



Tess Lamont

Bound
to
Surrender

Bound To Surrender
by Tess Lamont

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Jetta: Volkswagen

Dedication

To Carolyn and Sue for all the support.

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PRAISE FOR AUTHOR

Tess Lamont

AND HER BOOKS

BOUND TO BE MINE

"The chemistry between Lisa and Ben gives the reader a taste of what can happen when two people are ultimately suited to meet each other's needs...Needless to say, the bedroom activities in this book are not for the faint of heart, but contain lessons in loving we can all learn from. Ultimately, the question remains, can Lisa and Ben get past their past? You will have to read this book to find out, but as smoothly written as it is, that will be no chore."

~5 hearts-Yzhabella's Bookshelf, Romance Studio

"I could not put the book aside until I knew what the end would be."

~Gina Kincade

"The story is well-written and progresses at a steady pace, which is wonderful in a novella this length. Ben and Lisa have an excellent chemistry, and their emotional scenes are both touching and heart-breaking. Be sure to place this story onto your TBR list, especially if you love a BDSM themed erotica with oodles of emotion."

~4.5 Cherries-Fern, Whipped Cream Reviews

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Christina Welch thrust the key into the ignition of her 1999 Jetta and turned her wrist. The motor hummed, the air conditioner sputtered to life, and she sighed in relief.

The short walk from the bank to her car had left her panting. Hot, still air stuck to the back of her throat like cotton candy. She shuddered. It must be more than 100 degrees, she thought. With the usual South Jersey humidity, the temperature felt closer to 120.

She closed her eyes and stretched the long, thin column of her neck. Cold air wafted over her. The engine caused her seat to vibrate and a cool breeze swirled about her damp skin. A chill filtered through the thin, silk fabric of her blouse, perking her nipples. Shifting, she cursed her hormones. It didn't take much these days. Lately, her body maintained a constant state of high alert. Her doctor told her that heightened arousal was normal at her age. But if a man walked by right then, she would consider eating him alive—at least once he was hard and ready.

How normal could *that* be?

Christina crushed her arousal and opened her eyes. Life as a single mother made ruthless self-denial second nature. Besides, she harbored no hope of getting any action tonight, even if it was her birthday and she didn't believe in dwelling on what she didn't have. She had more than most: a job she loved, a great kid, a house she could afford, and friends she could rely on. So what if she hadn't experienced true sexual

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satisfaction in five *long* years? So what if today was her birthday, and she planned to celebrate alone? It wasn't as if she didn't have plans. Summer vacation only began last week. Tomorrow, she would lunch with her friends Lisa and Gillian. Then, she could look forward to Lisa's bachelorette party and then the wedding. After that, well, maybe she'd head down to the shore and rent a room somewhere in Ocean City or Brigantine. Warm ocean breezes might just help clear her head and soothe her body.

She sighed and pulled her grocery list from her glove compartment.

Milk, frozen pizza, cereal, bananas...

Shopping when her son was at his father's was never fun, but today, the thought of pushing around a half-empty cart just to cook for one seemed downright unbearable. She crumpled the list and threw it onto the passenger seat. What she needed was some small way to celebrate. She squared her shoulders. Grocery shopping could wait another day. Instead, she decided on a birthday treat: ice cream from Coneheads and then home for iced sangria, a racy novel, and a long, uninterrupted session with her ever-ready vibrating friend.

Christina shrugged off any remnants of self-pity and eased out of the bank parking lot.

God, damn, it was hot.

Bryce Walker braked, stopping at a traffic light. He leaned over his steering wheel and scanned for any sign of possible relief. No, not one single cloud marred the summer-blue sky. Muggy South Jersey air...he'd *never* get used to it. Although

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he didn't miss the congestion and pollution of Orange County, California, the weather in Jersey was far from ideal. A damp, frigid, misty-gray winter gave way to a bright, sweltering summer with almost no medium in between.

Despite the humidity, Jersey wasn't all bad. He liked his teaching and coaching job, and now he could look forward to the less demanding schedule of summer break. Still, transitions left him restless. Bryce flexed his right shoulder and then tensed his muscles to ease the strain. Was the start of summer break why he overworked at the gym?

His pecs ached from his workout. His body still hadn't cooled, though, from the few extra minutes in the gym shower where he allowed water to cascade over his well-worked muscles. Of course, his car's broken air conditioner wasn't helping.

He drummed his hands on his steering wheel, impatient for the light to change. Haze rose from the asphalt. The prospect of a long, lonesome summer loomed before him like a stretch of desert highway, without even a *mirage* of a woman to make things interesting.

Bryce pursed his lips. During the school year, he didn't have time for dating. Sexless nights trailed behind him. Worse still, every school day since September, the school librarian Christina Welch managed to stoke his lust. She flushed under his gaze in the teacher's lounge and, more than once, he'd caught her eyeing him with barely concealed interest. *She'd be a rotten poker player.*

He shook his head. He'd decided months ago not to pursue Christina. He didn't want to risk his new job. Besides, she was

a single mother, and he had too much respect to trifle with her. He couldn't help, however, that the obviously undersexed librarian stole into his fantasies from time to time. He had lubed and stroked to the thought of her more times than he cared to admit.

The light shifted to green. Bryce clutched the wheel and eased forward with traffic.

There was no way to hide from heat...not without air conditioning. He frowned. His open window wasn't any help at all. He should have fixed the AC when the temperature was normal. As it was, the AC in his car wasn't the only one broken...so was the one in his bedroom. Between coaching the school's baseball team and grading finals, he hadn't had an afternoon to spare in the past two months.

The turn for his apartment complex came into view but he hesitated. Living in cramped quarters during the school year was one thing. At least then, there were things to plan and do for school. With the year over, however, his efficiency seemed way too small, and, if he was honest, too damned empty.

No, he did not want to go home just yet. He drove past the gate. There had to be something *e/se* he could do, something cooling...

His eyes settled on a sign ahead—Coneheads Ice Cream. He'd never been there; ice cream wasn't his kind of indulgence. Still, he'd noticed the shop, with its clever moniker, almost every day. One of his students told him it was the best...who was it? Ah yes, Michael. *The librarian's son.*

He groaned.

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Why can't I keep that woman out of my head?

Bryce rolled his Mazda into the last available space in the strip mall's parking lot. He strode through the wall of heat toward the entrance, yanked open the door, and stepped inside. Bells jingled as the door closed behind him.

Ah...his mind sighed as the chill of air conditioning and the smell of sugar charged his senses. Perfect.

Then, he noticed a woman bending over the counter. He'd recognize that round, full posterior anywhere—the ass he'd been avoiding all year. The corner of Bryce's mouth twitched.

Fate's a bitch.

Fate: the topic of the final exams he'd just finished grading. *Discuss the modern, Freudian idea that there are no accidents referencing Homer's The Odyssey and any other work of art, film, or literature.*

He rocked back on his heels, glad he wore sunglasses. From his position, he could admire her shape at leisure while she considered the different flavors through the glass. He thought of the nervous way she ran her hand through her hair when he stepped too close in the halls, the way she jingled her keys and stuck out her hip when they chatted after games.

She needed flavor, all right. Flavor of a Walker kind.

Any man in his right mind would find her attractive, but instinct told him they may be compatible on other levels.

He grasped the back of his neck and massaged. Michael told him he would be spending the summer with his father. And if Michael was away, then the librarian was likely *alone*.

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What harm could it cause to flirt a bit? Summer lasted a long time. With school out and Michael away, time was on his side. Bryce ignored the little voice in his head telling him that his cock made the decisions. *One little advance couldn't hurt.* If she shut him down, he swore, that would be the end of it. He stepped beside Christina and mirrored her lean.

"I hear the vanilla here is very good, but if I were you, I'd be a bit more adventurous."

With a bolt of awareness, Christina recognized Bryce Walker's throaty baritone. His voice sent chills up her legs. When she glanced sideways, the muscles behind her knees weakened further.

Eyes like his should be illegal.

Her reaction to him was the exact reason that she'd avoided the man for months. She could not control her body's response to him, no matter how hard she tried. *Damn hormones.* Every time she got within ten feet of him, a shiver started somewhere behind her lower ribs and slithered down, pulsing in her sex and forcing her to seek release—either by self-distraction or, more frequently, in the privacy of her bedroom with the help of her vibrator.

Bryce was not a man to be trifled with, however, and she'd had her fill of overbearing males, *thank-you-very-much.*

His rakish smile stopped just beneath his sunglasses. *I'd be more adventurous.* Christina had no doubt of the double-entendre of his suggestion, but she couldn't act offended. Her body drummed the truth. She wanted nothing more than to pick up what he was putting down.

"Hello, Mr. Walker," she said, in her best librarian-voice. "Thanks for the advice, but I wasn't considering the vanilla." She lifted an eyebrow. Their eyes locked and the pulse in Christina's sex began.

The bells clanged as another customer entered the shop. She turned back to the server.

"I'll go with the maple walnut," she said, correcting her posture and straightening her skirt.

"Cup or cone?" the teenage clerk droned.

Bryce stood way too close. His heat radiated through her blouse, contrasting with the cool sensation of the counter against her belly. Christina suppressed the urge to giggle.

"Cone, please," she replied in clipped tones, but on impulse she added, "and you know what else I want? I want Jimmies."

The clerk nodded, not bothering to glance up before preparing her order.

"Feeling reckless?" Bryce asked, cocking his deliciously masculine head to one side.

She shook her head no. "Indulgent, more like. It's my birthday." *Why did I tell him that?*

"In that case," Bryce turned and spoke to the clerk, "I'll pay for the lady, and add a single cone of vanilla to the order."

The clerk nodded, handing Christina her cone. She thought of refusing Bryce's offer, but decided against it. To tell the truth, his gesture made her feel ridiculously pleased, even giddy. She couldn't remember the last time someone had bought her ice cream.

"Hey, I thought you said to try other flavors..." she laughed. "I wouldn't have pegged you as a vanilla man."

"Oh, I've tried other flavors," he replied. "Once I know what I like, though, I stick with it."

Christina swallowed. "Mr. Walker, you really don't have to pay for me," she forced herself to say.

"But I *want* to," Bryce purred, taking his own cone and handing the clerk cash. "Besides, it's your birthday."

Bryce held out his arm toward one of the shop's small tables. He placed a warm hand on the small of her back and guided her toward the table. Then, he slid in across from her and leaned forward.

"Happy birthday, Ms. Welch," he said, his voice low. "Do you have a wish for me to grant?"

Bryce's eyes held her, testing her and challenging her to respond. She swallowed a lick of ice cream. The cold sensation slid into her belly as she tried to remember the reasons why she'd held this man at bay. Bryce was strong, virile, and clearly interested. Why had it seemed so necessary to keep him at arm's length?

Work. Michael. Oh yes, and the uncontrollable flame he stoked in her pussy.

Just as she was about to slow it down, her mind rebelled. Too much denial, it screamed, too much restraint. What harm could a little flirtation cause? She practically salivated with the need to take what he offered.

"A wish, Ms. Welch?" Bryce prompted.

"Mr. Walker," she asked as her throat dried, "are you *flirting* with me?"

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Bryce winked and cocked his head in a half shrug. *Was beer better cold?* Christina's even, steady gaze set his pulse racing, even before he remembered the sight of her ass at cock-level. What he wouldn't give to lay her down and pound the living daylights out of her sweet, hot pussy. Even scarier, something inside him warned that he wanted more from this woman than just a good lay. He pictured himself kissing her eyelids, her cheeks, her nose, and the corners of her plump, pink lips. Perhaps that was the real reason he'd been avoiding her for so long.

He transferred his gaze out the window. The sun glinted off freshly washed cars rolling along Stokes Road.

"I could be," he said.

Bells rang as a group of teens entered. Christina sucked in. Turning, he recognized a few of their students in the group.

She raised her eyebrows and tilted her head in the direction of the kids.

"Got it," he said reluctantly. "We can continue that conversation later." Subtle tension drained from her shoulders.

"Thanks." She smiled.

He quirked the side of his mouth. Sharing a secret was kind of fun, even if the teens seemed too occupied with one another to spare a glance. Just to be careful, seduction would have to wait until they left.

"So, how's Michael?" Bryce asked, reclining into his chair.

"Michael's with his father for the summer," she replied. A shadow of sadness passed over her features.

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"Ah." He got the distinct feeling that she didn't want to talk about her son's absence. "He's got a hell of a swing, your kid."

"Yeah." Christina smiled wide. "He loves being on your team, by the way. You're all he can talk about...Mr. Walker this and Mr. Walker that. He's going to miss you next year."

Bryce nodded. "The team won't be the same without him. Boarding school is it?"

"His father's family tradition," she explained. "I held off until his sophomore year, but Michael decided he wanted to give the old alma mater a try." She waved her hand in the air as if to brush away the topic. "But let's not talk about that now. I wish I could have made more of his games. I enjoyed the ones I attended."

Bryce raised his eyebrows, surprised she'd feel guilty. Most parents didn't show up at all.

"You came to every home game we played," he replied. He decided against telling her that he had been acutely aware of her presence in the stands, particularly after they won a game and his testosterone ran high.

"I did," Christina conceded. "I wish I could have made a few of the away ones as well. The library renovation made it impossible for me to leave early, though."

"Things going well on that account?" he asked.

She nodded. "When we're done, we'll have the best technology lab in South Jersey. Kids grow up with the stuff now, and it's so important to show them technology can be more than entertainment. It's essential to education, to research..." Her voice trailed.

"Don't stop," he urged.

"I get kind of passionate." She lowered her head and glanced up at him through her lashes.

"I'll bet you do." He grinned.

She blinked, wetting her lower lip. She opened her mouth as if to say something, then concentrated on her dessert.

"Um. This is fantastic!"

"Agreed," he replied, popping the last of his cone into his mouth.

Bryce unfolded his legs as she licked. Her tongue flitted across the lower edge—just above where the ice cream disappeared into the cone. Her ice cream, he decided, was the best three bucks he'd spent in years.

He told himself to look out at the road, but he couldn't tear his eyes from her lips as they pressed against the cream. She looked up and blushed. *Actually blushed*. His pulse thudded inside his cock. It was *on*, baby.

"You look like you're enjoying yourself," he commented with more breath than he intended.

"I am, actually." When she smiled, her eyes sparkled.

Bells clanged again and then, after the teens made their noisy way out, the shop grew quiet.

"So, what brought you to Coneheads, Mr. Walker?" Christina asked, resting her elbows on the table and curving toward him. "I've never seen you here before."

Bryce wondered if she knew how much of the pale smooth swell of her breasts he could see through her shirt, and how much the sight aroused him. He glanced up, watching a sensual smile curve her lips.

"My air conditioner is broken," he said, his voice cracking.
"Really?" she asked.

Bryce was certain her next move was deliberate. She tilted her head and swirled the cone against her mouth, then licked her lips clean. He sensed she'd turned the tables and wished his sunglasses still shielded his eyes.

"Yeah. I was, uh, on my way back from the gym and ice cream seemed..." *What was it he wanted to say?*

"...preferable to my hot apartment."

Bryce could just about make out the edge of Christina's bra—delicate, light pink lace. He pictured himself unlatching the bra. Would her panties match? Would she wear a thong or a lacy brief?

Brief, definitely brief. Possibly sheer.

He rubbed his knee and leaned back in his chair.

"Must be awful to be without air conditioning—it's at least 100," she said. She popped the last of her cone into her mouth and hummed.

"105, actually. I heard on the gym radio that it's not supposed to go down past 90 tonight."

She shook her head and scowled.

"That's too hot to sleep without air conditioning. Hey, maybe you should check into one of those hotels on 73—there's a zillion of them. I bet you could get a good deal," she said in a light, careless tone. Her eyes were fixed on his.

Was she probing for his plans?

"I was thinking of heading over to the mall and seeing if I can find a new unit. I should have done it weeks ago, but with the school year ending, I was too busy."

Bryce refused to be the first to look away, especially since he'd just noticed how the brandy-gold color of her eyes shaded darker around the edges. Christina smiled like the damn Mona Lisa.

"Hey, I have an even better idea," she said, as if a thought just occurred to her. "Would you like to come to my place for a drink? I was about to pick up some sangria."

He'd been angling for an invite, and his palms tingled with anticipation. Bryce swallowed. He didn't want to assume sex was an option, but her body practically emitted raw, sensual need.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"It's my birthday, I want to celebrate," she said, her voice resolute. She peeked through her lashes and smirked. "Maybe after a drink or two, I could answer your question."

Bryce cleared his throat. "What question was that?"

"Well, you asked if I had a wish you could grant," she said, low and sultry.

Bryce's head swam. All his blood flowed in one direction.

She pushed back her chair. "Thank you for the ice cream."

"You are very welcome." He stood and placed his arm out. "After you..."

"I'm in the Deer Hollow development, number 221," she said. "Do you know where it is?"

"Sure, but I thought I'd follow you."

"I don't think so, I need to stop for sangria," she replied as they reached the exit. "And you need to get some condoms."

She turned away and pushed open the door and sudden heat burned Bryce's skin.

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Ice clinked as Christina took a sip of her sangria and stretched her legs out across her floor. *Not bad, for thirty-something legs.* How they both ended up on her floor, she wasn't quite sure. Bryce sprawled across her carpet; reason enough for her to remain right where she was.

She attempted to summon the feeling that sex would be wrong...hasty...but she couldn't. Having Bryce in her home set her body on fire, and she *loved* to smolder.

He leaned on his elbow and his inscrutable hazel eyes patiently drank her in. She squelched a nervous smile from flickering across her lips and, instead, drank deep from her glass. The drink, she decided, was a marvelous idea. Each mouthful cooled her inhibitions and heightened the pleasant, floating feeling swirling throughout her body. Christina congratulated herself on all her marvelous ideas: an ice cream, an impromptu birthday party, and her own private present in the form of a beautifully muscled English teacher/baseball coach.

Bryce chewed his lower lip.

She admired the athletic taper of his chest. He wasn't going to force the moment, though the small package of condoms on her counter served as a clear reminder of both their expectations. He waited, unhurried. If only she could quell the sensation that she was about to be devoured, she could get things started.

She suspected with Bryce, things would be different...hotter...more unrestrained. And though the thought struck fear into her heart, it was also the reason she'd asked him here. Hours and hours of watching him coach

gave her a measure of trust she couldn't hope to achieve in a few dates with a stranger. She needed a good, hard fuck, *damn it*.

"This *thing* between us has been building for months," she said.

"True," he replied. "It's about time we saw it through, don't you think?"

She nodded, thinking, *you're mine for the taking. All-right-already*. She set aside her drink and inched closer. She sensed prowling energy in the thick, musky scent of his body. One small signal and he would pounce. Pin-pricks of expectancy danced up her spine and her mound throbbed, heavy with arousal. She checked her gut: *still certain*.

"Well Mr. Walker," she sighed, hoisting herself onto one elbow to mirror his position. "About my wish...what I wish for is a man—"

"That much I was taking for granted," he interrupted, smirking.

His indulgent, confident smile cooled her ardor. Her cheeks heated with irritation. She arched a brow.

"You shouldn't take that particular wish for granted," she said, hoping he missed the slight slur in her speech. "I spent my first year of college at an exclusive all-girls university, chock full of curious women."

"Ha," he laughed, though the muscles beneath his shirt tensed. "My apologies, Ms. Welch, I hadn't realized the breadth of your, ah, experience."

He didn't look sorry at all. No. In fact, she had the distinct feeling he was making fun of what she deemed *experience*.

She shifted onto her knees and leaned toward him. His scent fogged her mind: clean and ready male. *Do I really want to bate this man?* She inhaled, drawing breath to the bottom of her lungs.

Yes. Oh God, yes.

"As I was saying, before you so *rudely* interrupted, I wish for a *man*..." she paused, her gaze raking him toe to head before resting with an air of disappointment on his amber-green eyes. "Oh, never mind."

His pupils dilated. His clear, piercing look cut to the core of her erotic need—to be *taken*—not just screwed, but *taken*. She froze. Perhaps, just perhaps, teasing him did not number among her good ideas of the day.

"What, Christina?" he asked, soft and low. "What keeps you up at night?" He leaned so close his breath tickled the thin skin of her neck. "What kind of man do you wish for...and what do you want that man to do?"

Christina sucked in. It was the first time he'd used her given name and, from his lips, it sounded sensual. Everything about Bryce emanated lustful intensity.

Wine made her bold and, now more than ever, she craved this man's cock. Christina looked Bryce straight in his eye, though the act drained every ounce of her courage.

"He's fucking me hard, fucking me until I'm screaming in his pillow."

Bryce's breath hitched. In an instant, his hot, dry hand grasped her chin.

"Are you sure about that, Christina?" he drawled.

There was no question in Christina's mind that a yes would unleash something dark and dangerous. Her nipples, already aching, strained against the confining lace of her bra.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Let's just see then."

Bryce straddled her and forced her back against the base of the couch. He clamped his legs around her thighs like he had a primal right to do so. Her breasts compressed against his muscles.

On instinct and alarm, she twisted in the clutch of his legs, and the tender part of her abdomen rubbed against a stiffness that *had* to be his cock. *Good God.*

"How hard?" he asked, flipping her arms above her head and clasping both of her wrists in a firm grip. He stretched her arms higher and a shiver of pain trailed down her shoulder.

She arched her back and parted her lips. "Harder than *this*," she gasped, challenging.

Bryce kept her stretched full until her fingertips started to tingle, but when his mouth met hers he was as gentle as satin against skin.

His lips brushed and teased. The ache in her arms pitted against the smooth caress of his kiss and she opened her mouth, delighting in her imprisonment. With his body, he kept her frozen in this pleasure-pain kiss she hoped would never finish.

Heat filled her cheeks, lust pooled in her belly. She groaned—half mew, half moan and all pleading. His lips thinned and turned up as he smiled, but it lasted just a

moment before he ground down, capturing her next breath in a long, probing attack.

Christina could not feel her hands, but they twitched with the urge to entwine themselves in his hair. She writhed in his grip. In response, he yanked her arms further above her head, pulling away to survey her tremble with a lazy, self-satisfied smile.

He gave her exactly what she wanted, but anger sloshed into the swampy mess of her desire. She wanted to fuck the little grin right off his face.

"Most men," she panted, "are too damn afraid."

"Is that so?" he asked. He ran a knuckle down the sensitive inner skin of her arm and continued up the side of her breast, stopping just below her aching nipple. *Shit*, she wished she was naked. *Rub it...please, please, please*. She shivered. *No*. She wanted him to work harder.

"From my perspective," he drawled, "I'm not the one looking afraid." He swirled the tip of his tongue around the base of her ear. "But, I'll take the bait. Would you like to tell me, specifically, what I am frightened of?"

He nipped at her earlobe as he waited for her to answer. She blinked. Her mind groped for a sensible thought. Yet, trapped beneath him this way, with his hot breath tickling her neck and his tongue suckling her earlobe, she couldn't think at all.

Bryce released her hands. Warm friction from the carpet penetrated her blouse as he pulled her flat against the floor. He eased his full weight over her body.

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She took a deep and shuddering breath. Yes, that was definitely his cock, this time she was sure. It pulsed thick and ready against her inner thigh. She moaned, spreading her legs. Still, there was something in the tone of his voice, something that made her itch to continue challenging him. She looked into his eyes.

What was he afraid of?

"You're afraid of surrender," she panted.

He blinked as if her reply surprised him and a jolt of mischief shot through her stomach. She planted her feet and administered a little trick she'd learned in self-defense class. With every ounce of strength she possessed, she bucked her hips in a sideways arc. He bounced to her side and, before he could react, she straddled him and pinned his arms at his sides. She dangled her tits just above his lips.

"You're afraid of surrender," she repeated, with a wicked, teasing smile. His laughter rumbled against her thighs.

"God you're hot, my little librarian." His eyes twinkled and he made no move to fight. "Perhaps you have me."

Why then, did she still feel like he was the one in control?

He smiled, but spoke to her lips rather than her eyes.

"There's a lack of clarity in your semantics, though. Is it *my* surrender I'm afraid of, or *yours*?" He rocked his hips forward, pantomiming sex.

Even through her clothes, the contact sent a quiver through her arms, weakening her hold.

She concentrated, leveling her gaze. "What do you think?"

With a quick twist of his arms he tripped her balance and quickly lifted her off his body. *God, he is strong.*

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He crawled over her like an animal claiming its prey. Pinching her chin, he forced her face to his and lowered his lips, picking up his kiss exactly where he left off. This time, as he ground harder, she pushed back, opening wide. She felt greedy, feverish and giddily glad to be underneath him once again. But she couldn't let the argument rest.

"Your surrender," she managed to mumble as he worked his hands down her body.

He sucked on her lower lip, then, the corner of his mouth curved.

"When I'm done..." he spoke between devilishly soft, breathy licks on her neck. "I doubt you'll be able to tell the difference."

Bryce thrust one hand underneath her crumpled skirt and ran his thumb lightly over the crotch of her panties. Christina cried out in both need and surprise.

"Lovely sound." He grinned. "At Coneheads you said I didn't look like a vanilla man, remember?"

Their eyes met.

"Yes," she choked.

"I should warn you...I'm not."

His words resonated deep in her stomach; her pussy muscles clenched. Bryce tapped and jiggled his fingers against her clit, coaxing the illusive tendrils of orgasm to coalesce. As she approached the release she ached for, she mewed again, an involuntary, plaintive sound.

He laughed, jerking his hand from her pussy and going to work on her blouse.

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Was the growl she heard hers? She scowled. "That's not fair, I didn't—"

"You will...when I want you to," he interrupted. "We have all afternoon."

One by one, he eased open each button. He worked his hands with languid confidence. When his calloused fingertips slid against her hot flesh, excited shivers skipped up her spine. Though he still straddled her legs, he bent her toward him until she was seated upright.

In a haze of desire, Christina responded to each touch as his fingers commanded. When he grazed her belly with his thumb, she shifted, allowing him to pull the shirt from her skirt. When he ran his finger up the outer curve of her breast she opened her arms, so he could remove her blouse. When he brushed his knuckle against her ribs, she lifted her hands and he drew her cami over her head.

The rush of an air-conditioned breeze surprised Christina as her bra straps slipped from her shoulders. How had he rendered her half-naked without truly breaking their kiss?

He leaned back and devoured her with his eyes. Christina tugged at his shirt.

"Uh-ah," he said, shaking his head no. His hands circled each of her wrists and he twisted her arms behind her back. "Patience, Christina," he said against her lips.

Sparks of annoyance flared in her breast, and she fought to pull away. What did he want? To have her naked while he remained fully clothed?

She jerked against his iron grip and realized she was once again helpless. With her face forced against his flexed pec,

she inhaled the scent of her own arousal mixed with the scent of his sweat. She panted.

"You'll get your fucking, I swear," he murmured.

Christina's blush seeped through her thighs and spread to her stomach, her breasts, her cheeks—full body mortification—even as she practically creamed. She hadn't been this turned on since...since...

Fuck it all, she'd never been this turned on. Her senses shimmered; the hair on her arms bristled in goosebumps. If Bryce ordered her spread-eagle so he could deep-stroke her until midnight, she would have obeyed without question. She'd take whatever he'd give. Her willing, submissive craving scared the shit out of her. It was his surrender she was aiming for, wasn't it?

Bryce's heartbeat thudded fast and relentless in Christina's ear, betraying the intensity of his own emotion, despite his leisurely pace.

Suddenly, his aim became crystal clear. Stretching her arms until they ached...taking her to the edge, then drawing her back...remaining clothed while he rendered her naked—they were mere shadows of where they were going. *Not a vanilla man*. She squeezed breath from her lungs with a slow, dragging exhalation. Did she flush from embarrassment or desire?

Did it matter?

Christina knew what she wanted, and she might never again have the chance to explore with a man she at least moderately trusted. She inhaled, this time focusing on Bryce's

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spicy male essence and savoring the heat of his body. Truth was, she trusted him not just *moderately*, but *completely*.

"You want *me* to surrender," she said against his chest.

"Yes. Didn't you ask to experience complete surrender?" he asked. "Not, I admit, in so many words. Though, I think, that's what 'screaming in a pillow' entails."

He loosened his grip on her wrist, though he kept her pinned. She could have broken free, but she lacked the desire to try. The only thing she craved was a mind-blowing shag with the man whose body was her prison.

He held her wrists and pinned her as he drew small circles on her back with his knuckles. Stretched taut against his muscles, every sensation made her shiver.

She focused on the reassuring pace of his breath, the radiant calm of his heated skin. Her embarrassment faded with each stroke of his knuckles.

"Maybe I'll surrender, Mr. Walker," she replied when her breath returned to normal. "If you make me."

He frowned. "Mr. Walker is what my students call me," he said, evading the question. "You will call me..."

For a moment, she hoped he would say something primitive and naughty like *master*, and she was afraid of melting into a pool of her own wetness.

Instead, he finished, simply, "Bryce."

She nodded. His eyes were dark. They were really going to do this...going to a place she'd fantasized about, but never dared speak of.

"Surrender is given, never taken," he said, enunciating each word, and a wrinkle furrowed his forehead. "Are you

sure this is a game you're willing to play?" His breath filled his body. "If so, for tonight, you will do as I say." He drew her fingers to his lips like a Victorian gentleman and kissed the tips of her fingers. "And only as I say."

Was he crazy? With rivers of anticipation running all over her skin, she didn't really care. Again, she nodded yes.

"You will answer when I ask a question," he ordered. His voice was lower, commanding, assured. He bent to her ear and added, gently, "I love the lilt of your voice."

English teachers and alliteration. She didn't dare smile, though the thought eased her fear.

They were playing a game. *Or not.* She wasn't really sure what was real. Whatever was going on, there was no way in hell she was going to break the mood.

"Yes, Bryce," she said in a breathy whisper.

"Yes, what?"

"Yes, I will answer when you ask a question." She sucked in. "And, yes, I want to surrender to you."

Just a hint of a shudder ran the length of his body. This time, she did smile. He stopped stroking and wound his fingers into her hair.

With his thumb tracing her chin he said, "For tonight, you are mine to command."

Oh, shit. Christina's insides turned to jelly, one big pool of fucking gelatin. Her eyes flickered back to the carpet as her cheeks flamed. He released her, sitting up on his knees and then crawled to her side.

Her naked breasts tingled. She wrapped her arms around her body.

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"Stand," he ordered.

Her legs trembled, weak and unreliable. How she managed to make it to her feet, she wasn't sure, but she didn't stay there long. Bryce lifted her into his arms. *Well enough*, she thought, because she wasn't sure she could walk, and she was too mortified to look into his eyes just yet. She wanted this, she wanted it *bad*. She wanted to feel his unyielding weight squeeze her tits and force her body into the mattress. She wanted to buck as he shoved his cock into her. *Fuck it all*, she wanted very much for him to *command her*. Then maybe, just maybe, she'd grant him her surrender...but not before demanding his.

Bryce pressed Christina into her pillows and bowed over her sherry cream flesh. As he rolled his tongue against her rust-brown nipple, he thought of the old English vows from the novels he taught. *With my body, I thee worship*. He closed his lips around her bud and sucked.

Christina, Christina, Christina.

She curled her body back, offering herself to him, eyes closed.

He rose, never allowing his gaze to leave her face. The emotions playing there fascinated him. She twisted her hips in a small arch as if to ask why he stopped. To reassure her, he placed his thumb just above her panty-line.

What next?

He traced a slow line up the center of her body. He needed to step back from the edge if he meant this to last. She sighed—a sound full of nervous, breathy anticipation...*and challenge*.

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'Yes, I want to surrender', my ass.

Oh, she wanted a little rough sex, but did she truly understand what was inside of him? What was inside of her? He and Christina toyed with TNT, but he'd never backed away from a challenge. The fight was part of it. Beyond the fight, though, beyond this little game, Christina was something truly special. Her surrender, when she granted it heart and soul, would mean complete devotion—a wide open vista. For now, he'd have to settle for her words...and her body.

Fate. He recalled first seeing her at the ice cream shop.
Hubris, more like.

What was he thinking when he promised screaming-perfect sex on the first try? Learning a woman's particular triggers took time. Time to discover the meaning of each shade of her skin, time to explore every inch of her body, while seeking the slight tremors that would betray the secret places she was most sensitive. Not that Christina was too much of a mystery. He'd already found a deeply sensitive hollow at the base of her neck, and her nipples were practically alive.

Mine to command.

His heart beat in his throat as his thumb reached the arch between her ribs. He admitted to himself he was a bit rusty on the seduction side, not that she seemed to notice. And, he hadn't meant to push the control game this far. *Not yet, anyway.* Maybe it was all the long months of repressed desire or, more likely, her all-too-accurate challenge about surrender. It really didn't matter, did it? He was here now, and he sure as hell better follow through.

Her surrender or mine.

He placed both hands around her waist and trailed small kisses from her breasts to her neck, all the while sliding himself against her soft curves. Her body sagged with a moan.

Both.

Christina opened her eyes in time to see Bryce pulling off his shirt like it was wrapping paper and he the present.

When he got it loose, he stretched it long. She frowned.

"Improvisation." He grinned.

"Hey, I—"

His mouth silenced her and her protest slipped from her consciousness.

He twisted his shirt, winding it through her wrists and wringing sparks of pain from her hands. As he secured her to her headboard, pain wasn't where she focused—far more intriguing was the naked vulnerability of her breasts. She'd never seen her nipples so dark and erect. If they tempted his lips, however, he steered clear. His attention centered on the flesh beneath her ear and he nibbled until she existed purely as a pool of sensation. She coiled her body and silently pled for him to drink.

His thighs locked her legs beneath him and his arm arched above her. He feasted at leisure with no apparent intention of rushing to the main course.

Christina panted.

"Stay still, unless I say you can move," he commanded. "Is that clear, little librarian?"

Clear? The only thing clear was his determination to drive her completely insane.

"Yes, Bryce," she breathed. He'd coaxed her to the edge of reason and she needed release; she'd go mad without it. Christina would say yes to just about anything at the moment.

He stepped away from the bed and drew his belt from his jeans. He let it dangle, watching her.

Apprehension convulsed the flesh between her thighs. She flushed. Did she really want him to...*shit*...did he really mean to...

"Not today, I think." He smiled. "When you are ready."

When, Bryce said. *When*, not *if*. *This was a one-time thing, wasn't it?*

She stopped that line of thought as he stepped out of his jeans and boxers. His cock jutted up and out of a tangle of dark hair. She'd never been particularly impressed with a man's dick, but she couldn't take her eyes off his as he unwrapped a condom. A tight but tingling feeling skittered over her thighs as she watched him hold his pulsing cock at its base. The latex stretched as it sheathed his smooth, veiny skin.

Any moment now and... Her hips jerked reflexively.

"I said no movement," he said, frowning.

She froze and cast her eyes down. Her submissive response felt completely natural.

Was she really tied to her bed with Mr. Walker's shirt? Was she really *enjoying* it?

Yes.

He placed a knee on her bed and the mattress sagged under his weight.

"So eager...so willing...I knew..." he said. He grasped each side of her panties.

There was no point in contradicting him. If her nipples weren't proof enough, her panties must be soaked by now.

"Arch up, Christina."

He slid her pink lace briefs off, leaving her skirt wrinkled around her waist. She didn't even think to care. All she could hear was rustling fabric and the sound of her gasps as they punctuated the quick, jagged beating of her heart.

"Spread for me."

She thrust her head back into her pillows and inched her legs apart until cool air tickled the dripping, twitching skin of her cunt.

"Very good."

Does time move slower when all you want to do is fuck?

He lowered his mouth and, with his tongue, circled her clit. His hot breath tantalized. Every instinct told her to thrash and moan, but she held herself still as the pressure mounted. His tongue slipped in rhythmic lines, tracing every fold, nearing but never touching the one spot that would give her release. Her thighs shook and the tremble spread outward until her legs were beyond her control.

"Please...I can't, I can't..."

Bryce inserted a finger in her pussy and raised his face.

"Oh, but you will," he insisted.

He grabbed her nipple between his teeth. Christina whimpered as his breath slithered across the lower curve of her breast. With the precision of an expert, he sucked and licked her protruding dusty-pink nub.

He removed his finger from her slick heat and, with her juices still dripping, he traced her lips. Without thinking she licked, then bit. The half-smile disappeared from his face.

"God, I want to fuck you, Christina."

"Do it then, dammit!"

Bryce's smile returned. "I said no talking unless I ask a question. That's your second infraction. Just for that, you'll have to wait a little longer."

Jerk.

He wedged his knees beneath her legs. Christina felt trussed. Her arms were tied above her, head pressed into the pillows, and legs inelegantly draped open across his thighs.

"I'll take whatever I want, whenever I want," he whispered.

Past the rise and fall in the valley of her breasts she saw him press his cock against her folds. Maddeningly, he paused with his eyes closed. Her skin enveloped his dick, but he was not yet where she needed him to be. He was not yet inside.

"Arch," he commanded.

She pushed her ass into the air and struggled to meet his angle.

"Not high enough, Christina," he said.

She pressed harder, arched higher.

"Higher," he barked.

Her neck strained and her eyes prickled with tears. She tried, but...

"Holy crap, Bryce...I can't!" Raw panic seeped into her voice. "I know I'm not supposed to speak but—"

"Shh," he soothed. "Shh, it's all right, I've got you."

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She relaxed and gave her body over to his guidance. With one hand, he held her ass. With the other, he arranged each of her legs over his shoulders.

"There," he said. "I have you. You see?"

"Yes, Bryce," she groaned.

"Good girl," he murmured.

She whimpered. A sheen of sweat cooled her skin and she shivered with bliss.

With his prick, he circled her opening until just the tip of his cock squeezed inside. Then, with an agonizingly gradual prod, he eased into her wetness. His gaze fixed on his dick as it disappeared into her body.

She was bent, swiveled and spread, yet all she could feel was the palliative stretching of her hot sheath as she took the massive length of his erection.

"I love the look of my cock in your pussy," he panted.

The walls of Christina's vagina constricted. Damn, she loved his voice. She pressed her head back into her pillow and pushed forward to meet each thrust, finally finding balance and pace. On top, he massaged her clit. Underneath, his grip held her steady, while he pressed a knuckle against the slippery lower part of her opening, just above her anus. The uncontrollable quiver returned. Her knees shook against his chest.

His surrender? Hers?

She didn't give a fuck, she was about to come harder than she ever had in her life.

She heard nothing, smelled nothing, tasted *nothing*. Only heat and fullness remained—desire and the messy, wet

friction where their bodies joined. Bryce's careful, conscious thrusts nudged Christina through the darkness. He pulsed inside of her: not just in and out, but up and down. She existed only in *that* place: she *was* sex and sex alone.

"Come now, Christina."

The spiral of nerves tightened in her cunt until the threads of her separate existence frayed. Her limbs shuddered, slaying the last of her reserve as the tension in her pussy finally cracked, spreading out in every direction. She screamed through a dark, hollow tunnel.

Aftershocks pulsed through her inner muscles and Bryce lost his load.

"Fuck, yes," he yelled. He shook and groaned and dug his fingers into her sides. Was he crying her name?

She couldn't tell. Caught in the tangle of limbs, all she could remember to do was breathe.

Later, when he eased out, she remained limp. She concentrated on his comforting, grounding hand against her forehead as he unbound her wrists.

Once free, she curled her arms to her chest and rolled to her side. She thought she should say *something*, but what? *Well, I should at least turn over.* She resolved to do just that, in just another minute...

Christina curled away and a shiver of fear slithered through Bryce's arms.

Did he go too far? What could he say? What was there to say? Was she angry? Embarrassed?

Her hair criss-crossed her white pillowcase in frantic patterns as the setting sun filtered through her lace curtains,

drawing shadows of roses across the skin of her back. Bryce's muscles remained frozen as her shoulders rose and fell with each, even breath.

She wasn't angry; she was sleeping.

He breathed a sigh of relief and smiled, recalling her uninhibited scream and the feel of her shivering thighs against his pecs. *I want a man who'll fuck me until I'm screaming into the pillow.*

Well, I fulfilled my end of the bargain. Masculine triumph swelled his chest.

Careful not to disturb her rest, he rolled to his side and wrapped the spent condom in a tissue. Then, he stretched out beside her, his eyes tracing the shadows on her skin. She sighed again and rolled to her back. Satisfaction was painted across her tension-free face and onto her red and swollen lips.

He shook his head at his own audacity: *you'll get your fucking, I swear.* That was a bit much, but she went along with everything he gave, moaning, *yes, Bryce.*

If he wasn't so spent, he could have gotten hard again just thinking about the way her body undulated like a wave in the ocean at his command. He brushed a tendril of damp hair from her forehead. Something in the vulnerable twist of her arm against her flushed cheek stole his sense of elation. He felt—*what?*

Bryce withdrew his hand and rolled over, sinking into her other pillow.

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He'd played games of domination with other women, but they had always been just that—*games*—role plays flirting with primal and base urges.

He kept the truth locked so deep within, sometimes even he forgot. But his wolf-heart slept uneasily. He could not deny he was an alpha seeking his mate.

He longed for a woman who could hunt on her own, but purr beneath him when he staked his claim. He'd nearly given up on the search, having decided long ago such a woman did not exist.

He frowned at the curled body beside him. *But she does.*

The moment Christina's muscles sagged and her body convulsed in ecstasy, Bryce *felt* her total surrender. He rolled toward her side and pulled her against his stomach, curling his body around hers.

He'd conquered her, yes, but he also lost something in the process. When her pulses drew his orgasm, he felt like her body yanked his cum from somewhere within his spine and he had the mindless, crazy urge to say he loved her.

It was the moment, only the moment. He reassured himself as he slipped into sleep. If not, it could cost them both everything.

"When you changed the lunch place to Molly Malone's, I *knew* the conversation was gonna get good," Lisa said, bouncing on the booth's bench at the rear of the tavern.

Christina bit the side of her lip. "You don't mind coming to a bar do you?"

"Nah," Gillian said. "I could use a beer or two."

"*You* could use a beer! Ha!" cried Lisa. "Try prepping for a wedding."

"How are things going?" Christina asked, pushing aside thoughts of Bryce and focusing on her friend. "Ben's not getting cold feet, is he?"

Lisa's lips lifted into a cat-with-the-cream smirk. "Hell, no."

"Phew!" Gillie chimed in. "We'd 'ave had to kill him."

"No, things are good." Lisa nodded at her assessment. "Very good, in fact. It's just getting all the RSVP's straight that's a pain in the ass. Ben and I are closer than ever." She hesitated and looked at Gillie. "You could say we are bound together."

Christina watched Gillie press her hand across her lips, and decided she'd missed some sort of joke. She ignored the twinge she felt at being left out.

"Anyway, you chose the place, Hon," Lisa continued. "Got something on your mind you want to share?"

Christina took a deep breath. "I did a bad thing."

"Ooh, it's about time," Gillian said.

"Don't," Christina scowled, "joke."

"Sounds serious. It must be very bad indeed. You told your ex to go to hell and Michael wasn't interested in boarding school?" Gillie suggested.

Christina shook her head no. In fact, she hadn't even thought of doing that. Michael seemed happy about the school. Guilt gnawed at her—her son should have been on her mind—not his baseball coach!

"Not Michael...let's see then." Gillian gasped. "You went on a date, didn't you?"

"Not...exactly."

"Sex!" Gillian yelled. "Oh, my *God*, you had sex!"

The two men in the booth across from them turned around and Gillie covered her mouth. "Sorry," she mumbled from under her hand.

"Yes, sex," Christina said in a whisper. "And now the whole bar knows."

"Don't worry, they're just jealous," Lisa said sipping her beer. "How was it?"

Christina flushed to the roots of her hair. She never minded when Gillie and Lisa discussed the details of their sex lives, but she could never bring herself to speak with the same level of candor. Or was it just that it had been so long?

"*That* good?" Gillie whispered.

"I didn't *say* anything," Christina said.

"You didn't have to." Lisa smirked. "So what's the problem?"

Christina put her fingertips to her forehead. *I had the best fuck of my life? I can't think of anything but him and how I want him to do me again?* "He's a co-worker," she said.

"Oh," said Gillie. "Not good, not good, not good."

"I know," Christina said, putting her head back on the booth. "Stupid, but, *jeeze*, I have wanted this man for ten straight months. I guess I just wore out my own resistance...*and* I wanted something nice for my birthday."

Lisa started to giggle.

Christina narrowed her eyes. "Go ahead, laugh away."

"Now wait," Gillian said. "It doesn't have to be all bad. I mean, you don't go back to school for a couple of months."

"Gil's right, Chris," Lisa chimed in. "By that time, it'll be long over or you'll know what's going on."

"Will I?" Christina asked. "I don't know." The slight twinge in her lower back reminded her constantly of the ways she contorted for him. Who was she kidding? She was more than ready to do it again. *And again.* She made a mental note to ask Lisa about the yoga classes she taught.

"You'll have to go for it some more, you know, just to get additional information," Gillie said in even tones, but then she broke into giggles.

Lisa reached across the table and took Christina's hand into hers. "We aren't being fair. I know work and Michael make the stakes higher. But, awe hell, you needed this."

Christina felt the side of her lip turn up and she blushed a little. "I *know*."

"Let's drink to a little summer lovin'," Lisa smiled. "Have your fun and remember: we'll be here to help you work it all out."

Christina's heart lightened, just a little, as she raised her Guinness to her lips. Whatever was coming, Lisa was right. It would be an adventure, and she was long overdue.

Bryce's gaze kept sliding back to Christina's ass, even though he was supposed to be keeping a watchful eye on the door to the Sixth Avenue sex shop.

"You are supposed to be on guard duty," she said under her breath.

"What?" he asked, eyes wide with feigned innocence. "I *am* watching. Besides, we aren't likely to run into any parents

or students in New York City. That's why we're here and not Philly, remember?"

"Not likely, but it is possible," she quipped. His appreciative gaze made her jumpy and the sheer variety of toys available blew her away. Back in college, vibrators pretty much only came in popsicle-shaped black. Now, it appeared, the options were endless. She examined the row of dildos.

"You won't need one of those," Bryce said.

"Oh, no?" she asked, crossing her arms.

"No." Bryce lowered his voice to a register that vibrated in her pussy. "When you come, I want to feel you drench my cock, not see it around some piece of plastic."

Her knees wobbled a little under her skirt, but she managed a haughty toss of her hair. "You love to talk dirty, don't you?"

"Does the librarian object?"

She looked him in the eye, but quickly broke into a smile. "No, not at all."

His quirky grin made her feel all crumbly and warm inside. Then, he claimed her mouth in a quick, but deeply passionate kiss, leaving no doubt about her status. *His*.

"If you are worried about getting caught, I'll finish up here and you can meet me on the corner where we parked the car," he offered.

She glanced around the shelves. "Okay. But if I leave, what are you going to buy?"

"Telling you would ruin the anticipation, wouldn't it?"

"Don't," she said in a whisper, "even think about the nipple clamps in that case."

He chuckled low and tapped her on the ass in a mock spank.

"Who is in charge here?" he murmured into her ear.

She tingled all over and closed her eyes. "You."

"That's right." He rubbed the base of her back. "Clover clamps look far more painful than they are."

"I don't believe you." She raised her shoulders and shivered. "I'll meet you by the car. I might stop by the hot dog stand on the corner, though."

The clerk had been cheerful and welcoming when they came in, but she avoided his gaze anyway and slipped out the front door. Three steps up and she was once again bathed in city sun. The skin on her arms instantly warmed and she closed her eyes and turned her face upward. It felt good to be in the city. She felt free and ready for some fun.

Summer lovin'.

She chuckled at Lisa's words and picked up her pace in the direction of the car and the hot dog stand. The avenue was much wider than the small village street where Bryce found the shop. She paused at the corner to people watch. Bodies of all types and ages strolled in waves down the sidewalk. The sound of chatter and laughter filled the air. In the heady mix of people and warmth and pleasantries, her need for order and predictability melted away.

Recess. A chance to play.

As she stepped into the hot dog line, she caught a snippet of a conversation. "He did *not*!" one woman exclaimed to another. "Oh, yes, he did," the other replied, "but mostly because I asked him too. Although you *know* he enjoyed it."

Hearing their exchange sparked wild imaginings. Christina thought of several sexual things Mr. Walker might do to her—if she asked—and a few she'd be too nervous to mention. They all flashed through her mind as the women's voices faded. *Oh, what a tongue that man had.*

She folded her arms so her erect nipples wouldn't show and smiled as she stepped toward the hot dog vendor. "Pretzel, please."

The vendor smiled back. "Anything for the pretty lady."

"Thanks," she replied, exchanging two bucks for the snack.

She stepped aside and Bryce's now-familiar scent enveloped her.

"I leave you alone for five minutes and already you're flirting," he accused.

She started to protest, but he slipped his arm around her waist. "I was just kidding." He drew her close and kissed the side of her head. "You *are* a pretty lady. So what if you want to flirt?"

Was she? She hadn't felt *pretty*...ever. Unsure of what to say, and feeling a little shy, she offered up her pretzel. "Want some?"

"Is it good?"

"It's not a Philly pretzel, but it will do."

"Thanks," he said, taking a bite.

Odd. Sharing food seemed more intimate than she'd expected. She silenced her thought. She wanted recess, she wanted fun. "You can have the rest."

"Not Philly enough for you?"

"I guess not," she replied, looking away.

"To be honest, I prefer the less bready kind." He took a deep bite into the pretzel.

"Sacrilege!" She managed to smile. "*Everyone* knows Philly has the best pretzels."

He put his finger up so he could chew and the funny expression on his face was just enough to make her smile genuine.

"I'm a California boy, what do I know? We'll have to do a taste test sometime."

He pulled her closer to his side, and his radiant heat soothed the dizzying experience of being tossed between her understanding of him as a friend and colleague and her need for him as a man.

"You're quiet," he said.

"I'm just enjoying the day."

"Good," he replied. "I was afraid you were having second thoughts."

His body tensed as he spoke. She glanced at him sideways, but couldn't read his expression.

"No, Bryce," she murmured. "Definitely not."

The knot in Bryce's back unwound. He had no fucking clue what was happening between them but, whatever it was, he wanted to keep it going. They'd agreed to rent a neutral spot, an out-of-the-way hotel where they could explore each other and their pent-up feelings from the past year. Stopping off in the city for some toys was his idea, but being here on the street with his arm around her, well, it made him feel like they were on a date. He kind of liked the feeling.

"Where's the bag?" she asked.

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Bryce grinned. "I stopped at a bodega for some snacks and dropped everything in the trunk. Now, during the whole drive to the hotel you can wonder, 'What nasty little things did he buy? What exactly does he have planned?' A little apprehension can be very stimulating." He winked.

Christina pulled her shoulders to her ears and laughed lightly in a way Bryce had already learned to identify as 'I'm nervous but controlling it.' He loved that about her. She was so *aware*, so in control...at least until he got her on her back.

He popped the last of her pretzel in his mouth and massaged the back of his neck with his hand.

Every time a gesture of hers became familiar, he got the bizarre urge to ask her to fly to California and meet his damn family. *Shit*. He had to keep his mind away from the juvenile confusion of sex and love. To take that leap from where they were, well, that was what his students would have called *whack*.

He sighed. His mind always slid toward semantics when he was nervous. He'd have to keep things focused on sex if he wanted to keep himself from blurting things he wasn't really ready to say—or her to hear.

The world was upside-down. *Bizarro*.

By the time they reached the hotel room, Christina figured there wasn't a sexual topic they hadn't covered. Bryce had been relentless in his questioning during the car ride, and she'd been as honest as she could when confessing the things that made her wet and revealing fantasies she'd like to explore. She'd even told him how wet he'd made her when he'd dangled his belt.

Thought so, he'd replied.

She'd never been spanked in her life, and the idea was as strange as it was hot. He asked her if she wanted to try it today...and she could hardly believe she whispered, yes. Thank goodness he was driving and she didn't have to look at him when she'd answered!

Now she stood in front of the turned-down bed with her hands on her hips, wondering how what Bryce described as a "scene" got started.

After putting some fruit and water in the mini-fridge, he stepped behind her and threaded his arms through hers. She relaxed, allowing him to pull her against the hard steadiness of his body. Sighing and closing her eyes, she breathed in his scent and forgot, for the moment, the spanking looming in her future.

His thumbs circled under her breasts. Her worries dissolved as her nipples hardened. She opened her eyes and met his in a mirror.

"I thought I was too old for this," she whispered.

"Apparently not," he murmured in reply. With teeth light and lips soft, he nipped at the valley of her neck. Her nipples sent shocks to her belly as he covered her breasts with his hands, kneading. "My librarian loves a good fuck, and she's good at it, too."

She was bright red and complete putty in his hands.
Playdough.

She allowed him to pull her shirt over her head. She hadn't bothered with a bra—one more thing to take off. He didn't

even look up. He returned to nibbling, seemingly enthralled by a curve in her shoulder.

Although his bites made her shiver and his erection pressed into her back, she was suddenly unsure of his desire. Watching her reflection left her self-conscious and nervous.

"It's been through a lot, this body," she said.

"It holds you, and it's beautiful." His words muffled against her shoulder.

"Please," she said with sarcasm plain.

"You don't think so?" he asked, looking up.

Christina rolled her head from side to side as if in slow motion.

Bryce covered her hands with his and stretched her arms wide. He stood behind her, his legs slightly spread like he was spotting her on an acrobatic jump. His body framed hers perfectly and his tanned, muscled forearm contrasted with her pale underarm. His heart thudded against her spine.

"Put your hands around my neck," he said. It was an order, but he kept his voice tender.

After a moment of hesitation, she raised her arms and wrapped them back around his head. Her breasts stuck out, begging for attention.

He met her eyes and she couldn't deny the primal hunger in his fixed, intense gaze. A slow smile spread across her lips. She felt sexy as hell.

"Keep your arms right there."

With just the tips of his fingers, he stroked each of her breasts.

"This is one hell-of-a perfect tit right here," he murmured. He smoothed one palm down over her stomach. "This belly has carried a child, and these indentations here..." he brushed the depressions above each of her hips, "...totally turn me on." He raised her skirt until her peach satin panties peeked from beneath the fabric and then he rubbed her thighs. "These legs have built a life. This is a body that lives to be loved. Not by a boy," his hand slid between her legs and he nestled a hot finger exactly where she ached, "but by a man." He flicked his fingers directly against her clit. "A man who can appreciate its *exceptional* ability to respond."

On cue, a sticky wetness dampened her crotch as her breath caught against the back of her parched throat. She closed her eyes.

"No," he said, his voice deep and commanding. "I want you to watch yourself. Watch yourself grind against me."

She opened her eyes and tilted her hips back into his erection.

"Not my dick, Christina," he said in a fierce whisper. "Ride my hand."

She froze, biting her lower lip as a flush dusted her body.

"Grind your pussy on my fingers. Make yourself come."

His sharp command electrified her thighs. When he took that particular tone, there wasn't anything she wouldn't do. She swayed to the side and rolled her hips forward, riding his hand from the tips of his fingers to the cup of his palm. Her first thrust felt strange and unnatural, but she concentrated on the sweet, tight heaviness building in her clit and kept

gyrating. Slowly at first, then faster, her body found its dance.

Bryce's quick, hot breath tickled her neck as he rolled one nipple between the fingers of his free hand and whispered dirty things into her ear she only half understood. Realizing that she pleased herself at his direction made her even hotter. She could feel her juice seep through the fabric of her panties. Her wetness covered his hand. She really *could* ride him 'til she came. She would never again look at herself in the mirror quite the same way.

"Watch yourself come, Christina," Bryce repeated. "I want to feel your body shiver in my arms."

Bryce wanted Christina to see what he saw. She moved with the natural grace of an erotic dancer, only her pleasure was real—not practiced. She was not just beautiful, but hot as hell. Her body was formed for pleasure. He'd be damned if he was going to slow the moment, but his cock's pulse painfully accented each second. Every nerve he possessed screamed to bend her over and fuck her *now*, but he kept his hand rigid.

He slid a knee between her legs and pressed up as she ground down against his hand. With a full-body shudder, she broke into a long, loud wail. She released, soaking his fingers.

He ordered her to spread wide. Pressed his palm on the small of her back, he forced her down until her body bent full over the bed.

He unzipped his pants, brushed aside his boxers and rolled on a condom in record time. He didn't wait to push down his jeans, didn't wait to pull down her panties. He yanked aside her thong and in one smooth thrust, he buried his aching

prick all the way to his balls. She was tight, lubed, and hot. He pumped.

"Harder, *please*," she whimpered.

Through blurred eyes, he could see her body reflected in the mirror. She was splayed across the bed, her chin resting on the mattress. Her eyes, full of sex and need, watched him silently and intently as he took her.

He grabbed her hips and lifted, forcing her body to meet each thrust. She was so warm, so smooth, better than a wet dream on a cold winter night. He had to focus or it was going to be too short and—*aw, hell*.

In a surprise, her fingers lightly grazed the center of his balls. He hadn't even realized she'd reached back. Her smooth caress along the center of his sack was more than he could take. With the same raw pull he'd felt the first time they fucked, he came, shivering with a guttural yell and an orgasm beginning in his cock and spreading in fire-bomb waves through every nerve in his body.

Christina didn't care that Bryce's body landed on hers. When he rolled to his back and pulled her with him, she lay limp as a rag doll across his body. Goosebumps covered her arms, and still she wanted more. She missed Bryce's weight, the full feeling of his dick in her pussy.

Sex.

How could something so *common* be so *good*? How often, when she was married to Joe, had she declined? Too tired, too stressed, just plain not in the mood—all her excuses had seemed reasonable enough at the time. Now, she wondered

what the hell she had been thinking. Then again, Joe was no Bryce.

How utterly essential to life a good fuck with the right man was!

She inched to the side and slid off Bryce's body. Under her leg, the paper bag crinkled. *Shit.* She'd forgotten.

As Bryce disappeared into the bathroom, she stared at the sprinkler valve against the popcorn ceiling and calmed the pace of her breath. Orgasm and all, she had yet to get her fill of him. Would she ever?

When his thighs had slapped against her ass, her anticipation for a spanking grew. With a little lube and a few well-placed whacks, she might well go all night. *Just how many condoms did he bring?*

He emerged naked, having rid himself of the condom, washed and shed his clothes. He tossed his jeans and shirt over the chair beside the bed and sank back onto the mattress. She rolled against him, rested her arm across his chest and propped her head up with her hand. She smiled.

"Hi," he said, brushing her hair away from her face.

"Hi," she replied. What else was there to say? Why talk when their bodies seemed so much better at communicating?
"Worn out?"

"No." His low laugh rumbled underneath her arm and breast. "I could use a minute, though."

She melted against his body and shivered with a deep breath.

"You cold?" he asked, concerned.

"A little," she confessed. "But don't worry, you're a god-damned furnace."

"My librarian has the mouth of a truck driver." He rubbed his hands up and down her back, creating more warmth with a pleasant sort of friction.

"I have to get it all out when I'm not in school."

He coughed. "Not the only thing you have to get out, huh?"

She raised her eyebrows and snorted. "Guess not."

Christina closed her eyes and rubbed her cheek against the heated, smooth skin just below his chest.

"Mmm," he murmured.

Her pussy tingled at sound of his pleasure. Her cheeks flushed as she recalled the way he'd praised her body, the way he'd trailed his fingers in places she never before longed to be touched. She wanted to explore his body too.

Gently, very gently, she smoothed her fingertips against the side of his thighs. His body relaxed as he gave himself up to her caress. Bolder now, Christina crawled to her knees. Pushing her feet toward his head, she undulated, stretching toward his feet. She took one foot in both hands and massaged.

He propped his head against his elbow and sighed. "Nice."

She damn well could have purred.

She remembered reading about reflexology...the idea that parts of the foot corresponded with parts of the body. What better time to test the theory? She ran her fingers hard under his arch and pleasure-pain flashed across Bryce's features. She pressed down against the top of the ball of his foot and

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he eased back into the pillows. She rubbed against the pale, inner part of his toes and he smiled. Christina felt a funny, inverted kind of power as she molded his body without touching anything but his feet.

Happy though he seemed to be, he was quite obviously not aroused...yet. *Had it been long enough? Maybe if they were both twenty.*

She let him rest as she concentrated on his other foot. But within minutes, her mischievous feeling returned. She parted his smallest toe and carefully, deliberately ran her tongue against the hidden skin. The sensation was surprisingly soft and dry. Keeping her gaze on his cock, she sucked against the soft webbing.

He cock twitched, exactly where she hoped.

He opened one eye. "Just what do you think you are doing?"

"Well," she said. "I was considering whether or not I wanted to run my tongue along the inside of your leg from here," she tickled his ankle with her fingertips, "all the way up," she dragged her nails slowly along his inner leg and grinned with delight as he grew harder, "to—"

He grabbed her hand just before she reached his balls. Sitting up, he pulled her toward him. Their lips met above his cock.

Bryce couldn't believe that he'd grown hard so soon. With tenderness, he placed his hands on either side of her face and closed his eyes, concentrating fully and probing the soft openness of her mouth. If he could have made their kiss go on all afternoon, he would have. *Something* was happening

between them, something *huge*—and he didn't just mean his cock. Call it instinct or call it fear, either way he wasn't ready to face it. He broke the kiss and pressed her forehead to his.

"Time to see what's in the bag."

Christina mewed and shivered under his fingertips. His cock responded with more movement of its own.

Not yet, not yet—he reminded his body—*all in good time*.

He had quite a bit of work planned for the afternoon. And if he wanted to turn her into the squirming, panting mess she'd been their first time, he was going to have to show some restraint.

He smirked.

And do some restraining too.

On his first run through the store, he'd gone simple: a roll of pink bondage tape, lube, and a ridiculously large feather for a little sensation play. He was going to stop there, figuring if she really enjoyed herself, he'd buy cuffs and rope another time. Then he'd remembered her warning: *don't even think about the nipple clamps*. Though he'd never expose her to anything that caused her true terror, instinct told him she wanted to be pushed, just a little. He'd seen the way her eyes sparkled as she looked at the clamps.

What's a dominant sort of guy to do? Challenge his charge, of course.

Clover clamps were out—those were the ones she saw. The sensation would be too much for a novice. The sex-shop owner had suggested tweezer clamps instead of clover clamps and gave Bryce a quick demonstration. Bryce had chosen a

pair with a beaded chain. He chuckled when the owner said he hoped Bryce's lady would, "Wear it in good health."

"Ready to play?" Bryce asked.

Christina bit her lower lip as she nodded. Bryce's kiss left her hot and ready, and she was eager to see what he planned. First, he pulled out what looked like a roll of shiny pink tape.

"That looks like it's gonna hurt," she said, unable to stop the quiver in her voice.

"Don't worry. Bondage tape is like plastic wrap...it only sticks to itself." His grin was evil, but his words reassured.

She cast him a doubtful glance, but remembered how it felt to be tied with his shirt and swallowed. "Okay."

"How about you choose a safe word?"

Bryce had explained about safe words in the car. She was supposed to pick a word, but use it only if she needed to break the scene. Her mind went blank, gaze fixed on the roll of tape. "You can pick one."

He cocked his head and thought. "How about Coneheads?"

Her heart flip-flopped. "Good choice."

"Now, dear Christina, stand up and put your hands behind your back. And remember, you must answer every question."

Bryce's fingers brushed against her skin, but Christina could not see him coil the tape around her wrists. He looped the flimsy plastic again and again until it became tight like rope and just as inescapable. She yanked. The tape stretched as if it would to break, but the give ended abruptly. The smooth plastic surface grew instantly hot and her skin dampened under her bind.

"Do you feel any tingling in your hands?"

She wiggled her fingers. "No."

"Just no?"

She furrowed her brow, and then she remembered. In the scene, she was supposed to answer with his name. "No, Bryce."

"That's better." He ran his hands up and down her shoulders. "Today, though, I want you to start addressing me as sir."

Ah, yes. Why did that detail curl her toes? "Yes, sir."

He shimmied her crumpled skirt down over her hips and repeated the motion with her panties, but left them stretched at mid-thigh. Then, he disappeared from the mirror.

Christina heard the unmistakable rustle of fabric from behind. In a whoosh of air, her hair lifted. A blanket slowly fluttered to the floor.

"You never know who has been here before," he quipped as he smoothed the rumples. "I thought this might be more sanitary."

His gesture struck her as thoughtful, but before she could get all warm and fuzzy he demanded that she kneel.

As she eased herself to her knees before him, she was so glad the mirror was no longer in her line of sight. As sexy as she felt, as ready for his command as she was, she didn't think she could handle seeing herself both bound and prostrate.

Her throat dried with uncertainty as he cupped her chin and raised her face. He winked.

She calmed her nervousness. It was going to be okay, no matter what.

"Face to the sheet," he ordered in the tone that got her wet.

Her arms strained and the soft heat of the plastic tape slid along her back as she lowered her forehead to the ground. Breathing slow and even, she waited. The sound of her own breath filled her mind, but impatience gnawed at the edges of her experience. She fought the urge to peek at his feet. *What the hell was he waiting for?*

She wanted him to touch her, to slide his hot hands over her body so she could open for him. She wanted to hear the low rumble of his voice giving her commands. She wanted him to spank her like he had offered to. She wanted...

She stopped breathing.

The *scene* wasn't supposed to be about what *she* wanted. With his silence, she realized, he was reminding her and testing her resolve.

Fucking good sub she made. She concentrated on the feeling of the sheet rubbing her forehead and the cool air conditioning tickling her raised derriere.

Her mind slowed and she moved her awareness around her body. Her breasts hung heavy—tingling and ready. Her toes stretched as they curled under. And her mound? Well, she could feel the folds of her outer lips, the throbbing of her clit, and the dampness seeping from her vagina. While she controlled her attention, she kept her body in perfect stillness but for the small movement created by her breath.

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Just as she found her groove, he kneeled. The hot roughness of his knuckles separated the crook of her ass. Her first impulse was to clench, but she resisted, staying open.

God, but she craved the feeling of his hands on her skin. After so long a silence, so long an absence, his hands felt like heaven. The baby-smooth heat of what must be—is cock caressed her crevice.

"One day I want to take you here, Christina," he said as he teased her most tender place. "Would you like that?"

Christina sucked her bottom lip through her teeth. *Would she?* Her mind went blank, *again*. He moved away.

"You promised to answer when I ask a question. I already had to remind you once. Now, I must punish you."

She opened her mouth to protest, and thought better of it. His hand crashed against the fleshiest part of her raised bum with a resounding crack. *Ohmygod*. She gasped from the sting. Pain literally rang in her ears—pain *and* a burning hot desire.

"I—I'm sorry, Bryce...sir...I—I think I—I mean I *might* like it, sir." Her words tumbled out as her mind pleaded, *spank me again, please, please, please*.

He rubbed his hand over the sting as her breath came hard and heavy.

"We have plenty of time to discuss our options...right now, I'm not sure you've learned your lesson."

Yes, sir. PLEASE teach me my lesson.

Whack. Christina sucked in air like a person coming up from the depths. But before she had time to think...

Whack. The pain and heat of it spread through her ass and she bucked.

Whack. "Oh!" Her scream gurgled against the blanket.

Whack. "Ooooh!" Her guttural cry released some of the tension in her body, but the pain still rolled like sound waves in and out of her core.

It *hurt*. There wasn't *any* sugarcoating. Though her eyes watered and her knees slipped, her pussy was wetter than ever.

He was *good*. She *knew* he would be. His palm was limp but fingers firm. His angle was calculated to land on the fleshiest area, and his smacks alternated between cheeks. Bryce knew *exactly* what he was doing. He was punishing, yes, but all the while making sure she enjoyed it.

Whack.

Her spanking continued and the sound of his labored breath became her lifeline. Her body jiggled on the beat of his palm. But then, the edge of her razor sharp pain crumbled to something broader, more diffuse. Her mind struggled to a precipice and suddenly it felt as if she were falling.

Christina blinked tears from her eyes, her forehead aching with the weight of her body. She cried out.

He stopped and knelt over her, scissoring her ribs with his thighs. His hands glided lightly, in rhythmic motion.

His prick rested in her bound hands. She wanted to cup his cock's smoothness. But even though he murmured comforting words and tenderly diffused the sting, she didn't dare move without permission.

She concentrated on his touch until her head grew dizzy and her agony melted into euphoria. She still burned, yes, but she felt so light.

He slid back over her body, resting on his haunches as he drew her face up from the sheet.

"Very good, Christina."

His face was flushed, his eyes dark and wide. Christina thought she'd never been as attracted to a man as she was to him right then.

He wasn't done, she could see it in the color of his skin, feel it in the urgency of his touch. And there was, of course, the matter of his rock-hard dick. She waited for direction with her pulse beating in her throat.

"Now, we balance your burn." He dangled a beaded chain. What appeared to be rubber-covered tweezers adorned each end.

Fuck. She glanced down at her pebbled nipples almost apologetically and a chilling sensation tripped down her arms. The security of her safe word dangled alongside of the chain. She could refuse, she knew.

"Do you trust me?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

She *did* trust him. He'd shown thought for her safety at every stage of their play. But, her rebel-lious mind argued, her nipples were *so* sensitive. The tweezers looked pretty damn unforgiving.

She started to quake and closed her eyes. She didn't think she could handle nipple pain.

This went farther than any game they'd played so far. To let him clamp her nipples, she'd need to hand him her blind faith. Could she offer up her fear and depend on him to lead her through the mire of trembling incoherence to the other side?

Her shoulders ached from her binds, but as she sat up on her knees, she rolled them back anyway. She made her decision. She was ready.

Bryce eased each hard, dark nipple into a tweezer and then secured it with a tiny ring. The pinching tightness was stronger than a flick. She played with the sensation. It hurt, yes, but not as bad as she had feared.

Once satisfied with his handiwork, Bryce sat back on his heels. Her gaze dropped to his cock. *Damn*. Her ass throbbed, her nipples stung and all she could do was salivate for fellatio.

"You're gorgeous in pink tape and nipple chains," he breathed.

He drew her up by the waist so she rested on her knees. When he stood, his erection pulsed at mouth level. There was little question as to what was next on the menu: Bryce.

"Suck me."

Yes, dear. She tried to wrap her lips around his cock but he stopped her.

"Oops, almost forgot," he said.

He hooked the beaded chain over his erection. She gasped as her tits strained upward, pulled by the chain.

Where the hell did he come up with that?

"Take as much of me as you can," he ordered.

Christina didn't think; she sucked. Using the present-moment awareness she discovered, she filled her mouth with his hard dick until she expected to gag, but she didn't. She opened her throat and relaxed her tongue, truly enjoying his salty taste.

Her nipples wrenched upward each time she sucked him in fully, but she did not slow her gyrations. Agony in her nipples alternated with torment at her jaw, but nothing but Bryce's voice could make her stop. She was dizzy with the sweet-musk scent of him and relished the feeling of his hand clutching the back of her head. Hot and horny and determined, she slid her tongue up and down, memorizing his curves, his ridges, his most sensitive areas.

When his balls practically disappeared into his body, he ordered her to stop.

"Enough."

Pushing her supine, he removed the clamps. *Now*, there was torment. Her raw and bruised nipples ached from their rosy tips straight through to the bottom of her stomach. Part angry but fully aroused, she wanted him to attack her, she wanted to attack him.

"I want to fuck you." Bryce's words were barely intelligible. "I'm going to fuck you hard."

"Yes, sir."

He cut through her bindings and she spread her legs as wide as they would go. Her heavy breath shook her body as she watched him slide on another condom. Her wrists still smarted, but she wound her fingers into his hair anyway, and twisted. Her back scratched through the blanket against the

unforgiving floor as he shoved his cock inside. Her burning nipples crushed against his chest each time she took him in full.

As they panted into near-simultaneous orgasm, she dug every fingernail into his back and held tight as he shook. His pulses against the sensitive, ready flesh of her wet pussy made her body coil like a spring. In a flash of light and sweat, her orgasm broke.

She rocked him through the aftershocks, pressing her lips firmly against his neck.

If she hadn't, she would have told him that she loved him.

Bryce pulled into the empty spot in front of Christina's condo. The his-and-hers parking spaces depressed him. "His," of course, was empty.

He shook off the feeling that he belonged there and shut off the engine. He didn't blame Christina for sleeping. They'd damn well sexed the shit out of each other for two days—and she quite literally bore the brunt of most of their play. Even now, he assumed her ass was just too tender to support her for the long ride home. She was curled on her side in his bucket seat.

He would have carried her into her condo if he could have extracted her from the car without her waking.

"Come on, sleepyhead, you're home." He whispered, even though they were the only two in the lot.

Ache swelled beneath his ribs as he thought of the courage she'd showed—the courage it took to trust her desire, to acknowledge her need, and to follow him through the scenes

with absolute trust. She'd even come to accept the nipple clamps without shaking.

Didn't *she* deserve *his* courage as well?

He massaged her back. Eventually, they would have to discuss their future.

"Christina, sweetheart, wake up," he urged.

She moaned as she stretched. "I'm sorry I fell asleep."

"Don't worry about it," he said, sincerely. "You earned it."

His fingertips lingered above her forehead as her eyes fluttered open.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi," he replied.

Not telling her how he felt seemed the worst sort of cowardice. Yes, they'd only been screwing for a few days, but they'd known each other for almost a year. Didn't that count for something?

"I'm home?" She asked.

"You're home, but I don't want to leave you," he said. He wished his car was better lit. It occurred to him that broaching the subject of his feelings when they were both exhausted was not the best plan, but he couldn't let her leave, couldn't let her step out of his car and away from this weekend without knowing what she was coming to mean to him. "Christina, I think I may be falling for you."

Her exhausted eyes opened wide. Suddenly, she was fully awake and, even in the darkness, he could tell she was definitely *not* happy.

"You can't be," she said, her voice broke in a tremor.

"Why not?" he asked. He forced his voice to remain even, flat.

"Because it can't last," she whispered.

"That's not true," he found himself arguing. *Shit*. He didn't want to be doing this, it felt like he was being sucked into some bad pantomime.

"Why does there have to be an answer? Why can't we just...just take this summer as a gift and..." Her words trailed off and she rubbed her face with both hands.

Bryce sighed and leaned back into his seat. A rushing sensation roared in his ears—the sound of their connection being stretched to its limit.

"What if we are rubbing up against some dark and dangerous place inside our minds and we can't get back?" Christina sat up as she continued. "What if I find out the scene is just an excuse to you and you think all women are whores for your amusement?"

Now Bryce *knew* he was in the tangled mess of no return.

"Come on, Christina," he said, not bothering to hide the anger from his voice. "You know me better than that."

"What about me, then? What if this kind of rough sex is a phase for me, but not for you, and suddenly I just want a normal life?"

He'd already lost, damn it. He shook his head and looked at the roof of his car.

"Sex is *always* a negotiation—vanilla or not," he quipped. "I won't argue with you, Christina. We can work together, but I won't be accused of pulling you into this. You are setting me up—"

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"No, I'm not," she exclaimed.

"Let me finish, okay?" He clenched a fist on the side she could not see, just to keep himself rational, just to keep himself from telling her, *fine then, get out*.

She squeezed her forehead between shaking fingers.
"Okay."

He waited for her breathing to slow before continuing, "You are setting me up to be the one with the answers and there aren't any. There is together and there is apart and the choice is always made in faith."

"Poetry from an English teacher?" Her voice was snide.

"I hope that made you feel better," he said. "Go home, Christina."

"Don't dismiss me!"

He put his key in the ignition. "I thought it was the other way around."

"Wait, wait," Christina insisted. "This is all wrong."

Waiting was fine with him. He didn't really want to move anyway, not unless it was back to this afternoon. She covered his hand with hers and pulled his fingers from key in the ignition. She crawled over the gear stick and into his lap. He didn't move as she wrapped her legs around his thighs and arms around his head.

"Don't leave," she urged. "I'm sorry I said those things. I'm scared." She tucked her head into his shoulder.

He wanted to cradle the back of her head, but he couldn't cut through the residue of pain from past relationships. In his experience, if a woman wanted to set you up as the problem,

there was *never* a way around it, no matter how much you cared.

"Please, Bryce," she said. "I shouldn't have lashed out. My words taste bad in my mouth. Kiss me and wash them away."

What the fuck? He looked down and into her eyes. "Bad poetry from a librarian."

Her smile was a tremulous olive branch, and the rushing sensation returned.

He snorted and cupped a palm against the back of her head.

"I scare me, Bryce, not you. The things I want you to do to me scare me. What's worse," she put her hands on either side of his face, "I think I'm falling for you too, and *that* scares me more than fucking nipple clamps."

He closed his eyes and his chest shook with a half-hearted chuckle. She rubbed his hair away from his forehead.

His chest squeezed. She'd hit all the right notes; her references drew him back into the magic he experienced the last few days. "What am I going to do with you?" he asked.

"For now, you're going to take me inside and fall asleep with me in my bed." She sank onto him and kissed his neck. "As to the rest, well, we'll figure it out tomorrow."

Christina swirled her beer, thinking about the odd, disconnected morning she and Bryce had shared. Neither of them mentioned the argument during breakfast and, when he left, he merely kissed her on the forehead and told her he'd see her soon.

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If it were not for the fact that this would be Lisa's only bachelorette party, Christina would have stayed at home, shut away from the world, taking refuge in a bottle of wine.

Gillian and Lisa returned from the club dance floor all giggles.

"You really gotta get up and move, Christina," Gillian said. "You've been a barrel of laughs all evening."

"Hey, sarcasm is my thing," Christina said. "I'm sorry. I'll get over myself."

"Trouble with your man?" Lisa asked.

"He's not my man," Christina replied. "He kind of tried to be, but I blew it."

"Uh oh," Gillie said.

Christina really didn't want to talk about it. She attempted to swirl around on the bar stool, but she stopped half way as the friction on her butt became a painful reminder not to move too quickly.

She looked up to see Lisa watching her with a funny expression.

"Hey, Gil," Lisa said. "Go over and see if you can get the deejay to rock some '80s tunes...maybe a little Depeche Mode."

"He's not gonna," Gillian said.

"Try?" Lisa said. "Use that famous charm."

Gillian shrugged. "Okay, but only because it's your night."

"I know that wince," Lisa said, once Gillian was out of ear-shot.

"It's your night," Christina protested. "I don't want to talk."

"Is it my imagination or are you sitting a little sideways?" Lisa asked.

"I was, um, working out," Christina replied.

"Yeah. Right," Lisa said. "Look, so things got a little wild with your guy, it's not a big deal."

Lisa turned her back to Christina and discreetly pulled down the waist of her jeans. Christina could see the beginning of some very red skin.

She snorted. "Oh, my God, there are things I'm not sure I want to know about Ben."

"He makes me *very* happy. That's all you need to know." Lisa shrugged. "I take it this is your first experience?"

"Yup."

"And you're freaked out?"

"Yup," Christina said. "But I couldn't keep my freak out to myself; I had to freak out all over him too."

"That sucks." Lisa winced. "It'll be okay, though. It only *feels* like adolescence all over again. You'll figure it out."

"That's what you said before," she said. "Gillie's coming back."

"Gillie knows about me and Ben," Lisa said. "'Fess up, she can handle it. She might be able to help."

"What's going on?" Gillie interrupted.

"Oh," Christina started, feeling like she might as well spill it all, "I was just telling Lisa how I fucked Bryce every-which-way-til-Sunday, but then he spanked me like I asked him to and I got to thinking it wasn't, well, normal."

Gillian's look was priceless. After blinking a few times, she said, "How do you know it's not normal?"

"I know because I wouldn't tell my grand-mother," Christina replied.

Lisa wrinkled her nose. "Would you tell your grammy about normal sex?"

Christina laughed. "No."

"You're telling us," Gillian said.

"Okay, setting aside what you describe as weird, kinky sex,, do you like him?" Lisa asked.

"Yes."

"How much?" Gillie said.

"Damn," Lisa said. "You don't have to answer."

"Did you tell her?" Gillie asked Lisa.

"Yes," Lisa replied.

"Well, if kink works for them, it can work for you," Gillian paused. Her gaze fixed for a moment on something not in the room while her mouth hung open.

"Gillie?" Lisa prompted.

Gillian smiled slow. "And, I just realized it could work for me."

"What?" Christina and Lisa asked simultaneously.

"Why should you two get to have all the fun?"

"Do you have someone in mind?" Christina asked. She couldn't believe she was having this conversation.

Gillian nodded. "I've been planning to seduce Eric after Lisa and Ben's wedding. I bet he's...you know...into stuff."

Lisa cocked her head to the side and nodded. "He looks plenty alpha to me."

Christina bit her lip. Ben was the one who had grown up with her and Gillie and Eric. Lisa came into their lives through

Ben. There was no way Lisa could have known about Gillie's life-long crush on Eric. Christina's heart went out to her friend. If Gil was going to risk her pride to get what Christina already had, didn't Bryce deserve a little more effort?

Gillie continued talking. "If you can make it work with Ben, and you can have hot wild sex with..."

"Bryce," Christina supplied.

"Hot *spans* with Bryce." She whispered the word spans. "I'm gonna go out there and get my man."

Christina smiled. If it were only that easy.

Christina had to make one more call before she braved seeing Bryce. Unfortunately, Michael wasn't home and she was stuck talking to her ex.

"Do you have anything you want to tell me about?" Joe asked.

Christina pulled the phone away from her ear and looked at it as if it were broken. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Nothing, I just thought maybe...Oh, never mind. How have things been going?"

"Fine. How is Marie?" It had taken two years, but she could finally say his new wife's name without feeling nauseous.

"Good. She and Michael have called a truce of sorts."

"Really?" Christina thought she would feel jealous; the lightness in her heart seemed more akin to relief. "How did that happen?"

"Softball."

"What?"

"Soft. Ball," he enunciated.

"I heard you," she said, rolling her eyes.

"When she was in high school, her team made it to the state championship. They've been trading war stories."

Great. Athletes.

"Christina?"

She didn't like the sound of his voice...too serious.

"Are you going to be okay when Michael goes to boarding school?"

She'd been avoiding thinking about it, knowing she'd have a few weeks with Michael in August. "I'm putting off dealing with it."

"That's what you do best."

"Goodbye, Joe."

"Wait. Sorry, baiting you is just an old habit. I shouldn't have done it, especially because there is something I want to tell you."

Christina cocked her head. "Yes?"

"I wanted to tell you that you did a good job raising him."

Christina opened her mouth, but no words came out. A funny sensation burned behind her eyes, suspiciously like the start of tears.

"I know we've had our differences, but I needed you to know. Michael is amazing. He's really good at communicating, and he never shies away from difficult things. I just said you avoid things, but that's really not true. I just feel guilty about putting you through this boarding school thing."

Pain seared through Christina's chest. She pressed her lips together and waited for it to pass. She pictured her son the night he'd told her he wanted to give boarding school a try.

"Michael wants to go." As she said the words, she knew they were true.

"I know," Joe said. "I just wanted to acknowledge that it's going to be hard for you."

She pulled the phone away from her ear again and shook her head. *Who is this?*

"Christina?"

"Yes, Joe...I, um, gotta go." *This was just too weird.*

"One more thing...Relationships can work sometimes."

"I *know* that."

"I know you do, but just because I was an ass doesn't mean you shouldn't try again."

"Where is this coming from?"

"I don't know, I just thought you should know that I don't blame you."

Oh, shit. There was only one explanation for Joe's sudden chattiness. He knew she was seeing someone. How much did he know? And how?

"How do you know?" She demanded.

"What?" Joe asked.

"Don't lie to me. I know your lying voice. You know I've been seeing someone. How?"

"Michael's coach was here earlier today."

"What?" She nearly screeched. She was going to kill Bryce, dismember him limb by limb. "How the hell did I come up? Trading war stories?"

She knew she sounded a bit irrational, but she couldn't understand how this had happened. She'd wanted time to break this to Michael. But, time had just run out.

"Don't be like that," Joe insisted. "He wasn't here to talk to me. He didn't even come on his own. I think he didn't even want to be here."

Christina's breath slowed. "What then?"

"Michael called him. Tryouts for his new school are next week, and he said he needed to work on his swing. How was I supposed to know Michael was going to ask about him and you? I didn't even know you were dating."

Neither did she.

"What did Michael say?" Her head pounded.

"Apparently one of Michael's friends said they saw you two together having ice cream, then, later the same day, they saw his car at your place. Michael asked what was going on. Mr. Walker told him you've been seeing each other."

"Damn," she said.

"I didn't mean to upset you."

"I'm not upset."

"You're being sarcastic. That's another thing you do..."

"No, really?"

"Okay, maybe now's not a good time. I was really just trying to tell you I'm happy for you. He's a good guy."

She shook her head. "I don't believe this. How did Michael leave things with Bry—Mr. Walker?"

"Michael told him it was weird, but said he was glad you won't be alone."

Oh, God.

"Let's not get ahead of ourselves. I'm coming over tomorrow," she said. "I have to see Michael."

By the end of her day with Michael, Christina had assured herself that her son really was okay, or at least dealing. What a trifecta—living with his father, going to boarding school, and knowing his Mom was dating. Joe had been right. Somehow he'd acquired maturity beyond his years. She assured Michael he'd always come first, but Christina knew he was growing up and breaking off on his own, and she needed to do the same. Not that the whole idea of her son calling Bryce still didn't freak her out, but what's done was done.

And Bryce could have said there wasn't anything going on, but he didn't. *Which meant there was hope.*

She brushed her hair back and urged herself for the third time to get her ass out of her car and ring Bryce's bell.

She sank back into the seat and closed her eyes. She sat listening to her breath and feeling the heat constrict her lungs until a knock on her door disturbed her silence. She met his unreadable gaze through her window. He opened her door.

"It's too hot to be sitting in a car," he said. "Come inside."

He closed her door behind her and she backed into the side of her car. She remembered all the post-game chats they'd had in exactly this position. She'd wanted him all along. She prayed it wasn't too late.

"Hi," she said, raising her brows.

"Hi," he replied. He looked away, but took her hand and led her to his door.

She half-expected some white-walled room full of '80s decor, a typical I-don't-put-any-thought-into-my-home bachelor pad. His apartment surprised her by being warm and soothing, painted in neutral shades. His relatively new

furniture looked relaxing. She could be comfortable here. He knew how to make an empty space into a home.

"Drink?" he asked.

"No, thanks, but you go ahead."

He lifted the beer already in his hand and she bit her lower lip.

"It's different than I expected," she said, glancing around his apartment.

He snorted as he switched off the flat panel television. "Did you expect some sort of BDSM dungeon? Hidden sex slaves perhaps?"

She wrinkled her nose, but decided he deserved at least one zinger.

"Now *you're* the one not being fair," she said. "And I think I'll take that drink."

"All I have is Porter and Gatorade."

"Porter's my favorite beer."

"I love a woman who likes a dark beer." He sounded sad and impersonal, not at all flirtatious.

He opened a bottle and started to reach for a glass.

"Don't worry about a glass, the bottle's enough."

"Even better," he commented, his voice still strange and flat.

She ran her fingers across the cold, wet bottle as Bryce sat down beside her.

"I saw Michael today."

He clenched his teeth and sighed. "How's he doing?"

"I could ask you the same question."

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by Tess Lamont

"He asked me not to tell you we talked." He examined her eyes. "Look, I'm sorry. He called me for help with tryouts, and then ambushed me with questions. I guess those kids in Coneheads were more aware than we thought. Word traveled fast."

"Well, he was going to find out sooner or later." She held her breath, but he didn't speak. "That is," she continued, "if we are still 'seeing' each other."

Bryce ran his hand through his hair.

What was she trying to say?

She didn't understand how deep his needs were or she wouldn't be here at all. Keeping his distance took every ounce of his strength, his control. Hell, he would have left her in the car if he wasn't so worried she'd suffer heat stroke. She'd said she was scared, and he was doing his best to give her space to figure things out.

"Why did you come here, Christina?"

"Because, to quote a poet I know, 'there is together and there is apart and the choice is always made in faith.'"

"And?" he prompted.

"And I want together," she said. She closed her eyes. "I *really* want together."

How could he deny her? He didn't want to at all. He offered the only paltry suggestion he'd been able to come up with, "If we are going to make this work, we have to get as comfortable with each other out of bed as we are in it."

"I know," she said.

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He set down his beer. It was a shame to waste it after only a few sips, but there were more important things to be done. He picked his keys up from the coffee table.

"Would you like to go on a date with me, Ms. Welch?"

At first, she looked up as if he were joking. Then, her cheek dimpled and her skin flushed with what he hoped was happiness.

"Definitely," she answered.

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet. She stood on her toes and leaned in, hesitantly kissing his cheek.

"Thank you," she added.

"Let's go to dinner." He brushed her hair from her face.

As they walked through the parking lot, he threw his keys into the air and made an overhand catch. He had to admit that he was feeling fine.

Two weeks later, Bryce closed the door to their hotel room and leaned against the frame. Even dressed as she was, she still took away his breath.

"It was a beautiful wedding," she said, sighing.

"Yes, but you're wearing the fugliest dress I have ever seen," he replied.

She smirked and held her arms wide.

"Better get it off me then, my dear." Her voice deepened into a sultry tone that resonated in his gut.

"I thought you'd never ask."

They'd played vanilla for fourteen days—at least what he considered vanilla. Sex was still of the high friction and multiple-position kind, but there'd been no staged scenes, no

role play, and definitely no toys. Every day, he grew more certain they belonged together, but did she?

Click by slow click, he released the zipper of the frilly, lacy concoction that proved either Lisa had very bad taste or they all had a very good sense of humor. Then, he saw just what lay underneath.

"Oh. My. God," he murmured.

Christina peaked over her shoulder and grinned. "I had to look nasty, but I felt marvelous."

"I can see that." He ran his fingers down the hooks of what looked like an extremely expensive gold corset. When he reached the straps that held up her stockings, he snapped her garter. She yelped, then broke into a giggle.

"Do you approve, sir?"

"Fuck, yeah."

She slipped the dress off her shoulders, turned around, and slid into his arms. His pulse went from second to fifth gear, skipping all stages between.

She hummed her approval as he traced the boning that cinched her waist.

"One thing in the ceremony keeps running through my mind."

"Yes?" she said, her voice full of innocence.

"In their vows...where did Lisa and Ben get that stuff about mutual surrender?"

"Maybe they came up with it on their own?"

Her wandering fingers distracted him, but not enough. "I don't think so..."

"Maybe they did a little research?" She nibbled on his earlobe.

"Possibly. Did Lisa ask a librarian for help?"

"Maybe." She pressed her forehead into his chest. "We are very close."

He suspected as much. "So your friends know all about us?"

"Just Lisa and Gil...and maybe Ben, if Lisa spilled." She pulled back and spoke to him with one eye closed and her head slightly turned toward the side. "Are you mad?"

He was a private sort of person. But in the last two weeks, he'd caught a glimpse of just how close the three women were. He admired it.

"No," he said. "I trust you and, therefore, who you trust, I trust as well."

With women, one could never be sure, but Christina rewarded him with a dazzling smile.

"How much do they know?" he asked. "Just out of curiosity."

"Well," she said. "The money we saved by buying dresses from a canceled wedding, we spent on lingerie and toys."

"Oh, really?" Now that was unexpected. "What kind of toys?"

Christina bounced on her toes. "Hold on."

She pulled a riding crop out of her suitcase. Bold as black coffee, she sashayed over and dropped it at his feet.

"Oops," she said. As she leaned down to pick it up, she rubbed her ass against his crotch.

He chuckled under his breath. God, he loved this woman.

"So, does that mean you've come to a decision?"

The teasing light left her gaze. "I can't say forever." She lifted herself on her toes and planted a chaste kiss on his lips. "But, Bryce, I sure as hell want to try."

"That's enough for me." He cradled her chin and caressed her bottom lip with his thumb. "I hope for forever."

Her lip trembled. "Are you ready to play, sir?"

Um, yes. "Have you been thinking about this all day?"

Her eyes sparkled once again with mischief. "Maybe, maybe not."

"What? Is that insolence I hear?"

She straightened one leg and bent the other, rubbing her bum against his palm as she did. "What do you think?"

"I think you should turn around and look at me when you speak."

Christina's heart beat so fast that she felt as if she'd been running. She turned to see his adorable lips twisted into just a hint of a conspiratorial smile. He winked.

The crop flashed and hit the bed with a thud. If she were wearing panties, Christina thought, they definitely would have gotten wet.

"You've been a very bad librarian," he murmured.

She cast her gaze down. "Yes, sir, I have."

"Turn around and let me see that beautiful round ass."

To Christina, the act of bending over for Bryce connected them. She closed her eyes and presented herself, waiting with even breath for the contact of leather-on-skin.

Not until the crop whooshed, cutting through the air and into the flesh of her cheeks, did she shudder and sigh.

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She was home.

Later, after he spilled himself inside her welcoming body, he confessed his surrender and, in turn, she vowed hers. *How lucky am I?* She thought as she wrapped him in her arms.

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About the Author

Tess Lamont tried to be a good girl. Really. But despite her best efforts, her imagination kept right on wresting her away to places where powerful men appear to dominate, but willing women keep them both guessing and enthralled.

Tess has been writing stories since she can remember; however, only within the last 2 years did she finally summon the courage to take her dream seriously and banish her inner censor. Tess lives in New York City with an often incredulous, but marvelously supportive husband. She enjoys writing romance, reading romance, web surfing, laughing with her best friend 'til her sides hurt, wine and cheese. She hopes her tales of wicked, lusty love leave her readers breathless.

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Also Available

* * * *

Bound To Be Mine

by

Tess Lamont

Stripping had not just been profitable for Lisa Emery; it had given her the power, the control, to be the woman she wanted to be. She'd had a stimulating job and the perfect man at home—her master. Together, they were exploring the darker side of passion, and both seemed to bloom with the knowledge. Why then had he suddenly disappeared just when things were going so well? And why now was he back?

Ben Johnson knew the "life" he and Lisa were living had been wrong...just knew it. Something that felt that good couldn't be right. According to his therapist, "only by atoning for your wrongs could you really grow and change as a person." Why then, after so many months apart, did he still need to dominate Lisa, to bend her to his will and give in to his baser instincts?

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Chapter One

Ben's eyes were slow to adjust in the dry-ice haze and darkness of the club. The sleazy den off Route 73 wasn't unique. Thousands just like it hid in cheap, neglected corners of the country. Outside, a neon sign perched on a tar roof flashed the promise of cheap thrills, luring men still experiencing the universal sting of adolescence. For the price of a few watered down drinks and some wilting dollar bills, lonely men found a private place to console their wounded egos with a flash of female flesh and the thud of 1980s music.

As if a tawdry, practiced act could be a substitute for the exquisite mystery of a real woman.

Ben flinched. Only the act was pretend, the women here were real—just as full of need and affection as any woman. How could he be sure? He knew, because the woman strutting across the stage had once shared his bed. She now relentlessly haunted his dreams by night and his conscience by day.

Flashing strobe lights separated Ben from reality in a room smelling of cheap beer and mold. He did not belong here...and neither did Lisa.

The star of the next set hooked a long, shapely leg around a glinting silver pole, swinging seductively to a pounding, ferocious rhythm Ben felt beneath his ribs. As she slid off the pole, Lisa's back curved unnaturally and her face contorted as if in the throes of sexual ecstasy.

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Slowly, Lisa unwound and inched her way toward the edge of the stage. There, she crouched with legs spread wide and rocked her pelvis to the beat of the music. Every thrust brought her breasts within half an inch of a patron's delighted face. She drew her arms over her head and pushed out her hip, allowing another eager fuck to stuff a bill in her thong.

Winking at the patron with lashes too long and thick to be her own, she rose and twirled toward the next man. Turning her back on him, she spread her legs and leaned forward. Her hair hanging, she winked again through her legs, then closed her eyes and slowly licked her lips. Her reward—a five on the other hip. She blew that man a kiss.

Ben leaned against a column. His posture alleged lazy indifference—false as Lisa's frightfully long lashes and the sensual hunger she radiated for her customers. Inside his gut, rage knitted into thick, heavy knots, looping repeatedly in quiet, deliberate progression. Once, he would have blamed her for the adrenaline flooding his veins, or worse, appeased his anger by pounding one of the poor bastards who waved crumpled bills in clenched, sweaty fingers.

That was before he learned to leash the madness, before he learned to bring his beast within to heel.

He'd spent the better part of a year trying to make sense of their relationship. Once, he believed nothing could separate them. Together they'd explored the outer edge of every craving—lust, love, power, and pain, But at what cost? He was certain now that he'd pushed their relationship to far and was ready to accept the blame...alone. Although with therapy, he'd mastered external control, Ben could still

imagine the sweet satiation that an all-out riot would bring. The urge to pounce tantalized. Ben raised a brow as his gaze stalked Lisa across the stage.

A fight would hardly suit his purpose. He'd come here to atone.

Lisa bowed forward this time, cupping her breasts. He could hear her moan above the music, and the sound made him shiver.

Lord, but the woman had tits to die for—and she knew it. He pulled his folded arms tighter against his chest. As the man leaned forward to stuff his bill into her thong, Lisa turned her head sharply toward Ben, meeting his eyes. She swayed, losing the beat of the music, but only for a second. Ben doubted the drunken sap near the stage even noticed.

So, Lisa was aware of him. Her reaction was a good sign—a start.

His journal rested in his back pocket, and although the contents might not change things between them—only a miracle could do that now—his scribbled thoughts were the best and last offering to the insane connection between them. He'd hurt Lisa and now he hoped to heal her.

The men by the stage were chanting her stage name—Venus.

How appropriate, he thought. She was Venus and he, like the sorry men at her feet, was her moon—doomed to circle around her brilliance, but never to touch.

Ben had no idea if she would even listen to his apology. He wasn't about to let her know how he trembled inside, how

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much he needed her—his Adam's apple jerked as he swallowed convulsively.

How much he needed her *forgiveness*, he clarified to his raging blood.

* * * *

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