face gave him away.

“You think I’m going to break Channon and leave him.”

Ewan shook his head. “I don’t think anything.”

“I can see why you think it,” Jack said evenly. It rankled, and yet it was not unjustified. “I seduced him when we met. He was eager to be seduced, but he was so new to all of this that you could say I took advantage of him. And when I asked if he wanted to try things, he was equally eager, but he didn’t fully know what he was getting into.” Jack reached for his water glass. “It would have been easy to do to him what Gary did to you. I could definitely have used him up and tossed him away, if I’d been that kind of person.”

Ewan was watching him with wide, storm-gray eyes. He had a look on his face as if he were hearing his fears confirmed. Jack went on, keeping his tone as even and non-confrontational as he could.

“And if I had, Channon would be right to hate me. Resent me. Feel wronged. Because a collar is a promise,” Jack said, feeling this in his bones. “As a Dominant, you make a similar promise every time you play with someone: I will take care of you. Whether that care means flogging them until they scream or knowing when to take the ropes off, it amounts to the same thing. You are responsible for this person. They’ve put their trust in you. If you break it, you’re a bad Dominant, a bad person, sometimes a criminal.”

He had Ewan’s full attention now. He wasn’t sure he’d seen Ewan pay so much

attention in all the time they'd known one another.

“When Gary gave you a collar, it was a promise to take care of you. And then he didn't. If that's your example of a Dominant, no wonder you think I'm going to do the same to Channon.”

Ewan made an unhappy sound. “It's not just that. You control everything about him. Everything. And he says he likes it but...I said that too. I thought it was true. But it weren't. And I can't blame Gary for that because I said I liked it, even when...when I hated it. Because that's what a good little fucktoy does, isn't it?” Ewan's voice edged into something hurt and angry. “Tells their master they love being used and, and shared around, and treated like rubbish!”

The words hung in the air, huge and impossible to ignore. Jack breathed in and out and tried to find a thread in that to pull, but...

That wasn't what he did to Channon. Yes, Channon was Jack's to play with however he wanted, and Channon liked that, but it wasn't the way Ewan made it sound.

Was that how it looked from the outside? Did Ewan really think Jack thought of Channon as disposable?

Channon did like it, didn't he? Or, no, he liked that Jack liked it, and—

Oh.

Jack looked at Ewan, who seemed to be regretting saying anything at all, and thought carefully before speaking.

“If someone had asked you, back then, if you liked it, you would have told them you loved everything he did to you,” Jack said with a feeling of inevitability.

Ewan bared his teeth. “Aye.”

“So you can’t trust Channon now when he says he enjoys the things I do to him.”

Ewan shook his head.

Jack sighed, leaning back in his chair. “Then there’s nothing I can do to convince you. But hopefully I can convince you that I won’t throw Channon over on a whim. I could show you the prenup, which states pretty definitively that, once we’re married, Channon can walk away any time he likes with half of everything I own. So you see,” he added drily, “it would be an expensive mistake that I don’t intend to make.”

This appeared to give Ewan something to think about. He regarded Jack with an intense, sullen expression. But he didn’t argue.

When Jack went on, he kept his voice even. “I hope you know I value Channon very highly. And his happiness; I value that too. It’s of the utmost importance to me. And when I enjoy his discomfort,” Jack added wryly, “it’s for the purposes of play, of the dynamic, the scene we’re making. I enjoy the fact that he will do almost anything for my praise. And when I push him to the point where he says no, I know he really has reached his limit. He trusts me. I trust him to be honest. I’m sure you and Nate have a similar arrangement, given the things you do.”

Because Jack knew what Nate and Ewan did, the sharp edges of their play. If Nate wasn’t giving Ewan the same boundaries, the same ways out of play that was too sharp, then Jack did not know him. Nate would—he was so careful. He had to be, because of the things he liked and wanted, the things Jack was sure he asked of Ewan.

Ewan looked down. “Aye,” he said after a while.

“Then I trust you understand.” Ewan nodded, still not meeting Jack’s eye. “You

know, if someone had ever treated Channon the way your ex treated you, I'd be furious. It would be an effort not to destroy them."

"Yeah?" Now Ewan looked up, his expression skeptical. "Someone like Channon's dad? He treats Chan like so much shit, and I—" He shook his head hard, pushing himself back from the table. "I fucken hate him."

"Me too," Jack confessed. It seemed to take Ewan by surprise. Jack smiled. "But he hates me back, so it's only fair."

Ewan snorted. He drummed his fingers on the table and then stood up abruptly, stacking dishes and carrying them to the sink. Then he filled the kettle. "You want tea?"

It was an olive branch, and Jack took it. "Sure."

He watched Ewan take out a teapot and mugs, a milk jug and a sugar bowl, and arrange them on a tray. It had a ritualistic air to it. Jack wondered if this was a service Ewan performed for Nate. He decided to be flattered and did not interrupt.

When the kettle boiled, Ewan poured hot water into the teapot, swishing it around before tipping the water out. Then he added the leaves, reboiled the kettle, and filled the pot. With the tea leaves steeping, Ewan carried the tray carefully to the kitchen table and set it down. He fetched a tin from the cupboard and opened it up, setting it on the table within arm's reach. It was half full of cookies.

When Jack declined, Ewan shrugged. "Suit yourself. Bet I know why Chan's dad hates you," he added gruffly, settling back into his chair. "Bet he thinks you made his kid gay and all."

"Certainly, but I think he could have accepted it if not for the fact that I'm more

successful than he is,” Jack said by way of agreement. “I make it hard for Howard to ignore what a terrible father he’s been when I give Channon everything he never did. Which is mostly attention, but to him the money seems a personal affront.”

Ewan snorted. “Your money isn’t what Channon likes about you.”

“No,” Jack agreed. “Channon’s talked to you about his father?”

Ewan frowned. A timer went off on his phone and he picked up the teapot to pour. “Aye. A bit. He’s a bawbag.”

“I’ve been...dissatisfied with Mr Beaumont for some time,” Jack said slowly, choosing his words with care. This was Channon’s business, and he didn’t intend to expose more of it than Channon would be comfortable with. “Every time he lets Channon down, I think up ways to ruin him.” This got Ewan’s attention, his stormy eyes flickering up to fix on Jack with a sudden intensity as he pushed Jack’s mug over to him. “It would be extremely satisfying to tear down the life he’s made for himself and leave it tattered around him. To make sure he knew it was me. Make sure he knew it was because of his negligence as a father.”

Ewan’s mouth twitched. “Oh, aye. And hear the lamentations of his women?”

Unbidden, Jack felt his own mouth curve into a smile. “Yes,” he said. “Except that’s the problem, isn’t it? Howard Beaumont has young children and a partner who don’t deserve to be caught in the crossfire. And Channon would be upset,” Jack admitted. “Which is unacceptable to me.”

This seemed to give Ewan something to chew over. He busied himself with his tea, his gaze flickering restlessly around the room. Jack added milk to his cup and tasted it. Surprisingly good. Ewan did seem to take tea seriously, if nothing else.

“So you can’t have your revenge,” Ewan said. His mouth twisted into a nasty smirk. “Bet you hate that.”

“I do.”

Ewan added, “Cos you’re a control freak.”

“I am,” Jack agreed. “And it’s an itch I can’t scratch. I must take care of Channon. His father hurts him. Therefore, I am compelled to hurt his father. But that would upset Channon, and so all I can do is make sure he feels the lack of his father’s presence in his life as little as possible.”

Ewan nodded sagely. “And that’s why you make him call you Daddy.”

It went through Jack like a shock, hearing that word in Ewan’s mouth. He forced himself to unclench. “I don’t make him.”

This seemed to satisfy Ewan; he pulled his knees up to his chest, resting his cup on top of them. It looked untidy. “Why’re you telling me this? You want help putting pins in Channon’s dad’s voodoo doll?”

“I,” Jack said in a low tone, “find it cathartic to imagine how I might ruin Mr Beaumont. In as much detail and to the greatest extent my imagination can manage.”

Ewan’s eyes twitched toward him, stormy and uncertain. “Aye?”

“And I thought you might enjoy the same thing, with regard to your ex.”

With an explosive breath of air, Ewan dropped his feet to the floor, drumming his heels restlessly. “I don’t get to have revenge. How would I even do that? I can’t just...put shrimp in his curtain rods.”

The thought of the smell as they rotted made Jack wince. “Creative. But you can think bigger than that.”

Ewan slunk down in his chair. “Like...strap him to a rocket and blast him into the sun?”

“If you like. I prefer my revenge fantasies to be more realistic,” Jack said. “As though I could actually achieve them.”

Ewan scrunched up his nose. “Shrimp in the curtain rods it is, then.”

“Or,” Jack said, turning his cup in his hands, “we could hit him where it hurts. What matters most to him?”

Ewan shrugged. “Money. His image. His fucking suits.”

“Well, first we get him blacklisted with his tailor,” Jack said, easing into the idea. “That would annoy me. Then expand that to include every tailor in his city. Just for the inconvenience.”

Ewan looked skeptical. “How?”

“Bribery.”

“I don’t have bribe money,” Ewan said acidly.

“I do,” Jack told him.

“I thought this was supposed to be ‘realistic’,” Ewan said, making obnoxious finger quotes. “I don’t have your bribe money.”

Jack smiled, a little. “Did you think I wasn’t going to help you get revenge in this fantasy?”

This made Ewan sit up straight. “Why would you do that?”

Because Nate told me to take care of you, Jack thought. Because I want Channon to be happy. “Because revenge is fun,” he said out loud, “and I like planning it. Even if I’m fairly sure you’re not going to let me actually do it.”

Ewan stared at him. Then he smiled. It was a wicked smile, full of teeth. Jack found it remarkably unsettling. “Oh, aye. Then I want him banned from every fucking kink club in Santa Rita.”

“Why stop there?” Jack asked. He tipped his palm up, spreading his fingers. “Get the word out on the scene and he’ll be blacklisted anywhere you like. All you’d have to do is tell Diana. She’d gleefully destroy his reputation for you.”

“Mistress Diana wouldn’t do that for me,” Ewan protested.

Jack raised an eyebrow. “I think you underestimate her affection for Nate. And, by extension, for you. But if you’d prefer not to ask her, you could tell your story to Mr White. He would be quite receptive.” As much as Mr White disdained a brat, he cared a great deal about the correct treatment of submissives, and a story like this would appall him deeply.

But Ewan made a face. “Pass.”

“Or just ask Nate,” Jack said calmly. “Nate would do it for you in a heartbeat. I’m surprised he hasn’t already, for that matter.”

Ewan looked uncomfortable. “Nate gets riled when I talk about Gary,” he said

quietly. “He pretends he’s calm but...he gets his serial killer look on.”

“Serial killer look?”

“Aye. You know,” Ewan said, pulling an angry face, “like he’s gonna straight up murder a bloke. And then I’m like, ‘fuck, I don’t want Nate going to jail’ so I just...don’t talk to him about Gary.”

Jack wasn’t sure he’d actually seen Nate’s ‘serial killer’ look. He’d seen Nate angry, and he’d seen Nate gleefully sadistic, but he’d never seen Nate on the verge of an actual homicide. Either Ewan was exaggerating, or perhaps this was a Nate that Jack had never actually met.

The idea made something twinge in his chest, like a string being pulled so tight it snapped. Of course Ewan had access to parts of Nate that Jack didn’t. It made sense. It was only fair. But Jack didn’t have to like it.

He took a deep breath. “Then you’ll have to ask me. Don’t worry, I won’t make you beg.”

Ewan gave him a narrow look. “You’re not gonna do anything to Gary for real, right? This is just...weird revenge roleplay.”

Jack smiled. “That’s right. Let’s make a plan for revenge.”

Ewan blew out a breath. “Okay. Okay, then...then could you, like, I don’t know. He’s a tech lead.” Ewan looked Jack in the eye. “What if I didn’t want him working in tech ever again?”

“Easy,” Jack told him. It was ridiculously easy to ruin someone professionally. All you had to do was find some old tweets or emails and put pressure on the right people

to be outraged about it. Jack had never done it, but he knew it was possible. People offered it as a service, of all things. “We’ll just...destroy his reputation. Make sure every search for his name comes up with the worst things he’s ever done. Nate can tear his code apart on stack overflow, for extra points. Done.”

Ewan snorted. “Just like that.” He cocked his head at Jack. “Ey, while you’re blowing shit up, can we get someone to put shrimp in his curtain rails?”

“Sure. Anything else?”

“Dunno. Still thinking.” Ewan held his mug up to his chest, cradling it in both hands. “How hard is it to impound a car?” he asked, his eyes bright.

Jack smiled. It wasn’t even forced. So, this is the playful side that comes with the brat. Plotting revenge. It was, after all, a hobby he very much enjoyed.

Perhaps he shouldn’t. Perhaps this was abnormal. But the glee on Ewan’s face was gratifying after all the gloom, and Jack couldn’t find a shred of remorse in himself, though he didn’t look very hard.

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Chapter Six

After dinner, Channon said good night to Nate and went to his suite. It felt echoingly empty with just him in it. He wondered how Ewan was doing and sent him a text, but he didn't get a reply right away.

Jack had told him to call once he was in bed. It was still early, really, but Channon felt that an early bedtime wasn't unreasonable.

He showered, dried off, and slipped into the bed, still a little damp. When he called, Jack answered on the second ring.

"Hey, sweetheart. How was dinner?"

Channon closed his eyes, picturing Jack on the other end of the call. In his mind, Jack was relaxed, leaning back in his office chair in his softest, oldest jeans and a comfortable T-shirt. Barefoot, his long, clean toes splayed against the rug. Channon could kneel down and kiss them, lick them if that was what Jack wanted.

"Good, Sir," Channon said. "We got Tex-Mex."

"Ah, excellent. And did Nate take care of you?"

Channon bit his lip. "Yeah. He was nice. How was Ewan?" he asked with some trepidation.

"We got along okay." To Channon's surprise, Jack didn't sound even a little

frustrated. His heart rate spiked. Had Jack worked out his frustrations on Ewan with a belt?

He rubbed a hand over his chest. “Did you play with him?” He tried to sound light, but in his own ears his voice seemed wobbly.

“I...” Jack hesitated, and then he laughed softly. “You know, I think maybe I did. Not anything serious, but I did make him sit down and tell me what was wrong, and then I got him to fantasize some terrible revenge on his ex. I think he found some catharsis.”

This didn’t seem much like play to Channon, who said as much aloud.

“Maybe not, but there was an element of dominance about it. I fed him, as well.”

Channon hummed, trying not to sound concerned. “Like, from your hand?”

“No,” Jack chuckled. “At the table, like a big boy.” His voice turned soft. “Were you worried about that, sweetheart?”

Channon breathed out, his anxiety draining and leaving him feeling ridiculous. “Kind of. Not really, just...I’d like it if you two were, you know. If you didn’t...I mean...”

“You want us to get along.”

“Yes,” Channon agreed, “but more than that. I know Nate’s your best friend, and Ewan’s my best friend. And...you know sometimes, I...I mean, I liked it when you and Nate played with us. Both of us.” He’d watched Jack flog Ewan then, and it hadn’t made him feel weird. So why did the idea of it happening when he wasn’t there feel so...so awkward?

Channon breathed out, trying to navigate the weird feeling in his chest. Didn’t he

want Jack and Ewan to get along? Maybe even play together? Wouldn't that be better than having them at odds with one another?

And he did. He just...didn't want Jack to want Ewan more than him. He didn't want to lose his Sir.

As soon as he put the feeling into words, Channon felt silly. Of course Jack wouldn't want Ewan more than him. Ewan was a brat. Jack didn't want that, not in the slightest. So there was no way. Even if Jack and Ewan did play, even if Jack did work Ewan over with a belt, it wouldn't mean anything. It wouldn't be like it was between them. Nothing in the world was like that. Channon belonged to Jack, and Jack wanted him.

Jack wasn't going to suddenly get bored of him and leave.

He's not my dad.

And because Jack wasn't his dad, Channon knew he could say this without being afraid of making Jack angry.

"I don't want you to want another sub more than me," he said out loud.

He heard Jack's intake of breath. "Sweetheart," Jack said firmly, "that's not going to happen. I'm your Sir. No one else gets to be that for you, and no one else gets to be my boy. Do you believe me?"

"Yes, Sir," Channon sighed. He squirmed down in the bed until his head slid off the pillow onto the mattress and his face was half submerged in covers. "You chose me. I'm the one you're going to marry. I know."

"Then what's going on?"

“When we’re married, you said nothing had to change. And I just...I think we should keep Nate and Ewan. Because they’re sort of part of us. Like, I don’t like the idea of them not ever coming over to do kinky stuff again.” He wet his lip. “And I don’t mind if you do things with Ewan. If, you know. He doesn’t mind.”

The silence on the phone was long enough for Channon to wonder if the call had dropped out, but then Jack said in a low tone, “I don’t think Ewan or I want that. But, sweetheart, do you really think you wouldn’t mind?”

Channon swallowed. “Yeah?”

“Because I think you really would,” Jack said gently. “I think you’d mind a lot. And there’s no way in the world I’m going to risk that, just for a chance to play with someone who, up until recently, couldn’t stand the sight of me.”

Channon rubbed his chest again where it ached. “Until recently?”

“Well, I think we did okay tonight. It’s new, so give it time.”

“Is he still at our place?” Channon asked.

“Ours? No, we’re at Nate’s.”

Oh.Channon tried to reimagine Jack at Nate’s and failed. His image of the place wasn’t strong enough.

“How are you feeling, sweetheart?”

“I’m okay,” Channon said, a little embarrassed at himself. “But...Nate and Ewan. I don’t want to lose them when we get married.”

“Then we won’t,” Jack promised. “We’ll work it out. This isn’t just about you wanting Nate’s cock in you, is it?” Jack asked teasingly. “Because you know, you can have that. I’d love to see that again.”

It startled a laugh from him. “No! I mean, I don’t mind. I like when, you know. When you invite people to do that. But I’m not just, just yearning for it or anything.”

“Mmm. I think I know whose cock you are yearning for.”

Channon felt his cheeks flush. “Yours, Sir.”

“Oh, that goes without saying. But I think you want someone bigger.”

Okay, they had officially veered away from the ‘big feels’ part of the conversation to the ‘big feels’ part. A familiar heat rose in his cheeks, and he knew he was blushing. “Sir, I don’t need any dick except yours.”

“You’re allowed to want it, though,” Jack said magnanimously. “I want you to.”

Channon squeezed his eyes shut, squirming back into his pillows. “Okay.”

“Okay?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“In that case,” Jack said in a low, suggestive tone, “I want to know how naked you are right now.”

“Um, totally?”

“I think I’m going to need proof, sweetheart.”

Channon wriggled under the covers. “What kind of proof?”

“How do you think you could prove it?”

“I could...send you a selfie?”

“That’s right.” Jack’s voice dripped with approval. “Go on, then. You can crop your face out if you want.”

Because Jack knew his body well enough to recognize it anywhere, and Jack knew Channon would never lie to him. “Yes, Sir. One sec.”

Channon pushed the covers down, his pulse running a little fast. A naked selfie. Nudes. That was what Jack wanted.

He knew from experience that body selfies were harder than they looked—harder to make them look good, anyway. Channon laid one hand on his belly and focused on that rather than his junk (though the junk was definitely still in frame). He took a burst of pictures, trying not to think too much about it.

One of them seemed okay. The top edge showed his throat and his mouth but nothing more than that. The bottom went all the way down to his thighs. Was it good enough? Channon quickly slapped a filter on it, warm and faded, and sent it before he could lose his nerve. Then he deleted the nudes from his phone.

“There, Sir,” he said, a little breathless. “Is that what you wanted?”

Jack chuckled softly. “Let’s see.” His phone chimed. “Hmmm. That’s exactly what I wanted. Good boy. But your dick looks lonely,” he added in a smooth, low tone. “Touch it.”

Channon slowly let out his breath. “Yes, Sir,” he said, sliding his hand down and curling it around his dick.

“Tell me what you’re doing, Channon.”

The command slid into him, forcing compliance. Channon licked his lips. “Just holding it. Just...squeezing a bit.”

“Slide your foreskin over the head. Jerk off with it.”

Channon did as he was told, feeling himself thicken. “I’m...I’m doing it, Sir. I’m getting hard.” It was so easy to get hard when Jack told him what to do.

Now Jack said, “Is it good?”

“Yeah, but...” Channon teased himself, fingering the underside of the head through his foreskin. “Not like when you do it.”

“Maybe you need lube,” Jack suggested. “There’s some in your toiletries bag.”

Channon sat up, feeling restless and surreal. There was lube in his toiletries bag. “Got it, Sir,” he said.

“You know what to do.”

Channon tucked the phone into his shoulder and was about to lie down when he hesitated. This might get messy. At home that wasn’t such a problem, but this was a hotel. People had to clean up after him. Self-consciously, he grabbed a towel and spread it out.

“Ready, Sir.”

“Describe it to me.”

Channon exhaled, closing his eyes. “I’m lying on my back, on a towel, on top of the bed covers. Naked. I’ve got the lube and, and I’m hard, Sir. I wish you were here,” he added for the sake of honesty.

Jack made a soft, pleased sound. “Oh, I bet you do, sweetheart. But you’re going to have to make the best of it. I want you to lube up.”

“My dick? Or...”

“Or?” Jack prompted, clearly enjoying himself.

Of course he wanted to make Channon say it. “My asshole.”

“Both,” Jack said firmly. “Jerk yourself off and get your fingers inside. Tell me how it feels.”

The door was locked, right? Channon resisted the urge to get up and check it. It was self-locking. He was pretty sure. “Yes, Sir,” he said.

He squeezed lube onto his fingers and slid them over himself. The lube was cool but warmed quickly. It had that familiar scent, the one that made him think of Jack. He confessed this as he slicked up his cock, moving his hand slowly.

Jack chuckled. “I smell like lube?”

“Lube smells like you,” Channon said. “Like...you’re the reason I need it.”

“Mmm, I am. How’s your hole?”

Channon slipped a hand down to stroke a finger between his cheeks. "Tight."

"Shy?"

"Maybe." He teased himself with a fingertip. "I...I need a sec."

"Take your time, sweetheart. Tell me what you're doing."

"I'm touching it." The first inch of finger slid in without resistance. Then he had to ease it deeper, and the angle was difficult. "I'm in past, uh, the first knuckle."

"Good boy," Jack murmured. "Keep going."

Channon fingered himself, one hand moving shakily over his cock, listening to Jack's breathing over the phone. Was Jack jerking off? Channon thought not. He wondered if Jack liked what he was hearing.

"I'm, uh. Two fingers," Channon said, not wanting Jack to get bored.

"How does it feel?"

Channon licked his lips. "It's not as good as when you do it, Sir."

"That's all right. If I can't be there with you, though, I want to know you can take care of yourself."

Of course. "I can, if you tell me to."

"That's my boy." He sounded pleased. "Get your fingers as deep inside you as you can. Try for a third."

The third took a little while, but Channon managed it. Doing it himself made everything more difficult, but Jack's low reassurances helped. Soon, Channon breathed, "That's as far as I can reach," into the phone, and Jack hummed with pleasure.

"Good boy," he said, and then. "Hold on a moment."

Something rustled over the line. A muffled sound was followed by another. Voices? Was Jack speaking to someone?

Channon held still, the fingers of one hand buried in his ass and the other wrapped around his cock. He stroked himself, slow as dripping molasses, feeling the warmth and heat pooling between his thighs as he waited for Jack.

Then Jack said, "All right. I'm back."

"Everything okay, Sir?" Channon asked breathlessly.

"Ewan's going to bed."

Channon had forgotten about Ewan. He clenched around his fingers, wondering if he was selfish for forgetting. "Is he okay?"

"He's fine. He asked if he could say hi. I told him you were busy," Jack said with amusement.

Oh...god. Ewan probably thought they were doing exactly what they were doing.

And it didn't matter. Channon reminded himself that Ewan had seen him do far worse. And if things went the way Channon half-hoped they would, Ewan would certainly see him like this one day.

“How are you doing, sweetheart?”

“Good, Sir,” Channon said. “I, uh. I kept jerking off.”

Jack hummed. “It sounds like you’re ready for your present.” The words didn’t immediately make sense. “Wipe your hands and open the box Nate gave you.”

Oh. That. Channon had forgotten about it entirely. He wiped his hands and reached for the box. Black, sleek, unlabeled—it was intimidating. Whatever it was, Jack clearly had a plan.

Warily, Channon opened it. He sucked in a breath, eyeing the contents with alarm, but no real surprise.

Nestled inside some molded packing foam was a dildo. Of course. It wasn’t as big as the biggest Jack had bought for him, not the enormous one Jack liked to tease him about. It was still huge, though. Huge and somewhat realistic, with fairly realistic balls at the base. The color was a few shades lighter than Jack’s own, the head blushing pink, veins ridging the length of it.

Channon breathed out. “Uh. I think I know where this is going, Sir,” he said weakly.

Jack laughed. “Yeah, sweetheart, that’s going in you. You’ll have to thank Nate tomorrow for delivering it.”

God, Nate had brought this through TSA? Channon couldn’t imagine doing that. The thought of it was face-burning.

“Get comfortable,” Jack prompted. “This is going to take a while.”

It did. Channon propped his hips up on a cushion with the towel over it and worked

the thing in slowly. Every inch of it felt like three, and he had to stop and breathe and listen to Jack's encouraging reassurances.

"You're doing so good. Such a good boy. You can take it. I've seen you take bigger than this. No need to rush."

Channon didn't rush, but time seemed to run slow. It felt like hours as he rocked the dildo in, feeling his body open up for it.

For it? No. His body was opening for Jack, as if Jack were the one pressing all this silicone into him. Because that was exactly what was happening. Channon's hands might be the ones holding the thing, but it was Jack who was pulling his strings.

"Stop touching your cock," Jack said, and Channon stopped. He clutched the dildo with both hands. "Tell me how it feels."

"It's so big," Channon gasped, lifting his hips off the bed and feeling the length of the thing flex inside him. He was sweating, droplets bursting out of his pores as he rocked the dildo into himself. The overwhelming fullness made his throat thicken, his body tightening compulsively with a delicious, unbearable ache.

"Can you take it?" Jack asked.

"Y-yes," Channon confessed. "But...Sir, I think..."

Something this large had an effect on him that was impossible to ignore. He was wired, his body straining against the urge to come. He wanted to let go, give in, let it crash over him. But he knew what Jack wanted, and he was trapped between the inevitability of the orgasm building in him and obedience to his Sir.

"Sir," he gasped, trying not to clench. "It's so much."

“You’ve had bigger,” Jack said again, low and insistent.

Channon shook his head. His eyes were watering. “But I came, Sir, it made me come, and I can’t...Sir, it’s going to happen...”

“You’re going to come?”

“Yes, Sir,” Channon breathed, holding the dildo still because if he moved it, it would happen. “I’m trying, but—”

“Then come,” Jack ordered.

Channon whimpered, sliding the dildo the last inch inside him and feeling it go deep. His body spasmed. It was beyond his control. He started to shake, breathing in punched-out little gasps as his balls drew up and his cock jerked, spilling in hot spurts on his sweat-slick torso. He groaned, unable to help it, mindlessly hitching his hips to press the dildo in as deep as it could go. God, it ached. It took him down, drowning him in it.

When it was over, he collapsed on the bed, wrung out and useless. He could barely think, his mind and body wiped by the wash of pleasure that ebbed through him.

His phone had slid down the pillow. It took him an effort to hitch it up against his ear. “Sir?” he slurred.

“That sounded good, sweetheart,” Jack said thickly. His voice was rough. He sounded turned on. Channon wondered blearily if he’d been jerking off. But when he asked as much, Jack laughed ruefully. “Not in Nate’s spare room. No, I’ll save it for when you get home and come on your face.”

If Channon could have laughed at this he would have, but he was wasted. Such a

waste. Just flesh.

Usually, this would be when Jack took advantage of his uselessness to fuck him hard and rough, and Channon would be able to do nothing but take it, be nothing but a receptacle for Jack's come.

Well. He'd have to wait for that.

"Is it still inside you?" Jack asked.

Channon groaned. "Yeah. I'm a mess."

"Take a photo for me."

Oh god, of course he wanted that. Channon wiped his hands on the towel and took a really obscene photo of himself. The angle wasn't great, but dildo was clearly visible stuffed all the way inside him, and he figured that was what Jack wanted to see.

"Beautiful," Jack said. "Maybe we should have someone take dirty photographs of you some time. Make a set of them. Victor could show them in his gallery." Channon made a weak sound of protest, and Jack chuckled. "Maybe not. But I'd like the photos, nevertheless. You can take it out and clean up, sweetheart. Leave the call connected, I'll wait."

When Channon was clean and dry and safely snuggled under the covers, Jack told him he'd done a good job, had been perfect. "I'm so pleased with you," Jack said, and Channon wriggled in sleepy contentment.

"I love you, Sir."

"I know, sweetheart. I love you so much. Looking forward to having you at home."

“So you can come on my face?” Channon asked with a yawn.

Jack laughed. “You’d better believe it.”

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Epilogue

Jack did come on Channon's face when he got home. He ordered Channon to his knees and jerked himself off, watching Channon's expression flicker from eagerness to disappointment at not being allowed to suck, finally settling on submissive acceptance.

Jack smiled down at him as he blinked his sticky eyelashes. "Welcome home, sweetheart."

It was good to have Channon back where he belonged. Jack had him on the floor between his feet during dinner and hand fed him pieces of cold chicken and salad. And later, because Channon had been very good, Jack took him upstairs and fucked him in their bed. He even allowed Channon to come. Magnanimous of him, really.

After, Channon snuggled into Jack's armpit and hummed. "Sir," he said carefully, like he'd been thinking about this and finally decided how best to approach whatever was on his mind. "Can I talk to you about something?"

"Always," Jack murmured, running his fingers through Channon's sweat-damp hair. "About anything you want."

"Do you think," Channon said slowly, "that we could, um. Do more of that predicament bondage?"

Jack felt it thrill down his spine. "Want me to put you in a painful position, sweetheart? Torture you a little? Make you torture yourself?" He scored his

thumbnail down Channon's chest, leaving a pink welt behind. "I can do that. I'd love to do that."

"It's just...I think I'd like having to try hard to make you happy." Channon squirmed around to look up at Jack with big, baby seal eyes. "You know I like that. And you like making me work hard for you, so...so it makes sense, doesn't it?"

"It does." Jack added a second score mark across the first, to form a cross. It was like and unlike a brand, he thought, his mark on Channon.

Was Ewan right about Jack being too much like his abusive ex? Because Jack had decided the man had abused Ewan, even if Ewan had thought he wanted it.

"Do you think you'd enjoy it? It can be strenuous," Jack said honestly. "You might find it too much. I'd like to be sure you'd tell me if you didn't want to do it anymore."

Channon laughed softly, shaking his bangs down over his brow. His hair was getting long again, in need of a cut. "Maybe that's what I'd like about it. Not liking it but doing it for you anyway."

"But if you wanted to stop," Jack insisted, pushing himself up on the pillows and looking Channon in the eye. "If you wanted to stop any of this. All of it. Would you tell me?"

This seemed to puzzle him. He came up on his knees, his hands curled on each naked thigh. "Stop...us?"

"The kink," Jack clarified. "The things we do."

Now he looked alarmed. "You mean if I wanted to stop being your boy?"

It felt sharp, a pain in Jack's throat. "If you wanted."

"But that's what I am," Channon said plaintively. His hands flexed, reaching out and then curling again. "You're my Sir."

"I am," Jack reassured him, taking Channon's hands and cupping them between his own. "That doesn't ever have to change. But some parts of what we do are a lot. I don't want you to go along with everything I want just because I want it," he said, but it felt wrong to say aloud because he did want that. He wanted Channon's blind obedience, his boundless submission. It was just that he couldn't have it. Couldn't and know himself to be a good person.

Anyway, Channon didn't buy it for a second. His expression was deeply skeptical. "That's not true, Sir. Don't say that."

Jack breathed out heavily. "You're right. I'm sorry. I do want that. But I don't want you to regret it one day. I don't want you to remember me as the one who fucked you up," he said, disliking saying it but having to.

Channon's hands pulled back, but only so he could twist his fingers into Jack's, holding on firmly. "I mean...maybe you fucked me up a little bit?" he said, smiling shyly. "Like, I might be a total pervert now. But I don't mind. It's worth it. Because I get you, and you let me...you don't make me do things that really hurt me. And you don't forget about me. And I know I can trust you, always. So." He shrugged one shoulder. "I think it's okay."

"Yeah?" Jack squeezed Channon's hands hard for a moment. "You think you won't hate me one day?"

"I mean, it depends on what else you do," Channon said solemnly. "Like, I don't think it's impossible for you to fuck me up some time between here and the rest of

our lives. I just don't think you'll ever do it on purpose." He sounded so sincere. Jack felt his chest loosen.

Perhaps Ewan had reason to worry about Channon. But Jack would do everything he could to make sure Channon never did. It was his job, after all, to take care of Channon. For the rest of their lives.

"Come here," Jack said, tugging, and Channon came up to straddle his hips and be kissed. Jack stroked Channon's cheeks with his thumbs, grateful to have him.

"So you want to do more predicament bondage," he said, watching Channon's cheeks pink up. "I think I can manage that. You're going to regret asking for this," he added with a grin.

Channon drew a shaky breath. "I mean, isn't that the point?" He pulled his lip between his teeth. "You know, if you want, we could do it with Nate and Ewan. Like...in a 'one of you is going to get hurt' way?"

"Are you volunteering Ewan to be potentially hurt?" Jack asked, amused and pleased by the idea.

"He likes being hurt," Channon said, wrinkling his nose. "He's a masochist."

Jack couldn't help it. He laughed and kissed Channon's brow. "He is. Sure. I'll talk to Nate. But we might have to have a practice run first, so don't get complacent."

Sighing, Channon leaned his head on Jack's shoulder, going soft and limp. "With you, Sir? I wouldn't dare."

Which was exactly as it should be.

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Bonus: Predicament

"You ready, sweetheart?"

Channon nodded, forcing himself to relax. Today was supposed to be a challenge, and he was ready for it. "Yes, Sir," he said, looking Jack in the eye.

"Good," Jack said, reaching for a hank of rope. "Okay. Let's begin."

He started at Channon's feet. Channon stood with his ankles apart, hands behind his back, watching Jack on the floor. To have Jack kneel in front of him was strange, but as Jack lashed Channon's ankles to a pole to keep them separated, the strangeness went away. Jack glanced up, his fingers lingering possessively on Channon's calf, and the sharp look in his eye took away the last of the strangeness—there was no question of who was in charge here.

Jack's hands were loving as they moved up Channon's body and wrapped Channon's torso in rope. Raw jute today— "I'm feeling traditional," Jack said, chaffing a hank against the underside of Channon's arm to make it itch. Channon shivered and accepted his fate.

Jack had hooked a chain to the ring in the ceiling of the playroom, and now he tied Channon's chest-harness to it. It would give him something to hang against, letting him redistribute his weight. He didn't need it yet, but he knew he would. They'd done things like this before, after all.

His arms were bound together above and behind his head, and then leashed to the

hanging chain. Jack tightened the leash to keep them in place, putting pressure on Channon's shoulders. It burned. Jack cinched the rope a little tighter, watching Channon's face as he winced.

"Good?" Channon nodded. Jack's eyes softened. "Good might not be the right word for it," he said wryly, and Channon breathed out.

You asked for this, he reminded himself. So he said, "Green," and Jack was satisfied.

It was so tender, the way Jack tied him, the way his hands moved on Channon's skin. Jack was especially tender with Channon's balls as he leashed them. "Comfortable?" he asked. Channon blew out a breath. Was it ever comfortable to have rope tied around your sack? But he nodded. "Yes, Sir."

"You sure?" Jack stroked the taut flesh. "It's going to get worse."

"I know, Sir. I can take it."

Was that true? Channon hoped it was.

Jack anchored a rope to the one above his hips and looped it around the pole. "Up on your toes," he said as he drew the rope taut. Channon exhaled, his body folding, and pushed up with his toes to try to keep his balance. He couldn't straighten, not with that rope keeping him folded. He pointed his feet, trying to push himself up to get a little relief. That burned too, too much weight on his toes for him to hold it easily. It felt so awkward, but Jack looked at him with pleasure, and Channon knew this was exactly what he wanted.

"Can you hold that?" Jack asked.

"Yes, Sir," Channon promised.

Jack smiled. "Good."

He turned away, moving to the wall. There was an electric kettle set up, and he flicked it on. Channon would have been more worried about it if he hadn't already seen the cup beside it. He watched as Jack made himself a cup of tea. and Channon bit his lip.

Jack came back with his tea and sat in the armchair he'd set up for the best viewing angle of his handiwork. The tea would have been too hot to drink, but the smell of it bloomed in the air, and Channon closed his eyes, wondering if that smell would bring this moment back to him later, if he'd always remember it when Jack drank that particular tea.

His calves burned, his thighs too. He felt his breath getting shorter and shallower. He tried to focus on the goal here, which was to endure this for as long as he could. We've barely started. He tried not to think about that.

"Channon," Jack said softly.

Channon opened his eyes. Jack smiled. It made Channon's heart race. He loved that smile. He'd do anything for that smile.

"How are you feeling?"

"Kind of...off balance," Channon confessed, his voice sounding strangled. "It's weird."

"Your feet don't normally do that," Jack said, nodding at them. "It's unnatural for you. But imagine you were wearing high heels."

Channon thought high heels were a fair bit different but didn't say so. He breathed, and settled against the rope at his back that held him up, balancing on his toes. It

wasn't that bad, really. He could handle it.

"You look almost comfortable," Jack said, leaning forward to run his fingers over Channon's balls in their rope prison. He caught the tail of the rope, the leash, and tugged gently. Channon shivered, trying not to wobble. "I should do something about that."

And then Jack pulled the leash down, stretching Channon's balls as he looped the rope around the pole between his ankles. A sound of dismay slipped out of Channon's mouth, but Jack just smiled and pulled the rope tighter. Channon's toes took the brunt of it, as he tried to hunch over himself, his breath coming faster. It ached. God, it ached, and the itch of the rope made it worse. As he bent, the pressure on his arms deepened until they burned. Oh god, it was getting worse by the second.

"Too much?" Jack asked, more curious than concerned.

Channon inhaled and then let the breath go as slowly as he could, breathing out the ache with it. Did that relieve it? Not really, but somehow he could stand it better.

"I can take it," he said, his voice a little wobbly.

"That's a good boy," Jack said warmly, and it wasn't fair. When he said things in that voice, Channon was trapped, caught in the desire to be Jack's very, very good boy.

Jack sat back and drank his tea, watching Channon as the ache solidified in him. It lurked in his arches and traveled up his calves, and every inch of it sunk him deeper. Slow, insinuating, it took him over, until it was all through him, echoing in every nerve. He strained to push himself up against the pain in his shoulders, and it drew the rope on his balls tighter. He had to choose every moment where to put the pain, where he could stand it. Every moment was a decision, and nothing was the right answer.

It was agony. It climbed his throat until he felt it in his breath, in every exhale. And Jack was watching him, rapt, as if this were exactly what he wanted.

Channon was simultaneously alone in the sensation, cocooned in it, and caught in the web of Jack's attention. He felt like everywhere the rope dug into him was the touch of Jack's hands holding him fast, insisting that he feel all of this. Channon heaved a breath, his throat thick. He let out a moan through his teeth, closing his eyes to concentrate. Did that help? God, he didn't know.

He felt Jack draw close, heard Jack's low hum of warning. Then Jack's hand was on Channon's side, sliding up. His fingers traced Channon's armpit, making him shudder, his muscles tensing against the too-light touch. Jack chuckled, soft and deep.

"Oh, Channon. You're doing so well."

The lump in Channon's throat rose to choke him. He whimpered, not wanting to let it out.

"Is it too much?"

Channon shook his head, his lips pressed together against the intensity of what was being done to him.

"Can you take a little more?"

Could he? He tried to speak and found his voice was trapped beneath the lump in his throat. A sob bubbled up and out of him, his breath hitching dangerously. But it freed him. "Yes, Sir," he managed in a voice that was shaky and thick.

Jack exhaled, a long, low, satisfied sound. "Good. This is going to hurt."

The rope that trapped Channon's arms above his head tightened. The agony in his

shoulders flared hot and red behind his eyelids. He cried out, pushing himself up to meet it, but his feet were weak from the strain and nearly buckled under him. His body was a line of agony: toes, calves, thighs, balls, shoulders, and the place where the rope bit into his forearms.

It peaked, and Channon lost the last of his ability to stand it. The pain spilled out of his mouth. He heard himself beg Jack to stop, and his face felt wet.

The tension on his arms lifted. Not all the way, but enough for the ache in his shoulders to subside into a dull roar instead of an inferno.

"Give me a color," Jack said.

Channon couldn't. He couldn't say it. "Yellow" felt like failure, but "green" was so far away that it just wouldn't come.

"Ah."

And the tension in his shoulders loosened, leaving him gasping in relief. He felt Jack move in front of him and felt the release of the rope that leashed his balls to the pole, then the one that kept him bent, and he shuddered, knowing this was coming to an end. Jack's hands moved over him carefully, firm but soothing, rubbing him as the ropes came off, as he sunk to his knees on the floor, still shaking.

He leaned into Jack, and he could hear himself whimpering as Jack stroked him, as Jack took his weight and held him close. The scent of Jack's cologne, woody and masculine, wrapped around him like a blanket, like the words Jack murmured to him.

"All right, sweetheart. It's over. You did such a good job. I'm so proud of you for trying so hard."

The praise was too much. Channon turned his face into Jack's neck and let himself

sob. It was messy, but he had nothing left in him to care. The only things that mattered were Jack and Jack's pride in him.

He lifted his head, and Jack kissed him on the mouth. "Good boy," he said. "That's my perfect boy."

Channon breathed out and let Jack take care of him. He'd done his best, and that was all Jack ever asked.

Later, when they were curled up on the sofa with a mug of hot chocolate, Jack said, "Was it everything you wanted?"

"Did it make you happy?" Channon asked, lifting his eyes to Jack's face.

Jack's smile was soft, his thumb stroking over the indentation of rope on Channon's forearm. "Very."

"Then yeah," Channon told him. He'd do it again, just to feel like this.

Jack kissed his hair. "I think you could handle a little more than that, next time."

Oh god. Channon snuggled into Jack's chest. "I...probably, yeah. I could have, maybe, tonight."

"Mmm. Maybe."

Channon took a breath, feeling a little regret. "You could have gone further."

"You wouldn't give me a color," Jack said evenly. "I'm not going to push you when you're like that."

"I'm sorry, Sir," Channon started, but Jack shushed him.

"There's nothing to be sorry for. You did your best, and I did my job. Which is what?"

"To take care of me," Channon said, feeling a rush of relief.

Jack nodded. "Exactly. Next time, though," he said with a smirk, "I have an idea for something you aren't going to like at all."

It made Channon groan and hunch his shoulders. Of course Jack did. He probably daydreamed about it between conference calls.

But what he said was, "Whatever makes you happy, Sir." Because when Jack was happy, Channon was happy too.