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Eighty Days Blue

Written by Vina Jackson

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Eighty Days Blue

Vina Jackson



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A Meal of Oysters

In the middle of Grand Central Station, he kissed me.

It was a lover's kiss – brief, soft and affectionate, full of the lingering memories of a day spent in blissful denial and a reminder that this would be our last night together in New York. We hadn't spoken about the future yet, or the past. Hadn't dared. It was as if these few days and nights were a window between those two looming spectres, best forgotten until the inevitable passing of time forced us to face them head on.

For the next twenty-four hours, we would be lovers, just an ordinary couple, like any other.

One more night and one more day in New York. The future would keep.

It seemed fitting to spend a few of our last minutes together in Grand Central, one of my favourite spots in the city. It's a place where the past and the future meet, where all the disparate fragments of New York mingle – the wealthy, the poor, the punks and the Wall Street girls and boys, tourists and commuters – each passing on their way to separate lives, united only by a hurried few moments of scurrying, all briefly sharing the same experience, racing for a train.

We were on the main concourse, next to the famous four-sided clock. After the kiss, I looked up and around, as

I always did when I was standing there. I liked to gaze up at the marble pillars and vaulted arches holding an upside-down Mediterranean sky, the zodiac view that ancient cartographers imagined angels or alien life forms might have when looking down on the Earth from the heavens.

The building reminded me of a church, but having always been ambivalent about religion, I had more respect for the power of the railroad, proof of man's never-ending desire to go somewhere. Chris, my best friend in London, always said that you never really know a city until you've sampled its public transport, and if that was true of anywhere, it was true of New York. Grand Central Station summed up all the things I liked about Manhattan: it was full of promise and alive with the energy of people rushing to and fro, a veritable melting pot of bodies in motion; the opulence and grandeur of the gold chandeliers hanging from the ceiling were a promise to everyone who passed through with nothing but a dime in their pocket that somewhere overhead, opportunity waited.

Good things happen in New York; that was the message of Grand Central Station. If you worked hard enough, if you threw your dream in the ring, then one day you'd get lucky and the city would throw a chance right back at you.

Dominik took my hand and pulled me along through the crowd to the ramp leading down to the Whispering Gallery at the lower level. I'd never been to the Whispering Gallery in St Paul's Cathedral in London either; both were things on my never-ending to-do list of places to visit and things to see.

He stood me in the corner, facing one of the pillars that joined the low arches and then ran to the other side.

'Summer,' he said, his soft voice coming through the

pillar as clear as a bell, as if the wall were talking to me. I knew it was an architectural phenomenon – sound waves apparently travelling from one pillar to its opposite across the domed ceiling, nothing more than a bit of acoustic magic – but it was eerie nonetheless. He was a dozen feet away, with his back to me, yet could have been whispering straight into my ear.

'Yes?' I murmured to the wall.

'I'm going to make love to you again later.'

I laughed and turned to look at him. He grinned at me wickedly from across the space.

He walked back and took my hand again, pulling me into another embrace. His torso was pleasantly firm, and he was nearly a foot taller than me, so even in heels I could rest my head on his shoulder. Dominik wasn't bulky – he didn't work out at the gym, or at least not that he had ever mentioned – but he had a lean, athletic physique and the fluid movements of someone who enjoys being inside their body. Today had been hot, coming to the end of a New York summer, the sun during the day so harsh and scorching you could fry an egg on the pavement. It was still muggy, and though we'd both showered before we left Dominik's hotel, I could feel the heat of his skin through his shirt. His hug was like being enveloped in a warm cloud.

'But for now,' he whispered, into my ear this time, 'let's eat.'

We were standing right outside the Oyster Bar. I didn't recall having mentioned to Dominik my love of raw fish – another of my idiosyncrasies that he had guessed correctly. I had half a mind to tell him that oysters made me squeamish, just to make the point that he might not always be right, but I had been wanting to go to the Oyster Bar

since I arrived in New York and wasn't going to turn the chance down now. Besides, I'm suspicious of anyone who doesn't like oysters, and he might feel the same way. I didn't want to tell him a lie that might backfire.

It's a popular place and I was surprised that he'd been able to get a reservation at this late notice, though knowing Dominik, he'd probably booked in advance and never mentioned the fact to me. We still had to wait for twenty minutes to be seated, but the waiter brought the menus immediately and waited to take our drinks order.

'Champagne?' Dominik asked, ordering a Pepsi for himself.

'A bottle of Asahi for me, please,' I said to the waiter, watching a hint of a smile pass across Dominik's lips as I ignored his suggestion.

'The menu is rather overwhelming here,' Dominik said. 'Shall we share some oysters to start?'

'Are you trying to fill me with aphrodisiacs?'

'If ever there was a woman who didn't need an aphrodisiac, Summer, it's you.'

'I'll take that as a compliment.'

'Good. I meant it as one. Is there any particular variety of oyster that you prefer?'

The waiter had reappeared with our drinks. I waved away his offer of a glass: beer is meant to be drunk from a bottle. I took a cool sip and glanced at the menu.

They even had oysters from New Zealand here, grown in the Hauraki Gulf, not far at all from my home town. I felt a fleeting ache, a passing pang of homesickness, the curse of the weary traveller. No matter how much I liked whatever new city I happened to be in, I was still at least occasionally plagued by memories of New Zealand. Seafood was one of

those things that reminds me of home, of warm days and cool evenings spent in the sea, digging my heels into the soft, wet sand at half-tide to pick out tuatua and pipi, the shellfish that live in shallow waters on sandy beaches, or of Friday nights at the local fish and chip shop, ordering half a dozen deep-fried oysters served in a white paper bag, covered in salt and served with a big slice of lemon.

I asked for half a dozen of something local, whatever the waiter thought was good, and Dominik asked for another half-dozen of the same. Homesickness or no homesickness, I hadn't come all the way to New York to eat seafood from the Hauraki Gulf.

The waiter disappeared to the kitchen, and Dominik stretched his arm across the table and laid his hand over mine. His touch was colder than I expected, considering the heat of his body, and I shivered involuntarily in surprise. He'd been holding his glass with that hand, I realised, and it must be cold, though he always ordered his Pepsi easy on the ice.

'Do you miss it? New Zealand?'

'Yes. Not all the time, but when something reminds me of home, a word or a smell or a sight of something, then I do. Not my friends or my family so much, because I talk to them on the phone and by email, but I miss the land, the ocean. I found living in London hard because it's so flat. Not as flat as the parts of Australia I've lived in, but still flat. New Zealand has a lot of hills.'

'It's like reading a book, watching your face. You give away more than you think. It doesn't all come out in your music, you know.'

He'd been disappointed that I had left my violin in my flat before returning to his hotel room just a couple of

streets down from me. I promised that I would fetch it and play for him again before he left. He'd booked an overnight flight and would be taking a cab to the airport tomorrow at around 4 p.m., returning to London, to his duties at the university and his home full of books near Hampstead Heath. My fortuitous week off was coming to a close and I would be back with the orchestra, rehearsing for our new show, on Monday.

We hadn't discussed what would come next. In London, just before I left for New York, we'd had a loose sort of arrangement, a relationship of sorts but an unstructured one. He'd told me that I was free to explore, so long as I told him the details afterwards, a requirement that I had enjoyed. I got a kick out of telling him what I'd been up to, and sometimes I did things or avoided them just for the sake of the following confession. I hadn't mentioned that point to Dominik. He was like the priest I'd never had. He'd seemed either amused or aroused by my adventures until the night that he saw me together with Jasper, when everything had gone so badly wrong.

I hadn't told him about Victor either, the man that I had fallen in with in New York. I wasn't quite sure how to broach that. The games that Victor had played had been so much more perverse than Dominik's tastes. Victor had even sold me, had given me to his acquaintances to use as they wished. I'd gone along with it all, enjoyed most of it. Would I tell Dominik about that? I wasn't sure. It was only forty-eight hours since I left Victor's party, because he had wanted to mark me permanently as his slave, his property, and I had refused. The suggestion of a permanent mark had been just one step too far. Already it felt like a lifetime ago. Being with Dominik had washed the sting of Victor away,

at least for the moment. I was also sure that Dominik had known Victor in London and that added a whole layer of awkwardness to the situation.

'How's London?' I asked, changing the subject.

The entrée arrived quickly, despite the reviews I had read suggesting the service was slow here. A dozen oysters were fanned out like jewels on a large white platter with a lemon in the middle, cut into halves, each half covered with white muslin, tied tightly at the top, trapping the seeds inside as if one miscreant pip escaping from the flesh of the fruit might ruin the whole dish.

Dominik shrugged. 'You haven't missed much. I've been working – lecturing, working on some papers in my spare time, doing a lot of writing.' He glanced up at me, caught my eye, hesitated for a moment and then continued. 'I've missed you. Some things have happened that we should talk about, in due course, but for now, let's enjoy tonight. Eat your oysters.'

Dominik brought an oyster to his mouth, resting the shell on one palm as he flicked the fleshy meat into his mouth with the delicate silver fork the waiter had provided. There was something savage about the way that he had extracted the juice from the lemon, so firmly you might say he crushed the fruit, rather than squeezed it. Then, almost as the next step in a well-practised ritual, he sprayed black pepper across the dish with two fierce twists of the grinder. He speared the fish neatly, deftly, not allowing a spare morsel or a drip of juice to stray from its trajectory to his tongue.

I preferred to ignore the fork and just suck the oyster straight from the shell, enjoying the slippery feel of it, the

slap of flesh wet against my tongue, untampered by utensils, the salty juice coating my lips.

I looked up to see Dominik watching me.

'You eat like a wild creature.'

'It's not the only thing I do like a wild creature,' I said with an attempt at a sly smile.

'I can't deny that. It's one of the things I like about you. You abandon yourself to your appetites, whatever they might be.'

'In New Zealand, they'd think this a refined way to eat seafood. Back home, I've seen people bite the tongues off pipi, the shellfish we have in the shallow water near the shoreline. They flick their tongues out of their shells when you pick them out of the water and the real enthusiasts bite them straight off, eat them alive.'

Dominik smiled. 'Were you one of those, eating sea creatures alive?'

'No, never had the heart to do it. I thought it cruel.'

'You admired it in other people, I bet, though?'

'Yes. Yes, I did.'

I suppose it's just part of being naturally contrary and something of a rebel, but the more likely a food is to split a room into lovers and haters, the more likely it is that I will enjoy it, or at least admire people who do.

'Fancy a stroll?' Dominik asked, thanking the staff on our way out.

They responded with a warm goodnight. Dominik was a generous tipper. I had read somewhere that you should always pay attention to the way a man treats animals, his mother and waiters, so I filed this bit of information away in his running positive column.

I looked down at my shoes. Black patent stilettos, and as I had only brought my smallest, most glamorous purse, I hadn't had room for a spare pair of flats.

'We can get a taxi if your feet hurt,' he continued.

'Yes, these heels weren't made for walking.'

I thought he would head to the road to hail a cab, but instead he grabbed my wrist and pulled me forcibly to the side. He pressed me up against the wall outside the restaurant by the stairs leading to the East 43rd Street exit and ran his hands down the sides of my body and round to my backside. I could feel the bulge in his trousers against my thigh. I thought he was getting hard, but I couldn't be sure, so I reached a hand down to check. He batted my probing fingers away. Damn him. His habit of getting me all fired up and then leaving me hanging drove me crazy. The quicker we got home, the better.

'I'll have you off them soon enough,' he said as he set me down again, not bothering to whisper.

A middle-aged woman standing in the now long queue outside the Oyster Bar, dressed in cream trousers, faux-snakeskin court shoes and, despite the heat, a pink cardigan, tutted at us.

Dominik linked his arm through mine, and we walked west up 42nd Street to Park Avenue, jostled by the Saturday-night crowd, a sea of partygoers, tourists, showgirls and spectators, all jazzed up and on the lookout for a sniff of the action. The fun part of the weekend was just beginning for most; their energy was gaining an almost manic edge, feeding off the bright lights and flashing billboards, the traffic whizzing by and Times Square Tower soaring into the sky above us like a gaudy middle finger flipping the bird to the more respectable parts of town.

'Did you still want to see a show?' I asked, hoping the answer would be no. We'd floated the idea earlier of behaving like tourists and catching a play on Broadway. True, we'd spent most of the day in bed together, but I for one wasn't worn out and I didn't want to waste our last night.

'I'd rather watch you,' he replied, his eyes glittering, and my heart raced in response as I remembered how much Dominik liked to watch, how aroused he had been after each of the private concerts he'd arranged where I'd played my violin for him in various states of dress and undress. I thought of the precious Bailly that he had bought for me after my own instrument was damaged, on the grounds that in return I would play Vivaldi for him – nude. How after the first solo concert in the crypt in London, he had fucked me against the wall, right there and then, before taking me home to his house in Hampstead and asking me to bring myself to orgasm while he sat in his office chair and watched.

We stood at the intersection while the rest of the world rushed past, and I imagined that if that moment were caught on film, the picture would be of just Dominik and me, our bodies clearly delineated in a whirl of colour, as if we were the only two people who existed, whole, on the streets of New York, while the rest of the population was indistinct, people blending together in a blur, each individual as featureless as the next.

We took a lengthy walk down Broadway, past Union Square, and then veered off towards University Place, avoiding the faded glitz and glamour of Fifth Avenue. By the time we reached my place, my feet were killing me, though the sensation was numbed by the couple of beers I'd

had with dinner and the light-hearted feeling I had walking alongside Dominik, with his arm threaded through mine, as if all my troubles had been swept away, at least for one more night and one more day.

Dominik didn't know it, but we were standing outside the apartment that I shared with a Croatian couple, Marija and Baldo, who played in the brass section of the orchestra and spent most of their evenings out. When they were in, they filled the flat with the sound of their lovemaking, heavy breathing and head-board thumping, Marija so loud that I was envious, though of course she may have been faking it. I wasn't sure of the status of their relationship, whether they were married, cohabiting or perhaps living in sin, each on the run from their own respective partners, which would explain why the fire of their lust never seemed to dim.

'My violin,' I said, 'it's inside, and I promised to play for you one last time.'

He took a step closer to me so that I could feel his firm body pressing against my back, then brushed his hand gently up the inside of my thigh.

'Of course. I'll wait here if you like,' he whispered softly into my ear.

The tone of his voice was utterly casual, and a little amused. He seemed to be enjoying the effect that his presence was having on me as I desperately fiddled with the fob that opened the main entryway to the apartment block with fingers so shaky that I might have been trying to solve a Rubik's cube.

'No,' I said, 'come in. It's Saturday night, so my flat-mates are probably out, and if not, I'll introduce you – they're friendly and won't mind a visitor.'

I couldn't remember the last time I had invited a man

home. Neither Dominik nor Darren, the man I'd dated for six months in London before Dominik and I met, had ever visited me at my flat. I'd picked up the odd one-night stand during my single months, but even then I always insisted on going back to theirs.

There was no real reason for my reticence; I'm just cagey about my personal space. I'm also messy, and I hate commuting, so I tend to end up living in cheaper, small rooms in more expensive parts of town, rather than taking somewhere larger in a less expensive suburb and needing to take the subway every day. My room in the East Village apartment was tiny; if I wanted anything larger, I'd have to move to Brooklyn. Marija and Baldo occupied most of the space and consequently paid two-thirds of the rent between them. I had a small room with just a single bed, a hanging rail with all of my clothes and shoes on display, a couple of photographs from home and a few books scattered here and there. I didn't have a desk, not a single piece of furniture other than the bed and the rail. Ever since I left New Zealand, I'd made a point of travelling light, so wherever I ended up I could pack up and ship off again with the minimum of fuss. I begin to feel edgy when I own more than I can fit into a single suitcase.

I pushed open the front door to the apartment and felt around on the wall for the light switch, sliding my purse onto the kitchen counter.

'Hello?' I called out, taking Dominik by the hand and leading him inside.

He stood in the kitchen and looked around, while I knocked lightly on the Croatians' bedroom door to check if they were in. There was no response.

'They're out.'

'Good,' he said, striding over to me and picking up a handful of my hair, then tugging it gently.

He suddenly swivelled me round so I stood facing the bay window in the living room, looking out into the small communal courtyard shared by the residents in our block. It was dark outside now, and with the lights on and the blinds open, anyone who happened to be sitting in the pocket-sized garden smoking a cigarette or standing at their own window and looking over at ours would likely have been able to see if not everything, at least our silhouettes, me in my short black dress and Dominik in his collared shirt and tie. We'd both dressed for a night out, in case we ended up falling into one of New York's classier bars. He looked good in a suit, never so formal that he might have been on his way to work, but not uncomfortable, like the sort of man who had owned the same outfit for ten years and resurrected it from the wardrobe once or twice a year for weddings and funerals. There was always something of a casual air about Dominik; he had the confidence of a person who knows they're in the right skin, so no matter what he wore, he looked good. He had an easy style.

Underneath that unwavering polite veneer, though, lurked a very dirty mind, and it was that dark edge beneath all the social niceties that stopped me from getting bored and moving on, as I usually did with men after a few months of dating.

I wonder what Dominik is going to do next, I thought, staring into the minuscule garden, watching the fairy lights that a neighbour had erected to cheer the place up flickering like fireflies. Push me against the window? Make me lift my dress up round my waist and then stand back and stare at my arse? Fuck me in full view of the neighbours? He

hadn't snaked his hand under my dress yet, so unless he had noticed the absence of a pantyline when we had been kissing, him stroking my body through my clothes, he would be unaware that I had elected to leave my knickers at home and had spent all night enjoying the occasional flurry of cool air between my legs.

'Take your hold-ups off,' he said, 'but without bending your knees. And don't look back at me.'

I could hear the smile in his voice; he was enjoying this, coming up with a new game that he knew would turn me on. It was the change, the surprise, that filled me with a rush of arousal. So long as I didn't know what was coming next, then it was exciting. My mind would just stop thinking and relax, all my powers intent on following his next instruction. It stopped me from thinking about the laundry that I needed to do, rehearsals next week, when my next pay cheque was coming and what bill I needed to pay first. The sound of Dominik's voice washed every other thought from my head, and when I wasn't thinking, I made up for it by feeling, all my physical senses now on hyper alert, so that even the lightest touch, the softest breath of air on my skin, sent me half mad with desire.

It's more difficult than it sounds, removing a pair of hold-ups without your knees bending. I rolled up my dress, offering Dominik a glimpse of flesh, and hooked a thumb under the sticky band at the top, the lacy border that separated the stocking part from the top of my thigh, and pulled downwards, spreading my legs wide apart so that I could bend over at the waist to touch my toes while keeping my legs perfectly straight. Then I balanced all of my weight on my other foot and gently removed my stiletto, just for a second, so I could hook the stocking over my heel and toes

and then slip the shoe back on again. Then the same on the other side.

'Hand them to me.'

I held my hand out behind me, still staring straight ahead through the glass. I wasn't sure what he was going to do next.

'Give me your hands.'

He hadn't specifically said that I should hold my hands behind my back, but that's what I did, because Dominik always meant exactly what he said, and if he had wanted me to turn round, he would have either told me so or spun me to face him. So I stood with my legs spread, facing the window, my shoulders twisted back in my sockets, chest forward and arms straight and stiff, my hands clasped in the prayer position with my thumbs facing my butt.

The hold-ups made a surprisingly efficient pair of handcuffs despite the stretch in the light fabric. He used both, tying my hands with two elaborate loops, joined snugly at the wrists so my circulation wasn't hindered, but even if I wriggled, I couldn't engineer my way free. I suppose I could have got out of it if I really tried, but escaping didn't appeal to me. I liked the idea of being subject to Dominik's will, a prisoner of my own choosing, to do what he wanted with.

He put his hands on my shoulders and turned me to face him. The ache in my feet following the endless high-heeled walk to downtown was becoming pleasant now, a sharp, exhilarating reminder that I had given my body to Dominik to use and therefore any sensation that I had was because he wanted it.

It had occurred to me before that if I could apply this mindset to other parts of my life, there'd be nothing I

couldn't achieve. Once started, I was like a train on its tracks, headed straight for whatever outcome awaited me with total disregard to any discomfort of the journey. Submission wasn't something that I could apply wherever and whenever I willed it, however. I needed a trigger. When I was growing up, I had my violin teacher, Mr van der Vliet, who had never laid a finger on me in any way other than as a teacher to a student, but for some inexplicable reason I had felt so bound to please him that I practised far beyond the norm. Now it was Dominik who commanded the same power over me, albeit because I had granted that power to him.

He bent down, his eyes locked on mine, ran his hand up the now bare skin of first one leg and then the other, from my ankle to my thigh, stopping just before where my pantyline would have been if I had been wearing any. His eyes were like granite; he had that look that he got when he was drifting into the path of his own desires, a place beyond conscious thought, where the body is the driver, if you just allow it to take over.

My breathing was beginning to grow ragged. I loved it when he did this, I really did, but God, every time his touch got close I just wished that he would slide his finger inside me. Patience has never been a strong point of mine.

He straightened and walked round behind me, grabbing me by my wrist restraint as if the stockings were a convenient handle. I struggled to keep up with him, walking backwards, my heels clattering on the polished wooden floor.

He pushed me face first onto the bed, my arms still tied tightly behind my back. I turned my face to the side so I could breathe and watched him, out of the corner of one

eye, as he kneeled down by the foot of my pillow and fumbled under the bed, his expression turning into a satisfied grin as he found the bottle of lubricant and box of condoms that I kept there. Not such a secret hiding place after all, I mused. Perhaps I wasn't so different from other women. Or perhaps he always dated the same type.

Dominik pulled my dress further up so the fabric bunched round my waist, my bare arse now on clear display. He drew a breath, now realising for sure that I had spent the evening with him in my short black dress without any knickers on.

I flinched as I heard the sound of his belt unbuckling, uncertain whether he meant to slap my arse with the leather strap or merely undo his trousers so he could fuck me. Either outcome I would have enjoyed, providing I got the latter eventually. I held my body perfectly still, waiting for his next move, hoping that it would come soon, otherwise I feared that I might explode.

I didn't want to give him the satisfaction of seeing me beg for it, but I wanted him inside me so badly that it felt as though time had slowed down. Every second that he stood near me but didn't touch me filled an hour.

It was like being on a knife's edge, perpetually trapped in that narrow place between desire and fulfilment. I enjoyed it and hated it at once. Every time he stepped away from me my desire for him multiplied, but each time he touched me he brought me closer to satisfaction and closer to it all being over.

He knew it too. As much as I tried to temper my responses out of pride, he had obviously paid attention during the course of our encounters and he knew how to play me as if I were an instrument. He didn't own all of me, and he never would, but for as long as we were in bed

together, he owned my body, whether I wanted it that way or not.

I was entirely at Dominik's mercy.

I jumped as I heard the sound of a wrapper tearing, and the snapping sound of the bottle of lube flipping open.

Then I felt his finger inside me at last, probing, exploring, just one at first, then another, and another, and another, until I was sure that he wouldn't be able to fit any more inside. I tried to shuffle back against him, to bend my knees and gain some purchase on the bedding so that I could drive myself backwards into his hand, but with my wrists tied and my body flat on the bed, all I could do was wriggle helplessly like a caterpillar on an entomologist's table, or a butterfly pinned to a dissection board.

He was surprisingly still behind me, likely taking pleasure in watching me try to worm out of my plight. I felt more exposed being half, rather than completely, naked. Somehow there was something more pornographic about having my top half covered and my bottom half nude, as though my naked arse and genitals were more shocking without my bare breasts to offset them. Half-nakedness was the pose of perverts, of old men at bus-stops with their shirts on, trousers down and coats open. At the wish of another, half-nakedness had an edge of humiliation, a feeling of ownership to it.

'Spread your legs apart,' he said.

I did.

'Further.'

My thigh muscles were beginning to ache, as he had me almost doing the splits. I was still on my knees with my chest pressed into the bed and my hands behind my back, only barely able to keep my balance. He dropped down into

a crouch and then ran his tongue lightly all the way from my knee to the top of my inner thigh, on one side, then the other. He stopped just short of licking my pussy, but he held his mouth right against me so that I could feel his hot breath against my lips.

I pushed back slightly, hoping to feel the touch of his tongue.

'Oh, no, you don't. Stay still.'

Despite my best efforts to play it cool, I began to moan, and rock back and forth slightly.

'Want me, do you?' he teased.

His tone was mocking. At any other moment, I might have wanted to slap him, but right now I felt as though my body was on fire and I would have done anything to get him to touch me, even if that meant I had to crawl across the floor on my hands and knees, begging for it.

'Yes.'

'Yes? You don't sound very sure. Perhaps I'll leave the room until you are certain.' He stood up and stepped away.

'No, please, please don't go. I want you more than anything.'

'More than anything – that's better. And if I give you what you want, what will you do for me?'

'Anything you want. I'll do anything you want. Just please, please fuck me. I can't stand it any longer.'

'Anything I want, huh? You should be careful what you promise. I might hold you to that.'

'I don't care. Please touch me,' I whimpered, my pride forgotten under the strength of my lust.

He stepped closer and pushed the head of his cock inside me, but only a few inches. Then he waited.

I clawed the bedspread in frustration.

'Beg,' he said softly. 'Tell me what you want.'

'Fuck me, please. For God's sake, fuck me.'

Finally, he pushed all the way, filling me to the brim. The heat of his cock inside me just about sent me through the roof at the first thrust.

He gripped my wrists tightly and drew in and out as I pushed back against him.

He filled me until I began to ache, and he was spent.

We both paused, panting. He bent down and gently untied my hands. I stretched my arms out cautiously, the blood rushing back to my wrists.

'Stay there,' he said, as if I could go anywhere with him still inside me.

He pushed himself off and lay down beside me, stroking my hair with one hand as he ran the other between my legs until he found my sweet spot and I began to moan again. I thought it was unlikely that I would come in this position, on my front, but I was willing to let him try.

'Turn over,' he whispered, maybe seeing the look of uncertainty on my face. I flipped over onto my back.

He continued with his one-handed rhythm, raising himself up so he could see what he was doing. I watched him watching me, his gaze intent on the path of his fingertip. He looked down at me looking at him and smiled. One voyeur recognising another. Then he ran his free hand up my torso and between my breasts, tracing a line round each nipple on the way. He placed his hand very lightly over my throat.

'Close your eyes.'

He was a quick learner, Dominik, and with my eyes shut, blocking out any remaining distractions, and his other hand busily pleasuring me, I was caught in the throes of my

own orgasm before long, an almost painful wave of pleasure that started at my groin and travelled all the way up to my brain before it floated away into nothing a few seconds later.

I opened my eyes to see Dominik looking down at me, his self-satisfaction evident. I don't orgasm easily and, besides Dominik, have had only one or two lovers who've managed it without my assistance.

'Good girl,' he said. Corny though it might be, it was a phrase that never failed to give me another hot flush.

We decided to relocate to Dominik's hotel room for what was left of the night. The hotel's double bed was infinitely more comfortable than my single one, and he had a view over Washington Square Park.

We made love again in the morning, both still half asleep and spooning. I nestled back against him to find his erection pressed into the cleft in my arse and, soon after that, inside me. We lay side by side, his arm round me protectively and a hand resting on one of my breasts as I pushed gently into him. There was something tender and nostalgic in our lovemaking. The bitter reality of our parting had quelled the fire of the previous night and left only desire and longing in its wake.

I stood by the window, nude, and played for him one last time, 'Message to My Girl', my favourite of the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra and Split Enz collaboration, though of course not the same without the rest of the orchestra, the flute and the piano, and the voice of Neil Finn. It was the first time that I had played anything for him outside of the classical canon.

He didn't know the lyrics, didn't have the same sense of

home that I did when I played that song, couldn't see the vision I had of Aotearoa stretching out in my mind's eye. Nevertheless, I hoped that at least a bit of the magic and my longing for it came out through the strings.

I put the Bailly away and sat down on the bed beside him.

'Shall we get breakfast?' I asked.

It was brunch by the time we arrived. I took him to Caffe Vivaldi on Jones Street, just a few blocks west of the hotel. It was one of the reasons I moved to the Village. I've always been a little sentimental, and the name of the café felt like a good sign, especially once I heard they had an open-mic night and were receptive to musicians of all sorts. I hadn't spoken to the owners about playing there, but I liked to sit and soak up the atmosphere. The area wasn't what it used to be by all accounts – the bohemians had moved to cheaper parts and been replaced by the wealthier middle-classes, who liked the community feel, boutique coffee shops and nearby parks, which explained why my rent was expensive despite the small room – but some of the magic lingered, and I couldn't help but think I might soak up a little of the energy left behind by all the musicians who had sat in those seats before me.

They also had great food and served Bloody Marys with just the right amount of spice. I ordered one, becoming more accustomed to having an alcoholic celebration for one, while Dominik always sipped an espresso or a Pepsi.

Maybe it was the booze that made me bold. I'm not usually one to disclose my feelings, especially to lovers, but each minute that passed drew us closer to the time that Dominik would have to leave, and the speed of the hands

flying round the clock on the nearby wall made me throw caution to the wind.

'I'll miss you, Dominik.'

He put down his fork and looked at me. 'I'll miss you too.'

I paused, gathered my thoughts. 'Thank you for coming. It really meant a lot for me having you here, even for a short time. Things will pick up for me, I'm sure, but I can't leave New York. My music . . . I've had some trouble settling in, but it's going well now, with the orchestra.'

'I'm glad. And you shouldn't leave – stay and make the most of it. I can't leave London now either. I'm working on a few projects independently, but I'm contracted at least to the end of term at the university.'

I nodded.

'It's not so far, though,' he mused. 'A seven-hour flight at worst. There's weekends, it will be half-term before long, and to be honest . . .'

'I'm not sure it would work between us full time,' I finished.

'No. There's still a lot we haven't talked about. I know you haven't spent all of your nights alone in New York, and neither have I in London. I don't think that should change now. We're not . . .'

'Dating?'

He laughed. 'No, not dating. I don't think it's as simple as that.'

'But I don't feel the same way with anyone else. Like I'm giving myself up. You're the only person I feel like that with.'

I still hadn't told Dominik about Victor. That was different, though. I'd allowed Victor to do the things he

did to me, but I didn't want him to do those things in the same way I wanted Dominik.

There was a time, not so long ago, when I would have thought that Dominik's expression was inscrutable, but now I knew him better, I could follow that look in his eyes. Lust. Heat. Agreement.

'Good,' he said. 'The same is true for me. I don't do this sort of thing with everyone, you know.'

My turn to laugh. It sounded like the sort of phrase that a woman would say in a sitcom, the morning after a one-night stand.

'I mean it,' he continued, taking my hand across the table. 'I don't understand it entirely myself, but I know this feeling. You make me want to . . . do things to you.'

'You make me want you to do things to me.'

'Well,' he smiled, 'at least we're in agreement.'

'So it's settled, then?'

'You mean, it's settled that nothing is settled?'

'Yes.'

'I'll come and visit again, enjoy the orchestra, make the most of New York. I mean that – make the most of it, in any way that you want to. But you must keep me informed, as we agreed.'

He ordered another espresso, and I asked for another Bloody Mary. I didn't plan to get drunk in front of him, but the spice and the vodka took the edge off the wave of misery that I felt rushing closer with each minute that drew us closer to the time he had to go.

We spent the rest of the afternoon in Caffe Vivaldi, drinking coffee, talking and laughing, listening to the pianist playing Billy Joel in the background. Dominik had already

checked out of the hotel, and he only had a carry-on overnight bag with him. He travelled light, like I did.

When the time came for him to go, I walked with him back to the steps of the hotel on Waverly Place where the limo he had hired for the airport run was already waiting.

His kiss goodbye was brief, soft, affectionate.

A lover's kiss.