



La Ceinture

MICHÈLE DE LULLY

SAMHAIN publishing, LTD.

eBooks are *not* transferable. They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
512 Forest Lake Drive
Warner Robins, Georgia 31093

La Ceinture
Copyright © 2007 by Michèle de Lully

Cover by Scott Carpenter

ISBN: 1-59998-510-1

www.samhainpublishing.com

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First **Samhain Publishing, Ltd.** electronic publication: June 2007

La Ceinture

Michèle de Lully

Dedication

For S.C.

Chapter One

She sold him the belt without ever actually touching it. That should have been a clue, but at the time she thought nothing of it. He held the tag out for scanning, and when she reached for a bag, he shook his head.

“I’ll wear it out,” he said with a wink. Ripping the price tag off, he began to thread the belt through the empty loops of his jeans, although the pants were tight enough that he did not really need a belt.

She stared, watching the tongue snake through the loops, fascinated, and the way he drew it closed with a jerk and clasped the buckle made something inside her twist and flip.

When it became obvious that she was staring, he kept talking. “Damnedest thing about the old one. Someone stole it out of my trousers while I was swimming on the beach,” He was clearly wondering what was wrong with her.

So was she, for that matter. What had come over her? He was tall and nice looking, broad across the shoulders, with rough, tanned hands, but surely she’d seen men put on belts before.

“It looks good on you,” she said, flustered. The dark silver buckle and smooth black leather gleamed under the store lights. With an act of will, she forced her eyes up from his waist.

“Thank you.” His smile was warm and friendly as he signed the credit slip and handed it to her. There wasn’t any electric feeling when his fingers brushed hers, like she had hoped for, but the sight of him walking away pulled at her, locked her eyes to the belt around his waist.

“Sir,” she called after him, startling herself.

“Yes?” He turned back, polite and helpful. As he walked towards her, he unconsciously reached down to adjust the belt, one thumb tugging at it.

Incredibly, her knees went weak, and she spoke without thinking. "Your copy." She handed him the slip of paper.

"That's okay," he said affably. "You can keep it."

He was going to leave again. She had to do something, quickly. "Someone could find it. Get your address from it." Even while she spoke, a part of her marveled at how stupid she sounded.

"Little good that would do them." He laughed. "I practically live at Jackie's, and anybody can find me there."

He almost reached for the paper, to take it anyway, but his thumb was still caught in the belt. He didn't seem to notice, but just stood there, looking at her. She wanted him to take the paper, to rescue her from this bizarre scenario she had constructed, but he would not be moved.

"Okay." Meekly, she began folding the paper into a tiny square.

Something hard glinted in his eyes then, something that had not been there before, and his lips made a sly, silent grin that was almost invisible. Without speaking, he sauntered away, and she stared after him, the paper crumpling in her unaware hands.

Another customer, a fussy middle-aged man, plopped a stack of clothing on the counter. Shaking her head to clear it, she went back to work, setting the crumpled paper aside.

An hour later she had nothing to do again. Curious, she wandered out into the aisles, to where the belts hung from racks. Searching through them, she could not find the style he had bought, a simple, plain strip of thick black leather, without designs or frills. Gaudy, fancy cuts, crisscrossed strips, bold studs, yes, by the yard, but simple and plain, not a one.

Going back to the cash register, she found the ball of paper and smoothed it out. There was a stock number on it, one she did not recognize. Returning to the belt display, she searched the labels, but there was no rack that matched. Where had he found it?

The computer was no help. It listed the item as discontinued, out of stock, and unavailable. No picture, not even a description. But while she was at the computer, she had a different idea.

Jackie's. The search engine returned a pub on the rougher side of town, where construction workers and car mechanics hung out. With surprise, she discovered she was relieved that it was a bar, and not a woman's name. Why would it matter to her?

She was still wondering that as she punched out for the day. The wonder turned to amazement as she stepped into the restroom, and slid her panties out from under her skirt, hiding them in her purse. With a little more effort, her brassiere followed.

It was just a mid-week break, she told herself. A short Tuesday night out. A few drinks at a pub and a little flirting with a good-looking man who was polite enough not to ruin it, not to take it too far into something she didn't want. Taking off her underwear would make it more fun, make her feel racy and exciting, and no one else would even know. Then she would go home and do what she needed to, alone in the dark. Unless the batteries were dead. She couldn't remember the last time she'd actually used the thing.

Chapter Two

Jackie's was crowded and noisy, even at six o'clock. But of course, construction workers started early and they'd already been drinking for hours now. She got plenty of looks as she worked her way to the bar, but shrugged them off with practiced disdain. She wasn't interested in these blue-collar louts, and she could project that with just a twitch of her hair, or merely by the way she walked. Rejecting men before they could even speak to her was a defensive skill she had mastered long ago.

She bought a pint, because she didn't want to be standing around looking unoccupied. Then she put a dent in it, drinking it a third of the way down to establish that she had been here a while, and was perfectly fine on her own. Now sufficiently entrenched, she let herself look around the room, trying to ignore the slightly dizzy feeling from the quick intake of alcohol and its heady fumes.

He was at a large table at the end of the room. Not the center of attention, but a comfortable fixture in a group of men and women, laughing and joking with them. Just watching him, at ease with his friends, made her feel his simple decency.

Then she glimpsed the belt, a dark band around his waist, and caught her breath. Under his gentle movements were hard muscles, under his soft flannel shirt and blue jeans was a strip of tough leather, bound by a steel buckle. The contrast fascinated her.

Her breasts agreed. The thin silk of her blouse utterly failed to conceal the nipples that suddenly stood out, sharp points that would not fail to draw every man's eye. She cursed herself for having taken off her brassiere. There was only one man she wanted looking at her, and she

didn't want him looking there. She certainly didn't want her body betraying her, revealing feelings or desires she hadn't decided to have.

But it was too late to change her mind now. He was making his way to the bar, an empty pitcher in his hand, buying a new round for his mates. She watched his face as his gaze ran up her body, his eyebrows crinkled in admiration. When he met her eyes, he grinned.

"Hello again," he said. She waited for him to say something catty, to force her to acknowledge that she had sought him out, but he just stood there and smiled.

"Hello," she said, frustrated at her inability to predict or manipulate him. Why couldn't he act like a normal man? He wasn't even staring at her breasts, despite the way her nipples strained for attention.

But she was staring at his waist, her mind drawn to the flat, black leather, a sensation like falling into a murky well of unfathomable depth.

"Does it still look good on me?"

She fought off a blush, and cast about for a way out of the conversational hole she had fallen into. "Where did you find it? There weren't any more on the rack. I couldn't even find a place for it."

He shrugged, unconcerned. "It was just the first plain one I saw. Do you want to join us for a drink?" The pitcher was full now, and he was paying the bartender. Soon he would walk away again, and she could not bear the thought.

"All right." She followed him across the room, her eyes fixed on the belt, ignoring his broad back and tight buttocks.

His friends included her in the festivities without question, extending her the friendliness that radiated from him. She made small talk and wondered what she was doing there. To keep her distance from the group, she found herself drinking more than she had intended. Just when she realized she should start taking it easy, the party broke up.

"Early day tomorrow," he explained to her. "For all of us." They were pouring concrete for a road, or a building, or something. She hadn't really paid much attention to their laborer's talk. Mostly she had concentrated on not staring at the belt. Several times she had become

bored, and thought about leaving, but then her eyes would glimpse it again, and she would remain.

“Did you track down my address, detective?” he asked her on the way out, smiling.

She cut off his flirtation instantly, reflexively. “No.” But in the brief silence that followed, she surprised herself by saying, “Is it close? I could use a cup of coffee before I try to drive.”

He grinned. “Yes, it’s quite close.” They walked across the street together, not holding hands, but still a pair instead of two individuals.

“Welcome to my humble abode.” With a laugh, he unlocked the front door of a multi-story townhouse. They climbed three flights to the top floor, and she found herself in a small apartment with a huge bay window facing out across the tavern.

The apartment was sparsely furnished, but not barren, and reasonably neat and clean, although mostly from disuse. The rumpled bed in front of the main window was the surest sign that anyone actually lived there. Drawn to its disheveled covers and comfortably disarrayed pillows, she found that the apartment towered over the tavern, and the window looked out over the sea. She stared at the nighttime ocean, the gentle stars competing with the rigging of an occasional ship, the dock lights hard and silent.

“I rented it for the view.” He came out of the kitchen with cups of instant coffee. “But I should move now, I suppose.”

She should have asked why, but that was too much like interest, too much like caring. “Why do your friends call you chief?” she asked instead. The cup was still cool in her hands, not yet warmed by the heat of the coffee.

“Habit.” He put his arm around her, looking out to sea and drinking his own coffee.

This was what she was here for, wasn’t it? Why she had tracked him down at the pub. Why she had left her underwear in her purse. Why she had come up to his apartment and immediately run to his bedroom. Then why did she feel so distant, so uninvolved?

Like she always did.

Disappointed again, she began making up an exit strategy. She started to shrug his arm off, lowering her eyes demurely from the hypnotic vision of the bay, but then her gaze fell on the belt, and she stopped in mid-action.

The buckle gleamed faintly, reflecting the lights that shimmered off the sea. It called to her with a pull she could not understand or name.

He could not fail to see. "You really like this belt, don't you?" Putting down his coffee, he began to take it off.

The sight made her knees weak, and she had to turn away.

"I'm sorry." He laughed, misunderstanding. "I didn't mean to imply... I was just going to show it to you."

She was too confused by her inner turmoil to respond. Standing there, with her back to him, it was only natural that he should playfully snap the belt across her buttocks, trying to get her attention. "Hey there," he said, chuckling.

It was only a slap, hardly more than a tickle, but the sensation arced through her spine like an electric shock, making her entire body twitch. Instantly she felt wetness between her thighs, and was stunned with the speed of her response.

Squeezing her legs together, reacting to the warmth in her groin, she unconsciously thrust her buttocks out slightly, unmistakably inviting another slap.

This time it was more solid, and she moaned. Her backside tingled with the unfamiliar contact, but the feeling gained warmth as it moved through her, sparking a fire in her groin. The flames spread to her thighs, licked up to her breasts. Her brain simmered in the heat and stopped functioning.

"You like that." His voice changed, lower and deeper than it had been, husky with the hint of menace. "Lie down, then, so you can get a proper whipping." He had been holding the belt loosely, now he doubled it, for a more secure grip.

She was still paralyzed with vertigo, events spinning out of control. But not out of his control. Gently he pushed on her shoulder, and she fell forward onto the bed, unable to resist in any way, her attention focused solely on the possibility that the belt might return at any instant.

Her coffee cup clattered to the floor, forgotten, spilling its steaming contents across the polished wood.

“Naughty girl. You’ll pay for that.” He reached out and drew her skirt up to her waist, exposing her bare buttocks. She trembled, knowing what he would see, but still unable to resist, mesmerized by a strange and burning desire.

“Very naughty girl,” he said when he saw her nakedness. With one strong hand, he grabbed a butt-cheek and squeezed it. When she didn’t respond, he moved his hand away, and struck with the belt.

“Ow!” she yipped like a small, startled dog. But then his hand came back, fondling her, massaging away the sting, and this time she pressed her bottom up into his grasp.

The belt struck the other cheek, and she moaned again. He stroked that one with his hand, but then the comforting grip went away, and in the bare air she knew what came next. She moaned this time before it even struck. The blows came with increasing frequency and force, his curing hand spending less and less time in its ministrations as his own excitement rose.

When the sting from the last blow was still sharp even while the next one was coming, she cried out in desperation, saying anything that would avert the punishment.

“Fuck me!”

She heard his pants fall, felt him looming over her, and then he was inside. Easily, because she was sopping wet, drenched and eager. No part of her held back this time, no internal dialogue nattered at her consciousness. Instead, she felt his belly smacking into the welts on her bottom as he drove into her over and over, and the fire created was greater than the one in her loins.

Her brain, still shut down from the inferno below her waist, drifted aimlessly and helplessly into an orgasm so overwhelming that she lost track of time and space. Only after she returned did she realize that he had finished too, leaning over her with his hands on the bed, breathing like a racehorse after a Triple-Crown derby.

Consciousness reasserted itself. Lying there under a strange man, dripping with his semen, her buttocks still stinging from his lashes, she gathered her distance around her like a cloak.

“I have to go.”

He fell to one side, still spent, lying on the bed watching her.

Standing, she rearranged her clothes, fumbled with her purse.

“I’m sorry about the coffee.”

But he did not speak, only watched her through the shadows the dark room left on his face. Though his body and cock lay limp and drained, a deep and feral hunger stared out at her from the hollows of his eyes.

The belt lay underneath him, the tip peaking out, and the sight aroused in her a way even his naked groin did not. Not trusting herself to speak, she walked to the door, let herself out, and started down the stairs. By the second flight, she was running, all the way out of the townhouse and to her car, locking herself inside and collapsing into heaving sobs.

Even through the tears, she could feel the warmth of the welts on her bottom pressed into the seat of the car, and her vagina responded with the memory of him inside her, longing for more.

With a shriek of frustration, she started the car. Still in control enough to not squeal the tires, she followed the roads into traffic and city lights, heading home. Resolutely she kept her hands on the steering wheel, where they could not creep unbidden to her neglected and lonely clitoris.

Chapter Three

All the next day she was angry. Furious with herself for the previous night, at having put herself in such a position, but most of all, at her body's betrayal by giving in to orgasm. And furious with him. She pretended it was his fault, that he was some kind of beastly monster who had taken advantage of her, beaten and raped her like a drunken lout.

Except she knew it wasn't true. Every rude customer who came to her cash register made her remember his gentle politeness. Every overweight man buying a pair of pants a size too small made her remember his lean body, every soft pair of hands brought back his rough calluses, the stigma of honest labor. She had never told him to stop, never tried to leave. The only words she had uttered were the short and commanding, "Fuck me". What a difference a single word made, what a reversal of meaning "me" had on the phrase, instead of "you".

She had worn the softest underwear she owned today, but the memory of those words still made her body respond below the waist, warm on her backside and wet in the front.

At least the belts she sold did nothing for her, evoked no special reaction.

Still, her anger sustained her through the day, waning only as night came on and she sat alone in her apartment, something mindless on the television and something tasteless on her dinner plate. The emotional effort had exhausted her, so sleep came easily enough, numbing and welcome.

Thursday was harder. Anger had given way to guilt, shame, and recrimination. She tortured herself with fears of pregnancy and disease.

Who knew what strange or sick things he had done with whatever kind of cheap tarts and low sluts?

Like girls who let him pull up their skirts and beat them, whispered her mind, compounding her guilt.

She should have made him wear a condom. She shouldn't have drunk so much. She should have worn her underwear. She shouldn't have gone to his room. So many shoulds and shouldn'ts, an ocean of blame to wallow in. Eventually she exceeded even her own capacity for guilt, and had to refute a few fears.

Like pregnancy. She was always on the pill anyway, because she liked the regularity it brought to her period. Also the dampening this brand happened to exert on her libido, whispered some distant voice in her mind, but she ignored it, like she always did. Her last boyfriend had complained loudly about her paranoid requirement that he use a condom even while she was on the pill, and his arguments came back to her now, comfortingly. She could accept them now that she was in the position of having had unprotected sex. The risk of pregnancy was really quite low.

There was still disease, though, and she became angry again. What had he been thinking? She almost made an appointment with a doctor, but the idea of having to admit she'd had sex with a virtual stranger was daunting and she put the phonebook down. Instead, she decided to confront him about it.

In bed, in her pajamas, she felt righteous and strong about her decision. She would face him down, make him take a test. Why should she have to? Why should she be ashamed of fulfilling her needs, even with a stranger? He was as much at fault as she—no, more so. Because... She didn't really have a "because", but she didn't need one. What she needed was release. Thinking of seeing him again made her thighs twitch. Just from loneliness, of course. She wasn't actually attracted to such a brute.

Her nightstand drawer yielded up its secret treasure, and she was pleased to see the batteries were still willing to serve.

But her body was not. It rejected her ministrations, refusing artificial food when it had so recently been fed with real meat. Frustrated, she turned the device off and banished it back into the drawer, as if it were somehow to blame.

Friday, she was nervous and scared, the bravery of the previous night no stronger than the memory of dream. But she had to, really had to do this. Work crawled by, the thought of returning to the bar looming like an execution in the distance. All night she stalled, changing clothes, procrastinating, until almost 11:00, long after the hour they had quit the bar on Tuesday. Then she cursed herself for wasting time, and dashed out the door to her car, pretending to hope that she wouldn't be too late.

Jackie's was even more crowded, of course, a fresh weekend just starting. She wore blue jeans for comfort and to dispel any foolish notions any parties might have about what would be occurring, and a silk top for power and confidence. Plenty of underwear, too. Pushing through the crowd, her angry demeanor like a shield, she went to the table where he had last held court.

Much to her surprise and dismay, he was still there, with all his friends. He saw her coming, and met her halfway.

"Hello," he shouted over the din. His smile seemed genuine and open, and she had to clutch at her anger to keep it from deserting her.

"We need to talk," she yelled back. Unlike every man she'd ever known, he did not flinch or retreat at those terrible words. Instead he nodded agreement, took her arm, and plowed a path through the crowd to the door.

Outside, they stood under a streetlamp, neutral ground between his bar, his house, and her car. This was not what she had imagined, not what she had prepared for, and she did not know where to start.

He started. "I was hoping to see you again."

"Then why didn't you?" A hint of frosty accusation. She was good at that.

"I didn't want to bother you at work. You know, after...that." He delicately referred to the strangeness of that night, apologizing for it, without recrimination or lewdness.

"You could have called." But of course she had never given him her number.

Instead of pointing out her illogic, he just smiled sheepishly as if he had been the guilty one, and shrugged his shoulders in appeasement. This unexpected generosity, an unrequited gift of responsibility, infuriated her.

"Why didn't you use a condom?" she snapped.

Now he almost blushed in real embarrassment. "I'm sorry. I should have. But I don't have anything to worry about, do I? You can tell me if I do. I won't be mad, because it was my fault."

"You? What about me?"

"Oh," he said, surprised. "No, I'm clean. I know that. I wouldn't have...done that otherwise."

"What about babies?" She spoke down to him like a schoolteacher rebuking a foolish child. "Did you think about that?"

The shame became real, his face dark red in the pale light. "I pulled out." His tone admitted it was inadequate. "At the last minute. I know that's not really safe, but something came over me. I just couldn't stop. I'm sorry."

And then he added, as if it were the most natural thing in the world, "But if it comes to that, I'll do what's right."

She wanted to scream in frustration. Even when he was admitting his guilt, he was impervious to fear. Even faced with the direst consequences, he refused to run.

"Why?" she said, meaning why are you so unlike me, but he could not know that.

"I don't know. Something came over me... I wanted that moment, that real thing, no matter what the cost. I felt alive, for the first..." He trailed

off. "I'm sorry. It won't happen again," he promised her, a penitent little boy.

"Do you have a condom now?" The question startled even her. But it was the only way to get control again, to make him into just another man.

"Yes." He recovered his balance quickly and easily, riding out the sudden change in pitch. "I'm prepared for whatever may happen, this time."

He was still leaving her an out, still not cocksure of his conquest. Struggling to retain command, she forged ahead.

"Then let's try to get it right this time." Breathless at her audacity, she turned to the street and tried to pick out his townhouse.

"Yes, my lady," he said with a grin, because really, what else could he say at that moment? Gently taking her arm, he escorted her across the street and up the stairs. At each door, at each landing, she felt her heart pound and wondered at herself.

But all of her self-discipline and will were bound up in not looking at the belt he wore, not acknowledging its existence, not giving the slightest hint of a clue that the strip of leather could possibly matter to anyone or anything except his trousers and gravity.

In his bedroom again, he kissed her gently, petting an unpredictable but beautiful wildcat. She responded with the practiced arts of seduction, melting into him, reaching to put her arms around his neck, while her brain issued careful instructions. A gentle tug at his shirt collar, and he took it off. A subtle nod, and he continued disrobing, dropping his pants on the floor and standing naked before her.

The belt was safely out of sight, still trapped within his jeans, and her sense of control was not challenged.

He reached for her waist, but she shook her head and took off her own clothes. Not like a cheap stripper, enticing him with each move, but merely the business of undressing, laying her garments neatly across the back of a chair. Then she lay down on the bed and opened her arms in invitation.

With gentle courtesy, he joined her. Holding their naked bodies together, feeling the heat and pressure of his bare skin, she began to become aroused. His hands were rough and strong, but the grave and delicate way he touched her made her feel safe. Not inflamed with passion, but safe.

There was a moment of good humor while he fumbled with the condom, and then he was inside her and everything was all right. Moving on top of her, his large body above, her legs apart and open, his steady breathing like a steam engine climbing a hill, she felt happy. This was what she knew, this was what she had always thought of as good sex. The time passed pleasantly, and she was comforted.

But she had to fake her climax, when it became clear he could not last much longer. With careful practice she made her body lie to him, hide her own disappointment and unfulfilled longings. Clasped to him while he swam in the afterglow of orgasm, dazed and idle, she fought back tears.

Afterwards, kissing and small talk, she said all the right things.

"Thank you," she whispered, as he pulled off the used condom and dropped it into a wastebasket. And then, while he was coming back into bed, "You're so handsome."

But he said all the right things, too. "You're fucking gorgeous." He ran a finger down her chest, circling her breast with a delicate touch and raw admiration. "I'm so glad you came back. Tell me what to do to get your number."

His frankness stung her dishonesty. She could never reveal that she had faked her ecstasy, so she offered him more of his own.

"You don't have to use a condom next time. I'm on the pill. And clean, as you put it." You had to actually have sex with people to be dirty, and she had let her last boyfriend drift away unclaimed and uncontested years ago.

To his credit, he did no more than raise an eyebrow. He understood and accepted her testing without complaint. She could not understand that, unless he was so certain of success that he never feared trial.

“So there will be a next time?”

“If you play your cards right,” she answered automatically, sticking to the script, the one that made everything safe and predictable. The politics of power, withholding and rewarding, controlling and manipulating.

But he was terrible at the game. “Awesome.” He grinned, and kissed her again.

To change the subject, she went to the window, a sheet wrapped around her nakedness, and stared out over the bay.

“Why did you say you should move, before?”

He came to join her, standing behind her.

“I’ve had enough of the sea.”

Because she could not speak her own heart, she asked for his. “Tell me.”

He put his arms around her, and told his story, his voice a little sad, his eyes always on the lights on the ocean.

“When I left home, a young and foolish boy, my best friend and I wanted to see the world. In time-honored tradition, we became sailors, because, we joked, we had no talents that would admit us to the circus life.

“We worked too hard, and never got paid enough, but the life was all we wanted. Hopping ships wherever we found them, picking ones that were going places we had not been yet. So we wound up on a tramp freighter out of Brazil with a less than sterling reputation. Well deserved, too—the captain had been remiss in his paperwork—so rather than go north and through the canal, he decided to go south and around the cape.

“The cape is a fearsome place, where storms appear from nowhere with a savage fury that awes you before it terrifies you. It seems a place put there by God, to remind man that no matter what he builds, the wild world is still a dangerous place, and all our plans and devices like candles in the dark, waiting for a puff of wind.

“Just after sundown on a peaceful, easy day, our first taste of the storm was a wall of water twenty-feet high that swept over us like wind. For the next three hours we fought for our lives and our ship, in waves that crested thirty feet or more, in a howling gale that tore away everything not nailed to the deck.

“And then it was gone as quickly as it had come. But it had taken two of us with it, and left one man crushed and dying under cargo that had not been properly stowed.

“I searched for hours, unable to believe that my friend was gone with the storm. A lifetime of adventures together, from the kindergarten playground to high school hijinks, washed away in an instant. And with it, my youth.

“I sailed another voyage after that, but it was all work and misery. The joy had gone out of it. So I came home and found a landlubber’s job, pouring solid concrete into piles that will never move.

“And here I sat, without lust for anything, until I saw you in Jackie’s, your nipples poking out under your shirt, and hunger in your eyes. Now there is something I want, again. Now there is something to gain.”

He hugged her, kissed the side of her face. A beautiful story, some cold part of her mind whispered, I’m sure he tells it to all the girls. The sheet between them seemed like a wall of stone, but she could not let it fall. It held her heart apart even while her body melded to fit his.

Chapter Four

There wasn't a next time for weeks. Although she came to see him at Jackie's every weekend night, although she came to know his friends and laughed and joked with them, although she went back to his flat every time, she always found some excuse to leave before sex. She managed to stretch her period over two weekends, but he was never suspicious or even cranky.

She learned why they called him chief. He was the crew leader for their team. His authority was never questioned, but she never saw him exert it. He never had to. When he made a suggestion, it was always a good one, and people just followed through on it.

"Ya," one of the men told her, "he's like that at work, too. They keep trying to promote him, but he can't go any higher without getting stuck behind a desk. He says there's time enough for that when he can't do the field work anymore. And thank God," the man added. "He's the best chief I've ever had."

She learned that the girlfriends of the group were envious, but not jealous. All of them had tried, in one way or another, but none had ever gotten past his politeness. None had been able to compete with the mistress who had used and abandoned him. They did not have the mystery of the sea, its dark and murky depths hidden under a smooth and cool surface.

Or perhaps he had just not been ready yet, to forgive and forget, to move on.

What she did not learn was why she ran away each time they returned to his bed. It was not that she was playing hard to get, trying to string out the lure of her mystery to keep him interested. She could see

him getting frustrated, though he did not let it affect his behavior. He was not a kitten practicing the hunt, but a man pursuing the leviathan, to capture and render it into the belly of his ship, to make it a part of himself forever.

And she was frustrated, crying herself to sleep half the time. But only in the dark, where no one could see her tears, not even her. She wanted to be caught, but she didn't know how to surrender.

"Not again," he finally said, as she made another excuse to leave his room. "Why do you even come here, if only to walk away?"

"I don't know what you mean," she lied. "I just have to get up early tomorrow. We're doing inventory, so we all have to work the weekend."

"It's just coincidence that keeps us apart? Three weeks in a row?"

"I wasn't counting. Is the number important?"

But he brushed off her guilt-ploy, immune as always. Under narrowed eyes, he studied her carefully until she blushed from the scrutiny.

"I'll think on it." It sounded like a promise.

The next week was much the same, except that even she was bored with herself now. A few more weeks like this and she would drift away, if he did not. Tonight, he laughed and drank with his friends as always, but when they went up to his room, the air changed.

"You're still here."

"Of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

"Why would you be?" But he wasn't waiting for an answer.

Just as well, because she had none to give.

"I've been around the world. I've seen a lot of things. I learned to keep my eyes open and ask questions."

When he did not continue, she had to speak, to break the tension. "What are you talking about?" She was unwarrantedly petulant.

"I asked about you, Well, not you specifically, of course, but about girls like you."

“And what kind of girl is that?” Her shoulders tensed in anger, expecting a kind of lecture on the theory and nature of cock-teases or frigidity.

“One who needs a different approach. A good sailor trims his sails to the wind he gets.”

“You’re not making sense,” she snapped. “I should go.”

But when she started for the door, he blocked her way, although he didn’t actually move more than an inch.

“Not just yet.” Slowly, deliberately, he began to remove his belt, pinning her with his eyes.

Conflicting emotions surged inside her. Fear at his menace, shame at the sound of the belt sliding free, and impossible and irrational desire, her body responding instantly even though it had ignored four weeks of her best efforts to please herself.

“Lie down on the bed,” he said softly.

“No. You’re scaring me.”

“We can’t chart our own course through the shoals,” he muttered cryptically, and she had no idea what he was talking about. “We take the one we’re given.”

Then, drawing back a fraction of an inch, giving her room and permission to escape, he said something anyone could understand. “Walk out that door... Don’t bother coming back.”

The threat of separation struck at her like a fist, more terrifying than his bulk and stature. The emotional strength that he could cut her free in an instant and not look back was more frightening than the muscles in his body.

“Take off your shirt. And lie down on the bed. I won’t ask again.”

He just wanted to fuck her, her mind rationalized. She’d denied him for weeks, and he just wanted to get laid. Let him into her thighs, and soon enough he’d be done with her and let her go and everything would be like before. He just wants to fuck, she told herself as she unbuttoned her blouse and dropped it to the floor, exposing her fine, lacy brassiere.

Even as she thought it, she knew it was a lie, but she lay down on the bed anyway, every muscle trembling with conflict.

“Pull up your skirt,” he ordered. This part she understood, this part was easy and comfortable, especially since she knew he would be pleased with what he saw.

She had nothing on underneath, again. The brassiere was detectable, so she had always worn one, but every night she had come to his room, kissed and necked and teased and then left, she had been naked under her skirt. And he had never known, because she had not let him know.

His hand stroked and fondled her possessively. She pushed into his hand right away, eager to seduce him and be finished, to prove that she could still control him just by spreading her legs.

But a part deep inside her made mocking noises in the dark, ringing hollowly in the depths of her soul. *Is that really what you want?* The voice in her head laughed at her.

“I did it wrong before,” he said. “The first time is the most important. You have to break to the lash. So now I’ll have to make up for it, and it will be harder on you than it should have been.”

What the hell was he talking about? Best not to speak. So she just concentrated on the feel of his hand on her buttocks.

She was intimately aware when the hand left, and experienced the sharp clarity of its absence for the brief few seconds before the belt came down in its place.

It wasn’t as bad as she had feared. And then his hand again, softening and spreading the sting out into a pool of warmth. Then the other cheek, and she was wet already. Anytime he liked he could take her. Surely he could tell that. But he kept striking her, slow and methodical, from cheek to cheek.

And the blows were getting harder. She grunted under the last one, and then, without thinking, spoke. “Stop it.”

“You want me to stop?” His voice was thick and deep. Instantly she was terrified and thrilled that he would go berserk, lose control and beat her into submission. Her mind recoiled in horror while her thighs

spasmed in eager anticipation. Paralyzed by this bizarre conflict, she did not move while he fumbled with something behind her.

Then he set down a cell phone on the bed next to her, its case flipped open and ready. He took her hand, placed it over the phone, directed her finger.

"This button calls emergency services. My address is a matter of record, and this is a bad neighborhood. The cops will be here within three minutes. All you have to do is push."

He paused to let her understand.

"Now, are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" she asked, but he did not bother to answer. She already knew, of course. Even though her mind would not let her put it into words, she knew.

"Yes," she whispered, her eyes closed in fear of the future she was begging into existence.

The belt came down again, and she yelped. But he did not stop.

Again and again, from cheek to cheek. The left hand tried to undo what the right inflicted, but it could not keep up with the rising intensities of the blows.

"Please..." she began, not knowing how to finish, but he ignored her. The only time he took a break was when she let go of the phone to clutch at the covers. Then he forced her hand back onto the safety latch, the magic button that would free her, and as punishment for her transgression, his left hand let two blows go without its comforting touch.

The blows were harder now, but something in her could stand them better. Her breaths came deep and slow, and every muscle in her body burned like a marathon runner in the home stretch.

"Fuck me," she begged, and then when he hit her again, "fuck me, fuck me, fuck me, please."

His only response was to increase the frequency of the blows.

"Please!" she cried. "What do you want?"

He stopped then, just this once, to answer her.

“Complete submission. You have to yield completely.”

“I am,” she gasped, desperate to placate him. “I’ll do anything, I swear.”

“Words are not good enough,” he said. “There’s only one way to show that you’ve crossed over.”

“Tell me. I’ll do it. I’ll do anything.” Inside she whirled deliciously, dizzy with the fear of whatever brutal and degrading sex act he might demand, ecstatic at the thought of having her dignity cracked in his hands like walnuts so he could root through the broken pieces for his pleasure.

“I’m going to beat you,” he said carefully and deliberately so that she would understand. “Until you come.”

“I can’t,” she cried. She couldn’t climax just from that, no one could.

“Then I guess we’ll be here a long time.”

The belt fell across her exposed bottom.

After a few strokes, he put his left hand on her back to hold her in place. “Stop squirming.” The pressure of his weight was intoxicating, but now nothing caressed her buttocks between the blows. She needed his hand to move lower, to push at her from a different angle.

“Touch me, please. Please.”

“Like this?” He shoved two fingers deep inside her. There was no resistance. The depth of her wetness astonished her. She latched on to his fingers, squeezing with everything she had, trying to keep them trapped inside, but they slipped out just as easily.

His hand on her back was wet and sticky. With a little laugh, he put his fingers into her mouth, so that she could clean them. She licked them thoroughly, but the belt didn’t stop. The pain was beginning to become all-encompassing, each wave spilling over her sensibilities and threatening to swamp her. She moaned loudly, no longer aware enough to be discreetly quiet.

“Shhh,” he said, putting more fingers into her mouth. But now she wiggled and squirmed, so he trapped one leg between his. The angle changed where he struck her on the buttocks, moving the point of impact a little higher. The skin here was not numb, and she squealed. The sound shocked her, and instinctively she pushed her head forward into his fingers, muffling herself. Now she did not need to concentrate on silence, but only on accepting as much of him as she could.

She reached back for him with her left hand, but he easily avoided her and struck her across her back, from shoulder blade to shoulder blade, the belt singing against her flesh.

With a muzzled yelp, she reached back with both hands, grabbing blindly behind her. Much to her surprise, she was actually disappointed when he stopped hitting her. Instead, he seized her hand and guided it back down to the bed. When she quit fighting, he put the phone back into her grasp, aiming her finger over the magic button. Only then did he reach for the belt again.

Lying there, rescue literally at her fingertips while the blows resumed, ranging up and down her back, from buttocks to shoulders, she broke into sobs. Every muscle in her body fought him, struggled against his domination, strained against his imprisonment. Every muscle save one. The finger that would release her lay limp and powerless.

Inside her grew a fear, the frightening thought that she might push the button *by accident*. She could not fight much longer. Her body was exhausted, and soon she would lose all control of her own actions. Deliberately, slowly, fully aware of what she did, she pushed her hand out, shoving the tiny cell phone across the bed.

When it fell from her non-resisting grasp, tumbling to the floor, she felt her soul fall with it, into some bottomless abyss of fire.

Now she lay helpless, soft like jelly, as the belt struck at her. She could not count the blows, or measure the passage of time. Moaning freely, trapped in freefall, she could no longer hold onto anything, not even the hope that it would stop, as the measured blows continued to fall on her with unpredictable targets but unyielding regularity. She felt

wetness dripping between her legs, and, seized with the unreasoning fear that it was blood, she broke completely.

Without conscious thought, her hips pushed up into the next blow. When they fell again, her thighs slid down the leg that trapped her, and the rough denim of his jeans licked across her clitoris. She surrendered instantly, and her climax took her so far away she did not realize the beating had stopped.

“That’s good,” he repeated soothingly, kissing her neck and stroking her hair until she returned to awareness. He gently disengaged his hold and stepped back, but she was too weak and disoriented to make anything of her freedom. She heard his pants fall, and then he returned, penetrating her easily.

The thrusts that drove into her were like cool water after fire, but she could not let the pleasure carry her away. She kept wondering where the belt was. Soft and pliant, she lay there while he pumped her, praying that the belt was satiated and limp. She could not even imagine it poised above her to strike again—that vision was too much to contemplate. She waited for him to come, so that she would be safe.

When his cock slid out of her, still hard, she began to whimper. When he laid the belt across her shoulders, she began to quiver, and the tears came again.

“Complete submission,” he demanded, and put a finger in her anus. The sensation was shocking, but she could not stiffen or pull away, because the leather lying across her shoulders robbed her of all power. His thumb slipped inside her vagina, and now he massaged her from both sides. Shock turned into pleasure, the sensation of being doubly invaded overwhelming everything else. She gave into it easily, enjoying the gentle thrusts from both sides.

Just when climax was a serious possibility, he pulled his hand completely out of her. Automatically her hips tried to follow, and when she felt something prodding at her backside, she made herself soft and yielding again. Something larger than his finger slid inside her, already wet and lubricated—his thumb. She had to catch her breath at its width,

but then he put his other thumb in front, and began to move them in and out in alternating thrusts.

Climax was now imminent. Grateful that this was all the submission required of her, she gave up any pretense of resistance, and let his hard, rough thumbs penetrate her at will. But again he pulled his hand out of her before she could come. This time, he replaced it with his still stiff cock, his other thumb still jammed deep in her ass, and thrust into her deeply.

“Come now.”

So she did, just a little one, but grateful that she could appease him.

But she had misjudged his intent. He held his cock inside her, bathing it in her climax, and then pulled out, but not away. His thumb came out also, but now the head of his cock prodded at her anus. Surprised, she almost said “No” but stopped herself from speaking in the nick of time.

Gently but relentlessly he pushed. His cock felt terrifyingly huge, but it was well lubricated, and she was still stretched and relaxed from the massage. The head went in an inch deep, and she gasped for air, impaled and immobile.

“Tell me when you are ready for more,” he commanded.

She knew she was supposed to shout “Never”, that good girls didn’t like this, that it was filthy and wrong. But the heat on her back, the small flames where the belt had kissed her, was intoxicating. She wanted to see if this would feel the same. She wanted him to push against her until she gave. She stalled in indecision while his little, short, one-inch thrusts grew more and more forceful, until finally she let herself speak.

“More,” she whispered.

Immediately he slid another inch deeper, and her head swam with vertigo. Now his thrusts were two inches at a time. She was shocked to discover that if she concentrated on relaxing completely, there was no pain, only the strange pleasure of being completely filled by force.

“More,” she whispered again, not waiting for his command. Three inches, and she thought she would die. She had no idea how it could all fit in.

“Say when,” he grunted.

“More.” The word slipped from her lips quickly, eagerly. “More...” His thrusts were irresistible now, and she could tell from his breathing that he was losing control. She lost all conception of how deeply she was being penetrated. It felt like her entire body was being stuffed with an iron rod.

“Say when you want it all.” His voice, still strong despite gasping for breath, stunned her.

“You mean there’s more?” she sobbed. It was only after she felt her head nodding that she realized she was saying yes. He pushed his way completely into her, his belly crushing the stinging welts on her backside. She grabbed and bit at the bed, fighting the desire to resist, knowing that her only salvation lay in complete submission and relaxation. Each thrust was long and deep, filling her completely. Dizzily aroused by his violent excitement, but terrified by her own ecstasy, she wanted him to climax and be done with her. She risked a moan to drive him over the edge.

“I won’t stop until you come again.” Each word was punctuated by a thrust.

Jiggled from the constant bouncing, the belt fell off her shoulders, and she was seized with unreasoning fear. What if she could not come twice without vaginal stimulation? What further perversions would his lust and demands unleash on her? How could she dare to defy him now, after all that—what twisted pleasures would he inflict? Her concentration on relaxation broken, she tightened, and his penetrations began to hurt slightly. He groaned at the new friction, and had to pause briefly, buried inside her, his thighs pressed firmly up against her buttocks.

Hope and desire spurred her. Whimpering a little at the effort, she made herself tight again, and he rewarded her with more forceful thrusts, driving into her and splitting her apart. His growing frenzy

encouraged her, and she moaned, open-mouthed and insensate. The ram struck again, and without meaning to, she clenched completely, trying to trap him inside. When he drew out again, she relaxed, eager for his return. When it came, her hands slid down and clutched at his buttocks as her hips pressed into him, confining him. The press of his body and pubic hair burned on her welts, but she did not care. He could not move, but she clenched and unclenched again and again, and when she felt his loins begin to pump semen into her, she exploded with him, an open and eager receptacle draining the golden horn.

He collapsed beside her, lying close and touching. She was still on her belly, in the position she had taken what seemed hours ago, her naked back and bottom cooling in the air. For a few minutes, he could do nothing but breathe heavily, and she lolled in the peace, comfortable and safe in her total exposure, knowing there was nothing left to lose, and so nothing left to hold on to.

Then he pulled her up against him, lying on their sides, like spoons in a drawer. The heat of his body on her welts discomforted her, but his hand on her belly mattered more, and she let him sleep.

Chapter Five

She took him to her house the next morning. Seized by unaccustomed domesticity, she wanted to cook him breakfast, and like all single men, his refrigerator contained nothing but beer and an old bag of potato chips.

Changing in her bedroom while he waited in the kitchen, she modestly closed the door. Given his total possession of her the night before, this was inexplicable.

Normally she enjoyed the feel of a skirt sliding against her skin, but today she gingerly touched the welts on her buttocks and chose differently. No panties, either, because they held too tightly to her skin. Instead, her softest pair of shorts, old and worn, gentle cotton that comforted her skin. A tired flannel shirt topped it off, making an unattractive combination that she would not ordinarily leave the house in. It was as if she were trying to be dowdy, daring him to object to her transformation into a hausfrau.

But he gave no appearance of noticing. After breakfast, they went for a walk on the beach, and he told her stories of his journeys, adventures of the young and foolish in distant ports. Alcohol, women, and the law figured prominently in many of them. The young men had not been entirely stupid, however, and had avoided imprisonment, disease, or disaster.

He did not ask her questions, waiting until she volunteered her own stories. Then he would listen, but she had little to say. Her life had been safe and careful to the point of monotony, and she much preferred listening to his escapades.

Walking the surf, her shoes in her hand, she felt the tide pull at her feet, the same way that his presence pulled at her heart. He was quick to laugh at himself, strong in body and simple in heart. Without fear, he exposed his soul, and with gentleness, he waited for her to do the same.

But she could not, any more than she could let the retreating water take her out to sea and freedom. She clung to the safety of shore and silence, like she always had. The part of her that fought to escape she stilled with force of habit, and it cowered down inside her, mumbling unintelligibly.

Cowed, but not beaten, overpowered, but not defeated. In stealth, her inner heart worked its will, which she realized only when it was too late to avert it.

After an entire day of the imitation of warmth, after subtly and coolly rebuffing his affections, she stumbled badly. Without meaning to, she found herself standing in her bedroom with him, and then hesitating, pausing just a fraction too long, while looking at the bed.

The implied invitation was not lost on him, and he came up behind her, hands on her waist and a grin so wide she could feel it without looking.

If she was going to put him off, this was time. She needed to speak now, or move away. Do something, anything to open the distance he had closed. But her adversary struck now with all its hoarded force, paralyzing her with weakness in her knees and dizziness in her head, brought on by the sudden sharp memories of what had happened last night, the last time she had stood facing a bed.

With one hand, he tugged idly at the waistband of her shorts, not really intending anything, just being close.

“You like skirts,” she said huskily, turning his innocent action into an implied criticism. Anger made distance.

But in his clumsy and simple way, he was unaffected. “These are nice,” he said with a laugh, and squeezed her buttocks with both hands. The old welts stung, and she gasped.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing. It’s just...” But she couldn’t continue. Her body was too happy to have his hands on her, and her tongue joined the rebellion.

“Show me,” he suggested gently, concern in his voice. The command was too inviting, and she unbuttoned and dropped her shorts before thinking.

She could feel the intentness of his gaze on her bare skin, almost more pressing than the light touch of his finger as he traced the still-red marks. The truth of why she had not worn underwear was as exposed as her backside.

She didn’t really want his sympathy. She prayed for strength and discipline, not soft compassion, but without hope. Only a brute would strike her now, while she was still sore and aching from the last time. He was far too gentle for that, she was certain.

Thus the gravel in his chuckle pierced her to the bone. “A little hair of the dog that bit you,” he said, and she heard the belt slide free again, escaping its restraining loops.

She grew wet at the sound and knew that he knew her better than she knew herself. She had arranged this moment, hoping only that he would have the courage to take advantage of it. She had put herself at his mercy, dreaming for desire instead.

When the first blow came, it was a relief, because it was light and playful compared to the day before. But it still stung, and the threat of it turning savage hung in the air, so after three slow strokes she was fully lubricated and eager to please him.

“How long shall I beat you?” he asked playfully, and hit her again.

“Until I beg you to fuck me.” But it was the wrong answer, and the belt struck.

“Until I come,” she tried, but this time the lash was hard, and she had to bite back a shriek. Stumbling forward to escape the pain, she fell face-first onto the bed. Now rendered unable to even flee, her helplessness washed over her.

“Until you come,” she guessed desperately. In the brief pause she rushed to give in more deeply. “In my mouth.”

This time the stroke had no speed behind it, and only licked, like the rough tongue of a cat playing with its prey. She must be getting closer. What else could he want from her? But of course she already knew, had probably known when she pulled on the shorts that morning.

“Until I beg you to fuck me in back,” she whispered, ashamed of herself for wanting this unnatural and brutal treatment. To be so violated here, in her own room, in her inner sanctum, was unthinkable.

But the belt only caressed her this time, its smoothness soft and pleasurable against her flesh. She heard his pants unbutton and drop, but was afraid to look.

“Do you want me to start off slow?”

“Yes, please,” she pleaded. Even before she felt him draw back, even before she heard the leather sliding through the air, even before she felt the belt slam into her bottom, she knew it was the wrong answer. Part of her knew that was why she had given it.

“Then you’re not really ready.” She could do nothing but wait for the beating to stop, biting at the covers to silence her cries. Mercifully, he sensed her surrender after only a few blows, and asked her again. “What do you want?”

“Fuck my ass,” she groveled, truly eager now. “Use it like a pussy.”

He took her in front. The unexpectedness of it hurt a little, but after one stroke she was soaking and limp. He fucked her for a few dozen more, just long enough for her to form the hope that he would come there. Then he pulled out and re-entered in the other hole, pushing in gently but irresistibly. The sensation made her grunt even as her body opened to him, and the sound made him frenzied. Grabbing her hips with both hands, he pounded into her.

There was nothing she could do but yield to him. There was nothing she wanted to do but yield. Instinctively, she put a hand between her legs and began to touch herself, trying to make herself come so he would be happy with her. Only after she had two fingers inside did she tremble, thinking about what he might do to her for acting without permission. The frisson of fear hurried her, and the stretching of tight muscles with

the strange sensation of fullness pushed her into a too-early climax. Then she had to lie there, defenseless, grunting with each stroke while he took his pleasure in her. But not without pleasure of her own.

To be rendered into an object of lust, forced to serve at his prodding, unable to resist him anything, even while she lay in the bed that had been her fortress of isolation, tore her loose from her moorings and she drifted on a sea of bliss. To have retreated as far as she could go, and yet still be caught and violated, made her feel, for the first time, truly valued.

When he was done with her, she kissed his hand with her tears, grateful that she had been worth pursuing.

Chapter Six

That night, he slept in her bed, his alien presence filling a void she had not known existed. Waking to find a warm body next to her, she turned into it sleepily, snuggling instead of retreating in fear or confusion. Brewing coffee while waiting her turn for the shower, wearing only a towel, was comfortable and easy. Pulling on a light summer dress while he watched out of the corner of his eye and paused in the middle of buckling his jeans was flattering and made her smile.

And yet, all day, she marveled at her reserve, that she could let a man violate her naked body but could not bring herself to bare her soul. Their sex was not the contained and delimited engagements she was used to, but sex alone was not enough in the warm light of day. And his kindness outside the bedroom was a weapon she had long ago learned to parry, with little coldnesses of her own.

But he did not seem to notice. Like a sailor, he took the choppy seas with the same equanimity that he sailed on smooth glass. When she grew still and unresponsive, he waited it out with the patience of one who knows the trade winds must blow again in their own time.

It was she who grew nervous as the day drew to a close. In the grocery store, she dithered over brands of coffee for an unconscionably long time, putting off the moment of reckoning, but he refused to help her choose, laughing that he had had too many flavors in too many ports and it all tasted the same to him now. It was the end of the weekend, and tonight he would return to his apartment, where his friends would find him at whatever ungodly hour of the morning they started work. She could not bear the thought of letting him leave unsated, but neither

could she think of letting him below her waist again. Two consecutive nights of beatings and anal sex were enough.

No, they aren't, said a small tingle between her thighs. All through the drive home, through dinner and coffee, she tried to stifle that voice through sheer force of will. And failed. By the third cup of coffee they had drifted back into her bedroom, making small talk about anything and everything except sex.

"I should go soon," he said, and in response, she threw herself on the bed huffily. But from the opposite side, where she had retreated so he wouldn't get any ideas. So now she was facing him, lying on her stomach, and true to her contrariness, offered him some very obvious ideas by turning her pouting mouth into an open and inviting "o".

He took a step towards her, and now his groin was at the level of her face. He might not have gone any further with it, but her eyes stared at the buckle of his belt, enraptured. The closeness of the monster to her face was breathtaking, like suddenly finding a rattlesnake on your pillow. Reflexively, she closed her eyes and opened her mouth a little more, as if this posture of submission would appease the belt.

She heard the rustle of cloth, but was so focused on her fantasies about the belt that she didn't comprehend what the sounds signified until she felt something warm and close to her face. She opened her eyes just in time to see him press his cock into her mouth.

Lying on the bed, propped up on her elbows, there wasn't much room for her to retreat. Still, she instinctively tried to pull her head away, and he, equally instinctively, reached down to stop her. Somehow he had the belt loose in his hands—when had it snuck free?—and he dropped it behind her head, grabbing it with his other hand.

Now she was trapped, like a lassoed calf, the belt a gentle restraining strap across the back of her head, his cock filling her mouth. If it had only been his hands, she could have slapped them away, freed herself, perhaps even let his cock feel her bare teeth. But it was the belt, and she found herself paralyzed, unable to do anything but clench the bedcovers in her fists while he slowly rocked back and forth.

Feeling his cock grow long and hard in her mouth gave her a sense of power. The way it eagerly sought out her tongue, responded to her suction, reveled in her wetness, made her think that she might wield some control this time. She would suck him dry, drain him of his strength and juice, and swallow his power. Then the belt would go limp, like his cock, and she would win this battle, bring him to moaning climax while she remained cool and collected. The vision of outwitting the belt that restrained her head made her warm inside, and she serviced his cock with a will. Soon it was fully erect, and she could stop trying, while he did all the work of thrusting. All she had to do now was be soft and wet and wait for him to come.

Except he was too long to fit all the way in. As he became excited, he began to thrust into the back of her mouth, trying to bury himself fully in her warmth and wetness. She pulled her head back, but the gentle pressure of the belt was enough to lock her into place. Though it was soft on her scalp, in her mind it felt like a bar of iron. Suddenly she was struck by what seemed like a brilliant idea.

Rotating around his cock like a spindle, she rolled over on her back. This left her head hanging off the edge of the bed. Now he had a more natural angle, and she had escaped the confines of the belt. She relaxed in triumph while he began to slowly fuck her mouth.

But he was still too long, and soon he poked up against her gag reflex. Automatically, he retreated, returning to short strokes. She made herself pliant and inviting, even reached up with both hands to his buttocks to pull him deeper in, but it was like pulling on an iron bar. The depth and speed of his strokes did not change, and she whimpered in frustration.

He leaned forward, reaching over her. This moved his cock deeper into her mouth, and she struggled to suppress her throat's automatic rejection. She was so focused on his cock that she did not even wonder what he was doing until she felt the tug on her dress. A shudder of fear and anticipation ran through her, but she arched her body anyway, making clearance for the dress. It slid all the way up to her shoulders, leaving the rest of her naked and exposed. She could not see anything,

she did not know where his hands or the belt were, and his cock was as stiff as steel in her mouth. Helplessly, she fixed herself to the bed by clenching the covers in her fists and fighting against her reflexes. She knew she must make herself submit, or he would.

He tested her, but she could not yet let him all the way in, could not force her rebellious throat to yield, and he retreated. In his place came the belt, falling down on her exposed belly. The sound of leather on flesh sung in her ears, almost disconnected from the burning stripe, but still she resisted him. She knew she would lose, but she could not—did not want to—surrender yet. He reached down and grabbed a breast firmly in his left hand to hold her body in place, and the belt struck her belly again.

All of the muscles in her body contracted, trapped between the innate desire to gag or bite. She could not suppress the former, and dared not do the latter. He entered her mouth again, but still her throat clenched and held him out.

It came to her that he would have to beat her body into obedience of his demands.

The realization made her wet, everywhere, her exposed and naked flesh perspiring in the sudden heat of the idea. The concept that he could compel her body to do what she could not will it to do made her dizzy. She did not want to surrender this much, to give him so great a power over her. But he already had, it seemed, for her hands remained anchored to the bedcovers, even while the belt struck her again.

She could not cry out, his cock a muffler that silenced her. She could not think of anything but not biting him, all of her strength thrown into suppressing the urge to clamp down with every blow. The belt fell where it willed, as high as her breasts, as low as her thighs, stinging kisses ranging up and down her unprotected flesh. The fear that he might strike her directly on her clitoris began to grow, flowing down like ice from her head, but burning up like fire from her groin.

“Stop fighting me,” he growled, his voice low and dangerous, and then he struck the bed with full strength. The belt sung in the air and the

mattress cracked like a bullet. The mere force of the sound terrified her, the threatening power dangerously close, and her entire body quivered.

“Relax,” he grunted, struggling against himself to retreat a little from her mouth. Dangling the belt over her body so she could not forget it, he gently probed again.

Dragging the belt gently up her belly, he let it slide off her breasts, and then lobbed it out again for another pass. It landed between her legs, and even though it had no more force than its own weight, the contact with her clitoris made her hips arch up into it. Laughing, he did it again, this time dragging the full length of it across her labia. The arch of her hips projected her body out, and her throat now accepted this slight increase in her impalement. One more time he flung out his leather line, jiggling it as it rubbed across her swollen mound, and in her climax she finally yielded to him completely, his cock going in the last inch without difficulty.

In the throes of orgasm, she molded her mouth to his cock, the deep invasion of her body now seeming natural and easy. Only a few short strokes, and he had his own orgasm so deep inside her that she could not taste it.

After she swallowed, he knelt and kissed her, holding her head tenderly in his hands. He did not speak, but he did not have to. The deep satisfaction of his smile, the possessive stroke of his fingers in her hair, spoke for him.

Chapter Seven

All that week, she avoided him. No phone calls, no nights at Jackie's. She told herself that she could not afford to be involved with a man so willing to use force, so perverse and domineering. During the day, this lie served her well, but at night, with her hand between her thighs, the memory of things he had done to her drove her into brittle climaxes that left her aching with emptiness.

On Thursday, he came to her, on neutral ground. Just as she was about to leave for the day, he came to her counter, armed with a single rose and a puppy-dog smile.

"I've missed you."

His simplicity disarmed her, and automatically she retreated into lies.

"I've been busy."

But he was not there to argue. "Okay." He laid the rose on her counter. Then he walked away, like it was easy, like everything was normal. She could call him or not, find him at Jackie's or never return. It was her choice, her decision. There would be no games, no politics, no guilt laid, no duty claimed. He had said what he wanted, given away all his leverage without negotiating, surrendered his power to honesty. In doing so, he had robbed her of any other response than her own honesty.

The feeling was unbearable, and in frustration she snatched at the rose. A thorn bit into her, drawing a bead of blood. Instinctively, she put the finger in her mouth, cursing silently. But as she stood there, the tang of iron, the smell of blood, the red bloom of the rose all rushed at her, and she had a blinding vision of the stem of the flower dragging across her inner thighs, the thorns tearing at her and blood springing out in

their tracks. The soft blossom crushed in her hand as she flayed herself and he watched approvingly, accepting her sacrificial offering. The smell of rose and musk.

She had to put a hand out to steady herself, her knees almost buckling with sudden weakness. Mumbling excuses to an uninterested colleague, she retreated to the bathroom, and in the privacy of the stall, brought herself to two separate orgasms, the first one barely ending before she had to start again.

I'm sick, she thought. He has infected me with his darkness.

That got her home, and through the evening. But in her bed, on the edge of sleep, the echoes of truth could finally be heard, and she remembered how he had sought out knowledge of the darkness only after meeting her.

In the morning, she resolved to end it with him, finally and completely. She would go to Jackie's tonight, return his rose on his own ground, and free herself from this strange snare he had cast. Or she had laid. The blame wasn't as important as escaping while she still could.

When it came time to go, however, she left the rose in its vase on her dresser. She did not dare to have it with her, the nightmare erotic visions it induced too dangerous to risk.

And again, all her plans were wrecked by his simple honesty, this time in the huge smile that beamed from his face when she came to his table. She fell into the conversation of the group as if she had never left, her brief absence hardly even remarked on. The easy familiarity carried her through the night, all the way into his room and out of her clothes.

Only when she was standing naked next to his bed, watching him drop his trousers, did she remember her resolve. Defensively, she stepped away.

He hesitated, almost as if he was confused, but the belt buckle was still in his hand. The pants slid off it, curling at his feet, the belt remaining with him instead of joining his clothes on the floor, and his mouth made a sly grin from confidence and lust.

“Still playing hard to get?” He winked and unconsciously slapped the doubled-over belt against the palm of his other hand.

“Maybe.” She was too paralyzed by the sight and sound of the leather to think straight. When he came for her, she stepped away again.

“Hey.” He flicked the belt out at her, extending his reach to touch her on the belly.

She made a tiny squeal at the contact, and hopped onto the bed.

“That’s better,” he growled, but when he tried to join her, she scooted across the bed to the other side. Leaning forward, he lashed out with the belt again, and it slapped against her retreating backside.

Now she squealed in earnest and stepped off the bed, rubbing the spot. He crouched on the bed, his eyes narrowed, staring her down like a predatory cat. Demurely avoiding his gaze, she was surprised to discover her other hand slipping in front and gently rubbing herself.

His nostrils flared, as if he could smell her sex in the air, and he lunged, all hesitation evaporated. As she slipped out of reach of his grasping hand, the belt struck her across the lower legs and then the belly. Scampering around the foot of the bed, she tried to protect herself with her arms as he followed, swinging at her.

He was no longer trying to catch her, only keep her in range of the belt. She crawled across the bed again, as fast as she could, but he followed, the belt snapping at her like a hungry tongue. The blows were measured and controlled, never achieving more than a sting. But she could feel the power they concealed, like iron under velvet. The threat made her squeal, trying to appease and divert the force before it came, but his hard leer did not soften.

The third trip across the bed, she felt the thrill of fear, the vision of his bulk advancing on her as oppressive as a heavy wave, and the snapping and biting of the belt a constant fire. She no longer fled from him, but only retreated from the blows. She tried to spread her legs, to surrender, but he hit her again, and reflexively she flinched away. But his pursuit did not waver.

Falling off the edge of the bed, she gave up all hope of flight, and curled into a ball, trying to protect herself. For what seemed like an impossible length of time, he stood above her, lightly lashing her covering arms and legs and back, but it was really only a few strokes. Then he reached down and caught her by the hair.

Lowering her arms in surrender, she let him lift her head up. Opening her mouth and closing her eyes, she transformed herself into a willing receptacle. But something else happened. The belt looped and dropped over her head and shoulders, down to her breasts, and then he drew it tight.

Now she was lassoed, arms pinned to the side by the leather harness. He lifted her up by it, and the pinch on her breasts made her rise with him. When his cock entered her mouth, she was more than willing, eager to appease him. That he was already hard did not surprise or delay her. She thrust herself at him, trying to impale her throat and suck out his power over her.

He made contented sounds for a time, letting her strive at pleasuring him. She began to hope he would claim her throat again, even though the angle was wrong. Instead, she felt the leash tighten, and he hauled her up onto the bed.

"I think you're ready now," he said, and her body signaled its agreement, although she did not know for what. It didn't matter. She was ready for anything he wanted to do.

Dropping her on her back, he pushed her legs apart with his other hand. Then he penetrated her while she spread as wide as she could. Holding onto the belt with both hands, using it as an anchor point, he pounded her with deep, hard strokes, over and over and over. Helplessly bound beneath him, the buckle of the belt pinching at one breast, her arms trapped and her legs wide while he rode her like a wild calf, she climaxed easily.

He noticed. His face was on fire, but he did not come yet. Instead he pulled out and rolled her over. When he gently entered her anus, she found herself wishing he would just shove it in and get on with it, but the

encircling grasp of the belt robbed her of speech and all she could do was grunt. She pushed upward, impaling herself, and he crushed her back down to the bed with his answering plunge.

Again the helplessness of her position overwhelmed her, trapped and bound while he violated her from behind. She was no longer in control of her reactions, and could only observe as her hips strained upwards to match his thrusts. The unfamiliar penetration filled her entire body, which synchronized to his, and her climax was just an extension of his.

Lying beside her, breathing heavily, he let go of the belt. Now it only draped loosely around her, but she was trapped by his arms instead. Turning onto her side, she pressed her back into his chest and squirmed deeper into his grasp. He held her tightly, but it did not feel like she was trapped inside. It felt like she was protected, as if she wore him like a suit of armor against the world. Her fears could find no entry here, and sat nattering outside the room, until his breath in her ear robbed them of even that small voice.

Chapter Eight

Saturday morning, snuggling in bed with him, she suddenly cried out in pain. Examination revealed a bruise on her arm, small but ugly yellow and black. She remembered it now, the belt wrapping around her arm when she tried to block it, and the tip snapped into unexpected fury from the leverage.

He studied it with severe displeasure, while she made excuses for him.

“People will think I beat you.” His eyebrows said he was only joking, but the words made her quiver inside. This was the perfect chance to make him feel guilty, to seize control and force him to stop, but instead all she could think was, you don’t beat me nearly enough.

He changed the subject. “Why don’t you ever open this window?”

“It’s stuck. It’s always been stuck.”

With a happy smile, he went over to fiddle with it.

While he made plans for his new project, she cooked them breakfast. Sitting at the kitchen table, drinking coffee while he went on about window sashes and caulking, she realized she was at peace. He was like an anchor, a steady point that she could revolve around without being weighed down, crushed and trapped, and without being cut loose, adrift and uncertain. Taking him to the hardware store, doing laundry while he hammered and sawed at her window, she felt like a sailor rediscovering what solid ground was like after too long at sea.

And rediscovering innocence. His boyish pride in fixing her window made her smile genuinely and without calculation.

That afternoon, he went out to take care of some business matter or another, and she had to reassure him it was all right. She couldn't blame him. Every time he left her alone, she started to retreat. She resolved not to let that happen again, and went to the store to buy something special for dinner.

But inexorably, she felt herself making space. Angered and frustrated, she pushed herself to close the gap, to remain exposed to him. By the time he got home for dinner, she had worked herself into extremes.

She met him at the door, wearing nothing at all, eyes cast down and hands demurely behind her back. With a huge grin, he reached out for her, squeezing her breast and nibbling on her ear. The feel of his clothing against her bare body was electric, magnifying her nakedness and vulnerability. She stood still while he stroked and fondled her like a favorite toy, taking pleasure in his possessive enjoyment.

Then she was afraid he would ruin it, because his hands went to his belt and began unfastening it. She didn't want him naked yet, she didn't want him on equal ground with her.

"Do you need a beating?" he asked, the belt free and loose in his hands.

"No." Her breath was short and shallow with arousal. "I'll be a good girl, I swear."

He let the belt fall against her body under its own weight. The contact made her quiver, and he was satisfied.

"A reminder." He looped it over her head, around her neck. Then he fed the tongue through the buckle, and she was leashed. He gave a gentle tug, and when she responded promptly, he laughed and petted her hair.

"What's for dinner?" he asked.

She led him into the kitchen, careful not to put any strain on her leash, walking at the pace he chose. His eyebrows raised to see a single plate in front of the burning candles, a single chair waiting at the table,

but his firm lips said nothing. Dropping into the chair, he released her leash and put his hands behind his head, relaxing.

She served him, pouring a beer into a crystal glass and filling up his plate with a ridiculously large portion. Then she knelt at his side and waited patiently, watching him eat.

"This is delicious. Perfect. You should try some." He cut another piece of the glazed pork, but paused just before the fork reached his mouth. "Would you like a bite?"

"Yes, please." She opened her mouth receptively.

With a wicked grin, he finished the bite. Chuckling, he cut another piece and almost ate it, but then relented and brought the fork down to her. When she leaned forward to take it, he pulled it away. Hunger and frustration made her pout.

"Open your mouth."

This time she waited for him to bring it all the way to her. He held it there, in her open and salivating mouth for a few long heartbeats.

"Close," he ordered, and she did. Pulling the fork clean from her mouth, he went back to eating while she chewed.

After that he fed her between his own bites. She had never realized how much some freedoms were taken for granted, but having to eat at his pace and his choice aggravated and aroused her in ways she had not imagined. He let her drink from his beer several times.

For dessert she brought him a bowl of his favorite—strawberries and cream, fresh and cold from the refrigerator. But when he offered her a spoonful, she shook her head and pressed her face into his lap, begging for her own favorite dessert.

Laughing, he undid his pants and pulled out his cock. She took it into her mouth eagerly, pressing up against his leg and straddling his workboot. He pulled her head back and gave her a spoonful of cream, some spilling and running down her chin. His eyes glowed at the sight, and she felt his approval in the stiffening of his cock.

The mixture of flavors was intoxicating, and she found herself suckling at him, wanting him to climax and add a new flavor. Again he

fed her a spoonful of cream, but his hand was less steady, and she felt a cool splash on her breasts. She moved her head in eager thrusts, grinding her clitoris against the rough leather of his boot, her fists clenched behind her in ecstasy.

She could tell he wanted more wetness, more depth. He tugged at the leash around her neck, pulling it down. She bounced between its pressure and his stiff cock, in time with his labored breaths, until he locked his hand on a downward stroke and held her still. Then he came in her mouth, the hot, wet, salty water of life pumping into her in spurts and gushes.

Crushed against his boot and spilling wetness even as he filled her mouth, she climaxed so hard she forgot to swallow. Afterwards she did, hugging his leg, and licking him clean until his cock was soft and gentle again. He stroked her hair and made contented sounds while she put his cock away and fastened his pants. Then she laid her head in his lap, and felt at peace again.

Slowly he finished his beer, taking his time. His hands seemed unsteady for a while. He offered her a drink, but she turned it down, preferring the memory of the taste of him.

He showed her his empty glass, so she stood up and got him another beer. When she came back with it, he pulled her into his lap, so she curled up there, her head on his chest, while he drank at an easy pace. She was happy pressing up against him, drawing warmth through his clothes, watching the kitchen grow dark as the day faded into night.

“You really were a good girl,” he said finally. Together they stood up, and he took the leash in his hand and led her into the bedroom. Guiding her onto the bed, on her hands and knees, he tied the belt to a bedpost. Then he dropped his trousers and knelt behind her, rubbing his cock between her legs until it was stiff again. She was still wet, had never really stopped being wet, so he penetrated her easily and comfortably. He fucked her from behind, humping her like a dog, until they both came again, gasping together for breath.

He had the strength to pull the belt over her head before he collapsed onto the bed. Freed, she pulled up the covers while he lay insensate, and cuddled up against him. He wrapped an arm around her, and together in the dark room they drifted into sleep.

Chapter Nine

He spent the next week sleeping at her place. Their interactions were easy and normal, and so was the sex. Simple intercourse, comforting and pleasing, with plenty of hugs and kisses. It should have been perfect, it was, actually, in every way, and yet as the week ran out, she felt the distance creeping back.

She hid it from both of them with expertise borne of long practice. How could he know, when even she did not? How could he speak what she would not acknowledge? To pretend everything was fine was so much easier than facing the subtle ghosts of discontent. Like any man, he could only read the surface, and so he was happy while she secretly rebuilt the walls of despair.

Or so she thought, until Saturday morning. He was frisky, but she pushed him away, telling him he could at least wait until bedtime.

“Are you all right?” he asked, and of course she said yes. But he had only asked to get her attention. Watching her closely to see her reaction, he opened the leather satchel he carried his work-gear in and brought out two objects. They dropped on the bedspread in a pile, with the shimmering clank of loose metal.

Handcuffs. Two pairs of them. The mere sight of the flat gray metal sent electricity down her spine. They made her think of the belt buckle.

He had not missed it. “Take off your clothes,”

She could stop it now, but she didn’t. Even while she tried to think of the words that would make him flinch and pull away, her hands loosened her nightgown and let it fall. The belt was there in his hands,

idly sliding back and forth, already doubled and ready to feed on her soft flesh. The sight mesmerized her.

“Get on the bed,” he commanded, his voice dark and low.

She managed some resistance, standing still at least. But he came up behind her and whispered in his ordinary voice, “We both know what you need.” With that she crumpled, climbing onto the bed on her hands and knees.

He pulled her back until she was sitting on her heels. Then he guided her left hand back so she could grasp her left foot. The same with the right, and he brought up the cuffs, fastening one pair to each wrist and ankle. The cold metal on her skin prodded at her consciousness, a strange and incomprehensible sensation.

He pushed her head forward, so her hair hung loose and flowing around her face. His fingers trailed gently down her back, barely touching her, and she shivered.

“Tell me what you need.” The darkness mixed with tenderness in his voice. “Tell me what naughty girls get.”

Beaten until they scream, her heart pounded. But what she said was, “Fucked.” Let him sate himself on her, so that the darkness of her true desire would go unnoticed.

Teasingly, his fingers gently stroked her pubic hair. “Fuck me,” she begged, and a single digit pushed its tip inside her.

“Yes,” she moaned, making all the sounds of desire. But her clitoris would not lie for her. It did not swell and moisten at his touch.

“That’s not what you want.” His logic was hard and unyielding. “Not yet.” His finger probed at her.

“Yes,” she pleaded, making her voice wet and inviting. “It is. Fuck me hard.” Men liked it when you talked like that. Soon he would force his way into her, and then everything would be under her control again.

“Maybe I don’t want to fuck you. Maybe I just want to beat you.”

Her body responded with immediate lubrication. Betrayed, she still hoped that he would settle for sex, right up until the belt lashed down on her back.

She bit her lip, stifling a cry. Now she was truly wet and ready. Surely he could tell, his finger still inside her.

But the belt struck again, and she whimpered.

"Tell me what bad girls get," he asked again, and now his voice was dangerous with darkness.

"Beaten," she whispered, her own voice coming out a well of blackness and desire. Paradoxically, she hoped that he would be appeased by her surrender and take her now, even while something deep inside her whispered back, *not yet*.

As if he could hear that inner voice, he chuckled and hit her again. She had no defenses, no hopes, she could only submit until he was done with her.

She lost count after the third lash, her concentration focused on the finger still inside her. From its subtle position, she could tell when a blow was about to land, and how hard it would be. Ministering to it with her thighs, stroking and pleasing it, she tried to placate the belt. But it did not work.

"Please," she sobbed at last when the pain was almost more than she could take. Her back was on fire, her muscles sore and aching from the tension of fearing the next blow. "Please," she cried, without adding any negotiation or condition, no calculation in her plea for mercy.

The belt paused. She could feel his finger still stirring inside her, hear his heavy breathing. But the minute she formed the hope that he would now fuck her, she knew it was too soon.

He pushed on her shoulder with his right hand, the belt negligently brushing against her burning back and making her tremble. His penetrating finger pulled up, and she had to fall forward, her face into the bed, her buttocks high in the air. His left thumb went into her anus, and he gripped her like a vise. Holding her in place, he proceeded to beat her buttocks with the same measured blows.

She sobbed in frustration that he had found a way to continue torturing her, but soon enough the stinging pain dominated her again.

This time, she did not have to speak, her glowing buttocks and choked sobs speaking for her. His hand drew out of her, but immediately returned in comfort, massaging her red and glowing cheeks.

She had given him everything, submitted to his discipline and punishment. Surely now he would reward her with sex, no longer just a cessation of the beating, but a prize earned by her suffering. But even as she felt it, she knew it was still short of what he demanded. Or rather, what she hoped he would demand.

“Lie down,” he said, tenderly. She fell to one side, and he helped her roll over onto her back. Then he pressed her thighs apart, exposing her like a butterfly.

He dangled the belt over her, dragging it slowly up her body, sliding between her thighs, across her belly, bouncing off her breasts, slipping over her throat and onto her face.

“Kiss it,” he commanded, and when she did she could taste herself on it, a little wetness from below.

“Please...” She was groveling, but she did not really know what she was begging for, and when he raised the belt high to strike, she had to close her eyes.

It fell on her stomach, a stinging line. She whimpered, and again the belt dangled gently, sliding softly across her body. She dared not open her eyes, terrified of seeing him standing above her, that strange cruel look on his face, and the belt in the air again.

This time the belt struck a breast, and she cried out. The whimpering continued while it caressed her again, because she knew the next blow had to be the other breast, and of course it was, this time catching the nipple and stinging fiercely.

Another caress. When it went into the air she had no knowledge of where it might land. The agony of uncertainty was almost as bad as the fire when it lashed against the inside of her left thigh. She had never realized how tender the skin was there.

Knowing the next strike must be against her right thigh, she fought against the reflex to pull her legs together, to close up and protect herself. She knew any sign of resistance would destroy all she had earned. Still, the aftereffects of the stinging blow made her tremble with the effort of keeping her legs apart.

He laughed gently, watching her struggle against herself, and caressed her again with the belt.

She could not stop herself from begging, even though she knew it would not help. "Please."

"Please what?" He dangled the belt loosely between her legs. The alternation between the smooth flatness and the rough edges took her breath away, and she forgot to answer.

Until he hit her again, across the thigh, the pain high and electric.

"Please," she cried.

"Please," he teased her. "Please what?"

She dare not say, *please stop*. Never could she ask for that. "Please fuck me."

"No." He struck her other thigh.

"Please hit me," she tried wildly, driven to despair.

"Okay," he laughed, and struck her thighs again. Only with supreme effort did she stop them from closing this time. Too much more, and she would lose, her legs would come together to protect her, and she could not even contemplate the disappointment that would unleash.

"Please hit my breasts," she cried quickly before she could think better of it.

"Yes." Finally he was satisfied. He struck softly, but her tender breasts had thought themselves safe, and the unexpected sensation made her world reel and stagger. The flesh swelled redness where the leather had kissed it, at the soft, heavy bottom of their roundness. Her nipples remained hard and stiff, almost as if begging for their own kiss.

But still the belt dangled between her legs, teasing and threatening. She had to say something more, before it struck her thighs again and her legs betrayed her.

“Please hit my stomach,” she gasped, and he did, twice for consistency. The pain there was bearable, but the stimulation of the belt sliding on her clitoris was not.

“Please hit my breasts,” she repeated out of desperation, and even though her eyes were closed, she could sense him shaking his head. Again the belt struck at her thighs, and tears squeezed from her eyes as she fought against the need to close her legs.

She stalled while the belt teased her again. She knew what had to come, but could not bear the thought. Anything to put it off. “Please hit my face,” she said, half-mad with anxiety.

He put his hand over her eyes, his large palm protecting even her nose. A slap to the right cheek, another to the left, and her eyes watered.

Where else? Where else? “Please hit my shoulders,” she offered, careful to use the same magic phrase. She was rewarded with blows on both sides, but maddeningly the belt returned to dangle between her legs.

“Please hit my arms.” That seemed safe, but this time the belt whistled as it flew through the air, and she cried out both times. The belt was not pleased. It wanted only tender morsels for its feast.

As it dangled between her legs again, she wept in frustration. She could not even think of any answers, and then she was out of time. She started crying as soon as the belt left, knowing where it would land, the fire on her thighs burning hot and long.

Her knees got halfway up before she seized control of them again, forcing them to relax and leave her exposed. She was out of options, only one choice left.

“Please hit me...there,” she sobbed. The teasing became gentler, almost soothing, and then it was gone, the belt withdrawn. When the blow came, it was the gentlest of all, but the fire that shot through her groin made her scream.

It took a moment before the shock wore off enough that she could feel it was still there, stroking her gently, its vicious appetite unsatiated. What more could it want?

“Please hit my face,” she offered wildly.

“Wrong answer.” A rough edge of the belt snagged against her clitoris, making her hips jerk.

“Please hit my breasts.” But she knew it was futile.

“Wrong answer.” The belt trembled and jerked between her legs, as if it were growing angry.

“Please hit me there...” The magic phrase that said what she could not. The stroke was gentle again, but her clitoris burned like a torch.

“Please hit me there,” she gurgled, reduced to incoherency. It struck again, and now she knew it would not stop until she gave it the ultimate victory, until she climaxed from its abuse. The knowledge drove her into desperation, and when the belt slid teasingly across her labia this time, she exploded in orgasm, furiously clenching as if trying to suck it inside her where it could do no more harm.

When she was done, exhausted and dripping, he chuckled. Through eyes slit with exhaustion, she watched him drop his pants and fuck her. His cock felt good inside her, stretching the muscles that had been so tensed against the belt, filling her with a solid center, but it could not compete with the memory of fire.

She came anyway, when he did. All she had to do was open her eyes and see the belt lying discarded on the bed next to her while he was pumping his semen into her, and her body responded instantly.

Chapter Ten

She thought this week would be the same, but it wasn't. She could feel the void pushing back in, faster than before. The beatings and submissions were becoming pleasurable instead of heart-pounding, anticipated instead of feared. The more she enjoyed surrendering to him, the less the surrenders meant. And pleasure was a flower she had long ago learned to strangle on the vine.

On Friday, everything changed, as these things will, without warning or premeditation. She performed the unprecedented act of visiting him at work in the morning, on the way to her store. He had forgotten his wallet, so she decided to drop it off at his construction site. A simple thing, she thought, until she actually stepped from her car.

Rough-looking men lounged around, smoking cigarettes and drinking from dirty thermos bottles. They eyed her wolfishly, here on their turf her disdain would not protect her. Into this den of mangy roughnecks, she had to walk, her silk dress suddenly seeming too thin to bar their hungry eyes from her body. One of them actually angled to intercept her. Unreasoning fear seized her and she tried to walk quickly without seeming to run. But he broke into a trot to catch her.

Just before she screamed and burst into flight, he grunted at her. His voice was rough, but human, and she stood still instead of fleeing.

"You can't go in there, Miss. Not without this."

Looking down, she saw the yellow hard hat he was offering her.

"Of course," she said, clutching at the tatters of her imperial manner. "Thank you."

Heart still pounding foolishly, she walked into the jungle of concrete and iron bars. The men were normal now, noticing her but not staring. The helmet marked her out as one of theirs, and so she could ask for him without any more than an occasional leer and muttered comments about his good luck.

The long wolf-whistle startled her for an instant, and then she relaxed. She knew instinctively that only one man would be allowed to do that to her, here and now. The flicker of disdain across her face was automatic, but not real. Something deep inside thrilled at his public pride as she walked towards him.

"Hey, gorgeous." He left the table to kiss her. "What brings you to the underbelly of the city?"

"I thought you would need this." She took the wallet out of her purse.

"I do," he said, claiming it. "But admit the real reason. You just needed this." He laughed and kissed her again.

"Don't be silly," she snapped, amazed at her flash of inexplicable anger.

But as always, he sailed gracefully over it. "Well, I needed it then."

A whistle blew. She thought that was only a cliché, but the men around her began to move with purpose and vigor.

"Gotta go, babe." Leaning over to kiss her on the cheek, he said, almost absently, as if it were the most ordinary and natural thing in the world, "Love you."

Then he was gone.

She walked in a daze, almost forgetting to return her borrowed helmet. At the store, she drove around the parking lot three times before she remembered why she was there. She worked in a fog, guided by automatic reflexes. It was not his words that layered her in unreality, it was his truth.

He really did love her.

Not just as a possession, although he clearly delighted in that, even as she delighted in being possessed. Not as a duty, like family to family.

Not as an answer to his own needs, a mere extension of his self. But as a sailor, free to roam the sea, who comes home again and again to the same port, choosing it above all the destinations of the world. As a choice, above all others.

He loved her.

And now she struggled with her own heart, the fear of exposure and the lure of the flame. Like ice, her defenses crept over her, stealthily and implacable, assured in their mission of self-defense. By closing time she was almost robotic, her mind carefully focused on nothing at all.

After dinner, he looked at her with a touch of real concern. "Are you all right?"

"Of course," she said automatically, and cleared the table. She would have dreaded what came next, when they retired to the bedroom, except that she was incapable of any feeling at all. Slipping into her nightgown, she kept her blankness intact until she turned around and saw him standing there.

"Do you need some of this?" The belt slipped free from his jeans and sang in his hands.

The sight made her instantly wet.

"No, sir," she said hastily, and fell to her knees. Ripping open the buttons of his fly, she took him in her mouth completely.

He moaned with pleasure as she tried to swallow his stiffening cock. She put her hands on his hips and took more of him inside her mouth. She wanted to fill the empty space inside of her with him. She wanted to gorge on him, to swell with his tumescence and be made whole.

"Very good, kitten," he growled, and tugged her up by her hair. She stood before him, her face wet and shining, and he pushed her backwards onto the bed. Her legs parted of their own accord, and her hands pulled up her nightgown, offering herself to him.

He put a hand under each knee and pushed them forward. Then he entered her and began to fuck. With every thrust, she thought of the beating that might have been. With every grunt, she thought of the belt burning its way through her frozen armor. It was still there, on the floor,

coiled like a snake and ready to strike if she showed even the slightest resistance.

The thought of it rendered her senseless, a wet and yielding softness that he pounded again and again. The careful blankness she had cultivated all day was replaced by a different disorientation, of fire instead of ice, of giving instead of withholding, of joy instead of fear.

After he was done with her, she licked him clean, grateful for the taste of his pleasure. Snuggled into his arms, she pretended sleep until he stopped stroking her hair and began to lightly snore.

Only then did she weep.

In the morning, lying in bed while he shaved, a ritual that took him as long as a full shower, she contemplated the belt coiled on the dresser. What magic did it contain? How did a few feet of leather slice through emotion, bridge the chasm of her separation? But more directly to the point, how could she hold herself open, and bind herself to this emotional place, so that the belt need not batter her down every time?

Thinking of the appetites of the belt distracted her, until she found herself masturbating. Snatching her hand away, she stared at the belt.

Impulsively, she sat up and reached out for it, but then froze, the sudden image of reaching for a snake paralyzing her. Frustrated, she tried again, but the image could not be defeated.

Feeling stupid, she knelt before the dresser, bowing her head until it touched the ground, a peasant in the presence of a terrible Oriental potentate. She blushed to think of him coming out of the bathroom and seeing her acting like this, but the obeisance worked. Now she could approach the belt.

Still on her knees, she came to it, and bent her head to kiss it fondly. Cradling it like a child, she gathered it to her breast and collapsed backwards onto the bed. The belt fell around her like a snake, titillating her with its gentle caress.

Now she kissed and licked the buckle, the flavor of hard metal strange and exhilarating in her mouth. She fed her nipples to the buckle,

rubbing them into it until it pinched and bit at her. Her other hand reached reflexively downwards, but it still had the belt wrapped around it, and the leather fondled her with its loops. She grasped the tongue of the belt and licked herself between the legs with it.

Feeling the wetness respond, she brought the tongue to her mouth and kissed it out of gratitude. Then, like it was a man, she took it in her mouth, deep and soft, letting it penetrate. It was stiff enough to hold some shape over a few inches, and this naturally led to the next step. Still using it like a man, she took it between her thighs and guided it gently inside.

Fucking herself with a half-dozen short strokes, her other hand rubbing the buckle across her breasts, she forgot it was only leather, an inanimate object for her pleasure. Instead she tried to please it, taking it out and into her mouth again, sucking her own flavor off it the way men loved to watch her suck their cocks after they had been fucking her, the way he had watched her the night before.

Now she threaded the tongue through the buckle, and strapped the belt across her right breast. Taking the middle in her mouth, she pulled up, cinching it around her breast in a tight grip that threatened to pinch at the buckle. With her left hand she spread her lips, with her right she stroked the tongue of the belt against her clitoris, and then plunged inside. With every thrust, she arched her back and pushed her head up, which caused the looped belt to bite into her breast. Falling back down to release the pressure, her hand would thrust the tongue into her again, and the cycle would repeat. Orgasm was but a few strokes away when she belatedly realized the door was open.

“Having fun?” he said, and she burned with embarrassment. But not at masturbating in front of him—inexplicably, she felt like she had been discovered with another lover, caught in *flagrante delicto* with his best friend.

“It would be more fun if you joined me.” What else could she say under the circumstances? At least she had not said “us”.

Dropping his towel, he came at her wearing only a grin. She still had the belt in her hand, and so she used it, wrapping it around his stiffening cock, spreading her wetness to him. Stroking his cock to erection in her hand, the tongue of the belt flopping against her palm and his cock, she felt the exhilaration of a woman who seduces her lover under her husband's very eyes.

And yet, when his cock penetrated her, it was wonderful and fulfilling, the proper state of affairs, the world in the right cosmic order. Rubbing the tongue of the belt against her clitoris while he fucked her, she had the best of both worlds, lover and husband, affair and marriage, lust and love. She floated on a sea of bliss, tongue and cock pleasuring her, the belt gripping one breast and his hand firmly squeezing the other. He felt huge and magnified inside her, until she became like an extension of his body, a slot on a well-oiled machine receiving a piston of steel and fire. She lay helpless to his will, bound to his desire. She felt climax shroud her like a warm fog, waiting only for his signal to immerse herself in its vertigo.

But he did not come, some invisible restraint holding him back.

"Say it." He panted between labored breaths.

But what could he mean? He could not want to beat her, not now. There was no barrier between them that he needed to knock down. What more submission, what further surrender could he possibly want? She would come now, when he did, or even just when he told her to. She was totally exposed to him, denying him nothing, holding nothing back. What else could he want?

"Say it." He pounded her harder, pushing down, and she responded by opening up more, letting him in deeper, offering no resistance. But still he wanted something from her.

"Say it," he moaned, a long, slow howl like a wolf baying to the moon, and she knew finally what it was he pursued, what he had hunted and stalked all this time, what final territory she had held apart from him. With the belt in her hands, its power wielded at her will, its rough edges biting into her clitoris as she forced it back and forth in time with his

thrusters, she knew what was still left to give. Clutching the belt spasmodically with both hands like a lifeline, holding on to it against the yawning gulf that now sprung up underneath her, she said the magic words they both longed to hear. Words she had said in other times and other places, without meaning them, casually or deceitfully. But here she could not lie, evade, or cripple them with insincerity. Here and now, they could only be truth, and once said, never revoked.

In the empty place that was her life, she turned to the stranger, the other who had fought his way up walls of ice and stone, and said, "I love you."

Afterwards, they lay together in the morning light, and everything seemed fresh and new. The belt lay between them, intertwined, welcome and comfortable. No longer an instrument of pain, but a vibrant nerve. No longer a restraint, but a lifeline, a tether of leather binding their flesh, transforming their three individual parts into a single, complex whole.

About the Author

Michèle de Lully lives in the desert, where erotic mirages of other times and places shimmer out of the hot summer nights. She commits as many of them as she can to paper, when not distracted by glorious sunsets, cool margaritas, and long nights of salsa dancing.

Please visit her at www.micheledelully.com.

Look for these titles by Michèle de Lully

Now Available:

La Bonne

Sandra Castilla is about to discover her true self...if she can survive that long.

Slave Heart

© 2007 Nage Archer

Sandra Castilla had never taken a chance in her life until she dreamt of her sister's murder. Driven by forces she couldn't begin to understand, Sandra finds herself thousands of miles from home, about to infiltrate a dark BDSM cult known as the Taleans.

Loved by one man and hopelessly attracted to another, Sandra is plunged into a hidden world where the first wrong move could be her last.

A powerful romantic suspense that will keep you on the edge of your seat to the very last page. Winner of the Enda Award for the Year's Best Erotic Read, a gold star from Just Erotic Romance Reviews and a reviewer's Choice Award from Road to Romance, join Sandra Castilla on an unforgettable journey of self discovery.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Slave Heart*:

Two hours later, and a bottle of Chianti behind us, we sat in Jorge's living room. His mood had improved somewhat, but I knew he was still concerned. I could feel it, and it touched me.

"You know the funny thing?" he asked.

"Tell me."

"I've never used a violet wand in my life. I was sort of looking forward to it." He started giggling. We were on our second bottle and hadn't stopped to eat.

"You could have."

He grew momentarily serious. "No, I couldn't." Then he broke out laughing and I joined him. "Do you know what I'm going to do when you leave?"

"What's that?"

"I'm going to call a girl, I'm going to have her come over here, and I'm going to fuck her six ways to Sunday."

He laughed again, but this time, I didn't join him. I think I knew then he'd fallen in love with me. I was torn between anger and sympathy. He had no right. I'd told him what I was going to do. Then I realized I was probably drunk and had no right to be angry at anyone, particularly Jorge. I leaned forward so my lips were beside his ear.

"Who are you going to call?" Perhaps part of me was jealous, though I had no reason to be. I had no claim on him.

"I don't know. I might have borrowed Tonya, but after tonight, I don't think Em will be very generous."

"Borrow Tonya? Have you had sex with her before?"

"No, but I could have on more than one occasion. Em has offered."

"What does Tonya think?"

He looked surprised. "Tonya does what her Master tells her to. She's a good girl."

"Why Emilio though? I don't understand." And I didn't. The guy wasn't worth his weight in dung.

"It's not something you choose, Sandy. When you meet the right master, you'll know it immediately. You can try to talk yourself out of it, you can fool yourself, but once you meet the One, there's no turning back."

I had come across this concept on various web pages and found it fascinating. "Is there only One?"

Jorge picked up the bottle and took a swig, ignoring the half-full glass on the coffee table beside it. Of course, some would see it as half-empty. "Who knows? Once you've found your One, that's it. If there's another One, you've already stopped looking, so how can anyone know?"

"Did anyone ever tell you you're a very clever man?"

"I think I heard that once. I don't remember where."

It was my turn to laugh. Almost without realizing it, I nipped his ear. He jerked his head away and turned to face me. I could see the anger in his eyes. "Don't *do* that!"

"Why not?" I was no longer scared of him. At that moment, there wasn't a man in the world I trusted more.

"Because I don't want to sleep with you."

I found myself growing angry. "And why is that?"

He didn't answer, but his eyes grew distant, and I immediately felt sorry. Of course he didn't want to sleep with me. He was already falling for me. Yet I was drunk and horny and this might well be the very last time I would be able to do what I wanted.

The thought surprised me. Did I truly want Jorge, or did I just not want another woman to have him? No, that didn't make sense. Oh what the hell.

He'd moved away, and I lunged at him, planting my lips firmly on his. I thought he was going to fight, but he didn't. His arms were around me, and he was crying and laughing at the same time. I might have been doing the same. We kissed for a long time before his lips finally parted, as if he were finally accepting the inevitable. I don't know when it became inevitable, but I'd known it would all along. He had complete power over me. I was supposed to obey him. Why wouldn't he make use of me?

Perhaps that was why I did what I did. His restraint was an insult to my femininity. At that realization, I kissed him more passionately than I'd ever kissed a man, devouring him as if he were a condemned woman's last meal. In retrospect, it wasn't far from the truth.

Any thoughts he had of resistance vanished, and he returned my passion, stroking my tongue with his in a way I'd never before experienced. We were two desperate people in a world of desperate people, taking what pleasure we could for the short time we had the opportunity. Before I knew what was happening, he was unbuttoning my blouse. He had a bit of trouble, until he jerked on the two sides, sending a shower of plastic buttons into the air. I was already in the process of unhooking my bra.

In short order, pants and underwear were shed. I was naked first, save for the rubber band around my neck. Jorge joined me a moment later. Our lips had barely separated during the entire process and our tongues continued dancing as if that were their sole destiny. My entire body flushed with excitement. For some reason, I thought of Scott, the last man I'd made love to, though it was a pale thing compared to this carnal coupling. It was the difference between civilized humans making love and savage animals mating. Now that I'd shed the veneer of civilization, I doubted I could ever again return to its embrace.

I screamed when he pushed me away, and screamed again when he dropped his head between my legs and parted my lips with his tongue. From

that point on, the screaming never stopped. I clenched my legs around his head, which likely muffled what he heard, though he didn't need to hear me, for the way I arched my back and writhed against him told the story in far greater detail.

His tongue was powerful, lusty, relentless, exploring my body as no man ever had, probing and snaking its way inside me, then sliding back out to engulf my clit. I can't imagine how many times I came, but he drank everything I gave him and kept licking, sucking and nibbling until I couldn't take it anymore. My hands clawed at his curly brown hair, attempting to pull his head closer. My throat was raw from screaming. I drew huge lungfuls of air and still couldn't catch my breath. Finally, I squeezed my legs together as hard as I could, putting literal pressure on him to turn his tongue from its torturous invasion.

SAMHAIN PUBLISHING, LTD.

It's all about the story...

Action/Adventure

Fantasy

Historical

Horror

Mainstream

Mystery/Suspense

Non-Fiction

Paranormal

Red Hots!

Romance

Science Fiction

Western

Young Adult

www.samhainpublishing.com