STAY

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

The Iron Eagle’s backroom smells like saddle soap and cold metal. AJ signs the waiver without reading it—he already knows what it says, or thinks he does. He’s forty, lean in the way of a runner who never eats quite enough, curls clipped close but not short, brown eyes ringed with flecks of amber you only notice when he laughs. He’s not laughing now. He’s quiet, that practiced Boi quiet, the kind that makes a room think he’s fine.

Music from the bar thuds through the wall—bass like a second pulse. The dungeon attendant gives the usual walkthrough: station hooks, wipes, a bottle of water, “check-ins every…?” “Fifteen,” AJ says. His voice holds. He’s done this. He has a system for making himself easy to love.

The man he’s scheduled with tonight—Stone—arrives late, already carrying the certainty of someone never told no. Broad shoulders, tidy beard, the confidence that makes people dangerous in dim rooms. “You clean?” Stone asks. AJ nods. They’ve negotiated in messages: open-hand impact, flogger, light humiliation, no slurs, no breath play, no marks that show. Safewords, ‘red’ to stop, ‘yellow’ for slow.

Reading sample — continued

“Yes, Sir,” AJ says, and the word starts its familiar work: a key that opens a door to belonging.

He folds his shirt, lines up his shoes under the bench, fusses with small squares of order because he can’t control anything else. Chest hair darker in the low light, the faint trail down to his stomach, a body he has taught to be offered. Stone glances at him like a craftsman appraising wood. “Arms up,” he says, and AJ obeys.

Leather cuffs bite in that first honest way—tight but not cruel, promise wrapped around bone. Metal clinks to the wrist cuffs. When the chain lifts his arms, AJ steps forward instinctively, lengthening his body to find the angle that turns discomfort into something he can hold.

“Position,” Stone says. AJ widens his stance. Breath in, breath out. He inventories the room—the black-lacquer Saint Andrew’s cross, the coil of rubber flogger, towels folded to triangles, a stern sign about consent printed in white vinyl that peels at the corners. He counts four breaths, then four more, and waits for the touch.