

Pursuit of Love
SERIES

THE
Sinner's
PENANCE

K.C. CARMINE

The Sinner's Penance

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Blurb and Warnings

Even disguised as a priest, Mat can't resist a man kneeling at his feet, begging to be punished.

Being a bodyguard for London's Polish Mafia had its benefits. Fast money, fast cars, and an endless stream of hot men fuelled Mateusz's insatiable lust for life.

But when he takes out the son of a rival Mafia boss, he is forced to flee to a remote island in the West of England.

Posing as a priest, Mateusz hopes he found the perfect disguise. Until a handsome stranger shows up to confession, begging for punishment. Can Mateusz rein in his ferocious carnal desires? Or will his cover be blown to smithereens?

As a newcomer to the island, Peyton's social life is limited to a dram at the local pub. Everything changes when he attends a mass on a Sunday and his gaze lands on the man he can't have. The one in a cassock.

A **standalone** MM book 3 from Pursuit of Love series.

Tropes/Themes: mafia, insta-luSt, roleplaying, priest k!nk, wax play, flagellat!on, D/S, hurt/comfort, morally grey characters, bla\$phemous use of religious artifacts, MM, HEA.

Trigger and content warnings: morally grey characters, blasphemy, use of religious artefacts for sexual purposes, dubiously safe use of items, death, violence.

Please use body-safe or specially designed candles for wax-play. Please do not use any work of fiction as your guide to BDSM lifestyle. Do extensive research, practice SSC/RACK/PRICK, and/or reach out to people in the community for information.

Contents

PART ONE: CHURCH

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

PART TWO: LONDON

Chapter Twelve

Chapter Thirteen

Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Twenty

Chapter Twenty-One

Chapter Twenty-Two

Epilogue

Also by

About Author

.

PART ONE: CHURCH

Chapter One

Mat

The gun, still hot from the shot he'd fired, slid from Mateusz's hand to drop into the pool of blood at his feet.

As the wooden panels disappeared under the pool of liquid crimson, the ringing in his ears grew more incessant. He could still hear a commotion of shouted orders and distressed screams through his auditory fog. Even after someone shook him by the shoulders, he continued to watch the blood inch towards his perfectly polished shoes. It was a clap on the back from one of the most dangerous people in London that finally woke Mat from his stupor.

Like the snap of a rubber band, crisp sounds returned to him in a rush and he shook his head to focus his gaze on a familiar face.

"We have to go," his uncle said, his tone commanding. No one in the room would dare question this man, and Mat was definitely not in a position to even consider it. He moved his leaden feet and ran alongside his uncle's bodyguards towards the exit, barely registering the November chill hitting his face. His oxfords hit the white marble floor, clicking with every step until he was rushed into the back of his uncle's BMW.

"Buckle up!" one of the bodyguards barked, and slammed the car door.

The other one had already started the car and it tore off in a squeal of tyres. "Yes, right behind you, Sir," he said as he

touched his earpiece.

The events of the evening replayed in Mat's head. Both he and Jack were usually careful not to invite lovers into the mansion they shared with Jack's father, Mat's uncle—one of the most powerful people in London. But exceptions happened. What he'd initially assumed were the noises of Jack's rough fucking on the other side of the shared wall had rapidly escalated into the telltale sounds of a struggle. Ready to risk seeing his cousin butt-naked yet again, Mat had barged into the room, only to see some dude straddling Jack and pounding his face with his fists. It was when he pulled out a knife from his boot and put it to Jack's throat that Mat had pulled the trigger. With the strict gun laws in England, he carried one on him only when he was making deliveries for his uncle, but he always kept one on his bedside table. Guns were also strategically hidden in various places in the house for emergencies.

He was Jack's bodyguard and had only been doing his job. But in reality, he had saved a man who was not only his cousin, but his friend. The last thing he wanted was to lose someone he was so close to.

Mat's parents had died in a car crash when he was ten. He still remembered the morning he'd learned of the accident with crystal clarity: he'd just finished buttoning the blazer of his school uniform when his uncle stormed into the house, scaring the bejesus out of Mat's nanny. Uncle Zbigniew had sat by the breakfast table and, in a calm tone, told Mat that he would live with him from then on. That had been his sister's wish in the

event anything happened to her and Mat's dad. She'd been a smart woman and knew Mat would be safe under the protection of her brother. After all, he was the boss, the Don, the Szeff of the Polish Mafia in London.

Back then, Mat had cried the entire trip to his uncle's house. Once there, however, the fear-evoking man had told him that from now on, he could only cry when he was alone.

Mat thrived growing up in Szeff's care. On top of going to an elite school, Mat received training in self-defence, mixed martial arts and personal security before his uncle entrusted him with the safety of his son. Mat was supposed to guard Jack and keep him company. Despite this being Mat's official duty to the heir to Szeff's fortune, he would have gladly done anything for the cousin and friend he'd grown up with.

Since most of Mat's duties involved being glued to Jack and running errands together, they'd become even closer, sharing their deepest secrets.

Uncle turned a blind eye to Mat's sexual proclivities and his trips to the family-owned BDSM club, The Golden Handcuffs. Jack was eager to accompany him and experiment on his own, and the club was a safe place for them both to indulge themselves. Mat performed his responsibilities with efficiency and pride, but allowed himself to spend those evenings letting go of the stress his duties brought.

Szeff gave Mat a lot of freedom and paid him heaps of money to do what he pleased, but if he sent him on an errand, he expected no argument and a job well done at the end.

That's why now, sitting in a car speeding through the narrow streets of London, Mat knew he was about to get an order he couldn't defy. No one argued with Szeff. Not even his nephew.

The city was nearly empty on a Thursday night in November, especially in the seedy neighbourhood they drove through before stopping in an underground car park. The driver shot out of the car just as the door to Mat's right opened. The piercing gaze of the man who slid in next to him scared many people, but Mat knew him as family and saw the care for Mat in his stare.

"Listen to me carefully," Uncle Zbigniew said, turning to face Mat fully. "You will change cars now and stay put until my driver gets you to your destination. You'll receive temporary paperwork in a few hours. Which reminds me—" He reached for the phone Mat had been clutching in his hands for dear life. "I'll take that. I need you to promise me you won't tell anyone about what happened today."

"I promise," Mat choked out immediately. Fucking hell, he'd love a cig right now.

"You can't contact your friends, your hookups, no one in our family, either. Don't log in to any of your social media accounts or websites. You will get a blank phone and we will let you know when it's time and when it's safe for you to come home. You know how it works. Anything necessary for your new identity will be there, so you don't need your shit where you're going."

“Of course.” Mat nodded. Sure, he knew how it worked for others, but he’d never been in this situation himself. He wished he could take his designer suits with him, but laying low was more important. There was one more thing he had to know before he parted with his Uncle. “Who was—” he cleared his throat. “Who was the guy I—”

“That was Rick. Don Francis’s son.”

Uncle’s words were like a slap across the face.

Did I just kill our rival’s son? “Is he dead?”

“Very much so,” Uncle said with a grim nod. “And they will come for you. You know how vendetta works.”

“Yeah. But they might go after Jack too, since he’s your son —”

“Right now, worry about yourself. I’ll make sure Jack stays hidden too.” Uncle’s eyes softened as he sighed, his lips a flat line of concern. “You’re like a son to me and I want you back in London by my side as soon as possible. It might be weeks, might be months, but you’ll return to your life. I promise you this.”

Mat released a breath in relief. “Don’t worry. I’ll be fine. And I’ll be waiting.”

“Good. Just go with what your head and your gut tell you when you have to make a decision. The same way you did today.”

Retaliation for the carnage was inevitable, and Mat knew he would need a hiding place and a new identity until his uncle

dealt with the backlash of his actions. It was not in the habit of a crime syndicate to send the son and heir to attack another syndicate's son and heir, so the very situation was suspicious. But now it was for Szeff to decide how to proceed. Mat was keenly aware that the East London Mafia with Don Francis as its head would put all their resources into finding out who killed Rick, and once they knew it was Mat, they wouldn't rest until they found him and killed him. Fuck, he needed a smoke.

"I contacted a friend who'll prepare a place for you," Uncle continued, shifting his big body to open the buttons in his suit jacket. "It will be a drastic change of scenery, but I believe there's nothing that can stop you from blending in, while also helping our friend."

"What do you want me to do?" Mat straightened up, wiping his sweaty hands on his crisp shirt, only to realise it was splattered with blood.

"There's a small church that needs a priest before they find a replacement for the one who died last week. No one would know you, and with the Roman collar around your neck, no one would even think to undermine your presence there."

Every powerful boss had people who could prove useful on their payroll, be they high-ranking government officials, police, or other influential figures. Szeff was no different. As it had been for generations, the biggest ally of the Polish Mafia was the Roman Catholic Church.

There were many priests who committed deeds considered by either the law or the Catholic Church as unforgivable, and

the Mafia stepped in to remove those men in a quick and efficient fashion, minimising the Church's scandals. When Szeff himself called in a favour, that call was answered by the Archbishop of Westminster—the representative of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Mateusz was not surprised that his uncle's idea of a safe place for him was in a church.

Mat had been born and raised in London, and the prospect of leaving the city to hide like a coward didn't appeal to him in the slightest. However, he knew he had no choice. He was in no position to argue with his powerful uncle, and was smart enough to understand it was for his own safety.

"You will take on priestly duties," Uncle said, ignoring his phone as it pinged, one message after another. "I hope Sunday school and mass prepared you for the role."

Mat nodded, even though he'd always been more interested in sucking face with boys in the confessional than listening to the preaching.

"You can do whatever you wish at night, but I don't want any rumours. Be careful, Mat. I know I can trust you, but I also know you, if you catch my drift." Szeff levelled a meaningful stare at Mat, his square jaw and greying temple adding seriousness to the look.

"Yes, Uncle." Mat nodded, getting the message.

He knew that during his impending exile, he would miss his lush flat in Soho, London's club scene, and the muscular bodies of men who'd warmed his bed for a night. But he'd find his way and lie low as long as necessary.

“You did good, *synku mój*.” Uncle clapped his hand on Mat’s shoulder. “Your mother would be proud of you for doing your duty and saving your cousin.”

“Thank you,” Mat said. ‘*My son.*’ It was exactly what he needed to hear. Uncle had spoken English to them since they were little, but they all treated Polish as their family language at home. Both Mat and Jack had learnt most of their English from watching the telly and school, anyway. Hearing the endearment from his uncle reminded him how grateful he was to the man who had raised him when his parents couldn’t.

Someone tapped the window. Uncle Zbigniew nodded goodbye and slid out of the car, motioning for Mat to follow. Mat obeyed, and a man he hadn’t met before directed him to a nondescript grey sedan.

Without so much as a word, the driver turned over the engine and drove for hours in complete silence. Exhausted, Mat dozed off and woke up to find the car was in a long queue. They were at a port, but not one he recognised.

“Are we taking a ferry?” Mat asked the driver.

“Yes,” he replied and lowered a rear window to reveal someone standing outside. A manila envelope landed on the seat next to Mat, and the person disappeared.

A harsh laugh left his lips when he opened the file and scanned the information about his new identity.

A priest.

Mat would have to pretend to be an actual priest.

The new driver's licence and British passport looked perfect with his picture above the name Matthew Evans. Cheeky. He wouldn't have to get used to reacting to a different name. Then again, everyone would probably call him "Father" anyway. How strange. How new. How... exciting.



By a stroke of luck and extremely fast planning, Mat found himself on a small island between Ireland and England. The car stopped outside a simple, rectangular house right next to a church that was quite impressive in stature for an island this size.

Standing there with nothing but the clothes on his back, he watched the grey sedan as it drove off.

"We've been waiting for you, Father Matthew," a calm voice said right behind him. Mat turned around to see an elderly man in a priest's cassock with a friendly smile on his face.

"Father." Mat inclined his head. Brought up around practising Roman Catholics, he hoped he remembered the basic rules of the Catholic Church—enough to at least slide by before he had a chance to brush up on them. Then again, he could always pretend that they did it differently where he was from. Or maybe they'd assume the younger generation bent the rules a little.

"I'm Father Ian." The man shuffled towards the priory, waving for Mat to follow. "My dear friend Father Richard

passed away recently, so I came here in his stead until someone was assigned to the duty. I'm old now, as you can see, so it's not easy to keep up with all the duties." He grunted as he took the step into the house. "I've been told that you're newly ordained, so I'll stay with you for a while until you tell this old man to mind his business as you take over your own parish."

"Thank you. I appreciate your help, Father."

"Now get some rest. You're pale as a sheet. I'll have Mary, our housekeeper, prepare everything you need for tomorrow."

His round figure wobbled as he led Mat into the house. They passed through a large kitchen and a dining room with a long, wooden table, eventually arriving at the foot of a staircase.

"I stay downstairs as I can't climb those easily. Would you be fine going up alone?" Father Ian asked, catching his breath.

Mat nodded, hoping the priest wouldn't keel over on his first day.

"Your room is the first on the left—it's the only one with a balcony. The other two are empty, but you can look around them, too. You should find books: religious, philosophical, and a few fiction ones. Father Richard loved a good detective novel." Father Ian chuckled with fondness, shaking his head. "The room is as he left it but Mary has stripped the bed, of course. Still, you can take either of the other rooms if you're not comfortable with that."

“Oh no, I’ll be fine. Thank you, Father.”

“Get some rest. Mary will have breakfast for us at six.”

Six in the morning? Mat flinched inwardly at the early hour.
“Excellent. Goodnight, Father.”

Upstairs, the single bed Father Richard had probably died in was covered with a thick duvet and a quilted blanket, looking cosy despite the gigantic cross on the wall above it. The bookshelf that took up most of the wall on the right was exactly as Father Ian had described: full of a variety of books that Mat had no intention of looking at tonight. He plopped his ass on the huge chest by the wall and took in the rest of the room. The cracked, yellowing ceiling was in stark contrast to the brand-new rug on the floor.

The windowsill was littered with an array of figures of the Virgin Mary, varying from thumb to palm-sized. It was nothing Mat hadn’t seen before at the houses of his distant cousins who pretended to be devout on Sundays.

Mat knew the ins and outs of the church enough to impersonate a priest with more than a modicum of believability. He’d attended mass every Sunday when he was a child, and, once he was old enough, he’d become an altar boy to help during the liturgy by bringing up the book or ringing the altar bell.

Now, he had to survive in the black cassock for as long as it would take for the Mafia to deal with the fallout of his actions. He didn’t like half-assing anything so he might as well play the part with devotion, despite having lost his faith years ago.

That didn't change the fact that he respected those who believed, no matter their religion. He'd also never parted with the delicate golden necklace with a cross he'd gotten from his parents.

He lay on the bed, certain he wouldn't be able to sleep. Instead of the tragic events of the day, his mind brought forward his time with Jack, their trips to the BDSM club, and wild, booze-filled parties. Jack would be fine without him; Uncle would make sure of that. What worried Mat was that he couldn't contact anyone, or text his friends to tell them he was fine but wouldn't be around for a while. He didn't see his friends in Bristol often enough for them to notice him gone right away. Caleb and Rod were supposed to visit him in the summer, but that was months away. He knew his best friend Hugh, whose hair salon in London he visited every few weeks, would probably assume Mat was running an errand for his uncle or was taking part in a seriously long orgy. But after a week or so, Hugh would probably start to worry, too. When Mat finally returned to London, he'd throw a party to remember for decades. The thoughts of his wild times with his friends lulled his tired body to sleep.

Chapter Two

Mat

The small parish welcomed Mat with open arms.

Within a few days, the priory's fridge was bursting with homemade meals and pastries from local families who wanted to show their appreciation. Mary, the housekeeper, organised it and made sure everything was up to her standards before she allowed Mat or Father Ian a taste.

The parishioners told Mat stories of the old priest and how he'd been a part of the community, visiting the town's schools and workplaces, and participating in events as much as his health allowed. Mat listened, knowing that to avoid raising any suspicions, he'd have to meet the expectations of the people.

The local believers arrived early before mass to help with preparations alongside the altar boys and asked Mat if he needed anything as he settled into his duties. When he and Jack were boys, less than a year apart in age, they hadn't been allowed to play with random kids on the block. They could invite friends from school with Uncle's approval but most days, it had only been the two of them. Since they'd both been altar boys, one of their games had been playing mass. They would wear their white albs and throw a coin to determine who'd play the priest that day. The winner would wear a long string of toilet paper on his neck and stand on a stool; the other would prepare chairs and sit whatever toys and figurines they could find to fill in for the audience. They knew the lines the priest said by heart. Looking back, Mat could tell how

ridiculous that game had been, but now, playing it alone, he was keeping himself and Jack safe from vendetta. Even after brushing up on his knowledge of all the procedures, conducting mass remained a challenge, but one Mat was ready to tackle.

Father Ian helped Mat with his first mass three days after his arrival, but Mat had to prepare his own sermon which he found the most tricky part. His research online brought him to portals with ones ready to download and he used them as a base for what he wanted to say that Sunday, adding something from himself. Soon enough, he was able to write his own from scratch. Most of them were about lessons he'd learnt in his life living as a part of a powerful mafia family, like protecting its members while also staying true to yourself.

After several weeks, he even received praise from parishioners for his heartfelt sermons. Instead of relishing these compliments, Mat found himself feeling like even more of a fraud.

He'd never shied away from roleplay, be that a kinky cowboy for a Halloween party at The Golden Handcuffs or a baseball player with a silicone bat ready to be played with. If he'd enjoyed pretending to be someone else once in a while, he hoped he could make a believable priest.

Even if he wasn't wearing Westwood suits, his cassock was a magnet for half of the people who'd laid eyes on him. The ladies were more open with their affection but he understood that it was because they felt safe to talk to him thanks to his

assumed celibacy. The men of the parish were more discreet with their glances but Mat could tell sexual curiosity when he saw it. He was tempted. It would be so much fun to play with a closeted man to help awaken his urges. But he couldn't risk his own safety for a piece of ass. He wouldn't be the first priest to indulge, but that's where the problem lay; he wasn't a priest and he couldn't afford to blow his cover. Not only would that endanger his life, but the church on the island would cease to be a safe haven for his uncle's people. His blood and chosen family.

His mind often drifted to The Golden Handcuffs, where he'd been able to explore his fantasies. Everyone knew him there, not only because he wore a bracelet that indicated he was a dom willing to play, but because his Family owned the place and he and Aunt Jagoda were the management—he screened the new applicants and was in charge of alcohol while she organised the parties and overlooked other recruitment. Besides, he frequented it often without hiding who he was. The eyes on him filled with lust and jealousy fed his vanity—he worked hard for his body to earn those stares. He wasn't bulky—his main goal was to tone his muscles and have the strength to support his sub as he lowered him off a St Andrew's cross.

Nowadays, his life was full of other crosses that were much harder to bear. One of which was celibacy. At first, he'd thought he could embrace even that aspect of priesthood, but after several weeks, his wrist was threatening to give out.

He never felt that initial spark of attraction with the men whose eyes followed him during and after sermons, so he had no issues ignoring all of them... except one. Each Sunday he found himself holding the gaze of a parishioner who sat on the very last pew. Over time, Mat grew familiar with the faces of the people who filled the sacred building every Sunday, but he was drawn only to the man sitting at the back. His heated gaze was intense, like a touch on Mat's chest that he could almost feel even from the other side of the church. Mat recognised it as the same lust that had been directed at him in many London clubs before.

The man with dark, perfectly styled curls and razor-sharp cheekbones never took communion, so Mat had no opportunity to see him up close. He was in his late twenties or early thirties, and his features were stunning enough for Mat to recognise him in any crowd should he ever see him outside.

This man fast became Mat's go-to fantasy, a comforting thought to see him through his lonely nights. Mat would imagine the stranger's slender body next to his or the man's lips clasped firmly around his cock. Memories of scantily-clad twinkles on the dancefloor of the club—subs eager to indulge in public flogging and bondage—paled in comparison when Mat dreamed of the beautiful man from the back pew.

Yet that wasn't enough to keep him asleep through the night. Since he'd arrived at the priory, his dreams were riddled with memories of his last moments in London mixed with improbable scenarios. Sometimes he stood in the middle of Jack's room with blood on his hands as he tried to put the

brain of the man he'd shot back into his skull. Other times, he dreamt of not making it in time and seeing Jack's lifeless body on the floor. He would wake up with a start and lie there in the dark, unable to clear his head. Until one night, at four in the morning, he reached for one of the books on the shelf. He'd never been a reader, but under his current circumstances, this was the best option available. He immersed himself in the detective story and was surprised at how entertaining it was. Gradually, he relaxed and his mind cleared enough for him to be able to catch a few hours' sleep before early breakfast. Maybe Father Richard had had the right idea.

He itched for a smoke during those sleepless nights as much as he did in the daylight hours, but he had no way of obtaining a pack without anyone noticing. Quitting cold-turkey had been rough on his nerves, so he tried to keep his hands busy during the day.

He hated the sparseness of his room and raided every old cupboard, nook and cranny in the three rooms upstairs out of sheer boredom, finding odd items of interest. The chest in his room ended up filled with crosses, prayer books, and various old artefacts that he had to google the use of on his phone.

Life moved at a slow pace on the island. Its closed, tight-knit community was like a small village, a place where everyone knew each other.

One day, several weeks into Mat's tenure as local priest, Father Ian approached him and announced his intention to withdraw.

“I think it’s time I handed over the reins to you,” the elderly priest said. “You’re ready to take care of the parish and I’d like to give myself to a solitary prayer.”

“I wouldn’t have made it without your invaluable advice,” Mat answered. Despite knowing he was up for the challenge, Mat felt the heavy weight of the obligation. The preparation of the church before Sunday, the scheduling of altar servers, and writing of the sermon now fell on Mat’s shoulders. Father Ian would remain in the priory, at least, awaiting a decision of whether he would stay or be transferred to another parish. Thankfully, the responsibility of decision making reinforced him with a strong sense of purpose he had been missing. Despite all that, he longed to return to his old life, to his job, his fierce family, and the freedom to go wherever he wanted. But Christmas was coming, and it would be the toughest, so Mat focused on the preparations for it and threw himself into church work. He tried not to wallow in how lonely he truly was during the time he’d always spent in a house packed with relatives for the entire week.

He missed his family but he also missed his flat, the space he’d made his own over the years that was his sanctum and a fuck den when he didn’t stay at the Kwiatkowski house. Wishing he could touch base with his friends, he often glanced longingly at his phone that had nothing but a browser on it with tabs for religious sites and, for contrast, porn. His friend, Hugh, whom he most often hung out with at the club might be texting him something fierce, but the messages would arrive on the phone Uncle had taken away. Jack was probably in the

same boat as Mat, cooped up somewhere alone and not allowed to contact anyone. If they could at least talk to each other, it might make it easier on them both.

With no sign from his Uncle, Mat was trying to be patient, but there were moments where the struggle became overwhelming. Not knowing how long he'd have to stay on the island and what was happening back at home was weighing on him. But he had to remain strong and live his life as if it were the only one he had until it was time to return.

Mat was used to the early breakfast by now, and the full English Mary served every morning was worth waking up for, even at the ass-crack of dawn.

“Good morning Father Ian. Lovely to see you, Mary.” Mat’s voice was still groggy from sleep when he joined Father Ian at the table.

“Morning, Father Mat,” Mary said without pausing as she laid the table. “There’s fresh strawberry jam for your scones today. Caitlin, the English teacher, made it herself.” Mary placed the jar in the middle of the table and buzzed around with fresh pastries and cream. “You have to try it. I’ll get some more at the fair next Saturday.”

“May the Lord bless you, child.” Father Ian reached for the goodies on the table and Mat followed in his wake, starting with the jam.

Mary was a force of nature. At about fifty, she had a teenage daughter living with her and an older son who’d moved away years ago. The energy radiating from her was infectious and

the speed with which she talked let her deliver all the town gossip and family updates to Mat within a short visit to replenish the fridge and do a bit of housekeeping.

As Mat scrolled his phone by the breakfast table, browsing ideas for sermons, Father Ian cleared his throat to get his attention.

“I don’t want to sound like an old man,” Father Ian said, then chuckled. “Maybe it’s too late for that, but I see you with that thing all the time.” He pointed to Mat’s Android.

Mat put the phone face down. “Sorry, Father, I was just—”

“Oh no no, I didn’t mean to chastise you. But I want to show you something. Come.” The old man stood up and slowly shuffled to the large office at the back of the house. Tall bookshelves took up most of the wall space and were filled with frayed ledgers from floor to ceiling. “I’ve been keeping the books until now but I think you might be ready to take over that too. You’ve been doing so well with the practical aspects of priesthood that this will be a breeze for a young man like you.” He patted a thick ledger on the large, oak desk. “These are our parishioners and their basic information like date of birth and address. Melinda is due soon, so we will have one more person to add and a christening to organise.”

“Right. That’s great, but are all these on paper?” Mat waved a hand towards the bookshelves.

“Yes. Father Richard wanted to create an electronic...” he pursed his lips, frowning, before he continued “...database, but he ran out of time. He started it but I didn’t know what to

do with all the devices and cables, so I did it the traditional way.”

“Can you show me what he has done so far?” Mat’s interest piqued at the ever-surprising man his predecessor had been.

“Yes, it’s all here.”

When Father Ian opened a drawer with a laptop in it, Mat could hear angels sing. As it happened, the elderly Father Richard was a fan of technology enough to have WiFi set up and added to monthly billing and to have had a fairly decent laptop with the rough draft of a spreadsheet. Mat took it from there and spent his evenings transcribing the newest and most relevant documentation.

With strong WiFi came great possibilities.

The connection allowed him to watch football games online, just in time for the start of the season. It was not surprising that most of the altar boys who helped him on Sundays were fans as well. It gave Mat something to talk about with them during preparations for mass, even if they rooted for different teams. Their constant banter over Mat being a fan of Chelsea and them insisting that Manchester United was the best team ever, brought some light and laughter to Mat’s solitary life.

Chapter Three

Mat

On a Saturday, before the chaos of his eighth Sunday of exile, Mat ventured down the hill from the church. The island was so tiny, the entirety of it was one town, with a single primary school, a shopping mall, and a bakery with mouth-watering scones and coffee. According to Mary, everyone in the community knew each other and each town-wide event drew in crowds. When several parishioners had approached Mat after mass the week before to tell him about the fair that coming Saturday, he knew he had to attend. He wore black trainers with his cassock and cheap sunglasses he'd bought at the local store. They weren't his favourite Ray-Bans but they did the job, and for once, he didn't spend hours picking an outfit. Besides, the glasses and cassock created the closest look to a closet Neo cosplay he could ever get. He was more a fan of kinky roleplaying than dressing up for the sake of it, but his geeky friends would be proud of his reference. If only he could send them a selfie...

On his way to the field where the big event was taking place, Mat saw several of the altar boys kicking a ball on the street with a few other kids.

"Hey guys!" he called, sliding his hands into the pockets of his cassock.

Kevin, the youngest of the bunch at twelve, waved at him, then elbowed the friend next to him and they all turned around.

“Do you always play in the middle of the road?” Mat walked closer to them, nodding at the kids he didn’t recognise from mass.

“The field is bumpy, Father,” Kevin said, wiping his nose with his sleeve.

“The grass in front of the priory looks like it could use someone running around on it, just saying.” Mat shrugged nonchalantly and smiled as the youngsters looked from one to the other.

“Really?” A girl of about thirteen squinted at Mat, disbelief on her features.

“Yeah, just tell your parents that you’ll be by the church. They should be able to see you from here when you play.” Since the old building stood on a hill, the front garden of the priory was visible from afar and much safer than the street.

“Awesome! Thanks, Father!” Kevin grinned, bouncing the ball on his knee twice before he caught it.

“Sure thing. But aren’t you supposed to be getting ready for the fair?”

“Oh, shit,” one of them said then clapped a hand over his mouth. “Sorry.” He looked at Mat, his eyes wide at Mat’s stern expression.

At times like these, playing a saintly priest was quite amusing. “Scoot and I’ll see you at the fair.”

The noise of excitement reached Mat’s ears before he saw the wooden arc entrance at the edge of a field. It was decorated

with fresh flowers, beautiful enough to get married underneath. His parishioners had told him that each year everyone chipped in to build the stalls and organise, so even those who had products to share and were unable to present them properly wouldn't have to worry.

The field belonged to the wealthy owner of the local whisky distillery.

“Not short of a quid, that fellow,” Mary had said. “But very unlucky in love.”

Mat was now used to finding out everything from his housekeeper. She was a true fountain of information, with her fingers in many pies: from running of the bakery part-time, helping at the primary school, to taking care of the priory's supply of food and fresh sheets. “Poor sod lost his wife over a decade ago, then a week before you got here his son passed away, too.”

Mat hoped to meet more of the townspeople who didn't attend church and this event was the perfect opportunity. Expressing his willingness to join the community would help him solidify his cover and dispel any suspicions about him, if there had ever been any. Even if the fair wouldn't bring him the excitement of London's nightlife, it was better than solitude.

He walked past the strawberry stand with baskets full of fruit, and the crochet stand with an array of stuffed animals as well as gloves, despite it being summer. He nodded at people

who greeted him, soaking up the buzz of excitement wafting off the crowd.

“I don’t think he saw it,” someone whispered behind him.

“Shut up, he can hear you,” came another semi-hushed voice.

Mat turned around to see two teenage girls with brightly coloured hair looking at him like he was the devil incarnate.

“What haven’t I seen?” he asked, towering over the petite girls despite not being overly tall himself.

They looked at each other. “The LGBTQ stand,” one of them said. She thrust her chin up in defiance, narrowing her eyes as a strand of her bright-blue hair fell on her forehead.

“Well, I’d better take a look. Where is it?” Mat kept his expression neutral. For the first time since he’d arrived at the island he truly hated the cassock for the bigotry that was associated with it. It had been the main reason he hadn’t set foot in a church for years and he only celebrated traditions for the sake of enjoying quality time with family. Right now though, he had no choice but to play his part. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t break a few rules here and there.

“Are you daft? You’ll get your mum in trouble.” The other girl glared at her friend, her short, ginger hair flopping as she shook her head.

Mat frowned when he saw the colour-bursting, rainbow-ridden stall with none other than Mary, the housekeeper, in charge of it.

“Mary is your mum?” Mat asked the girl with blue hair.

“Yeah. But please don’t fire her.” Her expression was still defiant but her eyes filled with dread.

“Why would I do that?” God, Mat hated this.

“Church rules? Homophobic shi— stuff?” She shrugged and looked towards the stand. “It’s my fault. When I came out to her, she made it her mission to educate the town about LGBTQ.”

“You’re Hannah, right? Your mum told me about you. She says you’re a sculptor.” Mat watched Hannah’s eyebrows pop up. “You’re very brave and I’m happy your mum is so proud of you. Be proud of her too.”

“I—I am,” Hannah stuttered out.

Mat had been lucky to find acceptance in his family after coming out. Uncle had not been ecstatic but Aunt Jagoda had never stopped being a loving mother-figure to him, showing her support to both him and Jack. Soon enough, if anyone in the family made so much as a semi-homophobic comment, Aunt Jagoda would smack them upside the head, no matter their age, rank, or gender.

“Good.” Mat walked to the stand, happy to see Mary. The caring lady had told him that with two grown teenagers, she had the time to take many odd jobs to keep herself occupied, as the kids didn’t need her like they used to. Yet he could see now that she’d gone beyond raising and supporting them. Meeting her opened a wound in Mat he hadn’t allowed himself

to think of for years. He barely remembered his mother and now found himself imagining that she would be as open and supportive as Mary and his Aunt Jagoda were.

He hoped Mary's kids understood how lucky they were. Mat had a sheltered childhood on many accounts but he'd heard horrible stories from people coming to Uncle for help, as well as ones in his inner circle. His best friend Hugh had been kicked out by his parents for being gay and, despite making a good life for himself, Mat had seen the pain that rejection had caused when the man talked about it.

"Morning, Father," Mary chirped, waving a tiny rainbow flag at him. Whatever misgivings the girls had about a priest's LGBTQ opinions, Mary definitely didn't share them. Or she didn't care. Which was even more admirable.

"Morning, Mary. Thank you for the scones you left this morning." He was on his way from gym-honed form to dad bod if he kept eating like that, but fuck, those scones had been fab.

"It was my pleasure. I prepared a package for Father Ian for his pilgrimage too. He told me that he thinks you're ready to handle things on your own now."

"Let's hope so." Mat was looking forward to having the house to himself—roaming around as he liked without worrying if Father Ian thought it was strange. He wouldn't have to stifle his moans when wanking either.

"Would you like a rainbow cupcake?" Mary grinned, lifting a plate full of homemade goodies.

“I think I’ll pass this time, thanks.” He patted his belly and smiled when Mary rolled her eyes.

“Do you want a leaflet about how supporting LGBTQ youth lowers the risk of depression and suicide in teenagers?” Her lips quirked as she posed the challenge.

Well, then. *Accepted.*

“Can I have a box of them?” he asked, meeting her gaze.

She frowned. “What for?”

“To have them on the table by the church entrance. And uh,” he blinked twice before he realised what the basket of colourful packets held. “And the condoms too, if possible.”

He looked back to Mary to see her lips tremble with emotion before she smirked. “For the entrance table too?”

“No.” He barked out a laugh. “That’s for those who come to confession and tell me they’re not comfortable getting them at a store in this tiny town where everyone knows who buys what.” He couldn’t even buy a pack of smokes, for fuck’s sake. Following this reasoning, he should open a sex shop in the church’s cellar. He had to bite his cheek not to smile at the thought.

“I know. It’s hard to make anyone take them cause their parents would see.” She shook her head. “And that’s not only the teens.”

“I’ll tuck them into the prayer alcove in case anyone wants to grab some in private.”

“You won’t get in trouble for that?”

“Father Ian will be gone for a month and, unless someone rats on me, I shouldn’t be.” He shrugged even as he realised he was treading on thin ice.

“I knew you were a good man—Priest,” she said, already packing the leaflets and condoms. “How old are you if you don’t mind me asking?” She looked up at him, her hands never pausing.

“Twenty-eight.” Although he felt forty since he’d arrived here, with the pressure of preaching and wearing the heavy crown of religious piety. He tried to be more serious and responsible playing this role and it took a toll on him. Sure, he had responsibilities to the Mafia before, but in his free time, he could be as wild as he wanted, dancing, drinking, fucking. He released a heavy sigh and saw Mary’s observant gaze on him. “Do you need help?” He waved at the stall.

“Nah, I’ll be fine. But you could check on Finley. He’s pouring his whisky for people to taste a few stands over there. The fair is always on his land and he’s such a kind man...” She shrugged, a sad expression on her face. “He’s not religious but could probably use someone to talk to or just spend time with. His son was about your age and—” She shook her head, frantically repositioning items on her table. “It’s not my story to tell.”

Mat nodded, although he could tell she was bursting at the seams to tell him everything she knew. “Guy with whisky. I’ll find him. Thanks, Mary.”

“I’ll drop off the condoms tomorrow!” she yelled after him, making several people turn around to look between him and her.

True to Mary’s words, a few stands further stood an absolute daddy of a man, with a sturdy body, a flannel shirt with rolled-up sleeves, and streaks of grey in his black hair.

A tall guy next to him had his back to Mat but his hair and body shape was enough for Mat’s step to falter. The parishioner of his fantasies turned around and Mat saw his regal face for the first time outside of the church.

The man said something to Finley, ducked out of the stand, and walked in the opposite direction. Mat’s eyes followed him, noting how his pink button-up clung to his chest and his sinfully tight jeans outlined the curve of his ass. Mat had half a mind to run after him. But what would he tell him? *I saw you eyefucking me and I liked it?* He couldn’t say that. Not in public at least.

Instead, he joined the queue and soon, Finley handed him a tiny cup.

“Enjoy,” he said, then his eyes snapped to Mat’s white collar. “Uhh, Father.”

“Thank you. And it’s Mat.” Even in his days as an altar boy he’d heard non-believers refer to priests by their first name. But even if it wasn’t common around here, Mat couldn’t care less, especially if it could put this man at ease. “Can I help you pour?”

“Why?” Finley’s bushy brows drew together.

“Your queue is growing and I need my good deed for the day.” Mat stepped to the side, showing he was serious with his offer. “Or maybe I want to shock the parishioners. Whichever.”

Finley narrowed his eyes. “Sure, knock yourself out... Mat.” He waved for Mat to round the stall and join him behind the counter.

After an hour of pouring alcohol and attempts at small talk, Mat finally managed to get Finley to reply with more than one word at a time. He even started leading the conversation.

“So what did you do to be sent here?”

Mat froze, not expecting a question hitting so close to home. “What do you mean?”

“If you were a good priest, they wouldn’t have sent you here, but to some nice city.” Finley levelled a look on Mat that proved how observant he was. “I mean, this place is beautiful but it’s butt-fuck nowhere,” he said matter-of-factly, pouring another cup to a happy sampler.

Mat exhaled. He didn’t want to admit that he wouldn’t have picked a remote shithole in a million years. “I’m freshly ordained and I had an opportunity to have my own parish right off the bat here.” He shrugged. “And you said it yourself—can’t beat the coastal views.” He was surprised how true that statement was. He’d grown used to the quiet, slow life, to the friendly faces in the tight-knit community. Maybe he should

get out of the house more and meet those people who don't come to mass. After all, he might be here a while longer.

"That's fair." Finley leaned over the stall to look around after the queue dissolved completely. "It's nearly one, everyone's had lunch, and soon the place will be empty. I'll start packing. Thank you for helping, Father."

"It comes with the job." Mat picked up a crate to place several opened bottles in it.

"Do you like rolling barrels too?"

"Yeah, sure. You have some exercise for me? I'm feeling useless most of the week with Mary doing all the chores around the priory and not much happening otherwise. I even started reading books. Can you believe that?" Mat fake-gasped, aiming to bring a smile to the hunk's face.

Finley chuckled. "I could use a pair of hands if you're not scared of physical work, *Father*." He smirked saying the moniker, the challenge clear in his tone.

Mat took it as a note that the guy was warming up to him. "Scared, no. But I'd have to change clothes."

"Oh, yeah. Are you allowed?" Finley grew serious.

"Would you snitch on me?"

Finley mimicked zipping his lips.

"So I'll be fine." Mat was itching to get out of the house. "Are you understaffed?" He'd rather hear the story from the horse's mouth than rely on town gossip.

“Well, yes. My son...he went on the mainland on business and...” Finley swallowed, licked his lips and downed a sample cup of whisky. “And returned in a casket two months ago.” By the tremble of his lips, it was clear he was doing his best to keep his voice steady. “I miss him so fucking much but it’s also hard on business. Recently a guy I work with sent someone temporarily to help with bookkeeping but I could use a pair of hands. The guy has been helping me at the distillery too, despite having been sent there just for the numbers.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.” Mat couldn’t even imagine how hard losing a child must be. “I’ll be happy to help. It will give me something to do, really.”

“Thanks. You’re not so bad for a priest. And not because you’re young. Richard was a good man, too. But you just never know with your lot.” He looked up at Mat. “No offence.”

“Yeah. I get it.” Mat waved a hand. He understood those reservations a lot more than he could disclose to Finley. After all, he’d seen crimes committed by men of the cloth that Uncle helped to erase. Along with the priests themselves of whom no one ever heard again.

“Do you know where the distillery is?” Finley asked, packing the remainder of his product on a cart.

“It’s the other big building that’s not school or the church.” Mat’s lips quirked into a smile.

“Fair enough. See you on Monday? Is eight too early?”

“Listen.” Mat leaned in to whisper. “Mary serves breakfast at six and I better be there or she’ll use her mother voice on me.”

Finley barked out a laugh so loud people stopped to look at them. Several passers-by smiled warmly. Mat could only surmise they hadn’t seen Finley in good spirits for a long time.



The day at the fair had been a welcome distraction from the confines of the priory, but once Mat returned to his room, the choking solitude became even more overwhelming. Initially, he’d planned to stay for the fireworks but after the first loud sound startled him out of his trainers, he excused himself. The display ended leaving him rattled as he forced himself not to relive the events of the night he’d taken someone’s life.

Think of something else. Anything.

He couldn’t travel to mainland to go to a club or meet with his friends, now miles away. He was supposed to stay clear of trouble and remain on the island. Hopefully, helping Finley, doing something not church-related, and Father Ian being away for a pilgrimage for three weeks, would help Mat feel less trapped.

After mass on the first Sunday alone, Mat took a moment to luxuriate in the sight of the beautiful place of worship he spent so much time in. Wooden columns in a half-moon behind the altar surrounded an enormous statue of Christ nailed to a cross that loomed over Mat every sermon. The marble altar had been

covered with a white sheet for the duration of the mass and the candles around it, now extinguished by an altar boy, had cast a warm glow over the gathered people. Mat took the three steps down the platform the altar stood on and walked between old carved pews his parishioners were leaving to return home. They exchanged well-wishes with him and went on with their lives, leaving Mat to the solitude he had no choice but to endure.

Mat took a seat in the traditional confessional of carved wood, surrounded by incense still lingering in the air, and waited for a stray soul needing absolution. The church was nearly empty and the sound of loafers on the floor echoed like punches in the air as someone approached the booth.

The oak door creaked, followed by a rustle of fabric as a penitent knelt on the other side of the latticed opening. Expensive cologne that seemed to smell of wind and freedom wafted into Mat's nostrils. He couldn't see the face of the person on the other side clearly but the moment he spoke, the baritone of his voice sent shivers through him.

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. I can't recall the last time I was in confession but I kneel here today with a burden I have to get off my chest.”

Mat chastised himself for closing his eyes to enjoy the sound of the voice, nearly seductive in its tone, his accent strikingly different to how the other parishioners spoke but he couldn't place it. Hmm, Liverpool?

“I wandered into the church several Sundays ago and saw a priest so gorgeous, so charismatic, his face haunted my dreams. I came to see him every Sunday since then and each time I had to run home to touch myself to the thought of him.”

The man on the other side swallowed loudly and Mat had to wipe his hands as they started to sweat. His heart beat faster as he turned to the side. Through the holes in the wooden slats, he glimpsed dark, curly hair and immediately he knew who it had to be. The man with the mesmerising eyes.

“It was you,” came the voice again. “I want to kneel before you outside of the confessional. I want you to punish me for my sins, for my impure thoughts. Please. Punish me, Father.”

Mat closed his eyes, gathering all the courage he could muster as his face flushed at the words.

“Stop,” Mat whispered, not trusting himself to speak for fear of his voice breaking. The man was painting a picture of life too similar to the one Mat had left behind, and it hurt as much as it aroused him. It was a scenario Mat had fantasised about, knowing it would never come true. And yet...

“I have tried, but my mind conjures your face and I imagine it’s your hand when I touch my cock.” The man’s voice was low, delivering the words in flawless diction.

Mat’s breath left him in a shudder as his own cock stirred under his cassock.

“I see the way you look at me,” the man continued. “Give me my penance. Let me kneel naked at your feet so you can do

with me what you see fit.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.” Mat held onto sanity by a thread.

“I’ve only seen a dom in need of a sub look at me the way you do. Like you’d know how to make me scream. I want to please you. Tell me you don’t want it.” He paused, waiting. “Say it.”

“I can’t.” The words left Mat in a near sob of uncontrolled lust. “It would be a lie.”

He felt as if he was in a dream and nightmare all at once, as if the confessional was his cage and he was unable to leave it to reach for the carnal riches on the other side.

Heartbeat roaring in his ears, Mat buried his face in his hands, imagining the lean body of the gorgeous man kneeling naked in front of him as Mat stood with his cock in his hand.

“Leave the door to the clergy house unlocked tonight. I know no one else will be there. Wait for me.” The man’s breathing came out in ragged puffs. “Please.”

With that, the confessional creaked again and Mat heard footsteps recede.

He did not lock his door that night.

Chapter Four

Mat

The subtle squeak of the front door announced an arrival. Mateusz had been lying in bed for hours, trying to fall asleep, but the words spoken in the silky baritone of his parishioner kept him awake. When, after a few minutes, no further noises echoed from downstairs, Mat assumed the visitor had left. Changed his mind.

It would be too good to be true if the man came, let alone wanted the things he'd mentioned. It was ridiculous. And yet Mat stood up to check if the house was empty.

He froze the moment he opened his bedroom door.

The gorgeous man from the confessional was kneeling on the floor by the entrance. His head was bowed and his legs spread as he sat on his haunches.

He was stark naked.

Mat's hand flew to his mouth, his other instinctively reaching for the delicate cross on a golden necklace he'd got for his first communion.

"What —" Mat cleared his throat. "What are you doing here?"

"You left the door unlocked." The man's head was still lowered as he spoke, his perfect position suggesting he wasn't a stranger to the rules of submission. "Did you mean it?"

Boże święty, that voice. His parents' mother tongue came naturally to him only in extreme circumstances, and mostly in the form of curse words. He had a feeling he would be using the Lord's name in vain in any language he could think of when in close proximity to the lost lamb in front of him.

"God help me," Mat whispered, knowing he was unable to lie. "I meant it."

The man didn't stir.

"What's your name?" Mat asked, sliding a finger under the parishioner's chin to lift his head up.

"Peyton," he replied. There was no trembling or hesitation in his voice despite being naked before a stranger. On the contrary, he looked proud, his face painted with an expression of willing surrender.

"I'm Mat. Father Mat," he said in a way he told subs in a club to call him Sir. The man in front of him acted like he already knew the basic rules for what he'd asked for and it confused and aroused Mat all at once.

This was insane.

Or was it? Even if Peyton told everyone about whatever they were about to do, no one would believe him. They were both adults and none of this was illegal or a sin. Not in Mat's eyes.

His cock stirred but Peyton remained unmoving, patient, waiting for Mat's instructions. A fresh rush of excitement hit Mat at the thought and he knew what he had to do. He'd been

pretending to be a priest for weeks and he wasn't about to stop now. It was as simple as roleplay.

“You came here as a lost lamb, but you found me and I will treat you with care.” The words came with an ease that surprised Mat as they were a promise as much for Peyton's benefit as his own. “Stand up.”

With grace rarely seen in a grown man, Peyton rose to his full height, towering over Mat by at least half a foot. Mat looked up but Peyton's gaze was lowered, his lashes casting shadows on his pale cheeks. Up close he was even more angelic in his beauty, with flawless skin, a lightly muscled, lean body and curls falling delicately over his forehead.

“Kneel at the end of the bed and hold onto the frame, back straight.”

“Yes, Father Mat.”

Mat's name on those full lips was like a poem, short yet meaningful, hidden in the deep baritone.

Complying, Peyton lowered himself to his knees, hands on the carved, wooden frame.

“Tell me again why are you here.” Mat needed to be sure Peyton hadn't changed his mind.

“I have sinned and I need my penance from you... more than the air I breathe. I beg you to hurt me until you're proud of me. Until my obedience pleases you. But I'll go if you tell me to.”

Mat's hand itched to touch Peyton's hair that looked like ribbons of silk, slide his fingers between the locks, pull hard then smooth it back with affection. He didn't though. It was not the time. Not yet.

"Your offering is precious to me and I will cherish it. Now, keep your eyes down." Mat adjusted his cock through the simple boxers he was wearing. He wished he'd worn something more deserving for the occasion.

He walked to the other side of the room, making sure Peyton couldn't see the griffin tattoo on his upper back. The image was a play on his family crest with an griffin rampant wearing a crown of knives.

Mat shed the boxers and t-shirt he'd gone to bed in and reached for his black cassock which hung on a hanger on the wardrobe door. The whoosh of fabric over his skin prepared him to give Peyton the amount of respect he deserved.

The building was old, as were the chests in his bedroom that hid relics he'd discovered over the weeks. Most were historical examples of various practices, but Father Richard had taken good care of them.

Opening the carved, wooden chest that stood by the opposite wall, he retrieved a battered Raccolta prayer book and set the red leather-bound volume aside.

A steel cilice belt clattered, its spikes gleaming in the light of the night lamp as Mat moved it to the side to reveal one more garment, this time from coarse cloth, right next to a bundle of rope at the bottom of the chest. Rummaging, he

glimpsed more items he could use but none spoke to him until his eyes landed on a discipline. It was a small flogger for penance, for mortification of the flesh. It had seven cords symbolising the deadly sins and virtues. Each cord ended in a knot—one for each day Christ had remained in the tomb after his death. Priests as far back as the eleventh century used it for self-flagellation and now, Mat would use it on Peyton.

Mat's grasp remembered the weight and heft of a flogger. He'd spent countless nights using a similar one on men he'd met at The Golden Handcuffs. Men who had come and gone in his life—the same fate that awaited Peyton.

As Mat wasn't tall enough to be a fan of long, single-tailed bullwhips, he favoured shorter floggers from leather or horsehair. Discipline in hand, Mat did several figure eights in the air as a warm-up, recalling how a flogger used to become an extension of his arm, aiming to caress his lover. And how he practised Florentine flogging with one in each hand, able to strike a large area precisely.

The tails of the discipline cut the air as Mat imagined striking both of Peyton's shoulder blades in rapid succession with the figure eight, admiring the knots at the end of each rope. Letting the tails slide slowly through the fingers of his free hand, he glanced at the perfection of Peyton's back. He wanted to make him feel the purity of delicious pain, the sting of a flogger but not at the cost of damage to his skin.

Fuck. The knots wouldn't caress, couldn't fall with grace on Peyton's back. At least not from the angle Mat was used to

standing behind the willing participant. After all, the discipline had been created for self-flagellation.

An idea struck him and his lips lifted into a smile.

He traced Peyton's upper back with the tails of the flogger and the man moaned when the knots grazed his flesh.

"Kneel in the middle of the room." He voiced the crisp command and Peyton rose to his feet, only to assume the same kneeling position in the centre of the rug. Before Mat managed to ask, Peyton linked his hands at the small of his back and bent his head. God, the obedience itself sent goose flesh rising on Mat's arms.

Wearing just the cassock, he stood in front of Peyton, the discipline hanging between them, the tails dancing in the air as if in anticipation. With his bare foot, he kicked the man's thighs wider and Peyton shuffled to spread them.

"Are you familiar with the traffic lights system?"

"Green for please hurt me more, Father, yellow for hurt me a bit less, and red for I've had enough." A thread of amusement crept into Peyton's tone with the words.

"That's my good Lamb," Mat praised, barely believing what he was about to do. On one hand, he didn't know Peyton, on the other, he'd hardly known any of the subs at the club. The only thing he needed was consent.

Turning around, he lowered himself to his knees, inching his clothed arse into his guest's groin. His calves were on the outside of Peyton's as he manoeuvred to sit on the man's lap;

his shoulder blades resting against Peyton's clavicles, erasing their height difference.

"Father, I am not worthy..." Peyton moaned, the puffs of air from his lungs caressing the nape of Mat's neck.

"That's for me to decide. Now, don't move."

Peyton spoke with formality, leaning into their play in detail. Yet his words didn't sound forced or rehearsed. Maybe he talked like that often for scenes with the doms he'd mentioned during his confession.

Peyton's erection nestled between Mat's clothed cheeks as he assumed the most comfortable position.

He nuzzled Mat's nape with his nose, at the same time as his cock twitched under Mat. "May I kiss your skin, Father?" he groaned.

"Yes, my Lamb, you may." Mat wanted to turn his head to link their lips in a kiss, but he wasn't ready for that level of intimacy. "Your safeword is Pontius Pilate," he said sternly. "Repeat it."

"Pontius Pilate."

"You will use it when you want me to stop, understood?"

"Yes, Father."

Mat could tell it was not the first time Peyton had played this way, and he felt that the confidence in his submission was of a man who knew his limits. Besides, Mat didn't plan to

push the evening far. He aimed to deliver what Peyton had asked for and feed his own Dom cravings in the process.

“Breathe in,” Mat said and took a breath as well, feeling Peyton’s chest expand behind him. “And out.”

His palm squeaked on the leather handle before the tails of the discipline whooshed through the air as Mat wielded it from between his legs and over their shoulders to land on Peyton’s upper back.

Peyton yelped, then moaned, his lips resting on Mat’s nape as his breath tickled the tiny hairs there. Mat felt Peyton’s dick jump against his buttocks, growing impossibly hard.

“You can’t come until I allow it, understood?” Mat’s voice dropped low, his cock dripping precome on his thigh.

“Yes, Father.”

‘Whoosh’ went the discipline through the air again, hitting the skin over Peyton’s other shoulder blade. When the knots touched Peyton’s back he arched, groaning, and Mat felt the momentum flow straight through Peyton’s body into his own, completing the circle.

His movements were slow and deliberate as he wielded the instrument of penance. His arm ached, his body needed release, and both worsened each time Peyton moaned loudly into his ear.

He could come like this, hearing the gorgeous man bask in the pleasure of the pain Mat gave him... but not yet. He took a deep breath. They would suffer together.

Mat sent the discipline into the air twice more, once on each side, hard enough to make the tails fly, but not to mar or break Peyton's skin. Mat could feel Peyton's body tremble and he knew it was time to stop. He loosened his grip and let the flogger thump onto the floor.

A sob sounded behind him and Mat felt the weight of the man press on his back. Sloppy, wet kisses landed on Mat's nape as what seemed to be tears flowed under Mat's collar and down his chest.

"Thank you, Father," Peyton whispered before another sob shook him.

Mat turned around and, cupping Peyton's face in his palms, searched his face. Those hadn't been tears and sobs of distress but of relief—it was clear from the blissed-out expression. Peyton had received what he'd come for, despite his cock remaining hard.

On legs strained by the position as well as the intensity of the experience, Mat scrambled to his feet to retrieve a bottle of lotion he kept by the bed. On his way back, he turned to the display of chalices on a shelf on the opposite wall and took one, wiping it against the length of his cassock.

Kneeling behind the taller man, he placed the chalice and the bottle on the floor as he inspected Peyton's back in the dim light, looking for any signs of abrasions. His skin was red but not broken. Mat kissed between his Lamb's shoulder blades, the spot hot, inviting, tender under his lips.

Mat poured lotion on his hands and, with the gentlest of touches, spread it over the parts affected by the discipline. The guttural moan that left Peyton shook Mat to his core, making his cock twitch and his abdomen fill with such an onslaught of lust, he was glad he was already on his knees.

He caressed every piece of skin on the man's back, coaxing sounds so lewd, so erotic, Mat had to fight not to come. Letting his hands roam, he explored Peyton's front, the pads of his thumbs grazing the man's taut nipples, then the ridges of his abdominal muscles. Peyton's hips bucked when Mat's touch moved lower, until he wrapped his lotioned hand around his Lamb's long, hard cock. He stroked slowly, teasing, sliding his thumb over the pre-come slicked head until Peyton whimpered, shuddering.

"Please," he choked out.

"Come for me, my Lamb," Mat ordered loud and clear.

"Ahhh!" Peyton thrust into Mat's grip, his body tensing. He cried out, then released a long moan.

Mat barely managed to position the chalice to capture his come in time, and a ribbon fell on his hand. Scooting to the side just enough to see Peyton's profile, he lifted the cup to the man's lips.

Peyton didn't question it. Hands on his thighs, he tilted his chin up and drank it like it was wine during mass. *Chryste Panie, so obedient, so beautiful.*

“Very good,” Mat cooed, placing the chalice aside. Peyton’s eyes darted to Mat’s come-splattered hand, following its movements, showing Mat what he wanted, what he expected.

Lifting his hand to Peyton’s lips, Mat watched the man’s tongue dart out to lick the thick liquid off his thumb before he sucked it in. The wet, lewd sound travelled straight to Mat’s cock, but he ignored it, letting Peyton suck his index finger clean as well. It was all too easy to imagine the gorgeous man with Mat’s cock in his mouth, his full lips parting around it, his tongue swirling. Mat groaned and retrieved his fingers, his body like a grenade ready to explode at the tiniest touch.

Peyton relaxed and rested on his haunches, his head bowed.

“I absolve you of your sin,” Mat whispered, placing tiny kisses on the untouched tops of the man’s shoulders.

“Thank you, Father,” Peyton said with reverence.

Holding onto his cassock, Mat shuffled on his knees to face his Lamb.

“Look at me.”

Peyton blinked slowly before his multi-coloured gaze looked into Mat’s eyes, and straight into his soul.

“Are you OK?”

“Yes.” A lazy smile lifted the corner of Peyton’s lips before falling ever so slightly. He hesitated.

“What is it? You can tell me.”

“Would you please...” His expression was open in his need.
“Let me suck your cock, Father?”

Mat had to stifle a groan. He'd been tested regularly due to his frivolous lifestyle and he hadn't been with anyone since the last results. He would love nothing more than to have Peyton's lips on his cock but the subtle sway of the man's frame suggested he should rest.

“I tested negative, Father and I'm on PrEP, I can prove it,” Peyton continued with persistence when Mat didn't reply. “I would be honoured to taste you on my tongue, swallow everything you'd be willing to give me. I'd take it as my communion.”

Oh, fuck. He was good.

Mat had to take several deep breaths to keep from coming at the sight of the magnificent man kneeling for him, ready to suck his cock.

“Not tonight.” Mat tried not to sound too disappointed but failed miserably.

“Yes, Father Mat. Thank you.” Peyton licked his parched lips.

Mat offered him the glass of water from his bedside table, holding it for Peyton to take a sip, before putting it aside.

With a tentative touch, he pulled Peyton to lay halfway on his lap, the man's face inches from his throbbing cock, but not touching, not asking again. Mat waited for his Lamb's

breathing to even as he danced his fingertips over the place where soft, sweaty locks fell on Peyton's forehead.

Silence stretched between them but from the subtle fidgeting, Mat knew Peyton wanted to say something.

"Talk to me, my Lamb."

"I will sin with my hand on my cock tonight, thinking of you. Then I'll need penance again." His deep baritone defied the soft, guilt-ridden words he spoke and Mat felt a pull towards the man he hadn't experienced in years, if ever.

"The door will be open for you after nine." *Any day.* "Every Sunday." The words flew out of his mouth before he managed to keep them caged for his own safety.

A rush of relieved breath left Peyton and pulling away from Mat's embrace, he whispered:

"Thank you. I better go—I shall leave now."

Stay.

Mat didn't say it. Instead, he placed one more kiss on Peyton's shoulder and rose to his feet. Peyton's leaving would be for the best. Even if he wanted to care for him, to caress him and to hurt him again when he was ready.

"Can you get home safely?"

"Yes." Peyton didn't clarify.

Had he driven to get here? Did he live nearby? Who was he exactly? None of that was Mat's business.

Peyton stood up, bowed to Mat and walked, stark naked and barefoot to retrieve the clothes he'd left folded in the corridor.

Mat waited for his footsteps to recede and the front door to click closed before he collapsed to the floor and came all over his cassock. Tears sprang to his eyes as his body shuddered from the release he'd craved so much for weeks.

What the fuck was I thinking?

His lust-filled brain cleared enough for him to realise how stupid he'd been. Mat had just endangered his cover for an evening of kinky roleplay with a stranger. The promise he'd made to his uncle hadn't included celibacy, not in so many words. Or had it? He definitely vowed not to get himself into trouble or blow his cover. Despite their insane chemistry, this thing with Peyton could never happen again.

Chapter Five

Peyton

Peyton stretched on the bed, relishing the echo of the pain on his upper back from the discipline. Eyes still closed, he smiled to himself, feeling more ready to face the day than he'd been in a long while. His hand travelled down his briefs and he squeezed his morning erection, already needy at the memories of the night before.

He'd taken a huge risk approaching Father Mat with his indecent proposal but he couldn't bear watching him every Sunday sending 'fuck me' vibes and not doing anything about it. The last pew had become his favourite spot where he would ball his hands into fists, willing himself not to spring to his feet only to kneel before the man in a cassock. He hadn't, but he'd let himself daydream about doing it way too often.

Until he acted on his fantasy.

He'd supposed that a role-play would put enough distance between them to feel like a scene at a club. The instant attraction had been something he'd underestimated, and their evening had ended up a lot more intimate.

Now he was wondering if he hadn't made a huge mistake. Only one night had passed and he was already looking forward to the next Sunday. He didn't have to accept Mat's offer for another hookup but fucking hell, he wanted to. He craved that intense kind of play that gave a release to his body and cleared his mind.

The moment he'd approached the priory's unlocked door, he'd decided to go all in and strip naked to kneel in a way expected of him at a BDSM club. When Mat had recognised his submissive pose and shown care for safewords and boundaries, Peyton had let go and followed every instruction from his Priest's lips. The entire experience had transported him to a realm where the two of them existed in their roles and could do anything they wished.

His walk to the tiny flat above the pub in the darkness, with the night's breeze cooling his flesh, had been a rude reminder of what the evening had been about. Pleasure and release. Nothing more.

It had never bothered him before; not in a club, not at a hotel with some dude he'd met on a dating app. Yet somehow, he was miffed that the sex with Mat had been just that. Even though Peyton's time in the village was limited, he'd have to keep emotional distance if he accepted the invitation for the next Sunday. No one on the island knew Mat was in disguise. Except Peyton. And he'd been ordered to keep that little tidbit to himself. Not even Mat could know.

Peyton's dad had sent him to the island to help Finley with paperwork, but the real reason he was here was much more important and had to remain a secret. Peyton knew that, in truth, his job here was his punishment.

Dad had told him that he needed to calm the fuck down with partying and fucking, as it reflected badly on him. As if Peyton wasn't his own person. Dad had claimed that a few months of

life on a quiet island would benefit Peyton and help him find balance. What it really brought was loss of freedom and utter loneliness. Until the night with Mat.

It was luck or some divine intervention Peyton didn't believe in that he'd had found such a fantastic fuck when being punished for something so similar. That one mindblowing orgy he'd helped organise had gone incredibly well and he'd have been able to continue his life in London or Liverpool, if only pictures of government officials at the orgy hadn't leaked...

Now he was stuck on an island. But he refused to forgo all entertainment, especially when a hot man was willing to give him what he wanted and let Peyton give his submission in return. He'd just have to keep his secrets close to his chest and far away from Mat, or both of them would be in trouble. Their saucy roleplay and how deeply they leaned into it should prevent him from blabbing, but on top of that, he'd been trained to keep secrets for the entirety of his life.

He had to, as the head of Dad's company's accounting. He'd held the position since he was a teenager but received it officially only after he graduated university. Just because he liked numbers and was brilliant at his job didn't quash his desire to lead a vibrant life beyond work, much to his dad's chagrin. Clubbing, dancing and fucking was what kept Peyton alive so he could stay sane during the monotonous hours at the office.

Dealing with the backlog of orders, returns, and invoices that had piled up in Finley's distillery was a task he was eager to continue tackling until the company was ticking like it was supposed to. Finley's son had done a decent job with keeping most of the spreadsheets clear but Peyton was on his way to fixing the faulty system, and creating a much better one. He didn't even attempt to explain it to Finley, because every time the man entered the office at the factory his eyes glazed over, as if the room itself evoked memories of the son he'd lost. 'Gone on business and never returned' was the information he'd disclosed to Peyton.

Now, if he played his cards right, he could do his job, make sure Mat didn't know his secret, and get fantastic sex in the meantime. Mat wouldn't blab about them to anyone on the island—that was a given with him being a fake priest and all. Now Peyton would just have to avoid the man the entirety of the week except Sundays.

The downside of trying to blend into the tiny community was wardrobe restrictions. His attempt not to draw attention to himself meant he had to forgo wearing bedazzled jeans and bright crop tops. Then again, his dad insisted on him prancing to work in a suit, so Peyton could only exercise his colourful sense of style in his free time. Dad wasn't the only person who'd told him to dress like a man of thirty and not like a teenage boy-toy. Peyton certainly wouldn't mind being one of those if he found a man worthy of giving himself to play with. Someone like Mat...

Wearing a simple pair of white-washed jeans and an orange t-shirt, he reached the steps leading to the red-brick building that was the distillery. The chill of the spring morning turned his nipples into spikes poking the tight fabric, but he doubted Finley would care.

The door creaked when Peyton pushed it, and the smell of alcohol and smoked wood filled his nose.

“Morning!” he shouted, the sound echoing through the vast open space as he entered.

“In here,” came Finley’s voice. “We have a guest.”

What? That was new. Peyton headed towards the offices to the left, following the sound of a conversation. Since he’d first arrived, the place had always been lively with full-time workers who took care of the various stages of process of creating the whisky. However, he did recall Finley mentioning he could use more hands on deck. The other employees had told Peyton that after losing his son, Finley’s light-hearted and chatty attitude died too. Peyton could only imagine how hard it must be for him to focus on work amidst that kind of grief.

“The coffee smells amazi—” Peyton stuttered to a halt as his heart leapt into his throat.

What is he doing here?

“Morning,” said the same voice that had commanded him to kneel just the night before.

Mat saluted him with a mug bearing the distillery’s swirly logo, as if his being there was nothing unusual. Then Peyton

noticed how Mat's smile strained and his free hand shook before he shoved it in the pocket of his cassock. Their gazes met and Peyton recognised fear when he saw it. He nodded once, and as understanding passed between them, Mat's shoulders relaxed visibly.

“Peyton, good thing you're here.” Finley looked up from whatever paperwork he was poking at and reached for the French press, still half-full with coffee. “Do you know Father Mat?”

Peyton couldn't tear his gaze away from the man who'd made him drink his own come. Wearing black from head to toe, hiding the muscles Peyton had had the privilege to glimpse, Mat stood with coffee in hand as if he hadn't just turned Peyton's day upside down. His short black hair was styled perfectly to match his clean-shaven face, creating the look of a businessman, or a very well-groomed priest. Despite being about 5'10" and a head shorter than Peyton, the priest emanated raw authority that sent tingles down Peyton's spine.

“He's been attending mass every Sunday for weeks,” Mat said with a neutrally pleasant smile. “But he always leaves the church right after.”

That wasn't a lie. And nicely left out their encounter from the night before.

“After listening to all your sermons, it's nice to finally shake your hand.” Peyton took a lesson from Mat's book of omitting the truth. “Father,” he added, squeezing Mat's palm. The flicker of fire in Mat's eyes brought back fresh memories of

that same gaze meeting his when Peyton asked to suck Mat's cock.

Electricity sparked between them at the contact just as goosebumps travelled up Peyton's arm. Dear God, he could kneel before this man right now if he'd only ask. Fuck, he was too starved for cock to think straight. He liked a good fuck but it was rare for him to be that desperate. Then again, he wasn't used to going without at least a hookup for over a month and that was exactly how long he'd been on the island.

"Likewise." Mat let go and took a step back.

Damn, Mat was a good liar. Which meant he could say anything and Peyton would be tempted to believe him. He had to be very careful. Playing with him was dangerous but whatever they did would be a temporary arrangement only. He'd just have to prevent feelings from getting involved.

Yeah. That was it. Other than that, he'd be fine.

"Are you here to bless the place or—?" Peyton shoved his hands in the back pockets of his jeans.

"Nah, Finley just wants to use my muscles." Mat grinned, and Peyton could have sworn he winked at him.

Peyton gave Finley a questioning look and a soft blush appeared above the man's beard.

"That's sort of the truth." He scrunched his nose but there was zero guilt in his expression. "Martin's daughter is sick and they're taking her to the hospital on the mainland. I don't know when he'll be back so I'm a pair of hands short." Finley

shrugged, but his smirk suggested that he didn't feel the least bit sorry for using a local priest. "And Father Mat was kind enough to offer his help."

Was he trying to woo Mat? Or was it the other way round? Was it possible that Mat was playing with more than one guy on the island? Peyton's stomach dropped to his knees, but he kept his composure.

Finley had been married to a woman, but that had been years ago and it didn't mean that he couldn't fancy men. Ones with lean, defined physiques and dressed in the kind of do-not-touch cassock that made Peyton want to reach out in desperate hunger.

"Right, of course." Peyton's eyes remained glued to Finley as if his greying beard held all the answers.

"The guys who've been working here for years know the entire process so they rotate responsibilities to avoid monotony," Finley said, looking at Mat. "I can show you around later, but honestly, I have three jobs for you in mind."

"I'm listening." Mat placed his mug on the table and linked his hands behind his back. The movement pushed his chest out and Peyton bit the inside of his cheek so as not to let a lewd comment fly out of his mouth.

"For our lighter whisky, we're getting the white oak barrels after American bourbon. The shipment is coming today and the casks need inspecting for cracks to see whether they're good enough for us to use." Finley shot to his feet at the sound of a tractor-trailer parking outside. "I think that's them.

Peyton, would you show Mat around? I'll go sign for the barrels and you can help unload in fifteen minutes?"

"Yup. Will do." Peyton stood up and tossed his backpack over his shoulder.

"Just quickly." Finley turned to Peyton. "The second thing I'd like you to show Mat is filling up the casks we prepared. You know which ones. Then rolling them to storage." He looked at Mat. "How does that sound?"

"As long as Peyton is there with me, I'm game." Mat returned his mug to the sink with finality.

The words warmed Peyton and he could swear that a smirk appeared on Mat's face.

"Peyton, you don't have to move the barrels if--"

"I don't mind," Peyton interrupted his boss. Just because he'd been sent to do paperwork didn't mean he wouldn't like to get sweaty with Mat. Rolling barrels.

"Perfect." Finley nodded.

Mat started unbuttoning his cassock at the top.

"What are you doing, Father?" Peyton tried to keep his eyes from bulging.

"I can't work in this." Mat pointed to the length of his cassock. "Or I'll lose my teeth." He chuckled.

Finley joined him. "Fair. You can leave your stuff in the break room, Peyton will show you."

In the shared space for workers, Peyton pointed Mat in the direction of the large bathroom. Soon afterwards, he saw Mat re-emerge wearing football shorts and a plain black t-shirt, looking casual and positively indecent.

Peyton took a glass from a cupboard, filled it with tap water and downed its contents in a few gulps. “Ready?” he asked, casting his eyes over the sleeves of the t-shirt stretching around Mat’s biceps, then down to the shorts that were bound to show the outline of Mat’s cock once he moved.

Mat drew Peyton’s gaze up by crossing his arms. “Listen, Peyton, I just want you to know that—”

The door swung open and two men in their mid-twenties entered, talking excitedly.

“Yeah, right. But then she said I didn’t put away the dishes properly. You know, the way she wanted. Like dude, they were clean, what the fuck does it matter how I arrange them? I leave them to dry on the rack but she likes them wiped and back in the cupboard.”

“For fuck’s sake, Lewis, your problems are shit.”

“Fuck you.”

Peyton recognised the second speaker as Owen. His sister owned the inn Peyton was staying at, and their younger brother was one of the altar boys he’d seen at Mat’s church. Owen elbowed Lewis in the ribs the moment he saw Mat and Peyton.

“Shit. I mean *shoot*. Father Mat? What are you doing here?” Owen asked.

“You look different.” Lewis skidded into a halt.

“That’s cause he’s not in a cassock, dumbass.”

“I noticed that.” Lewis made a face at his friend, then mouthed: “idiot.”

“Nice to see you, guys.” Mat said in a tone he used during mass, making the men focus on him.

Right at that moment, Peyton realised Mat’s priest voice was very much like his dom one and it seemed to have a similar effect. People listened. And wanted to obey him.

“I’m here to help a bit and give my cassock a rest for the day. I’m probably helping myself more by getting out of the house.”

“That’s cool,” Owen said, then he and Lewis tossed their stuff into the lockers at the wall and their lunches into the fridge. “And thanks for letting my little brother kick the ball on church grounds. It drives our mum insane when they play on the street.”

“No problem.” Mat waved a hand in dismissal.

Peyton stared. He knew Mat was just playing a priest but the joy on his face when he heard that he’d helped someone was not fake.

“See you around, Father.” The men bumped fists with Mat and Peyton as they all headed out of the breakroom and in

separate directions down the corridor.

“These guys know all the details and steps of the production.” Peyton led them towards the back of the building. “I’m mostly familiar with the basics and deal with the paperwork. They should be the ones showing you around.”

“I’d rather you do it,” Mat said, his gaze raking over Peyton’s tight t-shirt before he snapped his eyes ahead.

“We could do so much more.” Peyton’s words came out in a breathy whisper.

The next second his back hit the wall and air whooshed out of his lungs. Mat pinned him with a forearm across his chest and a grip on his balls, making Peyton thrust into the touch with a moan.

Mat’s breath punched the air between them as he shook his head. “No one can know, Peyton. Tell me you understand this.”

Mat’s low tone sent shivers through Peyton and his cock responded accordingly. “Yes, Father,” he said, letting submissive sweetness seep into his voice. He cast his eyes down and let his body sway forward.

“Fuck. We can’t.” Mat licked the side of Peyton’s neck then pulled away with a groan, robbing Peyton of their delicious closeness.

“Yeah, of course.” Peyton straightened his t-shirt, relishing how the tug made Mat focus on his nipples. “I’ll be careful around you here. And I don’t want anyone to know either.”

Mat frowned, taking a step back. “Are you undercover? Are you a cop or something?”

Peyton stiffened. *Shit*. “No,” he scoffed, his heart racing. He really needed better control over what flew out of his mouth. “Of course not.”

Mat exhaled but his stormy expression lingered. “Good. Let’s just be... casual.”

“Yup. Only a priest and his parishioner.” Peyton shrugged but could see that the words ignited fire in Mat’s gaze.

“Let’s go.” Mat shook his head, a small smile playing on his lips.

It took Peyton several moments to will his erection down as they continued walking.

“Finley showed me a few of the basic things, the shit you can’t fuck up, in case he needed help when someone couldn’t come to work,” Peyton said, leading them down the corridor. “First. Let’s pick up the shipment of barrels that just arrived.”

They went outside where a black truck stood with its double doors wide open at the back.

“Thanks,” Finley said to the driver as he handed him a clipboard. The other man tipped his hat and hopped into the front seat. “Let’s get that ramp.” Finley turned to Mat and Peyton, and pointed to the side of the building. “So we can roll the barrels inside.”

The three of them hoisted the wooden monstrosity and repositioned it to lead from the vehicle to the elevated entrance

of the building's storage space.

Finley hopped on the bed of the truck and laid the first barrel on its side. "We need to make sure they don't have cracks or strains. Our whisky is quite decent so it would be a shame to waste it. Besides, the cleanup is a nightmare." He rolled the cask on the ramp where Mat took it over until it was on its way inside the storage space.

Peyton grabbed it and placed it by the door.

"Bossman! Do you have a minute?" came Lewis's voice from the building.

"On my way!" Finley jumped off and wiped his hands on his shorts. "I need to check on the barley. Will you two be OK?"

Mat had already replaced him in the truck and was grabbing another cask.

"Go! We'll be fine," Peyton assured.

For the following hour and a half, they unloaded the barrels and stacked them in storage. Peyton had the pleasure of ogling Mat's arm and thigh muscles straining during the work. It was clear the man worked out and his perfect shape and definition suggested it was at a gym, not through physical labour.

"I can feel your stare." Mat straightened up from re-tying his trainers.

"Guilty." Peyton smirked. "But I know you've been watching me too."

Mat licked his lips, his expression serious. “You’re too beautiful not to look at.”

Mat held Peyton’s gaze, making his knees weak with the words.

Peyton stood mesmerised. He’d been called pretty before, sure. He’d worked hard to make his height and slim build work to his advantage, getting leanly muscled to be enticing enough for men to fuck him whenever he wanted. But the unreachability of Mat in their current situation was making him even more desirable. Yes, that was what it was. Some fucked-up grasp for the forbidden fruit.

“Yeah, well...” Peyton scrambled to get his brain to work before he started begging to be railed in a storage room. “Now that we’re done here, I have to show you how to gently put a nozzle in a hole.”

“A what?” Mat frowned.

“Let’s fill up those casks, Father,” Peyton said in a mock-seductive voice.

“Berk.” Mat chuckled, shaking his head as they made their way down the corridor and into an industrial room with white walls and piping along one of them.

“The barrels we just stacked need to be burnt again before we use them, but the ones waiting to be filled are lined up there.” Peyton walked to three long rows of casks with the top painted white. “First, we put the stencil with the company’s

logo, date, and number on top of the one we'll be filling." He nodded to the side where a tiny roller lay.

Mat dipped it in paint and created the lettering while Peyton held the stencil, then they rolled the barrel on the scale.

"It's 57.5 kilos." Peyton made a note on the clipboard on a metal shelf nearby. He pulled the cork out with a large screw and released the rich smell of bourbon.

Dismounting the long hose attached over their heads, he pointed the metal nozzle at the hole in the barrel. "Now, I'll release a steady stream," he said, filling up the cask. The gentle whoosh of the amber liquid and the scent of whisky filled the air between them.

It was nearly peaceful until Mat snorted so loud, Peyton turned to look at him. Mat was biting his lip, his eyes twinkling with mirth.

"Does it make you think of douching too?" Peyton asked, suppressing a giggle.

Mat barked out a laugh, "I didn't want to say it, but yeah, hardcore one too."

They chuckled as Peyton positioned the cork over the hole and handed a hammer to Mat.

"Close it up."

Mat landed three blows and grinned, his free hand on his hip.

God, he's so fucking handsome.

“Now, let’s record the weight.” Peyton looked at the scale and wrote the numbers on the clipboard. “It’s 236.5 kilograms.” He grunted as he hauled it off and Mat rushed to help him.

“How many of those does the distillery fill?” Mat asked as they reached for another.

“About fifty a week.”

They filled up the second cask and rolled one each to the warehouse for maturation, pushing them side-by-side along the corridor, laughing like children on a playground.

“They’ll stay here for four years or so,” Peyton said, panting after placing his barrel in a cradle.

“Shit, that’s better than going to the gym.” Mat exhaled, wiping the sweat off his forehead with the bottom of his shirt.

“Priest at the gym, huh?” Peyton smirked, then immediately regretted his words. He shouldn’t say anything that would make Mat uncomfortable about his disguise.

“I’m freshly ordained, remember?”

Peyton held onto an exhale of relief but didn’t shy from ogling Mat’s sweat-slicked abdomen before the man dropped his t-shirt. “You’re still allowed some fun, I guess?” he said, attempting to change the topic. “Maybe you can solve local mysteries, like in that show from the 90s.”

“Yes!” Mat’s eyes lit up. “I watched that too. What was it called? Father...” He bit his lip, thinking.

Peyton wanted to bite it too. And lick it.

“Father Dowling Mysteries!” Mat exclaimed with triumph.

“That’s the one!” Peyton laughed until his throat ran dry, setting the tone for the rest of the day.

Chapter Six

Mat

Exhausted, but welcoming the muscle ache, Mat sat in the break room at the distillery. After a quick shower, he'd returned to wearing the cassock that reminded him spending time amongst barrels was just for fun.

One hour from now would mark five days since he'd started his whisky pro-bono work. Finley had tried to pay him, but to keep his disguise safe, he'd refused. He didn't need the money so he suggested Finley could donate whatever sum he saw fit to the church. Besides, he'd been going to a gym since puberty hit so his body craved the workout. Glimpsing Peyton during the day was just a juicy bonus. They had the opportunity to spend breaks together and an occasional moment in the corridor. With every brief encounter, the electric pull between them was hard to quench, but the proximity charged Mat with anticipation for Sunday. During everyday conversations with Peyton, Mat became so familiar he let a Polish word slip here and there. He'd used the language during their scene as well but he avoided it with anyone else on the island. Since Poles were known for their devout Catholicism, Mat's heritage wouldn't necessarily give him away but it was better not to draw attention to it.

That night they'd spent together had reached the intensity he'd craved so much in his life before the cassock. Before he took someone's life...

It had also been the first night Mat had slept through without being startled awake by his nightmares. Even living next to his powerful uncle and seeing the worst in people hadn't prepared him for killing. He'd witnessed victims of domestic abuse, overdose, and knife and gun violence seeking help and shelter from Szeff Kwiatkowski. Or maybe it was that cruelty, then being on the giving side of it, that made the thought of holding a gun now an impossibility for Mat.

Being completely uprooted from his home helped him dissociate from that life, and trying to perform as a priest and a part of a new community created a bubble in which he could hide. Peyton added a much-needed splash of colour to it. Meeting him at the distillery the day after their scene had been a shock he hadn't expected, but welcomed nonetheless. That first shift they'd spent together had gone by with Peyton showing Mat simple tasks as they chatted about random things with ease. The following four days Peyton had spent mostly at the office taking care of the distillery's finances but he'd met Mat for lunch. With other workers in the breakroom, they'd stuck to chatting about the distillery and casual topics.

Mat hadn't asked many questions, not wanting to give anyone reasons to ask him about his personal life either. Peyton was just as quiet about his, which was fine, but it also made Mat wonder if Peyton wasn't hiding something. Or maybe he just wanted a peaceful life on a secluded island? Whatever it was, Mat wouldn't press for answers. He'd simply enjoy how well they vibed together.

The sexual tension crackling between them paved the way for tentative friendship. However, Mat had to be careful not to dive too deep into a relationship that he'd not only have to keep secret, but one he'd be leaving behind once the opportunity to return to his former life arose. Maintaining a suitable distance was the right course. He would have to make it clear to Peyton too. So much had changed since their first encounter—Mat wasn't sure if Peyton would still come on Sunday without a new invitation.

They hadn't had a chance to talk about their memorable night for fear of someone overhearing them. Mat's cock stirred at the very idea of Peyton visiting him again, but his head hurt at the mere thought of how complicated it had all become. Could he trust Peyton? He was new in town and no one knew him well enough to vouch for him, except Finley. But Mat didn't know him either. It wouldn't be the first time thinking with his cock landed him in trouble, but it had never been as risky as now.

He put the kettle on in the break room and, just as the water finished boiling, the door swung open. In barged the distillery's rowdy bunch, led by Lewis and Oliver.

"Tea? Oh, that's perfect." Lewis zoned in on the pot Mat was filling.

"Oi, I thought we were all going to The Malted Barley for a drink," said Oliver, though he grabbed a mug nonetheless..

"Yeah, tea first and then we'll go."

“Will Father join us at the pub?” Lewis looked up as he was pouring, overfilled his mug, and hissed as hot tea dripped on his hand. “I’m OK!” He stepped back to grab a paper towel as he continued talking. “It’s a Friday tradition, it would be very unholy to say no.” Lewis grinned, then grunted when Oliver elbowed him in the ribs.

Mat chuckled. “If you put it that way, then I have to come.”

He looked at Peyton who was tossing his backpack over his shoulder, his gaze lingering on Mat just a tad longer than necessary.

“I’ll meet you there,” Peyton said on his way out.

A three-minute walk from the distillery brought them to an old pub and inn with a mid-1600 date above the door. It was in surprisingly good shape for its age, with a well-kept garden in front and several wooden tables outside.

Walking with Finley and the other people from work, Mat felt the ease of friendship and camaraderie for the first time since his arrival on the island. He wasn’t just a priest anymore. Not to these guys.

Which meant he had to be even more vigilant not to slip into being his old self.

The bar smelt of old wood and cigarettes, nothing like the upscale clubs Mat frequented in London. Despite that, the cosy, nearly domestic atmosphere and the dimmed lighting made Mat relax. The psychedelic 70s music only added to the

time-travel feel with stained oak tables and a bar spanning the length of the place.

“Come on, Father. Care for a dram?” Lewis asked, sliding onto a bar stool just as Peyton entered through a door to the side, dressed in fresh clothes.

The rest of the guys followed and Mat found himself sitting between them to his left and Peyton to his right.

“Yes. I’d have the local speciality.”

“Awesome. My sister will be shocked to see you.” Lewis grinned. “Grace! We’re home!” he yelled. “And we brought someone new!”

A handsome couple walked through the kitchen door, mid-conversation. Mat assumed they were together from the way they looked at each other with adoration.

“God I can’t believe how fast this beard has grown,” the tiny blond woman said to her partner, patting his cheek.

“I know right? So glad I’m back on the T again.” He smiled then kissed her forehead. He was broad-shouldered and taller than her at probably Mat’s height of 5’10”.

The train of thought led him to remember how much taller Peyton was than him and how easily he knelt to let Mat tower over him.

“Father, this is my sister Grace and her husband Ryan,” Owen said, bringing Mat back from his musings. “They own this place.”

“Oh, Father Mat, our little brother has been raving about you.” Grace cocked her hip as she wiped the countertop with a cloth she was holding. “He told me you’re their coach now. How did that happen?”

“The boys asked me to join the game but I didn’t want to lose my teeth running in the cassock,” Mat said, accepting the dram Ryan slid into his hand before he poured glasses for the rest of the company. “Since I played a lot with friends when I was young and I love football, I gave them some tips.”

He’d split the group of ten in half to make two teams for the games. The time spent in fresh air put a new drop of excitement in his afternoons following work at the distillery. That still left him with plenty of hours to prepare for Sundays, a christening, and a charity sale.

“The Running Angels are fantastic.” Mat grinned as his coworkers whooped in unison. Mat had named them to honour their field and he figured it had a nice ring to it. As he sipped his Scotch, he talked about how the team perfected making the sign of the cross before penalty shots and how helpful most of them had been during preparation for the mass. “Next week they volunteered to help with the charity bake sale Mary came up with and we’re planning to—”

A loud bang echoed in the pub.

Mat froze.

His vision grew hazy as his breathing quickened. It was cold. He looked down at his hands to see them covered with blood. Drip, drip, drip, the crimson drops fell on his cassock,

burning holes in it to reveal his designer trousers and loafers. The ones he wore on the day he'd saved Jack.

“Father Mat? You OK?”

The sound of pub chatter whooshed back to Mat and he turned to the side to see Peyton's worried expression. His warm hand rested on Mat's forearm, grounding him.

Mat glanced at his hands again. They were clean but shaking, so he clutched the whisky glass and offered Peyton a smile. “Of course, I just... remembered something about the cupcakes.”

“Right.” Peyton's expression said that he didn't believe Mat in the slightest.

“Oi, you boys better behave in my pub!” Grace shouted, turning the place quiet with the exception of music.

Mat followed her line of vision and saw a group of young men in expensive clothes that had just barged inside. The door was still open and Mat realised that must have been the bang that had startled him. The fragility of his reaction frustrated him and scared him at once. He was stronger than that. He had to be.

He didn't know any of the newcomers, but he could recognise tailored suits from a mile away as that had been his chosen attire for all of his adult life.

Granted, he wasn't familiar with every single person on the island but he was sure he would have noticed this stand-out

bunch. He glanced at his co-workers, and none of them looked like they knew them either.

“No problem,” one of the men said in a thick Irish accent.

“Yeah, we’ll behave,” the one next to him yelled, fishing out his wallet. “Five whiskeys.” He slapped a gold credit card on the bar, looking up at Ryan. “Please.”

The men locked gazes and Ryan leaned forward to say something that only the newcomer could hear. The Irish boy nodded then waved for his companions so they could take the remaining stools by the bar.

“What brings you to the island?” Owen asked the new guy who sat next to him. “I’m Owen, by the way, and this is Peyton, Father Mat, Lewis, Finley, and Burt.”

“I’m Nick. We’re here for some well-earned holiday,” the young man said, rolling his “Rs.”

“Yeah, just some time off,” the other one added. “I’m Frank.” He waved to the others by the bar. “We’re staying upstairs at the inn.”

The rest of their party nodded, chuckling as they ordered their drinks. “Not a word about the shipment,” one of them whispered.

“Shut up, you knob.” Frank smacked him on the arm and looked around. His eyes landed on Mat and he smiled nervously before returning to his drink.

Despite their promise of behaving, half of them talked excitedly about a party they’d attended where something had

gone wrong, while the other half tried to shush them.

Mat recognised rookie criminal behaviour when he saw it. They were all too new not to get excited about being on the inside and unable to stop talking about whatever they had done or seen. He'd been like them once when he and Jack were teenagers starting to do Uncle's bidding. Only now did Mat realise how much he had to reroute every aspect of his behaviour since his arrival on the island. He'd been forcing himself to smile at everyone, rethink every comment, and swallow back all curse words.

Working for Uncle had never required him to be nice. Polite enough to do business, yes, but not nice. Watching the newcomers filled Mat with a sense of longing as well as fear of his old life being out of reach.

One of the Irish banged a fist on the bar making Mat flinch. Instantly, he hated his reaction, only now realising how peaceful his time on the island had been until today. The contrast between his life in London to the one here hit him hard with people so similar to his old group of friends in front of his eyes. Now they seemed so detached from who he'd become. Even if it was temporary...

Frank was wearing a signet ring similar to ones Mat had seen on heirs to mafia bosses or influential businessmen who straddled the thin line of what was lawful. Nick was scratching his cuticles so intensely they bled, leaving crimson smudges on the table. When he rolled his sleeves, black letters of a tattoo peaked out spelling *Omertà*—an Italian word for code

of silence. Irish rookie Mafiosi at their best. They probably had a book club where they only discussed *The Godfather*.

Trying not to stare at the newcomers, he vaguely recorded what his co-workers were talking about and nodded at what he hoped were the appropriate moments. He inhaled the sharp, woodsy scent of whisky and looked into the honey-coloured liquid as if the ice cubes swirling in it would soothe him. They didn't.

When another round of drinks arrived, the pressure on his bladder forced him to excuse himself to go to the bathroom. He fiddled impatiently with the buttons of his cassock to pull out his penis.

A creak of the door hinges announced an arrival, the tiled room filling with noise from the pub before it grew quiet again bar the groan Mat let out as he relieved himself into the urinal.

“You sound hot even in a dirty bathroom.”

Mat stiffened for a second before his brain recognised the voice.

He shook the last drops and buttoned up before he turned to Peyton. “Someone could hear you.”

“They'd just think I'm drunk. Everyone else is.” Peyton cocked the hip his hand rested on, showing a sliver of skin where his t-shirt rode up.

A tantalising view of a spot Mat had the urge to lick. Right now. Instead, he pumped soap on his hands and hoped the freezing water would cool him down.

“Maybe.” Mat’s eyes travelled from Peyton’s hip and up his lean chest to his face. God, he wanted those lips around his thickening erection so much.

“You sat there, tempting as all sins and just sipped whisky.” Peyton motioned to the entirety of Mat. “You gave me blue balls, Father.”

“Shhh.” Mat glanced towards the three stalls, all of which were empty.

“I want to suck your cock right now,” Peyton whispered, his high cheekbones making him look regal even in the poor lighting. “But I know we need to be careful.”

“Fuck,” Mat spat and took a step forward, clamped a hand over Peyton’s mouth, and pinned him to the wall with his body. Even being a head shorter than Peyton, Mat relished how the man went pliant under his touch. “I want that too. *Boże Świąty*, I’m fucked.” He gazed into the dark pools of Peyton’s eyes as they shone with lust. “My Sunday offer stands.”

Peyton’s eyes fluttered closed and he moaned under Mat’s hand, rolling his hips.

Mat glanced down to see the bulge in Peyton’s jeans and wished he could stroke it. At this point, the need to make Peyton writhe in pleasure on his cock bordered on desperation.

“Come to my room at nine as my Lamb and I will take care of you,” Mat breathed and let go of Peyton’s mouth.

“Yes, Father,” came a whisper filled with carnal hunger.

“Now, let’s pretend I don’t want to fuck you raw in front of all the people out there.”

Before he opened the door to step out, he heard Peyton groan as he stayed behind.



Sunday? What was he thinking? He should have invited Peyton to the priory straight from the pub. Now he was horny, buzzed, and alone in his bed.

Then again, he’d always refused to play when he had more than one drink and never catered to drunk subs either. He swore under his breath. How fucked up was he to follow those rules but break his promise not to draw attention to himself? Uncle had told him to trust his gut and he had a good feeling about Peyton, but he’d been wrong before.

Their tentative relationship was a ticking bomb—ready to explode and take them both down.

But Mat was too weak not to accept Peyton’s body when he was giving it so freely.

He tossed his duvet aside in frustration. Taking away the warmth only cooled his skin—it did nothing to flag his erection. He’d done it all to himself.

And he had to solve his problem on his lonesome too.

He spit on his palm and shoved his boxers down to fist his cock. A groan left his lips at the sliver of relief the first stroke brought. Sliding his foreskin, he revealed the head already

glistening with precome. Peyton's lips around it, licking and swirling would feel amazing. Or better yet... Peyton's long, lean cock gliding into Mat as he jerked just like he was now.

He rarely bottomed, but the idea of Peyton's dick inside him made his hole twitch. An image materialised in his mind of Peyton tied to the bed with rope, nipple clamps on, his cock up and ready for Mat to ride. He would look gorgeous, bound and waiting, maybe with a vibe up his ass to make him squirm even before Mat sat on him. Or maybe he'd fill himself with a toy and drill into Peyton until they both screamed their release. So many possibilities.

With a groan of frustration, Mat arched off the bed as he squeezed his cock. He needed Peyton, his body, his submission, his mere presence.

But he also craved fullness. Now. He looked around despite knowing damn well that he didn't have a dildo handy. "Fucking Christ," he mumbled, looking at the ceiling.

His eyes landed on the cross right behind him on the wall above the bed. It was carved with ornamental swirls with each end polished and rounded, shining as if wanting to be used.

He couldn't.

This was crazy.

His gaze shot to the colourful box of latex-free condoms in the corner. *Thanks, Mary.*

Jumping off the bed, he grabbed one and tore it open to release an artificial blueberry smell. The tinge would make his

knob look like a smurf but he had a different idea for it anyway.

His hardon swung side to side as he walked back to take the holy artefact off the wall. He pulled the condom on the longest part of it, encompassing the bottom of the wooden cross along with Jesus's legs.

If hell was real, this was only a mere addition to the ticket he already held.

A quick reach to the bedside earned him a small bottle of olive oil. It was the only lube-adjacent thing he could buy without raising suspicions on the island. He couldn't just go to Kinks-R-Us and get himself a prostate massager, lube, and a fleshjack. Wouldn't that be nice? Today, he had to make do with what he had. But on Sunday, he would bask in the freedom to touch the most magnificent man. He had a feeling that even if Peyton would just lay next to him, it would be more satisfying than a lonely wank.

Back on the bed, he braced his heels on the mattress, spreading his knees. Without a care for the sheets, he dripped the oil on his cock and relished the feel of it inching down to his balls and crack. He reached between his legs and pressed on his pucker, missing the sleek vibrating plug he had in his bedside table drawer at his flat. His index finger slid in but he had to breathe and relax before he fit in the middle one, stretching his hole open.

Even if he rarely had a cock up his ass, he liked being stuffed when he wanked. Playing with his fingers inside was

fuelling him up but that was never enough. He pulled out and, stroking his cock with one hand, guided the cross in with the other.

He didn't stifle the groan that tore out of his mouth when the wooden artefact slid into him. It wasn't flexible like a dildo or a real cock but the very blasphemous nature of it made Mat roll his hips. He gripped the crux of the three shorter sides, trying to hold the end of the condom in his slippery hand in the meantime. All that manoeuvring didn't prevent him from enjoying the stretch.

Fucking Christ just gained a new meaning.

A giggle spilt out of him as he sped his strokes, fucking himself on the cross, rolling his hips.

He closed his eyes and imagined he was ordering Peyton to do this to him, to fuck him with a toy, a cross, anything. Maybe he'd make his Lamb hold it in his teeth as his hands were bound behind his back.

With a shout of ecstasy, Mat came with Peyton's name on his lips and a cross up his ass.

Chapter Seven

Mat

Mat stared at the missal opened before him atop the altar, barely able to focus on the wordsbook. Looking up to the gathered parishioners, his gaze immediately locked on Peyton's, the zing between them palpable even over the distance of the church's chapel. The hammering of his heart betrayed how urgently he craved having Peyton naked and at his mercy in mere hours. Hopefully, the tight briefs he wore would keep his semi tamed for the duration of the sermon.

By the time he finished, he had cooled down enough to say his goodbyes to the parishioners, with several of them lingering by the door to seek advice about their struggles. Peyton was not amongst them. He never had been, so that wasn't unusual.

After the church was nearly empty, Mat retrieved his honey water from the sacristy and took a seat in the confessional.

The first Sunday no one had approached his confessional, but by now, he had a steady stream of parishioners who came to him after every mass. First in line, as always, was Mrs Byrne, confessing her anger at her husband and asking for forgiveness. He'd died two years prior, but she was stuck in a cycle of anger, furious at him for drinking himself to death and leaving her alone. Mat absolved her of her sins and encouraged her to take part in the baking extravaganza Mary was organising the following Saturday. Mrs Byrne left with

her spirits lifted somewhat, but she was sure to return after the next mass.

An elderly man who kept lying to his wife was the next penitent. He was allergic to her cat but didn't have the heart to tell her. Several more people asked for absolution, from parents who confessed to yelling at their kids, to teenagers who had been acting out at school.

Like every week, Mat listened to two older ladies who disclosed the same things they always had: from taking the Lord's name in vain while baking to wishing the neighbour's flowers would die. Mat sipped his water, nodding with patience, but his body yearned to leave, to check if he would find the same surprise he'd found the week prior.

When silence fell in the church, one more person entered the confessional. At first they remained quiet and Mat thought it might be Peyton pulling his leg, but the scent of the cologne on the other side of the latticed opening was starkly different.

“Forgive me Father, for I have sinned...”

The moment he spoke, Mat knew it was one of the Irish boys who'd come for their “holiday” on the island. Nick, yeah, that was his name.

“I... Father,” he hesitated then swallowed loudly, his nerves unmistakable even through the partition. “You can't tell anyone what I say, right? Whatever it is. You're sworn to it.”

“Yes, I am,” Mat lied through his teeth. He wasn't a real priest, he swore no such thing. But he made a promise to

himself now that unless it was a serious crime about to happen which he could still prevent, he would not reveal this man's secret.

“I can't sleep at night but I have a good reason.” Nick released a ragged breath before he continued. “I see his face. The wide, wet eyes of the man—the *boy*—I killed. It was an accident. Well, sort of, but I had to do it. It was me or him and he was a—” His voice broke as he sniffled. “He was so young.”

Nick shuffled in the confessional and Mat half expected him to bolt but he stayed put. The anguish in his tone and the reason behind it hit Mat square in the chest. He knew exactly how Nick felt, and the inability to tell him that was infuriating.

“I'm not looking for forgiveness, for absolution, or whatever, but I just had to say it. I had to—”

Nick fell quiet, only tiny sobs shook his body on the other side. Mat wanted to ask him about the man. Was he from the Irish cartel? Was it self-defence? Was that why Nick and his buddies were hiding on the island? He couldn't ask any of those questions, just as he couldn't console him in any meaningful way. But he had to do something.

Reaching into the bag of 'what would a real Priest do' tricks he'd been pondering since he'd landed in a cassock, he leaned over.

“The Lord sees the purity of your soul and the pain you carry for what you did. He will judge you with mercy when the time comes and know your circumstances and reasons for

your actions. As your penance, I won't tell you to say ten Hail Marys, although praying won't hurt. But you can focus on how to make someone else's life better for the life you took, to balance your sins with good deeds."

A loud sniff came from Nick. "That—" His voice hitched and he cleared his throat before he tried again. "That actually helps." He sounded surprised. That made two of them. "Thank you, Father."

Mat nodded and imparted absolution with the words he'd said to every other penitent today:

"God, the Father of mercies, through the death and resurrection of his Son has reconciled the world to himself and poured out the Holy Spirit for the forgiveness of sins; through the ministry of the Church may God grant you pardon and peace, and I absolve you from your sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son..." Mat made the sign of the cross as he spoke the words "...and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Amen," Nick whispered and scrambled to his feet.

"Go in peace."

The door on the other side opened and closed, leaving Mat alone with his thoughts, Nick's confession, and the advice he'd given. Was that what he'd been doing here, subconsciously? Trying to help people to make up for his deeds? Pouring all his energy into smiling, listening to everyone who needed an ear, helping at the distillery, coaching the football team...

Helping gave him something to do, but if he thought about it, it also brought him a sense of accomplishment, if not happiness. Despite that, he was still trapped and gnawing at the cage that kept him safe. He'd found a semblance of peace on the island, but the life of a priest wasn't for him. Was his old one? He wasn't sure anymore.

If he sat back and looked at his behaviour as Father Mat, he wouldn't recognise Mateusz, the party freak, the gym rat, the bodyguard. Only the sex-craving dominant part of him remained, heightened by Peyton's presence.

There used to be no quenching of his rampant desire, no matter how many subs he went through. But now... there was only one man who could fulfil his needs.

Chapter Eight

Mat

The moment Mat entered the house, he knew Peyton was already waiting for him. The musky but light scent of Peyton's cologne lingered in the air, and the door to Mat's room was open, the milky bedside lamp illumination streaming into the corridor. The tattoo of Mat's heart drummed in his ears at the knowledge that after a long week, the wait to touch Peyton again was over.

With a hand on the knob, Mat released a slow breath before he stepped into the room, locking the door behind himself.

Peyton was a statue carved in marble in the undeserving museum of Mat's room, on his knees on the rug, hands on his lap, palms up. His bowed head sent his slightly-damp dark curls falling over his forehead, obscuring the eyes Mat wanted to get lost in.

The sight itself nearly made Mat stumble as a wave of arousal struck him. Peyton's chin was clean-shaven and his body hairless, bar a short thatch of hair above his cock. He was perfectly pristine and ready for Mat, making him wonder what other areas had received the same attention. Maybe he'd have the privilege to check tonight.

Mat forced himself to look away to make sure the room was ready for them, from the dim light, drawn curtains, to the items he'd laid out on the lid of the massive chest before leaving for mass. He took in the meticulously arranged artefacts: the prayer book, candles, the discipline, a long stole,

the chalice Mat had used the week prior, a sturdy wooden cross, a rosary, and a length of folded rope. He'd been indecisive regarding what to use for the scene. Until now. The moment he'd been hit with the sight of the man kneeling in the middle of his room, offering himself up so beautifully, Mat knew what he wanted to do.

“Oh, my Lamb,” Mat breathed, returning to the headspace of their roleplay. This wasn't Peyton, his friend from the distillery. This was his parishioner who needed punishment and release.

Peyton remained unmoved.

“I missed you.” The words left Mat's mouth before he was able to consider their consequences. He was getting attached too fast.

“That makes this Lamb very happy, Father,” Peyton said, his baritone filling the room, slithering under Mat's skin like a snake tempting him to reach for what was forbidden. “I need my penance.” Peyton's half-hard cock, laying heavy between his parted thighs, twitched at the words.

He was superb in his role, and his low tone and more formal wording helped Mat get into proper scene headspace. A smile bloomed on Mat's face and he made his way to the chest, picking one item from the top of it.

“Cross your wrists behind your back,” Mat ordered and Peyton complied immediately. “Do you remember your safeword?”

“Yes, Father. It’s Pontius Pilate.”

“Do you promise to use it or the traffic lights system? You can’t please me if you feel the bad kind of pain. I want to know about it.”

“Yes, Father, I promise.”

“Good.”

The rosary swinging from Mat’s hand was sturdy, with smooth wooden beads connected by a thick string. He knelt, placed it under Peyton’s wrists and wrapped it around them, the beads clattering against each other softly as Mat tightened the knot. Peyton was a tall man with a healthy layer of muscle that adorned his lean frame, and he could break the tie if he put his strength to it. But that was not the point. It was not the bindings that were important but the submission itself. Just as orgasm was not the objective, the play itself was.

“Practise the virtue of patience and wait for me.” Mat couldn’t help himself and placed a kiss between Peyton’s shoulder blades, then one more on the side of his neck. His lips lingered for a second over the silky skin as he inhaled the delicate scents of his cologne and the shampoo wafting from his hair. The combination evoked a thought of a picnic in a forest with a bottle of well-aged whisky, possibly with Peyton on his lap. After one last peck on Peyton’s shoulder, he finally forced himself to stand up.

Mat took his time in the shower, torturing himself as well as Peyton with the building anticipation. Stepping out, he let the water slide off his body and onto the floor as he re-entered the

bedroom dressed in just a delicate gold necklace with a cross. Gooseflesh rose on his skin—not just from the chill, but also at the sight of Peyton, kneeling in the same pose Mat had left him. *Perfect.*

His cassock lay prepared on the shelf and he let it cover his body like the armour it was, buttoning only the top buttons, leaving the bottom open. Taking the rope from the chest, he knelt in front of the man whose body and willingness to submit were so alluring, Mat knew he was ruined for the rest of his life, never able to find anyone like Peyton.

It had been months since he'd practised shibari, but his hands remembered the art of bondage with near muscle-memory precision. He stood in front of Peyton, lifting his chin with a finger until their gazes met. There was no hesitation in the sub's eyes but fiery lust, contrasting with his perfectly submissive pose.

Mat knelt and placed a palm over Peyton's heart, feeling its beating accelerate the moment he teased the frayed end of the rope along his lover's collarbone. It could have meant he was afraid or reluctant, but his face told a different story. Peyton's eyes drifted halfway closed as he released a long breath before he opened them again. His gaze hit Mat with its intensity, full of lust and fire, but his body remained unmoved, ready for instructions. A rush Mat hadn't felt in a long while, if ever, tingled over his skin like tiny droplets of rain in the summer, raising the hairs on his arms in their wake.

With slow, deliberate movements, Mat formed loops and threaded the rope through, creating pathways that wove over Peyton's chest. Each whisper of the jute as it slid between his fingers and against another thread was music. Mat felt like a composer, creating a masterpiece; the rope his bow, Peyton his instrument—a breathing, wanting instrument, willingly waiting to be played. Peyton released tiny, approving moans each time the rope tightened against his skin, an intricate network forming over his upper body. Mat manoeuvred around the man, his knees sore from shifting on the rug, the pain helping him focus on his task. Peyton's breath remained steady throughout the process.

Standing behind Peyton in his cassock, Mat was the embodiment of his role as a priest, and wondered if actors felt the way he did—so utterly consumed, he could almost believe it was real. Reaching around, he gently caressed Peyton's smooth chin. In his other hand, he held the leftover rope springing from the knots at Peyton's mid-back, and he knew that pulling it wouldn't tighten the bonds he'd made.

They had no time to exercise all of Mat's fantasies in one night, or even if they'd had a year, but he allowed himself to daydream. The web he'd created over Peyton's chest could work as a harness and he conjured an image of leading a crawling Peyton. Peyton would do it if asked, and the very notion was enough for Mat. A humbling sense of power coursed through him at the thought.

Letting the jute slide from his hand to the floor, he walked around to place his bare feet in front of Peyton's knees, his

half-open cassock swaying. Dear God in Heaven, the man was gorgeous, from his thighs, his rope-bound chest, to his mop of curls. But Mat needed to see his regal face—glimpse the heat rolling under the still waters of submission.

“Look at me,” Mat commanded, his voice an octave lower than usual. Peyton obeyed, lifting his chin, stretching his long neck to gaze up.

When Mat’s hand wrapped around Peyton’s throat, the man shuddered visibly, his eyes fluttering closed as a soft moan left his lips. Mat’s hand rested there only lightly, just enough to feel Peyton’s heartbeat. With his bare toes, he nudged his lover’s balls, tight and close to his body, right under his heavy erection.

“You may come only when I tell you. Understood?”

“Yes, Father,” Peyton said, his voice straining, his twinkling, worshipful eyes still on Mat’s.

Mat lifted his foot and put it over Peyton’s cock, making its head graze the rough rug the penitent was kneeling on. Peyton’s moan was loud and long, and Mat pressed his cock harder while increasing the pressure on the man’s throat. He could feel his Adam’s apple bob under his grip as Peyton swallowed. It was exhilarating.

“You are so beautiful in your penance.” With his free hand, Mat reached between the folds of his cassock to stroke his own hardon, stifling a groan at the release he needed but didn’t want just yet.

Peyton's eyes wavered, glancing at Mat's cock then back up. He swallowed again.

"Look what you've done to me," Mat said.

Peyton did, his lips parting, as his gaze followed the lazy strokes of Mat's hand.

"You made me crave you. With your voice, your body, and your eagerness to repent." *With your wanting me as much as I want you.* "How am I supposed to live without knowing how your lips taste against mine? How your hole feels under my tongue? How your arse clenches around my cock?" Mat said too much but he had no regrets. They understood each other on a nearly subconscious level, reading each other's needs and wanting to fulfil them. It was... magical.

"For... forgive me," Peyton whispered.

"I can't." Mat shook his head. "It's not your fault. It's mine. I can't resist you."

"Then use me. I need my penance but I want to... let me please you, Father." Peyton's eyes darted to Mat's cock again. "Please."

"I will use you, but first I need to know your deepest desires."

"That would be too much, and it is for Father to decide what to do with me. I want what Father wants."

There was a vulnerability in Peyton's voice that Mat couldn't place, and the man didn't give him time to ponder as he slid his tongue over his bottom lip, distracting Mat.

“Good.” *Bloody fucking hell.* “Then you will suck my cock.”

“Yes, please.”

Peyton was a sinner ready to take communion, his gaze directed upward, his lips parted, but his eyes full of fire.

The head of Mat’s cock fit perfectly on Peyton’s awaiting tongue.

“You’re so eager, my Lamb.”

Peyton nodded slightly, his tongue gliding over the thick knob before he closed his lips over it. Mat groaned, knowing he had to savour every second because he wouldn’t last long. Not when the exquisite warmth of Peyton’s mouth enveloped his cock, not when he looked at Mat as if he was giving Peyton the most precious gift, when, in fact, it was the other way around.

Rocking his hips, Mat inched further, observing his Lamb’s expression for signs of discomfort. There were none. Mat’s hand moved to cup Peyton’s cheek but kept his thumb on his lover’s thrumming pulse. He could feel his throat expanding, taking his cock in deep.

Peyton’s moan vibrated through Mat’s erection. He bit his lip, tasting blood, as he saw Peyton’s dick leak precome onto the rug. Mat had never experienced anything so mutual, so equally arousing, as seeing Peyton’s need as strong as his own.

Peyton sucked harder, and Mat knew he didn’t want to hold on anymore. He gripped Peyton tight by the nape, fingers

sinking into curls, as he fucked his Lamb's mouth mercilessly, watching his adoring eyes fill with tears. Their moans grew louder, uniting in a lascivious song, as Mat's body felt aflame at the stake for his heresy, blasphemy, and lies. Good. He was more than willing to burn for this man.

Then Peyton swallowed around Mat's cock, still deep in his throat, and Mat was done. With his few lingering remnants of coherent thought, he pulled away, even when Peyton's sucking intensified, giving him the signal to come into his mouth.

No.

Mat cried out from the intensity of the release and aimed for Peyton's opened, waiting mouth. His cock kicking in his hand, he shot on his lover's face, neck, and rope-bound chest. He could come again from the sight alone if he had it in him, especially when Peyton's tongue darted out to lick whatever ejaculate he could reach around his lips.

"Gorgeous," Mat breathed. "Perfect little Lamb." He knelt to cup Peyton's cheek, gathering the come there. Peyton turned his head to capture Mat's fingers, licking, swirling his tongue, cleaning them thoroughly. A strangled sound left Mat and he retrieved his hand to lick Peyton's saliva off it. It wasn't a kiss, but as close to it as Mat dared without losing himself in a man he couldn't have and wanting things from him he had no right to ask for.

Mat traced a finger over the ropes crossing Peyton's chest, straying to graze a pierced nipple. The moment he noticed a

drop of his come on it, he dipped his head to suck it, the bud hard on his mouth, the steel piercing warm against his tongue.

Peyton sucked in a breath, arching his chest.

Mat let go only to roll both nipples in his fingers as he licked his lips. “Tell me what thoughts you had of me.”

Peyton didn’t waver, even if his face pinkened, more from arousal than shame, Mat assumed.

“I imagined your hands spreading my thighs to fuck me, your fingertips leaving bruises I could wear like a badge of pride. I thought of you putting me over your knee to deliver penance and leave marks in the shape of your hand on my ass cheeks. I thought of you fingering me until I came, soiling your sacred clothes.” Peyton paused, air leaving him in short puffs of air. “That was just this morning... but there’s more.”

Mat placed a finger on Peyton’s lips to stop him. It was enough. It was nearly too much.

“I will touch you now.”

“Please, Father.” It was a low growl. The begging of a man consumed by lust.

Mat gathered the remaining come from Peyton’s neck and chest, then wrapped his slick hand around the man’s cock. Peyton watched, his hips unmoving even as his abdominal muscles trembled with the clear need to thrust.

“Look at me.” Mat squeezed his hand and Peyton’s head snapped up, his hazy gaze meeting Mat’s. “What do you have to say to me?”

“Forgive me, Father.”

“For what?”

“Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned. Forgive me for touching myself to the thought of you.”

“And?”

“And for wanting you to touch me. For imagining your fingers inside me, your cock inside me. For wishing you would punish me with your hands, your body, and your words. For hoping you would slide your cock between my lips so far my eyes would water. For praying you’d fuck me so hard I’d drown in my own sobs while begging you for more.”

Oh, dear Lord in heaven.

Mat pumped Peyton’s dick harder, faster until the man’s thighs quivered.

“You ask for penance. But do you truly regret your sins?”

Peyton’s eyes blew wide, his lips opening and closing with indecision.

“Answer correctly and I’ll let you come, *piękna owieczko moja.*” *My beautiful lamb.*

A sob left Peyton before he moaned again, thrusting into Mat’s hand.

“Do you regret your actions and impure thoughts?”

“No, Father.” The words left him in a whine, tears filling his eyes.

“Good.” Mat breathed and saw the relief on Peyton’s face.

Retaining a fierce grip on Peyton's cock, Mat flicked his nipple with the fingers of the other hand, then twisted it, watching his lover's back arch, and his chest strain against the ropes.

Leaning close, he could feel Peyton's breath as it left him in ragged puffs and whispered: "Come, my Lamb."

Peyton let out a cry of ecstasy as he spasmed. The muscles in his entire body strained as hot spurts of semen landed on the rug, on Mat's lap, and his hand.

Like a marionette with its strings cut, Peyton collapsed into Mat's arms.

His strong, lithe body was in need of comfort, his ragged breathing slowing down as a drop of sweat rolled down his spine. "Come here, my beautiful Lamb." Mat pulled him close, soothing his back with languid strokes before he started loosening the knots there. The ropes fell from Peyton's frame like a silk ball gown, exposing porcelain skin marked with intricate rope grooves. Mat placed his lips over the marks on Peyton's shoulder, holding the kiss, inhaling Peyton's scent, tasting the thin sheen of sweat on his soft skin. He wanted to kiss every inch of the marks and, to be honest, every inch of Peyton.

With Peyton's face snuggled into the crook of his shoulder, Mat was able to reach to unwind the rosary that was still holding Peyton's wrists together. He tossed it aside and relished how Peyton's hands immediately wrapped around his waist.

As if in unison, they shivered, the heat of the sex leaving their bodies.

“Come to bed,” Mat murmured into the locks that tickled his nose as he helped the man get to his feet.

Mat knew he’d crossed a line in their roleplay scene when he guided Peyton to lay in between his sheets, but it felt right. “Don’t move.”

Mat went to the bathroom to grab a washcloth and ran it under the tap. He returned to wipe Peyton’s chest and neck, where remnants of Mat’s smeared release dried, then tossed it onto the puddle of come on the rug. Peyton watched as Mat reached for the holy water he kept in a decorative bottle on the bookshelf above the bed. Uncorking it, he dipped two fingers inside and splashed the man curled between his sheets with it.

“I absolve you of your sins,” he said, watching the drops fall over Peyton, marking him as the treasure he was in Mat’s eyes. With a sound of glass on the wooden shelf, he returned the bottle to its place. “Now, sleep.”

Mat leaned and hovered over the beautiful man, hesitating for a moment. At the end, he followed his instinct and placed a soft kiss on Peyton’s forehead.

“Will you let me come next Sunday?” Peyton sounded hopeful.

Mat paused. He knew he would have to stop whatever they were doing before it went too far, before he would yearn to have Peyton in his bed more often.

He was afraid it might already be too late.

The worst of it was being forced to lie to the man who looked like he belonged in between his sheets. Their indiscretion was risky, even if Mat was not a real priest. More so, in his case. The sharp intelligence in Peyton's eyes made Mat wonder if Peyton suspected he was an impostor.

Right now, Mat didn't care.

"Of course," he whispered. Peyton looked peaceful, as if Mat had alleviated all the demons that had been plaguing him. Mat felt heaviness sink into his chest. This was never going to end well. Not for him and his heart.

Ignoring the negative thoughts, Mat climbed onto the bed and pulled Peyton close, the man's back to his front, wrapping his arms around him, inhaling the scent of sex lingering on his lover's skin, wishing it would be possible for them to fall asleep together every night.

He was about to turn the bedside lamp off when Peyton spoke. "You don't like light reading, do you?"

"Huh?" Mat frowned, brought back from the verge of sleep. He was surprised at Peyton's casual tone, but excited to hear it, wanting to know the man beyond his submission even more.

"I couldn't help but glance at your bookshelf. Apart from the detective novels you mentioned before, it has *Crime and Punishment*, Kafka's *The Trial*, and... *The Godfather*."

"The books were Father Richard's, but I got *The Godfather* once on my birthday from my uncle. A lesson in family

values...” Mat let his voice trail off, as he realised he shouldn’t be mentioning his relatives.

“Of course.” Peyton snorted. “My dad would approve too.”

“I was not big on books as a kid, not counting reading from the bible on Sunday’s mass. But then I got into reading... never mind.”

Mat eased his hold, wanting to face Peyton, who turned around, wordlessly understanding, just like they seemed to have been doing since they’d met. His eyes were far from sleepy, his dark hair falling in stark contrast over the white pillow.

“Tell me.” The corner of Peyton’s lips quirked.

At that moment, he was not Mat’s parishioner, he was not a man seeking penance or sexual gratification. He was a man sharing Mat’s bed and a late-evening chat. A friend. A smile of ease and comfort spread on Mat’s face.

“I liked Stephen King’s books when I was a teenager, before —” he stopped himself before he mentioned clubbing, parties and orgies. “I used to love the feel of a battered paperback in my hands.” They had brought him solace after his parents’ death. He’d stay alone in his room, reading horrors far worse than what he and his parents had gone through, helping him make peace with what had happened.

Peyton’s eyes were inquisitive and Mat worried that he’d ask about scripture reading or training to be a priest and he’d have to lie.

“You like classics, horror, and... the attention of other men,” Peyton drawled, lifting an eyebrow.

Mat chuckled with relief. “You could say that.”

“Have you read *The Picture of Dorian Gray*?”

“I know of it, but I never read it, no.”

“You should.” Peyton’s deep voice rumbled and Mat could feel it nearly as a caress.

“Maybe you can read it to me.”

Peyton’s expression changed and Mat’s breath hitched at the little flames burning in those mesmerising eyes.

“One moment.” Peyton slid from under the covers to retrieve his phone, hidden between his neatly-folded clothes on the chair in the corner of the room. “I have my library with me.” Peyton returned to the bed and tapped his phone, illuminating his face. “Would you like me to read to you, Father?”

Mat groaned. *That voice.*

“Yes, my Lamb.” He reached to dance his fingers over Peyton’s bare hip as the man thumbed through apps before finding what he was looking for.

“It’s not very romantic... reading from a phone and not a paper book,” Peyton said with a note of regret.

The words struck Mat. *Romantic?* He nearly sputtered but then Peyton continued, his gaze catching Mat’s.

“Then again, I think we both have a somewhat skewed idea of romance... Father.” Peyton’s smile was a full-blown grin this time and Mat melted, unable to stop himself from reaching around to squeeze Peyton’s buttock.

“Go on.”

“The studio was filled with the rich odour of roses...” Peyton started reading and Mat traced his fingers over the man’s hip and up, closing his eyes to listen to the voice that wrapped around him like a warm blanket, giving him a sense of comfort he couldn’t recall ever knowing before that moment.

Mat woke up to an empty bed but he still patted the other side to make sure Peyton was truly gone. His bleary eyes flew open when his hand found a piece of torn paper.

Sitting abruptly, he focused on it.

‘I know everything. Your secret is safe with me. Burn this. P.’

Mat broke out in cold sweat. *What?*

Chapter Nine

Peyton

Something smacked Peyton in the face, startling him awake. It took him a second to realise he was in Mat's bed at the priory and his lover was thrashing next to him. He mumbled and flailed his hands around as if he was pushing someone away.

"Shh, it's just a nightmare." Peyton sat up and attempted to hold Mat's arms down, worry filling his chest.

"I'm sorry." Mat's voice broke in a sob. "You gave me no choice."

The rest was incoherent, possibly Polish. Peyton had recognised the phrases that occasionally slipped into Mat's vocabulary as the language one of his dad's associates spoke—Mat's uncle.

"It's OK, you'll be fine." Peyton wrapped his arms around his lover, struggling to pull him to his chest. Fuck, he was strong. "Mateusz," he said into Mat's ear. As if he'd pushed a magic button, the use of his given name made Mat cease all flailing. "Shhh, you're safe. Everyone's safe."

With a choked whimper, Mat's body calmed... His breath still laboured as if he'd run a marathon and his heart hammered under Peyton's palm. *What happened to you?*

It wasn't the first time Peyton wished he'd been more thoroughly briefed regarding the reasons Mat had been hiding

behind a cassock. Then again, it was hard enough for him to lie with the little information he had.

He waited for Mat to slip into peaceful slumber but couldn't fall back asleep himself. When he reached for his phone, a message from his father lit the screen.

‘A boat will be waiting for you at five a.m. Don't be late.’

It was three in the bloody morning. Fuck.

He wanted to throw the damn phone against the wall.

Instead, he leaned over to kiss Mat's nape before he left the warmth of the bed. He didn't want to see his dad and report on Mat. He'd rather cuddle all night and enjoy a morning with his lover.

Then again, what if Mat didn't want him there in the morning? What if Mary saw him?

Shit. He was so stupid. They both were. Sex-raving mad.

Yet, he couldn't leave without a word. Mat deserved better. So much better than Peyton could ever give him. He turned the glow of his phone screen to the bedside table to locate a pen and a notepad. It had pieces of sermons in it and various notes. It was awe-inspiring how Mat had taken his role as a priest to heart even if none of this was real.

Peyton's lies or careful omissions had been eating at him for weeks, but now he had to tell Mat at least a sliver of his truth. Quietly tearing an edge of a page from the notepad, he scribbled a note.

The man who'd given him the best sex of his life might soon hate him. And yet Peyton didn't regret a second spent with Mat.

Peyton gathered his clothes and padded to the corridor, dressing there to avoid waking Mat. After the turmoil in his sleep, he needed the rest. Not having a lot of time to spare, Peyton ran back to his flat, took a shower and packed necessities into a duffel before going to the port.

Sure enough, a rugged trawler was waiting for him there. The same man who'd brought him to the island several weeks before welcomed him inside with not much more than a grunt. Peyton's dad could afford to send a fancy yacht for him, but that was sure to raise eyebrows on the island even at butt-crack of dawn. Peyton sat on the bench at the back of the tiny wheelhouse and endured the trip with unease eating at his gut.

Maybe leaving that note had been a mistake? But he wasn't sure if he'd be sent back to the island during Mat's stay there. Maybe Peyton's mission was over and he would never return, not undercover. In that case, it was better for Mat to at least know that Peyton was not who he'd said he was and... and what? Hate him for lying? Seek him out? Find him to live together happily ever after?

Peyton snorted to himself at the utter stupidity of his thoughts. He'd read Mat's file. His dick had seen more action than a gay sailor's. Peyton was just one of many. He was conveniently the only one available and willing on the island.

Three hours and a sore ass later, Peyton disembarked to take a ride in the back of the black sedan already waiting for him at the port.

Entering his father's mansion deep in the country always brought mixed memories. The joyful kind from his childhood growing up here, painting nails with his older sister or his first kiss in the orchard with the neighbour's son. Then there were the ones of his parents arguing, plates smashed against kitchen walls, mum leaving with her suitcase packed, tears streaming down her cheeks. They'd never divorced but had lived separately since Peyton was about ten.

Dad's pride and joy was the whisky distillery he'd built from the ground up and turned into a successful business, making many tough decisions along the way.

As the only son, even as a pansy, Peyton was a better successor in his dad's eyes than a daughter who wouldn't pass on their last name and legacy. Medina could name her child anything she wanted these days, but Dad's rules had always been rooted in his mediaeval mindset. What was worse, she wanted Dad's legacy, studying economics and business, as well as knowing everything about running a distillery.

Peyton was content supervising the making process and dealing with accounting, but he'd also perfected fake-smiling in a room of filthy rich sharks and entertaining them in hopes of closing some deal or another. His dad had made him come up with suitable entertainment for said entrepreneurs and that's how the idea for the infamous orgy had been born...

He'd tried to push the concept of him opening a smaller distillery someplace new and running it himself. He'd rather do that than wait to become Dad's right hand, unable to make his own decisions. For now, he wasn't even a fucking pinkie.

The weird-ass timing of his early-hour boat made sense the moment Peyton showered in the bathroom of his old room and saw that it was half to eleven—Father's lunchtime and time when he conducted business.

Unlike most business people, he preferred to deal with smaller matters before noon and leave evenings only for big fish who had to be wined and dined before they were ready to sign anything.

A suit was already waiting on his bed. The cut was gorgeous but it was a boring charcoal grey, daring Peyton to pull out something insanely colourful from the wardrobe instead.

Nevertheless, he donned the soft fabric that fit him nearly perfectly on every curve thanks to Dad's tailor. Pulling on the cuffs, he faced the mirror. He'd always worked on his physique to stay lean but toned. Yet, he had bulked up doing manual labour on and off at Finley's distillery making the suit jacket a smidge tight at the biceps. He shrugged it off and opened the two top buttons of his white shirt, then upturned the trousers and slid his feet into the loafers without socks.

Yeah, he returned to being fourteen and wanting to spite his dad with tiny things while performing his important duties to perfection. His mission had always been to show that his

sparkly and colourful attire wouldn't reflect badly on business. Except he'd never succeeded and he doubted he'd even change Dad's mind. It was still worth trying.

The glass shelves above the sink had Peyton's chosen hair products, cologne, and even his favourite nighttime face cream. Dad's spies knew everything, including what kind of shit he'd kept at his own flat in London. A tiny sanctuary he paid for with the money he'd earned fair and square. He low-key hoped one of the spies broke into his place and saw his collection of dildos and lewd art on the walls, then reported back.

Then again, he'd spent weeks spying on Mat and was about to report back. Thank fuck there was nothing negative to tell. He'd hate to paint Mat in a bad light before his father. Even if he and Mat had no future together beyond the island, he wanted to remain in the illusion they had something special, even if briefly. Their flame burned hot but had been doomed from the start.

With one last look in the mirror, he imagined Mat seeing him like this. Would he like him in a suit? Or would he prefer the casual jeans and t-shirt combo Peyton had been wearing to work? To know how to approach him, Peyton had read Mat's redacted file before he'd gone to the island. From there he'd surmised that Mat grew up in mafia wealth and the pictures showed him in designer or tailored suits, always looking impeccable.

Yet, he was so hot even in a cassock he'd driven Peyton to kneel. Now he wondered if it had been worth having Mat just to lose him after the man returned to his former life. Maybe it might have been easier to have never had him in the first place.

Peyton entered the house's large conservatory, filled with green plants and sun streaming from the glass roof and walls. A tray with tea stood on an antique coffee table and a middle-aged man sat in one of two armchairs facing each other.

Even sitting in the faux garden of Eden, his dad commanded the place. Not with his height or big build but with the calm way of a cobra before it strikes. Peyton was used to it, but he'd seen how the man evoked respect in any room he entered. The one person who rivalled Dad's stare was Szeff Kwiatkowski, Mat's uncle and the only man who was powerful enough to ask dad a favour knowing he couldn't refuse.

So, when Szeff had needed someone to keep an eye on his nephew, Ronan Murphy—Peyton's dad—had been the person to ask. Peyton had heard the news of his impending leave on spy duty when still hungover from some party. He'd gone to forget the major fuckup the orgy from the week before had created. It hadn't worked.

Since Peyton had worked in dad's distillery for years, going to help Finley whose business was a branch of theirs was the best cover he could ask for.

"Sit and report." Dad's booming voice filled the room and, if Peyton didn't know better, he'd think the plants next to him

shivered in fear. The man didn't turn to Peyton, but lifted the pot to pour fresh tea into the second porcelain cup.

No "Hi, how are you, son?" nor "It's nice to see you again." Nope. Not his style.

"Hello to you too, dad." Peyton slid into the seat, tossing his legs over one of the arms of the chair.

The man nodded in greeting.

"I missed you as well," Peyton fake-chirped. "How's mum? No, wait. How's your cat?"

Dad leaned forward aiming a stoic glare at his son. "Tell me about Mateusz."

Right. Mateusz not *Mat*. Definitely not *Father Mat*.

Peyton cleared his throat, repositioning himself on the armchair. "He's doing what he's supposed to. And what you told me to do as well: play the role as convincingly as possible, make friends, don't stand out, and become a part of society. He's helping a few hours a day at the distillery cause he said he's bored. He's a great priest, too. People are loving his sermons and the help he offered to young people like coaching football." He omitted the part that said help also included giving away free condoms. "He even took part in organising a baking competition for the entire island, not just the parish. It's next Saturday."

"I see," Dad said, taking a sip of his tea and waving his free hand. "Did anyone at any point question his presence?"

“Not at all. Not that I could tell. And trust me, I was paying attention.”

Dad’s eyebrows went up. “I can see the look on your face when you talk about him.” He put his cup back on the saucer with a soft clatter. “You didn’t do anything stupid, did you?”

“No,” Peyton’s voice rose high in the octave. Sex with Mat had not been stupid. Well, OK maybe a little, but they were adults for fuck’s sake. “You always have to criticise everything I do, so of course, you’d assume that! Just because I’m gay doesn’t mean—”

“Silence!” Dad boomed. “I hate your foolish sense of style. It’s unprofessional and problematic. As are your parties. But I have never said a word about you being gay.” Dad’s jaw clenched. “Have I?”

Well, shit.

Had he? Peyton raked his mind through all dad’s jabs over the years, at how he dressed, how he sat, how he drew attention to himself, who he spent his time with... He hadn’t explicitly condemned him for his gayness. Only his flamboyance. To Peyton, those were intertwined. But maybe not to dad?

“Jesus, fuck. OK, OK.” Peyton raised his hands in mock surrender, sliding his feet to the ground. “No need to get so defensive.”

At that, Dad looked into his tea and lifted the delicate porcelain to take a sip.

Peyton had had his eyes peeled and Sherlock Holmes hat on for weeks now, and his dad's reaction made his newfound detective ears prick up. A collected man blowing up with indignation at the mere suggestion of him judging his son for being gay...

Was he a closet case? *Holy shit*. That had never occurred to Peyton before. *No. No way*. His eyes landed on dad's filed nails, impeccable hair, and evened, thick eyebrows. He always took good care of himself and his attire because he needed to exude power and money. That meant nothing. His mysterious feud with mum was a different story. Dad leaned back and steepled his fingers over his abdomen. Even in his late fifties, he was so in shape that twenty-something ladies could fall at his feet for a taste of cock. Except there had never been any ladies, even after mum had left...

Impossible. Peyton filed that thought for later and shook his head to clear it, focusing back on their subject.

"You never told me what Mat—Mateusz did to be shipped off to the Island." *Did he throw an orgy party like me?* That would explain the cassock as some cruel punishment.

"Are you sure you want to know?" Dad lifted an eyebrow.

"Of course." Peyton huffed but a sense of unease swirled in his stomach at the look Dad gave him.

Dad returned his cup to the saucer and looked straight at Peyton. "He killed Rick. Don Francis's son," he said in a calm, matter-of-fact tone.

Peyton's world stopped. *He what?* His brain was clattering with an annoying sound of... porcelain. Nope. It was just the teacup dancing on the saucer in his shaking hand. He placed it on the table, ignoring the spilt tea.

"East London Boss's son?" Peyton asked, his voice a mere whisper.

Dad nodded solemnly. "One and the same."

"How?" Peyton straightened in his seat, holding the arms of his chair so tight his knuckles turned white. *Maybe it was an accident or—*

"With a shot in the face."

Peyton swallowed. "Oh..." Mat... his Father Mat killed someone. Well, he'd been a bodyguard, so that shouldn't have been so shocking to Peyton, but the man he'd grown to know was not a killer. Then again, he wasn't a priest either.

With horrid clarity, Peyton realised that he didn't know Mat at all. "Did he have a reason?"

"How close did you get to him, son?" Dad's brows furrowed as he straightened in his seat.

"Was there a reason?" Peyton repeated, his voice trembling.

"Rick broke into the Kwiatkowski mansion and attacked the man Mateusz swore to protect. So he did his job."

Peyton nodded, processing it. *Oh God, was that what Mat's nightmares were about?* And Peyton had just left him there to

deal with them alone. He was a shit friend and lover. Even if he was those things only temporarily. Fuck fuck fuck.

“I didn’t want to tell you so as not to cloud your judgement, and for you to focus only on making sure that Mateusz doesn’t endanger his cover. Now you know that, if he had, his life would be on the line. Vendetta is not to be taken lightly and Don Francis is a vicious man.”

Mat in danger... Oh, God. What if someone had caught them at the priory or saw Peyton leaving early in the morning? Fuck. What had he done? Were they careful enough?

“You don’t have to go back. Zbigniew—Szeff Kwiatkowski has plans underway to make it possible for Mat to return to his old life in London. So your eyes are not needed on him anymore.”

“What plans? When is he going back?” Peyton fired, panic flooding him.

“Within a month. That’s all I know. You can stay here or take a break in London. You definitely deserve it.”

The flat he’d bought in London had always been his oasis of peace, but right now it was not the place he wanted to be.

“But can I go back?”

“To the island?” Dad looked into the teapot, displeased to see it empty, seemingly oblivious to Peyton’s turmoil.

“Yeah. Just for a few days. I didn’t pack my stuff.”

“I can send someone to get it.”

“I need to do it myself.” He wiped his sweaty palms on the impeccable trousers. “Dad, I have to go.”

The note he’d left for Mat couldn’t be the last thing he said to him. He had to say goodbye. Sure, he could seek Mat out in London—he’d even read in his file that he frequented The Golden Handcuffs. Peyton was a member but had never seen him there. However, meeting Mat somewhere in London was not the same as making sure that the man was aware Peyton was on his side and knew his secret before he left the island. That not everything between them was a lie. He could beg Dad to find out what Mat’s number was, as they had never exchanged them, but some things needed to be said face to face.

“I want you here for the charity gala on Friday, but you can go after that.” Dad stood up, readying to leave.

“No way. I’m going back today.” Peyton shot to his feet, pushing the armchair back with a screech against the floorboards.

“That’s non-negotiable.” The look in Dad’s eyes as he towered over Peyton only solidified his words. “It supports the charities you wanted to benefit. The least you could do is appear at the gala.”

God, how Peyton hated it. Hated being so dependent.

“Fine,” he said through gritted teeth.

“I hope you realise how important the mission on the island was and that you were the only person I could trust to do it. It

was a favour to Szeff Kwiatkowski himself.”

“What? No.” Anger somewhat deflated from Peyton at the words. “I thought it was your idea of punishing me for that party.”

“You mean the orgy that set our business at risk thanks to the photos that leaked?” Dad lifted an eyebrow, crossing his arms.

“Yeah, that one.”

Dad shook his head, visibly trying to make his sigh seem tiny. “I hoped the retreat would just be a bonus. Did it cool you down?”

The trip? No. Mat? Also no. He set him on fire even more.

“You have that look again,” Dad said, the smirk on his lips knowing and downright bizarre in its rarity.

“I’m just tired.”

“Since you’re stuck here, you will look at the spreadsheets. Make sure the accountants did a decent job when you were gone.” Dad’s emotionless gaze dared Peyton to protest.

“Sure. Can’t be worse than what Finley had going on.”

“Do tell.” Dad crossed his arms, his gaze flicking to the empty teapot then back to Peyton.

“It was an organisational mess but I took care of that. I showed him how the new system works so he should be fine going forward.”

Finley's distillery was a branch of Dad's. Peyton had lied to Mat saying he didn't know the process. He'd known every part of it to perfection since he was a boy. He used to come to work with Dad on weekends and after school, walk around the main distillery and pretend to supervise. It was as natural as kicking a ball with his friends, like braiding his sister's hair. Thanks to that he was able to see the holes in Finley's branch and implement changes that would significantly improve the way it operated.

"He needs to hire someone permanently in my place. In his son's place, actually." Peyton crossed his arms then realised he mirrored his dad and shoved them in his pockets instead.

"That poor man." Dad shook his head, looking into the vast green grounds of the estate beyond the windows of the conservatory. "I'll make sure he has the help he needs. Thank you, son."

Peyton nodded but couldn't decipher the faraway look in Dad's eyes as he gazed to the greenery surrounding them, the palms he had delivered from the Caribbean and the array of exotic plants he'd glimpsed on his travels and had to have in his sanctuary.

Maybe he looked lonely.

After that infamous fight when Peyton was ten and Medina twelve, mum had moved out to her own villa and never returned. Even though she had a new lover every few weeks, Dad acted like he didn't care. He even seemed happy for her. It was all fucked up but Peyton learnt not to question it. Mum

looked barely thirty in her fifties, thanks to all the surgeries and workouts and diet regimes. And yet Father had never crawled to her and begged her to come back, nor had he ever brought anyone new home himself. Like some fucking business monk. Unless he'd been extremely discreet with his lovers.

Even that broken view of marriage didn't ruin Peyton's dream of walking down the aisle, or simply holding hands with the man he loved when they said their vows. At thirty, he still held hope.

An image of Mat appeared in his mind, looking at him like he was the greatest gift on Earth, touching him like he was precious. Peyton massaged his sternum and excused himself to go to his room, leaving dad to his own thoughts.

Chapter Ten

Peyton

Days passed with Peyton examining spreadsheets and attending meetings with Dad. Nights were his time to think about Mat, his commanding tone, his gentle but firm hands, and the way he looked at Peyton when he knelt at his feet. It was easy to wank to that image before going to sleep. But it wasn't enough to quench his thirst to kneel for the man at least once more.

Friday finally came, and with it another boring suit he would have to wear to the wretched gala. At least it was for a good cause. Peyton made sure to double-check the financials and how the donations made would benefit the charities they were raising money for. He'd been naïve enough before to trust a charity that in reality aimed to stuff the coffers of its owners. The small charities started by students and people who truly cared supported angel sharks and minke whales in their natural habitats.

He'd made it abundantly clear to his dad that if he was to take over his business someday, he would still try his best to maintain relations with Polish mafia and other influential businesses but wouldn't stand for drugs and trafficking.

For the past decade, Peyton had attended galas with women as Dad was not in favour of him bringing a male date. Usually, they were daughters of powerful people. Despite never keeping his sexual preferences a secret, he'd been swimming in marriage proposals as a means of economic union between

families. Again with the mediaeval shit. After many refusals, Peyton had insisted on forgoing dates for future events.

This time, he would have the opportunity to attend with the best woman of all at his side—his mum.

“It would give us time to catch up,” she’d said when she’d called him a few days prior. “And I love the charities you picked.”

They were supposed to arrive together but her plane from Miami had been delayed and they decided Peyton would meet her at the party. The moment he received her text, he stepped out just in time to see her white limousine stop by the entrance to the mansion.

He opened the rear door and offered his hand. Like a Hollywood star on her way to the red carpet, Mum exited the car with grace, her long fingers in Peyton’s hand.

“Hi, Mum,” he said, beaming.

“My baby,” she cooed, pulling to her high-heeled feet. She rearranged her classy white dress at the bosom before she pulled him into a hug. He fake-kissed her made-up cheek and grinned at the familiar feel of a warm mum hug.

“You look gorgeous, Mum.”

“Oh, pft.” She rolled her eyes, brushing her black-as-night hair off her shoulder, then smiled at him, looping her hand through his arm.

Her dress split at the side, revealing her long leg to the upper thigh as she walked up the marble stairs. The strapped

top revealed enough of her cleavage to have the security at the door swallow their tongues.

“Mrs Murphy.” The bulky guy with a close-cropped beard nodded at her.

“Liam? Oh my God, you’re so big. I remember you running around our garden with Peyton and your brother.”

Ah yes, Liam’s older brother. Peyton’s first kiss.

“Well, look at you. Lovely, absolutely lovely.” She patted his cheek as if he were a child, even though he was a foot taller than her even in heels and three times her weight.

Peyton bumped fists with the guy and a subtle shake of Liam’s head as he smirked confirmed that he still remembered that fateful day he’d caught him and his brother snogging in the bushes. Winking in return, Peyton was glad Dad hired security and staff from the trusted people that had been with them for years.

After Dad’s welcome message to everyone, Peyton stepped on to a podium to say a few words about the organisations benefiting this gala. A round of applause later, they sat at white-cloth tables and Mum told him about her trip to Barbados and how much she loved it.

“Why don’t you visit me more often in Miami? The weather here is horrendous, I don’t understand why you endure it, knowing that you can go anywhere you want.” Mum swirled the olive impaled on a toothpick in her drink.

“You know how Dad is with keeping an eye on me. I’m glad to be spending time in London at least, since all I need is a laptop to check on the finances. He did send me away for a few weeks, though.”

“So I heard. A favour for Zbigniew, huh?” She smirked and took a sip of her dirty martini. “The place sounds dull. Was it absolutely dreadful?”

“No, actually, it was...” He licked his lips, remembering Mat’s fingers dancing on his hip. “Good.”

“Ooooh!” She raised her eyebrows. “Who are they? Did you find yourself a hot shepherd to entertain you there?”

“Uh, something like that.” He hated lying to his mother but he didn’t want to get Mat into trouble. A priest was a shepherd of sorts and he was Mat’s lost lamb.

“Good for you. Rodrigo and Linda have kept me occupied and I don’t want to jinx it, but I hope they’re my forever people.” She put a hand on Peyton’s over the table, squeezing it as if seeking approval for her poly life.

“That’s brilliant, mum. I’m so happy for you.”

“Thank you.” Her lip quivered but by the time she blinked and flipped her hair back, her subtle smile was back. “Now, dance with me.”

After a song with Mum, he danced with several other ladies, then chatted appropriately with business sharks. His mind wasn’t there—even dancing didn’t bring him any joy.

It was not the same as dancing his ass off in the freeing atmosphere of the clubs he frequented. God, he missed proper, butt-shaking, body-grinding fun. The Golden Handcuffs had been his go-to club for dancing when he studied in London and he still loved going there for that as well as volunteering his back for a flogging presentation or two.

Completely knackered after the gala, he plopped on the bed with a smile on his face, knowing that his bags were packed and he was going to the island first thing Saturday morning.



The chill of the island breeze when Peyton stepped off the trawler brought back memories of the weeks he'd spent here, intensifying the need to see Mat even more. He dropped his duffel in his room at The Malted Barley Inn and headed towards the church.

Initially surprised at the crowds gathered on the parish grounds, his eyes landed on several tables full of cakes, cupcakes, and pastries. That's right—it was the Great Parish Bake-off. Peyton took in the sight from afar, scanning it for a glimpse of a man in a cassock.

The cake stand was Louisa's and her son's, both skilled at making birthday and wedding cakes for the residents of the island. They ran the post office but baked by order in their spare time.

Pastries belonged to Roger, the owner of the bakery Mary worked at part-time. His bread was known in every household,

as were his tree-trunk arms when anyone needed to move a sofa. Next to him, a group of teens gave away tiny water bottles. They ran back to get more supplies from a big open cooler manned by Mat. His dark blond hair was sun-streaked from the summer rays, his normally pale face pinkened. Peyton's heart leapt at the sight of his lover—handsome, commanding, yet so kind.

Only his sure gait and the way he looked suave even in cheap sunglasses gave a hint of the man underneath—a son of the mafia.

Mat exchanged a few words with the kids before he walked over to the next stand.

Mary's table was full of colourful cupcakes she handed to the people queueing with a smile on her face. Judging by the body language, Mat offered to help but Mary's daughter and her girlfriend snuck up on him. They threw a rainbow flag over his shoulders and ran away giggling like wild hyenas.

Peyton chuckled as he watched Mat pull the flag closer and do a twirl with it, before posing Dracula-like with half his face hidden behind the colourful fabric. He lowered it when his eyes locked with Peyton's and his expression grew serious.

Peyton's chest ached from how badly he needed to talk to him but this was not the time, not the place. Instead, he jogged towards the guys from the distillery. It looked like it was snowing powdered sugar as they stuffed their faces with pastries.

“Welcome back,” Finley said, handing Peyton a doughnut.

“Thanks. I had to deal with something on the mainland—”

“That’s fine. We’ll talk later.” Finley nodded, the understanding in his eyes suggesting he knew how controlling his dad was.

“Peyton!” Mat’s voice washed over Peyton and he turned to face his lover. “You’re just in time for our football match! The tourists—” Mat motioned to the Irish boys munching on cupcakes to the side, “—agreed to play against our Running Angels today. Five of ours against five of them.” Mat offered him his joyful priest’s smile as he took his glasses off.

Peyton smiled in return but his mind was whirring with the image before him, the memory of Mat binding him with rope, and the words his dad had said—that Mat blew someone’s brains out. This lovely guy was a priest, a dominant, and a killer.

Only now Peyton recognised the dark shadow behind Mat’s pale blue gaze as a burden he’d been hiding from everyone around him. He’d seen it before but couldn’t decipher it. In a matter of a second, Mat blinked and it was gone, even before he slid the sunglasses back on his nose.

With a tone that made people hang on every word, Mat herded the crowd to one side of the front lawn of the priory. The remaining area had two wooden goalposts with what looked like a fishing net attached to the back. Peyton had learnt that his lover was resourceful and it clearly extended beyond the bedroom.

The Irish guys were shedding their shirts and putting on green t-shirts with Finley's distillery's logo on it, flashing their abs with no shame, to the utter joy of the islander women and several men who quickly looked away. Mat's angels wore white t-shirts in smaller sizes with the same logo.

Four boys and a girl from Mat's team would play against five twenty-something men from the Irish Mafia. Unusual and unexpected were the smallest of the words to describe a match like that.

Since he'd been stuck at home, Peyton had used the opportunity to ask Dad if he knew anything about the loud bunch who mysteriously appeared on the island. Apparently, they'd been making a delivery of drug money to launder, and local teenagers who'd thought themselves tough enough, tried to hijack their van. During a scuffle, one of the Irish guys, Nick, stabbed a nineteen-year-old boy who died from the wound on site. For the duration of the capos covering up the mess, the guys were to stay on the island, far from questions and prying eyes.

A whistle made everyone turn to Mat who stood with a red and white card in one hand as he waved with the other.

The match started and Peyton let himself get lost in the sounds of cheering families and neighbours. In the meantime, his mind tried to come up with what he could say to Mat so their imminent goodbye would be less than heartbreaking.

The truth. He'd have to confess the entire truth.

Except he wasn't sure how much was safe to say. Should he tell the man who would go back to his life in London as a bodyguard and a nephew to the Polish Mafia's boss that Peyton was a paper pusher who shook his ass in clubs in his spare time? Probably. Maybe they could find a way to see if whatever they had could work out in the real world too.

As of this moment, Peyton couldn't imagine himself kneeling before doms who were complete strangers like he used to. The rush, the care, and the orgasms Mat had given him had been more than just scenes, more than roleplay. It put them both in a mindset so pure, so devoid of outside troubles, only they existed in their fantasy.

A whistle startled Peyton to reality.

"Penalty shots!" Mat yelled and waved his team over to give them instructions. They gathered around Mat and nodded before returning to the field.

Mat stood, hands on hips, watching one of his Angels prepare for a shot.

The boy of about sixteen nodded at his cassock-wearing coach, then focused on the Irish goalie bouncing on the balls of his feet. The boy nodded with resolve, made a sign of the cross and ran towards the ball waiting for him on the field. A dull sound echoed when his foot connected with the inflated leather and the entire audience waited with bated breath.

With a whoosh, the ball landed in the net on the furthest upper left corner and the crowd erupted in cheers.

Once the game was over, everyone gathered for a second helping of whatever was leftover of the pies and other goodies. Mat sat on the church steps with his Angel team, praising them as they all grinned, red-cheeked from exertion.

Nick, one of the Irish guys, stood to the side, talking to a local girl who taught in the primary school. The way they looked at each other told Peyton that Nick found something positive about the exile on the island.

Approaching the church, Peyton heard the remaining four Irishmen talk in their characteristic abrupt tone to Mat.

“The sign of the cross before penalty shots got me!” one of them said, his voice high in pitch.

“That’s fucking brilliant.”

“You’re OK for a priest, you know,” the third guy mumbled, then stuck his tongue out to an Angel squinting at him.

Somehow, Mat brought out the inner child in the newcomers, welcoming them into the community that he’d joined himself only recently.

“Father, can I talk to you for a second?” Peyton asked. His heart was in his throat, not wanting to draw eyes of every gossip on the island their way.

“Of course.” Mat stood up, and the conversation resumed without him, leaving them to move further away to avoid the weight of stares.

They walked in silence until they reached the gate to the old graveyard next to the church.

“We need to talk,” Peyton said, keeping his voice casual and quiet.

Mat smiled at someone passing by before he looked at Peyton. “I know. I’ll be helping pack the stands now so let’s stick to our schedule, OK?”

“Yeah, that’s fine.” Peyton nodded. He’d come to Mat tomorrow, on Sunday, at 9 pm, as he had the previous two Sundays. “I’ll be ready.” The words came out breathless, as he recalled how very ready his body had been for each one of their evenings together.

Mat’s expression was neutral, and Peyton hated that he couldn’t see his eyes behind the sunglasses. As if hearing Peyton’s thoughts, he took them off to reveal a gaze full of fire and longing all at once. It was so intense, Peyton wanted to reach to touch Mat’s face to check if he was real. If someone could want him so much. He didn’t, knowing it would just make the wait worse.

“I’m leaving the island on Monday. For good.” Peyton swallowed, trying to keep his face neutral for anyone who was watching them.

Mat’s eyes grew stormy as he clenched his jaw. “Until tomorrow.” He nodded once, put the sunglasses on, and walked back towards his parishioners.

Chapter Eleven

Mat

On Sunday, Mat's heart was in his throat for the entire afternoon mass, the one Peyton usually attended. He'd been waiting for the day to come, not only so he could touch Peyton's velvet skin again, but to talk. They needed to talk. Mat didn't want to assume the reasoning behind Peyton's disappearance, or his presence in Mat's life in the first place, so he'd kept his mind off conjuring reasons that would make him hate his Peyton, his Lamb.

They'd never exchanged phone numbers—Mat had seen no need for it and it was safer for his cover. It had nothing to do with the temptation to text or call Peyton every waking moment he had to spare. Nope, not at all.

Peyton had been absent from the factory all week, supposedly on an urgent trip to the mainland. His return on Saturday during the bakeoff had been a surprise that filled Mat with conflicted feelings. The note and Peyton's sudden departure were one thing, but there was also something different about how he had looked at Mat the day before. As if Mat was a riddle he wasn't sure how to solve.

The entire week Mat had slept like shit. The nightmares that had plagued him since he killed Rick were riddled with different scenarios of that night. Someone died in each one, whether it was Rick, Jack, or Mat, ending in gruesome bloodshed at the end, right before Mat would gasp himself awake.

Memories of his evenings with Peyton had put his demons to rest for at least part of the night, letting him dream of a soft gaze directed his way and beautiful lips asking him for the best kind of penance. Knowing Peyton was away from the island had somehow made it worse, even more so than it had been before their first scene.

The day after reading the note from Peyton, Mat had received a call confirming that his stay in the parish would last three more weeks before he could return to London.

He asked his uncle for details but “It’s not safe for you to know yet,” was the reply, in a stern voice that sounded off to Mat’s ears.

Soon, he’d go to London to learn every piece of information he could and reclaim his previous life. One that had no Peyton in it. His Lamb who knelt so beautifully for him would not be a part of that danger-ridden existence.

Peyton was his drug; and despite bringing him a temporary rush, he’d destroy him in the end. They’d destroy each other. Peyton shouldn’t invest himself in someone who was counting the days until he could leave the cassock behind and return to his old life. Once Mat was back in London, he’d slide into familiar routines, finally see Jack, and put his nightmares to rest.

Mateusz, the bodyguard, the club-goer, and the child of the mafia, could not belong to someone like Peyton. A person who deserved care and attention. Things that Mateusz couldn’t give him.

A heavy awareness settled in Mat's chest with the realisation that no matter what happened between him and Peyton today, it would have to be their last meeting. Peyton was leaving to wherever he'd come from and Father Ian was due to return from his pilgrimage on Monday. It didn't matter anymore because Peyton would be gone by then. It hit Mat how little they knew about each other's pasts, while at the same knowing each other intimately on a level Mat would call spiritual, if he was truly a man of the cloth. Their easy connection as co-workers brought them even closer, ensuring Mat wouldn't forget his time on the island.

The thought process made it hard to breathe, especially with Peyton's cryptic message remaining unexplained. What did Peyton know? He swore he was not a cop, but that could have been a lie. It would be impossible for him to be a regular guy and find out who Mat was. Had he been sent by someone? Who?

At the end of his sermon, Mat announced that the confessional would be closed. He didn't have the mental capacity today to help others when he felt so helpless himself. He spied Peyton in the line of parishioners nodding goodbyes to him by the door and touched his arm just as he was about to leave.

"Stay, please. I need a word." He was proud of his voice remaining neutral, without dropping into the seductive tone he loved using with his Lamb. He had to talk to Peyton now, not wait until nine for him to come to the priory.

With a nod, Peyton stepped aside but remained hovering at the periphery of Mat's vision, taking a seat in the last pew in the middle. Exercising angelic patience, Mat ushered the remaining parishioners out and bolted the heavy church doors.

Peyton didn't turn around when Mat approached him and slid into the pew next to him.

"Why are you here? On the island," Mat asked, keeping his tone matter-of-fact, despite his entire being wanting to shout how much he missed the man and how the thoughts of him had occupied every waking moment of the past seven days. He had no way of knowing where Peyton had been during the week, but he also wanted to respect the boundaries between them and not ask for information Peyton hadn't willingly offered.

In a whisper someone sitting right behind them wouldn't hear, Peyton spoke.

"I was sent to check if you were safe and that you were being strict about keeping to your cover story."

Mat sat speechless, his mind reeling. Several things started to make more sense, others a lot less. "To spy on me."

Peyton hesitated. "In so many words, yes."

"Did your orders include fucking me too?" Mat asked from between clenched teeth as a wave of betrayal overtook him.

"No," Peyton said sternly, lifting his hand as if to touch Mat but putting it on his own lap instead. "I was only here to observe. But then I saw you..." Peyton's gaze drifted to the

altar as if recalling Mat standing there. “And what happened after was not in my job description. Please believe me.”

Mat exhaled in relief. The acidic disappointment and chest-constricting pain lessened at Peyton’s words as he refuted Mat’s worst suspicions. It hadn’t been just an act for Peyton, and he hadn’t been with him only to see if he would talk and blow his cover in bed.

“Who sent you?” Mat raised his hand to stop the reply. “No, who are you, really?”

“I don’t think—”

“Who?” Mat’s voice boomed throughout the church.

Peyton didn’t flinch. He thrust his chin up and bit the inside of his cheek.

“Your uncle asked my dad to send someone. And he sent me.”

“Your dad?”

“Ronan Murphy,” Peyton said, as if the name explained everything. It sounded familiar to Mat’s ears, one his uncle had mentioned more than once. “He’s been doing business with your uncle since before I was born.”

“So you’re just a pawn in this game.” *Like me.* Mat wiped his palms over the simple black fabric on his thighs.

“I hate to admit it, but I had no choice. I had to come here to spy on you.” Peyton’s eyes were full of guilt as he reached for Mat’s hand.

Mat intertwined their fingers on his lap, relishing the softness of Peyton's skin, the touch itself sparking a need for more. Even if he remained sceptical about what to believe. "And you figured you would stick it to your dad by fucking me?"

Peyton smirked. "I've done worse things to spite him and he still hasn't offed me, so no. That was all on me." Peyton looked at Mat, scooting closer until their faces were mere inches away. This time there was no partition between them. "I knelt for you. I told you to do anything you wanted to my body. I asked for punishment, hoping against hope that in this silly roleplay we called life for the last month, someone could give me what I so desperately need."

"And?" *Is this just a roleplay? Is it all a game to Peyton? Is it to me?* Even if it was, Mat didn't want them to stop.

"And you did. You've given me much more than—"

Mat shushed Peyton with a finger on his lips. "Don't say anything you'll regret."

Peyton nodded, kissing the finger pressed against him. "I wouldn't regret it. But maybe this way it will hurt less later."

Mat's chest constricted at the admission that mirrored what was on the tip of his tongue. *It will hurt me anyway.* He let his finger trace Peyton's bottom lip before he cupped his cheek. "We have today," he said instead.

"It's our last night. Let's not waste it." Peyton squeezed Mat's hand. "Let's not talk about reasons or complications."

Not here. Not now.” Peyton’s gaze drifted to the enormous cross on the wall behind the altar. “It would be safest for the both of us if we set aside the problems and return to the way we’ve been since we met. Live in the moment. Do what we do best.” He inhaled slowly, his shoulder lifting and falling. “I need that. And so do you.”

“God help me, I do,” Mat sighed.

Within seconds, Peyton’s entire demeanour changed—it was eerie yet absolutely fantastic. His stern expression and stormy gaze softened. His chin, until now thrust up in defiance, lowered to nearly touch his chest. Yet his shoulders remained square and proud.

I’m going to miss you.

The thought struck Mat so hard he sucked in a breath as if he’d been punched. He had to make the best of the evening they had before them.

Sliding out of the pew, he stood up and extended his hand. Peyton took it and, gripping it firmly, walked with Mat down the aisle, subjecting them to the scrutiny of the saints from the icons hanging on both sides of the chapel.

The marble altar stretched before them, surrounded by large candles secured to brass candlesticks on the ground. Behind it, white statues of saints adorned the columns, all of them turned towards the majestic statue of Christ on a fifteen-foot cross.

The moment they took three steps onto the rug around the altar, Peyton let go of Mat’s hand and dropped to his knees. He

splayed his palms on the floor and extended his back like a stretching cat.

“Thank you, Father,” came the muffled words. “Tell me how I can serve you. How can I repent?”

“Sit up and look at me.” Mat’s arousal was conditioned by now, reacting swiftly to the sight of the man’s body, his words, the very sound of his voice.

Peyton lifted his gaze and Mat knew his Lamb had all the power in the universe over him, even if he was the one on his knees. Peyton’s calm expression of submission told a story of a man wanting penance from a priest that wasn’t one. From someone who craved the interaction just as much.

“I’m bathed and prepared,” Peyton announced, sending an image of his naked body in a tub of scented water into Mat’s head.

“Very well, Lamb.” Mat let the anticipation build as he turned from Peyton. He picked up the closed missal he’d read from during mass and placed it at the feet of the cross behind him before he removed the white cloth from the sacred table with a sharp tug. Folding it slowly, he watched the way Peyton was waiting there with impeccable patience.

Gliding a hand over the smooth surface of the altar, he picked up the matches and struck a flame before approaching each of the four candles surrounding it. The warm glow illuminated the marble top along with the pale features of the kneeling man.

“Now strip.”

Mat leaned against the altar and watched Peyton unbutton his shirt, his long fingers working slowly, unveiling smooth skin inch by inch. Mat wanted to grip the damn fabric and rip it off, place his lips on the soft skin, close his teeth over Peyton’s nipple, tease the piercing there, then lick his way down...

Mat’s hands gripped the altar top to steady himself, hoping to keep the wild animal inside him on a tight leash. He had to exert appropriate care and stay collected in order to do Peyton’s penance justice.

Once the excruciatingly sweet torture of Peyton’s stripping was over and he stood in all his naked glory, Mat instructed him to climb the altar. Mat was ready to help him, but the man hopped on it with an effortless show of agility. Placing his hands on Peyton’s pliant body, Mat arranged him in the same position he’d assumed on the floor, on his knees with his arms outstretched in front of him, his head bowed low.

Mat walked around the massive table, admiring the long lines of his Lamb’s beautiful body, and the power and determination it must have taken to expose oneself to the extent Peyton was willing to for Mat.

From the sacristy, just to the side of the sanctuary, Mat brought two chairs which he placed between the altar and the gigantic cross, then made one more trip to return equipped with everything he’d need to perform what he’d spent the week planning. Despite his fears after he’d seen Peyton’s

letter, Mat had still held out hope they could meet one last time before Father Ian returned from the pilgrimage. His body singing, Mat placed the items he retrieved, as well as a bowl of warm water, on the chairs.

He approached the altar with his stole draped over his forearm. When around his neck during mass, the nine-foot-long, four-inch wide band of violet cloth contrasted with the white alb he wore over his cassock. Today it would serve a better purpose.

With a soft whoosh of silk, Mat wrapped the stole around Peyton's wrists, still stretched in front of his gloriously naked body. The thickness of the fabric made it hard to bind Peyton properly, but it worked well enough to keep his wrists together, while still allowing Peyton to hold onto the edge of the altar if he needed grounding.

"Today, you are the sacrificial Lamb and your penance is not to come until I tell you," Mat whispered into Peyton's ear, watching goosebumps break out on the man's skin. "Do you remember your safeword?"

"Pontius Pilate." Peyton cast his gaze down, his curls falling over his face.

"Do you promise to use it when you want me to stop?"

"Yes, Father." Peyton's voice was sure, his muscles devoid of strain. He was ready.

From the depths of the pockets of his cassock, Mat retrieved lube and condoms, and placed them next to Peyton's feet. For

the entire duration of the mass, the bottle had bounced against his thigh, reminding him of the hope that Peyton would offer his body to him again.

Taking a bottle of baby oil from the chairs nearby, Mat poured it over Peyton's shoulder blades, watching it slide over his skin to drip onto the marble top. With a lazy glide of his hand, he spread the oil over the expanse of Peyton's back, and his buttocks, noticing how perfectly smooth Peyton was, just like he'd been the previous Sunday. Returning the oil, Mat washed his hands in the bowl of water.

Stepping into Peyton's field of vision, Mat lifted one of the candles he'd lit before from a tall, brass candlestick. Its wax symbolised Christ's body, the wick his soul, and the flame his divinity.

With the foot-long candle thick in his grip, Mat approached his sacrificial Lamb.

Peyton's head was to the side and Mat saw the flickering flame reflect in his lover's eyes. It was the perfect metaphor for the heat that lay within him. There was no shock, no hesitation, and definitely no fear in Peyton's expression or his body language. *Lovely.*

Mat swirled the hot wax that gathered in a small pool around the smouldering wick of the candle before letting a dollop fall over the top of his hand. Fuck. It was hot, but not enough to burn the skin or hurt Peyton more than for the sake of pleasure.

Satisfied, Mat held the candle high over Peyton's buttocks then tilted it.

The first drop of wax landed on the porcelain skin of Peyton's right arse cheek, hardening within a moment on the cool surface. The man hissed, tensing, then released a tiny moan.

"You're doing so well."

Peyton didn't reply, only hummed as if he was being caressed.

Mat hovered the candle lower, knowing that the closer to the skin, the hotter the wax would feel. Peyton's moan was louder this time, and Mat rewarded him with a gentle kiss on the slightly sweaty nape of his neck.

"*Moja piękna owieczka,*" Mat cooed, placing a hand on Peyton's cheek. My beautiful Lamb. "On a scale from green to red, how are you feeling? Red meaning you're close to safewording and—"

"Green, Father," Peyton interrupted, then bit his lip, knowing he'd spoken out of turn. "I apologise."

Mat placed a kiss on Peyton's temple in lieu of a reply. He knew his lover was familiar with the traffic lights system, but he'd played with subs before who'd forgotten their own name during an intense scene. Double-checking never hurt anyone.

Peyton's eagerness was endearing, but Mat had to pay close attention to how the man's body reacted, looking for signs of discomfort. There were none so far. A blissful expression

clouded Peyton's eyes and Mat's cock twitched at the very notion that he could do that to his lover.

With each drop of wax, Peyton's moans grew louder and his skin became redder, the sight sending Mat dancing on the dangerous threshold of coming.

It was silly, he knew, but with the slow drip dripping of wax, he shaped a heart on the expanse of Peyton's back, wondering if his Lamb could tell what he'd created. Tilting his head to admire it, he smiled to himself and traced a finger on the outer rim of the shape. The hardened wax broke away from the skin, cracking at the edges where Mat pressed with a satisfying tiny sound.

He repositioned himself so he could watch Peyton's expression as he tapped the wax with a finger to break it. He could use a whip or a riding crop to remove it, but today he wanted to focus on gentler worship of the body before him.

After several drops more, Mat let the wax drip at the very edge of Peyton's bum, then watched it slide down it, creating a trail before dropping and solidifying on the marble surface. The cleanup was going to be horrid, but he'd worry about that tomorrow.

Returning the candle to its cradle, Mat rounded the altar, took Peyton's bound hands, and kissed the long fingers one by one, before untying the stole. A confused sound left Peyton, as if he was disappointed, but obediently kept his head down.

From the pile of items he'd brought, Mat retrieved his kneeling pillow and lifted Peyton's head to place it under.

“Rest your cheek on it. I won’t bind your hands but they’re not free to do as you please, only what I say. Now spread your ass open for me.”

Peyton’s fingers twitched as he hesitated. Mat asked for intimacy, for Peyton to expose his body to him even more. His Lamb had the right to back away. All he had to do was use his safeword.

“Hold yourself open for me,” Mat repeated.

“Yes, Father.”

This time, Peyton reached behind, his long fingers digging into the muscles of his pert bum to spread the cheeks, opening himself to the cool air of the church.

It had been a while since Mat had kissed his way between another’s ass cheeks, and he took his time to revel in the gift Peyton had given him now—the sacrifice of vulnerability, and humiliation of being so exposed.

Mat’s hard-on twitched, and he pressed the heel of his palm to it to release the pressure, groaning at the need for more. He was glad he wore nothing underneath the cassock, letting his cock hang loose, feeling the precome on his thigh. Peyton’s puckered hole and the perfectly smooth skin around it beckoned Mat to taste it. His mouth watered and he swallowed. Peyton had prepared himself indeed.

“You have the most gorgeous ass I’ve ever seen,” Mat said, not hiding the lust in his tone. He wiped his palms over his

cassock, holding himself back a moment longer. “I’m going to taste you now.” *The way I’ve dreamt of doing for weeks.*

“Please, Father.” The words muffled into the pillow were all the permission Mat needed.

Bracing his hands on the edge of the altar top, he leaned in to lick a long stripe from Peyton’s sack up to his lower back.

“*Jezu Chryste...*” Mat groaned, his eyes avoiding the depictions of saints glaring at him from the icons and the gigantic Christ on the cross to his right.

An affirmative moan from Peyton suggested he shared the sentiment.

His delicate skin tasted of perfumed soap he must have used when showering, or maybe he’d soaked in scented water.

Peyton’s fingers dug into the skin of his ass when Mat leaned in again. He flattened his tongue against the puckered hole then swirled it, feeling the texture, before kissing it. Oh God, he could kiss it all night. Peyton was panting, his breathing punching the air in short bursts, but his body remained in place.

Mat dipped the tip of his tongue in and the groan that left Peyton echoed, bouncing against the walls of the chapel. Emboldened, Mat delved in with enthusiasm, licking, kissing, prodding until Peyton’s thighs trembled, his hands slipping from his buttocks then scrambling to hold them open again.

“That’s my good Lamb,” Mat cooed, saliva dripping down his chin.

Mat reached for the bottle of lube that still rested on the altar. The click of the cap was loud in the church, announcing to Peyton what he was doing.

“Are you okay?” Mat asked and kissed one of Peyton’s buttocks, then the other.

“Yes,” Peyton whimpered into the pillow. “Please...”

“What are you asking for?”

“Please...”

“You have to say it.” Mat meant to sound stern, but his voice came out amused.

“May I have your fingers inside me?”

“And?”

“And... your cock. Please, Father.”

“Not so fast. Let’s work towards that, okay?”

Peyton nodded, adjusting his grip on his buttocks, his cheek pressed into the pillow.

Mat coated his hand in lube and placed a kiss at the lowest part of Peyton’s back before circling the man’s pucker with a finger. A low sound that Mat could only describe as a purr came from Peyton and intensified with the slip of the digit inside.

“Oh...” Mat moaned, adjusting his cock as he wiggled a finger inside his lover. Just watching it disappear, and witnessing Peyton grip him tight was nearly too much to bear

for his poor, deprived dick, now staining his sacred robes with precome.

Adding another finger, he prepared his Lamb, pouring more lubricant to glide them in. Crooking them, he applied gentle pressure to massage Peyton's prostate. The high sound that left the man was so much unlike his regular voice Mat grinned with satisfaction.

Hanging heavy and thick, Peyton's erection dripped tiny white drops on the altar and Mat took it to stroke, synching the movements with his other hand. Pulling Peyton's cock between his spread thighs, Mat leaned in to wrap his lips around the plump head to taste the milky liquid he'd coaxed out of his Lamb. He closed his eyes and sighed, his taste buds singing at the rare treat.

"Father, please," Peyton mewled, his voice hitching with every sound he made.

Mat had no plans beyond that point. He'd decided he'd cross this bridge once he got to it. They'd had sex two Sundays in a row but somehow penetration seemed like the ultimate claim, like a seal between them. A promise for more. Mat was afraid that once he felt Peyton clench around his cock, he would never be able to be with anyone else. They barely knew each other, yet the metaphysical pull between them was undeniable.

A whimper left Peyton, his fingers sliding off his cheeks, leaving red marks where his fingertips had dug in.

Mat kissed the tops of Peyton's hands.

“You can let go now. Stand on the floor.”

With Mat’s help, Peyton slid down from the altar, his legs parting the moment his feet touched the rug. *So needy*. He remained bent, his torso splayed on the flat of the marble, hands holding the edges of it, his ass thrust back.

If what Mat had done with Peyton made him a sinner, it would be the sin he was proudest of, and he would go to his grave without an ounce of regret in his heart. Except he knew, sacrilege or not, there was nothing wrong with what they were doing. Being with, and touching Peyton felt like the most natural, divine act.

It was time their bodies united.

With quick fingers, Mat unbuttoned the lower half of his cassock to his mid-abdomen and took a hold of his cock. Precome coated his hand and he spread it over the head, stroking as he reached for a condom with the other hand, ripping the gold packet with his teeth.

“May I speak, Father?” Peyton’s baritone was tinged with desperation.

“Yes. Is there something wrong?” Mat hesitated. *Fuck, was this too much?*

“I told you before that I was tested and I’m on PrEP...” Peyton cleared his throat, his voice coming out raspy, yet lilting as if he were reciting a poem. “Could Father please forego the condoms and fill me with no barriers? Leave your seed deep

inside my body, so I could carry it home and have Father with me for at least a little bit longer?”

“Jesus Fucking Christ,” Mat rumbled, squeezing his cock, which jumped at the idea, precome dripping onto the rug between Peyton’s feet. “Yes,” Mat choked out. PrEP and regular testing had gone hand-in-hand with his own lifestyle of sexual decadence. Besides, the mafia’s doctor insisted the health of every bodyguard was in tip-top condition.

Suddenly, he wanted to face Peyton, to see his expression when they joined, but short of fucking him on the cold, stone floor or wine-stained rug, there was no way to do that.

An open-mouthed kiss to Peyton’s back was his segue to leaning over him and positioning himself. He tossed the condom aside and squirted more lube on his cock, spreading it quickly, eager to seat himself in his lover.

The tip, the head, and...

“Ahh...” they groaned in unison.

Mat paused to take a deep breath then began a slow glide in and out until he was fully inside. They fit together perfectly, the squeeze of Peyton’s body sending tingling flickers of heat through Mat.

He closed his eyes and let himself take in the sensations. Them so close, the chill of the church on his thighs, and Peyton’s tiny, broken whimpers. “I won’t last, my Lamb. I’ve been wanting to feel you like this for far too long.”

Peyton thrust his hips back in response. *Cheeky.*

“Would you like me to fuck you slowly, my Lamb?” Mat asked, kissing Peyton’s back. It would be a difficult task, but he could do it, he could tease Peyton with slow glides for an hour if need be.

“No, Father.” Another thrust.

“Tell me then, how did you imagine me taking you?” Mat traced circles on Peyton’s hips, loving how their games always led to Peyton revealing his dirty thoughts.

“Just last night when I lay in my bed stroking myself...” Peyton sucked in a breath as Mat reached around to take hold of Peyton’s cock. “And... oh Father, forgive me... My ass was stretched on a dildo and I imagined it was you, taking me hard and fast, leaving bruises on my hips, filling me with your seed.”

Mat groaned at the filthy and delicious imagery, amazed at his ability to withhold his orgasm after hearing such words. He slid out nearly all the way then slammed back in with a thunderous clap that echoed in the space built to carry the sound coming from the altar.

“Is that what you want, my Lamb?” Mat dug his fingers into Peyton’s hip.

“Yes, Father. Please. Ah! Yes!” Peyton pushed back as Mat thrust in and their bodies collided again, filling the air with lewd slaps and grunts.

“You feel so good... Peyton... *o Boże Świąty.*” He was so damn close. “You don’t have permission to come.

Understood?”

“Yes. Ah. Father,” Peyton replied in a rhythm Mat set with his thrusts.

“Good,” Mat gasped and pistoned into Peyton without mercy, maintaining a ferocious grip on his hips. Within moments, familiar tingling gathered in his lower back, his abdomen, spreading throughout his body as he chased the explosion. He squeezed his eyes shut, arching and let out a loud cry of bliss as he came inside Peyton. His entire body convulsed with each spurt, his abdomen taut, his being floating above him.

If there was a God, he lived in this act of union. The ultimate joining and mutual pleasure, the highest of highs, the most spiritual experience. The sacrament of them taking from each other, feeding on each other’s bliss was so divine, it truly belonged in the church.

Mat looked to his right, to the gigantic Christ on a cross, and smiled, finding not an ounce of shame or regret inside himself.

He rested his forehead in the middle of Peyton’s back, panting, allowing himself a moment of respite. He didn’t want to leave the warmth of his lover’s body, but he had plans.

“Don’t move.” Mat’s voice was hoarse as he pulled out, trying not to spill any of his come.

He watched Peyton’s perfectly-round cheeks hold the imprints of Mat’s fingers, his long legs, covered in

goosebumps and shaking as his cock leaked precome on the rug. Mat wished he could snap a picture of his view, but he was sure the memory was so sealed in his brain now that he'd have the spank material until the end of his days.

From the bundle he'd brought earlier, he took out a box and walked back to Peyton, making sure he couldn't see what he carried as he returned to his position.

"It was supposed to be a gift. So you could use it and think of me, remember how I felt inside you." The cock-length plug he'd bought was made out of soft silicone and wobbled in his hand as he poured lube over it. "But the occasion calls for me to use it now, so you can carry it home in secret. It will keep my come inside you and I will be falling asleep with that image in my mind, reaching to stroke myself to the thought of you."

Even without seeing the item in Mat's hands, Peyton must have realised what it was as he rolled his hips in anticipation.

"Your obedience is commendable." Mat scooped the come that leaked out of Peyton and tucked it back in with his fingertips before sliding the pointy tip of the dildo in with a smooth glide.

"That's very kind of you, Father," Peyton purred, bearing down on the plug until it fit snugly inside, only the flared base visible between his cheeks. He should have a harness to help keep the toy in, but Mat hadn't thought of it. Besides, this way, Peyton would have to work hard not to push it out on his way home, keeping him constantly aware of the plug's presence.

“Lay on your back on the altar,” Mat instructed, helping his lover up. Peyton sighed the moment his heated back rested on the cool surface.

Mat arranged Peyton’s ass close to the edge. Taking his lover’s legs to rest over his shoulders, Mat placed a kiss to each calf, nuzzling his cheek into the soft hairs there. He looked along the expanse of Peyton’s chest to the blissful expression on his face.

“I will suck your cock now, my Lamb. And I want you to come down my throat so that I can have a piece of you to myself as well.”

“Yes, Father.” Peyton’s eyes gleamed in the light of the candles around them, his hard erection bobbing on his abdomen.

Mat tapped the base of the plug, then captured Peyton’s erection in his hand. Guiding it to his lips, he knew he wouldn’t be able to take it as deep as Peyton had swallowed his. Mat’s tongue swirled over the silky surface of the head and under, his eyes closing briefly to focus on the feel of the warm, hard cock on his tongue before he opened them again to watch Peyton’s expression. His Lamb’s mouth had fallen open, and he stared at Mat with hooded eyes before letting his head fall back, a moan escaping his gorgeous lips.

Mat took more of Peyton’s length into his mouth as one of his fists pumped the base, while the other kept sliding the dildo out an inch, only to push it back in.

Little keening gasps ricocheted through the chapel, off the statues of the saints and the column holding the arched roof. Mat worked faster, increasing the squeeze of his hand, hollowing his cheeks.

Give me your orgasm, my Lamb, he thought, his mouth full of cock.

As if he'd heard Mat's thoughts, Peyton's muscles strained, Mat's name interwoven between incoherent moans leaving his lips. He thrust into Mat's throat, making his eyes water as he tried hard not to gag. spurts of semen invaded Mat's mouth and he swallowed every drop, taking it as if it was the Eucharist—the Lord's Supper. Because he'd truly dined today like a son of God.

Easing his sucking and stroking, Mat let Peyton's cock finish pulsing, then pulled away. He licked the crown clean, making Peyton hiss at the attention to his now sensitive flesh, before letting it go.

With Peyton's legs still over his shoulders, Mat placed a kiss to the inside of one of Peyton's thighs, then the other, wanting to snuggle in the warmth, to rest his head on Peyton's abdomen and sleep.

“My gorgeous Lamb.” *I'll miss you so much.* “You did so well today.”

“Thank you, Father,” Peyton whispered, his voice dreamy, still lost in the fog of orgasm.

Letting Peyton come back from the blissed-out state, Mat caressed the man's thighs, and glided his hands over the expanse of his abdomen in a soothing motion. Once Peyton propped himself up on his elbows, Mat helped him stand on the floor.

Mat should invite Peyton for the night, like the week prior. Just as he needed to hold his lover in his arms until he stopped shaking, Peyton deserved to be cared for, cleaned and soothed after their scene. But with father Ian due to return the next morning, it would be too risky. He refused to expose Peyton to scrutiny. A scandal would put more eyes on him as well and blow his cover. With a heavy heart, he would have to say goodbye to his Lamb tonight and live the remaining days he had here with only memories of their time together.

There was a wooden chair just inside the entrance to the sacristy and Mat grabbed it after he popped into the tiny room to wash his hands. He swivelled the chair around for Peyton. "Sit. I need access to your back." The least he could do was soothe Peyton's skin, if he couldn't spend the rest of his life making sure his lover's lust was sated.

With a nod, Peyton complied and Mat watched his expression change the moment his lover felt the plug press deeper from his weight on it. He must be uncomfortable and sensitive after coming, but he took it bravely—the need to have Mat's come secluded inside him stronger than chasing comfort. A sense of pride and an insane longing for having this man just to himself swirled in Mat, making this encounter so much harder for being their last.

Mat turned to his pile of pre-arranged items and picked up a tub of aloe vera. Squirting some on his hand, he applied it gently to Peyton's back, taking his time to make sure each area previously covered with wax was properly tended to. Peyton's muscles were relaxed, and he made that lovely purring sound again. Mat's hands caressed the skin from the nape he wanted to kiss before he fell asleep, to the place his back ended and buttocks began. All too soon, he was done.

With a sadness Mat desperately tried to keep from his face, he helped Peyton dress. He saw his Lamb fading away into the background as Peyton stood tall, his expression still open, but not as vulnerable as before.

The parishioner willing to repent, the one kneeling at Mat's feet, retreated from his lover's demeanour, yet still remained on the periphery. Peyton's posture changed, his chin thrust up and his shoulders squared, and Mat felt his heart accelerate. He leaned his back against the altar, his hands splayed on top, feeling hardened wax drops under his fingertips. He gave the control over to the other man this time, needing to part on Peyton's terms.

A look of surprise passed over Peyton's face before understanding settled in. In two strides, his long legs ate the distance between them and Mat prepared for a searing kiss, for an attack of desperation. A harsh goodbye. Instead, Peyton stopped, his face inches away from Mat's and tilted his head to the side, his eyes searching Mat's face. He was still seeking permission. Mat nodded once.

They met in the middle and the touch of their lips was the softest, most tender kiss Mat had ever experienced. It was a meeting and a goodbye all at once. Peyton's tongue slid along Mat's bottom lip and Mat captured it, deepening the kiss. Their first kiss. Peyton's hands hovered over Mat's face for just a moment before he cupped Mat's cheeks. His cool palms did nothing to diminish the heat of Mat's body. Angels sang in Mat's head as he took hold of Peyton's hips to pull him close.

After all they had done together, this moment, this kiss, was the most intimate act of them all.

In the sensual dance of tongues, they shared their happiness and the sorrow of imminent loss, as life was about to rip them apart.

Peyton was the one to pull away, resting his forehead against Mat's, his breath staggered. His hand disappeared into the pocket of his jeans before he slid an envelope folded in half into Mat's hand.

"For your eyes only." The 'read it and destroy it' remained unsaid but clear in Peyton's tone. His lips were a thin line, his gaze growing sad—the expression so different from when he'd been splayed on the altar, and yet still, somehow, the same—proud and knowing what he wanted.

"Are you sure I won't see you next Sunday?" Mat sounded needy, but this was more than sex for him and he was fairly certain Peyton knew it by now as well. Maybe he could come back?

A shadow of regret passed on Peyton's face before he hid it.

“I’m sure,” he said simply, his gaze meeting Mat’s.

Mat nodded. That was for the best. Seeing Peyton sit in a pew and knowing they wouldn’t be able to meet after the mass would have been worse torture than not seeing him at all.

With grace, Peyton turned away, and Mat watched his tall, lean frame move from the altar and along the aisle to the door, his shoes clicking on the tiles, the way they had the first time he’d sought Mat in the confessional. He unlocked the side door, slid out and let it fall closed with an eerie creak of old wood and unoiled hinges.

Mat could almost hear the sound of his heart shattering into tiny pieces.

He was a ship on a stormy sea, the waves he’d often seen crashing against the rocks from the priory’s bedroom window trying to swallow him into the darkness of the abyss. But he would ride it out and weather the storm in his heart until he could find peace.

The envelope bit into Mat’s sweaty hand as he clutched it tight before ripping into it. There was a single sheet of paper with one line on it.

Mat mouthed the words as he read a full name and a London address.

A sob of relief tore out of his throat and he collapsed to his knees next to the altar.

Once he was back in London, he knew where to find his Peyton.

The burning of the letter was a cleansing ritual. He was saying goodbye to the stranger who knelt at his confessional with blasphemy on his lips, and preparing to meet his lover in several weeks. Even if, deep down, he knew he should leave Peyton to live in peace, without the dangers Mat's mafia life would bring.

PART TWO: LONDON

Chapter Twelve

Mat

The moment the driver stopped at Uncle's mansion, Mat knew something was wrong.

He'd received instructions to tell his parishioners he'd been transferred. He'd said his goodbyes, packed his shit, hopped on the ferry, and bid farewell to the island forever.

After passing the perfectly trimmed hedges and the flower garden illuminated by Victorian-style lanterns, he noted that the fountain in front of the entrance was empty. The house was usually quiet at midnight but the silence that met Mat was eerie. Green vines grew up the walls of the mansion, reaching beyond the windows behind which the hustle and bustle of the family and staff always livened up the old house. Not tonight. With the lights off, the place looked abandoned, sending Mat's stomach into an uneasy spin.

He thanked the driver and exited the sedan with his duffel, half-full with food Mary packed for him as if he was going to hike through the woods. Climbing the front steps, he startled when the door soundlessly opened.

"Hi, Sofi," Mat said to the head housekeeper. "It's good to see you. You look lovely." He smiled at her wave of dismissal of the compliment but her eyes didn't show joy.

"And you need a haircut." She eyed the unruly mop that had grown out during his stay on the island.

“I’ll visit Hugh the moment I go to London, he’ll do his magic.” Mat entered the house bathed in silence and darkness. “Where’s Uncle?”

The elderly lady looked up at him, her lips in a thin line. “He said you should get some sleep first and he’ll meet you for breakfast. Your room is ready.”

“Thank you. Have a good night.”

“It’s good to have you back, Mateusz,” she said before she walked down the corridor to her rooms.

Mat climbed the marble staircase of the eerily silent house, wondering with each step what the hell was going on. He hadn’t expected a grand welcome, but no one coming to say as much as hello was downright rude. It had been four months.

He showered and sprawled on the comfortable bed, so different from the old mattress at the priory. Sleep eluded him for what seemed like hours. The modern room with sleek black furniture was a reminder of his time here when Jack was just next door. Their childhood comprised sneaking through the doors that joined their rooms to stay up past their bedtime to play battleships, then, as years passed, to look at magazines with naked people in them. It was then that Mat had realised it had been men’s bodies that drew his attention. Jack had always been interested in every hot person, no matter the gender and, once they grew older, they’d shared details about each sexual experience worth mentioning.

Now, he couldn’t wait to tell him about Peyton. Jack was likely still in hiding somewhere, but there was a chance he was

just asleep. Mat had to check. He padded barefoot to the door at the other side of the room and unlocked it. The quiet squeak as he pushed it open filled the silence. Jack's room was empty. The curtains were drawn, the bed made, and the general order of it suggested Jack hadn't used it for a while. Probably since that night...

Mat took a step forward and breath caught in his throat, his body going completely still.

The rug was gone.

The floors had been scrubbed clean.

Yet in his mind's eye, Mat saw Jack struggling under his assailant until the man fell off him with a hole in his head. A hole Mat had put there.

The pounding of Mat's heart was as loud as his breathing was quick. His chest hurt.

Am I having a heart attack?

Mat scrambled back to his room, slamming the door behind himself to ward off the demons living on the other side of it. The walls closed in on him as the furniture spun out of control.

He barely made it to the bed before he collapsed.



A polite knock woke Mat up and he rolled over from the pillow he'd been drooling on.

“Come in.”

Sofi cracked the door open, her silver hair in the same bun she had worn since Mat was a boy, but her usually sparkling eyes were suspiciously dimmed. “Szef expects you at the breakfast table in fifteen minutes,” she said in her kind but strict tone.

“Thank you, Sofi. I’ll be there.”

Mat sprang up the moment she left, knowing Uncle would expect him shaved and properly dressed, even for breakfast. Besides, he couldn’t wait to find out how Uncle managed to deal with the East London Mafia to ensure Mat’s return was safe.

The gigantic wardrobe with sliding mirror door held a vast array of his clothes, and he picked a blue button-down and grey trousers to go with his loafers.

Downstairs, Uncle was already at the round breakfast table. His wide shoulders were uncharacteristically slumped as he looked into the mug that quite possibly held black tea in it.

It was the mug Jack had got him in Santorini when he and Mat had gone to discuss opening a new underground fighting ring and stayed to party for the weekend.

“Morning Uncle,” Mat said, pushing a chirp into his voice that he didn’t feel. He was still hungover from the move. The clothes were off, the atmosphere in the house was weird, and even Uncle looked unlike himself.

“Jack is dead.”

The hollow tone of Uncle's voice hit Mat as the words registered in his brain. He collapsed into the chair as blood drained from his face.

"What?" he whispered, vaguely realising that his hands shook against the marble top of the table.

"He was on Crete, in hiding." Uncle didn't look up from his mug as he spoke. "But he got drunk one night and blabbed something stupid that revealed who he was. Don Francis's people found out quickly after that and executed revenge on Jack." He lifted his gaze to meet Mat's. His eyes were bloodshot, his face swollen, and he looked like he'd aged ten years in a matter of months. "He was shot in the head."

For years Uncle had taught Mat to rein in his emotions. To avoid crying in public, to not let his anger take charge, to keep a straight face regardless of the circumstances. But Mat was done. Pain of loss and shock gave way to pure fury at the death of the man who was like a brother to him.

"You were supposed to protect him," he snarled, challenging his Uncle to confront him. "And you failed. You promised. You fucking promised me that he'd be safe. How could you let him die?!"

"Careful, Mateusz," Uncle said in a steady tone, levelling a dark look at him.

"No. I wasn't there to protect him and now he's dead! Because you sent me away!" he yelled, his throat constricting from holding the tears in.

“I know that!” Uncle’s voice boomed as he slammed his fist on the table. “I failed you and I failed my son.” He inhaled then released the air slowly, like a raging bull. “And for that, I will never forgive myself. You can be certain of that.”

Mat flattened his lips in an attempt to prevent them from trembling.

“If only I was with him... if I—” Mat’s voice broke as he slumped in the seat, seeing his pain mirrored in his uncle’s gaze.

“No. You can’t change the past and neither can I. Otherwise, I already would have.” He dropped his head into his hands and whispered, “*Wszystko bym zrobił. Kurwa, wszystko.*” *I’d fucking do anything.*

It was the closest to broken Mat had seen his uncle. He had no clue how to offer him comfort, especially when he himself was far from OK.

“When—”

“The funeral was three days ago.” Uncle lifted his head, his expression back to vacant and dark all at once.

“And you didn’t tell me.” A new wave of fury was gearing its waves in Mat.

“I’m telling you now.”

“Fuck. We have to do something!” Mat stood up so abruptly his chair squeaked on the floor. “We know it was East London. They started it so we will finish it!”

“No. We are even with Don Francis. Eye for an Eye. We stop now to avoid more bloodshed.”

Mat wanted to scream. Wanted to yell into the void of injustice. It was on the tip of his tongue to call Uncle a coward but he knew the man was backing away from further conflict to protect the rest of the family. Mat included. He dropped his ass back on the chair with a huff.

“Why was Rick even here that night? Do we know?”

“I had people find out, yes.” Uncle poked the mug on the table to situate it in the middle. “He wanted to prove himself to his father. That he had what it takes.” He shook his head. “As an unreliable dumbass and a junkie, only he was stupid enough to do what he did.”

“*Skurwysyn jebany.*” *Fucking motherfucker.* Mat folded his hands on the table, then leaned back, only to scoot his chair closer. “So, what’s the plan going forward?”

“I named you my heir,” Uncle said as if it was the most obvious statement.

Maybe to some it would be but it didn’t feel right to Mat. “I—I was never supposed to be.”

“You are now.”

“But at what cost?”

“What’s done is done. Do you accept the position?”

As if you could refuse. There was no retirement from mafia. “You have no one else.”

Uncle winced, pressing his lips into a thin line. “That’s not why. You earned the right and you deserve it. You were a brother to Jack and you’re a son to me. That is a fact you should be well aware of.”

Mat nodded. He shouldn’t be an ungrateful brat at a moment like this. Nor any moment when Uncle was concerned. He owed this man too much. “I accept it.” *To honour Jack*. “What do you want me to do now?”

“I think we all need some rest. I’ll be handling the business and will let you know when I need you. You’ll still be in charge of the Games, but I had the Twins take over in your absence.” Uncle meant the fighting ring Mat had organised in London years ago, and which succeeded enough for them to branch out to other cities.

“Jagoda has been taking care of The Golden Handcuffs with little help, but she’ll want you to take over your old duties whenever you’re ready. You used to spend so much of your free time there anyway. Meanwhile, get yourself back on your feet. Despite the shitty welcome you received, I hope you understand I made sure you’ll be safe now. At least when it comes to vendetta. Don Francis gave me his word when he attended Jack’s funeral.”

“Fucker,” Mat spat, imagining the scene. The two powerful men, grieving yet still shaking hands to strike a tentative deal of peace.

“You’re not allowed to go after him or his family. Is that clear?”

“Yeah, yeah. Crystal.” Mat clenched his fists. He knew Uncle was right but that didn’t cool his simmering fury.

“I can’t lose you too.”

Mat sighed. He understood how it worked but it didn’t mean he had to like it. How was he supposed to move on from losing his cousin? No, a man who was like a brother, with whom he’d grown up with. Mat looked at Uncle who had always been the picture of power even at the breakfast table but now sat there looking miserable. He’d lost a son. But he wasn’t the only one.

“Where’s Aunt Jagoda?” Mat asked, his throat dry.

When the silence stretched, he looked up from the napkin he hadn’t realised he’d been wringing. “Uncle?”

“She left. She—” Uncle shook his head. “I don’t expect her back. She blames me for Jack’s death and I agree with her.”

“You didn’t—”

Uncle raised his hand in a gesture demanding silence.

Right. No need to poke that wound again. Mat poured two cups of water from the fridge filter and placed one in front of Uncle.

“Is she still in charge of The Golden Handcuffs” He took several gulps, the cold liquid barely soothing his throat.

“Yes, but she delegated some responsibilities to Pawel and Lina, so there’s nothing for you to worry about.”

“But they hardly ever visit the club, they don’t know what it needs. We have doms who could be interested in the position temporarily or Latif would be my first choice, really.”

“Lucy?” Uncle used the man’s drag name.

“Yeah.”

“But they’re not Family,” Uncle said as if that was a deal-breaker.

“Well, I trust them.” Mat waved a hand in dismissal, knowing there was no point arguing his aunt’s decision anyway. “Besides, it was the Family who sent a spy to watch me when I was on the island playing dress-up.”

“Nothing happens to my people without my knowledge, you know this,” Uncle said, annoyance clear in his voice. He wasn’t sorry at all.

Mat gritted his teeth. Peyton had only been sent there to keep an eye on him. But he’d promised that all the rest was not in his contract. How would Mat ever know if that was the truth? He couldn’t ask Uncle about that.

Everything was supposed to return to normal but he came back to much bigger shit than he’d left. It was all too much.

“If someone needs me, I’ll be at my flat.” He stood up slowly this time, fight and anger giving way to grief and confusion as his stomach churned to match the first signs of a migraine.

“My driver can take you.”

“I’ll get a cab.” *Then a pack of smokes.*

Chapter Thirteen

Mat

Mat's growling stomach motivated him to sit up in bed the next evening. He winced as his brain felt like a prickly rock trying to push his eyes out from the inside.

When he'd entered the flat the day before, he'd searched for food and found only a jar of pickles and a box of stale cereal in the kitchen cupboards. Uncle must have sent someone to clean out the place as the food that he'd left in the fridge was gone and there was not a speck of dust in the entire one-bedroom flat.

Thankfully, he always kept the liquor cabinet full. Once he'd gone through the twelve-pack of Coronas, he reached for vodka. Now, he couldn't remember what had happened after that. He used to drink regularly and party every weekend, most often at The Golden Handcuffs.

The rapid change of lifestyle on the island had forced Mat to create a new persona for himself and, with that, new habits, while the old ones slowly faded away. For the four months on the island he'd only sampled wine for the mass and had an occasional whisky at the pub with his new friends, with Peyton... With all the people he'd lied to and who had no idea that he was an impostor. Peyton may have been told who Mat was in theory—a nephew of the infamous Polish mafia boss—but he didn't know the real him.

Mat's eyes landed on the suitcase Uncle's minion had brought an hour after he'd entered the flat. He'd dragged it to

the bedroom but left it untouched. In a hurry to leave Uncle's house, he'd only grabbed his priestly duffel.

Swaying, he tried not to step on the beer bottles on the floor. He needed more. *Do they deliver those? Maybe with a grocery order?* He could use some takeout, too. Ugh, he needed his phone.

After a quick rummage in the suitcase, he found his old phone and put it to charge. Sitting on the rug next to the wall socket, he fired it up.

An onslaught of messages from his friends reminded him he had a life beyond his duty to Family. His duty to Jack.

Mat took a deep breath and forced away an image of Jack in an alley with a hole in his forehead. Instead, he focused on the texts.

Caleb, a friend he'd met online and who emigrated to the UK a few months prior, was moving in with his boyfriend in Bristol. Luna, a girl who'd gone to school with Mat, was inviting him to a party from five weeks before.

Hugh, his closest friend apart from Jack, had been messaging Mat non-stop during his absence.

They'd met because the fame of Hugh's hair salon preceded the man. Mat had heard about the open acceptance of queerness in the establishment. But it was the praise people sang about the owner's talent that made him want to check it out. Once he had, he'd recognised Hugh as a member of The Golden Handcuffs and fellow kinkster.

It was protocol not to react if you met someone outside of the club, and neither of them acknowledged it, bar a nod in understanding. But once they impromptu spit-roasted a sub at the club, they'd clicked as friends quickly after that.

Hugh was a self-made man, his story the complete opposite of Mat's privileged upbringing. He'd worked on his craft and salon from the ground up and Mat's respect for Hugh had no bounds.

Now, he scrolled through dozens of texts Hugh had sent him during his absence.

'Meet you at 8 at the club?'

'You're due a haircut. I'm expecting you to pop in.'

'It's probably not a surprise, but Brendan and I moved in together.'

'Stop ignoring me, you asshole lol.'

'For real, where are you?'

'OK, it's been two weeks so I assume you're either on business and can't tell me cause it's one of your secrets, or you're on a yacht somewhere, balls deep in a twink.'

'Seriously. A month and I'm starting to worry. No one at The Handcuffs knows where you are.'

'Your uncle's guys at the club only told me you're alive and well, which should be good enough I guess.'

Several more messages followed with various degrees of concern and banter until they changed in tone:

‘Oh fuck. I heard about Jack. I’m so sorry.’

‘I hope you’re OK. Let me know when you can talk. Jack’s funeral was beautiful.’

The newest message was from an hour before. The man never gave up.

‘I’m helping plan a collaring ceremony at The Handcuffs. If you read this and can come, please do. It will be beautiful. It’s next Saturday at eight.’

Mat sat back on the bed and typed a reply. ‘I’m back. Sorry about the radio silence. Shit happened.’

Incoming call from Hugh.

Mat sighed and braced himself before he swiped the green icon, and immediately started talking. “I’m a shitty friend, I know—”

“Mateusz! Bloody hell, are you alright?” Hugh interrupted him, his voice high and distraught. “What happened? Tell me everything! Where are you?”

Mat released a short chuckle. “Slow down. I’m fine. I’m at my flat.”

“You sound like shit. I’m coming over.” Hugh’s tone was decisive even though he knew damn well his dom voice wouldn’t work on Mat.

“I’m a mess. Just—”

“I’ll come over to judge for myself, hm? Then you can tell me to bugger off.” By the clanking in the background, Hugh

was already getting ready to leave.

“Fine. Suit yourself.” As much as Mat didn’t like Hugh seeing him like this, lightness filled his chest after reconnecting with his friend. He should meet Hugh at a cafe or at the club. But if he was to share what had happened to him, he didn’t want to be anywhere public. Not only was he bound to secrecy, he was in no shape to socialise. Besides, his head felt like it would render him unable to leave the house anyway.

“I’ll be there in an hour.” The telltale sound of jingling keys accompanied Hugh’s reply, followed by the closing of a door.

“Two,” Mat said and headed to the kitchen for a trash bag. He’d have to clean the place enough for Hugh not to trip over empty bottles. How the fuck had he made so much mess in a day?

“Do you need anything?” Hugh asked, his breathing suggesting he was running down the stairs.

I need Peyton. “Paracetamol,” Mat squeaked then cleared his throat. “That’s it. Thanks.” He collapsed onto the stool in the kitchen as his head swam. Fuck, he wanted to puke.

“On it,” Hugh said and the line went dead.

It had always been insanely convenient for Hugh to be so flexible, up for anything and ready to party. Mad had been gone for four months and Hugh was on his way the moment he’d received a sign of life. Even now that he had a boyfriend.

Mat had never noticed how lonely his life had been. As Jack’s bodyguard, he’d never been alone, even when running

errands for Uncle or going clubbing, dancing, fucking...

But Jack was dead and Mat wasn't a bodyguard anymore. Which meant he couldn't do his job or fully return to the life he'd left. He should have gone with his cousin, to protect him the way he always had. As had been his duty. Instead, he'd indulged himself in an easy life, preached to people he had no right to preach to, and enjoyed the best fucking he'd ever experienced. Meeting Peyton seemed like a dream now. As if Mat had imagined him—so perfect for him at that time in his life. But the moment had passed and he was not Father Mat anymore.

Mat scrubbed his face with his hand and looked at the mess around him. He'd never been such a drunken pig before. Ignoring the pounding headache, he dumped the bottles into a trash bag and tied it before he left it by the door to take out later. He could afford a bigger flat or a house, even in Soho, but he'd wanted something small enough for him to manage on his own, without the staff of cooks, cleaners, and maintenance crew he'd grown up around at Uncle's mansion.

Showering was quite the challenge. The cold water helped him feel more awake but he ended up shivering all the way to the bedroom. Dressed in overpriced joggers and a t-shirt he only wore to sleep, Mat shuffled to the kitchen to put the kettle on.

The knock announcing Hugh was short and sure. Mat straightened his back and took a deep breath before he unlocked and opened it.

The sight of Hugh brought forward memories of times spent together, but in none of those moments had Hugh's face had been as full of concern as it was now.

Hugh's hair was dyed black with artistically placed white streaks. The waistcoat over his crisp, white shirt shone with gold and black sequins. Even carrying bags full of groceries, Hugh looked impeccable, like from a fashion magazine. He always had, but Mat back then wore tailored suits and looked quite impeccable himself. Unlike now.

"Ohmygod, Mateusz!" Hugh dropped the shopping on the ground and pulled Mat into a hug, his long, thin arms squeezing hard.

Mat reciprocated, even as his stomach flipped at his sudden movement and the intense scent of his friend's cologne. *Don't be sick, don't be sick.*

"I'm sorry. I don't know exactly what happened, but I'm sorry about Jack. Fuck. I went to the funeral and when I didn't see you there, I knew something fucked was going on." Hugh pulled away, holding Mat at arm's length for a moment as if looking for visible damage. Apparently satisfied enough to let go, he transferred the bags to the kitchen, unpacking pasta, sauce, bread, and several full Tupperware containers.

"It all happened so fast, I didn't get a chance to tell you I was leaving. Besides, I wasn't supposed to contact anyone anyway. What are you doing?" Mat watched Hugh open and close the cupboards, looking into them with a frown.

“I brought leftover meatloaf and pasta bake. Do you even have pots and pans?” He turned around, hands on his hips. “Mat?”

“Uhh...” Mat winced the moment he forced his brain to think. “Here!” He pulled out a pan from the cupboard in the corner, still with a tag on the handle. “But you don’t have to do that.”

Hugh glared at him in response, then proceeded to pop the Tupperware lids open. “You were gone for God knows how long, you’re clearly hungover, and you lost weight.” He pointed a spatula at Mat like he was a petulant child. “You’re eating my pasta bake.”

Mat had no energy to argue, especially when faced with Hugh’s fantastic cooking. No one but this guy had ever treated him like an equal, just a friend. Not the heir’s bodyguard, not the mafia boss’s nephew. Not taking each other’s shit was what made their friendship so strong.

“I lost muscle. I didn’t have access to the gym where I’ve been.” Mat tried to turn the conversation to a lighter note but he didn’t feel it. Judging by the way Hugh’s hands shook, neither did he. And Hugh’s hands were always steady, his haircuts perfect and surgeon-precise.

“Damn. You disappeared before but I usually got a text or a postcard. Tell me everything. Or whatever you’re allowed.”

The cat was out of the bag now and Mat could share the events of the past months. Besides, by now he knew Hugh could be trusted. He sat on the kitchen stool and told Hugh

about the attack on Jack's life and how Mat had been shipped to a remote village without disclosing the exact location. The island was a safe haven for those who needed to hide, like the Irish boys, so he'd rather it stayed secret.

In the meantime, Hugh heated the food and sat next to him, listening, pointing at Mat to eat every now and again.

Mat had to put his fork down when the story reached Peyton. His throat closed as he told his friend about the intense and secretive relationship, keeping only the most intimate details to himself.

“And now I'm back here, a complete mess and I can't face Peyton. I just can't.”

“I'm sure he'll wait. From what you told me, he must feel that bond between you too. He wouldn't have given you his London address otherwise.”

“It's different now that I'm back.” Mat felt the food attempting a refund, whether caused by the hangover or the unease concerning his fake identity. “He knows me from how we met. Not *this* me.” He waved at the entirety of himself.

“Sure, you pretended to be a priest, but he was aware of that from the start. He knows the real you.” Hugh's words made sense in theory but he hadn't been there.

“Hugh...” This was so hard to explain. “I don't feel like my old self. But not like the priest self either. My head is fucked up.” He winced as pain pierced his temple. “And not only from the alcohol.”

“You’re grieving.” Hugh reached for the last unpacked bag on the counter to pull out pain meds and tossed a box at Mat.

“I should be stronger.” Mat squeezed two pills out from the strip.

“You just lost your cousin, mate. And you haven’t shed a single tear when telling me this entire story.” He plopped back on the stool. “Let yourself grieve.”

“If Uncle can do it... if he can move on from the loss of his son, I can do it too. I have to.”

“And how do you know how he’s feeling, hm?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Mat popped the pills into his mouth and swallowed. Stalling, his thoughts a mess, he stood to pour water into a glass and drink its contents before refilling it. “He does his job and goes to work every day anyway. And I’m...” He returned to his seat only because his legs felt wobbly. He didn’t want to face his friend. “I don’t even have a purpose anymore.”

“Whoa, Mateusz. Hold on there.” Hugh pushed his seat back and placed his palms on the counter as if ready to make a speech. “You have your share to do at the club. And fuck, you have The Games to take care of.” Mat knew his friend didn’t approve of the underground fights but he still acknowledged and accepted all aspects of Mat’s life. “You set it up here, in Oxford, and Bristol by yourself.”

“I had help.”

“Yeah, OK but you did it, mate. Now, even your uncle gave you time to rest. Take it.” He stood up and paced the small kitchen. “You’ll have a lot on your plate once you’re ready to go back to work.”

“I’m not sure I can go out there like nothing happened. Like Jack wasn’t... like he...” *Like he wasn’t dead because I didn’t protect him.* Mat’s voice failed him and he swallowed, unease like a colony of ants crawling under his skin. He needed the old Mateusz back. “Did you bring smokes?”

Hugh pursed his lips. “I hoped you wouldn’t ask for them.”

“But you did buy them?” Mat asked in a hopeful tone.

“We’re friends for what, five years?” Hugh raised his hands in exasperation. “Of course, I bought the fucking smokes, even though I hate that you kill your lungs with them.”

“You’re the best.” Mat stood up to rummage in the bag on the counter. He snagged the pack and shoved it in the pocket of his joggers. Glancing at the remaining necessities, Mat made a mental note to wire Hugh money back after he left. Otherwise, he wouldn’t accept it.

He looked at Hugh’s face, his brow marred with worry but his entire demeanour glowing. Being in a relationship looked good on him. “Tell me about you and Brendan. How have you been?” He attempted a subject change, needing to hear some good news.

“I see what you did there.” Hugh pointed a fork at Mat as he took their plates to the dishwasher, still restless on his feet.

“But I’ll let it slide.” Even as he rinsed the Tupperware, a smile bloomed on his face. “We considered selling both flats to get a new one but since his is right above his flower shop, it was convenient to keep it. So I moved in with him.” Hugh said this as if it was the easiest, most natural thing in the world.

If only it was so easy for Mat.

“That’s quite close to your salon, right?” Mat tried to recall where Brendan’s shop was.

“A thirty-minute walk or a fifteen-minute run.” Hugh chuckled, doing a little twirl before he sat back down. “I would know.”

“You look happy.” Mat smiled for the first time that evening, his spirits lifting at the genuine joy in his friend’s face.

“I am. It’s like my heart has a purpose to beat. I don’t know how to explain it.” Hugh bit his lip before he grinned.

Tears sprang to Mat’s eyes as he felt the words hit true to his own experience with Peyton. “I think I know what you mean.” He cleared his throat. He couldn’t go there. Thinking of Peyton hurt too much. He had to let him go, for both their sakes. “What’s the collaring ceremony you mentioned?”

“Oh oh oh!” Hugh clapped his hands. “Brendan’s brother and his fiancé. I think it’s more important for them than the wedding they’re planning next year. Will you come to the club for the ceremony?” He beamed, excitement wafting off him in waves.

“I’d be an idiot to miss it. How about you and Brendan?”
Mat asked. “How’s he with the club?”

Mat had liked the guy the moment he’d seen how good he was for Hugh. Their relationship dynamic wasn’t easy to guess but Mat’s keen eye had spotted the needy bottom in Brendan quickly. Hugh had confirmed it as Mat watched the big, hairy ex-rugby player blush when he’d held Hugh’s hand.

“It will be his second time going. We’ve been once before but haven’t played. He’s very eager but I don’t want to push him too fast. I told him he’d wear a plug for the ceremony and he was so excited, it makes me hard just thinking about it.” Hugh repositioned himself on the chair then tugged his waistcoat down.

“I know you proposed, but are you planning a wedding too?”

Hugh had told Mat about the romantic proposal on the beach just a week before Mat’s life turned to shit.

“We’re aiming for May next year but haven’t decided yet. Brendan had an idea of a double wedding with his brother, so we’ll see what they think. We definitely won’t get to talk much after the collaring ceremony. Cause—*oof*.” He whistled low. “You’ll know what I mean once you’ll see those two at the club. They are fire.” He made jazz hands as he said the last part and Mat burst into laughter.

The evening went by on more catch up as Hugh used his mad skills to cut Mat’s hair and make him resemble a civilised human again.

All too soon, Hugh left, leaving Mat alone with his thoughts.



Hours spent with his best friend invigorated Mat enough to feel less miserable. And there was the food too. Then Mat sprawled on the sofa and patted his belly. Damn, Hugh could cook.

He was a fabulous hairdresser, but drunk Brendan told him once that Hugh was very good with his hands in other ways too. Mat was happy for his friend but at the same time, it made the gaping hole in his chest more real. What if Peyton wouldn't want the wreck that Mat had become here? Worse, Mat wasn't sure Peyton even knew what Mat had done to end up on the island. Somehow that had not been a topic they'd discussed during what they knew would be their last day together on the island. They'd both just wanted to play their game and get off. Except it had been so much more. As a result, Peyton had an image of only a fraction of who Mat was. What if he hated the rest?

Mat had never had that issue before. Rich, powerful and dressed to kill, with a body honed by daily gym workouts, nothing could shake his confidence. He would enter The Golden Handcuffs where the bouncers knew him, the drinks were free for him, as was the VIP booth reserved only for the Family, which most often meant him, Jack, and whoever joined them. He'd play with a twink or two in an evening, maybe do a flogging demonstration on said twink as he would

be strapped to the St Andrew's cross on the stage of the public playroom. Then he would fill a throat or a tight hole in one of the rooms at the back before returning home. Unlike Hugh, Jack had been too private to share a man with Mat, instead sneaking off to his suite with his chosen partner for the night.

Now, Jack was... gone, Hugh was engaged, and his friend Caleb, lived in Bristol. It hit Mat how short the list of his closest people was. It took him a while to trust someone enough to call them a friend, as he'd learnt the hard way how many people wanted his uncle's money or influence, not Mat himself.

Now he felt like he'd never done anything with his life and, at twenty-eight, he had no idea what to do next. No solid plan for the future but work for the Family and simply exist.

Feeling dizzy again, despite, or maybe because of, all the food, he closed his eyes. He recalled the moment he held the note from Peyton with his address on it and had read it over and over until he'd memorised it. He reached for his phone from the bedside table and only then opened his eyes to type in the address into the map app. *That's not far from here.* He sat up, already ordering a cab.

Five minutes and twenty British pounds later, he exited the cab, giving the girl a five-star rating for not trying to chit-chat once she saw his gloomy expression.

Peyton's flat was in an white ornate residential building in Marylebone. Fancy, but not over the top. With a shaky hand, he fished out the pack of cigs from his pocket and ripped into

the foil. Once one was in his mouth, he lit it with the lighter he'd grabbed from the kitchen counter before he'd run out the house. The first long inhale filled his lungs with the blissful familiarity until it scratched every place it filled. "Fuck!" Mat coughed, his chest on fire, but he took the next drag. He couldn't smoke on the island so the very act felt like a declaration of freedom.

He stood across the street from the apartment building, hiding in the semi-darkness between street lamps. As he smoked, he peered up at the windows, trying to work out which one might be Peyton's.

A light switched on in one of them and Mat's eyes immediately focused on it. Someone was moving around the room, their tall frame casting shadows over the delicate curtains. Mat's heart pounded fast and he backed away until his ass hit a fence behind him. *Is it Peyton?*

God, how he missed his face. His beautiful smile, his laugh, his low, sexy voice, his body...

His eyes prickled and, as if on cue, rain patted on his head. The tiny drizzle became a downpour within moments, turning the night sky into complete darkness. Mat shivered as his tracksuit and trainers soaked through and his feet felt as if he had walked into the ocean. Yet, he kept looking up, hoping for a glimpse of his lover.

The man deserved so much more than the wreck of a man Mat had become.

Just then a slim and tall figure appeared in the window. With the illumination from behind Mat couldn't be certain but he recognised the lines of Peyton's body even from afar. The man looked straight at Mat even though he should be fairly invisible in the pouring rain. His shoulders slumped and he pulled the heavy curtains closed, cutting Mat off from the warm light of the flat.

Mat's soaked feet slapped the pavement until he found a local corner shop. He passed the fridges with beer, needing something that reminded him of Peyton and would hit harder and faster than lager. He reached for two bottles of Irish whisky to keep him company for the evening, then added two more to the basket.

He'd been wrong. Going back to London hadn't magically turned him back to the man he'd been before he'd taken someone's life. Nothing was as Mat had left it. London didn't heal him. Everything was complete and utter shit as dark thoughts took more and more space in his head with each day.



A week had passed since Mat stood by Peyton's window in the rain. Since then, all he'd done was drink and sleep. As the day of the collaring ceremony drew close, Mat knew he had to get his shit together enough to be presentable. He promised Hugh he'd be there.

A push he'd got from Uncle was an additional motivation. The man had called to tell Mat he should show himself out in

public so people would know the Family was still standing strong, that Jack's murder had shaken them, but not broken them apart. If only it was the truth.

A message from Hugh popped on his phone and Mat swiped to read it.

'Are you coming tomorrow?'

'Yeah. I'll be there.' Mat typed quickly.

'Fab. See you at the club.'

Mat had to look presentable showing up at the place he'd spent many nights since he'd turned eighteen. He couldn't let his grief—his weakness—show. He'd taken a week to wallow in drink and smokes. It was enough, and time to return to his normal life. His cock had remained unused since the last night with Peyton, but the club's atmosphere and half-naked bodies had always turned Mat on in an instant.

Maybe today he would snap out of the state of limbo and find a tight hole to fill. That would make him feel better. Yes, definitely.

He had a plan.

With determination filling him, he walked over to the sound system that cost more than a fancy car and played Ramstein. The heavy thump rattled the windows as Mat turned the volume up, letting the familiar German lyrics fan the flames of his seething anger. He took his t-shirt off and tossed it to the side as he released a scream of frustration that blended with the music.

Standing barefoot on the living room panels, he stretched before he picked up a set of barbells and worked out until every muscle in his body screamed. Until he had to run to the toilet to refund the lunch and the alcohol still in his system.

Chapter Fourteen

Mat

The quick move from the island back to London was fucking with the routines Mat had got used to as a priest. Now, he woke up before six in the morning even if Mary's breakfast was not waiting for him. He missed the physical labour at the distillery, as well as the friendly faces of the people who worked there with him.

Staying at home for days with nothing else to do hadn't helped him either. But that would change today.

Mat stood with hands on his hips and looked at the suit he had just put on. It was black silk that moved flawlessly with his body and matched the black shirt he paired with it. After months of life in a cassock, picking a dark outfit was natural, as if his old self merged with the priest he'd pretended to be for a while. The sleeves were looser on the biceps than they used to be, but not by much. Work at the distillery had helped with his strength but his definition had gone to shit. He needed to return to the gym and his previous shape—focus on himself and what his life would be like from now. He had to make Uncle proud—resume taking care of the Handcuffs and look into improving the Games. And it all started today with his attendance at the collaring ceremony.

He'd talked to Aunt Jagoda on the phone every other day, telling her about his time on the island as she briefed him about the club. Jack was a constant visitor in their

conversations and they'd grown to laugh at stories of the past despite them now being dogged by the tragedy.

With a sharp tug, he straightened the cuffs of the shirt peeking from the jacket and squared his shoulders. The puffiness of his eyes and the redness of his nose were nearly gone and he was determined to look like he wasn't about to crumble into pieces and climb back into bed. To accomplish that, he poured himself two fingers of whisky, keeping the hangover at bay.



The Golden Handcuffs. The yellow neon sign above a steel door was a welcome sight when Mat stopped in front of it. He'd bought a flat close to the club on purpose, wanting to be able to come and go as often as he pleased with just a few minutes' walk.

"Welcome, Boss." Darek, the bouncer at the door, grinned at Mat, flashing his golden canines. "Been a while."

"Thanks. I'm back now." Mat nodded at the man twice his size. "How's your mum doing?"

"Oh, so much better. After Szeff got her into that fancy facility, her backache is gone and she even signed up for tap dancing lessons." The joy in Darek's tone put a smile on Mat's face.

"Excellent. I'm happy to hear that. I'll see you later."

"All right, Boss." Darek nodded and held the door open.

Mat could have entered through the back door but he liked to see what experience members of the club received as they went in. He passed by the lift and took the stairs down instead. Since he hadn't been here in ages, he took in the black and red corridor leading to a cloakroom and changing rooms—for those unwilling to travel dressed in fetish wear—before he emerged by the bar.

He took off his jacket and left it at the cloakroom, knowing that he didn't need a keychain with a number to retrieve it. Continuing his stroll, he rolled his shirt sleeves to his elbows, showcasing his brown leather bracelet. It was more of a cuff with the engraved name of the club. Patrons wore those to signal their rank and preference. The brown colour of his meant that he was a top and a dom but he didn't work for the club. Only the doms who did presentations on stage and demonstrations of different techniques had a black cuff. Some of them could be hired for a session that always brought crowds. The service subs had steel bands painted gold. They were the true treasure of the place—wearing golden handcuffs.

No one was restricted to only one bracelet. Depending on the mix, a second one could be for service tops, power bottoms, and the biggest crowd—a neon green steel cuff for freelance subs, often young and inexperienced, their membership not established enough to wear a gold one.

Purple steel bracelets were for staff who didn't want to engage because they were on duty, like a bartender or a bouncer, or because they were not in the mood for the day.

The dance floor opposite the bar was lit in pinks and purples, bathing the sweaty crowd in happy colours. The disco ball reflected the lights onto the dancers moving to the rhythm in the human-sized bird cages hanging off the high ceiling. His Aunt Jagoda had been in charge of the place for years but Mat wondered now if she'd still want to do it after she left Uncle. If not, Mat could take over her duties alongside his own or find someone much more suitable than the people she'd picked. Although, despite his scepticism, the club looked well-taken care of.

Mat turned to the bar and smiled at Lucy's friendly face. She'd been working here in drag for at least six years, bringing the staff together and spreading positivity while keeping the bar stocked and well-tended. According to Aunt Jagoda, Lucy now had free rein to order whatever was needed and managed the bar to perfection.

"Mateusz, good to see you!" Lucy sashayed towards him, her glittery fingernails tapping the counter. "What can I get you? The usual?"

"Hi, you look fantastic," Mat said, taking in the outfit of bright yellow latex that clung to Lucy's slim waist and fake boobs. "And no. Irish, neat. Make it double."

"After years of vodka and Coke?" Lucy's drawn-on eyebrows rose at the change of drink. "Coming right up."

The moment Lucy served Mat's whisky, he saw she wanted to ask something, maybe comment on the fact that he'd been absent for a while, but the chaos in the queue pulled her away.

“Order!” Lucy barked sharply, the sweet tone of her voice gone for a moment before returning.

The customers shuffled to form a neat queue but one guy cut it. He was swaying slightly and swiped a hand on the bar where Mat’s drink stood. The sudden shatter of glass on the ground paralysed Mat on the spot. Lead covered his feet and cold sweat broke on his back.

It wasn’t a gunshot.

The amber liquid on the floor was not blood.

By the time Mat shook himself back to reality, the man was apologising to him as a security guy escorted him out with a gentle but firm grip on his arm.

“Here’s a fresh one,” Lucy said and slid a glass of the same drink towards Mat.

“Thanks.” Mat took a sip, relishing the pleasant burn down his throat, taking a moment to compose himself. “There’s a collaring ceremony today. Where is it at?”

Lucy clapped her hands. “Oh, it’s a good one too. It’s on the theatre stage, starting soon, I’m going too. Pawel will come to tend in the meantime. The couple is—fuck, sorry.” Lucy turned around as the queue vibrated in need of drinks.

“Thanks!” Mat yelled, letting Lucy work. “See you there.”

Mat meandered through leather and latex-clad people, noticing how they looked at his suit. Only the long-standing customers and friends of the Family could forego the strict dress code the club had—no regular clothing.

It wasn't a rule anyone would break easily, as it was in place for a reason. It allowed kinksters to feel at home and prevented the grey population from entering in their jeans and polo shirts to feast their eyes on a culture so foreign to them. Enough drink could make them point fingers and laugh. Mat had seen that type of behaviour at other cubs during his travels and he was glad it had no place at The Handcuffs.

His suit was a sign of status, as was his engraved leather bracelet that marked him as the club's high-ranking dom. Standing out used to bring him a rush, but today he'd rather stay less visible. Too bad he hadn't thought of it before coming over.

Most people asked for their collaring ceremony to be in the Dungeon, the room with a big round stage, and several smaller ones used for BDSM presentations like shibari and flogging where others could watch. It was perfect for it.

Today's couple picked the Theatre that usually held burlesque shows, decorated in heavy drapery with ornate walls.

A dazzling sequined waistcoat drew Mat's eye and he entered the Victorian vampire's dream place. Hugh's waistcoat hugged his slim waist and bare chest, leaving a sliver of abdomen visible above tight leather trousers.

"You're just in time." Hugh grabbed Mat's arm to pull him to the front of the gathered crowd. "Brendan! Mateusz is here," Hugh chirped the moment they reached his fiance, a huge bear in leather shorts. His big chest was on display and

Hugh raked his fingers through the hair there as he side-hugged him.

“Hi,” Brendan mouthed, then turned his misty-eyed stare towards the stage.

Mat followed his line of sight. “Who is who?” Mat whispered, trying not to disturb what looked like the start of the ceremony.

“The one wearing the harness is Brian,” Hugh explained. “Brendan’s older brother.”

“They don’t look alike.” Apart from being tall, the sub’s musculature was on the leaner side—athletic without being bulky, as opposed to Brendan’s mountain-like build.

Brian’s tight black trousers and leather harness accentuated the definition of his muscles as he moved with grace. His Dom was nearly his height but slimmer in build, with a Taxi-driver-style blue stripe of hair, tattooed arms, and wearing only black leather trousers and boots.

“Wait. Is that Master E?” Mat elbowed his friend.

“Yup.” Hugh grinned.

“I thought he never took subs for more than a night.” Mat frowned. Wow, he’d been gone for a while.

“A lot changed for both of them and they seem all the happier for it.”

Mat watched Master Kage step to the middle of the scene in a leather waistcoat, trousers, and knee-high boots. “Are they

having an officiant?” Mat asked. During most ceremonies, the Dom spoke the vows and placed the collar on the sub, but it was up to the couple how they wanted their collaring to be organised.

“Brian insisted on it being wedding-esque that way,” Hugh explained then put a finger on his lips. “And Master Kage is E’s friend.”

Master Kage’s eyes narrowed, and he widened his stance as his hand tightened on the handle of the bullwhip he was holding. Even his tall and lean frame coupled with a nearly angelic face wouldn’t fool anyone who’d ever seen him in action. His scenes were famous for elaborate ideas and he had subs applying online months in advance for a spot with him on the stage. With the confidence of a seasoned Dom, he lifted the bullwhip and cracked it above his head. The sound ricocheted in the air, and the entire room fell silent, bar a stray squeak of leather clothing.

“We are gathered here to celebrate the union between Brian and Master E...” He continued talking, his face deadly serious, his words resounding throughout the Theatre like it was a cathedral.

“I, Master E,” the Dom said, “commit to own and protect my sub, my beloved.” He cleared his throat, eliciting snuffles from a large percentage of the crowd.

Mat’s eyes remained glued to the couple. Soon it was the sub’s turn to promise to be owned and to obey his master.

Mat registered the words but his mind travelled to the way Peyton knelt in front of him, much like Brian lowered himself to his knees before Master E.

If they'd met under different circumstances, maybe Mat would have had a chance to develop a proper D/S relationship with Peyton. Would a collar be what he wanted? Would he want to hold hands on the beach? Marriage? Kids? Those possibilities were surreal and so out of his reach, the mere thought of them hurt his heart.

Mat closed his eyes to take a deep breath, inhaling the smell of leather around him and whiskey from his glass. He opened them to see Brian still on his knees and Master E holding a heavy-looking beaded necklace. It shone, reflecting the glow of dozens of candles surrounding them. It was either steel or silver—Mat couldn't tell from where he stood, but it was beautiful for its purpose. Brian could wear it daily without drawing the attention of the vanilla population. The man definitely loved it as he looked up with tear-filled eyes, baring his neck to his dom.

Master E closed the necklace around Brian's neck, securing it with a tiny padlock in front.

He reached a hand to help his sub up and they moulded their lips into a kiss. The gathered guests cheered and clapped as someone turned on music and let Axl Rose squeak through the speakers. The couple swayed to the song about rain and what sounded like grieving but Mat would never judge anyone for their choices, music or otherwise. Especially not in this club.

“I’m going to congratulate them,” Hugh mumbled, wiping his tears with the hand that wasn’t squeezing his boyfriend’s. He kissed Brendan on the lips and the big man squeezed him close.

“Join us at the after-party. It’s in Gluttony.” Hugh turned to Mat and waved a hand towards the corridors leading to the rooms named after the seven deadly sins. Each of them was equipped with tables, sofas, and a small stage in the middle. They were intended for private parties and could be locked from the inside for orgies, a development that had resulted from clients’ requests for spaces bigger than the bedrooms available at the back.

“Will do. I’ll just get a refill.” Mat lifted his empty glass. The teary and romantic atmosphere was fucking with his head.

Chapter Fifteen

Mat

In hopes of feeling more like his old self, Mat ordered vodka and coke, knowing damn well that the hangover would be worse when he mixed it with the whiskey he'd already had. Then again, if he continued drinking, his head would never catch up.

Needing a minute of peace before he joined the collaring party, he sat in one of the leather armchairs facing the dance floor. He sipped his drink and realised his bracelet was showing the moment a pretty twink with ear-length ginger locks knelt at his feet. His gold sub bracelet shone in the neon lights as he ran his hands up Mat's spread thighs.

The music was so loud, they'd have to yell to hear each other, but it was clear what the sub asked for without words. The man's face looked familiar and Mat wondered if he'd fucked him before. Yes, he had a birthmark on his ass cheek... But what was his name? Maybe Mat had never asked. The young man's hands rested on Mat's knees, his big blue eyes looking up at him with hunger as he nuzzled Mat's trousers. The sub was gorgeous and willing but his attention did nothing to rouse Mat's cock from its sad slumber.

All he could think of was Peyton and how beautiful he was on his knees, how soothing his voice was, and how he deserved so much more than Mat could give him. His glass clattered on the tiny table he put it on as he looked up in exasperation.

There, high under the ceiling, he spotted a dancer in a cage, his lithe body moving with grace. He was dressed in a purple lacy top that clung to his lean chest and leather shorts that showed the curve of his arse. His shape and movements reminded him of Peyton, and Mat thrust his hips up at the thought. The sub's mouth closed over Mat's growing erection through his trousers, and he moaned, sending delicious vibrations. Mat slid his fingers into his hair on instinct, his eyes still on the dancer. He wanted to piston his hips in tiny quick thrusts, his cock buried deep in a hot throat. But the man on his knees was not the one he wanted.

The pretty sub didn't turn Mat on as much as the man in that cage for his similarity to Peyton. As Adam Lambert finished singing his heart out and the song ended, the metal contraption was lowered to the ground.

Mat pulled the sub's head back by his hair to meet his hooded gaze. "Not today," he mouthed.

The young man thrust his bottom lip in a pout but nodded. He sprang up and sashayed into the throng of sweaty writhing bodies.

Mat's eyes followed the dancer who stepped gracefully out of the cage and turned around. Through the dance floor's crowd, Mat could barely see his face...

Peyton?

It couldn't be.

Deep brown eyes met his from the other side of the dance floor and Mat's pulse quickened. A myriad of lights reflected on Peyton's regal face as he smirked before he swivelled on his heel and let the crowd swallow him.

Mat's heart leapt into his throat as he jumped to his feet and ran after him. He spent the next half hour searching the club for his lover. *Ex-lover?* There was no way of knowing where they stood. He combed through the dance floor, the dungeon, the theatre, and wandered around in hopes of bumping into him, to no avail.

Was Peyton mad at him? Mat had never promised him anything.

But Peyton hadn't made any promises either...

As the thought hit him, Mat's stomach dropped, filled with invisible lead.

Fuck.

He closed his eyes and tried to contain the rage directed inward. *Głupi zjeb.* He should have visited Peyton before like a normal person, not a creepy stalker. He should have reached out, even if it was just to tell him that they couldn't be together, they wouldn't work in the real world. But he'd been a coward and unable to face the truth, let alone speak it.

Storming out of the club, he recited the address to the nearest cab driver waiting on the curb. He could run but it would take him over fifteen minutes. Instead, during the short drive he tried to summon ideas for anything remotely logical

he could say to Peyton. After tipping generously, Mat exited the car, his mind still blank.

Standing in the same spot he had the week prior, he looked up to the windows of Peyton's flat. The lights were off. Maybe Peyton had stayed in the club after all. *Fuck*. Energy left him and he slumped against the iron railing at his back.

"Took you a while."

Mat snapped his head towards the sound of Peyton's voice. "It did," he said, wallowing at the sight of his man sauntering his way, his long bare legs eating up the distance.

The sea-blue trench coat he wore billowed in the wind, making the sequins accenting the collar and pockets reflect the street lights. Peyton's heavy eyeliner accompanied purple, glittery eyeshadow that matched his lacy top.

He looked... different.

Mat had been undercover when they'd met. But so had Peyton. Gone were the calm clothes of a church-goer. Now, his personality shone outside as well.

Mat knew he'd been in trouble when thoughts of Peyton had occupied his every waking hour since his return. Now, he was certain he had no chance to stop thinking about him unless Peyton told him to leave him alone. Peyton was his obsession, his drug, and now, he was weak.

"You didn't get your cock sucked tonight so you came here?" Peyton asked, hands on his slim hips, eyebrows raised.

"That's not—" Mat sputtered as if slapped back to Earth.

“Never mind.” Peyton waved a dismissive hand in the air.
“Come in or you’ll get soaked again.”

Mat winced. Peyton must have seen him that day in the rain. He felt like a fucking loser, a stalker, a failure. Putting pride in his pocket, he followed the billowing coat.

Peyton’s mid-calf black boots, with more buckles than the belts of her Majesty’s army, led the way to his flat. They took the stairs to the second floor and stayed quiet until Peyton unlocked the heavy white door with a click of several bolts at once.

“Lock it,” Peyton said and flipped on the light.

Mat did, turning the bolts and hanging the chain.

The smell of incense filled his nose before he realised it was coming from the potted plants suspended from the ceiling, snuggled in crochet baskets. The bohemian living area was neat and colourful with scattered pillows on the sofa, a shaggy rug, and... a sex swing in the corner.

Mat blinked and turned to the wooden shelves packed with books right next to a cabinet full of dildos. They stood proudly in different shapes and colours, some silicone, others glass, presented like ornamental pieces in a museum.

Peyton was in the kitchen, pulling out mugs from overhead cupboards when Mat entered.

“Yorkshire or Earl Grey?” Peyton asked, filling in the kettle with tap water.

“Do you have something stronger?”

“I do,” Peyton grunted without looking at Mat. “But you’ll get it after we talk.”

Well, shit. “Yorkshire is fine. Just a splash of milk.”

Peyton swirled around in the tiny kitchen, opening the fridge door with a sharp tug only to get the milk and slam it closed.

“Listen—”

Peyton shushed him with a finger in the air. “Tea first.” He took both mugs and nodded for Mat to take a seat on the sofa.

Mat sat stiffly; even the lewd watercolour paintings on the walls couldn’t lift his mood. He had no clue what to expect and Peyton didn’t seem happy to see him.

“I can just go—”

“Don’t you dare.” Peyton stomped with the mugs into the sitting room and placed them on the glass and rattan coffee table with a dull thud on the cork coasters.

Despite being raised by mafia and having seen a lot of shit in his short life, Mat had the urge to grab one of the knitted blankets draped over the armrest and wrap himself in it to protect him from Peyton’s glare.

Mat expected Peyton to sit next to him on the sofa, but the man pointedly sat in the armchair in front of him. His expression was stoic, but the sharp features of his face conveyed his anger. Or was it disappointment?

“I thought we had something special back then,” Peyton said, crossing his long legs at the knee, his expression dead serious.

“We did. We still do. But...” Mat sighed, unable to put the chaos in his brain into words.

Peyton closed his eyes and shook his head. “But it was fun when it was convenient and now it’s over. Is that what you want to say?”

Wait, what? “No. Not like that.” Mat scooted to the edge of the sofa. “Listen, I’m not the same Mat you met back there. I’m not a priest, nor a do-gooder, I’m not—not *that* man.”

“I know that.” The ‘I’m not stupid’ came implied in Peyton’s tone. “That’s no reason to avoid me. Let me get to know *this* Mat.” He thrust his chin up. “The one who stands in the rain outside my window.”

Dear Lord, Mat felt like he was the one who should drop to his knees this time.

“You don’t want to,” Mat said, his voice sounding resigned even to his own ears.

“Would this Mat make me kneel at his feet? Would he pour hot wax all over my back?” Peyton recrossed his legs, all Catherine Tramell from *Basic Instinct*, seductive and smart at the same time. “Tell me, would he fuck me until I saw stars, then hold me all night?” His expression challenged Mat to compare his two dissociated personas.

Mat swallowed. “Of course.” Whoever he pretended to be and wherever he was, he would always want willing and naked Peyton all to himself.

“Then I want this Mat, too. Can I have him?” Peyton stood up and extended his hand as if Mat could place his heart on it. He would if he could. Or maybe it already was there, sneaked under the veil of night without his notice.

It wasn’t the first time Mat found himself unable to say no to Peyton. In fact, since the moment he’d appeared in the confessional, Mat had been wrapped around his slender finger. Yes, he was the dominant one coming up with ideas for their scenes, but it had always been Peyton who’d instigated them and who fuelled Mat’s brain and pumped blood to his cock.

Mat had never said no because he’d never wanted to. He wasn’t about to force himself now.

Wordlessly, he took Peyton’s hand and stood up, pulling Peyton into a hug. He inhaled the scent of his lightly sweet cologne and clean sweat, the heady mix hitting his senses. His cock instantly reacted at their proximity, hardening in his trousers.

“You know you can trust me, right?” Peyton asked, his beautiful voice close to Mat’s ear like a siren’s call.

“To be fair, I can’t know for certain, but my gut says I can trust you.” *And Uncle told me to always go with my gut.*

“That’s good enough for now.” Peyton pulled away but his arms remained locked at Mat’s nape. “When I was very young,

my father was in financial trouble and made a deal with your uncle.” He let his hands fall to his sides then took a seat on the sofa, patting it for Mat to join him. “For the money he needed to keep his distillery afloat, he’d pay twenty per cent of his earnings to your uncle... forever. Even if he dies and me or my sister take over.”

The details of the deal were news to Mat, but he recalled Uncle talking about connections they had with the whisky business. Now, he hoped some puzzle pieces would fall into place. He nodded, and sat next to Peyton, encouraging him to continue.

“Your uncle could also ask for a favour here and there. He didn’t do that often but a few months ago he asked my dad to send someone he trusts to watch over his nephew and make sure he stays safe and doesn’t blow his disguise. I thought him sending me to buttfuck nowhere was a punishment for this party I threw that ended up a clusterfuck, but it was actually a sign of his trust.” He flipped his hand palm up and Mat placed his into it, cherishing the connection.

Could it be that simple? Talking and touching. God, Mat hoped so.

“If I fucked up,” Peyton continued. “If something happened to you on that island, my dad wouldn’t be in your uncle’s good graces anymore. I found that out only after he summoned me back for a week. I was so careless, so *stupid* approaching you at all. But what we’ve done—what I asked you to do—put you in danger.”

“Shh, no.” Mat danced his fingers on Peyton’s waistband until he touched the hot flesh under his top for comfort. “Don’t tell me you regret it. Because I don’t. Until you, I didn’t realise how empty my life had been. It was busy—full of parties, trips, business meetings but not... not what I had with you.” *That metaphysical connection.*

“We can figure out how to have that again. Without sneaking around. Or at least not in the long run. If you still want me.”

The vulnerability in Peyton’s voice broke Mat in half. *How could he ever doubt that?* “Why wouldn’t I—”

“It’s been two weeks, Mat,” Peyton said, his lips forming a straight line.

“I was dealing with some stuff. I still am.”

“Alone?” Peyton scooted closer, their knees bumping, as if he too missed their proximity.

“Well, yeah. I didn’t even think to put all that burden—all that’s been happening in my life, what’s happening here—” he let go of Peyton’s hand to point to his temple, “—on you. You don’t need that.”

“Mat, sweetie, let me tell you something.” Peyton shuffled back, forcing Mat’s hand off his hip. “I will kneel for you. I will beg for your cock. I can be your cumslut in the bedroom. But—” He lifted a finger up. “I will not let you tell me what I need in my life, OK? I need a tender man who can listen to me

read him a book in bed and I need a dom with a firm hand. I found him but now he's the one who seems lost."

"I am. I'm so fucking lost, Peyton." Mat's throat hurt and his eyes burned from the tears he was trying to hold onto.

Peyton took Mat's face in his hands. "Can I be the search party? I want to help find you."

Mat nodded, hardly believing how vulnerable he'd let himself be. But it was Peyton, the man his body craved, the one his heart hurt for. "Yeah. I'd love that."

"Will you tell me what happened? Are you allowed?" It was such a relief that Peyton understood who Mat was and that not all secrets were his to tell. But if his uncle and Peyton's dad trusted him, so could Mat.

Mat nodded and took a deep breath, organising his thoughts. He'd frequently wondered, in the event he gathered the courage to approach Peyton again, whether he'd disclose the reason for his being sent to the island. Peyton had a right to that knowledge and to decide if he really wanted to know Mateusz, the nephew of the Polish Mafia's boss or just the nice priest Mat had pretended to be. If Peyton hated him for what he'd done, Mat would rather know now than keep lying to him by omission.

"First, I need to tell you why I had to be in hiding, but—"

Peyton opened his mouth to speak but Mat stopped him.

"No, let me finish. This is important." He had to start from the beginning. He took a sip of scalding tea and nodded to

himself. “I was Jack’s bodyguard and I swore to protect him with my life. But that wasn’t it. I would protect him without that role—he was like a brother to me. So, when I heard a scuffle one night, I busted into his room and my world stopped for a second. Some guy had a knife at Jack’s throat.” He swallowed, recalling the moment. “I didn’t hesitate.” He looked up, pulling his shaking hands from Peyton’s to fold them over his chest. “Peyton, I shot him. I shot him in the head.” Mat shuddered as the vivid images from that night flashed in his mind. “And I would do it again to save him. I would. This is why you can’t be with me. This is who I am.”

Peyton reached to unfold Mat’s hands and squeeze them. Mat tried to pull away but Peyton was stubborn and held on.

“I know,” he said, his voice calm. “I know what you did to protect Jack. And that you could come back to London because he was killed in retaliation for it.”

“I thought you had no idea...”

“Not back then. But after I came home for a week to deliver my report on you, I asked my dad about the hows and whys.”

“And you still came back?” Mat was dumbfounded, his brain wrapping itself around the notion of Peyton’s acceptance.

“Yes. I didn’t know what would happen to us so I had to have one more night with you.” Peyton’s soft smile turned into a wicked smirk. “And it was one for the books.” He paused, his gaze lowering to their linked hands. “So good that I hoped that you’d come to find me.”

“I did.” *Sort of.*

“Standing in the rain doesn’t count.”

“Fair.” Embarrassment crept up Mat’s cheeks. *I acted like a total creep.* “Are you mad at me for that?”

“Maybe a little. I’ve been waiting for a sign of life from you for so long, I tried to tell myself to stop, to let you go. Because if you cared for me, you’d reach out.”

“Peyton, I—”

“But after I found out about Jack all I could think of was how you must have been grieving and how I wanted to be there for you. From what you said, you two were close. Yet if you didn’t want me there for that... It was OK to fuck but not to share something tough, scary, and meaningful.”

“I didn’t know what to do with myself, and dragging you into my mess still sounds like a horrible idea. You can have anyone else, not this—” He shrugged, pulling his hands out of Peyton’s grasp to point to himself.

“I know what I want.” The tiny smirk on Peyton’s lips invigorated Mat’s heart.

He cupped his lover’s cheeks, needing to feel the shadow of a stubble under his fingertips. God, how he missed that regal face. He’d woken up every morning with the hope of seeing it, of having Peyton next to him.

Peyton’s eyes filled with warmth as he placed his hands over Mat’s. “Can you stay the night? I don’t want to let go of you just yet.”

Mat pulled the taller man on his lap and wrapped his arms around his waist. “Yeah.” He rested his cheek on his lover’s sternum. “I just want to stay here,” he said as he listened to Peyton’s heartbeat.

Chapter Sixteen

Peyton

Falling asleep in Mat's warm embrace was something Peyton had dreamt of for weeks. Waking up with a crick in his neck and a cramp in his thigh from sleeping on the sofa was not. The weight and scent of his guest was gone but the sounds of the shower suggested he wasn't far.

Peyton tossed the blanket aside, stretched like a cat in the sun, and blinked his vision awake. Their tea mugs were still on the table, along with empty Tupperware boxes from the Chinese they'd ordered. The entire evening had passed talking about their lives, childhood, likes and dislikes, the way they hadn't had the chance to talk before—openly and honestly. Spending those precious hours with Mat only secured Peyton in his position to fight for him. For them. Mat seemed careful and hesitant—not about his affection, but about their future. Peyton hoped that this morning Mat would be ready to discuss it.

Peyton would be forever grateful to his mum for teaching him that talking things through with an open mind could solve a shocking amount of problems. It had saved Peyton a lot of heartbreak, even if his previous boyfriends rarely appreciated him asking how serious they were about him early in their dating. Despite freely giving his body to Mat, he was not ready to have his heart broken and needed to know where they stood.

Sure, they'd reconnected just the day prior but their time had been more meaningful to Peyton than his months-long

previous relationships. If Mat was looking for a fling, and would want to move on quickly, Peyton would rather know now than remain stranded like he had been for the past three weeks.

After taking the mugs to the kitchen, he tidied up the area and ventured to the bathroom. He knocked to announce his presence before he opened the door.

“I hope you don’t mind,” Mat said between the suds sliding down his face as he rinsed his hair.

Peyton’s gaze followed the soapy water as it travelled down the valley of Mat’s pectoral muscles and abs. His cock hung flaccid and Peyton’s mouth watered at the rare sight. “Not if I can join you.”

Mat smiled, pushing the door to the shower stall open in reply.

Peyton chucked his shirt and underwear into the hamper and stepped in behind Mat. The enclosure wasn’t huge but spacious enough for the two of them to fit closely together.

Peyton’s eyes were immediately drawn to the tattoo on Mat’s back and he traced his fingertips over the white griffin rampant on a red crest background. It had a tail and ears but the most characteristic part was the crown made of knives on its head.

“Your Family’s coat of arms?” Peyton’s hand smoothed the soap down, relishing the feel of Mat’s back muscles flexing under his palm.

“Yes. My great-grandma added the crown of knives to it after she immigrated to the UK with her husband. It represents the viciousness we need to have to survive and thrive as Family.” Mat rolled his head on his shoulders, letting the water cascade over his upper back. “She was an artist and a true matriarch, bringing everyone together. The notion of Family we have now started with her and that crest.”

“I’ve never seen this,” Peyton breathed with awe at the perfect execution of the design, the bold lines and detailed shading. The tattoo was doing the powerful symbol justice.

“I made sure you wouldn’t. It would give away who I was.” Mat snorted, leaning into Peyton’s touch. “Of course, you knew that already anyway.”

“I’m glad I can see you now. All of you.” Peyton’s words held more meaning than he led on, hoping Mat wouldn’t shy away from what they had again.

“Jack and I got these as matching tattoos for my eighteenth birthday. His was just two months after so we celebrated together.” Mat soaped his arms and legs in quick movements and Peyton was too mesmerised to offer help. “I’m itching to get a new one.”

“A tattoo?” Peyton reached for the bottle of shower gel and lathered himself up, making sure he was ready to welcome Mat into his body.

“Yeah.”

“I’ve never liked the idea of needles stabbing me for hours, so I don’t have any.” Peyton leaned over to place a kiss on Mat’s shoulder, the same way Mat had done to him after binding him with rope. A shiver ran through Mat and he turned to wrap his arms around Peyton.

“The pain is worth it in the end.” Mat’s hands splayed on Peyton’s back, caressing. “Sometimes you have to suffer to get what you want.”

Peyton nodded, ghosting a finger over the delicate gold necklace with a cross pendant snuggled between Mat’s pecs.

“This is not a disguise necklace, is it?” Peyton asked.

“It was a gift from my parents for my first communion.” Mat looked down at it, wrapping his hand around Peyton’s. “They may not be here anymore but they live in my heart.” His smile wasn’t sad, as if Mat remembered the fond moments more than the tragedy itself. “My uncle is my godfather and he gave me a gold watch that day. It’s too small for me now but I keep it in a box on my desk. It still works.” He chuckled. “I need to show it to you someday. And so many other things...”

Peyton murmured in agreement and buried his face into the crook of Mat’s neck as they stood under the spray in a tight hug. The deep breaths they took confirmed that they both had been waiting for a minute of simple closeness forever. There was no tension between them; as if the lukewarm water had washed it away and they could live in the moment together.

“This feels different,” Mat murmured, grazing Peyton’s ear.

“Because it’s not a stolen moment. We won’t have to steal them anymore.” Peyton let his hands slide to Mat’s buttocks, feeling the glorious curve under them. “If we choose each other.”

“It’s not that easy.” Mat mimicked Peyton’s move, cupping Peyton’s ass.

“I didn’t peg you for a quitter.”

“I’m not.” Mat pinched Peyton’s buttock, sending a spark of lovely pain through it.

“Prove it.”

“I can’t think right now. There’s no blood in my brain.” Mat ground his hips, showing where all the blood had gone.

Peyton snorted. “Oh God, that’s awful.”

He felt Mat smile against his shoulder as his fingertip made its way to graze over Peyton’s pucker, teasing a purr out of him.

They didn’t need to discuss this. Their sex had always been instinctual. And this time, they were stripped bare of all pretence.

With a reluctant groan, Peyton stepped out of the stall, dripping water on the sand-coloured tiles. Mat’s hooded gaze following his every move sent shivers through Peyton as he tossed a huge towel at his lover. Wrapping one around himself as well, he led the way to his bedroom.

The morning sunlight bathed the room in a warm glow, casting its rays on the patterned sheet set. Peyton had bought it as an 'I miss Mat' consolation gift to himself so that he could wallow in high thread-count cotton. Now, it was on its way to becoming a celebration set instead.

Peyton let the towel slip to the floor and relished a ghost of a touch on his hip as if Mat couldn't keep his hands away a moment longer. He turned around to see his lover looking at him like he was Christmas dinner and Mat hadn't eaten for weeks.

"Fuck, I want you so much," Mat whispered in a tone so tender it was as if he was voicing his deepest thoughts.

"Then take me." Peyton sat on the bed and scooted to the middle of it, watching Mat stalk him like a panther, crawling after him.

Mat's lips were soft when they met Peyton's in a slow kiss, letting him luxuriate in the closeness before he opened to welcome his lover's tongue. Mat kissed like he was taking ownership of Peyton, claiming him, stealing his breath with tender intensity. Peyton gave in willingly, letting Mat push his legs apart with his knees.

Peyton welcomed Mat's weight on top of him and licked into his mouth, asking for more. He got it when Mat rolled his hips so that their cocks slid against each other. With a dash of lube, Peyton would be satisfied with frotting like this until they both came, but Mat had other plans.

A trail of sweet kisses travelled from Peyton's jaw, down his neck and to his nipple where Mat lingered, teasing the piercing with his tongue. Pinpricks of pleasure travelled through Peyton's chest all the way to his groin and he moaned, arching towards the touch. With a deep growl Mat moved lower, placing a gentle kiss on the gallbladder removal scar on Peyton's abdomen as if it were a war wound. Peyton smiled then gasped when Mat licked around the head of his cock before he let it bounce free as he sucked on the sac underneath it. Mat was hungry—his mouth and hands worshipping Peyton's body, the lust clear in his impatient movements. Peyton pulled his legs to his chest, looping his arms under his knees, giving Mat easy access to his hole.

“I missed every inch of you,” Mat murmured into Peyton's groin. “So much it hurt.” More kisses, nips, licks.

Peyton wanted to say something similar but all thoughts flew out of his brain when Mat's tongue grazed his pucker. Instead, he whispered Mat's name along with a chant of “yes please” over and over.

It was one thing to be with an experienced lover, but Mat went beyond that—paying attention to Peyton's reactions and following them, customising his erotic strategy in a way that turned Peyton into a puddle of goo. Peyton's thighs trembled, his balls getting ready to explode as Mat licked, dipping his tongue in while his hands kneaded Peyton's buttocks, his stubble scratching the delicate skin between them. He kissed, lapped and prodded as if Peyton's ass was a feast he wanted to savour and devour all at once. The ministrations made

Peyton's cock harden and his chest swell with adoration. He wished it would never end, while at the same time needing to come hard and fast.

When Mat emerged, licking his wet lips, he met Peyton's gaze as he sucked on his own thumb.

A tiny "please" escaped Peyton's lips before Mat disappeared between his legs again. A pressure on his pucker made Peyton breathe out to let Mat's thumb in. It was a saliva-slicked intrusion and the friction heightened its intensity. Peyton let out a loud mewl and bucked his hips, his hands grappling for purchase on Mat's hair. Sweet and tender was nice but Peyton wanted to be fucked into oblivion.

An evil chuckle from Mat told him that was not the plan. Or not yet at least.

Mat's touch was gone, and the mattress bounced back as he stood up. Peyton took in Mat's honed body as he scanned the room, his tattoo looking alive with the movement of his back muscles.

"Hands above your head," Mat said, pulling out a sash from the neon pink dressing gown hanging on the door.

"Yes, officer." Peyton grinned, grabbing the headboard railing.

Mat gave him a playful glare and waggled a finger.

Ooops. Maybe mentioning police to a mafia prince was a bad idea.

“Yes, Sir,” Peyton corrected himself, his cheeks hurting from the impertinent smile still fixed on his face.

Back on the bed, Mat straddled Peyton, his cock bobbing at Peyton’s chin, enticing him to lick it. He felt a pressure on his pulse points as Mat’s fingers traced the veins there, then the lines inside Peyton’s palms. “Your hands are so pretty. They look so delicate with those long fingers.” He kissed each one. “Yet I know how strong they are.”

“Office work is gentle on the hands.” Peyton closed his eyes as Mat placed more kisses on his wrists before wrapping the sash around them, securing them to the headboard.

Nuzzles and licks trailed down Peyton’s arms to his armpits. Mat’s tongue made Peyton convulse with a giggle before he relaxed as his lover buried his face there. It was insane how Mat’s every tiny move set Peyton on fire more and more.

“Lube?” Mat murmured, nuzzling the sensitive flesh of Peyton’s armpit.

“Top drawer.”

With a kiss to Peyton’s nipple, Mat rolled over to retrieve the bottle. “No coming until I say so.” He positioned himself in the cradle of Peyton’s legs, kissing his thigh before he poured lube over his hole. Peyton welcomed the digit, or maybe two, into himself, trying to remain still for the slick, languorous stretching. But when Mat found his prostate and put pressure on it, he arched his back and his cock bounced in the air. “Oh fuck! Mat, please!”

“Please what?” Mat asked before taking Peyton’s cock deep into his mouth.

“Fuck me, just—Ah! Please.”

Mat sucked, swirling his tongue, hollowing his cheeks as his fingers worked magic. Peyton pulled on the sash around his wrists, holding onto it like a lifeline as he bucked into Mat’s throat. A strong arm pinned him down by the waist and he breathed deep, drinking in the sweet torture of almost too much yet not nearly enough.

Fighting his impending orgasm, Peyton squeezed his eyes shut and was rewarded with more digits inside, preparing him. The suction on his cock disappeared along with the fingers, leaving Peyton needy and empty. The squirt of lube and an unmistakable sound of stroking told Peyton he wouldn’t wait long. Mat’s weight was back on him and a kiss to each of his eyelids prompted him to look at his lover above him.

Mat’s eyes shone, not only with lust, but affection so tender that Peyton’s heart jumped as if to place itself in Mat’s hand. Mat leaned over to link their lips just as the blunt head of his cock prodded Peyton’s pucker. The smooth glide in and the blissful stretch tore a moan out of Peyton that disappeared into their kiss.

Once fully in, Mat paused, nuzzling Peyton’s neck as he murmured something Peyton didn’t understand.

Note to self: learn some Polish if it was Mat’s love language.

Peyton adjusted to the girth of Mat's dick inside, relishing the fullness and letting his lover know that by squeezing him hard. A groan from Mat and a nibble of Peyton's collarbone followed.

Mat pulled out an inch only to slide back in, then repeated the motion, setting Peyton on fire with the languid movements. It was a dance of reunion, but Peyton hoped it was a promise too—a promise of more time together.

“Fuck, you feel so good.” Mat met Peyton's gaze as his dishevelled hair matched the craze in his eyes. “I want to go slow but—”

“Don't.” Peyton gasped with Mat's next thrust. “Just fuck me. Take me. Own me,” he whispered then flicked his tongue over Mat's lips.

Like a bull breaking free from its cage, Mat captured Peyton's lips in a ferocious kiss as he pistoned his hips in a quick, sharp motion. Peyton sucked onto Mat's tongue as he held onto the bindings, taking the sweet roughness of Mat's fucking, his cock filling him perfectly as if it was made just for him.

With a low growl, Mat straightened on his knees, holding Peyton's legs by the calves. He put one of Peyton's feet on his chest, the other on his cheek, kissing the sole before he licked a stripe along it.

The sight and sensation of Mat wrapping his lips around Peyton's big toe to suck it added a fresh layer of excitement. It

was something new, sending shivers through him as they looked at each other, panting, communicating without words.

It was so effortless to give his body to a man who wanted to worship every inch of it.

“Fuck, you’re so perfect,” Mat grunted as he let go of Peyton’s legs to wrap a hand around his cock instead.

Peyton was ready to explode at the contact and he whimpered, wordlessly begging Mat for release.

“Look at me,” Mat panted, each word accentuated by his hips slapping against Peyton’s cheeks. “I want you to look at me when you come. Yes, like this. Fuck.”

Holding Mat’s gaze wasn’t easy as Peyton had the urge to let his eyes roll back and his mind float in the pleasure Mat was giving him.

Mat’s jerking of Peyton’s cock became as erratic as his thrusts. The intensity of it all, coupled with the view of Mat so completely undone, sent Peyton over the edge.

“Yes, ah!” Peyton’s muscles strained as he shot a load on his chest, then another that reached his chin. He felt his ass convulsing around Mat’s cock and he watched his lover’s parted lips, flushed cheeks and chest in all its glory. He was gorgeous in plain clothes on a rainy day, but like this, deep in the throes of passion, he was divine.

Mat changed the angle by lifting Peyton’s hips to thrust harder, deeper, fucking more come out of him. Peyton’s body

trembled from the onslaught as his mind drifted away, leaving him with only this moment of pleasure in his head.

“Fuck, oh fuck, Peyton!” Still thrusting, Mat covered Peyton with his body, wrapping his arms around him. “Come here,” he grunted and took Peyton’s lips.

Peyton swallowed the groan as Mat tensed, his cock pulsing deep inside Peyton, filling him with warm seed.

Mat murmured something into Peyton’s skin in a voice full of the affection of a sated man.

Maybe it was the moment or the relief and joy of having Mat again, but a dangerously emotional thought floated through Peyton, trying to slip from his lips. His heart told him that saying those three words would be right but he’d rather confess his love when not high on fuck pheromones.

Limp and relaxed, Peyton let his lids flutter closed and registered Mat pulling out, untying his wrists, kissing and massaging where the sash had been. He returned to lie next to Peyton, his warm finger touching Peyton’s chin, then his chest. A smacking sound prompted Peyton to pop his eyes open to see Mat’s blissed-out expression as he tasted Peyton’s come. *Oh God...* Peyton lacked the energy to pounce on Mat again, but he sure as fuck wanted to.

“Why pink?” Mat folded the neon sash into a neat square and placed it on the bedside table.

“Why not?” Peyton shrugged. “I like it. It’s not a boring colour.”

“Right. I’m fine with charcoal and black myself, but colours suit you.” Mat scooped some from Peyton’s belly button and licked it off his finger.

At that rate, they’d be horny again and never talk properly. Peyton reached for a box of wet wipes from the bottom drawer and tossed it at Mat, who accepted it with a snicker.

“Initially, I wanted to look different from the boring crowd that visited my dad. To be proudly gay—something he couldn’t dictate. Yet, he still pressured me to wear what he called proper business attire most of the time.”

“I get it. I like me some Armani, though so...” Mat shrugged one shoulder as he continued gently wiping Peyton’s abdomen with the tissues. “I bet you won’t have a suitable change of clothes for me.”

“I might. But I’d give you a crop top anyway just to see you in one.” Peyton snickered, imagining Mat in 80s-style camp shorts to match.

“Brat.”

“I’m so not,” Peyton gasped theatrically.

“Not in the bedroom.” Mat kissed Peyton’s cleaned-up chest and balled up the wipes before he plopped onto his back. “You’re just...you’re...” Mat hesitated as if not wanting to let the next words out as he stared at the ceiling. “Mine.”

Peyton rolled over and buried his face in Mat’s chest, nodding so Mat wouldn’t see the grin on his face.

Chapter Seventeen

Peyton

“OK, this is not so bad.” Mat walked into the kitchen wearing Peyton’s oversized Chewbacca t-shirt. His flaccid cock swung underneath it and Peyton had to force his gaze away so as not to drop to his knees to taste it.

“I’m out of beans for full English but... are you OK with hash browns and bacon and eggs?” Peyton asked, opening the fridge door. *Shit, only three eggs left.*

“What kind of bread do you have?” Mat looked around the kitchen, his gaze lingering on the souvenir magnets on the fridge. He snickered at the cock-shaped ones from Peyton’s trip to Greece.

“Uhh, full grain with seeds, why?”

“If it’s not the nasty white toast, I can make sandwiches.”

“Oh. Sure.” Peyton tried to contain his elation at Mat being so comfortable in his house. “Take anything you need.” He waved a hand in the general direction of the fridge and cupboards.

“I can’t cook for shit, but I make a mean sandwich.” Mat grinned, tracing Peyton’s arm from shoulder to his hand, leaving goosebumps in his wake. Was it weird that having Mat in his flat was more surreal than freaky sex in a church? Maybe. But now Peyton had both and he wasn’t about to look a gift horse in the mouth.

After raiding the kitchen, Mat arranged butter, lettuce, tomatoes, ham, mustard, and spices on the countertop while instructing Peyton to boil the eggs and make coffee. Watching him prepare the ingredients, Peyton knew that this view would remain sealed in his memory. A domestic moment they'd never shared before. That he used to think they could never have.

Peyton's throat constricted, and he chastised himself for being emotional over something so trivial. But in the grand scheme of things, those tiny moments were the most precious ones to cherish.

Peyton peeled the eggs and handed them to Mat, who cut them into slices and arranged them on top of the other ingredients on the two plates with sandwiches. A dash of mayo and mustard, then a pinch of spices and he waved a hand in a ta-dah motion.

"*Kanapeczki*," Mat said, waggling his eyebrows as a playful smile turned his face even more insanely handsome. "Sandwiches are the first food Polish parents teach their kids to make for themselves. It starts with a slice of bread, butter and some cheese but it can turn into a nice meal on its own."

"I can see that." Peyton eyed the mastery on the plates.

They ventured to the sofa they'd slept on and covered the small table with plates and coffee.

The moment Peyton reached for his food, he felt Mat's gaze on him. He took his first bite of the sandwich and his taste

buds sang at the perfect proportions of the simple ingredients.
“Mmmm. Subway can go fuck itself.”

Clearly satisfied with Peyton’s reaction, Mat smiled and dug into his own.

They ate in silence, but Mat’s eyes roamed around as if he was trying to decipher a mystery. Once done, he picked up his mug and walked over to the shelves of books and knick-knacks, ducking under the low-hanging potted fern. His fingers traced the CDs that spanned from Britney to Adele, with an occasional ABBA thrown in.

“You’re into pop, huh?” Mat asked, already moving to the cabinet of dildos, tilting his head as if imagining using them.

Oh yes, please. “You’re not?”

Mat shrugged. “No. But if it plays in the dance section at the club, I won’t complain. As long as I don’t have to sing along with a whole congregation watching.” He released a dry chuckle.

“You’ve had enough of that, huh?” Peyton pulled his legs up on the sofa and reached for his coffee. “I recall some other church stuff we did with fondness though.”

“You don’t think God will smite us?” Mat asked, leaning against the wall, mug in both hands.

“Nah. Faith was never strong with this one.” Peyton pointed at himself. “You?”

“Losing faith was a gradual process for me.” Mat blew on the steam coming from his mug. “But it’s gone now.”

“Do tell.” Peyton had read basics about Mat in his file but it was their long talk the night before that had filled in the gaps about his parents and how he ended up being brought up by Szeff. Peyton had shared a lot about himself as well, but there was still so much they didn’t know about each other.

“After my parents’ accident, I prayed every night wishing that when I woke up, they’d be alive. It was a silly child’s fantasy but I thought if I believed hard enough, God would grant a miracle.” His laugh was self-deprecating and Peyton wanted to get up and hug him. But he stayed quiet, listening.

“I told Aunt Jagoda about it and she said God listened to my request and answered. But his answer was ‘no.’ I held onto my faith after that, but not for long.” Mat sipped his coffee but then placed it on the table as if it had lost its taste.

“I’m so sorry.” Peyton hoped Mat heard the sincerity in his voice. “It must have been hard. I can’t even imagine.”

Mat crossed his arms over his chest and shrugged. “As I grew up and glimpsed what the church asked Uncle to help them with, my faith in the institution crumbled first. I wanted to believe. It would be easy to rely on the thought that there was something waiting for us in the afterlife. At that point, I knew I was gay so I couldn’t believe in a deity who’d allow so much cruelty in the world, yet hate people who love each other only because they’re the same gender. Even to a twelve-year-old that made no sense.” Mat plopped back onto the sofa like a deflated balloon, showing how hard of a subject that was for him. Peyton appreciated him sharing all the more.

“That’s fair.” Peyton smoothed a hand over Mat’s arm, enjoying how the little hairs there raised under his touch.

Mat’s body visibly relaxed at the contact, but his gaze remained straight ahead. “Having faith would be easier now, I think. Losing my parents was hard, but at least I knew there was nothing I could have done to prevent it. It’s so much different with Jack. If only I’d been there... If only I’d done my job.”

“You saved him when you could.” Peyton scooted even closer, his thigh touching Mat’s.

“And that wasn’t enough. In the end, killing someone wasn’t enough for Jack to live.” He closed his eyes and swore in Polish on an exhale.

“Is that what your nightmares are about?” Peyton asked without thinking, then hoped he hadn’t pushed too far.

“How do you—” Mat stiffened, looking at Peyton with panic in his eyes.

“You thrash and mumble in your sleep.”

“Sorry you had to see that.” Mat looked away but didn’t shrug off Peyton’s touch.

“I’m more worried about whether you’re doing anything to address it. Have you talked to someone?” Peyton’s stomach twisted at the thought of Mat struggling with his PTSD for months alone.

“I’m talking to you.” Mat huffed as if the question had been illogical.

“A professional.” Peyton sighed when Mat gave him a confused glance. “Not the killing kind.”

“I don’t need a therapist. I’m fine.”

“Is this some ‘boys don’t cry’ shit?”

“No!” Mat bristled then pursed his lips. “Yes. I was brought up that way. I know it shouldn’t dictate my life, but I still don’t want to talk about it.”

“OK. But would you consider getting help? My mum can recommend a therapist.”

Mat grunted in disapproval. “I don’t need it. I need you.” Mat looked at Peyton with intensity that reached his soul. “But I won’t drag you down. That’s why I didn’t reach out before. I’m a mess.” He buried his head in his hands and leaned forward. “Besides, if I can’t tell the whole truth, what’s the point?”

“You can if they’re already familiar with who you are and are on my or your family’s payroll.”

Mat looked up at that, his expression less reluctant before it fell again. “What would I tell my uncle?”

“That you’ve seen The Sopranos and got inspired. Jesus, Mat.” Peyton squeezed Mat’s hand. “I’m sure he cares for you enough to understand.”

“Yeah, OK. God, you’re stubborn.” Mat eyed Peyton and a smile tugged at the corner of his lips. “Brat but not in the bedroom.”

“That’s me.” Peyton side-hugged Mat. He hated seeing him struggle. He wanted to help, but he wasn’t the product of a healthy family either. Reaching out to a professional seemed like the best solution, even if it meant jeopardising sexytimes with Mat to discuss it. “Where does that leave us?” Peyton finally asked the question that was on his mind all along. “Do you want to continue playing our game?” *Please say you want more too.*

“It’s my favourite one to play...” Mat kissed Peyton’s temple. “Until someone gets hurt.”

“You’re tough.” Peyton snuggled close, throwing a leg over Mat’s lap.

“I meant you. You know what happened to Jack and he wasn’t even my...” Mat cleared his throat, swallowed, then reached to take a sip of his cold coffee.

“What if we keep our relationship behind closed doors? Then I’ll be safe, right?” It would suck, but it was better than nothing.

“That wouldn’t work. I can’t act like I’m not crazy about you in public.” Mat sneaked a hand under Peyton’s shirt to caress his hip. “And you deserve much more than being a dirty little secret.”

“Mmm.” Peyton nuzzled Mat’s neck as a shadow of doubt hung over him. He would fight for Mat, but not if the feeling was one-sided. “So we can’t— we...”

“Fuck. I’m trying to be reasonable, but I know it’s a recipe for misery.” Mat pulled Peyton onto his lap to straddle him and looked up to Peyton’s face. “I want you. Just you. Holding hands, exclusivity and all. I need to know where your head is at.”

Peyton’s lips trembled as he kissed Mat quickly once, then once more for good measure. “I want everything. I just thought maybe you—”

“I’m sorry if I gave you any other idea. I’m a mess, but my thoughts have been on you since I saw you at the other end of the chapel, sitting with your perfect hair and mesmerising eyes.” Mat cupped Peyton’s cheeks, pulling their faces close. “The day you came to my room was the first time I’d felt alive since—” He swallowed, then shook his head as if to disperse demons looming over him. “Since that day. I was afraid I treated you like a balm, a drug. Then once I got addicted, I could never live without you.”

“What if you don’t have to?” Peyton’s heart filled with hope, with the possibility of a future. No matter how or where, but together.

Mat closed his eyes, took a slow breath then opened them again to show the determination in them. “Then I’ll do everything to never lose you again.”

They reached for each other and clashed in a desperate kiss, sealing their agreement, their promise. In a frantic grapple for flesh, they spread on the sofa, their hands roaming over each other.

Peyton pulled away for a breath. “Holding hands, huh?”

Mat squeezed Peyton’s ass, smirking. “Yeah. But I’d like a written list of your limits, too. I know we’ve been fucking without one, but that was reckless and I took what I could under the circumstances. I don’t want that with you. We’d negotiate as we go. And the same goes for me. I want you to know where my kinks lay so we can be on the same page.”

“Yes. Yes to all of it.” Peyton beamed, his cheeks hurting as his stomach filled with butterflies. “Actually, I’ll send it now. Just need to update it.” Peyton picked up his phone from where it lay face down on the table.

“Now? Well, that’s even better.”

“Yeah, I have it saved.” Peyton located the list and opened it. “I’ll tick and untick some boxes since I’m more flexible about what I want to do with you.”

“Like what?” Mat made lazy circles on Peyton’s thigh with his thumb.

“Like barebacking. But you’ll see the rest yourself.” Peyton smirked, scanning the pages to make sure he updated it properly before attaching it to an email. “Type your address.”

Mad did, and a moment later was reading the list on his phone with a grin as well as a blush on his face. “Fuck. I’m getting hard just reading this.” He repositioned himself, his hard-on thickening on his thigh. “Sex in public, huh? That’s not that surprising.” He put his phone away and turned to

Peyton, visibly trying to leash his excitement. “I can’t wait to turn this into a checklist.”

He cupped Peyton’s face. “God, Peyton... You make me want to be a better person,” Mat said then frowned. “But there are things you should be aware of. You know about my family, but not my part in the business.”

“OK, shoot,” Peyton said with confidence, certain he couldn’t be surprised at this point.

“I’m responsible for organising underground fighting.”

“Fucking hell, Mat.” Peyton sat up, taken aback and interested at the same time. “Tell me.”

“I have some footage on my laptop, but it’s in my flat.”

Peyton narrowed his eyes. “Very smooth way to invite me over.”

“Well, at least you don’t have to wait until Sunday at nine to drop in.” Mat poked Peyton’s ribs, making him back away with a squeal.

“Har har. Let’s get dressed then.”

Mat was forced to wear clothes from the night before, grunting that his suit jacket was crumpled and the trousers would need to be dry cleaned.

Peyton threw on a mesh top and black, chic cargo bottoms to go with his red leather jacket. Pure joy coursed through him when he intertwined his fingers with Mat’s as they left the building.

Chapter Eighteen

Peyton

Peyton insisted on walking to Mat's place, needing the air and time to process everything they'd discussed. The warm sun on his face and Mat's hand in his created an illusion that nothing could break them apart.

Mat's flat in Soho was starkly different from Peyton's. The sleek, modern furniture and decor in shades of black, grey, and white gave off a posh feel despite several empty whiskey bottles in the corner.

Mat opened the windows in the sitting room the moment they entered and frantically picked up stray items off the floor, including beer cans and mugs. If Peyton could describe the state and smell of the place in abstract words, he'd say it was depression mixed with grief.

The room was divided from the kitchen by an island with four stools around it and a fruit bowl with one apple and a pack of smokes in it. Mat appeared in his field of vision, grabbing said pack and shoving a cig into his mouth like his life depended on it.

"Do you mind?" he asked around the filter, his hand reaching for the lighter next to the stove.

"No, other than you destroying your lungs, I don't mind." Peyton had spent enough time in rooms filled with cigarette smoke to the point it was hard to see anyone's face to care anymore.

Mat rolled his eyes and lit up. The way he took the first drag, his chest expanding, his eyelids fluttering closed reminded Peyton of him sucking something else entirely. Fuck, someone should smack him with a horny stick.

Back to the reason they'd come here. "So how about that Fight Club you mentioned?"

Mat chuckled. "We call them 'The Games,' since you can't mention a 'fight club' or an 'underground ring' in a casual conversation." Mat unplugged the laptop from cables on the desk in the corner to bring it to the island.

"I thought you didn't talk about fight club." Peyton smirked then slid onto one of the stools, propping his feet on the metal foot rest.

"Shut up," Mat chuckled as he fired up the laptop, then took a seat next to Peyton and navigated to a folder with videos. "Here's a fight from Bristol I recorded a few weeks before my exile." He kissed Peyton's temple, lingering there for a moment. "Funny how I call it that when the predominant memories I have from it are so good."

"I hated being shipped there too. Then everything changed." Peyton moved his stool closer to Mat's to see the screen better as Mat clicked play.

The footage showed what looked like inside of a brick building with a makeshift ring in the middle, illuminated by an industrial floor lamp.

“It was in a derelict factory. We change locations to avoid cops smelling what’s up,” Mat explained, sitting straighter. “That’s Caleb, my friend.” He pointed to a compact but muscular guy with a bunch of tattoos all over his bare torso and arms. He fought a much larger bloke but moved so fast on the balls of his feet, Peyton immediately hoped he had the upper hand.

Then the blows landed.

“Holy shit!” Peyton covered his mouth with his hand as he flinched, but his eyes remained on the gruesome fight. He watched as Caleb’s head bounced back from a punch and he spat blood on the thin mats on the ground. “That’s so brutal. And not at all like in the movies about boxing.”

“That’s why it’s so popular. It’s raw and real, not some brushed-up shit for the masses.” Mat caressed Peyton’s back making soothing circles that only marginally helped as he watched the distressing video.

“You said you grew up seeing violence around you, but I haven’t. So this is... just ouch.” Peyton grimaced. “What kind of medical staff do you have on standby?”

Mat winced, looking guilty. “A guy who used to be an A&E doctor.”

“Used to?”

“He got fired for malpractice.”

“Oh, God...” Peyton groaned. This was worse than he’d thought.

“I can improve whatever is needed.” Mat closed the laptop shut, as if hiding evidence. “This is a huge source of income and the club launders it. It’s been working like clockwork for years.”

“The Golden Handcuffs?” Peyton’s voice reached high notes.

Mat nodded.

Of course the mafia-owned club laundered money. “Why the fighting? You said this was your idea.” Peyton tried to understand the reasoning behind it all.

“You grew up with money, yeah?”

“Yes,” Peyton nodded, but his brows drew together. “So?”

“I never had to wonder where the next meal will come from, or whether I’d be able to pay for medical bills for my mom, or send a sister to a better school, shit like that.” Mat repositioned himself to face Peyton. “Did you?”

“No,” Peyton answered slowly, not sure where this was going.

“There are people out there who need quick cash in exchange for entertainment. Some would choose to do something harmful for many people, others would only harm themselves.”

“This is some morally grey shit, but I know who my dad does business with and some of them are much shadier than a fighting ring.” Peyton waved a hand for Mat to continue.

“Selling drugs is much worse than camming online. The second is not harming anyone, but not everyone is entertaining enough to draw a crowd to earn decent cash, so I provide an alternative.”

“You say that like you know people like that.” Peyton raised his brows.

“I do. Several of my friends complained that so many portals for sex workers fuck them over. Then, just last year, this genius guy I know needed funding to create a social media website that ensured a safe place for content creators in the sex industry.” Mat sat straighter, visibly excited. “I had to fund it. It was such a brilliant idea.”

“Are you making money on it?”

“No, actually. Don’t tell my uncle.” Mat chuckled. “It wasn’t an investment, more of a donation. I used my own money so he didn’t need to know what I spent it on. It’s making good cash now for the owners, apparently, the content creators are happy with it too.”

“Do you often sponsor stuff like that?”

“I gave a small donation to an app last year too where matched couples turn up blindfolded for the date. It sounded like a fun idea.”

“Hey, I like that! Lets you avoid awkward meetings after a bad date.”

“Exactly. He’s made a small fortune on it now, so that went well.”

“So the reasoning behind the Games is to give people a way to earn money while you also make a killing yourself?” Peyton asked, getting the conversation back on track.

“Yeah, basically.” Mat nodded.

“How did it come about?”

Mat drummed his fingers on the countertop. “I had a privileged upbringing, that’s no secret. So I’m only aware of other people’s struggles because they told me or asked my uncle for help. With lives like ours, it’s easy to get lost in the bubble of wealth and easy-ish life.” He waved to indicate the nice flat. “But I’ve been working for my Uncle since I turned sixteen. He trusted Jack and me with secrets we were probably too young to know. We sat through recruitment to the Family, to our inner circle, as well as some punishments. In time, we made friends with the unfortunate people who reached out to my Uncle with money or troubles with the law. They grew up in tiny flats, got evicted, ended up on the streets, addicted, abused, you name it. My uncle gave them a roof and a decent wage. Since most of the workers came from shady backgrounds, some immigrants, looking for a better life, they knew a thing or two about using their fists. They often fought among themselves. It had been Jack’s idea actually to bet on who’d win. It started as an inside fighting ring for funsies, between us teenagers.” Mat swivelled on the chair as he spoke.

“It showed us an untapped opportunity. Not everyone wants to be on the mafia boss’s payroll but some may want fast cash on the side—no strings attached. We were barely eighteen

when Uncle sent us to scour old abandoned buildings in London and ask around clubs whether anyone would be into earning some cash fighting. There was always one or two of Uncle's men following us around far enough for us to pretend we didn't know Uncle was worried about our safety. The London ring quickly became popular so we expanded to Bristol and Oxford. We give a cut to the mafia in those cities, though, and they've been chill about it so far.

“What I'm getting at is that we want to make dough on that, sure, but it's not as bad as it looks. The fights provide quick and easy money for those who need it without the need to pay taxes on the cash. Like Caleb. You saw how well he fought there.” Mat tapped the laptop with a finger. “He couldn't work legally for a while and used the money from the fights to settle in the UK.”

“You're quite the Robin Hood.” Peyton grinned, sliding his foot up Mat's calf.

“No.” Mat chuckled. “And neither is Uncle. It's business. It's an illegal business to boot. But is it worse than what the leaders of this or other governments do? Nope. Is it worse than the crimes the Church covers up? Also no. Besides, you know damn well that no one retires from the mafia. Not me. Not you. So we better do well with what we got.”

“Fuck you for making this insane shit sound reasonable.” Peyton pouted and got a peck on the cheek for it.

“Years of practice.” Mat cracked his knuckles, offering Peyton a smug smile.

“You ran this and I did accounting and most of HR in Dad’s distillery. My life sounds so boring in comparison. But I can definitely tell you that your fighting events need more security, and better medical care. And like a dozen more things.”

“How about...” Mat tapped his chin, the stubble on it making him look like a rugged model ready for a photoshoot. “Let me take you to the one happening next week. Then you can tell me what needs changing and I’ll make it happen.”

“What would your uncle say if I meddle in your business?” Peyton was all for helping but he’d rather not anger the big bad wolf.

Mat took Peyton’s hands in his, his expression growing serious. “I’m Family and you’re mine,” he said decisively but paused and continued only after Peyton nodded. “So you’re family by default. He won’t dispute that. He’s a reasonable man.”

“He never had anything against you being—” Peyton rolled his wrist indicating both of them.

“Fruity?”

“Yeah,” Peyton laughed.

“It came as a shock initially, yeah.”

“Why?” Peyton asked then looked at Mat’s suit. “Yeah OK, maybe I can see it but tell me.”

Mat flipped Peyton the bird and smiled. “Back then no one expected a gay bloke to be into stuff that was considered for boys. As if there are some boxes you have to tick when you’re

gay or some other bullshit. I was into cars and football as a boy, then growing up, I dressed in sleek suits, followed the rules, and tried to meet every expectation my uncle had of me.”

“Was it your choice or was it a matter of survival?” Peyton had heard Mat talk about people in distress but his childhood couldn’t have been easy either.

“Thinking back to it...” Mat sighed, “I lost my parents when I was ten, so my future, as I imagined it, went to shit. Uncle raised me like a son, never treating me worse than he treated Jack. The only difference was our rank. Jack was the heir to his business, his only son—and I was his bodyguard, his cousin that was like a brother. Uncle put me through fancy schools, dance lessons, even bought me my first BMW. I felt grateful all my life and I wanted him to know that by just looking at what I did and how I behaved.”

“That makes sense.” Peyton smoothed his thumb over Mat’s knuckles. “So how did you come out?”

“At sixteen, Jack and I weren’t old enough to go to Golden Handcuffs but we were so curious, we told the bouncers that Uncle sent us for ledgers or some shit. They let us in. When I first saw the place it was better than Disneyland.” Mat laughed. “Can you imagine?” His amusement was infectious and Peyton was glad he had so many fond memories around his early sexual experiences. “When Uncle found out he was more mad at the security than at us for being curious. He said he’d rather we fucked and experimented in the safety of the

club than somewhere we might end up in danger. After that, we got our newbie bracelets. It was just a matter of time for Uncle to find out I preferred men.”

“How about Jack?” Peyton hadn’t known the man but he’d been such a big presence in Mat’s life, he wished he could have met him.

“Oh, he had no preference. He’d fuck anything pretty with a hole and let them fuck him.” Mat grinned before his expression turned sad. “He was a force of nature.”

“He was really your brother at heart.”

“He was. We were different but joined by so much, being his bodyguard felt like we were just two guys having the best time. Although once we nearly got shot at the border coming to Northern Ireland on our way to a meeting. It’s not always fun and games, but you know that.”

“Yeah, I do.” Peyton played with Mat’s fingers on top of his lap. “My dad roped me into the distillery and whiskey business. That was the fun part, but the meetings I went to were just with mostly nasty rich guys. So yeah, there were several not-fun moments there. They’re handsy when drunk.”

Mat sat straighter, his jaw tight. “Did they touch you?”

“They tried, but no. Nothing bad like that. A harmless grope here and there,” Peyton said, even if he knew now even that shouldn’t have happened. “After that, I started to work out a bit. So even if I still look thin, I’m a lot stronger than I used to be.”

“You’re perfect.” Mat rode his hand up Peyton’s shirt, tracing his abs. “So fucking gorgeous.” He groaned.

Peyton opened his legs, as Mat slid off his stool to step between them. “Oh yeah?” Peyton soaked up the praise.

Mat inhaled the side of Peyton’s neck. “I can’t believe that you’re mine. Tell me again.”

“I’m yours.” Peyton ran his hands up Mat’s back, feeling the muscles flex. He slid one hand under his lover’s shirt, tracing the ridges of muscle on Mat’s abdomen.

“I used to be much more fit.” Mat nuzzled Peyton’s cheek. “I’m going back to the gym this week.”

“Where do you go?”

“I have a membership to one nearby. They have lots of actors and TV personalities as clients so they’re very secretive and quite safe.” Mat pulled away to face Peyton. “Will you come with me?”

“To ogle you as you sweat? Sure. But I’d love to check out the equipment too.” Peyton teased the band of Mat’s boxers.

“For now, can we still...” Mat hesitated even as his hands cupped Peyton’s ass. “Roleplay?”

“Oh fuck, Mat.” Peyton pulled him closer by wrapping his legs around his waist. “I thought you’d never ask.”

Mat chuckled, a sliver of disbelief creeping into his voice. “Really?”

“You in that cassock? Shit.” Peyton released fake steam from under his collar. “I even borrowed a slutty nun dress in latex from a friend at the club. Just in case I ever saw you again.”

“Lucy? I saw her wearing one before.”

“Yeah.” Peyton grinned. “It’s in my flat. I wish you brought your cassock with you.”

“I did.” Mat’s voice dropped an octave.

A flash of heat crept to Peyton’s cheeks. *Fuck yeah.*

Peyton slid from the stool and onto the floor. Resting his bum on his haunches, he looked up at Mat. “Punish me, Father.”

Chapter Nineteen

Peyton

Naked and with eyes closed, Peyton tried to even his breathing as he remained still, kneeling on the living room floor. He listened to Mat in the bathroom then probably the bedroom, going by the sound of wardrobe doors sliding and zippers opening.

It was mind-blowing to return to their fantasy, to the familiarity of it, while also being so inexplicably themselves. He recalled the first time he'd crept into the priory, stripped in the corridor and waited for Mat to open the door and find him naked and on his knees. It was the best decision he'd ever made. Now, just as then, the anticipation peaked during his waiting, giving him time to imagine scenarios, as well as set his mind free and prepare his body to be used.

The sound of Mat's feet approaching sped up Peyton's pulse. "You don't think this is fucked up?" came his voice.

"Nope. It isn't." Peyton opened his eyes to see Mat with wet hair slicked back and wearing a cassock. "It's ours," he breathed, his cock hardening at the sight.

Mat flicked Peyton's nipples with his fingers until they peaked under his touch. From the pocket of his cassock, he pulled out steel clamps connected with a chain.

Peyton's heart pounded but he tried not to squirm. Now that Mat had read his list of limits and preferred kinks, he could push their play much further than before. The most exciting

thing was that Peyton didn't know whether he'd do it today or not.

“Breathe,” Mat said before he closed the first clamp on Peyton's nipple, sending pinpricks of pain through his chest.

Motherfucker! Peyton bit his lip and breathed through his nose. He was good at playing the perfect submissive and he wasn't about to fuck it up by yelling obscenities. The other one followed and once the initial shock subsided, Peyton's cock twitched at the sensation. Just enough pain to elicit pleasure.

Mat's nod of approval and the delicate way he traced Peyton's bottom lip with his thumb sent Peyton into a proper headspace. He was ready to do whatever Mat asked of him.

“Sit on the chair, facing the backrest,” came the order in Mat's silky and commanding dom voice. The one Peyton missed so fucking much.

Peyton did as he was told, parting his legs around the backrest with half of his ass hanging off the round seat.

“Don't move.”

Peyton sat with his back to the room so he couldn't see what Mat was doing, but he heard him approach the wall with the sound system. He grinned when Ave Maria played through the speakers but quickly changed into church organ music—a song that wouldn't play during mass. It was poignant but calming at the same time. Perfect choice.

A moment later, padded handcuffs locked around Peyton's wrists and Mat secured the chain holding them with a longer one to the steel leg of the stool. Peyton wiggled to check his position. He could move his shoulders but couldn't pull his front away from the chair, the nipple clamps constantly rubbing on the backrest. He let a moan fly as delicious pain flowed through his chest.

A kiss to his asscheek told him where Mat was. He must be kneeling on the floor, his face right in front of Peyton's exposed hole. Just as Peyton imagined the position, he felt soft wetness on his pucker.

He closed his eyes and let his body absorb the pleasure of Mat's tongue licking, flicking over, and delving into his hole. Cool slickness followed and Peyton relaxed to let Mat's finger in, exhaling at the welcome invasion.

Mat caressed the rim in slow circles, before adding another digit as his hot breath tickled Peyton's buttock. The moment Peyton felt the familiar pressure on his prostate, his balls drew up in pleasure.

Yes! More.

The only sound he made was a whimpered moan as Mat continued the gentle assault on his p-spot.

"I love the needy sounds you're making," Mat purred, increasing the pressure as he rolled Peyton's balls in his other hand.

“I want to come so bad.” Peyton mewled. “Please, Father, let me come.”

“Not yet.”

Mat’s touch disappeared and Peyton had a hard time hearing over the music, but he recognised the sound of the dildo cabinet being opened and shut. Mat walked in front of him to the sink, but made sure Peyton wouldn’t see which dildo he was washing.

Returning behind Peyton, Mat leaned over him with his weight, pressing Peyton’s nipples to the backrest. “I have to use a dildo on you now, because if I sink into your gorgeous ass I’ll come on the spot.”

Peyton released a pleased sound of approval, thrusting his ass back only a fraction because of his position. A slick, blunt object prodded his pucker and he knew it was one of the glass ones by how hard it was. It glided in and Peyton slumped on the backrest, riding the wave of the pleasurable stretch as Mat fucked the toy into him in languorous motions. A kiss to Peyton’s butt cheek, then a squeeze, made him imagine Mat relishing the view of Peyton’s ass taking the dildo.

Was he touching himself as he did it?

“Ahhhh! Father, can I come? Please!”

Without stopping the penetration, Mat appeared behind Peyton to whisper in his ear. “I have an idea.”

Oh yes, please.

Mat reached under Peyton's abs to tug on the chain on the nipple clamps.

"Do you know what day it is?"

"Thursday," Peyton said, then moaned as Mat pulled the chain again.

"It's Good Friday tomorrow." There was amusement in his voice. "This means your ass yesterday was my last supper."

Peyton burst out laughing, his ass squeezing the dildo in the process. "Would that make you Jesus?"

"No. But you will play him tonight. We need to go to church." Mat smacked Peyton's ass.

"What? I didn't come yet."

"I know." Mat kissed Peyton quickly on the lips. "Let's go."

Chapter Twenty

Peyton

Peyton was not hiding his amused grin as he watched Mat lead the way to St Patrick's Church in Soho Square dressed only in a cassock and a leather jacket.

The elongated red brick structure was close to the street but they couldn't sneak up from the other side as it was attached to the next building. The church's bell tower loomed over the front, right above the entrance that was framed by white columns.

With confidence in his step, Mat approached the front door and shrugged off his jacket to hand it to Peyton. The smirk on his face was so fucking hot, Peyton's knees threatened to buckle. Mat turned serious when he stuck a set of long pins into the keyhole.

"It's always darkest under the lamp, as the saying goes." Mat said, slowly picking the lock.

It took Peyton a moment to figure out the meaning as he looked at Mat, dressed in a cassock and opening the front door of a church. They'd indeed look more suspicious if they tried to break in through the window.

Mat didn't glance around like a frightened villain but clearly trusted Peyton to keep watch. As it was nearly midnight, even the busy streets of Soho were quite deserted before Good Friday and Peyton leaned casually against the door until it opened with a soft click.

Without a word, Peyton followed Mat inside. They passed two life-sized angel statues holding holy water stoups as they walked down the marble aisle, their steps echoing in the quiet chapel. Only moonlight from the windows up above on both sides illuminated their path. Memories of Mat's hand in his in a church swam back into Peyton's head. This was so insane, yet so fucking romantic, too.

Mat might be nuts for bringing them here, but Peyton must be equally crazy for loving every moment of it already.

They reached the steps to the altar and Mat let go to wander to the side. Peyton fished out his phone and pointed its light up the golden marble walls leading to the dome ceiling.

"Beautiful," Peyton whispered, his voice sounding eerie amongst the paintings of saints.

Mat appeared next to him and struck a match to light several candles around the altar, gracing Peyton with a look that told him they recalled the same evening a few weeks ago.

"The procession is tomorrow so the cross for it should be in the sacristy or—" Mat elbowed Peyton and pointed to the big cross propped against the wall. "This is almost too easy," Mat said, amusement in his tone. "Help me move it."

They dragged the simple wooden construction to the white and grey marble floor, where the steps to the altar ended and before the pews began.

"Thanks, that's perfect." Mat pecked Peyton's cheek, then raised a finger as he pulled out his phone for the light. "One

moment.” He disappeared through the sacristy door and returned with an armful of pillows and smaller items.

“I found Holy Chrism Oil.” Mat grinned, lifting a small glass vial. “It’s a mixture of olive oil and balsam, so should be perfect for what I have in mind.” He walked towards the cross, then pulled out more items. “And the crown of thorns.” He placed it on the first pew. “And several pieces of rope. It might be a new set for the curtains at the sacristy cause it was still in a box. Oh, and some pillows.” He dropped them to the floor with a dull thump that echoed nonetheless.

Peyton’s face beamed at the absolute whacko of an idea, but more at Mat’s resourcefulness and kinky mind.

“Where do you want me, Father?” he asked, his voice full of the willing submission he knew worked on Mat like a charm.

Sure enough, Mat repositioned his cock through the cassock as his face became the serious mask of a pious man. “On this cross.” He pointed down. “On your back. Naked.”

Peyton nodded and stripped slowly for Mat’s benefit, but efficiently enough not to waste their time in the holy place.

Mat helped him lower to the cross, positioning Peyton’s arms along the shorter sides and crossing his legs at the ankle in the same position Jesus was crucified. The wood bit into Peyton’s back but that’s where the pillows came in and Mat squeezed them under Peyton’s shoulder blades and hips.

“Are you comfortable?” Mat asked, kissing Peyton’s hardened nipple.

Despite spring weather during the day, nighttime in a church was chilly, but Peyton knew he wouldn't be cold for long.

He nodded in lieu of an answer. "I'm your Jesus. I would die for you and for your sins," Peyton whispered, feeling the sting of the thorn crown Mat put on his head.

"Yes," Mat breathed, kissing a trail down Peyton's abdomen before he reached for the ropes. The whoosh of it was soothing as Mat bound Peyton's wrists and ankles to the cross. Peyton noticed the knot could be untied with one tug. *In case someone came in.* Mat thought of everything, even in the most bizarre scenarios.

Fresh waves of arousal flowed through Peyton and he felt precome leaking on his thigh. He met Mat's questioning gaze and nodded his approval, gently tugging at the bindings.

Mat's face was flushed as he unbuttoned the bottom of his cassock to his mid-chest and straddled Peyton's thighs. Even in the carved, marbled, and bedazzled interior of the statue-filled church, Mat was the most gorgeous thing around. With his slicked-back hair, the stubble forming on his face, and the muscles on his powerful thighs—he could tempt any saint to stray.

Mat reached for the tiny glass bottle and lifted it in both hands above Peyton. "The oil symbolises strength, and the balsam is the aroma of Christ." Mat's voice echoed in the church, sending gooseflesh through Peyton. "Using it signifies the gift of the Holy Spirit when consecrating someone or something to God's service."

Mat looked down at Peyton and his eyes were full of promise. This was their love language and what Mat was doing held much more meaning than a simple roleplay fuck. Peyton felt it deep in his heart and saw the depth of it in his lover's gaze.

Mat poured a dollop of oil on his palm, letting it drip through his fingers to Peyton's chest. "I'm using it today to promise myself to you. Priesthood is a marriage to God, to the Holy Trinity." He reached his slicked hand behind his balls and gasped, his sinful lips parting, his eyes still on Peyton's. "I'm your priest and you're my Christ. Let this be our union."

With that, he oiled Peyton's cock and positioned himself above it.

Their lewd groans ricocheted off the statues and gilded walls as Mat took the head of Peyton's dick inside. He braced his hands on Peyton's chest and breathed deep, his eyelids hooded, his cheeks pink as he slowly lowered himself.

The feel of Mat's tight ass squeezing Peyton hard enough to explode any second was intensified by the fact that it was the first time Mat had chosen to take Peyton's cock. He turned it into a sacrament rivalling the best of romantic gestures or even a marriage proposal.

Peyton wasn't just owned by Mat—they belonged to each other.

When Mat's ass finally met Peyton's thighs, they both remained still for a moment, only their heavy breathing filling the silence of the chapel. The roaring passion in Peyton's chest

was reflected in Mat's intense gaze as their bodies and souls united in a church. A stray tear rolled down Mat's cheek but he didn't swipe it off. Instead, he let it fall to Peyton's pecs before his lips turned into a smile.

With a slow roll of his hips, Mat started to move, his heavy cock wetting Peyton's abdomen with glistening precome. The downside to being tied up was the inability to reach for the clear liquid and taste it.

As if hearing his thoughts, Mat scooped a drop of precome on his thumb and slid it between Peyton's lips. Peyton moaned, sucking on the salty and smooth digit with remnants of the holy oil on it.

Mat took it away too soon and straightened his back. Linking his hands on his nape, he snapped his hips in a rhythm that made them both grunt low and with animalistic need. His abdomen flexed, visible through the vee of his open cassock, linked only by the white collar at his neck.

The fiery heat in Peyton grew as Mat moved like a snake, seducing him, milking him, whispering filthy ideas that Peyton lapped up with glee. Mat's hand stroked Peyton's abs up and down, gliding in the oil spilt there before it wrapped over Mat's cock.

"Our union." Mat sped up his movements, stroking his thick dick and riding Peyton with fervour. "It's you and me, Peyton."

"Yes, just us. Together." Peyton gasped as his orgasm neared, his balls getting ready to unload. "Forever."

“Yes!” With a shout, Mat threw his head back and came on Peyton’s chest, painting it with white ribbons.

The glorious sight and Mat’s channel pulsing around his cock sent Peyton over the edge. With a wail he failed to stifle, he joined his lover, filling him with his come. He saw Mat slow down, his hips rolling, his smile deliciously sinful. Peyton’s body convulsed on the cross, held by rope and the gorgeous man sitting on him. *Will it always be so intense?*

It wouldn’t matter, as long as they could be together.

Through a hazy, orgasm-fried haze, Peyton watched Mat grab one of the remaining pillows to wipe Peyton’s abdomen, then untie the rope at Peyton’s wrists with two sharp tugs.

Peyton relished Mat’s weight as he collapsed on top of him. Their bodies quickly lost the heat but Mat’s cassock kept them covered like a cape. When their breathing finally evened and Peyton’s soft cock slipped out of Mat, he started to feel how uncomfortable the cross was on his back. Even if he ended up with bruises, it was worth every second as a willing martyr.

“That was—”

“Shhh.” Mat lifted his head like a dog hearing danger nearby.

Peyton listened, his heart accelerating in alert.

A creak of a door.

And footsteps.

“Fuck,” Peyton mouthed just as Mat scrambled off him and untied his ankles in a swift move.

Peyton grabbed his trousers and pulled them on, but Mat had his trainers and top already bundled in his arms. He waved for Peyton to follow towards the main door.

The noise came from the sacristy, indicating there must be another entrance there or someone had been in the cellar before they’d broken in.

As they ran, Peyton’s bare feet slapped the marble a lot louder than he wished, but they made it out into the street within moments.

“Come on.” Mat grabbed Peyton’s hand and they hid behind the next building.

With a kiss to Peyton’s lips, Mat handed him a bundle of clothes and shoes to put on. While Peyton was rushing to get properly dressed, Mat shrugged into his jacket and buttoned his cassock. Their gazes met and they burst into manic laughter fuelled by adrenaline and post-coital bliss.

“The ropes, pillows, and the oil are everywhere,” Peyton wheezed, unable to stop giggling.

“Even someone with a very Christian imagination would figure out what happened there,” Mat added, holding his stomach as he doubled over.

“Oh God, we’re awful.” Peyton grinned, calming his breathing. “I love it.”

Mat kissed Peyton quickly on the lips, then again, as if he couldn't get enough. "Walk with me." He offered his hand and Peyton took it, intertwining their fingers.

"You're still wearing a cassock." Peyton lifted his eyebrows.

"So?" Mat zipped his leather jacket to his neck, hiding the white collar. "Nah. It's my Neo costume."

Peyton let out a giggle. "Very convincing."

They ventured through Soho, passing closed shops and rowdy people leaving the clubs still brimming with music.

"What if we leave?" Mat asked out of the blue. "Just... I don't know." He sounded surprised at what had just come out of his mouth.

"What do you mean?" Peyton's heart leapt, but he wasn't sure where the conversation was going.

"We can just say 'fuck all this shit' and go." Mat made an angry gesture in the air.

"To the island?" Peyton fished for elaboration.

"No, somewhere else." Mat swung their hands before he brought them up to kiss Peyton's knuckles. "Far away, but maybe an island too—I liked the breeze there. Maybe someplace warm."

"You said there's no retirement after the mafia. Besides, can you really leave your family, the business, or your aunt and uncle? Especially after they lost Jack?" Peyton wouldn't let

Mat risk his life and family only to play house with him. It was everything Peyton wanted but not at a cost too steep for both of them to handle.

“I’m not Jack. And my aunt and uncle had been through a lot of shit before and only came out stronger. They both need to find their life after the loss. But so do I.” Mat squeezed Peyton’s hand. “I’m suffocating in London. It’s filled with too many memories.” Mat cleared his throat. “I’m not saying we could disappear without telling anyone. That would never work. But what if we could figure out a way to leave the city, maybe even leave the UK and start fresh? Even connected to Family and business, doing what we’re good at. Just... not here.”

“Are you sure that’s what you want?” Peyton’s heart pounded at the idea.

Mat stopped walking and looked at Peyton. His moonlit features were serious, his eyes filled with doubt. “Does that mean you wouldn’t want to leave?” Mat swallowed. “With me?”

“Jesus Christ, Mat, I would.” Peyton took Mat’s other hand in his and squeezed them both. “I can pack now. Hell, I don’t need to pack. We can just drive and figure out the rest later.”
Didn’t Mat know this by now?

“You’d do that?” Mat’s eyes glistened, his voice barely a whisper. “For me?”

“No.” Peyton stepped closer and cupped Mat’s face, forcing their eyes to meet. “For us.” Peyton slid one hand down to

Mat's chest, resting it over his heart. "I didn't want to say anything, but I have a bad feeling about you being back in London. Even with Jack's death, I don't believe the vendetta will just go away."

The grim set to Mat's jaw proved he agreed with Peyton. "I'll talk to my uncle this week. He has fingers in many pies in many countries—maybe he could help us find a safe place."

"I'll talk to my dad too, see if he has ideas." Peyton stepped to the side as they started walking again, a new determination seeping into their step. "We can do this. Together."

Mat nodded. "I'm going to The Golden Handcuffs tomorrow to meet with my crew. It will be good to hang out, especially if I won't get time to do it if we leave. I think it's casual enough for us to be seen together."

"Is this a date?" Peyton bit his lip.

"It can be if you don't mind a bunch of rowdy Polish guys drinking next to you."

"As long as one in particular has his eyes on me, I won't mind the others," Peyton said in a flirty tone.

"That's a given. You're my...boyfriend," he said, as if testing the word on his tongue.

After what they'd just done, Peyton felt like they were much more than that.

Chapter Twenty-One

Peyton

It wasn't the first time Peyton had visited The Golden Handcuffs but he'd never asked for the red band that indicated he was attached and unavailable for play. He traced his fingers over the thin steel and glanced at the identical one around Mat's wrist, next to his black bracelet.

He looked up that sexy forearm dusted with hair to the rolled-up sleeves of a dark blue shirt that hugged Mat's pecs, making Peyton want to suck his nipples through it. His polished Oxfords shone with the neon lights of the club and his pressed trousers accentuated his perfectly round butt. Fuck, Peyton couldn't believe his cock was buried between those cheeks just the night before.

Heat rushed to his face at the thought and he squeezed Mat's hand as they meandered through the crowd to the VIP booths above the dancefloor. The black leather crescent sofa welcomed their weight and Peyton snuggled close to Mat, enjoying the view of the people below them. They writhed to the music like souls in hell, if Satan knew how to throw a great party.

Within minutes, a server brought a tray with a selection of drinks and finger foods, and a champagne in a bucket of ice to their table.

"I wanted to come early so we could have a moment to ourselves." Mat nibbled on Peyton's ear, his arm sneaking around his waist to pull him closer.

Peyton plucked a raspberry from a bowl on the tray and popped it into his mouth, then took one to feed it to Mat. With a glint in his eyes, Mat caught Peyton's hand and kissed his fingertips one by one.

Peyton leaned in, basking in Mat's attention just as he saw three men in designer suits approach their booth.

"Hey, Mateusz! Long time!" said a guy with short-cropped hair and a thick gold chain around his neck.

"Bartek, this is Peyton, my boyfriend," Mat said, squeezing Peyton's knee.

"Hi." Bartek shook Peyton's hand and sat on the opposite side of the sofa.

"This is Krystian and Jurek." Mat pointed to the two other blokes who joined them, fist bumping them in greeting.

"A break from London looks well on you." Krystian nudged Mat. "Nice to meet you, Peyton." He caught a stray hair that had escaped the neat bun on his head, then smoothed his hands over the shaved sides.

"Hey." Jurek frowned, leaning back, his eyes on Peyton. "Aren't you the one who was supposed to have a flogging presentation with Master E a few months back?" He stroked his stylish braided beard, deep in thought. "He cancelled, and Master Roderick swooped in at the last minute."

"Yeah, that was me!" Peyton grinned, recalling the fun-filled night. He'd been desperate for attention and had craved submission in the purest form. Flogging without a happy

ending could be a lot better than fucking. Now, with Mat he had both and so much more.

“Woof. I still remember that one.” Jurek let invisible steam out his collar then his eyes widened when he looked at Mat. “Sorry, Mat, I was just—”

“Oh no, it’s fine. I’m lucky we found each other, but neither of us was a virgin or a saint before we met.” Mat chuckled. “That’s not a secret.” His hand tightened on Peyton’s hip. “But it doesn’t mean I’m not jealous.”

“Aww.” Peyton pecked his cheek. “Now, I’m only yours.”
And I will be forever if you let me.

Mat grumbled something inaudible. “But you weren’t then. I wish I saw it. Or maybe not.” He leaned in to kiss Peyton’s neck, nuzzling it before he reached for his drink. He took a sip of the vodka coke but put it back quickly and pulled Peyton on his lap. “Have you seen the private rooms here?” Mat whispered into Peyton’s ear.

Peyton shook his head.

“They’re equipped with everything the doms have access to at the club and more. I’ll have to show you someday.” Mat’s fingers danced on Peyton’s hip where his top rode up.

“Yes, please,” Peyton purred. There was something visceral, so surreally beautiful about Mat being open and affectionate with him in front of his friends.

Since they were a part of Mat’s Family, they were aware of Mat’s circumstances and stay on the island. Thanks to that

knowledge and their sitting in an isolated booth, Peyton and Mat were able to tell a semi-censored version of how they'd met. After faux-gasps and low whistles at the story, the men brought Mat up-to-date on what he'd missed during his absence.

“Father Mat?” A warm Irish accent reached their ears, breaking their conversation.

Peyton felt Mat stiffen as they all turned towards the voice. Despite the two smiling faces belonging to Nick and Frank, the guys they'd met at the island, the sight didn't relax Mat in the slightest. Peyton wasn't sure if they were aware of who Mat really was but he was about to find out. From what Peyton's dad had told him, the Irish had close ties to the Polish mafia, but he had no way of knowing at this point if anything had changed.

“Small world.” Mat bumped fists with the men who greeted Peyton and introduced themselves to Mat's friends. “Come join us.”

Mat waved to a member of staff and ordered a round of drinks.

“No offence, Father, but what happened to your vows?” Nick asked, eyeing Peyton sitting on Mat's lap.

“It's a long story,” Mat said with a laugh, his voice smooth and confident.

“What's most important is that he's here with us now, and with his boyfriend,” Bartek said, helping keep the story vague.

“True, true. You brought your love with you but Nick’s stayed on the island, if you can believe it,” Frank said, leaning forward.

“Actually,” Nick shoved Frank with a smug glare. “I already proposed. You remember Bridget, the primary school teacher?”

“Of course I do.” Mat grinned and clapped Frank on the back. “That’s great news. Congratulations.” Mat looked visibly happy for the guy and Peyton suspected there was more to the story than he was privy to. Priestly secrets? Maybe.

A fresh round of drinks arrived and the conversation steered towards some football match Peyton had no interest in.

“Dance with me,” Peyton whispered into Mat’s ear, making circles on Mat’s back. They could discuss their story on the dancefloor in case the Irish asked more questions.

Mat captured Peyton’s lips in a quick kiss before he stood up, taking Peyton by the hand.

Amongst strangers, under the strobe lights, and surrounded by sweaty bodies, they gyrated against each other. Peyton let himself enjoy the moment and release some tension. He needed to be relaxed and ready to tackle the inevitable questions people were going to have about Mat’s time on the island. After weeks of sneaking around and hiding in the priory, the freedom of dancing with Mat and touching him in public filled Peyton with ecstatic glee.

He skimmed his hands over Mat's hips and up his chest just because he could and because he couldn't help touching Mat every chance he got. When he looked into his lover's eyes, he saw a similar elation.

In that moment, Peyton believed they were determined enough to have a life together—that they could figure out how not to betray their families while prioritising their relationship. Yes, they could do it.

Dancing, Peyton brushed against Mat like a snake, tempting, hoping he'd succeed and get to lick his lover's cock later, feel it up his—

Peyton's brain screeched to a halt when he saw a guy approach Mat from behind. He differed from the gyrating crowd as there was no smile on his face. He didn't look drunk either.

He was angry.

Peyton pulled Mat closer to him just as something sharp pierced Mat's shirt, nipping Peyton's hand.

“Motherfucker!” Mat hissed and turned around, elbowing the guy in the face.

Blood from the attacker's broken nose splattered on Mat and the dance floor.

A cacophony of screams broke through the loud music as people dispersed like cockroaches from a smoke bomb. It took Peyton a fraction of a second to realise the attacker fled and

Mat was right on his heels, swerving through the crowd towards the emergency exit.

Security will catch him, Peyton thought, taking off after them.

To his shock, the stabby guy reached the door devoid of any staff or security.

What must have been blind fury fuelled Mat as he got there incredibly fast, catching his attacker by the collar the moment he opened the emergency exit door and triggered an alarm.

The loud sound blared and Peyton glimpsed several guys waiting outside before the doors closed.

It's a trap.

“Mat, NO!” Blood drained from Peyton’s face as he sprinted and burst through the exit, barely registering their entire booth of guys following him—the Poles as well as the Irish.

Peyton’s entire world stopped.

Mat was on the ground surrounded by five guys in ski masks, each one of them stabbing Mat with a knife wherever they could reach. The rhythmic wet sounds of steel piercing his lover’s flesh sent Peyton into blind fury.

With a wild roar, he threw himself at the nearest attacker, punching him in the face, pulling his hair, kicking his balls, all while screaming at the top of his lungs. He managed to tackle him to the ground but quickly realised it was only the element

of surprise that let him accomplish that. He knew self-defence but he was in no way skilled at using his fists in a street fight.

He scrambled to his feet to avoid the guy's massive paw swinging at him. The fist to the face that made his head swim came from a different direction, as did the punch to the stomach that threw him backward until he hit the wall. Air whooshed out of his lungs but he didn't register the pain, his blurry gaze searching for Mat on the ground.

Peyton crawled, his hands slipping on blood, mud, and broken glass until he made it to his lover. Mat was alone, coughing up blood.

Peyton turned to the ruckus of the fight behind him only to make sure the attackers wouldn't be back. Thankfully, Mat's friends were already on it. Peyton didn't linger to watch the carnage that was five guys with knives against three from the Polish Mafia and two from the Irish one.

It was hard to see what exactly was going on, but Peyton managed to get ahold of a knife someone dropped to the ground and put it next to his leg in case he had to use it.

He hovered his hands over Mat, not sure if he should touch him. There was blood everywhere—Mat's face and chest were barely visible under the crimson veil.

“For Father Mat!” someone yelled. Peyton lifted his gaze to see Nick make a sign of the cross before he kicked the guy on the ground so hard in the face his head snapped back at the wrong angle. The men roared and continued the fistfight even as one or two of the attackers tried to flee.

They didn't need Peyton and his priorities lay elsewhere.

"Mat, look at me!" He patted Mat's bloody face. "Stay awake!" He tried to remember his first aid training but there was nothing about multiple stab wounds in it. He was helpless.

Tears streamed down Peyton's cheeks, creating tiny clear splotches in the blood on Mat's unresponsive face. "Come on! Mat!" He shook him by the shoulders.

Mat blinked his eyes but only one opened as the other was already swollen shut.

"You can't die, you asshole!" he yelled, pressing his hands to Mat's chest, hoping to cover a wound. "I love you! Did you hear me? I can't lose you. Come on, Mat!" A sob tore out of Peyton's chest as his heart shattered into tiny pieces. "Fuck!"

Peyton pulled his phone out to call the ambulance but his bloody hands shook so much, it slipped from his grasp to the pavement. Just then, friendly faces congregated around him and Mat, asking questions. Peyton pressed his palms to his own temples in hopes of squeezing out coherent thoughts.

"Do any of you have a direct number to his uncle?" he asked, looking around to see two attackers bleeding out on the ground, the remaining three nowhere to be seen. "He needs an ambulance but I don't think it's safe to call for one."

"I have Szeff's number!" Bartek said, phone already in hand and dialing.

"Yeah, he would be fucked in a hospital—this isn't over," Krystian said. "But his uncle has a private one." He stood up,

clearly in shock as he dusted off the designer trousers that were stained beyond recognition. “I’ll go get the club’s medic in the meantime.” The moment he said it, a burly dude with a first aid kit burst out the door they’d come through.

“*Kurwa wasza mać,*” he swore when his eyes landed on Mat. “Move away, let him breathe. Holy shit.” The medic knelt by Mat, checking his vitals, telling Peyton to hold a hand over a wound on his abdomen while he pulled out bandages.

It seemed like only a few moments had passed when a black van backed into the alleyway. Peyton stiffened, his mind coming up with the worst possible scenarios. But when the door swung open, two medics jumped out, pulling out a stretcher. Peyton scrambled back to make space.

They patched Mat quickly and efficiently before loading him on the stretcher and strapping him with belts that immediately became stained with his blood. Peyton shot to his feet and caught Mat’s wrist.

“We’ll take it from here,” the medic from the ambulance said, gently trying to peel Peyton’s hand away.

“I’m going too! I’m not leaving him. You can’t make me!” Peyton yelled. “And the fucker better not leave me again!” Through his tear-filled gaze, Peyton saw the other medic nod and let Peyton follow. “You hear me, Mat?! No dying! I forbid you!”

Peyton plopped on a bench in the van right before it tore off with a squeal of tyres. The inside was packed with what looked like state-of-the-art medical equipment but Peyton’s

eyes were on Mat's face, swollen, unmoving, and covered in blood.

"Hold on!" the driver yelled.

They swerved and Peyton grabbed onto some rail next to him, his other hand still holding Mat's. Only the sharp movements of the vehicle shook Mat's seemingly lifeless body.

Peyton let out a gut-wrenching sob, unable to believe what had just happened. *They were dancing, it was perfect...*

"Will he be OK? He'll live, right?" Peyton asked, not taking his eyes off his lover, his boyfriend, his future.

"We'll do everything we can."

"You fucking better," Peyton muttered, then yelled: "Mat! Don't leave me!"

Chapter Twenty-Two

Mat

Everything hurt.

But he was also on a cloud—his body surrounded by softness, his brain hazy. Voices around him were distant and muffled but gained aural sharpness with every passing second.

Mat tried to move and groaned as the pain intensified. The rocks on his eyelids made it hard to lift them but he finally managed and the bright light pierced his retinas instantly. *Ouch.*

“I’ll call you back, he’s waking up.” The voice became crisper and Mat recognised it as his uncle’s. A shuffle and a squeal of chair legs on the floor suggested the man was close.

Mat blinked to clear his vision and the blurry mountain in front of him transformed into his uncle. As realisation of what had happened hit Mat, he looked around frantically.

Peyton. Is he OK? Where is he?

Mat tried to speak but his throat hurt. Panic overtook him as he clawed at something sticking out of his mouth.

“Careful, Mat. It’s the feeding tube.” Uncle held Mat’s hands down in his big paw as he reached for a button next to the bed with the other.

What? How long have I been out?

“Easy there, lad.” The soothing male voice of a nurse reached Mat’s ears before he instructed Mat to breathe through

his nose.

“You’re in our villa in Kent. You’re safe and healing well.”
Uncle spoke slowly as if not trusting Mat’s lucidity.

Fair. Mat didn’t trust it either.

Mat knew they had a private medical facility in London but being far away from there was probably safer. He remembered visiting Jack’s grandma when she’d spent the last months of her life here. It was a nice place but Mat couldn’t wait to get out of bed and find Peyton.

The unpleasant process of extracting the tubing was made better with Mat realising that if everything hurt, it meant he was alive and all his limbs were in place. Once the tube was out Mat felt like he’d deep-throated a centaur. The mental image made him release a breathy giggle and he patted the nurse’s hand as a thank you.

“You can talk but don’t strain yourself. I’ll be outside,” the nurse said. Despite his name tag being in Mat’s field of vision, he couldn’t decipher it, his eyes unable to focus properly.

Events from the club played through Mat’s mind, from the sexy dancing with Peyton, to getting repeatedly stabbed. He’d been bleeding out on the pavement when he’d heard it, but he could vividly recall Peyton’s yelled love confession. *Did he mean it?* Despite the fatigue, the mere thought of Peyton made him feel better. Except he didn’t remember what had happened next and if Peyton was OK. God, his head was a mess.

“Peyton?” Mat croaked before he realised his uncle had only a vague idea of his lover.

“He’s in the East Wing taking a shower. He hasn’t left your side and was starting to stink.” Uncle spoke with fondness in his tone and it confused the shit out of Mat.

“How did—” Mat’s poor attempt at a question left his throat on fire.

“Take it easy. I’ll tell you everything.” Uncle patted Mat’s arm, under the IV. “Peyton suffered minor abrasions and bruises during the attack but is completely fine now. You were out for a week, which gave me time to talk to him.”

Mat groaned. *That can’t be good.* “What did you do?”

“You always assume the worst of me. When you wouldn’t have even met him if it wasn’t for me.” Uncle crossed his arms and leaned back on the chair that barely contained his large frame. “He’s a fine lad. But let me start at the beginning.”

“Club?” Mat asked, fumbling for a button to raise his back. The whirring of the bed accompanied a burst of discomfort in Mat’s abdomen. *Right. Stab wounds.*

“Don Francis’ men acted without his permission.” Uncle explained, his expression stormy. “Or so he swore on his mother’s life.”

Mat rolled his eyes.

“I know. They wanted an eye for an eye when they found out that you were back. You have our boys and the Irish to thank for their quick reaction. Three fled, but one died at the

scene and one is still in a coma. Francis won't seek retribution for them as it was their own fault, defying his orders. He swore to me that the three who ran off have been dealt with. I extended our gratitude to the Irish mafia and was happy to learn you managed to make some good connections even during your exile."

Mat shrugged, smiling. "Just happened." His mind was groggy but he still had so many questions. "How did they bring a knife into the club?"

"It was a sharpened nail file—connected to nail clippers," Uncle said through gritted teeth, shaking his head.

"Security?" Mat tried to use minimum words to convey what he meant.

"The guys who were on the emergency exit and dance floor duty had been killed after they clocked in for work. It looks like they were lured outside too—Lucy found their bodies near the bins at the back. They must have planned this ahead to be able to act so quickly. " Uncle sighed, shaking his head. "We're looking into it, and Jagoda has already started a recruitment process for new security. We won't be supplementing with a hired company—all the members of the security will be hired directly by the club and trained by us."

"I can't—" Mat said and sighed, frustrated by the pain in his throat. *Fuck it.* He had to talk. "I can't work for the club anymore. I can't be in London." He looked around for water for his parched mouth. Uncle handed him a glass from the side table and Mat took two sips. They went down with discomfort

but it was worth the relief the water brought. “I know what you’ll say.” Mat lifted a hand the moment Uncle wanted to talk. Bold move, but he was hurt so even his uncle would cut him some slack. Mat knew he should stay in London and work for his uncle, and he was safe from vendetta for sure now, yada yada. But Mat needed change. “I know business is important but so is family, right?”

“Of course.” Uncle nodded and crossed his legs at the knee, listening with angelic patience.

Mat pulled himself straighter which caused the pillow to slide down his back. With a grunt, he poked it out, trying not to pull on the tubes going into the crook of his arm. Frustrated, he finally relaxed into the bed and looked at his uncle. “You won’t retire for a long while, right?”

“No,” Uncle said with finality. “This is my life. And until my health allows me, I’ll take care of our Family and the business.” He had a calm, yet knowing look on his face. This threw Mat off, because what he was about to ask for went against Family logic.

“I can be the heir but I don’t want to be in London. I can do something useful elsewhere. I don’t know where, I haven’t thought that far ahead. Then maybe in a few years, I’ll be back.” Mat took several shallow breaths then a big one, needing the pause. “But right now, I have to be far away.” He pushed the button to straighten the bed more. He looked at his uncle, ready to make his big statement. “Peyton is family for me and I can’t risk his safety or mine by staying in London.”

Mat braced himself for an argument but he was determined not to let even his uncle talk him out of this.

“I agree,” Uncle said with the calmness of a priest.

Mat frowned, taken aback by the pliant response to his outrageous statement. “What?” he squeaked.

“Peyton mentioned that you talked about leaving London or even the UK altogether.” Uncle shifted to reach for a briefcase leaning by his chair and placed it on the coffee table. It opened with a click and he retrieved a manilla folder.

“A man called Patryk Zbozowski bought a rum distillery that had closed down in Barbados. It’s all up to him, but there’s a potential to turn it into a whisky distillery.” Uncle drummed his fingers on the documents.

“Why are you telling me this?” Mat was all sorts of confused now, but a suspicion flickered in his drug-filled brain.

“Here.” Uncle handed him the folder. “Take a look.”

A set of brand new identity documents slid onto his lap and he opened the passport first. A pair of familiar eyes stared at him from the picture above a name: Patryk Peyton Zbozowski.

“I hear Patryk knows the business quite well.” Uncle leaned back on the chair, a smirk on his face. “Maybe he can help you start over if you fancy a life in Barbados.”

“This is...” Tears welled in Mat’s eyes. “How?”

“My friendship with Ronan—Peyton’s father—goes back years, and we agreed it was time to bury the hatchet and put our minds together to give you two more room to grow. I imagine working for your uncle, and Peyton for his father, didn’t give you space to spread your business wings fully.”

“I didn’t think you’d understand.” Mat clutched the documents in his hands as if they were precious jewels.

“I started under my grandfather’s firm hand. He was an excellent businessman and a terrifying man, but I wanted something more for the Family.” He sighed, as if the memories brought a heavy topic. “Now you can decide what you want to do and how. Do with that information what you want but I know that cruise ships stop often in Barbados. And I’ve been informed that people are looking for some bloody entertainment. I’m just saying that there’s an untapped market for what you’re familiar with.”

Peyton could have a distillery to run and Mat could organise the Games. This was unreal.

“Peyton is definitely willing to put the work in.” Uncle nodded, his expression revealing his approval for Mat’s choice of lover.

“I can too,” Mat said. “But I’d be fine rolling barrels if it meant I could be with him.”

A quiet life. With Peyton. Far from the ruckus of London.

That was the lesson priesthood had taught him. That freedom to take time off, to enjoy rays of sun with the man he

loved was far more valuable to him than parties, designer suits, or fast cars. Priesthood itself was not for him, but a more secluded, quieter life sounded like a dream. At least until he was ready to crank it up again.

“You’ll still be the heir and can return to your old name and duties whenever you’re ready. Until then, live free, without expectations. Only the Family will know that you survived the attack at the club—the world otherwise will see your obituary in papers and your name on the family plot. Peyton asked for a change of name to keep you both safe. You can keep the one you used as a priest or I’ll get you a fresh one.”

“I need to ask Peyton something important first.” Mat’s chest filled with hope and excitement. “So I can have a different last name than the one I used on the island.” *The same as Peyton’s.*

Just then the door swung open. Mat startled, but his uncle only smiled as he vacated his seat to stand by the window.

“Oh, my God, Mat!” Peyton rushed to the bed, taking Mat’s hand to put against his cheek. “You scared me.” He released an angry sob.

“I’m sorry.” Mat caressed Peyton’s clean-shaven cheek with his thumb.

“It wasn’t your fault, but don’t you dare die on me again.” Peyton’s glare was filled with so much love, Mat wanted to cry happy tears from just looking at him.

Wait, what did he say? “Die?”

“Your heart stopped in the ambulance.” Peyton released a shuddered breath and put a hand on Mat’s chest where various cables monitoring his vitals were attached.

“But I lived. And I heard you.”

Peyton lifted his gaze and Mat looked into the eyes he wanted to see every morning when he woke up. “I love you too. And I’m sorry for everything.”

“Shh.” Peyton buried his face in Mat’s neck, wetting it with his tears. “I love you with all my heart.”

Uncle cleared his throat, turning around from his place by the window where he’d been enjoying the view. “I was just telling Mat about Barbados.”

“What do you think?” Peyton perked up, his eyes glistening with excitement.

“When do we leave?” Mat grinned, even as he felt his level of energy waning.

“How quickly can you get dressed?” Uncle smirked. “Proper medical care and a rehabilitation facility is already waiting for you there. And a trusted therapist.” Uncle looked at Peyton and they both nodded at each other.

Wow, Mat had stepped into a parallel universe where everything was looking up and the people he loved got along with each other. Or maybe he was still asleep... Nah, his body hurt too much for him to be asleep.

“Thank you. I—I don’t know what to say.”

“Peyton is very convincing and he cares about you, that’s very clear.” Uncle clapped a hand on Peyton’s shoulder as he stepped next to him. “Hold onto this one.”

“I will. You just made it possible.” Mat intertwined his fingers with the man he loved.

“It was all Peyton’s idea, I just made a few calls.”

Mat grunted, trying to sit up. “Then what are we waiting for? I need to make an honest man out of Peyton.” He smiled, seeing tears in Peyton’s eyes before his lover’s image blurred and dizziness took over and everything started to go black.

“Fucking hell! Nurse!” Peyton’s voice made Mat smile. It was so nice to hear it.

Epilogue

Peyton

Three days after Mat had woken up from his coma, they were able to transport him to Barbados to start a new life. The vast private land with a newly-renovated coral stone villa became their home with their families visiting and staying over. Mat's aunt Jagoda insisted on overseeing the recruitment of anyone who would set foot on their property, from the gardener and Mat's physiotherapist to the entire staff organising their wedding.

For the past three months, Peyton's mum and dad had been in and out, arriving in separate planes but being very civil with each other. Mat's uncle dropped it at least once a week in his jet; he often piloted himself.

Mat made good use of the wonderful Caribbean weather to do most of his exercise sessions in fresh air, following the set of instructions he'd received from his physiotherapist. He would forever have scars from the stab wounds all over his abdomen and arms, but his muscles were gaining strength again. Peyton watched as Mat's vanity and stubbornness pushed him to get back into perfect shape with speed and efficiency, using the swimming pool outside the villa every day.

Latishia, Mat's therapist, had been helping him deal with the guilt surrounding shooting Rick, Jack's death, and everything that had been plaguing him, including the loss of his parents.

Peyton had regular sessions with her as well. He'd always assumed he wouldn't need them, but like Mat, he'd realised that he had untapped trauma to process, from his mum and dad splitting to the most recent one—the attack on Mat.

Peyton was happy to see the proof of Mat's progress in how often he slept through the night without nightmares, waking up behind Peyton and ready for morning sex. According to Mat, the complete change of scenery had helped as well.

Tonight had been a quiet one, with Mat sleeping like a baby, squeezing Peyton close to his chest. Good. They had both needed the rest before greeting guests arriving for the rehearsal dinner.

During the wedding planning, Peyton had watched Mat struggle with accepting that getting married on the island they'd met and in the community that had made him welcome during his dark time was impossible. Showing up there and making a spectacle with a gay wedding would bring too many eyes on them and not everyone was discreet. With a heavy heart, they settled on inviting only several trustworthy people from that community. According to quality intel, courtesy of Mary, a new priest had been sent in Mat's place and the parish had moved on, having never forgotten Mat.

Finley and Mary had arrived several days in advance to help with the preparations. Mary supervised the catering and Finley had been ordained online and was ready to officiate the civil ceremony.

Peyton and Mat had spent most of the day before the wedding welcoming a handful of cousins on both sides, showing them their rooms and the buffet. Finally, they had a moment to themselves in their spacious garden full of native plants and trees.

“Here you go,” Peyton said, handing Mat a glass of lemon water.

“Thanks.” Mat took it and nuzzled Peyton’s sweaty neck. “I can’t wait till this time tomorrow. I’ll be taking that suit off you with my teeth.”

Peyton giggled as shivers ran down his side and they sat on a bench under a tree.

“And here I thought you were so eager to marry me.” Peyton stuck out his bottom lip in a pout but couldn’t keep the grin off his face.

“Well, yes.” Mat leaned to whisper in Peyton’s ear. “But then I get to fuck my husband.”

Heat swirled in Peyton’s abdomen just as a commotion near the gate made them turn that way.

“Hugh! Brendan!” Peyton shot to his feet, pulling Mat by the hand with him. “I’m so happy you made it.”

They hugged in greeting and Peyton watched as Hugh poked Mat in his chest with a finger. “When someone put a sack over my head and dragged me to the car, I nearly shat myself. But then I figured it must be your Uncle’s men since

they weren't rough," Hugh said, rocking on the balls of his feet, a smirk on his face.

"What?!" Mat looked around, possibly to find his uncle, but he was nowhere to be seen. "They were supposed to be discreet but not that much. Jesus Christ." He slid a palm over his face. "I'm so sorry."

"Are you OK?" Peyton asked, looking their friends over. He relaxed somewhat when Hugh waved a hand in dismissal and smoothed his maroon waistcoat.

"You did warn us." Brendan shrugged, drawing attention to how his short-sleeved chequered shirt stretched on his massive chest. His neatly trimmed beard completed the summer lumberjack. He was the softest bear of a man Peyton had ever met, but he also seemed not to be fazed by much.

Hugh's smile grew wider as he glanced at his fiancé. "Brendan knocked out three of your Uncle's men after they put a sack on his head." He chuckled. "And it took another four to get him into the car."

"I'm not good in stressful situations," the huge man said, crossing his arms over his chest.

Hugh side-hugged his fiancé and kissed his cheek. "But now we're here for the wedding. It's not in a church, is it?" Hugh grimaced, looking around as if expecting a holy building to manifest itself on the premises.

"No." Mat smirked, taking Peyton's hand. "We already had a sacrament in a church."

Oh no, he didn't. Peyton glared at Mat but his lips formed a grin, remembering the evening.

“Ohmygod! Did you—” Brendan gasped then looked at Hugh, who patted his forearm, nodding with an amused smile on his face.

“Tell me it was in St Patrick’s Church at Easter?” Hugh snickered, his eyebrows raised.

“Maybe.” Peyton grinned, swinging Mat’s hand like a teenager at a mall.

“You’re the couple from the Daily Fail article who fucked on Easter?” Brendan’s baritone managed to sail quite high as he spoke.

When the reply he got was a set of nods and self-satisfied smiles, he looked at Hugh. “I want them at our wedding.”

“Oh, they’re definitely invited.” Hugh kissed Brendan’s cheek. “And we won’t tell them where the cameras are.”

“You wouldn’t.” Mat narrowed his eyes at his friend as they all laughed. “OK.” He clapped his hands once, closing the subject and Peyton could see that the reason for it was the arrival of new guests. Nick and his fiancée looked ready for the hot weather, dressed in soft earthy tones. “We can get you some drinks, but you might want to rest before the rehearsal dinner tonight. After the wedding tomorrow, we’ll give everyone a day’s break, then Peyton planned diving excursions and some other surprises. I’m so glad you’re staying for two weeks.” Mat grinned and Peyton loved seeing him so happy.



Peyton stretched on the bed and smiled, remembering that it was their wedding day.

He kissed Mat's slightly sweaty shoulder and slid his feet onto the pleasantly cool floor. The man liked the weather so much, he kept the AC quite low for Caribbean standards. Peyton didn't complain, enjoying getting sticky with his fiancé one way or another.

The decorative knick-knack bowl on the bedside table held Mat's smokes alongside a pack of nicotine gum. He was trying to quit. Even if Peyton hadn't pressured him to do it, he was glad that Mat wouldn't be destroying his lungs anymore.

With a smile on his face, Peyton meandered towards the kitchen, recalling their daily fucking on every surface of their new house. He planned to grab some basics to snack on and return to bed for a last fuck as an unmarried man.

Just as he opened the fridge, a thump upstairs sent a sliver of worry through him. There were several family members staying with them as the rest slept in the large guest house on the premises. A glance through the window told him that his mum was strolling the gardens like a morning ghost in a flowy white dress. *She's safe.* Mat's aunt Jagoda might be upstairs, though. As was his dad and Mat's uncle.

The noise repeated.

Remembering Mat's tale of how he'd found Jack fighting for his life in his own bedroom, Peyton rushed to the second

floor.

More thumping came from his dad's room. Stopping to listen for a moment, Peyton heard a grunt and a male voice that wasn't his dad's.

Acting quickly, he burst through the unlocked door and froze.

Cue Benny Hill theme.

Like a teenager in a comedy, Peyton's bare-assed dad startled and scrambled away from the other person in his bed.

"Zbigniew?" Peyton squeaked, looking at Mat's uncle, unable to believe what his eyes registered. *What the actual fuck?*

Zbigniew sat up and slid his feet to the ground with surprising grace for such a burly man. The stoic expression on his face contrasted with his kiss-swollen lips and the python dangling between his legs.

Peyton forced his gaze up. *Nope nope nope.*

"I know it's a shock, son," Dad said, and reached for Zbigniew's hand while pulling a sheet over himself with the other.

Whoa.

When they'd been at the rehearsal dinner, Dad and Mat's uncle—or Zbigniew as he'd told Peyton to call him—had sat at a table engrossed in conversation. But this was something

different from just friendly chatting over their families becoming one.

“Do you want me to keep this a secret?” Peyton watched both men shake their heads.

“We didn’t want to take away from the fanfare of your celebrations, so we postponed telling you.” Dad offered an apologetic smile. “But it’s official and we’re not hiding, right, Zbigniew?”

“Absolutely.” Mat’s uncle pulled Dad onto his lap to plant a solid kiss on his lips.

“Yeah, OK.” Peyton waved a hand in the air. “We can talk later when you’re all, uhh... dressed. I’ll see you at the wedding. Have fun.”

He smacked himself in the forehead as he swivelled on his heel. After making sure the door was closed, he ran out to the hot Caribbean air. Even the morning mist on the freshly-cut grass under his feet didn’t ground him enough to process the new information.

“Are you OK, darling? You look like you’ve seen a ghost.” His mum’s voice was like an angel’s coming to rescue him from shock.

“I just saw Dad...” Peyton plopped on the bench that seemed to materialise under his ass and Mum joined him. “Did you know that he—” Peyton cut himself off mid-sentence. This was not his information to share, even if they weren’t

keeping it a secret. “Nevermind. I’m fine.” It was no big deal. Just adults fucking. Pft.

“Oh no, you saw him with Zbigniew before he told you?” Mum patted his forearm as she leaned to look at his face.

“What? You know about that? You’re not surprised?” Peyton frowned. “Wait, what do you know exactly?”

“Oh, honey, your dad always kept matters of the heart close to his chest, and I promised his secrets were not mine to reveal to anyone, even our own children.” She pulled her legs to the bench, sitting like she was posing for a fashion magazine. “But even though we were the perfect match for our families, we were never meant to be together. I wanted freedom, to be impulsive and do whatever I felt like. I guess you take after me in that respect. But he wanted—” She shrugged. “Cock?”

Peyton sputtered. “What?”

“I’m being harsh.” She laughed softly, waving a hand as if to erase what she’d said. “We loved each other, I could feel it. We even had a good sex life, but his heart already belonged to someone else.”

“I’m so confused right now.” Peyton looked at the expanse of the garden that morphed into the blue sky, trying to ignore Mum’s TMI sex comment.

“You see, darling, your dad and Zbigniew were best friends when they were teenagers.” She winked. “The very best.”

Peyton opened his mouth then closed it.

“Yeah. Now you’ve caught on,” She squeezed Peyton’s arm. “I hope Ronan will finally find some happiness. He deserves it.”

“Oh, Mum.” Peyton hugged her tight. “I can’t wait to see Mat’s face when I tell him.” Peyton laughed. “See you in a few hours.” He kissed her cheek and ran to his soon-to-be husband.



Peyton had held onto the banging news long enough to have a long, lovely fuckfest with Mat. After they’d indulged in post-orgasm snuggles, Peyton revealed what he’d found out.

Mat had been mildly shocked but, in the end, they were both happy for the men who raised them to find, or rekindle, a flame long neglected. It was quite romantic for them to come out on Peyton’s and Mat’s wedding day.

Now, standing with Mat’s hand in his outside their house, Peyton took a moment to soak in the view of their garden-turned-wedding venue.

The white benches filled with people led to a wooden flower-decorated arch where Finley stood in a summer suit.

On the right side, next to Mum and Dad, sat Peyton’s sister, the new CFO of Dad’s distillery business, then Peyton’s friends Dina and Fiona who’d flown in from Canada. An entire row of Peyton’s great aunts and great uncles turned halfway to watch them, some of whom had been supportive when Peyton had come out, while others had taken their time.

But in the end, they'd all arrived to support him and his soon-to-be husband on the biggest day of their lives.

The left side, with Mat's uncle and aunt at the helm, was filled with sleek suits of Mat's friends from the Polish and Irish mafia, with the splashes of colour that were Hugh's waistcoat, Brendan's light blue suit, and Mary's peach-coloured hat.

Peyton felt Mat squeeze his hand and he looked at the man he wanted to spend the rest of his life with. Mat's black suit accentuated his broad shoulders and slim waist, its colour a contrast to Peyton's violet one.

Mat pulled out the delicate golden cross that was always around his neck and kissed it before dropping it back under his white shirt. His parents couldn't be with him on the day but he carried their memory with him. Those sentiments, so subtle yet so strong, were what made Peyton love Mat all the more.

When Mendelssohn's March started playing from the decorated speakers around the garden, Peyton tightened his hand around Mat's. They walked down the white-petal-sprinkled aisle between the families until they reached the arch.

"Peyton and Mat." Finley's voice carried, challenged only by the breeze and birds chirping as everyone else fell quiet. "Have you come here freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?"

They both said yes. Peyton's lungs constricted, his heart ready to burst, and he barely recalled the words he was

repeating after Finley.

“I take you, Mat, to be my husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honour you all the days of my life.” Peyton watched Mat’s eyes shine as he winked at Peyton before repeating the first sentence that was the same as Peyton’s before adding:

“I will love you and I promise to cherish and protect you for the rest of my life.”

Peyton sniffled and only then realised that he was crying. He extended his hand to Mat, who slid a simple gold band on his finger. He knew that on the inside it had the inscription “Sin with me Forever” and the date Peyton had approached Mat in the confessional for the first time.

From his jacket pocket, Peyton retrieved an identical one and slid it on Mat’s ring finger.

The guests stood up, clapping, cheering, and sniffing. Peyton spotted a reshuffle amongst them and saw Dad reaching for Zbigniew’s hand as Mum and Jagoda embraced each other with tears in their eyes.

Kissing his husband in front of their family and friends, Peyton knew that a new era in his life had started. One he was looking forward to exploring with Mat.

Peyton had thought that his spy mission on the island had been penance for his fuckups, for his sins. In reality, it had been Mat who was punished over and over for the action that

had saved his cousin. They'd both sinned in many ways, but the sum of it all had led them to their ultimate heaven.

THE END



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If you'd like to read stories slightly interwoven with this one, check out my Pursuit of Love series. Hugh and Brendan get their HEA in *The Flower Arrangement* which is book 1 of the series. E and Brian, whose collaring ceremony you've just read get their story in *The Blindfold Date* (book 2) and *The Lonely Date* (prequel)

The next book in the series is **The Golden Handcuffs** where you will meet the mysterious Master Kage up close (who officiated the collaring ceremony in *The Sinner's Penance*) and a new bodyguard at the club.

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Stitch Me

When a bad-boy immigrant wants to explore his kinky side, Rod is willing to give him much more than his firm hand.

His career a mess and his sex life a string of meaningless hookups, Rod is ready for a change. He needs someone who can fit into his world as a true partner, but also feed his dominant and sadistic sides. Impossible? Maybe, but he needs to try. He signs up for a new dating app Bears-4-U, where a feisty young man catches his eye.

Desperate to escape his dead-end existence in the US, Caleb flees to England in search of a different life. Along comes a true friend, a new dating app, and a chance to find a cuddly bear to submit to, but can he really trust that Rod won't abandon him like everyone else has?

Consumed by his white-hot passion, Rod refuses to let his perfect sub slip from his grasp. He's determined to do whatever it takes to earn Caleb's love before they run out of time.

A standalone high-heat MM romance / spin-off from Pursuit of Love series (book 2.5 – full novel)

Stitch Me contains: a dating app, age gap, D/S, exploring

k!nks, Cuddly S@dist, feisty pain slut, high heat, travel, MM,
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The Flower Arrangement

Heartbroken after a bitter divorce, Brendan finds solace in running his beloved flower shop. Wary of being hurt again, he vows to think twice before jumping into a new relationship. Then he meets flamboyant hairstylist Hugh, a man with skilled hands and a cheeky smile who tests Brendan's resolve.

Hugh has at long last realised his dream of having his own salon, but the glow of his success is hampered by the shadow of his loneliness. When brawny, six-foot-three Brendan appears wielding a bouquet of exquisite flowers, Hugh feels that shadow begin to fade. Brendan's kind eyes, chequered shirt, and dad-next-door appeal dare Hugh to break his no-dating-clients rule.

Sparks fly as their desire for each other grows. Passion and laughter help heal old wounds, but only time will tell if it is enough to build a lasting relationship.

A standalone story of second chances, idiots in love, and steamy jacuzzi scenes.

MM Contemporary Romance Novella (Pursuit of Love Series, book 1 – standalone)

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The Blindfold Date

A new dating app. Rules: both parties sit at a table with blindfolds on. Each can ask three questions to the other. If they don't like the answers, they can leave. If both parties enjoy the conversation, they take the blindfold off. What can go wrong? Nothing. Unless after taking off the blindfold, you realise the other person is the last guy you expected to see.

This is exactly how Ernesto—an autistic video game programmer with a secret dominant streak, meets Brian—an easy-going ex-football player with a burgeoning desire to submit. And giving in to the demands of this lean, geeky Dom may be just what Brian needs.

A standalone MM book from the contemporary Pursuit of Love series. TW: D/S dynamics, mention of past abuse.
MM Contemporary Romance (Pursuit of Love Series, Book 2 – standalone)

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The Lonely Date

Brian has always dreamt of a professional football career. Years of dedication and hard work have brought that goal within arm's reach, but now he's facing a new battle—with his sexuality he can no longer repress. Coming out—or even experimenting—would endanger his prospective career. After a devastating accident, Brian finds himself being led through doors he was reluctant to open before.

E has always struggled with intimacy. As a gay geek on the spectrum, his love life has consisted of a series of haphazard and unrewarding anonymous encounters. After a hopeless crush on a fellow student, E faces a tough decision: step out of his comfort zone and reach for what he wants, or face a life alone.

A prequel to “The Blindfold Date,” “The Lonely Date” meets Brian and Ernesto at a pivotal moment 12 years earlier as students at the same university.

MM Contemporary Romance Novella (Pursuit of Love Series, book 1.5)

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The Blindfold Date and The Lonely date are now available as **The Blindfold Date Duology** on KU, eBook, and paperback!

The Sinner’s Penance

Even disguised as a priest, Mat can’t resist a man kneeling at his feet, begging to be punished.

Being a bodyguard for London’s Polish Mafia had its benefits. Fast money, fast cars, and an endless stream of hot men fuelled Mateusz’s insatiable lust for life. But when he takes out the son of a rival Mafia boss, he is forced to flee to a remote island in the West of England. Posing as a priest, Mateusz hopes he found the perfect disguise. Until a handsome stranger shows up to confession, begging for

punishment. Can Mateusz rein in his ferocious carnal desires? Or will his cover be blown to smithereens?

As a newcomer to the island, Peyton's social life is limited to a dram at the local pub. Everything changes when he attends a mass on a Sunday and his gaze lands on the man he can't have. The one in a cassock.

Tropes/Themes: mafia, insta-lu\$, roleplaying, priest k!nk, wax play, flagellat!on, D/S, hurt/comfort, morally grey characters, bla\$phemous use of religious artifacts, MM, HEA.
MM Contemporary Romance (Pursuit of Love Series, book 3 – standalone)

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The Golden Handcuffs

Tired and brokenhearted, he wanted a fresh start. When faced with an opportunity to work at a BD\$M club, he embraced it, despite zero knowledge of what the work would entail. He definitely didn't expect to fall for tall and broody Dom.

MM Contemporary Romance (Pursuit of Love Series, book 4 – standalone)

Get yours.

Whispers in the Woods

MM Paranormal Novella (BPO Series)

When a gigantic forest creature saves Tomek from a falling tree, he feels an intense desire to know more about the young man the creature turns into. As Tomek and Robert's friendship blooms, the bigotry permeating society puts their relationship to question, while Tomek's heart fills with doubt and his head with denial about his sexuality. Will he be able to face his friend and admit his feelings? A new adult, queer tale of love in extraordinary times — full of emotion, reflection, and second chances.

Themes and tropes: pan + gay MCs, shifter romance, fighting bigotry, friends to lovers, Eastern European setting.

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About Author

K. C. Carmine is a Polish-born writer, currently living in England. She loves writing about people falling in love with a focus on characters and their journey to HEA. As a member of the queer community, it is important to her that her writing reflects the diversity of voices around her. While she is a lover of romance, she also enjoys horror, paranormal and mystery stories. When she's not writing, she likes travelling, playing the guitar, video games, and reading.

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