



POKER STUD

Barrie Abalard

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Her gaze followed his card play as fantasies rolled in her mind.

Naked, my arms are restrained behind me as I try to keep my balance on stilettos. Those cobalt eyes of his see my every desire. I know he'll order me to go down on him. It'll be like sucking off Superman. The whole time I'm giving him pleasure, he'll play with the remote control to the vibrator he's inserted inside me, buzzing me to the edge, then backing off. I suck and moan because it's so damned hard to stay balanced, bent over to service him while my arms are locked behind me and my ankles are wobbling in the spike heels and the on-off-on of the vibrator is making me bounce my ass up and down, so badly do I want to be fucked until I come—

“Hello? Hello? Lucy?”

“Huh?” she said, acutely aware that she'd been staring into space, slack-jawed, her pussy wet and aching for action...

ALSO BY BARRIE ABALARD

Poker Brat

Semper Fi

POKER STUD

BY

BARRIE ABALARD

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POKER STUD
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*To my software-writing, poker-loving husband.
Thanks for suggesting stories containing poker players.*

CHAPTER 1

If the atmosphere of a casino could be bottled, I'd buy a case of it.

The buzz Las Vegas poker dealer Lucy Stone Brookfield experienced when she walked onto a casino's floor reminded her of sex. Raw, grasping, sweaty sex, the kind of sex you have when you go for broke. The kind of sex that made the bright lights of the Strip pale in comparison. The kind of sex she'd enjoyed only a few times, but wanted again.

Bondage. Discipline. Sexual submission.

Bondage gave her the illusion of control over her appetites and her mind. Something about the physical restraints produced feelings of invincibility. When she was bound, she could do anything, learn anything, be anything. She knew who she was, and what she wanted, when she was bound.

At the poker table, Lucy experienced the same sureness. When she was dealing hands, she knew what she was doing, and she was damned

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good at it, too.

The rest of her life, however, remained a mess. Having been named after a famous women's rights pioneer didn't help. It made Lucy feel as if she should be doing *Something Important With Her Life*.

She found it ironic, considering her namesake, that she should so thoroughly enjoy sexual submission. Not that she acted one bit submissive outside the bedroom.

In the middle of a hand, Tyler O'Toole sat down at her table. She enjoyed the rush of sensation that seeing him always produced in her loins. She wanted the guy, wanted him badly—for her poker mentor.

She also wanted to fuck him, but that was another story.

After he sat, the man she secretly called The Poker Stud—Tyler—flipped his raven hair off his forehead. His eyes were navy blue behind his steel-rimmed glasses. As usual, the software-engineer-slash-poker-player was dressed like the geek he was—jeans, a pocketed T-shirt with a couple of pens in it, and battered running shoes—and that fact made her smile. He sat quietly until the hand was over, and then smiled back at her, saying, “Deal me in.”

Before she could respond, a Doyle Brunson wannabe in a cowboy hat too big for him said, “Hey, ain't you the guy who won the World Series of Poker two years ago? Sorry, I forget your name.”

“No. I was *third* two years ago. The name's Tyler.”

Mr. Cowboy Hat kept talking. “Tyler O'Toole, that's it. Why didn't you go pro? And what are you doing, sitting at a thirty-sixty dollar table instead of playing high stakes?”

Lucy sneaked a look at Ty's face, which had turned to granite. She had always figured him to be a private person—score one for her.

“I'm having a good time, that's what I'm doing. Or, at least I was,” he said, ignoring the question about turning pro.

Cowboy Hat was pushing Tyler's buttons, no doubt about it.

The man opened his mouth again. “So, tell me how you did it. You

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started playing online, am I remembering it correctly?"

"Yes," Tyler said, his tone and body language conveying a complete lack of interest in talking to the man.

"So, did you buy your way into the WSOP, or did you win an online tournament for a seat and save yourself ten thousand dollars?"

The hand was over. Tyler hadn't won. He shrugged, his glance catching Lucy's. "I'll see you later," he said, tossing her a chip.

"I can't take this," she protested. "It's fifty dollars. You played only one hand."

"I'll see you later," he repeated.

She was just going on break when he returned to her table two hours later. "Damn, I came back at the wrong time. Guess I'll take a break, too." His smile was wry.

Lucy hesitated before saying, "May I have a moment of your time?" He nodded. "Let's walk."

I can't believe what I'm about to ask him.

"Mr. O'Toole—"

"Call me Ty," he said, his glance warm.

"Ty," she said, "I want to turn pro. Would you be willing to teach me what you know?"

* * *

Tyler stopped to study her expression as the crowd flowed around them, two rocks in the middle of a human river. He flicked his gaze to her left hand. As usual, she wore a wedding band. As much as he'd like to take a personal interest in her, he couldn't. She was taken, and affairs weren't his style.

"Ms. Brookfield—"

"Lucy."

"Lucy, you have good card sense. I can tell that from the way you deal. Have you played much? Tried any tournaments?"

"Some online ones, but I've never finished in the money. I do play

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low-limit Hold'em as often as possible at the casinos."

He said nothing, lost in thought.

I want to run my fingers through her hair, kiss her Cupid's-bow mouth. I want to hear that mouth begging me to—

"Uh, Ty?" she said.

He shook himself mentally. "Sorry. My attention wandered. I apologize." He resumed walking.

"So, what should I do next to further my career as a poker pro?"

He noticed that she was stepping fast to keep up with his long legs, so he slowed his pace. Willing himself to keep his mind on her request, he said, "What's your goal? To support yourself? To become a world-class player? To play limit, no limit, or some other game?"

He liked the way she squared her shoulders before answering his questions. "Eventually I want to become a top player, but in the meantime, I need to make a living at cards so I don't have to work as a dealer. I figured the best way to do so was to play low limit Hold'em."

"Not necessarily, though I can see why you'd think it'd be better to go that way. Have you read Lee Jones's book?"

"Yes. Doing so got me started."

"How about the classics? *SuperSystem*? *The Theory of Poker*? *Harrington on Hold'em*?"

She stopped meeting his gaze. "Well, I own all three books. I read some of *SuperSystem* and Harrington's book. I tried Sklansky's *Theory*, but concluded much of it was over my head."

He rubbed his chin, amazed he was considering tutoring a woman he was dying to fuck. "Do you think you've mastered the concept of pot odds?"

She nodded her head. "I think so."

"Do you practice online?"

"Low limit. No limit's pretty hard to play online, I think, without seeing body language. Hard to bluff."

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When she licked her lips, his cock grew hard. “It’s always hard to bluff online if you’re playing the free games,” he said, trying to ignore his arousal. “Is that what you’re doing?”

“Well, yes. I save my real money for casino games.”

“I suggest you play less for free, and more for money. Talk with me again when you’re ready to move your play to the next level.”

“But I’m ready now.”

She put her fisted hands on her hips, her gaze full of sparks. She had what his parents had called “spunk.” He liked spunk.

“A fighting spirit—good. You’ll need it at the table. Now, go read Sklansky and practice ’til you understand all of it,” he said, stepping away. He didn’t want to brush her off, but he also didn’t want her to see his tented jeans. Her sass rocketed his desire.

Imagining Lucy’s wrists in leather cuffs, attached to a hook in the ceiling of his play room, taunted him. He found it too easy to picture her naked, her round breasts topped with perky, stiff nipples. If she were his, he would restrain her legs, using a spreader that he fastened to each finely boned ankle. That way, her delta would be open and available to him—every part of him.

Sweat popped out on his brow. Christ, he needed a drink, but not in the same casino where she worked. He had to escape her spell.

In the bar of the casino across the street, he sat away from the other patrons and ordered a gin and tonic. After downing the first one, he nursed the second while watching TV. He avoided thoughts of Lucy, naked and glistening and ready for his pleasure.

* * *

After talking with Tyler, Lucy wanted to play poker, not deal. She even wanted to read about poker, determined to take another crack at Sklansky’s *Theory*. But most of all, she wanted to spend time with Ty, even though he’d made it clear she didn’t interest him. The man couldn’t even keep his mind on her questions, for cryin’ out loud, no

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doubt distracted by the showgirl she had noticed to her left.

At her table, Lucy dealt hand after hand, working to ensure that each one was flawless. Her practiced, economical moves faltered, however, because her thoughts remained stuck on Tyler. He'd treated her kindly, but with polite distance. Clearly, he had no interest in her or in her career.

What did she expect a pro to do? Jump at the chance to help a wannabe learn the game? No doubt he had way more important things to do, and way prettier women to do them with, as well. At least he was kind. So many customers acted like jerks, or worse, so she appreciated kindness, especially from a poker star like Tyler. It was because of the jerks that she wore a wedding band.

She stopped dead. When she realized the boss was staring at her lack of motion, she willed herself to put her mind back on her game.

The wedding ring—she'd forgotten she had it on. Maybe Tyler had reacted to the ring she always wore. Maybe he didn't want anything to do with her because he'd rather avoid a jealous husband. She'd take the ring off the next time she talked with him. Maybe she'd even stop wearing it at the table, in case he dropped by.

She felt herself flush. She was acting as if she had a schoolgirl crush on Ty. In a way she did, for she longed to be his student.

Hmm. Students who don't learn their lessons get caned by the teacher, bent over with panties down...

"Hey!" a man with a bullet-shaped head and thick neck said. "Watch what you're doing. You nearly knocked over my drink."

Although he'd been the one to place his drink in harm's way, she gestured apologetically. "I'm sorry, sir."

I have to pay attention to the game. I need my job.

At the end of her shift, her boss took her aside. "We don't pay you to daydream, Lucy. Make sure that during your next shift you keep your mind on dealing."

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“Yes, sir,” she said, sticking her tongue out at him after he turned his back. A nearby dealer unsuccessfully suppressed a smile.

After changing into the jeans and sweater in her locker, Lucy didn’t want to go home. Nothing lived there but boredom, so she might as well go play a few hands. She withdrew five hundred bucks from her bank account, the most she ever allowed herself to lose in one session. Then she headed for the casino across the street from her workplace. She didn’t like to gamble where she worked.

Suddenly, she remembered the wedding band. Pulling it off, she stuffed it in the coin pocket of her jeans. If she didn’t get lucky at the poker tables tonight, maybe she’d get lucky with a man.

Once she hit the casino’s poker area, she cruised the tables, looking for Bill Simmons, her preferred dealer. Instead, she saw Ty sitting at a high-stakes table.

I ask him for a little advice, and he decides to play poker at a completely different casino rather than play at my table. I really must have offended him.

Stepping behind a pillar to be less noticeable, she watched him play. With his dark hair, American-flag-blue eyes and square jaw, he looked like a superhero.

God, but he was hot. She wondered why he still worked full-time for one of the software companies in Vegas. He was good enough to support himself playing poker, not to mention the millions he’d won two years ago at the WSOP. She wondered what he’d done with the money, because he sure hadn’t spent it on clothes.

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the edge, then backing off. I suck and moan because it's so damned hard to stay balanced, bent over to service him while my arms are locked behind me and my ankles are wobbling in the spike heels and the on-off-on of the vibrator is making me bounce my ass up and down, so badly do I want to be fucked until I come—

“Hello? Hello? Lucy?”

“Huh?” she said, acutely aware that she'd been staring into space, slack-jawed, her pussy wet and aching for action. She felt her face turn hot when she realized who was talking to her—Rod Parsons, a guy with whom she'd had once-in-a-lifetime hot sex.

“Uh, hi,” she managed around a mouthful of spit. “Rod. How've you been?”

He tilted his hand back and forth to indicate so-so. “I've had better years. Dani broke up with me, for one.”

Dani. That had been the woman he'd been dating when they'd had their hot one-nighter. Dani had been the reason Lucy wouldn't have anything more to do with the lying bastard. Cheaters pissed her off.

“So you see,” he said, “I'm on the market. That night we had together was dynamite. Any interest in getting a drink and seeing where tonight might take us?” He bent down to whisper in her ear, “I've got an even bigger remote-controlled vibrator for you to try, plus some restraints that will—”

Lucy edged away. “No, I can't. I'm meeting someone.”

He frowned. “You're meeting someone behind a pillar?”

“No,” she said, frantic for an excuse. She hurried toward the table where Ty was sitting. “I'm meeting—this man. Hi, Ty,” she said, placing her hand on his shoulder. “How's it going?”

* * *

Lucy's hand on Ty's shoulder made him start. “What?” he growled at her.

“I'm meeting you later, for drinks. Right?”

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Her gaze pleaded with him to agree, and when he saw the lounge lizard breathing hard next to her, he understood why.

He checked his cards. Nothing but rags. He folded before standing with his back to the table.

"Of course we are," he said. "At eleven, in the bar."

Thank you, she mouthed at him. "I'll get out of your way now. See you then," she said.

When she fluttered her fingers good-bye at him, he noticed she didn't have the wedding ring on.

He tried playing poker again, but his concentration was broken now. All he could think of was the way Lucy's butt had looked in her tight jeans when she walked away.

"Fuck," he said to himself, gathering his chips. He tossed a hundred-dollar one to the dealer. "Thanks, Tim."

Tim said, "Thank you, sir," scooping up the chip, yet never missing a beat with the cards.

Ty intended to find Lucy. She was the reason he couldn't play now, not with the blood pooled in his groin. He finally located her at a two-and-four dollar poker table, waiting for a seat.

Edging close to her, he muttered, "You broke my concentration and my luck, and that cost me money. You know better than to approach a player at the table, unless invited to do so. Do that again when I'm playing, and I'm going to spank you. And I'm not speaking in metaphors here. Now, let's go."

"Are you going to teach me some poker?" she said, falling into step beside him.

"What I'm going to do is teach you a lesson. If you're not married, that is. What's the deal with the ring?"

"I wear it to keep the asshats from bothering me. I'm not married."

"Don't you know that a ring only attracts the sleaziest of them all, the ones who enjoy doing it with a married woman?"

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Like my ex. What a mistake that marriage was.

“I didn’t know that,” she said.

She appeared so sweet and wholesome, Ty couldn’t continue his charade. “Look, I’m not really going to spank you. I was just making a point—never bother anyone at the table. Especially not me.”

“Oh,” she said, looking away. “I—I was kind of looking forward to learning my lesson.”

CHAPTER 2

Ty put his hand on her shoulder to stop her. “A poker lesson? Or another kind?”

She turned her face to his, making him think how much he’d like to suck her plump lower lip.

“Both,” she said. Her eye contact left no doubt that she wanted him.

“Then let’s go.” He grabbed her hand before he could lose his nerve, heading for the hotel desk. He was so horny for this woman he couldn’t think straight, but he couldn’t take her home, not yet. Home was only for women he knew for sure were into his kink, the ones who wanted to be restrained and ravished. He’d had enough rejection to be wary of who saw his playroom. Lucy seemed to want to be spanked, but that was fairly common foreplay. It didn’t necessarily mean she wanted to enjoy a rousing night of bondage and discipline.

“I’ll deal some hands and give you some poker tips if you want. And then”—he tugged her along—“I’m going to spank you. Are you

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absolutely sure you're not married or taken?"

She raised her free hand, three fingers sticking up. "On my honor as a Girl Scout, I am not married or taken. How about you?"

Yeah, right. Like I could find a woman who wants a software engineer, even if he is wealthy and plays poker on the side.

"I'm not currently involved with anyone. I swear it on, um, oh, hell, I don't know, Fermat's Theorem," he said. "Trust me, I'm completely unattached."

Her impromptu response surprised him. "I hate cheaters, at the table and in the bedroom."

"Me, too," he said. "That's why I asked about the ring." He stopped walking. "Before I get a room, are you certain you don't want to bail out?"

"Bail? As if," she said, and his heart leaped inside his chest.

The hotel's front desk "comped" him a room. Room service brought cards and a bottle of wine. While they sipped, he dealt different combinations of hands, explaining how strategy differed in each case, depending on one's position in relation to the button.

He couldn't believe an hour had gone by so quickly, not with his cock rigid and his balls aching the way they were. But the wine was gone. If he was going to make a move, he had to do it now, before he—or she—chickened out.

He stood, saying, "Stand up, Lucy, and face me."

She did, her lips parted.

"First, I'm going to undress you. I only spank naked women. Are you okay with that?"

She nodded, her eyes large and round.

"Second, when I spank naked women, it leads to sex. If you don't want to go there, say so now."

She nodded again. He thought he heard a soft moan escape her lips before she said, "Yes."

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“Yes, you want to go on? Or, yes, you understand?”

“Yes to both.”

He placed his hands on her shoulders, sliding them down her torso, lingering briefly on her breasts. His gaze never left hers until he pulled her sweater over her head, revealing round breasts imprisoned by a tight bra.

He liked what he saw. He preferred a little flesh on a woman.

He sat to remove her shoes, then undid her jeans, pushing them to the floor.

“Step out of them,” he said. She did so, trembling before him, her nipples puckered, naked except for her bikini panties.

“Stand to my right.”

He hooked both his index fingers into the waistband of the panties, tugging them down. Once he had them at her knees, he let himself look fully at her.

Christ.

Her mound was smooth and shaved, practically begging his tongue to take a lick. He let one finger slide between her nether lips. Immediately she spread her legs, gasping, as he explored her cunt. When he spread moisture between her lips, circling her clit, he said, “You’re very wet. That fact, combined with your shaved state, tells me you’ve played these games before. Did you shave yourself because another man wanted you to?”

Her head flew up and down energetically. “Another man shaved me during an evening together. I like it, so I keep doing so.”

He patted her inner thigh, and she spread her legs wider to oblige his unspoken command. “You’re here for my pleasure, do you understand that?”

A tiny, “Yes,” squeaked out. He watched her gulp.

“Lock your hands behind your back.”

After she obeyed, he observed her quivering lower lip, her tightly

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budded nipples, her shallow breathing. He leaned toward her, using his hands to spread her pussy gently before he allowed his tongue to explore her. Her thighs shook as he circled her clit with the tip.

He let his tongue play, flicking it across her clit, while he moved his hands to her breasts. He tweaked them, watching her face as best he could, until he could tell by her expression that the pressure he used was just a little too much for her comfort. Then he continued using that same amount of pressure when he pinched, enjoying the changing expressions on her face, his tongue still busy in her pussy. Her eyes had closed, and she was licking her lips and moaning.

He withdrew his tongue and fingers. Her eyes snapped open.

“Across my lap, now. You may use your hands to position yourself, but after you are settled, clasp your hands behind your back again.”

She complied, melting into his lap like butter in a frying pan. The aroma of her ocean rose to his nostrils, stronger than before. He held her wrists together in his left hand.

“I’m going to spank you now. Why am I doing so?”

“Because I interrupted you at the poker table,” she choked out between pants.

“That’s right.” He let his hand spank her hard, pressing her bottom for a moment or two until her breathing steadied.

He smacked her again, not holding back. He intended to give this woman the hardest hand spanking she’d ever experienced.

“Oh,” she groaned, “that smarts.”

“Shall I stop?” he asked, though he knew what her answer would be.

She shook her head, the silky chestnut strands flying through the air.

* * *

Lucy could feel each blow deep inside her, and her breasts swayed with each smack. Rod hadn’t spanked her much the night they’d played

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together. She wasn't certain she liked it, though the idea of being spanked drove her wild, and the heat in her seat warmed her pussy nicely.

If only the burning sting wasn't quite so intense. She squeezed her eyelids against the pain. It didn't smart as sharply as it did at first, though the sensation of heat had grown until the burn had lost its localized feeling. It was as if a giant sunlamp was beaming down on her bottom, thighs, and pussy. It wasn't entirely pleasant heat, but it wasn't entirely unpleasant, either.

Then the stinging heat morphed into an electric tingle, little shocks coursing through her. She arched her back in response, actually lifting her bottom toward the palm spanking her so thoroughly. She started to raise and lower her hips in time with his smacks, and discovered that doing so rubbed her mound against his nicely muscled thighs.

The slaps rained down, faster now, almost as if Ty were responding to her quickening movements as she pressed her clitoral area against his leg. Then, suddenly, she wasn't conscious of a damned thing except the hot pleasure coursing through her body. She could hear a woman doing something that sounded like screaming—happy screaming. Then she realized the woman was her.

"Jesus," she panted, feeling tendrils of hair clinging to her damp forehead. "That was—"

Her words were cut off when he lifted her up to kiss her. She clung to him as he carried her, setting her down on the room's hip-high dresser. She heard a zipper slide, followed by the sound of fabric rubbing together while he continued kissing her, his tongue tangling with hers.

He broke away to guide his cock inside her. She looked down, not able to keep from blurting out, "Wow," just before he rammed home. He wasn't unusually long, but he was thick and nicely proportioned. She wrapped her legs around his waist, meeting his thrusts with equal

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force. Rubbing her sitting area on the wood's surface hurt, but she didn't care. His hands were on her breasts, tweaking and rolling her nipples between his fingers.

"I wish I could suck your breasts while we fuck," he whispered, the first words he'd spoken since the spanking had begun.

Never had a man filled her cunt so completely, his cock remaining in constant motion on her G-spot. Her building orgasm prompted her to use her fingers to rub her clit. When the wave of sensation broke over her, he pinched her nipples harder, driving her orgasm to new heights. As she shivered with thrills that spread through her body, he writhed against her, making little sound but clearly enjoying himself.

Then he hugged her tightly. His mouth sought hers and they kissed, his cock still inside her.

She broke the kiss but refused to untangle her legs from around his waist. He buried his face in her hair. She murmured, "Ty, God, that was incredible. Though my butt is so sore now."

"Your backside was rubbing against the top of the dresser. No doubt the friction intensified the spanking's burn," he said in her ear. He untangled her legs and arms from around him and backed away. She regarded his softening cock with longing.

He caught her glance. "I'm afraid that's it for a little while. Could I interest you in some other activity, like a meal?" His tone of voice was cool.

The Tyler O'Toole of the poker table is back in control, she thought. Carefully she moved off the dresser, unable to keep from wincing. "You know anyplace where we can eat standing up? Damn, but your spanking hand is tough."

"I perform special activities to keep the skin calloused," he said, zipping up his jeans.

"Special activities? What, do you moonlight as a ditch-digger or lumberjack or something?"

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He laughed. “No. I play handball for exercise, with another guy I know who learned it the way I did, on the mean streets of Queens. And, no, I don’t know any place where we can eat standing up. Besides, I think I’d enjoy watching you sit down. Ready to go?”

His voice, friendly but distant, hurt her more than the spanking had her bottom.

What did I expect? He was perfectly clear about what he wanted, and made no promises. I can’t fault the man for not acting like he’s in love. Hell, I don’t know if I’m in love, just in lust.

“Sure,” she said, careful to keep her own voice friendly, but nothing more. “Give me a minute, and I’ll be ready to go.”

* * *

Watching the way her bra strained against their contents made his cock stir. And when she pulled up her jeans, she wiggled in a most seductive way.

He could still taste her pussy. He wanted to rip down those jeans to savor her musky folds again. He wanted to restrain her in some awkward but sexy position, relishing the power flowing from her to him, and back again to her. The joke that the submissive partner was always the one ultimately in control was dead-on. He would never, ever do anything to a woman that she didn’t absolutely crave to have done to her.

“Excuse me,” he said before ducking into the bathroom. He splashed water on his face, staring at himself in the mirror while towel-drying.

What ever made me start teaching Lucy poker?

Images of her face in the throes of orgasm filled his mind.

Right. The usual reason I agree to do anything for a sexy woman—to get laid. Even though mentoring her effectively means I probably shouldn’t fuck her again. I must be the horniest, stupidest geek in Vegas.

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He emerged from the bathroom, willing his erection to fade. "Want to grab something at the bar downstairs? All the nicer restaurants will be closed by now, I'm sorry to say."

She shrugged, and her apparent indifference to dining with him made his chest ache. "Something wrong?" he asked.

"Not really. Let's go."

She moved toward the door, but he caught her before she opened it. "Lucy, are you sure nothing's wrong? You don't seem happy."

To his surprise, she kissed him. "I'm fine. You gave me one hell of a good time."

In the bar, they lucked into a booth, and exchanged pleasantries while waiting for their food. When his burger, fat with cheddar and bacon, arrived, he was primed to enjoy the first bite. He opened his mouth to taste it, the aroma tickling his nostrils.

Then Lucy said, "How can you eat that? It's a heart attack on a bun."

"My cholesterol's 145," he said before biting into the burger.

Lucy looked at her soy patty. "Normally I enjoy these things, but meat always tempts me."

"I can tell," he said. "You're regarding my burger with the same intensity that you regarded—me."

Her giggle pleased him. "Oh, that was an awful thing to say."

"Maybe, but it's the truth." He took another bite while watching her toy with her veggie burger. "Go on and order the heart attack special. You know you want it," he said.

"Okay," she said, waving for the barmaid. After she ordered, he put down his food. "Do you want half of it? We can split the burger that's coming, too."

"Okay," she said. "But you don't have to."

"I know." He liked the casual way they talked to each other.

"So, tell me what it was like to make it to the final table of the

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World Series of Poker,” she said before digging into her portion of burger.

“I honestly don’t remember a lot of it. I was exhausted from the long days of play that preceded the final table, and by then I was living on caffeine and whatever sandwiches I could scarf. Playing poker for twelve to sixteen hours straight for days on end is a real endurance contest, but most people don’t realize that. They think, days of sitting on your butt playing cards, how hard can it be?” He sipped his drink before continuing. “I made a bad read, and then I was out in third place. I think my brain was too fried to go on. Jazzed as I was from coming in third, once the high was over, I slept for something like seventeen hours.”

“I can’t imagine making the final table at the WSOP,” she said.

“Well, you have to be a good player, but you also have to be lucky, and being lucky is always better than being good. That’s why the top pros so rarely make the final table anymore—the sheer number of participants increases the chances that bad beats—bad luck—will knock you out.”

The other burger arrived. While he cut it in half, she said, “So, tell me. Why do you keep working? Why don’t you play poker full-time?”

Because I lost my taste for groupies, and I need something to occupy me now that I’m divorced.

He said nothing, staring at the plate of food, until she said, “Oh, God, I’m sorry. It’s really none of my business.”

“No, it’s all right,” he said while divvying up the burger. “After everything we’ve done tonight, you have the right to ask at least one personal question. The short answer is, I did a dumb thing. I married a poker groupie who then left me when she realized I wasn’t going to blow all my money on things like Porsches and diamonds and first-class flights to Monaco. Thank God I’d had the presence of mind to write a pre-nup, but I still lost some of my WSOP money to her. Not

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that I care about money per se—I care only about the security it can buy. I've invested most of my winnings so that I never have to worry about going broke. The rest became my poker stake. I work as a software engineer to provide for my daily needs, and my poker stake lets me have my card fix, all without worrying about the future."

Her next question made him flinch. "You don't take many risks, do you?"

He handed her half of the burger, saying, "Only at the poker table."

"Damn," she said. "I never expected that. So, do you still date poker groupies?"

His laugh was a cheerless bark. "I kind of lost my taste for them after Tara. I'm fairly sure she was running around on me, though I couldn't prove it. That's why I hate cheaters. Why do you hate them?"

* * *

She chewed the burger, thinking before responding. "I simply don't like dishonesty—except at the card table, of course, in the form of bluffing. I think cheating on your partner is dishonest."

He nodded, but his glance slid away from hers, as if he were embarrassed. A stab of empathy pierced her through.

"You're really not dating anyone?" Lucy said.

Ty motioned no, his mouth full.

"Would you like to date me?"

Her heart hammered against her ribs when she said it. Then she stuffed her mouth with food so she wouldn't say anything else.

He put down his burger, and that made her look away.

He's going to turn me down.

"Lucy, no. Not if you want me to be your poker coach."

She nearly choked, and grabbed her drink to wash down her food. "You will? You'll be my coach, my mentor, my—"

He held up his hands. "Enough. I said yes, didn't I?"

"Thank you." She squirmed a little. "You really do spank hard, you

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know. Good thing you were using only your hand.”

He wagged his index finger. “Now, now. I said I’d be your mentor, not your disciplinarian. We can’t talk about such stuff, not if you’re serious about me teaching you how to improve your poker play. Want another drink?”

“No. Why can’t we talk about such stuff?”

“Because I can’t teach you well if I’m distracted. And you are quite a distraction to the logical portion of my mind, Luce, as well as my body.”

She placed the burger on her plate, no longer hungry. Though becoming his student thrilled her, she would miss not having sex with Ty again. “Okay, I understand.”

He picked up the bill. “Let’s go for a walk. You can pick the poker-playing part of my brain while we do.”

She pulled money from her wallet. “I’m paying my portion. I insist.”

“I’ll pay. You leave the tip.”

“No,” she said firmly. “I already feel in your debt because you’re going to mentor me.”

“You can tip me when you win your first tournament,” he said. “Come on, let’s walk.”

Lucy followed Ty outside. Once they hit the pavement, she had to jog to keep up while dodging the middle-aged out-of-towners looking for their next buffet special, the young and the hip on their way to a club, and the hard-core gamblers, their eyes glazed from staring at too many losses.

“Mind walking a little slower?” she said, her words bursting out between breaths.

“Sorry,” he said, slowing down. “I do some of my best thinking while walking fast. A habit of mine.”

“What are you thinking about?” Now that she was no longer

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struggling to match his pace, she could actually speak without gasping for breath.

His next words surprised her. "My life."

"What about your life?"

"What don't you understand about Sklansky's *Theory*?" he parried.

Okay. I give up trying to break down his walls.

"Effective odds and implied odds give me a little trouble. Positional play and reading hands, too. By the way, you do know this is kind of weird, don't you? Having a serious conversation while walking on the Strip, I mean."

* * *

He could hear Tara's accusations echoing in Lucy's comment: *nerd, geek, weirdo, freak show!*

"I know I'm odd," Tyler snapped. "Can we move on?"

"Hey, you were the one who said you were thinking about your life."

The hurt that underlay her words made him uncomfortable. He didn't like it when people seemed disappointed in him, because he felt it as a lack in himself. Tara had never stopped reminding him how much he'd let her down.

"In case you haven't noticed, I'm not much of a people person," he said through clenched teeth. "If I keep apologizing for that fact, we'll never get anywhere, so just accept me for who I am."

Not that anyone else does, so why should Lucy be any different? Yes, I got into her pants, and it was great. But hotties usually find better-looking poker players than me to screw, once they discover I'm nothing but a nerd.

"I'm going to explain the various kinds of pot odds now. Ready?"

"Yes, sir. Whatever you say, sir." Her slouched position, and her hands digging into the pockets of her jeans, underscored her sarcastic tone. He smiled.

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“You should know that I love sarcasm in a protégé. Here we go. I’m going to lecture first. Then you ask questions. Got it?”

They covered the rest of the Strip on foot while he explained the topic to her. He answered her questions as they walked back the way they came.

“You straight on the various kinds of pot odds?” he said. “If not, maybe you should read *The Theory of Poker* again. Give everything time to sink in.”

“I have one more question,” she said while nodding, her brown hair taking on copper highlights when her head moved.

I want to tangle my fingers in her hair, make those lips do my bidding.

He watched her breasts and butt jiggle as she walked, and the heat warming his groin spread all the way to his solar plexus.

Hard again.

“You haven’t answered me,” she said.

“Uh, sorry. What did you say?” He forced himself to meet her eyes rather than stare at her curves.

Brown, with specks of the same copper color in her hair. Oh, to see those eyes filled with pleading...

“I said, how about I help you with your wardrobe?”

“My wardrobe? Why would I want that?”

“Because you look like a geek. You’d have more success with the ladies if you dressed better. Every gal loves a sharp-dressed man. I think ZZ Top sang about it.”

Her eyes were appraising him, challenging him to respect her honesty. Still, he couldn’t help blurting, “What makes you think I have trouble getting lovers? After all, I am a well-known poker player.”

“Only poker groupies would know that. And you said you were through with groupies.”

“If only groupies know who I am, what does that make you?”

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He enjoyed watching her cheeks pinken. “Okay, groupies and dealers and serious poker players all know who you are.”

“What makes you an expert in dressing men?” he said, brushing an errant strand of hair from her cheek. “That was not meant to be an X-rated question, by the way.”

“For your information, I have an Associates degree in fashion design. Plus, I’ve always had an eye for such things. Either you don’t have an eye, or you don’t care. Or both.”

He frowned. “Both. I hate dealing with clothes, and I think someone should love me for who I am on the inside.”

“Of course they should. But first you need a woman to learn who you are inside, and an unattractive exterior keeps most women away.”

“You seemed to like my exterior a short while ago.”

Her exasperated sigh amused him. “And you said, as my poker mentor, you wouldn’t date me. If I have to choose, I’ll pick mentor over date. Do you want me to help you, or not?”

* * *

Lucy felt his gaze rake her, top to toe. Even though she was dressed down in jeans and a sweater, the jeans fit her ass perfectly, and the sweater showed off her breasts without looking too-tight and slutty. And her heels—well, she adored her Vaneli kitten-heeled ankle boots. They weren’t Jimmy Choos, but they hadn’t broken her bank account, either, the way the Choo shoes would have.

Damn, he’s making this harder than it has to be.

She knew her face was red with embarrassment. “Look, I want to trade your poker knowledge for my fashion sense. What’s so awful about that?”

He walked faster, and she had to trot to keep up. She tugged at his arm, and he slowed.

“Sorry. Thinking, you know.”

They walked another few minutes, until she said, “Damn it, these

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boots aren't made for a marathon. We've already walked half an hour. What do you say?"

"All right. When's my first lesson?"

"I'm off Tuesday evening. Meet me at Thomas Pink. We'll start with shirts."

He stopped, placing his hands on her upper arms. The contact gave her stomach a roller-coaster type of thrill. When he slid his hands to her wrists, gently pushing them together behind her back, her pussy throbbed.

"You win. I expect I should bring a high-limit credit card?"

Flashing neon played colors across his steel-rimmed glasses. Unable to resist her impulse, she said, "Teach me while I'm restrained."

CHAPTER 3

His entire body stilled. “What did you say?”

She stood on tiptoe to whisper near his ear. “Teach me poker while I’m tied up, tied down, whatever. If I don’t learn properly, tie me tighter. If I still don’t learn, spank me. I do my best learning when I’m tied up. I’m not joking.”

“No.” But he didn’t let go of her wrists.

“I’m serious,” she said. “Please, please, please. Restraining my body disciplines my mind, that’s the God’s honest truth.”

Did I screw up? Or does he want it as much as I do? Oh, God, maybe he thinks I’m a freak of the first order.

He inclined his head to the right. “We need a quieter place to discuss this matter. How about my car?”

When she nodded, he let go of her wrists. “Can you walk there, or are your feet hurting too much?” he asked.

“I can walk, as long as your car isn’t at the other end of the Strip.”

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"It's only a block away."

Nothing more was said until they reached the car. She couldn't help smiling—the guy drove a battered, dusty Honda Civic. "Guess you don't spend your money on clothes or cars, do you?"

He lifted a shoulder. "It gets me where I need to go. Why spend money on a driveway penis?"

"A what?" she said, laughing.

"A driveway penis. You know, a vehicle that screams what a big, swinging one you have—when you don't have one."

Collapsing in giggles against the car, she gasped, "I've never met anyone who needs such a thing less than you."

"Get in, and tell me again what you want, and why," he said.

As she settled into the car's seat, her throat grew tight with nerves. She needed to get through this as fast as she could, or she'd lose it. "Listen," she said. "I'm into bondage. It turns me on, I admit it. But something about physical restraint also gives me mental discipline, helps me focus. I need discipline to learn the finer points of Hold'em. I know you don't think you can teach me if we're constantly distracted by sex. I'm not talking about sex. I'm talking about you tying me up, then teaching me poker."

He stared at her so long without speaking, she assumed his answer was no. "Okay, I guess you think I'm all weird, so I'll be going now," she said, her hand on the car door's handle.

"Wait," he said.

So she did.

When he finally spoke, he said, "I'm probably going to regret this, but okay, we can do that. As long as you answer one question."

"Yes?"

"How did you discover that bondage helps you learn?"

She glanced away. "You'll never believe it."

"Try me."

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“My study partner in college was a guy. A gay guy. He swore that he aced all his exams because he studied while bound. I didn’t believe it. He invited me to try it. He restrained me while we studied for our next exam. I received the highest grade I’d ever earned up to that point.”

And later I spent half the night masturbating, I was so turned on.

She watched the corners of his mouth twitch. “You’re right, I don’t believe it,” he said.

“It’s the truth. I don’t lie.”

Well, maybe I lied a little when I said I wasn’t talking about having sex with you.

“I have noticed you value honesty,” he said. “I guess, in our own ways, we’re both a little odd.”

“Have you ever done that? Bondage, I mean?”

“Luce,” he said, “you have no idea.”

* * *

Five days later, Ty chewed his thumbnail while driving to Lucy’s apartment, anxious over what he’d agreed to do to her.

Jesus Christ, I’m nuts.

They’d worked out a schedule and a place—Thursdays in her living room. He would bring some restraints. She would wear modest, baggy clothing. And they’d both agreed that sex was a no-no, so he would order something for her to wear that would help prevent impromptu fucking.

He didn’t have a clue how he’d resist her, baggy clothing or not. Not if her eyes grew round and hungry, the way they had after he’d tongued and spanked her.

He wished he hadn’t fucked her before, because now he knew what he was missing. He’d jerked off three times before he’d started out in his car, to keep his dick from distracting the hell out of him tonight.

He turned onto her street and parked. After removing the satchel

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full of adult toys from his trunk, he carried them to her building. “Guess who,” he said when she’d turned on the intercom.

She said nothing, but the door buzzed to let him in.

Give me strength.

When he emerged from the elevator, he found her standing in front of her open door. True to their agreement, she was wearing ugly, fuzzy socks, a baggy sweatshirt, and sweatpants that looked about two sizes too big. Unfortunately, they didn’t hide her figure completely.

“I see you’re wearing one of the shirts we bought on Tuesday,” she said. “Looks great on you. So do the jeans. Want something to drink before we start?”

“Nothing alcoholic—neither of us should do this with impaired judgment. Soda would be good, though.”

He went to her living room to unpack while she fetched drinks. Emerging from the kitchen with a tray that held a bowl of snack mix and two glasses of something carbonated, she stopped a moment, whistling.

“Where did you get all this stuff?” she asked, putting the tray down on a side table.

“The internet. Where else?” He sipped his soda. “Tonight I’m going to deal Hold’em hands. Your job will be to tell me what your opener would be, depending on your table position. My job will be to distract you as much as possible.” He removed a large tarpaulin from the bag, spreading it across the carpet. “I hope you don’t mind some of the distractions I have in mind.”

She shook her head, but said nothing. He crooked his index finger. “Come here and stand in the center of the tarp, with your arms behind your back.”

She complied. He picked up the leather cuff binder he’d brought with him, a long tube meant to snuggle both forearms together. When he tightened the laces after slipping it on her, he thought he heard a

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small sigh escape her lips.

“How are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m okay,” she said, in a bored tone that indicated having her forearms bound behind her was old hat.

“Now for the ankles,” he said, pulling cuffs with hook-and-loop closures from the bag. Once he secured them, he fastened a bar between them. “The bar will mess with your balance, though of course it’s more effective when high heels are worn.”

“I could change into heels,” she said. “Really, I wouldn’t mind.”

Yeah, but I sure would. I don’t think I’d be able to keep from fucking you if you did.

“I’ll do my best to break your concentration, because a lot of your tablemates will try to do so while you’re deciding on a course of action. However,” he said, smiling, “they won’t do the things I will tonight. You are wearing the chastity belt I had sent to you, aren’t you? Locked?”

“All five locks are secured, and all five keys are on the top shelf of the bathroom cabinet,” she said. “In case we need them.”

He shut his eyes briefly, picturing how her shaved pussy would look with the tight black leather pressing against it, and swallowed.

When he opened his eyes, he said, “Then we’re ready. Focus your attention on the coffee table, and tell me what you would do—fold, call, or raise—pre-flop in first position.”

* * *

Her breathing ragged, she said, “Ty, I’d call.”

“Wrong. In first position, you should either fold or raise almost all the time. If your hand isn’t strong enough for a raise, then fold.”

He dealt two more cards. “What would you do if you were in the big blind with these hole cards?”

Speaking of holes...

A slight ache began in her shoulders, but the ache in her cunt was

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the more difficult one to bear. With her feet spread over two feet apart, all she could do was clench her vaginal muscles and dream. “Uh, I’m not sure.”

“Look, if you’re not even going to try, these lessons are over. Stop thinking about your cunt.”

She jerked her head up at the word, stung that he knew how aroused she was, even though she’d made it clear that bondage excited her. “How do you know I was thinking about my, er...”

“Let’s just say this isn’t my first bondage experience. Now, what do you do with suited connectors when you’re the big blind, and the person in third position has limped in?”

“Call, I think.”

“Sure, why not? You get to see the flop for free. Now, how about this hand, when you’re second? Take a moment to think about it.”

She tensed with longing when he moved to stand behind her. As he pulled the front part of her sweatshirt’s neck away from her body, she thought, *perhaps he’ll slip his hand inside*. Her nipples were fiercely hard and ready for his fingers.

She shrieked. He’d poured icy water down her shirt instead. “What the fuck?”

“Just another distraction. Did you know that the famous MIT blackjack team used all sorts of physical distractions to test whether a member was ready for Vegas?”

“No,” she panted. “I didn’t. But now I understand the tarp.”

“Time, Lucy. What would you do with your hand?”

The water still dripping off her breasts had warmed somewhat. “Fold?”

“Excellent.” He moved to stand in front of her. “Now I’m going to lecture. Keep your mind on what I say, because there will be a test.”

* * *

Christ, Christ, Christ, I can’t believe I’ve managed to keep my

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hands off her.

Ty paced as he talked, explaining the fine points of positional play in Hold'em. He was trying hard not to look at her chest. Despite the sweatshirt, the bumps of her nipples were visible. They had to be hard as diamonds if they were showing through the thick cotton.

He wished he didn't know where the chastity belt keys were, even though safety demanded such knowledge.

After he wrapped up his talk, he said, "Time for a break," unlacing the binding cuff and removing the ankle spreader bar. "If you need the little girls' room, Lucy, now would be a good time."

He enjoyed watching her scurry for the bathroom. He had a hunch that she'd ease some of her tension in there, just as he planned to do right now. He unzipped his jeans to work on his cock, his right hand flying up and down its length. He choked back his exclamation when he came in a great, shuddering rush.

* * *

Grabbing the keys, she jerked down her pants, her eagerness making her fingers clumsy. She cursed the locks, and how long it took to open them. When the chastity belt dropped to the floor with a clunk, she didn't care whether Ty heard it, or whether he would figure out what she was about to do. All she could think about was her clit and cunt, wet and hot and needy.

She leaned against the sink to plunge the vibrator in, jerking it with one hand while the other massaged her clit. She didn't think she'd ever been so excited—not the hot bondage night she'd spent with lying bastard Rod, not even when she and Ty had fucked.

A mere fifteen seconds later, she came, and she bit down on her lower lip to keep from making noise. Now she had to slip the chastity belt back on, and she didn't want to. But an agreement was an agreement.

Her legs shaky, she returned to the living room, becoming annoyed

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that Ty was completely immersed in a poker book. Sneaking a look at his groin, disappointment stabbed her in the heart. He wasn't even hard, and she'd been on the edge of orgasm since they'd started. Damn it, she'd thought he was hot for her, and he wasn't.

"Ready for your quiz?" he asked.

She kept her tone neutral. "Sure."

He bound her the same way he had earlier. He spread poker hands on the coffee table, asking questions after each one. She answered, missing the right answer only once, but it earned her one hard swat from a paddle. Even though the sweatpants' thickness, it stung intensely. And made her horny again.

"You're doing great," he said as he unbound her. "See you next Thursday. Unless we have more shopping to do before that. Do we?"

"Let's put the rest of the shopping off for now. Is that okay?" she said, not truly giving a damn if he did mind. Her desire for him pissed her off, since he so clearly didn't want her. No, he'd had no trouble at all keeping his hands off her. She knew it was unfair to resent him for keeping to their agreement, but her pussy longed for him to violate it—and her.

He stopped packing the gear. "Is something wrong?"

Hell, yes. Why won't you fuck me again?

"No, I'm fine."

He picked up his bag. "See you."

She could barely wait for him to leave so that she could call Rod.

CHAPTER 4

Ty sat, parked in the garage of the Aces Up casino. He'd never felt less like playing poker than he did right now, and he had a tournament about to begin.

He'd entered mostly to keep his mind off Lucy, who was also playing in the tournament. The plan was to keep himself busy with his own cards while she played. The images of her dominating his thoughts, however, meant his plan might backfire.

Images of lounge lizard Rod also haunted Ty.

Ty had trained Lucy because he'd said he would, even though every moment he spent in her company was torture. For reasons he couldn't fathom, she'd moved on—or perhaps, back to—Rod. So he'd spent eight Thursday evenings lecturing, testing, binding, and paddling her, while keeping his hands to himself. She'd been right—the bondage had helped her focus on her game, and she was ready to play in a tournament. Readier than he was, actually. He was a wreck.

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He closed his eyes, rapping his forehead against the Honda's steering wheel. Stupid, stupid, stupid, that's what he was. Stupid to become emotionally involved with a woman again, stupid to keep teaching Lucy in ways that sexually tormented him, and stupid to insist they not have sex despite his aching need to do so.

Not that any of it mattered now. She didn't want him anymore. After their first tutoring session, Lucy had barely registered any interest in him beyond what he'd had to teach her. Not long after that, he began to see Rod escort her here and there.

He cursed once and hit the steering wheel with both fists before getting out of the car. His protégé would be waiting for him, and he should cheer her on before the dealing began.

He found Lucy calmly sipping coffee near the tournament's entrance. "You register yet?" he asked her.

She produced a smile chilly enough to ice her hot beverage. "All set. Thank you for everything you've taught me, Ty. I have a good feeling about today."

"Hey, how's my favorite poker player?"

Ty grimaced to see Rod kiss Lucy's cheek and pat her bottom. "I'll go register now," he said.

* * *

Once Ty was out of earshot, she said, "Thanks, Rod. Now get your hand off my ass. Free feels weren't part of the deal. I've paid you good money, and that's all you're going to get—cold cash, not hot sex."

"Aw, Luce," he said, but her glare stopped him. "Oh, all right. I know your heart belongs to Mister Softy-Nerd."

"He's more of a stud, and a better man, than you'll ever be," she shot back.

Rod turned his hands palm-up. "So I'm not relationship material. That doesn't invalidate the hot night we had once."

"Once was enough. Besides, you already have a new woman."

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“Yep. I can’t go without for long.” He chuckled before strolling away. Lucy shuddered, glad Rod was gone.

She didn’t know whether her attempts to make Ty jealous had worked. She only knew she had to have the man. Acting uninterested the past few weeks had tormented her. Every Thursday, after he left, she’d masturbated herself to exhaustion. These days, all she had to do was *think* about donning the chastity belt and she was raring to go.

Too, too ironic, that thoughts of a chastity belt made her want to screw her brains out with Ty.

She located the tournament seat assigned to her. Once the dealing began, she only had to imagine her arms behind her, cradled in soft leather, to call up her lessons.

* * *

Thirteen hours later, Tyler realized that both he and Lucy had made the final table. Six players would continue until a winner emerged.

Frankly, he hadn’t expected to see her finish in the money, but there she was. Now she was guaranteed to take home at least twenty thousand, the winnings for sixth place. He was impressed with Lucy’s tenacity. Luck alone couldn’t have taken her this far.

Not that he was going to speak with her during the short break before final play began. He intended to win. And he was certain that she intended to win just as much as he did.

He loved her passion. Damn, he might as well admit it to himself. He loved *her*, loved her quick mind, her never-failing honesty, her determination—and, of course, her sweet little body.

While the TV crew readied themselves for the taping of the final table, Ty ambled around, studying the other players while drinking from his bottle of water. He did his best to keep from making eye contact with Lucy, because it would only lead to his dick hardening, and he needed his blood to stay in his brain.

When the crew was ready, he sat at the table, opposite Lucy. For

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him, none of the other players mattered. What he wanted was a heads-up battle for first between the two of them. He slipped on his clip-on sunglasses, the better to study his opponents without giving anything away.

A fellow Ty had never heard of, the short stack at the table, quickly took sixth place. Fifth went to Dale Land, a Vegas resident Ty had seen at the tables before.

Then, his luck began to sour. Three bad beats later, Ty was knocked out fourth, good for forty-five thou, but hardly the finish he wanted.

After a brief interview with a smiling female who worked with the TV crew, he took his seat to watch Lucy. Though stunned he'd busted out fourth, he was delighted that she was still in the game, though her short stack of chips didn't bode well.

He left his sunglasses on so that he could watch her without her knowing it. She'd taken a page from Jennifer Tilly's book by wearing a tight, low-cut top that threatened to spill her breasts onto the table.

He enjoyed every bit of the view she'd provided. But he was worried about her chances for first.

* * *

Lucy peeked at her hole cards. Bruce Smith, a pro who usually played only high-stakes cash games, had raised. Sam Everett, who had turned pro after big tournament wins in Atlantic City, had re-raised.

She wanted the six-figure winnings almost as badly as she wanted Ty. She could feel his laser-beam gaze on her, despite his attempts to hide it with his clip-ons. At this point, she was flaunting her "girls" as much for him as for their distraction value.

She willed herself to shut out all the noise, all the distractions, including Ty. Especially Ty. She could feel sweat caused by hot spotlights and stress trickling down her back.

She liked her ace-ten of spades in a three-way Texas Hold'em showdown, and decided to raise the re-raise. The other men called.

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Ty's mouth grimaced, and her heart stuttered. Maybe she'd just screwed up by re-re-raising.

The flop came king-queen-three, the king and queen both spades, the three, a diamond. She threw her hair back from her face, but kept her expression impassive. She hadn't screwed up at all. In fact, she liked her chances. She had a straight draw, a straight flush draw, a flush draw, and a royal flush draw, all in one. And all of them would be the nuts, or best possible hands, in the current round of play. That is, as long as another spade showed up on the board.

Bruce raised, but Sam simply called. She studied Sam, wondering what the man might have for pocket cards. She'd put him on small suited connectors, maybe five-four of diamonds. She figured Bruce was out-and-out bluffing.

Still, she had too many outs, or ways to make a winning hand, to check, call, or fold. Her pot odds were great. Maybe if she went all-in, the other two would lay down their hands.

Lucy shrugged. "I'm all in."

Bruce, the chip leader, nodded, throwing down his cards, saying, "Let's gamble." However, Sam folded.

When she looked at Bruce's cards, her stomach had marbles rolling around its bottom.

Looks like I read them both wrong. Bruce wasn't bluffing, though Sam might have been. That was probably why Ty frowned at me—he knows how these two play better than I do.

She stared at her own ace-ten of spades, then at Bruce's ace-jack of diamonds, feeling sweat pop out on her forehead. Waiting for fourth street, the next card, took forever. Finally, the dealer laid it down—five of diamonds.

Now they *both* had a flush draw and a straight draw.

Christ!

Behind her sunglasses, she shut her eyes, not able to bear seeing the

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river card. The crowd roared. She peeked. The river card was a diamond—the eight of diamonds.

What a time for my luck to run out.

She sleep-walked her way through shaking Bruce's and Sam's hands and talking with the smiling lady commentator. It wasn't until she went to Ty that she realized she'd won seventy thousand—more than she made in a year of dealing.

He said nothing, but he put his arm around her and hugged her to his side. She sat beside him, her head on his shoulder and tears of disappointment on her cheeks. She was tired of playing hard to get, because it felt like losing. She wanted Ty, and she would have him, no matter how big a fool she had to make of herself.

With her chips now in Bruce's pile, he was way out in front. Two hands later, he wrested first place from Sam. Amid the noise and excitement, Tyler spoke the first words he'd said to her since early that morning, before the tournament began. He took off his clip-ons, stared into her eyes, and said, "Your re-re-raise was dumb. I taught you better than that."

"Fuck you," she said without animosity. "It was the right call. That hand could have gone either way and you know it." Crossing her arms, she waited for him to snap back at her. Instead, he grinned.

"Spoken like a truly arrogant poker player who knows when she's right. And you *are* right—I was only testing you. How about a drink? I'm buying whatever you want, and lots of it. Finishing third in your first big tournament is something to celebrate."

His face drooped around the same time she felt Rod's hand on the small of her back.

"Hey, honey," he said. "Let's go celebrate your win."

"Duh, I didn't win," she snapped. "I came in third."

"Whatever. Let's go." His hand slid north to rest beneath her breast. One more fraction of an inch, and he'd be copping a feel.

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“Rod,” she said, “I no longer require your services.”

She heard Ty exclaim, “*What?*”

Rod said, “No problem,” and copped the feel he’d obviously decided he deserved before he walked away.

She turned to face Ty. “I hired him eight weeks ago to make you jealous. Have you been?”

He pulled her to him, and his hot breath tickled her ear when he whispered, “Mostly, I wondered why you wanted a guy who’s clearly beneath you. Now that I know it was only a scam, I think you deserve a reprimand, the kind you know that I know how to dish out.”

“Does that mean you’ll have sex with me?” she whispered back.

“Luce,” he said, “you just try and keep me from it.”

* * *

Tyler had blindfolded Lucy in the car before guiding her into his home. As he led her to his play room, a moment’s insecurity gripped him.

What if she doesn’t enjoy the night I have planned for us?

He let the fear go as he positioned her under the hook in the ceiling before removing the black silk covering her eyes. He held his breath, examining her face for the slightest negative expression while she surveyed the room.

“Oh, my,” she breathed. “You do know how to excite a girl.”

He watched her glance wander across the various restraints hanging on the wall, the dildos lined up on a dresser’s top, smallest to largest, and the odd furniture that clearly indicated its use was sexual.

Cupping her chin with one palm, he kissed her softly, without tongue, pushing away her hands when she tried to touch him. Then he peeled off her form-fitting top and removed her bra. Her full, pale breasts were topped with hard, puckered nipples.

He had plans for her nipples.

“Hold your wrists out for me, please.”

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She did so, her gaze never leaving his.

He slipped on the soft suede cuffs, then raised her arms over her head, attaching her to the hook in the ceiling with a quick-release chain. When he stepped back to admire the pretty picture, he heard her quickening breathing.

“You have some lessons to learn, lessons that have nothing to do with poker.” He used his thumbs to rub each nipple, appreciating how her respiration roughened.

“Have you ever been ‘snake-bit’?” he asked. She shook her head.

“You will answer me, ‘yes, sir,’ or ‘no, sir,’” he said, selecting a paddle. “Push your bottom out.”

He landed one fierce swat on her denimed behind, which gave him the pleasure of seeing her dance and moan before responding, “Yes, sir.”

He pulled two small, soft suction cups from the top drawer in the dresser.

“Lick the insides.” He held the suction cups until her tongue had thoroughly wet their insides. Then, he sucked one nipple, pulling on it, encouraging it to grow even harder. Once he’d spent a moment doing so, he repeated his actions on her other nipple.

Then, he squeezed the cups closed, placing them over her wet nubs. When he let them go, the suction held fast, and it made her eyes pop wide.

“Oh, oh, please, it’s sort of painful,” she panted.

“And it’s sort of not, right?”

“Yes sir,” she said, her words trailing off into a moan.

He proceeded to remove her jeans, panties, and heeled ankle-high boots, slipping them back on her feet once the rest of her was naked. “A shame I don’t have any stilettos for you to wear,” he said. “Perhaps we can remedy that next time.”

* * *

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"I'd like that, sir," Lucy murmured, closing her eyes to savor the sensations coursing through her body. Her nipples ached, but in a very, very good way. Her cunt was hot and wet, and her bottom stung from the paddle.

A promising beginning to an interesting night.

She felt his hands on her legs, the fingers skimming up her thighs. They trembled when his fingers played over the outside of her mound.

"I can hardly wait to taste you," he said.

She groaned at the thought.

She watched him place cuffs on her legs, just above her ankle boots, along with a spreader bar that made standing still a bit of a challenge. It also pulled the chain holding her arms above her taut.

"I need you on your tiptoes," he said while carrying a pole with a dildo attached to it. Fresh waves of heat rippled from her face to her toes as he positioned the pole between her legs, raising its height until the dildo was fully inside her.

"Now," he said, "place your heels back on the floor."

"No, I can't," she cried. "I don't have any more room up there. I have to stay on my toes."

"As you wish."

Until that moment, Ty was fully clothed. Her hungry gaze ate up his body as he stripped. His thick, beautifully proportioned cock came into view, and she thought how much she longed for him to slide it inside her.

Her legs had begun to shake with the effort of remaining on her toes, so she lowered her heels a fraction of an inch. Surprised that the pressure in her cunt excited her, she let them rest fully on the floor.

"See, that wasn't too difficult, was it?" he asked, his palms caressing her backside.

"It's a little snug, sir, but it doesn't hurt."

"Good."

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Her eyes tracked him as he picked up a deerskin flogger, and she swallowed with nerves. As if reading her mind, he said, "It'll sting a little, but it's not going to hurt the way you think it will."

Buttery leather strips bit into her bottom, and the effect was more like warmth than burn. The light whipping Ty was giving her butt and thighs had her raising and lowering her heels in order to slide the dildo in and out. After fewer than a dozen lifts, she was jerking up and down as fast as she could manage.

She noticed he was no longer whipping her when she felt his tongue part her labia, licking her clit. Sweat tickled its way down her face and back. Then, she tasted herself on him when he kissed her.

He lowered her wrists a bit, until she could bend at the waist. "Suck me," he ordered.

She complied, slipping her mouth up and down as much as she could while bound, her tongue greedily flicking the length of his cock. It seemed a brief moment before he came, his hands in her hair, his voice a hoarse cry of pleasure.

Once he finished, he raised her arms again, then crushed his mouth against hers, his tongue stabbing insistently. Her entire being felt swollen with lust: her lips, her breasts, her cunt, her clit.

"How do your nipples feel?" he asked, but before she could answer, she sensed something soft and velvety-wet rubbing her clit. She pounded up-and-down on the dildo, crying, "I'm about to come."

Pain that was also pleasure poured into her nipples about the same time she realized that Ty was stroking her clit with his wet, soft cock. He'd removed the suction cups, and the intensity of the sensation made her take several powerful hops, fucking the dildo as hard as she could. Such movements rewarded her with a wall of sensation.

She screamed, her cunt hungry and clenching, her clit tingling, her nipples throbbing, for what seemed a very long time. But it couldn't have been too long, because she'd barely finished when she realized

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that Ty had removed the dildo-on-a-pole and replaced it with his own rigid cock. While he slammed into her, the vibrator he held touched her clit, and the two of them came hard, swaying together as one.

* * *

“I can’t believe it,” the World Poker Tour play-by-play announcer crowed. “A year ago, nobody had heard of Lucy ‘Stoneface’ Brookfield. Now she’s heads-up against her husband, Tyler ‘Poker Stud’ O’Toole.”

“This is the first time a husband and wife have played each other heads-up in a WPT tournament,” the color announcer said.

“Yes, and he’s all in against her, so this may be the final hand.”

Everyone, player, announcer, and fan alike, watched as the cards fell for the flop and the turn.

“He has twenty outs to her two,” the play-by-play announcer said. “But Lucy’s had a horseshoe full of luck pouring over her during this tournament, so it all comes down to this one card. Will her luck hold?”

The dealer turned over the river card, and the crowd went wild.

“Can you believe it! ‘Stoneface’ is our newest World Poker Tour champion,” the play-by-play announcer said while moving toward Ty. “Let’s talk to the second-place finisher first. Ty, how do you feel about losing to your wife?”

Ty noticed Lucy’s smug smile, and said, “You know, sometimes she beats me, and sometimes I beat her. It all evens out eventually.”

And none of you have any idea what I really mean with that comment.

The announcer moved on to Lucy. “What ever made you call his all-in with a ten-deuce?”

She smiled. “Ten-deuce worked for Doyle Brunson, didn’t it?”

“Tell us your reaction to your husband’s comment.”

Ty caught Lucy’s glance, and he shared a smile of secrecy with her. He couldn’t wait to hear her reply.

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“Well,” she said, “I don’t submit to any man at the poker table. But ‘Poker Stud’ is the only player I don’t mind whipping my butt.”

He couldn’t help a small chuckle.

After the interviews were over and the excitement had died down, Ty took his wife’s hand. As they left the casino, he said, “Your win was lucky. You blew a few hands along the way. I think you need a few refresher lessons.”

“How could the luckiest gal in the world refuse an offer of lessons from The Poker Stud?” she said. “Besides, I spent a little money that you don’t know about. I’m looking forward to the stilettos that came with ankle cuffs attached.”

“Losing a tournament has never been so satisfying.”

Ty followed his wife, the better to hold her wrists together behind her back.

BARRIE ABALARD

Barrie has worked as a radio personality, technical writer, taxi driver, bank clerk, and ad copy writer, but she's always come back to her first love, fiction writing. For eleven years, she has written for various spanking-oriented e-publishers. Her credits include the sale of over thirty short stories, several novellas, and two short novels to DisciplineAndDesire.com, for whom she writes as "Belle," and over thirty-five short stories and two short novels to CF Publications, for whom she writes as "Miss Lee." Barrie is married with a grown child and lives in one of the Middle Atlantic states, along with two persnickety cats.

You can learn more about Barrie by visiting her website:

<http://barrieabalard.com>

* * *

***Don't miss Poker Brat, by Barrie Abalard,
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Texan CJ Jackson plays poker for a living, but his heart is never on the line when he charms the ladies—that is, until he meets Kat O'Toole.

Kat prefers civilized men to poker-playing cowboys. But when CJ challenges her to heads-up play for his right to spank her soundly, she finds herself disappointed when he loses.

Can she overcome her winning streak and lasso the cowboy's heart?

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