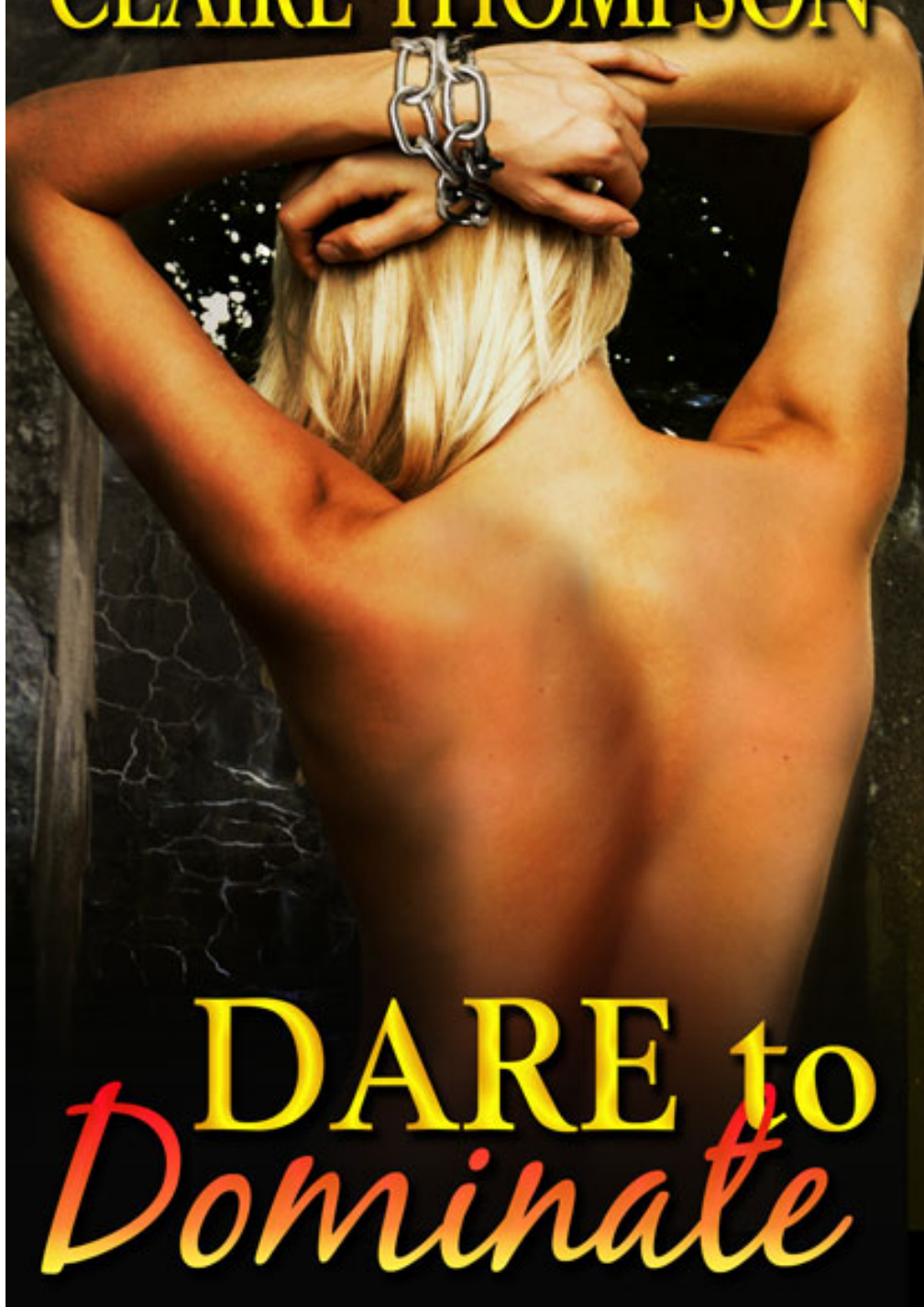


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

CLAIRE THOMPSON



DARE to  
*Dominate*

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Dare to Dominate

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# ***DARE TO DOMINATE***

**Claire Thompson**

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## Chapter One

Jonathan took a long drink from his gin and tonic. He couldn't help the erection pressing uncomfortably against his pants as he watched the woman writhe and heard her theatrical little moans.

She wore black leather wrist cuffs from which she was secured with silver clips to a wooden beam overhead. Her torso was bare, the pert breasts tipped with pink and crisscrossed with red lines from her whipping. She was wearing blue jeans, unzipped against her flat belly. Jonathan found this sexier than if she'd been completely naked.

The man holding the single lash was dressed in black leather from head to toe. He was overweight and quite a bit older than the girl, who couldn't have been much over twenty-one. But Jonathan didn't care about the guy. He'd paid good money to come into Striplokal, a BDSM strip club located in the heart of Munich's Red Light District, and he certainly hadn't paid to look at the men.

Jonathan Goldman, a successful businessman for a prominent New York real estate development firm, had been sent by his company Bergman & Miller to meet with the key players of a German firm who were interested in investing in New York. He'd just completed a very successful negotiation and was enjoying a little R and R.

He enjoyed traveling to Europe. People were so much freer about sexuality than uptight Americans. Even the billboard on the way out from the airport had showed a bare-breasted woman in some ad about skin cream! No one even blinked an eye over it. Sex clubs were everywhere and women went as often as men. It was no big deal.

He especially liked the BDSM clubs where one could get an eyeful for a few Euros. Not that he was really "into" BDSM. Not that he'd actually want to whip a woman. To hold her down and force her to submit to his will like some caveman. No, that wasn't for Jonathan. He was a liberated man, raised by a liberated mother who'd impressed upon him the importance of respecting a woman.

So why did he seek out these clubs? Why did he cruise the Internet for BDSM websites, stroking his cock as he viewed videos depicting girls being held down and ravaged, forced to suck cock, whipped while tied down in chains and leather? Just for a lark. Just harmless fun. A little thrill, an idle fantasy.

That's what he'd say anyway, if he were asked.

Jonathan was thirty-three years old and had never been married. He'd had three serious relationships, the last one for seven years. Finally two months ago Marie had walked out on him when he'd said he wasn't ready for marriage. She said he was incapable of commitment and her biological clock was ticking. Secretly he'd been relieved, though he'd felt sad things hadn't worked out.

"You're just immature," his older sister Caitlyn had said when he'd tried to explain what had gone wrong. "You have to work at a relationship. It's not all roses and sunshine. Me and Jack have fourteen years and twelve of them sucked. You just keep at it. You're never going to find your dream girl—she doesn't exist, so just grow up."

Jonathan wasn't buying it. He was a romantic at heart and he did believe there was someone out there for him, someone he could love and admire and want to fuck every time he looked at her. He just hadn't found her yet.

Just what was this dream girl like? If asked, he would have said she should be strong, secure about herself and happy with who she was. She should be educated and self-sufficient, not clingy or needy or financially dependent. She should be pretty, but it wasn't necessary that she be supermodel sexy. Not too skinny but not obese. Sassy, feisty, hot in bed, insatiable.

That's what he would have said if pressed. But what was his real fantasy? Any or all of those attributes, perhaps, but when his guard was down, alone, a little drunk and feeling blue—what fantasy woman came to comfort him?

This dream girl was on her knees. Naked with a collar of leather around her neck. There were silver loops sewn into the collar every few inches to easily secure her to an overhead hook or a whipping post. Her arms were bound behind her back, tied at the elbow and wrist so her breasts were forced up and out. She was kneeling back on her haunches, her legs spread wide to reveal her pussy. Little gold hoops pierced each outer labium and a satin tie was drawn between them, a symbolic gesture of his ownership. Her head was bowed in proper submissive posture, her eyes on the ground, her lips parted.

This was the image he sometimes allowed himself to see when his hand curled around his cock, pulling it to erection as he thought of the girl, the nameless slave girl who belonged to him. She existed solely for his pleasure, completely devoted to him and utterly in love with him. She wore his brand on her ass, a discreet JG he'd burned into her flesh himself at her insistence. She wanted a permanent mark of ownership—a clear sign she belonged to him and him alone.

Instead of his hand, it was her mouth taking in the length of him as he held her head, pressing the shaft into her throat until her nose touched his pubic bone. She would gag at first, but he would hold her in place, further aroused by the tears rolling down her cheeks as she struggled to accommodate his girth and length. He would feel her throat muscles relax, taking him in fully at last as she surrendered to his power.

He might come down her throat and whip her if so much as a drop escaped her sweet lips. Or he might stop before he came and push her over on her side so he could fuck her while she was still bound, powerless to resist him, her pussy wet as always for him. He might leave her bound and on fire all night, or he might take pity on her and untie her. He might let her play with herself for his amusement, coming only when he said she could.

But she would always sleep in his arms, his lover as well as his slave. His darling as well as his property. Jonathan sighed. This was a secret fantasy, one he barely allowed himself to be consciously aware of. It was aberrant in his mind, proof he was “sick” or at least twisted. It only surfaced when he was close to orgasm, lonely and longing for something he didn’t believe he should have.

He focused again on the stage as the man pulled the girl’s jeans to her knees and proceeded to whip her cute little ass, covered only by thong panties. His cock was raging and he imagined for a moment he was up there with the girl, handling the whip, making her cry...

He shook his head. What was wrong with him? Was he a pervert? Did he really want to hurt a woman? Make her cry, make her beg him to stop? Or to continue? The little act was over. The man let the girl down and carried her from the stage to scattered applause from the jaded audience.

Jonathan sighed. He had a plane to catch in the morning. He paid his bill and made his way out of the smoky bar, walking the three blocks back to his hotel room.

He didn’t notice the woman following him.

\* \* \* \* \*

Laurel hefted her purple backpack over her shoulder, dropping a few crumpled bills on the table where her half empty beer bottle stood. Pulling her soft black wool cape over her shoulders, she whispered in giggling German to the two girls with her and turned her attention to the man as he walked out.

In English she said, “Wish me luck.” They did so, shaking their heads with amusement. Laurel was used to people shaking their heads where she was concerned. At twenty-seven, she had been told by any number of well-meaning family members and friends it was high time she settled down and quit gallivanting around the globe as if she hadn’t a care in the world.

After college she hadn’t felt ready to dive into a career, not even sure what she wanted to do. She had graduated with honors with a degree in international studies and a minor in French, but had only the vaguest notion of what she planned to do with it. So instead she’d spent two years in India, helping to build a Buddhist convent for a bunch of nuns. She’d lived on a kibbutz in Israel as a volunteer for a year before leaving with a drop-dead gorgeous Swede named Sven who’d taken her skiing in the Alps and made delicious love to her until his wife had suddenly appeared and kind of ruined the party.

After a ten-month attempt to settle down at a job with an investment bank headquartered in New York, she’d agreed with her boss that maybe she just wasn’t banker material. Joyously she’d tossed her designer suits, sublet her coveted Manhattan apartment and hit the road, using the money she’d earned playing the stock market in her spare time. She did seem to have a knack for buying low and selling high, a

combination of savvy, instinct and luck working in her favor. And knowing when to cut loose. Laurel knew when to let go. Not only of investments but of men.

She wasn't the type to stay with a fellow past her welcome or let him overstay his. She was free as a bird, ready to move on once the thrill was over. If marriage were in the cards, she hadn't found that particular deck yet. She was in no hurry. So many men, so little time...

She was in Germany visiting friends. Greta, like Laurel, was into BDSM, though much more actively. In fact they'd met at a BDSM play party in Spain that her lover of one week had taken her to. That relationship had melted down one horrible night, the so-called Dom turning out to be little more than a bully.

Jorge had been dominant but without the romance Laurel found necessary to truly submit. He had talked the talk, claiming he loved the intensity of a romantic D/s relationship. But in fact, he just loved the intensity of being completely in control. He didn't really like women, it seemed to Laurel.

She'd been fooled at first by his gallantry. His Spanish dark good looks had perhaps made her ignore her initial instinct that he was trouble. He was so handsome it almost hurt to look at him, and she'd been rather flattered when he'd chosen her over so many beautiful women vying for his attention at the gathering where they'd met.

She'd wanted to believe his chauvinistic attitude was just part of his dominant persona—as he claimed he would make her swoon with passion from his lash and his kiss.

Laurel did love a good whipping, especially with a heavy, multi-tressed suede whip. She loved the buildup—the featherlight strokes teasing and readying the flesh for the intensity to come. Nothing made her hotter than being bound spread-eagle and having her entire body lovingly whipped by a Dom in tune with her needs.

Jorge had done all the right things, at first. For the first few days they'd made mostly vanilla love—with Jorge insisting they needed to develop their bond first. When he'd decided she was ready for more, he'd made love to her, teasing her to arousal with his tongue and his cock but not letting her come. She loved having her orgasm withheld, making it all the more powerful when she was finally granted release. When Jorge had made her wet, he'd told her he wanted to suspend her and whip her to orgasm.

Laurel's first impulse was to refuse. She wanted to go a little slower. She didn't know Jorge well enough to feel comfortable being completely bound and at his mercy. Yet he'd gotten her so hot and he was so persuasive she'd gone along. "But if I'm feeling overwhelmed, I'll say 'butterfly', okay? That's my safe word. Then you stop and let me down, okay?"

"Sure, yes. Absolutely. Butterfly."

He'd hung her by her wrists from a large hook embedded in the ceiling in his bedroom. He'd used cuffs and chain, drawing the chain taut with a little pulley device until she was on tiptoe.



Her heart had begun pounding as he'd raised her higher and higher. She'd been afraid he was going to fully lift her from the ground, putting all the weight of her body on her wrists. He had stopped though, but only barely. Instead of the heavy flogger she loved and had thought he would use, he'd produced a cane.

"Oh no, Jorge. I don't like canes. They're too much for me. The flogger, please."

"Sorry. You don't say what you get, whore. I'm in control now."

*Shit.* She'd known then she was in for it. His entire demeanor had changed, the slow, easy smile he'd shown before now cruel. When she protested in earnest, telling him to let her down, he'd laughed and said, "Cut the crap. You know you want it. Make another sound and I'll gag you."

He had used the cane. No preamble. No warm-up as he sliced it along her ass, catching both cheeks and making her scream. "I said silence!" He'd pulled her head back roughly by the hair. "You've had the all the romance, now comes the pain. This is how I use my girls and you'll learn to love it." He let her head go, moving behind her, the cane slicing the air a split second before it made contact with her body. Pain exploded through Laurel's nerve endings. It wasn't sexy, it wasn't erotic, it wasn't exciting. It was terrifying and it hurt like hell.

"Butterfly! Butterfly!" she'd cried breathlessly, stunned by the savagery of his blows, feeling as if she'd somehow landed in a nightmare.

"Oh spare me. We've only just started. You can take more than that. Way more." Taking a ball gag, he'd secured it around her head as she struggled and twisted to get away from him. He slapped her face, which stilled her for a moment, allowing him to push the large rubber ball into her mouth and buckle the gag around her head.

Her heart had pounded so hard in her chest she thought she would faint. This couldn't be happening. She couldn't have been so stupid, so blindsided by his earlier sweet attentions. Laurel Jordan was always in control, always on top of her game. How had she so badly miscalculated with this man?

He'd caned her for some twenty minutes, covering her ass, thighs and breasts with welts – white lines that turned to dark red as the blood surged just below the skin. After the initial terrified struggle, she'd sagged helplessly in her bonds, praying for it to end.

When he'd finally let her down, he'd had the gall to want to fuck her. "Come on, baby. You know you loved it. All women are whores at heart – whores who need a good whipping before they're fucked to teach them their place."

After he had let her down, he'd moved to the bed, stripping off his clothes and fondling his erect cock as he beckoned her to join him.

"If you touch me, I'll fucking kill you," she had said in a low voice, steely with rage. Her skin felt as if someone had set fire to it. She was sick with anger and lingering adrenaline. Her number one thought was to get out of there as fast as she could. He made no move to stop her, just watching her as he massaged his cock.

As she'd pulled on her clothing and grabbed her backpack, he'd sneered, "What a poser you are. You told me you were a masochist, but you're just a cunt."

"How dare you, you asshole," she'd shot back. "You're a sadistic bully posing as a Dom who doesn't have a clue about what a loving D/s relationship entails. First and foremost it's about trust, you dumb fuck. And you betrayed mine. I should call the cops on you, you prick. If I never see you again, it will be too soon."

He had laughed. "Yeah, call the cops. What'll you tell them? You only wanted to be whipped but not caned? You let me tie you up but you didn't really mean to? Go ahead, I'm sure they'll be very sympathetic to a stupid American cunt and believe your word over a prominent Spanish citizen."

She'd slammed the door, furious but also aware he was right. She wouldn't go through the humiliation of pressing charges. Nor would she allow one bad BDSM experience to turn her off from the scene. She'd just be more careful going forward. Way more careful.

She watched the blond for a while. He had a nice face, not overly handsome—his nose was a little too large to be classically beautiful—but there was a kindness in his expression as well as something else. Something sexy and indefinable she would like to learn more about. "Who's that guy?" she asked Greta.

"Some tourist, who knows. Why?"

"He's hot, that's why. And he's into what he's watching. Look at his face. Look at his hand idly laid over his lap to hide his erection. Look at his tongue sliding over his lips as that poor girl's ass turns red. He wants to do that to her."

"Or have it done to him!" Monique laughed.

Greta and their friend Monique looked over at the man. His profile was strong, his features rugged. He was tan, with the sort of golden blond hair that streaks almost white in summer. He was a tall man with a broad chest and shoulders beneath his perfectly cut suit jacket. Greta and Monique both agreed he was very good-looking.

"But he's probably just another uptight American getting his secret jollies looking at the decadent Europeans so he can go home and tell his wife how disgusting it all was and how good it is to be home in the good ole hypocritical US of A."

Laurel laughed and said, "Hey, don't forget I'm an American! I might just resent your remarks, young lady!"

"Well, you're an exception. At least from what I've seen."

"Thank you, I think," Laurel rejoined, laughing. "Oh look! He's getting up."

"He's leaving from the looks of it. Going back to his hotel to jerk off, no doubt," Greta added dryly.

"Damn! I was going to go over there. Introduce myself. Ask what a guy like him was doing in a joint like this!" Laurel laughed, but in fact she had thought about going over, sitting near him, maybe sending a drink his way and seeing how he reacted.

There was something about him. Something in the way he held himself that Laurel found intriguing. She had a sort of sixth sense about men and she was rarely wrong. Her gut would tell her after a few minutes if they were for her or not and, especially

after Jorge, she'd learned to listen to her gut and thus save herself heartache later. But she needed to talk to him, to get a sense of him face-to-face. He couldn't leave!

Yet even as she thought this, he was on his feet, pulling on his coat and heading for the door. "Shit! He's getting away," she said.

"So, go after him. Make his night."

Laurel wasn't sure if Greta were kidding or not, but she decided it was a good idea. What the hell—she was leaving for New York in two days anyway. Why not have a one-night stand with a sexy American, if he *was* even American. She'd better move if she was going to find out!

Hurriedly she kissed both friends, saying she'd call in the morning. It didn't even occur to her she might not be spending the night with the total stranger she was going to follow. Laurel Jordan never considered failure.

## Chapter Two

"Excuse me, I think you dropped this."

The man turned around. So he understood English at least. Good start. Laurel held up the black wool scarf she had just unwound from her own neck. She'd followed the man to his hotel a few blocks from the club. The finest hotel in the area, she noted, as he'd nodded to the doorman who impassively opened the large glass doors for him.

She'd nodded to the doorman as well, saying in German, "Cold as a witch's tit, eh?" The man had done a slight double take and then grinned broadly as she sailed past him, her eye still on the broad back covered in a fine camelhair coat.

As he turned around, she now noted his eyes, a dark, rich chocolate brown—unusual in a person with such blond hair. She felt his appraising gaze as his eyes quickly swept her. He smiled and said, "No, uh, sorry. I have my scarf." He touched a tan scarf at his neck that perfectly matched his coat.

"Well then, guess I've got me a scarf." Laurel grinned, draping it over her neck. She stuck out her hand and said, "Laurel Jordan, pleased to meet you."

He automatically took her hand, shaking it firmly. "Jonathan Goldman." They stood smiling at one another for a moment as she waited. After a beat he said, "Uh, would you like to go into the bar and have a drink, perhaps? Are you staying here?"

Bingo.

"I'd love to," Laurel assented as if it were a brilliant idea, and one she never would have thought of on her own. She didn't add that no, she would never drop four hundred dollars a night for a room, no matter how posh the hotel. "I'm staying with friends," she said airily.

They settled themselves at the bar. Jonathan ordered another gin and tonic, Laurel asked for Cabernet. As they sipped their drinks, Jonathan said, "So you're American. What brings you to Germany?"

"The tail end of a few months of bumming around the Continent. I'm going to give it another try back in New York. I have an idea for a club there and a few friends with too much money for their own good willing to invest in it. I've already found the location and I have a partner too."

"You're from the city? I live in Manhattan. Work for a real estate development firm. Just finished closing a deal here with a German firm that wants to do business in the States. Small world."

"It is. No matter where I go, I run into people from New York." *Though I don't always follow them from strip clubs*, she thought, inwardly grinning.

"So what's this idea of yours for a club?"

Laurel took a drink of her wine and said, "A BDSM club. But not some dump in the basement of a clothing boutique or a warehouse, like most of them. Not a poser club for wannabe players dressing up in leather and pretending they have a clue. No, this would be something different—a full dungeon, professional Doms, paid membership. Very upscale."

Jonathan's eyes widened and he raised his eyebrows. "BDSM! Sadomasochism, whips and chains, all that stuff?"

Laurel laughed at the surprise in his voice. "Uh, yeah. You've heard of it?" Her tone was sardonic.

"Well, sure, yeah. Catwoman in latex and stilettos wielding a whip over a little naked bald guy who's licking her boot?"

Laurel laughed. "Oh stop. Surely you're not that naïve. Even if you are American."

Jonathan colored slightly and took a long drink of his gin and tonic. "So what would make your club different from the usual black walls, porn videos, fat girls in leather corsets and miserable lonely men in trench coats?"

"Sounds like you've been to a few of the clubs, huh, Jonathan?" She grinned, dimples appearing in each cheek as she watched him blush.

"Well, uh, you know. Passing through..."

"Passing through? So you have no fantasies of your own personal slave girl? Of having her meet you naked at the door each night, a whip in her mouth, forehead touching the floor, ass in the air?"

"Jesus," Jonathan said. "No! I mean, I respect women."

"So? What's that got to do with what moves you sexually? With what turns you on?"

"Well, I mean, it's just, I would never, you know, hurt a woman. Degrade her."

"There's nothing degrading about consensual submission," Laurel said softly, putting her hand lightly over his. Jonathan didn't pull away, instead narrowing his eyes as he regarded her.

Laurel wondered if he liked what he saw. She knew she was good-looking with dark hair that fell in soft waves, large green eyes and fine, clear skin. Even at twenty-seven she barely needed and rarely used makeup. Her body was long and lean, the muscles a result of hard work and hard play. The idea of joining a gym to work out made her laugh—why pay to jump up and down and lift things? Why not just get out there and plant a garden or climb a mountain? Do something useful or do something fun. Life was too short to spend time sweating in a mirrored room with a bunch of overweight women jumping in place to bad disco music.

He wasn't exactly falling over himself for her as so many guys did but she liked that. He didn't send off that desperate vibe that was so unappealing in a man. He seemed confident, if a little guarded, about his sexual predilections. But maybe he was just being careful on her account—not wanting to shock her with his sadistic fantasies.

If he even had them! Maybe Greta had been right and he was actually a sub! Watching the girl onstage with his hand over his cock, but in his mind's eye it was himself on that stage. God, maybe he was gay too! A gay sub – terrific.

She smiled ruefully at the conversation in her head. "You have the most adorable dimples," Jonathan said suddenly. He still hadn't pulled his hand from beneath hers. Okay, not gay.

"And you have gorgeous teeth," she responded. "I was always a sucker for good teeth." They grinned at each other for a few seconds and Jonathan withdrew his hand. He gestured toward the waitress for another round.

"So when are you heading back to the States?" Laurel asked casually.

"Well, tomorrow actually."

"Tomorrow! Doesn't give us much time to get to know each other, huh?" She watched him and could almost see the wheels spinning in his head as he calculated his ticket times and weighed the risks and possibilities. He looked at his watch. It was already near midnight.

He had taken off his coat and suit jacket, and now unbuttoned the top two buttons of his shirt. The tie had probably come off after he'd closed the deal with the Germans. She noted the fine linen of his shirt and the gold cufflinks at his sleeves. As he opened the shirt a little, she couldn't help but admire his thick neck, not muscle-bound, but strong and masculine. She liked a big man – someone who could give her a good fight when she wrestled him but who would always win.

She felt her pussy moisten and tingle as he smiled again, square white teeth against tan skin. When he smiled, his face creased up, smile lines at the corners of his eyes and his mouth. He looked like a man who smiled often.

She licked her lips, her eyes on his, waiting. Either he'd invite her up to his room now or he'd stand up, say how tired he was and how he hoped they'd meet again soon. She found she was eagerly hoping for the former.

He stood and said, "Say, would you like to come up to my suite? Maybe have a little nightcap there? Unless you have to get back to your friends?"

Ah, that was good. He had given her a graceful out in case she found him too forward. His *suite*. Not bad. Laurel didn't especially care about money – she had plenty of her own – but she did admire competence. And clearly this Jonathan Goldman had whatever it took to make it in his business.

She stood as well and said, "I'd love to come up for a bit. That would be nice." She followed him to the bank of elevators. As they glided silently up a few flights, Jonathan stood at ease. When the doors opened, he gestured her out. "The last door down there on the left."

He unlocked the room with his keycard and again gestured for her to enter first. A gentleman. The room was typical overdone lavish European with too much brocade, silk and crystal, but it was certainly comfortable. She sat on a couch while Jonathan went to the little minibar. "What'll you have? They have everything in this thing."

Laurel joined him by the bar. "Oh! I love those tiny bottles! They're so cute, like they were made for little miniature people in a miniature house." Jonathan laughed as Laurel touched and examined the various little bottles of liquor before settling on Grand Marnier. She took two, pouring them both into the glass Jonathan handed her.

He chose a Cognac and together they settled on the couch. Laurel kicked off her boots, tucking her legs up under herself. She was wearing ripped jeans and a brightly patterned hand-woven sweater she'd bought in Sri Lanka. It was hot in the room. "Do you mind if I take this off?"

"Of course not. It's hot in here. The thermostat doesn't seem to respond so I end up cracking a window to sleep." He watched as she pulled the sweater over her head, shaking her hair free. Underneath she wore a man's sleeveless white T-shirt with nothing beneath that. Her breasts were large but firm, held up by strong pectoral muscles. She rarely wore a bra and tonight was no exception. She felt her nipples distend and harden under his gaze. His smile had faded, his eyes hooded as he stared at her.

Laurel pulled off her socks, revealing straight, pretty toes, the nails painted pearly pink. She tucked her feet up under her body, sitting cross-legged on the couch. She took a sip of her brandy and gazed back at him. She could feel the sexual tension in the room and she hugged her torso, suddenly shy. She waited to see if he would lean over and kiss her.

Instead he sat back and said, "So we were talking downstairs about BDSM. About D/s relationships. You said something that intrigued me. You said there's nothing degrading about consensual submission. What does that mean exactly?"

He leaned toward her a little, his expression sincere. She smiled, delighted he had brought the topic back up. It was rather clear whatever prurient interest he'd had at the club, he must have little or no actual experience himself in the scene. She sighed a little at the thought. She didn't like the idea of "teaching" someone how to dom her. That would kind of defeat the purpose surely. But he was so good-looking, clearly a nice guy, and there was at least some interest on his part, so she swallowed her impatience and said, "Just that when two people agree that a certain behavior is desirable and sexy, and they both want it, there's nothing degrading about it."

"I guess you could say degradation is in the eye of the beholder. Some couples might freak out over oral sex, for example, with the guy sententiously announcing he would never 'degrade' his woman by making her suck his penis. And maybe for her it really would be degrading. But for some other couple, it might be their favorite thing—a huge turn-on to both of them."

"That makes sense. You sure jump right the point, don't you?" Jonathan laughed. "Very cosmopolitan in your outlook, seems to me."

"Hey, I just call it like I see it, I guess. Sex and sexuality are just natural parts of what we are, you know? And different people are hardwired differently. Some guys

like guys, some girls like girls, some men like to be tickled 'til they piss in their pants, some women like to be tied down and whipped as a warm-up to a good fucking."

"And you," Jonathan said softly. "You would fit in that last category?"

"Yes," she said simply.



## Chapter Three

She smelled like heaven—some delicate perfume and her own sweet essence, he suspected. Her lips were lush—full and dark pink. Her skin looked creamy-soft. She was like a fresh-faced ad for Noxzema or something. He wanted to kiss those lips, stroke that cheek.

Was he reading the cues right? Her breasts were gorgeous. They looked firm and juicy—good enough to eat. She was leaning toward him, her lips slightly parted. As she sipped her Grand Marnier, she watched him over the rim of the glass. He could almost hear the “come-hither” in her demeanor.

Was he supposed to pull a whip out about now and start using it on her? What was she expecting from him? An image of that German woman on the stage at the club flashed by his mind’s eye, her jeans pulled down to her knees, her head falling back, her body crisscrossed with long thin welts...

Jonathan swallowed hard. He drank the rest of his brandy in one gulp. He was supposed to leave in a little over ten hours, returning to the United States. Did he make the moves on this gorgeous girl, knowing he might never see her again? Actually, that in itself had a certain allure.

If she rejected him, fine, he never had to see her again. If she accepted him...well...he could do whatever he wanted, take risks he wouldn’t normally take, and if it didn’t work out, oh well, he never had to see her again.

Laurel leaned back against the couch, her nipples poking provocatively against the cotton of her T-shirt. Jonathan licked his lips, imagining rolling one of those nipples between thumb and forefinger, imagining her jeans down around her knees, her head back...

Jesus. He was in a hotel suite halfway around the world with a lovely young woman who had plenty of liquor in her and only cotton and torn denim between him and her naked body. “Stand up,” he said suddenly.

“Scuse me?” Laurel said, tilting her head at him.

“You heard me. Stand up. I want to see your body. Stand up and turn slowly for me.”

“What are you...?” Something in his expression must have stopped her, convinced her he meant business. Slowly she stood, unfolding gracefully as she drew her bare feet from under her body. Her breasts were so full, so lush, he wanted to reach over and grab them. Instead he said, “Turn around. Slowly. I want to see your ass.”

“Really. We’ve just met—” She grinned at him, tossing her hair coquettishly.

"Stop. Do what I tell you. Now." His voice was firm. Not angry but authoritative. Jonathan felt his cock engorge painfully as Laurel actually began to obey. He saw the slight flush on her cheeks as she turned away from him, her hair partially obscuring her face.

Her ass was perfect—round and full, completely filling out the denim of her tight jeans. Jonathan's mouth actually watered as he looked at her. Did he dare? She was clearly into BDSM, into dominance and submission, at least theoretically. She had answered simply and directly when asked if she was into whips.

Still, Jonathan had learned over the years not everything women said always jived with what they actually wanted. Or what they would permit. Yet there she was, her back to him now, letting him ogle her ass.

Deciding to go for it, Jonathan said, "Take down your jeans. Just to your knees."

"Just like the girl at Striplokal. You like to watch, huh?" Laurel's voice was taunting, the sneer implicit. Yet she remained standing, facing the wall.

Jonathan felt heat lick his face as he realized she must have seen him at the BDSM club, watching the girl on stage get whipped, his expression no doubt as revealing and goofy as any typical American tourist.

Then he remembered with a rush how they'd met. She'd come on to him with a line about a scarf. A scarf he was now pretty certain actually belonged to her. Which meant she'd followed him all the way from the club to the hotel! So *she* was after *him*!

He was glad she was still facing away from him and hadn't seen the series of emotions playing over his face. Instead of confronting her, he simply said, "I do. I also like to participate, but that can come later. For now, show me. Take down your pants like a good little girl and let me see that ass."

When she didn't immediately react, Jonathan felt a sudden surge of irritation. Had she just been leading him on with all the talk about submission and whips? Was she just a cock-tease who liked to follow strange men and come on to them? Suddenly he felt as if he had a right to see this girl's ass, even as he knew how insane that was.

He wasn't like that! Marie would definitely not have recognized him at this moment. It must have been his lingering euphoria over the huge deal he'd closed that afternoon. And the image of the sexy German girl onstage. The several drinks he'd had since early evening. And the very real attraction toward this beautiful, enigmatic woman standing only a few feet away from him, waiting to see what he'd do next.

It was his call. This was the moment. Either she obeyed or the game was up. In which case, he'd wish her good luck and send her packing. He could use the sleep anyway.

"Laurel," he said softly. "I know there's no particular reason for you to obey me other than because I want you to. I'm not a Dom. Whatever that even means. I like the idea of a sexually submissive woman. I find the possibility of exploring a D/s relationship exciting, even dangerous, but for me that's what it would be, an exploration."

"I think you're beautiful and sexy. You turn me on. I'd like to see you naked. I would like it to start with your pants. You can either choose to obey me or you can pull your sweater back on, take your scarf," he paused, having put a slight emphasis on the second *your*, "and say good night. I'll call down to the doorman to get you a cab to wherever you're going."

She could have argued. He was half expecting her to turn around and ask him who the fuck he thought he was to have invited her up to his rooms and then demand she strip for him, a total stranger.

He waited, feeling the world tilt in the balance, realizing he'd lied to himself earlier that it didn't matter which way it went. For a second he wished he could take back everything he'd said. Start over. Put it back to vanilla.

His heart was tapping against his ribs as she lifted those slender arms and moved them in front of her. She was opening her jeans!

Slowly she slid the soft, worn denim fabric down past those delicious globes. She was wearing white cotton bikini panties. This was somehow sexier than if she'd been in a black lace thong. She pushed the pants down to her knees, just as he'd ordered and stood still, her back straight, her arms again at her sides.

Jonathan felt a curious clutch at his heart. She was breathtakingly lovely and somehow so innocent standing there with no real idea what he might do to her. Why was she taking such a chance with him? Was he such an obviously "good guy"? So clearly a milquetoast kind of fellow who would never dare take advantage of a young woman alone in his suite with no one to witness his actions?

He felt his blood rise, his cock straining in his pants as a sudden fantasy of pulling her to the ground, ripping those little-girl panties from her ass and fucking her silly raced through his mind. He swallowed. She was wildly sexy, standing so submissively with her pants around her knees, but he would not betray that trust. He would not give in to those base instincts. At least not yet. Not until he was sure she wanted it too.

"Laurel," he said aloud. "You have the sexiest ass I've ever seen. Did you know that?"

She giggled a little bit and said, "Hey, Jonathan. I did what you said. Did I pass the audition? Can I sit down now?"

He suddenly felt like a cad, making her stand there with her face to the wall while he sat on the comfortable couch watching her perform for him. "Yes, of course. You can pull your pants back up if you wish."

Instead of doing so, Laurel kicked them away, settling back on the couch across from him and again tucking her legs under herself like a little girl. He could see the outline of her pussy lips, covered in demure white cotton. The impulse to rip those panties from her body almost overcame him. Laurel saw the direction of his gaze. Instead of covering herself, she just smiled and said, "Mind if I have a little more brandy? It's my favorite."

Jonathan stood and moved to the minibar, taking two more miniature bottles from the rack and bringing them to Laurel. He sat next to her on the couch, their thighs touching as he poured each bottle into her snifter. He handed her the glass and said, "To your health."

She took a healthy swig and set the glass down. "Want to taste it?" But instead of offering him the glass, she leaned over, her face almost touching his, her eyes closing for a kiss. He understood and moved closer, his lips touching hers.

She kissed him, slipping her orange-brandied tongue between his lips as she reached up, touching the back of his neck with her cool fingers. Jonathan kissed her back, thinking he'd never tasted anything as sweet as this sexy, perfect girl. He pulled her up into his arms, crushing those delicious breasts against his chest.

They kissed for several minutes. When he finally let her go, she smiled up at him, her face flushed, her eyes bright. "My, my, Mr. Goldman. Where did you learn to kiss like that?" He grinned at her, starting to lean forward to kiss her some more, but she stopped him.

"No, wait," she said. "I want to feel your skin on mine." Long, slender fingers moved to his shirt as she began to unbutton it. He noticed her fingernails, painted the same pink as her toenails, not too long to hinder what she was doing. Could she feel his heart pounding as she opened the buttons, one by one?

"Oooo," she said, her voice a purr, "I love a man with chest hair! Yours is so soft. So silky sexy. And your muscles. Hey, you're hiding a very buff body behind that Wall Street getup, aren't you?"

She laughed, her voice teasing. Jonathan couldn't help but puff up just a little as she pressed her hands over his chest, feeling the muscles. He was strong and had always built muscle easily without trying. He knew women liked it. The muscles, along with his height of six feet three, made them feel feminine, or so he'd been told.

Laurel pulled his shirt all the way open and moved her hands down over his flat, firm belly. His cock was straining up toward her, but she stopped at his belt. Surely she could see the clear outline of his painfully erect cock in his wool pants. Sitting back, she said softly, her voice almost shy, "Should I take my shirt off too?"

"I insist," Jonathan answered, his blood boiling for her. He watched as she took the hem of her T-shirt in both hands and lifted the shirt over her head. Her round breasts bounced free as she tossed the shirt over the back of the couch. As she sat in only her panties, he saw her nipples were erect, dark pink like her lips.

He bent over, taking one nipple in his mouth, rolling it against his tongue. Lightly he bit down, pulling the nipple taut, drawing a moan from the girl. He felt the nipple swell and bit just a little harder, feeling his power as she gasped, her breathing becoming labored.

He moved to the other nipple, licking and biting it as well, loving the moans he could wrest from her. How might she moan, how might she cry, if she felt his hard palm smacking across that perfect ass? Or the kiss of a lash striking her back?

Jonathan's cock was going to explode if he didn't do something. As he continued to kiss and lick her nipples, he opened his belt, unzipping the pants over his huge erection. He felt her hands as he continued to suckle at her breasts. Sure fingers reached beneath the band of his underwear, curling around his shaft as her other hand pressed down farther to cup his balls.

Jonathan knew he was going come in about ten seconds if she kept that up. He was thirty-three, for Christ's sake, not eighteen! To save himself that embarrassment, Jonathan pulled away, standing up from the couch. Laurel let him move away, falling back on the couch, her nipples shining with his kisses, her mouth slack.

Leaning over, he scooped the girl up in his arms, carrying her into the bedroom. She didn't protest. Instead she wrapped her arms around his neck, nuzzling against his chest as he walked.

He tossed her on the king-sized bed and kicked his pants off, along with his boots and socks. He pulled down his underwear, his eyes on the girl. She was lying on her back, her legs pressed together, her arms wrapped just under her breasts, forcing them up and together like round, lovely peaches on a plate. Her eyes locked on his groin as he stripped.

His cock, which was as big as the rest of him, sprang free, fully erect, bobbing lewdly toward her. She actually licked her lips, looking like a girl being teased with a cone of her favorite ice cream. Jonathan couldn't help but grin.

He had planned to lie over her and feel her sweet body beneath his, but before he could do so, she was up on her knees, bending her head down to take his cock into her mouth as he stood by the side of the bed.

Sheer buttery pleasure melted over him as her hot little mouth moved skillfully up and down his shaft. "You have such a gorgeous cock," she whispered, looking up at him with big green eyes, her mouth wrapped around the head of his shaft. "Mmmm, it tastes like cotton candy. I could do this all night!" She closed her eyes, her expression ecstatic as she licked and sucked him, her hands wrapped around the base of his cock and cupping his balls.

He grabbed her head, pulling her closer so she could take the shaft deeper. She pulled back, resisting him it seemed. Something about this gesture ignited something primal in Jonathan. He pulled her again toward him, forcing his cock deeper into her mouth, into her throat. Laurel gagged a little and tried to pull back again.

Normally Jonathan would have immediately let her go. Indeed, Marie had made a point of occasionally bestowing this great "gift" of oral sex upon him, making it very clear it was a huge sacrifice on her part and done only out of duty and love. She'd convinced him no woman really liked to suck a man's cock, but it was expected and so they did it. He had believed her since neither of his prior girlfriends had been especially skillful or desirous of pleasing him in this way.

But something about tonight, about Laurel, about their talk of submission and dominance, made him forget his normal hesitation and guilt. He held Laurel's head

still, feeling the back of her throat hot and soft against his cock. She stopped gagging and stopped resisting him.

He held her that way a moment longer and then released her head. To his delighted surprise, she didn't pull back sputtering and gasping. She remained in position a few seconds longer of her own volition before slowly pulling back, her lips creating perfect suction against him.

She looked up at him, her expression intense, full of lust and desire and something else. Submission?

Jonathan moaned as she moved back down again, taking him as deep as before, this time with completely relaxed throat muscles. Had it been his holding her head still, his forcing her to accept his cock that had allowed her to relax her throat, had made her face flush with desire?

Laurel continued to kiss and fondle Jonathan's cock until he knew he would explode in her mouth. He didn't want to come yet, not yet. He wanted to savor this pleasure, this perfect girl, for as long as possible.

"Get on your hands and knees," he said in a firm, authoritative voice. Without hesitation, Laurel did as she was told. She was still wearing those little cotton panties. Jonathan crouched behind her and pulled them down her thighs, tossing them aside.

He rubbed his hands over her lush ass, grazing between the crack, moving lower to find the sweet wetness between her legs. Jesus, she was sopping! He was annoyed with himself because he kept comparing, but the image of Marie floated by, poor Marie who always had to use lubricant to "accommodate" him, and who intimated it was his fault she wasn't wet.

He knelt behind her, nestling his cock between her butt cheeks as he held her by the hips. She moaned, pushing wantonly back at him as the tip of his cock touched her pussy lips.

He entered her, dimly aware he wasn't using protection, not caring enough to do anything about it. She felt so good, so hot, her muscles clamping around him as he slammed into her, forcing a grunt.

"You're hurting me!" she cried.

Her cries fired his blood as he ignored her protests. He grabbed her hips, fucking her hard and fast, aroused by her whimpers, turned on by her struggle. She tried to fall forward onto the bed but he wouldn't let her, holding her firmly by the hips as he pummeled her sex, his blood raging with lust.

Slowly she stopped struggling, instead moving in time with him, her breathing deep and loud through parted lips. Jonathan reached under her, finding her sex, spreading the labia, lightly teasing her clit. She was soaking wet, her juices down her thighs and on his balls. The air was rife with the heady scent of her sweet musk. As he massaged her clit, Laurel moaned and thrust against him, her breathing staccato, punctuated with cries of pleasure.

On a whim, Jonathan seized a handful of her hair and pulled her head back so he could kiss her mouth. The gesture was rough and he pulled her hair hard as his lips sought hers. Laurel bucked against his fingers as she kissed him back, her tongue entwining with his, her eyes shut.

All at once she began to tremble, arching and shuddering against his hand and cock. He let her hair go, catching her body in an embrace as he pummeled her, feeling her ride over the crest of an orgasm, threatening to take him with her. He tried to pull away, to withdraw so he didn't leave his seed inside her, but she reached back, holding him, begging him to come inside her.

"Please! It's okay! I'm on the Pill. Please, I want it." His body took over as he jerked and spasmed inside her, a low moan of pleasure rumbling from his throat as he orgasmed. He collapsed against her, crushing her beneath him as they fell together to the bed. He could feel her heart pounding against his chest. She was like a little bird beneath him, making him feel powerful and strong and also tender.

He rolled off her, pulling her toward him so she curled into him, her face hidden against his chest. Softly he stroked her hair as they both came slowly back to reality. He wanted to kiss her again, to tell her he loved her though he knew this was absurd. He'd been rough with her, forcing her to take his cock, slamming into her, pulling her head back by the hair. She'd seemed to love it, but now in the cold light of post-coital reality, would she hate him for it?

Jonathan lay still, hoping to prolong the moment before she told him she had never been so ill-treated in her life. Eventually she lifted her head, but instead of a curse, she whispered, "Wow. Can we do that again?"

## **Chapter Four**

Laurel touched her nipples, idly teasing them to erection as she stared into space. She glanced at the man sitting next to her, his face stuck in his book. Thank God. Laurel couldn't stand sitting next to someone who talked all the time, especially on transatlantic flights.

She'd been a little worried when at the start of the flight he'd rambled a bit in German about never having flown overseas and how disconcerting it would be to fly over an ocean for hours at a time. Several stiff drinks had seemed to calm him however, and he'd slept the first half of the flight.

Her roaming hands under her shirt were discreetly hidden beneath the blanket the flight attendant had given her. She looked out the window at the huge glowing ball of orange sun suspended over the ocean.

Having left the day before she did, Jonathan must be back in New York by now, sleeping off his jet lag or already hard at work at the office. Or in the arms of his wife?

He'd said he was single and she had no particular reason to doubt it, indeed even to care. At least not at first. He'd surprised her. She'd expected someone who was "Dom curious", since he'd been so aroused at the strip club and since he'd wanted to talk about the scene with her.

She hadn't expected his natural dominance—the forceful way he'd made her suck his cock, the way he'd taken her from behind, rough and sure and utterly delicious. She'd had him pegged as a good-looking stud muffin who was probably sexually skillful but not aggressive or confident in his fledgling fantasies.

What a thrilling surprise when he'd forced her head down onto his cock, making her gag but also tapping into that deeply ingrained masochistic streak in her. His cock was delicious, hard as steel beneath satin skin, thick and long and made for worshipping.

Oh! And when he picked her up, carrying her in his arms as if she weighed nothing, throwing her on the bed like some conquering pirate...it made her wet now just to remember it. And what came after! The rough, exciting sex and then his sweet, gentle caress as he'd held her tenderly in his arms.

He had said he wasn't a Dom but he could have fooled her! Maybe he was inexperienced, untried, but she sensed a dominant passion in him she would have loved to explore for another day or three or twenty...

They'd stayed awake all night, dozing intermittently in each other's arms between bouts of passionate lovemaking. He hadn't used any toys—no whips or crops or even his hand on her ass—but it hadn't mattered. As he held her down, his strong hands



closing over her wrists as he pulled her arms high overhead, she'd felt his total control and surrendered herself to it.

Toward morning, when dawn was graying the sky outside his hotel room window, she'd wanted to do something extraordinary. She'd wanted to whisper "I love you" to a man she'd only met the night before. Of course she hadn't. It would have been absurd and far too risky. Laurel never wore her heart on her sleeve. She'd learned the hard way men didn't like to feel pressured into love.

Instead she'd contented herself with kissing his entire body, tiny little kisses on every inch of his skin. He'd lain still, his eyes closed, a small smile on his lips as he allowed her to do this, only his rising cock betraying his conscious state.

She'd half expected him to cancel his flight and stay in bed with her. But when his seven a.m. wake-up call came, he'd stood, stretching gloriously. "How 'bout some room service before I head to the airport?"

She'd forced the pout away from her face, instead admitting she was starving. After a quick shower, they'd eaten a huge breakfast of buttery scrambled eggs, fresh rolls, steaming coffee with cream and a big bowl of delicious, sweet strawberries. He'd finished eating before she had and moved around the room packing his things.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say, "Are you sure you have to go?" But she didn't. She had no intention of asking if it hadn't occurred to him as well. Let him go. She would be in New York herself within a few days. If he wanted to see her again, he'd find a way.

And to his credit, he had. He'd even asked if she could change *her* flight and fly back with him. She'd said no as she still had things to pack at Greta's house and wanted a chance to say goodbye to her friends. It felt good to be the one who said no. It had made her feel more in control. Laurel, like many so-called submissives, had a great deal of trouble giving over control of any aspect of her life, most especially her emotions. Her strong reaction to Jonathan had disconcerted her and left her off balance. To be the one to say no" had righted her a bit, even as it had made Jonathan frown.

She'd ridden with him in the taxi to the airport where they smooched like kids in the backseat most of the way, no doubt to the amusement of the cabdriver. Jonathan had given her his business card, scrawling his home number and email address on the back. She'd written her number and email address on the back of a second card and handed it back to him.

At the airport curb he'd kissed her one last time and handed the driver a wad of bills that would cover her trip back to Greta's. On the ride back, the driver had said in English, "Boyfriend, huh?"

"No, just a lover," she answered in flawless German. He'd laughed, nodding knowingly.

"Americans," he'd rejoined, disdain dripping, assuming she was German as most Germans did. Laurel was fluent in German, French and Italian and got by in Spanish as well. After college, she'd never studied formally—she just loved languages and had a

facility that came naturally. She always sought out local people, immersing herself in the culture of whatever country she was crashing that month.

Back at Greta's, her girlfriend was eager for details. Laurel had found herself curiously silent on the subject. Usually she would dissect her latest "conquest" with her friends, brutally examining their every virtue and flaw.

Now she only mumbled noncommittally that he was a very nice guy who she hoped to see again when she returned to New York. Greta had smiled knowingly. "Oh my God," she'd laughed. "If I didn't know you better, I'd say our little Laurel is in love! Say it isn't so!"

Laurel had given an embarrassed laugh before shrugging it off. "He's probably married or a closet gay," she grinned, "with my luck."

Now she was winging her way back to the States. She reached in her purse, tucked under the seat in front of her, feeling amidst the loose change, crushed packets of crackers, tissues, tampons and lip balm until she found the little card. She'd handled it so much in the day and a half since she'd said goodbye that it was bent on one corner and slightly gray.

She'd already memorized his phone number and his email address without trying. She thought about the Wall Street address on the card, thought about him sitting thirty stories high in some skyscraper, a phone to his ear, a saucy little secretary hovering nearby to do his bidding...

*Laurel Jordan, get a fucking grip!* she silently admonished herself. This was nuts. She didn't have schoolgirl crushes like this. She couldn't remember the last time a man had gotten under her skin. She was used to getting whatever man she wanted, using him and using him up in short order. What had been so special about Jonathan?

Maybe it was because he'd left her. Men didn't leave Laurel—she left them. Not that he wouldn't see her again. She was reasonably sure he would call her. He had given her his home phone number. Surely he wouldn't have done that if he were married. Though it could be his cell number. Maybe he set his phone to vibrate and kept it in his pants pockets so his wife never knew when his girlfriends were calling...

*Stop it!*

Laurel was mercifully distracted by the flight attendants coming down the aisles with steaming trays of food on their rolling cart. As she picked at the pinkish gray meat covered in some kind of brown salty gravy, she turned her mind forcibly to other things.

Her club for example. She'd found the perfect spot with the help of her good friend James. It was a townhouse near Washington Square in Greenwich Village. Exclusive but not so exclusive she couldn't afford the monthly rent, at least once she started making income from the enterprise. She and James, her partner in the new venture, had signed a three-year lease with an option to buy at the end of that time frame.

The owner Henry Chattingham, a portly Brit who had made a fortune in the American stock market, had been made aware she would be using it for business and

would live in the upstairs bedroom. He hadn't had a problem with this. Indeed, the idea of a fine club for gentlemen to relax during business hours—a haven from the rough and tumble workday—had reminded him, so he'd said, of the old clubs back in London where he was returning to retire.

So she'd lied a little, leaving out the fact the club would have a theme—one including whips and chains, a well-appointed dungeon and a few "specialists" trained in the art of dominance and submission. James had agreed as long as they paid the rent and took good care of the property, he would never know the difference. She'd made sure to get all the proper permits to operate a home business and as long as they were discreet, she wasn't worried about any problems with the authorities.

She was excited about the club. They had been arguing over the name. He wanted to call it the *Switch*. "It's a play on words, don't you see," he had explained unnecessarily. "A switch, like the branch of a tree, for switching your cute ass, or a switch—someone who plays either side of the D/s equation." Brian, James' lover, had also pushed for that name, but he wasn't a partner in the business and as such had no say, in Laurel's mind.

Laurel wanted to call it Club Roissy, evoking the haunting erotic imagery in the *Story of O*. It was a name only those who had read the novel and were familiar with the BDSM scene would pick up on without beating them over the head with it. She felt it was a more elegant name and the clientele they hoped to attract would appreciate its nuance.

They'd fought about it and decided to settle it later or maybe come up with a new name altogether they could both agree upon. James was to be one of the professional Doms on duty at the as yet nameless club, by appointment only. She would also find a Domme and a sub girl or two available for men who wanted someone to whip but didn't have their own slave handy. Laurel planned to run the business end, keeping the books, developing the clientele and in her spare time, playing the gracious hostess.

She had no idea if the idea would fly or how long she'd stay in it. James and Brian were very excited about it and heavily into the lifestyle so she figured she could always sell her share if she got the traveling itch again, which she knew she would eventually.

The captain's intercom switched on as he mumbled something barely coherent in a southern American accent about their descent and estimated arrival time. For a moment she was surprised because he'd spoken in perfect, if still mumbled, German at the start of the flight. She realized as he was speaking it must be the copilot.

Now that they were nearing Kennedy Airport, everyone on board seemed to be speaking English, where at the start of the flight they were speaking German. She'd noticed this phenomenon of switching languages on other flights from other countries as well and found it interesting.

To prove the point, the man next to her now said in thickly accented English, "Guess we made it, eh?"

She nodded, smiling as her mind shifted back to the man somewhere down there who had made such amazing love to her for seven hours straight before disappearing, leaving only the little business card she held in her hand.

\* \* \* \* \*

James and Brian were there to greet her when she finally arrived at baggage claim. James was a tall, thin man with sandy blond hair and wide, round eyes magnified behind tortoise-shell-framed glasses. He dressed in Oxford button-down shirts and old corduroys, and looked more like a professor at a community college than the professional Dom he actually was.

"James!" Laurel laughed, letting him catch her up in a big bear hug. "I told you, you didn't have to come! I was going to take a cab!"

"I know, I know. We wanted to surprise you. And Brian wanted an excuse to drive his new Lexus." Laurel grinned at Brian, who seemed to buy a new car every year.

Brian was African by birth, his skin a rich dark brown. He was well-built and so handsome he was almost beautiful, with liquid brown eyes fringed with thick lashes, a broad nose and wide sensual lips in a face of angled cheekbones and square jaw. He wore his hair in hundreds of tiny braids that fell to his shoulders and he wore colorful cottons. Laurel never understood how this gorgeous, exotic man had hooked up with plain-Jane James, but she well knew there was no explaining the ways of the heart. Brian was not only James' lover but his submissive sex slave as well. He never removed the thick silver chain around his neck, which was in fact his slave collar.

As they drove into Manhattan, it was on the tip of her tongue to tell them about Jonathan but something stayed her. She found she wasn't ready to share him yet. Especially not with James, who would demand every detail about his anatomy and sexual prowess or lack thereof.

Laurel was exhausted after the long flight and maneuvering through customs and baggage claim. She hoped James and Brian weren't planning on an extended visit. James had been sending her weekly emails about his progress in decorating the townhouse during her European jaunt. With the help of Brian's artistic flair and eye for design, he had decorated the living room, creating an elegant, subdued atmosphere much like a gentlemen's club in prewar England.

The dungeon, as James preferred to call it, or the playroom, as Laurel thought of it, was actually located on the second floor of the townhouse. James had been busy converting the two large bedrooms on that floor into delightful torture chambers guaranteed to thrill even the most jaded and experienced players. There was also a bathroom on that floor with a large sunken Jacuzzi for possible water play.

Laurel's bedroom was located on the third floor and had its own private back stairway that came out into the kitchen. Laurel had designed her bedroom from afar, using the Internet to shop and email to let James know how she wanted it. She liked simplicity in her life, including her furniture. Her room was spacious with a large bay

window on the east wall to let in the early morning sun. There was a computer desk and chair in one corner and a large, comfortable recliner of the softest black leather for curling up into with a good book. The bed was black wrought iron with four posts and a headboard covered with bright yellow silk that matched the lemon yellow silk down quilt that covered the bed. The walls were painted a more muted, warm yellow that soothed her when she looked at it. A thick throw rug of yellow and dark blue in geometric designs lay on the wide-planked pine floor next to the bed so she could sink her toes into it upon awakening. There was a bathroom and two other furnished bedrooms on the floor to be used for the occasional guest or for the house staff to relax.

Laurel hadn't seen the townhouse since they'd signed the lease and shook hands with the owner. Then it had been empty but full of potential and possibility. She was looking forward to seeing what James had done with it. But even more, she was looking forward to a good night's sleep.

At the freshly painted red door of the old townhouse there was a small brass plaque with neatly painted letters in shiny black. *Club Roissy*. Laurel grinned hugely at James, who grinned back. "What can I say? You were right."

Now he stood proudly by as Laurel took a tour of their new club and her new home. It really was amazing what money could buy, she thought, looking around at the fine old furniture that filled the living room and the lush paintings hanging along the walls.

"Wow, this must have set us back a fortune," she remarked, staring down at the faded but still beautiful Oriental carpet that covered most of the floor.

Brian offered, "Got it for a song. Estate sale. I don't think they realized its value. It does have a rather large hole under that couch over there." He grinned. "The adult kids just wanted to get the place empty so they could sell it fast. We got half this stuff from there at ridiculous prices." Laurel nodded, pleased. Brian was actually the levelheaded one of the couple and he would have kept James' sometimes lavish spending habits in line. Next they showed her the playrooms, and here James was in his element, eagerly showing her the steel suspension bars, tethers, spreaders and harnesses as well as the whips and crops hung on a special rack designed for the purpose.

In one of the playrooms there was a full-sized upright cage for misbehaving slaves and a Saint Andrew's Cross—a large wooden X very effective for securing a sub. This cross was a deluxe version, including adjustable footrests to allow for people of different heights to be bound at the waist, arm, thigh, and of course wrists and ankles. They could be bound either facing the cross, suitable for whipping, or bound facing out, for genital and nipple torture. A stand had been attached at the bottom that allowed the cross to be pivoted forward, rendering the captive off balance and providing easier access to their back and ass.

The other room contained a bondage table with leather restraints along its sides. A full-body leather strap sling hung in one corner of the room. Though she was exhausted, Laurel's body responded like Pavlov's dog to all the delicious torturous possibilities these well-equipped rooms offered.

"You guys did a terrific job!" she marveled. "This is going to be fantastic."

"Yeah, now all you have to do is fill the place," James laughed. Actually he already had a few clients of his own he would bring along, but the real moneymaking part of the enterprise would be in the memberships she hoped to sell for private play.

They'd finally made it up to the third floor where a delighted Laurel fell on her bright yellow silk-quilted bed. "This is perfect, James! Just how I envisioned it." Her eye fell on an eight-by-ten photograph hung on the wall, framed in silver. It was a picture of a young woman suspended from wrist cuffs hung by chains from a ceiling not shown in the picture. Her face was mostly obscured by a thick, dark pink satin blindfold. Her lips were parted, head back, dark wavy hair streaming down behind her.

She was naked with high, full breasts tipped with dark pink that matched the satin of her blindfold. The narrow rib cage tapered to a long, slender waist and flared out into feminine hips. Long, firmly muscled legs were spread wide, held open by a silver spreader bar that attached to cuffs at each ankle.

"Oh my God," Laurel said softly, staring at the picture. "Where'd you get that?" For Laurel was the subject of the photo. She recognized the scene—a play party she'd attended before leaving for Europe the prior year. She'd had quite a lot to drink, she recalled, and she'd had a good time, but now, gazing at the picture, she hadn't realized how good a time. She hadn't known pictures were being taken.

"Brian's friend Joseph took the picture. At Frank's party, remember?"

Softly Brian said, "I told James we should ask you first, but he thought you'd like it. It is a lovely composition."

Laurel colored slightly, aware the two men were critically assessing her naked form in the photo. Though of course she knew their interest was merely academic.

Seeing herself in that position, so completely vulnerable and exposed, sent her suddenly to that submissive place within herself, a place she hadn't been in for a long time.

It had been fun and sexy with Jonathan but not a truly submissive experience. While she did think he had dominant tendencies, he hadn't been able or willing to take her to that sweet, dark headspace where she literally felt transformed from her usual tough, controlled persona to pure submissive lust. She craved the experience but couldn't get there on her own.

Mercifully, the boys finally took their leave after hugging her and promising to return the next morning with muffins and coffee. She lay back on the bed, musing at the woman in the picture—at herself—lost in masochistic rapture after a rough but satisfying flogging at the hands of her host Frank, a man she liked and admired but had never had romantic feelings for.

What would it be like to "fly" with a man she was actually in love with? A man who could make her weak in the knees just with his smile, with the toss of his blond head, with the way he drew a circle around her nipple with a lazy finger...

Her cell phone rang, startling her. She had only just remembered to turn the phone back on, having turned it off for her flight. The number scrolling across the caller ID was one she'd memorized only recently. Her heart caught in her throat as she flipped open the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Laurel! It's Jonathan. Jonathan Goldman."

## Chapter Five

"Jonathan," she said carefully, hiding the ridiculous surge of joy that rose up in her throat. "How nice to hear from you."

"Laurel?" Jonathan's voice was light and teasing. "Is this the same Laurel Jordan I fucked silly not two nights ago? The same Laurel Jordan who made my head spin, she was so hot and perfect? Did I miss something? Did you meet someone better on the plane?"

Laurel laughed despite herself. His voice made her blood run warm. She leaned back into the bed, sighing happily. "Okay, okay," she admitted. "It's the same Laurel. How you been, hot boy?"

Jonathan laughed. "That's better! You had me scared for a second there with that la-di-da 'how nice to hear from you' stuff! And me already picking out the rings."

"Shut up, you dope," she rejoined, laughing. They talked for a while about their respective plane flights, neither of which, thankfully, was eventful. "Did you go back to work yet?" she asked.

"Yep. Had to go crow about the deal and answer six hundred phone messages. I'm taking tomorrow off though. I hope to see a certain sexy little number who I think said she'd be staying in the Village for a while."

Laurel laughed. "Well, I hope you're taking tomorrow off, seeing as it's Sunday! I don't want to get hooked up with a workaholic, you know." She felt so good, bantering and flirting with him. She could almost smell his lemony warm scent, almost taste his lips as she remembered his kiss, almost feel the hard press of his cock.

"So, seriously. Would that be okay? To stop by and see you? You could call me when you've had some rest. You've still got my number, right?"

"Now I have it on my cell phone in my caller ID."

"Oh right. Yeah, I always forget that. So I guess maybe if you told me where you lived I could come by. Or do you think we should meet at a café or something since after all we've only had one date."

Laurel laughed again. That had been some doozey of a date! She gave him the address and they talked about nothing much until she literally couldn't keep her eyes open any longer. She drifted into sleep, Jonathan's sexy voice swirling through her mind, his image coloring her dreams.

\* \* \* \* \*



Jonathan showered and paid careful attention as he shaved. That was all he needed—to nick his face and show up at Laurel’s place with little bits of bloody toilet paper stuck to his cheek and chin.

Laurel’s place! How amazing they both lived in the city! What luck she had been moving back at just this time from an extended tour of Europe. How adorable to think she had followed him from the club and pretended to have found his scarf. He grinned at that one. She had been so sincere, he wouldn’t have figured it out if she hadn’t made the remark about him liking to watch.

He had replayed that long, perfect night over and over in his head since he’d left her in the taxi at the Munich Airport. Their conversations, their kisses, her beautiful naked body, open and willing to do whatever he wanted...

She was like a dream girl—smart and sassy, good-looking and confident, sexually willing. He couldn’t help the small moan that slid out as he recalled her naked on her knees, her ass round and luscious as he plunged his cock into her wetness from behind.

They’d talked for hours as they lay in each other’s arms between bouts of lovemaking and lightly dozing. She’d admitted to a number of D/s relationships, none of them serious, none of them ultimately satisfying. They had talked about what it meant to be submissive, to be dominant and where love fit into that mix.

“Love doesn’t have to be a part of it,” Laurel had insisted. “You can still experience the intensity, the deep thrill of giving yourself completely over to another person.”

Jonathan hadn’t pushed the matter, not wanting to seem as if he were falling in love with her or that he knew more than he did about the scene. Mostly he’d listened, aware some of her remarks contained a subtext that she’d enjoy more from him...more sadomasochism. A spanking on that delectable ass. Why didn’t he comply? The truth was, he was afraid he’d do it wrong and appear a fool.

She had talked about the circle of pleasure and pain, how for a masochist it was a continuum, a dichotomy where one complemented the other, creating sensations far more powerful than either alone.

“I’m a little confused,” he’d finally confessed. “You use the terms submissive and masochistic almost interchangeably. Are they the same thing?”

She’d taken a while to respond, as if mulling over the question in her own mind as well. “I think,” she said finally, “maybe masochism is a subset of submission. Not all submissives are into pain. Some are what you’d call ‘service subs’. That is, they like to please their master, to perform acts, sexual and otherwise that are proof of their subservience and sexual submission. They might accept a punishment—a whipping or being bound in an uncomfortable position—as proof of their devotion and willingness to serve. And this seems to satisfy some deep-rooted need within them. What I mean is, it’s not like they’re being abused or anything. They want to be there. They have to be there.

“A pure masochist, on the other hand, is someone more just into the pain. Erotic pain of course—not bumping into a table or stubbing your toe.” He’d smiled into the

darkness. "They get off on the whipping or the bondage or whatever it is they're into, not because they're serving their master but because it gets them hot. Maybe it's the intensity of the sensations—pleasure and pain combined can be deeply erotic, almost spiritual, if the Dom administering them knows what he's doing."

"Okay. So you have a service sub and you have a masochist. Where do you fit into all this?" Laurel hadn't answered immediately. Had he overstepped? Too personal a question? They were lying in each other's arms in the darkened room, the city lights outside the window softly illuminating her face. He'd just kissed, licked and fucked her for hours. Surely the question wasn't out of line.

Laurel finally answered, "I guess I'm a sub. But maybe an untried one. I mean, I definitely am into the erotic pain. I adore a thuddy flogging—nothing gets me hotter. I love the feeling of being bound and helpless while a big, strong man has his way with me." She shivered and giggled, nudging her face against his chest in a way that made him feel masculine and protective of her.

"But I guess I haven't found a man who can really control me. I don't mean that like it sounds. I mean, I'm not like some willful bitch playing a game and pushing a guy to see how far I can make him go in dominating me. But I guess I haven't been able to trust anyone enough. To really trust them to the point where I surrender myself in a total and loving way. Maybe that doesn't even exist, I don't know. Maybe there are only masochists and bully boys, and the idea of a loving Dom or a truly sexually submissive woman is the stuff of romance novels."

She'd seemed to withdraw at that point, her body stiffening as she turned away from him. "What is it?" he'd asked gently.

"Nothing," she'd said at first. He stroked her hair softly and waited. Finally she added, "Well, something..." And she'd told him about that bastard Jorge. How he'd taken advantage of her trust.

Jonathan felt his blood boil as she related the story. She seemed to be blaming herself for getting involved with the guy—for being fooled by him. Jonathan had wanted to shout, to demand they fly to Spain, find the bastard and have him jailed. He wanted to drop to his knees and promise this lovely young woman no one would ever harm her again. He, Jonathan, would protect her.

He did none of that. He knew he was reacting and it wasn't his place to demand retribution for her or to offer his devotion. They were just two people who had come together for one night of intense passion. If he'd said all those things he was feeling, she would have run a hundred miles in the other direction. And for some reason with Laurel Jordan, this mattered. He didn't want to take the chance of overreaching too soon and losing her.

Because for all her bravado and forward behavior, he sensed a vulnerability in her. A skittish, wild animal fear. Jonathan wasn't yet sure what the fear was, but he suspected it was fear of intimacy. He recognized the symptoms since he shared them in spades.

Jonathan stood at the door of the townhouse. He noticed the little painted plaque and raised his eyebrows. Club Roissy. Interesting name. He'd have to ask her about it. He raised the gold-plated knocker in the middle of the door and let it fall a few times against the hard wood.

As he stood waiting for Laurel to open it, he looked around the neighborhood. When she'd first told him she was going to be staying in the Village, he'd imagined some little one-room dive on Bleeker Street, the second floor of a falafel shop or something shared with three other girls. He knew his real estate and this townhouse was worth three or four million if it was worth a penny. How could the young woman in the ripped jeans with her little backpack afford digs like this?

Maybe it was her daddy's or a rich uncle's. Or maybe she was just house-sitting for someone and had invented the idea of creating a BDSM club to sound sophisticated. He realized he really knew very little about Laurel Jordan.

Well, hopefully he'd find out more! The door opened and there she was, fresh-faced and beautiful. Her hair was pulled back in a French braid and it looked wet. She was wearing a soft cashmere sweater of royal blue that made her green eyes look almost blue and soft brown pants that fit her body as if they'd been tailor-made.

"Wow, is this the right place?" Jonathan grinned.

"Welcome to my humble abode." Laurel smiled, stepping back with a lavish wave of her hand. Jonathan stepped into the foyer, taking Laurel into his arms for a long kiss. She smelled delicious, that same delicate perfume and her own essence. He kissed her as long as she would let him. She seemed a little stiff in his arms. As if they hadn't spent seven hours together making wild, passionate love just a few days before. He didn't stop her as she pulled back.

Jonathan stepped into the living room. "Holy shit," he said, taking in the antique furniture, the real oil paintings on the walls, the huge Oriental carpet. A fire was burning in the black marble fireplace, its flames casting a rosy glow over the room. "You didn't tell me you lived in a palace!"

"Oh!" Laurel responded, dismayed. "Is it too much? James and Brian do tend to go overboard. We were going for old-style gentlemen's club. You know, nineteenth-century elegance for men of means who needed to get away from their Victorian wives and find a few hours' respite with fine cigars and the best brandy. That sort of thing."

"Well, you certainly achieved it! This is great! This is yours? Or...?" he left the question unspoken, realizing it might be offensive.

"Or some sugar daddy's? Is it out of the realm of your chauvinistic little worldview to imagine a woman in her twenties could actually earn and invest her own money without help from a rich old man?" Her voice held disdain but her eyes were twinkling.

Jonathan blushed and stammered, "No, no, not at all. I apologize. You'd mentioned your luck in the stock market. I can see you were being modest! This isn't luck, this is skill and plenty of capital." He looked around appreciatively.

Mollified, Laurel said, "Well, a lot of it *is* luck. And this wasn't all put together with my own money, though I've got a chunk invested. I have investors in the club and we only rented this place to see if we could make it work. It's a crapshoot at this point."

"The BDSM club, you mean."

"Yeah. I have my eye on a professional Domme I want to hire on a commission basis. And James, my partner, is a pro too, though he limits himself to gay boys. I want to get a few masochists on board who can sit around and act submissive with the gentlemen who show up solo without their own slaves to torture in our playrooms. And we'll have parties too, planned soirees with events and entertainment. By invitation only of course and very pricey."

"Is this even legal?"

"Yes, as long as no bodily fluids are exchanged. This won't be a whorehouse, if that's what you're thinking. It's a place where likeminded people can come together to share their—er—hobby, if you will." She laughed. "And it's a rental facility too. People can rent the playrooms by the hour, depending on availability of course. What they do in there, in the privacy of their own perversion, is their business."

As Jonathan grinned, Laurel continued. "I hope to sell memberships, and those members can use the playrooms any time they want on a reserve basis, kind of like a racquetball court or something."

"Let's see these playrooms!" Jonathan enthused.

Laurel obliged, preceding him up the stairs as he admired her small, rounded ass and long legs. The playrooms were impressive with their array of torture and bondage equipment. He knew from his own idle cruising of BDSM Internet sites this stuff had cost a pretty penny.

He found himself drawn to the bondage table. "Whoa. Look at this. Leather straps and all." He lifted one of the thick leather restraints, noting the buckles that could be pulled taut. "Wow. Imagine a naked woman on here, strapped down and helpless, her feet bound in those stirrups, her legs spread..."

He stared at the table imagining Laurel there. He felt his cock engorge and resisted a desire to reach into his pants and fondle it. "You like that, huh?" Laurel said. If she was aware of his immediate arousal, she gave no sign.

"Check this out! I can't wait to try this!" She walked over to the contraption in the corner, giving it a gentle push. "It's a swing. A leather strap sling, I think was its name in the catalog. See, you sit here," she hoisted herself up, pulling herself easily into place with her strong arms, "and then your wrist cuffs can be hooked here." She gripped the thick leather straps that were attached to chain suspended from the ceiling. "Or you can just hold on."

She kicked her legs out so the swing swayed gently. "You can lower it, see, with that pulley thing over there." Jonathan walked over to the wall where James had placed a crank handle. As he turned it, Laurel was lowered to a fully horizontal position. Her feet were resting in the leg restraints on each side of the swing and she was the perfect

height for him to stand in front of her spread legs, pressing himself into her wet opening with her restrained and powerless to resist.

Or flip her over and whip her, watching her sway as the lash found its mark... Jonathan took a deep breath. So far since he'd been in her place all they had done was kiss at the door. Was she offering more, lying there with her legs spread in that provocative position? He moved toward her, feeling his cock lengthen in his jeans.

As he leaned over to kiss her, she hopped up, slipping adroitly under his arms. "Let me show you the other playroom. We've got all kinds of toys." Jonathan followed, slightly frustrated, mildly amused. Was she playing hard to get now? Suddenly shy after their one wild night together?

The second room was much like the first with an impressive array of whips, cuffs, crops, floggers, ropes and chain. There were a few more esoteric items like a violet wand—an electrical device used to provide erotic stimulation with a gentle shock strategically applied to sensitive parts of the body, and vampire gloves—leather gloves with prickly tack points along the fingers to create a wide range of sensation from tickling to pain.

Jonathan moved toward the whip display, taking down a heavy flogger with many soft suede tresses. He ran the leather over his fingers, enjoying the weight of the whip handle in his other hand. Experimentally he pulled back his wrist and let it snap, creating a whooshing sound in the air.

Laurel gave a mock shudder and said, "Oooo, Jonathan! Don't get me going with that whip! That's my favorite one—how did you know?" She laughed, her eyes bright, her expression teasing.

"Bend over, let's try it out," he said, half teasing, half not.

"Yeah, right," she rejoined. "You wouldn't know what to do with it." She was grinning but the challenge was clear.

"I'm serious. Bend over." As he said it, he decided he was serious. He wanted to swat that delectable ass with this flogger. He wanted to try it on bare skin but he didn't dare. Though he'd seen women being whipped at the BDSM clubs and in videos, he'd never had the nerve or opportunity to try it himself. Would it turn him on? Would he be able to handle it? Would she like it?

Laurel had assured him she loved being whipped—that it took her places she couldn't get to any other way. He was pretty sure he'd like to do it. Even now, the mental picture of her bent over and waiting for his lash was thrilling to him. His own lack of skill however, plus an annoyingly guilty feeling that it wasn't right to strike a woman no matter what, stayed his hand.

Even as all these thoughts raced through his head, Laurel grinned at him saucily, slowing bending over. She was quite limber, easily touching her toes with her hands, her long legs beautifully stretched, her pert bottom pointing provocatively toward him.

Jonathan moved toward her, his hand itching to smack that gorgeous ass, to pull down those soft pants and lay into it with the whip. He felt his heart start to pound as

she remained perfectly still at his approach. She clearly wanted him to whip her, and he wanted to. He was suddenly desperate to succeed, to prove to her, and more importantly to himself, that he could do this.

He drew back his hand and brought the whip down on Laurel's ass. She didn't move. He did it a few more times. In a teasing voice she said, "Are you trying to whip me or tickle me?"

Stung, he hit her harder, quite a bit harder. She stumbled a little from the force of the blow but quickly regained her position. Jonathan felt stupid, as if she were testing him and he was failing.

"Take down your pants," he ordered, feeling lust mingled with anger rise in him like a wild thing.

"No."

"What?" Wasn't she submissive? Didn't she have to obey? Jonathan felt his face heat with embarrassment and chagrin.

"I said 'no'." She stood up slowly, her eyes flashing at him. "I'm not ready." More softly she said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to tease you. That was unfair. Let's go upstairs. I'll show you my bedroom."

Jonathan stared at her a moment, not sure what was expected of him. For a moment he toyed with the idea of forcing her – ripping off her pants and beating the crap out of her. Even as these thoughts entered his head, he dispelled them. Jonathan Goldman was not a bully.

He dropped the whip, confusion and anger warring in him. What had just gone on? He followed her up the stairs, a part of him wanting to go the other direction, back down and out the door. But he continued to follow her.

She ushered him into her pleasant, warmly decorated bedroom. Sitting on the bed, she patted the quilt next to her, indicating he should join her.

"What's going on, Laurel?" he said, trying to keep his voice neutral and calm.

"I'm sorry, Jonathan. I didn't mean to lead you on. I know this stuff is new for you. I was pushing you. I was arranging the scene – setting it up so you'd want to whip me. I realized as I was doing it, I don't want that with you. I don't want to play games. When you dom me, I want it to be because you're ready and because it's right for us. Not because I made you think with your cock instead of your head or heart."

Jonathan nodded. Either she was sincere or she was giving him a way to save face. He decided to accept her at her word. "I want to do it," he said quietly. "I've thought a lot about all the things you shared with me that night in Munich. I'd like to explore with you, Laurel. To, how did you say it? To follow my heart and my natural dominant impulses."

"Did I say that?" Laurel laughed. Jonathan grinned and lunged at her, throwing her down against the soft pile of pillows at the head of the bed. This time when he kissed her, the self-consciousness between them was gone. He kissed her for a long time,

savoring the soft yielding of her lips, the sweetness of her mouth, the feel of her warm body beneath his.

When he pulled at her sweater, lifting it up over her breasts, she didn't protest, instead lifting it herself over her head. She was wearing a yellow silk lacy bra, sheer enough to reveal the dark pink nipples pressing pertly against the fabric.

His blood on fire, Jonathan unbuttoned her pants and slid down the zipper. Laurel lifted her hips, allowing him to pull the pants down. Her panties were matching yellow lace.

Jonathan put his hand over her crotch, feeling the heat between her legs. He leaned over her, kissing her mouth again as his hands slipped past the soft lace covering her pussy. He pressed a hard finger into her, feeling its delicious wet heat as her vaginal muscles clamped down.

He was back on familiar ground, his body remembering hers as he lifted her into his arms, unclasping her bra before letting her fall back against the bright yellow silk, her dark hair spread over the bed, her green eyes wide. Slowly he pulled her panties down her legs, his eyes locked on hers.

Jonathan stripped off his clothing, dropping down against the girl, his mouth finding her nipples, his hand again seeking her sex. She was wet and compliant, moaning softly as he had his way with her. He lay over her, forcing her legs far apart as he pressed his manhood against her slick entrance.

Laurel moaned as he entered her, wrapping her arms around him, pulling him in deeper with her legs. "Put your legs down," he ordered.

She didn't obey immediately, and he snapped, "I said put your legs down! Now. And don't move."

This time she did obey, letting her legs fall from his body. She was breathing hard, her heart doing a lovely tattoo against his chest. Slowly Jonathan withdrew his cock from her velvet heat. Laurel started to move forward, as if to keep him inside her. A sharp look from him and she stopped, letting him withdraw.

He hovered for a moment, only the tip of his cock still inside her. She moaned and sighed, but to her credit stayed perfectly still. He looked down on the gorgeous girl, her eyes now closed, her luscious breasts heaving. All at once he plunged his cock deep into her. Laurel grunted and arched up, starting to buck and shudder against him. "I said still!" Jonathan growled, and to his delight, she again obeyed, only a lingering tremor she couldn't quite control running through her body.

Over and over he withdrew, held himself poised over her and then slammed into her willing body, making her stay still each time. After several minutes of this "torture", Laurel could no longer obey. Her voice was coming in staccato little gasps as she reached up and pulled Jonathan down to her, wrapping her strong legs around him as she bucked and shuddered to orgasm, her voice a steady keen.

Jonathan, having held himself from his own orgasm through sheer will, succumbed to her onslaught, releasing his seed inside her, his mouth finding hers.

After some minutes during which they lay side by side, arms and legs flung akimbo, Laurel said, "You know, Jonathan. You definitely have potential." She rolled away from him as he mock-growled and lunged toward her, his heart doing loop-de-loops of joy.



## Chapter Six

The weeks passed and the club seemed to be taking off. Laurel had discreetly gotten the word out through some of her more wealthy contacts in the scene. She had seven members signed up already, each of whom had paid the substantial annual membership fee in advance, in cash. Their membership earned them the right to use the facilities whenever they wished and to “borrow” whatever sub girl might be available to titillate their jaded palates. They also could come and lounge in the salon, as Laurel liked to call it, smoking cigars, sipping fine Cognac, sampling Laurel’s outrageously delicious chocolate chip cookies and fresh coffee, and warming their bones before the fire.

In addition, word was getting out in the BDSM community, really rather a close-knit group in the large city of New York. Club Roissy was the place to go if one wanted to rent a finely appointed dungeon or to submit to the whims of a gay Dom or very dominant female mistress.

Mistress Catherine was a formidable woman, large-boned and tall with huge breasts and long, shiny red hair. She dressed the part of Dominatrix, wearing a close-fitting black leather vest that barely contained her ample bosom, a leather miniskirt that left little to the imagination and stiletto heels over her fishnet stockings. She enjoyed cracking her riding crop against her thigh as she lectured her chosen sub boy on his shortcomings before ordering him to lower his pants and take his due.

She was hugely popular with straight and gay men alike because she administered a blistering paddling along with a scathing running commentary that had most of the men ejaculating on their feet as they endured her delicious wrath. She would chain them or bind them as it pleased her, and use them until she used them up. A man who spent an hour with Mistress Catherine really felt he received his money’s worth.

Laurel and James were planning their first big party, to be held that Saturday evening. Mistress Catherine and all three of the sub girls had agreed to participate. They planned a slave auction, a whipping demonstration and a lesson on breast binding techniques. Food and drink would be served downstairs in the salon before the fun in the dungeons began.

It was by invitation only, including the regular members as well as friends they had in the community and a few big players in the scene who they hoped would further advertise the club.

One such player was Tom Saunders, a whip maker whose whips sold for as much as five hundred dollars apiece, beautifully crafted out the finest leathers with perfectly weighted handles of smooth polished wood or thickly knotted leather.

Two years before, Laurel had had a serious and unrequited crush on Tom but he'd been heavily involved with another woman at the time named Stephanie, a serious masochist who lived the life 24/7, only happy when in chains, covered in welts and bound and gagged. Laurel had once witnessed Stephanie being whipped until she bled. Laurel was upset by the display and had told Frank, at whose party the beating had occurred, she thought it went over the line. Frank had admonished her not to pass judgment. "It's only a matter of degree, Laurel," he'd said calmly. "You and she are cut of the same cloth, she just likes her fabric a bit more tattered." Frank preferred bondage to inflicting pain, though he would still mete out a whipping to his slave girl of the moment, should she deserve it.

Laurel didn't know if Tom was still with Stephanie and she didn't ask. He hadn't been the one to whip Stephanie so severely that night but nor had he stopped it. Yet Laurel had still found him compelling, in a dangerous sort of way. When he'd resurfaced, calling her business number at Club Roissy, she'd had a knee-jerk thrill.

Yet he'd been fairly to the point, calling to make an appointment with one of the three house subs. He'd heard about the club, he told her, from one of the men who had bought a membership and he was interested in checking it out. Laurel had wondered at his asking for an hour with one of the girls, if he was still with Stephanie. She hadn't asked.

The girls were each real-life submissives, who had eagerly answered Laurel's want ad, which promised \$180 an hour – sixty percent of the house charge for a "scene", plus whatever tips the guests chose to bestow. Laurel had interviewed more than twenty candidates before selecting these three, all experienced, all genuine and all drop-dead gorgeous. Two of them, Noelle and Amanda, had been waitresses with no particular prospects and the third one, Jenny, was a second-year law student.

It was strange to see Tom again, and Laurel's heart did a tiny flip-flop as she opened the door to the man she used to hold a torch for. Tom was medium height with dark curly hair, a rather prominent nose and brilliant blue eyes. He was thin but wiry, deceptively strong. It wasn't his looks so much as his attitude that had attracted Laurel. He was supremely self-confident without being egocentric or obnoxious. He knew what he wanted and never hesitated to take it.

She stepped back for him to enter the foyer. He entered, sporting a large duffel bag over his back, which he dropped to the floor. He stood a moment, appraising her before opening his arms for a hug.

Laurel stepped into his arms, quietly pleased she felt no particular zing, no tug at her pussy, no unrequited longing. The crush, such as it had been, was over. She had her own man now!

"Laurel! It's been too long. How have you been?" As they walked into the salon where three men were sitting in large reading chairs, two bent over newspapers, one watching a large flat-screen TV set along one wall, Tom gave a low whistle. The men looked up, nodded and smiled, and returned to their pursuits.

"Guess you've been doing fine! Is this yours? Or are you just the hostess?"

"All mine." Laurel grinned, feeling a rush of pride. "Well, not *all* mine. I do have a partner. But I'm sixty-percent owner."

Tom glanced at his watch. "Well, I just have a couple of hours but I wanted to check out your dungeon, maybe play with a girl or two. I have some new whips I want to try out." He gestured toward the duffel still on the floor in the foyer. Laurel produced a small photo album. Inside were her three sub girls, each in various states of dress and undress, bound and unbound, to show their potential and capabilities. Tom sat on a couch, flipping through the album. "I don't see you in here. Aren't you available?"

Laurel laughed. "I don't have the time. I didn't realize how much work it would take to keep track of appointments and schedules, advertise, prepare for my upcoming party and keep my guests," she waved toward the men in the room, "satisfied."

"Indeed," Tom said, appraising her. "Well, my hopes are dashed. I thought if I could buy an hour with the dazzling Laurel Jordan, you wouldn't be able to turn me away. You'd belong completely to me, at least for an hour." He smiled, a slow, seductive smile that transformed him from merely attractive to truly handsome. Was it her imagination or was he coming on to her?

Laurel shook her head, giving a little laugh. "Sorry," she said, "I'm taken." It had slipped out. She hadn't meant to share her private life with someone who was basically a customer. But as she watched Tom's face crumple with mock despair, she had to laugh, this time for real.

"Married? Say it isn't so!" The other men in the room looked up, clearly listening to the exchange.

"No," Laurel said, flushing a little. "Not even engaged. But, well, taken. We've only been going out a few weeks but, I don't know." She took a breath and let it out as a happy sigh. "He's terrific. I've never met anyone like him."

"Well then. I bow out with grace." He turned back to the album in his lap. "I think I'll pick," Tom waved his hand over the album, letting a pointed finger drop on a particularly provocative picture of Jenny, "that one." In the photo, Jenny was bound from neck to toe in blood-red rope, only her breasts and pussy left exposed. She was suspended upside down from her ankles by thick chains that hung from a ceiling not visible in the picture.

"Excellent choice," Laurel smiled. She picked up a pager, punching in a number that summoned Jenny from the third-floor spare bedroom where the three girls were waiting, having been called to the club by Laurel in anticipation of Tom's visit. Once Tom had made his choice, the other two girls were free to come and mingle with the guests in the salon if they wished or they were free to go.

"She'll be waiting for you in the dungeon. The first door on your left on the second floor. You can move to the other playroom if you wish, as neither is being used right now. But once you choose one, you'll need to stay put for the, uh, duration."

Tom nodded and smiled. Laurel knew Jenny would be waiting for him, kneeling up in her sheer white stockings and garters, her olive skin beautiful against a white satin bustier and thong panties. Her head would be bowed, eyes to the floor, hands clasped behind her straight back.

"Read this please before you go up and sign it. You can pay after." Laurel handed Tom a little contract she had devised, which included a brief outline of what was and was not permitted during the purchased hour. Basically no sex, no exchange of bodily fluids, an agreed-upon safe word and gesture for the sub, agreement to pay in cash, in full, at the time "service" was rendered, and a clause absolving the club of any physical or psychological damage due to any activities that took place in the dungeon during the purchased time. This clause had been inserted for the submissive men who bought time – Laurel had rarely observed a Dom suffering physical or psychological damage, at least not while giving someone else a sound whipping.

Tom read it, signed it and handed it back. "I prefer to pay in advance," he said, giving her three crisp one-hundred-dollar bills. "I'll just take an hour for now. If I want more, I know where to find you?"

Laurel nodded. "Yes, I'll be right here." She had planned to spend the afternoon looking through the menus her caterers had provided so she could select items for the party. She felt so domestic and a little overwhelmed. There was a lot to running a small business and though she was intellectually prepared for it, it was quite a change from traveling the world at her whim with no one to think of but herself.

Luckily, James had said he would be by later to help with the selection and other details of the party. She needed to get the invitations out, clever little cards Brian had designed of red heavy stock with a tiny real leather whip that fell out when the card was opened.

Jonathan was coming over later that night too and she wanted time to get ready. *Jonathan...* As Tom departed for the dungeons, Laurel permitted herself a moment's daydream. They'd gotten closer and closer over the past couple of weeks and all had been going wonderfully well. Laurel kept waiting for Jonathan to do something wrong, make a false move, ruin things. So far, he'd passed the test, though she wasn't entirely conscious she was giving him one.

He was sexy, kind, smart and a wonderful lover. Jonathan was dominant but he was tentative. He was just new, was all. She knew that. She knew she needed to give him time, let him find his own level of comfort as a Dom.

When Laurel had approached him about possibly experimenting with maybe a little spanking, perhaps a whipping with a nice easy flogger, he had laughed and said teasingly, "Is the sub trying to top from the bottom?" He knew the lingo, he'd been to the sites, he'd read up on the BDSM scene. He was naturally dominant, so why the hesitation? What was he waiting for?

It frustrated Laurel, but at the same time, she truly didn't want to "top from the bottom". If and when he chose to claim her, it would have to be because he wanted it,

not because she'd forced it. Otherwise it wouldn't mean anything. It would be a hollow mockery of what she longed for—a deep and abiding D/s relationship.

She was excited about tonight though. He was taking her to a lovely little Thai restaurant she'd wanted to try, and afterward they were coming back to her place for an "adventure". Jonathan had said he wanted to try out one of the playrooms if it was available. Up until now, though he'd walked through the playrooms several times, stopping at each piece of equipment and discussing its potential use in an almost clinical way, he'd never wanted to play with Laurel there. Even when she'd been provocative, sliding her wrists into the dangling cuffs at the top of each side of the X of the Saint Andrew's Cross, he hadn't taken the chance to chain her. He'd merely pressed his body against hers, holding her wrists as he'd kissed her before whispering, "Let's go upstairs."

Laurel had written a large X across ten o'clock to midnight for that day in the datebook her staff used for booking the rooms. No one was signed up for either playroom during that timeslot, which suited her. Even though each room was soundproof, she knew Jonathan would be more comfortable if no one was nearby.

She'd already planned her outfit. She was going to wear a lovely batik skirt she'd bought in Bombay with a silky, low-cut blouse. Underneath she was going to wear nothing at all except some nipple jewelry hanging from her nipples in such a way they appeared to be pierced.

The jewelry, as well as her nipples, would show beneath her blouse, and Laurel was already nervous but excited at the prospect of appearing that way in public. Those who knew what they were seeing would assume her nipples were pierced. In fact, Laurel wanted to have her nipples pierced but a particular aversion to needles had kept her from taking the leap.

She hoped Jonathan would like the jewelry. Who knew, maybe someday *he* would be the one to pierce her. Maybe someday he would truly claim her, body, heart and soul. Meanwhile, tonight he'd promised he wanted to try out some of the bondage and torture equipment and maybe a whip or two.

Laurel couldn't wait! Patience had never been a virtue of hers. But of course she would wait. Like a good little sub girl. She laughed to herself and turned her attentions to the one man now sitting in her salon, waiting for Master James to arrive and torture him mercilessly.

"So tell me, Mark," she said, refilling his cup with steaming coffee. "How are things at the U.N.?"

## Chapter Seven

God, she looked beautiful bound and naked on the bondage table, the straps securing her just above and just below her breasts so they were forced up and together for better access. Her legs were bent at the knee and spread wide, secured with thick, soft leather cuffs attached to the stirrups. Her ass hung just at the edge of the table with excellent access for smacking or for fondling her pussy, which beckoned him with its sweet, dark pink folds.

Jonathan tried to ignore the nervous butterflies in the pit of his belly. He had wanted this. He *did* want this! But now that it had come down to it, was he strong enough? Laurel had remembered his initial attraction to the bondage table and had suggested for her first “torture” session he bind her there.

“You don’t have to whip me, sweetheart,” she’d assured him. “You can just have your way with me.” She’d laughed, a sexy, low laugh that made his cock hard.

Still, he knew enough to respond, “If I choose to whip you, I will. That’s *my* call, isn’t it?” She’d nodded, her expression sobering, her green eyes darkening to emerald.

Now he held a riding crop—its small leather end easy to aim with—as he walked around his beautiful, bound girl, completely at his mercy. Her arms hung over the sides of the table, her wrists loosely secured beneath it with ties set there for the purpose. Jonathan bent over and kissed her mouth. Laurel responded ardently. As he bent over her, he reached down and cupped her bare sex. She was already wet, the very act of tying her down having aroused her.

Jonathan slipped a finger into her as he murmured, “Hot, wet cunt.” He kissed her a little more and stood up. His erection was outlined in his jeans, snaking up toward his hip. “Shall I crop your tits first or your ass?”

Laurel didn’t respond. Lightly he smacked her cheek with his open palm. Her eyes opened wide and she said, “It’s for you to decide, Sir.”

“Yes, it is. But when I ask you a direct question, I expect a direct answer.” He struck her cheek again, this time harder and Laurel gasped. Jonathan suppressed a sudden urge to apologize. To comfort her and smooth the cheek he’d just reddened.

Laurel responded breathlessly, “My ass, Sir.”

“And why is that?” He tapped the crop against his palm, feeling power thunder through his veins, knowing he was playing a game but what a delicious one!

Laurel hesitated again. “Um, it’s harder to take on the breasts, Sir. I thought I could warm up to it easier this way.”

“Well, you’re honest at least. I like that.” He smacked her breast, square over the nipple. Laurel screamed. Jonathan nearly winced but instead only took a deep breath.

The nipple was reddening and distending. Gently he touched it, smoothing his fingers over the tip.

Laurel was breathing hard, her chest heaving, but she hadn't protested or asked him to stop. Jonathan thought about that—Laurel had refused to choose a safe word when he'd asked her about it, having read up on the topic on various BDSM sites.

"That's for players, Jonathan. For people who don't know each other that well. Who don't trust each other." Her expression darkened and Jonathan knew she was recalling that Spanish bastard who had abused her trust. But she smiled and added, "We don't need that, Jonathan. When you and I begin our D/s journey and something is too much for me, I'll tell you. We'll communicate. You will listen and know when to stop."

God, he hoped she was right. Had he overstepped with the crop? What had compelled him to smack her breast? He'd done it because he'd wanted to, he realized. Was that enough reason? Could a Dom just do what he wanted because he could? Jonathan wasn't sure. But he didn't want to appear hesitant in front of her. He didn't want this to be a game. He didn't want her to doubt him.

He moved in front of the girl, pressing his body up close so his thighs touched hers. He could feel the heat emanating from her pussy. He could smell the sweet, light scent of her arousal. Leaning his body over hers, he kissed her mouth. She responded passionately, which gave him courage to continue.

Stepping back, he angled himself so he had a good range of motion for cropping her ass. He let the little leather loop smack against her, not too hard. She didn't move. He hit the other cheek. She sighed a little breathy sigh. Slowly he began to hit first one cheek then the other, steadily increasing the intensity of the strokes. Her flesh jiggled in a sexy way with each smack and the skin was turning a nice shade of pink.

He cupped her ass cheeks with his hands. They were hot, deliciously hot as blood flowed beneath the skin in response to the cropping. Jonathan felt almost lightheaded with excitement. He was doing it! He was using a riding crop on a gorgeous, bound girl, and not because he'd purchased the privilege but because she wanted it too!

He smacked her right cheek several times in succession on the same spot. "Ow!" Laurel squealed, trying for the first time to wriggle.

"Oh," Jonathan responded, "feeling a little tender, eh? Surely you can take more than that, can't you, Laurel?"

When she didn't answer, he struck her again, in the same spot. It was now a darker red than the rest of the cheek. "Ow!" she squealed again. "Yes, Sir! I can take more but it hurts, Sir! All in one spot like that hurts!"

He smacked her again on the same spot, his cock nearly exploding, the drop of precum at its tip staining his underwear. "Well, of course it hurts. It's supposed to hurt, silly girl. That's the point. You suffer for me. Because it pleases me to have you suffer for me. Isn't that what you told me? Your very words?"

"Yes, Sir," Laurel answered softly. Jonathan drew his fingers lightly over the abraded skin, letting it trail upward toward her spread pussy. It was glistening with

arousal, the labia swollen and red with desire. Jonathan smiled and wet his finger in the juice, sliding it back down over her ass.

"You protest but your body says otherwise. I have an idea." He idly rubbed her swollen labia as he talked, drawing a moan of lust from her as she tried to wriggle into his hands. She couldn't move however, except for a slight side-to-side motion. "Let's test your professed desire to 'suffer'. I'm going to choose a spot and you're going to count the strokes. Twenty strokes per spot. You need to be careful and pay attention to your counting or we'll have to start over. Do you understand?"

Jonathan had read something along these lines and been very aroused as he'd read it, but nowhere near as aroused as he was now. A part of him wanted to just shuck his clothing and climb over her, slamming his cock into her and fucking her silly. But the true Dom in him wanted to take her further—to see how far his submissive lover was willing to go.

"Yes, Sir," she whispered. It was hot how she kept calling him "Sir". It made him feel powerful, masterful. She'd never called him "Sir" before, even when the lovemaking had gone past vanilla. She'd mentioned in passing she didn't care for the term "Master" when speaking directly to one's Dom as it seemed stilted and artificial. "At least for me," she'd said. "Though I've never had a 'Master' so maybe I don't know what I'm talking about."

He'd been relieved when she'd said that actually. Part of his fear of domming her was that he would be compared and fall short, far short, of the mark. She had told him she'd been quite active in the BDSM scene but never in love at the same time. "I think," she'd mused while lying sweetly in his arms in the afterglow of some wild sex, "that love really is the key. That true submission can only come with true love. I know that sounds really corny!" She'd laughed, nuzzling her head against his bare chest. In almost a whisper she'd added, "But I think it might be true."

They'd been together for five weeks now. Barely a day had passed when they hadn't seen each other. Over the past two weeks, they'd been sleeping together all night, instead of one or the other slipping away near dawn. He mostly stayed at her place because it was actually closer to his Wall Street office than his apartment, and because her bed was so inviting, especially with her in it.

Yet through all the growing closeness and the delicious, decadent sex, they had yet to say those three magic words to each other. *I love you*. Jonathan had never been one to throw those words about. It annoyed him when people said it at the drop of a hat. It cheapened the emotion, discounted the feeling he thought should be all-consuming. He had told Marie he loved her, though never enough for her taste as she subtly and not-so subtly let him know. Toward the end of the relationship, he had no longer known if he was saying it out of a sense of obligation or because he really meant it.

He didn't want to cheapen what was developing between Laurel and himself by throwing it out there too soon. And if he were really honest, on an even deeper level, he didn't want to be the first one to say it. Because what if she didn't say it back?



Instead he contented himself with other endearments, knowing in his heart he was definitely falling in love with this wild, brilliant and sassy submissive. Focusing on her sexy ass and exposed pussy, Jonathan said in a commanding voice, "Are you ready? Remember, twenty strokes. Then we move to a new spot." She didn't answer and he didn't force the issue. Instead he let the crop fall on the center of one globe.

"One," she said. "Two, three, four, five, six, seven, oh! Ow! Eight! Nine, oh that hurts, really...I—"

He cut off her words. "You forgot the rules." Jonathan felt lust coursing almost dangerously through his blood. He was on fire with his power over this sexy woman. He touched her pussy—still sopping—and smiled a cruel smile. Perhaps the woman did protest too much?

He began again, on the same spot, already a lovely cherry red. "Ten!" Laurel cried.

"No, no. So sorry, little girl. It's one. Now we'll start again. On one." He struck her, the sound of leather against flesh like smooth fingers gripping his cock. "Two! Three, four, five, six!" Laurel was whimpering in between counting but she hadn't said to stop or that she couldn't handle it. In truth, he had eased up on the strokes, not wanting to really hurt her.

When she reached twenty in a breathless little voice, he dropped the crop and knelt between her legs. Lightly he kissed the hot little square of tortured flesh. Laurel shuddered, still breathing hard though no longer whimpering. Jonathan licked the hot skin, letting his tongue glide toward her crack. Laurel jerked hard suddenly, as if trying to close her legs.

*Interesting*, Jonathan thought, as he continued his tongue's journey 'til it found its mark at her sweet, sticky labia. Lightly he kissed and nibbled her swollen pussy, drawing a guttural moan of pleasure from her. He put a hand on either thigh, thrilled by the fact she was bound and immobile, unable to close her legs, even if she had wanted to.

He kissed her pussy, alternating his focus from her hard little clit down to her wet entrance where he would slide his tongue as far as it would go into the slick heat. Laurel was jerking against him, nearing orgasm. She was breathing hard and fast between sweet little mewls of pleasure.

Just as he felt her body begin to tremble, that telltale moment before she slid into a climax, he pulled away, sitting back on his haunches. He had to open his pants—his cock was painfully mashed in his underwear. Pushing off his boots with his toe to the heel, he pulled his jeans down and off, kicking them away.

Reaching into his underwear, he gripped his firm, thick cock, running his hand up its smooth shaft with his own sigh of pleasure. Laurel's breathing had slowed a little and she was wriggling a bit, as if to call his mouth back to its duty. He watched her, amused as he stroked himself.

"Jonathan? Hey, I was so close...come on..."

"No longer 'Sir' I see? When your selfish little pleasure gets involved, all submissive thoughts just seem to vanish, am I right?" He laughed full of mirth but his eyes glittered.

"Oh I, no, it's just. I was so close..." she trailed off.

"Sluts like you have to earn their pleasure, Laurel. Surely you know that?" When she didn't respond he went on. "I think twenty more strokes are in order if you want to come. Agreed?"

"Do I have a choice?" Her tone was sassy, almost angry. Greedy little girl.

He walked over to her head, gripping her long hair in his fist as he answered softly, "No, you don't. Not if I'm in charge, that is." Jonathan's heart was pounding. This might be the moment. He'd pushed her too far. He'd denied her her pleasure. She was going to call the game off and demand to be let free.

"Yes, Sir," she said softly, her tone submissive, her eyes wide. Jonathan smiled, hiding his relief by bending over to kiss each nipple in turn, pulling it gently to erection before moving back to retrieve his riding crop.

Again in front of her glorious ass, he chose a spot on the other cheek and began. "One! Two, three, four, five..." The sound of the leather mixed with her breathless counting, interspersed with little "oh!"s nearly drove Jonathan mad with lust. He kicked away his underwear, firmly gripping his cock to ease the pressure as he smacked her ass.

When she'd reached twenty, not faltering this time, he knelt again between her legs. Again he kissed and gently licked the red abraded skin, crooning to her. "You were wonderfully brave, darling. What a good, sexy sub you are. I think you've earned those kisses now."

He drew his tongue along her ass cheek again, sliding into the crack and lightly licking her little puckered asshole, mainly to see if she'd react as she had a moment before. Sure enough, Laurel bucked hard in her bonds. "No!" she shouted, surprising Jonathan with her vehemence. Was this a no-trespassing zone? They hadn't had anal sex yet, but he had assumed it was just a matter of time. It wasn't his favorite type of intercourse but it could be very exciting, especially in light of their developing D/s relationship.

Shouldn't a submissive allow her Dom to touch any part of her body in any way he wished? Wasn't this part of the definition of a D/s relationship? Yet he sensed she wasn't merely being coy. Jonathan had tapped into something sensitive for Laurel by touching her asshole. Something he wasn't prepared to explore at this point. Not while her pussy was sopping wet and his cock was so hard he could hammer a nail with it.

Instead he moved his mouth to her pussy, licking and teasing her until she was screaming with lust. Just as he felt her shudder, as she screamed, "Oh! Oh, oh, oh!" he climbed up over her, pressing his cock into her entrance, which made her cries crescendo up a scale of pleasure. He pummeled her, loving the feel of her heated ass against his balls.

In just a few minutes—he couldn't hold back after the lengthy foreplay—Jonathan felt his balls tighten as he slammed into her, coming hard as he found and kissed her mouth.

Laurel was jerking against him, her arms still bound under the table, her legs still forced wide. As Jonathan lay atop her, his heart pounding against hers, he reached under and released the ties at her wrists. Her arms came around him and she held him tightly, whispering his name over and over in a way that made his heart almost ache with joy.

Reluctantly—he wanted to stay locked in her arms, leaning over her with his cock still buried inside her—he pulled away. He didn't want to leave her legs bound like that any longer. It had been at least thirty minutes, he figured. Long enough to be tied down in that position.

Quickly he released the clasps that held her ankles in the thick cuffs. Gently he put his arms under her back, pulling her up on the padded table so her legs could rest comfortably along it.

"You okay?" he said softly, a sudden pang of worry he'd gone too far again pricking him.

Laurel smiled beatifically at him. "Better than okay, Sir. Good job for your first time out."

"Why you little—" Playfully Jonathan cuffed her ear. Laurel laughed, pulling him down to her, smothering his protest with her kisses.

## **Chapter Eight**

Laurel looked around the salon and smiled with satisfaction. It was ten o'clock and most of the guests had arrived. There was Tom Saunders, his arm conspicuously empty of Stephanie or any other woman. He looked good in his black leather jacket and faded jeans, his dark hair falling over his forehead, vivid blue eyes flashing. Frank Rogers had come, her old friend from the scene, a big burly man in his late fifties with a twinkling eye and jolly laugh that belied his heavily sadistic penchants.

There were several professional Doms and Dommes, friends of James and Mistress Catherine, along with their submissive pets, properly attired—or more accurately barely attired—in silk, leather, rope and chain. The growing ranks of their annual membership holders were there as well, mingling and hobnobbing with their friends and acquaintances. Laurel couldn't place all the faces and had a suspicion a few of these were party crashers. She didn't mind however, as it was good advertising and she had hoped the exclusivity of the event would make the club that much more sought after.

Everyone was busily sampling appetizer trays set out on every available surface. Laurel was pleased with the menu. Once she'd made her selections, James had done the actual ordering and coordinating with the caterer who was a friend of his. Guests had loaded their plates with selections of sausage-stuffed mushroom caps, cucumber boats filled with soft herbed cheese, smoked salmon mousse on toast, sesame-crust chicken on little skewers with ginger soy sauce, the usual piles of cut cheese and clustered grapes and melon, and some gorgeous-looking chocolate-dipped strawberries upon which Laurel had her eye.

There were bottles of white and red wine as well as champagne to celebrate the formal opening of Club Roissy. Jonathan had just arrived, running late from a large deal he was brokering that had apparently run into some last-minute complications. Brian took his coat at the door as James ushered him into the salon. He looked wonderfully handsome, dressed in a dark blue silk shirt that set off his golden blond hair beautifully. His pants were of light tan wool. Not a few eyes turned in his direction as he arrived, tall, broad-shouldered with sunny good looks. A mystery man no one had seen at the usual venues.

He seemed to have eyes only for Laurel. They lit up as he smiled at her and moved into her embrace. "So glad you could come, Mr. Goldman," she said formally, before breaking into a giggle. He caught her up in a bear hug for a moment before letting her down.

"And so lovely to see you, Ms. Jordan. You look simply ravishing in that gown." He bowed in a stilted manner, waving his hand toward her as if it contained a plumed hat. They both burst out laughing.

"So," he said, as Laurel handed him a glass of dry, fine champagne, "I thought you'd all be upstairs by now, getting beaten and tortured for fun."

"Oh, we were waiting for you," she retorted, grinning. "I know how jealous you get when I'm beaten and tortured and you aren't there to join in the fun!" He smiled back but a flicker of something went through his eyes.

A tall woman in her middle forties, dressed in a dark crimson bustier and black leather pants at least a size too small came up to them, putting her hand proprietarily on Jonathan's arm. Her long red nails dragged along the blue silk of his sleeve. "And who is this perfectly *gorgeous* man? Where have you been hiding him? Tell me he's submissive. Tell me he's fair game for tonight, I'm begging you!"

Laurel laughed and said, "Sorry, Beth, this one's all Dom and all mine."

"Damn!" Beth said, tossing back her long black hair. "I'll have to make do with my two boys." She waved desultorily toward two young men, both dressed identically in black leather cock pouches and thick black cuffs at their ankles, wrists and throat. Otherwise they were naked, their bodies long and well muscled, the result of weight training. They were chained together by a dog leash with clips at either end. They created a rather peculiar image as they stood nearly naked and chained, holding their plates and shoveling food into their mouths.

Turning to Jonathan, who seemed a little flustered by the exchange, she said, "Jonathan, this is Beth Cohen. Or Mistress B. as she's known to her entourage of adoring sub boys."

Beth smiled widely, slightly yellowed teeth clashing with the powered white of her face and the vividly painted red lips. "That's right. I know how to train my boys. They'll do what they're told and thank you for it. None of this consensual crap. The only thing my boys consent to is to give themselves utterly and completely to me. After that, I call the shots. All of them. No discussions, no touchy-feely bullshit. They submit or they suffer the consequences. They have a problem with that, they hit the road. End of story."

"Doesn't seem very loving, if you don't mind my saying so," Jonathan said.

Beth laughed theatrically, throwing back her head as if Jonathan had said something endlessly amusing. "To quote the song, 'What's love got to do with it?'"

Jonathan smiled a tight smile and turned slightly away. Laurel said smoothly, "Beth, have you tried the salmon mousse? It's absolutely out of this world." Beth drifted away toward a food table and Jonathan grunted.

"Why did you invite *her*? She's repulsive."

"Well, I guess that's a matter of opinion. She runs a BDSM website, her stated goal being to turn every man on the planet into an adoring and obedient slave. She takes men by the hour or by the day or by the month. Same service we offer here really, but just for submissive men. She works out of her house in White Plains. I invited her because a lot of her clientele live here in the city and she has more business than she can handle. I figured she might refer us some clients or rent our space from time to time

when she's in the city. If she approves, her word-of-mouth advertising will be priceless."

"So those are clients?" Jonathan gestured toward the two slave boys who had moved to the bar for more wine.

"No, those are her actual fulltime 'pets'. Her lovers in fact, if you can call them that. They sleep in her basement on mats and are never unchained or unmarked, but she does love them in her way. They seem to adore her."

"Go figure," Jonathan said, his expression bemused. "No telling about these people, I suppose. A different universe."

Laurel was distracted by a few more guests entering and she left Jonathan to fend for himself for a while. She thought about his comment. He still tended to differentiate himself from people in the scene as if they were alien beings.

They'd had two sessions so far in the playroom, the second more intense than the first. Yet she still sensed his hesitation, his uncertainty. She had come to realize her bantering and teasing were sometimes taken seriously. He questioned if she were truly submissive or just in it for the thrill. He questioned his own nature as well, though more obliquely. She knew he wasn't entirely confident in himself as a Dom or in what his boundaries were with her when it came to D/s and BDSM play. She hoped it was just a matter of time and trust until he found himself in a place where he felt completely comfortable. Until then, things were still wonderful.

Beyond wonderful. She knew she was definitely falling head over feet for Jonathan, though she hadn't yet said she loved him to his face. Nor, as a matter of fact, had he. This didn't especially trouble Laurel. She knew men often had trouble with those three little words and she herself was hesitant to throw them out. What mattered more was action and Jonathan had showed her in a hundred little ways over the time they'd been together how much he loved her. The beautiful cut flowers he brought several times a week, the way he made love to every inch of her body, the way he never wanted to leave her, preferring her company to his work, which she knew up until they'd met had completely consumed him.

She was still waiting, though less overtly, for him to make a false move or for herself to get bored of him. They were nearing the two-month mark. Laurel rarely stayed with a man past two months. By then, it seemed she knew all there was to know or all she cared to know and was beginning to be bored with the sex and irritated by any number of little habits and quirks she hadn't been aware of in the blush of new lust.

But with Jonathan that wasn't happening. No list had as yet been compiled. And the sex! Instead of getting duller by the day, it had only been more and more exciting. Jonathan, as he gained confidence, had begun to dom her in a way that actually took her breath away. So far he hadn't pushed her past any limit of comfort—not for longer than a second or two, if at all—but he was growing more sure of what he wanted and of his right to take it. This excited Laurel on a deep, primal level. She needed someone

who could control her. To whom she could give herself completely, if she were ever to be fulfilled as a submissive.

She smiled around the room at her guests, aware Mistress Catherine was about to appear with a flourish and announce it was time to move the festivities to the dungeons. She thought about their second visit there, just the night before. Surreptitiously she rubbed her bottom through the red satin of her full-length gown as she recalled the delicious whipping he'd administered, her skin still tender twenty-four hours later.

He had his eye on the Saint Andrew's Cross, black and gleaming with hooks and straps strategically placed to harness one's victim. When she'd said she wanted to try the swing, he'd laughed and said, "We will. We'll try everything, my eager little slut. But for tonight, I want to try this ingenious-looking device. Tell me about it."

She'd explained its function, adding in a bit of history. "Saint Andrew was an apostle who rose in the early Christian ranks until he was martyred on a diagonal cross by the Romans. Apparently it was such an honor, the cross was named after him."

"Nailed up, you mean? Crucified and left to bleed to death?"

"Yes. Standard practice back then for criminals and religious upstarts. Now we just use it for fun and profit."

"Have you had a lot of experience with this particular, eh, device?" His tone was neutral but Laurel was suddenly a little on her guard. Though he wasn't openly jealous of her past lovers, he did seem to get almost possessive about her BDSM experiences, which she found odd, given that he knew she had been a seasoned player before she'd met him. She chalked it up to insecurity, hoping her continued affection and submissive obedience would calm his fears, whatever they might be.

"I've had a bit, yes." She grinned. "No nails through the hands and feet though! Just cuffs and weights. And a good flogging."

"Weights?" he asked, and then realization dawned on his face. Though his prior BDSM experience had been limited to visiting the clubs and surfing the 'net, he'd been around enough to know weights were sometimes used as part of nipple, pussy, cock and ball torture.

"Where might the weights be kept around here?" He glanced around, maybe looking for a bin of BDSM toys like the toy baskets kept at preschools.

"BYOT," Laurel laughed. "Bring your own toys. Things like weights, gags and dildos are not generally kept on hand for the public at large. Would you want to clamp my pussy with something that had been on some guy's balls?" She grinned as Jonathan winced. "Anyway, you get the point."

"I do. Have you a set of weights in your bag of tricks?" Laurel had a large duffel filled with all kinds of BDSM paraphernalia she'd acquired over the years. She did indeed have nipple and pussy clamps with little clips to attach weights, rendering the torture that much more excruciating. They were nestled in a little green velvet bag someone had given her years before to keep her jewelry in. She didn't wear much

jewelry, but it had come in handy for the loose clips, clamps and fishing weights used for nipple torture.

Laurel was more partial to being bound and whipped than to being clamped on her delicate parts. But a Dom she used to scene with regularly had insisted she acquire the clamps and had used them on her from time to time with some success, once she overcame her initial fear.

In the right situation, she would submit to anything a Dom cared to impose. It was all about the mood and the headspace. Actions and behaviors she would consider degrading or even disgusting in a different context could be wildly erotic when handled by a skilled Dom.

Jonathan had never used weights or even clips or clamps as far as Laurel knew, but she felt safe enough with him to experiment. She could tell him if it was too much and she knew he would listen. The thought of submitting to him in this way, to a thing she didn't normally engage in or fantasize about was in itself erotically appealing.

Dutifully she fetched the little velvet bag. She set out the items inside, neatly displaying them on a side table. She started to explain how to use them but Jonathan stopped her. "I'm not an idiot, sweetheart. I can see how to use them. Let's get you into this devilish contraption, shall we?"

She'd dropped the robe she'd wrapped around herself to go up to her room, shivering a little as she stepped up to the cross though the room was warm. She started to face it, prepared to offer her back and ass, but Jonathan stopped her.

"No, not yet. Perhaps if you behave well, I'll give you a flogging. But first I want to see how you handle these clips." Laurel's impulse was to protest. That was always her impulse when clips and clamps were involved. Though she knew they did no permanent damage, they scared her a little, clamping down on delicate flesh, painfully compressing the nipples and labia until they numbed enough for her to tolerate the pain. Adding weights compounded the pressure, heightening the pain and making it last much longer.

Yet she could enter submissive headspace under these conditions with the right man and give herself over to the pain until it was in itself actually pleasurable. She never understood how this dynamic took place, but if she could get there, it was beyond sublime.

Jonathan had her stand so the small of her back leaned against the midpoint of the X. She raised her arms, slipping them into the open cuffs. Jonathan secured her wrists and then her ankles, forcing her to spread her legs wide. She leaned into the X for balance as she felt her breath quicken of its own accord. She swallowed and licked her lips, nervous but deeply aroused.

He leaned into her, kissing her gently on the lips. She felt especially vulnerable spread-eagle and naked while he was fully clothed. "Beautiful," he breathed as he stepped back, gazing at her with lust in his eyes.



Lightly he slapped her breast, making it sway. He hit the other one as well. Taking her nipples between finger and thumb, he pulled them, twisting and then letting them go, watching with satisfaction as they rose and darkened.

He went to the table and returned with the nipple clamps. This pair had adjustable tips, coated in soft plastic over the little teeth that would grip even through the plastic as the clamps were tightened.

Laurel closed her eyes as Jonathan pressed the clip wide open and then let it close over her nipple. She couldn't contain the sudden intake of breath as her nerve endings registered their distress. A moment later the second clamp compressed her other nipple, and again she gasped.

Jonathan lifted the chain, pulling up against her nipples to assure himself the clamps were tight enough. Laurel moaned a little. Her lover's expression was at once tender and wild. She could see he was fiercely aroused by what he was doing. "Are you okay?" he asked, bending down to kiss her lips again.

"Yes," she said. "But my nipples hurt."

"That turns me on, Laurel. You know that." His saying those words somehow fired her blood more even than what he was doing. He was behaving in a very dominant way, a way that thrilled her to her bones. It was understood she would submit to this because it turned him on. Period. Not because it excited her or pleased her, but because *he* wanted it. It felt so right. She sighed a little, easing into the pain, conscious of her wet, throbbing pussy aching with need.

He took the second chain, this one with a clamp dangling at one end and a small clip at the other. He used the clip to attach it to the silver chain swaying prettily between her breasts.

The clamp dangled near her spread legs. Laurel drew in a shuddery breath. "Oh Jonathan," she said, trying to fight her panic, "I'm not sure I can do this."

"That's all right, darling. I'm sure you can. That's all that matters." Carefully he'd pulled her right labium taut, closing the rubber-coated teeth over it. She'd hissed her pain but otherwise had tolerated it. Really, it didn't hurt as much as the nipple clamps, to which she was also adjusting at that point.

Then came the weights. He attached heavy little teardrop iron weights to each nipple clamp and finally to the clamp on her pussy. Laurel moaned as each weight dragged against her flesh, pulling it and causing a new and added pain. Jonathan stood back, admiring her naked, tethered body. "You look so fucking hot like that, Laurel," he said in a low voice husky with desire. "Does it hurt?"

Laurel nodded, biting her lip. It did hurt, but at that moment, there was nowhere else she wanted to be. This was her own personal, perverted little heaven. Lightly Jonathan slapped a breast, watching it sway, watching her wince as the weight pulled hard against her tender, compressed nipple. He slapped the other breast harder. Again and again he hit her breasts until she cried out. Each stroke also jerked against her

imprisoned labia, sending little spirals of pain shooting into her pussy, mingling with the liquid heat of her own lust.

When at last he removed first the weights and then the clamps, she couldn't hold back the shriek of pain as the blood flowed back into now very tender nipples and pussy, reawakening all the angry nerve endings.

Jonathan had soothed her body, gently smoothing and holding the breasts he'd tortured a moment before, crooning in her ear what a good girl she was. He released her wrists and ankles but only to have her turn around. "You've earned this, slave girl," he said as he locked her in place.

Laurel shivered. It was the first time he'd called her that. Did she want to be his slave girl? Yes! A thousand times yes. He came up behind her, sliding the many tresses of a thick, suede flogger along her back and ass. It was soft and felt good against her skin.

After a few moments of this initial caress, he drew back his wrist and left it fall, gently at first. With a deliciously slow buildup, he began to flog her back and ass, concentrating mostly on her ass.

As the intensity increased, Laurel moaned her approval. More, more! she had wanted to shout, but at the same time, she did not want to control the scene. This was his scene and so far it had been intensely hot and deeply exciting. He had barely touched her sex yet she felt as if she'd orgasmed two or three times, the endorphins created by the torture simulating pleasure in her brain.

He whipped her for a long time, eventually hitting her quite hard so her body was thrust against the smooth wood of the cross. This was her favorite kind of whipping, with a thuddy, heavy flogger of softest suede that didn't mark so much as cover one in delicious, stinging sensation. She found it hard to believe this was his first time with a flogger. He was definitely a natural and completely in tune to her.

When at last he stopped, she stayed inert, her head back, eyes closed, barely conscious but still on fire for him. Gently he released her cuffs, letting her fall back against his strong chest. He scooped her up in his arms, carrying her to a soft, thick sheepskin rug in a corner of the room. Gently he lay her upon it.

She stayed still, her back and ass soothed against the soft rug, her eyes closed, her heart still thumping as endorphins zinged through her bloodstream. Jonathan lay down over her and she could feel his now naked body as he spread her thighs with his knee. She felt the head of his shaft, fat and eager, against her pussy and she arched up, desperate to receive him.

He made love to her, holding her tightly as he whispered how beautifully she'd taken a whipping and how she was the loveliest, most exciting woman he'd ever met. He came quickly and she came along with him, having teetered on the edge of sexual arousal for over an hour.

Laurel was pulled out of her daydream by a booming feminine voice. "Ladies and gentlemen. Doms and subs. Master and slaves. The time has come." Mistress Catherine

had appeared for her grand entrance as they'd previously planned. She was dressed in a stunning gown of black satin, intricately beaded over the breasts in a style reminiscent of flapper girls from the Twenties. Her red hair was swept up on top of her head, black-beaded earrings dangling from her lobes. "You will follow me to the dungeons."

James, who had been mingling with the guests, approached Catherine. He looked quite different from the mild-mannered, bespectacled man in corduroy who had met Laurel at the airport. Tonight he was dressed in soft, toffee brown leather, sporting only a vest with no shirt, revealing a muscular if narrow frame. He wore matching pants that looked as if they'd been painted on his lean body, highlighting the sizable bulge at his crotch. He had a red bandana tied around his head, lending him a rakish air.

Standing next to Catherine, he turned to the crowd, who had his full attention, and announced, "Let the games begin!"

## **Chapter Nine**

Both dungeons were available for the party. The demonstrations and slave auction would take place in one of the dungeons while in the other, partition screens had been set up for semiprivate play. Right now everyone was crowded into one dungeon, eager to see the first demonstration on breast binding.

Mistress Catherine, herself amply endowed, was going to give this presentation as she was known for her expertise in the area. She had chosen Noelle, a house sub, for the demonstration because Noelle, while otherwise slender, had large full breasts tipped with dark, beautiful nipples. Noelle was African American with skin the color of melted brown sugar. Her head was shaved, which might seem severe, but because of her beautiful bone structure and features, made her look like some kind of exotic, delicate angel.

She stepped gracefully up onto a dais prepared for the occasion so the guests had a good view. As Catherine spoke, Noelle stood perfectly still, her nude body straight and proud, her eyes cast down as befitted her status. The room quieted, except for murmurs of appreciation at her beauty.

"Welcome, class, to Breast Binding 101. And pay attention because there will be a quiz after," Mistress Catherine said in a schoolteacher voice to much laughter. "Tonight I'm just going to touch on what breast bondage is, what you need in the way of materials and what its place is in D/s. I'm going to give you a demonstration in my favorite technique, breast circling or as some call it, cinching."

She looked back toward Noelle. "Our lovely house sub Noelle has graciously agreed to be used for this demonstration. As you can see, she's perfectly endowed for this particular form of bondage." There were a few whistles of appreciation as the audience ogled her large, pretty breasts. If Noelle was aware of the attention, and of course she was, it was not reflected in her still, serene countenance.

"Breasts are perfect for erotic torture," Catherine said, "as they are generously provided with an abundance of nerve endings and have no bones to break. The object of breast bondage, in my estimation, is to provide an erotic display for the Dom, and to focus the sub on their breasts and the upcoming torture they might endure once bound and helpless. I find it quickly reduces a sub to a very submissive state of mind.

"You can bind your sub for an intense, short period or a less intense, longer period. The duration of the bondage must be taken into account when choosing the technique as well the material to be used and the tightness imposed. Breasts should never become blue or become numb. Some discomfort can be expected, and indeed, is desired. But remember, different women have different sensitivity to various areas of their breasts

and it's essential you explore your own sub's breasts and comfort level carefully in the beginning with much honest communication between the two of you."

She stepped up onto the dais next to the naked woman, who didn't move or look up. Catherine walked behind her and reached around her slender frame, cupping and lifting her heavy breasts. "Noelle, here, is perfect for breast binding. She has large, malleable breasts and she's not oversensitive to pressure." Catherine gently squeezed Noelle's breasts, her white fingers and long red nails contrasting against the creamy brown skin.

"She does have rather sensitive nipples," Catherine added, grasping and pulling one nipple, which elongated and engorged, the areola puckering around it. She did the same to the other. Only those standing close enough heard the slight intake of breath as Catherine rather savagely twisted the second nipple before releasing it.

"As I'm sure all you perverts well know, there are lots of delicious erotic tortures you can devise for nipples once the breasts are bound. Feel free to add clamps, rings, bows, clothespins or whatever your devious minds come up with to suit your personal taste.

"I'm going to concentrate on the actual binding. There are lots of different techniques from simple cinching to complex Japanese bondage methods. I like to use cotton rope because it's soft and easy to work with. You can also use leather thongs, silk ribbon, twine or even light wire.

"The technique I'll demonstrate is called circling or cinching. Works best with nice big tits like these." She lightly slapped one of Noelle's breasts. It swayed prettily as Catherine produced some soft rope and lightly touched Noelle's back. She bent slightly forward, putting her hands behind her back.

Catherine proceeded to bind the breasts, one at a time, all the while giving a running commentary on the procedure. Some people crowded closer to observe while others, mainly gay men, drifted away to check out the broad range of equipment in both dungeons.

Jonathan and Laurel were standing off to the side a bit but near the front of the dais. Jonathan was watching the demonstration rather intently, his lips slightly parted in concentration. At that moment Tom came up to Laurel's other side. Standing close to her, their hips almost touching, he moved his hand along her satin-covered hip. Laurel startled a little at the gesture and moved closer to Jonathan.

"That's a lovely gown, Laurel," Tom commented softly. "Very becoming. I admire the simplicity of it. Why bother with unsightly lines." She knew he was referring to her lack of panties. He'd purposefully run his fingers along her hip, feeling for the telltale panty line and not finding it.

Though she was slightly affronted at his forward behavior, the lingering half-life of the torch she'd once carried for him still glowed dimly somewhere in her mind. She felt her nipples stiffen slightly as he continued to gaze appreciatively at her. "I do hope you'll watch my demo. I'm going to use a single tail I've just designed. It has a hard

handle and makes a lovely cracking sound. Perhaps you'd like to be my model? I know you can take a whipping beautifully."

Jonathan turned toward them and said a little gruffly, "I don't believe we've met yet. Laurel?"

Laurel felt the sudden tension between the two men. "Tom, this is Jonathan Goldman."

Tom said, "Ah, so this is the man who stole you away," as he held out his hand for the requisite shake.

"Jonathan, I'd like you to meet Tom Saunders. He's a world-renown whip maker and an old friend."

Laurel regretted the last part of her sentence as Jonathan's features darkened a little. She knew he was wondering if "old friend" was a euphemism for old lover. The two men shook hands. They all turned to watch as Catherine finished the last of her knotting and binding. Noelle looked very erotic with white rope wrapped around her breasts and looped together, forcing them up and out, the nipples fairly screaming for attention. She smiled shyly as the audience applauded Catherine's handiwork.

Catherine looked over toward Tom, nodding slightly. "Guess that's my cue. Sure I can't convince you to be my model?" Tom laughed, his blue eyes boring into hers.

"She'll just observe, thanks. Maybe I can learn a trick or two as well," Jonathan said. Laurel slipped her hand into his.

Tom approached the dais, bringing with him a medium-length single-tail whip with a three-foot braid. Jenny, the sub he'd hired for an hour earlier that week, also approached. She was dressed in a sheer gold blouse and matching skirt, completely see-through. She was naked beneath it.

People gathered around to see what Tom had to show. Many of them already owned or at least coveted, one or more of Tom's pricey but beautiful and functional floggers and whips.

Jenny had short, dark brown hair streaked with blonde. She had a long lovely neck and slender build that brought Audrey Hepburn to mind. She stood quietly next to Tom as he began to talk. People might have been listening to him but they were staring at her.

Tom garnered their attention, plus a few gasps from the submissives in the audience when he suddenly cracked the whip in the air very close to but not touching Jenny's leg. Jenny didn't flinch.

"For many submissives," Tom began, grinning, "simply seeing and hearing a whip being used can be incredibly arousing. However, the reality is very few people actually use a whip. Floggers with their soft, light tresses are much easier to use and to tolerate. Whips are more difficult to become skilled with and if used improperly, they can be very dangerous.

"Tonight I just want to show you some simple techniques for safely using a short single tail. I have workshops for more advanced techniques. If you're interested, see me later." Turning to Jenny, he said, "Tonight Jenny will be our model. And I should say," he looked out toward Laurel, "this party is fantastic and this club is fantastic and I wish Laurel and James enormous success. And," he lightly touched Jenny's cheek as she smiled shyly at him, "judging from the house subs, you can't help but succeed."

The room broke out in applause as both Laurel and James, who was standing across the room with Brian and several guests, nodded their thanks. Tom turned back to Jenny and said, "Strip." Just that one word, no "if you please" or preamble.

Just as simply, Jenny calmly pulled her blouse over her head and unzipped the back of her skirt, stepping neatly out of it. Her breasts were small and high, almost girlish but her womanly hips and shaven pussy left no doubt as to her femininity. Tom gestured with his finger and she turned slowly around.

Her ass was perfect, not too large but round and full with a deep dimple just above each cheek. She stood with her legs in an at-ease position so the people standing just below her had a lovely peek at her pouting pussy lips from between her fleshy ass cheeks.

"There are safe ways to use a single tail," Tom continued. "What you need to do is forget about its ability to crack. Don't try to crack the whip on someone, use it more like a belt or flogger. And before you try it on your sub, practice on a piece of paper until you're comfortable. You can hang it from a light fixture or a clothesline—anything so long as it's hanging free. If you've never done this, practice for hours, not minutes. I like paper, because you can see exactly where the whip lands. If you hit it with too much force, the paper tears. Skin isn't as delicate as paper but this teaches you to precisely control the whip. Remember, a whip moves damn fast and it's gonna hurt when it touches the skin.

"You want to hit your target with just the barest tip of the whip. This creates an incredibly intense, sharp, cutting sensation and can cut the skin if you apply too much force. When you're ready to try it on the real thing, I suggest you start with a flogging. This sets the brain flooding with endorphins so by the time the single tail appears they're already flying around in the clouds.

"The sensation of being hit with the single tail is indeed incredibly intense but only a very small spot is struck and only for a very short time. By the time they register the sting it's gone.

"I'm not going to flog Jenny beforehand because this isn't a session between lovers but a demonstration. She will feel the sting more as a result but I'll make it up to her later." He stroked her cheek again, suggesting an intimacy between them. Laurel raised her eyebrows, wondering what had taken place in the house session and perhaps afterward.

The room quieted as Tom prepared to whip his charge. The crack of the whip struck the ears a second before the braid struck Jenny's ass. She jerked slightly and a tiny red

line began to emerge on the spot. Tom struck her several more times. Jenny took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"That's right," Tom said. "You learn not to tense up—to let the pain ripple over you like a rock hitting the surface of a pond. It becomes the fuel for endorphins, more lift to get you higher. You let the pain wash over you, the way ocean waves wash over your feet on the shore. It's when you clench and resist that it's not enjoyable."

He struck her, leaving little red welts evenly distributed over both cheeks. Laurel felt herself responding as if she were the one feeling the cut of the lash. She was thinking on his words, beautifully phrased and so apt. That was just what it was like—letting the pain wash over you and lift you higher. She'd tried to explain it to Jonathan but hadn't had the proper words.

She turned to him now. "Are you having fun, sweetheart?"

He was watching Tom and Jenny, his eyes bright. She glanced down at his crotch and grinned at the physical evidence of his arousal. Would she be next to feel the sting of a single tail?

"I want one of those," Jonathan said, as if hearing her unspoken question. "And yes, I'm having fun. I had no idea there was so much to learn though! Maybe I'll have to sign up for a few of these workshops."

"Oh, I don't know," Laurel responded. "I don't really think it's necessary. A few basic techniques and listening to my body as you use it. We should be fine."

"Well, I guess that's up to me, isn't it?"

Laurel recoiled slightly, wondering if the rebuke she imagined in the remark was real or not. She realized he wasn't the only one separating himself from the players in the scene. In her mind too, in some respects, he represented the sweet, romantic side of her submissive nature, and this club and the players in it were more of a business. She found most of them, if she had been pressed, to be pompous and even a little silly, strutting about with their semi-naked pets in tow. She knew it was a game for most of them.

She wanted something more with Jonathan. Something real. Something from the heart, not just the genitals. Was she corrupting Jonathan by exposing him to these games? Did he think she expected him to behave as the Doms in the scene did?

*Stop over-thinking everything, she admonished herself. Stop trying to control everything. The party is a huge success and this place is going to make you rich. You love Jonathan and he loves you.*

She glanced over at him, still staring raptly at the whipping in progress. He'd never said he loved her. Did the words really matter?

She leaned over, intending to whisper those three powerful words into his ear, but at that moment James and Brian flanked them. James caught Laurel in a hug and gushed, "We've done it! We've done it! We've done it! Club Roissy is on the map!"

The moment had passed. Laurel turned away.



## Chapter Ten

Jonathan swiveled his chair toward the window of his twentieth-floor office, looking out at the barges drifting along the East River. March was indeed going out like a lamb and the sun glinting on the water held the promise of spring. Jonathan was supposed to be reviewing a proposal but he couldn't concentrate.

He stared the phone. Should he call her? No. He would see her tonight. He had seen her almost every night for the past ten weeks, except when work kept him away. Yet twice now he'd fucked up, the first time pressing her to reveal something she hadn't been ready to share, and the second time just going over the line in his foolish attempt to act tougher than he was.

She promised him she forgave him and she behaved as if she did, but he hadn't forgiven himself. It made him question everything up to that point. Maybe he just wasn't cut out for this D/s lifestyle. Maybe he was more of a dabbler and in over his head, way over his head.

It was still wonderful to see her, to spend time with her, to make love to her. They continued to delve further into the exploration of their D/s relationship, as she called it. Whatever one called it, Jonathan had never been so deeply involved or so conflicted about what he felt.

Up until this point in his life, he'd managed to convince himself his interest in BDSM was just a casual one. He enjoyed looking at the erotic images of bound women, he was titillated by the shows in the clubs, he might masturbate to vague images of sexual torture. He'd managed, until now, to actually convince himself that was all there was to it. He'd dated women who were strictly vanilla, even repressed.

On some level, he himself remained repressed or at least shocked he was allowing this "perversion" to come to full flower with the woman he loved. He chided himself for calling it a perversion—he knew that degraded Laurel and what they shared together. Intellectually Jonathan knew what he and Laurel did was not perverted but simply a different and admittedly far more intense expression of sensuality than plain vanilla sex.

But emotionally, beyond where his reason could convince him otherwise, Jonathan secretly felt dirty. Wrong. It was wrong to flog Laurel until she whimpered in pain, even if she promised him afterward she adored it and proved it when he later made love to her by coming explosively almost the instant he touched her. It was wrong that he got an erection watching Tom Saunders whip that beautiful, naked girl, the welts rising on her ass along with his cock.

Yet if it were wrong, why did he feel so alive? So close to the "true love" he had come to believe only existed in fairy tales? Laurel was without a doubt the best thing

that had ever happened to him. In addition to being gorgeous, sexy, smart, fun and independent, she seemed to actually be in love with him!

Well, she hadn't ever actually said she was in love with him but she showed him in a hundred different ways—the way she woke him up by licking and stroking his cock to erection and then taking it into her hot, perfect mouth, the way her eyes lit up with pleasure when he came to her at night, the way she showed her submissive desire to please him sexually and through her erotic suffering for him.

What could possibly be wrong in that? Why was he such an idiot to let these stupid fears and repressive bullshit even enter his mind? He thought back to his first big mistake, which had occurred last weekend. He stared unseeingly out the window, remembering that night.

He'd been curious about her obvious hyper-shyness regarding her asshole. He'd been talking it over with James with whom he'd become rather friendly from visiting the club so often on his way up to Laurel's room. He hadn't mentioned Laurel's particular sensitivity of course. But casually he'd asked, "How would you handle a sub's extreme sensitivity toward something? I mean, like, say she refuses to assume a certain sexual position for you because she's shy about some aspect of her body. How would you handle that?"

"In a love relationship or in a scene?" James had asked.

"A love relationship. A D/s relationship between lovers."

"I would try to find out why she was so shy. What motivated the shyness. Then I'd try to desensitize her. Force her to experience the very thing that distressed her. With love though, not in a way to over-traumatize her. Modesty has no place in a D/s relationship. Not if you're serious about submission as a lifestyle."

Jonathan had thought a lot about that conversation. That night they had enjoyed a lovely few hours of delicious sex, including several lengthy flogging sessions and a palm-to-ass spanking with Laurel wriggling delightfully on his lap.

As she lay spent, still over his lap after a spanking, Jonathan smoothed her hot skin, running his hands over her cheeks and thighs. She was sprawled facedown over his lap with her legs spread, unselfconscious in her post-coital, post-spanking bliss.

Jonathan let a finger draw over her cheeks and slip into the crack of her ass. Her asshole was visible to him but as he drew his finger toward it, Laurel suddenly slammed her legs closed, her body tensing.

"Open your legs," Jonathan commanded, but in a gentle voice. Laurel hesitated, but when he repeated the command a little more firmly, she obeyed. Again he slid his finger into the cleft and this time, though she flinched, she allowed him to touch her asshole.

"What makes you so shy, sweetheart? It seems so out of character with your bold personality. You don't strike me as a woman who would be shy about anything."

She rolled from his lap and he allowed her to do so, lying down on the bed next to her. She lay on her side, her face away from him as she answered, "I don't know. Nothing. I mean, I don't know."

Something told him she did know or at least there was a story there, though she seemed hesitant to share it. "Laurel, do you belong to me?"

"Yes," she said softly. She often told him she belonged to him and he loved to hear it, but was it just lip service?

"If that's true, do you think it's right to withhold something from me? To keep secrets from your Dom? To keep up this silly modesty? Modesty has no place in a D/s relationship," he added, quoting James.

Laurel turned toward him, her expression troubled. "No, no. I don't want to keep anything from you. Or be coy or falsely modest with you. It's just that—" She paused, gathering her thoughts. "It's just that, well. It's really dumb actually. I mean, I know I'm stupid about my ass. I know it's not submissive of me to push you away. It's just. Maybe we can wait, you know? I mean, we can work on it, but maybe not yet?"

He wished now he'd kissed her and said, "Yes, baby, we can wait." Instead, thinking he had to be a "real Dom" and make sure she knew her "place", he'd stupidly persisted. "Laurel. You claim to be my sub, my sexual slave girl. You claim to want to take our D/s relationship deeper, take it further. Well, prove it. Tell me why you're so shy. We can work through it together."

Laurel took a deep breath. She looked so fragile, so vulnerable. Again he wanted to take her in his arms at that moment and say, "I'm sorry. I'm being a bully. Just let me hold you." Instead he said nothing, afraid if he backed down now, she'd really think he was a jerk and a pretender.

She turned away from him again, pressing her still-hot ass against his now-flaccid cock. He wrapped his arms around her. In a quiet voice she began. "Well. When I was in seventh grade my family moved to a new city. We moved a lot when I was a kid—my dad was transferred to different states for his work. Age twelve is a tough time to be a new kid, as cliques are formed and kids can be reluctant to let a new kid in. I wasn't very socially adept to start with, never having settled anywhere long enough to feel secure. There was this group of mean girls who used to tease me all the time.

"I didn't have a real good support system at home. My parents hated each other and my older sister was always getting in all kinds of trouble with drugs and stuff and was the focus of all the attention, albeit negative. Instead of reaching out to someone—a teacher, my parents—I just dug in and tried to handle it myself. One of the girls, I'll never forget her pasty face and carrot-top orange hair, she seemed to make it her life's mission to make my life at school a living hell.

"Kelly Ann, that was her name, was always with these two other girls who did everything she said. I had a huge crush on this boy named Tim Shepard. She found out about it by stealing my spelling book on which I'd written *Laurel Shepard* and *Laurel loves Tim* all over the inside back cover with little hearts bordering the words. She'd told

Tim I was in love with him and he, immature asshole that he was, told me to my face he wouldn't go out with me if I were the last girl on earth. He did it in front of Kelly Ann—they had known each other since kindergarten and he apparently believed whatever nonsense she had told him about me.

"Well, that was bad enough. I ran to the girls' bathroom to cry over it, but as I was crying, I started to get madder and madder. What a bitch to have stolen my notebook and then to have told Tim my secrets! I was hurt by his remarks but I was enraged by Kelly Ann's behavior. She'd finally crossed the line.

"That afternoon after school I lay in wait as she came walking down the main road we all took toward our houses in the development. As she turned onto a private street, I jumped her, throwing her down. She was quite a bit bigger than me but I'd had the advantage of surprise and I whaled into her, punching her in the face, pummeling her, pulling her hair. It was horrible. I was like a girl possessed. She barely hit me back, intent on getting away. I must have really freaked her out. She ran the rest of the block down to her house and slammed the door.

"I kept waiting all night for her parents to show up at our house demanding retribution but they never came. I was at once relieved and afraid. I realized Kelly Ann wasn't going to tell on me. She was going to take matters into her own hands."

Jonathan sighed, recalling Laurel's recitation of this story from her childhood. She'd said it in a rather mechanical voice, as if recalling something she'd read once. He should have stopped her. He should have said it was long ago and she didn't have to tell him. But he didn't.

She continued, her voice less mechanical now, the pain seeping through. "After school the next day they were waiting for me. I'd waited extra long after school let out, to make sure the coast was clear, expecting her to be waiting to do to me what I'd done to her. She was supposed to be in Girl Scouts by the time I finally started home so I figured I was safe, at least for that day.

"But she'd skipped Girl Scouts as I was to discover. Apparently they were following me because I took a different route home, just to be safe. So I was farther from home than I would have been, cutting across an open field to come up behind the houses instead of along the main way. That was my mistake."

She paused and this time Jonathan actually said, "Sweetheart. I was wrong. To push you. It's okay. You don't need to tell me."

But Laurel had insisted. "No. No. You're right. I shouldn't keep things from you. Nothing. I want to tell you. It's okay. It was a long time ago." So he had let her go on. "They waylaid me in the field. There were four of them. Kelly Ann and her cronies and Tim Shepard. They threw me down and Kelly Ann punched me a few times, but then Tim put his foot on the back of my neck. Kelly Ann sat on my back and the two girls each held an ankle. They..." she swallowed and paused, taking a deep breath before resuming.

"They lifted up my dress and pulled down my panties and someone, I don't know who, spread my ass cheeks. I was squirming like crazy and screaming bloody murder, but I was no match for four of them. I was pinned down as they stared at my asshole. Kelly Ann said something like, 'Oh look, the asshole has an asshole. She's an asshole squared.' They finally let me up. My face was covered in dirt and grass and I was crying. Kelly Ann had a swollen lip and a black eye from my attack on her the day before. 'That'll teach you to mess with my friend,' Tim snarled. I just stood there crying, my panties around my knees, stunned at what had happened. They turned on their heels and ran."

She was quiet a long while. Jonathan finally asked, "Then what happened?"

"Nothing. We all avoided each other after that. I think they must have known they'd gone way over the line. But I wasn't telling. The episode was so humiliating I just wanted to forget it. I did end up making friends at that school and fitting in okay. Kelly Ann moved away in eighth grade and I was so used to ignoring the other three I barely knew they existed after a while. Anyway. So now you know."

"I'm so sorry, baby," Jonathan said, holding her and stroking her hair. "Kids can be so cruel. So pointlessly cruel." James had said a Dom had to desensitize his sub to whatever it was she was hung up about, but at least Jonathan had had the sense not to press her that night. Maybe any night. He didn't know.

But worse than that night, much worse, was what happened several nights later. Jonathan shuddered as he thought about it. They had been at his apartment where he'd proudly produced the single-tail lash he'd purchased as a surprise.

He'd been practicing for days, having bought the whip from a Greenwich Village BDSM boutique, inspired by the whipping demonstration at the party. He'd shown her the whip, grinning evilly. "Oh Jonathan, I don't know."

"What? You can handle it. I'll warm you up first with the flogger, don't worry. Get those endorphins flowing."

"Well, okay. I mean, it's just that, you don't have a lot of experience. A whip like that can be dangerous in the wrong hands."

Jonathan had felt his anger flare for a moment. So he wasn't Mr. Professional Whip Maker Dom Tom Saunders. He'd been practicing! He could control the whip so just the tip kissed the piece of paper on which he'd been honing his skills.

"Do you think I'd jeopardize this?" He stroked her bare ass. "Damage the flesh of my most prized possession?" He'd turned her toward him, wrapping her in a warm embrace. She sighed into his kiss, melting into his arms. "Do you trust me, darling?" he whispered into her hair.

"Yes. Completely." And so he had secured her to the exercise bar he'd put in the doorframe, chaining her wrists over her head. It got him so hard to secure her like that, knowing she was helpless and unable to get away — truly at his mercy.

The scene had started out great with a sensual flogging by a heavy, thuddy flogger that kissed her skin, warming her with its many-tressed caress. As he'd built up the

intensity, he'd interspersed it with kisses and with fondling her hot, wet pussy. She was on fire with lust when he'd finally brought out the single-tail lash.

In hindsight, if only he'd let her down right then, carried her to his bed and made delicious love to her. Instead he waved the single tail, cracking it in the air near her, making her jump. "Oh Jonathan! I'm not sure."

"That's okay. You're going to love it. Trust me." Lightly he flicked the tip against her ass, hitting the target perfectly. Laurel squealed and jerked forward. Jonathan felt a jolt to his cock, feeling the heat of his power. He flicked the whip again. Again she squealed and jerked.

He bent over, drawing a finger over the small red marks he'd made on her ass, marveling he'd put those marks there. His marks. He stood back again and took aim, lashing her flesh with the tip. Over and over he flicked the whip against soft flesh, the room hot and close around him, the sound of her harsh breathing filling his ears. His cock was rigid with lust and power.

Again she pleaded, "Please, please. No more. I can't do it! Please." Sometimes she said no when she meant yes. It was up to him as her Dom to listen to her body and decide accordingly. As he watched her sway, sagging hard against her wrists, her ass patterned with small red marks, a voice inside said *stop*. If only he'd listened.

But for some reason the smug face of that whip maker Saunders went through his mind, smirking at him as he remarked how "beautifully" Laurel could take a whipping. Little prick. Jonathan knew Laurel had had many lovers before him, and why shouldn't she? But something about that little man irritated Jonathan. He was a threat. If Jonathan were honest, he knew why he felt threatened—it was because Laurel was still attracted to the bastard. He'd sensed it right away. The way her expression seemed to soften when she looked at Tom. The way the man had touched her hip in full view of Jonathan, and she'd done nothing to stop him. The way she had been too quick to assure Jonathan when he'd stupidly asked, there had never been anything between them.

With the negative image of that man taunting him, Jonathan found his blood rising. Laurel was his sub, dammit. She'd take it until *he* decided she was done. He flicked the tail again, catching her smartly just where her ass met her thigh. Laura screamed and jerked as he caught her on the other thigh, his stroke perfectly aimed. He watched in fascination as two little lines of bright, pure red appeared, seeming to melt before his eyes as they slid down her thighs. He realized with fascinated horror he'd cut her skin—he'd drawn her blood.

"Jonathan! Jonathan! Stop! I need you to stop! Butterfly!"

The heady, lust-driven mood that had taken him over slipped away, everything slowing, blurring, sickening, inside him. The lust chilled in his veins and he dropped the whip as if it were a venomous snake. Jesus, what had he done? Laurel, the girl who swore they would have no need of safe words, had been driven to say the word she had

used in the scene when things got too intense. The word that other cruel, insensitive son of a bitch had ignored.

He had promised never to harm her. It was a sacred trust between Dom and sub, and one he had betrayed in his foolish, jealous lust.

Jonathan swung back around to face his desk, dropping his head into his hands. He'd taken the trust of the woman he loved and he'd abused it. Torn it with a flick of his wrist. He had listened to her body but he had ignored its signals. He was a failure as a Dom and by extension as a man.

As fast as he could, he'd released her, carrying her in his arms to his bed where he gently laid her on her belly. He smoothed a soothing salve into her welted flesh, biting his lip with worry as she lay still, so still. She didn't answer his whispered entreaties, "Are you okay? Laurel honey, are you all right?" The two little cuts were not deep and had stopped bleeding almost at once. Still they alarmed him, scarlet reminders of his crime.

Eventually she had turned over and opened her arms to him. He'd fallen into them, wanting to cry like a little child. He held her tight, whispering how sorry he was. How stupid he was. She fell asleep in his arms.

Later she had promised him it was okay. That they would learn from it and go on. That this wasn't a science but a loving art. She assured him he wasn't the first Dom to overstep a sub's bounds. She knew it hadn't been done out of malice but out of lust and inexperience. She promised she forgave him, but he hadn't forgiven himself.

He had lain sleepless for a long time, staring at the ceiling. Finally he decided perhaps a walk would clear his head. He would walk and things would fall into place in his head. He would know what to do.

He walked and walked and walked.

## **Chapter Eleven**

Laurel looked around her bedroom. She'd only been here a few months but it felt like home. Maybe this was it and she was finally ready to settle down after years of nearly constant travel. There was something peaceful about her bedroom that calmed her. She liked the way the pale gold dawn light filtered through her east window, gently waking her and casting the room in a soothing glow.

She'd added a few items to the initial design James and Brian had set up for her at her direction. She had a small bookcase filled with her favorite books, above which she'd hung an oval white-framed Art Nouveau mirror. A large vase of a delicate pale blue-green, at present filled with yellow daisies, pink and white roses, golden wildflowers and fresh greenery, sat on a white-painted wooden table near the window. She had found some cushions to line the seat of the bay window and now she sat there, gazing out the window at the bit of winter sky she could see between the other townhouses surrounding hers.

It had been two nights since she'd seen Jonathan. Normally she wouldn't have given it a thought. From time to time he'd had to stay away, working up a big deal or even going out of town for a day or two. Laurel wasn't a possessive woman and didn't feel the need to spend every possible second with her man. But she'd sensed this time was different.

Jonathan claimed he was especially busy with work, though he was vague about what he was working on. Usually he enjoyed telling her about his latest project as she had the knowledge to understand what he was talking about and took a genuine interest in what he was doing.

She knew he was still very upset about the whip incident, as she thought of it in her head. He'd taken her too far too fast, that was all. He hadn't listened to his heart, instead reacting with his ego and his cock. He wasn't the first Dom to have done that, as she'd tried to reassure him.

He hadn't pulled away completely but she sensed a reticence in him. As if he wasn't entirely present when they were making love or as if he were standing aside and observing. The spontaneity of the relationship seemed to have burned away, leaving the ash of regret.

The sex was still hot but he was careful. Too careful for a D/s relationship to flourish. Laurel sighed. She'd been so thrilled, down to her bones, to have found a man who was so in tune with her. Someone who wasn't just a sexy, dominant man but also a friend and someone she could respect and admire. The men she had been attracted to in the scene in the past were always very Dom, very confident, but usually when she got to know them well, they bored her on a human level, which ruined her ability to



continue to submit to them. Thus she usually kept her distance, playing at parties and dungeons but rarely letting a man anywhere near her heart.

And it had worked well over the years. She didn't need a man in her life to feel fulfilled or complete. She'd even told herself she wasn't relationship material since wanderlust always seemed to rise in her blood when she stayed anywhere for too long. Men liked a woman they could come home to and Laurel hadn't even had a home for the past several years.

Until now. Now she felt as if this Greenwich Village townhouse with the lavish salon on the first floor, the wild dungeons and luxurious bath on the second floor and her peaceful, homey bedroom on the third floor could be the place she might settle down. The three-year lease she'd signed had an option to purchase at the end of the lease. Maybe she would! Why not? She would have a place to come back to, even if she did decide to travel again for extended periods. James could keep the business afloat and her room would be waiting for her.

Would Jonathan be waiting for her? She fingered the little cell phone in her pocket. Had she perhaps missed a call from him? She took out the phone and flipped it up, checking for any missed calls. Nothing.

She snapped the phone shut. This was stupid. She wasn't a teenager. If she wanted to talk to her lover, she could just call him. What was the big deal? She flipped open the phone again and pressed the number two, connecting directly to his cell phone.

It went to voice mail. "Hi, Jonathan," she said brightly. "Was hoping to hear from you. You gonna be able to come by tonight? I got something sexy I want to show you! Bye!" She flipped the phone shut and slipped it back into her pocket. She really did have something to show him.

She'd been on a little shopping trip with James at some of the BDSM boutiques and she'd picked up a lovely piece of jewelry. It was designed to slip over the clit hood, making it appear as if the clit were pierced, with a golden chain tipped by a pretty red stone swaying from the ring.

It was very sexy – she'd tried it out on her own of course, to see how it would look for her lover. She knew Jonathan would like it as he'd remarked a few times he might like to have her pierced eventually so he could hang jewels from her nipples and sex, or lead her about on a silver leash clipped to her pussy. She loved when he talked like that – about what would be.

He would whisper in his low, sexy voice about their future life together as they lay in the dark. About how she would sometimes be expected to wait at the door naked and on her knees, her arms bound behind her back by cuffs she could attach and clip herself. She would be wearing the collar he was going to get her as a symbol of her status as well as a functional way to quickly secure her to a whipping post or suspension beam. He would mark her permanently in some way as a discreet sign of ownership. She would be expected to keep herself groomed in precisely the manner he determined. She

would be marked every day in some way by his whip. She would learn to tolerate more intense lashings with more grace.

She *loved* when he talked like that and had believed they were working themselves toward it—not as a game but as a lifestyle. Indeed, she was ready for it now. As he whispered the words, they wove a net of deep longing around her—she knew she wanted what he had seemed to be offering. She didn't have any problem reconciling the life of a sexual slave with her own very strong and independent personality. She understood in a way perhaps Jonathan did not that true liberation was the ability and willingness to embrace one's true nature, whatever it might be.

The whip incident hadn't been the only indication of Jonathan's periodic unease with their D/s exploration. But it had been the most significant, and she wished now she had somehow managed to handle it better. But no, that was silly—she had been honest in her reactions. It was his job as Dom to have controlled the scene better. Was it his first false step? The first entry on the list of "things gone wrong"? She thought about it and decided, no, it was just a mistake. A chance for them to learn, if he'd let them. Instead he seemed to be avoiding her, possibly rejecting her before she rejected him—taking the coward's way out.

This was stupid. She was going to call him right now. She had his office number. No doubt he was at his desk, piles of papers all around him, engrossed in the numbers on his latest multimillion-dollar package. She took out her phone and scrolled through the address book.

"Mr. Goldman's office."

"Hi. This is Laurel Jordan. Can I speak to Jonathan please?"

"Just a moment. I'll see if he's in." *Like you don't know*, Laurel wanted to say, but she knew this was a polite fiction employed by every secretary to protect their boss from unwanted phone calls.

"I'm sorry," the rather nasal voice was back on the line. "Mr. Goldman is in a meeting. May I take a message?"

"Oh. Uh, no. No, that's okay. Thanks." In a meeting. Well, it could be true. Or he could be avoiding her. Okay, this was getting beyond ridiculous. Laurel Jordan *never* obsessed about a man.

She stood up resolutely from her bay window and went downstairs to make fresh coffee and prepare the salon for any late-morning visitors. She had bills to pay, books to balance and schedules to arrange. She would worry about Jonathan later. No. She wouldn't worry about him at all.

\* \* \* \* \*

*You can't avoid her forever.* These words floated through Jonathan's mind as his secretary softly shut his office door. She'd actually taken the call from Laurel while sitting on the opposite side of his desk. When she'd put Laurel on hold to tell him who

it was, he'd waved his hand and mouthed "No". Mary Ellen had showed no emotion whatsoever, though she knew Jonathan was dating Laurel. She had calmly told Laurel he was in a meeting and then they'd returned to their work with no mention of the lie.

Jonathan took a deep breath. He wasn't used to feeling so out of control. What had felt like the greatest thing in the world seemed to be unraveling before his eyes. Though he was still crazy about Laurel, he couldn't seem to relax around her anymore. Ever since the whip incident, he was tentative. Afraid of hurting her. Of misreading her cues and signals. Of going too far. He had lost his confidence.

This was a death knell in business and it was a death knell for a Dom, he was realizing. How could he sexually dominate his lover when he was unsure of himself? He doubted his every move now. He knew this was irrational and even stupid, but he couldn't seem to get past it. It was as if all the quiet misgivings he'd been able to push aside when things were going great had leaped to the fore, screaming "I told you so!" when he messed up.

Maybe what they needed was a little space. Maybe part of this was fear of intimacy—a thing Marie had regularly accused him of. Maybe she was right and he was just unable to commit. Maybe he really did use problems in a relationship as a way to distance himself, to keep himself safe.

Safe from what? Jonathan sighed. This was stupid. He was a busy man. He didn't have time to dwell on this anymore. He had phone calls to make, meetings to attend, deals to close.

Maybe if he were open with her. Explained he needed some space. Time to work things through in his own head. She would understand. She wasn't like most women. She wasn't clingy and needy. Yes. That was the thing to do. Stop hiding like a boy and face the issue head-on.

He pressed the intercom button and said, "Mary Ellen. Let Jack and Mr. Snyder know I'll be out to join them in just a few minutes. I've got an important call to place."

## **Chapter Twelve**

Laurel's long shapely legs looked longer in the stiletto high heels she was wearing. The eye was drawn in either direction—downward along lean muscular lines to the highly arched feet encased in shiny black leather or upward toward her lush round ass, the globes splayed as she stood with feet placed wide apart.

Her legs were not bare but covered in sheer black stockings held up by satin garters gathered around each thigh. She was not naked but wore black lace thong panties cut high on the hip and a beribboned bustier cut to her waist that lifted and thrust out her lovely, round breasts.

Her arms were cuffed at the wrists and suspended with sturdy chains from the steel suspension bars installed in the ceiling. Her head had dropped back, her hair wild. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted, her body covered in a light sheen of sweat.

Tom Saunders stood behind her, dressed in a black shirt and black jeans. His dark hair curled around his face. His cheeks sported a sexy three-day stubble and his vivid blue eyes were bright. He was holding a heavy flogger with a snakeskin handle, its tresses made from cowhide, dyed a deep blood red. This leather was more intense than deerskin or elk but not as rough as the heavier leathers including bison and bull.

They were not alone in the room. Several men and a woman were watching the show, each of them riveted to the scene. Ostensibly this was a demonstration of some of Tom's more exclusive whips and floggers—too fine and rare to sell in his standard catalog.

Noelle and Amanda, two of the three house subs, had been the objects of these demonstrations earlier in the evening. A select group of well-heeled players in the scene, most of whom had been at the club's opening party, had been invited to view the whips and of course hopefully to purchase them.

Laurel had consented to Tom's request to have his demonstration in her dungeon, agreeing to take a percentage for the club and the girls. Tom claimed her dungeon was more ideal for the showing than his and more centrally located for this particular group of buyers than his Scarsdale home.

She knew the request was partially legitimate but had suspected a subtext. She'd become certain when he'd begged her to allow him to try his finest flogger on her. "Your lovely back and ass would be the perfect flesh to break in this virgin leather. I can't think of anyone I'd rather share this gift with."

He'd called two days before to inquire about renting the space for his demo and possibly using some of her girls as well. They'd talked business a while and then he'd casually said, "Perhaps Jonathan would like to attend? Round out your collection a bit?"

Just as casually she'd replied they were taking a bit of a breather—things had been moving rather quickly and they'd both decided on a small break—just a week or two—to sort things through.

She hadn't said what things needed sorting and he hadn't asked. She had told him this private information as a way to test it out on the world. Could she say it without bursting into tears? She could and she did. She was a consummate actress when she chose to be.

The tears had come earlier, after the initial shock and prior to the ensuing anger. She recalled the conversation of six days ago for the hundredth time—it had been burned into her brain.

Jonathan had called her later that day—the day she'd decided to face head-on whatever was eating at him. He'd beaten her to the punch, saying, "Laurel. I have to talk to you."

His voice was different. The sweet lyrical warmth of his usual tone had been muted, careful. She was instantly on her guard, sinking into her leather chair as she prepared mentally for the worst. It had come.

"Listen. You know I've been going through a lot of stuff in my head. Trying to get my arms around what it is I want and who I am. I know I hurt you, betrayed your trust the other night—"

"Please!" Laurel had interrupted. "Aren't you ever going to let go of that? It was a mistake. That's all. Can't we move past that? Are you going to use that as an excuse to distance yourself from me? To ruin what we have?" As soon as the words had escaped her lips, she'd regretted them. She should have let him have his say, work through his angst and then she should have uttered soothing sounds and told him it would all be all right.

But she was growing frustrated with this constant obsession over the whole thing. Deep down she knew her frustration stemmed not from the immediate issue of the whip incident but from the obvious underlying ambivalence Jonathan felt toward the whole scene and toward his own feelings and desires. He was ruining their love with his hesitation and self-recrimination.

Jonathan hadn't responded immediately. Finally he said, "You're right, Laurel. And I don't want to ruin it. You're the best thing that ever happened to me. I've been thinking about it a lot. The problem isn't you or my lack of skill as a Dom. The problem is me. I need to figure out what I really want. Who I really am. This image of myself as sadist, as someone who hurts another person for pleasure—I'm having a very hard time with it emotionally."

Laurel had started to interrupt again, to protest he wasn't "hurting" her for his own pleasure—that BDSM encompassed so much more than that and that it was a deeply ingrained need in her to be "hurt" as a part of *her* pleasure, to be dominated sexually, to be controlled and used and of course adored by the man wielding the whip. But he hadn't let her say these things. They were all things she'd said before and all things he'd

claimed to understand and agree with. But obviously he hadn't, not in his heart of hearts.

He still held some deep-rooted, and in her mind misguided, notion that when he whipped her or "forced" her to do things that might be considered demeaning or dangerous to those not initiated, he was abusing her. He didn't appreciate on a gut level he was in fact expressing his love for her and fulfilling a deeply held masochistic need in her.

He'd barreled on, telling her he needed his space, in her mind code for "I don't want to be with you anymore". He'd tried to say it in a way that let her completely off the hook, assuring her it had nothing to do with her and he was just trying to get his head around things. "I just need a little time. I'm stuck, you see. Caught in this shame thing I can't seem to find my out of. Every time I see you, I'm reminded of what I did. I know, I know—" Again he'd cut her off as she tried to say yet again the whip incident was no big deal. "It isn't directly about that. I know we both know that. It's just a symbol really of my own inadequacies, my own insecurities. I just need time to sort it through. To try to understand my own motivations better. If you never want to see me again," his voice had cracked then, the first real emotion seeping through, "I'll understand."

She'd hung up rather quickly, telling him to call her when he figured out what the fuck he was doing. She hadn't meant to say it like that but it had popped like a toad out of her mouth. How dare he break her heart?

She had stared at the phone for several minutes afterward in a state of disbelief. Her initial reaction, along with the deep sadness things had seemed to founder so badly and so quickly, was anger at herself for letting this man into her heart in the first place.

She felt like that person in the song about sending in clowns. When she had finally decided to settle down and let someone get close to her, he'd been the one to bail.

Then the tears came, a slow trickle down each cheek that soon overflowed into wrenching sobs. Alone in her room, she'd cried the raucous harsh sob of grieving—her nose red and dripping, her eyes screwed up in misery.

She'd only cried the one time though. It was a release, a purging.

She would go on with her life. Other than the total crash and burn of her personal life, things were going great. The club was really taking off with the membership up and the dungeons booked weeks in advance. Her staff was making money hand over fist and as a result, so was she. It looked as if Club Roissy was a resounding success.

The slap of leather raining against her skin flipped off her mind. The flogging was like a healing distraction, pulling her from her obsessive thoughts about Jonathan and what had gone wrong.

When Tom had begged her to be his final subject, she'd agreed in a sudden fit of pique. Why the fuck shouldn't she? She adored a good flogging and that flogger looked heavenly. What irony that Tom was the one holding the whip. A couple of years before, she would have been ecstatic he'd finally seemed to be interested in her.

Now she didn't know what she felt for him. Was her attraction for him simply a rebound now that she and Jonathan were history? Not that they were necessarily history—maybe he was really sincere in his intentions to sort things out. Maybe he would somehow come to terms with what and who he was and find a way to be at peace with it. For Laurel was certain Jonathan was a natural Dom with the potential to become a skilled and loving master, if he could find a way to permit himself to be who he was without censure. She wondered if this is what it must have been like for disenfranchised homosexuals in the Fifties and Sixties, finally daring to experiment and own up to who they were but frightened by conditioning and cultural mores into denying their own honest impulses and needs.

*Smack!* The flogger again brought her out her reverie, creating a delicious stinging heat over her ass and thighs. Tom was droning on quietly to his guests, discussing the attributes of this flogger and his wrist technique. Laurel only dimly heard him, not interested in what he was saying but only in what he was doing. He stroked her flesh with the soft tresses for a long time, sending her slowly and finally into that delicious space where her mind shut down completely, her body taking over, doing what it was born to do.

She barely noticed when he—or someone—unzipped the sides of the bustier, pulling it away from her body. She felt a slight draft that caused her nipples to perk. The flogger lashed her bare back, moving from neck to thigh in even delicious strokes. She felt her breathing slow and couldn't have lifted her head if she tried. Her dark wavy hair streamed behind her, her red lips were parted, her eyes closed.

She came slightly out of this endorphin-induced trance when the tresses struck her breasts. Her eyes opened a little in surprise, her brain registering the sting and the fact her torso was now bare. Laurel was used to being exposed in public and actually reveled in it. She knew her body was lean and strong and admired by men and women alike. She was comfortable in her nudity and had never worried about her shape or size or if it was good enough or thin enough or round enough or flat enough. This very comfort made her that much more attractive, though she wasn't consciously aware of it.

Tom fondled her breasts a moment, smoothing the flesh with strong, certain fingers that found the tips and pulled them to attention. This intimate contact was not inappropriate in a whipping demonstration as the Dom could be said to be merely making the subject more prepared for the lash. Erect nipples experienced the lash with more sensitivity and also presented a prettier picture for the observer.

If he handled her breasts perhaps a bit longer than was necessary, no one commented and Laurel was barely aware, focused entirely on her pleasure and her pain, and the heady, dark combination that transcended either.

Next Tom chose a crop dyed a bright red with a long rectangle of leather designed to cover more skin than the traditional riding crop. Laurel gasped as the tip caught one nipple, nerve endings exploding with sensation. He cropped the other nipple as well, dragging a little scream from her.

Laurel came out of her sweet subspace, the pain too sudden and too severe to let her float. Tom was watching her, no doubt precisely aware of what he had done. He slapped her breasts with the crop, moving evenly over all the creamy area, turning it a dark, hot pink. Laurel was breathing hard and sweating, trying to stay still as the crop found its mark again and again.

"If she weren't bound," he said to his audience, "I'd make her hold her breasts up, so I could crop the tender undersides. However, her arms are raised high enough so I think I have a pretty good angle."

To demonstrate, he smacked the underside of one of Laurel's breasts, pulling another cry from her. She was breathing hard, her nostrils flared, her hair wild about her face. He used the crop as if painting her breasts, covering every surface to his satisfaction until she was writhing and pulling at her chains, whimpering steadily as she tried fruitlessly to dance away from the crop.

"If she were *my* slave," Tom said, his voice cruel, "I would beat her for this graceless display. Once the guests were gone, I'd take her down and whip her within an inch of her life for this total lack of control."

Laurel heard him of course. She wasn't unconscious or deaf. She felt a surge of anger flame inside her. *Let's see him take this kind of torture, the bastard!* Tom put down the crop, sliding cool fingers over her hot, tortured flesh, circling the nipples with an intimate gesture that reminded her of Jonathan.

He took up the flogger again, moving behind her to continue the beating. Normally the demonstration would have been over at this point but he didn't seem ready to stop and none of his observers remarked upon it, instead silently watching the girl in her chains try to balance on her tall, thin heels.

As he lashed her back, the stinging in her breasts subsided somewhat, her focus returned to the steady rain of leather on her back. At last and completely she entered the zone some call flying, almost leaving her body, literally no longer registering pain. She still felt the impact of the flogger but the sensation only served to raise her higher into the clouds of submissive headspace.

Pain no longer existed in her psyche, having given way to something better, something deeper. She arched her back, not aware she was doing it, her body longing for more of what Tom was giving her. He complied, no longer even pretending to discuss the merits of his whips, intent on the flogging as he watched her expression, vacant, sublime, lost in space.

This was the time where an inexperienced Dom could go too far, mistaking his sub's acquiescence for an ability to handle whatever he meted out. Laurel was in a space where, if Tom had calmly informed her he was going to cut off her arm, she would have nodded vaguely, her being focused only on the sensations he was providing. Luckily for Laurel, Tom was a pro and while he was giving her a very thorough whipping, he would never go past the point where her safety was at risk.



At last she could take no more, her legs giving way as she sagged heavily against her wrist cuffs. She actually lost consciousness briefly, surely only a second or two. Her arms were being let down, several pairs of helpful hands releasing her as Tom stood just behind her, letting her lean into him. Someone knelt and removed her heels so she stood in stocking feet. Tom led her to the sheepskin rug, helping her to sink down upon it.

Gently he stroked her hair from her face as she looked up at him. Someone handed him a glass of cool water that he tipped toward Laurel's lips. She sipped, watching his handsome face over the rim of the glass, feeling completely at peace.

At that moment, that precise moment, Laurel believed herself in love with Tom. Those dangerous blue eyes, that cruel smile, captivated her. He had skillfully pulled from her sensations and emotions reserved for a lover—his whip the secret kiss that awakened the submissive princess living always inside her. She stared at him, her eyes full of adoration. He smiled and whispered, "Rest, beautiful girl. I think you sold my entire collection tonight. You were stunning."

She closed her eyes, exhausted, her body properly used. Someone laid a soft coverlet over her nearly naked body. If only Tom were her lover. He would now carry her to her bed and make slow, delicious love to her as Jonathan had used to do after a session. But Tom wasn't her lover—he was a businessman out to turn a profit. And Jonathan wasn't there—he was somewhere finding himself. And she was alone as she had always been, except for those brief months with the man she had mistakenly thought of as "the one".

She drifted into a light sleep, going to join her dream lover who gave of himself and took from her what she joyously gave without hesitation and without question. If only she could see his face.

## Chapter Thirteen

Jonathan toyed with his water glass as his ex-girlfriend Marie prattled on about her family and her job and her new dog and her fabulous new boyfriend Frank something or other. It had been a surprise when Marie had called out of the blue after all these months. If she'd called just a few days before, he would have politely told her he was sorry but he'd moved on and there was someone else in his life now.

He should have told her that anyway. After all, he hadn't broken up with Laurel—he just needed a little time as he'd told her. How strange it had been these past few days waking up alone in his apartment instead of with his arms around a beautiful, warm woman. How lonely, how bereft he felt, as if someone or something had died. Though they'd only been together a few months, his body had gotten used to her. He felt an actual physical withdrawal from the loss of her, an emptiness nothing seemed to fill.

When Marie had called, he'd been taken by surprise, the sound of her voice at once so familiar and foreign. Dinner that night? He wasn't sure. Then he decided, what the hell. If nothing else it would pass the time and he could see what Marie had been up to. He was pleased to discover no ache of longing when he first heard her voice. When she'd dumped him, he had been terribly hurt, had thought himself bereft, but in fact it had only been his ego that was bruised, his heart still intact.

She was pretty—without the dramatic beauty Laurel possessed, but attractive nonetheless. Laurel was tall and elegant with long flowing lines and brilliant green eyes. Marie, a much shorter woman, was rounded and feminine with heavy breasts and hips like a fertility goddess. She wasn't fat at all—he thought voluptuous was a better term. Her face was sweet with large blue eyes, a pert nose and a small mouth. Her hair was blonde and blunt cut to her shoulders. Now she was staring at Jonathan. Clearly she'd asked him a question and was waiting for a response but for the life of him, he didn't know what she had said.

"I'm sorry?" he said finally.

Marie's eyes darkened for a moment, her eyebrows knitting together. This used to be a bone of contention between them. She would prattle on endlessly about something until he would just drift away, despite his best intentions. She took it personally as perhaps she should and invariably a fight would ensue.

However, they weren't lovers anymore, though he still realized it was impolite to just ignore her. He really hadn't meant to. He had never meant to. She just...bored him.

"I said, how's your love life? Have you been dating at all?" He *had* heard her earlier as she'd talked about her new boyfriend and how rich and handsome he was, and how they would probably get married in a year or so but neither of them wanted to rush as

they'd both been burned in relationships before—she had glanced meaningfully at him as she said this.

He started to answer her but something stopped him. He could have told Marie about Laurel without including the BDSM aspect of their relationship, but on some level he thought that would be a betrayal to Laurel and to their D/s relationship. And it would be awkward as Marie pressed for details of how they had met and what they had in common as she invariably would. Instead he mumbled something about seeing someone for a while but that it was on hold for the moment.

“On hold?” Marie seized on this and Jonathan sighed inwardly. “You mean, like a break. To get your head on straight. That sort of thing.”

Jonathan nodded, preparing for an onslaught about how he'd done the same thing to her over and over until she'd had enough. And maybe he deserved it. Maybe he was incapable of a sustained intimate relationship with anyone. Maybe he expected too much of himself to ever live up to his own standards.

But instead of lambasting him, Marie put her hand over his and looked into his eyes. “I know,” she said softly. “I know how it is. Seven years is a long time, Jonathan. We think we can move on—we want to move on, but we can't help but wonder...what's he doing right now? What if I hadn't left him? Would we be married right now? Would I be pregnant?”

She stopped and bit her lip as if she'd said more than she intended. Then a look of almost fierce determination in her eyes, she plunged on. “Jonathan Goldman. I'm not over you. And if I'm reading you right, by your acceptance of this dinner and our conversation tonight, you are not over me either.” She gripped his hand harder, her expression pleading.

Jonathan stared at her, stunned. He hadn't seen that one coming. Hadn't she just been spouting on endlessly about her successful, handsome new man? What was going on? He pulled his hand from beneath hers, confused and unnerved.

“Oh Marie,” he said finally. “No. No, no. I'm really sorry, but no. My heart belongs to another. I'm in love with her. With a woman named Laurel Jordan.” As he heard his own words, he knew it was true—and he knew he'd better find a way to let her know before it was too late.

\* \* \* \* \*

James looked through his large tortoiseshell glasses at Jonathan, his expression bemused. “I almost feel like I'm in high school, if you want to know the truth.” He grinned. “With Laurel coming to me asking if you've said anything about her and you coming to me asking if she's said anything about you. Why don't the two of you just sit down and talk like grown-ups? Work this through. Face your fears.”

Jonathan had asked him to meet for a drink that evening. He'd almost called Laurel a hundred times that day, the seventh day since he'd told her he needed space. Yet he'd

lacked the courage. What if she told him to go fuck himself? Not that he wouldn't deserve it.

Instead he'd had a huge bouquet of beautiful flowers, the most expensive arrangement in the floral shop, sent to her with a note that simply read *With Love, Jonathan*. He planned to call her tonight, but instead he'd called James who had graciously agreed to meet.

"Jonathan, Laurel told me some of what you're going through and I have to say, I do understand. I was raised a strict Catholic and I was taught in school and church to believe my very nature as a homosexual was a crime against the church and against God. Imagine what that felt like as I was entering puberty and discovering my sexuality, to be told my orientation was deviant and perverted. Top it off with emerging sadistic tendencies, a desire to sexually dominate and control, a passion for whips, chains and men in black leather, and you had one fucked-up teenager!"

"How did you reconcile all that? You seem so happy with Brian. So content with who you are."

"Oh I am. And I wouldn't want to be any other way. I love being gay and I love being dominant. And Brian is my submissive slave and the love of my life. He exalts in his submission to me and I cherish the gift of it."

"So how did you get from repressed Catholic to this actualized sexual being?"

James grinned and fingered a little diamond cross he wore at his throat in what Jonathan could only imagine was an ironic gesture. "I grew up. I came to realize my impulses and desires, the way I was hardwired, could not be evil on their face. It didn't make any sense. If there is a God, and I think there is, why would he or she or it single out certain types of people and define them as evil by their nature? Certainly Jesus wouldn't have. He would have taken them to his bosom and offered them succor.

"As I explored D/s as a lifestyle, once I was past drooling over the pictures and videos as a teenager of unrealistic BDSM torture stuff, I came to realize how deeply romantic it has the potential to be. It's poetry, in my mind. Physical poetry to watch a sub submitting with grace to a whipping. Watching his body writhe as I mark him with my lash. Hearing his sweet, tremulous thanks when I finally let him down and he kneels to kiss my feet. Seeing him bent naked and spread, watching my cock slide into his ass as he takes it with absolute acceptance and pleasure."

Jonathan flushed a little at James's evocative words. Yet he understood the sentiment completely. When he could get past his own hang-ups, it was amazing to watch Laurel's intense expression as he clamped her nipples, the pain fleeting over her features, which soon became suffused with a sort of glow as if she were lit up from inside with desire.

The way she moaned and arched when he poised over her, ready to plunge his hard cock into her, waiting until she begged for it before relenting. The way she covered his face and chest with tiny kisses of gratitude after a hard, hot spanking on her delectable ass...

James touched Jonathan's hand lightly, bringing him back to the present. He said gently, "It's so clear from your face right now you're in love with her. Don't let your fears or old tapes from a life that no longer suits you get in the way of that love. How often does such a thing come along? Laurel is devastated without you. She goes through the motions—she's a tough cookie, but I know her. She's bereft, Jonathan. You've taken the love light out of her eyes."

*Old tapes from a life that no longer suits you...* Somehow these words penetrated Jonathan's mind, reaching him in a way all the endless conversations Laurel and he had had, all the soul-searching he'd done by himself had not. *A life that no longer suits you.* The sort of life he'd lived for so long—hoping to please his parents with his good grades, his MBA, his choice of a partner in Marie, a "good" girl from a "good" family who would give him children of his own to raise in their suburban, two-car garage family home in White Plains or wherever...

God! It all made him shudder. He realized in a moment of clarity it wasn't Laurel and his dominant sexual desires that were the problem—it was his own ridiculous efforts to conform to someone else's standards and ideals. So what if Marie or his parents would think he was a total pervert if they knew his greatest joy was to tie up his lover and whip her until she was near orgasm and then fuck her soundly, controlling all aspects of the lovemaking, even her orgasm? If they didn't approve of his lifestyle, they didn't have to engage in it!

Jesus. It seemed so simple. So obvious. But then there was his lack of knowledge, his blunderings as a Dom. Would Laurel even want him? Aloud he said, "But, James. I hurt her. I went too far. I didn't listen to her cues. I used a single tail and she needed me to stop and I didn't. I betrayed her trust." His voice cracked on the last words.

Instead of offering tender words of sympathy, James laughed, offending Jonathan, who had just laid his deepest shame on the table. "No, no. I'm not laughing at you, Jonathan," James assured him, seeing his stricken expression. "It's just, do you have some idea that good Doms spring from the head of Zeus, fully formed and completely comfortable with every implement at their disposal? That they are born knowing how to use a single tail or a cane? That they never misstep, never misjudge, never think with their cock instead of their head?" He laughed again and Jonathan couldn't help laughing a little as well. He did make it sound rather ridiculous.

"Stop taking yourself so fucking seriously, man! I'm sure Laurel forgave you instantly, am I right? In fact, I'll bet on some level she was turned on by having her envelope pushed. Subs like to be taken over the edge. Not too far over but just enough to feel out of control, teetering over the abyss, but knowing in their hearts you, their Dom, will pull them back and keep them safe.

"When you make a mistake, you can turn it to your advantage. Say your girl is wriggling while you're caning her ass and you catch her inadvertently on her pussy. You don't apologize as she screams. You admonish her that if she'd stayed still like a good little slut girl, that wouldn't have happened. And if she doesn't stay still going

forward, it's going to happen again and this time on purpose. And I'll make you a bet, my friend. You reach down and touch her pussy after that, it'd be sopping."

Jonathan flushed again but took his point. They finished their beers and James started to signal the waiter for another but Jonathan said, "James, do you mind if we call it a night? I have somewhere I have to be. Greenwich Village in fact, to see if a certain gorgeous young woman will consider giving her thickheaded lover one more chance."

James grinned widely and said, "Glad to see you're finally getting your head out of your butt, Mr. Goldman. Go to it and good luck!"

## Chapter Fourteen

The flowers were gorgeous. They must have cost a fortune. The note was ambiguous. *With Love, Jonathan*. Was it a peace offering? An overture to start over or a farewell? Laurel didn't know, but the bouquet was especially lovely with golden lilies and red, yellow, pink, orange and creamy white roses, all long-stemmed and just at the peak of blooming. They'd arrived in their own vase, a dark blue cut crystal that set off the flowers beautifully. She set the arrangement in the salon so she might enjoy it as she worked.

John Holland and Gil Nathan were there, two regulars who were both waiting their turns in the dungeons, John to dominate, Gil to be dominated. They were chatting with each other and including Laurel in the conversation from time to time. She was half listening, half working on ideas for the next play party, this one an open invitation for those who could afford the one hundred dollar per head cost of admission.

She was also considering a series of seminars to be kicked off by Tom Saunders. He agreed to do the seminar for free, in exchange for the business it would drum up. In fact he'd invited her over that evening for dinner and she had accepted. Why not, after all? He was handsome and sexy, and while her heart still secretly pined for another, how would she get over him if she just sat in her room?

That was before she received the flowers however. Surely these were a precursor to a visit, a phone call, something! She wanted to go find Jonathan and just shake him! How could he have done this to her, to them! Maybe he was coming to his senses at last. Maybe all he had really needed was a little space as he said.

She would wait for his phone call. Of course, she could call him. The flowers were the perfect excuse. She could call and thank him for the lovely bouquet, keeping her voice cool and neutral, testing the waters of his reaction. She thought about it and decided not to. He had been the one to withdraw, to pull away, to break her heart. He would have to be the one to come back, all the way. Not just flowers, but himself. She would not meet him halfway – he would have to find his way back to her on his own.

Five o'clock, six, seven. No call. She couldn't know he was sitting with James at the bar at that moment, pouring out his love for her and finding the courage to act on his convictions. She couldn't know as she fumed and then sighed, giving up on him for the evening, that he was on his way to her at that moment, wearing his heart on his sleeve.

She slipped on a simple green blouse that made her eyes look like cut emeralds and a pair of old jeans with her cotton panties and bra beneath. She was fresh from the shower, her hair still damp at the tips. A little lipstick and she was good to go. She had no intention of dressing up for Tom Saunders.

So why was she going at all? To erase the pain. It was seven days now. She'd given him a week in her head. If Jonathan didn't call or come to her by then, in her mind, it was over. She wasn't yet ready to confront the deep sadness the loss of him left in her. She preferred to put it off, at least one more day.

It was a lovely March night, the sky clear and speckled with pale stars she knew would brighten as she left the city and headed toward Scarsdale. She had never been to Tom's house and she was curious how he lived. He was single and as far as she knew had never been married. She wasn't sure of his exact age but guessed him to be somewhere around thirty.

He always seemed to have a string of lovely women at his beck and call, and she got the sense for him part of the thrill, perhaps most of it, was in the chase. When she'd been available and even eager, he'd barely seemed to notice her. He'd had a lover then, it was true. She wondered what had happened to Stephanie. Maybe tonight she'd get a chance to ask him. He hadn't asked her on a date. The dinner was a business dinner. He had invited her to see his whip collection and see what she thought about perhaps having a Club Roissy party at his much larger abode—intermingling their clientele and getting new business for each of them.

As she drove toward his house in the car she'd borrowed from James and Brian, she wished Jonathan were beside her. They could take a detour to White Plains where Jonathan had grown up and see his old house. Maybe meet his parents... *Jesus, Laurel. Get a grip. It's over. End of story. Life goes on.*

She consulted her directions, concentrating as she found the neighborhood she was seeking, peering at the street signs as she slowed. There it was. Chedworth Road. The place was impressive—a three-story Tudor-style house set back from the road with a huge sweeping lawn in front of it. The driveway curved around to the back of the house and she followed it as he had directed, parking behind his little black Porsche.

As she got out of the car, the floodlights went on and Tom opened the back door, gesturing and calling his greeting. "I'm so glad you could come," he said as she entered what turned out to be the kitchen. It was a huge old room with stone floors and modern, gleaming appliances. It smelled wonderful, like baking bread and something in tomato sauce with garlic. "Wow," she said. "This is some place."

"Yeah. I grew up here. This was my parents' home before they passed away. I'm an only child. You don't think I made enough for all this with my whip collection, do you?" He laughed. "It was built in 1750, before the Revolutionary War. It's been a bit modernized as you can see." He waved toward the double stainless steel oven and the matching refrigerator. There was an expanse of marble counters and huge wood block in the center of the room, over which hung copper pots and pans that looked as if they'd never been used. "I don't cook much but the caterers love it when I have parties here. Come see the rest."

As she toured the first floor, she thought about the house Jonathan and she might one day buy. If they had kids, they'd want a bigger space. Even if they didn't, they couldn't very well live together in her bedroom with subs being tortured in the



dungeons below day and night. She grinned. That was pretty much what they had been doing up until now and it had worked out okay. It was pretty handy having complete torture chambers set up for their amusement as long as they weren't booked by paying clientele.

She was snapped back to reality as Tom said, "I'll show you the rest of the house later. I work on the third floor and that's where I keep my collection. It's something to see, if I say so myself. I have two entire rooms devoted entirely to my leathers. I have a small fortune up there in inventory. Happily, what started as a hobby has become a thriving business," he said proudly, and she gave the usual appreciative responses that seemed to satisfy him.

"Are you hungry? I've got a delicious lasagna in the oven—don't worry, I didn't make it," he laughed, "and some fresh garlic bread." She followed him back to the kitchen, watching his nice ass as he moved to the counter, taking a bottle of red wine he'd already opened. "Can I pour you a glass? It's a fine Cabernet I found recently—hints of mocha and cherry. It's got a silky texture. It's a sexy wine. I think you'll like it."

"Yes, thank you," she said, wondering how a wine could be sexy, aware he was trying to impress her. They sat side by side in front of the fire in the huge living room, each sipping their wine. "So, about your idea to have a club party here. It's an interesting one. We could do it later in the spring and have it outside. Is your backyard secure? There are limitless possibilities."

"It is indeed secure and my neighbors are not nosy. We could have some interesting demonstrations." He looked meaningfully at her, making her stifle an impulse to grin. "Let's not talk business," he said, his voice pitched low. "Not yet. I just want to enjoy you for a moment, to savor your beauty, to drink to your health." He held up his glass and she lightly clinked her glass to his.

This felt so strange! She didn't really want to be here, she realized suddenly and belatedly. She should have refused. What if Jonathan was in fact at her doorstep now, having gotten there as soon as he could after work? The staff took shifts at manning the salon, taking phone appointments and getting the door when Laurel wasn't there. In fact, she planned to interview four potential candidates for a fulltime receptionist as she found herself spending far too much time answering the phone and getting the door herself, and she wanted to devote her time to other things.

She imagined Jonathan arriving, a little disheveled, not quite daring to use his kitchen door key, but instead standing on the front stoop, waiting politely for someone to let him in. It was after all Friday night and the club was open for business with both dungeons booked through midnight, so someone would let him in. He would ask for Laurel and be told she was not available. Well! It would serve him right! Had the bastard forgotten how to use his phone? Had he forgotten where she lived for the entire past week? She was Laurel Jordan. She wasn't someone to sit at home pining for a man who'd rejected her!

Thus energized, albeit negatively, Laurel turned back toward her host and smiled her dazzling, dimpled smile that left men weak. He smiled back, his eyes hooding. He

put his hand on her thigh, applying a light pressure that sent a sizzling shock through her as it slid up toward her crotch. Laurel shifted, not certain if she was ready for what Tom seemed to want.

She tried to stand but he pressed her back down, his hand strong upon her leg. "Where you going, little girl?" he said softly as he leaned toward her, taking her face in his hands. She took in a breath, both wanting to struggle away and curious what his kiss would be like. Most men were too aggressive in their kisses, trying to molest her mouth with their tongue, dripping their saliva noisily as they slurped and wiggled their tongue about.

Jonathan had been the best kisser ever, teasing her, drawing her in with his subtle touch, his delicious probing. He had made her lean forward for more, captivated, enslaved by his tongue and his lips until she was his and he knew it. Then he'd take her, his kiss a passionate and sensual part of his lovemaking that left her weak with desire, always longing for more...

Tom's lips touched hers. He pressed his tongue into her mouth as he held her face. He was passionate but trying too hard, and Laurel found she felt nothing. She kissed him back a moment or two, really out of politeness, before pulling away, wrenching her head from his hands.

"Listen, Tom. I'm sorry. I'm not ready for this."

To his credit he stood up, saying, "I'm sorry. Laurel. I shouldn't have done that. You were just so ravishing sitting there, I couldn't help myself." A timer in the kitchen went off and Tom laughed a little self-consciously. "Saved by the bell. Come have some of the best lasagna in the world, courtesy of Dean and DeLuca. Oh and I made the salad myself!"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Oh God, oh, oh God, you idiot, you idiot, you fucking idiot!" Jonathan was muttering aloud as he sped along the highway toward Scarsdale. In fact, Laurel had been precisely correct about his actions that evening. He'd arrived at the club stoop at eight o'clock, not daring to use his house key since he no longer knew where they stood as couple.

The door had been opened by Noelle who smiled sweetly at him and said Laurel was not at home. Would he care to come back tomorrow? No, he didn't care to come back tomorrow! Now that he'd gotten his nerve up and maybe his head on straight at last, he had to see her!

Noelle didn't seem to know where she'd gone. "Could you check her datebook? Please, it's really important." Noelle knew who Jonathan was of course, and so she complied, looking through the large appointment book on Laurel's desk, flipping to the right day. "Tom Saunders, 21 Chedworth Road, Scarsdale. Dinner – eight o'clock."

Tom Saunders! Why, she hadn't even waited a week before running off with that little prick! So he had been right! She had had something with that bastard and now

was picking up where she left off! He noticed his flowers on the table in the salon—she hadn't even taken them up to her room! Just left them down here for her guests, probably barely noticed who they were from.

He stood there fuming, his hands clenched at his sides until Noelle asked, "Can I get you some water or something? You don't look so good."

"No, no. I'm fine. I have to be somewhere. Thanks, goodbye." It was a cool, clear night as Jonathan hurried toward the subway station. He raced down the stairs and moved quickly across the tracks to the train that would take him to his apartment where his car was kept in the underground garage.

He didn't have a clear plan, but he knew how to get to Scarsdale and he'd use his car's navigation system to find the exact location. That bastard, moving in on his woman the second his back was turned. Soon he was speeding down the highway, muttering and mumbling to himself like someone crazed.

Slowly he calmed down, realizing he didn't know what the hell he was doing. First of all, he was the one who had walked out on Laurel, too cowardly to stay and try to work through his fears, not willing to trust her enough to stick with him. He had no right, no right at all, to act like the affronted lover, the one betrayed, the cuckold. Laurel had every right to go where she pleased and see whom she pleased. A fancy bouquet of flowers wouldn't fool Laurel. She was nobody's fool.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," he chanted as he slowed for the exit. Within a few minutes he drove into Tom's neighborhood. He looked at his watch. It was already nine-thirty. Dinner was probably over and they had retired to the bedroom for wild sex or to his no-doubt lavishly appointed dungeon so he could try his latest multi-tressed, triple-braided, super-duper flogger with snakeskin tips and bull testicle handle or whatever the fuck it was he made for five hundred dollars a pop.

"Okay, Goldman," he said out loud as he drew alongside Tom's home. He saw the driveway curving toward the back and wondered if he should go back there, make sure her car was there and then storm the place, demanding what was his.

He had a brief daydream in which he did just that, bursting through the door to find his one and only naked and about to be whipped by the crazed, lust-ridden Tom, who had tethered her in his dungeon against her will. In would come Jonathan to save the day and save the girl after neatly decking that little prick with one well placed fist.

Laurel, so grateful for her rescue, wouldn't mind the fact he'd basically stalked her, following her to where he wasn't invited to physically wrest her from the arms of another man... Shit, that wasn't a good daydream! Why did reality have to enter into it?

Jonathan didn't go down the driveway. He went past it at such an angle to confirm there were two cars, though he didn't recognize either and knew Laurel didn't even own a car. The Porsche had to be Tom's—a penis substitute obviously. The other car looked like a Lexus. Of course it could just be Tom's second car. Laurel might not even be there at all! She might have come and gone already. He might sit out there all night like a dope until some cop appeared and told him to move along.

*Call her, you idiot.* Yes. He could do that. Jonathan grinned sheepishly into the dark. He hadn't wanted to call her. He had wanted to dramatically appear at her doorstep, sweeping her into his arms as violins played in the background and his tears of regret mixed with her tears of joy. Who said only women liked romance? He laughed at himself and was relieved to find at least he could still laugh.

What had James said? That he'd grown up. Maybe it was time Jonathan did the same. He owed Laurel the courtesy of a phone call before just bursting in on her, wherever she might be. He reached into his coat pocket and extracted his phone, pushing the number two, waiting until the name *Laurel* scrolled across the screen before putting it to his ear.

It rang five times and was probably headed for voice mail. Fair enough. He'd leave a message. He'd be a grownup and leave a message saying he'd really like to see her again, if she were so inclined. That he really missed her. That he was so, so sorry for what he'd put her through.

"Hello?" It took Jonathan a second to realize there was a real voice on the other end of the line, not just a message. She'd answered!

"Oh! Laurel. Hi. It's me."

"I know." Of course she knew. Caller ID.

"Oh yes. Well. Um, did you get my flowers?"

"Yes, they were beautiful, thanks." Her tone was guarded, neutral. He felt his heart cracking but he plunged on.

"Well, I, um, I stopped by to see you tonight. I mean, but you weren't there. As you know, obviously, since you're somewhere else." He laughed nervously and hit himself on the forehead. *Jesus, Goldman. Could you be more of a jerk?*

"Yes, I'm at a friend's for dinner. You may remember him, Tom Saunders."

"Oh right. The whip maker." Jonathan tried very hard to keep his voice calm and pleasant. He looked toward the windows of the house, noting only the downstairs lights were lit. Perhaps they were really just having dinner, discussing business ventures, old friends. But that didn't mean they weren't about to go upstairs. About to embark on a love affair that would make Laurel forget Jonathan, wonder what she'd ever seen in him.

"Oh Laurel," Jonathan's voice was no longer controlled but full of pain. "God, I'm so, so sorry. I'm so sorry I ran away. I know it's probably too late to tell you this but I love you. I love you, Laurel. I'm so in love with you it's crazy. I'm so in love with you I'm finally telling you even though there probably isn't a chance in hell it matters anymore." He felt tears, ridiculous hot tears, welling up in his throat and he stopped talking. The last thing he wanted to do was cry like a baby while his now ex-girlfriend listened with disdain. Maybe put him on speakerphone so they could both laugh at his pathetic little display. Instead he swallowed hard and said softly, "Anyway. I just wanted to tell you. So I'll let you go—"

"No! No, don't go. I mean, um, hold on a second, okay?" He heard her say to someone, to Tom, "Could you excuse me a minute. I just need to take this call. I'll just go in here." After a moment she was back on the line. "Jonathan? Oh Jonathan! Where are you, sweetheart?"

"Well, I'm kind of afraid to tell you actually."

"Why? You can tell me. I'm just so glad you called! I thought when you sent the flowers there was hope but then when you didn't call, didn't come by..."

"I know, I know. I was still trying to get my head out of my ass. I think that's how James put it." He laughed a rueful little laugh. "James talked some sense into me finally. He's really a wise man, you know."

"I do know," she said. "But where are you? I demand that you tell me!"

Jonathan grinned so hard his face hurt, his heart lifting. "You demand, huh? Since when does the sub demand anything of her master?"

"Shut up, you dope," she rejoined, laughing.

"Well, I'll tell you, but please don't be angry. I wasn't thinking very clearly. I just had to see you. I'm, um, well, I'm right outside Tom's house as a matter of fact. Parked on the street. I think there's a security cop cruising by who's about to arrest me, if you want to know."

As he was talking, he saw the front door opening, Laurel's silhouette in the door. She waved and said into the phone, "You wonderful idiot! I'm in love with a stalker, oh my God! Let me just make my excuses and I'll follow you somewhere. Anywhere. We'll find a diner or something where we can talk."

He waited while she was saying her goodbyes and getting into her car. He heard the sweet whine of the Lexus' engine and watched as she turned around and pulled out of the driveway. She pulled up behind him, waving at him to drive on. He started his engine and pulled away, wondering what Tom had made of all this but not really caring.

*I'm in love with a stalker. I'm in love... I'm in love...*

That's all he cared about and she had said it! She hadn't said, "Oh Jonathan, it's sweet you feel that way but it's really too late." No! She had sounded flustered and happy. She had left her dinner date high and dry with barely a fare-thee-well! And she was in love with him!

Even after all the crap he'd put her through, she was in love! He focused on the road, heading back toward the highway, his eye out for a place to stop. He pulled into a hotel parking lot with a large sign proclaiming its twenty-four-hour restaurant. Laurel pulled in behind him and parked next to him.

She burst out of her car, running around to him before he had a chance to move toward her. Like a woman reuniting with a soldier who has just returned from war, she flung herself into his arms, kissing him hard as she clung to him. Jonathan's heart ached

with tenderness as he held her. She buried her head against his chest, holding on to him as if her life depended on it.

Something wet hit Jonathan's face and he realized it was raining. The sky had been clear only an hour ago but now when he looked up it was a slate gray, the rain spattering in big drops that promised a steady shower.

"Let's get inside, sweetheart," he said. "It's raining!" She looked up and gave a surprised little laugh.

"Why so it is! And here I thought you were just trying to get me into a hotel room."

"Don't be so sure I'm not!" he rejoined as they hurried arm in arm to the hotel lobby, their steps in sync as if they'd been walking side by side for years.

Laura sat on one of the double beds, feeling almost shy. In fact they had decided to give the diner a miss and check into a room. Rain drummed heavily outside the window, lending the rather sterile atmosphere of the motel a certain warmth. Jonathan was stretched out on the other double bed, his arms behind his head as he stared up at the ceiling. He'd kicked off his shoes and Laurel now followed suit.

"You know," he said softly, "when I was sitting outside Tom's house, feeling like a total jerk, I imagined you in there with him. Naked and tethered, with him behind you holding one of his fancy whips."

"Don't—" Laurel began, hearing the pain in his voice.

"No, let me finish. I imagined you there and I realized if that was what was happening in there, it was my own fault. I ran from the most wonderful thing in my life. Instead of finding the courage to work through it with you, I thought I had to do it alone." He sat up, looking directly at Laurel. "If I had lost you, Laurel, I would have lost what was most precious to me. I would have lost the part of me that gives my life meaning."

Laurel stood, moving to Jonathan's bed and lying next to him. "It's funny," she said. "Sitting there with Tom, he made it very clear he was interested in pretty much what you described. The dumb thing was, while two years ago I would have jumped at the chance," she paused, aware of Jonathan's body tensing at this admission, "I just wasn't interested anymore. Someone else had slipped into my heart." She turned to kiss his cheek. Jonathan turned as well so their lips met instead.

After a long, lingering kiss, Laurel pulled away and Jonathan let her. "The week without you made me realize I'm ready for something more. Maybe I'm finally growing up." She grinned toward Jonathan, who grinned back, pointing toward his own chest in agreement. "If you'd done that to me a year ago, hell, even a month ago, I would have said, 'fuck him,' and moved on. This is going to sound odd, especially from someone who's been with as many guys as I have," Laurel admitted, "but I came to realize I've never been in love before."

Jonathan's hand sought hers, his fingers gripping hers as she continued. "I know this is new for you, darling. Believe it or not, it's new for me too. Love has added a

whole new layer, a new dimension, to the experience. It's funny," she said, looking intently at Jonathan, who was watching her with those lovely dark eyes. His crooked nose was endearing and impulsively she traced the line of it with her finger. "I've always talked the talk, that is, said that a D/s relationship is so much more intense when love is at its core. But I didn't really *know* it. It sounded good—it sounded romantic, and beyond that, I'd always felt something was missing until now. I just figured it had to be love."

"Laurel," Jonathan said softly, taking her head into his hands as he pulled her back down to him. "Love is everything. You've taught me that. Without it, we're just adrift—searching for something we'll never find. You've anchored me. I love you with all my heart. I promise not to run again. To find the courage to stay no matter what an ass I make of myself!" He grinned and Laurel grinned back, feeling joy bubble up through her, emerging as a laugh.

She threw herself on him, straddling his waist as she playfully gripped his wrists, pulling his arms up over his head. "Damn right you'll stay," she laughed. "I'll tie you down and keep you hostage, you rat bastard!"

"Oh you will, will you?" Jonathan laughed, easily pulling himself free from her grasp. She kept her strong thighs locked around his body as she grabbed again for his wrists, succeeding again in pinning them against the bed. She leaned over him breathing hard, her breasts grazing his chest, their lips nearly touching.

With a sudden twist of his body, Jonathan flung Laurel off him so she landed with a grunt on the bed beside him. In a moment he was on top of her, strong fingers curling around her wrists as he pulled her arms up over her head. "You want to play, huh? Think you can overpower me?" He took her slender wrists easily into one hand, rendering her prisoner as he lifted the hem of her shirt, pulling it up over her breasts. He pulled at the bra, lifting it up so her breasts bounced free beneath it.

Still keeping her wrists pinned above her head, he leaned down, biting a nipple between his front teeth, pulling it taut as Laurel moaned her appreciation. "I'm going to let go of your wrists but you keep your hands up over your head, understand?" Laurel thrilled to his tone. She realized she had been afraid he might have returned to her but with vanilla aspirations—unable to reconcile his dominant impulses with his romantic love for her.

Yet the dominant, sexy man now ordering her to keep her position was speaking directly to her pussy, which tingled and swelled in her panties. She nodded, feeling almost feverish with desire as he let her go. He pulled her top over her head and tossed it aside. Reaching beneath her, he unclasped her bra and pulled it from her body. With rough hands he tore open her jeans, sliding them down her legs along with her underwear.

"This is mine," he said huskily, as he moved down to lick her sensitive labia, making her moan with lust. She'd been too sad to even touch herself since he'd left the week before. Desire unspent now spilled over her as she arched toward him, almost desperate for his touch.

He licked and kissed her for a few moments until he whispered throatily, "Jesus, I have to have you. Now." He stood up, pulling his clothing from his body as if they were on fire. He fell back over her, pushing her legs apart with his knee. Her arms had remained over her head. He grasped her wrists again, pinning her down with his strength as his cock nudged toward her entrance.

Tremors of pure pleasure surged through her as he entered her. Eagerly she wrapped her strong legs around his back, pulling him into her. For a moment she worried she was too wet—she could feel her slickness and knew she was sopping. She laughed inwardly at the thought—what man would think a woman was *too* wet for him? She stopped thinking as he began to move slowly inside her, controlling both their pleasure with masterful skill.

As his passion mounted, Jonathan held her tight, moving inside her until she thought she would pass out from pleasure. "I love you. I love you. Oh Laurel, how I love you," Jonathan whispered urgently, his words a sweet backdrop to the swell of orgasmic pleasure that drew her along in its tide.

"I—" she wanted to answer in kind, but her lips refused to comply as her body was lifted in a wave of release so fierce it took her breath away. Some minutes later, her heart finally slowing, she opened her eyes, trying to focus on Jonathan's face. She murmured the rest of the sentence, "Love you."



## Chapter Fifteen

"It's the needle, that's the thing. I know I can tolerate the pain—well, I think I can. But needles freak me out. The thought of a long, sharp needle piercing my flesh..." Laurel shuddered. They were having the pierced nipple conversation again. This conversation at once worried and excited Laurel. She found the idea of pierced nipples and labia erotic, but when it came down to practicalities, that was something else again!

They were lying in bed after an almost vanilla bout of lovemaking. Jonathan was feeling his way back with her and he seemed to be comfortable with his role as her Dom, but he was perhaps overly careful as a result of the past. She could sense sometimes he wanted to go further, but he held back, not yet entirely trusting his own instincts. Slowly though, he was working his way back to her. She hoped as she continued to submit and respond honestly, he would come to trust himself fully again.

She lifted up on one elbow, watching him as he talked. He really was a gorgeous hunk of man with that strong chest covered in lush dark blond hair, his pecs clearly defined, his shoulders broad and strong. She felt feminine and cared for in his arms as he crushed her to him, his gesture at once proprietary and tender.

"When you're ready, Laurel, and not before, we will have you pierced. I think we'll do your pussy lips first, since they're not as sensitive as your sweet nipples." He lightly flicked her nipple, watching with rapt pleasure as it rose to his attentions. He did the same to the other before bending down to kiss and lick each one until Laurel moaned.

"And, Laurel, I'll decide when you're ready, not you."

Laurel shivered. This was what she loved. When he actually took over, when he told her how things would be in his sexy, low voice. He was never a bully about it—just very matter-of-fact. When he was like that, it was almost as if his words bypassed her mind, going straight to her sex. She felt herself moisten and open to him. Even though he'd just fucked her to a searing orgasm, if he had wanted it, she would have been ready again.

They were lying in her large bed with its sunny lemon yellow quilt. He looked so beautiful lying there like a naked, mythical sun god, all blond and strong on his bed of gold. His cock was only semierect, lying in its nest of dark golden curls. She reached over and lightly drew her fingers along the shaft, curling them around it as he shifted slightly to give her better access.

Ah, so he too could use a little more attention. Kneeling on her haunches, she crouched over him, opening her mouth wide over his cock, teasing him by not quite touching it with her lips. He watched her, his large brown eyes dark as melted chocolate.

Slowly she lowered her mouth, still not quite touching his cock. She felt his hand on the back of her head, gently pressing her, taking control. His cock lengthened and thickened as her hot breath tickled it until at last she gripped it with her lips, sliding her tongue along it to the base. Gently she wrapped her fingers around his balls, which tightened in response to her touch.

Laurel was kneeling with her ass toward Jonathan's face. She was concentrating on teasing a moan from her lover when she suddenly felt herself lifted and swung back over his body. She kept her mouth on his cock as Jonathan pulled her legs up, positioning her so her pussy was poised over his mouth. His tongue snaked out, lightly tickling her flesh, skirting around her clit and making her shiver.

She stopped sucking his cock a moment, utterly distracted by his attentions. She was reminded of her duty when he said, "Don't stop. Keep at what you're doing." She resumed her kisses, lowering and lifting her head, keeping her lips tight around the now-hard, thick shaft.

His tongue teased, his teeth lightly pulled at her labia and again Laurel was distracted, pleasure welling up in her as he held her hips, keeping her centered over his mouth. She tried to pull away so she could concentrate but he easily held her fast. "Focus," he commanded, though she knew he knew exactly what he was doing.

Again she lowered her head, taking his cock deep into her throat. "Don't move," he commanded. "Don't raise your head and don't move." Laurel shuddered and sighed on his cock. It was difficult to breathe with his shaft stuffed down her throat and now that he'd forbidden her to move, her body was perversely desperate to do so.

His tongue was perfect, tickling, teasing, knowing just exactly where to apply pressure and where to go easy. Despite her best intentions, her body began to tremble and shudder. Jonathan barked at her to stay still but she could no longer obey, not with his mouth on her cunt and his cock down her throat.

She moaned on his cock as Jonathan warned her not to come. "You come and you'll pay, slut." His voice was stern but she knew his intention *was* to make her come. She knew part of their delicious game was for him to forbid her orgasm then wrest it from her and then punish her for disobeying.

Knowing this, she let herself go, bucking and grinding against him as a mind-blowing orgasm sent her nearly into unconsciousness. She had let his cock fall from her mouth, too intent on her own pleasure to think of his. Jonathan held her as she tried to pull away, locking her head between his knees as they rolled to their sides, his mouth still on her sex.

The orgasm lasted several minutes, or perhaps it was a series of many small ones, strung together like pearls created with each perfect stroke of his tongue. When at last it became too much and any more sensation would move her from pleasure to oversensitivity, Laurel summoned what little was left of her strength and pushed Jonathan from her. He let her go, satisfied he'd drawn every last drop of pleasure from her.

She lay sticky and exhausted, her legs lewdly spread, her head lolling to one side. Her heart was pounding a tattoo against her bones and though she wanted to open her eyes and see her lover, she could not. Even the act of opening her eyelids was too great an endeavor at that moment.

Jonathan let her rest for quite a while. It was a Sunday morning and neither of them had anything planned for the day. He pulled her into his arms, watching her as she lightly dozed. Finally he said, "Wake up, little slut. Since you came without permission, I'm going to have to punish you. You know that, right?"

Her eyes flipped open, the green irises expanding as her pupils contracted against the light. "Yes, Sir," she whispered, tensing and thrilling to his words. Instead of ordering her to stand and take a flogging or bend over his knee for a spanking as she'd expected, he took her into his arms.

"Sweetheart, sometimes a punishment doesn't hurt. And it's always supposed to teach. I think you're ready to learn something, to go further in your training as my sub today and to perhaps break down some old walls you've been carrying around that are no longer necessary."

Laurel looked at him with a question in her eyes. What old walls? Instead of answering her directly, he said quietly, "I want you to get up on your hands and knees with your ass toward me." Laurel swallowed, a feeling of disquiet settling over her. She didn't question him however, determined to obey. Obediently she assumed the position, her ass invitingly facing his direction.

"Good. Now put your forehead down on the bed, reach back and spread your ass cheeks." Laurel felt something cold shoot through her veins. No. She could not do that. She would not do that. She would die of shame if she knew he was behind her, staring clinically at her asshole. No.

She hadn't moved as these thoughts raced through her head. Softly Jonathan said behind her, "Laurel? Did you hear me?" Laurel swallowed hard. Slowly she lowered her head to the bed. Of course her asshole was already visible to her lover, and her awareness of this made her flush. But to be forced to spread her cheeks—to put herself on such humiliating display! Why was he asking this of her?

She crouched, still not reaching back to do as he had asked. She felt his hand on her head, softly stroking her hair. He leaned over her so his voice was in her ear. "Laurel darling. Who do you belong to?"

Just this sentence was enough sometimes to lower Laurel into submissive headspace. "You, Sir," she whispered, knowing as she said it where this would lead.

"Whose body is this?" He stroked his hand along her back.

"Yours, Sir."

"Whose breasts, whose nipples?"

"Yours, Sir."

"Whose lips?"

"Yours, Sir."

"Whose cunt?"

"Yours, Sir."

"Whose ass?"

In barely a whisper, "Yours, Sir."

"Whose asshole?"

She tried to form the words, knowing her hesitation was ridiculous, childish, but somehow unable to respond. She felt his hands in her hair, fingers entwining as he jerked her head back, his voice now harsh in her ear. "I said," he demanded, "whose asshole?"

"Yours, Sir." There. She'd said it.

"Prove it. Do what I asked you." He let her hair go and she dropped her head back down to the soft sheets. At least she could hide her face, which burned with shame, though if she were entirely honest, she was also aroused on a deep, secret level by what he was doing. Slowly she reached back, trembling fingers pulling at her luscious, round ass cheeks, displaying the little puckered rosebud at their center.

"There, that wasn't so hard, was it? You're lovely, you know. You have the sexiest ass I've ever seen. And your little virgin asshole is adorable, tiny and tight. It does belong to me, doesn't it, slave girl?"

Laurel mumbled something into the sheets. "Speak up, I can't hear you."

"Yes, Sir," she said louder, flames licking her cheeks and also beginning to spread through her loins. She was dying to drop her hands, to roll away from him, to hide herself, but at the same time, to her own surprise, she was becoming deeply aroused.

He was so masterful, not in a threatening way, but in a loving and deeply sexy way she responded to on a visceral level. She felt his hand sliding over her ass, smoothing the flesh, moving ever closer to the center. She started to drop her own hands but he said, "No. Hold yourself open for me. I'll tell you when to move." She obeyed, forcing her body not to tremble as his finger drew softly along her cleft, sliding down inexorably toward the center.

She jerked a little as his finger finally found its target. He lightly touched and probed it for a moment. Laurel stayed very still, her heart pounding, adrenaline hurtling through her veins. As he stroked it with featherlightness, Laurel found herself calming somewhat. It actually felt rather nice. She shifted a little, the tension easing in her body. His finger was withdrawn and when it returned it was wet with his saliva. *Oh God...*

He pressed, the little nether entrance yielding to his gentle but insistent invasion. Laurel squealed and dropped her hands. Jonathan wrapped his other arm around her waist, forcing her to remain in position, though he didn't rebuke her for letting go. His finger was still nestled in her asshole, just the tip, and now he pressed harder, rotating the finger until again her muscles eased and accepted him.

Laurel was whimpering into the pillows, clutching at the sheets. Jonathan slowly withdrew his finger and against smoothed her ass cheeks, gently removing his arm from around her waist. He pulled her down against him and crooned, "See, that wasn't so bad, was it, darling? You were wonderfully brave. I'm so proud of you."

Laurel felt submissive pride gush up inside her as he held her close, lightly kissing her lips. She grinned at him, feeling a little foolish but also delighted with herself. Yes! She *had* been brave. No man had ever been allowed to touch her *there*. Jonathan was the first to penetrate her virgin entrance, though admittedly just with his finger.

"That was the first step, Laurel. I will begin to claim your ass going forward. I think you're ready to submit on a more basic level with me. You say the words, that all of your body belongs to me. Now I'm going to give you a chance to prove it. When you are properly trained, you will not only display your asshole on command, you'll ask for my finger, for a dildo and finally for my cock. You will give yourself to me completely and without hesitation." He held her in his arms, his tone soothing but his words brooking no argument.

"You know," he continued, staring up at the ceiling, "James once said to me that modesty had no place in a D/s relationship. I'm finding as we explore together I don't entirely agree. I think there's a place for it—I mean, you can be as modest as you like, as shy and trembly as you like. In fact, I find it both endearing and arousing. But," he paused for emphasis and then repeated, "but, you *will* work past that modesty to obey me. You will never withhold any part of yourself from me, ever. Do you understand, sweetheart?" He took her chin between his forefinger and thumb, forcing her to look up at him.

Laurel nodded, feeling submissive adoration for her master well up inside her. She almost wanted him to begin right then. To put her to some submissive test involving her asshole so she could show him she could do it.

She almost wanted this. Almost, but not quite.

## Chapter Sixteen

"Did you make the appointment?"

"Yes."

"Are you ready?"

Laurel didn't know how to respond to this question precisely. Could one ever be ready to have someone stick a needle through one's most delicate parts and draw jewelry through it? Ouch!

She'd done the research as Jonathan had suggested, reading testimonials from other women online about labial piercing—the process, the aftercare, the best places in the city, what it felt like, how they liked it afterward. Most of the testimonials were positive, even from women who had been afraid beforehand as she was.

Laurel didn't mind being naked in front of others but spreading her legs for their clinical appraisal was something else again. Still, she dutifully went to the gynecologist every year and it was never as bad as she anticipated. She'd found a woman, Sylvia Pitman, who had a website with lots of positive comments from clients.

Jonathan wanted the traditional two piercings with a small-gauge needle, one on either side. Laurel was relieved he didn't seem too keen on a clit hood piercing as she knew there was no way she could tolerate that! She shopped around on the Internet for pretty jewelry and found little golden hoops—simple and elegant, that seemed just right. When the package arrived a few days later, she opened it nervously, examining the pretty loops of gold, imagining them hanging from her sex.

"They're perfect," Jonathan said. Now here they were, in the crowded outer store of a tattoo and piercing parlor called Sylvia's Lair. Sylvia had twenty-plus years experience and obviously knew what she was doing. Jonathan and Laurel wandered around the little shop looking at the various body jewelry displays and pictures of tattooed people lining the walls.

A woman of average height with short dark hair, a pleasant face and tattoos covering most of her visible skin stuck her head out from the back room. "Laurel? Laurel Jordan?" Laurel's heart jumped a beat but she nodded and smiled nervously as they followed the woman back into what looked like a doctor's exam room, spotlessly clean.

"I'm Sylvia," Sylvia said. "And you must be Jonathan. Laurel mentioned you would be coming with her." She nodded toward Jonathan. "If I may ask, does Laurel belong to you? Is she your sub?"

Laurel colored a little as Jonathan raised his eyebrows in surprise at the question. "I have a sixth sense about these things," Sylvia said. "It's the way a couple moves, the

way the man puts his hand on her lower back, the way she looks at him. Sometimes I'm wrong but more often I'm right. Not that it's any of my business of course," she added, starting to turn toward her worktable.

"No, no, that's quite all right. Very discerning of you actually. Laurel, answer the woman. Are you my sub?"

Blushing a becoming shade of pink, Laurel nodded. "Yes, Sir," she said softly, a curious pride blooming inside her to admit this to someone else.

"That's good." Sylvia nodded. "Because you can draw from your submissive strength. Subs have a lot of courage. They can take things plain ole vanilla girls and boys would have a fit over. Subs have what I call grace. Real subs, that is. I think you'll do just fine today, Laurel. Especially with Jonathan's help and direction."

This unexpected speech surprised but also calmed Laurel. Yes, she *could* take pain with grace. Why not incorporate this experience as one more way to show Jonathan her complete devotion to him? To submit to him and through the submission to exalt them both?

"Why don't you sit down, Laurel," Sylvia said. "I'll get you a glass of water. It's good you're wearing a skirt. You can just hitch it up and take off your panties." Laurel sat in a large exam chair that leaned far back for easy access with stirrups for the feet. It felt less clinical to sit in a chair than to lie on an exam table.

"You don't have to use the stirrups," Sylvia said, as she placed various packages onto a tray on the high worktable next to the exam chair. All the implements of the trade lay sparkling clean in their clear blue packages. Jonathan removed the little black velvet box that held Laurel's jewelry and set it down on the tray. "But I recommend them because they help you keep still when the needle's going through."

Laurel shuddered at the mention of the word needle. Sylvia grinned toward Jonathan. "She doesn't like needles, eh?" As Jonathan concurred she said, "Well, don't worry. You don't even have to see it. Me and Jonathan will take care of business. Your entire job is to lie back, close your eyes, breathe deep and find some kind of happy space in your head. You just hang out there 'til I tell you you're done. Deal?"

Laurel smiled weakly and leaned back in the padded chair. Jonathan leaned over her and kissed her lightly on the forehead as Sylvia donned a pair of thin white disposable gloves and a paper mask.

Jonathan and Sylvia moved down between Laurel's legs. Sylvia was holding a marking pen. "How about right here," she said, lightly touching a spot on Laurel's right labia with a closed pen.

"Perfect," Jonathan agreed. Sylvia uncapped the pen, pulled on Laurel's labia with a gloved finger and touched the tip of the pen to it. They spent a few minutes checking and comparing the other side. "I'm a perfectionist," Sylvia laughed. "You don't want lopsided rings!" As she peered and tugged at Laurel's labia, Laurel sipped her water and glanced at the walls, trying to ignore what was happening below her waist. They were hung with pictures of naked woman displaying their pussy jewelry. The pictures

weren't crude but really rather beautiful with spread labia like orchids, gold and silver jewelry glittering amidst the petals. Laurel felt the pen mark her other side.

"Here's what we're going to do, Laurel," Sylvia now explained. "I'm going to pull your labia nice and taut so I can get the exact spot. When I tell you, you'll take three deep breaths, in and out. On the last exhale I'll push the needle through. You've got fine, supple skin, so it should be a breeze. You'll feel it—it's going to hurt, I won't lie to you, but it's very fast and I'll slip the jewelry in right away and presto, you're done. Then we do side two and you're good to go. You brought a panty liner with you, like I asked?"

Laurel nodded, pointing toward her purse on the floor. "You might not even need it. Labia don't bleed much. But just in case, we want to keep your undies clean." Sylvia grinned. "Okay then! You ready?"

Laurel took a deep breath. "Jonathan," she said.

He stepped over to her head and leaned down. "What is it, sweetheart?"

"I'm scared," she murmured, clutching his hand.

"I know, baby. And I am so proud of you right now I could burst. You're working past a very real fear because of your love for me and your desire to please me. But I want you to want this too. I know you've said you do but there's always time to turn back. Even right now. If you want to, we'll just stop right now and go home. We can always come back later. No one's going to be upset, I promise you. You've already shown your submission and grace just by sitting in that chair. We can go right now. You say the word, baby."

Laurel stared at Jonathan. She hadn't expected him to say that. She had expected a pep talk about how strong she was and how she could do it, and how he knew she would be terrific, et cetera. She hadn't expected him to let her off the hook like this! Yet ironically, because it was suddenly back in her control, she felt herself relaxing. Hey, it was just a skinny little needle, not some spike! Yes, she knew it would hurt, but only for a few seconds. And labia healed quickly. Of course she could do this!

As these thoughts whirled through her head, she slowly smiled at Jonathan. "No. I want to do it. Not just for you. For me too."

"That's my girl."

"Okay, Laurel. Ready? Breathe. One, two, three." As Laurel slowly exhaled, she felt the needle, sharp and burning. "Jesus fucking H. Christ!" she screamed. The pain was intense, especially as the needle exited, but when she looked down, the beautiful gold loop was in place, glittering like a promise.

Laurel felt dizzy from the adrenaline rush. She felt clammy and a little sick. She let her head fall back. "Here, honey," Sylvia said. "Have some of this nice, cool water." Laurel sipped and felt better. She looked at Jonathan, who smiled encouragingly at her. Sylvia said. "You ready for number two?"

Laurel nodded, though what she really wanted to do at that moment was slam her legs closed. She was unable to help tensing as she anticipated the sharp sting of the



needle on the second side. "One, two, three." Again a string of curses as the pain seared through her but then it was over, the second hoop easily placed in the tiny hole.

"This gauge is so thin," Sylvia remarked, "that when you remove the rings, you'll barely be able to see the holes. You did great, Laurel!" She swabbed the area with a cleansing agent and said, "You're good to go. Would you like this pen as a souvenir? Your own personal pussy pen." She laughed as Laurel took the pen. It had the words *Sylvia's Lair* and her phone number embossed on the side. "You've got the aftercare package right here," she added as she handed Laurel a thick brown envelope, "and you call me with any questions. Remember, no intercourse for at least a month, you got that, mister?" This last remark she addressed directly to Jonathan, who grinned.

"Don't worry," he responded. "We're very creative."

"Oh I just bet you are," Sylvia rejoined, laughing.

\* \* \* \* \*

"I don't want to use it."

"That's okay. You don't have to want to. I want you to." Jonathan held out the slim, little butt plug he'd purchased for Laurel's training. He planned to teach her not only to tolerate attention to her ass but to revel in it.

Since she'd taken him back, he almost felt as if he were a different person. At last he'd been able to shed the inhibitions of a lifetime and admit his true nature and predilections. It was so freeing he found it hard to believe he'd kept his deepest sexual impulses repressed for so long.

Earlier that evening as they lay in bed talking, Jonathan had mused, "Someone once told me we build our own prisons. Erect our own walls, step through the door and throw away the key. And it's so unnecessary! Life is precious—it's such a shame to spend it lying to yourself, denying your own desires and the things that move you. Thank you, my sweet girl, for sticking with me, even when I was such a jerk about everything."

"Oh hush," Laurel had said, tussling his hair. "I really had no choice. You're under my skin. In my blood. I couldn't have done anything but wait for you."

He had kissed her softly, looking into her green eyes, almost losing himself in their clear gaze. "I want to give you some of what you gave me. You helped me to find myself as a Dom and as a man. I'm still learning of course. But I know you still have some areas, some issues, that are difficult for you. Your sweet little asshole for example."

Laurel had turned her head away. They were propped up against her headboard on her big comfortable bed. Gently Jonathan had turned her face back to him. "Laurel. I'm going to teach you. You're going to submit to me. Do you understand?"

Slowly she had nodded, her eyes hooding as they did when she was aroused. He knew in spite of the fact his attentions embarrassed her, on some level it also turned her

on. He knew if he could get past the hang-ups from bygone days, help her to stop playing the tapes of a life she no longer lived, they would have a more fulfilling love life and relationship as Dom and sub.

Now he held out the butt plug and said, "Here's your first assignment. I want you to insert this in your asshole. Use a lubricant. Take your time. It's very slim, the smallest one they had. It's just to get you used to something inside of you. And it's also a gesture. A gesture to me that you're willing to endure some erotic discomfort for me. You are willing, are you not?"

Laurel took the butt plug as if it were a dead rat, holding the tip of it between two fingers. Jonathan laughed. "Come on, sweetheart! It's not so bad! This is the first step. You'll be the one inserting it, so you control the movement. I'll just be watching."

He sat on the closed toilet seat of the small third-floor bathroom. They couldn't use the second-floor master bath as it was currently being used by paying clients for some water play. Jonathan had found the constraints of Laurel's home-club combination were beginning to cramp their style. While it was wonderful to have all the dungeon toys for their use, they still had to be mindful of paid usage, and since the club had taken off, pretty much every waking hour was booked. And they didn't have a space, other than her bedroom, where they could relax.

Still, he didn't protest. It was better than his tiny apartment and just being with Laurel was enough—for now. He watched her as she stripped off her long-sleeved T-shirt and jeans, the same tattered jeans she'd been wearing when they'd met. Her breasts, braless, swayed gently as she pulled the shirt off and tossed it aside. Those nipples would be next for piercing, he told himself, when she was ready.

He watched as she pulled off the little thong panties, revealing her labia with the gold rings glinting beneath soft pubic curls. "Spread your legs," he commanded. "Show me."

She obeyed, arching her hips forward slightly to show him the pretty gold jewelry. The piercings were healing well. There had been very little bleeding as Sylvia had predicted. Jonathan found it difficult to keep his cock from her lovely pussy but he loved her far too much to even think about fucking her too soon. No, he planned to fuck her in the ass instead. What better way to finally make it clear every part of her belonged to him? And what better time than now when her hot pussy was off-limits?

"Lovely," he breathed. "I'm going to get ribbons and tie them through the hoops. Your pussy will be beribboned like a perfect gift, just for me." He laughed and then, his eye falling on the butt plug Laurel had set on the counter while she was stripping, he said, "I put some lubricant in the cabinet. Go on. Bend over with your ass toward me. You can kneel on the floor if it's easier."

Jonathan couldn't help a grin as he watched her squirt what seemed like nearly half the tube of lubricant on the narrow head of the plug. It was made of black rubber, resilient for easy penetration but not so hard as to be uncomfortable.

She gave him a baleful look before turning around, her luscious ass now facing him. Delicately she spread her cheeks with two fingers while pressing the plug lightly against her sphincter. She pushed for a moment and then turned around, her face beet red.

"Jonathan. Really. I can't do this."

"Oh stop. You silly, sweet girl. You most certainly can do this! You let someone stick needles through your labia, for God's sake! Surely you can tolerate that skinny little thing. How are you ever going to take my cock if you can't handle that?" Oops, maybe he shouldn't have said that as Laurel's eyes grew wide and she bit her lip. But this was silly – what sub didn't willingly give her ass to her master? Was this all just a game or was she serious in her declarations that she longed to submit to him? To suffer for him? To belong to him utterly and completely?

He watched her, seeing her consternation, knowing of her desire to please him and knowing she was on some level also aroused by what was happening to her. Slowly she turned around again, bending forward slightly. Again she pressed the head of the plug against her asshole and this time it popped in, sliding past the tight ring of muscles easily until it reached the widest circumference of the plug near its base.

"Ouch!" Laurel said. "I can't do this! It's too big."

"You can. One more push and it'll be in. Then the narrow base will hold it in place. You're going to wear it while we go out for Japanese. I, for one, am hungry, so hurry it up." He watched with a wry smile as she whimpered and pushed and danced about, making quite a display of such a simple act. "Oh," she grunted, as it finally slipped the rest of the way in. Slowly she stood, turning around to beam at him, her dimpled grin making his heart skip a beat. "Hey! I did it! I did it! And it's not so bad. It feels kind of full but it doesn't hurt. Are you sure it's safe?"

"Absolutely certain, sexy girl. Now get dressed. Wear that pretty green silk dress of yours and let me take you out for some sushi and saki. Oh and skip the bra and panties."

## **Chapter Seventeen**

Laurel swayed gently in the swing. Her wrists and ankles were clipped to the chains attached to the suspension bar in the ceiling. She was blindfolded, and in a way glad for this. It was easier to submit in public when blindfolded. She was better able to sink into the moment, ignoring the distractions around her, not able to see the greedy eyes riveted to her every move.

She was naked, unless the narrow pink satin ribbon Jonathan had looped through her pussy rings counted, tying a little bow between them. "That's in case anyone at the party gets any ideas," he had grinned. "Private property."

As they were dressing for the party in their new home, a townhouse in Soho Jonathan had found for a steal through his real estate connections, Laurel marveled over the past six months.

After Jonathan had come back to her, after that aching, empty week, things had tumbled forward with a wild, delicious erotic energy. It was hard to believe it was already September. It was even harder to believe she'd bought a house with a man! Laurel Jordan didn't settle down, and if she did, certainly not in a permanent relationship!

Yet it felt so right. She missed her cozy bedroom at the club, which now served as additional space for the staff, but she'd brought all her things to their new townhouse. Jonathan had brought a few of his favorite things as well. They'd had fun picking out new furniture and art for the walls, both feeling very domestic and surprisingly happy to discover this new side of their personalities.

They were attending a BDSM gala at the club this evening, and while she was still a full partner at Club Roissy and helped run the business, tonight she was just another naked sub girl, tethered and waiting her turn to be tortured to the delight of all, including herself.

As she swayed, she thought back over the past wonderful months and the evolution of their relationship as they grew into their respective roles as Dom and sub. She couldn't suppress a small grin as she thought about the anal training, and she wondered if anyone were watching her now as she swayed in the swing, and if they wondered to what that little smile could be attributed.

She'd handled the butt plug okay and found she even rather liked it as an erotic device when they were out together and no one else knew their secret. It was a very clear sign of secret submission in Laurel's mind, and one she never would have considered before she fell in love with Jonathan.

She was no longer directing the situation as she had been, albeit subtly, at the beginning of their relationship. Jonathan truly called the shots now, controlling their

BDSM play, approving what she wore—or didn't wear—beneath her garments, even controlling her orgasm. For the first time in her life someone else was actually in charge, and instead of feeling belittled and objectified, she felt exalted and fantastic. It freed her to be herself. She didn't know how else to put it.

She thought perhaps it was a similar spiritual growth along the lines of what Jonathan had experienced, although hers was perhaps less obvious. She'd always considered herself a free spirit, picking up at the drop of a hat to travel wherever whim dictated. She made friends easily and was equally comfortable in a squalid youth hostel in Bombay or a fine chateau in the south of France.

She thought nothing of stripping at a party and exhibiting her bare body or having sex with a man on the first date if she felt like it. But beneath this wild exterior was a girl still afraid on some level. Still afraid of having no home to come to. She'd never let herself settle enough to face that. Still afraid of someone violating her most private and intimate space, and so never allowing herself to fall in love.

Yet somehow Jonathan had penetrated all this, helping to set her free from her own personal prison. He told her, and she did actually agree, he wasn't the one to whom credit was due—she was. It was true. By coming back to the city and starting the club with James, she had already begun to behave like an adult for the first time in her twenty-seven years. Now, by allowing Jonathan to truly lead her, truly teach as a loving Dom can do, she had found a new freedom and comfort with her body she had never thought she would achieve.

Still, there had been amusing moments with the training. That first day with the butt plug had been embarrassing but not so difficult. After that night, Jonathan had begun to pay more direct attention to her asshole, touching it, sometimes penetrating it, occasionally even licking it lightly as he was passing by on his way to her pussy.

One time he lingered a bit at her asshole, pressing his tongue so its tip entered the little hole, which was very clean and very tight. Laurel had screamed as he had done that and punched him hard in the arm. The punch really couldn't be called playful and as he rubbed his muscle he said, "Uh-oh. Someone needs to be severely punished."

She had thought she was in for a nice hot spanking or maybe a lovely lashing with her favorite soft leather belt. But this time when Jonathan had said punishment, he meant punishment, not erotic play. He had calmly directed Laurel to stand in a corner. She was to bend over, spread her ass cheeks and stand like that for as long as he decreed.

He had brought a small TV to her bedroom in the club where they still mostly stayed back then and he turned it on, flipping through channels and ignoring her for at least fifteen minutes. Fifteen minutes may not seem very long, but when one is bent over with asshole bared, head touching the wall, it can seem like an eternity. She'd been sorely tempted to stand up, to say "fuck this" and to flounce out of the room. She was tempted to beg forgiveness and be allowed to come back to bed. Somehow she managed to do none of those things but to stay bent and spread, her face hot with embarrassment but her mouth shut.

Finally he'd relented and let her rejoin him on the bed. "Whose asshole is that, Laurel?"

"Yours, Sir," she whispered, nuzzling against his bare chest.

"If I want to touch it, is that my prerogative?"

"Yes, Sir."

"If I want to stick a butt plug in it, is that my right?"

"Yes, Sir." Her face began to color.

"If I want to lick it, is that my choice?"

She gulped but managed, "Yes, Sir."

Her pussy was still off-limits as it healed from the piercings, which caused no end of frustration to them both, most especially Laurel who was left high and dry, though she dutifully and joyously sucked Jonathan's big, hard cock every morning and night. He told her the deprivation was good training and to think of it as such and before they knew it, a month would pass. In the meantime he'd told her, "What better time than now to begin serious work with your lovely ass?"

The training continued the very next day when in the morning he'd handed her an enema and said, "Tonight, little virgin, we will explore your nether region in earnest. I thought you might feel more comfortable if you used this beforehand to clean yourself out. I don't mind if you don't want to. It's up to you."

She had taken the little oblong box, staring at it as if she had no idea what to do with it. He'd grinned at her and left for his office. Laurel had never used an enema before and found the process rather daunting. She decided she did want to use it because one of her greatest but as yet unvoiced fears was if she did have anal intercourse, she would be dirty. Her lover would be horrified and she would die a thousand humiliated deaths.

Jonathan had guessed this fear, having talked around, rather than directly about it. "You know, the rectum is fairly clean—it's the bowels that are a mess." He'd grinned as she'd grimaced. "If anal sex were so disgusting, men wouldn't engage it."

"Okay," she'd granted him, somewhat mollified but still not convinced. "But why do it at all? I mean, I can see why gay guys do it—it's all they've got. But straight men?"

"Well, it's a different feeling than your sweet, warm pussy. It's tighter at the entrance but then looser inside. It's like this little ring of very tight muscles is massaging your cock as you move in and out. It feels great, though different from the velvet hug of a pussy."

They were lying in the dark where Laurel found it easiest to have this sort of conversation. Jonathan continued as he idly stroked her bare breasts. "Then there's the submissive aspect. Between a Dom and his sub there's an added intensity because anal sex is a submissive act to some degree for most women. It can hurt a little, especially when you're not used to it and it's a humbling position, on your hands and knees with your ass being penetrated by a man's cock. This can put you very quickly in a

submissive headspace from what I've read anyway. I want to find out with you, Laurel. I want to take you to a deeper, freer place where you truly withhold nothing from me."

And so he had. That first time had been frightening and as he'd said, humbling. She used the enema and later wished she hadn't, for she kept running to the bathroom all day with a sudden painful urge. It was embarrassing in front of her clients in the salon. However, it did give her some peace of mind that she would be clean for her lover. When she showered and groomed that evening in anticipation of his arrival, she paid special attention to her ass, making sure she was squeaky clean.

That night Jonathan lit candles around her room and put soft music on her CD player. He gave her a long, lovely massage, completely relaxing all her muscles. She felt herself sinking into her quilt, her bones and muscles like jelly under his skilled, strong fingers.

When he'd moved down to her ass, kneading the muscles there and slowly moving toward its center, she hadn't stopped him. She hadn't wriggled or squealed or tried to conceal herself. She was ready—ready to submit to him fully at last. She wasn't sure she would do it well or without fear, but she knew she was ready to try.

He had been gentle and slow, first dobbing cold lubricant over her asshole and gently slipping in his finger to get her ready for what was to come. She'd tensed, mostly out of habit, but had forced herself to relax. It didn't hurt and maybe felt a little good, if she were completely honest.

When he poised himself behind her, holding her hips with his large hands, he'd whispered, "My girl. I'm so proud of you. Look how far you've come. Nobody can keep you down now. You're free." He pressed the head of his cock against her entrance. Again she tensed and again she forced herself to relax. She took several deep breaths, inhaling to capacity and exhaling slowly.

Jonathan remained with just the tip of his cock at her anus, allowing her to adjust. As she relaxed her body, he again gripped her hips, pressing harder. It hurt and she tensed again, giving a little yelp, despite herself. Jonathan held her fast, giving one final push that made her grunt.

"Jonathan. I can't do this. I'm sorry. You're too big! It'll never work."

Jonathan had laughed and answered, "Well, guess what. You've already done it. I'm in all the way. And it feels great! Congratulations. You are no longer a virgin."

She'd laughed with surprise, feeling delighted with herself. Then she quieted, her body suddenly tensing again. Jonathan as usual, had immediately sensed her disquiet. He whispered, "What is it?"

Forcing herself to say it, knowing she sounded like a little child, but not knowing how else to phrase it, she had whispered back, "Am I—poopy?" Jonathan had burst out laughing, holding on to her body to keep from falling over in his glee and inadvertently pulling out.

"No, you're not poopy, you silly darling! You're perfectly clean! Now shut up and let me fuck this delectable ass. My ass, my asshole, my beautiful, perfect girl." He began

again, slowly easing in and out, letting her body adjust to his presence. As she grew more comfortable, he began to thrust harder, his breathing growing more labored. His concern became less with her comfort and more with his own pleasure.

His fingers dug into her hips and he began to fuck her hard. If she tensed, it hurt, but if she relaxed, it was almost pleasurable. Almost. She grinned now as she recalled that first time. Since then she'd come to actually enjoy anal sex, much to her surprise and Jonathan's delight. He'd confessed to her later he wasn't especially experienced with anal sex but he'd let their bodies guide him, listening to hers and using his in a way to bring them both pleasure.

Once she'd healed, he continued to use her ass, now a regular part of their sexual games. Only now she was permitted to touch herself, making herself come as he came inside her. Laurel found this added stimulation made the experience much more enjoyable. She even found herself arching back to better receive his cock, taking it deep inside herself before thrusting forward. He would pull her back with his hands, keeping her still as he fucked her. This further excited Laurel's submissive impulses, creating a lovely spiral of intensifying pleasure for them both.

Laurel was brought abruptly back to the present by her lover's voice in her ear. "Are you ready, slave girl? You're next on the list of entertainment for this group of perverts." He laughed and she knew he was including himself under that heading, without judgment—indeed with pride.

Laurel nodded. Her arms were a little tired, having been bound to the chains for at least a half-hour. People had stopped by from time to time, fondling her naked body, lightly touching her beribboned pussy, tweaking her nipples. Now she was to be the focus of attention and she forgot her muscle fatigue, her body tensing with anticipation.

The swing was ideal for sex—positioned just right for fucking—and Jonathan and Laurel had tried it out on a number of occasions but always alone. This play party was not about sex per se but more about the Doms who had been invited taking turns showing off their subs and their subs' ability to submit with grace and style.

Tom Saunders was there with Jenny, who had become his live-in lover, quitting her job as house sub. Jonathan had joked with Laurel that she'd have to take over and fill in until she found a replacement, but she knew he was far too possessive to ever allow that. She'd found an excellent replacement in short order, drawing from a long list of women she'd had to turn down. She even added a fourth girl, since demand was so high and there was plenty of money to be made for all. They'd hired another professional dominatrix as well.

Frank Rogers was there with a woman named Isabelle. Earlier in the evening he'd bound her breasts with rope, lifting and separating them in a way Laurel found distasteful, pulling them far apart as they were compressed in tight rope wound 'round and 'round each one. They turned dark red, the pierced nipples forced to erection as blood pooled and was trapped. He had threaded rope through her nipple rings and tied that rope to a hook on a whipping post, pulling the nipples taut.



Isabelle couldn't protest, being gagged with a large red ball gag. Her arms were tightly secured behind the whipping post and rope was passed around and up high between her legs before being wound around the post. Laurel hadn't yet been placed in the swing while this was going on, and she had whispered to Jonathan, "That seems awfully severe, doesn't it? Are we sure she's okay?"

"I asked Frank that same thing earlier when he was telling me what he does to her at home. Not only is she okay, she's in seventh heaven. He's finally found his dream girl. She can stay like that for hours, he says, and when he finally releases her, she pretty much attacks him and forces him to fuck her like a rabbit. They're getting married, he said. Soul mates."

He'd laughed but Laurel remembered Frank's remark to her long ago, admonishing her not to judge others and reminding her she was cut from the same cloth as other subs. She knew this was true. While she didn't especially get off on bondage for its own sake, when she was tied down or cuffed and unable to move, it could dramatically heighten the experience, thrilling her as much as it confined her.

Jonathan released her cuffs and helped her stand. She leaned into him as he held her a moment. "I'm going to take off your blindfold now. We're going to show these folks how well you can take a whipping. We'll use the stinger."

Ah, the stinger. A part of healing their rift and getting over the "whipping incident" had been Jonathan's reintroduction of the single-tail lash. He'd practiced more, taking lessons with James and practicing on the willing Brian, who loved that particular whip.

When he brought the purple single tail home, he had told Laurel about his work with James and his practicing on Brian. "You too will learn to love the lash, to crave the sting." They'd begun to call it the stinger as a result and the name was an apt one.

That thing stung like hell! But, as he usually was, Jonathan was right about her coming to love it. To crave it. It always took her breath away when he first began to use it. The sharp, sudden cut across her skin was always a surprise. She would suck in her breath and hold it, waiting for the pain to subside, waiting for the pleasure to take its place. Again, the lash would kiss tender flesh, making her hiss her pain and then sigh her pleasure. It was more pointed, more focused, than a flogging, but it was so quick, the shift from pain to pleasure was rapid. As he increased his pace, the pain and pleasure would blur, becoming a circle of pure perfect sensation that quickly sent her flying, much more quickly than a flogging or spanking could.

Jonathan now marked her each morning with one stroke across each cheek. This served to heighten her awareness all day, reminding her what she was and who she belonged to until he would return to her at night to finish what he'd begun. Just the thought of the little stinger, which Jonathan had hung over their bed, along with their growing collection of whips, floggers and crops, made her pussy moisten and swell with anticipation.

She'd even asked him to whip her pussy with it but Jonathan had refused, telling her he would happily whip her lovely pussy but with a crop or a light cane. The stinger was too difficult to apply lightly and he didn't want to damage his prized possession.

He led Laurel to the Saint Andrew's Cross, which had been moved to the center of the room for the night's festivities. She felt a combination of feelings—excitement, nervousness, sexual arousal, trepidation. Would she measure up to the deeply submissive and masochistic women in the room? Would she embarrass Jonathan and herself by failing to submit with grace?

Jonathan's arm was around her as he escorted her to the cross. Leaning down he whispered, "Just remember who you are. And how loved you are. By taking this whipping tonight, in front of all these witnesses, you are telling the world you belong to me and are cherished by me. I love you, Laurel."

These words while heartfelt were still rare between them and Laurel warmed to them, smiling up at her man, determined to make him proud. Frank and Tom approached them, helping to secure her into wrist and ankle cuffs once again. The cross was mounted on a pivoting stand that enabled it to be pushed slightly forward. Laurel's feet were placed in the footrests and the cross was pushed forward, leaving Laurel feeling unbalanced and thus more vulnerable.

"Nice," Tom commented. "May I?" He held out his hand to examine the whip, not one of his. Jonathan handed it over and Laurel knew he was waiting for some kind of snide comment about its shoddy workmanship. He still didn't like Tom, though he had no real reason except lingering misplaced jealousy.

"Not bad. Good weight to the handle. Nicely braided." He handed it back and Jonathan moved behind Laurel. She was not going to get a nice flogging as a warm-up. She was going to be tested by going straight to a whipping. Their morning ritual had prepared her however, and Laurel knew she could handle it.

"Okay, Laurel. Relax." She took a deep, slow breath, knowing he was warning her of the first stroke. It came, its whistle through the air preceding the actual contact with her flesh by a fraction of a second. Laurel expelled her breath sharply as she felt the line of fire where the tip had kissed her. He struck again, hitting the other cheek in the precisely the same spot. He proceeded to mark her ass, alternating sides and creating a neat pattern of small horizontal welts, never hitting the same spot twice.

Laurel was still at first but after the tenth stroke, she began to lose her composure. She forgot about helping to impress Tom and the others with Jonathan's ability to use a whip and her ability to submit with grace. Instead she began to jerk at her restraints, unable to control her movements, unable to stay silent. She was breathing hard, her mind riveted on the pain, not yet in tune with the pleasure.

"Oh! Oh, oh, oh, oh!" She bit her tongue, biting the words that threatened to explode from her lips—*I can't! Stop!* She didn't say the words, and after a few more tortured minutes, the lovely lift of submissive pleasure began to raise her up, taking her on wings of peace to her secret place.

She felt her body relax utterly, no longer resisting the lash but reveling in each new stroke, each new mark upon her flesh. With perfect skill, Jonathan whipped his lover, taking her to the very limits of her capacity and just a tiny bit beyond. He performed with perfection, never making a false stroke.

When he finally stopped, Laurel kept on, soaring high above them all, barely aware of where she was or who was watching her. She heard them murmuring but couldn't focus on the words.

"Let me have a go, Jonathan. Now that you've warmed her up." Jonathan was standing just behind Laurel, his hand on her back. He knew she was flying, lost for the moment in some private heaven. He felt as if he were flying with her, tethered to her by invisible strings wrought from his whip and his love. It took him a moment to focus on Tom's words.

Slowly he turned to stare down at the man. "What?" He thought he must have misheard, lost in his own fog from the intensity of the whipping.

"I said, give me a turn. Let me do her back. Let me continue the pattern you've got going. Then we can turn her around and do her tits. Really mark her up."

Jonathan shook his head. Laurel was done. Laurel was at her capacity. While she loved pain when provided in an erotic context and delivered with love, she did not seek it for its own sake. He would never take her past this perfect place she had reached. He knew if they began to whip her again—and on her back, far more sensitive without any padding, or her delicate breasts—that she would be immediately thrown out of her submissive pleasure trance.

For her the pain would replace the pleasure and she would lose the peace she had attained, instead panicking as she was taken too far. Tom obviously lacked sensitivity or else he just didn't care. Perhaps for him the pleasure was rooted solely in what turned him on. If the sub didn't like it—tough. She was the sub, she had no choice.

Maybe for Tom and Jenny that worked, and Jonathan knew D/s had as much variation as any vanilla relationship, but it would not work for his Laurel. For the woman who was going to become his wife.

He realized as he stared at Tom he was no longer threatened by him. However accomplished he was at making whips, however skilled he fancied himself as a Dom, Jonathan now knew with certainty he was a dolt when it came to true appreciation of the power and beauty of a submissive. He would never touch Laurel, not as long as she belonged to Jonathan.

Smiling a little he answered, "I think not." As he replied, he pushed the cross back to its upright position and released Laurel's ankles and wrists. Laurel leaned back into him and he lifted her into his arms, kissing her forehead as she nuzzled her head against his chest. "Laurel's done for tonight. She's right where she needs to be."

## About the Author

Claire Thompson has written numerous novels and short stories, all exploring aspects of Dominance & submission. Ms. Thompson's gentler novels seek not only to tell a story, but to come to grips with, and ultimately exalt in the true beauty and spirituality of a loving exchange of power. Her darker works press the envelope of what is erotic and what can be a sometimes dangerous slide into the world of sadomasochism. She writes about the timeless themes of sexuality and romance, with twists and curves to examine the 'darker' side of the human psyche. Ultimately Claire's work deals with the human condition, and our constant search for love and intensity of experience.

Claire welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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