

LAURA ANTONIOU

THE  
MARKETPLACE

BOOK ONE OF THE MARKETPLACE SERIES

# THE MARKETPLACE

BY  
LAURA ANTONIOU



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The Marketplace Series

The Marketplace

The Slave

The Trainer

The Academy

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# INTRODUCTION

Merchandise does not come easily to the Marketplace.

It never has. In years past, just finding the Marketplace required a mix of personal dedication, passion, and the investment of a great deal of time. The creators always intended it to be that way. If it were easy to find, we would be overwhelmed by applicants.

As it is, far too many intermediate applicants appear on the edges of the Marketplace, their eyes wide with pleading and frustration. They hear of us, they instantly believe in us, and then spend months, sometimes years, trying to find their way to us. They haunt the clubs and the organizations, their need so real and desperate that they exude sensual tension when they glide through the crowds. Some of them are so ripe that they intimidate the poseurs, the weekend sadists and the furtive dilettantes who are so endemic to that world. And they never stop asking where we may be found.

So few of them are truly ready. They may have flirted with the trappings of a subculture and found it to be the extraordinary aphrodisiac it is. But a steady diet of aphrodisia is far too overwhelming. To survive and to thrive in this world, an applicant must need it more than they need pleasure, more than they need the companionship of peers, more than they need even the barest personal satisfaction.

Those of you who have toyed with or even lived a term of service may wonder at just how hard it could be to attain the level of excellence required by the Marketplace. After all, you muse, these are people who will be called slaves. Owned chattel, their lives formed and polished for the pleasure and use and amusement of those whose need is to control and improve. Many of you believe that the right attitude combined with some physical charm would be more than adequate to the task.

It is not. Even the most gifted of naturals, those individuals whose

wrists are naked without restraints and whose souls are bleak without guidance, need to be trained.

That is why we exist, actually. We are a gateway to the Marketplace, one of the few ways to be a part of it yet be outside of it. We are also easier to believe in, easier to access, easier to afford.

If you work hard enough and your devotion is genuine, one day you may ask someone where the Marketplace can be found. They will consider you, perhaps ask one small service of you or a deeply personal question, and they will judge whether you are ready. If you show some slight potential, they may take you home and give you what you desire. Or, if the need is very strong in you, they may grant your wish and take you on a long drive, a soft blindfold locking out the light. At the end of that drive, your entire body in a state of sexual hunger and your mind obsessed with the fruition of all your deepest fantasies, you may come to our household.

I shall be awaiting you.

You will learn to hate me.

And you will remember your stay in our house for the rest of your life.

# Part One

## CHAPTER ONE

“May I serve you tea, ma’am?” The girl’s body was bent slightly forward in a subtle, exquisite, inquisitive posture. Her small white hands held the china teapot firmly, waiting for an answer. That was excellent, too. An untrained girl might have started pouring as soon as she asked the question.

“Yes, of course,” the mistress of the house replied. Her eyes followed the movements of the girl as the liquid poured into the cup. The tea made a distinct sound while it ran into the cup, another perfection. When the cup was three quarters full, the pot was replaced, and the ritual continued.

“Would you like sugar, ma’am?” Then lemon, then cream. Each refusal was met with a slight bowing of the girl’s pretty head. When the options were finished, she backed away from the table, her steps small and carefully placed, barely disturbing the slender golden chain that wound between her white, high-heeled shoes.

She was pretty, small and delicately shaped. She was well suited to the serving ensemble she wore, the tight-corseted bodice and the lightly ruffled apron. Her curly, light brown hair cascaded down her back, the pert lace cap pinning it back. Her deep green eyes were always lowered in humility, long lashes charmingly fluttering. The wisps of hair which seemed to carelessly escape from the cap to frame her heart-shaped face were in fact cunningly arranged to suggest disarray.

Cute, Alexandra Selador thought, as she drank some tea. Far too cute for her own good.

“That will be all, Claudia,” Mistress Madeleine said, her voice strong and tightly controlled. Alexandra nodded and her majordomo came forward to leash the girl and remove her from the room. The two women waited until the servants had gone to relax back into their chairs. They laughed together at the conceit.

“It’s good to see you, Alex.”

“And you, Madeleine. It’s been far too long. You should come out and visit us more often. And Claudia is simply enchanting. It’s rare you see such grace in that form of service these days. At least here in the States.”

That comment was answered with a simple but elegant shrug. “You should come and visit us,” Madeleine insisted. She smiled, her face transforming in a way few of her slaves had ever witnessed. “Did you know that we finished the pool and the deck? It’s beautiful, especially at night. We light torches—it’s very romantic.”

“Hm, I bet it is,” Alexandra murmured. “And you bring in some extra property? To serve at poolside?”

“We invite people to bring their own, but of course we try to have someone for everyone. You should have come to the last party we threw! We had some friends in from the Netherlands. They had just bought a pair of twins, big, blonde beauties. We had them dressed in nothing but slender, black chains, wound all around their bodies.”

Alexandra tried to imagine that, and the image of them standing next to the tall, dark Mistress. She nodded. “That must have been nice. Boys?”

“Boy and girl. Barely spoke English, actually, but very well trained.”

Alexandra whistled slightly. “Very nice indeed. Twin brother/sister combinations are very, very hot right now, especially if there’s a strong resemblance.” She waited politely for Madeleine to begin the business discussion. Over such an elegantly served tea, it didn’t feel right to just ask what the woman wanted. Was she interested in a set of twins herself? Alexandra did a quick mental inventory. There was one pair she knew about that might be ready for training, but they were in San Francisco, a continent away, and there was no telling what kind of contracts they wanted.

“Well, there was a strong resemblance here, honey.” Madeleine flashed that brilliant smile again. “Both of them had long hair, shaggy almost. They looked primitive, very... raw. I told David to have their noses pierced. That would have completed the image. But even without that, they were a great success. Wherever they walked, people admired them. David even got a few offers.”

She sighed, and finally put her cup down. “Shall we get on to business?”

“At your service, ma’am.” Alexandra reached for her notepad. “What can we do for you this time?”

“I want you to take Claudia.”

Alexandra’s eyebrow shot up in surprise.

“Claudia?”

Madeleine nodded, her smile gone. “I want her trained.”

Alexandra considered for a moment. “I have to be honest with you. I don’t think we’re the ones you want, Madeleine. We’re entry level, undergraduate. Claudia, if I might say so, is already past the level of many of our graduates.” She smiled ruefully. “But I can put you in contact with one of the master trainers, if you’d like. I think Anderson is accepting new applicants next month.”

“No, I want you to do it,” came the confident reply. “Anderson is wonderful, her slaves are always perfection, but that’s the problem.”

Alexandra waited for the explanation. It was not every day when a client protested that they didn’t want perfection. Her eyes scanned the table. There wasn’t a drop of moisture on a serving utensil nor on the tablecloth. In fact, the teapot, creamer, sugar bowl and everything else seemed to be pleasingly arrayed, something she hadn’t noticed before.

Madeleine stood up, looking toward the door as though she could see her property through the walls. “Claudia was meant for perfection,” she began, walking away from the table. “From the first time I saw her, I could tell. It wasn’t just her attitude, you can see she’s a slave to her soul, but the way she devoted herself to being attentive to the slightest details. Adequate was never acceptable to her. Every once in a while, I would find her practicing... how to move, how to curtsy, how to speak. She would watch herself in the mirror and do something over and over again until it satisfied her.”

She turned to look at Alexandra. “It was intoxicating for a while. Of all my slaves, even the Marketplace ones, she had the most desperate drive to be perfect for me. It was worth the challenge to find fault with her. A fray on an inch of lace, a scuff on her shoe, a grain of sugar on the table, it didn’t matter. I punished her heavily for every imper-

fection.

“And the punishments! What else could I do to such a creature but have her bent tightly over a bench and caned until she cried? And she would cry, just like the little girl she is. Every time, early on, but with grace. I taught her to stand for the cane and kiss it prettily when I was done... they were wonderful sessions.

“With stripes across her bottom, she was even more perfect.” Madeleine paused. “Do you understand?”

“I understand that you made a perfect slave,” Alexandra said cautiously.

“Yes, and no. I took a perfect slave and made her more perfect. And now...”

“Now she bores you.”

Madeleine nodded, a blush faintly discernible under her dark cheeks.

It was a rare but classic dilemma. Alexandra began to jot down some notes. She had heard of this happening, but had never seen the results. What did happen, owners would ask between themselves, if a slave actually achieved the perfection they were supposed to be searching for? Would master be happy? Or would the slave have surpassed the master in one of those unquantifiable ways that makes people unworthy of each other?

“So what do you envision for her?” Alexandra asked when she finished writing. “Do you want her changed into something more challenging?”

“If possible.”

Ah, Alexandra thought, making another note. “So you’ve already tried.”

“Well of course. As soon as I realized what was wrong, I tried to see if there were some other areas I could explore with her. But she... resisted me.” Madeleine frowned slightly at the memory. “Not directly, of course, that might have been interesting in itself. But somehow, anything outside of her role would just make her sad, or confused. I love her dearly, but she’s so limited!”

“Yes, of course,” Alexandra murmured sympathetically. “You’ll want her back then?”

Madeleine turned back to look at Alexandra, her face composed. “If she cannot be taken beyond the role she is in now, I will want her sold.”

“Does she know that?”

“No. I want her to change because she wants to please me, not because she is afraid of the possible results. Besides,” Madeleine waved one hand toward the hallway, “a new owner may be what she needs. After all, I can’t pretend that I had nothing to do with the state she is in. Although she came to me as a novice little maid, I was the one to enhance her training to the level she has achieved. I was the one who decided to seek perfection in this role. Perhaps with someone new, she can break out of it. Be more complete, more useful.”

Alexandra underlined ‘useful.’ “We’ll want her for one week of evaluation. After that, we’ll send you a report and you can decide whether to take our recommendations. If you decide to go through the whole program, we suggest four to five more weeks, depending on how intense you want the experience to be.”

Madeleine nodded, came back to sit down. She reached into her bag to draw out her calendar, and began marking down dates.

“And you know the rules here,” Alexandra continued. “You will not be able to call or visit her. And of course, Claudia will have to agree to go to the block. If she undergoes the training and decides not to enter the Marketplace, you lose all the training fees. We’re happy to do this for you, Madeleine, and in the way you like, but you know the risks.”

“That’s perfectly acceptable. Here is her file.” The folder was filled with sheets of heavy, cream colored paper and photographs. “I can’t tell you how much she means to me, Alex. If you can do what I ask and get her back to my house a new girl, I’ll be in your debt.”

“You certainly will,” Alexandra said with a smile. “You’ll get the invoice for the evaluation tomorrow, and an estimate for the training will come with the report. As you know, it’s a business doing pleasure with you.” The two women laughed and finished their tea.



Grendel read through the file before him, scanning relevant parts and occasionally glancing at the two photos on the desk. One showed a young, dark-haired man in black leather, looking in what he must have imagined to be a defiant way at the camera. It came off more petulant than angry or proud. The second was a nude shot, the same man standing in a stiff position, his arms at his side. The file wasn't very long.

"Well, you were right about one thing," he said lightly, closing the file. "This is a classic example of raw goods."

The man on the other side of the desk shrugged. "I told him he wasn't ready." Paul Sheridan was wearing his own black leather. But in sharp contrast to the picture on the desk, Paul looked as though he lived in his leathers. They were old, well crafted, well formed to his hard body. His only concession to the summer heat was that his shirt had short sleeves. "But when he decides he wants something, he just keeps asking and asking."

"How submissive."

Paul shrugged again. "Oh, he can be submissive when the situation is right. But he's really just a greedy bottom most of the time. A real 'stand and model' type. In fact, that's where I first saw him. It was at one of those events, you know, Mr. Leather something-or-other."

"And this was the best they had to offer?" Grendel waved over the file. "Now I know why those things never interested me."

"Yeah, well it was pretty awful. He wasn't the best maybe, but he was hot-looking. Also, he had that nice bratty attitude. Made me want to pull him off that stage and spank him 'til he cried."

The master of the house nodded, familiar with Paul's tastes. "So what do you want us to do with him?"

"Make something out of him if you can. Break through that bullshit smugness he has, get rid of that 'I want, I want' nonsense. If you can bring out his real submission, I know he can fetch a nice price somewhere." Paul examined his fingernails for a moment. "All I'm interested in is the spotters fee."

"I bet. You know, we don't usually work with talent this shallow." Grendel leaned back, his smile genuine but his voice hardening with business. "I don't think you've got market quality here, frankly. Hot

leather boys with selfish needs don't rate very high in value."

"He's not all like that, Gren. There is something real in him. I've seen it, I've brought it out. Besides, I'm not asking for three months of real training here, just the basic six weeks. Just enough to fetch a nice starting price. Have I brought you any dogs before?"

Grendel grinned. "Only that puppy."

"Right!" Paul pointed at Grendel, emphasizing his words. "And he went into a two-year contract right out of training, didn't he? And traded at a 25% increase out of San Diego last year."

"So he did." Grendel flipped open the file again. He looked back at Paul from time to time. The man had a point. Paul had yet to bring someone by who didn't have some real potential in them. But taking a trainee like this was always an iffy proposition. If he didn't fetch a high enough price at his first sale, Paul only lost a spotters fee. Grendel and the house stood to lose the cost of training, and the loss of face if the training didn't last longer than the sale.

"You say he's bisexual," Grendel said, still thinking.

"Well, he says he is. But his preference is men."

"Does he know that preferences aren't allowed here?"

"Of course."

Grendel tapped the folder a few times and then reached for the intercom button. "Chris? Bring him in, please."

The door opened immediately, and the man from the photos walked in, followed by the majordomo. He strode to Paul's side and knelt next to his chair, keeping his eyes lowered. He was wearing artfully worn jeans covered with stylishly cut black leather chaps. His chest was bare except for a harness made of silver chain. A matching chain was around his neck, with a silver lock, and small, silver rings adorned his nipples. His hair was shorn boot-camp short, and he wore a black mustache.

No imagination, Grendel thought. "I didn't tell you that you could kneel," he said, his voice soft and reasonable.

The man looked up, then toward Paul. Paul groaned and rolled his eyes in frustration. "I warned you not to embarrass me, you scumbag. Get up!"

With a jingle of harness, the man did so, and then stood, his arms

behind his back and his head lowered.

“I didn’t tell you that you could avert your eyes, either,” Grendel smiled. “Paul, why don’t you introduce me?”

“Sure. Grendel Elliot, meet my latest boy, Brian Cohen. Brian, this is Mr. Elliot, the master of this place. If you’re lucky, he’ll accept you for training. But thanks to your spectacularly stupid entrance, he probably thinks you’re nothing more than a cheap, thrill-seeking little leather clone, and he’ll kick both of us out in the next ten minutes. After which you’ll be walking the sixty miles back to Manhattan.” Paul compressed his lips into a smile. He’d do it, too.

“Uh. Pleased to meet you, sir.” Brian exposed a mouthful of large white teeth and he extended his hand across the desk. His attitude had gone from stylized subservience to game show host in one second. It took him two more to realize that Grendel had no intention of shaking his hand. Awkwardly, he pulled back. Unsure of how to stand, he put his hands behind his back again.

Grendel studied the man before him. He was not particularly stunning, but handsome in a dark, ethnic way. His skin didn’t show evidence of a lot of time out in the sun or at a tanning salon, and his waist showed a lack of time spent in a gym. Grendel’s face didn’t show the slightest spark of interest as he rose and walked around the desk to study Brian a little closer. He looked as though he was dutifully examining an incomprehensible piece of art at the behest of a loved one.

Brian was clearly not used to such dispassionate observation. Within thirty seconds, he began to tense. In another thirty, he began to fidget.

“No discipline,” Grendel snapped from behind him. Brian almost jumped, but managed to remain still.

“He’s just shy,” Paul offered.

“Are you? Shy?”

“Well, it depends, sir. I’ve competed in contests, and I don’t think I could win if I was really shy. I, um, get nervous sometimes, but I try to get over it as best I can...”

“That is not an answer to the question I asked, Mr. Cohen. That is a series of personal observations referring to yourself far too many times in one sentence. Try answering yes or no.” Grendel remained behind Brian, speaking to the back of the man’s neck.

“Uh, no, sir!”

Grendel raised an eyebrow at Paul, who merely grinned and shrugged again.

“This is not very promising, Paul.”

“Well, I’m sorry to waste your time, Gren. Listen, I’ll make it up to you, real soon. I’ll find you a muscle stud like you wouldn’t believe, a god. Some guy that would eat this twinkie for breakfast.” Paul started to rise, but Grendel waved him back down. Before he could begin to speak, Brian piped up.

“Please, sir, please reconsider me! I’ll do better! I’ll learn. I can be better, much better. I’m just nervous today, I promise you, I’ll be the best slave you ever trained!”

“I wasn’t speaking to you, Mr. Cohen. And if whining and making impossible promises is any indication of how you plan to be the best anything I’ve ever trained, you are badly, badly mistaken.” Grendel put his hand out and grasped the back of Brian’s neck. The man’s first reaction was to stiffen up, but then he relaxed and leaned backward into the hand.

“Hm. First thing you did right.”

Paul smiled.

Grendel let go and walked back around to his seat. “All right, Mr. Cohen, I’ll give you one more chance. Tell me what you’re good for.”

Brian looked startled at the question. Although Grendel asked it of all new applicants, many of them didn’t know how to answer. They invariably felt intimidated by the question, some of them afraid of boasting, others simply mystified at the implication that they should know their own capabilities.

Brian started to say something, but stopped himself on the first syllable. Some instinct in him told him that “Whatever master wants” wasn’t going to fly here. Not with this man.

“Well, I can take a good beating, sir.” Grendel nodded, and gestured for him to continue. “And... and I can obey orders. I can take care of a man’s leather, polish boots. Um. I can service a man...”

“Don’t be evasive!”

“I can suck cock, sir. And work over a man’s body, I can make love to every part of him, sir.” That came out in a rush. Paul nodded, obvi-

ously agreeing.

“Can you? Show me.”

Brian looked startled again, but recovered quickly and looked at Paul. When Paul made no invitation or protest, he glanced at Grendel, and then began to walk around the edge of the desk.

“Not on me, Mr. Cohen. On Chris.”

Brian turned to the majordomo, who had remained standing inside the door until this time. They had not exchanged a single word in the time that Chris had been watching him, but Brian had plenty of time to study him.

Chris was a very small, compact man. He was dressed in a suit with a crisp, high-collared white shirt and a long, dark jacket, which seemed to emphasize his heavy shoulders and hide his waist and hips. His hair was dark, thick and curly, his eyes shadowed by tinted glasses with heavy steel frames. It was Chris who had answered the door and brought them to this office. After announcing Paul in a mellow tenor voice, Chris had stayed with Brian in the antechamber, silent and watchful.

Blow him? That would be easy. Little guys tended to have under-sized dicks too. It would look good for Brian to dive in with enthusiasm. As the majordomo moved forward, unfastening the fly of his pants, Brian slid to his knees and moistened his lips.

He put his hands behind his back as he had been taught, and waited for Chris to pull out his cock. The first indication that things were not as they should be was when Chris's hand had to actually slide into his fly to grasp it. Maybe he's not that tiny, Brian considered, giving his lips another swipe. No big deal, I can handle it.

But he couldn't handle what came out of those pants. For although the size was indeed respectable, it lacked one important element for any devoted cocksucker. His eyes widened as he gazed at it, and without a single cognizant thought, his head snapped back and his hands loosened from behind his back. He heard his own voice echo in the room. Instantly he gasped, and then compressed his lips in trepidation. He screwed his eyes shut for what he knew was coming.

“You stinking, good-for-nothing fuck-up!” Paul exploded. “You're going to be lucky if anyone ever takes you home as anything but a

cheap trick, you lousy son of a..."

"Paul, Paul, please." Grendel held up one hand as he jotted one more note down. "No need to raise your voice. Chris, you may put that away."

Still mute, the majordomo did as told, tucking it back into his pants. Brian remained where he was, a deep blush growing at the back of his neck and a trickle of sweat sliding down his back. I screwed up big time, he thought, grinding his teeth. I don't believe my big, fucking mouth. Oh, that was rich, Brian buddy, just shout it out like this was the first time you ever tried any of this. What's the big deal if the guy...?

He glanced up at Chris, who seemed entirely unaffected by the exchange. Brian shuddered involuntarily and then ducked his head down again. Whatever this guy was didn't matter any more. Brian wouldn't have to worry about ever seeing Chris or Mr. Elliot ever again. Paul would kill him when they got out of here.

It took me four months to get him to admit that he knew about this place, and I blow it in the first ten minutes, he thought in a flurry of self-condemnation. He lowered his chin until it almost touched his chest and didn't look up as Chris walked away from him.

But Paul was smiling. Grendel hadn't stopped taking notes, and that was an excellent sign.

"This is what I'm offering you, Paul," Grendel finally said. "We'll evaluate him as usual. If he passes, and we think he can get better, we'll take him on as a total novice. Your commission will be cut by fifty percent for our trouble. If he fails and proves to be a loss, you owe us his estimated value on your next find."

Paul laughed. "Cut the commission only ten percent and I'll guarantee your choice on the next one. If he fails, I'll cut my fee fifty percent on whatever I bring you."

"I hate to quibble. Twenty-five, plus our choice on the next one with a ten percent decrease in your fee. No change on the failure, take it or leave it."

Brian trembled.

"OK. But only because I know that he's quality and that you're the only people in the world who can bring it out. And get a mark-up

worth my time.” The two men shook hands over the desk.

Brian was almost in shock as Chris reappeared, bearing a key. The chain around his neck was taken off and returned to Paul. He was so flustered that Paul’s voice had to filter through his confusion gradually, like light coming through a dense fog.

“...and you do as they say, boy. Did you hear me?”

“Yes, sir!”

“You’ll see, Gren. He’s got the potential.”

Grendel stood up and closed the file. “We’ll let you know in one week, Paul. Chris? Take Mr. Cohen to the dorm, please.”

Brian turned back as he got up. “Thank you, sir, you won’t be sorry—” and immediately knew that he had made yet another grave error. Paul’s grimace told him so.

“And gag him,” Grendel said softly. The majordomo nodded and pushed Brian out the door. As they were exiting, Grendel turned back to Paul with a devilish glint in his eyes. “Our choice for your next find? How about a pair of twins...”



“May I serve you tea, ma’am?” The server’s body was bent awkwardly forward. His large hands held the teapot gingerly, aware of how much more fragile it seemed when those blunt, calloused fingers were wrapped around the delicate handle. He started pouring at once.

Alexandra cut off her reply as he poured and studied him some more, unabashedly amazed at the sight.

He had to be over six feet tall in his stocking feet, so the grotesquely large high-heeled shoes he was wearing made him seem like a giant. The corset-style maid’s costume he wore emphasized the broad expanse of his back. A beautiful wig gave him styled locks of bleached-blond hair which contrasted with the barely discernible shading on his cheeks and chin.

“Would you like some sugar, Mistress?” His voice was scaled up to approximate something feminine. Alexandra declined, and he offered the sugar tray toward the woman who brought him, who waved it away. With a slight rattle, he replaced it on the table and reached for the

lemon. His offering was stiff, and his hand trembled, and when he replaced the lemon, the china rattled some more. He whimpered.

Alexandra narrowed her eyes as he lifted the creamer. They followed his shaking hand as he poured a little cream into the other woman's cup and droplets spilled down the side.

"Oh dear, oh dear! I'm so sorry Mistress!" That comic-opera voice grated.

"Just serve the sweets, Roberta," came the icy reply.

The creamer quickly found its way to the table, where it left a growing stain. The man in the maid's uniform hurried in ridiculous little steps to the sideboard, where he picked up the waiting tray and turned around. But as he stepped toward the table, the stiletto heel of his right shoe caught on the edge of the carpet.

Alexandra closed her eyes.

The man stumbled, lost his balance, and the tray shook in his hands. His face a mask of horror, he tried to regain his feet and succeeded, but the tray had tilted too far already. A plate of cookies slid neatly off.

Alexandra heard the dull thumping of the tray hitting the floor and sighed. What a stereotype. But when she opened her eyes to see the damage, the only thing on the floor was the tray. The plate of cookies was in the man's hand. His knees were still bent. He had caught the plate before it fell, sacrificing the tray. Nice move. But totally irrelevant in the context of the scene.

He had also started to cry.

"Oh, dear! I'm so sorry, Mistress! I am so bad! Please don't punish me, I didn't let them fall! Please?" He sniffed.

"That will be enough... Roberta. Chris, please?" Alexandra beckoned, and Chris came forward, picked up the tray and replaced it on the sideboard, and took the plate from the man's hand. Placing it on the table, he gave a slight bow to the two women, and then took the sniffing man by the elbow and led him from the room. Alexandra watched them leave with a sigh.

"What was that?" she asked, ignoring the tea.

"That was a perfectly good slave, absolutely ruined... ruined! by some amateur bimbos who called themselves 'mistresses'!" Ali glared at the

closed door. “Do you believe it? The first time I saw him, I thought it was a joke, some kind of one-time role switching, maybe a punishment. The woman who ‘owned’ him,” she raised her fingers to make imaginary quotation marks, “was, well...” She sighed and said a name and Alexandra nodded. “You know, Ms. Famous All Around the World, I’ve been on Donahue, and I charge \$400 an hour to do this stuff so I’m much better than anyone at it?”

Alexandra laughed and nodded. Yes, she knew the type and knew the particular woman involved as well.

Ali continued. “But then I realized that this woman was proud of the way he was trained! She actually wanted to take him on some sleazy talk show and show him off as her great success! I tell you, I almost smacked her I was so angry!”

Ali Cruz was an expert in a specialized field. She had not been born a woman, but achieved that status after years and years of effort. Her skills in teaching others in similar positions made her a much sought-after mentor, but her focus was on those who not only desired a change in gender but in lifestyle as well. Any transgender property of Marketplace value in this part of the country could be traced to Ali or one of her students or friends. They were all uniquely qualified to deal with the combined needs and pressures of their clients. Ali had been to the house many times before.

“He... Robert?... he doesn’t really want to change, does he?” Alexandra asked, opening his file. It was very brief.

“No! Oh, God, no. Could you imagine? He’d be an Amazon!” Ali rolled her eyes. “He’d be a silly-looking Amazon. But can you believe it? That... woman he was with wanted him to go for electrolysis. And he has got to have beautiful body hair... when it grows back. You’ll see. And Alexandra... his cock. It’s beautiful. Huge. Mama, men would kill for such a cock. And he’s ashamed of it. That’s how I met him. He was actually attending meetings asking about where he could get it cut off! To please his mistress, he said.”

Alexandra shrugged. “Not unheard of.”

“You’re telling me? I hear it all the time. But he’s not really like that, Alexandra. He’s all man, inside and out. He’s just a little confused, about the slave part. I know, believe me. He’s a natural slave.

Trust me on this, babe, have I ever lied to you? Of course not! It's just that he needs to be... deprogrammed."

"Ah. You mean, he's stuck."

Ali nodded. "Too many women told him that he should behave like that and look like that if he was going to be submissive to women. And Mistress Prime Time, She Who Must Know Everything, told him so. What else could he do? He wanted to be a slave, and that's how he was told slaves should act." She shook her head.

"Well, somewhere in there, he made the decision to put those clothes on," Alexandra commented. "You can't blame it all on the tops."

"Of course not! But still, it's a sin. I want you to do whatever you do, find out what he's good for, and get him out of those stupid clothes. He wants to be owned, Alex. He needs it. But like this? You couldn't move him for play money."

"Do you know," Alexandra asked in between making marks on her notepad, "he's the second maid I've seen today? But we'll take him."

"You're an angel. A miracle worker! Have a good time with him." Ali brought her notebook out, bracelets jangling, and wrote down some notes. "If he gets through the evaluation, keep him as long as you need to. He wants to be sold to a woman, but I told him about house rules. I told him everything." She stressed the last word, glancing up to give it extra meaning. The two women shook hands warmly.

"It's always good to see you, Ali. I'll call you in a week and let you know how Robert does in the evaluation. Now... how about if we step outside and have some iced tea? Served without the embellishments?" They laughed and left the room together.



Robert had followed the little man, sniffing and sobbing, away from the scene of his disgrace. At some distance from the room, they turned a corner, and his escort stopped and let him go. Robert immediately gave a long whimpering moan and slid against the wall.

I embarrassed Her, he thought as he mourned. And myself. I'm such a bad slave, I can't do anything right! I'll never get sold, I'll never

find a mistress, I'll never get it! Tears continued to flow, and the sounds he made as he sobbed were alternately harsh and deep and high-pitched and whining.

Finally, he realized that Chris wasn't reacting. Cautiously, he opened his eyes.

Chris was holding out a clean, white handkerchief. Robert reached out and took it, his hand shaking, and hurriedly dried his eyes. Shadow and mascara stained the linen.

"Th-thank you," he sniffed, dabbing at the wet spots on his face. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be a trouble... oh! Look at what I did!" He stared at the soiled square in shame and then crumpled it in his hand and dropped to his knees. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, it's all my fault!" The bend of his body ill-suited his tall frame, the position was comical to the point of being ludicrous.

The majordomo calmly extended a hand. "At this time, this behavior is inappropriate, Mr. Grafton," he said. "Please get up and accompany me. If you are accepted for training here, we will discuss your behavior and faults. Now, you are a guest."

His voice was soft and edged with a city accent. Robert looked up in confusion and then allowed himself to be raised. "Um. I'm sorry. I didn't realize..." He sniffed one last time and offered the handkerchief back. "I'm really making a big mess, aren't I?" His voice remained in the stylized "maid" aspect.

"I couldn't say, Mr. Grafton. Now please come with me. You will be informed how the meeting went when the ladies are through." He gently took the handkerchief back and folded it before putting it into his pocket.

"Yes, yes, of course. I'm sorry. You're very kind. Much better than I deserve. Are... are you a master here?"

Chris, who had started to turn away, twisted back to look up into Robert's eyes. He smiled, his eyes dark behind the glasses.

"Not today."



"How did I end up with two French maids, that's all I want to

know,” Alexandra complained.

“Just lucky, m’dear.” Grendel put Robert’s file back on the table. They were in the garden, the late afternoon sun warming and pleasant. Just past the ornamental hedges and along a stretch of lawn, the brown rails of the paddock could be seen. They were far from the public roads, and the sounds of birds and an occasional snort or cry from the stable made a soothing background for their consultations. From inside the house, they could also hear the cook preparing a meal for their three applicants.

“At least you have Claudia to work with. That’s certainly a consolation for you. It’s not often we see such perfection.”

“Ah, not true.”

Grendel looked up for a moment and then winked. “You’re right, you’re right. But still, she’s the star of this group. My second interview never even showed up. I told Chris to contact the next on the list. Have you noticed how quality continues to plummet? We never had so many no-shows before.”

Alexandra nodded absently.

“And this Brian!” Grendel sighed dramatically. “Barely acceptable. If Claudia bores you so much, maybe you’d like to trade?”

“Ah, no. That kind leaves me cold. Let me see him when you put the fear of God into him.”

They both looked up when Chris politely cleared his throat. He was standing between the open glass doors. “Excuse me, Ma’am. Sir. Ms. Sharon Brosa is here.”

Grendel raised one eyebrow. “What time is it?”

“Four forty-five, Sir.”

“Great start,” Alexandra commented wryly.

“I’ll see her in my office. Tell her I’ll be there in ten minutes.” He turned back to Alexandra before Chris left. “See what I mean? No more quality. An hour and a half late, and she didn’t even call. Didn’t even ask Chris to deliver her sincere apologies and beg our forgiveness.”

“And she’s all yours,” Alexandra said with a malicious grin.



Sharon followed the guy who answered the door, smoothing her skirt over her hips. He was real short. Bad enough it cost so much for the car service and they got lost anyway, bad enough her skirt was wrinkled and her hair was starting to uncurl from the heat. But the least she expected was that the door would be opened by some tall, muscled, naked slave or something like that.

Nope, only some quiet guy who looked at her like she was from New Jersey or something. And he wasn't a butler or anything, because he wasn't dressed up like one. And she knew he wasn't the master here because she had descriptions of the two people who ran the place.

He didn't even offer to take her bag.

He had taken her to a small room where she waited with nothing but a large, fresh flower arrangement and a hard bench for company. She sat down and tapped her feet impatiently.

All this way and they keep me waiting. You'd think they'd send people out looking for me by now. I hope they realize it wasn't my fault. Maybe they're trying to psych me out? Maybe this is some kind of power thing already?

The guy from the door came back, his sudden appearance startling her.

"Jeeze!" she exclaimed. "Give some warning, will you?"

"My apologies," the guy said smoothly. "Mr. Elliot will see you in his office in the north wing. You may leave your piece of luggage here. Please follow me."

More surprises. She had expected rich furnishings and a castle, like in the story books. Instead, the house was clearly modern and decorated with a light, contemporary style. Large windows allowed the afternoon sunlight to penetrate the corridors. When they passed a dining room with open doors, she saw someone laying the table. Disappointingly, she was also fully and plainly dressed.

"Don't you have slaves to do the work around here?" she asked as they reached the stairway.

"Sometimes." Chris turned down a wide hallway, opened a door and indicated that she enter the room. She walked into an office showing a lot of use. File cabinets lined one wall. A table was piled with papers and folders and stacks of correspondence. There was a computer

in one corner, and at least two phones that she could see. A large oak desk dominated the room, with a sturdy leather chair behind it. Two more chairs were angled in front of the desk, and she walked over to one. Sunlight poured in the large windows behind the desk. There was a view of a driveway and a grove of trees beyond.

“Mr. Elliot will be here in ten minutes, Ms. Brosa. Please do not seat yourself or disturb anything in the room.”

She stopped herself as she was sitting down. “I can’t sit?”

“No.”

“For ten minutes?” But Chris was already leaving, and closing the door behind him. She walked over to the door and reached for the handle, her indignation growing. But she stopped herself.

It’s a trick, she realized. If I chew the little guy out, I won’t be acting submissive. She grinned. Ten minutes? He’ll come in five. He’ll be expecting to surprise me, like I’d be sitting down and he’d come in all of a sudden. Not this babe, buster.

She put her purse down on the floor next to one of the chairs. I’ll just wait here like it’s the most natural thing in the world. Five minutes isn’t that long. She checked her watch.

As the seconds ticked past, she glanced around the room. It was obviously a working office. It wasn’t dirty, but it could probably use some organizing. Where were the house slaves, anyway? This wasn’t anything like the books. In the books, everyone was drop-dead gorgeous, and the slaves walked around naked, or wearing bikinis and stuff like that. They lived in pristine palaces or in Victorian mansions with luxurious play-room dungeons in the basements, where masters and mistresses lolled around being waited on. They didn’t hang out in boring offices surrounded by paperwork.

She checked her watch impatiently, and then wandered over to the table and looked at the items spread over it. Maybe there were slave files here. Maybe some pictures? No such luck. Bills. Lists. A diagram of something, she wasn’t sure what. A Rolodex was open to some guy’s name and number somewhere in Maine.

Boring.

The bookcase was also dull. No mysterious books on the training of slaves. In fact, there weren’t even any of the classic books that she

read. Instead, it was all computer books. And some sailing books, a big dictionary, a bunch of business books. She looked at her watch again. It was already five minutes, thank God, but the guy wasn't there.

Huh. Double psych-out, she thought. Like he figured I'd figure him to be here in five, but he really meant ten. Damn, this stuff could get confusing. She picked up a small glass dog, looked at it and put it back. Was he really going to make her wait a whole ten minutes?

Over to the desk to see if there was anything interesting there. Ah-hah! Right on top, a file folder with her name neatly typed on the label. She glanced at the door, and then at her watch. Two minutes to go, just enough time to take a peek. She picked it up and opened it to find only one sheet of paper inside. It had her name at the top, and absolutely nothing written on it anywhere else.

Damn! She carefully put it back. Where was the letter she sent? Where were the pictures? How long was this guy going to make her wait?

Pacing filled out the rest of the ten minutes before she considered the effect all that walking would have on her hair. She touched it up neatly and had the brush back in her purse before she realized that ten minutes were up. Now he was late! And her legs were starting to hurt. It was almost a two-hour ride in the car, and she was tired and stiff.

Minutes dragged by.

Is he going to make me wait an hour? That horrified thought came to her about the tenth time she checked her watch. Standing up? She walked to the door and reached for the door handle. Enough was enough. But as soon as her hand touched it, it turned by itself. Sharon shrieked and leapt back from it.

"Jesus! You scared me!" she cried. Expecting to see the little guy again, she found that she had to look up. The man standing in the doorway was taller and broader, his shoulders at the height of her nose. He was casually dressed, in jeans and a button-down shirt. His hair was black and longish, his beard a close-cropped mass of black salted with silver.

Oh shit. He fit the description she had been given. She composed her features at once and knelt gracefully, the skirt swirling around her legs in an elegant way. She had practiced this move hundreds of times,

and knew that it was beautiful. She bowed her head slowly. Don't speak until spoken to, she reminded herself.

Grendel looked down and then walked past her. "I'm glad to see that you aren't injured, Ms. Brosa." He sat down behind the desk, the leather chair creaking.

Sharon raised her head a little. He had just walked by, without noticing what she did! She turned her head, but the angle was wrong, she couldn't see him. Now what? What should she do?

"Why don't you take a seat?" The suggestion was slowly and firmly made, in a way that suggested that she was a child. Biting her lip, she rose with the same grace she used in kneeling and then took one of the chairs facing the desk.

Grendel opened a drawer and brought out the real file on her and laid it out on the desk. When no apology seemed forthcoming, he began to lay out the pages, putting the photographs to one side. Now that she was here, he realized that they didn't do her justice.

Oh, they were well done, a class act. The photographer had known what he was working with and had done very little to distract from her natural beauty. But in the flesh, she was absolutely stunning. From the gentle waves of her deep auburn hair to the curves of her toned body and her lovely legs, she was quite a prize. Her eyes, under thick lashes, were hazel.

"When you failed to appear, Alexandra and I thought that there might have been an accident," Grendel prompted.

Sharon smiled in thanks. "Oh, I'm OK. The driver was totally lost, though. I'm really sorry you had to wait."

She doesn't get it, Grendel realized. He sighed and referred to the papers before him. "I see you've never had any formal training," he began. And stopped when she frowned. "Yes?"

"Yes, I did," she said, leaning over the desk. "With Jerry! And Frank. I know I put that in there. Do you need another copy?"

"No. Your experiences with your lovers don't count, Ms. Brosa. When we refer to formal training, we are talking about a more intense and structured form of living. What you did with those two men was more of a negotiated fantasy relationship between partners who were on an equal footing." Grendel tapped the sheets of paper. "These kinds

of experiences are fun, but they aren't what the Marketplace is about. And if you had approached us in the proper way, I wouldn't have to explain that to you."

"Well, I couldn't get anyone to train me the way you need," Sharon protested, trying to keep the whine out of her voice. "I asked everyone I knew, and they never even heard of you! You wouldn't believe what I had to do to just get your names!" She sat back, trying to regain her composure. Be humble, she said to herself. Be like a slave. "All my life, I've wanted this, master. All my life. But I keep running into guys who, like, do it on the weekends, you know? I want to live it. Like in the books." She nodded toward the papers. "Like I said in the letter."

"So you stole information about this house from the office of a friend of ours," Grendel noted.

Sharon visibly trembled. Did he really know that? Or was he bluffing? This wasn't going the way she planned. What was going to happen now? Was all this for nothing?

He leaned back in the chair and watched her. She would fetch a high price if she were gagged, he thought. But the minute someone got her home, her flaws would become as apparent as her physical appeal. He remained impassive as she bowed her head (very prettily) and said, softly, "Yes, master."

"I'm not your master, Ms. Brosa. And frankly, your behavior isn't impressing me. I train people to act like that. It's nothing new to me. If you wanted to impress, you might have tried it with genuine contrition for your inexcusable tardiness, and swift admission of your felonious behavior." He suppressed the incredible desire to grin at his own pomposity, but it had the desired effect. She withered a little and then became angry.

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Elliot?" she shot back. "You want me to say I'm sorry? It wasn't my fault, but OK, I'm sorry. You want me to say that I took the stuff about you and this place from what's her name's house? OK, I did. But that was the only way I was gonna get in. All the people who know about you keep you a secret. Like you're the president, or something."

"There's a reason for that. When someone comes to us untrained

and unprepared, it wastes time. For us and them.” Grendel pointed at the papers and photos. “This is a good attempt at faking our file format. And I have to admit that you would make a nice decoration in someone’s hallway. But you have no idea what you might be getting into.”

“I know exactly what I want to get into, Mr. Elliot.” She picked up her pocketbook and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. She smoothed it out and placed it on his desk. “OK, so I need some real training, maybe. But I can be the best thing that ever happened to you. Everyone who ever knew me says I was the best pleasure slave they ever saw. Take a look at that and tell me I don’t know what I’m doing!”

Grendel picked the paper up and read it through. It was an excerpt from a contract, written in proper Marketplace jargon. He read it through once and then scanned it again. Then, he placed it carefully on the stack of papers in front of him.

“Who wrote this?”

Sharon looked down. “I can’t tell you that.”

“Well, at least you didn’t try to claim that you did. This interview is over. Chris will call you a cab.”

“What?” Sharon’s voice scaled up in genuine surprise and anger. “You can’t... I mean, why?”

He closed the folder with the contract inside of it. “Because how could I ever expect you to be trainable if you are incapable of telling a simple truth to the people you might be training under? Ms. Brosa, this isn’t a game. But never mind. I’m sure you’ll be happy with someone outside the Marketplace. You might even find a situation like the one outlined in this contract. But for now, investigating who exactly wrote this document has to take priority.”

Sharon panicked. “No, wait! Wait. I didn’t know it was so important to you. It’s just, I promised I wouldn’t tell anyone about him, OK? But I won’t let it screw up my chances to get in here. Could you promise that you won’t tell him I told you?”

Grendel hit the intercom. “Chris, please call a cab and come and get Ms. Brosa.”

“It was Joe, Joe Manelli, OK? From Forest Hills! I got his number!”

Wimp, Grendel thought, suppressing a smile.

“Aren’t you going to tell him to cancel the cab?” Sharon de-

manded.

“I never said that I would, Ms. Brosa.” He leaned back, still impassive.

“But you have to! I mean, please, *please*, master, I mean, Mr. Elliott, this is the most important thing I ever did in my entire life! I told you about Joe, didn’t I? And read those papers, they’re true, every word! I’d give up everything for a chance, OK?”

“That’s what the contract says,” Grendel reminded her. “Do you understand what it means?”

“Yeah! I get sold to a place and a guy like it says in the contract, and I’m a pleasure slave. For at least two years, but preferably five.”

“That’s what it says about your life. But do you understand about the fee?”

Sharon nodded. “You get it all.”

Grendel nodded. “And you understand that this isn’t the usual way we do things.”

“Yeah. It’s like that book about the resort hotel, isn’t it? Usually the slaves get the money after the contract is over.”

A long sigh. “You really got all your information about us from these fantasy books, didn’t you? My God, I don’t know if they do ten times more harm than good.” He shook his head and pulled the contract excerpt out to read it again.

She just gazed at him, a confused look on her face. “I just wanna get trained and sold,” she finally said. “And I know I can be worth a lot. Come on, Mr. Elliott, look at me! Guys fight over me.”

“We will have to alter your gender preference in the contract,” Grendel noted. “Slaves out of this house may not negotiate the sexual preference or gender of their future owners; it’s a house rule. If it’s that important to you, come back in six months with some real training and I’ll refer you to a trainer who will accept that limitation with the rest of them.”

She shook her head. “As long as they’re single, I don’t care. I’ve had my share of women, too. I can do it.”

Grendel considered. She was hot. Very attractive, with an edge of feral rut around her, and that always went over well. She was young enough so that the lack of real records wouldn’t hurt her that much.

And the way the contract was written wasn't so difficult that they'd have trouble placing her. It was just her attitude! Was she submissive at all, underneath her play-acting? He wanted Alex's opinion on this one.

"We'll accept you for one week of observation and testing," he declared. "After which, if you look promising, another four to six weeks of training. But under this agreement, if we feel you need more training, we may keep you as long as we like. And you understand that you will receive absolutely no part of whatever we arrange as a selling price for you."

She nodded, her eyes sharp with anticipation.

He leaned over, hit the intercom again. "Chris, please put Sharon with the others."

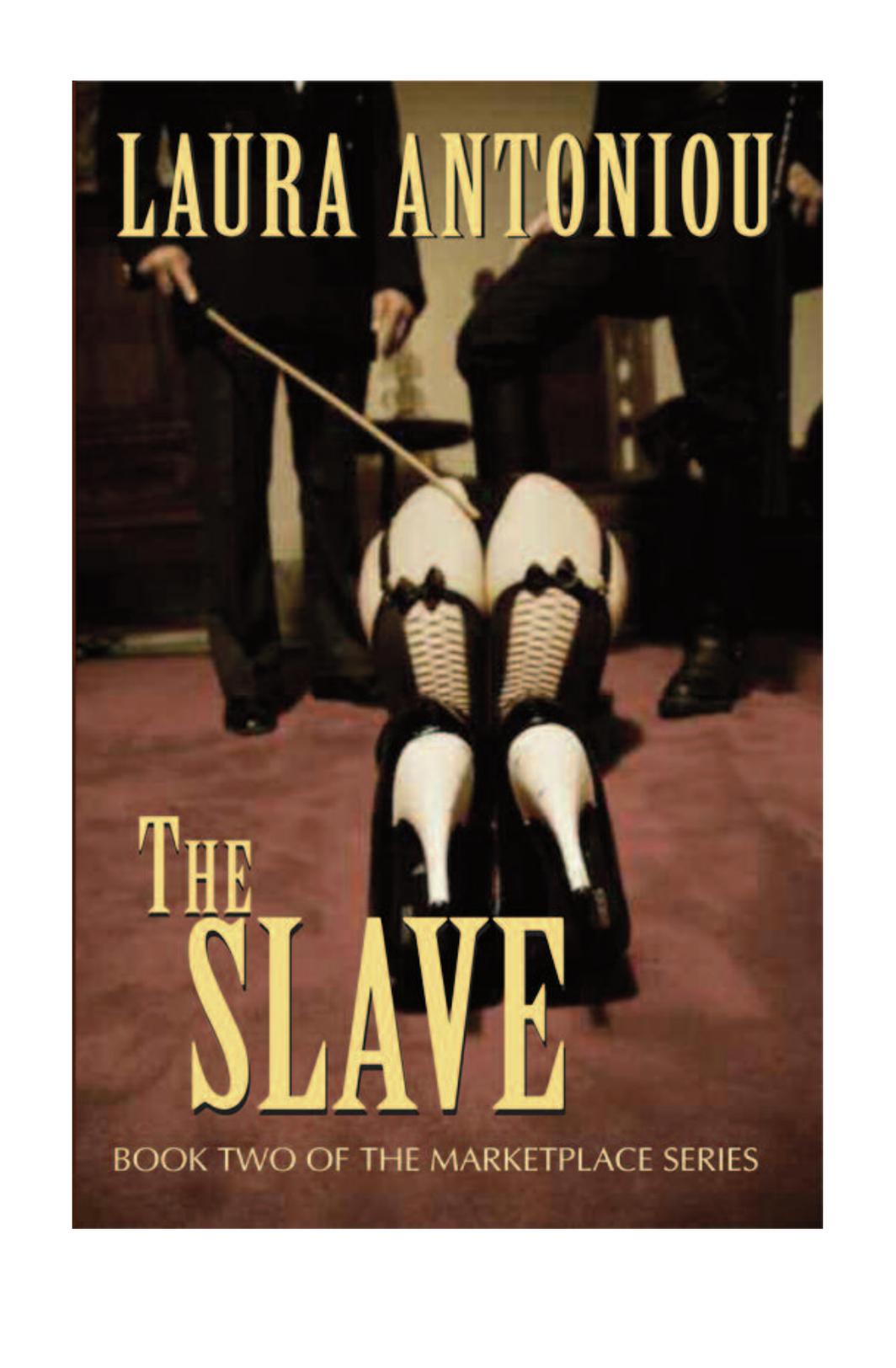
"What about the cab?" she asked, helpfully.

"Chris will take care of it," Grendel said, as the door opened. "You will find that Chris takes care of a lot of things here."

As they left, Grendel picked up the phone and punched in a long number. As he waited to be connected, he read the piece of contract that Sharon had given him, shaking his head. It was very neat. It was very good.

"Hello, this is Grendel Elliott, from New York. I just accepted an applicant with a contract drawn up for her by Joseph Manelli, from Forest Hills." He spelled the last name. "No, the writing is fine, in fact, it's constructed to give the maximum benefit to the house. But the merchandise is incredibly shoddy. I'm talking barely, barely acceptable, and even then, I'm taking a gamble on it. I think this is the third time I've heard that he's working with unsuitable clients, isn't it? Yes, I thought so. Well, I just wanted to let you know. Thank you."

The beauty queen princess and the Christopher Street clone, he thought as he put the phone down. Alex always gets the interesting ones.



LAURA ANTONIOU

THE  
SLAVE

BOOK TWO OF THE MARKETPLACE SERIES

# THE SLAVE

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BY

LAURA ANTONIOU



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The Marketplace

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# CHAPTER ONE

New York City, Autumn

The traffic in the streets below the hotel echoed upward, pushing through the window, which was cracked open for fresh air. The city was restless; the pulse of the weekend had reached its frenzy. The customized horn of a wedding limousine blared out the identity of the newlyweds that the dark-haired woman had passed in the lobby. The sound made her want to jump, but she held herself still with practiced tension.

The man sitting in the high-backed chair paid no attention to the tacky sound of the horn, or to her for that matter. His eyes were busy scanning the papers in front of him, turning them over in patient, careful movements that didn't betray the slightest interest in their contents.

The urge to speak, to cough, to shift her body into a more relaxed position, to pour a glass of water from the sweating pitcher on the room service tray, all hit Robin at once. She had been standing still since she handed the file to him; he didn't seem to notice. She pushed all the thoughts aside with an almost angry strength. *I will be patient*, she chanted inwardly. *I am patience*.

"Why don't you make yourself comfortable?" His voice was a rough tenor, a singer after a grueling concert, a student at four a.m. It was also loud; it broke the silence and Robin's efforts to be calm.

"Please," Robin said. Her own voice shook, almost imperceptibly. When the man looked up, she swallowed hard and continued, "I'm unsure of the proper courtesy to show you, sir."

He nodded. "Very nice. Why don't you sit down on the couch for now? It's already been a long night."

Robin nodded and sat, smoothing her skirt neatly down her lap. Sitting made it easier to relax into a more proper attitude. She took a long, softly casual look at her inquisitor.

He was older than she, but had the kind of face that refused to betray its years. His short, black hair was very thick, and showed a slight tendency to curl, but was trimmed back so severely that Robin knew he would get it cut again soon. A sparse mustache and the vaguest of five o'clock shadows gave him a scholarly look, or, as she remembered in the dim light of the bar last night, the look of a terrorist. He wore tinted glasses in heavy steel frames. Today, he was dressed in a crisply clean, long-sleeved shirt and a muted tie. His jacket was draped across the arm of the other chair in the sitting room.

There was no sign of the leather jacket he had been wearing last night.

He finished with the papers and stowed them neatly back into their folder. Then he sat in silence, until Robin began to imagine that she could hear the swishing sound of the second hand on her watch. The silence was as oppressive as any heavy hand she had ever felt. She wanted to bend to it. For a brief moment, to her horror, a flush of shame and thrill passed over her, as clear to her interviewer as the strident horns of the taxis below.

The corner of his mouth rose in a twitch of a smile.

"You're very good," he said, leaning over to retrieve his jacket. "Tell me what your instinct was telling you to do."

Robin's mouth went dry. She licked her lips and coughed a little to clear her throat. "I wanted to kneel," she whispered.

"I know that. But there's more." He pulled a cigarette box from one pocket and snapped it open.

"I wanted to make obeisance at your feet." Robin's voice was still at a whisper. Her blush fairly glowed.

"Show me how you were trained to do that," the man said, leaning back into his chair.

Robin rose, quickly but without any jerky movements. In two steps, she was in front of him, but still outside of arm's reach. With grace, she knelt, lowering her body to the carpet, and then continued the movement seamlessly until her forehead brushed the fibers. She could smell the chemical scent of the cleaners. It struggled with the richer scent of the well worn, polished leather boots now within her reach. She held perfectly still.

"You may," came the voice from above. The man sounded faint, his tones overrun by the pounding in Robin's ears. She raised her head a few inches and placed one careful, soft kiss on each boot, firm enough to let him feel her presence, light enough not to leave the

faintest smudge of her lips. Then, she retreated back and lowered her head again.

“Very nice,” the man repeated. “Please seat yourself again.”

She rose up to her knees and looked at him, her eyes meeting his. “Thank you.”

“Oh, you’re quite welcome.” As she sat down again, he lit a cigarette. “Do you smoke?”

“No, sir.”

“That’s good. You would have to quit, you know.”

Robin leaned forward, her heart pounding. “Does that mean that you’re accepting me?”

“Yes. Your records are acceptable, your spotter is well known to me, and your behavior is impeccable. I just wanted you to realize that when you enter the Marketplace, you are not permitted to retain any addictions.” He smiled suddenly. “Except of course, for the obvious one.”

She smiled back despite the echoes of panic which resounded in her. “The addiction to submission?”

“To being owned, yes. That’s a prerequisite. We weren’t formally introduced last night. I am Chris Parker.”

“Thank you,” Robin said politely. “I’m sure you know all about me now.”

“What, this?” He waved his hand over the folder. “No, that doesn’t tell me much about you. It tells me how you’ve experienced some minor forms of service, which is helpful, but it couldn’t possibly tell me anything about how genuine your devotion is, or how serious you are about a potential commitment, or how profound your need for this kind of life is. Those things I can only learn from you. I will need to test you some more, and to train you in the specific areas of behavior and service that I require any client of mine to possess before I present them for sale.”

Client! Robin swallowed hard. *When they called me a slave, I wasn’t, and now that I am, they don’t call me one.* She resisted the urge to giggle, but her shoulders relaxed just a little bit more.

“I would love to have the opportunity to show you my dedication.” Robin’s eyes danced. “These are things I’ve been thinking about for years. No, not only thinking about, but dreaming about. Trying to do, in some way or another. This is something I’ve wanted all my life.”

“All your life? That’s impressive. Tell me.” Chris flicked ashes into the glass ashtray beside him.

“Everything? From the beginning?”

“That’s the traditional place to start a story.”

Robin frowned for a moment, considering. *Where do I begin, she wondered. What is the real beginning here? When I was little? Those games we used to play? Or when I first realized what power the fantasies had? Or with Maria? Or Troy?*

“I’m sorry,” she said softly, suddenly aware of time moving around her. Parker hadn’t moved an inch, except to bring the cigarette up and down again.

“I’m so excited... so, relieved, I guess. But scared, too. This is turning out to be harder than I thought.”

“I won’t tell you to relax,” Chris said with a slight smile. “But you shouldn’t be trying to impress me with your story. I’m much more interested in the things you remember as important.”

“But I remember everything,” Robin laughed. “And I’m not sure what’s important. I mean... it all was. And... and... nothing was.” She took a deep breath, trying to remain calm. “I’m sorry. Now that I have a real chance, suddenly I’m nervous.”

“Naturally. It’s all right to be nervous.” Chris ground the stub of his cigarette into the glass, twisting it down until the last sliver of smoke vanished. “Tell me about your first sexual experience as an adult, if that makes it simpler.”

Robin nodded gratefully. “That’s easy. But you’ll laugh.” When Chris remained silent, she blushed again and lowered her head. *Everything depends on this interview, she reminded herself. He’s accepted me for now, but I can still mess things up. I have to be perfect.*

“I was at college,” she began.

\* \* \* \*

“Greg? Do you have the... things?”

“Sure, baby, right in my pocket.” Greg Carneson, basketball player, drummer, and communications major, patted his hip pocket with a knowing chuckle. “I wasn’t going to forget. I mean, how could I? With you writin’ it down and everything. That was a nice letter, babe. No one ever wrote me nothin’ like that before.” He grinned and shifted his knapsack onto one shoulder. “I wish we had a nicer place to go, though.”

Robin laughed nervously. People passing them raised their heads to follow the sound and saw a really cute couple. Greg was tall, with raggedly cut blond hair and a tight T-shirt that displayed his team num-

ber. Robin always looked like she stepped out of a soap commercial, her face bright and slightly pointy, her burnt mahogany hair swinging free around her shoulders in soft curls. Neither one would ever be picked out as a beauty, but they were young and healthy and seemingly happy, and that made up for all their minor imperfections. They complemented each other, tall and slight, massive and elfin, fair and dark. Even their eyes—Greg’s an uncomplicated bright blue and Robin’s a deep amber-brown—were as different as possible.

“We’ll just have to make do,” Robin replied, eyeing her boyfriend’s pocket.

Oh no, was her real thought. *I don’t believe it. He just brought condoms, the idiot! What the hell did he think I was writing about?*

As she followed him to the parking lot, she tried to remember everything she had written about in that oh-so-hard-to-write letter. *I was as clear as I could get, she thought desperately. What do I have to do, scream it out? Serves me right for going out with a jock. She bit her lip, trying to figure out what to do. Damn it! I shouldn’t have to do all this! Doesn’t he get it?*

They had been dating for about two months. They had met in the gym, where they had been eyeing the same karate class. In the end, he didn’t have time to take it, but Robin enrolled. And since she was in the gym so much anyway, she came to watch him shoot baskets and drill with the coach. Soon, they were going for lunch together, and then, wham, they were dating.

And of course, everyone knows what eventually happens when you date someone. What Greg was absolutely oblivious to was the fact that Robin had never gotten to that “eventuality” before. Nor, apparently, after all of her careful hints and coaching, had he gotten around to understanding her more specific desires.

A terrible, nervous weight settled in her stomach. *Oh God, why am I doing this?* was the thought that rustled through her consciousness as she followed Greg silently to the car, smiled blankly when he sang along with a love song on the radio, and then nodded when he pulled into a parking space near the off campus frat house where his friend was going to let him borrow his bedroom.

In the end, all that Greg had brought was the condom in his pocket. No scarves, nothing to bind her or to blindfold her, or anything. And if he’d seen any of the movies she had suggested he rent and watch or bring with him, his style certainly didn’t show it.

Because the minute he closed the door behind him, he was all over her. His big hands encircled her body in a rush, and he kissed her hard

and long, the way they kissed after at least twenty minutes of warm-up stroking, nibbling and licking. As he slid his fingers up inside her sweater, his sole concession to romance was whispering “Oh, babe, I’ve wanted this forever.” Followed immediately by, “But we gotta get outta here by eight.”

Robin tried to think of what she was doing as submitting to his desires. She allowed him to lead her to the bed, passively standing and turning for him as he pulled her clothing open, up, down, off. She closed her eyes to his kisses, to his glee as he fingered and then gently kneaded her breasts, but it just didn’t work. Her disappointment over his lack of attention to her careful hints was so overwhelming, and his eagerness was so clean-cut and so achingly stereotypical!

His own body was as handsome as his face, a strong chest and beautiful long legs. And her first sight of an erect male organ wasn’t disappointing; it was about the size she had expected, and Greg was fresh from showering after practice. She reached out to touch it, and he fairly purred.

Her imagination switched on, and she heard his purr change to a growl. *“Do you like it, baby? Tell me you like it, slut. Tell me how much you want to kiss it. Get down there and make me believe that you love this cock. ‘Cause I’m gonna slam it right down your throat, baby, and you’re gonna take it. You’re gonna take this cock any way I give it to you, aren’t you?”*

Instead, in cold reality, he quickly guided her backwards to the bed and practically fell on top of her. He shifted to find a good position, trying not to lean an elbow on her, kissing her when he could, trying to keep at least one hand on her tits. And then, he remembered the rubber in his pocket and had to go back to get it, leaving her lying on her back, staring up at the ceiling. She looked over to one side of the room, where the frat boy had pinned up about a dozen overlapping beer posters, all featuring big-chested girls in skimpy bikinis, running around at the beach, their hands full of dark, sweaty bottles. She looked back down at her own body, with her small breasts and her short legs, and felt a sudden wave of inadequacy.

By the time Greg got back, fumbled around in his idea of foreplay for a little while longer and then heaved himself up to put the condom on, she found herself wishing that the experience would be as painful as some of her romance novels suggested it was; instead, it felt a little like a lightning-fast cramp.

She then tried to imagine that he was someone else. Her very distant and cold Italian teacher, for example. Or maybe, if she squeezed

her eyes really tight, she could believe that he was a pirate, a dashing serial villain, holding her maiden's body in his rough, churlish hands, breathing the scent of rum into her face, growling curses and taunts.

Yes, that was it! Or, maybe, when Greg was done, he would leap off of her, pull a pair of handcuffs out of his knapsack, and snap them on her while she lay back in an exhausted swoon. Then, with a leer, he would tell her that the price for the room was her body—and that all the boys in the house would be by to sample her charms. And they would come, first to ogle, and then to paw at her, and then to finally thrust their way into her body, again and again...Yes... yes....

But before she could work that fantasy into a proper orgasm, he was done, his body heavy and sweaty over hers, his breath as stale as any pirate's, a wet, limp bag of latex dripping across her thigh and onto the musty sheets.

And to make matters so much worse, he nuzzled her throat gently, whispered, "Oh, baby, baby, that was great! Was it good for you, too?"

\* \* \* \*

"And it took every ounce of strength I had not to laugh in his face," Robin remembered, her own face finally showing her amusement. "I went to bed that night thinking that if I couldn't get this all-American jock to tie me up and spank me, then I wasn't going to get anywhere. It was such a letdown!"

"It was better than what many people have," Chris commented. "You did choose him, and he did not harm you."

Robin blushed, but nodded. "I know. But I still feel like I really messed that up. I should have waited... I should have been clearer about what I needed. I mean, I wrote these little coy phrases in this love letter, about wanting to be swept away, and be made powerless—but I never really said, 'Hey, Greg, I want you to tie me up and pretend you're a pirate, OK?'" When Chris didn't respond right away, she leaned forward a little and continued. "If I had waited, I might have been able to give it to someone—maybe to Maria, or Troy. It should have been special. And I threw it away."

"Having mediocre sex is hardly something to mourn several years later," Chris said.

"It's just that now, with this chance to really live it, I feel like I made this incredible mistake. Wouldn't I be more... valuable if I were still a virgin?"

“Certainly not. An oddity, perhaps, but not especially valued. Experience is what counts, Robin, and you should know that. You’re allowing your fear and anxiety to distract you. You’re over-compensating. You don’t have to do that with me.”

“I’m sorry, sir.” She looked genuinely ashamed. “I’m really very nervous. I talk a lot when I get nervous.”

“I can see that. And you’ll speak a lot more before we’re through. Just keep in mind that I’m not interested in hearing excuses or explanations. By the end of our time together, I want to know all about your past experiences and dreams and how you felt about them.”

“All of them? My entire history?”

Chris Parker nodded. “As much as is relevant. I’ll let you know when you’re telling me something I don’t need to know.”

Robin glanced up and looked out the window. The late evening darkness was cool, enveloping. *I could still walk out now, she thought, catching the shadow of her reflection in the glass. I could just tell him that I must have been mistaken, insane, I have a job to do. I have to go to Italy in two months. I can leave and just go on like I was. I was happy. I am happy. I can find someone new.*

*But if I leave, I’ll never know. Never know if I was really ready for this. If I could have been....*

Robin turned back to Chris and lowered her head. “I’ve always been strong,” she said, her tone a sharp contrast to her words. “I did what I wanted to, and never let someone run my life. And I can’t remember a time when I didn’t want to be a slave.”

“Good,” Chris said smoothly. He rose, and with a speed she could have never suspected, pulled her up off the couch by the front of her jacket. She gasped at his strength, and rose to her toes, her eyes just barely above his. His fist was tight against her throat, his body terrifyingly close.

“Maybe I can make you into one, girl,” he said softly. “What do you have to say to that?”

Robin gasped in another breath. *Oh God! Oh, I want this! What do I say? What does he want me to say?*

“That was a question!” he barked. “When I ask you a question, I expect an immediate, honest reply!”

“Yes! I mean, thank you, sir, yes, I want you to make me a slave!” Robin gasped again, her heart pounding, and her throat pressing against Chris’s knuckles.

He let her go, and she fell back onto her heels, but kept herself erect. She tried to control the urge to pant; her breath returned in short gasps.

“Strip.”

Robin took her jacket off immediately and cursed her trembling fingers. She laid it on the couch and tried to be graceful as she unbuttoned the silk blouse. She was glad she had decided to wear the garter belt and stockings rig instead of pantyhose, but Chris wasn't even watching as she took her skirt off. He had gone into the adjoining bedroom without a word.

Robin looked down. He hadn't said strip to your lingerie. So she unclipped the expensive stockings and rolled them off, and then wiggled out of everything else. Almost as an afterthought, she unclipped the gold necklace and dropped it and her watch and earrings on top of her clothing.

Now she was as naked as the day she had entered this world. She drew herself up into a standing posture that seemed appropriate, with her hands behind her back, and then fretted about whether she should kneel. *He didn't tell me to*, she reminded herself.

He kept her waiting for what seemed to be a long time. She jumped a little when she heard his voice in the bedroom, but it was clear that he wasn't talking to her. She could hear pauses, and the sound of his light laughter. He had to be on the phone.

*I wonder who he called. Maybe he's calling someone else to come and... look at me. Or maybe to try me out. Oh, get a grip, Robin, you should be over those fantasies! It's just a phone call. He'll be back in a minute.* A slight chill built in her upper arms and spread across her shoulders, raising goosebumps. As the first shiver ran through her, a tightness settled around her nipples and drew them achingly up.

*This is only a test*, she thought, trying to calm herself. *I am being good. I am being patient.*

*I am patience.*

When Chris Parker returned, he paused to examine her. He had taken his tie off, and unfastened the top button of his shirt, but that was the only change. His eyes registered neither interest nor appreciation.

Well, of course not, Robin thought. *Think of where you met him, girl. This is one man who is just not interested in the temptations of the female form. And besides, if what they say is true, he's seen hundreds of slaves. Amazingly beautiful ones, men and women. So there's not much to be impressed by here.*

He walked around her slowly, not touching her. When his finger finally did land on her shoulder, she jerked a little more upright, and a faint shuddering ran down her arm. He didn't comment, but slowly ran that finger along her collarbone and down her spine.

She couldn't help it. She freed a slight moan, an exhalation of pleasure and tension.

"You're very sensitive," Chris said, drawing his hand away. "Turn to face me."

She did, and met his eyes. She instantly dropped her eyes down, but kept her shoulders back.

"That was careless. You should have kept your gaze up, or turned with your eyes already cast down." Casually, he pinched one nipple. The sudden sharpness stabbed into her and she gasped again, feeling a flush rise along the back of her neck, and a familiar thrumming between her legs.

"Do you have to return home tonight?"

The sudden return to real issues startled her, but she recovered quickly. "No, sir."

"Then you will stay here. Go and lock the door; put the Do Not Disturb sign out."

He sat down again, and watched as Robin approached the door, hesitated, and then maneuvered her way around it so anyone standing in the hallway could have only gotten a glimpse of her bare arm and shoulder. She slipped the chain lock into place, fighting back the familiar fear that came every time she played with someone new. Of course, this time it was far stronger than it ever had been before.

Hundreds of questions resounded within her in an instant. Would Chris Parker demand new or unfamiliar service from her? Would he be as brutal as his appearance last night had suggested? Was he really worthy of the trust she was about to give him? Would he want to have sex?

*Can I get out of it if it gets to be too much for me to handle?*

"Now come back here—" Chris pointed to a spot on the floor in front of him, "on your hands and knees. With grace."

"Yes, sir," she whispered, dropping to her knees. Concentrating on moving her limbs cleanly and guiding herself around the corner of the chair without awkwardness took over from the morass of concerns which had temporarily flooded her, and she relaxed in the performance of that simple task. She halted in front of him, and let his hands guide her to the precise position he desired.

His hands swept over her body in an examination. While she held herself still, her hands and knees pressed firmly in place against the carpet, he touched every part of her that could be reached. His hands circled her throat and then stroked it, trailed across her shoulders and down her arms, probing at the muscles in her upper arms, tapping the inside of her elbows. His fingers tickled her ribcage on the way to gently cupping her breasts, pressing them up against her body lightly, then letting them fall.

Robin moaned, and dipped her head low.

Ignoring her, Chris placed one firm palm on her lower back while the other hand stroked and probed her midsection and her belly. A tap from that hand and she pushed her knees further apart, and then still further, so that one hand could comfortably reach between her thighs to explore the tenderness of her pussy. She had shaved only that morning; it was a habit left from her time with Troy. But Chris gave no indication as to whether he approved or disapproved. He did cup her entire sexual delta in one hand and compress his fingers around it until she moaned again. And when one finger slipped along the edges of her lips, she gasped, and lifted her ass just a little bit more, her face flooding in shame.

“Ah, hungry little cunt...” Chris whispered. But he left off teasing her in that fashion and continued his examination, cupping her round buttocks, squeezing her thighs and running his fingers across the bottoms of her feet.

She felt his hands suddenly leave her, and the creaking of the chair as he leaned back into it. Her entire body felt primed for attention. Every inch ached for another touch; her skin felt like it was alive with electricity. And this just from being so lightly handled! She drew in one long breath and said, “Thank you, sir!”

“I was wondering where your manners had gone,” Chris replied. “There are much harsher ways I could have conducted that examination.”

Robin cringed. “Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir.”

“Just for comparison’s sake, then. Up, girl!” He snapped his fingers, and Robin drew her body up, coming off of her arms. But before she could complete her turn to face him, he grasped a hand full of her hair and dragged her toward him, throwing her off balance, sending her crashing into his knee.

“Keep yourself up, you clumsy idiot,” Chris snapped, pushing and pulling her into place. She winced and he jerked hard on the fistful of

hair he still held. With his free hand, he cuffed her lightly across the mouth, and she gasped in the shock of impact. No one had ever done that to her before.

“And don’t let me see such exaggerated reactions, either. I know what you can take, girl.” He cupped her chin and forced her mouth open. “That’s it, show me what your teeth look like!”

Humiliated to her core, Robin tried to allow her body to follow his manipulations, but it was hard, because he moved quickly this time, never allowing her to fully relax. He twisted her head one way and then the other, and then dropped the hand from her face and slapped her heavily across her left breast. Before she even had enough time to gasp, he slapped her right breast and grasped the nipple between his fingers, pressing tightly.

Robin bit her lip to keep from moaning, and the heat from the slaps seemed to rise through her chest and into her face. Her breaths came in short gasps, punctuated each time he compressed that captive nipple, and when she whimpered at the pain, he switched and took up the other one and did the same thing. His hand went back and forth between her nipples, twisting and pinching them, while he still maintained a tight grip on her hair, bending her backward.

“Do you like this?” he asked suddenly, pulling her head forward so she could look at him. “I asked you a question, girl!”

“Yes! Yes, sir, I do!” Robin managed to get the words out all in a rush.

“Then you should be thanking me.” He jerked her head back again and slapped her breasts, harder this time, and as he savagely twisted one nipple and pulled it up and away from her body, she wailed and threw her hands behind her body to keep them still. Dimly, through the haze of intoxicating pleasure and pain, she heard her own voice offering thanks, again and again, until Chris pulled her back forward and touched her lips with his fingers. She panted, her chest rising and falling heavily, her nipples burning and itching with pain.

“You’d do better if you simply remembered to offer your gratitude on a consistent basis, rather than waiting for commands or invitations,” he said calmly. He released her hair, and she wavered a little, catching her balance, but managed to press her lips against his hand, lightly.

“Thank you, sir,” she breathed. “For the lesson.”

“It’s not over yet.” He pushed her back, and when she fell onto her arms, he nodded. “That’s it. Now raise your hips. Present that hungry

cunt to me, girl, lift it high. And don't you dare fall until I give permission."

Robin followed his instructions, so that she was still resting on her calves, her back curved like a bow. Her legs were still wide apart, and this position opened her pussy lips before Chris, giving him a perfect view of the wetness his treatment had drawn from her.

He leaned down and opened her, carefully, keeping his eyes on hers. When she looked away, unable to bear his gaze, he thrust two fingers inside of her, slipping through her folds like a hand sliding through thick layers of glossy silk. Robin opened for him easily; she was hot and soaked with her own excitement, and her entire body shook with hunger and ecstasy.

In the same quick motion, he withdrew the fingers and snapped a lightning fast slap against her swollen cunt lips, and then penetrated her again. He repeated the motions again and again, pushing into her and then slipping out to deliver another stinging blow.

Robin thought she would go insane with the pleasure and the agony! She lifted her hips in surrender and fell slightly back with each blow. Her nipples, still aching from their torment, felt as though they were still being crushed, so tight was their arousal. And with each invasion, her clit seemed to nearly explode with the pressure, only to feel the sharp sting of his fingers a moment later. Her hip movements began to get more exaggerated, rising to engulf his fingers, jerking back in reaction to their impact.

Her arms shuddered with the pain of the position, and she knew that she couldn't take much more of this without falling, but she bit her lip again and straightened them out, fighting for the strength to keep going. And when finally, she was trying to prepare the words that would let her tormentor know that she had reached her limit, he stopped, and slapped one thigh.

"Over! Hands and knees again!"

She turned, trembling. As her thighs met, she felt the amazing warmth and the flood of her own juices which covered her sex and her upper thighs. When she knelt again, and Chris pulled her legs apart, she whimpered.

"Oh, I'm not finished with you yet," Chris said, reaching under her body. He seized her aching sore and needy cunt in his right hand and let the left one rest against the curve of her ass. Without warning, he began to spank her, but not in the manner of her past lovers, who used this particular form of chastisement entirely for pleasure. No,

Chris's hand was heavy and punishing, and each time it fell, his fingers under her body accepted her thrust forward and hurt her in some way. At first, he would strike, and then pinch her lips, tugging her backward again. Then, he began to flick his fingers harshly across her engorged clit. He would go back to pinching after a while, and then spread her lips wide and press one finger up against the hood, until she wriggled with explosive agony.

And meanwhile, his hand on her ass cheeks gave rise to first a flush of heat, and then an insistent stinging pain, and then the awful, jarring pain that brought up red marks and left a lasting warmth.

Robin fell forward, onto her elbows, whimpering, inarticulate sounds of endurance and reaction mixing with every stimulus. And when the rhythm of the actions built up to a peak from which she could not escape, her hips thrust back and forth, her fingers gripped the carpet, and she gulped in breaths that couldn't sustain her until the next shock. The wave was coming, it was building up like pressure in a sealed bottle, and each new strike, each new twist, each torment drew her closer and closer!

And then Chris stopped.

"Wait there," he said as he drew his hands from her body.

Robin gasped, and it took all her strength to keep from collapsing face forward onto the floor. As Chris rose from the chair and walked behind her, the slight breeze caused by his passing swept between her legs, chilling the skin that was so covered with moisture. She moved slightly, and scraped her nipples against the carpet, and bit back a moan. Carefully, she pushed herself back up onto her arms, and stayed there, her head low, and waited.

*I don't believe he stopped, she thought, feeling tears in the corners of her eyes. I don't believe it! I am so ready... I could have come in an instant! I haven't been this ready this fast in ages. Oh God, he is good. She tried to ignore the throbbing between her legs, and around her nipples, and the glow of the beating on her ass. I will be good, she reminded herself. And when he is finished with me, I will get what I've wanted all my life.*

Dimly, she heard him speaking again, but not to her. It again took him a long time to get back, and she was amazed that in that time, she had not lost the edge of her passion. She was still as excited upon his return as she had been when he left.

"Come here," he said. Robin looked toward him. He was standing by the window, his foot resting on the edge of a low, narrow table positioned underneath it. She crawled to him, not sure what other way

might be permissible.

“Good. Now come up—” He guided her with a hand in her hair again, and pointed at his boot. “I want you to straddle that. Yes, get your cunt over it, nice and comfortable. Put your legs on either side of the table, and wrap your arms around my leg.”

Robin did as he instructed, and the feel of the polished leather between her legs sent a shudder throughout her body. She gladly wrapped her arms around him, feeling the warmth and strength of him, the smooth fabric of his pants.

“That’s it. You know what to do now, girl. I want to see you get off. So move your body, hump my leg, just like the little hungry pet you are. I want to feel you fucking yourself on my boot, bringing yourself off just like a bad dog in front of company. And you’re going to do it quickly, girl. You have three minutes.” He gripped her hair and showed her that he was looking at his watch. “Begin.”

Robin couldn’t think; she didn’t dare think. Every word he said, the images he invoked, the incredible humiliation of it all was too overwhelming to believe. But the need within her was also overwhelming, and the need to obey, to do as she was told, was also incomprehensibly strong. Slowly, she shifted her position, trying to figure out how to do it. The first time her weight settled back onto his boot, the leather pressing against her, opening her up, she moaned at the intense surge of joy that raced through her. The position was odd, and the command heavy, but she moved her hips and body, and grasped his leg and whined, and soon she had built up a rhythm that would satisfy.

“Ah, such a good girl,” Chris murmured encouragingly. “Such a good little pooch. Come on, hump it out; let me see how much you need it, you’re just like an animal in heat, you need to fuck it out.”

“Oh, oh, nooo!” Robin whimpered, clutching him even tighter.

“Yes, yes, that’s it. Do it. You may come at any time, girl, but if you don’t before the time is up, it may be a long time before I permit it this opportunity again.”

“Please! Yes! Yes! Ungh! Oh God!” Robin writhed against the leg and against the boot, feeling the leather grow slippery underneath her, and feeling the wetness of tears against the cloth she was leaning into, and then the rush hit her as fast as lightning. Her entire body, aching, hot and tight, drew tightly against Chris’s leg and her cunt ground into the top of his boot and she seemed to explode! Her eyes tightly shut, she still saw bright bolts of light, her hands gripped compulsively, her toes dug into the carpet, scraping back, pushing her for-

ward. She panted, and thrust herself forward again, only slower, and felt the shudders rise into pleasure again, only this time fainter, and as she drew back, she felt Chris's hand lightly stroking her head.

This time, she let the tears come and knew they were there, and she sobbed and gulped air as he gentled her down, putting her back onto the floor. When he lowered his leg, and nudged her with the boot that was now covered with her own essence, she didn't hesitate, but raised her head up and began to wash it over with her tongue. She didn't stop until she covered every inch, and her tears added a different taste to the leather where they fell.

He took it away when he was satisfied, and she felt something light fall across her shoulders.

"There is money on the table by the door. Give it to the housekeeper when she comes, and then lock up again and come into the bedroom."

As he walked away, Robin sat up, still a little dizzy. The object across her shoulders was a shirt—the one Chris had been wearing. She pulled it on just in time to hear the gentle knock on the door, and she followed his instructions, giving the five dollar bill to the woman in return for the blankets she bore.

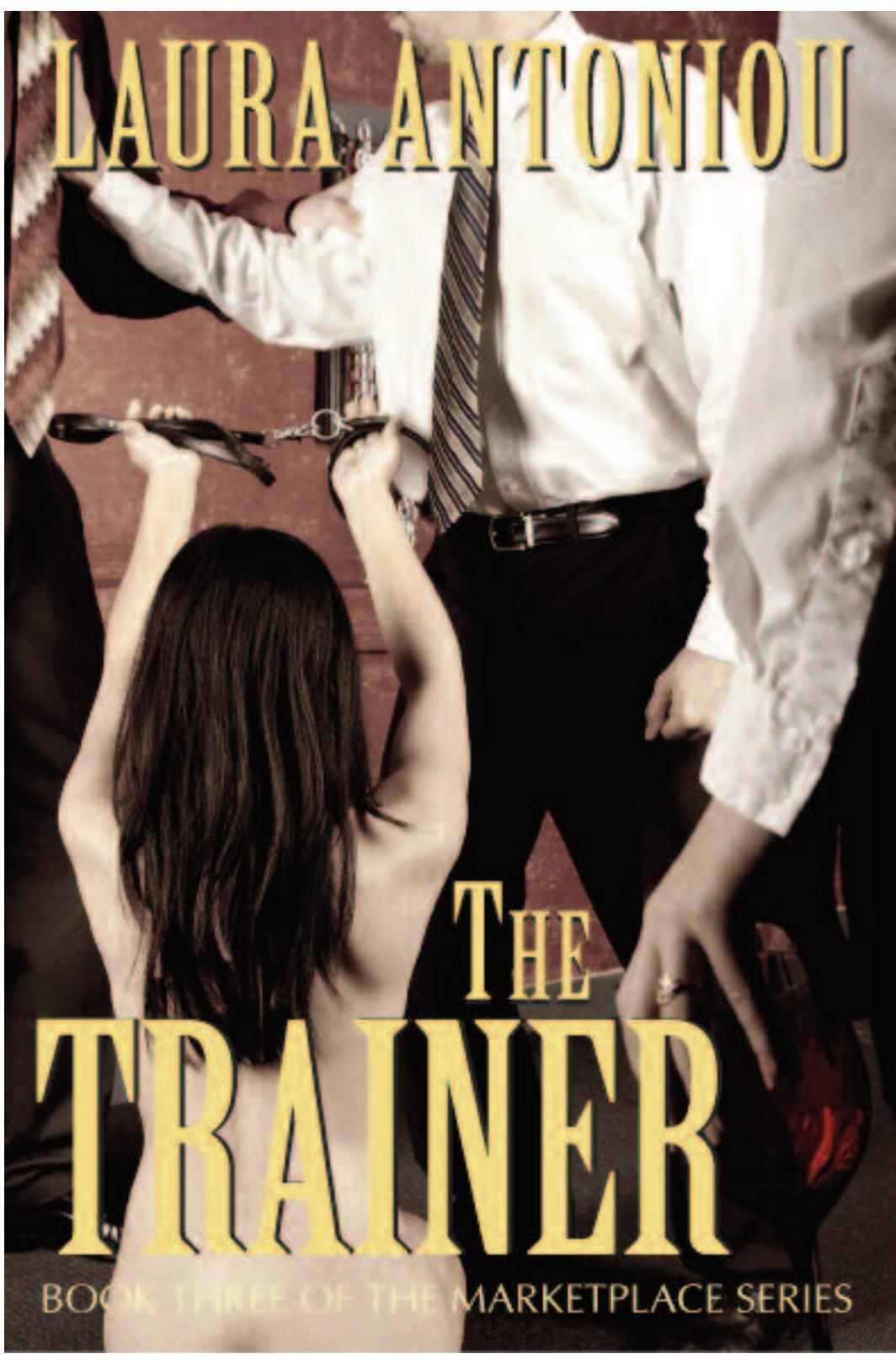
Chris, his muscular shoulders now more evident in the white T-shirt that was tucked into his pants, pointed at the floor at the foot of the king-size bed. Robin nodded, and, feeling more than a little bit disappointed, laid the blankets out on the floor. *I should have expected this*, she thought, folding them into a semblance of a bed. *It's in all the books, isn't it? I've dreamed about it, haven't I?* But somehow, the cold reality of a hard floor next to a wide, soft bed with plump pillows and the warm body of a man who had just given her a magnificent orgasm was just too jarring. She trembled slightly, trying to form the words in her mind, trying to decide whether begging for the privilege of sleeping next to him would be presumptuous, and then just allowed the thoughts to subside. She would not—could not!—tempt fate. When Chris came up behind her, she knelt absolutely still.

"Do not remove this during the night," he said, slipping a soft blindfold over her eyes. "If you must rise to answer a call of nature, you will manage to find your way without removing it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir. Please—I'm sorry, sir, I should have thanked you. After...I mean, thank you, sir."

“Yes, you should have. But I’ll make an allowance this one time, because of unfamiliarity. Go to sleep. I will tell you when to remove the blindfold.”

He guided her down into her cocoon of scratchy wool. She pulled the blankets around her and—despite the strangeness of the place and the circumstances—fell at once into a deep, deep sleep.



LAURA ANTONIOU

THE  
TRAINER

BOOK THREE OF THE MARKETPLACE SERIES

# THE TRAINER

The Marketplace Series

The Marketplace

The Slave

The Trainer

The Academy

The Reunion

The Inheritor (forthcoming)

# THE TRAINER

BY

LAURA ANTONIOU



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For Kate, Mike, Sky, Billy, Jack and the many who inspired,  
educated and provoked me over the years.

# INTRODUCTION

In the hierarchy of positions within the Marketplace, there is no role as vital as that of the responsible trainer.

The extraordinary trainer will at once be a pedagogue, a parent, an exacting employer, a model employee, and a drill sergeant. The skills needed to even approach a professional level of ability are rare.

We have found that there are certain types of individuals uniquely suited to the vocation, and may in fact feel a calling to it. Our challenge is in how to take that inspiration, that drive, and hone it to razor sharpness, in effect training the trainer, so that the results of their work will improve the stock of clientele.

By reading this document, you are being admitted to this circle. Do not take your training lightly; your success here will reflect on your professional life for the rest of your career with the Marketplace.

Be honest, and true. Never forget that you are the linchpin upon which the entire Marketplace swings; from bad trainers comes bad merchandise, which creates a chain of corruption and disruption which may influence the Market for years to come. Be ruthless in your drive for the unachievable, patient in your need for recognition, and loyal to the school in which you were taught.

And above all, seek personal control in all things. Your actions, emotions and very thoughts will be marking the merchandise whether you will it or not. You must be more disciplined than your clients, controlling anger, doubt, lust, humor, frustration, and love.

You will love them, probably all of them. That is part of your talent, and should be expected and cultivated.

But there is no figure more tragic than a trainer who falls in love with a client.

# CHAPTER ONE

*Brooklyn, New York January*

It was nearing the end of another mild winter. The skies were rippled gray silk, streaks of sunlight shining through only in the middle of the day, peeking out and then rushing to set again. No snow, and very little frost, but that particular kind of city climate that settles over the coast for a season and lifts so gradually that the spring seems to arrive almost by surprise.

The row of brownstones was lit with the scattered bands of light from street lamps shining through twisted, barren tree branches, a spooky but oddly pleasant effect. Michael stepped out of the cab and shivered slightly. He had checked his letter of instructions in the car as they drove down the Grand Central Parkway from the airport that bore his name. He had smiled when he received the ticket just a few weeks ago. Now, as he took a deep breath and checked the address again, his smile broadened.

He heard the cab driver hauling bags out of the trunk, but walked up the five steps to the glass-paneled front door and rang the bell. It took a few moments for him to hear responding footsteps inside, and he was half turning to the cabby to tell him to bring the bags closer to the door when the sound of a lock being undone interrupted him. He took a quick glance and snapped his fingers.

“Hey, took you long enough,” he said. “I’m LaGuardia, Anderson is expecting me.” Michael waved absently over one shoulder to indicate the tasks which awaited on the pavement and pushed past the undersized fellow who had opened the door.

At last! Stepping through a small hallway, he turned to the left and found a perfect urban oasis, a warm, comfortable sitting room with a

large bay window and a heavy fireplace, now dark. Muted colors met his gaze, dark woods and shadowed burgundy, indirect light from other rooms flowing across an ancient, ornate carpet. Soft music was playing in the background—Vivaldi, also perfect—and the wide doorway through the sitting room led to a formal dining room. Very classy. Just like he imagined.

Like magic, as soon as he was in the room, another slave appeared; this one a charming little bundle, her russet hair drawn up into a bun, dressed in a formal maid's uniform with a pristine apron tied around her. She was round and plump, with heavy breasts and a rosy cheeked face; definitely not what he was used to, although she did have a beautiful smile. She curtsied at once, a very nice one indeed, understated yet satisfyingly obvious at the same time. He recalled that the twit on door duty didn't make a similar gesture, and reminded himself to make sure that Anderson found out.

"I'm Michael LaGuardia, is Ms. Anderson available?"

"Yes, Mr. LaGuardia, I'll fetch her at once. May I take your coat?" She was poised on the balls of her feet, ready to approach him or take off to fetch her mistress, yet displaying no hint of expectation. Her voice showed strong traces of a British accent. Michael sighed in pleasure; this was going to be fantastic! He started to shrug the raincoat off, and she caught it from his shoulders with a touch so light he thought it had grown wings and lifted of its own accord.

She swept it away, and left the room quietly, and Michael stretched out and looked around. From the door, he could hear the cabby thanking the doorman; at least he knew how to tip. Michael's luggage was poking inside the sitting room entranceway now, and as the doorman stepped back to close the door, Michael raised his voice.

"You can take those things to my room." There was no response, and Michael started to move forward to give the guy a good smack. Establish dominance and authority early, that was the key! But he stopped himself, and held still. Maybe the doorman was under instructions not to speak? It would probably be inappropriate to start off his training by hitting a slave who didn't really deserve it. Just as he decided to ignore him, the doorman stepped into view and casually leaned against

the inside of the entranceway. He examined Michael with a look of studious curiosity.

This was not silence. It was sheer insolence.

“I don’t know if you understood who I am,” Michael said, rubbing his right knuckles. “I’m the new trainer here.”

“Are you?” He adjusted the steel-rimmed glasses on his nose and examined Michael again. “Oh, I beg your pardon, sir.” And he straightened his posture a little bit, smoothing down the suit jacket and tightening the tie.

Oh, he’s itching for a beating, Michael thought, controlling a grin. Man, he’s aching to be taken down.

“I’m not that easy to provoke—boy,” Michael stated firmly. No sense in letting the squirt get an upper hand, no way.

“That’s quite a relief, sir. Since that is the case, you may carry your own damn bags upstairs.” One small hand pointed to the staircase, and the man actually started to walk into the room, intending to pass Michael on his right.

There was a second or three when Michael wondered if he had heard right—surely no one would speak to him that way in Anderson’s house! But as his hand shot up instinctively, Michael got the second major surprise of his evening. The smaller man moved quickly—even as Michael’s arm swung to deliver a classic disciplinary slap, he intercepted it. Michael felt his wrist hitting what seemed to be a steel post, followed by the disorienting sensation of being pushed back a step.

His mouth dropped open in astonishment even as he lost his balance and fell backward, awkwardly, into a large wingbacked chair.

“So, this is our new pupil,” came a woman’s voice from the direction of the dining room.

Michael turned his head and saw the mistress of the house and staggered to his feet. Blood rushed to and then from his face. He opened his mouth once to catch a breath and tried to gather himself. “Anderson—I’m—”

“Michael LaGuardia, I know. What I don’t know is why you would possibly have the temerity to strike someone in my house without my permission.”

She was tall, as oddly tall as her doorman was short. She was no longer a young woman, silver streaks running through her almost waist-length black hair, all bound behind her at the nape of her long neck. Standing in the doorway, she seemed all angles and lines, a hard, horsy woman who would have looked natural in the dusty plains of Kansas or in the hills of Arizona. Her voice was low and hoarse, her rhythm of words strong and direct, with the slightest of twangs.

She was everything he had imagined she was—except maybe a little bit older. Well, a lot older. She looked at least fifty-five. He swallowed and gave her a terse acknowledging nod with what he judged to be the proper deference.

“I beg your pardon, Ms. Anderson. I thought your boy here was challenging me.”

“Really?” She turned slightly to look at the doorman, who was busy straightening the sleeve of his jacket. Michael didn’t catch any meaning in the looks they traded, and started to feel very, very wary.

“Well.” It was a statement, a verbal comma that came out as though she were summing up possible options of discourse. “This is not a very auspicious way to make an entrance, Mr. LaGuardia. Maybe I’d better make an introduction. Michael LaGuardia, trainer in training, please meet Mr. Chris Parker, my friend and house guest. And, in case you didn’t know, a trainer who’s been around the block a little longer than you. He definitely has seniority over you.”

Michael looked at the man facing him, really looked this time, and felt a sudden need to sit down again. What an absolutely stunning way to make an entrance indeed.

“Ah, Mr. Parker,” he searched for some kind of proper words to try to salvage this situation as best as he could. “I—I’ve made a terrible mistake. I’m so sorry if you took offense at what I did.”

One glance at the hard look in Parker’s eyes and the faint sound of a “tsk” coming from Anderson completed Michael’s sensations of social vertigo. What did I do wrong now? he thought miserably.

“Maybe I’d better go out and come in again,” he offered weakly.

“Only slaves get to do over mistakes in my house,” Anderson said firmly. “You’ll just have to work harder, that’s all. And just so you know,

no one raises a hand—or any other part of the body—to any one else in this house without permission from me. Is that understood?”

“Yes.”

“Then take your bags upstairs. Joan will show you the way. Parker and I are about to go over your records. After you freshen up, you may join us in my office.” With that, she turned and walked back through the doorway, and Parker followed her. The maid stood by his bags, waiting to show him upstairs. The slightest of drafts curled around his shoulders and he shivered way out of proportion to it. This was bad, very bad. He hadn’t counted on there being two trainers in residence. He hadn’t counted on there being other free people around, period. And he had never made such a spectacularly bad entrance in his entire life.

I’ll just have to get better, he swore, gathering himself. He turned to Joan and picked up his bags to follow her.



“Michael Xavier LaGuardia, born and raised in Los Angeles, California. BA in Communications from Berkeley, just twenty-six years old. Likely looking fellow, isn’t he?”

“He’s an arrogant, unobservant infant, straight out of kindergarten. How the hell did you get stuck with him?” Chris Parker was still brushing imaginary dust off of his jacket sleeve. He scowled and glanced at the folder on the table between them and pointed at another offending entry. “He’s only been training for two years! You barely spoke to me when I was a two-year man!”

Anderson nodded. Her eyes danced slightly, and she kept her smile in the crinkles around them, not in her tightly drawn lips. “You were different, bucko. I wanted to see where you’d go without me first. But now—have you seen the new crop of trainers in the past few years?”

“No, not especially. I tend to keep an eye on the older houses, and the formal apprentice relationships only. Why? Are all the new American trainers rude, ignorant twenty-somethings?”

The Trainer of Trainers sat down, her raven-black skirt fluttering down around her legs to settle around her like a silken lap robe. “No,

not all of 'em. But in the past five years, I've only seen two American novices with the touch. The sight. And of that pair, only one will make a career out of it, if he actually gets out of the training whole."

"Are you saying I'm part of a dying breed?" He did smile, a crooked twist of one corner of his mouth. He sat down as well, and dropped one hand down to the side of his chair, where a blonde woman was kneeling, carefully assembling papers into assorted folders, hearing yet not listening to their conversation. When his hand brushed her shoulder, she turned slightly to kiss the flesh behind his thumb, but continued to work.

"Ah, the joys of a cliché. No, I didn't say that, although you might be. But whether you are or not, I do owe the Marketplace their new trainers—and this Mikey was the best looking out of the list they offered me."

"They were right about that. He's pretty as he can be. Those eyes! A potential distraction." He ran his fingers through the hair of the slave beside him, felt the slight tremor when he touched the back of her neck, and then stopped trying to distract her as he focused his attention back on the trainer.

"Is he?" Anderson looked up, and her flinty eyes caught Chris's across the table. "I hadn't noticed."

"Oh, of course not."

They stared at each other, calm and serious for all of a moment and then laughed, the sounds similar in tone and pitch.

"I can leave if you like," Chris offered, after the moment passed. He looked out the window as if the waving tree branches were suddenly captivating. "I do have other places to go."

"You'll stay until you finish," Anderson said.

"As you wish."

On the floor, Tara hid a slight smile of her own.



Michael looked at himself in the mirror, and, as usual, liked what he saw. He ran his fingers through his hair, flipping it back so that the

seemingly stray locks fell in an artful arc over his forehead. His face was cleanshaven and evenly tan, although not quite as dark as he would have preferred. He took all that skin cancer stuff seriously; no sense in spoiling this face.

His Italian father boasted that the good looks came from his side of the family, and Michael knew that it was at least half true. He had some mighty good-looking uncles and cousins in the LaGuardia clan. But it was his Irish mother's ancestry that gave him the naturally fair skin, and those magically blue eyes, so haunting under a mop of black hair. They were the ice blue of sapphires, ringed with black, always the first thing people noticed about him. Once, he had tried to darken them with contacts, thinking he'd look more natural, but found that it only made him look more ordinary.

Ordinary was hardly what he wanted to be.

Unlike a lot of his friends, he did not work out—and he didn't have a beautifully hard, cut body. But he was trim and in good health nonetheless, one of those lucky men with a good body and good hair—for now. Time enough to lift and push and investigate Rogaine when he was older.

His suitcase was on a rack near the bed, his garment bag hung on the closet door. Joan had shown him the room, given him directions to the bathroom, and left him alone. He had expected that his bags would have been unpacked, at least.

What a weird system, he thought, pulling his collar straight. Why have slaves in the house and not use them? Using people is the natural talent of a master, his Uncle Niall said.

If it hadn't been for Uncle Niall, I wouldn't be here.

There were no slaves and masters in the LaGuardia household, unless you counted a dysfunctional aspect or two in one or another family grouping. Nothing but a second and third generation, mixed heritage but all-American, hard-working family, based on the West Coast. Michael had gone to college because it was what everyone he knew did, and had a relatively normal sex life for an American boy, full of experimentation and discovery and the freedom that good looks, a car, and an easygoing personality will give you.

The family was politically divided on several issues, but generally liberal in many things. The question of whether Uncle Niall was gay wasn't really discussed as much as it was an unstated fact which had to be accepted. Invitations to him always included "and guest," and occasionally he did show up with a usually younger and very good looking man as his companion. Once, Michael heard his mother saying to her sister in law, "At least Niall doesn't flaunt it, dressing in women's clothing and dancing naked in the streets. You'd never know he was...that way."

Michael didn't think about it much—he had his past experiences with boys and preferred girls, and if Uncle Niall didn't, it was hardly any of Michael's business, was it? He just treated Niall like everyone else.

So when Uncle Niall invited Michael up the coast to his place for a weekend, Michael accepted more out of obligation than interest in spending a weekend with a relative. He packed his swim trunks and sunscreen, expecting to spend most of the time on the beach.

It was a nice place; small but classy, with huge bay windows that had a view of the ocean, and a long winding path that led to the dunes out back. Uncle Niall was a screenwriter; he did a lot of work for sitcoms and some commercials and a few straight-to-video movies, all of which he thought were outrageously funny. All in all, he was a great guy to hang out with, funny and full of industry gossip. When Michael got there, he was swiftly introduced to Ethan, his uncle's "companion," and Jerry, the older man who Niall said "runs the house." But as soon as hands were shaken, Michael was in his swim gear and heading down to the beach.

It was a great afternoon—he splashed alone for a while and then stretched out in the sun, loving the illusion that this entire area was his alone. He wondered if Uncle Niall and Ethan ever came down here and swam naked together. Michael had doffed his Speedo a couple of times at clothing optional beaches. He liked the feeling of the water against his genitals, the way his balls felt, tight because of the cold yet sensuously teased by the motion of the waves and the current. He also liked the looks he got when he walked along the beach, his cock

swinging. He might not be some tremendous god of a bodybuilder, but hell, they were practically common in Los Angeles.

Just thinking about it made him pull the trunks off, that first caress of wind and sun enough to stir him tumescent. Yeah, that was better! He ran down to the surf and plunged in again, and laughed with the sheer exuberance of it. This was the life—out where no one could bother you, practically your own private beach—one day, he'd have this. How, he didn't know, not yet. But one day, somehow, he would.

He saw Ethan coming down the path just when he was ready to get back into the sun and dry off.

His first instinct was to blush, because man, to be caught skinny dipping by your uncle's boyfriend? How embarrassing. But there wasn't anything to do—the man was going to see Michael's abandoned trunks next to his sunscreen. Michael sighed and composed himself and began to make his way to shore. When he stepped free of the water, he shook his hair out and tried to act casual.

Ethan, whose apple-cheeked midwestern origins were betrayed by the slower, almost drawling way he had of speaking, was hardly casual. He gave Michael a long and measuring glance, and Michael found himself doing the same. Because Ethan was not in the jeans and sweater he'd been wearing at the door, but in a thong bikini, his cock a hard mass twisted to one side, clearly visible through the skimpy fabric. He had no hair on his chest or legs, like a competition swimmer, and his nipples were larger than any nipples Michael had ever seen on a man. And they were pierced, too—with heavy, silver-colored rings. Between his pierced nipples hung one of those little plastic cases that floated, someplace to put your change or Chapstick or car keys.

“Hi,” Michael said lamely.

“Hi, Mike. Your uncle thought you might like some company.” He flashed a friendly smile.

“Oh, yeah, sure.”

“I see you've already gotten comfortable,” Ethan continued, motioning to Michael's crotch. “Maybe I can help you out there.”

“Huh?” The sunlight was definitely getting to him.

“You look like you could use a little release, Mike. Would you like a blowjob?” This was said in as casual a way as if Ethan was inviting him back up to the house for lunch. Michael stood silently for a moment, and tried to ignore the urgings of his cock, which definitely did want a blowjob. He struggled not to bring his hands together in front of the anxious organ, and covered his embarrassment verbally instead.

“Jesus, man, you’re my uncle’s boyfriend!”

“Sort of,” Ethan admitted.

“Well, what is that, coming onto me? We’re practically related! What if Uncle Niall found out?” Michael bit his lip; he hadn’t wanted to ask that last question.

“Mike—he sent me here. It’s no big deal. If you don’t want to, that’s all right, I won’t be insulted. But it looks like you could use one—and I am good.”

Michael looked up the hill toward the house. It was too far to see, covered by dunes and shrubs. He glanced down at his obviously eager cock, and then across to the man he thought was his uncle’s lover. “Well—okay, sure.”

“Great!” With that, Ethan led him up the beach, to an area where the sand was soft and warm, and settled him down comfortably. Michael leaned back, still amazed at the offer, but willing to believe that it was real.

And it was real—every minute of it. Ethan was right, too, he was really good. Excellent, in fact. Better than anyone, girl or guy, that Michael had ever had, even that hooker he picked up on Santa Monica Boulevard one night. He just slurped Michael’s entire cock into his mouth and then settled down to work on it for a good long time.

This is heaven, Michael thought, throwing his head back. I’m never leaving.

He tried to hold on to his erection as long as possible, and Ethan helped by varying his speed and strength, and the motions of his head. But soon, the sun and the sand, the overall tightening of the skin on his body, and the wondrous, pulsating pressure on his cock made Michael’s head begin to spin. Without even knowing it, he grabbed

onto Ethan's hair and pulled him tighter into his own crotch, crying out when Ethan pulled back.

"Jesus! I'm ready to fucking explode!"

"I got you, Mike, I got you!" And suddenly, there was a cool touch on the head of Mike's cock, and then the reappearance of Ethan's sucking, swallowing mouth, only tighter this time, hotter, and Michael finally let it come, shooting so hard he couldn't even keep his head up. He arched his back and felt Ethan's lips smashing against his groin as he came, and groaned out loud.

"Oh man, oh man!" he said, when his cock stopped spurting and started that throbbing slide into softness. He felt Ethan's mouth gently surrounding his glans, licking, letting the cock fall slowly back against his thigh. Then he felt a condom being stripped off of him, and looked down.

"Shit, where did that come from?"

"My secret," grinned the other man. "I hope you didn't mind."

"Mind? I didn't even know it was there! Shit, that was fantastic!"

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," Ethan said. He wiped his mouth and scooped up a plastic wrapper from the sand, and then stood. "Dinner is at five, okay? You can stay here or come back and soak in the Jacuzzi, or whatever you want until then."

"Thanks—thanks, man."

"It was my pleasure to serve." And with that odd statement, Ethan walked away, heading back up to the house. Michael didn't know what to say to such a comment, so he didn't say anything. Besides, it was better to just lie back and relax in the afterglow of that fabulous blowjob. Man, gay guys are really good, he noted. I'd be gay, if I didn't like tits so much.

He let himself fall into a reverie of erotic images, and then, when he was feeling more awake, went off to find his trunks and went back to the house.

More surprises were in store for him that night.

"Did Ethan show you a good time on the beach?" was Uncle Niall's first question when Michael came downstairs for dinner. Michael had changed into pull-on pants and a T-shirt, and felt better

than he'd felt in weeks, relaxed and rested. The question stopped him in his tracks.

"It's okay, I know all about it," his uncle continued. "I sent him."

"Um. Yeah, that's what he said." Michael looked around. Ethan was nowhere in sight. "What can I say, Uncle Niall? He was great."

"Good. I thought you looked a little tense when you got here. Let's sit down and eat, I have some things to tell you." The older man waved at the table by the open doors that led to the deck. It was set for two.

"Isn't Ethan eating with us?" Michael took a seat.

"No, he eats with Jerry, in the kitchen. That's part of what I'm going to tell you about."

"Okay," Michael said. He glanced toward the kitchen, feeling suddenly aware that it wasn't that far to the little room from where he and his uncle were seated.

Uncle Niall dug into the grilled vegetables and sea scallops, serving Michael and then pouring wine for both of them. "Here's to the Marketplace," he said, raising his glass, "and to your introduction to it, nephew."

"The Marketplace?" Michael echoed, tapping his glass lightly against Niall's. "You mean the stock market?"

"No, boyo, a slave market. Ethan isn't my lover, and Jerry isn't my assistant or housekeeper. They're both my slaves; I bought them. Eat, and I'll explain everything."

Michael didn't remember eating that night or drinking, or even getting back to his room later on, after he and his uncle continued their rather one-sided conversation out on the deck. He remembered asking lots of questions, and his uncle's long, complicated responses. But it was almost too much to believe all at once. A world-wide network of voluntary slaves? Secret auctions of human property? Actual money changing hands, and contracts signed, with training locations and special schools and entire houses filled with people who could be traded or gambled away on a whim?

And his Uncle Niall—his own mother's little brother—was a part of it?

He didn't remember saying that he had to think about all of it, but

his uncle did usher him upstairs to the spare bedroom with gentle encouragement to do just that. Michael thought he was going to remain awake all night, but in due time he fell asleep, and when he awoke the next morning, Ethan was kneeling next to his bed, naked except for that little tube around his neck, swinging gently between the silver rings.

“Would you care for some more attention, sir?” he asked, his eyes bright. And as Michael turned back the sheets to reveal his morning erection, Ethan wordlessly moved his mouth over it and proved that yesterday’s afternoon delight was no unique circumstance.

I could really get used to this, Michael reflected.

And I have gotten used to it, he thought, pushing the hair out of his eyes again. Used to people being deferential, slaves being eager to please, my luggage being carried and unpacked. It actually feels weird having to carry my own stuff. It should be no big deal—but it is. Maybe she does that with all her trainees. Surprises them; puts them off balance. Everyone knew that doing that was an essential part of training—you broke down expectations first, and then built new ones. Everyone knew that, because it was one of the methods she approved of.

There’s nothing like an Anderson-trained slave. There were maybe ten trainers in her class in the whole world, and they could train only so many slaves at a time. But the trainers they taught were especially valued. Months—or even a year—with Anderson could guarantee him a prominent placement in a large household, or in a training facility. He knew that some trainers spent even more time with her—years even! But that wasn’t necessary for his purposes. Just enough time to say that he had studied with her would be fine, and anyone would welcome him as a partner. Or, he could just go freelance and open a house of his own, or travel from job to job for a while. If he was properly trained. If Anderson approved of him when he left.

Anderson, the mystery trainer who saw no one except by appointment, who attended no auctions or parties or sporting events, visited none of the ranches or resorts where people of the Marketplace gathered. Her rare appearances at the trainer-only gatherings were

spoken of like saintly visitations. Yet, her writings on the training of slaves and the responsibilities of owners were part of the canon of the field; her contracts and her method of structuring and ranking slaves were almost universally applied.

She had studied methods of teaching, indoctrination, and even brainwashing, and was rumored to have been an observer in military, medical, language, and penal instruction. Her writings certainly contained comparisons of every technique from toilet training in North America to captivity trauma training designed for the Mossad. And all of these methods were somehow entwined in her seemingly endless instructions about how to find, create, and maintain perfect servitors.

In a way, she was the ultimate master—for she taught not only slaves and trainers, but she taught the masters how to manage their slaves and trainers. Her structure of certifying owners for the North American markets was considered an international model for safety and security, and many of her former students spent their time flying all over the world to make sure that new owners would be ready for the valuable property they were about to take responsibility for. Hell, that wouldn't be such a bad way to make a living either!

Michael dropped his eyes from his reflection and gathered his dignity and confidence. It was time to make up for his embarrassing entrance into the world of the Trainer of Trainers. How on earth had he misread the man at the front door as a slave? When Anderson had introduced them formally, he looked into Chris Parker's eyes and what he saw there made him almost gasp out loud. Amusement, disdain and contempt, sure—but also a clear and challenging look that read “I can take you down right now, kid, just try me.” It was hostility threaded through with such confidence that Michael had, for one split second, been actually afraid of the man!

Impossible. And stupid. Michael put it down to jet lag and nervousness. Of course he was a little off balance the first time he entered the house of America's most famous trainer. It was only natural to make a little mistake somewhere. There was no reason for Parker to hold this against him, and certainly no reason to be afraid of the little man. He was only a guest, after all. Perhaps he would be gone soon.

If only he wasn't here at all! Michael allowed himself a moment of bitterness, and then buried it. He had work to do. Anderson's guests were none of his concern. He had to focus on her and his goals and make sure he handled this whole thing right this time. There was no other alternative for him.

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TALES OF THE MARKETPLACE

A NOVELOGY

BY LAURA ANTONIOU

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Dedicated to the 1999 Master/Slave conference in Atlanta, Georgia, because it was there I first read from the manuscript in progress and invited friends to join the party. And it has been my pleasure over the years to serve that particular community with my flights of fancy.

With deepest thanks to Karen Taylor, who read this page by page as my friend, lover, bride, and #1 fan. It's a cliché, but I truly could not do this without her. Really. I'd be working at Starbucks.

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Isn't it a pleasure when you can make practical use  
of the things you have studied?

Isn't it a pleasure to have an old friend visit from afar?

Isn't it a sure sign of a gentleman, that he does not take offense  
when others fail to recognize his ability?

Kung Fu-tzi, known as Koshi-sama, or Confucius

## CHAPTER ONE: WELCOME TO OKINAWA

The murmur of voices had that peculiar polyglot cadence of a mixture of languages. English dominated, as it always did, a combination of sheer numbers and the decibel level of its native speakers. But Japanese was a close second, and the lilting tones of French wove in and out like snatches of melodic static. The excitement level was high, matched by the energy of people in motion, going from one to another, hands and arms outstretched.

“Parker-san.” It was a strong voice, cutting through the din as neatly as though it had been pitched perfectly for one listener without seeming like a shout.

Chris Parker glanced up as the automatic shading in his glasses finally began to fade. He smiled and waited until the man who had called to him came closer, and then bowed low in greeting. His bow was met by one noticeably less deep, and they both smiled when they rose to look at each other.

Sakai Tetsuo hadn't changed much in the three years since they had last met in person. His hair was a dense mixture of gray and white, trimmed just a little longer than current Tokyo fashion, his blue suit impeccably tailored and pressed, his shoes hand-made and Italian. His tie was knotted tight to his throat, perfectly neat, matched by the shining peaks of his pocket square. He was only slightly taller than Chris Parker, and as they shook hands, they looked like a strange pair of brothers, small and compact and precise in every movement.

“You are looking excellent, my friend,” Tetsuo said warmly. “It has been too long! You must stay after the conference and come back to Tokyo and visit with me.”

“Oh, no, Sakai-san, I must look like something the cat dragged in. Spending a day on airplanes doesn't do much to improve one's disposition or appearance. Thank you very much, but you are too kind.” Chris ruefully ran a hand through his hair and shook his head. “I would love nothing more than to visit with you, and it might be possible.” He avoided the direct and rude negative that they both understood would have been improper, and Tetsuo nodded slightly in pride.

"You are always a welcome guest," he said simply. "Perhaps we could speak later, upon some insignificant items concerning mutual business?"

Chris hid his shock at Tetsuo's directness. To bring up business first was unknown of in this rigid instructor in all things Japanese. "I am at your service," Chris answered, this time in Japanese.

Tetsuo smiled again. "Excellent! In this too, you have improved," he said. "But perhaps we shall speak English, so that I may practice my own poor efforts?" They could continue this dance back and forth all night—as in fact, they had, on several occasions. The rhythm of Japanese conversation, especially concerning business, was soft, rolling, and required patience which few untutored Westerners could finesse. However, Tetsuo's English was excellent, a language he had begun to learn as a child and had honed with years in America. His business acumen was also honed in America, with a Harvard MBA. Chris's Japanese was of much more recent vintage and rudimentary at best. The areas of knowledge which he had studied both at college and during his first extended contact with Tetsuo would simply not be adequate to the subtle nuances of negotiation.

"I will be honored to see you at your convenience," Chris said, inclining his shoulders slightly. Tetsuo immediately reciprocated, and the two of them straightened at the sound of a delighted, low-pitched laugh.

"I could watch you all day, bobbing up and down like those strange toys in the backs of American cars," Ken Mandarin said, sliding up to them. Today, she was not in her usual Western cross-dressing drag, but in a stunning Japanese outfit. She whirled for their approval, indigo hakama trousers flaring out, the heavy jacket wrapped more tightly around her body than perhaps necessary or customary.

The two men bowed to her and she laughed again, dipping elegantly into an enormously exaggerated one. "All this up and down, up and down!" she exclaimed, tossing her head back. "One might get dizzy!"

"I see you've already been shopping," Chris said.

"What, this old thing?" Ken looked pleased, though, and she leaned forward to give him a peck on the cheek. "And look at you!" she exclaimed, backing up to arms length. "I like your new haircut! Very modern, oui?" She glanced lightly to her right. "Good to see you, Sakai."

"A delight to see you again," Tetsuo said, his voice equally light. But they both had acquired a slight edge. "I did not realize that your name also revealed an interest in a martial art."

"It's Ken-da, not ken-do," Ken answered. "And I wouldn't know

which end of that bamboo sword to hold, let alone how to beat my opponent to bits. But this—this is a fine outfit, no?” Her eyes became sharply drawn; no matter why she choose an outfit more suited for a dojo, she was clearly ready for some kind of battle. There was a reason why Ken did not often work in Asia, but preferred the West. Her battles with the various Marketplace establishments in the Far East were legendary, as were her father’s before he died; they had both shared a marked dislike of the Japanese block for their own reasons. Memories were long in the East, she would sometimes say with a shrug. No matter how carefully the Marketplace cultivated an air of neutrality, there were always political and historical differences between some people. Chris was grateful for the sight of a convenient excuse to move on.

“Michael!” Chris snapped. “Find out what room I’m in and don’t dawdle.”

“Yes, sir,” Michael said, struggling with the luggage and too obviously dismayed that he couldn’t join in the mingling. As slaves approached, he had to shake his head over and over again, until the message spread not to help him. He turned toward the registration room to the left of the main stairs and both Ken and Tetsuo relaxed somewhat at the distraction. Tetsuo was the first to excuse himself, omitting the usual reminder to schedule a meeting, and Ken kissed Chris again and gave him a hug.

“Is that the boy you told me about?” she said, appraising Michael’s body from behind, cocking her head as if she could see his hips and flanks through the hanging garment bag. Apparently the edge she had acquired was gone again as she switched her attention to something new. “Pretty! Lend him to me. I’ve brought the two—they haven’t had a toy in months!”

Chris chuckled at the thought of Ken’s rapacious matched set of personal servants and what twisted and exhausting use they could make of Michael. He nodded. “Done,” he said. “But there is a price.”

“Anything!” she replied extravagantly. Then, her eyes narrowed again and she adopted an arms akimbo stance that looked rather appropriate in her new outfit. “Oh, you mean a real price!” she said accusingly. She wagged her finger at him, making tsking sounds between her teeth. “You should know better, white boy. The proposal you’ve placed before the Academy is more complicated than it seems to be—I am still not quite comfortable with all the potential... ramifications.”

Chris shrugged. “I am sure we can find some grounds to agree upon,” he said. “But I was really thinking of asking you for a proper introduction to your friend from Seattle and the junior she’s brought with her.”

Ken had the decency to look abashed, and Ken Mandarin looking ashamed was quite a sight. "I am so sorry," she said, with just the slightest evidence of a blush underneath her wheat-colored skin. "Of course, I shall introduce you to Marcy, she wishes to make your acquaintance as well. Naturally! But now, you must excuse me, so that I can go and commit suicide over my stupidity." She reeled away in a false swoon, and threw herself through the open panels of the exterior wall into the garden beyond. Her gutter Cantonese trailed behind her as she cursed herself. Chris smiled as he saw two Chinese gentlemen gaze after her in shock and horror.

But her gaffe had communicated more than she had perhaps thought. Chris's smile faded as he turned to look for Michael, thinking of the comfort of a long, hot bath. It wasn't even the first day of *The Academy*, and the battle flags were out. And for the first time ever, he wasn't the squire on this crusade—he was a goddamn knight.



Trainers from all over the world were converging on the Shimada Resort and Ryokan, located deep in the green hills about forty miles outside of Naha, the capital of Okinawa. Autumn in this tropical area was lush and warm, and the gleaming wood beams of the Japanese country-style inn glowed in the sunlight. It had been specially emptied for the week, entirely staffed by Marketplace employees and servitors of varying levels. Stone lanterns marked the long drive into the property, and a beautiful red and gold gate framed one of the splendid views of the valley to the east. There was a bubbling stream on the northern edge, where outdoor baths were also available, framed by raised dark oak platforms. Ornamental gardens could be seen from almost every window. Small ponds were dense with almost garishly colored lilies, hidden between the trees. It was a breathtakingly beautiful site that invited exploration and an experience of sensuality. The army of service staff moved with the practiced ease of slave veterans—no one would embarrass themselves by sending a marginally acceptable piece of property to serve at the Academy. In fact, it was common for trainers to bring a special slave with them, a way for those lucky individuals to see perfection in action.

The resort was cunningly split between Western and Japanese style accommodations. Much of the actual conference area was Western, with high tables and straight backed office chairs and rooms that were exact

copies of every other hotel room in the world, clean, small, and efficient. But in his annoying way, Chris had insisted upon a room in the ryokan section of the resort, a traditional Japanese room, and Michael had prepared to deal with one. The pictures he had studied and the descriptions in the tourist guidebooks had been enough to let him know that there were in fact, beds in the room—or at least they were behind panels somewhere. He gazed at the perfectly proportioned room, counting the tatami mats that made every room in such a traditional arrangement uniform sizes. There was an ikebana arrangement of a floating lily in shallow water over dull, gray, water-smoothed stones, set in a niche across from the door; a perfect position for the late afternoon sun to hit it. He found that he couldn't remember what the little niche was called, and tried to hide his panic by unpacking.

Belatedly, he remembered his shoes, and took them off immediately, carrying them to the door. He had been gratified to see that many of the guests were shod in the shoes they wore outside. But in this traditional wing, where the flooring in the rooms was the ubiquitous tatami matting, you had to leave your street shoes outside, wear slippers on the wooden floors, and socks or bare feet inside.

*Oh, jeeze, and I walked through the whole place! Why didn't someone stop me?*

Did I pass the slippers on my way in without noticing? Wasn't there supposed to be a special kind of porch, a genkan, something like that? Were staff people right now snickering over his error and whispering about him? He was about to slide the door open and dash down the hall to the main entrance, but naturally, that was when Chris got there.

"That'll be ten," Chris said, brushing by him. Chris had already removed his boots, and his small feet were neatly encased in Japanese slippers. He kicked them off and stooped to place them neatly by the door, toes facing out. "Excellent," he said with a sigh, after turning again to scan the room. "I'll be bathing. Have everything unpacked and my strap out by the time I'm finished."

"Yes, sir," Michael said glumly.

"And don't worry, Michael," Chris said cheerfully as he took one of the ryokan yukatas hanging on one wall. The light cotton robes all bore a stylized gate pattern in soft, pale gray on a much darker background. "You have an infinite number of potential fuck-ups ahead of you over the next couple of days. You had to start somewhere." He chuckled as he padded out the door, leaving Michael to slide the lightweight panel shut after him.

Michael bit back even the thought of a retort, one of the hardest things in his new regimen of exercises. Back in the spring, when he had impulsively volunteered to be trained as “a classic”—a rigorous, seven year process involving everything from this current apprenticeship assignment to actually being sold and living for a term as a slave—he thought he had considered every possible drawback to the situation. As usual, however, he was dead wrong.

He hadn’t counted on being immediately assigned to Chris Parker, the man he had somehow developed a massive crush on, despite years of knowing that one, he was just not very attracted to men, and two, he was certainly not a bottom. He hadn’t counted on suddenly becoming the real low man on the totem pole at an entry-level training house, subject to the whims of everyone except the damn slaves in training, and occasionally to them as well. And finally, he hadn’t counted on liking it so damn much.

It was perverse beyond belief. No matter how difficult things got, from Chris’s degrading taunts about his skill level or thought processes, to the various hazards of working with no less than three demanding trainers, to the sheer pain of his continual punishments, erotic and not so, his heart beat out a passionate plea for more and he slept like a baby. Even his constant stream of self-castigation seemed to be part of this whole process to make him stunningly aware of his place in the world—and more firmly convinced that it was right for him.

And this was only the beginning! If Anderson and Chris weren’t bullshitting him, they intended to actually sell him to someone within the year. At first, he had been eager for the chance to prove himself, but lately, he had been wondering if, in fact, it was all some sort of head-game. After all, they both admitted that almost no one was trained like that any more, and Chris hadn’t mentioned this potential sale since they were both at Anderson’s place. Plus, there was the fact that despite his occasionally insufferable arrogance about these “Old Guard” methods, Chris admitted that he had not fulfilled them himself. Not adequately, at any rate.

Of course, Chris had been in some sort of service, somewhere. It showed in the way he perfectly deferred to Grendel and Alex back at the House, and in the way he acted toward Anderson. But there were no sale records for him in the Marketplace. His experience had to have been some sort of private arrangement that somehow still counted. Michael was convinced that his own “sale” was really just going to be some kind

of reassignment to another trainer, possibly Grendel and Alex, since they seemed friendly with Anderson and busy enough to use him. But if that happened, he feared that Chris would no longer be part of the picture. There was no way they really needed two under-trainers, and the house seemed over-staffed as it was, what with Rachel pretty much running things and the trainee slaves doing the scut work.

The thought of continuing his training without Chris—no matter how much he hated him—was very disturbing.

It was, in fact, mortifying.

Even now, as he found the closets and hung up Chris's suits and smoothed out his ties, (and found a western style shoe rack), Michael could feel his cock straining against the narrow cotton rope that Chris had wrapped around it before their connection in Tokyo. It had been almost three hours to Okinawa, and another hour and a half on the road to get here. But that was nothing, Michael thought ruefully. At least the rope didn't have little spikes on the inside of it, like the parachute/cockring assembly that he had been directed to pack along with the other items that Chris used to keep him aware of his status. It didn't matter, really. Anything that Chris used on him, touched him with, said to him, seemed important beyond all logic now, imbued with erotic and emotional significance.

The only regularly used toy not in the bag, as a matter of fact, was Michael's now well-used gag. Because, for once, he was free to speak for the entire trip—free to ask questions, engage in conversations, even—chat about the weather. After months of isolation, he was almost feverishly eager to have those experiences. And cautious as hell, too. Just because you are allowed to do something doesn't mean you can do it badly. That was one of his most underlined notes in his precious book of hints and rules, compiled since Anderson, the Trainer of Trainers, reminded him that obedience to her was more important than what he felt was correct. If he took the opportunity to speak up, his voice had to be controlled, his questions intelligent, his conversation appropriate. If not....

He pulled Chris's strap out of the garment bag pocket and laid it out on the low, polished, pine table. The handle was dark with palm sweat, the smooth leather worn by years of use. Michael couldn't remember three days that had gone by in the past five months without feeling it. Even now, there were fading bruises on the backs of his thighs.

As he moved and felt them, he sighed in pleasure. Oh man, he thought, fighting to keep his motions sure, his attention on the task

before him. This is as far from where I was a year ago as I could get!

*And it felt so damn good!*

He had no illusions about his presence here. He was not here to serve anyone but Chris, and he was not here as an example of anything except for what he was—a raw, untrained man marked by Anderson as having a chance at becoming a trainer. And while some people would envy his position, Michael still felt the tug of ambivalence from time to time. Was he crazy, thinking that he stood a chance at being anything but a dilettante, Chris's favorite accusation? Was he clinging to this trainer-in-training facade in order to avoid considering becoming a full-time slave?

As if to relieve his worries, his cock gently settled underneath its bondage, no longer strangling itself in frustrating tumescence. There was never a true erotic attraction to being a full-time slave, never that jolt of *feeling right* that he had read about in so many slave interviews and reports. So clearly, he was made to be a trainer, and this newfound passion for use, abuse, and humiliation was directed toward one man and one man only. And since Chris made it clear that his loyalties lay in only one direction—that of Imala Anderson and her methods and traditions—and that he was certainly not interested in owning a slave, then that settled things. Period. Nothing more to say.

Yet when Chris came back and Michael got on all fours and presented his ass for a beating, his traitorous cock was hard as a rock, red, and straining painfully between the white strands of rope, and every stroke drove the breath from him in gasps that were ecstatically pure. And his thanks were as genuine as his obedience and his gasps. As usual, he forgot all about how cut and dry everything was, needing only to feel the slight brush of Chris's hand on his head to make him wriggle with pleasure and ache to be better—so much better—in the future.



“Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for attending this year’s Academy. On behalf of the International Coalition of Trainers and Handlers and the Asian and South Pacific offices of The Marketplace, I welcome you to Okinawa and this beautiful resort, provided for our use by the Shimada family.” The speaker was Noguchi Shigeo, the undisputed Trainer of Trainers in his part of the world. At least eighty years old (some said ninety), he seemed to be made of seasoned timber, as ancient and creaky as the central beam of an old country house. His English was precise and

British, his manners impeccable, his training methods unspeakably brutal. It was said that his school rejected at least a dozen applicants for each position, and then weeded out half of those who were accepted. In the small world of the Marketplace, that was quite considerable, especially because although he was always cordial and respectful, no *gai-jin*—no foreigner—had ever been accepted for training in his house. Plus, his rejections were still considered among the most desired of private trainers, especially if they had survived the first year.

Tetsuo Sakai had been trained by Noguchi. Like all of those who had received the touch of this venerable master, he was standing to Noguchi's left side, mingled with the crowd, yet easily within sight of the old man and proudly attentive. It didn't matter that Tetsuo had been an independent trainer for decades or that his house was the acknowledged second, right behind Noguchi's, in slave training. What mattered was knowing where you came from.

The rest of the room was still settling as Noguchi went into the extensive list of welcomes and introductions of the various Marketplace representatives who were going to be present for the Academy's session. Slaves circulated, bearing bound copies of the schedule and various position papers that were to be shared, discussed, and debated. There was also one formal proposal this year, requiring a vote of the membership. Interpreters buzzed constantly; there was a tight edge of excitement in the air.

Ken Mandarin had made the attempt to look interested and be quiet, but as soon as she got hold of the Academy schedule, she flipped it open, scanned the contents, and immediately began turning pages to the section she wanted to read first. Several of Noguchi's men gave her short, stern glances, but she ignored them, preferring the circle of spotters who had congregated around her, just as eager to see what was going to be the real business of the week. *We are the real outlaws here*, Ken thought smugly, as she and her peers began to scan the items that might affect them. *Perhaps it is not at all where you came from*, she reflected, *but where you are going. And neither this old man nor my pompous little American friend is going to tell me where I am going.*

Yes, there it was. They had scheduled an obscene amount of time for debating, as usual. Talk, talk, talk, they always had to talk everything to death! She sighed theatrically and shut the binder sharply, noting who ignored the sound, who jumped and tried to pretend they didn't hear it, and who actually turned to see. It was gratifying to have her powers of observation. It was all part of what made her so good at what she did. Damn to hell anyone who thought they could tell her what her job was.

She felt that the critical mass of her fellows had digested the material, and deliberately scanned each of them in turn, letting them see that she was prepared to fight. Even the oldest one there deferred to her—as was only correct. A pity that she and Parker would come to heads over this, but *c'est la guerre*. She turned her attention back to Noguchi, who was finally getting to some of the information she had come to hear.

“As our schedule is heavy and our time limited, we shall limit discussion on the major proposal to our formal debates. I respectfully request that the usual ‘hallway discourse’ be as limited as possible, so that all of our attendees will have the most complete information possible.” There was a slight wave of laughter at this valiant attempt to control the second oldest human instinct in the world, that to gather and gossip. Noguchi gave the slightest of shrugs, acknowledging the futility of his position, but his face was stern, his voice slightly harder. “When matters of such import come before us, they deserve our best efforts for resolution,” he added. “It is not an exaggeration to say that the very character of our institution might change after this meeting of the Academy. I encourage all of our members to be cooperative both in the process, and in the final results, whatever they may be.”

“Even if we are disenfranchised by this process?” Ken called out, stirring those around her to muted agreements.

Shigeo Noguchi lowered his gaze to her, slowly and with the great majesty that was his to bear. The anger of his students and the surprise of those who would never presume to interrupt such a grandfather in their midst was perfectly palpable. Ken tossed it all off with a casual sniff and stared back at the man with a perfectly insolent smile on her lips.

“I look forward to the debates with great pleasure,” the old man said simply. “But I know no amount of talk will ever disenfranchise you, Ms. Mandarin.”

The light laughter broke the momentary tension until Ken laughed herself. She gave another of her dramatic bows toward Noguchi and turned to leave. He seemed not to take any offense, and continued his introductory words as she and several others quietly left the room.

Michael itched to follow her. *Now, there was a hot babe*, he thought, fully aware of the massive disrespect such a thought entailed. He had never been formally introduced to her, had only heard of her, seen her from afar. He knew that she and Chris were old acquaintances, if not friends, and that she had spotted several excellent clients, both for Chris and for Chris’s employers, Alex and Grendel. In fact, Chris had told him that Ken’s

patience when scoping out potential clients by far exceeded his own. Not a bad compliment from a man who thought that patience came before obedience in the proper attributes of someone in service. Or those who trained them.

Even still, Michael liked the way she looked, exotic and playful, strong and passionate. He liked the way she moved quickly and gracefully, assuming that people would move out of her way. She looked like the kind of woman who had had people surrounding her to see to her every whim for a long, long time. It was frankly sexy, enticing, yet slightly dangerous. In his older days in California, he would have played with her in a minute, gone hunting with her, if she wanted to, and enjoyed her wickedness when it was aimed at someone who was helpless before it. He smiled slightly, imagining her in a latex cat suit and spiked heels.

"I'm loaning you to her later," Chris said casually. The level of sound rose in the room as people applauded Noguchi and broke up into their little social groups. Michael paled, unsteady for a moment. Damn him! Damn all of them! Was he so transparent that they could all read his mind, or was he so simple that they could all stay two steps ahead of him?

"Speak," Chris snapped.

"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir," Michael replied smartly. He had learned that gratitude fit almost every occasion and used it liberally. This time, it seemed appropriate, because Chris nodded and let the matter drop. In any event, there was someone approaching, from behind Michael's shoulder, according to how Chris's eyes were tracking. Carefully, Michael edged out of the way, and sighed when he managed to move to the side just as the newcomer came close enough for a personal greeting.



"Mr. Parker, what a pleasure to see you again." The voice behind him was low, smooth, and gently accented; he turned his body to stand behind Chris and to his left, and saw one of the most beautiful women he could possibly imagine.

There he had been, just seconds into a full-fledged erotic fantasy about this slender, angular Asian woman with spiky hair and high cheekbones. But now, Ken Mandarin faded before something ever so much more—ethereal. And Michael struggled to understand why.

She was in her fifties, maybe even her sixties, it was hard to guess. Her smooth, olive-toned skin was faintly glowing in health, that kind of

color you got when you lived in a warm place. Her hair was a rich, lush black, touched lightly with silvery white, making you guess at her age, mocking you with the possibilities. She had large, bold, dark eyes, and a body that Americans would describe as heavy. But when she stood and offered an elegantly manicured hand toward Chris Parker, she seemed as tempting as Aphrodite freshly come from the waves, as stunning as an Italian movie actress, as inviting as a warm embrace.

Chris took her hand and kissed the back, European style. Michael couldn't think of any other way to greet this woman. He realized that his mouth and lips had dried out, and nervously swallowed, hoping that Chris would not introduce him. I'll just fade into the background, he thought, praying that his palms weren't sweating.

"Ninon," Chris said, pronouncing it like it was French. "I was so pleased to get your note."

"And I was pleased to see that you have at last truly joined us," the woman said. "Your writings have been so useful to me, it seemed a shame you were not more active among us. I hope that I am among the first to give you my full support and encouragement."

"I'm honored by your interest," Chris replied. "I just hope that the upcoming discussions won't be—unpleasant to you."

"Oh, my young friend," she laughed, and her laugh was like something warm and soft thrown over bare shoulders. "I have been here much longer than you, and have faced terrible battles in the past. Surely, you know that it is those moments of unpleasantness which accentuate the moments of joy."

"Of course." Chris smiled, and was that just the slightest touch of color in his cheeks? Well, there was certainly a lot of heat pumping through Michael's face, and it intensified when Chris turned toward him and indicated him. "Ninon, please allow me to present Michael, who was chosen by Anderson to train under me."

Michael felt buffeted when the woman turned her gaze toward him. He bowed deeply, appropriately for a person of such little status, and, he hoped, low enough for Chris's judgment. She smiled at him, though, and it made everything instantly better. She did not extend her hand to be kissed, for which he was terribly grateful. He didn't think that it would be appropriate to take one of those pretty hands into his suddenly huge and sweaty paw.

"Ninon is one of the greatest gifts the modern Marketplace has," Chris said. "And her specialty will interest you, Michael."

“Yes, sir?” Michael managed to say.

“Ninon exclusively trains pleasure slaves.” Chris smiled again, and Michael gulped as Ninon turned to look into his eyes again.

“Is that truly a field of interest to you, Michael?” she asked, her eyebrows raising delicately. “As a client, or a trainer?”

“I—I hope to be a trainer,” Michael stammered.

“How charming. And fortunate for you, as well. You are at an awkward age for pleasure training,” she said gently. “Too young for the proper experience, too old to be fully trained in the most proper way. But a few months with me, and I would teach you things about pleasure which you could have never imagined.”

I bet, Michael thought, bitterly hating the way the spikes were digging into his balls and around the base of his cock. “It would be an honor for me to study under you ma’am,” he said. He hated the way it sounded the minute the words left his mouth, but again her smile made everything better. When she turned her attention back to Chris, he tried to breathe in deeply and gently and regain his composure.

“Surely, you have many allies in this,” she was saying.

“All I need,” Chris said confidently. “And I suspect that many of those who have indicated opposition will come around before our meeting is over. I’ve found that there are a lot of irrational fears surrounding what this might mean for independents, especially spotters.” He gave her a meaningful look, and she nodded wisely.

“Still,” she said gently, “it is needed. The quality of merchandise has been declining for years now. I have seen common threads; a lack of dedication, a lack of the proper spark, the passion.” She shook her head sadly. “However, we cannot place the blame entirely upon the clientèle. We must bear this responsibility, as we are the foundation upon which the Marketplace exists. We are more than the conduit, Mr. Parker—we are the shapers of service. Surely, we must admit that there are universal standards of acceptability.”

“Of course we do,” came a deep voice from behind her. “We accept the standards and teach them. But we can’t allow any governing board authority over us and our methods. That would go against the very essence of our origins and place in the world.”

Michael cringed at the sound of that confident, cheerful voice. Chris and Ninon turned to welcome Geoff Negel into their little conversation, and Michael wished even harder that he could sink into the floor, unnoticed.

“Mr. Negel,” Ninon said, extending her hand. He shook it, American

style, and offered his hand to Chris as well. Michael half expected his trainer to refuse it, but without the slightest hesitation, Chris returned the greeting.

“A pleasure to see you again, Ninon, Parker,” Geoff said. His eyes sparkling, he turned deliberately to Michael and held his hand out. “And great to see you, Mike! You’re looking well.”

“Thank you, Mr. Negel,” Michael said softly, surrendering to the moment. He shook his old trainer’s hand nervously, and stepped even further back away from the little group.

“Oh, please, we’ve never stood on that kind of formality,” Geoff said cheerfully. “Call me Geoff, the way you always did.”

Michael glanced at Chris, but the man didn’t come to his rescue. “Uh, thank you, Mr. Negel, I’m honored. But, I’m—it would be improper for me to address you so informally. Please excuse me.”

“Of course, of course,” Geoff murmured. “You’re quite the stickler for formality, Parker, aren’t you?”

“Quite.” Chris said with a slight smile. “Which is why I see we shall be the principle opponents over this issue.”

Geoff opened the binder and read, “‘Proposed: That the International Coalition of Trainers and Handlers create a standing committee of Standards of Training, including a certification process for accrediting new Trainers.’ It sounds so innocuous, Parker. But what you’re suggesting could destroy one of the primary freedoms we enjoy in the Marketplace—the ability to create new and innovative methods, to challenge the past and create for the future. I mean no disrespect, I hope you realize this. Your own methods are documented successes, and I have learned much from your input in Anderson’s reports. Anderson herself is truly the greatest American trainer of our generation, I will admit that freely. But there are other styles—perhaps better, perhaps equal, certainly worse. But styles which deserve to succeed or fail on their own merits, not on your personal judgment.”

“What makes you think that my standards would be the sole basis for accreditation, Negel?” Chris asked. “My proposal clearly outlines a method for establishing the criteria by committee.”

“And who selects the committee?” Geoff asked, waving one hand dismissively. “We all know that’s where the real issue is. Who is selected to rule over us, and what training methods will be approved of, hm?”

“Gentlemen, gentlemen. Surely, this is one of those discussions best left for the debating floor?” Ninon said lightly, touching each man and smiling at both in turn.

Geoff immediately assumed a contrite expression. “Of course, Ninon! I apologize. I really just meant to come over and say hello. I’m sorry I interrupted your conversation. You’ll both hear enough from me later! See you in session, Parker. Bye, Mike.” He turned and entered the crowd, immediately greeting someone else and getting drawn into another conversation.

“The battle is joined,” Ninon said softly.

“I wish that he was the worst of my opponents,” Chris said lightly. “You know where the real battle will be—with the spotters.” He coughed, and then added, “And the British.”

The older woman nodded, and laid her hand lightly on Chris’s arm again. She looked sympathetic. “Yes, I have heard. Still, I believe we should gather our friends close, and be sure to listen very carefully to what Mr. Negel and his supporters are saying. It would be a shame to lose because we have underestimated the feelings of those like him. I think I shall see who else is here and in agreement. Let us share our resources at breakfast, yes?”

For a second, Chris Parker looked almost shocked, but he recovered and nodded gravely. “An excellent idea, thank you, Ninon.”

“No, no, thank you. And may I say, Chris, you are looking more handsome than ever! Good-bye, young Michael, and do try to calm down.” She smiled kindly, and as she turned to leave, Mike colored into a blush.

God, this was going to be difficult! It was one thing to just be there, acting as Chris’s valet and all around flunky, being nice and polite to everyone. But he had been dreading this eventual meeting with Geoff Negel. To have it coincide with the erotic flush he had felt upon meeting Ninon was just typical of the exquisite timing that made his life so hard.

Geoff Negel had been the first Marketplace professional that Michael had ever met, back when his first exposure to this underground world was through his Uncle Niall, a Hollywood writer. Somewhat undecided as to what his own professional life was going to look like, Michael had leapt at the chance to become a trainer of real-life slaves, and for many months, lived the idyllic life of a man for whom no pleasure was denied. But then, he screwed up royally and put his own training in jeopardy. By sheer luck, the East Coast trainer known as Anderson responded to his request for further training. Little had he known where that trip would take him, exactly how far from the warm, sheltering hedonism of Geoff Negel’s California-based house of slave training.

He felt ashamed; as though he had been stripped and exposed before Geoff, and made to grovel like a penitent slave. Geoff hadn’t gone for all

this “in order to be a good trainer, you have to know how to be a good slave” stuff. In fact, he had spoken derisively of it, confident in his own methods, his own style. To stand there in front of him behaving like a slave in training, to refuse his invitation to call him by his first name—it was humiliating. How could something that was so right, day to day, be so damn hard minute to minute?

“Was it really so difficult?” Chris asked, in his casually maddening way.

“Yes, sir,” Michael said. “I’m sorry I let it show.”

“Well, it takes practice to know exactly how much emotion to display,” Chris said. Apparently, he was in a generous mood. “If your intention was to show Geoff that he could effectively humiliate you, you did well. If your intention was to make Ninon treat you like a clumsy, shy adolescent, I’d say you were marvelously successful.”

*Or, maybe he was just saving the cutting remarks for last,* Michael thought.

“Never mind that, though—Ninon has that affect on many people, regardless of orientation or taste.” The corner of Chris’s mouth twitched slightly, and Michael knew he was flashing on some pleasant memory. “If she had not produced that affect on you at first, she would have no doubt tried for something even more devastating.”

“I’ve never been attracted to a woman who—” Michael hesitated, trying to find the right words.

“Was so much older than you? Who was not two slender legs supporting breasts of a more than moderate size?”

“It’s not that, it’s just she’s—I mean, she isn’t—she’s hardly unattractive!” Michael sputtered.

“Certainly not. But it is her profession to make people who can attract attention, divert it, keep it. Naturally, in order to pass that knowledge on, she is the master of the art.”

*Oh, so it was a lesson.* Michael tried to compose himself. “If I heard her physical description, I wouldn’t have thought she could have that effect on me,” he admitted. “Is she Italian? I couldn’t place the accent.”

“Greek,” Chris said, with a slight nod. “Her house is on Mykanos, surely one of the most beautiful spots on earth. I guarantee that you would find it absolutely intoxicating. Most trainees do. But such training isn’t for you. Think about that, and write me a few words on it tonight.”

“Yes, sir,” Michael said. He was doing a lot of writing these days. And unlike Anderson, Chris not only checked up on him, but read and commented on everything.

In fact, Michael mused, this seemed an awful lot like junior high

school. He spent far too much time reading and writing, and kept getting interrupted by inconvenient boners. He hid a grin as he wondered whether that would make a good entry in his journal. Probably not.



As trainers would continue to arrive the next day, dinner was an informal affair, with ad hoc groups meeting in separate rooms or enjoying an array of fresh sushi being prepared on one of the open porches. Michael finally was freed from his duty at Chris's side, as Chris went off for some private meeting with one of the Japanese trainers. Michael had practically jumped for joy; instead, he smiled and thanked Chris as politely and warmly as he could and dashed off to enjoy a tour of the premises uninhibited by anything save his fear of being unintentionally rude to someone. *I can manage to stay out of trouble*, he swore to himself, after trying a few clearly identifiable pieces of raw fish from a table hosting two stern sushi chefs. He found that the food was not quite what he knew as Japanese food *per se*, and tried to act as nonchalant as possible when confused by dishes of what looked like little nuggets of something pale and soft. Noticing several people digging into them and popping them like peanuts, he tried them and found himself chewing something that tasted remarkably like incredibly dense Velveeta.

Weird. Also weird was the fact that a lot of the foods seemed spicy hot, especially when dabbed with a red pepper sauce that seemed very popular with the locals. He smeared a healthy portion on top of a piece of sashimi and took a bite, and felt like his mouth was being seared. As he gasped and tried not to choke, someone pressed a small cup into his hand and he swallowed its contents compulsively. Not the best idea, as it turned out. Expecting the light taste of fine sake, he was met with a much denser, harsher feel, like a brandy, which did precious little to soothe his tongue and quite a bit to make him dizzy.

"*Uchinaa guchi wakai miseemi?*" A tall, broad and bearded Japanese man demanded of him. It was one of the local trainers, of course, and his face was so composed that the loud voice seemed terrifying. He helpfully repeated himself in a slower, and much louder tone and Michael made a helpless gesture, still spitting around the array of tastes in his mouth.

"Sir, please excuse my rudeness, but Master Sato wishes to know if you speak Okinawan Japanese," said a young woman suddenly next to him. By the

collar around her throat and the careful phrasing, he knew she was one of the many interpreter slaves who were wandering around, and he was very grateful for her sudden appearance. She had a ribbon pinned to her blouse that listed English, Deutsch, Español, Italiano, and two names in kanji, one of which he assumed was Okinawan Japanese. Michael wasn't even sure whether there was a big difference between Okinawan and mainland Japanese, or whether it was like the difference between Mexican and Puerto Rican Spanish. But he was glad to see her anyway.

"Yes—er, no," he said carefully, finally feeling a slight easing in the burning sensation. "Thank you, please tell Mr. Sato that I am sorry that I don't speak Okinawan, but thank him for his kind concern for me." Michael handed the little cup back with a sheepish grin, and as Sato heard his response, he nodded and smiled. The smile barely broke through the stone of that face. He said "Ma'asan, eh?" and elbowed Michael and winked, and then bowed slightly and left.

"Ma'asan?" Michael asked the interpreter.

"It means, 'tasty,' Sir." she replied with a brilliant smile. She was not even five feet tall, Michael realized. Tiny, like all the women in adventure books about big burly men finding themselves in Japan. Her ink black hair was short, though, appallingly short. He wondered if it was custom, or her owner's taste, or even a punishment. Without thinking about it, he brushed one hand across the soft layers of shorn hair, so much like an animal's coat. She didn't even blink, only took his caress with the same calm confidence she had radiated when interpreting. But her smile seemed to waver and then get suddenly wider.

"Thank you for your help," he said, suddenly embarrassed by his action. It had been so long since he felt free to touch a slave, he thought. Yet how natural it felt, how comforting to know that she would stand there and allow him to run his hand across her head. But did he do something wrong by touching her? No one had said anything to him about such things.

"It is my honor to serve, Sir," she said. "Do you require anything more from me?"

"Yes—yes," Michael said. He didn't want her to leave. He wanted to touch her again. Most of all, he wanted to take her into one of those secluded groves and fuck her brains out. Instead, he asked her what he had been drinking, and how to get another one.

"It is called Awamori, Sir," she said, elegantly indicating in which direction he should walk. "It is considered one of Okinawa's most famous

exports. It is like brandy, and the Awamori here is of the finest quality." She remained calm and polite, but that initial smile was now barely a memory. Her face was frozen in a kind of cheerful grin that made him shiver, and he recalled that one of the ways that Japanese people showed embarrassment was by smiling. So he had done something wrong by touching her, dammit. Also, he knew a factoid when he heard one; she was slipping into a tour guide mode, and she was much more important as an interpreter. He sighed and shooed her away to help someone else while he waited for one of the servers to pour him a new cup.

"You must watch yourself when you drink this fine beverage," came Ken Mandarin's voice from over his shoulder. "It is a drink that seduces, you know. You think you have not had enough, and then suddenly, you find yourself in—how do you say it? A compromising position."

"Ms. Mandarin, I'm honored to meet you," he said, surprised at how cleanly it came out. The he remembered that Chris had arranged to "loan" him to her, and he blushed. She smiled in her predatory way, and tossed back a cup of the strong drink and sighed with satisfaction. How dangerous she seemed, especially in contrast to the slight, composed translator who had come to his rescue a moment before.

"Yes, I am sure you are!" she replied, putting her cup down. "So, what are you doing off of your leash, hm?" She started to walk away, and he felt compelled to follow—a question was hardly a dismissal, and she was one of the big shots here.

"I've been freed to wander," he said, keeping up with her. "I am even allowed out to play from time to time," he added daringly.

"Oh, ho, you are? How terrible for you. Do you not find it easier to be controlled, knowing that your world is ever safer than the traffic you are playing in now?" She waved merrily to someone who had nodded her way and turned suddenly back into the hotel. The cool shade of the evening was so pleasant inside, warm wood everywhere, muted light in the corners. Michael scrambled to keep up because she seemed purposeful now.

"I'm not a good porch dog," he said.

"That's not what I heard," she said, suddenly stopping and flashing a very nasty grin. "In any event, you shall certainly meet a rather fascinating doggie trainer later on, and we shall see what he makes of you."

What the hell am I supposed to say to that? Michael wondered. "Well—I'll be honored to meet anyone you wish to introduce me to, Ms. Mandarin."

"Ha!" she laughed, smacking him smartly on the arm. "You're a good boy. Come in and meet some of my friends—I make no promises that

they will not bite!”

He looked around, and saw the half-open sliding door that she was pointing to. Instantly, he slid it open wide enough for them to enter, and found himself in a small western-style meeting room, with a regular sized table and real chairs. Seated around the table were five individuals he had seen earlier with Ken. Her fellow spotters, most likely. Suddenly, he realized that this might not be the smartest place for him to be. If Chris was stirring up trouble with the spotters, and he was Chris’s...Chris’s...trainee. Student. Junior trainer. Boy? Whatever.

“Heya, this is Mike here,” Ken said, sprawling across one of the chairs, one leg dangling over the arm. “Meet the real people who make the Marketplace work, Mikey.”

Michael sighed and bowed as the people in the room introduced themselves. There was no awkwardness with these people, and no one extended a hand to shake his. Only one of them was known to him, a man named Paul Sheridan from New York City, a friend of Chris’s older brother, Ron. Paul had literally decades of experience in the field, and this was the first time Michael had seen him out of some form of leather. In fact, Paul was wearing a rather loud Hawaiian shirt over a pair of cut-off jeans, certainly one of the most informal people there. But he had never met the darkly tanned woman who introduced herself as Shoshana, or the vaguely sinister Italian man who barely scanned him for an instant before nodding and shrugging as though the meeting was of no consequence at all. The last man was a slender, brown-skinned man who was engaged in the Academy schedule and barely nodded to him when he was introduced. It was one of those moments when Michael realized he had been examined and quickly regarded as a person of little consequence. As always, it hurt.

Michael felt an increasing need to leave, but couldn’t figure out how to elegantly get out of the situation without insulting Ken Mandarin or showing how scared he was.

“Do you know why we are here?” Ken asked him, as he bowed to his final introduction. She looked pointedly at him, and he felt that sinking sensation that meant he was about to Learn a Lesson.

For a second, he thought of answering her with a quip, but decided against it. “I know the purpose of the Academy is to encourage communication and learning among the trainers,” he said carefully. “You meet every year, but not everyone attends. I know that for years, it has been the custom of the Academy to bestow an honorary accreditation to

senior trainers who are sponsored by previous members, and that this was always a voluntary process, something like getting a certificate from a civic organization. And I know that this year, there's a proposal to make accreditation into a formal status instead of an optional one, and you have to vote on that."

There was a derisive snort from the only other Californian in the room, a man Michael had never worked with when he was out there.

"Oh, don't be so harsh, Daniel, everything he says is true," Ken said waving a hand at him. "So what do you think happens to us, Mike, hm? What will happen to the freelance people, the spotters who train, the trainers who spot? What will happen to those who might not get this, this accreditation, eh?"

"Well—we can't know that until it's tried," Michael said, knowing how awful it sounded. "Besides, it's not even clear what the qualifications of accreditation will be, you don't know who might be accepted and who not. And I know there's nothing in the works to deny people access to the Marketplace—"

"Yet!" snapped Shoshana. "Nothing yet! First they want to register us, make sure we are all in agreement, and then those who are not will be cast out."

Michael instantly put his head down and his hands behind his back. It was a posture meant to receive a rebuke, and it calmed the entire room as though they were all alpha dogs and he had turned his throat to them. Ken laughed, delighted.

"Oh, poor thing, poor thing," she crooned. "Come here and sit by me, and learn something, mmm?"

"Ma'am—" Michael began to speak, but she shushed him.

"No, no, we shall not frighten you any longer. I only want you to leave here knowing what we do for the Marketplace. Actually..." she paused meaningfully and looked into his eyes, "actually, I think you understand quite well what a spotter should and should not be, is that not true?"

Michael wished he could just hang himself there and then. But instead he sat gingerly where she pointed, even more subdued than before. *She knows!* he thought with a moment of anguish. Of course, Geoff must have told her, they were on the same side now.

Daniel pointed a finger at Michael and said, "People always say that spotters are the gateway to the Marketplace, and leave it at that. Well, sometimes I don't think that anyone really understands how much time and effort—and money!—goes into being a successful spotter. Come on,

folks, who here spotted ten clients last year?”

Ken waggled a finger, but the rest of them scowled. Daniel waved at Ken with one hand and said, “Well, we have to expect that from you, Ken, you have no other life! Besides, you pick ’em and send them off for training faster than anyone I ever heard of. I doubt you remember the names of the people you spotted last year!” That was met with friendly laughter and Ken grinned with satisfaction.

“But look at me—five damn clients last year, and I was grateful for every damn one. And you know how many people I spotted and let go?” He looked around the table.

Shoshana shrugged. “One hundred? Two? It is the same all over.”

“I built the playroom, I go to all the soft events, every damn one of them. Plus, I do the swinger circuit, and the post military rounds. Know what that means? I’m on the road three weeks out of four sometimes. And when I find a good one and get ’em into training, there’s no guarantee I can see ’em to the selling floor, because we’re getting a higher return rate now than ever!” He was obviously worked up about this, prepared to say all these things, and in the saying, some of his anger seemed to deflate. He sank back into his seat. “What I don’t need from the Academy, thank you very much, is more rules to learn, so I have to make it even harder for a new client to get into shape. And the last fucking thing I need is someone else telling me what trainers I can use if I don’t have the time or talent to train.”

“Trainers tend to think they have the hardest job,” Shoshana said. “They are always whining about how much time they spend getting a client ready for market. But what about the time we spend making sure they are market material? What about the number of times we throw back bad merchandise, the ill-bred, the ill-motivated, the... the fakers. How many times we find out only at the last minute that they truly do not have the wish to serve and must be gotten rid of so that we can move on? How many times are our hearts broken because we cannot get a client to the right level to send them on?”

“Don’t ever let them break your heart,” Ken scolded. “You must be more positive! But it is true, we toss so many back into the sea! We are more than the gateway, Mike, we are the funnel, the, what is it? The strainer. Without us, these exalted trainers would be wasting all of their time going to meetings on...” she thought for a moment. “On Twenty-Four-Seven! Yes, that was the phrase, 24/7!”

“What is that supposed to mean?” the Italian asked.

“All the time. Twenty-four hours in a day and so forth. How to, ‘live the lifestyle,’ *nes’t ce pas?*” Ken laughed and the others joined in. Even Michael spared a slight giggle. He had been to several seminars on just that topic, and couldn’t begin to imagine what Chris would look like at one, let alone how he would participate.

“I went to one last year, as a matter of fact,” Ken said, sitting up in her chair. “I go to several of these conventions, these weekend meetings, although I prefer the ones most concerned with fashion for my own uses! I have found some very good clients there, very good ones. But, oh, what I go through to find them! The agony! The hours of looking, and waiting! The teasings, the bindings, and oh, oh, all the sex I must have! But you know—when the bird is in the bush, you must beat the bush to get it to fly out.”

“I’m sure you hate all that bush beating,” laughed Daniel.

“Oh, sometimes,” Ken agreed. “But sometimes, also, one finds a moment of truth.”

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Laura Antoniou has become well known in the erotically alternative community as the creator of the Marketplace series (*The Marketplace*, *The Slave*, *The Trainer*, *The Academy*, and *The Reunion*), the first three volumes of which were originally published under the name Sara Adamson. One Marketplace character also appears in her first book, *The Catalyst*, but she leaves the reader to figure that out. The only independently written Marketplace short story, "Brian on the Farm," appears in Lawrence Schimel and Carol Queen's ground-breaking anthology, *Switch Hitters: Lesbians Write Gay Male Erotica, and Gay Men Write Lesbian Erotica* (Cleis), which has been published in English and in German. "That's Harsh," a new Marketplace story that appears as a bonus story in *The Slave* (Book Two of the Marketplace) won the 2011 John Preston Short Fiction award, presented by the National Leather Association.

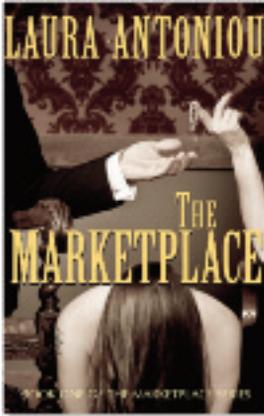
Antoniou has also had great success as an editor, creating the *Leatherwomen* anthologies which highlighted new erotic work, *By Her Subdued*, a collection of stories about dominant women, and *No Other Tribute*, which features submissive women. Her nonfiction anthologies include *Some Women* and an homage to author John Preston entitled *Looking for Mr. Preston*. Antoniou's work has been published in the United States, Germany, Japan, Israel and Korea, to international acclaim.

Antoniou's short stories also appear in other anthologies, most recently in *SM Classics*, edited by Susan Wright; *Things Invisible To See: Gay and Lesbian Tales of Magic Realism*, edited by Lawrence Schimel; *The Second Coming*, edited by Pat Califia and Robin Sweeney; *Once Upon a Time: Erotic Fairy Tales for Women*, edited by Mike Ford; *Ritual Sex*, edited by Tristan Taormino and David Aaron Clark; and *Best Lesbian Erotica 1997*, edited by Tristan Taormino. Antoniou was also a columnist for *Girlfriends* magazine from 1995-1997, the submissions editor for *Badboy* and *Bi-Curious* magazines from 1995-96, a regular contributor to *The SandMUTopia Guardian*, and a short-lived columnist for *Alt.com*. Winner of the National Leather Association's 2011

Lifetime Achievement Award, Antoniou is a highly demanded speaker at schools, leather/SM and sexuality conferences, and has become well known for her rants, thinly disguised as keynote speeches.

Antoniou is currently finishing the sixth book in the Market-place series, entitled *The Inheritor*. She has no intention to stop there.

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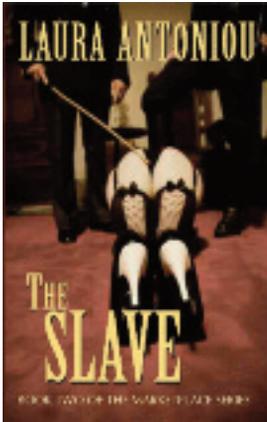
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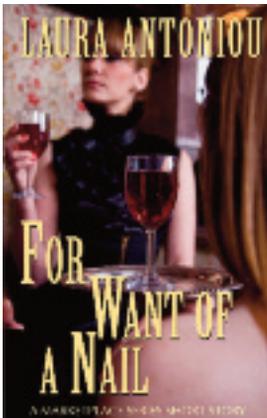
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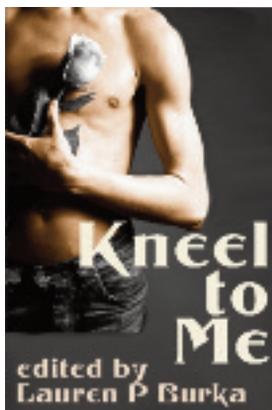
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When Emily is promoted, the bosses make it clear that it comes with certain expectations: she is to purchase herself a morph, a customizable animal hybrid of the future that is both sexual pet and status symbol. Her own tastes require the unique: an exotic and submissive male pet. All desires are exceeded with wynn, a white fox morph. Only it is his uniqueness that is a challenge to the morph-culture status quo and could ultimately spell disaster for both Master and pet.



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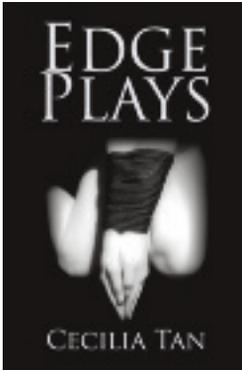
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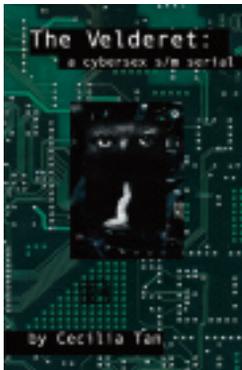
Five classic fairy tales reemerge as deliciously dark erotica stories with a BDSM twist. These stories describe the many diverse faces of bondage, discipline, sadism, and masochism in sexy encounters ranging from haunting to healing, and painful to playful. A witch punishes naughty interlopers, Beauty loves her beast more than the prince. Winner of the NLA: International Award for BDSM-positive writing in 2010.



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