

A close-up photograph of a man from the chest up. He is wearing a dark, possibly black, suit jacket over a white button-down shirt. The shirt is unbuttoned at the collar. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. His hands are positioned at the bottom of the jacket, as if he is about to button it or has just finished. He is wearing a watch on his left wrist and a bracelet on his right wrist. The background is dark and out of focus. The text 'BARON'S' is overlaid in a large, purple, serif font across the middle of the image.

# BARON'S

D. G SMITH

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# Love is an Open Road

*An M/M Romance series*

## BARON'S

By D.G Smith

### Introduction

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

### What Is Love is an Open Road?

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 is an Open Road*.

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.

Each year, a dedicated group of Volunteers from the M/M Romance Group work hard behind the scenes to bring these stories to you. Our Editors, Formatters, Proofreaders, and those working on Quality Assurance, spend many long hours over a course of several months so that each Event is a success. As

each and every author also gives freely of their time and talent, it was decided that all edits suggested may be accepted or rejected by the author at any given time. For this reason, some stories will appear to be more tightly edited than others, depending on the choice of the author.

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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By D.G Smith

## Photo Description

A shirtless man sits in the backseat of a car in the black-and-white photo. We mostly see his torso; his back is to us, and his wrists are handcuffed behind him. The cuffs and his bare skin seem to glow in the light coming from the open door of the car.

## Story Letter

*Dear Author,*

*At first glance, the man in this picture looks like he has no control over his own situation. Stripped of his shirt, hands cuffed behind him, pushed back into a tight space...he doesn't seem to be the one in charge here.*

*I want you to imagine a story where he is the one in charge, where his face is actually glancing over his shoulder at you, calm and cocky, or someone's opening the door for him, their eyes turned respectfully away. Or maybe whoever put him here doesn't know he's in charge yet, but oh, they're going to soon.*

This story doesn't have to be BDSM, but I am looking for the subversion of common power-dynamic tropes. Give me a contemporary, give me a science fiction, give me anything but most of all, give me a protagonist who doesn't need to flaunt it to know that he's got it. And please, no non-con/dub-con and rape as a plot point. Also, I'd like an HFN/HEA if at all possible.

*Thank you,*

*Cari Z*

## Story Info

**Genre:** contemporary

**Tags:** BDSM, slow burn/UST, lust, tattoos, over age 40, age gap, public activity, visual arts, bratty sub

**Word Count:** 35,888

*Dedication*

This, my debut novella, is dedicated to my bestie and mentor, Wulf Francu Godgluck. Without you kicking my arse and building my self-confidence, I would never have been able to accomplish this, thank you Wulfy! It is also dedicated to all the m/m authors out there who have taken me on many countless journeys where I have hated and loved you, sometimes in equal measure but I have never been able to walk away unaffected by your stories, thank you.

To Cari Z, thank you for the fantastic prompt and the opportunity it gave me to introduce you to Axel and Baron.

Lastly, and to me, the most important of all, my betas. I would never have finished this without your constant encouragement and love, thank you.

Sanet Nel – Woman, without your sharp eye and insight into my characters, this story would not have happened! You are a gem to be treasured always.

Lily Lamb – My pickle, without your love and encouragement, I think I would have gone bonkers.

Wulf F. Godgluck – You taught me everything I know and threatening me with your whip only inspired me more!

May Wilson – Your constant love and cheering me on is what kept me going when I second- guessed everything I was doing.

A special thank you to Master Tim O’Rahilly, thank you for your patience in answering all my questions.

**BARON'S**  
**By D.G Smith**



## Chapter One

### *Baron Moreton*

Baron Moreton tensed the moment the woman across from him leaned over his desk. Granted it was a huge desk but with her leaning that far forward, Baron was subjected to quite a cleavage show. Her full breasts were shamelessly on display in an obscenely low-cut see-through blouse. She flirted with his cheek, dragging a manicured nail along his skin. It sent prickles down his spine and not the kind he wanted to feel from his sub, *these*, just freaked him the fuck out! *Wait...* Baron had no sub of his own... but did he want another after his ex?

Baron Moreton was the CEO of Moreton Advertising, a company he had started with his ex-lover and partner. He had received a "Dear John" email informing him that his lover had decided to elope with one of their clients, and asking if Baron was interested in buying out his share of the business. It took him two weeks to finalise a bank loan, and the company was his without needing a face-to-face with his ex, something he was grateful for. His ex had married in New Zealand, where unlike Australia, gay marriage was legal. Fucking convenient that their client had been a Kiwi. Five years later, his company was doing relatively well in the downward economic climate and Baron hadn't looked back.

"You have a good lunch?" Baron heard Abby ask Jacky, and pictured her walking on those impossibly high stilettos. How women managed to stand in those things still remained a big mystery to Baron. In the clubs, even the Dommies wore those terrifying six-inch heels; seriously, you could kill someone with them. Abby was the administrative assistant floater in the office and took over light duties when Jacky, Baron's personal assistant, left for lunch. Jacky's office was adjacent to Baron's with a connecting door between the two. It was spacious enough to accommodate two desks.

"Sure did." Baron could almost see Jacky's smirk. "Even though it's a salad day today, it was made tastier by the luscious vision serving in the canteen."

"Tall, dark chocolate, brown-eyed dreadlocks who started there last week?"

God, seriously those two women were more worried about the new eye candy than they were about saving his arse from the "Samantha Jones" wannabe trying to take out his face. Their voices became a hushed tone from

outside his office, and Baron counted impatiently down for Jacky to come to his rescue.

The vixen's reputation for bedding her husband's business associates preceded her, but she was no match for his personal assistant.

Jacky burst into his office. "Baron, darling, you shouldn't have," she drawled in her most seductive voice, flicking a box open and taking out a tennis bracelet.

"Oh." She pressed a hand to her neck. "I'm so sorry. I didn't know you had a client," she said emphasising client ever so slightly, glancing over to Mrs Kentwood. The woman straightened up, face flushed as she set herself in the chair.

Baron struggled to keep a straight face. Jacky Saito was in fine form doing what only she could do: keep aggressive wives of potential clients at bay while still maintaining polite decorum.

"Mrs Kentwood was in the area and popped in early for their meeting." Baron briefly gazed at Mrs Kentwood, before giving Jacky a forced smile. "Her husband should be joining us shortly, I'm sure."

"Of course. She must have arrived when I stepped out to sign for the parcel, which I love by the way. Well, I'll not keep you from your meeting; just wanted to say thank you for the absolutely stunning bracelet, darling. Isn't it just gorgeous?" Baron cringed when Jacky dangled her hand in the air a little too close for comfort to Mrs Kentwood's face.

"If this is to make up for having to cancel our weekend away, then you are so forgiven, but I'll show you just how, much later."

"Behave, Jacky," Baron admonished to her retreating back as she flicked her long black mane and flounced out of his office on her impossibly high Jimmy Choo stilettos. How the hell that woman did the things she did on those spikes he had no clue. His musing was interrupted at the sight of his assistant's dramatic exit fail when she collided with Mr Kentwood entering his office. Baron snorted. *I'm bad*. Jacky was gonna make him pay for sure.

\*\*\*\*

Twenty minutes later, having walked his clients to the elevator, Baron stopped at Jacky's desk.

"Remind me to give you an extra special bonus this year," he huffed out, taking residence on the edge of her desk. At forty-two, Baron was still in his

prime physically. Longish black hair on top, combed up and away from his face—with much shorter, silver rather than grey, along the sides—framed a strong, more rugged than handsome face. His ex had always compared him to more of a gunslinger in some of the old western movies they used to watch than an advertising executive. The lines etched across his high forehead and around his mouth told the story of the past few years worrying to keep a relatively new company out of the red column in a volatile economy. A straight nose with a slight indentation at its tip gave his face an aristocratic look. He was clean-shaven, though sporting a constant five o'clock shadow, and his plump lips had many subs, at the club he frequented, drooling for a taste. At six foot five, he was well above average height and was graceful despite this. Broad shoulders and well defined arms were a result of the many years he helped his father in his cabinetmaking business while growing up. He was proud of his flat stomach even though he had never been able to sculpt the elusive six-pack.

"Damn straight I will. I don't get you, though. Big bad Dom that you are can't put these women gently but firmly in their place. I'm sure there is a tactful way to tell them that you prefer dick to pussy?" she said, cocking her eyebrows at him.

He stretched his long legs out in front of him and crossed his arms. "No, there isn't, and it's none of my clients' business that I like to suck dick."

"Oh, so you suck, too. I thought your boys were the *suckers*, and you were always the *suckee*."

"Do shut up, woman, that's not even a word." He glared and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Of course it is. I just made it up. Words are tools to convey a message or meaning. *Suckee* conveyed a meaning to you. Therefore, it is now a word."

Baron turned towards her and narrowed his eyes. "Why do I employ you, again?"

"Well, five years ago you saw the light, and I don't think you want to find out what it would be like if you had not hired me, do you?"

"Tsk. I give in." He grinned. "Can you order some lunch? Anything will do, I don't really care. Have to get these tenders finalised today. I'll be having lunch in my office. Thanks, Jacky. What would I do without you?"

"You don't need to suck up, getting your lunch is no problem. I left a cup of coffee for you on your desk and remember this time, it's hot!"

“Thanks. Shit, one time burning my mouth, and I can’t live it down. Phone and order my lunch. You do not need to go downstairs. I’m sure dreadlocks will still be there, later, when you leave.”

“He won’t.” She was already out of her chair grabbing her purse. “They leave much earlier.” Jacky walked out of the office, giving Baron no time to pursue her.

Baron chuckled at the antics of his assistant and sat down at his desk, but the smile faded when he studied the portfolio handed in that morning by his creative director, Tobias Manning. His tongue had a painful encounter with his hot black coffee when his gaze landed on a name.

*Goddammit! Axel Harris.*

The man’s name consisted of two first names. For some unexplained reason, that fact just pissed him off. There was something about the guy that rubbed him the wrong way. He didn’t know if it was his cockiness, the arrogant way he carried himself, or the fact that Baron’s cock hardened every time the man opened his mouth. His name was on the list of staff members allocated to different duties within the campaign. Reading it made him growl. He could not be in the same room with Axel for any length of time without having his hackles rising. It was the general consensus that Axel’s talents as a freehand illustrator were unmatched in the company.

No matter how artistic the man was, giving him the lead for the artwork of a major account was risky. Baron was not prepared to take that risk, especially with a bratty kid who irritated him to no end. Sure, Axel wasn’t a kid. According to his personnel file, he was turning thirty that year, which made him twelve years Baron’s junior.

Baron walked across his office to the wall of windows letting in the afternoon sun. His desk was situated at an angle in the left corner of his office, so that he faced a bank of windows covering the entire opposite wall. They were up high enough that all one could see when seated at his desk was open skies. Staring down at the city sprawled out beneath him, he reminded himself how fortunate he was to be living on the Gold Coast in one of the most beautiful cities in Australia. But the panorama in front of him was in sharp contrast to what he was feeling. His mind wandered back to the day he’d read his ex-lover’s goodbye email. After the shock had worn off, anger had set in at Anthony’s betrayal.

Baron still shuddered whenever he remembered the days following Anthony’s departure. In a fog of misery and rage, he’d gone to so many leather

bars he'd lost count. The back room had been his penance. On all fours with his face pressed into a carpet encrusted with God knew what, its stench making him gag, leather Daddies had lined up to have their turn at fucking his arse. Raw and bleeding, it had taken the bartender coming off his shift, to put a stop to more bastards taking their turn. For someone who hardly ever bottomed, he had been in agony for days. It was his punishment for letting his sub down.

Not a conscious decision he had made, but, thinking back, it was the only logical reason for doing something so out of character. He had immediately gone to be tested and had religiously been tested every six months ever since. He had gone through a gamut of emotions, but the one that had stuck was fear.

The break-up had come out of nowhere. It had blindsided him; it felt as if the foundations of his world had tilted because his lover hadn't only left for another man, he'd eloped. He got married within three weeks of leaving their home, and Baron had not seen it coming. There were no indications that Anthony had been unhappy. As the man's Dom, Baron should have picked up on it; he should have known. It did, however, make him wary to trust so completely again. This made his role as a Dominant a little difficult. He firmly believed trust was a key component between a Dom and a sub. He had been part of the BDSM scene for the past twenty years. He found his proclivity for control and kink could not be fulfilled any other way. After Anthony, after the bottoming clusterfuck, Baron had been going to the clubs less and less.

So what the hell was up with all these conflicting emotions surrounding Axel bloody-fucking Harris?

He rotated his shoulders trying to work out the tension that had settled there. Baron had never had any cause for concern with the way Manning had run his campaigns in the past. Tobias Manning's imaginative campaigns and artwork rivalled even Baron's—until now.

He walked to the connecting door and poked his head out. "Jacky, could you get Manning to see me in my office as soon as possible, please."

"Sure thing, Baron. I ordered you a pastrami and cheddar sandwich with pumpkin soup. It should be delivered in the next thirty minutes, according to Mr Hottie downstairs," she replied, her lips curling up at the corners giving her face a mischievous glint.

Baron opened his door a little wider and leaned casually against the doorframe, tilting his head. "Thanks," he chuckled. "I wonder if Mr Hottie will be delivering my lunch himself. I'd like to find out if he bats for my team."

Baron kept a straight face and, with an air of total innocence, turned as if to go back into his office, when he heard Jacky's protests.

"Hands off! I called dibs on him first! Go play with your subs. You have enough of them panting after you as it is," Jacky let out, and he heard her jabbing the buttons on her phone with more force than was necessary.

It didn't take long before there was a knock on his door and Manning walked in.

"Baron, Jacky said you wanted to see me." Tobias's clean-shaven baby face greeted him. Many people found it hard to believe that the man whose face didn't have a single wrinkle, other than the crow's feet gathering around his eyes, was pushing fifty at his next birthday. He attributed his youthful appearance to the copious amounts of coconut oil he drank on a daily basis.

"Please, have a seat. The Baxter account. It's one of our top accounts."

"I sent in the report for that account this morning. Is there a problem?" Manning seemed a little on the defensive, as if he were preparing to do battle. Baron knew Manning's tell; a raised eyebrow and squaring of the shoulders meant they were in for an extended exchange. The man did not give in easily if he thought his cause was worthy of a fight. Baron leaned back in his chair, arms resting on the armrests, and steepled his fingers in front of him.

"I don't know. You tell me. You've given the artwork for this account to a rookie. Someone who has only been with this company for a year, while there are other illustrators who have been with us from the beginning. Most of them are at senior levels, yet you've given Axel Harris lead. I'd like to know why."

Tobias leaned forward, placing his short forearms on the desk in front of him. "Because he is that good, and I have confidence in him. You know the campaign is for a publishing house that specialises in comics. They have requested that all their adverts be animated. They have offered one of their own illustrators but that is not how we do things. Axel is the best we have in freehand drawing, and the rest of my team know this.

"Fine. Yes, there have been grumblings amongst certain members of the team about Axel not having paid his dues to the company. But it's because this is such an important account, that I need the best person on these drawings." He took a deep breath before continuing, "I have told my team if any of them have an issue with my decision, to see me personally. So far nobody has stepped forward."

Baron sighed and picked up his coffee. "I don't doubt his talent, but can he handle the pressure of lead?" He decided against it, still feeling the scalding on his tongue, and set the cup back down. "He would be doing all these illustrations by hand, and with the timeframe set up for this campaign—if he were doing all the sketches himself—it would be a difficult task for two illustrators, let alone one."

"I'd like to give him the chance to prove himself." Tobias grabbed Baron's discarded coffee with an unspoken question, and at Baron's nod, took a sip. "Shit, Jacky makes even black coffee taste good."

Baron loved the close family feel of his staff—that his creative director felt comfortable sharing his coffee. A healthy sense of competitiveness existed, but Baron insisted on transparency. He firmly believed the great comradery amongst his employees contributed to the success of his company.

"I'm not going to sign off on that. You need to reshuffle your team, Tobias."

Baron crossed his arms, which always meant he was in for a fight.

"Dammit, Baron, I know you have a bee in your bonnet for this guy, but don't mess with my team or interfere with the way I run my campaigns. You've never done it in the past. Don't start now. I have always delivered results and that will not change," Tobias said in an unsteady voice, his face turning red as he tried to control his temper.

Baron stood and ran his hand through his hair. With a sigh, he rounded his desk and sat on the edge, directly in front of Tobias. Arms folded across his chest, he patiently regarded the smaller man who stared up at him.

"I'll remind you that the name of this company is still Moreton Advertising. It has not changed to Moreton and Manning Advertising. You are right. I've never interfered with the way you've done things in the past. You've never given me reason to until now. I will not risk the success of such an important account on someone with so little experience. I know that you have a lot of faith in this kid." Baron raised his hands when he saw Tobias lift his eyebrows. "Yes, okay he is not a kid, but he has very little experience. You can make him lead on one of our smaller accounts if you want him to prove himself. I'm quite surprised that you've chosen this one in the first place."

"I chose this campaign because it is right up his alley. This is what he does best."

“No, Tobias. His talent lies in his artwork. He hasn’t proven himself to be a leader yet. Shall we compromise? Make him co-lead for the artwork alongside Olivia? She is patient enough to handle his antics if he decides to have a hissy fit.”

Tobias rose out of his chair with a deep sigh, his shoulders slumped. “He is not one to throw hissy fits. But I’ll accept that, the co-leader, that is.”

He paused at the door, tilted his head and said with a smile, “I’ve never known you to throw the boss card at me in the five years I’ve worked for this company. I don’t like it, but I’ll admit that I might have been too hasty in my excitement to see Axel shine in this campaign.” He raised the folder up as a mock salute and walked out.

\*\*\*\*

Two weeks later, Baron walked into Jacky’s office and handed her a black USB. “I need three copies of the files on here. Send one copy to Tobias, please. Hold my calls for the next half hour. I need to make a few rounds today.”

He walked down the corridor of the fifteenth floor that belonged to Moreton Advertising. He appreciated the buzz of the place. Everyone seemed to be doing something that either had them deep in concentration or in animated discussions, constantly pulling up what looked like colour schemes. Offices were located on the left side of the floor with the rest of the area open plan, and a large double-sided bookshelf with pigeonhole compartments stood in the centre of the studio.

When he reached one of the back offices, he braced himself, knowing that dealing directly with Axel Harris would take all his control not to fly off the handle.

*God, that boy pushed his buttons.* He had never met a sub who could make him lose his temper or get a rise out of him, and many at Apex had tried. This boy simply opened his mouth, and Baron was ready to redden his arse, but not before he gagged him and fucked him until he knew when to shut up. He adjusted his crotch; just thinking of the hellion had him going half-mast.

Baron took a deep breath, knocked on the door, and walked in.

“For the love of everything that is leather, Toby, you’re worse than my ex-Dom, constantly wanting up my arse,” Axel growled. The boy didn’t seem bothered to lift his head from the drawing table in front of him. “I told you I’ll give you a shout when I’m done with the doodles for the first set.”



“Well, I can assure you I do not want up your arse, but I certainly want to see what you’ve done so far.” Baron’s voice was laced with acid.

“Holy shit!” Axel jumped, causing his pencil to slash a line across his paper and knocking over the drawing table.

“Fuck!” He lunged and caught the table before it toppled, righting it to its original position. “Baron. I thought you were Toby... erm, Tobias.”

Baron advanced further into the spacious office, surveying the clutter and mess. “How the hell do you get anything done in this chaos?” He picked up a Styrofoam cup from the floor and placed it on the workbench, adding to numerous others and the empty water bottles also there. Open magazines and newspapers littered every available surface. He looked up and studied the different posters pinned to the wall and notice boards. He turned his back and walked over to a desk nestled in the corner of the office. Picking up a file simply labelled “Baxter,” he glanced over his shoulder. “Your mouth, and the state of this room, would get you not being able to sit for a week. If I were your Dom, that is, which would never happen in this lifetime.” Baron frowned, his lips compressing into a tight line. “Is it customary to leave client files lying around?” He flicked through the file causing newspaper and magazine clippings to slip out.

“Watch what you’re doing!” Axel rushed forward and yanked the file from Baron’s hands. “Those are in sequence. Dammit, they *were*. Now they’re all mixed up.” He went down on all fours, picking up the scattered clippings. The boy sounded like a bratty four-year-old.

“This is my personal file. It has absolutely no information about the client in it.” He placed his hand on the arm of his chair, using it as leverage to stand, and then carefully placed each clipping on the desk. He tried to straighten them out, mumbling under his breath.

Baron took a step away from the desk. “Speak up, boy. You have something to say to me, say it out loud.” His voice carried across the office. This was the voice that normally had subs scurrying to obey.

Axel stilled, hands frozen. His chest rose and fell as his breathing quickened. When he seemed to get some control of himself, he lowered the file, clutching it in front of him. Almost unconsciously, he dropped his chin, but in a clear voice replied, “I am not *your* boy.” Axel’s head slowly lifted, and he turned to face Baron with a sombre glare.

*God, the boy was beautiful.* Baron couldn't take his gaze off Axel as he clutched the file like armour in front of him. His eyes sparked shades of emerald when he was riled up. His cheeks had gone a ruddy red, and he seemed to be having difficulty keeping his breathing under control. His dark hair was in disarray as if he were constantly pulling at it. It only added to the allure this man seemed to have. Baron clenched his fists, his fingers itching to feel those dark locks against his skin. *Oh, yes, this boy was crying out for a Dom.* Baron noticed Axel's erection before it was covered by the file, and this pleased him immensely, before he heard the words: *I am not your boy. I am not your boy.*

Baron felt the words like a punch to his gut as they replayed in his head. A yearning like nothing he had felt before took over. *That luscious mouth speaks the words, but your body tells me differently, my tantalising Axel Harris.* What the fuck! He was not in the market for a sub. *Baron Moreton did not do contracts or long-term anything with subs anymore.* He played the field, choosing a different sub at his whim. Besides, Axel was an employee and a pain in the arse at that! One should not piss where one ate. Golden rule, *numero uno!*

Baron sneered with false bravado, raising his hand in a dismissive gesture. "No argument there. You wouldn't last a week." He turned and walked towards the door. "Make sure the cleaning staff have access to this room tonight."

"No," came the immediate response before Baron could open the door. He swore it sounded more like a growl.

Baron paused with his hand on the door handle to compose himself, before he slowly turned around and faced Axel.

Axel straightened his back and squared his shoulders. "I have the client's incomplete artwork everywhere, and I work erratic hours at night. So having to pack everything away just to have to take it out again, after a few hours, would be inconvenient. I cannot allow any outsiders in here while we're busy doing the initial workups."

"Then you damn well better make an effort to keep this place clean." Baron's voice thundered through the room. "How can you operate in such mess?" Baron let go of the door and swept his arm around the office.

"Tell that to your chief illustrator," Axel shouted back, stomping towards his drawing table and chair. "My work station and desk are kept in order. I am sick of cleaning up after Olivia and it's enough that I have to look at this disorder every day. I don't need you to point a finger at me for what is out of my control," he huffed, and sat down trembling. The boy's face was flushed,

and a lock of hair dangling across his forehead that he tried to flick out of the way only irritated him more when it fell right back in the same spot.

“Right.” Baron ran his fingers through his hair, desperately trying to gain some composure. “How far are you with the mock-ups?” he asked in a more civil tone.

Axel straightened the page he had been sketching on, picked up his pencil, and took a deep breath. “If I’m left to continue *undisturbed*, I will be able to finish them by this evening.” He stared at his half-finished drawing instead of Baron.

Baron chose to ignore the dig. “Finish the prelims and lock up whatever needs locking up so that you can give the cleaning crew access tonight. I will deal with Olivia.”

“Thanks.”

“Oh, don’t thank me. I’m not doing this for you,” Baron responded, opening the door. “I refuse to have any of my offices looking as if they need fumigation.” Without waiting for a response, he walked out and firmly closed the door.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Chapter Two

*Axel Harris*

Axel waited until he heard the click of the door closing before he let out the breath he had been holding. “Fuck, fuck, fuck!” he barked, banging his head against the table a few times.

*How did that man get under his skin so quickly?*

Baron Moreton made him see red, but at the same time he wanted to drop to his knees and beg for the privilege to lick his boots. He tried to shut off any thoughts involving prostrating himself at Baron's feet and stood, stretching his five-foot-nine frame to get rid of the kinks in his spine. He had missed his gym workout for another night, the previous evening opting to stay late at the office to continue working on the Baxter campaign. An extensive exercise regime was one of the stipulations his therapist had insisted on when he concluded his final consultation more than a year ago. The physical workouts not only resulted in a beautifully toned and sculpted body, but also allowed him to switch off mentally, which helped greatly with his OCD. His need to have everything symmetrically placed and ordered had ruled his life for many years.

Axel's ex-Dom, Viktor Petrov, had been a tremendous support in the success of his therapy. When he had reached a stage where he was seeing Viktor more as a loyal friend than a Dom, they both decided to part ways but remained close. Not a week went by that one didn't phone the other.

He walked across his office to his desk, and intentionally averted his eyes from the mess on Olivia's table so that he did not need to acknowledge its existence. It was a great feat and something he could not have accomplished two years ago. This knowledge made him smile for the first time that day. He placed the clippings that had fallen out back into sequence and then put them into the Baxter folder without attempting to straighten out the creases. Another smile crossed his clean-shaven face when he realised that the wrinkled papers weren't a bother at all.

He'd had a moment of panic earlier, when Baron had opened the file and his papers scattered to the floor, but that was quickly replaced when he heard that voice. *God, the things that voice did to me. Instant boner.*

Axel struggled to get his breathing under control and attempted the calming techniques the therapist had taught him. It helped regulate his breathing but did

absolutely nothing to his pulsing dick, which had filled out and was pressed against the zipper of his jeans. To hide his predicament, he had lashed out on the defensive. *I am not your boy*. But fuck, he so badly wanted to be!

After he and Viktor had parted ways, Axel joined another fetish club a little way out of town. Viktor owned Apex, and Axel, feeling a clean break would be more beneficial for him, had applied for membership at Club Nightshade. With a recommendation from Viktor, he had no problems being accepted.

Axel realised that his time in the gym had more benefits than just a mental release for him. The Doms at Nightshade were eager to play. He knew he used his looks to his advantage and would pick and choose whom he played with. Apparently, not all Doms went for slender twinks with baby faces. Some wanted what he offered—broad shoulders and powerful biceps. Not a single hair was found on his smooth chest, which rippled with hard muscle, except for the fine curls around his brown nipples. He had sensitive nipples others loved to clamp, and Axel thoroughly enjoyed that. It was one of his favourite sensations to have his nips squeezed to within an inch of their lives, making them pop out like ripe cherries. Even though he was made aware that he had a good body, the one thing he was most proud of was his tight, round arse. He felt it was his best asset—a bubble butt that sat atop powerful muscled thighs with a splattering of black hair midway down his legs to equally muscled calves. This was one of the reasons why his favourite choice of clothing was his jeans, not only because they were the most comfortable item ever created, but because they showcased his backside to perfection.

In the year that he had been attending Nightshade, he'd subbed for a few Doms on and off but had no desire to enter into a contract with anyone he had played with. No one had piqued his interest, until Baron Moreton.

Axel had felt an immediate attraction to the man when he joined Moreton Advertising just over a year ago, and along with the attraction came the realisation that the man was a self-opinionated arsehole. They had clashed on numerous occasions, and Axel struggled to control his mouth to the point that he feared he was going to get the boot.

It didn't stop him from fantasising about the son of a bitch walking around the studio as if he owned it. *Well fuck, the man did own it*. But hell, he didn't have to rub it in. The odd thing was, no one else in the office saw him that way. He apparently got along with everyone and knew all his employees by first name.

His fantasies had taken on a new meaning, and he knew he was in trouble when, during one of his regular visits to Nightshade, he had been tied to a spanking bench after taking a good workout with the paddle from a Dom. His arse had been on fire, and the pain was intensified by the Dom pounding into his arsehole with such force it was jerking him forward despite his restraints. He had been denied permission to come and was struggling, because all he could think of was Baron ramming his cock into him instead of whoever was behind him at the time.

*Goddammit*, he needed to get his mind out of Baron's pants and into the Baxter account.

Axel reached for his phone, but jumped when the office door was thrown open so violently, it rebounded against the doorstopper behind it.

"What the—" Axel exclaimed.

"Ace! You son of a whoring bitch!" Olivia bellowed. "I've just come from being summoned to the big boss's office." Olivia had a propensity to give everyone she met a nickname, and Axel had become Ace. She shut the door and stood glaring at him with her hands on her hips.

"Now wait just a min—" Axel tried to intervene, rising from his chair with his hand in the air as if to ward her off.

"No, you wait. You..." With that, Olivia doubled over and roared out laughing. "Oh my God, babes! You should see your face," she struggled to get out in between bouts of laughter.

"Well, fuck! What did you expect? You came in here shouting, looking ready to neuter me and feed my balls to me via a straw. What the hell, Liv!" Axel sagged back onto his chair, dramatically clutching his chest.

"Oh, Ace, you know I'll never harm those little girlfriends, let alone feed them to you."

"Little! I'll have you know I have huge balls. They hang like—"

"Shut up!" Olivia raced across the office slapping her hand over his mouth. "Man, I really don't need a visual of your smelly balls." She spun him around on the rotating office chair and looked him in the eye. "Sorry, babes, I couldn't resist. You can be such a drama queen sometimes that I wanted to see your reaction." She placed her hand on his shoulder. "But in all seriousness, I owe you an apology."

“No, no”—she stopped him from responding when he tried to speak—“I know what went down. The big boss explained his visit to our office and, look, there’s no excuse. I got used to Rachel’s team coming in every night and cleaning up after me. With this campaign we’re working on, I just let it get away from me, which I know is no excuse. You should not have put up with my messiness. Hell, I know I wouldn’t have, if roles were reversed. Please just accept my apology. I won’t let it happen again. I should’ve taken note of how it affected you. Sorry, honey. You still love me, right?” She grabbed his neck and made smooching sounds into his hair.

“Hey! Watch the hair, bitch!” Axel leaned away from her.

“Oh, God, Ace.” She stood back with a mock expression on her face. “This hair has never been styled in forever. What are you complaining about?”

“I don’t have time to style my hair, and it never stays in style for long in any case. So what’s the use?”

“Yeah. Well, with the way you keep pulling on it, I’m not surprised.”

“I like that split second of pain,” he said, swatting her hand away from his head.

“You’re the biggest pain slut I’ve ever met. No, let me rephrase that, you’re the only pain slut I know. Speaking of, have you been someone’s whipping boy again? Now, *that* I just don’t get. How on God’s green earth would anyone enjoy being whacked with a whip? I mean, that must be painful as shit! What the hell do you get out of it?” She cringed as if visualising being on the receiving end of said whipping. “Whip meeting flesh, that must hurt like a motherfucker!”

“It does. But, how can I explain this. The pain is only fleeting, then it changes into—it sorta morphs into a different sensation. It feels like little drops of joy dancing around on your skin.” He smiled when he saw the incredulous look on her face.

Olivia turned and started gathering empty Styrofoam cups, stacking them into each other. “The whipping, the pain, does it help with your OCD, you know, your anal obsession with order?” Cracking up all over again, she sputtered, “Excuse the pun.”

“My OCD has very little to do with my enjoyment of pain, and even less with my love of anything kinky. I simply enjoy being whipped before being fucked thoroughly.” Axel grinned at a smiling Olivia.

"I can safely say that I would never even attempt anything like that," she continued, as she tossed cups and bottles into the bin.

"It certainly isn't everyone's scene, but there are many people who enjoy pain. If done properly, it can be an all-encompassing experience." He got up and started handing her the empty water bottles.

"No, let me." She took the bottles from his grasp. "You finish up the last sketch so, tomorrow, all we simply need to do are the last touches before we hand the prelims over to Manning."

Later that evening, Axel sat across the lounge from Viktor Petrov. They had finished a late dinner and were enjoying a drink together. Viktor's penthouse apartment was situated in the affluent area of Surfers Paradise, a few blocks from his club, Apex. It was a modest three-bedroom unit including a gourmet kitchen, which Viktor took full advantage of, and a spacious lounge-dining room combination. It had floor-to-ceiling windows, which gave way to a picturesque view of the Pacific Ocean and sparkling white beaches reaching all the way to Coolangatta, which was the southernmost suburb of Gold Coast City. Viktor hardly ever closed the blinds, and they had a perfect view of an inky-black night sky with sparsely scattered stars. The soft sounds of Charles Aznavour played in the background. Viktor's father was Russian and had married his French mother, hence his love for Aznavour, his mother's favourite singer.

"Your work is going well?" Viktor enquired, as he placed his wine glass on the coffee table in front of him.

"Yes, Sir. I've finished the hand-drawn sketches. Everything, now, will be done using the new software we installed. My manager is happy with what I've prepared." Axel smiled at the man who had become his closest friend and confidant. The first and only Dom he had signed a contract with. They had never been in love, but they loved each other fiercely, nonetheless.

Axel relaxed further into the brown leather couch and stretched his legs in front of him. He had always felt at peace in this room with its mixtures of browns and creams. The dark mahogany bookshelves lined an entire wall to his right, and he knew from experience it contained numerous first editions that Viktor treasured. Axel's graduation picture still took pride of place on the grand piano next to the window. The piano had belonged to Viktor's mother, and although he knew how to play, Axel had never seen Viktor do so. More photographs were scattered around the room, mostly older photographs of Viktor and his parents, with a few of the two of them standing outside Apex.



“Your parents would have been proud, my boy. I think, more so, your mother.”

“Yes, you’re right. Especially my mother. She was always so excited about my drawings, even the stick figure ones.” Axel grinned as he thought of his parents with fondness. His mother and father had had him when they were both in their mid-forties, their one and only child. They had given up on ever having kids until he came along.

His dad had been a top-notch mechanic working six days a week to provide for his family. Mum, a laid-back, throwback-of-the-seventies kinda woman, added to the family income by doing part-time clerical work for the local lawyer. Axel discovered her fondness for weed when he was fifteen years old after finding one of her half-smoked joints in the laundry room. His parents came home from shopping that Saturday afternoon to their son in fits of giggles, sitting in front of a shrub in the back garden. High as a kite. They delayed the parental talk when they realised that everything they said resulted in more bouts of giggles. His parents told him they weren’t going to be hypocritical and forbid him to smoke weed, however, they did prefer if he waited until he was at least of the legal age to drink alcohol. That was the last time he ever indulged, hating “the drop” after the effects of the drug wore off. He came out to them at eighteen. His mother’s only concern was that he choose someone who could cook because, as she had put it, “he was a disaster waiting to happen in the kitchen”. All his dad could say, before he went back to watching the game, was that it did not give him a free pass on condoms. He was still to use them religiously.

They sat in companionable silence, each in his own thoughts, until Axel broke the quiet.

“I want him, Sir,” Axel said quietly, reaching for his beer glass and holding it, fixedly examining the golden bubbles popping on the surface.

He could feel Viktor’s gaze on him but didn’t elaborate. Viktor eventually asked, before taking another sip of his wine, “Is this the same man you’ve been mooning over? Your boss, Baron Moreton?”

Axel snapped at Viktor, “I have not mooned over him, Sir!” He felt his face heat up, and he narrowed his eyes until he remembered whom he was glaring at. He lowered his head again and gave a hint of a smile when he realised he had overreacted a bit.

Viktor chuckled and raised his hand. “Relax, boy. I’m teasing you. You do know Baron Moreton is a Dom at Apex?”

“Yes, Sir. He has said on more than one occasion that I would never make it as his sub, but I don’t think he means it.”

“You look at him as a challenge, then? It would seem that the man is attracted to you but is not acting on it for whatever reason, not to mention stating that he was not interested in you as a sub.” Viktor’s face showed concern, all teasing aside.

Axel shrugged. “I might have seen him that way in the beginning, especially when I realised that the attraction was mutual. Even though he tries very hard to hide it, I see it in his eyes.”

Axel’s stomach tightened, and his chest constricted. He pushed off the couch, moved to the open windows, and stared unseeingly down below. He turned and faced Viktor. “It’s more than that, Sir.” He moved to sit down again but changed his mind and walked to the bookshelves, randomly taking out a book and placing it back.

“Stop manhandling my books, boy,” Viktor chided. “Sit, and calm yourself.” He pointed towards the couch. “What has got you so flustered? Is it the thought that the man is fighting his attraction to you, or the thought that he doesn’t think you would make a suitable sub for him?”

Axel sighed, and sat down as instructed. “Both, I guess. None of the above. I don’t know. Just the thought of him makes me feel...” Axel fell back against the couch, staring at the ceiling. “He gets under my skin so quickly, and I want to punch him in the face. But at the same time, I want to lay myself down at his feet and beg him to use me.” Axel’s eyebrows were drawn so tightly together they formed a knot between his green eyes. “I know him to be the kind of man who takes what he wants. He doesn’t often allow anything to stand in his way. The fact that I’m not with him, tells me everything I need to know.”

“Does it, now.” Viktor placed his empty wine glass down and moved forward to the edge of his seat. “Have you let Moreton know that you are interested? Have you approached him and verbalised your interest in any way, shape, or form other than what sounds like volatile encounters between the two of you? Sensing and feeling a physical attraction is one thing, but how would he know that you are interested?”

Axel stared at Viktor as if he had somehow solved one of life’s mysteries for him. “No, Sir. I haven’t told him what I want or how I feel.”

“Do you realise that Baron, being your boss, has to consider you as an employee first before anything else? It could be the reason he isn’t showing his interest in you.”

*Of course. Dammit! Obviously Baron couldn't let on that he was interested. It would be highly unprofessional of him. Can you get any denser, Axel?*

“Sorry, Sir, I didn't hear that,” Axel said, when he realised Viktor had still been talking to him.

“I asked what you planned to do now.” Viktor chuckled. “I can already see the wheels turning in that beautiful head of yours.”

“I plan on letting Baron Moreton know exactly what I want, Sir!”

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## Chapter Three

A month had gone by and Axel wasn't any closer to gaining Baron's interest. He had been the perfect employee, punctual to a fault, volunteering for any new projects above and beyond his normal workload. And nothing seemed to penetrate the guarded look he received from Baron, regularly accompanied by raised eyebrows. Things were coming to a head, along with Axel's level of patience, and it was taking its toll on him, both physically and mentally.

*I need to do something. Something that will make that man sit up and take notice.*

He had done some digging at Apex, and quite a few subs had informed him that Baron was one of *the* most sought after Dominants. One of the main reasons given was that the man knew what he was doing and was as sexy as sin, but also because he was one of the most controlled Doms at Apex, rarely showing emotion. Subs were now vying for the opportunity to be *the one* to get "Ironman", as he was nicknamed, to react. Axel couldn't get over the fact that Baron was seen as so aloof, even cold, as one sub had described him. The man he had come to know at Moreton Advertising was anything but cold. *He loses his cool with me on a weekly basis. Blowing his gasket at a drop of a hat. Ironman, my fucking arse. Well, fine, yes. I should not have argued with him about which sketches were to be used, but bloody hell, I—*

"Oomph!" Axel collided with a solid wall of muscle as he came out of the men's stall into the washroom.

"Fuck! Hey, sorry, I didn't see you there," he exclaimed, looking up into dark-brown eyes.

Baron's arms came out to steady him and prevent him from falling back. His large hands were now locked on Axel's biceps, holding him at arm's length. Axel's mouth snapped closed when he realised who was holding him in such a vice grip. They stood frozen, staring into each other's eyes. It was then that Axel realised what people meant when they said *time stopped*. Axel's breathing elevated to almost panting levels, but he was helpless to control it. A deep yearning that overwhelmed any logical thought rose up in him. It made him want to throw caution to the wind when all he could think of was being owned and used by this man. He wanted Baron inside him, on top of him; he wanted to ingest the man's smell, his taste. It seemed as if every nerve ending in his body was screaming for this man's touch.

He dropped his gaze to Baron's mouth. A sharp intake of breath resonated before those lips descended, and he was taken to Shangri-La. Axel opened his mouth and Baron plundered in, Baron's tongue seemingly trying to reach every corner and crevice of his mouth. Teeth smashing as Baron ate at him. Axel felt the man's groan vibrate from within his chest. He wrapped his arms around Baron's neck and raised himself on tiptoes, lifting his right leg, trying to climb the man, while not letting go of the mouth on his. He felt Baron push him backwards until he was slammed up against the wall of the men's room.

He was bodily lifted, and instinctively wrapped his legs around the man, rutting his engorged cock against Baron's equally hard erection, swollen against his suit pants. The layers of material separating them added to the friction against his pulsing shaft, igniting embers in his blood. The man was bucking against him, and Axel felt a sense of ownership, a level of possessiveness he had never felt with Viktor.

*He* made this *man*—Baron, the CEO, the Dom—lose control.

When the need for air become a necessity, Axel nestled his face in Baron's neck and whimpered brokenly, not caring that it didn't sound very manly. He increased his tempo, rubbing against Baron's cock, feeling that it didn't matter what he did, he would never get enough of this man.

"That's it, baby. Ride my cock. Take what you need." Baron growled in his ear, biting down hard on his earlobe.

"Sir!" Axel cried out, grabbing handfuls of hair and holding on for dear life. He realised his mistake when Baron stiffened before setting him down and pushing him away. Axel saw the emotions running rampant on Baron's face, as he seemed to fight a battle with himself, turning his back on Axel, inhaling deeply.

Axel wrapped himself around Baron from behind. "Please," he beseeched, pushing his face into the stiff back.

Baron shook himself free and swung around. "Please, what? Please, fuck me? Do you think I don't want that? How easy would it be to lay you over that basin, strip the pants off you and rip your arsehole apart with my cock? To fuck you until you didn't know your name? Then what?" he demanded.

His chin was brutally gripped in Baron's hand, lifting his face up so that he had no choice but to look into the other man's eyes.

"You are my employee, do you understand that?" was savagely spat into his face.

“That does not matter,” Axel implored, holding onto the hand gripping his face. “I could resign and work for someone else.”

“No. This”—Baron gestured wildly between Axel and himself—“is never going to happen.”

“What more do you want? I’ve done everything I possibly could this past month to prove to you that I’m worthy.” Beads of perspiration were running down the side of Axel’s face and neck. Overwrought and beside himself, he felt the frustration getting the better of him.

“You do not have to prove to anyone that you are worthy. That has never been in question. Your level of commitment these past few weeks, while being admirable, has only proven to me that you are a valuable *employee*. A man of integrity who would not hesitate to help others.” Baron caressed his thumb over a trembling bottom lip. “If you ever have a need, in the future, to impress a Dom, make sure you show him what a valuable *sub* you are. But, that Dom will never be me. Do you understand me, Axel?” Axel tried to look away but the grip on his face tightened.

“I need to hear you say that you understand me.”

Axel raised his gaze to see a storm brewing in those brown eyes glowering down at him. Yet, there was a light, a flash of fear hiding in that storm. He didn’t quite understand why. What the hell could scare Baron?

“No, I do not understand.” Axel emphasised each word slowly. “Your argument does not hold any value, especially if it can be as easily resolved as me seeking employment someplace else.”

“It does matter. I don’t want a sub. I don’t want a relationship. Period.” Baron jerked his hand away and turned to leave.

“Baron!” Axel tried to grab his arm to prevent him from leaving.

“Enough!” Baron shouted, his voice as harsh as the look on his face. That stormy brown gaze swept over Axel, and then... Baron was already walking away from him.

Axel drew in a shaky breath and leaned back against the wall. He slowly sank down to his haunches and ran his hands through his hair, trying unsuccessfully to compose himself. A grunt of pure frustration echoed in the empty room as he pushed himself away from the wall and walked to the basin. The image in the mirror above the counter stared back at him—a pale-faced

man with eyes that were hollow and haunted. *It's obvious the man wants me. If he is such a controlled Dom, why is he always losing control around me? I know I saw fear in his eyes. What is he afraid of?* Viktor had taught him that a Dom was a man first before he became a Dominant. That brought along with it fears and needs, as with any other human being. *He is running. You can run, Baron, but I won't let you get far.*

With his mind made up, Axel washed his face, squared his shoulders, and walked out. He was a sub on a mission—a mission that would entail him stepping out of his comfort zone to convince a Dom that whoever or whatever had put that fear in his eyes could only be relegated to the past if he dealt with it. It didn't make sense to him that someone as strong and confident as Baron could be controlled by fear.

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Two weeks later, Axel nervously paced the office he shared with Olivia. He had enlisted her help in setting up the events of that night and was now waiting anxiously for her go-ahead. He raised his arms and sniffed his armpits to make sure he still smelt fresh. He resisted the urge to drag his fingers through his hair because he had actually managed to gel it into a style that was holding. *Where is she? For God's sake! I'm going to pee my pants if she doesn't get here in the next few minutes.* Wringing his hands because he was losing the battle to tug at his hair, he swung around when he heard the office door open.

"Fuck, where have you been?" he hissed at Olivia as she walked in. "I've been close to climbing these walls, and I can tell you, in these trousers it would have been impossible."

"Relax, Jacky has just left with Michael, and the rest are already at the pub." She squeezed his shoulders in order to calm him down.

"Michael?"

"Dreadlocks, downstairs in the canteen. You know, the new guy who started a few months ago."

"Hmm, yes, I recall seeing a dreamboat full of dark chocolate coming out of the kitchen during lunch last week. Anyway, forget chocolates, is he in his office?" Axel grasped the back of the chair, his knuckles going white in anticipation for Olivia to just bloody answer him.

"Yes, Jacky has arranged for him to get a call from the States at exactly quarter to six. He needs to be in his office to take it. She knows that

something's going on but hasn't asked any questions, and knowing her, she won't. She won't know anything unless I tell her."

Axel handed Olivia her handbag and hugged her. "Thank you," he whispered in her ear before watching her leave.

After he double-checked that everyone had left, Axel found himself in front of Baron's office. He took a deep, fortifying breath, knocked, and walked in. He avoided making eye contact and turned quickly to close and lock the office door. He slowly turned and saw a surprised Baron sitting at his desk with the phone to his ear. He slowly walked towards him, maintaining eye contact, and stopped diagonally across from Baron to give the man an unobstructed view of what he was about to do.

Axel closed his eyes and took a deep breath, trying to calm his tense muscles. He slowly opened them, hands reaching for the top buttons of his dress shirt. Baron's gaze followed the path of Axel's progress down his chest. This was his most daring performance as a sub ever; he was jumping without even a hint of a safety net. Despite his anxiety, he knew he wanted this man more than he feared rejection. Axel moistened his lips with his tongue and played with the bottom one between his teeth. God, his heart was going to kill him beating this fast, but he forced his hands slowly down, popping each button on his shirt, exposing small glimpses of skin for Baron's gaze to feast upon. Releasing the last button, he shrugged the shirt off his shoulders but trapped it halfway down, placing his thick biceps and chest on display. The only sound in the office was Baron's sharp intake of breath, and then nothing, as if the man were holding it. Axel unhurriedly released the buttons on each of his cuffs before he lowered his arms and allowed the silk shirt to drop and catch in the waist of his pants. There was no turning back now. He couldn't even if he wanted to; he was mesmerised by the look of desperate need on Baron's face. Axel's heart felt like it would explode in his chest. He was right. This man wanted him, and the fact that he hadn't just taken what was on offer was testament to his caring for Axel, as well as lusting after him.

Baron still had the handset glued to his ear, but the man's mouth had stopped moving. Axel could clearly hear the other person's agitated voice through the phone's speaker.

He heard Baron swear under his breath and cut the caller off by placing them on hold. "What the fuck are you doing, Axel?" Baron hissed between clenched teeth.



"I'm formally presenting myself to a Dom, Sir," Axel replied, toeing off his shoes and moving them aside with his foot. He ran a finger along his belt, stopping at the buckle, and tapped the leather once. Slowly, while letting out a little groan, he unbuckled the belt, slipped it from his trouser loops, and hung it around his neck. His left nipple instantly pebbled as the cold metal of the buckle came to rest on it. It didn't need much: his nipples were still tender and sensitive from last night's wanking session, done while fantasizing about *this* moment in his mind. Well, the conclusion of it—reality was a totally different matter.

Axel was sure his nervousness could be seen. The perspiration on his palms wasn't very pleasant, but he knew the sheen to his body would expose each curve and fold his muscles made.

The continued silence in the office had to be proof of the effect it was having on Baron. Axel looked up and... *Definitely got the Dom right where I want him.* There was no denying it by the way Baron was openly devouring Axel's chest with his heated, hungry stare. Axel reached for his tenting slacks, running a clammy palm over his erection, and popped the button of his trousers.

"Stop right there," Baron said, gripping the phone in his hand while the other shot forward, slapping Axel's hands away from his fly.

"Do not remove those trousers," he growled, red-faced, brown eyes dark as the very night. "You will be in so much trouble if you proceed to take them off. I need to finish this call, but I'm warning you for the final time, Axel, stop what you are doing." Baron practically shouted his command.

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Baron punched a button on his phone and opened the line to David, a potential customer in the States who was expanding his business, and looking at Moreton Advertising to do their media announcement.

His body shook with the effort to control himself. Anger, frustration, and lust battled inside his chest right that fucking moment and he needed to rein it in. If ever he needed to be a Dom, then it was now.

"I'm sorry, David, I seem to have an unavoidable situation here at the office." Baron flashed his gaze at the beautiful shit standing before him. His nostrils flared when he got a whiff of Axel's body odour—a mixture of something citrusy, sandalwood and very male. With the potential client still talking to him, Baron watched helplessly as Axel disregarded his instruction not to remove his trousers.

"I will need to reschedule this call," he said abruptly, and didn't give the caller a chance to respond before he hung up, making a mental note to call the following day to apologise profusely for his lack of manners. Baron sat back in his chair and closed his eyes trying to give himself a few moments. Axel stood with his arms locked behind his back, head bowed, and eyes downcast. His splayed thighs were thick and corded with muscle, and a tiny red jockstrap that could hardly be called decent covered a very hard, very protruding, very impressive erection.

A tan line was visible mid-thigh indicating the man liked being outdoors in shorts. Arms held behind his back pushed the most delectable, smooth chest Baron's eyes had ever feasted on, outward. His scrutiny zeroed back in on the jockstrap. He followed a smattering of dark hairs up towards a navel on well-defined abdominal muscles. A twitch of pectoral muscles drew his attention to brown nipples that were standing out as if asking him to pinch them and suck them into his mouth. He rose from his chair and made no secret of adjusting his crotch. Fuck. Fine, he wanted this boy, but... *No... just no.*

Baron slowly circled Axel and resisted the urge to run his hand over the tight globes that were presented to him by the back of the jockstrap. Round olive-toned cheeks that made him want to spread them apart and lick at their essence.

Baron ran his fingertips lightly over the man's shoulder, eliciting a tremor from the sub. That skin felt... *yeah.*

"You are by far the most beautiful man I have ever seen," Baron whispered softly near Axel's ear. He stood in front of his desk facing Axel's back without touching him at all.

"Thank you, Sir," was the breathy response.

Baron walked around to stand in front of Axel. "Look at me, Axel," he said softly.

When the green gaze met his, he replied gently, "Do not call me *Sir*, Axel. I am honoured that you have offered yourself to me in this magnificent way, but I've been clear from the start, I am not your Dom and never will be. I'm not interested in a contract or a relationship of any sort. I am not willing to go down that road again. The casual scene at Apex fulfils my needs, and I don't have room in my life for anything or anyone else."

Baron was not prepared for the impact his words would have on Axel or himself. The man visibly shrank in front of him. Pain gripped Baron knowing

he was the cause. Disappointment and self-loathing fought a battle for supremacy. The strength and courage it must have taken for this young man, this sub, to take such a huge risk, offering his submission in the most vulnerable way a sub could. It was the equivalent of exposing his jugular. And how did he reward such tenacity? He rejected it. Baron was torn. He wanted to give in to his need for this man; the need to possess him, to honour his submission knowing it would be a mistake. Another mistake he didn't think he could live through a second time. He chose not to live through that level of betrayal and heartache again.

Baron watched as Axel seemed to take a shuddering breath. The next words spoken hit him like a sucker punch to his solar plexus.

"As you wish, Mr Moreton. If you don't mind, I know it's your office, but I'd like to get dressed, and I'd prefer to do that without an audience." The voice was soft and completely monotone as if its owner was speaking on autopilot. It was as if Axel had retreated and only a shell remained.

"I—" Baron tried to explain further, but was cut off.

"No, really, I'm a big boy. I turn thirty tomorrow as a matter of fact, so please don't concern yourself any further." Axel looked him in the eye with a blank, unreadable expression.

"Axel." Baron reached out and was immediately stopped when Axel jerked away.

"Please, don't touch me," he said in a panicked voice.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry for everything." Baron withdrew his hand, turned, and walked out of the office. He walked towards the staff lounge area across the studio, wanting to give Axel some privacy.

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Baron could not stop the feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. The feeling that he had just made the biggest mistake of his life. He wanted Axel. There was no question. He admired him not only for his artistic talent, but also for the level of integrity he showed on a daily basis in his interaction with clients and staff alike. It didn't matter who you were, Axel treated everyone with the same level of respect. His wacky sense of humour had the staff constantly retelling "Axel jokes". He had been honest when he told Axel that he was only interested in the casual scenes the subs at Apex offered him. Those scenes were done clinically and served to satisfy his needs as a Dom.

Contemplating anything, even casual, with Axel would be asking him to risk more than he was willing to. There was nothing clinical about his feelings for the man. He was in danger of losing his heart, and he couldn't take that chance again. He had no intention of ever being in the position Anthony had put him in. Nobody, not even Anthony, knew how deeply he had been invested in their relationship. He had planned on collaring Anthony the same week the man had decided to elope with their client. Five years later, he was finally in a place where the thought of his ex-lover brought only a twinge of regret.

But as honest as he was with Axel, Baron was lying to himself.

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Viktor opened the door to his apartment and let in a very ashen-looking Axel. An unexpected call had him leaving the club to find the man waiting outside his apartment.

"Scotch or Bacardi? You seem to be needing something stronger." Viktor tossed his keys on the sideboard and headed to the bar.

"Scotch." The answer came from across the room where Axel had gone to stand in front of the bank of windows, hands shoved into his pockets. There was a worrying slump to the man's shoulders, screaming defeat.

Viktor joined him at the windows, handing over the scotch over ice, and watched as Axel downed the whisky in one gulp, choking as the strong liquor went down. Viktor patted the boy's back, and took the glass from Axel's grasp before turning to place it on the coffee table.

"No, another please," came the scratchy request.

"That would be no." Viktor's face showed the concern he was feeling. "You were never one to handle strong liquor, and I think you need to talk more than you need to drink."

"Don't want to talk." Axel raised his voice a notch.

"Don't argue with me, boy," Viktor replied in a stern voice, as he stood in front of Axel. Then, more gently as he opened his arms, he said, "Come here."

Something seemed to snap within Axel, and he flew into Viktor's arms. Gut-wrenching sobs wracked his body as Viktor held him in a fierce grip.

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## Chapter Four

Axel inhaled deeply and held his breath before releasing it slowly. He felt his muscles respond and relax. Viktor's warm, protective arms were like a cocoon in a bed big enough to comfortably sleep three grown men.

"That's it, boy, let it go, and sleep." The words were spoken softly near his ear.

Viktor had insisted on a hot bath after his crying jag. He should have known it was Viktor's way to get him to talk. With every swipe of the large sponge filled with hot, soapy water over his tight muscles, the words spilled out. Like a dam that had burst its constrictive walls, Axel recounted his humiliation. It didn't stop there. Viktor's gentle ministrations and coaxing seemed to unleash a geyser that intermittently spewed out little bits of memory of his time with Baron.

Axel recalled being swamped with getting the sketches for the new campaign completed before the deadline, when he had been surprised by a waiter from the café they used downstairs. Olivia had let it slip that Axel often forgot to eat when he got busy. So Baron requested a favour and had the daily special delivered. Axel wished he could feel anger towards Baron, but he had warned him on more than one occasion that he was not interested in any relationship, casual or otherwise.

Viktor's words reverberated in his head—*Sometimes a sub has to know when to let go and walk away without shame, but, sometimes a Dom needs to man up and take what he knows to be his for the taking.* As if he weren't already so confused about his next course of action.

A big part of him, despite Baron's rejection, believed that Baron wanted him as much as he wanted the man. For whatever reason, Baron was hiding. A feeling of utter despair sank into the pit of his stomach. It was one thing to fight for a man; it was another thing altogether when said man was fighting himself.

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The following morning, Axel called Tobias Manning to inform him that he was taking a personal day, something he had not done in the year he had been at Moreton Advertising. He expected a roasting for his unscheduled request and silently took the tongue-lashing Toby dished out about future planning and adequate notice. He smiled when Toby ended his tirade by wishing him well for

his birthday. The man was notorious for his swift mood changes, one minute, taking your head for a mistake, the next, complimenting you on a job well done.

Axel spent a leisurely birthday breakfast with Viktor, who gave him a signed copy of *Hades*, a book by his favourite author Wulf F. Godgluck, as a birthday present. He was not only ecstatic at the gift, but shocked too, because he knew the book had not been released yet. After convincing the protective Dom that he was over his emotional meltdown of the previous evening, Axel took a cab home to his one-bedroom loft. He lived in a less affluent part of town but the area was still safe enough without the high price tag.

His loft was situated in one of the smaller buildings boasting only four floors. He loved that even though the loft was spacious, they had subdivided the area into only one bedroom and en suite and had left an abundance of open floor space. The kitchen was situated to the left of the entryway and was separated by granite bench tops. On the right of the kitchen was a little laundry room, just big enough to take a washer and dryer. Further along was a guest bathroom leading to the back master bedroom. The informal dining area was adjacent to the kitchen and the only indication that it was an actual eating area was the sad-looking table and two chairs situated in no man's land. Axel could not be bothered to get a decent table as he hardly made use of that area, preferring to take his meals on the balcony, which was on the opposite side of the room. The lounge area contained his couch, two recliners and a coffee table. A bookshelf held quite a few first editions courtesy of Viktor, and his goldfish, Maya. A stereo system lined one wall with a huge television mounted next to it. Glass panelled French doors led to the balcony area where a black wrought-iron table and chairs lived. Multi-coloured scatter cushions dotted the chairs.

Axel could not believe his luck in gaining such a great place without it costing him a testicle. He suspected Viktor might have had something to do with it, but had never asked.

He was comfortably seated on his couch, one leg tucked under him, with his sketchpad and pencil. The sounds of the city drifting up through the open French doors became background noise as he sat deep in thought as he drew. His concentration was so complete that when the loud knocking came, it startled him.

Axel placed his sketchpad on the floor beside the couch and shouted, "Keep your pants on, I'm coming. What's with th—" He lost his ability to speak when opening the door revealed the man who had occupied his thoughts nonstop.

"I've been knocking for the past five minutes," Baron growled, standing on the threshold clutching a bouquet of deep-red roses.

Axel realised that he was still standing there staring with his mouth hanging open. He snapped it closed and moved aside, wordlessly inviting Baron in.

"I know I'm the last person you want to see right now, but I couldn't let your birthday go by without at least wishing you well." Baron walked in but turned to look at him.

"You could have called," Axel responded coldly, once he regained his ability to speak.

"I didn't think you'd take my calls." Baron glanced around the room taking in the sparse furniture scattered around the large area.

"What's that for?" Axel pointed towards the flowers Baron was still holding.

"Oh, these are for you. Happy Birthday."

Turning thirty was just another birthday for Axel, and he had not made any plans to celebrate. Viktor's gift didn't come as a surprise though; the man always looked for an excuse to spoil him. Nothing extravagant, but always with a lot of thought involved. But red roses from Baron. He didn't know what to make of it.

"Red roses?"

"What's wrong with roses? You're not allergic to flowers, are you?" Baron glanced at Axel with a worried expression.

Why did the man have to be so delectable? He was wearing a grey pinstriped suit with a stark-white shirt—the grey of his suit matching the grey stripe in his green tie. The top button of his shirt was open, and the tie was a little loose around the collar, exposing a thick neck. Axel's mouth wasn't the only thing watering, as he thought of licking that neck and rubbing his nose along the vein running down into areas unknown. He had never seen Baron shirtless, but imagined a chest covered in black hair if Baron's constant five o'clock shadow was any indication of how hairy the man was. Hardly having any body hair himself, except for halfway down his legs, Axel drooled over hairy men. They were the ultimate examples of masculinity for him and definitely spank bank material.

"No, I'm not allergic to flowers, but red roses are what you would get for a lover, yellow would be for a friend."

Baron had a perplexed look on his face as he looked at the roses and then at Axel, until understanding dawned, and he seemed both embarrassed and uncomfortable.

"I didn't know there was any significance in the colour. I simply preferred the red ones." Baron held the flowers out to Axel.

"No dramas, I promise not to read anything into the gesture other than what was intended." Axel took the flowers and walked in the direction of the kitchen.

"I didn't mean to infer that to you."

"Relax, Baron," Axel cut him off, "they're beautiful. Thank you." Axel tried to calm his rioting nerves, taking his time looking for a suitable vase for the flowers.

*Don't know if I can be this close to the man without falling to my knees and begging him to reconsider. Red roses! If only it meant... God, Axel, stop being pathetic, and grow a pair why don't you?*

After arranging the flowers in enough water, Axel stood transfixed as he softly caressed the silky red petals. The pep talk only a few seconds ago didn't help as he was enveloped in sadness, imagining what the red roses could have meant under different circumstances.

"I have to go. I need to place a call to the States shortly, and I cannot afford to miss this one again. Axel," Baron called out when he got no response, "Axel, please look at me." Walking to the kitchen, he gently coaxed Axel to turn around and face him. "God, baby, don't look at me like that." Baron felt agonised when he saw the downcast look on Axel's face.

"Please, don't call me that," Axel murmured. He cleared his throat and squared his shoulders before looking Baron in the face. "I am as much your baby as you are my Dom."

"You're right, sorry." Baron took a step back and put his hands in his pockets.

"And for God's sake stop apologising!" Axel's control snapped. "There is only one thing you should be apologising for—your inability to face whatever you're running from. Until that day comes, you're not living, you're surviving. But not just surviving, surviving in a gutless way. Do you know they call you 'Ironman'?" Axel didn't wait for a response, and he was too agitated to notice the effect his words were having on Baron. "Yeah, I bet you didn't, but I can



see why they do. You won't allow anyone in because heaven forbid anyone evoke a genuine emotion from you. Sorry, but that is not the Dom I want to submit to. My submission deserves more than a coward's Dominance."

With his fists clenched tightly and his chest heaving, Axel watched the colour drain from Baron's face. Could he have gone too far? No, the man obviously didn't hear the truth often enough.

Axel followed Baron with a stubborn gaze as the man abruptly turned and walked towards the door. He stopped and remained motionless near the couch. He seemed about to say something, but raked his fingers through his hair, instead, and walked out in silence.

The stillness Baron left behind was suffocating. It seemed to hover above Axel until slowly its tendrils extended and invaded his being, creeping into every little crevice, leaving him desolate. His eyes stung and his throat ached, but he refused to give into the emotion. It was obvious the truth had been devastating for Baron to hear, but it was as painful for Axel to admit. It was hard to accept that the man he wanted so badly, the Dom he craved giving his submission to, did not deserve it. If the Dom was not man enough to face his own fears, to look at his demons head-on instead of running, how could he be trusted to be in control of the well-being of his submissive?

Axel closed his door with a resounding thud that broke the silence in the apartment. The outside noises of the neighbourhood filtered through the French doors. Kids laughing as they passed by, shouting at one another, car doors slamming. Life continued along like it always did, not stopping for anyone who fell along the way.

Axel picked up the sketch he had been working on and examined it with a critical eye. He had *the one*. It was done. He reached for his phone and dialled a familiar number.

"Hey, now don't tell me you're calling to cancel."

"Hello to you too, Jed. What are you on about cancelling?"

Jed Sinclair was one of Axel's oldest friends from his college days. He and his wife, Zoey, had a small tattoo and piercing shop in the heart of the city.

"Never mind, sorry, it's been one of those days. I just had a call from one of my clients cancelling an entire afternoon session tomorrow. Something about his wife going into labour. I couldn't quite understand the idiot. He wasn't making much sense."

"I guess the labour thing would do that, don't ya think?" Axel laughed. "But, no, we're still on for the game next week." He paused, picking up the sketch and giving it a final once-over. "I called to tell you I have the sketch." He didn't have to explain which sketch; Jed knew exactly what he was referring to.

"Well, hell, finally. It's only taken you all of two years to decide on *the* one."

"Yeah, yeah. So when can we do this?" Axel smiled at the ribbing he was getting from his friend based on the familiar complaint that being an artist, he should have been able to sketch his first tattoo ages ago.

"I have tomorrow afternoon available thanks to the cancellation I mentioned. I'm all yours if you can make it."

Axel settled on a time with Jed and ended the call, thankful that his first day off was a Friday, which meant that he was free the following day, too. He had barely put his phone down when it chirped the familiar ringtone for Jed.

"What, the labour was a false alarm?"

"No, you dickhead, I forgot to wish you well for your birthday. Happy Birthday. The big three-zero, today. You wanna grab a pint tonight or do you have plans?"

Axel accepted the invitation for drinks at their usual pub, thinking it beat spending the rest of the evening on his own.

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Baron walked out of Axel's apartment in a daze. His cab driver, whom he had asked to wait because he was only going to wish the boy well and deliver the flowers, gave him a concerned look when he got in. He was one of the regular drivers Baron used whenever he needed travelling around the city. He stopped the cab a few blocks from his office, needing the physical activity to get himself under control. Shock had given way to anger, and he was seething.

*How dare he call me a coward? Because I chose not to get involved with him, he decides to lash out and insult me.* Even as he thought the words, Baron knew they weren't true. Was he hiding? And if so, what was he hiding from? Granted, he had intentionally steered clear of any emotional ties, changing subs the minute he suspected they were becoming too attached. That was a conscious decision, a choice he made. He did nothing out of fear. Yet, the very

thought of being responsible for a sub, long-term, made his scalp itch and his heart rate speed up.

He needed to speak to someone who had experience in the lifestyle. Viktor Petrov.

He knew Viktor had had a sub for almost two years. They had parted ways more than a year ago according to the talk at the club. He needed the man's advice. Baron stopped, causing a few people to collide into him not having anticipated his sudden need to change direction. He had been so deep in thought that he missed the office building. The feeling was foreign to him. He was always aware of everything around him. He was always in control. A lack of control, or losing control, was not an option in the way he approached life anymore.

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Baron stood in front of his bathroom mirror with a towel secured around his waist. His perpetual five o'clock shadow still showed even though he had just shaved. He was getting ready for his lunch appointment with Viktor, who was meeting him at Apex. He looked at himself in the mirror. He had aged over the last five years. Fresh lines seemed to have appeared out of nowhere around his mouth. There was nothing he could do about the dark shadows under his eyes, either.

Baron barely slept the night before. Never had anyone ever considered him a coward, and it bothered him deeply. He had been a star cross-country athlete growing up and continued training during his college days. A solitary sport in most instances, but he was popular amongst the other athletes too. The middle child of three boys, he came out to his family in his senior year just before his eighteenth birthday. He told his older brother, who encouraged him to tell the rest of the family. His parents, both lecturers at the local city college, teased him for waiting so long because they had known since he was twelve. This came as a shock to him because he hadn't known at twelve. He was too caught up in competing on the BMX track back then to notice girls, let alone realise that he had a preference for boys.

He had never been a coward. Everything he did, he tackled head on and with determination. It was the way his parents had taught him and the rest of his brothers to approach life. Axel's words still echoed in his head. He knew there was a nugget of truth somewhere there. What he could not understand was why. Why did the thought of having a submissive for anything other than a few

scenes make him feel as if he were going to break out in hives? Axel's words had cut him to the core.

He had been angry at first, thinking the little shit had the audacity to tell him he didn't deserve his submission, that he was a coward. When his anger subsided, he realised that maybe, just maybe, he had been hiding. Hiding for five long years. *Fuck you, Anthony! Fuck you and your husband wherever you are!*

The cab stopped in front of a double-storey building on the border of Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach. It was an older part of the city where huge warehouses and buildings had not yet made way for high-rise apartments. From the outside, it looked innocuous enough with its ruddy brick exterior and heavy wooden double doors. The only oddity was the lack of windows on the bottom floor and the blackout mirrored glass used on the upper floor. Baron knew at that time of day, that the guard who normally stood at the doors would be absent from his post. He pressed the buzzer for the video intercom at the side of the doors and waited. It wasn't long before he heard Viktor's deep baritone inviting him in as the inside lock clicked open. Baron turned the bronze door handle and entered the dimly lit passageway as Viktor descended the interior stairway facing the door.

"Good afternoon, Baron." Viktor extended his hand in greeting. Baron took the Russian's hand and was surprised at how soft it was.

He waited for Viktor to close and secure the front doors before following him as he led the way back up the staircase. Baron recognised the barman restocking the fridges, and they exchanged a wave as he swept his gaze over the place. The man's cute dimples could be seen even at that distance. Baron could not recall his name, but remembered him always smiling or cracking a joke with whomever he was serving, no matter how busy he was. Out of all the clubs Baron had frequented, Apex was the most tastefully decorated. It had an abundance of floor-to-ceiling mirrors scattered throughout. The red brick of the exterior was duplicated for the interior walls. A reddish-brown tile, infused with patches of gold giving it a marbled effect, covered the entire floor space. There were numerous tables and chairs scattered throughout, with black leather-bound ottomans everywhere. A large stage situated directly opposite the bar and against the back wall boasted a permanent St Andrew's cross, although it was structured in such a way that it could be moved around the stage as needed.

"I've taken the liberty of ordering lunch for us to save time. I hope you are a meat and potatoes guy like me because I got the steak and baked potatoes with 'the works'." Viktor's fingers drew quotation marks in the air.

"Rare?"

"Medium rare." Viktor smiled as he entered his office and indicated the couch to Baron.

"I'll live," Baron replied, looking around Viktor's office. "I remember this room when I first joined almost a year ago, if I can recall correctly." Baron had been to a few establishments before he settled at Apex, liking the feel of the place and the eclectic mix of patrons. Baron was seated on the red leather couch and tried to gather his thoughts as he watched Viktor make himself comfortable in the armchair directly across from him.

"I need advice." Baron cleared his throat before he continued, "You were in a long-term contract with a sub before I joined. Harris, I think his name was. I know you split amicably, but I think I just need to know, as a Dom, how you knew your sub wasn't being fulfilled or happy. Were there signs that clued you in?" Baron was feeling extremely uncomfortable and edgy. Viktor had become a good friend over the past few months. This was a personal issue for Baron, and one that made him feel especially vulnerable. He felt like a novice instead of a Dom with over twenty years of experience in the lifestyle.

"Straight to the point as always," Viktor commented. Baron did not waste time with niceties as was the social custom. "Baron, before you continue, I think there is something you need to know." Viktor straightened in his chair. Baron met the man's direct stare, and subconsciously squared his shoulders.

"My submissive was Axel Harris. We were in a contract for about two years."

Baron felt the air leave his lungs in one swoop, making him feel light-headed. Something ugly crawled up from the pit of his stomach and he growled. It was one thing knowing Axel was with anonymous Dominants at the club he attended, he could deal with that. But to have a man, someone he considered a friend, tell him that he had known his boy intimately for almost two years, had fucked his boy—his mind refused to accept it. He. Could. Not. Comprehend. Baron leapt up and paced the office like a caged animal. Every time he tried to speak, a growl escaped instead.

"I recommend you take a deep breath and calm down," Viktor suggested, slowly crossing his legs and relaxing back into his armchair.

“Calm down? Calm down,” Baron thundered. “You’re sitting there telling me you fucked my boy, you fucked him for more than two years, and I’m supposed to calm down?” Baron’s voice carried across the room, his face turning a deep red that extended down his neck.

“Yes,” came the calm response. “Fucked, sucked, licked, rimmed, whatever your mind can come up with, we probably did it. Might I add though, it was long before he even knew you, so take a deep breath and sit the fuck down.” Viktor wasn’t done. “Let’s get something straight from the get-go. Despite how you refer to him in your head, he is not *your boy*. You rejected him, remember.”

Viktor’s words were like a steel fist to Baron’s gut. He sagged onto the couch and rested his head in his hands. “How do you know about that? Did he tell you?” he asked in a dejected voice.

“If you mean, did he tell me that he stripped and presented himself to you in your office, and you rejected him, then, yes. He told me, and it was my arms that held him while he cried himself to sleep. So, I would get a grip on your anger because your show of possessiveness over the boy does nothing for me.” Viktor’s voice remained even but arctic.

Baron lifted his head and stared at Viktor. His face, red and agitated only a few moments ago, was now pale and drawn. The agony he was feeling clear for anyone to see.

“He doesn’t want me anymore,” he murmured.

“I’m not sure we are talking about the same Axel here, Baron, because the Axel I know would do anything to be with you.”

Baron sighed and sat up. “I could do with a drink if we’re going to go into this right now.”

Viktor jumped up, a surprised look on his face. “Shit, I’m sorry. How remiss of me for not offering you a drink.” He walked to the minibar in the corner of his office. “What can I get you, scotch or vodka?”

“Scotch with ice would be great. Make it a double, and you’d be forgiven for your slip.”

Viktor smiled as he readied Baron’s drink, and handed it to him. “What did you mean, Axel doesn’t want you anymore?”

Baron sculled half the scotch before he answered, “He told me he couldn’t be with someone like me, that I didn’t deserve his submission.” He swallowed

the rest of his drink and gasped at the burn as it hit his throat, then his empty stomach. "He called me a coward."

Baron raised an eyebrow at the hint of a grin on the older man's face.

"He's called you out then, has he? Sounds like my boy." Viktor smirked.

"He is not your fucking boy." Baron rose and faced Viktor as if preparing for a brawl.

"Oh yes, a slip of the tongue," Viktor calmly responded, as he took a leisurely drink of his vodka. "The important question is why is he not *your* boy, Baron? What is stopping you from claiming him? You already think of him as yours. Judging from your reaction, you certainly want him."

"I think another drink is in order. May I?" Baron helped himself to more scotch at Viktor's nod. Many drinks later and lunch consumed, Baron had recounted his break-up with Anthony, and his fear of becoming emotionally involved with anyone.

"In my opinion, there was nothing you could have done or foreseen, as a Dom, to forestall Anthony's decision or choice. Have you ever considered that the man simply fell in love? That it wasn't a matter of being unhappy in the first instance, but that he met someone and fell in love. It had nothing to do with you as a man or as his Dom."

The question hung in the air as Baron contemplated its implications. He hadn't failed Anthony as his Dom. The man was just not as invested in their relationship as he was. Could it be possible? Could it be that simple? These past five years, agonising that he was not as good a Dom as he thought he was, and what it came down to was something so clichéd?

"Your confidence as a Dominant was shaken, but instead of rebuilding and working on that confidence, your pain and disappointment probably fed on each other. I'd say that you started second-guessing yourself into believing that you couldn't be trusted with the wellbeing of a submissive, long term. Any of this sound familiar?" Viktor asked, compassion clear in his voice and face. Baron's mind was whirling, and the scotch wasn't helping matters either. He convinced Viktor to open another bottle of his finest.

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Axel sat on the bench that ran along the wall of the waiting area. Jed's Place was a small tattoo and piercing shop wedged between a barber and a pizzeria.

The décor was completely black and white right down to the curtains separating the booths used to either tattoo or pierce, affording privacy for clients who needed it.

Jed employed a part-time, on-call tattooist. In addition, there was Zoey, who was the only one who could do piercings, but the demand had not grown to justify getting in additional help yet. Various posters depicting tattooed or pierced models broke the stark whiteness of the walls. Many of Axel's sketches had been framed and hung alongside Zoey's. She was a talented artist but had no ambition to take her talent any further than sketching elaborate and imaginative work for her husband to bring to life with his ink gun.

Jed joined Axel on the bench after he cleaned up his section. They were waiting for Zoey to finish up with her final client. After hearing that Zoey had made paella, Axel invited himself to dinner.

Axel adjusted his T-shirt again, as it kept hooking on the bandage covering an eagle drawn mid-flight now adorning his back. Inked only in black with shades of grey to show the intricate feathers, its wingspan extended from the tip of one shoulder to the other. Jed had complained that the lack of colour took away from the majesty of the bird, but Axel held firm that that was what he wanted, and he refused to give an explanation. The eagle was symbolic of the deep inner peace he felt when he hit subspace. He needed a reminder of that feeling. He pictured himself, like the eagle, soaring high above the world with all its complications and disappointments, where nothing and no one could touch him. It had taken hours to complete, after which he endured Zoey sticking a needle through each of his nipples and inserting new titanium rings into them. His nipples were extra sensitive, and Axel had to fight a mother of all erections when the rings were pulled through.

Zoey howled with laughter at the bulge in his jeans when he couldn't hide his predicament. He loved pain, no point in denying it.

Axel's phone beeped, signalling a text message. He reached into his pocket and hissed when the nipple rings pulled. Jed snickered and got an elbow in his side, which only caused him to laugh out loud. Axel read the message and the smile on his face died, but he hid his reaction before Jed could notice anything. He was further saved from an explanation when Zoey emerged with her client, and they were able to finally leave. They drove through the early evening traffic to Jed and Zoey's apartment, but Axel's mind was on Viktor's message.



*Your boyfriend passed out on my office couch. He owes me a bottle of scotch—damn fine scotch that I'm sure he didn't even taste after the first bottle! I wouldn't quit on him so readily, boy.*

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## Chapter Five

It had been two weeks since Baron had woken up and found himself wrapped in a throw rug, sprawled on Viktor's couch. He was amazed and touched when he found Viktor softly snoring in his recliner with an open book on his chest. It was obvious that Viktor had held vigil over him as he slept but had succumbed to sleep himself. It took a few prods to awaken the man who then insisted on personally driving him home. That wasn't enough for the overprotective Dom. Baron was escorted to his front door and ordered to lock up before the older man decided it was safe enough to leave the still intoxicated Baron to his own devices. Even now, the thought caused him to laugh and he could only imagine what Viktor's subs went through. A vision of Axel on his knees at Viktor's feet caught him by surprise. Jealousy, like nothing he had experienced before, tore through him.

Baron picked up the long-stemmed red rose he found on his desk that morning. Business commitments had him taking an unscheduled trip to the USA where he spent three long days travelling and attending meetings. A week back at Moreton Advertising he had learnt how easy it was to avoid someone if you didn't want contact with that person. He had not seen nor heard from Axel since that unfortunate incident in the man's kitchen. Not until the rose on his desk.

He sent a one-word message to Axel.

*Red?*

Within seconds, his phone beeped an incoming message.

*I am not the one with the problem with red. Are you?*

Shit, the boy was a brat. Before he could respond, his phone beeped another message.

*Dinner tonight. Pick me up at seven.*

He had barely finished reading it when another came through.

*And Baron, don't keep me waiting.*

Baron looked at his message and read it again. He had to make sure it said what it said. *What the fuck! A sub dictating to me?* Then he realised Axel had used his name. He was being pursued; the hunter was now the hunted. The

Dom in him was having kittens. He palmed his phone but paused with his fingers hovering over the keys. Most people, even some in the lifestyle, were under the misconception that submissives were weak, or nothing more than doormats. He knew the true power a submissive held. Baron rose from his chair behind his desk and walked to his favourite part of his office, the floor-to-ceiling windows.

He looked out from his perch above the chaotic order of a vibrant city at his feet. Drivers, impatient with the ebb and flow of traffic, were always governed by a force outside of their control. Pedestrians, impatient with one another, jostled to get ahead, some of them risking bodily injury by darting through oncoming traffic to get to destinations perceived to be more important than safety.

The rhythm of movement he was witnessing below was symbolic of relationships. Some stayed within the norm, stayed within what was expected of them, and got to their destinations. Others chose a more exciting but perilous path, taking risks with no safety net. In the end, everyone got to where they wanted to be but some got there feeling a little more alive than others. With a smile, he retrieved his phone and sent his message.

*Casual dress. And Axel, don't keep ME waiting.*

He planned to take Axel to his favourite steakhouse. It had a homey feel, and he liked the huge fireplace in the centre of the restaurant, so, no matter where you sat, you were able to see the roaring flames. It was also the place you went if you wanted huge juicy steaks done to perfection. He had taken a few clients in the past but had never been there with a date. *A date.* Shit, he was going on a date for the first time in—he had no idea how many years. Instead of the trepidation he thought he'd feel, he felt as excited as a teenager on prom night.

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The cab stopped in front of Axel's apartment building. Baron pocketed his phone after sending Axel a message to let him know that the cab was parallel parked across the road. He got out and leaned against the passenger door. The traffic had picked up and there was a steady flow of pedestrians as people made their way home. It was a few minutes after seven and the sun had set, leaving a dusky hue over the neighbourhood.

The street lights switched on and bugs were already flying around, attracted to the artificial light. Baron felt his stomach flutter when he caught sight of

Axel coming towards him. He had to wait on the sidewalk for a break in the traffic and the light of the street lamp picked up the black sheen of his hair. He saw Axel drag his fingers through the strands, trying to stop the locks from falling into his eyes, but it was a losing battle. Baron's digits itched to feel the ebony mane, not just feel it, but fist it while he... *No, not thinking that right now, Baron!* His tight jeans were not the best item of clothing to hide a hard-on. He watched as Axel sprinted across the road to stop in front of him. An emerald gaze found his in the twilight, and it made him draw in breath when he saw them light up. They stared at each other and time slowed down. It was the first time since the man's birthday that they'd laid eyes on each other. There was less than a foot between them. Not a word was spoken, but Axel smiled up at him, and Baron couldn't resist touching the beautiful pink lips. He cupped Axel's jaw and traced his thumb gently across his lower lip. He watched as Axel's eyes closed, and Baron leaned down and placed his lips gently on Axel's forehead.

Breaking apart, they smiled.

"I'm hungry," were the first words out of Axel's mouth.

With a chuckle, Baron opened the cab door and ushered him into the back seat. "Let's feed you then."

Axel was as impressed with the steakhouse as Baron had hoped he would be. Dinner was a relaxed, but lively event as they discussed the advantages of being able to complete artwork on computer programs, as opposed to the old-fashioned drawing tables and pencils, which Axel preferred. The discussion became so heated, with neither man backing down, that they were getting stares from other patrons in the eatery.

The waiter came to their table, carrying a tray with two glasses of ice-cold water. He very diplomatically said, while trying to hide a smile, that he thought they might need it to cool down. It was a nice way of telling them they were getting too loud. Both of them burst out laughing, toasting the waiter as they accepted the water.

Baron nearly choked as Axel stuck his tongue out when the waiter said, in passing, that he agreed nothing could ever adequately replace blank paper and pencil when it came to real art.

*God, what he could do with that tongue, and it had nothing to do with eating.*

Baron had a hard time all evening, watching Axel's lips close around a morsel of food, when all he could think about was feeling those lips around his cock. He struggled to keep his half-mast erection under control and was grateful the tablecloth concealed the evidence. Axel looked more delectable than the juicy steak set before him. The young sub's idea of casual had been tight army-green jeans that hugged his round arse like a second skin and clung to his muscled thighs. The faded, brown studded-leather belt matched his worn cowboy boots. Baron wondered if they were ankle boots or ones that extended mid-calf. Visions of Axel's legs in the air, encased in those boots while he fucked him, flooded his mind. He needed fresh air or he was going to jump the man across the table, and he knew that wouldn't get them just another glass of ice water.

He ushered a surprised Axel from their table. After he paid the bill and went back to tip the waiter, Baron placed his hand on the small of Axel's back as he guided him out of the restaurant. He inhaled deeply, taking in a good lungful of the chilly night air when they reached the sidewalk. He saw the enquiring look on Axel's face and knew he was questioning their sudden departure. "I just needed some fresh air." He grabbed Axel's hand and tried to get the attention of a passing cab. The look of disbelief on Axel's face said he didn't, for one minute, buy Baron's lame excuse for leaving so quickly that he almost forgot to tip their quirky waiter. Baron opened the back door of the cab that had stopped for them, but pinned Axel against the frame of the car, stopping him from getting in.

"If we hadn't left when we did, I would have ripped those clothes off your sexy body, and we would have been fucking on the dinner table right about now. Satisfied?" he growled into Axel's ear.

He felt soft lips against his Adam's apple, teeth scraping the skin, followed by a breathy, "You should have," whispered against his throat. With a chuckle, Axel preceded him into the back seat. Baron took Axel's hand and held it against the inside of his thigh. This caused the driver to glare at him in the rear-view mirror. He met the glare with one of his own and issued a silent challenge. Axel squeezed his leg, picking up on the tension in the cab. Baron continued to stare at the driver who had, as yet, not moved back onto the road. He rattled off Axel's address and waited for a response. The only indication that the driver had acknowledged him was a stiffening of his shoulders as he pulled out, rudely cutting off another vehicle and getting a horn blasted at him for his indiscretion. When they arrived at the apartment block, traffic had subsided enough to allow

the driver to wait just outside the entrance. Baron intended to escort Axel to his door, and the only confirmation he got that the driver was willing to wait was a stiff nod of his head.

Apparently the mighty dollar held more weight than the man's homophobia. Baron noted the serial number of the cab as he got out. He was definitely going to send in a written complaint to the company whenever he got the chance. He was not one to simply accept homophobia from people whose job required them to deal with the general public. If people accepted such treatment without at least trying to do something about it, change was going to be very slow.

They walked side by side through the entrance of the building after Axel punched in his security code to unlock the electronic door. Baron remembered the day he had brought Axel his flowers. He had stood there in the entryway, holding the roses, when an elderly gentleman came out at the same time Baron was contemplating whether Axel would let him in if he announced himself. The older man was very excited when Baron explained that the roses were for someone he hoped to make amends with. When the gentleman found out that Axel was the one in question, he agreed that the "young man" was definitely a "catch". The vestibule of the building was open and airy with stairs leading to the upper floors. The stairs were right next to a single lift that was to the right of the entryway. When one considered the building only had four floors, one lift seemed adequate. Mail boxes with their open slots extending to the outside of the building allowed the postmen to make their deliveries without having to enter.

Baron kept his hand on the small of Axel's back as the lift ascended to the fourth-floor loft. When they got to the apartment door, he gathered Axel in his arms, breathing in the citrusy shampoo he seemed to favour. He moved his lips through the silken ebony strands. "I had a great time tonight." Baron groaned when Axel licked his lips. He captured the pink lips and plunged his tongue into a waiting mouth. Baron grabbed a handful of hair, pulled on it to expose a toned neck, and licked down a protruding vein before travelling back up into a warm mouth. Tongues duelled as each man tried to taste the other. His cock throbbed in answer to Axel attacking his mouth. Baron knew he needed to stop or the choice was going to be taken away from him. He cupped Axel's head and rested his forehead against his. They were both breathing a little heavier. "I'll see you at work tomorrow." He kissed Axel's brow before releasing him. He got a nod in response and waited until Axel entered his loft and locked the doors before taking the stairs two at a time.

Baron stood poised at the entrance of the building contemplating the emotions racing through him. He needed more. He might not be ready to claim Axel as his sub, but he needed to stake a claim on the man. Axel needed to know who he belonged to. There had to be no doubts about that. Baron removed his leather jacket and used it as a wedge to stop the automatic doors from closing. He sprinted across the road to the grumpy cab driver, paid him without a tip, and dismissed him for the night. Baron retrieved his jacket and raced up the stairs, ignoring the lifts, and halted outside Axel's door for a second time that night. It took a few minutes for Axel to open the door to his knock, surprise written all over his face.

“What the—” Baron didn't give him a chance to ask the obvious, claiming his mouth in a demanding kiss and kicking the door shut behind him. He turned them around and slammed his sub against the closed door. A part of his brain registered that Axel had been in the process of undressing, because the man in his arms was shirtless and had the top buttons of his jeans undone. *Nipple rings? His boy had been busy since the last time he had seen him.* Baron released the succulent mouth.

“I want my cock so deep inside you, you'll be tasting my cum at the back of your throat.”

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Axel groaned. The man who had occupied his thoughts and fantasies was his for the taking. Not in the way he most wanted, but at that moment he would take whatever Baron was offering. He had made a decision after speaking to Viktor and getting a better idea of what made Baron tick. He was not prepared to give up on the man who made his heart race and his world come alive. He loved their bickering albeit sometimes heated altercations at work. He wanted to be with Baron and if it meant quasi-vanilla in the interim, then so be it, but he was going to get his Dom come hell or high water.

Axel gripped the hand that was trying to loosen his jeans and sank to his knees. God, he wanted to rub his face all over this man's body. He wanted his scent permeated in Baron's pores. His teeth sank onto a hard cock through the denim covering it, leaving a wet patch. He raised his beseeching gaze. “Please.” The husky *yes* was all Axel needed. He ran his hand over the outline of what promised to be more than a mouthful of hard manhood, before loosening the top button and slowly releasing the zipper. Impatience won out and black boxer briefs and jeans were tugged simultaneously down mid-thigh. Axel growled long and deep, rubbing his face over balls, cock, and a trimmed thatch of coarse

black hair. He didn't care if he looked like an animal in heat. He was in heat. He wanted Baron's personal piquant scent seeping into his skin.

He couldn't get enough of the clear juices dribbling down Baron's cock. He coated his lips and his cheeks. His tongue licked a line down from the swollen head, and he lapped up the precum like a starving dog. His hand gripped Baron's hip in a tight hold as if he feared the man would take away his treat. He laved at the heavy hanging balls before taking each one into his mouth and rolling it around with his tongue. Spittle ran down his chin as he worked his way up the thick protruding vein running the length of Baron's cock. His teeth gently scoured the underside of the dark red glans, so deeply red it looked purple, before stretching his lips around the engorged head, the skin so soft it felt velvety, the muscle beneath hard and pulsing. He sucked as Baron growled. Axel felt his hair being tugged on either side of his head and raised his eyes. A slight nod, Axel acknowledged Baron's intentions. He opened his mouth to accommodate the big man's girth and prepared to be skull fucked.

His head was held in a vice grip and Axel nearly creamed himself at the force with which Baron was slamming his cock up against the back of his throat. Axel did not have much of a gag reflex but knew even if he did, he would not stop the man from fucking his mouth so completely. The sounds coming out of Baron went straight to his cock. He fought against fisting himself, rutting against thin air. His dick caught against a jean-clad leg, and he moaned. It spurred him on to grip Baron's arse cheeks even tighter and pull his hips for even deeper penetration. He knew his throat would pay for it later, but right there, that minute, it seemed a small price to pay for the ecstasy written all over his man's face. He felt Baron harden even more, the cock in his mouth swelling, and then going still before erupting. Axel swallowed as fast as his raw throat could take, but the abundance of creamy cum was too much, and it flowed out the sides of his mouth. Baron's roar as he came was still ringing in Axel's ears, and he sagged against trembling legs. Fingers were gently brushing sweat-soaked hair from his damp forehead. Axel carefully tucked Baron's softened cock back into boxers and adjusted his jeans, leaving the top button undone. He was helped to his feet by strong arms and engulfed in a warm embrace, his face tucked into Baron's neck. "Thank you," he croaked against clammy skin close to his mouth, his throat dry and scratchy.

"God, baby, don't thank me. That was the fucking best... the most... I can't find words to describe how good that felt. I'm sorry, I know I got carried away; your throat must be on fire. Fuck! Are you okay?" Axel heard the concern in Baron's voice as the man cupped his face and searched for any discomfort.



"I'll be fine, but I could do with a drink of water." He could only manage a whisper through his scratchy throat. He was led to the kitchen and made to sit at the counter while Baron fetched a bottle of cold water from his fridge. Axel nodded his thanks and downed half the bottle in one go.

He startled when he felt a warm torso pressed up against his back. *Shit, when did he shed his shirt, and how the hell did I miss that glorious sight?* A pair of strong, muscled arms wrapped around him, urging him up off his chair. Axel obliged and tried to turn, but the arms tightened and a hairy chest pushed into his back pinning him up against the counter. His chair was moved out of the way. Warm lips brushed over his bare shoulders and teeth nipped the crook of his neck. Axel was struggling to control his breathing. Chest hair rubbed sensuously against his back making him groan. How he had longed to feel this man's body against his just like this. He wished he could feast his eyes on the chest that was creating such havoc with his body, but he knew the Dom in Baron would not appreciate him disobeying an unspoken request even if they weren't in a scene. He wanted Baron to take charge, so he relented and decided to simply enjoy whatever Baron had in mind for him.

"I love this." He felt Baron's finger trace the outline of the eagle on his back. "You need to tell me the story behind this drawing." Axel was pleased that Baron intuitively knew that the eagle wasn't just a random illustration.

"And these"—fingers tugged at his nipple rings causing a sharp jolt of pain to radiate from each nipple—"are my favourite." Axel hissed as Baron continued to twist the rings between his fingers. The pain caused a short circuit straight to his cock. He moaned and palmed his throbbing dick, leaning back against the chest behind him.

"Why are you touching what is mine? It would seem you don't really need me here. You are quite capable of doing this yourself."

"Nooo," Axel objected, giving his cock a final squeeze before removing his hand.

"Loosen your jeans and take them down, slowly, including your underwear, and be sure not to touch what belongs to me this time."

Axel complied with the request and wriggled his way out of his jeans. He was barefoot so stepping out of them wasn't a problem. Standing naked with his back still turned to Baron, he waited patiently for what the Dom had in mind.

“God, you are gorgeous, Axel.” Baron’s words flowed over him, like his hands, causing pleasure to radiate as they seemed to touch him everywhere. He couldn’t stop the involuntary clench when he felt fingers caressing his backside. Baron needed to do something and he needed to do it soon. Axel’s cock was throbbing with a life of its own, and his nipples were erect and tingling, begging to be tortured.

“Lean over the counter and spread your legs.” Baron urged him towards the countertop, pressing on his upper back. Axel inhaled sharply when his warm chest came into contact with the cold granite. He laid his head down, stretching his arms out above him, and widened his stance. He heard the chair scrape behind him and pictured Baron sitting down between his legs. His hole twitched in anticipation, and his breathing became laboured. Axel’s butt cheeks were squeezed by two powerful hands, and he knew he’d have fingerprints there the next day. He felt the cool air hit his hole when his arse cheeks were spread and couldn’t stop the whimper that escaped him with the first lick of Baron’s tongue down his crack.

Baron’s tongue was prodding at his hole and the moist tip of a finger soon joined it. Axel spread his legs as far as they could go, silently encouraging Baron in his ministrations. He bucked, trying desperately to get some friction on his neglected dick as Baron continued to lick and suck at the nerve endings along his arsehole. His nipple rings were twisted under him providing extra-sweet torture. Axel sucked in a breath, resisting the urge to rut against the counter, when he felt Baron’s partial weight on his back as the man reached for something on the counter just outside his line of vision. Glass clinked and seconds later he felt the cold against his hole. His lust-filled brain could not comprehend until he felt two slick fingers slip into his arse, stretching his muscles unexpectedly. The sudden burn went straight to his cock causing it to weep copiously.

Butter. The man had taken out his butter dish when he had taken the water from the fridge. Axel wondered if he’d ever use it again without getting an erection. Logical thought vanished when he felt teeth scrape along the line of his spine. An arm was pushed under him urging him up, fingers twisting a nipple ring. Axel cried out, bucking against the two fingers pumping into his hole. He vaguely heard Baron encourage him to let go and crooned when those fingers methodically rubbed his sweet spot, his orgasm hovering just out of reach. Axel thrust violently back against Baron, desperate for it.

“I need... I... more...” Axel could barely form any words; his throat was on fire as he panted and tried to get air into his lungs.

"I know what you need, and I know when to give it to you."

"Please... please." Axel was not beyond begging. He let out a loud wail when he felt a firm grip tighten over his leaking cock. A buttered hand set up a maddening pace, jacking him while fingers continued to draw circles around his sweet spot. Axel howled, his voice breaking in his attempt to scream out his release. His cock erupted and his vision blurred, he was being milked as Baron continued to manipulate his anus. His trembling legs could not hold him, and he sagged against Baron.

"I've got you." Axel didn't care that Baron was spreading the cum on his hand all over him as he held him up. Fingers were slowly pulled out of his abused hole, and he whimpered at the loss.

"I'm a mess," he said as he was turned, and his face held gently against a hairy chest.

"My mess. My sexy, bratty mess. But mine, nonetheless."

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The following day, Baron was questioning the advantages of being a CEO when even *he* couldn't get out of meetings. It was lunchtime before he finally walked out of his office in search of Axel. The first point of call was the man's office but he found it locked. The other option was the café most of his staff frequented. Baron walked into the busy coffee shop. There were still a few vacant tables with most of the office staff preferring to take their lunches outside, but the serving counter was a hive of activity. He spotted Axel almost immediately. He gritted his teeth and his hackles rose when he saw whose company Axel was in. Even though both Olivia and Jacky were seated at the large table and there was enough space around it, Mitchel Thornton had his chair so close to Axel's, there could be no mistake what the man was up to. Mitchel Thornton was a self-proclaimed bisexual who went around boasting about his conquests. Who the hell advertised something like that? Granted, the man had charisma, and it showed in his sales figures, but Baron didn't have to like him on a personal level—which he certainly did not. Mitchel spotted him and propped his arm around the back of Axel's chair, rubbing his thumb against Axel's neck. *The fucker*. Baron drew closer to the table and clenched his fists, knowing that physically attacking a staff member would not be a bright idea.

"So, Axel, tell us, who was the lucky guy responsible for you hardly having a voice today?"

Baron didn't give Axel a chance to answer. He walked up to him and grabbed the back of his hair, fisting it before he pulled his head back and shoved his tongue down his throat. Baron heard Jacky howl in delight and Olivia bang her fists against the table, egging him on. Fuck yes, he knew it was beyond juvenile, but he didn't give a motherfucking rat's arse who thought so. When he released Axel's mouth, the brat had the audacity to laugh at him. Well, it was a poor imitation of Axel's normal laugh because the man's voice was hoarse.

"Now, that was so beneath you as a Dom, Baron," Axel croaked.

"Does it seem as if I give a shit?" Baron glared at Mitchel and then at the arm still around Axel's chair, which caused the man to turn the colour of beetroot and quickly remove it.

"Get Meredith to give you something for that throat and don't leave tonight without seeing me first." Meredith was their receptionist but also the person in charge of their first aid supplies.

Axel smiled up at him. "Okay, Mummy."

"Fuck, don't call me that," Baron protested as he turned towards the counter to order his lunch.

"Would you prefer Daddy?" came the snarky response.

Baron turned to glare at Axel, which only caused him to laugh even more.

*Fucking brat.* Baron was straining his ears to hear the conversation when he left the table.

"So, I don't stand a chance with you, Axel. You're obviously with hotshot because of his money. Can't compete with that," Mitchel whined.

Baron straightened his spine and felt a few inches taller when he overheard Axel's response, "No, Mitchel, I'm with hotshot there because he has class, and besides, he fucks like a machine." Which, of course, had both Olivia and Jacky squealing. Shit, he was gonna get it from Jacky for the next few days at least, but fuck, he could live with that after hearing Axel's words.

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Axel battled to wipe the smile off his face. He was sure Tobias thought he was high. The man was giving him strange looks throughout the meeting. When the new project was introduced to the art team, everyone groaned when they realised the workload involved. Except him. He smiled. It would seem he was on a Baron-high.

"Axel!" He jumped at the sound of his name. He had phased out after the discussion turned to the logistics of expanding the company with a home base in the USA as well as Australia.

"What the hell is up with you? I had to repeat my question twice." Tobias glared at him, impatience written all over the man.

"Well, Toby, if I had the bossman's tongue down my throat as Axel did during lunch, then I'd probably be smiling too," Helen, one of their interns, remarked. The room erupted in laughter, which only caused Axel to smile even more. Tobias eventually got them all to quiet down and refocus on the project.

"I hope you know what you are doing." Axel took the folder Tobias held out to him.

*Not really, but I don't plan on walking away either.*

Almost everyone had left for the day when Axel made his way to Baron's office. He knocked and entered when he heard Baron call out. Axel, seeing Baron on the phone, walked to the set of windows on the opposite side of the office. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow over the city. A few stores and restaurants had their lights on. It was a hive of activity down below with everyone trying to call an end to another working day, while others were just starting theirs. It was one of Axel's favourite pastimes as an only child growing up. People watching. He would look at people and make up stories about their lives. He turned to look at Baron and tried to think of a story he might have conjured up for him. The man had given up on trying to keep a clean-shaven face and was now sporting the beginnings of a salt-and-pepper beard. Axel found the beard downright sexy, thinking of the many places he'd love to have beard burn. His groan caused Baron to look at him and give him a knowing smile. Damn him for being so sexy; he made talking on the phone seem like a come-on.

Axel walked closer to the window, resting his forehead against the cool glass. His thoughts turned to the previous night and the way Baron had taken care of him. They shared a shower, and even though both of them had erections, neither of them had the energy to do anything about it. Baron then dried him off and put him to bed, overriding his protests that he wasn't a child. Because he had fallen asleep the minute his head hit the pillow, Axel didn't quite know when Baron had left. He assumed it was shortly after because when he woke that morning, he was alone and there was no indication that anyone had shared his bed.

Arms wrapped around him. "So I fuck like a machine."

Axel laughed and leaned back against Baron, staring out at the view through the window. "It never hurts to dream." He yelped when his nipple was pinched in retaliation.

"What are you doing tonight?"

Axel let Baron turn him around and steer him towards the armchairs across from the windows. They sat facing each other. "I'll be packing and sorting out the software on my laptop. Liv and I leave for New York at eleven tomorrow morning. Thought you knew. The client is footing the bill because they apparently want the team directly involved with the campaign, to get firsthand experience of what the company is all about."

"Shit. I was informed, but I didn't think it would be you, which is rather stupid of me considering the great team you and Olivia make."

Axel stood. "I've got to get going. I have no idea how long it's going to take to sort out my laptop, and I am going to need it on this trip." He waited for Baron to walk him to the door.

"I was hoping to see you tonight."

"No can do. You'll have to just miss me." Axel gave him impish smile and opened the office door. "Duty awaits."

The kiss they shared soon wiped the smile off his face, and he questioned the urgency to work on his computer. He groaned when Baron pulled away. "Duty awaits," Baron repeated. Axel was still grumbling when he got into the lift to go home.

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*Fuck!* Four days without seeing Baron, without smelling that special male essence that was distinct to Baron only. They had spoken on the phone and exchanged numerous text messages, but it wasn't near enough. Axel couldn't wait to see the last of New York. The weather was shit, it rained all the time, and he'd had enough of Wheels for Wheels. The company manufactured and sold a one-person electric car designed for people in wheelchairs. The vehicle was modified to allow the driver to simply wheel their chair into the interior of the car, and with wheels immediately locking onto the floor, prevent any backward momentum. All controls were situated on the dash within easy reach. It was a fantastic invention, and he knew the company would do well in Australia, not to mention how beneficial it would be for disabled people. But if

he had to be subjected to another demonstration of how well the hydraulic system operated, he was going to scream. No, not just scream. He was going to yell at them that it was bad customer service not to offer baked beans with breakfast. And pie meant beef or chicken; it certainly did not mean pumpkin! *My God, these people had no taste.* He was homesick and Baron-sick. He couldn't wait to get on a plane the next day.

The cab driver nudged him awake several times. Twenty-four hours of travel, and he was finally outside his apartment building. It was half past one in the morning and Axel was dog-tired, couldn't wait to crawl into bed. After settling with the driver, he dragged his feet through his front door, dumped his suitcase, and started stripping on his way to his bedroom. He didn't bother with lights. The blinds in his bedroom were always open, and the moonlight was bright enough for him to see what he was doing. His heart literally skipped a beat when he saw the outline of someone in his bed. He had given his spare key to Baron so that he could feed Maya for him while he was gone. Something Viktor always did, but Baron insisted he would now do. Now, here he was fast asleep in Axel's bed. He crawled into bed, snuggling into Baron's warm arms, and felt a kiss on the top of his head. Arms tightened around him as the big man spooned him, and he knew no more.

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## Chapter Six

Days turned into a week of long, exhausting hours. Axel's world shrank to his office and his bed, or Baron's, depending on where the man was. Not that anything exciting happened in Baron's bed. Axel would usually drag himself home, or to Baron's home, in the early hours of the morning only to repeat the process the next day. There were so many technical aspects to the campaign, and the client wanted a different campaign for each branch they were opening in the different states. They were working around the clock, and it was taking a toll on him not only physically, but mentally too.

No matter how exhausted Axel was, he battled to sleep. Tossing and turning, he was surprised it hadn't affected Baron, but he realised when Baron slept, he slept like the dead. He was teetering not only because of the workload—he was used to the gruelling pace of a new campaign—but he found himself in a position he'd never been in before. How did he tell the man he was falling in love with that the vanilla thing they had going was causing him to feel like he was spiralling? Edgy, like his skin was prickling. He needed a release. The quickie blow job and handjobs he and Baron exchanged in the shower were enough for him sexually, but he needed release of a different kind. He was going to take a few hours off that night.

Axel packed a carryall for his session at Nightshade. Most of his team were working on fumes, and they agreed to take turns taking a day off to recharge creative juices. Axel had the following day, which suited his plans beautifully. He was about to leave when he received a message from Baron, who had left that morning for a meeting in Sydney. He messaged that his meeting was going to be longer than expected, and he would be taking an early flight home the next morning instead of that night. Axel felt relieved that he wouldn't be seeing Baron that night because he honestly didn't know how he would react to him going to Nightshade. They had made no commitments to each other, but Axel did believe that the commitment was at least an unspoken one on both sides. He hoped that Baron would understand that, as a submissive, he had needs that could only be ignored for so long.

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Axel soaked in Epsom salts and gingerly dried himself. It was fortunate he had the following day off because his backside was on fire. Master Ray had definitely earned his title with their session that night. His expert handling of



the cane had Axel flying. Now he was paying the price. He knew the bruises would be more prominent the following day as they were already showing shades of blue alongside the red stripes that adorned his arse. He was coming down, and he knew it was going to hit him hard. Sleep was always the best thing for him after a session, and he prayed it wouldn't elude him tonight. When he got into bed, he opted to sleep on Baron's side, wanting to inhale the man's scent on the pillows. Guilt consumed him as a flood of emotions raced through him. He couldn't stop the avalanche. Full-body tremors had him clutching the pillows. Viktor had spoken to him of this. Axel vaguely remembered something about a sub drop that subs often experienced when either away from the lifestyle or their Doms for too long. He thought a session at Nightshade would help, but all it did was show him how far he was from the man he yearned for. Baron's cufflinks were on the bedside table next to his side of the bed. Axel reached for them, holding them as sobs racked his body. *I hardly ever cry outside of a scene. What the fuck is happening to me?*

He was always an early riser, and Axel was up and coming out of the shower when Baron walked in.

"Damn, five minutes earlier, and I would have got you all naked and wet in the shower." Axel was engulfed in a bear hug that caused the towel around his waist to drop.

"Hmm, I missed you too." Axel turned, hiding his face in Baron's neck. He knew he was only buying time because eventually the man would see his puffy eyes and want an explanation. Then, as fate would have it, an explanation for puffy eyes was the least of Axel's concerns. Baron squeezed his arse cheeks, and Axel yelped in pain. Baron took a few steps back and stood looking alarmed and confused.

"Careful. My butt still has battle scars. My Dom was a little too thorough last night." Axel searched Baron's face to determine how he was going to react to the news that he'd had a session the previous evening.

Baron hadn't moved and confusion coloured his face.

Raking a hand through his hair, he asked, "What do you mean, 'your Dom'?" Baron's face flashed with a hint of anger or jealousy. Axel wasn't sure which, because the growled words, "Turn around," had him holding his breath and swallowing hard as Baron advanced on him repeating more loudly, "Turn the fuck around, Axel!" His arm was yanked around, and his body twisted, giving Baron a clear view of his backside.

“No, that was a poor choice of words. Not ‘my Dom,’ but the Dom I normally have at Nightshade. I had a session last night, and as you can see, I’m still paying the price,” Axel said with a forced laugh. He didn’t know why he was feeling defensive and guilty. He didn’t think he should feel guilty about getting his needs met. It wasn’t as if he had cheated on Baron. He didn’t even know if they were exclusive. No, he did know, even if it wasn’t official.

“You went to Nightshade last night? The very first night, since we’ve been together, that I was out of town?”

“No, well, yes, but I had already planned on going before I knew you weren’t coming home.” Axel faced an angry-looking Baron. His face resembled a growing thunderstorm, with dark ominous clouds brewing in those eyes. His chest was heaving, and his fists clenched as if he were battling to stop himself from smashing something.

“I am a sexual submissive who gets off on pain, Baron. You know this. I needed a release last night. I needed a session.”

“And you couldn’t come to me?”

“I did. Two rejections were enough for me.” Even through his anger, Axel could see his words had the desired effect. He felt bad for bringing up the past, but he needed Baron to understand.

The man was back to dark anger again. “So you want me to whip you? Is that it? You want me to whip you, and then I get a chance to finally fuck you? Right? Being the sexual submissive you are and all? So maybe you should have taken another chance to ask me again. I mean, I think I would have jumped at the chance to whip the shit out of you, so that I could at least get to fuck you! Is that what you want? No, sorry, is that what you *need*?” Baron’s voice thundered across the room, his face a mask of fury.

Axel felt pain rip through his chest at his lover’s words. He was going to lose it, and he didn’t want Baron to witness his meltdown. He felt vulnerable and exposed, and the person who was supposed to protect him was now his attacker. The one who was staring at him with accusations in his eyes. Yes, it seemed that Baron assumed that he had offered up his arse for more than just a caning. Guilt turned to anger, and Axel stared at Baron and straightened his shoulders, lifting his chin.

“No. No, Baron, I need you to know my name. I need you to know that I am Axel Harris. My name is not Anthony Wilcott. But more importantly, I need

you to want to be my Dom more than you fear to be my Dom. That's what I want. That's what I need." Axel walked past the still-seething Baron to his chest of drawers and retrieved his underwear. After stepping into his boxers, he cleared his throat, which had tightened up on him. "I'd like you to leave, please."

Baron grabbed his jacket off the bed and stalked towards the bedroom door.

"Gladly. Oh, and I'd be asking your Dom to put some salve on that arse of yours. We wouldn't want you to be out of commission for your next session at Nightshade."

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Axel had spent the previous day in a fog of misery. He couldn't tell what hurt more, his backside or his chest. The pain he felt at Baron's callous words hurt like a physical ache, but he was as angry as he was hurt. Angry, because he knew Baron had assumed he got more than just a caning from Master Ray. Axel had lost interest in the meeting he was sitting in and was relieved when people started getting up, signalling that progress assessments were done for the day. Mitchel Thornton walked in and pulled a chair up close. "I hear there's trouble in paradise. You wanna go out to dinner with me tonight?"

"Fuck off, Mitchel." Axel was not in the mood for the conceited over-the-top dipshit.

"Come on. The rumour going around is that you got dumped, so what have you got to lose?"

Axel lost what little patience he had and stood, sending his chair careering back against the office wall. "I didn't get dumped, and even if I did, why on earth would I settle for you when I've had the best cock in town?" Everyone in the office froze at his words. Clare, the art team supervisor, turned a bright shade of red before going off.

"Axel!"

"What? What, Clare? You can't handle the fact that I love dick? That I just love to ride and swallow cock? Or that I told everyone that our boss has the best cock in town, even if he is the most stupid man I've ever met?" Axel was beyond caring how his words were being taken. He knew he had stepped over many lines, and shit, he just didn't fucking care.

"No, Mr Harris. I don't care that you prefer the company of men. I do however care that this is a place of work, and these are your colleagues. Not to

mention that I am your supervisor, and as such, do not need to listen to such vulgar language in said place of work. Please know that your behaviour will be reported to HR. You are excused.” The older woman’s hands were trembling as she gathered her files and sat down.

Axel felt lower than cockroach droppings. He bowed his head and left, feeling the stares of many of his colleagues and friends. He walked to the men’s room and splashed water on his overheated face. *What the fuck is wrong with you?* “Mumma Clare” as she was called, never had a bad word to say to anyone. She was called Mumma because she was so old school, always looking out for everyone in the office, often calling them her children. She and her husband never had any kids of their own, and she admitted to mothering the art team as if they were hers. He knew he was up for a written warning from HR, but that didn’t bother him as much as the fact that he had hurt Clare’s feelings. He was not just lower than roach droppings; he was lower than the organism that fed off the droppings.

Axel waited until after lunch before approaching Clare. He sat in front of her desk while she ignored him and continued to write. He pushed the bar he held in his hand across the desk to her. She glared at it but proceeded to write.

He cleared his throat. “I tried to get your favourite chocolate muffins at the café, but they were out.”

She finally looked up at him, and he sagged when he saw her red-rimmed eyes. *Fucking organism feeding off the organism that feeds off roach droppings, Axel, you low arse piece of shit.*

“An energy bar?”

“Yes, I’m sorry, that’s all the vending machine had other than pretzels.” He made to take the bar back, but she snatched it out of his hand.

“Clare, I’m so sorry for my outburst. There is nothing that could justify it, and I have no excuse for my lack of judgement. Please, accept my apology.” Axel was leaning over her desk trying to take her hand, which she pulled away not wanting to touch him. He sighed and sat back in his chair knowing he deserved the rebuff.

“It wasn’t just a lack of judgement, Axel. It was a complete show of disrespect, not only towards your colleagues but towards me. I know I’m not very worldly like everyone else in this office, but I have never judged anyone for their lifestyle, no matter how different it is to mine. Your accusation that I would have a problem with you being gay was uncalled for. I had a problem

with your choice of language in a work environment. I have a right not to have to be subjected to that in my place of work. That is what hurt me the most. Unfortunately, I have already sent my complaint to HR, and you will be reprimanded.”

“I fully accept the reprimand, Clare. This is not about HR. I needed to apologise to you. I am sorry for disrespecting you. I promise you it will never happen again. You have my word. I have always had the utmost admiration for you, and your level of patience with all of us. I hate that I’ve hurt you this way. Please, tell me what I can do to make it up to you, and it’s done.” Axel had captured her hand and was tugging at it.

“Let go, you fool.” She pulled her hand away from his tight grip. “Anything?”

“Yes... hmm, anything.” Axel smiled tentatively, a little nervous, now, at the gleam in Clare’s eyes.

“Okay. I’d like a chocolate muffin every day for the next week, and a foot rub while I eat my muffin.”

“A foot rub?” Axel groaned, and he gave a full-body shudder.

“Hey! There’s nothing wrong with my feet. You’re lucky my husband loves giving me foot rubs.” She smiled at him. “My favourite muffins for a week, and you’re forgiven.”

“Done!” Axel sighed in relief.

“Bear in mind, you will be apologising to the rest of the team at tomorrow’s progress assessment.”

Axel was already out the door, but responded as he always did when she told him what to do.

“Yes, Mum.”

Axel reached his office, closed the door and leaned up against it. *I can do this. Wear my public face, and get through it.*

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Baron left his office, planning on working from home that day, immersing himself in contracts and estimates. He refused to think about Axel. He refused to think of him at Nightshade, while he sat in meetings. He refused to think of another Dom having his... No, he was not going to think any of those thoughts.

By early evening, Baron was going out of his mind, frustration and anger crawling over his skin like little fire ants. He threw a file across his desk in his home office and sat back in his chair. He needed to get out and do something physical. He changed into his gym clothes—a tight-fitting cycling short under his joggers, and a loose T-shirt. A change of clothes and his towel in a duffel bag, and he was on his way to the gym. Baron walked the two blocks and within minutes of getting there, he was hitting the treadmill hard. This was the time when he could simply zone out, when nothing interrupted his thoughts, and he could relax and just breathe.

Axel. Yes, Axel was all he could think of. *Why did he insist that I know his name?* What did it mean that he had planned to go to Nightshade even before he knew Baron wasn't coming home? Axel wasn't going to keep his session at the club a secret. Well, he couldn't possibly keep his abused arse a secret for long. But things didn't add up. Baron knew that they weren't spending much time together, what with the hours Axel was keeping at work, but things had been good between them. *Why did he tell me he wasn't Anthony?* The realisation hit at the same time a voice interrupted his thoughts, and he pulled his earplugs out. "Baron, I'm going to slow you down and then get you to walk, okay, mate?"

"What?" Baron gulped in air, panting as he tried to make sense of what his trainer was trying to say to him.

"You've been going hard for more than an hour now, and the lactic acid build-up in your legs is going to cause your muscles to seize up and spasm." Joel punched another sequence into the treadmill's controls, and Baron slowed down to a walk and eventually stopped. He was breathing heavily, and drank from his water bottle like a man dying of thirst.

"You need to loosen up those leg muscles now before cramps set in." As if the man had conjured up the dreaded spasm from thin air, Baron got a charley horse in his calf, and he face-planted against the handle of the treadmill. Joel caught him in time, before he could do more damage to his eye, and held him as he grappled with his calf. Setting Baron down on his stomach, Joel attacked the offending muscle and tried to loosen the spasm as quickly as possible. Baron howled in pain, feeling the knock against his upper cheek, just below his right eye, while his calf was on fire. The muscle eventually relaxed, and Joel helped him to stand.

"Hell, you got quite a knock on your face, there. We should have put some ice on it sooner."

"I'm glad you concentrated on my leg first. My God, that hurt like a motherfucker." Joel helped him walk towards the locker rooms and got him to sit down.

"Okay, you need to stay put while I get some ice for your face. Don't try to do anything right now; you need to relax your muscles for a little while. I'll give them a quick rub when I get back with your ice pack."

"Thanks, man, much appreciated."

"It's my job, so no sweat. Don't move."

"Don't think I can." Baron laughed and drank deeply from his water bottle.

After a hot shower to soothe his aching muscles, Baron took a slow walk home, still holding the ice pack to his face. He had an ugly bruise just below his eye, but it didn't bother him as much as realising what Axel had been trying to say to him. Axel was not Anthony, meaning he didn't go to Nightshade to get fucked by another Dom. Whoever had caned him had done only that and nothing else. He had a lot to answer for, not only for doubting Axel's loyalty, but degrading his submission. In his anger that his fears had been warranted, he had crossed a line.

*I'm a dick.*

Baron arrived at the office early the next morning and greeted Jacky as he walked in. Jacky being Jacky, jumped out of her chair and raced around her desk. "Oh my God! Who happened to your face?"

Baron held her at arms' length and brushed her fingers from his face. "I was attack—"

Jacky stomped her small foot and raised her fist in the air, cutting him off, "If that little shit... I don't care how much I love that black-haired walking God of pure muscle, if he hit you, I will pound him to the ground!"

Baron grabbed her raised fist. "Down, Balboa. I was about to say I got attacked by a treadmill. I knocked my face against the handlebars. 'Walking God' huh? What am I, chopped liver?" He put his arm around Jacky's neck, and she strained to look up at him.

"Eww, that would be like telling my brother he's sexy."

Baron's eyes instantly teared up at Jacky's words. He blinked, brushing his lips over her head. "Shit, Jacky, sometimes you say the damndest things."

“What, you didn’t know you were family?” She hugged him tight around his waist, and he rested his chin on her hair.

“I hurt him, Jacks.”

“Well then, I suggest you do something about it, because I saw him yesterday, and he looked as if someone switched a light off inside him. I don’t think it’s the written warning he got from HR that caused it.”

Baron released his hold on her and moved back to look at her face. “Written warning? What written warning?”

She sighed and returned to her seat behind her desk. “It seems Axel lost his temper and insulted Clare, and a room full of his team, yesterday.”

Baron walked towards her desk and leaned on the edge, his face a mask of concern and disbelief. “Clare? Our Mumma Clare? What the hell did he say?”

“Yes, the one and only. He apparently lost it when Mitchel came sniffing, and told him to fuck off, which being Mitchel, he didn’t.” If Jacky’s scowl were anything to go by, Mitchel would be wise to give her a wide berth, too. “Axel lost it and proceeded to tell the room that he’d had the best cock in town, and he wouldn’t settle for the likes of Mitchel. But the idiot didn’t stop there. When Clare admonished him, he then told her that he loved cock, he loved to swallow it, and he loved to ride it.”

Baron raked his hands through his hair. What the fuck was going on with Axel? Yes, Baron’s ego liked the fact that he was “the best cock in town”. But to say this to Clare—the most conservative person he knew—and to the rest of his staff, was definitely unprofessional and out of line. “I hope he at least apologised to her.”

Jacky gathered the folders on her desk in her arms and walked towards Baron’s office. “Yes, he did. She’s getting muffins for a week from him.”

Baron followed her into his office, placing his jacket on the hook near his door. “How the hell do you know all this?”

Jacky smiled up at him. “That’s what makes me a good personal assistant, and the fact that I’m Olivia’s gym partner helps.”

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## Chapter Seven

It had been a few days since Baron had seen Axel. He had to be satisfied with brief glimpses of him around the office or coming out of the lift. Baron was not satisfied, but he respected Axel too much to force his company on him. His calls went unanswered. But he knew an apology was in order, and so he settled on texting it.

*I'm sorry. I assumed things that, knowing you, I should never have assumed. I know your name, and I love your name, Axel Harris.*

Baron's message had gone unanswered, but he hadn't been expecting one. He should have known what Axel was going through. He had been feeling the same yearning, an intense urge, a feeling that knotted his gut. He had suppressed the emotions, falling into the trap of second-guessing himself as a Dominant. He didn't want a few casual scenes with Axel. He wanted the contract, the commitment. But was he ready? He had no idea when Axel had been to the club prior to his latest visit. A sudden break in the lifestyle would have sent him into something similar to a sub drop. Axel's uncharacteristic outburst with Clare was a telltale sign that his boy was in trouble.

Yes, *his boy*.

Baron was done with allowing fear to rule his life. He was done blaming Anthony for many things. Anthony had followed his heart even if it meant breaking Baron's in the process. He needed to take responsibility for failing himself, for not seeing the signs of what the disappointment and emotional turmoil Anthony left behind had done to his psyche. The ringing of his phone broke into Baron's thoughts. *Shit*, where the hell was his phone? *Goddammit!* Shoving aside papers and folders in haste, he found it and was inexplicably excited, thinking it might be Axel finally returning his call. *Viktor Petrov* flashed on his phone's screen. Disappointment tasted bitter in his mouth.

"Afternoon, Viktor." Baron sagged back down into his chair.

"I guess you were hoping it was someone else, by the sound of your voice." Viktor's voice was laced with concern.

"You could say that, but not to worry. To what do I owe the pleasure of your call, Viktor?" Baron held a lot of respect for the man, not only as a Dominant, but as an individual, too. He liked Viktor, despite the fact that he

was plagued with jealousy at the thought of the intimate relationship he once had with Axel. Illogical jealousy, because he knew it was in the past, and they were now only close friends. Baron was grateful for their friendship because it had helped Axel at a time when he needed it the most. A time when Baron had been stupid and blind to his own limitations.

“When was the last time you saw Axel?” Viktor sounded worried.

“I haven’t seen him since our disagreement more than a week ago. I’ve seen glimpses of him, but that’s about it. He doesn’t answer my calls either. Not that I blame him. I fucked up again.”

“Yes, you have. But as surprising as this might sound to you, I fully understand your reaction and your anger, even if your presumptions were incorrect. He should not have gone to the club without discussing it with you.”

“We aren’t in a contract. Nothing has been agreed on between us except for a mutual understanding that we are together, so I guess he didn’t think he needed to discuss it with me before he went.” Even though he said the words, Baron didn’t really believe them. He felt disappointed and angry that Axel had gone to the club even if nothing more had happened than a caning scene.

“We both know you don’t really believe that, Baron, so let’s drop the façade. You must have guessed that he has spoken to me, and from what I understand, the boy is trying to claw his way out of a funk that took him by surprise. He admits his guilt in not sharing with you what he was going through, and for his session with another Dom without at least discussing it with you.”

“Yes, it’s something else I should have noticed, but didn’t. He was working long hours, and the time we spent together was always rushed. But that’s no excuse. Even though I’ve been going through a few issues myself, I should’ve known that as a sub, he would be experiencing something similar, perhaps even more intense.” Baron sighed. They had made mistakes but it was time to set things right, and he was sure this was the reason Viktor had called him. “You obviously called for another reason, other than to tell me what you’ve discussed with Axel.”

“Yes, I called to let you know I’ll be doing a few demonstrations at the club for a group of very elite Dominants and their submissives. Master Claude and I put on a week of demonstrations every year. I’ll be doing three demonstrations this year, and that’s the reason I called. Axel has volunteered to be my submissive for our demonstrations.”

Baron stiffened at Viktor's words. "I see," was all he could manage. He felt a nerve pulsing at the side of his jaw and clenched his teeth.

"Baron, let me remind you there is nothing sexual between myself and Axel. I care for him a great deal, but we've never been in love. We both acknowledged this a long time ago." Baron knew this, but it didn't make it any easier that Axel would, once again, be Viktor's boy even if only in a platonic way.

"I'll be there. When will the demonstrations be taking place?" He clicked on his laptop to open his calendar.

"The first demonstration is tomorrow night at ten promptly. And Baron, if you think that boy's beautiful, and I know you do, in his submission, he is breathtaking." Viktor seemed to pause, giving Baron a moment to absorb what he had just said. "You will need an invitation. I'll ensure one is delivered to your office in the morning."

"Why would I need an invitation? It's being held at Apex isn't it?"

"At Apex, yes, but in the dungeon, which is invitation only."

"The dungeon? Apex has a dungeon? How long has it had a dungeon?" Baron tried to visualise the club, to think of where the entrance to the dungeon could be, and came up with zero.

Viktor chuckled. "Apex has always had a dungeon, but only selected Doms have access to it."

"Why haven't I been invited to use the dungeon? I have more than twenty years of experience as a Dominant." Baron didn't know if he should feel insulted, or angry, or both, for having been overlooked.

"I'm the only one who issues invitations to make use of the dungeon. You, my dear man, have not impressed me as a Dominant. Don't get me wrong, you are one of the most technically perfect Doms when it comes to execution and technique, but frankly, you've shown no heart in any of the scenes I've witnessed."

"Fuck, Viktor, are you telling me that Axel will be your submissive for these demonstrations, but I can't be there? What the fuck, man!" Baron rose from his chair, anger rolling off him in waves. Anger and desperation at the thought that someone else would be touching his boy, and he would not be there to, at least, keep an eye on Axel.

“No. If you’ll calm down, you’ll recall I *said* I would have an invitation *delivered* to you in the morning. It will cover the entire week’s demonstrations.”

Baron sat down. “Shit, yes. Okay. I’ll be there. Can I ask what you’ve decided for your demonstrations?”

“No. You’ll have to be there to see like the rest of the group.”

“You’re an asshole, Viktor.” Baron was not happy, but a part of him was relieved that he didn’t know, because he would probably torture himself with mental visuals of Axel in the demonstrations until it drove him insane.

“Yes, I’ve been told this on more than one occasion. I have things to do and people to see. I shall see you at Apex tomorrow night, then.” With that, Viktor ended the call without so much as a goodbye. Baron smiled, familiar by now with some of Viktor’s abrupt mannerisms.

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Axel needed to complete the finishing touches to the last sketch, and the Khoisan collection would be complete.

Axel had never done African tribal art before, and the request from Jed had been too intriguing to pass up even though he was feeling exhausted.

Things at work had at last slowed down, giving everyone a much-needed breather. Jed’s client, who had cancelled because his wife had gone into labour, came back to set up another appointment, but with a change of heart as to the tattoo he now wanted. His wife, a native descendant of the Khoisan tribe in the Kalahari Desert of South Africa, had given birth to their first child, a little girl. He wanted to honour his wife by choosing sketches that depicted her heritage. Axel had sketched a few, but had chosen a woman carrying her child on her back as one of the two sketches to be presented to Jed’s client. Traditionally, a blanket was used to secure the child to the mother’s back by tying it around the child and in front of the mother.

The second sketch depicted a woman balancing a basket on her head. Jed’s client wanted one for each bicep, and Axel hoped he had captured the strength of the Khoisan women in his drawings. It had taken him a few nights to complete the collection. Nights he had thought of Baron. While lying in bed battling to fall asleep, he longed to feel those strong arms hold him and wished for hairy legs to entwine themselves around his. Axel had a long talk with Viktor, who explained what he was going through: the mood swings that had

him going from biting someone's head off, to sobbing like a baby. He understood—he didn't like it—but now he knew how to deal with it. He was no longer angry with Baron.

Axel owned his share of the guilt in what had happened between them. He could also, to a degree, understand Baron's automatic assumption that sex had been part of his session at Nightshade. Baron's apology had helped. *I love your name, Axel Harris*. He could recall every word of that apology by heart; he had read it that many times. Maybe it was time to push the Dom down the homestretch. Axel's fingers hovered over the keys on his phone. *Thank you for your message...* No, that sounded too stiff. He deleted the words.

Several attempts later he reread his message. *I'm sorry for not opening up to you, for not taking the chance that you would understand. I'm sorry for allowing another Dom to touch what I know belongs to you. I love your name too, Baron Moreton.*

He pressed send. He needed to get ready. The first demonstration would be held that night. Axel looked forward to volunteering for Viktor, knowing he was in for a treat because, tonight, Viktor would be demonstrating the correct use of a bullwhip. His only concern was how Baron would react to the scene. Viktor had kept his word and sent an invitation for Baron to attend the demonstrations. This was the homestretch.

Axel could only hope.

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The dungeon was built below ground floor. Viktor had renovated the space which had previously been a bunker used during the Second World War. A door in Viktor's office led to a stairway with direct access to the dungeon. Guests to the dungeon came in via the entrance situated at the back of the building—by invitation only. It consisted of one large open-plan room decorated in black and silver. Both floor and walls were painted a matte black. Light sconces were placed intermittently along the walls. A wet bar was situated adjacent to the entrance, although no alcohol was ever served in the dungeon. Several leather couches and armchairs were positioned along the wall on the opposite side of the entrance separated by a large open floor space.

Unlike the stage set-up in the general club, the dungeon sported a large wooden dial in the centre of the floor. It measured five meters in diameter and could rotate slowly in a full circle, depending on what was required. The speed and rotation were controlled by a handheld remote. Steel fixtures and beams

extended down from the ceiling. The framework of horizontal steel beams was constructed just above the dial. The height of the beams could also be controlled by the Dom using the dial. Tables and chairs were scattered around the dial. There were as many comfy pillows on the floor as there were chairs. Viktor refused to allow any sub or slave to kneel on the cold concrete floor without a cushion, no matter what the circumstances. It was one of the many house rules that everyone abided by, or they never received an invitation again.

Baron arrived at Apex fifteen minutes before the designated time indicated on his invitation. He had been to enough demonstrations to know that the scenes or shows never started at exactly the time advertised. Organisers normally gave their audience a chance to mingle and socialise. Newcomers were allowed to explore the club, and resident Doms used the opportunity to make introductions, ensuring that guests at least knew who everyone else was. Baron recognised a few Dominants from Apex, and quite a surprising number of submissives were present. It was generally understood that unaccompanied subs were off limits, and need not wear any adornments to show their preferences or availability.

Demonstrations were not usually used to elicit future scenes even though many used the opportunity to foster new friendships. Baron was especially pleased to see Senichi Ishida had been invited. He knew, even though the subs followed a strict protocol at Apex, bitchiness was still rife, and Senichi had been the victim of many a bitchy remark. It was obvious to Baron; the man evoked feelings of envy amongst some of the subs because he was absolutely stunning.

Most people would describe Senichi as effeminate, but to Baron, the young man was just beautiful. He had a flawless, almost porcelain-like complexion that made his dark chocolate-brown eyes stand out. A full head of pitch-black hair stood up in spiked formation on top of his head. A narrow, sharp nose sat between regally high cheekbones. For Baron, the man's most striking feature was his heart-shaped mouth—full red lips that were always covered in shiny lip gloss.

Baron doubted that he had ever seen Senichi without makeup. He watched the man as he accepted a glass of alcohol-free champagne and was surprised when the beautiful face lit up like a Chōchin. Following the man's gaze to see what could have caused the reaction, Baron was intrigued to find Viktor had walked in and was smiling at Senichi as if he were the only occupant in the room. *Interesting.*

Baron, on the other hand, had a different reaction to seeing Viktor because Axel had not accompanied him. Viktor greeted many of the Doms by name before he took a microphone from one of the staff members on duty. Greeting everyone, he proceeded to ask people to find their seats as the demonstrations would soon commence. There was a flurry of activity as everyone found a place to sit, the rotating dial providing equal visibility to all. Baron noted that Viktor secured a pillow for Senichi next to the dial before turning to speak with Master Claude, the other Dominant responsible for demonstrations with his contracted sub. Viktor carried his age well. Baron knew the Dom was closer to fifty than he was to forty, but didn't know Viktor's exact age.

Baron found a seat at a table where a Dom and his sub were already seated. He introduced himself with an outstretched hand after he placed his glass of water on the table. His hand was still being held, and Baron sent the Dom a questioning look.

"Ah, *the* Baron Moreton. We meet at last. Ray Mc Cauley, from Nightshade. This is my boy Marcus Delmonte." The blond-haired Dom indicated to the man kneeling at his feet on a puffy red cushion.

Marcus nodded his head in his direction. "Sir, pleased to meet you."

Baron reciprocated, but was too taken aback by the stranger knowing who he was, until the realisation dawned. This was the Dom Axel had seen at Nightshade, which meant Axel had spoken about him to this man. It was the only way he could know who Baron was. Baron had conflicting emotions making him go crazy. He was pissed at the Dom for touching his boy, but knew his anger was not warranted. He was also thrilled that Axel had told this man about him.

"I take it you know Axel Harris." Baron sat up a little straighter, feeling the irrational need to affirm himself.

"Yes, he knows my cane well. It amazes me sometimes, how quickly he hits his subspace with the cane or even the whip. My boy here isn't so much into pain, so I get to keep up my techniques with all the other unattached subs who love the bite of my hand." Ray ran his fingers affectionately through his sub's hair. The adoration between the two men was plain to see.

Yes, karma was a bitch.

Out of all the Doms he could have been seated with, it would have to be this man. Baron was being shown exactly how unfair his presumptions about Axel's session at Nightshade were. *I get it. Dammit, I got it days ago.*

Baron was becoming restless. He needed the show to get on the road, like, yesterday, already. He didn't understand the hold-up. Baron glanced around and saw everyone was seated, chatting amongst themselves. A hush fell over the large room as all eyes turned to his right.

He was clothed in a black satin robe that was tied in front by a loose sash, and was being escorted from the inner stairway to the dial by another sub.

Axel passed the table looking straight ahead, and Baron resisted the urge to reach out and yank him into his arms. He looked as beautiful as ever, but Baron could see the tired lines on his boy's face. Axel reached the dial and turned to face his audience. Their eyes met, and Baron felt a tug at his heart. Those expressive eyes had dimmed, even as the face lit up at seeing him. Then, Baron's attention was drawn to Viktor who was introducing Axel to the crowd.

"As most of you know, Axel was my submissive for almost two years. Right now, he is not attached to any Dominant and has graciously volunteered for tonight's demonstration. I personally think it's simply to taste my bullwhip again, because this boy lives for pain." Viktor's words received a chorus of chuckles and laughter, but Baron stiffened on hearing his friend declare to the room that Axel was without a Dom.

*The fucker. Russian bastard. Liar.*

Yeah, fuck, he knew it wasn't a lie.

The St Andrew's cross had been secured to the floor of the wooden dial. Viktor whispered something to Axel before removing his robe. Baron's breath caught when Axel's body was put on display. He was wearing a tiny red jockstrap that looked vaguely familiar. A chant of encouragement came from the crowd.

"He is gorgeous, isn't he?" Viktor said into the mic attached to the headset he wore. Baron watched as Viktor deftly secured Axel to the cross using leather cuffs. When he was finished, Viktor stepped off the dial and activated the rotation mechanism with the remote handed to him by a sub attending to him. The dial started its slow three hundred and sixty degree revolution. Everyone was given a chance to view Axel at all angles. Viktor stood to the side and cracked his bullwhip across the floor of the dial, causing the sound to ricochet throughout the room. The sound was sharp and electrifying. Baron knew subs and Doms, alike, got high on the sound alone. Viktor coiled the whip and exchanged it for a flogger from the sub standing respectfully next to him.



“If you want to give your sub the best possible experience with your whip, then you take the time to prepare his skin.” Viktor moved onto the dial behind Axel, striking his upper back and arse with the flogger. Gentle strokes gradually increased into firmer ones. Viktor closed in on Axel and whispered something into his ear that had Axel nodding in agreement. Viktor’s hands were caressing Axel’s pink upper back, and then moved down to cup his arse and give it a squeeze. Baron growled.

The mocking smile on the Russian’s face told Baron he was being played, but it made no difference to the rising feelings of possessiveness that gripped Baron. *Calm the fuck down. There is nothing between them.* Viktor stepped away and again exchanged whips, finally taking charge of the bullwhip and letting it sing through the air. The sound was exhilarating and terrifying at the same time.

“You are all seasoned Dominants. You wouldn’t be here if you weren’t.” Light laughter followed Viktor’s words. “I will still point out the areas I have prepared on the sub’s back and arse. This”—he let loose a small crack of the whip in his hand—“is both a tool of pleasure and destruction. When released, it will follow its own path, and whatever happens to be in its way will be met with its wrath. You do not want that wrath to maim your sub. You want that connection between leather and skin to be purifying, sublime.” His hand followed his words, the whip landing in a straight line with accurate precision across Axel’s upper shoulders. Baron saw Axel’s slight flinch, but knew from experience the stroke hadn’t been too painful. Viktor was only getting warmed up.

Baron’s attention was, again, drawn to the older man wielding the bullwhip like the master he was. “Upper back and arse are the only zones you want to target.” Another arch of the whip, and a second stripe landed an inch from the first. “Areas covering any major organs are strictly off limits if the wellbeing of your sub is your concern, which by God, it should be.” Two strokes in quick succession followed until there were four lines precisely spaced an inch apart on Axel’s upper back. “You will have noticed I gave my boy a chance to fully experience a stroke before the next. Do this often. It adds depth, and your boy will be anxiously awaiting the next sting to send him further on his way to never-never land.” Hesitant laughter followed, mostly from subs as they knelt, transfixed by the scene before them. A quick succession of firmer strokes had Axel grunting into his pain. Viktor upped the ante considerably, and Axel’s back and arse showed the Dom’s expertise at placing his strokes.

Baron could not keep his eyes off his boy. The dial was constantly turning. He searched Axel's face and found only ecstasy. Axel's screams and groaning echoed around the cavernous room, causing Baron to adjust his crotch a few times. Viktor voiced his encouragement to his sub, and Baron saw the instant Axel let go and hit his never-never land. The boy's face was a picture of tranquillity and pure bliss like nothing Baron had ever seen before. He understood that what Viktor had said had been an understatement; Axel in his submission was beautiful, but Axel in his *surrender* was breathtaking. Baron gripped the arms of his chair to stop himself from launching across the dial when Viktor cupped Axel's cock, which had grown and was now peeking out over the top of his jockstrap. Baron didn't care that he was attracting stares as he growled at Viktor's back. The Russian fucker didn't take his hand away, or turn around, but Baron heard him chuckle over the mic before his words sank in, "I'd like to ask Master Baron to step up and give the sub the reward he so richly deserves."

Baron did not need a second invitation; he jumped up, removed his shirt, dropping it along the way, and stalked the man tied to the St Andrew's cross, his face a mask of fury. Baron was about to let the older Dom know exactly what he thought of him, when Viktor held up his hand. "Not a word, Baron, because I know you'll regret it in the morning." Viktor laughed, and stepped out of the way. Baron took a deep breath and pushed his irritation and anger aside. He had a sub in need of release. Baron stood behind Axel, gently pressing his hairy chest against the man's abused back, the soft leather of his pants caressing the reddened arse.

Viktor ceased to exist. The crowd, silently mesmerised, ceased to exist. The boy in his arms became the centre of his existence. Axel groaned loudly as Baron encircled him from behind with his arms, leaning his head into the crook of Axel's neck and shoulder. "You are so beautiful, my boy." He ran his hands over Axel's chest and abs, feeling the boy shudder in his arms. He cupped his boy's cock and squeezed the shaft and balls together in his palm. Axel bucked into his hand, groaning like an animal in pain. Baron drew the jockstrap down and covered his hand with the juices seeping freely out of the swollen head. His teeth nipped at the pulsing vein throbbing in Axel's neck. With a firm grip on the top of the hard shaft, Baron dragged his hand over the leaking glans, pulling back down to the root. "Fuck me, boy."

Axel shouted as he violently fucked Baron's hand. Baron pinched nipples and pulled at nipple rings with his free hand, while rubbing his thumb into the

leaking slit atop the cock that was forcing its way through the hold of his fist. "So close, so close," Axel panted and yowled. Baron rubbed his chest against Axel's inflamed back and it sent the boy over, screaming his name and bucking into Baron's hand, which was now covered in cum. Baron's heart squeezed and dropped in his chest. He closed his eyes in disappointment, and held on to the sub slumping against him as far as his ties allowed. In the throes of subspace and ecstasy, his boy had shouted out his name, not his title.

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Axel stretched out, naked, on a bed in one of the back rooms that had been prepared for him. Viktor had administered aftercare when Baron made a sudden departure from the dungeon. Axel was still feeling hazy and lethargic, coming down from his high, but knew his provocation had been noted. It would explain Baron's sudden retreat. Nothing screamed more at a Dominant than a sub who did not acknowledge his rightful place as Master. Viktor gave him a knowing smile that told him his ex-Dom knew what he was doing. The homestretch looked like it was taking its final lap.

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Baron spent a restless night. The next morning dawned; the sun barely opening its eyes to make its way out of its nesting place below the horizon. Baron stood in the darkened lounge with a fresh cup of coffee, looking out over the still, relatively silent city coming to life. It was quarter to six in the morning. Two women, rugged up against the chill of the morning air, jogged past closed shop fronts. They stopped, jogging in place, to stare at a mannequin draped in an evening gown and highlighted by the downlights of the shop window, before continuing on. Baron tracked them as they rounded a corner and disappeared out of sight. *No better time than the present.* He retrieved his phone from the charger and dialled a number he never thought he'd dial again.

"Hello," the voice greeted, alert despite the early hour of the morning.

"Good morning, this is Baron Moreton." Baron pulled a chair out from the table and sat down, listening to the silence on the other end of the line. He heard a muffled shuffling. "Boy, I think it's your ex on the phone for you."

"Hello, Baron?" The question in the familiar voice was clear. The man had obviously been taken by surprise, which was understandable considering it was early in the morning and five years since he had heard from him.

"Hello, Anthony. Yes, it's Baron. How are you?" *How are you? After five years, that's the first question you ask the man. What the fuck am I supposed to*

*ask... how's married life? Your husband fuck you better than I did? Does he have a bigger dick?*

"Hmm, I'm good. Baron, is something wrong? Are you sick? Is that why you're calling me after all this time?" Anthony rattled off questions in quick succession, panic in his voice.

Baron smiled. The same ol' Anthony, creating dramas even when there weren't any. "Calm down, Anthony. I know my call has come out of the blue, and you're probably only on your first cup of coffee." Remembering Anthony's brain only really kicked in after his second cup for the morning, Baron smiled, reaching to take a sip of his own second cup of coffee.

Ten minutes later, with a weight lifted off his shoulders that he never knew was there, Baron ended the call. Anthony and his husband and Dom, Eugene, were happy and were waiting on news from their surrogate who was due any day. They were having a little girl. Baron felt a stab of envy that Anthony would soon become a dad, which took him by surprise. *Me, a dad? Not going to happen.*

Before he took his shower, Baron sent a text message to Axel's phone.

*Take the morning off. I'll clear it with Tobias. Yes, it pays to know the boss. I'll see you tonight.*

He scrolled up and reread Axel's message. He knew the words by heart but liked seeing his name above the message. *God, he was turning into a teenage girl... whatever.*

*I'm sorry for allowing another Dom to touch what I know belongs to you. I love your name too, Baron Moreton.*

Damn straight. Axel Harris was *his*.

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Baron was already seated at a table closest to the wooden dial where the night's demonstration was to take place. He glanced up at the network of steel beams that had been dropped from the ceiling above, and guessed Viktor would be suspending his boy at some point in the night's proceedings. Ray McCauley and his sub, Marcus Delmonte, joined him as if they were designated to share a table with him. Baron swallowed his irrational annoyance. Master Ray smiled at him. "If he were mine, I think I'd feel the same way."

Baron knew he was being a dick and reciprocated the smile, raising his water glass at the Dom. Viktor decided at that moment to make his appearance,

announcing that he would be demonstrating the different techniques used in rope play and suspension. A table was brought in and placed next to the dial. The sub who had assisted Viktor the previous night carried a huge black bag and set it on the floor next to the table. Presumably, Viktor's tools of the trade. As with the night before, Axel entered—accompanied by yet another sub—wearing a red robe this time. Standing behind him, Viktor introduced Axel to the crowd.

Baron sat up a little straighter when Axel's robe was removed to reveal a very naked Axel. With the help of the sub handing him the lengths of rope he requested, Viktor proceeded to demonstrate intricate Kinbaku knots. Baron stopped listening the minute Viktor stepped behind Axel to pull the rope through his arse crack and link it up with a second rope already tied around his waist. The resulting pull caused Axel's balls to separate—the rope transfixed them dead centre. Part of the rope had been looped around his cock, which was now standing out, looking rock solid. Baron's gaze was so pinned on the mesmerising sight of his boy's genitals being so explicitly displayed, that it didn't register he was now looking at Axel suspended up in the air, swinging around in a circle. Viktor attached a D-ring to another set of ropes along the beams above them, and pulled on it, which brought Axel's whole body to lie in a horizontal position with his legs extended out. His cock was now pointing straight down.

Baron groaned, his erection painful against the zipper of his leather pants. With a few twists and release of knots, Axel's legs were lowered and planted back onto the dial, while his upper body was still tied, keeping him upright. Viktor gently cut the knots around Axel's body, releasing the ropes that the other sub then gathered together. He guided Axel, who was still a little dazed, down onto his knees with his head bowed. Baron watched as Axel slowly relaxed his muscles and got into his headspace. Viktor placed a water bottle in his line of vision, instructing him to drink. Baron was not happy when he saw Viktor switching off his mic near his mouthpiece, and having a whispered conversation with Axel. Rising up very gracefully for someone of his age, Viktor switched his mic back on, and addressed the crowd. "My sub has agreed to do one last task, and you all get to choose what that task will be. He will, however, choose whom he performs that task with. Let's hear suggestions for what Axel is to complete."

Baron nearly overturned his chair in his haste to stand. He was glaring at Viktor with such intent, he was surprised the man didn't vaporise on the spot.

*What the fuck are you doing, you Russian bastard?* Baron sat back down, his face showing the utter horror at hearing some of the outlandish acts the crowd was encouraging his boy to choose. The suggestions being thrown at Viktor ranged from blow jobs, to rimming, to flat-out anal sex. Marcus Delmonte, Master Ray's sub, shouted out, "Lap dance!" which Viktor latched onto, quelling the crowd.

"We have the winner. A lap dance is the final task my sub will perform tonight. I have had the pleasure of one of his lap dances, and I can guarantee the lucky Dom will be in for a treat."

*Fucker!*

Viktor turned to face Axel. "There you go, boy, the floor is yours. You may choose anyone in the crowd to honour with one of your infamous lap dances."

Axel rose gracefully, and with bowed head said, "Thank you, Sir."

He stood as regally as any nobleman ever stood, facing his captive audience, albeit with his dick hanging out. Axel surveyed the crowd, which was now chanting different names, the audience members encouraging him to choose either themselves, or a favourite.

Baron's heart skipped a beat, and then sped up when Axel's gaze stopped at his table. His breathing increased to the point of almost panting.

Axel was approaching his table.

Baron didn't know if his leather pants could handle a lap dance. He didn't know if his cock could handle a fucking lap dance. Never mind him! People speak of having a slow, excruciating death. No. His death was sudden and sharply agonising. Axel walked straight to him. And past him.

He gracefully sank down to his knees in front of Master Ray. He bowed his head and respectfully requested the honour of giving the Dom a lap dance. Master Ray placed his hand on Marcus's head and lovingly ran his fingers through the strands before giving Axel permission. The boy rose and turned to Viktor, giving him a nod, which had Viktor turning up the music.

Baron was frozen in his seat. He didn't know who he needed to kill first: Master Ray for again touching what was his, Master Viktor for facilitating this violation, or Axel for ripping his heart out.

*No. No, I am not going to kill Axel Harris. I am going to shove a vibrator up his arse and crank that motherfucker on mega vibrate, right on his sweet spot, while I swallow his dick like a fucking Hoover. And, he will not be allowed to*

*come. I am going to do this every fucking day until the boy swears he will never, ever, rub his motherfucking gorgeous arse on another Dom's cock.*

He watched his boy, who had not even acknowledged his presence, sit on Master Ray's lap with legs spread on either side of him. Axel pressed out his arse slowly, so motherfucking slowly, grinding those globes against a very obviously tenting bulge, keeping up with the rhythm of the music blaring out.

The crowd was going crazy, screaming their appreciation. Baron was going crazy trying hard not to scream. He lost it when Axel stood up and wiggled his muscular globes at Master Ray, before turning around and straddling the man's lap, rubbing onto him with his hands thrown up in the air.

Yes, Baron Moreton lost it in a big way.

He roared at the top of his lungs, screaming at Viktor to shut the music, before he yanked Axel's arms—that were still in the air—behind his back. He gripped both of his hands with his right hand and with his left, he snagged a handful of hair, pulling Axel's head back and lifting his face up. "You are in a fuckload of trouble, boy!" he gritted through clenched teeth.

There was a deafening silence throughout the room as everyone waited for Axel's reaction. He did nothing, simply stared up at the Dom. Baron straightened, pulling on Axel's arms, which forced the sub to stand up with him.

"Master Ray—" Baron cleared his throat, and in a more civil voice than his earlier growl, addressed the Dom. "—I apologise for the misunderstanding. My sub did not have my permission to offer you a lap dance. Quite frankly, he didn't have my permission to offer you anything at all."

Ray seemed as calm as he always was. "Really, Master Baron, I was under the impression the sub was not attached to any Dominant."

"I can assure you, he is my sub, *Sir*, and there has been a huge mix-up in communication." Baron snapped his gaze to Viktor.

"Let's ask the boy who he belongs to." Viktor gestured to Axel who had as yet, not said a word.

Baron was seething with anger. His body vibrating not only with the need to claim his boy, but to take him far away from anyone looking at what was his.

"Well, boy, is what Master Baron said true? Are you his?" Master Ray directed his question at Axel, but kept his gaze on Baron. There was total

silence as everyone seemed to hold their breath, waiting for the answer. Baron was grinding his teeth so hard, he was in danger of cracking a molar.

“Yes, Sir, I’m Master Baron’s sub.” Axel’s shoulders relaxed, and his legs started to tremble. Baron tightened his hold on the boy’s hands, and slung an arm around his chest, pressing into his body.

“Master Viktor, I have need of your handcuffs, if you don’t mind. Not the covered ones. The ones you would use to punish a sub will do.”

Viktor took up a set of steel handcuffs and handed them to Baron. “What did you have in mind, Master Baron?”

“I’m taking my sub home.” Baron placed the handcuffs around Axel’s wrists, and though he was angry, he double-checked that the links were not too tight to cause discomfort.

“I don’t think that is such a good idea, considering your sub will be naked and cuffed. I think whichever taxi service you choose will take exception to this sight, and definitely call the cops on you.” Viktor smiled his usual sardonic smile before he continued in his naturally calm voice, “May I suggest you take your boy up to my office? His clothes will be brought to you. You will also find the keys to my car in the first drawer of my desk. Feel free to use it. I will warn you though, leave even a hint of a scratch on my baby, and I will hunt you down. You won’t like the consequences.”

“Duly noted, Master Viktor, and thank you.”

Baron held on to Axel’s cuffed hands as they climbed the stairs to Viktor’s office.

“I—”

“Not a word from you, boy! I don’t want to hear one fucking word coming out of that mouth.”

When they reached the sanctuary of Viktor’s office, Baron slammed his boy, face first, up against the closed office door.

“You will never again, *never*, offer yourself to another Dom. You are mine. Do I make myself clear, boy?” His voice was arctic and formidable. “I want your words.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You will never allow Viktor to lay one hand on you without my express permission.” Baron was forcibly leaning into Axel, further pushing him into the unyielding door. “Your words, boy.”



“Yes, Sir.”

Baron fisted Axel's hardness in his hand. “This cock belongs to me, and will only be on display when it is for my pleasure, and mine alone. Do not move.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Baron searched the first drawer of Viktor's desk and found the keys the man had told him would be there. *You had better have what I need in here you manipulating Russian fuck!* He was rewarded when he found a roll of condoms.

Baron rubbed his groin against his boy's naked arse. He unzipped and sheathed up. With a handful of Axel's hair tightly grasped in his hand, he pulled his head back, exposing a sweaty neck, and licked his way up. Lips sought his and tongues duelled, spit running out of mouths at the awkward angle with which they were attacking each other. He rode his sheathed cock over his boy's crack while feasting on his mouth. Groans and whimpers filled the office when Baron broke away and bit along the back of Axel's neck.

“Please... please, Sir.”

“Please what? What do you want, boy?” Baron licked along his neck, behind his ear, feeling his boy rubbing his arse against his cock. The side of Axel's face squished up against the office door, and he jutted his arse out in invitation.

“I need you, Sir. Needed you for so long. Please.” Axel quavered under Baron's hold.

Baron groaned. “I don't have any lube, so you have to be satisfied with my spit.” He spat on his fingers and searched, finding a slicked up arsehole.

“I prepped before I got here tonight, Sir.” Baron filed that statement away to be questioned at a later date, right now he had a boy to fuck and claim. He aligned his dick with his boy's hole, and slowly pushed his way in without pausing. Both men shuddered, groaning long and hard when Baron hit, balls deep.

Baron breathed in Axel's scent, flaring his nostrils against the boy's damp and warm skin, tasting his sweat on his tongue. It caused a fire in his gut to ignite with carnal lust. He rocked forward, ripping a yelp from Axel's lips. He fisted the boy's hair, pulling his head back and biting down on his shoulder, as Baron rocked his hips back, and thrust forward. Axel's channel clenched around Baron's shaft, sending an electric surge through Baron's skin.

“Master Baron,” Axel panted.

“Yes, I am your fucking Master, boy. I will own every inch of you.” Baron pressed wet, open-mouthed kisses to Axel’s neck, tasting the unique essence of the boy. Axel was everywhere—in his nose, on his tongue, around his cock, and definitely in his mind—and Baron was in ecstasy as he thrust himself into his sub. Axel was his.

Baron slowed his thrusts when he felt Axel’s fingers touch his lower abdomen, gently caressing the hairs there, which sent a quiver down Baron’s legs and straight to his balls.

He pulled out, growling at the loss of tightness and heat. He grasped Axel on the back of his neck, guiding the boy to Viktor’s desk.

Baron turned Axel around and met the boy’s gaze. He held his breath, taking in Axel’s flushed face, and hair damp with sweat. But it was the boy’s eyes that held his attention. They were dilated in arousal and lit up like a Sydney Mardi Gras. There was no mistaking the joy dancing in the emerald gaze. There was no mistaking the love.

Baron didn’t speak. He could not get his throat to work. He swallowed convulsively, trying to loosen the knot that had formed there, his emotions too close to the surface. He might still need to overcome a few mindfucks, but he could rest assured his heart was in good hands. He attacked Axel’s mouth, lips, and tongue, teeth clashing hungrily, trying to devour him. He pressed Axel down onto the desk and broke the kiss, gently lifting his legs up, noting Axel clasp the edge of the desk. Baron splayed his boy’s legs, exposing that beautiful, pink ring glistening in the light of the office.

Without warning, Baron took Axel in one full thrust, making him howl like a dog. He leaned forward, bringing their lips to an intimate meeting, while he rocked inside his boy’s heat.

“You are not allowed to come, boy,” Baron snarled into Axel’s mouth, taking him before the boy could respond. Axel’s muscles rippled under him with each long drive of his hips. He alternated between fast stabs and slow pullbacks. With each plunge, Axel eagerly met Baron’s penetration, grinding himself against his lover.

“Who do you belong to, Axel Harris?” Baron demanded, fucking into Axel, feeling himself teetering on the edge.

“I... Sir... Baron’s.” Axel’s words were interspersed with gulps of breath. It would seem his sub was unable to form a coherent sentence.

Baron peered down at the boy, those eyes awe-filled, radiating their striking green. With a final thrust, he roared, feeling his orgasm explode from his sac and empty into the condom. He sagged onto Axel, feeling his precum, sticky against his belly hair. He cupped Axel's cheek, narrowed his eyes, and smiled. "*Your Dom*," he growled, before taking that succulent mouth again. "That's right, *your Dom*!"

Baron found a pair of black jeans and a black button-down shirt at the door of the office. Someone had dropped off Axel's clothes without them being aware of another presence, or the office door opening. They had both been too far gone.

"You'll wear jeans, only. The handcuffs remain." Baron lifted each of his boy's feet and helped him step into the jeans, threading the leather belt and buckling it. The sub's poor cock looked a sad blue, and painful. Baron couldn't resist the urge to give it a quick stroke and hard squeeze, loving the way Axel squirmed at his hand. "Let's go." He held Viktor's car keys in his hand, and opened the office door. A sub stood just outside, and bowing his head, said, "Sir, if you'll follow me, I'm to take you to the private exit and parking garage."

Baron followed the sub, amazed that there was another entrance to Apex that he was unaware of. A few corridors later, they stood in front of a lift, which opened immediately when the sub pressed the down arrow. Shortly after, they emerged into a well-lit basement containing an array of stylish vehicles. Baron had no idea which car belonged to Viktor, and pressed the key fob, looking for the car that responded. He laughed out loud when a restored vintage Lincoln blinked its lights at him. So this was Viktor's baby. He turned and thanked the sub for his assistance. "I am to remind you, Sir, that any damage to the baby is akin to a slow and painful death."

"Yes, tell Master Viktor I shall guard it with my life." Baron guided a handcuffed Axel to the classic car and helped him into the back seat, not an easy feat with hands tied behind his back.

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Axel averted his face as Baron walked around the car to the driver's side. He hid a secret smile. *Homestretch*. The hunted had become the hunter, and even though he was the one in handcuffs, he knew he had finally landed his prey. He was Baron's boy!

**The End**

## Author Bio

*I am D.G Smith from sunny Gold Coast, Queensland Australia. Sometimes, running a hyperactive family can be a two-person job, but I have a built-in escape hatch. You see, I have many men. They all live in my head, and sometimes they are pushy and arrogant enough that they fall out all over my laptop, and no one can get a word in after they are let loose. I let them, and try to hold on as much as possible as they take me on a journey with them. These men are all Alphas. But there are Alphas, and then there are ALPHAS. They aren't all perfect, but they are all beautiful in their own broken way.*

## Contact & Media Info

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