

EXPOSED



Bette Browne

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# Love's Landscapes

*An M/M Romance series*

## EXPOSED

**By Bette Browne**

### Introduction

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

### What Is Love's Landscapes?

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

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

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

### Words of Caution

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

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

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## Photo Description

A half-dressed man stands in front of an ornate mirror. The room is luxurious, as are the red, lacy panties and fishnet stockings he wears. Long black patent-leather boots reach mid-thigh. He is muscular and very handsome.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*Fuck! I got all dressed up for an evening alone and forgot that tonight was my night to host "pizza and basketball night" with the guys. My detective partner arrived at my house first and came looking for me upstairs and found me like THIS!!! How am I going to explain this to him?! He doesn't even know I'm GAY! Much less that I have a lingerie and heel fetish!*

*Author, the kinkier the better (no ménage or cheating). I want there to be tons of tension during the basketball game and please do not have it resolved immediately. I give you the freedom to choose from which pov you want to tell their story.*

*Sincerely,*

*Gyn*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** fetish, gay for you, alpha males, cross-dressing, friends to lovers, cops, NYPD

**Word Count:** 22,071

*Acknowledgements & Thanks*

For S. Bigger thanks than I can say.

Thanks to the DRitC team. You all rock for doing such an amazing job of putting this all together for the benefit of everyone. Bravo!

Thanks to Gyn for an absolutely amazing prompt. I would never ever have gone anywhere near this topic without it, and considering my future plans on where I plan to take these two guys, that would have been a real shame. I hope I've done it justice for you, and that there is just enough kink (for now) to whet your appetite.

And finally, thank you to the wonderful people at XDRESS who granted me the rights to use their image for my cover—I am eternally grateful. Not only for the sexy guy in red wearing product number 290, but also for their supportive words in our email correspondence. Please go to their website—[xdress.com](http://xdress.com)—for many great products, including loads of great photos of gorgeous men in lingerie, but also for an amazing blog that is insightful, inspirational, and incredibly well presented. It helped me on this journey a great deal.

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## Chapter One

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* flowed through the sound system, filling his brownstone with its soothing, rich tones and surrounding Mason Reid with a total separation to the world outside his four walls. He couldn't hear the traffic, and he couldn't hear the neighbors next door. And god, he needed it. He lifted a glass of his favorite California Cabernet Sauvignon to his lips, breathing in the heavy notes of black currant and dark cherry, then took a mouthful, swirling it over his tongue and enjoying its flavor. *So good*, he thought, swallowing, the liquid sliding easily down his throat.

He looked at the open bottle on the counter, deciding to leave it uncorked to breathe, and left the kitchen, walking through the dining room and then the living room. His footfalls accompanied the music as he moved across the hardwood floors, *clack, clack, clack*, only muffling when he crossed a rug. He stepped into the entry, pausing for a moment to take another sip of his wine before he began to walk again. The marble underfoot made a new, brighter sound. He liked it. His hips swayed to the music with every accentuated step he took, and he lost himself to the moment.

Mason ascended the staircase. Despite wearing the three-inch heels, he didn't reach for the banister. He climbed steadily, the action as natural as if he'd been in bare feet. The stair runner removed the music from his steps, but he'd get that again as soon as he reached his bedroom. The parquet oak floors there wouldn't let him down.

His business shirt ruffled with his movements, swishing about in the breeze he created as he walked. He'd removed his tie and undone his buttons but, as yet, hadn't removed that one item of clothing, even if he had already changed from his restricting everyday suit pants and boxer briefs and, of course, his shoes and socks. Going downstairs still wearing his shirt had been an unconscious decision. He was in his own house, but down there, downstairs, everything seemed so much more public and open—so very different to the intimacy he felt when he was upstairs.

Moving into his bedroom, Mason took off the shirt and threw it on his bed. Then found the sound system's remote control and turned the music up louder. He had speakers in his bedroom, but they weren't as loud as in the rest of the house. The music seemed to reverberate through the walls now, and he loved it.

He took another mouthful of his wine and walked toward the antique French armoire that had been his mother's pride and joy.

\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Two

*What the hell is that noise?*

Thomas Perkins stared at the door in front of him, straining his ears to try and make out whatever that god-awful noise was coming from inside. It was familiar, in that he'd heard it somewhere before—*maybe?*—but he couldn't place it. *And why the hell is it coming from inside Mase's place?* He considered that, his eyes flicking from side to side as he stood on the stoop, six-pack of beer in hand, as if the answers would just appear. He knocked again then put his ear to the door. Through the inch-thick timber the sound was clear—it sounded like damned opera. He stepped back and eyed the large brass number on the middle of the black-painted door, checking that he was at the right house. He'd knocked on this door too many times to count, so he knew he was, even if it didn't feel right today. He wondered if one of the other guys had already arrived. If so, maybe they were joking around in there. Mase had an amazing sound system more than capable of delivering the music; it was just the type of music the stereo was currently delivering that had him perplexed. He was more used to his partner wanting to listen to Seattle grunge and arguing with him about it—his own preference of “anything but” often a contentious issue between them. As he knocked once more, it occurred to Tom that he was early. Only half an hour, but the other guys were usually late, if anything. It might be one of them subjecting Mase to that orchestral din, but that was unlikely. So what was going on?

Tom reached into the pocket of his jean jacket and pulled out his overloaded key ring. He shuffled awkwardly through the keys one-handed, the six-pack of beer still held in the other, until he found what he was looking for. Mase had given him a key to his place not long after they'd become partners. He'd wondered why at the time, and asked the question. Mase had looked at him, a “why the hell wouldn't I?” expression written all over his face, and told him that, of course, his partner should have a key to his house. What if some drug-crazed loony tracked him home and put a bullet in his gut? He had no one else to come find him, so the job fell to Tom. Tom chuckled, even as he pushed the key into the lock. Guys that said shit like that *did not* listen to opera. And since no one was opening the door, and he was clearly expected—it was game night after all—then he was letting himself in. He'd never forgive himself if that “loony” was the one playing the music in an effort to drown out the sound of Mase's screams.

He pushed open the door and hesitantly stepped into the large marble-tiled foyer of the brownstone. This place blew him away. Most of the time it was hard to remember that Mase came from this kind of lifestyle, from so much wealth. On any given day, he was just one of the guys: loudmouthed, crude, hardworking, dedicated... and most of all, loyal to the core. There were no airs and graces about Mase. He worked hard, he got dirty if he had to, and he was always there for everyone—especially for Tom. He trusted the guy with his life. That had nothing to do with the money in his bank account and everything to do with Mase and the kind of guy he was. He was just good people.

The music was even louder in here. Tom shook his head as if that would ease the pain in his ears and didn't bother to call out for Mase. No one would hear him over the volume of that music anyway. He made his way to the kitchen, and the refrigerator, to get the beer chilling again. Like the foyer, the kitchen amazed him. Tom loved to cook, and he loved this room. Mase had even given him full access to it a few times. Of course, Mase had benefited from that, as had a few of their friends. Tom knew the room had been redone not long before they became partners. It was one of the few things Mase had changed about the house after his parents died. And for a guy who had no idea about those sorts of things—Mase's words, not his—he'd done a damned good job of the renovation. Dark timber and marble and stainless steel. It was beautiful. There was a story behind the renovation, one Mase had "almost" told him on a couple of occasions. But he still didn't know, although he suspected it had something to do with Mase's mother. Hopefully, Mase would feel comfortable enough to confide in him one day.

Tom opened the large French-door refrigerator and placed the beer on a shelf. As he turned back around, he noticed an open bottle of wine. Odd. Mase drank beer, occasionally bourbon, but usually beer. He tried to remember if he'd ever seen Mase with a glass of wine. Possibly, but it was certainly the exception, not the norm. The only reason he didn't question again that he must be in the wrong house was that he knew this kitchen so well.

"Mase!" His voice blended with the music, falling flat even to his own ears. "Fucking hell," he mumbled to no one as he walked from the kitchen toward the media room. Had Mase forgotten tonight was even happening? The low coffee table, usually set up with chips and dips, was empty, and the pre-game telecast was noticeably absent from a very dark flat screen on the wall. Tom glanced back toward the kitchen. Even though he couldn't see through the walls, he thought of that bottle of wine. Could Mase have someone here with him?

He'd be pissed if Mase had forgotten them for a woman; this was game night—you didn't *forget* game night!—and you didn't forget your friends. But for all his posturing, he'd understand it if Mase had. Not much in the world could make you forget yourself like a beautiful woman. He was almost envious. It was too long since he'd had the pleasure of a night with the fairer sex himself. He looked toward the ceiling and listened, trying to hear anything above the volume of the music and got nothing, but that was hardly surprising. God, it was loud. And so *unlike* Mase. His thoughts drifted back to today at work. Mase had been distracted come to think of it. Nothing obvious, but he knew his partner. Sly dog. He'd had something else on his mind. *You go, Mase.* But then he remembered why he was standing in Mase's media room—it was game night. He tried to remember if something had been said. Had Mase canceled things? No. He'd even overheard Griff say that he'd see him tonight when they were leaving for the day, and Mase had agreed. Or had he? Maybe he just nodded. But nodding was agreeing. There'd been no other talk of it between any of them, but that wasn't unusual. They all met every two weeks, as they had done for so long that it was now a habit. They didn't need to reconfirm their plans, and if someone had to cancel, for whatever reason, they made it known to everyone else, usually organizing a trade. One of them would then have everyone to their place instead. Mase had definitely not organized a trade.

The thing was, Tom wanted to know what was going on. It was the detective in him—he was a curious SOB. His gut told him that maybe he should just leave, but his curiosity was winning over. “Mase!” he yelled again. Still nothing. The other guys would be turning up soon. If Mase had a woman here, and that was a big if, even if it was Tom's guess right now, then he'd be able to shut off the other guys at the pass. He was fine to have them over to his place if he had to, but he'd need to move fast. He really didn't want to miss the game, even if he was eager to learn what Mase was up to.

A break in the music between songs—they were called that with this type of music, weren't they?—was a welcome relief to his ears. He could actually hear himself think. He was about to call out again in an attempt to get Mase's attention when the distinct sound of stiletto heels moving across a wooden floor came from overhead. Tom smiled wide. *He does have a woman up there! You go, Ma*—The thought was abruptly interrupted by the start of another piece of music. “Jesus Christ,” Tom muttered. “Looks like it's on at my place now.” He turned for the kitchen and his beer, pulling out his cell to call Griff and let him know the change in plans. He hadn't even leveled the phone to waist height when another musical interlude brought the sound of more footsteps. Tom imagined what she might look like: all long legs in those sexy sounding heels.

He was happy for his friend, even as a pang of envy shot through him. Not that he'd ever begrudge Mase his happiness; he just wouldn't mind a bit for himself.

He looked at the screen of his phone, finding Griff's number and pressing on it. The call connected and as quickly went through to Griff's message service. "Shit." The guy could be anywhere. In fact, he could be walking up Mase's street right this minute. He'd better let Mase know he might still get some unwanted visitors. He dialed Mase's number instead. A phone began to sound behind him, and he turned. Mase's phone was on the counter right there. So much for leaving a message! Oh well, it wasn't really his problem. He took another step toward the refrigerator then stopped. But if it was him in the same situation, he'd want to know. Wouldn't he? Yeah, he would, he decided. It was what friends did for each other—they kept each other in the loop.

Tom was still justifying that to himself as he climbed halfway up the staircase. He paused. "Mase." Still nothing. He took a few more steps, listening carefully for any sign that might make him turn around and get out of there. "Mase," he said again at the top of the stairs. The sound of the music was his only reply. He looked down the hallway. It was rather dark with not even a lamp turned on. There was a soft glow coming from the end of the hall—Mase's bedroom, if he recalled correctly. He would go most of the way and call out again. He sure didn't want to see anything he shouldn't; although a glimpse of whoever was in there with Mase was rather appealing. At least if he got to see her he'd have ammunition for weeks, if not months, to play at Mase with.

With every step he took, Tom knew he should turn around and go back downstairs. He wouldn't be welcome here, but screw that, Mase had ditched them for whomever it was he had in that room. The least Tom could do was remind Mase who he was forgetting. To see Mase's face would be the best thing ever. He just hoped he didn't embarrass the poor woman. If they were in any compromising positions, he'd hightail it out of there quick smart... and deal with Mase tomorrow.

"Mase," he said once more as he got closer to the door, far too softly; there was no way that would be heard over the music. The first thing he saw was the bed, and Mase's clothes discarded on it—he recognized the shirt Mase had worn to work during the day—his shoes and socks haphazardly thrown on the floor. He'd obviously been in a hurry; the disarray very unlike Mase. Tom's eyes darted around the part of the bedroom that he could see. Tom didn't make a habit of taking in the details of Mase's bedroom, but to him it looked like it always did, nothing out of place. There were no signs to indicate a woman was

anywhere in the room. She might still be dressed, though, a glass of wine in hand, pushed up against the wall. A shiver walked its way over Tom's shoulders. *Just a peek*, he convinced himself as he took another step.

The first thing he noticed was a leg. A leg so long it seemed to go on forever. Or maybe that was the shoe, no, the boot. Black with spiked heels and shiny leather that went all the way up to a thigh... a thigh that was so toned and firm. Tom had to force himself to breathe. His eyes were locked on that thigh—red fishnet stockings clinging to it, like a gift ready to be unwrapped. His eyes moved up. Had he ever seen a more perfect ass? He'd sure never seen one that looked like that. The red lace panties hugging it tight just begged to be pulled down slowly to reveal more of that lower back. Jesus Christ! Dimples. Dimples and narrow hips, and honey-colored skin so soft looking... Tom took it all in, not realizing until his gaze moved up toward the woman's shoulders that something was wrong. She was too toned, too tall, too—too fucking muscular and strong. As he swallowed, Tom felt the lump lodge in his throat. He slumped sideways, using the doorframe for support, just as there was another break in the music. The sound must have alerted the room's occupant to the fact he was there, because they turned.

Tom's eyes fell immediately to the front of those red lace panties. Holy shit! Definitely not what he'd been hoping for. He looked up. A deep-brown gaze met his. As those eyes he knew so well registered what was happening, they widened.

"Tom?"

Tom only saw Mase say the word, as if he'd said it so softly he'd only mouthed it, voiceless.

"What the hell is going on?"

Tom watched Mase as emotions passed clearly across his face: shock turned to mortification—Tom could definitely get on board with that—and then anger. "The fuck are you doing in my bedroom, Tom?"

"I—I—Fuck, Mase. It's game night. I—I'm supposed to be here." They were both talking loud enough to be heard above the music.

Mase closed his eyes at the reminder and let out a sigh, but then he seemed to steady himself. He looked back at Tom, lifted one eyebrow, and asked, "In my bedroom?"

"Well, no, of course not, but—"

"But?"

*Who gives a shit if I'm in your bedroom?* Tom thought. *That's kind of insignificant right about now!* There was something much more important to deal with. "Jesus, Mase. I thought you were a woman." Tom couldn't think. This was incredible. "A-a woman..." he stuttered, repeating himself. Not that he had to. Mase had heard him. The look in his dark eyes assured Tom of that.

"Obviously I'm not." As did the tone of his voice.

"You do this a lot? Dress up? Do you get off on—"

Mase didn't reply. The continued rise of his brow, as if it was lifting right up into his hairline, and the jut of his jaw meant he didn't have to. He was getting pissed off. And Tom felt bad for it. But he didn't understand—and he *needed* to understand.

"I heard the heels on the floor and thought you were up here with a woman, Mase."

Mase laughed, the sound not even close to jovial. "And you thought that gave you the right to come up here and... what, check on me?" Mase's eyes were glacial as they stared at him.

"No, I—" What could he say to defend himself? He'd known it was wrong to come up here, known that he was overstepping boundaries with every step he'd taken.

"Fucking unbelievable."

"I'm sorry, man."

Mase expelled a breath-like snort as he threw a hand in the air, and then, as if resigned, shook his head, his lips drawn into a thin line. He finally looked back up to meet Tom's eyes, pausing for just a moment, and then said, "Besides, when have you ever seen me with a woman?"

Tom let the words sink in, his mind scanning quickly back over the last two years, unable to pinpoint a time when he was sure Mase had been with or left anywhere with a female. There'd been plenty of women; they all loved Mase with his exotic dark looks and easy-going nature, always flocking around him and flirting with him... He looked back at Mase. *Fuck!* His gut clenched, the wind knocked right out of him. "You not only wear this shit"—his hand gestured wildly up and down Mase's body—"but you're gay as well."

"A-plus, asshole." Mase turned and walked over to the window. Tom could see the tension in his friend's back and the set of his shoulders.

“Jesus Christ, Mase. Why the fuck didn’t you ever tell me? Like I could give a shit who you want to fuck.” Tom watched Mase’s head move slowly in a negative shake. “I really wouldn’t—I don’t—I really don’t care.”

Mase held up the wine glass in his hand in an almost salute. Wine? The music? Did he actually know this man at all?

Tom couldn’t think. He brought his hands to his head, clenching the hair just above his ears in frustration. “Would you turn that fucking noise off?”

Mase spun on his heel—very expertly, Tom noticed—and looked at him, his face a study in contempt. Tom wondered what he was about to say, maybe only “Go to hell” if he was lucky, but then Mase walked toward the chest of drawers next to the window—his hips swayed as his heels clacked across the hardwood floor with each step—and picked up what Tom guessed to be a remote. He turned back to Tom, looked directly at him, then lifted his hand and pressed a button. The music instantly died.

Mase stood motionless for what seemed like an hour, but would have only been seconds, and stared at Tom. When he finally broke the silence, he said, “I think you should leave, *partner*, before one of us says something else we might regret.” Mase turned back to the window and stood there looking out. His back, shoulders, and his incredibly long legs, almost defiant in their stance, and very masculine.

“Mase I—”

“Is anyone home?” a loud voice bellowed from the ground floor. “Where the hell is everyone? The game’ll be on soon.”

Mase’s shoulders slumped. “Fucking great,” he muttered softly, but loud enough for Tom to hear it.

Just what they *didn’t* need! This was a disaster waiting to happen—as if it could get any worse—and he needed to divert it. He stuck his head out the door and called out loudly enough for Paul Staten to hear clearly. “Be down in a minute, Pauly.” He then turned back to Mase, who was still facing the window, saying the only thing he felt could possibly make any of this okay, “Get out of those clothes and be downstairs in five minutes. I’ll get everything, and the guys, organized.”

He didn’t wait for a response.

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## Chapter Three

Mason felt ill. It took everything in him to not throw up. His guts churned, and his head throbbed. What the fuck had just happened? How the hell had he forgotten that tonight was game night? And what the hell had he been thinking to put himself in a situation for Tom to find him like this? He braced himself on the windowsill, staring aimlessly out onto the quiet street he had called home for most of his life. Nothing about the calm streetscape soothed him.

He felt like pitching his glass against the wall, but what would that solve? Nothing. With his luck, Pauly would be up those stairs in a heartbeat to find out what had happened. Like he needed that. Instead, he downed the remaining mouthful of wine and placed the empty glass on the side table. He leaned down and yanked at the zipper of one of his thigh-high boots. It stuck, but with another tug, it finally gave. He couldn't get the offending items off fast enough; it was as if they were burning him. He knew he was being irrational, but he didn't care. If one time in his life allowed irrationality, it was now. The boots removed, discarded carelessly by throwing them across the room, he started on his stockings. He grabbed at the netted fabric, pulling and ripping at it. When it didn't give like he expected, he stopped. Of course it wouldn't, it was attached to his underwear. He undid the suspender belt, releasing its clips and flicked it away too, then gripped the top of the panties, the silky fabric that generally felt so good in his fingers disgusting him right now. He pulled them down and kicked them off, and then, gathering the netted stockings in his fingers, he bared each inch of skin quickly, freeing his legs from the hideous things. With the last pull over his left foot, he did with them what he'd wanted to do with his glass—threw them against the wall. It was rather anticlimactic. Nylon and lace didn't fly very well. Instead of hitting the wall, they dropped silently to the floor.

“*Fuck.*”

Mason sat down on the edge of his bed. His naked ass sank into the soft down comforter. Ordinarily he'd like the feeling. Today he didn't even give it a thought. He was a man defeated: forearms on his knees, shoulders slumped, head down, eyes closed. He inhaled deep breaths to try and calm his rapid pulse. The ramifications of what had just happened began to take root. He was screwed. How the fuck could he go down there like nothing had happened. How could he face Tom now that his partner, his *friend*, knew the truth. Tom

was a good guy, so Mason doubted he'd out him right here in his house, but that didn't mean he'd ever be able to look at him the same again. He'd said it didn't matter, and maybe that was the truth, maybe Tom really didn't care, but Mason couldn't rely on that. Not in words said in the moment. When he'd had time to think about it, would Tom still want to rely on him as a partner? Mason didn't want to make assumptions, but he couldn't help it. His whole life had been about keeping things from people so that they wouldn't make assumptions, and now he was doing the same thing. He might be wrong; he hoped he was wrong. What he did know was that everything was about to change—how could it not.

“Get down here, Mase. Game's about to start.”

He recognized Griff's voice. He hadn't heard Griff arrive, but that didn't surprise him. Now that he was paying attention, he could hear more voices. Bobby and Randy, by the sound of it. He had no idea how long he'd even been sitting up here, lost in his head, in his thoughts. He reached for his discarded briefs, hating himself for the feeling of “normal” that swept over him as they slid over his ass. It wasn't that long ago that he'd felt good about himself in what he *had been* wearing. His eyes fell on the red pile on the floor in sadness. He pushed up off the bed and stepped over to it, reaching down and picking it up, then threw it, with much more accuracy, straight into the trashcan beside his bed.

Mason pulled his bedroom door closed behind him. He'd cleared his room of any “evidence,” but closing the door to what that room represented at the moment worked best for him. Dressed now in old jeans and a sweatshirt, his feet covered in socks, he padded along his hallway and then down the stairs. The noise of his friends got louder as he got closer to where they were. He could picture them sitting around, pizza boxes spread out and opened, bottles of beer either clutched in tight fists or resting on the coffee table.

“Mase?” Randy this time, loudly, and then, “Where are you, man?”

“Yeah, yeah. I'm right here,” he called as he walked into the kitchen.

“Well hurry up. Pizza's gettin' cold.” Like he cared.

He filled a glass with water and pulled three Tylenol from a pack, downing them quickly. That would hopefully stop the headache that was forming behind his temples from taking hold. As he turned, he noticed that the bottle of wine he'd opened earlier—the one he'd been so thoroughly enjoying—had been moved. Now it rested beside the coffee machine, out of the way, its cork

pushed firmly back into the neck, the label facing the wall. Tom. He looked at the doorway, listened to the noise of the guys as they ate and watched the beginning of the game. All of them full of commentary and opinion. All of them, except Tom, whose voice was noticeably absent. He leaned back against the counter as he finished the water, almost expecting Tom to appear and ask him what the hell was going on. He didn't.

Mason opened the dishwasher and placed his used glass inside. He then opened the refrigerator door, eyeing the selection of beers inside. For only a split second he contemplated reaching in and grabbing one, but he didn't want beer. He wanted the wine he could still taste in his mouth, that lingering fruity acidity that he loved. He liked beer too, and normally it wouldn't even be a question, but right now... right now he wanted that wine. He wanted to be defiant. He wanted to pour another glass of wine and drink that with his pizza. Griff and Pauly, Bobby and Randy... would they even notice? Or care? And Tom? Well fuck Tom. Wasn't like his "preferences" were a secret anymore, anyway.

Mason closed the refrigerator door and pulled out a wineglass from the cupboard beside it. He took the three steps from the refrigerator to the counter where the bottle was sitting with gusto, pulled out the cork—loving that quiet pop—and poured a generous glassful. Before he'd even placed the bottle back on the counter, he'd tipped half of the glass of wine into his mouth, barely even registering the taste as he swallowed the far-too-much mouthful down, and then he belched. "Don't be an idiot, Mason," he chastised softly. Getting stupidly drunk was definitely not what he needed. What he needed was his wits about him. For that reason he replaced the cork and left the bottle be, not daring to top up his glass further. But he was taking his glass of wine in with him. He'd deal with any comments about it if they came.

Mason stood at the door to his media room and watched his friends. With their backs to him, they were oblivious that he'd finally arrived. They were doing just as he'd imagined: eating pizza and drinking beer, with a good dose of chastisement at the large flat-screen TV thrown in for good measure. All of them, except Tom. His partner was sitting with his back to Mason, only a small part of his profile visible from where Mason was standing. He sat quietly, solemnly. No pizza in his hand, only a beer, which he kept lifting to his lips and taking long mouthfuls of. Mason wondered what he was thinking, and it was obvious he was thinking, and not about the game. Pauly clapped him on the shoulder, his accompanying exclamation of, "They can't do that!" barely even

gaining a reaction from Tom. None of the others noticed this, too caught up in the food, the beer, and the game.

Knowing he couldn't stand in the doorway all night, Mason steeled himself and stepped into the room. He'd expected Griff or Randy to spot him first. They were the ones on the sofas at the side, but no. As if expecting him, it was Tom who turned his head and met his eyes... and as quickly turned away again. Mason's heart fell. *Oh shit!* He kept walking. He couldn't exactly turn around and leave.

"Here he is!" Randy finally noticed him. "What the hell you been up to?" He ignored the question, and Randy didn't seem to mind, his attention quickly taken again by a three-pointer scored by the opposition. "No!" Randy cried, his complaint echoed by Pauly and Griff. A quick discussion immediately ensued about the poor quality of the referee.

Mason could feel Tom's eyes on him, knew they were following him as he passed in front of the TV to take the seat next to Bobby. Bobby smiled at him and nudged him playfully in the side, and then he went back to what he'd been focused on. Mason reached for a slice of the pepperoni with anchovies—only he and Tom ate the salty combination—but sat back without taking a slice. The thought of the food made his stomach churn again. Instead, he sat back in the seat, crossed his ankle over his knee and lifted his glass to his lips. Then he looked pointedly at Tom.

Tom returned his stare but didn't say a word. Mason couldn't get a read on him at all, couldn't tell whether he was angry or disappointed, or just plain indifferent. No, he wasn't that. His face was blank, but his eyes weren't. They studied him intently. What was he looking for? An answer? If so, Mason didn't think he could provide one, even if asked.

"Great game, Mase," Griff said, pulling his attention away from his partner, and Mason looked at his oldest friend. "Even if the Knicks ain't playing."

"Yep. Who you cheering for?"

"Don't really care. All I know is it will be the—" He stopped as another three-pointer was scored. The stadium crowd went wild, and Mason couldn't help but pay a bit more attention to the TV. "Jeezus," Griff drawled, slightly in awe. "If they keep that up, they'll be the ones in the final come June."

The consensus on that seemed to be agreement as Bobby, Randy, and Pauly all muttered and grumbled. None of them were happy. The Knicks were out,

and Boston too—Randy's team—neither having made it to the playoffs this year. Mason listened to his friends as they debated the merits of the player who'd scored and whether the referee's decision of allowing the points was fair. Mason tuned out to them.

Tom was noticeably quiet. Well, at least, to Mason he was. He could feel Tom watching him. He wished the guys weren't here; he'd confront Tom if he could... maybe. He wanted to think he would, now that his heart had stopped pounding, and he was thinking more clearly. He'd come to an uncomfortable acceptance. Tom knew he was gay. He also knew he liked pretty, lacy underwear. What he had to work out was how the hell he was going to deal with it. That's if he had anything to deal with come tomorrow morning.

Pauly asked a question. Mason wasn't sure who to, so he turned to look at him. It hadn't been to him. Pauly was facing Tom, a look on his face indicating he was confused. "What do you mean you don't care?"

Tom answered, "Just what I said, Pauly. I don't care." His tone was flat, as was the expression on his face—at least in Mason's opinion. Mason felt all eyes turn in Tom's direction.

"What the fuck is wrong with you, man? Ever since you came downstairs, you've been in a prick of a mood." Pauly glanced at Mason, his eyes narrowing, then back at Tom. "Did you two ladies like have a domestic or something?" He laughed loudly as if his question was the funniest thing in the world.

Tom lifted his beer and took another long pull. The moment dragged out, even the TV stayed silent. "Screw you, Pauly."

"Settle down," Pauly defended, holding up a hand. "You know I was only jokin'."

"You're both acting weird. He's right," Randy added. "Get the fuck over it, whatever it is, and enjoy the game."

Mason looked at Griff, who didn't add an opinion along with the others, but narrowed his eyes at Mason. The slight tilt of his head asking silently if everything was okay. Mason let him know he was fine, as much as he could without words, and Griff let it go. He just hoped Pauly and Randy would as well.

"When the hell did you start drinking wine?"

That question was for him, and Mason turned his attention to Bobby. On any other night, if things were fine, he doubted anyone would have noticed, but with all attention on him and Tom, it was bound to happen. He was just about to respond when Griff beat him to it.

“Mase drinks wine all the time,” Griff said, phrasing it like Bobby was an idiot for only noticing tonight. “Look around you, man”—Griff gestured around the room—“look at this place. Of course he drinks wine.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

“You want one, Bobby? It’s a really nice vintage,” Mason added, trying to make a joke out of his words and defuse the tense situation.

“Hell no. I’ll stick with the good stuff, thank you very much.” He held up his beer for effect. Pauly and Randy chuckled, but the looks on their faces were as surprised as Bobby’s. None of them had ever seen him drink wine.

Griff laughed. Mason knew there was little humor behind it—his friend was diverting attention and helping him out. “Bobby wouldn’t know a ‘nice vintage’ if it smacked him in the ass.” The others laughed too. “And neither would you two fools.”

Pauly looked offended. “I drink wine at Momma’s Sunday lunch every week. Have since I was thirteen years old.”

“Sure you do. Does it come out of a box?” Griff asked on a laugh.

“Fuck you, asshole.”

Griff continued to chuckle; his easygoing manner defusing the quickly escalating tension. And after a moment, Pauly joined in.

A loud cheer from the speakers had all the men looking to the screen. Another point. And a much needed distraction. *Thank god.*

Mason watched the game, forcing himself to look only at the TV and definitely not at Tom, although he did chance a couple of glances, neither time meeting Tom’s eyes. The game was white noise, though. If any of the guys asked him a question, he doubted he’d be able to answer. He was lost in his own thoughts, and his wine—his long-empty glass hanging loosely in his fingers. He could feel the effects of the alcohol moving through his body and mind, warming him, but also clouding his judgment, and that could be dangerous. The two glasses he’d drunk wouldn’t ordinarily affect him so, but with no food in his stomach it wasn’t surprising that it was. He didn’t feel like

eating but forced himself to chew and swallow a slice of pizza, and then another. Wishing he hadn't had the second when his stomach started to protest.

Pushing from his chair, Mason made his way to the kitchen. No one questioned what he was doing—he doubted they cared—but he did glance at Tom. Tom's blue eyes met his, studied him, asked a hundred silent questions, and then looked away. Mason kept walking. In the kitchen, he opened the refrigerator and pulled out a bottle of carbonated water. Hopefully, a large glass would settle his stomach. He finished drinking it down, the accompanying belch that he'd hoped for was loud and felt good. He remained facing the rear wall of the kitchen, his hands holding on to the edge of the counter, taking his weight.

“That's more the Mason Reid I've come to expect.”

He didn't turn straight away. Instead he closed his eyes and waited, unsure of what to expect and not wanting a confrontation. When he did turn, Tom was standing on the other side of the island, his arms crossed on his chest like a barrier.

“I'm the same guy I was at work today.”

“I'm not sure about that.”

Mason huffed. “If you'd minded your own damned business, you'd be none the wiser. We'd say hi at work tomorrow morning, like any other day, and nothing would be different. Would I be the same person then?”

“If you hadn't been so—” Tom looked over his shoulder and lowered his voice. “—fucking eager to get into your *play clothes* and forget about your friends, then I wouldn't have had to come looking for you.”

“Go to hell,” he shot back, defiant. “What I do in my own house is none of your fucking business.”

Tom unfolded his arms and leaned forward, gripping the far side of the island counter, his knuckles whitening. “No. It's none of my business; you're absolutely correct.” His voice was still low and Mason appreciated that—they didn't need to attract an audience. “And I don't give a shit what you do... or *who* you are. What I told you upstairs is the truth. You should know that about me.” He stopped, watching Mason for a long moment, as if contemplating his next words. “What I can't come to terms with is that you didn't trust me, your partner, your friend... the guy you gave a key to your house to—the reason I was inside by the way—with something so important.”

Tom actually looked hurt, and that surprised Mason. Hiding that part of himself was intensely personal. If someone else suffered because of that omission and got their feelings trodden on, then he was sorry; it had never been his intention, but Tom's feelings had never been on his radar.

What could he say? Everything Tom had said was the truth. Deep down he knew Tom didn't care if he was gay. He probably didn't care too much about the lingerie either. Mason knew it wouldn't have affected anything between them, so why hadn't he ever told him the truth? He leaned back against the counter behind him, his ass taking his weight, and scrubbed a hand over his face and up into his hair. He didn't want to have this conversation now; especially not with Bobby and Randy, let alone Pauly, two rooms away. "I don't—" His head fell, the black-and-white checked floor tiles suddenly very interesting. He stared at them for what seemed an eternity, studying the gray grout filling the joins... filling time. But that didn't make Tom go away, and when he couldn't ignore him any longer, he looked up. Tom still stood there, hands on the counter, his face etched with concern, and his eyes—those gorgeous blue eyes—asking so many unspoken questions.

*Those gorgeous blue eyes.*

Oh god. Yes, he'd thought it, and it wasn't the first time. But he couldn't think it again, or allow himself to think about how that stray lock of dark hair always fell over Tom's right eye, or about the dimples that just peeked through when he smiled like he meant it or really laughed. Mason had fought against thinking it for two years. Knocked anything like it out of his brain at the first sign of a nigger of thought. Because you didn't think about friends that way, not when you wanted them to stay friends, and especially not when they were straight.

So what could he say?

"I'm sorry."

And weren't those the two most pathetic words in the world.

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## Chapter Four

*I'm sorry.* Tom repeated the words that Mase had spoken in his head. "You're sorry? You're sorry! That's bullshit, Mase."

Mase shrugged his shoulders. "What more do you want me to say? I kept a part of me private. I didn't tell you. I'm sorry."

That didn't cut it for Tom, and in his opinion, Mase was full of shit. He was trying to brush it off, act like what had happened was insignificant, but his voice, and his eyes, betrayed him. Especially when they looked over his shoulder at whoever'd just walked through the door.

"Everything okay in here?"

Griff. Of course it was.

"Everything's fine," Tom answered without looking around.

"Mase?"

Mase's face warmed for his friend; he even managed a small smile. "Yeah. We're cool."

Tom wasn't sure they were.

And apparently, Griff wasn't going to accept Mase's declaration so easily either. Mase continued to look at Griff, strange headshakes and narrowing of the eyes passing right across Tom's shoulder. He didn't have to turn to know the same was happening behind him. Obviously Griff knew about Mase. He wasn't surprised, and certainly not disappointed in the fact that Mase's oldest friend knew something so important. He was actually glad that Mase had a confidant, he should, but it did sting... a little.

He faced Griff. "Look, I know, okay. And it seems you do too." Griff's eyes narrowed, and he threw a quick glance at Mase before looking back at Tom. "I shouldn't have gone upstairs. It was wrong of—"

"Yep. Seems I'm coming out of that closet all over again," Mase interrupted, his voice still low. Griff's eyes shot back at Mase. "It's fine. We're fine, man. Just go back in with the guys and give us a moment." Griff didn't move. His head tipped—he seemed to be assuring himself it was safe to leave the room—as his eyes darted back and forth between them. "Just go. Please."

Griff opened his mouth, seemed to reconsider what he'd been about to say, and closed it again. He watched Tom, his eyes burrowing into him like lasers, then flicked back to Mase. "I'll go. But I'm only through there." He gestured back over his shoulder.

"Jesus, Griff. What do you think I'm gonna do? Like I could care less if he likes to dre—"

Mase's words shot from his mouth. "He's fine with it, man. Let us deal with it, okay? ...Alone."

Griff shrugged, his eyes continuing to dart between him and Mase, but didn't make an argument, and with one last look at his friend, he turned and left. As he watched Griff walk away, Tom was hit with the realization that Griff didn't know *everything*. He knew Mase was gay, was obviously supportive of the fact, but he didn't know about those red panties and thigh-high boots—he didn't know about what Mase liked to do when he was alone. What surprised him even more was that he knew, and Griff didn't... Interesting. He also kind of liked it that way. Until he remembered any knowledge he now had was through default.

Mase's steely gaze met his. Clearly, Mase now understood that Tom had worked it out, and his elation blossomed, but that enjoyment of the fact was short-lived. Who cared? It was all irrelevant. It didn't change the fact that he worked with someone who didn't trust him, at the very least with the truth about his sexuality. Tom wasn't comforted by the fact that Mase didn't know everything about him either, but he sure knew the important stuff. The stuff that mattered. And that's what he had issue with. How could you really trust someone who didn't trust you?

He had to get out of here.

"Look, I can't deal with this tonight. I'm going home." He waited for a response from Mase, and when he didn't get one, took a step closer, prompting... something. He stood there, his eyes locked on the man standing across from him, waiting. When nothing came, he raised his eyes to the ceiling. When he looked back at Mase, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow. Say bye to the guys for me."

He was almost at the door when Mase spoke. "Please don't tell them—or anyone."

This angered Tom. He whirled around. "Really? You really think I would do that?" When Mase lifted his shoulders as if he wasn't sure, Tom exploded

again. "Fuck you! Go to hell." He didn't care if the guys heard that last bit.

Tom was halfway down the street before he realized he'd even made it out the front door. He was furious. Fuck being hurt, anger trumped that pathetic emotion. How could Mase even think he needed to say that to him? He would never betray that kind of confidence, and the fact that Mase felt he had to remind him—Well, screw him. "Fuck you, Mason Reid," he spat out through clenched teeth.

He'd seen Mase's face when Pauly had called out announcing his arrival; he'd seen the absolute mortification. And he got it. Pauly, Bobby, Randy, they weren't like Griff. They were good guys, but they were guys: hard-hitting, fast-talking NYPD detectives. A bit rough around the edges and not always one hundred percent tolerant. They were men who liked women and were vocal about it. They viewed masculinity that way. He couldn't imagine them ostracizing Mase if they knew he was gay, but it wasn't beyond the realm of possibility. Especially from Pauly, who was the most religious and set in his ways of all of them. And that wasn't even counting what Tom had walked in on. The fetish, he couldn't see that going down too well with any of them, Griff included. Maybe that was why Mase had never told his friend. But then, he hadn't told Tom either. It was clear where he stood—he was just one of the guys. He'd have to deal with that.

A yellow cab was coming his way, and he stuck out his arm to hail it. The driver was thankfully not a talker, and the streets of Manhattan were quiet, so he was home and closing the door of his small fifth-floor walk-up in no time.

As he moved around his home, his anger began to abate. What happened between him and Mase was going to happen regardless of how long he stewed over it. They'd either get through this or they wouldn't, and either way that saddened him because Tom knew they were never going to be the same again. A part of their relationship had changed, and there was no going back from it. That pissed him off. He didn't want it to change. He liked Mase, had from the very first time they were introduced. Their friendship—he scoffed; so much for that—had always been easy. Well, at least it had been for him.

He flicked on the TV. No point in missing the end of the game, not that he really cared, but the TV provided some white noise. He took off his jacket and threw it over the back of the sofa. Doing so made him think of Mase and how he never did that at his place. The hall closet was there for a reason in his big ol' Brownstone, and Tom had gotten into the habit of using it. Tonight he'd

been thankful he did; it had meant he didn't have to go into the media room to get anything when he stormed out of Mase's house. No confrontations. He almost felt guilty knowing Mase was back there dealing with it all alone. Almost...

Beer in hand and shoes discarded somewhere close to his bedroom, Tom sat in front of the TV. The score was as they'd predicted, although much closer, and it looked like Miami was moving on to the next round of the playoffs. He could care less.

At some point, he must have zoned out. He had no idea what piece-of-crap show was on TV and no idea of what the time was, but the beer in his hand was empty, and he placed the can on the coffee table in front of him. He picked up the remote and clicked off the TV then pushed up off the sofa. Bed sounded like a good idea. Hopefully, everything would seem better in the morning.

His soft queen-sized bed, normally one of his favorite places in the world, was not a good place to be tonight. Every time he closed his eyes, images of Mase in red stockings... lacy panties... and those boots came to mind, and try as he might, he couldn't keep them away. He also couldn't forget how he'd felt when he'd first seen him. Sure, he'd thought Mase was a woman, and as a straight guy, it was okay to find women attractive, but Mase wasn't a woman. Definitely not. Those legs were not a woman's legs, and that ass, oh Jesus, that ass. He'd wanted to touch that ass, had felt a need to do so, but that was before. He also remembered those shoulders, and whom they belonged to, whom it *all* belonged to, and that realization was enough for his willful erection to wither and die, leaving him lying there more confused than he had ever been.

He was so screwed.

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Tom didn't know what time he'd fallen asleep, only that he'd spent far too much of the night tossing and turning in his bed. And he was paying the price. Even with a half-drunk grande triple-shot latte in his hand, he was still fighting tiredness. A couple of hours of sleep—and restless, thinking-about-your-gay-partner sleep at that—had a tendency to do that to you.

“You flew out of Mase's place fast last night.”

Bobby.

Tom found himself face-to-face with his friend. “Oh, you know how it is,” he tried to make light, “things to do, people to see, and all that.”

“Not really,” Bobby replied. *Fucker!* The man was far too shrewd. “You’re full of shit, Perkins. You and Mase had a big ol’ showdown last night; mind you, he was pretty vague about it too when he came back in for the end of the game.”

Not that he’d imagined Mase would bare his soul to the guys, he was happy he hadn’t. “It’s got nothing to do with you, Bobby. If Mase didn’t want to fill you in, then I’m sure not going to.”

“You girls havin’ a lover’s spat?”

Tom felt his empty fist clench at his side. “You’re a jackass.” He turned away from Bobby and walked toward his desk.

A loud burst of laughter sounded behind him. He’d thought it once, and he’d think it again: *Fucker!*

He really wasn’t surprised. They’d made a lot of noise last night—figuratively as opposed to literally, except for that last outburst of his—so it was only natural the people they’d done it in front of would be curious. He would be. That didn’t mean he was going to allow any of them to be assholes about it.

Tom sat at his desk, conscious of the fact that Mase hadn’t arrived at his. He looked around at the desks surrounding him, noting that Griff wasn’t in yet either. Randy and Pauly were out too, but he remembered the case they were on had some leads they’d talked about following up this morning. He could see Bobby in with the boss through the glass windows of his office. He wondered what they were discussing and whether it had anything to do with Griff. Bobby and Griff were a good team, strong. They got on well and did most things together, not everything because they pooled their resources, but it was strange to see Bobby without him. It wasn’t something he’d generally give a second thought to, but with Mase missing in action too, and what had gone on last night, he couldn’t help his train of thought. Brushing it aside, he started on the pile of paperwork on his desk; he must have been at it five minutes when he heard his name.

“Perkins, get in here.” Bobby poked his head out the doorway of the boss’s office to call him over.

This was gonna be interesting. Tom made his way quickly. Captain Liam O’Farrell wasn’t always the most patient of men. He was a fair and honest man,

but keep him waiting and his very loud Irish-New York brogue would leave your balls shriveling back into your body in fear.

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The day progressed slowly. He'd been given a small assignment with Bobby for the day, and it had gone well, even if things between them had been a little strained. It was when Tom was finally tidying his desk for the day, ready to file some paperwork on his way out, that Mase and Griff returned to the precinct. Bobby was still there too, and Griff clapped him on the shoulder as he passed. "Miss me, partner?"

"Not damn likely," Bobby said loudly, his Brooklyn accent pronounced, the words clear even from halfway across the room. He was a happy guy, and it was good to see him joking around with Griff. "You better be back in the car with me tomorrow. Don't think I can stand another day with that surly bastard." Bobby tipped his head Tom's way.

Tom flipped him the bird.

Griff studied Tom as he packed up his own things for the day, making him slightly uncomfortable, and he again wondered what might have been said involving him. And when Griff walked over to Mase's desk and pressed his hand to Mase's shoulder, quietly saying "Work it out," he guessed he'd been right on the money.

Tom could have walked out right then and gone home, but he'd had a lot of time to think in the twenty-or-so hours since he'd left Mase's house the night before. He looked around the room. Now that Griff and Bobby were gone, they were the only two left. And Mase had yet to meet his eyes.

"What did you tell Griff?" he asked, his tone as even as he could make it, hoping to break the ice.

Mase continued to turn the stapled pages of the report in his hand. Without looking up, he said, "Nothing for you to worry about."

He heard the rebuff, but it wasn't the words Mase said but the way he said it that Tom took notice of. Mase was a "Noo Yawker" born and raised, but his private-school education and Wall Street-banker father meant that his accent wasn't strong, not like Bobby or Pauly. Something about his voice resonated in a way it never had before. Tom sighed. He'd never cared about the sound of Mase's voice. It was just another thing that Tom found himself looking deeper

into about Mase now that he realized he didn't know him as well as he'd thought he did.

He tried again.

"Jesus, Mase, don't be like that. I said a lot of shit last night I wish I hadn't said." His thoughts over that "lot of time" had provided few answers, but this was something he was sure of. "I overreacted. I'm sorry." Mase stopped shuffling, and stared distractedly at the papers in his hand. Tom quickly glanced around them again, making sure they were alone. "I had no right to react like I did, not about what you did or didn't tell me. What you tell anyone is your business, and I respect that. I do." Mase placed the papers carefully on the desk and turned his head. His eyes were narrowed but focused. "I'm not gonna lie, man, you shocked the hell outta me, and you in those—" Mase held a hand up halting his words, but he still didn't say a word. "Put it this way, I ain't gonna forget you in your bedroom in a hurry." Mase could take that however he liked—Tom was still undecided.

"Do I need to ask the boss to reassign me?"

*No?! Tom should have responded faster, he knew that, and the resignation that crossed Mase's face at his silence was like a kick in the guts, but he was torn. Not because he gave a rat's ass about what he had learned, he really could care less, but his reaction when he got home the night before, and the subsequent thoughts that had invaded his mind all day, had spooked him.*

Mase pushed out his chair, the sound loud and echoing in the empty room, and stood up. "I'll come in early tomorrow and make sure he finds me someone else quic—"

"No!" Tom might have been struggling with his own demons, but Mase getting a new partner was not what he wanted. "I don't want that, man. It might be weird between us for a few days, and that has nothing to do with what I now know"—he tried to make that sound like an assurance—"but we'll be fine." They had to be. And he was going to try his hardest to make sure they were.

Mase scoffed. "What do you mean it has nothing to do with 'what you now know'? Of course it does. If you were so *okay* with it all, we wouldn't be having this discussion."

"I am okay with it."

"You're really not."

Tom looked down at the ground. How the fuck did he explain himself? “Christ, Mase, I not only found out you’re gay”—he whispered the word and lowered his tone as well—“but that you like... certain things. To be honest, I didn’t need to know that, just like you don’t need to know whether I like to fuck missionary or doggy.” Mase’s brows skyrocketed toward his hairline. “But I do know, and try as I might, I can’t erase those images from my brain. I can’t kid myself you were practicing for Halloween, and you need to accept that, and give me time to pretend it never happened.”

“It did happen, Tom. It’s who I am.”

“Yeah, man, I get that.” Damn, did he get that. He took a step and stopped. He didn’t think getting too close to Mase’s personal space was a good idea. “Look, I’m hitting the road. Don’t go speak to the Captain in the morning, please. Let’s try and get through this.” He waited for an answer, and when nothing came, resigned, he began to walk for the door.

“Tom.” Mase’s voiced halted him. “I’m the same guy I was yesterday. If you can’t get back to that place then we can’t be partners. I can’t put myself through that.”

“I know.”

And with that he walked from the room.

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As expected, things were strained between him and Mase, but Tom tried his hardest to keep acting like normal. Days passed, but he wasn’t able to forget what had happened. If anything, his thoughts and memories became more and more of a burden, his mind constantly replaying every move Mase had made in his bedroom that night, even at times expanding those memories into new images and, what he didn’t like to refer to them as, fantasies. It was making him crazy. Not once in his thirty-two years had he ever even considered a man sexually, not once, but now... god, now, that’s all he did. Try as he might to send his thoughts and burgeoning desires in any other direction. He’d even gone to a bar in the hopes of finding some beautiful woman, thinking a gorgeous woman would make him remember what it was he really desired. And there had been more than one candidate, but he’d found himself comparing them to him—well, Mase’s alter ego at least. And when a gorgeous blonde with big tits and a sexy round ass had gotten in real close and slid her hand up his thigh, her hot breath close to his neck and ear, he’d not even felt a twinge of desire for her, his dick remaining neatly flaccid in his jocks.

“What the hell is going on with you?” Griff asked one day, two weeks later. They were alone in the lunchroom, and Tom was thankful of that, even though he knew, considering Griff and Mase’s friendship, that Griff would never do this if anyone else was around—even Mase it seemed. “Do you want him?”

Tom felt cold all over. “Do I—What—Do I—*Who*?” He knew exactly “who” Griff meant.

Griff put a hand on his shoulder. “This is between you and me, man, and you know I can keep secrets.” That wasn’t comforting. “I’ve seen you looking at him.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” The words raced out much too fast. “You’re wrong, mistaken.”

“What am I mistaken about, Tom?” Griff, the master interrogator—fuck! He was king of wearing someone down and getting them to admit to... everything. “Mase is a good-looking guy. Some might even say he’s really hot—if you’re into that sort of thing. Are you into that sort of thing now, Tom?”

Tom glared at Griff, then flicked his eyes to the door, petrified that someone might walk in. “You *know* I like women,” he insisted vehemently.

“Yeah, you do, or you did. But I think something else has sparked your interest. And I know I’m an observant bastard, but others around this place are too. If you don’t tone it down, it won’t be only me noticing.

Tom didn’t say anything to confirm Griff’s words, but he didn’t deny them either—with Griff and this situation, it would be futile. God, had he really been that obvious? If Griff had worked out that something had changed in him, what about Mase?

He wasn’t sure how long he’d been lost in his thoughts when Griff spoke again. “You don’t have to say anything to me, but you might have to think about what you’re gonna say to Mase, and soon. I won’t say anything to him, so don’t worry ’bout that. Whatever it is between the two of you is between the two of you, and it’s none of my business.” At some point, Griff’s hand had fallen away, and he replaced it on Tom’s shoulder again, giving a supportive squeeze. “I’m only saying something now because you need to be careful—you don’t want to be confronted with a conversation like this from Pauly or Bobby.” Tom agreed with a small movement of his head. Griff deserved that much. “But you need to be sure of where you’re going with this, Tom. Mase doesn’t deserve to be an experiment.”

Tom would never do that. "I'd never—!"

"Not intentionally, no. I don't believe you would. But people get hurt, man, for many reasons. Don't let the two of you become a statistic."

Griff walked away, leaving Tom dumbfounded.

By the time he arrived home that night, he was more confused than ever. Mase had been friendly enough, and there had been no issues, but he'd also been oddly removed, his verbal replies succinct but far "too" to the point, not reminiscent of their friendly banter of weeks earlier. And Mase had caught his eye more than once; each time the stare had held longer than felt comfortable for him. He wasn't sure what it meant. It had never felt like a come-on, but it hadn't felt normal either.

With a beer in hand, he sat on the sofa and turned on the TV. It was a cop show, the episode set in some seedy joint filled with hookers. A woman walked onto a stage, her long brunette hair only kept his attention for as long as it took for his brain to compute what she was wearing. Not much, but what there was comprised lacy lingerie and fishnet stockings. He slumped back in the seat. Her sparse outfit wasn't the same as what had haunted his dreams night after night, but it was close enough. His eyes closed, and a picture-perfect image of Mase in similar attire was all he could see. Tom looked back at the TV but couldn't even focus on it. He didn't care. He picked up the remote and flicked the machine off.

Tom squeezed the beer in his hand tightly. Cool condensation from the bottle ran over his hand. He lifted it to his mouth and finished off what was left of the beer, wiped any drips off his mouth with the back of his hand, and stood up. He walked to the desk at the far side of the room and picked up his MacBook, returning to the sofa and sitting down again. It only took a moment for the computer to boot up, and when he opened Safari, the large Google search bar of his home screen flashed its taunting cursor at him. "Fucker," he mumbled. The distraction was not enough to empty his mind of the image in his memory, or of the fact his cock was rock hard in his jeans.

Taking in a deep breath, Tom began to type: G-A-Y-space-P-O-R-N. And with each keystroke he wondered if he was gonna like what he found. Was it Mase driving him to do this, or was it thoughts of having gay sex, or even just the lingerie and what that represented? Maybe it was a combination of all of them. There was only one way to find out. He pressed Enter.

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## Chapter Five

### *Wednesday*

Mason walked into the precinct begrudgingly. Prior to two weeks ago—before game night—he couldn't remember a time when he'd felt that way. Before then, everything about his job had driven him to get up in the morning and drag his ass in: rain, hail, or shine. He loved his job, loved how it pushed him to put in the best effort he could every day; he even loved the guys he worked with—most of the time. But since that night, and building up steadily each day, it had felt like a gathering storm cloud was shadowing his every step, bringing him down, and he refused to go on that way—something needed to be done about it.

He'd tried, he really had. He'd hoped things would get better, easier, back to how they'd been between him and Tom before that night, but they hadn't. Tom tried his best to act like everything was normal, and Mason was thankful for that, but it was obvious to him, and to some others around them, that nothing about their relationship was normal any more. That sounded so damned dramatic, but it was how it was. In essence: totally fucked up.

More than once, Griff had pulled him aside to offer his support and assistance, and Mason was thankful he had at least one person truly on his side, someone who actually knew him—most of him, at least. Griff wasn't aware of what he was protesting for—which was the irony—but he had been vehement. At first, Griff was angry with Tom, sure that the tension between them stemmed from prejudice and determined to involve himself on Mason's behalf. Mason had talked him down, assured him that wasn't the case; Tom was just coming to terms with the guy he worked so closely with not being the guy he'd thought he was. Griff thought that was bullshit, but he'd let it go. At some point, Griff's support had changed, though. He looked at Mason as if he was sorry for him now, and Mason hated that. He refused to be pitied by anyone. He didn't pity himself or the fucked up situation they were in; it just made him angry, and a little sad. But sad wasn't pity, not in his book. Mason didn't need a white knight; he was too proud and self-resilient for that. Although he had to admit, it was nice to have a friend who actually gave a shit.

What it wasn't nice to have was friends beginning to make deductions he wasn't comfortable with. When Randy had stopped him near the Xerox

machine Tuesday to ask, “What the hell’s goin’ on with you and Tom?” he hadn’t reacted well. He didn’t yell or scream, and even if he was tempted to, he didn’t tell Randy to mind his own fucking business, but he did get pissed. “There’s nothing wrong with me or Tom or anyone else.”

Randy ignored his words, adding a sympathetic shake of his head. “Something’s going on with you two, man. I don’t know what the hell went down, but you’ve gotta fix it. You’ve gotta make it right.”

*What the hell do you think we’ve been doing?* he thought to himself.

But then Randy delivered the clincher. “People are starting to say stupid things, man, and you don’t need that sort of crap goin’ down.”

“I could care less what people say about me; you should know that.”

“Well, maybe you should... care.” For the first time Mason could recall, Randy had looked uncomfortable. Not much phased the Bostonian, and his reaction concerned Mason, even though he played it down.

“Really? About bullshit rumors?”

“It’s what they’re—Christ, man, it’s just that: bullshit.”

Mason could only guess what would make Randy uncomfortable like that, so he hadn’t bothered to ask what “stupid things” Randy was referring to. Randy was a good guy, even a pretty accepting guy—most of the time—but there was a reason only Griff knew about his sexuality. The idiots around this place had vivid and incredibly juvenile imaginations at times. They’d carry on thinking their bullshit was a joke, until something was said, and some bright spark would make some astounding realization that would really fuck everything up.

“Yep, bullshit, so don’t worry about it. I sure don’t. And don’t worry about me and Tom. Shit happens, man. We’ll get past it,” Mason had pacified, trying to convince himself of the fact as well—as the cloud loomed closer.

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Right now, he and Tom were in their black police-issued G-ride, traveling back to the precinct from a block of apartments in Brooklyn where they’d questioned a suspect involved in one of their cases. Things were uncomfortably silent, the crackling, disembodied voice of the NYPD radio dispatcher and the sounds of the engine the only things breaking it. It was the end of a very long and very trying day. The rush-hour traffic made the journey slower than usual,

and all Mason wanted was for it—the day—to be over. But it wasn't over yet. He had a few things to address before he could claim that victory.

He wasn't sure what to say, but he knew it had to be something, especially after what Randy had told him yesterday, and the night of reflection he'd bathed in the evening before.

"Randy cornered me yesterday." He waited for Tom to respond, making allowances for the busy intersection they were turning at.

"Oh yeah?"

Mason continued to look out the front window and watch the heavy crosstown traffic, choosing his moment to continue.

"Yeah." He looked sideways at his partner. "Seems we're attracting some attention."

Tom's eyes closed for a split-second, before quickly resuming their concentration on the street ahead. "Is that right?"

"That's right. He didn't go into details, and he was damned uncomfortable, but seems we're generating some talk and some *unusual* conclusions are coming out of it."

Tom scoffed. "Something more interesting will happen tomorrow, and they'll forget all about us. Besides, there's nothing for them to make 'unusual' conclusions about."

"You're not that naive, Tom." Mason waited again for a reaction. When none came, and Tom's stoic stare continued to watch only the street ahead, he added, "I can assure you everyone would have no problem deducing that things are not right between us."

"Not right? What's not right?" Mason could almost feel the clench of Tom's teeth as he lied through them.

"Jesus Christ, Perkins." Mason felt his ire spike. "You can barely look me in the eye, you hardly say two words in a row at any time, and you think that everything is fine. You are so full of shit!"

Tom didn't reply, but Mason watched as his hands gripped the steering wheel, his knuckles whitening with the force. He waited for Tom to say something in return, but when it didn't come, he scoffed.

"I can't do this anymore! I know you've tried. I really believe you have. But you can't get past what you know about me now, and I can't keep coming into

work every day knowing I'll have to face this tension. I hate it. I'm going home at night feeling drained, yet I've only been at my desk or questioning some worthless kid, and I shouldn't feel like that. Work's not tiring me, you are. I can't stand it anymore. It's not worth it."

"No." Mason hardly heard the word; it was said so softly. Tom was still clenching his jaw and looking straight ahead. It was as if he hadn't spoken at all.

"Yes." Mason leaned forward a bit as he spoke. "The boss should still be there by the time we get back. I'm going in to see O'Farrell, and I'm going to ask to be reassigned. I'll ask for a transfer—"

The car swerved, Tom pulling it toward the curb in a move that was frankly impressive. He threw it into park, yanked the handbrake, and turned the car off, then looked at Mason. "No!"

"You don't get to make that decision." Mason sucked in a deep breath, his chest expanding forward, and his own jaw clenched. "You said you were okay with everything, and you're not, so—"

Tom's body moved forward too. "You can't change partners. I don't want you to—"

"I don't want to do that either." Their faces were about six inches apart in the small space of the car's interior. "Jesus, Tom. If I walk in there and ask O'Farrell to transfer me, I don't only lose my partner, I lose my friend. Do you think that's an easy decision for me?"

"Easy?" Tom spat. "You think anything about this is fucking easy?" Mason felt puffs of warm, sweet-smelling breath touch his face with each of Tom's words. "Nothing is easy. Nothing!" Tom was almost panting now, his frustration tangible. "I can't forget what I saw. Do you get that? I can't fucking forget."

"I'm sorry you saw me like that, but I can't—"

"You don't get it." Tom's eyes closed again, and his body shrank back against his seat. "You don't get it," he repeated but much softer. Then his eyes popped open, his gaze boring into Mason's, and he sat back up straight, grinding out, "I. Can't. Forget." Each word was punctuated with a stop. "It's always there. Every time I close my eyes. Every time I *don't* fucking close my eyes. I can't stop seeing you like that."

"I've said I'm fucking sorry!" Mason yelled at him. "I can't change what happened. If I could, I wou—"

"I wouldn't want you to change *anything*," Tom interrupted, his voice coming during a break in the dispatch, and far too loud in the small cabin.

*What?* Mason puzzled, repeating what Tom had said in his head, his eyes moving to look at the dashboard so as to get some separation.

When Mason looked back after a long moment, he asked, "How can you say that? After how hard it's been these past weeks between us." He shook his head in bewilderment. "You said you can't forget, that it's always there. You can picture me, Tom. Jesus Christ, I can't be happy to put you through that. It would be easier if you hadn't—"

Tom had moved closer again during Mason's rant. Now only inches separated them. "I said I can't forget." Tom's voice was much lower, not that it needed to be loud seeing as how close they were. "I didn't say I didn't like what I was remembering."

Mason's heart stopped in his chest. His eyes bugged out, and his mouth dropped open. He felt like a fish as his mouth opened and closed with no words exiting.

Tom continued. "I liked it. I *like* it." Tom lifted his hand toward Mason's chest, not touching, just hovering there. Mason could almost feel it—wanted it to be real. "I liked you in those clothes, Mase... looking like that." Tom finally allowed his hand to settle, the firm pressure on Mason's pectoral electrifying. Then Tom swept his hand up and along the underside of Mason's throat, ending with his hand under his jaw. He touched Mason softly, turning his head so that their eyes met. "I've never seen anything so sexy in my life."

"Holy shit," Mason muttered. "What are you—?"

Tom didn't allow him to finish his question. Tom's hand held tight, tilting Mason's head, and then Tom's lips were on Mason's. Tom Perkins was kissing him, Mason Reid, and Mason couldn't do anything but melt into it. A kiss like that, in circumstances like these, should have been awkward, but it wasn't. Tom kissed him like he'd done it a hundred times, his lips smooth and soft, his afternoon stubble just scraping the soft skin under Mason's bottom lip. Mason didn't breathe; he couldn't breathe, but he didn't want that kiss to stop. Finally, Tom pulled back.

They stared at each other for long moments as their breathing calmed. When it seemed like Tom's had, he sat back in the driver's seat and started the car up

again. Clicking on the turn signal, he looked over his shoulder into the traffic. The car began to move, but then it stopped, and Tom turned back to Mason.

“Don’t go see O’Farrell. Not today, Mase. Please.”

As if not expecting an answer now, Tom pulled out onto the busy street, rejoining the flow of cars. Mason, too stunned to say a word, let him concentrate on his driving.

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### *Thursday*

He’d walked into the precinct begrudgingly the day before... and today, well today, Mason couldn’t explain how he was feeling. He was dog-tired—having no sleep in a twenty-four hour period would do that to a person—and he was confused.

Fourteen hours before, Thomas Randall Perkins, his NYPD partner and friend, had confessed to liking seeing him dressed in red lacy lingerie and thigh-high boots and had kissed him. Mason still couldn’t get a handle on how he felt about that. He’d liked the kiss, god had he liked the kiss. Anyone who didn’t like a kiss like that was a fool, an unfeeling, probably dead, fool. But the kiss had come from Tom—straight, never shown an interest in anything other than buxom, leggy women, Tom—and Mason wasn’t handling it very well.

He’d picked up the phone numerous times to call Tom over the course of the night but had been unable to follow through to hit the send button every time. And while there’d been a part of him silently hoping, the phone had never rung for him either. Not that he’d expected it to. At one point, his fantasies of Tom arriving and pounding on the door at midnight had almost overwhelmed him, but he’d known that’s what they were, just fantasies.

It was just past seven thirty a.m., and Mason let the bustle of the already busy police station settle his nerves. This was what he was used to. This was what he loved.

“Hi, Mase,” Carol, the desk sergeant, called out to him, adding a big smile to go with her greeting. “How are you on this fine Thursday?”

“Great,” he lied but returned the smile as convincingly as he could.

He was stopped to chat and joke numerous times before he could reach his desk. The normality of it settled him further—until he rounded the hallway close to his office, his heartbeat racing steadily faster and faster as he closed the

gap on the room. But when he walked through the doorway, Tom was nowhere to be seen. Griff was, though.

“What’s got you spooked?” Griff asked.

Mason narrowed his eyes at his friend as he pulled out his desk chair.

“I saw the look on your face when you walked through that doorway. Things haven’t improved?”

“Umm... Ahh...” he faltered.

“You need to do something about it, man. You can’t go on this way.”

“Yeah. We’re working on it,” he said noncommittally. Griff raised a very unconvinced brow.

Randy and Bobby entering the room saved Mason from the conversation. Randy seemed to assess him, but he didn’t say anything related to their discussion the day before, of which Mason was very glad. The four of them joked around, then Pauly arrived, and finally Tom, just after eight. He was polite to everyone, including Mason, and joined in with the fun until Captain O’Farrell called them into a meeting. To the unobservant it might seem like a normal day, and a return to everything being normal again, but Mason didn’t miss the slightly longer than usual glances from Tom, most of them locked on his mouth, or the one to his groin.

The day progressed oddly, considering he was sent out with Pauly for the first part of it. They did what they’d been assigned to do without any drama, and Pauly didn’t once even mention him and Tom, or any “rumors,” so maybe it was really Randy who had the issue. When they returned to the precinct, Mason finalized the accompanying paperwork then went to the lunchroom to eat. Being with Pauly had worked wonders for him; Pauly spoke so much, and so fast, that he really had not one minute of spare head time to even think about Tom. And he’d appreciated the time off from his thoughts.

But the time off had ended.

Mason first realized someone had entered the storage closet behind him when the door closed, the lock clicking into place. He knew who it was. There was no undeniable scent or electric impulse, but he knew it was Tom. And knowing who was in the small room with him, knowing the man might be stepping up closer behind him, did things to Mason’s body he wasn’t sure he was happy with. He felt out of control, and at work, that wasn’t acceptable, but he liked it—wanted it.

He finished collecting the black and red ballpoint pens he'd been in there for, letting the tension build, even somehow enjoying it. He wondered which of them was happier by letting Tom wait, Tom or himself.

"Tom," he finally said.

There was a brief delay, and then Tom replied, "You were so sure it was me?"

"Yeah." And that was the absolute truth. Who else would come in and lock the door on him?

Mason took half a dozen slow, deep breaths before Tom spoke again. "Have you had a good morning?"

"Have you?" he said with a little more bite than intended.

"Ouch." Tom took a few steps forward, the sound of them an echo in the room. "To be honest, I wasn't sure I would, but I did. I was pretty fucking nervous coming in here this morning."

Those words slid over him, making Mason less on edge with the realization Tom had struggled with what had happened as well. "It wasn't an easy night for either of us then?"

"No." Footfalls closed the gap between them. "And now?"

"Pauly kept me entertained this morning. Kept the demons away."

Tom chuckled. "I'm sure he did. The guy can't shut up." Two last steps, and Mason could feel Tom's heat behind him. "And those demons? Are they gone yet?"

Mason needed to look at Tom's face. Maybe then he'd know for sure that the tone of Tom's voice matched his words. He turned around. Tom was right there, right in his space. Those blue eyes he'd thought of, dreamed of, so many times recently were right there too. Bright and clear and locked on his. Time stilled. And he stopped thinking of anything other than the man in front of him.

Like he'd done yesterday, Tom reached up a hand and gripped Mason by the jaw. His thumb grazed the skin there, then his bottom lip. "So fucking handsome." Not beautiful or even gorgeous, but handsome. Was that a straight man's way of thinking of other men? He liked it. Liked the masculinity. Mason was interrupted from his thoughts when Tom's tongue swiped his own lip. Mason focused on the slight shine it left there, felt his body move forward, offering himself, and then, all of a sudden, Tom was kissing him again.

Tom's kiss made him weak at the knees, and he had to grab onto the shoulders in front of him and hang on or he might fall down. Tom was still gripping his jaw, holding him and directing him the way *he* wanted. Mason really liked that assertiveness. Tom's other hand found its way to his waist, slipping slowly around until it was spread, fingers wide, on his lower back—and he could feel and make out every digit through his business shirt. Tom pulled him closer, and their bodies met from waist to thigh, not a doubt in his mind what Tom thought about the encounter after he felt Tom's erection hard and straining against his own. Mason might have whimpered.

Tom pulled back and looked into his eyes, "We can't do this here," then he kissed Mason again, his lips aggressive and determined, until he broke away, his next words like breaths against Mason's cheek. "But god, I want to."

Mason pulled away this time; he couldn't sense conflict within Tom, and all he could see was acceptance in his expressive blue eyes. Could it be that easy? "It feels like you want to, but... shit, Tom, do you really? Are you sure? This is huge."

Tom pushed his hand higher on Mason's face, sliding a thumb across the cheekbone he'd just whispered against. His eyes softened as they looked at him with an almost adoration. Mason shivered. "I can't stop thinking about you. And after yesterday, and now today—I don't want to."

Mason knew what he meant, but he teased him anyway, as was his way, trying to lighten the moment. "You don't want to kiss me?"

Tom laughed, the sound breaking the serious tension between them. "Come 'ere." And he kissed him again, sliding his tongue deep into Mason's mouth. When they broke away one final time, Tom added, his tone serious, "I want to see you tonight."

Mason didn't feel like playing games anymore either. "Okay."

Tom seemed to appreciate that. "Can I come to your house?"

"Yes." Wanting more of that assertiveness, he asked, "Any special instructions?" He was happy for Tom to lead—it seemed the safer thing anyway.

Tom dragged the hand still resting on Mason's hip higher, dipping his fingers under the waistband of his dress pants. When his fingers met the fabric of Mason's underwear, his breath hitched. "Holy fucking shit!" he exclaimed,

and jerked back to study Mason's face. He swallowed hard, his eyes wide in surprise. "You wear them... here?"

Mason lifted his lips in a smile. "I wear them whenever I feel like it."

"Is it the same ones?"

"The red ones?" Tom nodded frantically. "No."

Tom swallowed again and seemed to struggle to make words. "You have more than one?"

Mason's grin teased. "I have many pairs. In all sorts of colors."

"*Holy shit!*" The emphasis was there even if the words were said so low Mason hardly heard them. "Wear them tonight." It was a command, albeit a quiet one.

Mason screwed his face up a bit. "I've had them on all day."

"Not these. The red ones. The ones you wore that night... and the boots."

"That's a rather special outfit."

Again, Tom's fingers brushed against the lace below his dress pants. "It sure is. Will you wear them for me?"

Mason knew he had to check... to make sure. "Tom. This is serious, if we do this, there's no going back." Tom's eyes didn't waver from his. "Is this really what you want?"

He replied with one word. "Yes."

Mason kissed Tom this time. They needed to be quick, but honestly, if someone tried to get in at this very moment, caring about it was the last thing on his mind.

When the kiss ended, Tom withdrew his hand and took two steps back. The loss of Tom's hands touching him pained Mason, but the time for jokes was over. This had to be all on Tom.

"I'll be at your place at eight sharp. I'll let myself in—just like I did that night—I'll come up to your bedroom, and when I see you in those red panties, when I think about how long your legs are and how tight your ass is, I won't stop doing exactly what I wanted to do that first time."

And with that he turned on his heel, unlocked the door, and left the room, leaving a very horny and very amazed Mason Reid behind to watch him leave.

Mason hoped that was the first and last time Tom would ever walk away from him when he was so aroused.

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## Chapter Six

Mase stood in front of an armoire in his bedroom. Tom didn't even recall the antique piece of furniture from last time, but it was in the same place Mase had stood that night. He was looking into a mirror, the same mirror he'd probably stood in front of and looked in a million times—one day he'd ask him about that—the same mirror he must have been preening into the night Tom discovered his secrets. This time Tom didn't stop his admiration at Mase's legs or his ass or even his shoulders. He allowed himself to appreciate everything. The view from the front was just as good as, if not better than, the one from behind. Even though Mase had his back to him, the mirror did the job of voyeur, making the experience even better, because he got to see both sides at once.

“Jesus Christ, you look good.”

Mase knew he was there. That was obvious from his lack of reaction. The music was playing again tonight, classical too, but not loud enough to burst his eardrums. Mase smiled but didn't turn around.

“You came.”

Hell would have frozen over before anything could stop him. Mase likely didn't need to know that right now. “Yes.”

“I'm glad.”

“Yeah, me too.” Mase began to turn around. “Stop,” Tom insisted, halting Mase in his spot. “Stay like that. Please.”

Mase didn't reply, an inch of a smile seen through the mirror assured Tom that his request was okay.

Tom didn't want to waste time. His lust was pulling him like a magnet toward Mase, but he resisted. The thing was, he didn't know how long he could do it, resist. Or whether he wanted to. “Can I come in?” He was still standing against the doorframe.

“Yes.” The tone was subordinate, and god, that turned Tom on.

He stepped cautiously toward the mirror, watching Mase's face for any sign that his consent had changed. He received none. Mase watched him intently through the mirror, even via that detached medium, evidence of Mase's lust

was obvious, assuring him, prompting Tom to keep walking. It felt like a hundred steps, when in reality it was no more than ten, but Tom took each as if he was turning the page of an amazing book, savoring each new scene that would finally lead him to the excitement. At last, he took his final step.

Up close, the man in front of him was magnificent: long, lean, perfectly sculptured. They were very close to the same height when in normal—Tom had to stop himself from thinking that—in “day” shoes, Tom was half an inch or so taller. With Mase in the heels, he seemed to tower above him; even if Tom knew that wasn't the case. Not that it mattered, it didn't lessen the feeling of subtle control he felt right now.

Tom stood behind Mase, watching him in the mirror over his shoulder. He might be wearing lingerie, but he didn't seem feminine to Tom. He didn't smell it either. Tom could still make out the faint hint of Mase's expensive cologne, and the unique scent of Mase. He let his eyes move up and down Mase's body. He was so toned. How many times had they hit the gym together? Tom had never even looked twice, let alone suspected this other side of Mase. His chest was contoured without being overly muscled, a nice lineation of his pecs showing the effort Mase put in, without being overdone. He slid his arm around Mase's waist, that first contact causing a quick breath to leave Mase's lips. Tom placed his hand over Mase's chest, felt it move with each breath, was fascinated, but he'd finished with that part of Mase's body, was eager to move on. His hand slipped lower, and he reveled in the flat, hard abdomen beneath his hand. Mase's abs contracted as he moved over them, another hitch of breath the one reason he looked back up to meet Mase's eyes. They were heavy and lust-filled.

He resisted looking back in the mirror, wasn't ready to look lower. Not because the thought of what was inside Mase's underwear was confronting, but because Mase was a prize, and that part of him wasn't his yet.

Tom moved in close to Mase's back, his hand still resting on Mase's stomach. He let the fingers of his other hand trace up the side of Mase's thigh. He moved them slowly, lingering on the skin between each break in the fabric of the stockings that peeked above the boots, sometimes rubbing the fine netting through his fingertips as he passed. His fingers still moving, he leaned in and kissed the taut muscle of the shoulder closest to his mouth, pulling back the slightest fraction and then running his tongue across it. Mase's entire body quivered, and then he moaned... the sound low, aroused. When his hand reached the satiny edge of the panties, Tom couldn't help but ghost his hand

over the red silk. It was so soft, utterly sexy, and even knowing the panties were red lacy lingerie, and that Mase was wearing them, nothing about Mase was at all feminine. What he really noted was how hard Mase's buttock was underneath. He'd never felt anything like it; it was an absolute juxtaposition. When his fingers reached the edge again, he lifted it. It pulled away easily, allowing him the freedom to slide his fingers up under the fabric onto the soft, warm flesh of Mase's ass. He leaned his forehead against the shoulder he'd just kissed as he played with the skin under his hand, his entire palm and fingers now spread wide. A fine dusting of hair covered the skin of Mase's ass cheek. The sparse hairs tickled his palm, fascinating him—so much like his own, but different. Women didn't have hair like that—well, none he'd ever been with. He could still feel that silky fabric, now brushing the top of his hand, and it too fascinated him, reminded him how Mase looked right now dressed in this lingerie. He continued to explore, and his thumb grazed the ridge of the cleft separating Mase's ass cheeks, but he didn't delve any further, cautious, waiting.

"I might be wearing these clothes," Mase said, his voice tight, "but I'm *not* a woman," as if reading Tom's mind. He pushed his hips back, his ass pressing against Tom's hand. "Don't treat me like one. You don't need to be gentle with me."

Had he been? He didn't think so. He just wanted to savor every moment. Tom met his eyes in the mirror again. "I'm sorry, I..."

"Tom. I'm serious," Mase insisted. "Touch me like you mean it, for fuck's sake. Please." His courtesy more a command than a request, Mase punctuated the word with another push of his ass.

Tom reacted to Mase's words. "Jesus Christ." He squeezed the flesh under his hand hard, the touch of his thumb, which had been so delicate before, moved to insistent, running along the warmer valley of flesh. Rather than turn him off, the heated hollow turned him on. He liked anal sex, always had. Mostly, it was more a fascination, because for many women, it was a no-go zone—at least it had been for the casual encounters his experience comprised. Of his two serious girlfriends, only one had enjoyed it, and that had been only sometimes, and only after he'd "softened" her up with a nice dinner and good wine, and even then he'd had to work hard to get it. But Mase, he seemed so eager—it didn't seem like working hard for anything would be the case tonight.

"You really like the thought of me touching you here?" He edged his thumb a bit lower. Mase sucked in a breath.

“Like?” Mase scoffed. “I fucking love it!” Mase’s hand reached up behind him and pushed his fingers into Tom’s hair, gripping it tight, and pulling his lips back down onto Mase’s shoulder. There was nothing gentle about it either; the grip hurt, reminding him of the power of those hands. “Want it.”

He did. That was glaringly obvious. And Tom wanted it too. Damn, he wanted it.

Tom moved his whole hand farther down, torturously slowly, and even while he let his lips move over the smooth skin of Mase’s shoulder, he watched Mase’s face for a reaction. Mase’s eyes closed, and he sucked in a breath, holding it, leaving his lips parted on the exhale. *Damned hot!* Tom squeezed again, his thumb moving just a bit lower. With each fraction of an inch he descended, Mase seemed to become more impatient. “You *really* want this.”

Mase sighed. “So much.” He took another staggered breath, his fingers gripping tighter in Tom’s hair at that moment. “And for so long.”

Tom didn’t need any more encouragement. He dragged his thumb with purpose, the pad quickly coming upon the puckered skin of Mase’s opening. He hovered there, applying pressure, rotating in tiny circles. With no lubricant, he dare not try to push in, but he could tease, and he did, his own cock hard as a rock over the reactions of the man in front of him.

Mase was wanton, his body betraying every aroused breath. Tom couldn’t remember ever having such a responsive lover, and this was only the beginning. What would Mase be like when he really touched him? As he continued to apply pressure on Mase’s most intimate of places, he looked at Mase’s front reflected in the mirror: his chest, nipples, stomach, cock... Oh god, his cock. Tom finally locked eyes on the very obvious erection inside those panties, leaving nothing to the imagination. He wanted to touch it, maybe even—That thought stopped him. He loved touching his own cock, so he was fine to go down that road, and he loved oral sex—giving and receiving—it didn’t seem so different to consider sucking a guy as opposed to going down on a woman. Would it be so different? Bother him? No, he didn’t think so; his concern more about worrying whether he’d be any good. He’d put plenty of thought into this over the last couple of weeks, and he was ready... eager. He wanted it.

“Tom, oh god, so good.” Mase’s voice surprised him from his thoughts. “More. Need—I need more.”

*More?* Tom stilled his hand but didn’t remove it. He moved back a bit, and Mase began to turn his body. “What do you want?” he asked, their eyes

meeting face on. In that moment, he would give Mase almost anything. Mase's dark eyes were heavy, the pupils dilated, his stare filled with lust.

"I—I—" He seemed unsure of what to say. "God, anything. Everything."

Mase watched him, waited for Tom to respond. When he didn't, Mase's eyes closed, his expression unsure. Tom wasn't having that. He removed his hand from Mase's ass, only allowing a minimal slump of Mase's shoulders before he grabbed them and pulled Mase around to face him. Mase's eyes opened, and Tom gave him only a split-second to realize what was happening before he kissed him.

Kissing Mase's lips lit a fire under him. He recalled the kiss in the storeroom earlier today, and how afterwards, he couldn't recall ever having had another like it. And this was better—a hundred times better. He burned for the man in front of him, felt consumed by him. Tom held on tight, his hands gripping Mase's shoulders. They fell back against the armoire, and Mase shuddered. Tom imagined that it was because of the mirror's cold glass on Mase's bare skin. But Mase didn't slow in his attack on Tom's lips, so Tom wasn't going to, either. When the need to breathe finally made him break away, he needed to look at Mase. He stepped back and observed.

Mase was panting for breath, his cock still steel-hard and pushing at the top of the panties in an effort to escape. His hips swayed ever so slightly, and Tom wondered whether it was the music or if it was him Mase was moving for.

"You are *so* sexy." Even though he directed the words toward Mase, it was himself he was reminding. But did he need that reminder? Hell no. He was right here, in every way. "So damned sexy."

The words seemed to buoy Mase, and he stepped away from the armoire and came toward Tom. He could handle those heels—expertly—and Tom took steps backwards to keep Mase walking. *Clack, clack, clack*. The sound resonated in his head as the steps he'd heard from downstairs two and a half weeks ago. Definitely not a woman. He was surprised when his legs hit the bed, because he hadn't been expecting it, but he held his ground and kept standing upright.

"*You're so sexy*," Mase parroted. "I'm wondering what you're gonna do with me. Or what I'm gonna do with you." Mase took the final step and pushed Tom back. With the strength in Mase's arms in that push, there was nothing he could do but fall on the bed. He shuffled back, and Mase crawled over the top

of him. “What do you want me to do... Tom?” The words came out like a breathy sigh—it was the first time Mase had seemed somewhat feminine; no, not feminine, it was a slightly submissive edge to his voice, and hell if he didn't like it.

“You want me to tell you what to do?”

There was no delay. “Yes.”

*Yes. Interesting. But fucking intimidating.*

“But I'm new to this, Mase. You have experience.”

Mase chortled. “You're not a child, Tom, and you're far from inexperienced. You know what to do and what you want.” He kneeled up on his shins and moved his hands to the buttons of Tom's oxford. “And I think you've been studying.” He said no more while he undid all of the buttons, pushing the sides away to reveal Tom's chest. He then placed both hands flat over it, adding pressure with his palms over Tom's nipples as he leaned forward. “Did you like watching boys together?” No one would ever accuse Mason Reid of being stupid.

“What boys?”

“The ones on your computer screen with the big cocks who've been tutoring you in the joys of sex between men.” His tongue met Tom's sternum. “You must have liked it—you're here right now.”

“You mean porn.”

“Of course.”

“Yeah, I've been watching some porn.” He had, quite a bit of it, and he'd learned a lot for sure, but none of the guys on his computer screen were Mase. And none of them had affected him like Mase did. “Those guys really get into it, don't they?” Mase paused, and Tom noticed the smile in Mase's eyes when he looked up to meet his, before Mase continued to run his tongue over Tom's over-sensitive skin again. “But I couldn't find any with this...” Tom reached out to run a finger along the waistline of the panties.

“You don't need it. I'm right here.” Mase's tongue continued across to Tom's nipple once he'd moved his hand.

And that led to one of his main questions. He'd been the one to insist Mase wear this tonight. “Do you always wear—” He pinched at the silk. “—this when you're with someone?”

Mase's immediate shake of his head came before his words. "No. I don't." Tom wasn't sure if that surprised him or not.

"But you're happy to wear it for me?"

Mase sat up a bit straighter, his eyes now a bit more intense. "I wear it because I want to wear it. You asked me to, and I'm happy to please you. I even *want* to please you, but in the end, I only do it to please myself."

He thought about that for a moment.

"I'm sorry if that offends you," Mase added.

"No. No, not at all." And it didn't. What it did do was bring home exactly who was kneeling above him. That surety of attitude—that was the Mase he knew. This—he quickly scanned every visible inch of the man—was like an added bonus; at least, that was how he thought now. How he'd been thinking for two weeks, if he was honest. "That's one thing you have never done—offend me."

"I don't know that I believe that. You seemed rather offended last time."

"Not over you." And he knew without a doubt that was the truth.

Mase's smile was wide and lit up his face, but it only lasted a heartbeat before happiness blended with lust, and Mase's eyes narrowed. Tom felt like prey, about to be consumed, and he reveled in it as Mase nipped and sucked at the bare skin of his chest and stomach. Those lips felt amazing, and he was happy to let Mase continue to move lower, but he remembered that Mase wanted him in control.

"Mason. Undo my jeans, and touch me."

Mase didn't look up at him, a hardly recognizable pause of his lips on Tom's skin the only sign he'd heard. Nor did he assent. His lips resumed their exploration of his flesh. Mase dipped his tongue into Tom's navel. A shiver erupted over his skin, and he moaned low. Mase nipped at the sensitive nerve-laden edge of it, almost like a distraction, continuing to do so. Tom had never realized the pleasure that could be received by such a small, innocuous part of the human body, and he pushed his hips up, seeking more attention from Mase's mouth. It was when Mase began to unbutton the fly of his jeans, he realized it had been a distraction—intentional or not—it had made him forget what he instructed. This was going to be a very long night.

Mason's fingers worked the fly of Tom's jeans quickly. He was all for teasing Tom and showing him how good sex could be between them, but he wanted more as well. He was straining, almost ready to bust out from his panties, and needed more contact between them.

When Tom told him to undo his jeans and touch him, Mason had fallen into the command. He craved it, needed the structure. He led everything else in his life, had for so long, and this was the one time he allowed himself to bend to someone else's will. He didn't get off on humiliation, or pain for that matter, but commands and having someone lead him on the journey of intimacy was amazing—especially when he was dressed like this.

The buttons now undone, Mason sat back on his haunches to see what he'd revealed. He'd felt Tom's erection under clothing already, but was unprepared for how perfect it looked: long, thick, uncut. He sucked in a breath.

“Like what you see?”

He'd been told to touch Tom, so Mason moved his hand and closed his fingers around the long velvety length. “I do.” He slid his palm lower, his thumb dragging over the frenulum, and Tom hissed. “Perfect.” He continued to masturbate Tom, alternating his eyes between watching what he was doing and looking at Tom's face. Tom watched him with rapt attention, his breathing continuing to accelerate as he became more aroused. Pearly pre-come formed a long thread to Tom's stomach, and Mason collected it on a fingertip before leaning forward, not letting go of Tom's cock as he directed the fingertip toward his mouth. He stuck out his tongue and licked the pre-come from his finger, then eyes locked with Tom's, pulled Tom's cock more vertical and sucked the tip into his mouth.

“Holy Jesus!” Tom gasped.

Mason smiled around him and sank his mouth lower.

“Fuck, fuck,” Tom chanted. “Oh god, yeah. That's it. More.”

Mason gave him more, a practiced blend of everything he knew felt good. And continued to give him more until Tom was begging him to stop, then demanding that he move away and stand in the middle of the room.

On unsteady feet, he did as he was told, but he couldn't resist palming his own leaking dick through his panties, the fabric wet under his hand.

“Fuck,” he heard again.

Tom was still on the bed, slow to move, but doing so. When he finally sat up and pulled off his shirt, it was Mase's turn to gasp. Tom's body was broader and more defined than his own, his skin pale ivory. In that seated position, his abs were tight, holding him upright, each ridge visible, and Mase wanted to attack them again, but he held fast. Tom pushed off the bed, quickly discarding his jeans and socks as he took the few steps between them.

Mason leaned down and reached for his boots, ready to remove them too.

"No."

He remained bent over but looked toward the voice.

"Leave them. Please."

Mason straightened again, relaxing his posture. "Okay."

"I—" Tom trailed his fingers across Mason's chest, leading them up along his throat, then dragging one along Mason's very dry bottom lip, the skin catching and pulling with the movement, causing his tongue to swipe out and wet both lip and fingertip. Tom pushed it inside his mouth. "Let me," he said as Mason sucked in his finger.

That worked for Mason. And he nodded his head once, slowly.

Tom leaned over and lifted Mason's leg at the calf. Mason placed a hand on his shoulder for support. He drew down the zipper on the inside leg, allowing the soft faux leather to fall away and expose the stocking underneath. The long boot came off easily, much to Mason's relief. Tom repeated the process on the other leg, but when the shoe was off, he didn't let go of the leg, instead, he ran a hand over Mason's calf and foot before he placed it reverently back on solid ground.

Tom straightened back up, then leaned in and kissed him, slower this time, with more purpose, his hands looping behind his back and touching him all over. Tom finally broke the kiss, moving his lips to mirror his hands, both making Mase feel as if they were touching every part of his body at once. Tom kissed a nipple and pinched its mate, then a hand was in Mase's hair, then running down his side. Tom dedicated long minutes to his torso and face, hand only moving as far down as his panty line. Finally he paused, his mouth moving millimeters away from the skin of his clavicle, Tom's hot breath the only thing touching him, and Tom was gripping the silk fabric of Mase's underwear in tight fists. "Have the overwhelming urge to rip these off you."

“Do it.” He understood that kind of desire, was happy it was there for him, and he honestly didn't care about the panties. “I want you to.”

“No.” Tom shook his head. “I don't want them destroyed.” Tom laid a chaste kiss on Mason's chest then looked into his eyes. “But I do want to take them off, now. I want to see all of you.”

“Please.”

Tom began to lower the panties, first over the swell of Mason's ass, and then carefully at the front, pulling them out and down. He didn't look at what he was doing, kept their eyes locked. The silk moved easily down his legs, but then it caught on the edge of the stockings. This caused Tom to look down. His breath hitched at what he saw, and Mason doubted the panties, or the stockings were the cause.

“Fucking incredible.”

“Like what you see?” he repeated Tom's exact phrase.

“You have no idea.”

“Don't know about that.”

“No, really. You didn't see what I'm seeing when you first saw me. Your cock—*fuck*—and the red of the panties, the stockings. Jesus Christ, Mase.”

“You can rip them off.”

Tom's whole body vibrated with the shake of his head. “No. But I'm leaving the stockings.” He pulled the panties down lower. “Is that okay?”

“You're running the show.”

Tom scoffed out a sound halfway between a laugh and a huff. “That's right. I am.” Then he dropped to his knees.

Tom didn't take Mason in his mouth, and to be honest, Mason would have been surprised if he had. But he pushed his nose into the join of his leg and hip and breathed deep. The panties long gone, Tom's hands slid up his legs along the stockings, rubbing up and down, almost creating heat. He sat back and studied Mason's erection right in front of his face, “I'm not sure why, but I didn't think you'd be cut,” tentatively reaching up a hand to touch him. Mason sucked in an involuntary breath at the contact. “Not that I'd thought about your cock at all before.”

“I hope you still like it.”

“Like it?” Tom applied more pressure with his thumb. “It’s perfect.” He wrapped his hand more firmly and stroked long and slow, over and over, alternately watching what his hand was doing and looking up to meet Mason’s eyes. At one point, when their gaze held for longer than it had before, desire bright and obvious in Tom’s eyes, his hand stuttered to a stop. He stood up, not letting go of Mason’s cock, and kissed Mason again, the kiss increasing in passion until Tom dropped his hand and pulled Mason in tight to his body, grinding their groins together. For a long time.

Mason was inordinately aroused, almost ready to take command of the situation. He loved these kisses, but was Tom stalling? Tom answered that unasked question when he spun them around and backed Mason toward the bed.

“I need you. Can’t wait... don’t want to wait any longer.” Maybe he’d needed those extra moments to convince himself and be sure, but the heated look in Tom’s eyes caused Mason to grin. Happy they were finally moving forward again, Mason shuffled onto the middle of the mattress. Tom’s eyes darted to the side table, and guessing where his thoughts had gone, Mason lifted the pillow behind him.

“Something I prepared a little earlier.”

Tom grinned and crawled over him. “You’re a good boy.”

“I am.” Mason ran a single finger teasingly between Tom’s pecs. “Now I want you to hurry up and use them.”

And so it began in earnest.

“Turn over. Get on your hands and knees.”

Mason did as he was told, posturing his ass into Tom’s face. He reached out and grabbed the lube, passing it back to Tom, then placed a condom closer to them on the sheet.

Tom’s hands were on his buttocks, kneading them firmly and pulling them apart. Tom’s thumb dragged down the crease between them, stopping at his entrance with more insistence than before, and applying delicious pressure. He groaned deep and low at the intrusion, begging for more with a push of his body. Mason felt the other hand move away then heard the snick of the tube of lubricant. Heard the airy squelch as the gel was squeezed out. Felt it drip onto his skin above Tom’s thumb, the sensation of it even more arousing. Tom began to spread the gel over his opening, working it in slowly but surely. They hadn’t discussed it, but Mason thought Tom might have done this before. He

wasn't going to think any more about it now, but Tom's confidence was comforting. Mason loved how Tom worked the muscle, using his thumb with pressure to move around the edge, pushing in a little deeper as it loosened. His other hand now rubbed Mason's back, from his ass all the way up, and into, his hair.

"So hot... God, Mase, I want you."

Mason couldn't reply. It felt too good. Tom's finger was now in deep, fucking him with much more purpose. He slowed, withdrew, and then pushed in another. Mason loving the burn that was a mix of pleasure and pain.

"More," he managed. "Faster."

Tom ramped up the speed to mirror what he'd been doing with one finger. With two he could go deeper, and the graze of Tom's fingers over Mason's prostate had Mason canting his hips to chase every bit of sensation. It was too good, and if Tom didn't get inside him soon, it would all be over. Mason pulled forward, and Tom's fingers left his body. He looked over his shoulder, directing his eyes on Tom. "Now."

Tom understood and scrambled for the condom, ripping it open. Sheathed, he got in close behind Mason. "I don't want to hurt you. I'll go slow."

"You won't. Just take it easy, not slow. You'll know."

Mason felt Tom press against him, but then he moved back. "Not like this. I want to see you."

Tom didn't even have to ask the question. Mason turned over onto his back and spread his legs, lifting one to place on Tom's shoulder when he moved in between them. Tom slid a hand up the leg from thigh to calf, closing his eyes and leaning his cheek against the stocking-covered skin, then he kissed it. *Wow*. But Tom gave Mason no further time to become sentimental; he quickly took himself in hand and lined up, then eyes locked with Mason's, he pushed in steadily, all the way.

Mason felt it down to his toes. Tom pulled out and pushed in slowly again, then did it again. Mason's body quickly adjusted for him, and then he began returning the thrusts from the bottom, moving his hips to meet each one. Perfect pressure rubbed over his gland, rocketing him toward what he could only imagine was going to be an amazing orgasm.

"Fuck," Tom said, his eyes closing momentarily then popping open again. "Fuck."

Mason understood Tom's incoherence. He wasn't sure he could produce more than that either; the sighs and moans that were escaping his mouth would have to suffice.

Tom paused and lowered Mason's leg gently, then readjusted his position, thrusting a few more times before he took Mason's cock in his hand. Mason wasn't sure he wanted that. There were too many sensations, and he was too close to coming, but it felt fucking amazing.

Still, Tom flicked his attention between Mason's face and the cock in his hand. He looked awed.

"Kiss me," Mason said, Tom's eyes settling on his. "Please kiss me."

Tom let go and leaned forward, and Mason wrapped his legs around Tom's waist as their lips met. The kiss stumbled; it was a mix of tongues and lips and teeth all working against the other, but utterly perfect. At one point, Tom bit lightly on his chin, and held there, as he continued to thrust deep. With no hand on his dick, Mason had fallen away from the edge, and that suited him fine—he wanted this to last and last. But he could tell Tom was close; his thrusts and movements were getting erratic.

"Gonna come," Tom said against his mouth. "Too good."

"Come. Let me feel you." He wanted to feel Tom break apart in his arms, to totally lose himself, and then he'd worry about his own orgasm.

Tom pushed his face into the hollow of Mason's throat and came. His whole body quaked, and Mason could feel every inch of it shuddering against him, inside him. The eroticism of Tom's orgasm pushed Mason closer, but it wasn't enough to take him along on the ride. Instead, he gripped Tom's hair as he rode through his high. Tom collapsed on top of him, panting, and then he looked into Mason's eyes, understanding immediately sparking. He reached down to hold the condom as he withdrew from Mason's body, quickly pulling it off his dick, tying it, and throwing it on the floor. "Your turn."

Tom spat saliva into his hand and gripped Mason's cock tight, quickly beginning to jack him. He also bent his head toward the closest nipple and laved it with his tongue. Mason threaded his hand into the curls at Tom's nape. He was tempted to pull Tom's head to his mouth, but he didn't. Tom needed to see him come.

"Harder," Mason requested, and Tom tightened his grip. "Faster... so close." Tom ramped up the speed as well, his eyes locked on what he was doing

the whole time now. Mason felt his orgasm start low and build like a wildfire in his body. There was no stopping it. "Coming... Oh god, coming."

"Yes. Come for me, Mase." Mason began to shoot. Long thick bursts that showered his stomach in blobs. "Hell yeah!" Tom exclaimed sounding awed. And so he should be. Mason couldn't recall when he last came that hard, if ever.

Mason slumped back against the mattress. He was shattered, totally boneless. Tom had let go of his cock and was now running his finger through the warm evidence of his release, trailing it in long sticky lines all over his skin.

When he could make a sound, he chuckled. "Are you done making a mess yet?"

Tom huffed. "You made the mess. I'm just cleaning it up."

That caused a lump to form in Mason's throat as he considered another way Tom could do that, but that was a game for another day, maybe one he'd have to play first. That's if the chance ever presented itself again. "Look at me."

Tom's finger stopped moving, and he realigned his body to look up at Mason's face.

"That was amazing." He brushed his hand across Tom's cheek. "Really amazing."

Tom smiled, and it seemed genuine, without any hint of a scared rabbit making an appearance. "It was. *You're* amazing, Mase."

*Well, damn*, he thought. As long as it wasn't only the post-sex glow talking.

"Well, we have that in common." Tom's skin pinked. "But seriously, are you okay?"

Tom moved up and kissed Mason chastely on the mouth. "I'm really okay. In fact, I'm fucking *great*." And he kissed him again, and this time there was nothing chaste about it.

**The End**

## **Author Bio**

*Bette Browne is wife to an extremely understanding husband and mother to two very tolerant children. In her mind they are the most accepting family in the world, allowing her the freedom to indulge her passion for fiction, whether it is reading or writing it.*

*She enjoys traditional male/female romances, but male/male is her passion. In her mind nothing is more erotic than two (or more) beautiful men finding love together.*

*For Bette, the fight for tolerance in all its guises is an important one, and hopefully her contribution, even if it is only in the form of the occasional love story, is one she will continue to happily find the time for.*

*Bette's story, Dirty Martini, is published by Bottom Drawer Publications, and her contribution, The Jacobite, in the Not Quite Shakespeare Anthology is published by Dreamspinner Press.*

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