



MASTERS OF THE CASTLE™

Dante's Daddy

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR
MAREN SMITH

DANTE'S DADDY

A MM Master of the Castle 2 Novella Collection

MAREN SMITH



Masters of the Castle™

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**DANTE'S DADDY (A MM MASTERS OF THE CASTLE
NOVELLA) BY MAREN SMITH**

CHAPTER ONE

“Your brother says you’re leaving?”

Halting in the act of packing, Dante closed his eyes and tried not to let himself get frustrated. Dumping his toiletries in his duffel bag, he turned to look at his mother. She was a dear woman. Sure, she had a tendency to nag too much and put her nose in places it just didn’t belong, but that was practically written in the universal mother handbook. Mothers did that sort of thing; it was how they showed they loved their children.

Or so she’d told him.

“Mom,” he drawled, hating how tired he sounded, but—damn it—how many times and with how many people did he need to have this same conversation?

Stick to your guns, he told himself, but already that old uncertainty was wending its way through him. *Don’t waffle*, he ordered himself, but one direct question from her and he knew he’d crumble. He hated having to lie, and he refused to break trust with friends or family, no matter how hard the truth might be, but this... this one was a social doozy.

“But it’s not natural!” she huffed, flapping her hands against her thighs, a small hint of her own growing frustration.

“Your brother has been saving for months to throw this bachelor party for you.”

He'd been saving money for a motorcycle for months, she meant. Dante shook his head. Travis had been all grins when Dante told him to take his savings and get his bike instead. Rolling his lips, he barely kept himself from saying that out loud, knowing how hurt she'd be to hear it. A product of her generation, she was old-fashioned in just about all her thinking. Weddings had bachelor parties, and men married women. And that right there was the problem. For her, and for him.

On some level he'd always known he was different. He'd always known he wasn't anyone's mental image of a strong, handsome, alpha male with dominant tendencies, who sought only to find his opposite attraction and love, protect and care for that person until death did they part... but he was attracted to that. Strongly. For as far back as he could remember, he'd been drawn to men. He ached to be taken in hand by someone bigger, heavier, vastly more authoritative than he ever had been. But he was a Georgia boy, born to and raised in an old-money family, and while his parents and siblings had never been as outrageous about it as some folks he knew—and did his best to avoid—he could practically see the abject disappointment on his mother's face as she silently took in the truth, realizing that the grandchild-heavy future she'd imagined for herself wouldn't be happening the way she'd always envisioned.

“Isn't there a camp we could send him to for that?” Dante could already hear his father saying.

As if he were twelve, not twenty-six.

He had no idea if his beloved and yet clueless father really would say something so hurtful. What he did know, though, was how no one in his family was likely to bounce right up and start planning their “We’ve got a gay son!” lawn party.

He had to stop thinking like this.

“It feels like you’re running away,” his mother tried again, avoiding asking questions this time as if she thought she might be pushing too hard.

“Why?” Closing his eyes, Dante bowed his head and sighed. “Why? Because I don’t want to spend an entire night before I’m married ogling other women? Mom, I don’t frequent strippers because I don’t want to hate myself in the morning. One, money is hard enough to come by without losing all my ones into the g-string of someone I don’t even know.”

“I’d think knowing them would make it awkward,” his mom deadpanned.

He ignored that comment. “Two, gross. How clean are those g-strings anyway? And three, I don’t think I could handle it if I ever did something that left another person feeling as if they’re nothing but a piece of meat.”

That was a half-assed answer at best. One that made his mother smile, even though it felt to him as if he “doth protest too much”.

“You’re a good man, Dante,” she said so proudly.

Dante tried to smile, but in truth, he felt even worse than before.

“Megan is a lucky girl to be getting such a wonderful husband. Does she even know how lucky she is?”

Dante bit his tongue. His mom was wrong. Megan wasn't lucky at all. If anything, he was a monster and what he was doing to her—marrying her so no one would find out he was gay—was horrible. He loved her, but not the way she deserved to be loved—with every breath and ounce of feeling in his body. He didn't *not love* her either. They'd been friends since kindergarten. They got on like peas and carrots, never arguing. What stronger basis could there be for a successful marriage?

He knew better. In truth, he was marrying her because with her, he was hopeful he wouldn't hate every minute of his life from "I do" on. And she was marrying him... well, because he'd conned her into falling in love with him practically from the day they'd met. Conned was probably the wrong word, but the closer that moment of tying the knot came, the more he hated himself for what he was doing. Would he treat her right? Always. Could he make himself sleep with her without being drunk first? Yes, probably. They'd had a trial run and it had gone well enough, but could he make a lifetime out of swallowing back his natural preferences? Of closing his eyes so he wouldn't have to see her, and pretending she was, well... a he?

He had no idea, but the more he thought about it, the deeper his guilt chewed into him.

"I'm lucky she'll have me," Dante said, knowing all the way into his soul how true that was. Megan was his cover, not the other way around. He was going to have to do everything he could to make sure she never wanted for anything, physically, financially, sexually, and especially emotionally.

"So, where are you going?" his mother asked, seating herself on the side of his bed while he continued to pack. "You're not putting a lot in that duffel bag."

“Everything is supposed to be provided for us.”

“Us? Who’s going with you? And what’s the destination?” she pressed.

“I’m going by myself. I said ‘us’ because there will be more than just me there.”

Her brow furrowed. “Like who?”

“No one you know,” he said with yet another sigh. “No one I know, either. That’s the point.”

If he ever wanted to get out from under her microscope, then he’d better give her an answer she could readily believe.

“It’s kind of a trust-camp thing. No women,” he said, feeling the heat of his face flushing as he admitted, “just us guys. When someone’s about to take on this kind of life-long responsibility, even with someone they love, they need to get their mind straight and make sure they’re not making a mistake.”

That was a stupid answer. In two weeks, he and Megan would be legally joined for life. He was already supposed to be sure, and yet his mother’s face softened into a sympathetic smile. Getting up, she rounded the end of the bed, already reaching for him. They hugged, but he felt no acceptance in her arms, just deeper pinpricks of guilt.

“It’s just nerves, honey.” She patted his back before pulling away to hold him at arm’s length. “It’s normal. Everyone wrestles with the same inner questions the closer the exchange of nuptials get. How long will you be gone?”

“Four days,” Dante answered, grateful she seemed to believe his lie.

Great, that made the guilt even worse.

“Oh.” She brightened. “Well, that’s not bad. Let me know when you get back, and if you still want a bachelor party, I’ll happily throw you one.” She smiled and stroked his cheek. “No strippers.”

He’d probably end up accompanying her to bingo, her favorite vice. Probably her only one, considering that for his entire life, she’d been damn near Christ-like in her outward perfection.

Myrtle Annabel Headlee was the great-granddaughter of oil baron Arthur Headlee, and she had the bank account and the ancestral mansion to prove it. A proud member of Georgia’s highest society, about once a year her philanthropist hobbies hit the news. Her sitting room regularly hosted local politicians, visiting dignitaries and visiting royalty from other countries. Twice, she’d hosted the president of the United States. Charities loved her. Churches adored her. She was the epitome of honesty, integrity, and confidence. The only criticism he’d ever heard aimed at his mother was when one news anchor mentioned her having married so far below her station.

His father, Keith had been an auto mechanic when they’d met. All through his childhood, Dante had heard the story of how her car had broken down and the growing romance that had occurred over the engine block of his mother’s BMW 8-Series. When it came time, his socially awkward father handed her the repair bill and then asked her out.

In his 1977 Volkswagen, with the yellow fuzzy dice hanging from the rearview mirror, because he insisted on driving her. And in opening the doors for her. And in taking her to McDonalds, because it was two days before his payday and he hadn’t wanted to wait just to take her someplace nicer.

When that hit the news and a reporter jokingly remarked that she was slumming it, she got her father's permission before having a quiet word with the owner of the broadcasting station, and that was the last time that reporter stepped in front of a camera. The rumor was he'd been demoted to the mail room and quit two weeks later.

Boy, had her eldest son fallen far from her saintly tree.

"Love you, Mom," he said as she gathered her purse to leave.

She came back to him, laying her hand on his cheek as she smiled into his eyes. "I love you too, Dante. I have a charity auction tonight, so dinner's at seven sharp. Come over. You know your father would love to see you, and if you're going to be gone for four days, then it can be our fond farewell until you're back again. Please say you will."

Managing a smile for her sake, Dante agreed. "Be there at seven."

Patting his cheek, she took her leave and Dante promptly collapsed on the side of his bed. He didn't move and barely breathed until he heard his front door open and close again behind her. Burying his face in both hands, he wallowed in the quagmire of all his most recent decisions. What the hell was he doing?

Clinging onto himself with the barest tips of his fingernails, *that's* what he was doing.

He got up, rubbing his face and wandering. Finding himself in the bathroom just staring at his somber reflection, Dante avoided the silent accusation in his own brown eyes and quickly washed his face. He left the bathroom, closing the door as if that might somehow keep his own guilty shadow

from following him back to the living room. When he sat down next, it was at his computer. His fingers moved seemingly without any direction from him as he opened his laptop. Before he knew what he was doing, he had pulled up the website for The Castle, an infamous, if not notorious, resort that catered only to the BDSM-inclined.

He pulled up the welcome packet they'd sent him the morning after he'd emailed his submission paperwork. Again, he read through their receipt of his purchase price and their acceptance of his application, and the fake name he was supposed to use while he was there. Billy, it was the most generic name he could think of, so that's what he'd chosen. A part of him felt the sting of guilt that he'd even filled out the Castle application in the first place, but the rest of him... if he was going to spend the rest of his life making-believe, then for once—just once—he wanted to live. Really live. As the real him, no more closet. No more hiding who he was. For four glorious days, he was going to give in to every want and desire he'd never had the courage to express.

For the first time in his life, he was going to submit to a Dom. No sex involved. He'd been explicit in that regard, but anything else that was asked of him, he would do. He wanted... no, *ached* to do it.

He couldn't wait to get there.

CHAPTER TWO

Campbell sat in Master Marshall's office, holding the manilla file folder the Master of the Masters had given him and frowned at the top sheet in front of him.

"Do you have a problem with this?" Marshall finally asked.

"A problem?" he echoed, glancing up. Then shook his head and flipped the stapled top page up so he could read the second sheet. "Not a *problem*, really. No."

Leaning back in his chair, Marshall folded his hands in his lap. "There has to be a problem somewhere or you wouldn't still be sitting here."

"A question," Campbell clarified. "Not a real problem. I'm only surprised that I'm being matched to play with someone so soon. I only started a few months ago."

"All of my employees, with very few exceptions, get matched to play with guests from time to time. Including me."

Startled, Campbell forgot about the file. He almost threw back his head and laughed. "When?" he shot back.

"Every day," Marshall just as quickly returned, then pointed behind his throne of a black leather chair.

Campbell stared a moment at the canes and thought of the man and woman sitting on the bench right outside the office, waiting patiently for their turn with the Master of the Masters. “Touché,” he said. “But I thought I was being trained to spell you and Sam as Master of the Masters.”

“You are, and immediately after this assignment ends, you’ll be at your desk, doing this job while I take Kaylee and my son fishing for three days. But, in the meantime”—Marshall gestured to the file in Campbell’s hands—“what other questions might you have?”

“It says here that he’s never played in any kind of BDSM power exchange before.”

“That’s right. He’s here to live out a fantasy.”

“He’s here already?” Campbell did his best to keep his expression absolutely neutral.

“Not yet,” Marshall amended. “But he’s due to arrive on the morning buses.”

Campbell flipped another page, but he wasn’t really reading anymore. He just kept thinking, running his stone-gray gaze over hard and soft limits that matched his own, no matter how much he wished they didn’t. It had been a long time since he’d truly played with another person. Not since his last sub passed away. It had been four years now, and some days it still surprised him how fresh the pain could still be.

“What’s the real problem?” Marshall pressed again.

Flipping the folder shut, Campbell looked at it in his hands. He couldn’t think of a single “real” problem, apart from the one he was making. He wasn’t excited about it. When he first applied for this job, he’d thought he’d be more excited

than this about his first assigned play partner, but all he felt right now was dread.

Grudgingly, he tried to hand the file back to Marshall, who did not take it. He laid it on the other Master's desk instead.

"I'm just not feeling it," he finally said.

Slowly, Marshall raised his eyebrows. "You're not 'feeling' it?" he echoed in feigned surprise. "I'm sorry, but what about working here makes you think you need to *feel* anything about the clients in order to do your job? We fulfill fantasies, that's all we do. I'm not asking you to fall in love with him. I'm asking you to fill a staffing deficit in a moment of need. All you--"

"All right, all right," Campbell said, holding up a staying hand.

"Don't get irritated with me," Marshall countered.

"I'm not--"

"Your accent says otherwise."

"My accent?" Despite the escalating seriousness and the fact that he was being lectured by his boss, this time Campbell did laugh. "I'm Scottish. Of course I have an accent. That doesn't mean I'm--"

Not laughing, Marshall cut him off again. "It gets more pronounced when you're irritated. Like you are right now."

He didn't laugh this time. It could lead to getting fired and he wasn't ready for that, either. "I apologize. I'm not trying to shirk my work. It's just I--"

"I know what this is about," Marshall said gently. "I can't imagine what you went through when you lost Aaron. If I weren't so short-staffed right now, we would not be sitting

here, having this discussion. But I am short-staffed, and I don't have anyone else to ask."

And there it was: the rock and the hard place.

"If you absolutely can't do it—" Marshall started, but Campbell cut him off.

"I can do this." It would hurt, but he could Dom just about anyone. Sexual preferences aside, he could even Dom a woman. In fact, that might be easier. But a man... and God forbid he should find this Dante Bennet attractive. Just the thought of it made him feel as if he were cheating.

On what, the memory of Aaron?

Aaron wouldn't be flattered by that; he would have been appalled. He'd been very explicit that Campbell should not mourn him forever, but that he should find someone who makes him happy and live happily ever after. Or else.

He was pretty sure that "or else" part had been a joke. But it didn't matter; Campbell hadn't been ready to think about finding someone else. He still wasn't.

Suck it up, buttercup, he told himself. Managing a smile, he picked up the file and tapped it against Marshall's desk as he stood up.

"I'll get it done," he promised. He didn't know how he'd make it through the weekend, but he was determined not to be the first Master on staff to leave their client anything but smiling and thoroughly satisfied.

Even if it meant this might become the worst weekend of his life.

* * *

The Meet and Greet was traditionally where matched guests first met one another, and to that end, Campbell placed a note in Dante's file. It would be given to him in the courtyard when he checked in, leaving Campbell free to select a room and set it up for whatever their weekend together might need.

Judging from what he read in his client's online application, it didn't seem as if even Dante knew what he truly wanted. His answers were almost universally "Never tried, but I'm interested".

He'd chosen the Dungeon program, which suited Campbell just fine. He paid a visit to Wardrobe, dressing himself in all-black leather—pants, vest that left his chest and ripped abdomen bare, leather cuffs, and black boots which he planned to have Dante kneel in front of and kiss, perhaps even lick, in those few seconds after they met. He loaded the implement armoire with canes and straps and added a sturdy two-handed paddle capable of making even the most hardened bottom beg for mercy.

And when the room was as ready as he could make it, he sat on the edge of the bed and meditated, trying to get past the ugly feeling of betrayal he knew in his gut he shouldn't be feeling.

His poor boy. His playful, bratty Little, who loved playing pranks and had more energy than any other adult he knew. Aaron had been the perfect submissive, even when he was naughty. Nothing in Dante's paperwork suggested he had a Little's soul hidden deep inside him, and that was the only glimmer of relief that Campbell enjoyed in this assignment. At least that part of him would always be for Little Aaron alone.

He could make it through the weekend. He'd build up and reinforce his inner walls, keeping the Daddy portion of his

Dom makeup separate and for his dearly departed boy alone.

From the window, the cacophony of excited voices began to grow. Guests, he knew, disembarking from the buses and filtering across the drawbridge into the courtyard for Mistress Miranda's morning spiel on Castle rules of proper behavior.

Time to go meet his client.

Lord help him.

CHAPTER THREE

The Meet and Greet was held in a ballroom the size of two high school gymnasiums. Red velvet drapes flowed down the walls, softening the hard stone blocks. There were beverages, of which Dante had two, wishing for all his worth there was alcohol in them. He wasn't a heavy drinker, but he was just nervous enough to forget he wasn't. He took the note the check-in lady had handed him and read the short missive again.

I'll meet you at the Meet and Greet, boy. Prepare yourself.
It was signed by a Master Campbell and gave him goosebumps the longer he looked at it.

Master Campbell had impeccable penmanship, written in stark black ink with a slight slant to the left. He was a southpaw, a left hander. He'd even drawn a little bull whip at the bottom, and that gave Dante shivers too. Not the kind that declared he was in over his head, but the sort that gently suggested it.

He got a third fruit punch, and stood against the wall, surveying the room and wondering which of the obvious Doms present his Master Campbell might be.

For as big as the room was, it was still crowded. The Castle's popularity showed in its sheer quantity of clientele.

There were a lot of people here. Most were matched up and already getting to know one another. He was standing here like a wallflower, not at all certain if he should be mingling, working his way through the crowd until he found... wait a minute.

Dante's eyes locked on a slightly shorter man than himself, dressed all in mouthwatering black, pushing politely through the crowd and heading right toward him. The man stopped twenty feet away and Dante wilted, afraid this wasn't Master Campbell either and that he'd just realized his mistake.

Except the man wasn't looking around or even looking away. Unsmiling, he stared directly into Dante's eyes as he raised his hand and beckoned with two fingers.

Dante was leaning up against a stone wall, alone, so it was impossible the man could be motioning to anyone else. And still Dante looked around to be sure.

Now the Dom in Black wasn't just unsmiling, he was frowning. He didn't beckon again but snapped his fingers and pointed to a spot on the stone floor in front of him.

And just like that, this suddenly became "it". That moment Dante had longed for all his life. The moment a dominant man chose him with real BDSM play in mind. The first moment ever in his life that he had a choice in which to give in and obey, or simply... not.

His knees actually shook, a lightning bolt of awareness zipped through his veins, awaking every nerve in his body. Step by step, he approached the shorter man, stopping about three feet away, just shy of where he was pointing.

"Hi, I'm Dante," he said, clearing his throat. And then, just in case this wasn't Master Campbell after all, added, "I'm

waiting for someone.”

The Dom in Black was not impressed. “Do I look like someone to you?”

“Yes, but do you look like Master Campbell is what I’m trying to figure out,” Dante quipped, trying through his nervousness to offer a tentative smile. One that was not returned.

“Yes, I am Master Campbell,” he finally answered. If anything, his eyes grew that much sterner. “And you are Billy, not Dante. Did you not read your welcome packet instructions?”

Dante swallowed, fingers fidgeting as he felt himself literally getting smaller under the other man’s frown. “Oops.”

Master Campbell closed his eyes for just longer than a blink, then sighed. “Everyone here uses an alias for a reason. Anonymity is—”

“King,” Dante finished for him, then shrugged. “I’m sorry, I forgot. But if everyone uses an alias, then won’t they expect the name I gave them to be the false one?”

Campbell showed virtually no change in his stern expression. “Are you trying to be a brat?”

Smile vanishing, Dante fought not to fidget. “No, sir. Not at all. I really... I just forgot.”

“Your ‘forgetfulness’ just put me in the position of having to use your real name throughout your stay, in violation of our rules. Rules designed to keep you safe, both here and out in the real world. I’m not pleased.”

Dante shrugged, not quite understanding why his matched Dom was treating this so seriously. Nothing that could

potentially come from their using his real name would be the end of the world. “Okay, but... problem solved, right?”

“You really do want me to treat you like a brat.”

“Not particularly, no.” Dante lost the fight. Hands at his sides, he found himself fidgeting with the pants on a costume he’d chosen—tan trousers, white poet’s shirt with the neck open in a “v” that bared his chest from collarbone to a point between his pecs.

“Because I can do that,” the Dom calmly threatened. “Treat you like a naughty disobedient young man in desperate need of correction.”

His hands dropped to his wide, shiny black belt, and right in front of Dante’s disbelieving eyes, he took it off.

Dante stared at the belt as the Dom doubled it over and then just stood there holding it while Dante did everything he could not to shake out of sheer nerves. He swallowed hard. The sight of it wasn’t anywhere near as terrifying as his own reaction to seeing it.

It was the glass of water, dripping condensation before the eyes of a man dying of thirst. It was the culmination of every dream he’d ever had.

Yes, he wanted that.

“No, thank you,” he said automatically, and then stood there, wondering why he had when “no” wasn’t what he wanted at all.

The Dom—was it Master Campbell? Dante kind of thought it was—tipped his head to one side, eyes narrowing on him. Not in an angry way, but more regarding him curiously.

“Kneel,” he finally said.

What, right here?

Dante looked around the crowded room. No one was looking at them, but now it felt as if the spotlight were on them. He wasn't into exhibitionism. He remembered writing on the application that he was curious about it, but he knew for sure now. He was *not* into it.

“Kneel,” Master Campbell said again, only slightly sterner than before.

Dante's fingers were going crazy, twisting, tugging and folding the seam in the side of his trousers over and over on itself until there was no extra fabric left to fold and he had to stop.

Master Campbell deliberately looked down and stared right at his hands. Dante let go of his trousers. Just as deliberately, Master Campbell pointed again to the floor directly in front of him.

“I don't come to you,” he explained. “You come to me.”

Oh. Right.

A flush of slow heat bloomed in his stomach and slowly seared upward until the full fire of it was scorching his face. Dante took that reluctant step forward. There was less than eighteen inches between them now.

“Kneel,” the Dom ordered yet again, and this time, Dante sank to his knees.

He cupped his hands, a tiny thrill that was equal parts anxiety and anticipation tickling up inside him when he looked all the way up at the other man, his neck straining back in order to meet his gaze.

“Do you want to kiss my boot?”

Dante looked down at them in surprise. Not particularly, no. But was that what was expected of him? The knots in his stomach began to squeeze in, but not in a fun way.

“You don’t, do you?”

Why did Dante feel like he was failing? This was what he was here for, why did he feel like a fish out of water? Why wasn’t he falling all over himself, eager to obey and get it on? Why was “odd” the only thing he felt right now?

Bending, Dante lay the smallest kiss to the side of Master Campbell’s shiny black boot, but the knots didn’t relax. The excitement was gone already, just leaving him on his knees, wishing... well, kind of wishing he hadn’t come. His face burned hotter and he quickly looked away. He didn’t realize his hands were fidgeting again until slowly, Master Campbell hunkered down in front of him, hands dangling relaxed off the ends of his knees as he regarded Dante with far less severity than before.

“You don’t, do you?” he asked again.

Dante swallowed but didn’t answer. He had no idea what to say, except maybe to apologize. He wasn’t quite sure what to apologize for though.

Slipping the tip of one finger beneath Dante’s chin, the Castle Master gently forced his face up until they were locked, eye-to-eye.

“I’m sorry,” Dante blurted. “I’ll try to do better. I will.”

Master Campbell shook his head, and for one heart-stopping moment Dante thought he had failed so badly his first Dom ever was giving up on him, about to walk away, maybe even to find someone else.

“Why are you sorry?”

For doing everything wrong?

Flustered, feeling like an idiot for still kneeling on the floor like this, Dante started to get up.

In a flash of abrupt movement, Master Campbell had him by the hair at the back of Dante's head. He wrenched Dante's neck back as far as it would go, forcing him to meet his eyes. Search though he might, Dante didn't see so much as a shred of disapproval in the other man's face.

"I don't know," Dante answered automatically.

"I can't read your mind, boy. Try again."

Flustered became frustrated. Dante floundered, trying to find a good enough reason beyond the pathetic excuse rattling around in his brain. There wasn't one. He had to go with the only thing he could think of. He sighed. "Because I think I'm ruining this for you too. I'm sorry."

Master Campbell did not let go of his hair, but something in his face softened. "Don't be sorry. You're not ruining anything. You just chose the wrong program."

Dante blinked startled. "Wh-what program should I be in?"

Releasing his grip on Dante's hair, Master Campbell stood up. For just a moment, Dante found himself eye-level with the other man's crotch. He almost licked his lips. The black leather pants fit the Master like a dream.

Shit. Master Campbell was watching him and judging by the quirk at the corners of his mouth, he knew exactly what Dante had been staring at.

"I'm sorry," Dante said again, his face heating up again.

Dear God, am I blushing? Please don't let me be blushing.

Holding up his belt, Master Campbell fit the end in through the buckle and dropped a giant loop of his impromptu collar over Dante's head and around his neck.

"Stand," he ordered, pulling the makeshift leash snug around him.

Instantly, the tingles and knots sprung back to life in his stomach and chest.

"Come with me, boy," Master Campbell said briskly, that same severity still in his voice, but his expression was almost amused. "Let's find out where you belong."

CHAPTER FOUR

They weren't the first couple to leave the Meet and Greet, but this had to be the earliest that Campbell had taken a partner to, what he considered at least to be, the playground. The whole of the Castle and every inch of land it owned was wired for safety. Not even he knew where they all were, but though there was no place they could go where the cameras and microphones wouldn't pick them up, he knew Dante was safe, even if he himself didn't feel like he was.

He took Dante to the barn to watch the "ponies" being put through their paces, but though he helped relax Dante by talking about past experiences—or lack thereof—Campbell saw zero interest for all these scantily dressed ponies cantering in circles around the yard. Curiosity, yes. Just nothing that stood out to Campbell suggesting Dante might like to try it.

After a while, when Campbell turned to walk away, Dante fell into step beside him and happily nattered on about his work—computer programmer for a banking institute back home—to his fiancée—a girl named Megan, seemed nice from the sounds of it—and even the Castle itself and about how Dante wished he'd had the nerve to come here sooner.

Campbell listened to it all, making humming and ah-haing noises and leading him to the outdoor puppy mosh pit, where

the more adventurous puppies and kittens and the occasional wolf or fox, or even teddy bear, roamed in a fenced yard, tearing up the squeak toys and one even marking his territory, which quickly got him smacked with a newspaper as a cleaning squad went in to lay down straw. The puppy kennel always got a thorough cleaning at night, which was when the piddle would be scooped.

Again, he watched Dante's face, searching for signs of excitement. Again, there was no interest beyond curiosity, although he did reach in through the bars of the kennel to take a squeak toy from the shy puppy that came up to them. She wiggled her butt and romped off after the toy when Dante tossed it.

"So, Megan doesn't know where you are, and neither do your parents," Campbell finally said, hoping to show he at least understood the taller man's situation, even if he couldn't condone it.

Dante sighed, lifting his face to the warm sunshine. "Pretty much. Which is why if ever I was going to come to a place like this and just be myself, I needed to do it before I got married."

Campbell didn't respond. It was his place to make sure Dante got his money's worth, not judge his lifestyle choices. Even if all he could see in Dante's future was heartache and pain. For him and Megan both.

He turned to lead them back across the yard, thinking perhaps the Mermaid Lagoon might appeal to his matched submissive, but Dante stopped him.

"We could sit on the swings," he suggested, pointing out across the expansive green lawn to the back side of the Castle where Campbell could just make out bits of the Littles'

playground. Dante brightened. “Or, hey, could we feed the fish? I was too anxious about being late to everything else to do it earlier when I came across the drawbridge.” He stole a glance at Campbell, gauging his reaction and then quickly looked away. “I mean we don’t have to if you don’t want to. I can do it later.”

“Hm,” was all Campbell said, though his gut had tightened up harder than Fort Knox’s underground vault. “I don’t think I’ve ever fed the fish.”

Which was a lie, one he almost felt guilty about telling. He had in fact fed them once. A small handful, which he’d tossed out because Aaron would have loved it.

“Let’s go feed the fish,” he decided, struggling to hide his reluctance. Of all the wonders here, Dante wanted to feed the moat koi and play on the swings. *Please don’t be a Little*, the Dom prayed as they walked back to the courtyard, where an old-fashioned bubblegum dispenser held free fish food for anyone who wanted some.

“Do we have to get permission?” Dante asked once they reached it.

“Nope.” Taking hold of the twist lever, he motioned Dante to put his hands under the mouth and then turned the handle, dumping a generous handful of fish food into his empty palms.

Offering a tentative smile, Dante swiftly walked out into the middle of the drawbridge and softly called, “Here, fishy fish-fish.”

Well accustomed to being fed by visitors, koi rushed to the bridge, schooling in his shadow to fight one another for the best feeding spots. Dante’s eyes were on the fish as he threw out all the food pellets. Campbell’s eyes were on Dante and it

was all he could do to hide the stinging prick of tears. Dante wasn't Aaron, but in this moment of unbidden joy, it was impossible not to see a Little lurking just under Dante's mild demeanor.

Aaron would have been louder, though. He'd have laughed and clapped and never once thought about who might be watching or judging his childishly exuberant behavior.

"One more handful," Dante said, ducking past Campbell to help himself to another turn of the dispenser.

Campbell looked away, rolling his lips to keep from saying all the wrong things while Dante fed the grateful koi.

"One more handful," he said again, but Campbell caught his arm before he could duck back toward the dispenser again.

"That's enough, boy," Campbell said, fighting to keep his tone light. "You'll make them too fat to swim if you keep feeding them like that."

"D-do you want to feed them with me?" Dante asked.

Was it a trick of his imagination or was Dante really as hopeful as he seemed?

"*So they can get twice as fat?*" Campbell wanted to tell him but couldn't. Not when Dante started to smile.

"You do, don't you?" Dante asked, gleefully.

The Daddy Dom within Campbell tried a smile for his sake and let go of his arm.

Running back to the dispenser, Dante got another handful. Trying not to watch him and judge his every moment as anything but that of an eager Little, he saw Dante naughtily spill another turn of the handle's drop of pellets and then hurry back to him.

Campbell obligingly held out his hands so Dante could spill slightly less than half the pellets into them.

“On three, okay?” Dante asked, sidling up beside him so they could throw at the same time. Most likely hoping Campbell wouldn’t notice that Dante had more pellets than he did. “On three?”

Clearing his throat, Campbell held out his hand and waited.

He swore Dante shivered as he copied Campbell’s stance and started counting. “One... two”—he glanced at Campbell sideways, as if to assure himself that Campbell wasn’t going to back out at the last half-second—“three!”

They sprinkled the water with twin arcs of tossed pellets that the koi snapped up the second it all hit the water.

“One more handful?” Dante asked, eyebrows arching.

Campbell gave him a look, which instantly made Dante grin, fold his pleading hands under his chin, and even bat his eyelashes at him.

Dante had beautiful lashes and even more beautiful brown eyes.

He couldn’t do this. Not with a Little.

“Have I already told you no?” Campbell softly asked.

Dante wasn’t quite successful at hiding his grimace. “You agreed to do the last one,” he hedged.

“What about the handful you snuck when you thought I wasn’t watching?”

Dante flushed, his hands dropping to his sides where they tugged and turned over the fold at the side seams of his pants,

drawing the cloth up until his thighs were clearly showing and no extra cloth remained in his trousers. “I was hoping you didn’t see that part.”

Campbell braced himself to lay all his cards on the table. If Dante was going to object, please God, let him do it now.

“Is that how naughty little boys treat their Daddies where you’re from?”

Dante stared at him, his face slowly flushing a deep shade of red.

Argue with me, Campbell prayed. Tell me this isn’t what you’re into.

But Dante didn’t argue. Instead, he hung his head and twisted at his pants. “No, Sir. I don’t imagine they do.”

Jesus, God, no.

Campbell struggled to swallow, his throat too tight to permit it. “What do you think should be done to naughty little boys who don’t mind what they’re told?”

Nervous excitement—finally, a show of interest—made Dante’s voice rise to a slightly higher pitch. A younger sounding pitch. To Campbell’s ears, he sounded just like the little boy he’d accused him of being.

“Well, it’s cause there’s two of us,” Dante tried to explain. “So... I was sharing.”

“Taking an extra handful without permission isn’t sharing, and I think you should know that. Don’t you? So answer my question. What do little boys who are deliberately naughty after Daddy tells them no deserve?”

Now it was Dante’s turn to swallow. “Um”—he fussed with his pants—“a, um... spanking over Daddy’s knee?”

Maybe? But not hard, okay? It's my first."

As if he'd ever let a naughty boy control how long or hard he spanked, or even what his entire punishment would detail. That was Campbell's first thought. His second felt like a hard limit. He just couldn't do this.

Campbell pulled a keycard from his vest pocket, extending it toward Dante. "Go to our room, it's in the west wing on the second floor and the room number will be in your welcome packet," he said gruffly. "Find it and then find a corner and be in it when I get there. Go."

Crestfallen, Dante studied him for a moment in silence before silently taking the card. Campbell could see it in his eyes; he knew Campbell didn't want to follow him. Dante would be standing in the corner all night, in a room all by himself.

That was a terrible thing to do to a Little, Campbell knew, and yet he stood at the drawbridge, watching Dante trudge across the courtyard and up the front steps, shoulders slumped every step of the way.

Campbell kept his shaking legs right where they were, until he couldn't see his matched Little anymore. Before he knew it was okay to move, he was running.

Straight to Master Marshall's office.

* * *

Campbell charged past the bench of naughty guests, throwing himself into the Master of the Masters' office and quickly slamming the door behind him. Only belatedly did he recognize he'd just interrupted something he shouldn't have.

Kaylee, Marshall's wife, was sitting on his desk, her back to the door, scrambling to get her queenly skirts lowered over the equally struggling lump that turned out to be Marshall, flailing to get out from under them.

Kaylee smacked her husband on the head, blushing bright red as she said, "See? I told you to lock the door."

Standing, Marshall yanked her off his desk, swatting her that much harder on the butt. "I smack you, not the other way around."

She stuck her tongue out, which was as long as Campbell managed to wait before blurting out, "I can't do this!"

"Do wha—" Kaylee started to ask but stopped when Marshall glared at her.

"This is my job. Let me do it, please."

"Then stop calling me up here," she muttered as she turned, dodging another swat from him before hurrying out.

"You could have knocked," Marshall said, straightening his pants before dropping to sit on his throne.

"Knock?" Campbell stared at him. "Knock? This is important!"

"And the happiness and well-being of your employer isn't?" Marshall's white-blond eyebrows arched, possibly implying that was what he expected Campbell to agree to, but he had no time for games.

"This is serious. I *can't* do this."

"I assume you're talking about Dante Bennet."

Scrubbing the fingers of both hands through his hair, Campbell sank into the nearest seat. Head in his hands, he

groaned. Actually groaned! He'd always been a do-or-do-not kind of man. He didn't bitch or complain, and he for sure didn't groan.

"He's a Little," Campbell finally said. "I just see Aaron when I look at him. I just"—he shook his head—"I can't."

Getting up, Marshall came around the desk and sat down in another guest chair beside Campbell. They were both quiet a moment, before Marshall finally said, "I can only imagine —"

"If you say that one more time, I'm going to scream," Campbell said with a sigh.

Marshall's jaw clenched. "I need you to do this."

"God," Campbell groaned again. "Don't say that. Do you have any idea how hard my heart keeps pounding? My boy is perfect. He's cute and handsome, utterly innocent. I don't even think he understands what he is, and I'm the last person who ought to be showing him."

He stopped, noticing the strange look Marshall was giving him. "What?"

"You just called him your boy."

Campbell blinked, slowly straightening in his seat. "Yes," he countered, trying to hide his instant irritation. "That's because he's my client. You gave him to me, or don't you remember?"

Marshall waved that part aside. "I do, but you called him your boy. Not your client, but yours. Like, possessively."

Boss or not, Campbell cut him off. "This is not one of your matchmaking schemes. This is not a romance or a fairytale where everything works out for the best—"

“It’s been four years. I never knew Aaron, but I doubt he’d be happy to know you’re still grieving this hard.”

“How long I grieve is none of your business,” Campbell growled, his throat suddenly tight and his fists clenched in his lap.

“True.” Marshall held up both hands in surrender before slowly lowering them again. “But that doesn’t change the fact that I have no one else I can ask. I’m not playing matchmaker. I’m actually in desperate need of your help.”

Rubbing his face with both hands, Campbell pulled all of his thoroughly rattled nerves back under tightened control. Dante was waiting in their room, the one place Campbell would have given anything to avoid.

“It’s only four days, one long weekend. Whatever you need when it’s over, you’ll have it, I swear. I don’t care if it’s time off or a therapist to talk to, or—”

“I quit,” Campbell said abruptly. Erupting from his seat, he stormed from the office, but never made it any farther than the bench in the hall outside. That’s where he stopped, fists balled up so tight his knuckles turned white. Head bowed as the image of Dante standing indefinitely in the corner, waiting for a Dom who was too chickenshit to come and care for him.

Four days? What was four days? It was a weekend; it was nothing. Anyone could do anything for four miserable days...

Except him, apparently. Anything but this.

“I’m an ass.” He didn’t mean to say that out loud and didn’t realize he had until a chipper woman’s voice answered back.

“No, you’re a jerk-face,” said the Greek slave girl sitting closest to him on the waiting bench. “You cut in line ahead of

us.”

Campbell stared at her, and the longer he did, the faster his irritation and despair fled him. Lowering himself to her eye level, he braced his hands on his knees. “That’s Master Jerk-Face to you, little girl. Now watch me walk right back in there, ahead of you again. Say something else to me,” he coaxed. “Just one word, and I promise, you’ll spend the rest of your time here scrubbing the grout between all these old stone floors with a toothbrush. Do you understand? Don’t say a word, just nod.”

Losing her snotty smile, her eyes huge, the woman nodded.

“Good girl,” he said without any conviction at all. Shoving off his knees, he marched back into Marshall’s office.

“You’re an asshole,” he announced to his boss, who looked up from his phone call in surprise.

“I could do better,” Marshall only too quickly agreed. “But—”

“No buts.” Campbell cut him off. “The only reason I’m not leaving right now is because that boy up there doesn’t deserve being caught up in the fallout.”

“I’m glad you feel—”

Campbell cut him off again. “You don’t want me giving in to my feelings right now. You’re just as likely to get punched in your perfect, utterly too-straight nose.”

“I can’t be Master of anything with a broken nose.”

“But as soon as this assignment is over,” Campbell said, ignoring him, “I’m gone. Got it? Gone.”

Snapping around on his heel, he reached for the door just as it burst open, knocking him back in surprise. He had less than half of a second, just barely recognizing the Castle's Chief of Security, Jackson, before the bigger man tackled him straight to the floor.

He hit the stones flat on his back before Jackson quickly flipped him onto his belly. Straddling his back, Jackson secured Campbell's wrists against the small of his back.

"All right," Jackson drawled. "He's tackled. Now what?"

CHAPTER FIVE

Dante sighed, staring at the stone joining of the block Castle walls, wondering what he'd done wrong. Apart from sneaking that extra handful of fish food, anyway.

They'd been having fun... hadn't they? The puppy kennel had been interesting, and he'd kind of liked throwing that squeak toy for the woman romping about on her hands and knees. He didn't think he'd been judging her. He barely understood his own kinks; he wasn't about to look down his nose at another's. But maybe some of his personal confusion had shown on his face and that's why his grumpy Dom had decided to punish him. Seriously, it couldn't be just because he'd snuck more fish food than allowed.

Could it?

Sighing, he picked at a rough spot on the stone with his fingernail. He felt stupid, standing here in the corner, waffling back and forth between anxiously awaiting Campbell's return and wondering how uncomfortable a real-life spanking would be. The Scottish Dom was going to spank him, right?

Maybe he wouldn't. Campbell didn't seem to like him very much. Or at least, if he did, he was good at hiding it behind that stern exterior of his.

Maybe he shouldn't have teased him. Maybe that's what he hadn't liked. That was too bad, really. Because although Dante had been hesitant about it, for just a few minutes, it had been as if he were melting into himself. It had felt so organic as he'd timidly let himself go, and for a short time just let himself be... himself. That's what he'd come here to do, but he also wanted to have a good time and that wasn't going to happen if one of them was constantly upset by Dante's behavior.

He'd do better, Dante decided. He was good at hiding who he was, anyway. He did it all the time. For the sake of the peace, he'd keep the teasing under wraps from here on out.

A soft scratch at the door of the room he'd been assigned to share with the Scottish Master was his only warning he wasn't alone anymore. Campbell came inside, already returning his door card key to his pocket.

Dante ventured out of the corner, fighting not to worry his hands until he knew where Campbell was emotionally. Hopefully, he wasn't mad at him.

"I'm sor..." he started to say, but Campbell snapped his thick fingers and pointed back at the corner.

Frowning, Dante went, just not quietly. "I hate the corner," he muttered, putting himself back in it. "Whoever came up with this torture, now that's a real sadist."

So much for keeping the peace, he thought. Great. Now he felt bad again.

The clink of Campbell unbundling the heavy black belt from around his lean hips caught his ears, sending a wave of prickling awareness tickling up his spine.

He was taking his belt off again. Was that for the spanking, or was that for... *other* things? Dante couldn't breathe. They weren't supposed to do the other things. He'd been pretty explicit about no sex on his application, so why was his cock getting hard?

Staring wide-eyed at a spot on the stones directly in front of him, Dante ached to turn around. He needed to see with his own eyes what his ears were suggesting was happening.

A rustle of cloth... was Campbell changing his clothes? Dante flushed hot all over. Why wasn't he saying something?

Campbell strolled through the room behind him, softly sliding a dresser drawer open. The longer the silence went on, the harder it was to take. Unable to bear it, Dante blurted, "I can do better, Master Campbell. I've already had a really stern talk with myself, and if I made you mad, I promise I will do better."

"No talking in the corner, young man," Campbell said in a voice so calm and mild that it made Dante shiver. Then a heavy boot hit the floor, followed a short time later by its twin.

"Are you getting..." Dante couldn't bring himself to say "naked". He finished with a thrilling, completely inadequate, "Um... undressed?"

Did Campbell just stand up? It sounded like he just got up. Oh shit, and now was headed his way.

Every tiny hair on Dante's body stood up on end when Campbell's hand came to rest on his head. Of their own accord, his eyes closed when Campbell slowly dragged his head back and tenderly kissed the top.

"I can duck down to make it easier," Dante suggested, loving how cherished that completely chaste kiss made him

feel.

Dante jumped when Campbell suddenly swatted him. The clap of the impact was only half as startling as the sting. Wow. And that was his bare hand?

Grabbing a handful of Dante's short hair, this time Campbell yanked his head back as far as his neck would allow. Again, much more gently than his aggressive grip in Dante's hair, he kissed the top of his head. "Don't bait me, boy. I can reach just fine. And again, I said no talking in the corner."

As Campbell let him go to walk away, Dante heard the telltale click of a zipper skimming down its track.

Forget no talking. How the hell could there not be talking? He had a very muscular, good-looking man getting naked right behind him!

"We're still on for no sex right?" he blurted.

Campbell drew a slow breath, then let it out in a chuckle.

The Master was laughing, and that laugh was like slow molasses, flowing over Dante in the most delightful way.

"Yes, no sex is still on. You're the submissive, Dante. You're the one in control of what happens."

Dante considered that for all of two seconds, before turning around. He was just in time to see Master Campbell shuck off his pants.

He wasn't wearing shorts underneath, that was the first thing he noticed. As shocking and as noteworthy as that initial shock was, a flood of images instantly followed—the thickness of Campbell's strong thighs, the leanness of his waist, the ripped muscle of his smooth, shaven belly, the

narrow path of his happy trail leading straight to the dark nest of curls at the base of his... of his...

“Wow,” Dante said, his own cock throbbing as it swelled in his pants. He couldn’t take his eyes off the other’s.

Campbell sauntered closer, glorious and unashamed in his nudity. Dante couldn’t believe how hard he was trembling. God, he’d have given anything right then just to touch the Dom, but he couldn’t. His hands were frozen at his sides.

Campbell’s weren’t. Taking Dante by his shoulders, he physically turned him around and pushed his nose right up to the corner again.

His skin was still tingling even after Campbell let go of him.

Trailing his hands down over Dante’s arms to his waist, he took hold of Dante’s fly and unzipped it.

Dante’s knees weakened as the Master hooked both pants and shorts down his thighs until gravity caught his clothes, dropping them the rest of the way to his ankles.

“Wow,” Dante said again, his voice small and shaking. “Okay, I can do this.”

“I said no talking in the corner,” Campbell murmured just behind Dante’s ear. His hands settled warm around his hips. “Guess who hasn’t stopped talking once since I got here.”

Drawing his hand back, Campbell swatted him, hard. Dante’s hips jolted toward the wall, but he quickly caught his balance. His right buttock was stinging furiously. His Dom had a really hard hand. Why was that so thrilling?

Why was all of this thrilling?

“We’re going to use traffic signals,” Campbell said.

Right. What were traffic signals? Dante was so focused on the slow rub Campbell was squeezing into him, first one stinging bottom cheek, and then the other. When he let go, Campbell swatted that side too.

Dante's knees did buckle, but he caught the wall with both hands, arresting his fall.

"There's a good boy," Campbell soothed, the sweet honey of his tone leaving Dante trembling even more. "Hands on the wall. Stick that gorgeous ass out for Daddy to spank."

"D-Daddy?" Dante melted, and maybe it had something to do with that completely unexpected title, or maybe it was the seductive kiss the other man dropped onto his shoulder.

"We're changing programs," Campbell soothed, then patted Dante's naked hip, a silent reminder to do what he'd been told.

Spreading his feet as far as the tangle of his pants would allow, Dante stuck his bottom back at Campbell.

"I believe you'll enjoy this program better," Campbell assured.

For sure, Dante liked everything better right now, including the echo of that kiss that he could still feel, burning into his shoulder straight through his shirt.

Right up until Campbell took it off him, giving the garment a toss toward the bed. "This isn't the right uniform for you, is it?"

Dante shook his head, flustered and tingling, fretting and yet doing it over the wrong thing entirely. Who cared about clothes or even the lack thereof when kisses were on the line? A sudden rush of tears stung his eyes as it hit him. This didn't feel like "Let's pretend," not anymore. The awkwardness of

trying to feel his way through what very much felt like role-playing was gone. In the emptiness, all he knew was how much he'd give just to have someone kiss him again. Not as a woman or even as a man. This was so far beyond gender. He just wanted to feel that caress of acceptance. He wanted to feel, maybe for the first time in his life, that someone accepted him, no matter what.

Oh Jesus, he was crying.

Dante bowed his head, opening his mouth to hide any telltale sniffles or shaky gasps. He closed his eyes on the tears, and for just a moment, let himself get lost in Campbell's touch. Daddy's touch. Why did that sound so right, even if only in the quiet of his head?

"It's not the big scary dungeon you need, is it?" Taking hold of his hips, Campbell guided him until his ass was sticking well back and Dante was almost bent over in half.

"Okay," he said in that same small voice as before. He wasn't a crier, but here the tears came anyway, falling down his cheeks without his permission. Making his breath catch in a hitching gasp that the other man would have to be insane not to recognize as crying. "I'm sorry."

"Cry all you want, boy. Tears are a turn-on." Campbell turned and walked away.

To get dressed? Dante kind of hoped not. Something about them both being naked like this wasn't sexual. It was deeper than that. For the first time since he was too young to realize how not normal he was, Dante felt normal.

"Please don't leave," Dante whispered, breaking down under the weight of that vocalized fear.

The room fell quiet. No walking or rustling of clothes to suggest his Dom might be getting dressed again. Nothing, just embarrassment and silence and his own pathetic sniffing as he stood with his cock at full mast and his ass sticking obscenely out, as if begging Campbell to fuck him.

He wouldn't have complained if he did. If he could have taken back the no sex thing on his application, he would have. Just so he could leave here with the happy memory of just being held by someone who didn't need him to be anything but who he was.

"I'm not going anywhere," Campbell finally said, and the soft wooden bump of what might have been the dresser drawer opened again. "So what are traffic lights, do you know?"

Stop for red, green for go, yellow usually meant for him to go faster, but he had read enough stories now to know it probably meant the opposite. Dante told him so and won another seductive chuckle. He really liked the sound of Campbell's laugh.

He wiped at his face with the back of one wrist, his tears already slowing.

"Close enough. Don't say it, but do you remember Mistress Hardwick's introduction in the courtyard? Do you remember what she said the Castle's safeword is?"

"Yes." Dante also remembered her cautioning them not to use it unless he was in a situation where it was appropriate to have all of Castle security beating their way to his door.

There was another clatter. Something wooden and lightweight being picked up.

Campbell came back to him, sticking a small handheld paddle, painted jet black on the business end, but with a handle

wrapped in bright red paracord to provide a sturdy, comfortable grip where Dante could see it.

“If you ever use that word with me instead of red, I will be extremely displeased, is that understood? I want you to be comfortable in the knowledge that I will always stop if you use red. I don’t need the threat of Castle Security interfering in order to keep you safe. Are we agreed?”

He’d just met this man. He didn’t know him hardly at all, and yet Dante did know one thing: he already felt safe.

“Yes,” he said again.

“How do little boys address their Daddies?” Campbell gently reminded.

“Yes, um, Daddy.” He expected to feel stupid or awkward using that title, but to Dante’s surprise, it felt good in his mouth. It should have been embarrassing, if only for the first time, but it didn’t taste half as strange as Master had. Uncertainty gripped him then, and he turned far enough to see Campbell’s face. “I’m comfortable with Sir too, if you’d rather I use that one?”

“I’m comfortable with either.” Campbell patted Dante’s naked bottom and pointed to the wall. “Although I am partial to Daddy.”

Dante faced the wall, no longer feeling that awful heaviness of a moment before. “I can do Daddy, although I am sorry I cried. I don’t normally do that.”

“Get ready to broaden your horizons then, because the few tears you just shed aren’t half what you’re about to.” The flat of the paddle came to rest with breathtaking coolness on the center of his ass. “Have you anything to say before we get started?”

Wide-eyed, hardly daring to believe that he was now on the cusp of getting everything he'd secretly always yearned for, Dante shook his head. "Do you want me to count?" he asked hopefully. It had always been a fantasy of his to have to count out the strokes of his punishments.

It was a little scary and yet his cock twitched when Campbell said, "You won't have the breath to count. I just want you to feel this time and know that you're not really being spanked because of your naughtiness on the bridge or your obvious inability to follow directions when you're sent to the corner. I'm doing this because you need it. So we can clear the air of what haunts your mind and finally settle into our roles here. That's what you need in this moment, right now, isn't it?"

For the lies he couldn't help but tell just trying to get here... Dante shivered, then nodded. "Yes, Sir."

The flat cool surface of the paddle came down lightly to rest on the right side of his naked buttocks. Clenching was an instinct Dante couldn't control. It was also one that Master Campbell's sharp gray stare did not miss.

"Relax your bottom," he said. "Trust me, it'll bruise far less if you relax."

"Brui—" Dante didn't realize he'd said that out loud until the sudden crack of the paddle cut the word off mid-speech. Dante sucked a hard breath, eyes flaring wide at the intensity of the sting now chewing into his butt. Forget relaxing. Every muscle in his body clenched hard as a rock. His hands on the wall became fists.

His voice, on the other hand, was calm to the point of ridiculousness as he said, "Ouch."

He couldn't help his startled reaction, and only belatedly did he realize his calm was more akin to waving a red cape in front of an already charging bull. Master Campbell didn't need to turn this into a challenge, because Dante already knew he was going to lose it.

"Ouch is right," Master Campbell drawled, and promptly administered another sharp smack to the left side of his ass.

The pop of the wooden paddle bouncing off his tight buttock didn't sound anywhere near as explosive as the outright pain bursting across the surface of his naked skin. Okay, this really hurt, and yet Dante didn't spring up from his bent position, shove the other man back and just... just grab his burning ass with both hands. There was no rubbing this kind of pain away. He felt beyond ridiculous just thinking about it. This was a spanking, for god's sake. And he was a grown man, and no way did grown men break down into foot-stomping, bouncing, bottom-grabbing sobs. Yeah, he couldn't do that.

He wanted to, though.

There was something magical about the thought of relaxing completely, of letting go of his own autonomy so Master Campbell could take over... to simply regress to the point where he didn't have to think or pretend... all he needed to do was just be.

His entire body jolted to the next smack, the paddle catching both buttocks this time, dead center, where the sting was already terrible. The swat amplified it beyond Dante's ability to be silent—he grunted, hissing a deep breath that did nothing to help him work through the pain.

"Relax your ass, boy," Campbell said, the heat of his hand settling on the small of Dante's back.

The heat and comfort bore into him, sinking through Dante's skin, electrifying his veins, shooting straight into the backs of his suddenly watery eyes, squeezing in on his chest until he began to choke just to breathe, constricting his throat.

He was not going to cry. No. Dante refused.

He didn't cry. He'd spent years and years perfecting his image into that of a strong, masculine—maybe sometimes over the top in masculinity—projecting himself as anything but a gay man from a family who wouldn't support it, and crying was just not part of that personae. At least not while in front of other people.

Like he was right now, with Master Campbell steadily and repeatedly smacking his hellaciously burning backside. The sting was overwhelming. It wasn't just in his body; it was in his head. It was all he could think about—how much he deserved to have his ass just blistered with “Daddy's” harsh paddle, because deep down inside he knew he was fucking things up. And not just his life, either. In a few short weeks, he was going to fuck up Megan's life too—the best friend who'd stuck with him since they were small children. If only he weren't about to marry her, she was the first—honestly, the only—person he was halfway tempted to tell, just so the weight of his awful little secret might be easier to carry.

Snatching his hand off the wall, he clapped it over his eyes as the rising swell of his tears broke through the growing cracks in his defensive walls.

“Breathe,” Campbell told him.

Dante did, a great sucking breath of desperation that refused to bolster him. He lost all his strength, just like he'd lost himself: piece by piece, a little at a time over the span of so many heavy years that he'd been crushed by it.

Which is exactly what he deserved, and he knew it. Deep, deep down in his bones.

He covered his eyes and sobbed. He couldn't marry Megan. He couldn't do this to her. She deserved so much better and although he also knew he'd work himself to a frazzle to give her everything she wanted or needed, he would only be doing that to hide himself. Lives built on dirty little secrets did not succeed very well. Was he really going to do that to his best friend? What kind of person was he?

He broke down, helplessly sobbing into his hand. "I can't do this," he blurted.

The pain in his backside was barely felt anymore. Oh, it was there. It was terrible, but the pain inside was so much greater. So much more overwhelming, and that was what would have dropped him to his knees if only Master Campbell hadn't wrapped his arm around his waist, tucking him almost lovingly up against his side so the paddle could continue its nasty, biting, fiery business, lightly popping off both sides of his burning ass, making the pain inside just that much worse.

"I can't!" Dante wailed.

"You can't?" The paddle made a soft, cloth-muffled whumping sound as Daddy tossed it onto the bed a short distance away. It was his bare hand that found Dante's well-paddled behind. He cupped the fiery heat of one cheek, squeezing gently, molding Dante's firm flesh in his palm. "What can't you do, little man?"

Little man? He was taller than his Dom, and yet he felt every bit as Little as Master Campbell had called him. Height notwithstanding, he was the diminutive one. He was the small boy, bent over and wrapped around Daddy's hip, with both his pants and his defenses in a useless puddle around his ankles.

He was Daddy's boy, carefully held, sternly corrected. Worthy of forgiveness despite his foolish actions up until this point.

Forgiveness was useless without confession, however. And in that moment, forgiveness had become everything. So Dante told him all, everything. He started with why he'd come here, and Megan, what he had been hoping to find and which he now knew was completely impossible. "I'm such a liar," he bawled, but that was by far too mild a descriptor to use. "I've been so focused on this plan for so long, I lost sight of myself entirely. No matter what I do, I just know I'm going to ruin Megan's life." His breath caught in his too-tight throat, forcing him to finish in a raw whisper. "That's what being friends with me gets a person. I'm such a coward."

CHAPTER SIX

Campbell stood frozen, those four short words and the surety with which his little boy had just spoken them were painful to hear. More than painful, it was unbearable.

Pulling Dante up out of his bent position, he drew the taller man—his broken little one—into his arms. He hugged him fiercely close, completely unprepared for the possessiveness rampaging through him. And not just because he'd, with very little effort and only the proper amount of force to each swing, broke his boy into his first, long-overdue and much-needed release; he loved tears. He loved bringing his partners down to that point where he could then build them back up again as whole as he could hope to make them.

Like his last little boy, his Aaron, who had never spent so much as a day (as far as Campbell knew) regretting any part of himself or his sexuality, but who definitely needed a loving Daddy to keep him safe. That boy had spent most of his life in Little headspace, where his mouth and mental filter rarely ever shook hands. He'd almost married Aaron.

But Aaron was gone, and while Campbell knew in his soul he would always love that boy and hold him deep in his heart, as he stood holding Dante while the desperately confused Little clung to his shoulders and sobbed, for just a moment, it

felt like coming home. This was who he was in his heart. He was a Dom, a sadist, a lover, a protector and disciplinarian and... and he was a Daddy who hadn't had his own Little in a very long time. Holding Dante was like Christmas morning after many long, hard years. It was magical, and natural, and in no part was it sexual, although with very, very little effort it could have been.

Master Campbell stroked Dante's muscular back. Oh yes, it could have been.

"I'm sorry." Dante both hiccupped and snuffled, scrubbing his eyes with the backs of his hands.

God, he was adorable, and so very lost.

"Come here." Leading him to the bed, Master Campbell gestured for him to get on.

Sniffling, Dante crawled up onto the mattress, his red bottom waggling as he moved into the center of the bed before gingerly rolling over on his hip and sitting there. He looked at Master Campbell, eyebrows slightly beetled as he waited, needing to be directed whether he knew that was what he was doing or not.

He didn't need to know everything right now. Campbell knew it, and the determination that he be the one to guide his boy into the person he ached to be and yet was afraid to reveal... it was impossible to resist.

Placing a couple pillows up against the headboard, he propped himself up and wrapped his arm around Dante, making his own shoulder invitingly available.

Scooting down in bed, Dante rolled toward him and immediately cuddled in next to him, tucking his head up under Campbell's jaw. "I'm sorry I broke down like that."

Smiling slightly, Campbell stroked Dante's head. "Don't be sorry, little man. I'm not. I'm pleased to have been the one to help you and your Little side meet. You've been struggling with a lot lately, haven't you?"

Dante sniffled, then nodded. "It's my own fault though. I guess I set my brain on this course since I was twelve. That's when I heard my mother say some pretty bad things about a friend of mine. I knew then that I could never be myself around her."

"Who are you able to be yourself around?" Campbell gently pushed, and for a long time, Dante was quiet.

"You," he eventually admitted. "I've told you more than anyone else. Ever. Not my family, not Megan. My god," he moaned, covering his face with one hand again. "What am I going to tell Megan?"

Campbell stroked his hair again. "What do you want to tell her?"

Breathing in deep, Dante allowed his hand to drop into his lap. "I don't know. But I can't marry her. No matter how hard I try, I know I'll *never* be able to make it up to her. All I'll do is make us both miserable. I can't do that to her." He quieted a moment before adding, "I don't want to do that to myself, either."

Nodding, inordinately proud of him considering the short length of time in which they'd known each other, Campbell kissed his forehead. "That's a very mature decision."

"I need to call Megan," Dante added again, shifting just a hair deeper into Campbell's one-armed embrace.

"What will you say?"

Dante shook his head. “I don’t know, Daddy. But I do know I haven’t felt this comfortable talking to someone about what’s really going on with me than I do right now. I want *this*.”

He made no gesture, but Campbell knew what he meant. For just a second, he felt sparks of hope soaring to fill up his chest. He clamped it down. He didn’t want this to be some rebound relationship, doomed to failure right from the start. He didn’t want to assume Dante meant a relationship with him at all. There were half a dozen ways to interpret what he’d just said, the most likely of which was that he was only expressing a hope that he might one day have a relationship with a man. Out in the open, no more hiding. Just him, living his life. As himself.

“That’s a good thing to hope for,” Campbell cautiously offered. It was way too soon for them both, and he knew it. And yet, he couldn’t help adding, “I hope I’m there to see it.”

Dante stilled, but he didn’t pull away. He didn’t look up, for that matter either, but the hand resting lightly on Campbell’s chest began to pluck at him. Campbell glanced down, studying the shuttered, wide-eyed look on his Little’s face. It wasn’t a look of reluctance or dismay. Rather, it was like being offered a piece of candy after years of self-denial.

Fingers plucking away, he looked up at Campbell through long, dark lashes. They were eyes a man could get lost in. God help him, Campbell could already feel the pull. It was as if they’d been made for one another and brought together at the best moment in both their lives to make a relationship between them at least possible. Life did not offer guarantees, but it did like to present potential, and right now, when he looked at Dante, he saw all kinds of potential worth pursuing.

“Do you mean like good friends, or like a mentor sort of relationship, or...” Dante let his voice trail off, but his fingers were growing lighter and quicker, becoming like the brushing of butterfly wings as he fidgeted his way through that awkward question.

Moving slowly and calmly, Campbell gently covered his new boy’s hand with his own, pressing it flat to the heated flesh just above his heart. “We could define it now, or we could wait to get to know one another first. Which would you like to do?”

“Wait,” Dante said almost immediately, then stopped and flushed. “I didn’t mean it to sound like that. I just mean...”

“You mean,” Campbell countered in perfect understanding, “you want to wait and let whatever might happen happen naturally.”

Dante relaxed, his head nodding where he lay on Campbell’s shoulder. “Yeah.”

Campbell offered a comforting squeeze of his shoulders. “That sounds wonderful to me.”

Dante snuggled closer, then tentatively lay his head on Campbell’s bare chest. The brush of his dark eyelashes when he blinked were the sweetest of butterfly kisses against his skin.

One of Dante’s fingers began to tap, a telltale restlessness that felt at odds with the relaxation of the rest of his body. Or maybe not. Already Campbell could feel the tension begin to tighten in his boy’s long body.

“Can I ask you a question?” he softly asked.

Campbell nodded. “Of course. You can ask me anything, at any time. What is it?”

“Even if it’s not about us?” Dante hesitated. “Or anything to do with, you know, here?”

The slight arching of his brow was the only sign Campbell showed of his surprise. “Here” was usually all his clients wanted to talk about once they got their first taste of Castle fantasy come to life. “Of course,” he said again. “I’m all ears for anything you want to ask.”

He wasn’t even bothered by it, he suddenly realized. He wanted to know as much as he could about the boy to whom he’d been matched. As much as he hadn’t wanted this, holding him felt like holding perfection. Spanking him, bringing Dante to his much-needed emotional release had not been a chore either. For all his initial reluctance, Campbell was far from unaffected by Dante’s nearness and his semi-woody no doubt was broadcasting.

“What’s your question?” he coaxed when Dante hesitated.

“I’ve got a couple, actually.”

A corner of Campbell’s mouth curled. His boy was a staller. “What’s the first one?”

“How long before we eat? I was too nervous to attempt breakfast or lunch, and now I’m starving.”

Campbell laughed. Unwrapping his arm from around his boy’s shoulder, he sat up far enough to swat the side of Dante’s hip, making the paleness flush an immediate pink that was only a dozen or so swats from matching the bright red of his taut ass. “Up. I’ve got way too much I want to do with you to have you passing out on me. Connie’s Kitchen is always open here, especially when the deli and the Supper and Show aren’t.”

He started to roll from the bed but stopped when Dante quickly rose up onto his knees, wrapping his arms around him from behind in a tight embrace. Campbell looked down at the other's arms, his eyebrow arching, this time out of good-natured censorship rather than surprise. "Daddy gave an order, little boy. Are you trying to stop Daddy from doing what he needs to take care of you?"

"No-not yet," Dante said, the softest stammer making his voice tremble. "Is... is it okay if I just hold you a minute?"

How could he say no to that?

"One minute." Smiling, he covered Dante's embracing arms with his own and never once glanced at the clock as he submitted to the other's experimental hug.

Surprise came quickly back into the equation, however, when Dante partway released him, his right hand wandering down the flat of Campbell's washboard abs. That Dante had, in fact, noticed his semi-erection became the new elephant in the room when his hand closed around Campbell's cock, bringing it to immediate full-on stiffness before he could so much as draw a protesting breath.

"What are you doing, boy?" Campbell asked, his voice dipping lower, his words coming out deep and husky, tainted by lust rather than real disapproval.

They both knew exactly what Dante was doing... and how much that was in contradiction to what he'd put on his application.

"Did Daddy give you permission to touch his cock?"

Flush up against his back, Dante shivered, then squirmed. "Because of the way I filled out my application?"

Campbell glanced down at his boy's warm hand, firmly holding onto his now rampant cock. He then turned to look over his shoulder, fixing Dante with a firm stare.

Flushing, Dante let go and sat back on his heels. "I need to make a phone call," he said softly, reluctance mixing with fragile buds of determination on his handsome face.

Moving to position himself next to his boy, Campbell placed a hand upon his knee. "Before you do anything, I want you to sit here quietly, for at least ten minutes—don't worry; Daddy will time it—and think about what *you* want to do. It's no good making decisions in the moment if you end up regretting it later."

"The only decision I'm going to regret," Dante replied, "is the one I made before I came here. I can't live the rest of my life hiding who I am. I mean, I could, but when I'm with you, all I can taste is my own disappointment for having hidden this long. Megan is my best friend and has been since we were children. I can't marry her, knowing no matter how hard I try, in the long run I'll only make us both miserable."

Campbell didn't say anything. Inside, he was proud of Dante for the decision he'd come to. He didn't know what driving forces had pushed him into hiding in the first place, but god knows, it wasn't uncommon. It hadn't been difficult for him, revealing his true self to his family and friends. He'd made no grand statement or even had a single conversation. He hadn't felt the need. It was his senior year in high school and he'd been bringing his boyfriend home for study sessions and video games for months, and no one had said a word about it. Probably because they hadn't yet figured out that when Campbell said "boyfriend," he hadn't meant "a friend who

happened to be male,” which they all figured out anyway the day he’d asked Sam to the prom.

Again, Campbell had never felt the need to tell anyone about his personal sexuality in order to feel open about his life as a gay man. But over the years, he’d come to know plenty of others who did feel that way. People were made to be different; it was natural and it was okay, and he was the last person on the face of the planet who’d ever tell anyone differently. Especially not Dante, his sweet boy who was still so deeply mired in all the insecurities that came from standing out as different from the rest of the human herd.

“I really need to talk to Megan,” his boy finally said.

Twisting around far enough to face him, Campbell caught the back of Dante’s neck, pulling him gently close until their foreheads touched. He held them like that until he felt the tension begin to ease from Dante’s trim frame. Just before he let him go, Campbell added a tender kiss to his Little’s cheek.

How easy it would be to shift sideways just a little and kiss him full on his lips.

It was against the application Dante had filled out, however, and although he was far from the first client to change their mind once the sceneing began, Campbell was not a reckless Dom.

Turning his head, it was Dante who tentatively pressed his lips to Campbell’s, kissing him for real. God, his mouth. Soft and warm, hesitating as he ventured from one sweet kiss to another, until it was all Campbell could do not to seize his face and devour him with all the burning hunger the other’s exploratory touch was igniting.

Campbell broke contact first. He had to, before something inside him snapped and he threw Dante down on the bed beneath him, making his Little his in every way possible.

“Is it possible to redo my application?” Dante asked, first licking and then touching his lips with fingers shaky from desire.

“Phone call first,” Campbell said huskily, fighting back the instinct to find Dante’s willing lips again and simply devour him. “Afterward, if you still desire, then we’ll go over your application again. Master Marshall will need to be involved. And there’s still the matter of getting food into your tummy.”

“And taking care of this.” Dante started to reach into his Daddy’s lap again, but Campbell caught his wrist and latched on tight, stopping him before the boy could wrap his fingers around Campbell’s jutting cock.

“I already told you once, you may not touch without permission,” Campbell told him gruffly. The throbbing in his belly and loins was already beating its heady pulse throughout his veins. “Do it again, and Daddy will punish you.”

Mouth twisting in a grimace, Dante wasn’t trying hard to hide his disappointment. “I don’t think I want another spanking. It still hurts.” He wiggled experimentally as if testing his prognosis. He quickly stopped, his grimace dissolving into a wince.

“I said punish, not spank. Don’t for one second think a spanking is the only punishment Daddy knows how to give. That’s for Little boys, not boys who misbehave in Big-boy ways.”

Dante eyed him nervously. “What kind of punishment are we talking about?”

“Prior to fixing your application?”

Brow furrowed, Dante bit his bottom lip and nodded.

“How would you like to spend the night kneeling at my feet in a straitjacket to remind you that you may not touch what Daddy doesn’t allow?”

Dante made a face. “That doesn’t sound like fun at all.”

“No,” Campbell agreed. “But it would be far gentler on you than after your contract is changed.” Given free rein with Dante, the straitjacket would still be used, but already Campbell could feel his excitement building at the thought of throwing his new boy facedown on the bed and pounding him into the mattress with all the vigor of his body, taking his own pleasure and leaving Dante perched on the cusp of coming with no relief granted.

Dante’s eyes grew huge.

Shit, did he just say all of that out loud?

A flush of wanton desire swept up his boy’s chest, staining his face a bright red. Two seconds later, Dante scrambled off the bed to throw on his clothes. “Excuse me, Daddy. I’ll be right back!”

Grabbing his cellphone from his luggage bags, stacked neatly up against one wall where the porters had delivered them, Dante ran from the room.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dante struggled to find a quiet place to use his phone. Most of the Castle grounds were modern clothing and technology free, so as to not disrupt the fantasies that came alive here. But when one was about to call off his marriage to his best friend—over the phone, like a complete coward—then having as much privacy as possible was a necessity.

So, he smuggled his phone outside and found a quiet place in the shade of the woods that surrounded the expansive yard to sit and think, and finally to make the hardest and yet the most freeing call of his life.

God, he hoped Megan would be okay afterward. He couldn't bear the thought of hurting her.

“Thank God you called,” Megan said with a sigh when she picked up the line.

Everything Dante could think to say took an immediate backseat at her tone. “What's wrong? Are you okay? What's happening? Is it my mother?” Groaning, Dante covered his eyes. “I knew it. The minute I left, she became a Godzilla mother-in-law.”

“No, no, no,” Megan rushed to say, laughing awkwardly. “Well, I mean, of course she did, but I'm not calling about that. I need to talk to you.”

This was it. No turning back.

“I need to talk to you too,” Dante confessed, and he was a little surprised. Although far from easy, it wasn’t as hard as he thought it would be to broach this conversation.

“Let me go first,” Megan softly pleaded. “Otherwise, I’ll lose my nerve.”

Dante blinked twice. Was he about to get dumped? No way could he ever be that lucky. “Oh, okay.” He braced himself in case he was wrong. “What’s up?”

She hesitated for so long, he took the phone from his ear to make sure the call was still connected.

“Dante,” she hesitated again.

Knowing this was his fault, Dante just as softly replied, “Do you want to call this off?”

She sighed, but this time, she sounded relieved. “Yes. Yes, I do. I love you,” she rushed to add. “I will love you until the day I die, but a couple months back, I met someone. And he knows I’m engaged, and we’ve never done anything other than to be friends. But over the last few weeks, things have been... well, changing between us. I think I love him too. Only... I think I love him the way I’m supposed to love you, but it’s different.”

“Because we’re friends,” Dante finished for her, in perfect understanding. The wave of relief that washed over him would have been enough to drop him to his knees, if only he weren’t already sitting under the shade of an old oak tree.

“Yeah. I really mean it, though. I’ll love you all my life, but—”

“As a friend,” he finished for her again, smiling softly out across the yard. His gaze drawn to the formidable gray stone Castle, he wondered which of those shining windows Master Campbell was behind.

“Are you mad?”

He shook his head before remembering she couldn't hear that. “No, Megan. I love you too. In fact, I was just calling to say, I've met someone too.”

“Really?”

This was it. The point of no return. The moment that being with someone like Master Campbell would mean he'd have to risk over and over for the remainder of his life.

“His name is Campbell. Meg, I'm gay.”

This time, there was no hesitation when she said, “I know.”

Dumbfounded, Dante's jaw dropped. “You know?”

“I saw you kissing Ben Bailey down at the water park when I was thirteen.”

His jaw dropped all over again. “Why did you agree to marry me then?”

“Because you're my best friend, and I don't think I've ever known you when you felt safe in your own skin. If marrying me would give you that, then of course I'd marry you. Well, at least I thought I could. Until I meant Brian.”

“Brian, huh?” Dante couldn't help but tease. “You fell in love with a Brian? Tell me he doesn't spell it with a 'y'.”

“Like you've got room to talk. What kind of name is Campbell? Is that his first or his last name?”

“I have no idea,” Dante chuckled, “but the man is Scottish. Accent and everything. We had, like, an instant connection. I’ve never felt anything like it. Not for anyone.”

“Ah... tell him if he hurts you in any way, I’ll break his kneecaps.”

Dante laughed. “You barely come up to my belt buckle, and Campbell’s built like a brick house. I think he’s safe.”

“Short people are more dangerous than everyone else,” she replied with a sniff. “No one expects a headbutt to the groin.”

Dante threw his head back, laughing uproariously.

Behind him, a stick snapped and he turned just in time to see two security guards headed right for him. “I think I have to go now,” he said, humor abating.

“I’ll see you when you get home, though, right?”

“You’re my best friend,” he assured her. “Of course you’ll see me.”

“Love you,” she said softly.

“Love you too.” He’d barely hung up before the men reached him. One crooked a finger, beckoning him to stand. The other held out his hand to take the phone.

“All modern conveniences are banned except for where?” one guard intoned.

Shit.

Dante almost hung his head. “My private room and the media room. I thought it might be okay out here so long as nobody saw me.”

“The ol’ ‘I thought it would be okay, so long as I didn’t get caught’ excuse.” Taking Dante’s phone, the guard shook his

head. “Come on, you. This is a very serious rule you’ve broken. Let’s see what Master Marshall has to say about it.”

* * *

He’d just made a phone call, Dante thought, sitting on the unforgiving hard bench placed in the second-story corridor just outside the Master of the Masters’ office. How serious of a matter could this possibly...

Oh... no...

Dante felt his stomach flutter first and then drop to his toes when he spotted Master Campbell coming up the hallway. He wasn’t hard to miss. He was the only one in the vicinity dressed in a dark green and black kilt, complete with sporran and the wide black leather of his thick belt and heavy black boots.

Campbell frowned at him, a look that made Dante’s stomach tighten even as his skin tingled. He shifted, the tenderness in his backside grinding on the hardness of the bench.

“Hi,” he said, waving as he attempted a smile.

“Don’t you ‘hi’ me,” Campbell returned gruffly. “Do you have any idea how humiliating it is to be called to this office because my submissive broke the rules? Me, a Master of this Castle? And you did it out of my sight! Clean out of the Castle when here I thought you were in the media room the whole time? Do you have any idea how this makes me look?”

Floored, Dante stared up at him, suddenly seeing how something that hadn’t seemed like a big deal to him, really

might be to Campbell. “I-I am so-so sorry,” he stammered. “I didn’t think... I just wanted a quiet place... I-”

Dante’s mouth snapped shut when Campbell’s big hand came to rest on top of his head. There was little pressure, just enough to bend Dante’s head until he was looking forlornly down into his own lap.

Campbell was quiet a minute, then he ruffled Dante’s short hair and swung around to seat himself next to him on the bench. Muscular forearms resting on his knees, he leaned close and, in a voice that would not be overheard by passersby, asked, “Did you get what you needed to say said?”

The atmosphere between them almost immediately lightened. Not sure if he could trust it, Dante nodded. “Yeah. She found someone else too.” His face blazed when Campbell looked at him. “N-not that I’m jumping to any conclusions about me and you.”

“Don’t worry about that.” Campbell waved it aside, then fixed him with another assessing look. “Is she okay?”

Dante nodded. “Yes. I really think she is.”

His Dom raised an eyebrow. “Are *you* okay?”

Dante melted inside. He’d love this man forever just for asking. “Yeah. I’m okay too. More than okay.”

Campbell nodded slowly, then sat up straight. “How would you like to proceed? I’ll warn you now, you might want to keep your application the way it is. Have you the slightest inkling of the kind of trouble you’re in right now, little man?”

Dante shook his head. Trouble or not, he didn’t want to stop. For the first time in a long time, he felt like he was moving forward. It was a scary thing. There were a lot of unknowns looming in his future that would affect him for the

rest of his life. If he was alone, that prospect was scary as hell. But he wasn't alone, was he?

He reached for Campbell's hand. At least not in the moment, and even if things between them led only to friendship in the long run, well, at least it would be an open and honest one, right from the very start.

"I want to move ahead," he said.

Campbell squeezed his boy's hand before standing. Staring down at him, a myriad of emotions swirling through stormy gray eyes, he said, "I promise not to take things further than you can bear."

"As long as you're with me," Dante replied, "I won't be afraid."

Campbell cupped a hand under his chin, tipping Dante's face up as he bent down, and for the second time in one day, they kissed. It wasn't as explosive as the last time, but the dynamite was still there, sizzling beneath Dante's skin as he succumbed to the gentleness of Campbell's lovemaking.

He opened to the teasing flicks of Campbell's tongue. A pure jolt of electrified need zipped through his cock until the tight confines of his costume pants were all he could feel, pushing uncomfortably back on him when his Dom's hand came to rest on his throat.

He didn't squeeze; Campbell just held him. Firmly. His thumb stroking over the clean-shaven skin where Dante's pulse leapt, hot and pounding.

"I'm going to own every inch of your body," Campbell growled against his lips. "Are you sure you want to do this?"

Dante shivered. "More than I've ever been about anything else."

Campbell's slow exhale came out in another long growl. He looked up and down the busy hall, and then took Dante's hand. "Come with me."

Dante stood, falling into step beside him. "Where are we going? Won't Master Marshall be mad?"

"Not with you and I can take it." Leading him several doors down, Campbell stopped long enough to fish a master keyboard out of his sporran. Opening the door, he pushed Dante inside ahead of him.

They were in what looked like a conference room, with a giant oval table around which were placed at least thirty chairs. The black leather chair at the nearest end of the table to him looked more like a throne. There was a plant at the single floor to ceiling window and the area rug beneath their feet was a deep royal red.

That was as much as Dante saw before Campbell clamped a hand on the back of his neck and backed him straight up into the table. When the edge hit the backs of his thighs, he sat automatically.

"What parts of your application do you want to change?" Campbell demanded.

"All of it." Dante stopped when Campbell did and, realizing how open that could be for misinterpretation, he quickly corrected himself. "Not the Daddy part, or you. I've never been someone's boy before, Little or otherwise. I kind of like it."

"Kind of?"

"All right, a lot. But I think only because it's with you. I don't really have a lot of experience."

Campbell let go of his throat and grabbed his pants instead. In less time than it took Dante to gasp, his Dom had his pants shucked all the way to his ankles.

“I know your experience level. It doesn’t scare me. Does mine scare you?”

“I’d far rather one of us knows what they’re doing.”

Campbell smirked. He was so handsome when he smiled, even if only half-heartedly.

“I know I want to change the, um... you know.”

Bending, Campbell grabbed his underwear next, and down that went as well, leaving Dante pinned between his Dom and the table, with his cock standing straight up between them.

“Tell me,” Campbell commanded, bracing his hands on the edge of the table to either side of Dante’s hips.

His stomach was tight. He could feel the tension all the way to his balls. “Sex,” he admitted. “I want to be, um”—his whole body flushed hot—“intimate with you.”

“I want to be intimate with you too,” Campbell told him. “More than that, I want to get to know you. All of you.”

“Do you mean, like, a long-distance relationship?” Dante tried to think how that might work, but he couldn’t. What were phone calls compared to snuggling? And yet, when he envisioned long talks on the phone, he found he much preferred that over nothing at all. At least he could hear Campbell and see him over video. That was at least something, wasn’t it?

“We’ve got video chats, email, text so long as you keep in mind that I can only answer early in the morning and after my work is done. There are also vacations and holidays. We can

take turns. I can come to you half the time and you can come here.”

“I’ll start saving immediately,” Dante promised, excitement building as he thought about all the months with holidays. Plus, he still had twelve days of vacation time. If he was careful how he spread it out, they could see one another every month and maybe even twice a month sometimes.

“Don’t be silly.” Campbell stroked his hair. “You won’t have to pay the Castle fee when you come back. You’ll be my guest and I’ll get time off while you’re here.”

“That could work,” Dante marveled out loud. “I could make that work.”

“For you,” Campbell agreed, “I’m willing to try.”

Reaching for him, hoping it wouldn’t break his Dom’s no-touching rule, Dante slid his arms around Campbell’s neck and shoulders. “I’m more than willing to try for you too.”

“We need to talk to Master Marshall,” Campbell told him sternly. “And you’ve a real punishment coming for breaking a very important rule. In fact, I mean to impress upon you the importance of obedience, especially when you’re here with me at the Castle. I mean to bend you over this table, boy, and I won’t be gentle.”

Dante’s entire body erupted in tingling desire. He could feel it in his nipples, his stomach, his ass. And most importantly, perhaps, his happy, fast-beating heart. “I agree,” he promptly said.

Campbell raised both a finger, and a cautioning brow at him. “Think about what I’m telling you. Before I’m done, you’ll remember who your Daddy is and to whom you belong.

And I promise, this is just a taste of what you've got coming once I get you back to the room."

Shaking his head, Dante said, "I don't need to think about it. I promise I will never do anything again to make you look bad. I would never have done what I did if I had known that would be the outcome."

"I know, but—"

"But I want this," Dante cut him off firmly. His voice softened as he added, "I want you, and everything that comes with being with you. Teach me to be your good boy, Daddy. I need to be yours, even if it hurts at times. I need to be yours for all the times when it won't hurt. For the good days as well as the bad ones, and everything that falls in between." He blushed under the intensity of Campbell's stare. "I want the full Master Campbell package. The real Master Campbell. The man behind the fantasy."

His Dom drew a sharp breath, but it was with a gentle smile now budding on his lips when he said, "Thank you, Dante. That's something I needed very much to hear. Lay back, my darling boy. What kind of ass play have you done before?"

Dante flushed hot as he lay all the way down on his back, his cock twitching both at the promise and the threat of Campbell's declaration. "I have a dildo," he confessed shyly. "But it's not very big, and I don't play with it often, because it's... you know, not the same as when you're with a person."

"I'm going to send you home with more, then, and in gradient sizes so you'll be better prepared for me when next we see each other."

Dante jumped when he felt the unapologetic touch of Campbell's thumb brush the dusky bud between his slightly splayed ass cheeks.

"Lift your feet up on the edge of the table and spread your ass for me."

His cock was so hot and hard, throbbing with want despite knowing what was coming. He knew how this would feel. The first time he'd shoved his dildo up his ass, when in the heat of a moment he'd thought he wanted rough, had taught him clearly that he really didn't like that much pain with his pleasure. And he'd seen Campbell naked; he knew his Dom was much bigger, both longer and thicker than his toy at home.

He lifted his feet, pausing only when Campbell grabbed the puddle of his pants and underwear, and stripped them off his feet. He'd only just reached down to grab both sides of his ass when he felt Campbell's thumb push inside him.

He was dry, but no match for Campbell's intent. Though he pushed slowly, testing Dante's virgin flesh, he didn't stop until his thumb was inside and Dante was panting, breathing through the near insignificant twinge of discomfort until all that remained was the wondrous sensation of being taken by his Dom.

"Nice and tight," Campbell said, his voice dipping into that lusty growl that Dante had come to love so much. "Let's get you wet enough to take your Daddy's cock."

Dante shivered, loving Campbell's dirty Daddy talk, especially now when the intimacy of their act was everything Dante had ever wanted. And better than he ever thought it could be. He wasn't hiding. He wasn't ashamed. Instead, he was all melty and willing and desperate to feel it all, especially when Campbell suddenly pulled his thumb out of Dante's ass

and unexpectedly his mouth was on Dante's cock. Engulfing him in blessed suckling heat that made the throb beat harder and pulled so deeply through his shaft that he could feel the pressure all the way to his balls.

“Oohhh,” Dante groaned, arching his back and lifting his hips into the pull of Campbell's mouth. “Oh, Daddy... god...”

Campbell lashed at him with his tongue, clutching his cock at the base with one squeezing hand. He took turns, licking, teasing, sucking at his balls until Dante thought for sure he would explode, pouring all his new budding love for this man down Campbell's hungry throat as he rose to again suckle only at the head of him.

“Don't you dare come, boy,” Campbell growled, stroking his shaft until the pleasure turned mindless and impossible to resist.

He tried to hold it back. He struggled to be a good boy, but the rushing wave of greedy orgasm was too strong to resist and before he knew it, he broke beneath the pleasuring force and shot his load almost straight into his Dom's face.

At the last moment, Campbell yanked back, though his hand continued to beat him off, spurt after hot, ropey spurt, falling harmlessly onto Dante's stomach.

“I'm sorry,” Dante panted. “I'm so very sorry. I couldn't hold it.”

“That's all right, sweetness. It's just another reason for me to punish you more.” Campbell's grin was lascivious. Dante loved him all the more because of it.

Swiping at the streams of creamy cum, Campbell smeared it over, around and then deep inside Dante's naked back hole.

Dante tried to relax but couldn't help the tightening of his body when he felt again the first invading thrust as Campbell moistened him, first with cum, and then a lot of spit. Drips of wetness ran down the crack of his ass, pooling on the edge of the table beneath him. His hips were twitching; his thighs shaking with need.

Out of his sporran, Campbell took a condom, tearing the wrapper with his teeth before whipping up his kilt and deftly pushing it on over his rampant cock. He didn't get naked. That vulnerability was for Dante alone, and the next he knew, Dante felt the blunted prod of his Daddy's cock pushing against his back hole.

"Relax," Campbell coaxed.

Nodding jerkily, Dante closed his eyes and tried, but he couldn't. In seconds, his eyes were open again as he fixed on Campbell. He needed to see him, needed to be fully in the moment with the first man he'd ever allowed himself to get this close to.

"Breathe in."

Dante obeyed.

"Now, breathe out and push with your bottom. It'll help with the discomfort."

Dante almost didn't even care. He needed this. He needed the closeness. He needed Campbell just to take him, own him, love him in every way he'd never before felt.

"Now, boy."

Dante pushed, his back arching and a cry erupting from his throat when Campbell slowly pushed through the tight ring of muscle.

“God!” Dante shouted, accidentally letting go of his buttocks as he wallowed and writhed in the wondrous amalgamation of sensations. The pleasure was intense, the pain almost so, but none of that mattered as much as the glorious realization that kept singing through his head.

Daddy was taking his ass, stretching him, filling him up and up, impossibly full. Making Dante his and his alone. For now. Maybe for always. Dante prayed for forever, though only time would tell.

Dante would give them both that time. Some things were worth waiting for.

Buried as deep as he could reach, Campbell held himself still, letting them both adjust to the tightness and the fullness. Letting the twinging discomfort pass until all Dante could feel was Daddy. In him. Around him. Reaching down to grasp his buttocks in powerful hands as he threw Dante’s legs over his shoulders.

“You’ll remember this and be my good little boy from now on, won’t you?” Campbell groaned.

This was his punishment? If so, it was a piss-poor one, not that Dante was about to tell him so.

“Yes, Daddy. Yes!”

Seizing his hips, Campbell drew back and then both yanked Dante to him and thrust so hard Dante shouted. It was good. It was beyond good, and just like Campbell had promised, it wasn’t gentle.

Dante grabbed the table, Campbell’s wrists, and finally his own thighs. He pulled his legs all the way onto his chest, giving Campbell all the access he needed to pound them both into oblivion.

He didn't come again, but Campbell did. There was no feeling on earth like the jetting spurts of Campbell's hard cock, bathing his insides with all the pleasure he'd taken from Dante's body. The condom had broken, but the pain was already forgotten, and only the lingering thrust of ecstasy remained.

It was heaven.

EPILOGUE

They walked back to the hard wooden bench just outside Master Marshall's office together, hand in hand, with the wetness of Campbell's cum still slick in his underwear. He hadn't been allowed to clean up, not that there had been a place for it back in the conference room. According to Campbell, he wouldn't be allowed to clean up after they got to his room, either.

No, he was to go the rest of the night, feeling his Daddy's sticky ownership and knowing what he'd had was still just a taste of what was yet to come.

"Don't move an inch from this spot," Campbell ordered, before winking and walking into the Master of the Masters' office to get his "trouble" straightened out.

"I won't," Dante promised, and grinned.

After all, he'd waited a lifetime for someone he could at last be himself with. What were a few minutes more?

The End

**CAMPBELL'S CHOICE (A MM MASTERS OF THE CASTLE
NOVELLA**

CHAPTER ONE

Campbell stood in front of the mirror, taking extra care to make sure his kilt was straight, his sporran centered, and his belt and boots both shone in the dressing mirror's lights. He ran his hands over his freshly shaven head, feeling the stubble and wondering if he should grow it out. He looked good bald. He had the head for it as Dante, his darling Little, liked to say.

Campbell paused, just staring at himself in the mirror. One hand drifted to his sporran, feeling inside the pocket for the reassuring hardness of the tiny jewelry box inside. He'd been carting this damn thing around with him from the time he'd bought it, a bare three weeks after he and Dante first met.

First scened.

First made love.

Spent time together for that one whole weekend he'd initially not wanted to take part in. He had been a fool, but Dante's innocence had won him over. Campbell stared into his reflection's eyes. Once upon a time, he'd thought he'd love and grieve for Aaron forever. That was true too, he always would. But Aaron was gone and had been for years. Dante was his chance to move on. Come to find out, his mother had been right all along: love wasn't a cup of sugar. No matter how much it was used, it never ran out.

Outside his bedroom apartment window, he heard a mildly increasing volume of laughter, talking, and excitement as today's busload of new arrivals filed into the courtyard over the drawbridge. It was almost showtime. Cupping the ring box in his sporran, he gave it a squeeze.

Before this weekend was over, he hoped Dante would be his in every way possible, and especially in the most important way. He wanted to feel Dante's heart beating next to his own for the rest of his life.

It had been a whole whopping three months since he and Dante first clapped eyes on one another. The long-distance relationship that had followed had been excruciating ever since.

It was time to put "long-distance" in the past and start building a more satisfactory future. One in which they could reach out and touch the other whenever contact was desired.

Now that would be heaven.

* * *

Dante bounced on his bus seat, holding on to the back of the bench in front of him, and unable to stop grinning. He must look like an idiot, but he didn't care. Just a few more minutes and he would get to see Campbell again. Not over an internet connection or on the phone, but face-to-face. In the same room with one another. Close enough to touch.

Shivers ran up and down his back, raising all the prickly little hairs on his arms as he considered what Daddy Campbell would do first. Hug him? Oh, probably. Ask how his trip was?

Sure, but after that? Once they got through the administration's routine of checking in, participating in Mistress Hardwick's introduction to the rules of the Castle—after all of that, once they were back in their assigned room, then what? What if Campbell decided instead of renting a room, they would stay together in his apartment on the upper Castle floors? Dante shivered all over again, not sure if he was more excited by that prospect... or nervous.

Nervous was definitely at the top of his list, but so was excitement. He was so, so glad to be back at the Castle.

It had been three loooong months, and all Dante had been able to think about was his last visit here. His first visit too, for that matter.

He couldn't help bouncing just a bit in his seat.

"Excited?" a young man from the seat behind him asked.

Dante swung part way around in his seat so he could see who he was talking to, matching the grin on the other's face as he bounced again. "Yes! I can't wait to get there!"

"We're already here," the other laughed, tossing his somewhat long blond bangs out of his eyes. Dressed in jeans and a black leather jacket, he jumped up from his seat, and Dante cheerfully moved over, giving him room to sit down next to him. Like they were conspirators in some secret plot. Dante had never had a conspirator. Oh, there was Megan, but with her she was just his best friend, and really good at subtly talking him out of bad decision making.

Plus, the young man was handsome as hell. And although Dante had a Daddy twice as good-looking, not to mention strong, dominant, deliciously desirable... Dante didn't feel as tightly closeted as he had a few months back. He took full

advantage of Daddy Campbell's words of tender wisdom...
"You're with me, but that doesn't mean you can't admire from afar."

Dante enjoyed admiring from a distance so scant that their arms kept touching. He looked out the window at the rolling fields of soy plants, flanked by thick woodlands beyond. And beyond that, he thought, jostling into his newfound friend as the bus bounced in and out of a pothole in the unpaved road, *beyond that* was the Castle. Some of the old gray stones dated all the way back to 15th century Scotland. His Daddy had told him that additional new stones had been added more recently during the rebuilding required after the Castle had been bombed in 2018.

"True," Dante said, answering the other man's question. "But I mean, I can't wait until we get off this bus."

"Me too." Grinning, the blond man stuck out his hand to shake. "Darryl," he introduced.

"Billy," Dante introduced himself, remembering at the last second to use his Castle alias. They shook, like BFFs. Dante had never let himself be free enough to have one. Or at least, not one he could talk to about this side of his sexuality. The kink. The fact he had a Daddy. The fact that he knew Campbell was the man destined to own his heart forever. Even if they had only known one another for three short months. This was the trip though, he was determined. This was when he was going to finally look his Daddy in the eyes and say the "L" word for the very first time.

Campbell was going to meet him at the drawbridge. He couldn't wait to get off this bus!

"Dominant or submissive?" Darryl asked, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, despite the fact that this busload of

people were headed for the same destination. They all had kinks to hide, and yet this was the one place where they could be themselves without fear of weird looks and disgusted sneers.

And yet, here Dante lowered his voice too and replied, “Sub.” He held out his hand again, as if this were the real introduction. “I’m a Little. I’m meeting my Daddy here.”

“Daddy?” Darryl arched his eyebrows in surprise, rather than censure. Again, he dropped his voice. “You’re gay too?”

Dante bounced in his seat, he was so surprised. He faced his new kink friend. “You are?”

“Your gaydar must be broken.” Darryl tossed his hair again. “I’ve only been flirting with you for twenty full minutes.”

Dante laughed, playfully bumping shoulders with him. “You have not.”

Darryl mock pouted. “You didn’t even notice. I’m hurt.”

Sure he was kidding, Dante laughed again. But when Darryl only held his gaze without so much as a smile, he quickly sobered.

“Oh,” he said, and quickly straightened in his seat. He faced the padded bench in front of him. “I’m sorry I laughed. That was very rude of me.”

Darryl studied him in the awkwardness that followed. Just as it started to get really uncomfortable, he broke into a grin again and bumped shoulders back with Dante. “Psych.”

He waited until Dante attempted a confused smile before laughing. “I’m not looking to be anyone’s boy, though I would

dearly love to be someone's boy toy. Here I was hoping that might be you."

"Here I was hoping you'd get matched to one of the Castle Masters so you can fall in love and live happily ever after, just like me."

Darryl's laugh turned skeptical. "There's no such thing. Just touch-and-go friendships and great sex until the clock in our lives ticks itself out."

Dante hoped not, and yet he didn't know what to say to that. Before he could come up with something hopeful just so he could bring the conversation back into positive territory again, Darryl cocked another grin.

"Now we're here."

Dante popped his head up to look out the windows across the aisle from his seat, just as the bus eased to a stop in the roundabout at the mouth of the drawbridge. Porters were already waiting in a long line to bring in their bags.

"Oh," he said again, now ducking, trying to see through the other passengers who were standing up, grabbing their carry-ons and then impatiently waiting while everyone ahead of them slowly disembarked.

Darryl already has his duffel in his arms and rose, waiting with the rest.

"Good luck to you," he said with a wink and a smile. "I hope you get everything you desire. Or should that be deserve?" He winked again, so Dante took that the way he hoped Darryl meant it. Sincerely.

"You too," he replied. The line started moving, but Dante didn't get up until it had thinned out enough for him to stand in the aisle with no one behind him. By then, Darryl was off

the bus and by the time Dante stepped down, he couldn't see him anymore. He must have crossed the drawbridge already and was now waiting for Mistress Hardwick's greeting speech.

The last to get off the bus, all Dante could think about was how much he hoped Darryl was wrong about happily ever after. He hoped the other had a great time while he was here, and more than anything, he hoped he would too.

After that, his thoughts turned to Campbell and how at any minute Dante would see him come strolling across the drawbridge, looking for him.

Dante could already feel his Daddy's strong embrace folding in around him. He couldn't wait until he was feeling it for real.

* * *

Two unexpected encounters as he was coming out of the Castle had Campbell running late. Already the day's new arrivals were filing over the bridge and into the courtyard. Hell, some seemed already to have their packets and were now looking for seating around the portable podium where the stern headmistress was due at any moment to give the breakdown of the Castle's rules. At first glance, he didn't see Dante, but he had said he would meet his boy on the drawbridge and so he headed across the courtyard to do just that.

It was absolutely his imagination that made his sporran feel heavier than normal. The ring he'd bought for Dante was far too light and too small even for him to feel, bumping lightly against his junk as he strolled through the sunshine toward their arranged meeting place. Again, however, this time he was stopped by a young man, blond hair just long

enough on top to perpetually be in his eyes, and a black leather biker's jacket which he no doubt thought made him appear tougher than he was. All Campbell saw when the youngster "accidentally" bumped into him as he was coming away from the check-in desks was a wannabe brat looking for dominant attention.

"Oh, I'm sorry," the blond said. "I didn't see you there."

That was a lie. Although distracted by his growing excitement at seeing Dante again, holding him in his arms and over his knee, Campbell was pretty sure he'd glimpsed this young man look right at him before they so inconveniently—or was it conveniently?—crashed into one another.

"No harm done," Campbell soothed, looking toward the drawbridge. Still no sign of Dante. He needed to get out there before his boy started to think he'd been forgotten.

Campbell smiled gently, one hand dipping into his pocket where he already had three Castle coins to feed into the bubblegum machine that held the koi food. The slight "fee" had become a requirement when it was discovered the machine was emptying at an increasingly rapid rate by the Littles who were overzealous in feeding the little fishies. What better way to greet his boy now than by doing what Dante had so cheerfully wanted to do the first time they'd met: feed the fish. Only this time instead of Campbell wracking his brain for any reason he could come up with for why he shouldn't partner with his boy... yeah, this time, he was going to treat Dante from the start the way he should have done back then. The way a loving Daddy should always do for the boy he wanted to marry.

He started to go around the blond, but the young man quickly moved to stand in his way again. He even touched

Campbell's arm with two tentative fingers.

Campbell pointedly looked at him. "Yes, boy?" he drawled in his best *tread-carefully, I'm-the-Dominant-you-don't-want-to-mess-with* tone.

He'd be damned if the younger man didn't flutter his eyelashes at him. Growing more obviously and stereotypically flaming with each word he said, the young man coyly asked, "Do you know where we're supposed to go now?"

Hiding a knowing grimace and delving for patience, Campbell pointed to his left where the rows of chairs were set up around a still vacant podium.

"Oh," the blond said, still coy and nowhere near as embarrassed as he tried to pretend he was. "Silly me."

"Mm," was all Campbell replied. Again, he tried to step around him. If he didn't get to Dante soon, his boy's overactive insecurities really would have him believing he was forgotten. And again, the man got in his way, forcing him to stop.

"Excuse me—" he started to say, but Campbell had places to be and he was all through being polite.

"What is your name, boy?" he asked, putting deliberate emphasis on "boy".

The young man grinned. "Darryl."

Campbell again strove for patience. "I meant, your name while you're here. Anonymity, remember?"

"Oh." Darryl laughed and for the first time, a slight flush of what might be real embarrassment colored his cheeks. "Right. Uh..." He looked at the top page of the packet he'd come away from the check-in tables with. "Riley. I was toying

with using Brat Boy, but I thought that might be too subtle. What do you think?" He fluttered his lashes. "Think you're Dom enough to make me behave?"

"Yes," Campbell answered without hesitation. "However, I am already assigned. You'll meet your match at the Meet and Greet. Best find your seat now. Mistress Hardwick is at the podium, and you won't like it if she has to wait because of your naughty behavior."

"Aww," Darryl sighed, as if truly feeling for Miss Hardwick's soon-to-be strife with him. "Her naughty bits don't turn me on half as much as yours do." He touched Campbell's arm again, and this time painfully obviously, batted his lashes.

Out of patience and yet managing a smile, Campbell took the other's hand off his arm, turned him toward the waiting audience and firmly swatted him. The force he used made the other's hips pop and a real look of surprise lit his face. "If your match isn't up to taming you, don't worry. I'll make it my mission to find someone who can."

He left Darryl standing there, one hand on his backside and his mouth hanging open. Heading for the bridge where, at last he spotted Dante, standing there with sunglasses propped up on top of his head and with what looked for a split second like shock on his face.

It might have been the glare of the sun, though. Because Dante immediately dropped his sunglasses over his eyes. When Campbell raised his arm in greeting, Dante did too.

Campbell relaxed with what felt like the first heartfelt smile he'd had since last he and Dante were together.

Time to start making up for all those mistakes in their very short past. This was going to be a good trip.

CHAPTER TWO

Dante turned from Campbell so fast he was sure he'd just raised his Daddy's suspicions. He also dropped his waving arm and for a moment stood there, his back to his approaching Dominant, hugging his queasy stomach. His Daddy had been with Darryl. He'd spanked him, in fact. And that's what stuck with Dante, stirring up every insecurity he had until his heart was racing and he felt almost like hyperventilating. What was he going to say to Campbell? Did he even still want to *be* Dante's Daddy??

Campbell had made no mention on the phone that anything had changed. They'd been planning this reunion practically from the moment they'd parted the last time. Dante didn't know what was going on, but he did know one thing, there was no way he was going to tell Daddy he loved him if Campbell didn't feel the same. He'd thought they'd been on the same page before he left Georgia, but now he wasn't at all sure.

"There's my favorite boy," Campbell said with a growl as he reached the bridge. Dante didn't fully turn around before the Daddy's arms were around him, hugging him hard and fast, squeezing so tightly and seemingly with such sincerity that if only Dante closed his eyes, he could almost forget what he'd just seen.

When Campbell finally let go of him, Dante pasted on a smile and faced him.

Campbell took one look at his attempt, however, and his smile dropped. “What’s the matter? What’s happened?”

Tell him, let him at least explain. But Dante couldn’t, the bottom had fallen out of his relationship. He just didn’t know how far, but he did know he really didn’t want to hear Campbell telling him just how far it had fallen.

“Nothing.” Dante tried harder for a more believable smile. “It’s just been a really long trip. That’s all.”

“Well, I’m glad you’re here now.”

“Me too.” But that was a lie, and it not only hurt—physically and spiritually hurt—to say it, but he’d thought they’d long ago moved beyond hiding things from one another.

Honestly, what could he expect from someone who spent his days playing let’s-pretend Daddy with other Little boys. Oh God, he hadn’t let himself get conned into falling in love with a gigolo, had he?

Campbell slung a gentle arm around his shoulder and pulled him in for a gentler kiss on the forehead.

He hadn’t done that to Darryl. It was a spiteful thought that didn’t make Dante feel better. Just because he hadn’t done it, didn’t mean he didn’t want to.

“Let’s get you inside. Put something more substantial than airplane peanuts in your stomach and get you relaxed. Have you been drinking your water this week like I asked?”

Throat too thick to swallow much less answer, Dante nodded.

“Good boy,” Campbell purred. “I’ve got such plans for you. I want you to be well-hydrated for some of our games.”

It was a promise/threat that at any other moment would have sent thrills of excitement zipping through his veins. But not right now.

“Sounds like a plan,” Dante said, with far less excitement than he’d tried for.

Campbell studied him, his arm still around his shoulder. When Dante ducked his head, Campbell hooked a finger under his chin and made him lift his head so he couldn’t help but stare right up into his knowing gray eyes.

After a moment, whatever Campbell was thinking must have clicked into line. “Don’t worry,” he finally decided. “We can save all that for when you’re ready. For now, let’s just get through the introduction so we can head for the room. I think a nap might be a good place to start.”

Talking would have been an even better place to start, but Dante held that inside. He just wanted to know where they stood with one another. Had Campbell’s affection toward him lessened during the last three months when phone calls and messenger videos were all they’d had? He wanted to know, did Campbell actually mean it this morning before his flight when he’d bid Dante goodbye by saying, “I love you, boy. Travel safe”?

Had it been a slip of the tongue? Like, getting off the phone with one’s mom only to immediately talk to a friend afterward. He’d done that before. Only the one he’d said “I love you” to had been his boss.

They’d laughed it off, and Dante had taken a little teasing from coworkers afterward. He felt like anything but laughing

now. And when Campbell walked him over the bridge and into the courtyard, Dante's gaze went immediately to the other new arrivals in front of the podium where Mistress Hardwick, one of the Castle's sterner Dommes, was finally starting her Welcome to the Castle spiel.

Darryl must have been watching for Campbell's return. When they walked into the courtyard together, his eyes widened and his jaw dropped. He pointed to Campbell, mouthing, "That's your Daddy?"

Dante never felt so overly possessive in his life, so completely overwhelmed by the wave of jealousy that swept over him. He was drowning under the tidal weight of its ugly possessiveness.

He nodded firmly and belatedly hooked his arm through Campbell's. He managed a couple of half-hearted skips to prove it.

"There's my boy," Campbell said approvingly, leading him to the first row where two open chairs sat waiting for them side-by-side.

Dante would have taken the outside chair. He had no desire at the moment to be involved in anything so crowded like this arrival group. But that chair was claimed by Daddy and he was ushered in to sit between Campbell and a woman who'd arrived dressed all in bright red pleather.

He could feel Darryl's eyes burning into his back the whole time he was supposed to be paying attention to the strictness of certain Castle rules, the importance of keeping his program bracelet on at all times, and what magic word would stop all play and even bring Castle security running to his defense.

He never would have dreamed of saying that word, “onions,” before this, but from the moment he heard it and his brain clicked on the potential of an instant way out of this horrible situation, it became all he could do not to say it, stand up, and go back to the buses.

If they were even still out front. They might have gone already.

He might be stuck here.

He didn't realize how stiffly he was sitting until Campbell's warm hand settled on his knee and, hot breath brushing Dante's ear, told him, “Deep breath in... hold it, then let it out. We'll be home soon and you can let it all out there, over Daddy's knee, exactly where you belong. Okay?”

That sounded like heaven.

Covering Campbell's hand with his own, Dante gave it a squeeze to show how much he appreciated the attempt to cheer him up.

I love you, Dante ached to reply.

He felt like such a fool.

* * *

Something was wrong with his boy, and it was driving Campbell crazy not to know what it was. If Dante was struggling through a problem—something at work, or home—then here probably wasn't a comfortable place to discuss it. So he was willing to wait until they were alone before he broached it, but there was no doubt in his mind they could work through it together. But what if it wasn't that? Good lord, had Dante met someone while distance kept them parted?

Campbell could feel the ring burning through the cloth of his sporran.

Whatever the issue was, Dante had until they were in their room to figure out how to explain it. Because Campbell meant to sort this out. Whatever was going on in his babyboy's head, it wasn't going to ruin their trip or Dante's peace of mind for one second longer than Campbell could help.

It might also be nothing more than the mental exhaustion of looking forward to this trip for so long and now, when finally here, all his Little's insecurities were now talking to him louder than the joy.

Hoping that's what it was, Campbell knew his lap was exactly where Dante would find his moment to heal. A spanking might be called for, but only as a mild attention getter. All Dante might really need right now was a long comforting hug, a hot backside and a lasting reminder that Daddy was here and he meant to stay that way.

His ring was going to look beautiful on Dante's hand, just like his handprints would look, peppered all over Dante's firm little ass.

He checked his watch, but Mistress Miranda was already winding down her speech.

"So go out," she said. "Have fun, but remember our rules, because while little misbehaviors can get you sent to Master Marshall's office, others can get you banned for life."

Dismissed, people around them stood eagerly to head inside where all the kinky fun they ached for awaited, but although Dante was one who immediately rose, Campbell pulled him down to sit again. They waited side-by-side while the courtyard emptied.

“What?” Dante finally asked, once they were alone-ish. Miranda had gone inside with the others. There was a bottleneck of visitors being separated into program groups at the front door. Just their luck too, Darryl wasn’t one of them. He waited where he’d been sitting, just a few chairs to their left and one row behind, sneaking peeks at them. Every now and then, he picked imaginary fluff off his jeans, his head cocked as if trying to eavesdrop.

Dante wasn’t looking, but Campbell was aware enough of the intrusion for both of them.

“I should probably get my packet from the check-in tables, right?” Dante swiveled in his chair far enough to see that the tables were still manned and a few customers had drifted back there to ask questions.

“I’ve already taken care of it,” Campbell replied. “I got your packet earlier. All you have to do now is come with me and let yourself relax enough to relinquish your control. Are you ready for that?”

For some odd reason, Dante turned and looked right at Darryl. Did he know the other man? Maybe they’d come in on the same bus, or they might even be acquaintances from home. Suddenly, Dante’s strange reserve seemed to make more sense. This might be a doxing issue. Or the two might have had a disagreement on the bus. Either way, Campbell’s protective side came rushing to the surface.

“Don’t look at him. You’ve nothing to worry about there,” he assured. “Look at me.”

Dante flushed slightly, but obediently dragged his eyes off Darryl and met Campbell’s instead.

“This is Daddy’s world,” Campbell reminded him. “Daddy can and will always protect you.”

A flicker of sad vulnerability flashed through Dante’s eyes, and in that second Campbell knew his suspicion over what was wrong was in the ballpark, at least.

“Really?” Dante asked, every bit of that vulnerability Campbell had glimpsed now heard in his boy’s soft voice.

“That’s a promise you can take to the bank,” he assured again. “I meant what I said last night.”

Dante’s eyes widened, and Campbell knew he remembered exactly to what he was referring.

So there could be no mistake, Campbell added, “I love you. Very much. Probably more than I should at this point, but... there it is. That’s how I feel.”

Dante stared at him, frozen where he sat, as if wanting to believe him, but not quite able to. That there should be any doubt left Campbell fiercely determined to make sure his boy never had reason to doubt him. Not ever again.

Without a word, Dante threw himself into Campbell’s lap, scrambling into his soothing embrace and holding on as fiercely close as Campbell held him back.

“Thank you,” he whispered into Campbell’s thick neck.

“Don’t worry about saying it back,” Campbell soothed. “When and if you decide you can repeat those words back to me, it’ll be a treasure worth believing.”

It was enough in this moment that Dante had completely relaxed in his arms. This right here was all the treasure Campbell needed.

He patted Dante’s back. “All right then. Let’s go inside.”

CHAPTER THREE

Dante followed Campbell to wardrobe first, and they spent almost an hour picking out his first outfit. Dante immediately fell in love with a pirate captain's ensemble. He got to take that one in his arms when they left, although the outfit he ended up wearing was far more embarrassing. He was dressed as a young Victorian child, in short pants and white shirt, and a jacket with a giraffe in a boat on the breast pocket where a proper handkerchief should have been. He absolutely refused to wear the little sailor's cap that went with it.

"We'll talk about it later," was all Campbell said, but Dante was determined. He felt too tall and skinny to pull off this outfit, and the cap was just over the top. If Daddy was trying to get him into a Little frame of mind, then he could talk all he wanted. That jacket was too much as it was. No way was he going to wear the stupid hat.

Wardrobe was located on the second floor, down the far left of the balcony hallway that overlooked the Castle's massive entrance hall. To the far right was Master Marshall's infamous office. They walked right past it on their way further down that right-hand corridor, and just before turning that first corner where signs declared Saint Castle's school program to be located, Campbell stopped to unlock two massive double doors. Opening them revealed red-velvet carpeted stairs

leading up to staff quarters on the third floor. Daddy was taking him upstairs. Not to a private guest room, but to his actual apartment. The place where he lived when he wasn't working. A place no guest was ever allowed to go—except Dante.

Dante's knees went weak. He held on to the banister the whole way up, past the third-floor landing, then the fourth's, and finally they stopped on the fifth and last floor, where the stairs culminated at a window. He glanced outside. Dante knew green grass and farmland stretched on for miles, but all he could focus on was the dense curtain of trees surrounding the Castle walls.

“Wow,” he said. “Gorgeous view.”

Campbell smiled, waiting patiently for him to look his fill. “You should see the one from my bedroom window. That's where I was waiting most of the morning, hunting for the first glimpse of the bus that was bringing you back to me.”

Awww... What a romantic thing to say. Dante slipped his hand into Campbell's and together they continued on their way.

When they finally reached Daddy's door, Dante watched as Campbell fumbled through items in his sporran to find the same master keycard that he'd used to unlock the double doors downstairs.

He pushed it open, sidestepping so he could hold the door while Dante slipped by his slightly shorter Dom and went inside. Like every other place in the Castle, this room looked like a 15th-century living space, albeit for a wealthy man. The walls all around were dark bare stone. The furniture was expensive, antique-style wood, and the carpet was trimmed in red and gold.

The antiques everywhere else in the room made the shiny silver modern appliances in the adjoining kitchen strikingly luxurious. There was a big calendar on the wall with today's date circled twice in red felt pen and Dante's name underlined within its lines.

Just like someone who'd really been looking forward to seeing him might do.

Those awful foolish feelings that had consumed him since he'd seen Daddy swat Darryl in the courtyard, vanished, leaving behind nothing but the ugly foolish feelings he suffered now for having doubted Campbell's intentions.

"I'm sorry for my mood," he started to say, turning back in time to see Campbell close the front door. He put the deadbolt on for privacy before turning and opening his arms.

Dante didn't think twice. He fled into them, hugging Campbell tight and burrowing gratefully into his receiving embrace.

"I've missed you, boy," Campbell murmured into his hair. "Long distance was harder than I thought it would be. I swear, you had me on the brink of flying out to Georgia several times."

"I'm sorry," Dante whispered back, just glad to be here now.

"Don't you dare apologize for that."

Pulling back only far enough to see Daddy's face, Dante asked, "Can I apologize for what happened downstairs, because I am sorry for making things stupid this morning."

Campbell swatted him. "You're not stupid."

"I didn't say—"

“Yes, you did. You weren’t calling the situation stupid, you meant you were. And I don’t appreciate hearing my boy say that about himself. Do you want to talk about it?”

Nodding, Dante reluctantly disengaged from Daddy’s arms as Campbell took his hand and led him to the couch. Daddy sat down first, dead in the center of the couch cushions. Which made Dante hesitate, until his Dom patted the cushion to his left.

Daddy being left-handed did not make the “come hither, little one” look on his face easier to take. Daddy was setting him up to spank him at some point in this conversation. On the one hand, that made him relax. Only a Daddy who loved him would bother to discipline him, right?

Unless he was just treating Dante like he had Darryl, like any other guest he was paid to make happy. Like he was doing a job at the kinkiest fantasy resort most well known for making fantasies come to life.

God, he hated himself for even thinking that. Now he couldn’t stop thinking it.

He deserved to get spanked.

Unbuttoning his childish short pants, he lay himself down over Campbell’s lap, instead of sitting, as Daddy had gestured.

“All right,” Campbell drawled, a touch of amusement in his voice. Oddly enough, that amusement made Dante relax all over again.

“Are you laughing at me?” he asked.

“No, baby,” Campbell assured. “I’m just this happy to have you here. And I think you must be too. So happy that you’ve forgotten Daddy’s discipline isn’t something you want to invite.”

Dante shivered. "I haven't forgotten."

He hadn't, either. He wasn't sure he wanted a spanking, but what he did want was the closeness he knew would come afterward. Even if Daddy gave him a naughty bottom punishment, that closeness would be worth any number of spanks or punishment sex that Campbell decided to give him. The man was a sadist, and every bit as good at that job as he was at being Dante's Daddy.

Campbell's arm came down across Dante's back. When he patted, Dante didn't try to pretend he didn't know what Daddy wanted. He put his left hand back, half comforted and yet half freaking out when Campbell took his hand, preventing any flailing from happening before he'd even started.

It was going to be bad. Dante shuddered. But maybe bad was just what he needed to get past these awful insecurities. All he wanted when this was done was to feel Campbell's confident ownership.

"What do you need, boy?" Campbell asked gruffly, in a voice Dante knew well. He was getting turned on. He wriggled and, sure enough, felt the bulging hardness of his Daddy's cock rising to press against his stomach.

"To be Daddy's good boy again," he answered sadly.

"You have always been my good boy," Campbell corrected. "Even when you do things that aren't good for us, you will always be my good boy."

Dante was glad Daddy was so aroused, but good was the last thing he felt. He wanted closure on this morning. He wanted to be cleansed of the bad feelings he couldn't seem to get over. He wished he'd never met Darryl or seen that

exchange between him and Campbell. He wanted to believe it didn't mean the things his head kept suggesting it did.

"I feel bad," he whispered.

"Baby," Campbell petted the back of his head, ruffling his short dark hair. "That's something Daddy can definitely deal with. Do you want to talk about what happened?"

Definitely not. The last thing Dante wanted to do was talk about what he'd seen. To admit to any of that out loud just made him feel worse. "Can we just assume I was ridiculous and let it go there?"

"And have the meat of the issue continue on between us? Not on your life. If you want to banish those feelings, my darling, you first have to confess to them."

Damn it.

Dante buried his face in the sofa cushion, sighed and finally raised his head. "I saw you... and Darryl."

"You mean Riley? Blond hair, dick attitude?" Campbell asked, and Dante could hear the mild confusion in the other's voice. "I think he gave you his real name. It's supposed to be Riley while he's here. But okay, and?"

"And you spanked him!" Dante exclaimed, not believing that should even need expressing.

"Ah," Campbell said, finally understanding. "Sweetheart—"

The endearment would have been far more effective if only it didn't sound as if Dante weren't about to get a lecture.

"You saw me doing my job," Campbell told him.

"I thought you were going to get time off and we were going to have this weekend all to ourselves," he protested.

Dante deflated. “I really wanted that. I wanted to have you all to myself. It’s not fair! I—”

“Stand up.” Campbell let go of his hand.

Reluctantly, Dante pushed up off his lap and the couch both. He stood, his short pants around his knees. Embarrassed, he started to pull them up, but Campbell stopped him.

“Leave them down. In fact, might be better if you just take them all the way off. Shirt off too. Daddy’s little boy needs to be in the right frame of mind for this.”

Embarrassment was the right frame of mind? If that was the goal, Dante had been there most of the morning already.

Quietly, he did as he was told, removing his shorts before folding them neatly and setting them on the far arm of the couch.

“Shirt too.”

And leave him standing in nothing but socks, shoes, and tighty whities? God, he really was embarrassed now. The slow burn lit up his face as he stripped out of his shirt. Hoping Campbell wouldn’t care, he took off his shoes and socks too. He was hoping that would make it feel more like he was about to take a shower, something normal. But, oh, standing in literally nothing but his underwear just didn’t feel normal, especially when Campbell pointed to the floor between his shiny black boots.

Dante inched in to stand where he’d been directed.

“This is my job,” Campbell repeated. “Ril—I mean, Darryl,” he emphasized, “is my job.”

“Am I just your job?” Dante finally asked, already hurt because he was sure that was coming next.

Campbell's face softened. "No, baby. You're the only person in my life who isn't part of this job. May I show you something?"

Dante quickly covered his face with both hands. He was so relieved, he almost cried.

He nodded.

Dropping his hands, Dante sniffled back his suddenly runny nose and watched as Campbell opened the pocket on his sporran, pulling out a small jewelry box.

It was the kind of jewelry box that wedding rings came in.

"Oh my god," he said, covering his face again. This couldn't possibly be what he thought it was. But even if it wasn't, Daddy had just done the one thing that could have brought Dante soaring up out of the depths of his unhappiness straight into absolute joy.

Campbell got off the couch, but instead of standing, he dropped to one knee directly in front of Dante's stunned eyes, peeking as they were through his splayed fingers.

"Look at me, boy," Campbell ordered.

Now he was crying. Dante dropped his hands again. He would have dropped to the floor on his knees and hugged his Daddy fiercely close, but Campbell took his hand.

"Baby," he said soberly. "This has been the longest three months of my life. Before I let you leave me again, I want there to be no mistake about my affections or my intentions. Will you marry me?"

Dante lost it. He bent, throwing his arms around Campbell and nodding.

“Is that a yes?” Campbell asked, amusement again touching his tone.

Dante nodded harder. If he spoke now, he wouldn't be able to do it without sobbing.

He pulled back, still nodding, and finally sank to his knees beside his Daddy. He watched as the ring was slipped onto his hand, and when it was done, he hugged his hand just to feel the hard metal pressing into his other fingers.

“I had something I want to say to you too,” Dante confessed. He looked into his Daddy Dom's eyes and, crying so hard he almost couldn't get the words out, he wailed, “I love you, Daddy. I really do.”

* * *

I love you, Daddy... nothing more magical than those four beginning words existed. Not anywhere in any language on the planet. Certainly not to Campbell who had been waiting to hear them for months.

Gathering his boy into his lap, he held on to him as Dante got the ragged emotions wept out, and better ones took their place.

His boy. Two little words that were officially and legally one step closer to being true. And judging from Dante's reaction to his proposal, he probably no longer required the kind of spanking he'd been trying so hard to convince Campbell he needed. And frankly, all Campbell wanted was to pick him up, carry him to the bedroom and maybe tie him up once he got there. But definitely to make sweet love to his boy until neither of them could walk again afterward.

Unfortunately, Campbell had never been the sort to be accused of not following through. But he could temper the hardness of his hand and belt to what the situation deserved.

“Let’s get the bad things over with so we only have good things between us for the rest of the night. Okay?” He patted Dante’s back as his boy nodded again, wiped his eyes and gradually picked himself up off the floor.

So did Campbell. Returning to his spot on the couch, he sent Dante to the bedroom. “Bring me the wooden hairbrush from the dressing table,” he directed. “Sadly, my boy needs a hot, sore bottom, and I aim to provide it. Just like I intend to provide for all his needs, from this day forward for the rest of our lives.”

Dante grinned through his tears, and the whole way back to the bedroom, swiped at his face and eyes with his hands.

Within a minute, he was back with the hairbrush. He brought it directly to Campbell, just like an innocent Little unfamiliar with this implement’s sinister bite.

Campbell took it by the handle. Dante would feel it soon enough.

With his free hand, Campbell beckoned him closer. Taking hold of the waistband of Dante’s undershorts, he pulled them down to drop around his ankles. Taking hold of Dante’s cock, shaven bare just the way Campbell had told him he wanted it to be done last night before he left, he dragged him closer.

“Look at me,” Campbell ordered, and Dante did. His eyes were so brown. So huge and watery and gazing slightly down into Campbell’s own stare with anxiousness and, yes, he could see the love. Little Dante’s cock stiffened, swelling in the grip of his Daddy’s palm. “You remember what brought you to the

Castle in the first place, don't you, boy?" Campbell asked, his tone stern but unable at all to help the smile tugging at his lips.

Dante grinned, still swiping at stray tears on his face. With every hiccup and snuffle, he pulled himself back together again. He nodded. "It's a whirlwind. But yeah, I kind of remember how it all went." He was still smiling, even when he tried to make a face. "For what it's worth, I really do apologize for jumping to conclusions."

"I love you," Campbell re-enforced for him. "But this is my job and there will be times when you will see me interacting with other guests here. Also, I'm pretty sure I don't want to change jobs just because you have a tiny jealous streak." He cocked an eyebrow. "Do you understand what I'm telling you?"

Dante nodded, sniffled one last time and wiped away the last of his tears. "I have no intention of coming between you and your job, Daddy. I really don't. I got overwhelmed in the moment and didn't know how to process what I saw when I saw it."

"I understand, and this is why you're not going to get a serious punishment. Right now, all we're going to do is reconnect. Right?"

When Campbell patted his lap, Dante dropped to lay himself across his Daddy's lap. This time, it felt more like love and comfort when Dante bent himself over Campbell's knee, rather than punishment.

When Campbell lay his arm across Dante's back, it wasn't to hold him down. In fact, Campbell knew it wouldn't take much in the way of struggling for his Little to break free under the crisp, repeating smacks of his hairbrush. But then Dante

slung his hand back, giving Campbell permission he *didn't* need to hold him down that much tighter.

“Meet the new bane of your existence, sweetheart,” Campbell said brightly, and without further delay, he took the brush from where he'd set it near his hip and raised it high.

“Mm!” Dante growled when the brush came smacking down again, right on the pale pinkness of his right bottom cheek. The flesh was firm enough to bounce, followed by a squirm as he struggled to breathe through the pain.

Dante sucked air sharply, held it, and then growled again as he let it out. “Wow, that hurts.”

“I'm glad,” Campbell grinned at the back of his head. “Maybe when I tell you to settle down before Daddy has to get the hairbrush, you might actually do it.”

“I would,” Dante promised. “But I'd settle just for the asking, too. No hairbrush needed. Please, Daddy, maybe not too hard?”

Campbell patted his boy's tight little ass. “Sadly, you're not in charge of how hard or how long Daddy spansks. I am, and right now, I think a short but harsh reminder of who's the boss, and who just needs to relax and be themselves for a while is necessary.”

He landed a second sharp slap, not with the full strength of his arm, but just hard enough to make Dante jump and squirm again.

“Ouch!” Dante's hand in Campbell's grip clawed the air before balling up into a fist. He ground his hips into Campbell's lap, the hot jut of his hairless cock easily felt, and so damn near close to brushing against Campbell's that he almost couldn't bear it.

Enough playing. Locking his arm around his boy, Campbell tore into his little white ass with smack after smack of his hairbrush, quickly reducing Dante from squirms and grunts to howls that broke quickly into real thrashing to get up.

“Please, Daddy!” Dante howled. “Please, stop, please!”

It was swat after painful swat though before Campbell set the brush aside and let go of Dante who immediately scrambled up into his lap. He curled himself into Campbell’s arms, and it was the best feeling a submissive could know as Campbell wrapped his arms around as much of Dante as he could hold. He was curled into a ball, his teary face buried into Campbell’s neck while his arms hugged Dante tightly close.

“I have missed you so much,” Campbell murmured into Dante’s hair. “You are everything I’ve ever wanted in a partner.”

Dante melted. “I’ve missed you too.”

“We’ve got three whole days together,” Campbell told him. “And Darryl doesn’t figure into that, does he?”

Dante shook his head.

“It’s just you and me.” Sliding his arms under his little boy’s knees, Campbell scooped him up and carried him from the living room to the bedroom.

He was heavier than a woman, but Campbell didn’t mind. There wasn’t a woman in the world he’d have wanted laid out in his bed the way Dante was the moment he laid his boy down. “Roll on your back. Knees on your chest. Spread your legs.”

Dante mewed, squirming. Grinding his sore bottom against the mattress as he quickly obeyed.

Campbell took his time stripping out of his clothes. Crawling onto the bed between his boy's raised feet, he touched Dante, lightly caressing the splayed insides of his thighs, before running his fingernails, ever so lightly scratching him just to see his eyes close with the pleasure of it.

His Little shivered, delightfully wriggling his little ass. Campbell grinned, easily translating the unspoken wish.

Come and get me, Daddy.

Campbell's mouth watered as he eyed his boy's fully erect cock. Bending, he pressed his scruffy chin to Dante's skin, dragging his unshaven bristles down the inside of his thighs until his face was even with the prize of his Little's pleasure.

Dante shivered, gasping, "Yes, please, Daddy..."

Campbell swept Dante's cock between his lips, engulfing that salty-sweet taste in the warm, wet heat of his mouth. It was like coming home. So natural, so delicious—even more so when Dante arched his back, trying to buck his hips up to thrust deeper into the welcoming haven of Campbell's mouth.

He gathered Dante's tight balls in the grip of his spare hand, squeezing in a warning that Dante understood well.

"Sorry, Daddy," he panted. His body grudgingly relaxed on the bed, stopping his wriggling. "I'll behave."

Campbell didn't reply, he just went to the best work of his life, loving, sucking, bobbing and stroking his beloved's cock with both his hand and mouth until Dante was beyond panting.

He was moaning, groaning, thrashing his head back and forth on the pillow and fighting every involuntary reaction not to move his hips.

Disengaging from Dante's cock with a pop of freeing action, he smacked his boy's bright pink bottom. "Roll over. Ass up. Head down."

Dante scrambled to obey.

He moaned, his back arching the moment Campbell rolled on a fresh condom and lined the tip of his pulsating cock against his boy's puckered back door.

His anus tightened with flexing excitement.

Drizzling lube on his fingers, Campbell slid them into Dante's ass, slowly stretching him.

"You've been using your stretching kit," he said approvingly.

His face buried in the mattress, Dante nodded. Campbell could see the pink of a hot blush coloring his face.

Removing his fingers, he immediately sank into the extraordinary heat of his yielding body. "Which one is your favorite now?" he sighed, struggling to hold himself still enough for Dante's flesh to accept. Waiting for those tiny twinges of discomfort his entry might have sparked to fade away and the pleasure of being so intimately invaded to build. It drove them both to soaring heights of ecstasy so unbelievable that only God could have fit them so completely together.

"Please don't make me say," Dante pleaded, hiding his face in his arms.

Campbell chuckled, pulling almost all the way out before slamming hard all the way in again. He pushed so hard, he almost knocked Dante flat to his stomach on the mattress.

"Ah!" Dante's grunt was all the encouragement he needed.

“Does that feel good?” Campbell teased, knowing his boy was loving every minute of this. He pumped into him again.

“Yes,” Dante both groaned and panted.

“And why is that?”

“Please, Daddy, don’t make me say it.”

“But I love hearing it,” Campbell chuckled again. “Tell me.”

Moaning, Dante covered his face with both hands and buried himself in the mattress. Campbell could see the edges of his face turning bright, bright red. God, much more of this and he was going to blow.

“The second to the biggest one,” he shyly confessed, ripples of pleasure rolling through him like a wave. Campbell could feel his shivers all the way up and down his cock.

“Why?” Campbell demanded. Seizing a handful of his hair, he yanked Dante’s head up off the mattress so he could hear him clearly.

Dante laughed breathlessly, enjoying that too. “It fills me up like you do. Hurting just a little as it goes in. Nothing but fantastic sensation all the rest of the time.” His face was an adorable shade of scarlet as he confessed, “I love it, Daddy. I really do.”

Campbell growled his own pleasure. Dante’s walls felt too good surrounding his cock. As much as he wanted to draw this out, to make sure by the end of this his boy was so exhausted he couldn’t move or walk straight, it had been just too long since he’d last pounded into something so hot, wet and wonderful. Every thrust was mind-blowing. Every groan, both his and Dante’s, was a high incomparable to any other lover he’d ever had.

Grabbing Dante off his arms, Campbell pulled him upright, holding him—back to chest—his arm hooked around his boy’s stomach, feeling the spasms of his flesh as Campbell reached around to fist Dante’s cock, pumping it to the same swift tempo of his hips, smacking into Dante’s lean, pink ass.

Dante tried to grab his own cock too, but swiftly removed his hand it when his fingers touched Campbell’s.

“Ah!” His head fell back on Campbell’s shoulder. “D-Daddy... please... Oh my God, I’m g-gonna—”

“Come, boy. In fact”—letting go of his boy’s cock, Campbell grabbed him by the hips,—“put your hand on your dick and pump it. Match my rhythm and don’t stop until I do. Now. Fuck... now.”

They swapped hands and Campbell threw every ounce of himself into the heart-pounding joy of fucking his boy. The man he’d just proposed to. The one he couldn’t wait to spend the rest of his life with.

God!

The pleasure erupted, not just from his cock and his tight, spurting balls, but from his chest, his belly, and every taut spasming muscle in his body.

Dante collapsed to hands and knees on the mattress, still stroking his cock but gently now, massaging the streams of his cum over his shaft as he gradually softened. He buried his face into the mattress, struggling to catch his breath as was Campbell. They even panted in unison.

Flopping on the bed beside him, Campbell wrapped his arms around his boy. “I love you to pieces, honey.”

Dante instantly rolled onto his side toward his Dom, throwing an arm around his waist and burrowing in close.

They were both sweaty. Campbell couldn't have cared less.

“I love you too, Daddy,” Dante whispered.

It was going to be a great weekend.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Oh, how I’ve missed this buffet,” Dante said, eagerly following Campbell down the food line. There were multiple restaurants in the Castle, the Master’s Supper and Show being probably the most popular among them. The coffee and deli counter just off the media room was probably high on the popularity list, but maybe that was because it was placed so conveniently near the only place in the Castle that allowed laptops and cellphones outside of individuals’ rooms.

Cook Connie’s Kitchen was everyone’s fallback place to eat, though. It was always open, always busy, and in all the time he’d been here, including his previous visit, Dante had never seen anything but free, good home-cooked meals in silver trays on the heated buffet bars.

“Ooo!” Dante crowed, suddenly spotting a morning dessert bar with some fruits and lots of pastries, cinnamon rolls, and puddings. “They have bread pudding! I haven’t had that in ages.”

Campbell half turned to give him a smile. “You may have some if you like. But I expect more than just sweet things on your plate.”

“Well, hello! You look familiar,” a man’s warm voice said from just behind them.

They both turned to find the chief of the Castle's security crew beaming, big brawny Master Jackson. His black t-shirt stretched across massive pectoral muscles and his arms were almost as big around as Dante's thighs. He barely remembered the Dom from his first visit here.

"Hello," Dante greeted, and even offered a shy wave.

"Go get your pudding," Campbell told him. "I'll wait around the eggs and bacon for you."

"Woo hoo," Dante cheered, and off he went, leaving the two Castle Doms to talk about whatever so he could get a better look at the bread pudding.

It looked just like his mom used to make, although he was disappointed to see there were raisins mixed into it. While Dante liked raisins in principle, he hated when they were cooked into food. They looked too much like dead flies for him to dare eat. Before disappointment could sink in, though, he spotted another tray of bread pudding, this time without the flies.

He spooned up a hefty amount and thought about grabbing a second scoop, but that would probably fill him up and Campbell would likely not be happy about that. So Dante restricted himself to what he'd already taken.

Turning from the buffet, he hunted the crowded dining hall for his Daddy, and there he was. No longer by Master Jackson, but instead, by the egg station, exactly as he said he'd be. Except, who should he be talking to now, but Darryl himself. Again.

Dante saw red. It was knee-jerk reaction he couldn't seem to control any better than his legs, which were already moving,

taking him straight to them. He had no idea what he wanted to say to Darryl until he'd barged his way between the two men.

Glaring at Darryl, through gritted teeth, he said, "Go away. Master Campbell isn't your Daddy. He's mine! Stop horning your way into our weekend. This is our time together, not yours. Go. Away."

Darryl's grin was friendly enough, but that glitter in his dark eyes said everything that Dante needed to hear. They were teasing, but not in a friendly way. They were determined too, and unless he did something drastic to push the other man away, Dante knew for a fact he wasn't going to leave them alone.

"We could be brothers," Darryl declared. "Twins even. Fraternal, of course, since we don't look anything alike. Why can't we share a Daddy? It'll be fun!"

Dante didn't mean to drop his plate. He only vaguely heard it shatter on the floor, deaf to the instant quiet that suddenly dimmed the noise of a hundred or more people no longer talking. They were too busy staring at Dante, who balled up his fist and punched Darryl as hard as he could right in the nose.

Darryl fell backward, bumping the omelet buffet, his flailing hand falling into a hot tray of scrambled eggs before he slid off sideways and hit the floor. He grabbed his nose with both hands, smearing hot egg in his hair and down his cheek. His hand was burned, already turning bright red. Realizing what he'd done, Dante already felt bad. Angry, but sorry at the same time. And that was even before Campbell grabbed his shoulder, spinning him around to glare at him.

"What are you doing?" his Daddy demanded.

Dante's throat choked closed. He looked down at Darryl, at the blood pouring through the clenched fingers of both hands. And just as his stomach sank, Darryl gave him the meanest glare before letting out the most childish wail, crying so loudly that everyone in the now silent hall could hear. "You hurt me! I want to go home!"

Masters came from everywhere, helping Darryl up and trying to get his hands to lower so they could put the cold cloth someone had run to the kitchen to get over his face. Another had grabbed a pitcher of ice water from a nearby cart to soak his burned hand.

Another hard hand clamped onto Dante's shoulder, spinning him around. It wasn't Campbell's this time. It was Master Jackson, and this time he wasn't smiling.

"Come with me," he said grimly. "And I mean I want you following"—he snapped his fingers, pointing beside him—"right here."

Looking back at his frowning Daddy, Dante lowered his head. "Yes, Sir."

Dante was relieved when Campbell fell into step directly behind him, but that relief was short-lived when he found himself being led out of the dining hall and up the grand staircase that inevitably took them all straight to Master Marshall's office.

Jackson snapped his fingers again, this time pointing to the uncomfortable wooden bench placed directly outside the Master of the Masters' office. "Wait there," he ordered and then walked into the Master's office and closed the door behind him.

"I can't believe you hit someone," Daddy growled.

If only Campbell would sit down beside him, then Dante might not feel as if he'd ruined everything. He'd never in his life hit another human being before. Not for fun, and definitely not because he was angry. Usually, he was the most level-headed person of any group he joined. But look at what he'd done. He'd hurt Darryl, not just burning his hand at the egg station but possibly breaking his nose as well.

He hoped Darryl had two black eyes for the rest of his trip.

But no, not really. Now that the confrontation was over, Dante was appalled and disappointed in himself.

"I'm very sorry," he whispered.

"Oh, you will be," Campbell replied, so sternly that Dante's stomach clenched up tight and refused to unknot. He felt sick because of it. Once they got back to Daddy's home, he was sure Campbell would make sure he was never so naughty again.

Naughty? Who am I trying to kid?

Dante squirmed on the bench, every instinct in him letting him know that what he'd done was so far beyond naughty there was no word that really fit.

Dante wilted, and a few minutes later, out Master Jackson came from the imposing Master of the Masters' office. Dante shivered, remembering Marshall from the last time he was here. The man had the most piercing blue eyes he'd ever seen; they'd practically looked right through him.

"You're up," the Chief of Security told him, thumbing back at the office. "Best not to let him wait, boy. He's not happy with you as it stands."

Dante stood up, his gazing going immediately to Daddy Campbell. He prayed he hadn't just ruined everything between

them as well. Had he screwed up so badly that Campbell would change his mind about the wedding ring, or even about being his Daddy? Had he found the love of his life, just to lose him for committing one really stupid and violent misdeed?

“I’m so sorry,” he said again.

Clamping a hand on his shoulder, Campbell steered Dante into Master Marshall’s office. He never said a word, and that was all the confirmation Dante needed. Just as they reached the door, Dante stopped long enough to take off his ring. He tried to give it back to Campbell, whose frown deepened.

“Are you breaking up with me?” he grimly asked.

Horrified, Dante shook his head. “I thought... considering what I’ve done, you’d want to break up with me.”

Campbell didn’t exactly soften, but when he forced Dante to turn to him, he placed both his hands on Dante’s shoulders and gently said, “Put that ring back on your hand, and do not take it off again unless you are actively breaking up with me.” He shook his head. “As if you’re not already in enough trouble as it is.”

That reassurance certainly didn’t help. If anything, Dante felt worse than before. Hanging his head, he slipped the ring back on his finger and went inside the office to face Master Marshall.

The Master of the Masters had his pale blond head bent and he was writing on the header of the top page in the manilla file folder centered and open on his desk. Dante didn’t need to be told that file folder was probably his.

“Sit down,” Marshall told him without looking up.

Making his way to one of the two empty chairs on the client’s side of his desk, Dante sank down onto the soft

cushioned seat and waited. Again, Daddy didn't come to sit beside him or hold his hand, which Dante desperately wished he would. Did Daddy still love him? He covered his face with both hands, hot tears stinging his eyes.

Silence broken only by the scratch of pen on paper filled the room until it was too overwhelming to bear. "I'm so sorry," he tried to say, but Marshall held up his finger to stay him before continuing to write whatever note he was now making about Dante. Banned for life was one of the last things Mistress Hardwick had said in yesterday's introduction spiel. Was that what was about to happen? He had punched Darryl for trying to ruin his time with Master Campbell. Now it were his own actions that were about to accomplish that same exact, dreadful consequence.

How could he fix this? Dante had no idea.

"Can I just—" Dante tried again.

Marshall looked up, fixing him with the coldest blue-blue eyes Dante had ever seen. Yeah, he remembered those eyes.

"You have already been told to be quiet," Campbell ordered, standing behind him, his arms folded across his chest. "Are you the type of boy who doesn't listen to what he is told? Because I have a remedy for that and you won't like it."

"I suggest you listen to your Dom, young man, because I certainly don't like having to repeat myself," Marshall intoned dryly, still pinning him with that icy glare.

"I-I'm sor... sorry," Dante stammered.

Blinking slowly, Marshall raised a finger to his lips. "Shush, little man. Not one more word."

Swallowing hard, Dante nodded.

“I believe my boy requires something extra to help him follow directions,” Campbell said. “I don’t suppose you have fresh ginger in that implement closet of yours.”

“Restocked nightly.” Marshall waved his hand. “By all means, help yourself.”

Dante started to turn around, but Marshall stopped him.

“Face forward, young man. I have canes in this office for a reason. I don’t care if your Daddy is here or not. Give me another reason, and I won’t hesitate to use one.”

Dante immediately sat back in his chair and looked at his worrying hands. A deep flush of embarrassment burned his face. He wanted so badly to look when he heard the rattle of a cupboard door opening and Daddy rummaging around inside. He heard chains rattle and wooden paddles lightly clatter together as Campbell made his selections.

What was he picking? And what did ginger—an Asian cooking condiment—have to do with anything BDSM?

“Stand up and take your pants off,” Campbell ordered as he came walking back to him.

Right here, in front of the Master of the Masters?

Dante knew better than to turn around and look, but the spice of freshly peeled ginger was already heavy in the air. He could hear the crinkling of a plastic baggy being discarded.

“Did you hear me?”

Dante launched to his feet, his hands going to his waist as he unbuttoned his costumed short pants and took them straight down to his knees. His face was really flaming now. He looked everywhere but at Marshall. This was so embarrassing.

“Now your underwear,” Campbell told him. “Then I want you to turn around and bend over the chair with your hands on the seat. Don’t move them. I’m telling you now, that’s a warning you best listen to.”

“Yes, Daddy.” Hands at his waist, he only toyed with the elastic waist of his underwear before reluctantly lowering them now to his knees as well. Slowly, he bent to place his hands on the seat of the chair he’d been sitting in.

“You struck another guest,” Marshall said, turning his attention back to his paperwork. “Apparently, you struck him in Cook Connie’s dining hall. She’s already called.”

Dante flushed so hot he was sure he was about to spontaneously combust.

“Twice, in fact,” Marshall continued, his tone dropping low with disapproval.

Something cold touched Dante’s asshole. His Daddy’s fingers, lubing him up back there for what Dante could only imagine would be a serious punishment. He wasn’t going to take him right here, was he? Not in Master Marshall’s presence, right?

No sooner had that thought bloomed in his head, than he felt Campbell’s fingers abandon him and the nose of something that was definitely not his Daddy’s cock sidle up between his butt cheeks. Dante tried and failed not to clench, but it didn’t escape Campbell’s notice.

Dante jolted when Daddy swatted him. Hard. So hard that Dante almost fell face-first into the back of the chair. “I’m sorry,” he gasped, forcing himself to relax. And in that cold thing went. His eyes bulged wide. Already he could feel the

tingling around his puckered back hole as the juices of the ginger root trickled down his taint to drip from his ballsack.

“She’s not happy with you,” Marshall said. “Neither am I.”

“You’ve got more to worry about than either of them,” Campbell informed him, inserting the ginger as deep as it would go in his Little’s ass. “Worry about me.”

The knobby end of the ginger root stuck partway out of him. Dante could only imagine how pathetic he must look—with Daddy’s handprint coloring up his butt cheek and the ginger slowly heating up inside him, burning at his balls, his taint, and—god!—his asshole. It was a slow, tingling fire that only grew worse, burning hotter with every squeeze of his own uncooperative muscles.

“Uh,” he panted, spreading his legs in an effort to dull the growing fire.

“Enjoying this, are you?” Campbell asked, not sounding amused at all.

Dante shook his head. “No, it hurts.”

“Hurts or burns?” Daddy inquired.

Dante bounced on his toes, but he didn’t let go of the chair. Everything inside him wanted to be good and take his punishment so he could be absolved of his crime. But everything also wanted to grab the ginger root by its protruding end and yank it out of him. “It’s burns so bad!”

“I imagine it does, but this is what happens to little boys who come dangerously close to being expelled,” Marshall told him. “Do you want to tell me why you hit my guest?”

His guest? Was Master Marshall Darryl’s Daddy? He couldn’t imagine the blond master being paired with such a

petulant brat, but it was a terrifying thought that he might be in the very presence of a man determined to protect his temporary Little.

He gulped, blurting yet another apology. "I'm very sorry, Sir. I'll never do it again."

"No, you won't," Campbell agreed.

"If you do," Marshall added, "you'll have more to fear from me than just a spanking. You're lucky your Daddy is one of my Doms, or it would be my cane you'd be facing right now instead of a mere belt whipping."

A *mere* belt whipping? Was there even such a thing as *mere* when it came to Daddy's belt? Dante didn't think so. He cringed, hearing the click of a belt buckle being undone, followed by the leathery hiss as Campbell pulled his from the loops around his waist, folding it over in his authoritative hand and palming the buckle so it wouldn't accidentally strike Dante along with the thick, black leather.

"Hold your position," Campbell ordered.

"Yes, Daddy." Trying not to whimper, Dante tried to make himself as small of a target for the belt as possible. It didn't work. He heard the deceptively soft swish as Campbell swung his belt and struck the first consequential blow. The loud crack of contact had Dante arching up onto his toes with a high-pitched yelp.

"Hold your position," Campbell reminded. "Spread your legs and stick your ass right out for me. You've got eleven more just like that last one coming, and I expect you to hold still for each and every one."

Dante bowed over the chair, pressing his face into the seat cushion between his splayed hands. He gritted his teeth,

determined to take the rest like a champ, rather than the Little he was. The second hard crack of the belt had him dissolving into tears.

“I’m so, so sorry!” he wailed.

“As you should be,” Marshall told him. “Be glad your Daddy insisted on disciplining you himself. I promise, you won’t want me to do it for him. I will tear your ass up one side and down the other if you ever strike anyone on these grounds again.”

“Yes, Sir!” Dante pleaded as the belt struck again. And then again, the flexible end wrapping his ass to bite the side of his thigh. Squirming from the pain, his ass on fire now for reasons other than the ginger root, Dante apologized over and over again, but nothing stopped Daddy’s belt, not until that twelfth awful stroke was delivered and Dante was absolutely positive he’d never sit down again.

He bawled, but not because of the pain. It was the disappointment he could feel rolling off both Doms to crash over him like waves that tore him up inside. “I promise I won’t ever do it again!”

Campbell dropped his belt on the other chair, and stroked Dante’s heaving back until his boy tearfully glanced up at him. “Come here,” Campbell offered, and Dante didn’t need to be told twice. He threw himself into his Daddy’s arms, letting himself be engulfed by the warmth of his Dom’s now tender embrace.

“I love you,” Campbell whispered into his ear. “But I won’t put up with this. I mean it.”

Dante nodded against his shoulder. “I won’t ever make you have to do it again. I promise.”

“Good boy,” both Campbell and Marshall said at the same time.

“One down,” Campbell told Marshall, still stroking Dante’s back. “One more to go. What are you going to do about—”

He let the sentence hang, but Dante would have to be an idiot not to know who they meant.

“Master Jackson should be waiting outside with him already on the bench. Trust me, I intend to put an end to this nonsense right now.”

Campbell nodded, then patted Dante’s back to get his attention. He didn’t tell Dante to get dressed, but rather did it himself, pulling Dante’s shorts up over the hot, tender flesh of his ass, followed by his pants. The soft fabric scraped over his nether cheeks like sandpaper. He couldn’t help reaching back to rub the wounded throbbing out of his aching butt. It didn’t work, but he did feel better, lighter, especially when Daddy brushed the hair back from Dante’s forehead and gently cupped his chin.

“Let’s go home, boy. We’ve got some talking to do.”

CHAPTER FIVE

Campbell sat at his desk, calmly reading through next week's list of partners whom he would be making the dream of a lifetime come true for. Or at least, he was trying. While he managed to keep one eye on his work, the other kept wandering to the living room corner, between the drawn-curtains of the window and a lamp. His love's clothes and underwear were neatly folded on the arm of his couch. His shoes had been tucked into the front door closet. His precious Dante was completely naked, his hands on top of his bowed head, nose almost touching where the seam of the two stone walls met as he waited for his assigned time to be done.

Campbell wasn't a big fan of corner time. But then, normally he wasn't assigned the roll of Daddy Dom. To date, he still wasn't sure exactly why he hadn't succeeded in his attempts to escape this partnership. All he could think was it was fate. Fate had brought them together at just the right moment for Campbell. He still loved his first Little boy, Aaron, whose death had been the catalyst that finally drove Campbell to the Castle. This was supposed to be nothing but a job for him, but all that had changed the minute he'd laid eyes on Dante. Now they were inseparable, despite the long-distance relationship that had physically kept them apart these last three months. His heart belonged to this naughty, fist-

flying little boy, and damn if that didn't make the length of this punishment all the harder to mete out.

His boy had to learn, though. Briefly, he wondered how the other Doms had managed to bring the submissives they'd brought to live at the Castle so seamlessly. Maybe he should ask. He dismissed that thought the moment it formed in his mind. What happened between himself and his boy was no one else's business. Plus, he was not some newbie wannabe Dom with no idea of how to live this lifestyle 24/7. He had years of knowing exactly what he was doing driving him onward, whispering in his ear not to leave the room so his baby boy wouldn't feel abandoned in this, the lowest moment of his life. Convincing him that his boy needed to feel his presence right now, for however long it took until he'd absorbed the worst emotions punishments tended to bring into the hearts, feelings, and minds of all Littles everywhere who'd done themselves wrong.

The only still, quiet voice Campbell wanted his boy to pay attention to right now was his, telling him he was still special and still loved despite his behavior. Still his in every nuance of the word.

“Time,” Campbell said calmly.

Sniffing once, Dante lowered his hands and turned to face him. But he didn't leave the corner, not until Campbell swiveled his desk chair around and pointed to a spot on the floor between his widely splayed knees.

Lowering his eyes, shoulders slumped, Dante came to stand as directed. “I'm very sorry. I didn't mean to hit him. I mean, I wasn't planning to do that. It just happened.” Jerking his head up, his eyes going wide, he quickly corrected himself, “Not that I'll ever do it again. I promise, I won't.”

Campbell didn't dare smile, though he wanted to. He wanted to brush his boy's hair back from his slender face and reassure him things were forgiven and eventually would be fine again, so long as he kept his word. But the Dom in him knew better. No Little *meant* to break rules or start fights. But being a Little meant having little to no control over the emotions running rife just beneath the surface of them. Not even brats, who made it the mission of their lives to test their Doms' authority at every turn. Not that Dante was a brat. Far from him. He was the kind of Little Campbell liked to top. He was gentle, a little uncertain at times, but also eagerly seeking a firm hand and guidance. And reassurance that he wasn't just doing the right things when he was supposed to, but that he was safe and okay, no matter what.

Hitting Darryl was definitely one of those "no matter what" situations, and Campbell meant to give Dante all the reassurances he needed... but only once discipline was done. It wasn't yet and wouldn't be until he was certain all Dante felt was remorse for having committed violence on another Castle guest. Something that should have gotten him banned for life, and which only did not because Campbell was a fast talker. Also because Jackson had vouched for him—and Dante too, by association—and because Campbell offered to get that \$1400 bottle of scotch the Master of the Masters liked to sip when he relaxed at day's end.

The financial cost of that scotch wasn't anywhere near as important to him as keeping Dante close and feeling secure.

Forcing a stern frown, Campbell fixed on Dante's eyes until his boy slowly lowered his head again. His hands were clasped together as he picked at his fingernails, finding and creating hangnails which he then plucked free. It was a wonder

he hadn't made himself bleed. Already his cuticles looked raw and pink.

“Stop doing that,” Campbell ordered and Dante immediately dropped his hands to his sides. “Nobody hurts my boy, not even my boy himself. I believe I've mentioned that before.”

Dante nodded, his gaze firmly locked on either Campbell's feet or his knees. Campbell wasn't sure which and it didn't matter anyway.

“Look at me.”

Reluctantly raising his head, Dante did as he was told. “Yes, Sir.”

“What's going to happen if you lose control like that again?” Campbell asked, needing to make sure he understood the consequences—the real consequences—of his future behavior.

“I'll have to leave,” Dante whispered, his eyes watering with a fresh batch of tears. He reached behind him, his hands going to his tight, round ass where no doubt he could still feel the welts his Daddy's belt whipping had left behind, marking Campbell's territory in lines of pink and red. Looking up again, Dante met his direct stare and whispered, “And you'll want nothing more to do with me. Please, Daddy... I'm so very sorry. I won't ever hit anyone again. That isn't me. I'm not that person, and I swear I won't do again. I don't even know why I did it in the first place.”

That was an easy one to answer, though he knew the answer was likely to sting once Dante heard it.

“You did it,” Campbell said, “because instead of trusting Daddy to take care of the situation, you took it upon yourself to find your own solution. I don't doubt your emotions were

running high. What Darryl is doing isn't something I've ever seen happen here, but we have a system in place to give him every bit of what he needs, just like I am here to give you what you need. Not because this is my job," he added, already knowing that's exactly where Dante's thoughts had just shot to. "I do it because I am in love with you. Do you understand that?"

Dante nodded, but he didn't look at Campbell while he did it.

Standing, Campbell opened his arms. "Come here."

He didn't need to ask twice. Dante flung himself into his arms, hugging Campbell every bit as tightly as he was hugging Dante in turn.

"I love you," Campbell said again, as if those three little words could heal the damage Darryl's bad behavior had caused.

"Always and forever?" Dante begged.

Those were two things Campbell would never have promised anyone he was working with. With Dante, however, the promise came easily. "Always and forever," Campbell replied. With every fiber of his being, he meant it too. Nothing would ever break him away from his sweet boy. Dante himself most certainly included.

It wasn't what he wanted, but Campbell released him and finally stepped back. "Butt in chair," he ordered, gesturing for Dante to take his seat at the desk. Pulling a sheaf of papers from a lower drawer, he set it down in front of Dante along with a blue pen.

"The last part of your punishment is going to be line writing," he said.

Dante groaned, but dutifully picked up the pen. Sighing, he bowed his head over the papers, pen poised to write. “What should I say?”

“I...” Campbell dictated, waiting until Dante obediently wrote that down before continuing, “will always trust my Daddy to take care of me, and I will never lash out in anger again.’ You’ll repeat that one thousand times, and I expect you to have this finished before we go do anything fun. So, if it takes you from now until the Monday buses come before you finish, I guess this is the only thing we’ll be doing together while you’re here this visit.”

“One thousand times,” Dante groaned, already flexing his right hand. “Can’t I just type it instead?”

“So you can copy and paste it a thousand times? No, my son. You will do it by hand until it’s done.”

“...and I will never lash out in anger again,” Dante said, sadly repeating each word as he wrote it. Bowing his head over his work, he turned his attention to writing his penance.

Brushing his hand over his boy’s soft brown hair, Campbell gathered his folders and retired to the couch, keeping his boy company while he completed his punishment.

* * *

Dante shook out his hand again and again. He had no idea how many lines he’d already done, but he had four pages filled up front and back with his penance sentence. He looked up at the wall, but the antique grandfather clock must have been every bit as mad at him as everyone else. Time was passing inexorably slow. It had only been an hour since he’d started his assignment, and he heartily wished he was done with it. He

looked at each of the previous pages' lines, doubting if he was even a quarter of the way done. At this point, it really was going to take until Monday before he was done.

He sighed.

"Stop counting and write," Campbell drawled from the sofa directly behind him.

Turning his attention back to his work, Dante flexed his hand and then wrote out two more lines. He wished he could stop writing and just scrawl it all out, but although Daddy hadn't specified neatness, Dante wanted him to be proud of the care he was taking to make him happy. Or at least, as happy as he could be, considering this was a punishment.

"I'm hungry," Dante complained, almost without realizing he'd just said that out loud.

Setting aside the folder he was currently going over, Campbell asked, "That's what happens to little boys who would rather fight than eat their breakfast. To be honest, I'm hungry too. Would you like to take a lunch break?"

Dante nodded. "Please."

"Okay, I'll go get ready. Be a good boy and keep writing until I'm done."

In his mind, that began a challenge to get as many lines done as possible in what little short time he had. Dante threw himself into the chore. At least Daddy hadn't put Darryl's name into the punishment. One would think after getting a harsh belting, plus all the scoldings, he would have been able to let what Darryl had done in the dining hall go. He was trying, but it hadn't happened yet. Every time he let himself think about it, he got mad all over again. Not "punch Darryl" mad, but he could safely say he was all over that brat of a

“boy” he’d met. Darryl needed to find his own Daddy here and stop throwing himself at Campbell.

Preferably before Dante got in trouble again.

He got five repetitions of his lines done before Campbell came out of the back bedroom in a complete change of clothes. Gone were the kilt and sporran that had so successfully hidden the engagement ring until Campbell presented it to him. Gone were the boots, the soft black ones that he’d once lowered himself to kiss back when first they had met. In their place, Campbell had decked himself out all in shiny black leather. His boots were harsher, somehow. Thick and shiny and laced all the way to his knees. He wore pants now, still harsh, still black and shiny. There was no shirt, only the stark black of his leather vest and the bands with silver studs that he’d buckled around both biceps and wrists.

He looked so damn fierce. So dark and imposing. Exactly like he’d have imagined any hardcore Dom to look like. Dante lost his breath and for a second just sat at the desk, drinking in the sight of his Daddy dressed this way.

“I miss the kilt,” he blurted, and Campbell, just fastening the last wrist gauntlet into place, looked up at him, eyebrows arched.

“Do you?”

Dante nodded. “I mean, I do... just not so much that I’m not drooling over you now.”

Campbell forever lost serious austerity points, according to Dante anyway, when he chuckled and straightened the gauntlets. “Yes, well. I’m constantly drooling over you no matter what you wear.” Glancing at his still naked body, Daddy added, “Or don’t. Be right back.”

Although Daddy hadn't told him to, Dante threw himself into writing as many lines as he could until Campbell reappeared, this time with clothes meant for Dante. He'd brought out not those humbling Victorian short pants that never failed to make him feel ridiculous, but the pirate captain outfit that Dante had fallen in love with at Wardrobe.

Squealing in happy surprise, Dante threw down his pen and jumped up to take the outfit from Campbell.

“Hurry up and change, and don't for a second think I've changed my mind about your punishment. We're going to have a nice lunch and return straight back here so you can finish your lines. Understand? No more fun until your punishment is done.”

Dante saluted him. “Yes, Sir!” Running into the back room, he quickly pulled on his new costume—tan pants, black boots, a bright red sash around his waist with a toy sword pinned to his side. The balloon-sleeved shirt was a stark white that contrasted against the black and red *Pirates of the Caribbean* coat, and the elaborate red velvet tricorne hat was crowned with a big black ostrich feather that poked a good eight inches beyond the back of the hat.

Damn, he looked hot. Standing back from the dressing mirror behind the master bathroom's door, he admired himself.

“I'm waiting,” Campbell dryly called from the living room, and Dante immediately went to him. He practically jumped the last few feet, drawing his gray plastic sword, letting his Daddy see it as he ever so slowly extended the tip until it poked Campbell right in the chest. In his best pirate voice, he growled, “Hand over yer booty or walk the plank!”

Campbell looked down at it before, moving nothing but his eyes, he returned his playful glare to Dante.

Shivers of “oh shit” excitement rippled through him as he waited to see what his Dom would do. He didn’t have to wait long.

In a flash of movement, Campbell knocked the sword aside, grabbed Dante by the scruff of his shirt and one coat lapel, and yanked him in so close their noses almost bumped.

“Is that a fact?” he asked, but whatever sternness he might be trying for failed utterly. He couldn’t stop smiling and Dante was outright giggling. He arched his eyebrows again, and Dante’s giggles ceased. “Do we need to go find the hairbrush?”

“No!” Dante blurted, not even smiling now, although part of him was halfway sure Daddy was kidding. Trying to calm his racing heart, he said softly and respectfully, “No, thank you, Daddy.”

“Then watch yourself.” Setting Dante back on his feet, Campbell finally let his smile shine. Relaxing, Dante giggled again, but he also fell into proper step behind his Dom, following him from his apartment on the fifth floor, back down the employee stairwell to the keycard-guarded door on the second floor.

“Be good,” Campbell warned as he pushed the heavy doors open, holding one for Dante to pass ahead of him.

“I will,” Dante promised, and then he saw him. Darryl, standing against the opposite wall, arms folded across his chest and a pout upon his lips. As if he were faking his way toward looking adorable for Campbell, although all Dante saw in that sly pout was a target he badly wanted to smack so hard that, like Daffy Duck, it spun his obnoxious mouth all the way around his head.

Campbell's warning hand found its way onto Dante's shoulder, but he'd already turned around. Much as he wished he could return to their room upstairs and forget about food, he put himself into his place behind his dom. And just as he'd threatened to do upstairs, Campbell dealt with it.

"You're fucking kidding me," he said flatly, no trace of welcome or amusement in his dangerous tone. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for you, of course." Shoving off the wall, Darryl sauntered over to join them. Or rather, he put himself in front of Campbell, casting Dante a victorious smile as he did so.

"Where is your Dom?" Campbell demanded.

Darryl rolled his shoulder and his eyes. "I gave him the slip. I don't like him like I like you. He's boring, and old, and has wrinkles." He made a gagging noise that made Dante only want to hit him harder. And great, now he felt bad for whomever had been partnered with Darryl only to be disrespected this badly. "I mean, he's practically geriatric. He—ow!"

Dante startled, turning just in time to see Campbell hauling Darryl up onto tiptoes by his ear. "Walk," he ordered, deliberately giving Darryl no choice but to obey.

"My ear! My ear!" he squealed, but down the hall Campbell marched him, with Dante following in surprise until at last they stood outside Master Marshall's office once more.

Without knocking, Campbell threw open the door. "You busy?"

Dante couldn't see the Master of the Masters, but he did hear him when the leader of the Castle Doms answered, "I have a feeling I'm about to be. What's up?"

“This.” Stepping back, Campbell thrust Darryl through the door ahead of him. “Take care of this, or I will.”

“You,” Marshall said darkly, “are getting on my last nerve. And frankly, the Little Maids who were here before you, already did that.”

Campbell shut the door firmly, letting Marshall take over his dealings with Darryl. But instead of immediately heading down the grand staircase to where delicious smells were emanating up from Cook Connie’s dining hall, he stood where he was, feet planted apart, an irritated look on his face and stiffness running across his shoulders.

“Are you okay?” Dante asked, the sudden realization that this was affecting his Daddy as much as himself washing over him. He wished he knew how to make this all go away, for both of them.

At length, Campbell finally answered, “I’m annoyed.”

Not knowing how he felt about public displays of affection, especially while annoyed, Dante sidled a little closer to him. “How can I help?”

Campbell looked at him. He cocked his head, the dark glitter in his eyes turning into a challenge, one he then issued like the boss he was. “Get down on your knees, boy. Suck me off.”

Dante startled, looking up one end of the hall and down the other. “Here?”

“Did I stutter?”

Tingling excitement flushing him, Dante immediately dropped to his knees in front of Campbell. His mouth already watering, his cock rising hard against the sudden tightness of his pirate’s pants, he looked first at the bulge now tenting the

front of Daddy's leather pants, he then raised his gaze to Campbell's, holding it boldly as he raised his hands as far as Campbell's knees. This was one rule he knew better to break.

“Daddy, may I touch you?”

Campbell drew a breath, nostrils flaring as he held Dante's hopeful stare. He nodded once and Dante shivered all over. He'd never been one for exhibitionism, especially when it came to the private things that two people do in the comfort and privacy of their own homes. But this... reaching for Campbell's belt, he loosened it with all the reverence that revealing Daddy's cock should hold. This didn't at all feel cheapened simply because they were in public. It was still him, still his Daddy. His hands barely trembled, but the rest of him felt wild as he let himself fall victim to an old fantasy he often had back in his bedroom at home. The difference between then and now was as real as Campbell was, standing expectantly before him.

Pulling open the flaps of his leather pants, he dipped his hand into Campbell's undershorts. Daddy's cock practically sprang into Dante's open palm. He licked his lips eagerly, then opened his mouth as wide as he could to engulf the full length and width of hard flesh jutting out at him.

Dante must have been around ten when he'd given up lollipops. Funny, how his mouth seemed to remember the moves. And what his mouth didn't know, his entirely too-adult imagination made up for. There was nothing better than the taste of Daddy's pre-cum dribbling from the tip of his cock. Holding onto Campbell's hips, he bobbed gently up and down the length of him, tasting, licking, curling his tongue around the mushroom-shaped head of Campbell's cock until he was

all but delirious from the pleasure of the loving act he now performed.

He could hear people walking up and down the hall behind him. He even heard some of their whispers as they passed by, but none of that mattered to him as much as the ecstasy he got from this one simple act. He didn't even care if it was reciprocated, right here in the hall or later on in the privacy of their room. All he cared about was relieving Daddy's stress. Relieving his own in turn—Darryl and the rest of the world be damned.

He couldn't have cared less who saw them or what they thought. He was Daddy's, to love and to hold, to fuck and adore, however and whenever he wanted. And that's exactly what his Daddy was doing, in his own commanding way.

Security came to Marshall's office, but Dante barely noticed. Eyes closed, he tried to find a rhythm he hoped would curl Campbell's booted toes.

When Darryl's high-pitched and desperately whining tone erupted into easy hearing back throughout the hall, Dante kept his eyes closed and his attention all on the cock that Daddy suddenly pushed all the way into the back of Dante's throat. He almost gagged, but this still felt right and nothing anyone could have done in that moment risked shaking him out of his worship of Daddy's cock. Not even when Campbell grabbed the sides of his head, taking all control away from Dante. He set the rhythm, long, swift thrusts now battering his tonsils as Dante opened his throat as wide as he could and simply accepted his role.

He was Daddy's boy. His toy. The gangly, too-tall fuck toy that would forever love him for not taking this into a private room after all. Darryl tried to kick at him—Dante opened his

eyes when he felt the sweep of cool air as a security guard grabbed Darryl by the legs and with two others holding his arms, lifted the uncooperative guest clean off his feet.

“But I don’t want to leave!” Darryl wailed, fighting their grip all the way down the stairs. The shouting of his voice grew softer with distance, but the swells of victory were inside Dante. He felt drunk in its grip and his only moment of self-doubt was as short-lived as it was unimportant, and it only came when Campbell suddenly ripped his cock out of Dante’s mouth.

Fisting himself, Campbell gripped Dante’s hair, holding him frozen, a little baby bird with its beak gaping, as he furiously pumped his cock until spurt after creamy spurt of cum shot all over Dante’s face and mouth.

“Damn,” Campbell growled from between clenched teeth, the strain leaving his shoulders as the last spurt splashed onto Dante’s extended tongue, and the two gazed deep into one another’s eyes.

Campbell’s were hungry, full of love and promise, both of which only grew visibly stronger when Dante slowly closed his mouth and swallowed every ounce of what he’d been given.

“More?” Dante begged, unable to stop his grin from breaking the passion of the moment.

“Want to watch him leave?” Campbell asked, gesturing with his head in the same direction that Castle security had just dragged Darryl.

Dante shook his head. Darryl was gone, and he hadn’t mattered anywhere near as much as it had felt this morning,

when he'd taken that wild swing and broke Darryl's nose. "I don't want to waste one more minute thinking about him."

That answer must have pleased his Daddy. Cocking an eyebrow, he looked down at his slowly wilting cock, and then back at Dante. "Has no one ever taught you that good little boys put away their toys when they are done playing with them?"

Laughing, Dante reverently tucked Campbell's cock back into his pants and zipped him up. He even rebuckled his Dom's heavy black belt. Just touching it made his bottom tingle from his earlier whipping.

When he was done, Campbell offered him a hand up and Dante stood. "Whose boy are you?"

"Yours," Dante replied, wrapping his arms around his Dom and loving how Campbell immediately wrapped him in a returning hug.

"Who gets to come between us?" Campbell said, nipping the tender lobe of his ear.

Dante's entire body came alive with tingles and swirls of lust so strong his own cock hardened uncomfortably in suddenly too tight pants. "No one," he breathed, closing his eyes and enjoying the slight pain of Campbell's next bite.

"If you ever forget, I won't hesitate to remind you."

No worries about that, Dante thought, melting into his Dom's embrace. It wasn't that he was positive he'd never react badly again, on the off-chance they ran into another submissive determined to horn in between he and Campbell. In fact, he was pretty sure he would react. If nothing else, he knew a poke of anger would start heating up inside him and he'd be very lucky not to get punished himself for it later on.

But relief suffused him. He wrapped his arms around his Daddy's hard body, holding him close for as long as Campbell was content to hold him too.

"I love you, little boy," Campbell murmured against his ear.

"I love you too," Dante whispered, hugging him that much tighter. "Let's start today all over again, okay?"

Releasing Dante, Campbell stepped back and offered his hand instead. "I'm pretty sure breakfast is over and Cook Connie should have lunch put out on the buffet." Campbell winked. "Race you there."

In an instant, his Daddy broke into a run, racing for the stairs.

Grinning, Dante took off after him, although halfway down the stairs he already knew he wasn't going to win. Daddy wasn't just stronger than he was, but he was faster, taking the stairs at almost twice the rate of speed Dante could manage. He hopped the rail about six feet from the bottom, and still he couldn't catch up to Campbell who not only reached the dining hall doorway at least ten seconds before Dante, but who cockily opened the door for him too.

Breathing in the lovely aromas of homecooked food, Campbell slung his arm around his Little's waist, giving his bottom a pat as they walked in together to join the already long line of patrons.

"I smell fried chicken and pizza," Dante breathed in appreciation.

"Yup, it's definitely a mashed potato day. Have you tried her potatoes and gravy? My god," Campbell declared and

kissed his fingertips. “You’ve never had better, let me tell you.”

“And after?” Dante asked, eager to get his Dom upstairs for some serious reconnect and cuddle time. “Then what?”

“Well, I’ve got a short list of things I’m thinking of doing, both to and with you.”

Dante’s heart stumbled, skipping a beat before fumbling to find its rhythm again. “Intriguing. What’s first?”

“What you wanted to do the first time we met, do you remember?” Campbell asked with a smile.

Dante scrunched his eyes, trying to recall, but for the life of him, all he kept thinking about was this trip and the problem that was Darryl. Dante knew how selfish he was being, but he was glad the other man had been kicked out. Dante would never, ever have to worry about running into that jerk again. The rest of his life was soon enough to think about working on his jealousy so he didn’t drive Campbell crazy with unpleasant behaviors.

“I’m still too hung up on Darryl to remember much about the first time I was here.”

Leaning in close and lifting onto tiptoes, Campbell caught the back of Dante’s head and pulled him down so close they were practically kissing. Glancing at Daddy’s hard, handsome lips already had Dante’s mouth watering and his lips tingling in anticipation as Campbell said for him and him alone, “Want to go feed the fish and talk about forever?”

Breaking out into laughter, Dante threw his arms around Campbell’s neck. “What happened to not having fun before my lines are done?”

Holding him back, Daddy murmured softly in his ear, “Those lines will be waiting for us when we get home again. Our happily ever after? Now that’s too important to leave waiting for long, don’t you think?”

Burrowing into his shorter Dom’s embrace, Dante lay his head on Daddy’s shoulder, closed his eyes, and just relaxed. “You’re right. As usual.”

Laughing now too, Campbell gave his bottom a sharp swat. “And don’t you ever forget it.”

Dante smiled. He already knew there was no chance of that.

The End

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