Strike A Match

by purplefeen

Spike/Tara  
rating: MA  
warning: D/s  
time frame: human AU  
summary: Tara needs to trust again, so she goes for submissive lessons.

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"A matchstick is but a bit of wood and sulfur. You can do anything you want to it but until it is struck against the right surface, that's all it will ever be.  
  
You need the chemical reaction of the sulfur hitting phosphorous for it to become a source of unending light."

Chapter 1  
  
  
  
Tara opened her new journal and wrote, *May 1* then stopped to consider exactly how she wanted to word this.  
  
*I resolve to…  
  
Eat healthier (which will be easy considering all the crap I normally eat). No more lunches consisting of cheeseburgers and fries. I will eat only (mostly) healthier salads, lean meats and fish and way more vegetables (French fries don't count) than I did before.  
  
I resolve to ask Mr. Bergan for a raise, since I have had neither raise nor vacation in more than three years.  
  
Which leads me to my biggest resolution:  
  
I resolve to be more aggressive. I will not be a doormat for people to walk on. I will do favors for friends and co-workers only if its convenient for me and the person asking isn't Andrew. He never does his own work, he… but that's off track.  
  
I resolve to be stronger, healthier and more empowered in this new year.*  
  
She reread her entry and then smiled. Yes, that's what she wanted. To get some semblance of control over her own life - something she'd never had the courage to do before.  
  
She turned off her bedside lamp and fell asleep, content that she was being pro-active about her life.  
  
  
  
She left work fifteen minutes early the next day so that she could make it to her therapist appointment on time. Dr. Darla had been her rock for the past few months, helping her to get over the traumas of her childhood. Darla had helped her to break those last ties with her family, the ones that kept her from moving on with her life, the ones that only brought memories of pain and suffering.  
  
The journal had been Dr. Darla's idea.  
  
Tara showed her the new journal and the first entry she'd made the night before. Now all she needed was a plan to make all these changes come about.  
  
Darla surprised her with the first suggestion. "Have you ever explored Dominance and submission?"  
  
Tara blushed and stammered and said there was a time when she'd had fantasies of that kind, but she was afraid that pain and submission would bring too many memories of her childhood.  
  
Darla explained that modern BDSM could be anything you wanted it to be.  
  
"The submissive has all the power," Darla explained. "You've lived most of your life in the shadows and never learned when to submit and when not to. This may help you break out of that shell. It really is a very liberating experience."  
  
She went on to explain that a good friend from college owned a local club, where they could teach Tara to be a submissive and teach her to use that power to best advantage. Will would mold her into a powerful woman if she'd only give him half a chance.  
  
William was the best Dom she knew and was sure he could do wonders for Tara. She spent some time assuring and reassuring Tara that Will was honorable and trustworthy and that Will would not do anything Tara didn't want him to. She suggested she sign up for one session, to see if it was something she could undertake as a tool to help her keep those resolutions.  
  
When Tara agreed, Darla picked up the phone and dialed. After asking for Will, she explained the situation very briefly and made an appointment for Tara for that evening. She was afraid to give Tara a whole weekend free to change her mind.  
  
After she hung up, Darla explained what would be expected of her at the club. She said that she'd recommended many patients there over the years and some took to it and other didn't, but they'd all learned a great deal about themselves while they were there. She hoped Tara would give it the chance to do the same.  
  
When Tara left, Darla called Will back and filled him in on some of the details of her personality, so he'd know what to stress and when to pull back. He was, as ever, very thorough in his questioning and Darla was, as ever, guarded about those things her patients would consider confidences.  
  
  
  
Chapter 2  
  
  
  
Spike Pratt grabbed the file from the reception desk. This would be his last session for the day and then he had the weekend off. He couldn't wait; for some reason, he was almost desperate to be away from the city, back out in his beloved mountains, breathing clean air, pretending the human world didn't exist. Not that he had a problem with his fellow man; he just preferred, on weekends, to be by himself. Alone in the woods, camping, living off the land. Losing himself in something more primal than the mores and restrictions placed on modern man. He'd always felt that; that somewhere inside he had hidden a piece of animal instinct, something that set him apart from the others around him. That was what had led him to his avocation, which his became his vocation.  
  
Domination of his fellow man - and woman.  
  
Opening the file he found the information Darla had given him earlier.  
  
Dr. DR, as they called her at Gomorrah, was a good head shrinker. Spike had gone to university with her, when she was in pre-med; he'd been pre-med himself until he'd decided, thanks to an introduction to the arts by a dominatrix named Drusilla, that he would be better suited to a more hands on type of therapy. She'd been sending patients for years and had even worked with Angel, the other owner, to set up specific routines for common syndromes. It was rumoured that that wasn't all they did together.  
  
Studying the chart, he saw he'd have to be careful with this one. She had a bad history, from the sound of it, Darla wouldn't give him any specifics. It looked like all the usual techniques may not work with her.  
  
People who came here usually *wanted* to learn to be dominant or submissive. Most of them were forced to be dominant personalities in their normal jobs and lives and wanted, as if for a vacation, to get away from their own heads for a while - to be able to live in someone else's skin. To be subservient to someone they could trust with that role. It was the ultimate relaxation, to be able to not be yourself for a little while. The same held true with many of those who wanted to learn to be dominants, submissive personalities always made the best dominants, in his opinion; they knew not to abuse that power.  
  
When anyone, but especially when a dominant personality came in to train to be a dominant, there was always a psychological profile done, by Dr. DR of course, to judge if that person would be a threat to abusing his position. They had turned away several prospective clients over the years, not wanting to feel responsible if the person couldn't control him or herself.  
  
He read on:  
  
Instructions: Therapist requests William Pratt for her training. Also requests minimal punishment to begin, no humiliation, minimal pain to begin, no harsh domination to begin; she needs to learn to trust. Natural submissive, needs to learn that subs have power.  
  
Issues of trust dealing with her family.  
  
Personal note: Has no one, allows no one to come close, no longtime friends, no longer holds familial ties - PLEASE BE GENTLE.  
  
He remembered Darla's last words, "She doesn't trust anyone, Spike, not really. She needs your help."  
  
This girl was already submissive by nature. She wasn't here because she wanted to be, she was here because Darla was convinced that Will could do her some good. She must have convinced the girl as well. With her history, she wouldn't learn to trust him, which was the basic essential, if he pushed her boundaries too soon. So how could he train her?  
  
His curiosity piqued, he decided it was time to go have a look for himself.  
  
He used a key to make it sound like he was unlocking the door but the truth was, none of the doors at Gomorrah were locked when only a restrained client was inside.  
  
Fire codes.  
  
But the tricks you could play on someone's mind could heighten the experience for them and this was just one of the small deceptions practiced here.  
  
Dom and sub trainees always started their first session the same - as a sub. You had to understand what it was like in order to fill either role. Subs had their turn as a master as well, much further in their training, of course. Again, you have to experience how the other side feels if you want to fulfill your side of the partnership well.  
  
He didn't say a word as he entered, just let her sweat it out. He looked her over, trying to decide on a strategy.  
  
"Is someone there?" she asked, but he didn't answer. Wanted to see what she would do.  
  
After a few moments, the soft murmurs of her talking to herself could be heard.  
  
It was a stark, bare room. White walls, black mat, black restraints. Nothing personal or creative. Just a space to test the client's commitment. She was in a normal beginner's pose. Kneeling on a soft mat on the floor. Blindfold. Black mesh robe that allowed free movement. Hands bound.  
  
*Has no one, allows no one to come close, no friends, no longer holds familial ties*  
  
She has trust issues. Trust couldn't be forced but obedience could - if the client was a natural submissive - and the Dom was good at his or her job. Once he had her obedience, he could earn her trust. But would this girl, who was not willingly looking to be trained, respond to that?  
  
Looking her over, seeing her nervous gestures, her ways of calming herself down - breathing techniques and murmuring words of reassurance to herself - he was starting to like this girl. She was afraid, but determined to face her fear.  
  
*Brave - not to mention gorgeous.*  
  
She was… a dream. What the hell was a girl this fuckin' hot doing in a place like this - and with sex problems? He couldn't see her eyes because standard procedure had all new subs wearing a blindfold. But the rest of her, he could see that just fine.  
  
He forced his mind off her body, that wasn't what she was here for.  
  
Jill had helped her dress in a sarong of black mesh covered in zippers so the Dom could uncover whatever part of the client he or she needed to access. She was on her knees on the floor, hands bound, but gently, they could pull free if they really worked at it.  
  
She was average height, it seemed, maybe five five. Even if he couldn't see her eyes, he observed other things. Her lips were enticing, that was for sure. The colour of sun-kissed coral like you see at the beach; the colour those super-models get paid lots of money to try to sell to women who don't have it naturally. Far as he could tell, there was only maybe a little bit of gloss on those lips; that colour was all hers. Of course, when she wasn't muttering to herself, she was chewing nicely on that bottom lip.  
  
He could see long muddy blonde hair hanging down her back and could see the line where it was a bottle job grown out. Girl didn't care enough about her looks to do something as simple as fix that up was in dire need of help.  
  
They'd have to work on that.  
  
He heard her murmuring to herself that it would be all right, Doctor Darla had promised her she'd be safe here.  
  
Girl has courage.  
  
*She needs to learn to trust. Natural sub, needs to learn that subs have power*  
  
He was dying to see her eyes.  
  
He opened and closed the door again, making sure his steps could be heard this time.  
  
"Is someone there?" she asked again.  
  
"You are not to speak unless I ask you a direct question," he said, gently - but making sure she understood it was a command.  
  
She nodded and remained still, body stiff and rigid, she looked terrified. That wasn't going to get him anywhere. Most new subs, in her position, were excited about now, eager to begin. Not her. He paced slowly around her.  
  
"You're safe here, Pet" he said softly and she finally looked up at where she thought he must be.  
  
*She doesn't trust anyone, Spike, not really. She needs your help.*  
  
Looking at her and thinking about her profile, he decided he had to go about this *completely* different than he normally would. Girl needed to feel safe, needed to trust him - and being trussed up like that simply wasn't going to do it. He had to use a different tack with her.  
  
Hell, the single hour he had with her today wasn't going to do a bloody thing. He needed something urgent. An idea flashed in his head - Angel was going to kill him. But he really believed it would work.  
  
It was worth a shot.  
  
He untied her and took off the blindfold. He took her hand and motioned for her to sit on the bench and gave her a drink of water. She drank it.  
  
"I'm -" he thought his nickname might scare her off so amended with, "Will. I know Dr. Darla asked you to come here, but I want to know, why are you here? What do you hope to get out of your experience at Gomorrah?"  
  
The girl shrugged, didn't say anything.  
  
He tried again. "Did you discuss your coming here with Darla?"  
  
She nodded and her hair fell in her eyes, she didn't move it away.  
  
"What did she tell you?" There, a question she had to answer.  
  
He heard something, a strange noise and realized she was trying to say something, but - he thought maybe she had a stutter. He waited her out.  
  
"D-Dar-Darla s-said I-I sh-should-" she broke off and he saw her take a deep breath and blow it out. She tried again.  
  
"D-Darla s-said that m-maybe you could help m-me with my confidence. H-help m-me learn to be more c-comfortable with p-people."  
  
"I think maybe I can," Spike said softly, careful not to scare her now that he had her talking. "And the first step we should take, I think, is to go camping. Did you have any plans for this weekend?"  
  
Her eyes got wide and she stared at him, shaking her head.  
  
"Would you like to talk to Doctor Darla about it?"  
  
She nodded furiously. Spike did some fast thinking. This was not the typical client. And Darla knew it, that's why she had called and asked for an immediate appointment; that was unprecedented.  
  
The rules said he was never to leave the premises with a client but this girl needed something more and something made him think he could get through to her, just not *here*. Not in only an hour.  
  
"There's a phone right over there," he said, pointing to the wall. He knew Darla would have a small fit, his breaking the rules like this, but he was pretty sure he could talk her into it. "I'll give you some privacy. If you need me, I'll be right outside the door."  
  
She had to wait for a few minutes before she could talk to Darla, but Darla seemed very pleased that Tara was at Gomorrah and very interested in this new therapy of Will's. She asked to speak to him.  
  
He told Tara she could go get dressed and he waited until she'd left the room before he got on the line with Darla.  
  
Darla was not pleased.  
  
"Look, Darla, you sent me a frightened rabbit and expect me to work with her like a regular client?"  
  
More objections - it was ridiculous.  
  
"I can't get her to look me in the eye let alone follow a command! I want to get her out in the air, make her feel less trapped. You know her Darla, she's terrified here. Let me get her out in a surrounding she's more comfortable with."  
  
Darla was warming, but only slightly.  
  
"Yes, go camping. I know what I'm doing, I go almost every weekend. Let me get her out there and let her learn she can trust me."  
  
She seemed a bit concerned now about his reputation with women, but Spike knew that was just window dressing. Darla knew him well, and knew he'd never abuse one of his clients like that. Would Tara go if Darla asked her to? Had they a close enough relationship? Darla wanted Spike's word that the girl would be safe.  
  
"How long have we known each other Darla? I saw you almost in pigtails for Chrissakes! I won't lay a finger on 'er, I'm not stupid. I can't teach her to trust me if I'm shaggin' her; you should know me better than that."  
  
She was still holding out, this was completely against all the textbooks.  
  
His voice got softer. "I'm the best they got here an' you know it. There's a woman in there, Darla, I can see it. I just have to help her find it. Let me try, all right? I can't do anything for her here until she's not so frightened."  
  
By the time Tara was dressed and back in the room with him, Darla was ready to give her support of this endeavor. She promised Tara that she would vouch for Will's integrity; Tara was a little wary but then remembered her resolution to be more aggressive. And if Darla had known him such a long time, then she'd take her word that she'd be safe.  
  
A least she trusted one person; that was a good sign. Maybe he could get her to trust another.  
  
Will excused himself to go change, and then joined her in the lobby. "Ready, Pet?" he asked with a smile he didn't feel. God, he hoped this worked or his business partner, Angel was going to string him up.  
  
  
  
Chapter 3  
  
  
  
They took a cab to first Tara's apartment, so she could pack some clothes and then to Spike's apartment so he could get his camping gear. Both trips were made in silence. He'd never been around someone so unused to talking before. Spike waited in the lobby for Tara and she did like-wise for him. He was praying she wouldn't run as he grabbed his things that he'd already packed that morning.  
  
They walked the three blocks to the garage where Spike kept his truck, a black four-wheel drive pickup that was caked with mud.  
  
"Sorry, didn't have a chance to get it washed after last weekend. Like to get out o' the city for a bit. Breathe some real air." She didn't respond, but then, he hadn't expected her to.  
  
They headed out of town, going north on the freeway. After an hour, Tara's eyes started to drift shut and Spike told her she could lie down across the bench seat. She tried to put her head on the cushion, but he pulled her up so her head was resting on his thigh. She fell right to sleep.  
  
That had to be a good sign, right? He decided to think positively.  
  
As he headed west into the mountains, he thought about the girl asleep on his leg. He'd never done this before; never broken protocol and taken a client out of the office. And he'd had some real winners in that room. Women afraid of their own shadow, men who didn't know what they wanted but knew it was something different and hoping they could find it at Gomorrah.  
  
None of them ever made him want to untie them or take them out of that room.  
  
So why her?  
  
He remembered her words, the way she was talking to herself to keep herself calm.  
  
*Courage.*  
  
He saw that in her.  
  
*Fearlessness.*  
  
Standing up to something so frightening, not letting it get control of her, taking control of it.  
  
*Hidden beauty.*  
  
He felt it, felt that under that bad dye job and stringy hair there was real beauty there, one that matched the inward beauty and strength.  
  
*Strength.*  
  
That's what it was. There was real strength there; he could feel it, even if she couldn't. She might not know what that was yet, but with a little guidance, he'd show her that she had strength, she had power, and with the right tools, she'd be able to wield it.  
  
He took the route to his usual camping spot and it wasn't quite dusk yet when he put the truck in park and touched her shoulder.  
  
She startled awake and he assured her it was all right, he was going to put the tent together. Did she want to help?  
  
She nodded and he stepped to the rear of the truck and pulled out a canvas bag. The tent inside was small, made for only two-people and this made Tara nervous for a moment.  
  
"It's okay, I'm not going to touch you. Darla knows me well, Tara; we've known each other a very long time. It'll be all right."  
  
She remembered Darla's okay and went about helping him get sleeping bags and pillows in the tent.  
  
There was a huge log to one side of the clearing near the tent and he pulled a small plastic bag out of the glove compartment of his truck.  
  
"Be nice to have some help for this bit," he told her, as he grabbed some broken tree limbs and carried them over near the log. "Grab some dry bits of bark," he instructed as he pulled that plastic bag out of his pocket. Inside was a wooden dowel, worn smooth on the sides from being held and worn to a point at one end. He rubbed the pointy side against the log in a spot that had been partly hollowed out, from doing this many times before. He built up a small collection of very fine wood strands and then called her over.  
  
He looked her in the eye, finally seeing those blue eyes from this angle. "When you see a spark and these strands alight, drop some of the dried bark in to keep it going."  
  
She nodded. "Not too much or it'll go out," he explained.  
  
"Got it." She'd just said her first words to him of her own accord and she hadn't stuttered.  
  
Progress!  
  
It took only a couple of minutes with her help and soon he had the small bits of wood and bark burning into a decent campfire.  
  
"Hungry?" he asked and she nodded.  
  
Somehow or other, he was determined to get her to talk to him. Maybe she'd taken his instruction at the club to heart.  
  
"Tara," he said, and he waited until her hair was focused on him. "We're not at the club anymore. I brought you here to let you get to know me, as a person. You can speak whatever's on yer mind, Luv."  
  
She nodded, indicating she'd heard, but she still didn't speak.  
  
He fixed them a meal of canned chili and crackers. She ate her share and then started to clean up.  
  
"Yer my guest," he said, taking her plate from her hands and indicating that she should sit. "I only want you to be submissive to me when you want to, when you're comfortable with it. That's the great thing about being a sub," he said with a smile, "You get to choose when you obey and when you don't."  
  
She didn't say anything but she sat and looked thoughtful under her hair.  
  
He washed the dishes and hung the trash up between two trees for the night, making sure the animals couldn't get into it.  
  
He went back and sat by the fire, across from her, watching the light and shadows play against her hair.  
  
"Tara."  
  
She looked up and he could almost make out her eyes.  
  
"I want you to get to know me and I want to get to know you, all right?"  
  
She nodded.  
  
"For every question I ask you, you ask me one in return, all right?"  
  
She nodded again.  
  
He had to remember to ask her questions she couldn't answer yes or no to.  
  
"What's yer middle name?"  
  
"E-erin."  
  
He waited.  
  
"Now it's your turn," he prompted.  
  
"What's your middle name?" she asked.  
  
So she was going to play that game, was she?  
  
"Don't laugh," he said, hoping she would anyway, "Chester."  
  
She didn't laugh, but he did see her smile beneath the fringe of hair.  
  
His turn.  
  
"What's yer favourite color?" Best to keep it easy for now, let her feel safe.  
  
"Green," she said and before he could prompt her, "Wh-what's yours?"  
  
Less stuttering now, that was good, he hoped.  
  
"Green as well," he said, honestly. "Why?"  
  
The hair looked a little confused.  
  
"Why's green yer favourite colour?" he asked.  
  
"B-because it's the colour of the earth," she said, and she seemed more sure of her words now. He was amazed when she went on. "The colour of creation, of the goddess. I'm - I'm W-wicca," she announced, but shyly, hesitantly, gauging his reaction.  
  
"Why yours?" she asked, before he could comment, and he assumed she meant why was green his favourite colour.  
  
"For part of the same reason," he told her, looking out at the dark forest around them. "Nature. Something, I don't know, basic - about being out where things are as Nature intended them to be. 'S why I like it here, why I come here a lot. I need the energy of the city, but - out here, I feel - I don't know, closer to my animal nature, I s'pose."  
  
She nodded.  
  
His next question surprised her so much she actually laughed.  
  
"In a fight between cavemen and astronauts, who would win?"  
  
She laughed until she saw he was serious, then she stopped laughing and thought about it.  
  
"C-cavemen, I suppose. P-primal instinct."  
  
He smiled and waved a hand in the air in triumph. "Yes! Thank you! I told that prat Angel that cavemen would win and he keeps sayin' the astronauts would."  
  
She smiled, happy she'd said something that pleased him, even if she wasn't sure exactly why. Why he would even care what she thought.  
  
"Your turn," he said lightly, prompting her again, knowing that this time, she couldn't ask the same question in return.  
  
She didn't say anything for long moments and he'd almost given up hope when she asked, very quietly, "Will you hurt me?"  
  
"No," he promised, quickly, surely, a vow. "Nothing you don't want, Tara, ever. It all depends on you, Luv."  
  
The eyes behind the hair seemed unsure.  
  
"Raise your hand," he commanded, sharply, loudly - and she did, as her body stiffened and her eyes became almost afraid.  
  
"Put it down now, Pet" he said in his normal voice. "I know I startled you," he continued, voice very calm, "but trust me for just a moment more, please. I want you to close your eyes, Luv." His voice was whisper soft and caressing and it took a moment but she did.  
  
"Just listen to my voice and breathe in the fresh air. Find your center."  
  
He waited until he could see her body relax, the tension flowing out of her. He saw her whispering something to herself, probably those calming words again.  
  
"Tara," he began again, in those same soft tones, "I want you to raise yer hand above yer head."  
  
She did it, more gently, this time, almost gracefully.  
  
"Now put it down and open yer eyes."  
  
She was still calm.  
  
"There are different ways of being a submissive, Tara. It's up to you which kind you become, the first kind or the second. Which one would you rather be?"  
  
The eyes looked confused.  
  
There's a couple of good books on bdsm that I'm going to give ya when we get back, one of 'em's called *Screw the Roses, Send Me the Thorns* and there's a good explanation of Dominance and submission in there that says something like, "In exchange for obedience by the submissive, the dominant agrees to care for and work toward pleasure for both partners. Empowered by the sub, the Dominant takes control of the scenes and agrees to abide by the limits she sets. Having the submissive set her own limits, she - or he - controls what happens and when.  
  
"Every Dom/sub relationship is different. For most people it's a chance to get out of their own skin for a while and let go of that other side of themselves. But for you, what Darla wants is for you to explore yer natural tendency toward submissiveness and find out that you do have power. You can still choose when to say quit. The experience you'll get at Gomorrah will, hopefully, bring you out of yer shell a bit; teach you how to say no.  
  
"When a submissive obeys his or her master, they do it because they choose to. There's always a choice. For instance, if I gave you a command like the first one and you didn't want to obey it, you'd simply not do it and say your safe word."  
  
"S-s-safe w-word?"  
  
"It's a word, chosen by the submissive, to indicate that the command has made them uncomfortable and they don't feel right doin' it. Like a traffic light. Green means okay, go ahead. Yellow means caution, be careful; red means warning, stop. Yer safe words could be yellow for when you're unsure and red when I've hit a boundary, when I've touched an uncomfortable place. I'll back away and not go there again. It's all up to you. You could chose other words, of course, what they are is up to you, but their meanings the same."  
  
Her eyes had watched him the whole time, absorbing what he said. Still very unsure.  
  
The fire popped and he looked toward it and when he looked back, Tara was covering a yawn.  
  
"Why don't we go to sleep now, Pet, its been a long day."  
  
She nodded and he led the way over to his truck where he got her things and asked her where she'd like to change, here or in the tent or maybe down by the water so she could wash up?  
  
She chose the water and she took her gym bag and headed in that direction, picking up a flashlight from the tent as she went.  
  
He pulled off his sweater and left on his t-shirt. He quickly slipped off his jeans and exchanged them for sweat pants. He washed his face in the basin of clean water he'd left out after doing the dishes.  
  
He'd made progress, he thought, as he made his way to the tent. He looked at the two sleeping bags, one next to the other. He hadn't slept with someone without… sleeping with them, since he used to go camping with his family when he was a kid.  
  
And he was happy to note, he had no overt desire for Tara. Oh, she was pretty enough. But he felt more like her mentor right now, or an older brother. She needed a friend, not a lover. He very much hoped he could be the friend she needed.  
  
Although being her lover within the confines of her training would be a damn fine thing, he thought. But really, that end was entirely up to her.  
  
He heard her footsteps returning and he hurried into his sleeping bag, not wanting to make her feel uncomfortable.  
  
He kept his eyes closed until he was sure she was covered and then he asked if it was all right for him to put out the lantern now.  
  
She said it was and her voice sounded very timid, but he supposed that was to be expected.  
  
He held very still, trying not to toss and turn, wanting her to feel safe in the knowledge that he wasn't going to try anything untoward.  
  
He waited - and waited. If he hadn't been a trained Dominant, he wouldn't have been able to hold out. But finally, after what seemed like hours, her breathing evened out and she had settled into a seemingly restful sleep.  
  
With his submissive tended to, he could finally get some sleep himself.  
  
  
  
Chapter 4  
  
  
  
When he awoke she was still sleeping, breathing softly, not quite a snore. He snuck from the tent and used a tree behind the truck before finding his sneakers and socks and the notepad and paper he kept in the glove box of his truck.  
  
He left a note on his sleeping bag that said, *'Gone fishing'*. He left another next to a clean basin of water on the tail gate of his pickup that said, *'I thought you might like to freshen up.'* Alongside the basin were a cloth for washing, a tube of toothpaste, a hairbrush - and he had rummaged around in his knapsack and found a rubber band. He hoped she'd use this last to pull her hair back so he could see her face.  
  
She didn't know it yet, but these were subtle training tricks. By providing what she needed, he was letting her know what was expected of her. This whole process was a give and take between master and pet.  
  
He got his needed items, gathered some more wood for the fire, and went down to the lake to catch their breakfast.  
  
He was gone a while, the fish weren't as co-operative as he'd have liked them to be. When he returned, he was disappointed to see that she hadn't taken the hint and pulled her hair back, but she had stoked the fire and gotten a frying pan and some other items ready. She'd found his blueberry bush, he saw, the one he'd discovered on one of his first trips here that was down the trail a bit. She had a bowl of blueberries on the cooler.  
  
He thought about asking her if she knew how to clean fish, but decided against it. As much as this was a getting to know you trip, it was also a learning experience for her. He wanted her to learn what having a master would be like. A master took care of his pet and as her master, it was his job to provide for her.  
  
Which meant he had to clean the fish alone. Oh well, not like he hadn't done it before. Would have been nice to get out of it for once though, or share the job with someone else.  
  
During breakfast, he asked her about her job and after much hesitant stuttering, she finally began to talk with an even flow about a career she clearly loved. She wasn't a mere librarian, she was an antiquities book restorer. Which meant she spent much time alone in a small room out of the sunlight apparently.  
  
Which accounted for her slight pallor. Yet another thing on the list to take care of, besides her hair. He couldn't wait 'til Buffy Summers got a look at her.  
  
Buffy was the club's 'Hygiene and Inner Beauty' specialist, which meant she taught people how to take care of their bodies, something that did wonders for a person's self esteem. Once you started taking care of yourself, you started to look and feel healthier. When a person felt healthier, they usually started paying attention to other facets of their appearance as well, and here is where Buffy shone. Buffy could take the most awkward mouse and turn him or her into a stellar beauty with a few trips to the stylist and gym. It really was quite astounding what she could do.  
  
He couldn't wait to see what she made of Tara.  
  
He began to wonder how she could afford this. Gomorrah was an exclusive club and didn't come cheap by a long shot. His fees alone would send the average person to the poorhouse.  
  
But she must be getting on somehow, if Darla sent her to them.  
  
He noticed her began to fidget a bit and looked her way.  
  
"D-do you mind if I g-go for a walk a bit? J-just around the camp?"  
  
"Not at all, Pet, do as you like. Yer here to relax, too."  
  
She smiled and nodded and he got lost in his own thoughts as she wandered away.  
  
He'd never brought a woman up here; he'd never brought anyone up here. This is was his personal time. So why had he brought her?  
  
He didn't know, really, it just seemed like a good idea at the time. And she was good company, if a bit quiet. She didn't feel the need to fill the empty spaces with talk and, following her lead - for a change - he didn't either.  
  
It felt… nice, last night, sitting by the fire, looking at the stars, having another person sitting there with him. Not so alone for a change.  
  
That was one thing he often was - alone. His job prevented any real attachments to women; hell, even his friends didn't really understand what he did for a living. But he really did enjoy what he did.  
  
He provided a service, he gave people something they needed - something their souls needed, that for some reason, was shunned by moral society. He didn't understand why. He wasn't doing anything that millions of people hadn't been engaging in since the dawn of time.  
  
And he'd been doing this long enough that he could pick and choose now, who he took as a client. He had very few any more, but those he had paid top dollar for him.  
  
A new client was rare, he hadn't taken on the training of anyone new in… he thought about it. Since Xander, about two years ago. He was happy with his new mistress, he'd heard - they might even be getting married. Anya was definitely the right one for that boy. He liked it rough and Anya - he'd trained her too - Anya played rough.  
  
Right now he had the training of a new submissive to contemplate. He wondered who her next master would be, if he or she would treat Tara right. She was a natural, no doubt about that. He had a feeling that once she learned to use her ability to obey only those commands she was comfortable with, she'd take to submission like a kitten to cream.  
  
Thinking of cream made him think of some of the other commands he'd teach her, further down the road, when she was more sure of herself and willing to explore her sexuality. She didn't look like she had any sexuality right now - although, she had the remnants of a bad dye job. He wondered why she'd dyed her hair. Did she fancy someone and want to smarten herself up? Was she trying for a promotion into the 'Mustier Books' section and thought the blonde job would help her chances?  
  
What made a girl so thoroughly sexless want to change her looks?  
  
But she wasn't sexless. She blushed when he looked at her. A couple of times when she was looking at him, her breath caught and she wet her bottom lip. He wondered what she was thinking - what she thought, about him?  
  
Did she find him attractive? Not that it made a difference but it would be nice. He thought he would very much like the look of Tara, once she discovered what she really looked like.  
  
She was responding to him nicely so far, better than he would have thought, given her profile. He couldn't wait to see how she responded to his touch. To his kiss. To his body? Would she even allow him that?  
  
Strictly speaking, sexual intercourse was forbidden at Gomorrah by the zoning laws in Los Angeles. They could touch, they could kiss, but they couldn't have "a transfer of bodily fluid".  
  
Didn't stop anyone though, if the mood struck.  
  
Many Dom/sub relationships never took on that aspect. The simple act of commanding and obeying filled the need inside. But with Tara, he really hoped it would. If he were honest with himself, he'd admit that he wanted her a bit even now and she was a mousy little nothing who didn't know her own power. Once she found herself, she'd be irresistible.  
  
He hadn't felt that way last night. What had changed overnight?  
  
The sound of her breathing as she slept? The sight of the berries she had picked for them? The way she talked about her job?  
  
He wasn't her master, not yet, not really. What had made him stay awake last night, waiting for the sound of her breathing to ease, the feel of her body relaxing? He knew she'd stay, Darla had told her to and as long as he wasn't crossing any lines, he was confident she would do as Darla asked.  
  
Was that why?  
  
Because this woman who trusted no one had trusted him?  
  
Because he wanted to be worthy of that trust?  
  
She was a blank canvas, ready to be painted, she only had to decide on the colours and the tone.  
  
He wanted, he realised, to be the one to hand her the paintbrush. He wanted to be the one to show her the possible strokes. He wanted to be the first one to see what the finished masterpiece would look like.  
  
Because she would be - a masterpiece. He felt it in his soul.  
  
He couldn't wait.  
  
But he would.  
  
  
  
Chapter 5  
  
  
  
He heard her walking through the brush and felt the tight strain in his jeans.  
  
Great. Wouldn't do to go caveman on the girl now.  
  
He called out, "Going for a swim," and ran down the hillside. At the lake's shore, he stripped and dove in, not bothering to check whether or not she was looking. He'd been naked in front of too many people to be embarrassed now. And if things with Tara went where he hoped they would - eventually, she'd have to get used to seeing him this way.  
  
  
  
The afternoon passed with Tara reading a book and Spike hiking up the mountain, something he often did on these trips. He had invited her to join him but the hair had shaken and declined.  
  
Dinner was a quiet affair, in a good way. After dinner, he insisted on doing the dishes once again, showing her that he could take care of her as well as he expected her to one day take of him - or whomever her more permanent master would be.  
  
He didn't like that thought.  
  
He'd been the one to see the potential, he and Darla anyway. He'd be the one to coax her out of her shell, the one to make her become her true self. He didn't want someone else to -  
  
Whoa. Dangerous thinking that.  
  
It was his job to train them and pass them on, if she even wanted to continue.  
  
He couldn't keep her.  
  
Could he?  
  
No, he couldn't.  
  
  
  
They talked about books until bedtime. She really did know her stuff, had read some rare first editions of some very impressive books: original editions of works that had been destroyed by bad editors, bad translators and time.  
  
She could read a few of the old languages, things like Etruscan and Aramaic, languages you only saw on the most ancient of books.  
  
Seemed also she was something of a novice witch; no real magic, just magick - the kind that kept you focused and balanced and in tune with the world around you. She had trusted him with this knowledge only after he'd confessed to being rather bookish and shy growing up. Telling her, in generalities, about meeting and dating a Dominatrix in college who'd introduced him to the lifestyle.  
  
She began to talk without the stutter and it struck him what a beautiful, confident voice she had, when she was finally able to talk.  
  
He didn't want to say goodnight, but it was late and she was tired - he was too.  
  
They followed the same ritual they had the night before when getting ready for bed. He heard the water splash this time though, making him think maybe she'd decided to bath in the cover of moonlight.  
  
When she joined him in the tent, her hair was wet and back from her face, mostly, and he finally got a semi-good look at her face. As good a look as he could in the bad lantern light and wispy light of the moon.  
  
*Wow.*  
  
She hid *that* behind a veil of lank hair? Why?  
  
Hopefully, come next week, Buffy would have a few things to say about that.  
  
  
  
Sunday morning started exactly as Saturday had and she overlooked the rubber band once again. They had bass for breakfast, as opposed to yesterday's trout. Cooked the same way, on a hot frying pan with a little of the spices he kept in a jar. She toasted bread today, over the fire, hooking them on a thin limb and holding them over the fire like marshmallows.  
  
After breakfast she went looking for more berries as he broke camp and put out the fire, disassembling it once it was cool and making sure there were no embers in the dry pieces of charcoaled wood. He took care to cool the ground under the campfire slowly, with water from the lake.  
  
They ate the berries on the way home, in peaceful silence once again, except for the background hum of the radio he turned down low, in case she found she wanted to say something to him.  
  
He dropped a couple of the berries on his lap once and they laughed and then she said, without a stutter, that if he couldn't keep his eyes on the road then he couldn't have any more.  
  
He told her that she had to share and if she didn't trust him then she could just feed them to him then.  
  
He'd been amazed when she held one to his lips.  
  
He glanced at her but she was looking at the road, seemingly unaware of the intimacy of her act.  
  
He took it from her fingers with his lips, making sure not to do anything overtly sensual, no matter how much he might want to. If she were just a girl and this were a date, this scenario would be going so much differently right now.  
  
But she wasn't and it wasn't. She was a client. A damaged girl entrusted to his care. And nothing and no one - not even himself - would compromise that trust.  
  
They said goodbye at the curb in front of her apartment. She seemed more at ease than she had on Friday, but still very nervous of what the future would bring.  
  
"When's yer next appointment?" he asked.  
  
She thought, then said, "On Tuesday? With Buffy? And then I see Darla on Thursday and then," she blushed, "and then, um, you, again, on Friday."  
  
He nodded and let her go, driving back to his apartment, trying to forget all the thoughts that had been haunting him this weekend. He had a client to see tomorrow. Best remember that. They were all just paying customers.  
  
  
  
Chapter 6  
  
  
  
It wasn't his fault, really, that he was there on Tuesday when she came to see Buffy.  
  
But it was lucky.  
  
He'd come to check on the progress of one of Cordy's clients, a man who was having trouble adjusting to the fact that he would have to move on to someone else after his training with Cordy was done. The git was in love with Cordy, or so he thought. They almost all thought that, at one time or another.  
  
He'd assisted in Wesley's training at a couple of sessions, so he knew the man, a bit. He was there for backup as this was his last official session with Cordy and the man's intended Dom - his wife, Fred - would be expecting him to be trained and ready to be taken over by her.  
  
The club always insisted that their Doms and subs in training get no outside - practice - while they were being trained. The intended Dom or sub, if there was one - there were many area networks where a suitable partner could be found with no problem, if none were at the ready - but if there was an intended partner, that partner would be brought in for many of the sessions, to learn the ways of each other and learn how to inter-relate.  
  
Fred had been asked to sit this one out. Cordy, with Spike behind her glaring a warning at the poor besotted Wes, assured him that this was perfectly natural. That forming a bond with your trainer, the person who had taught you how to express yourself wholly, was a normal thing to occur. But once the intended Dom took over - once they found their way with the person meant as their other half - that bond would shift to the person who now held their leash, and in Wesley's case, his heart.  
  
Wes didn't like it, but with Spike standing there, arms crossed and eyes letting him know that no objections would be tolerated, Wes promised to give it the old college try and go home to Fred, on his knees.  
  
Cordy sighed when he left, she'd been afraid that one was going to be rougher than it was. The man had actually tried to kiss her during training. His wife specified that no sensual training was to be done, she would take care of that herself. She wanted him trained in the basics.  
  
Cordy had to remind him - over and over - that kissing was not part of the basics.  
  
She thanked Spike for his assistance and was about to thank him with a kiss- and a suggestion to thank him more properly later tonight - when he completely ignored her signals and checked his watch.  
  
"I thought you were off today?"  
  
"Am. Got a client comin' for a first with Buffy. Wanted to see how she's gettin' on."  
  
Cordy's eyebrows rose.  
  
"Problem case?"  
  
"No," he assured her, but she didn't believe him. "Just - Darla sent her. Got some things she needs to work through. Bit of a-" he didn't know how to describe her. "Just don't want Buffy's perkiness to scare her."  
  
That, Cordy could believe.  
  
Buffy Summers was good at her job, very good. Probably the best in California. But all that tanned skin and blonde hair and schoolgirl charm just sometimes sent her over the wall.  
  
"Best go check on her then," Cordy agreed, patting his arm, hoping to catch up on this when he was through with his frightened kitten.  
  
Spike nodded and left, checking his watch again as he went.  
  
She would have started by now. Should he just walk in? He'd never done that before, never interfered in a colleague's work. She didn't mess with his, he didn't mess with hers; it just worked best that way.  
  
But he just had to see her - know she was all right.  
  
He opened the door quietly and heard Buffy's normally cheerful voice sounding - a little less perky than usual. He opened the door wider.  
  
Tara was sitting in a chair in front of a mirror, Buffy standing behind her, trying to move Tara's hair out of her face.  
  
And Tara, sweet, shy little Tara, wasn't letting her.  
  
He smiled. That was his girl.  
  
"Something wrong?" he asked, coming into the room, working hard to hide his smile.  
  
"Spike! Ooomph! Yes, please! Could you please explain to this beautiful woman that I am not trying to molest her! I am merely trying to get a look at her skin!"  
  
She seemed completely exasperated. He'd never seen Buffy exasperated before. It was kinda hilarious. But he gathered his reserve and put a non-committal faÃ§ade on.  
  
"Tara, Luv? There a problem?" he asked softly.  
  
She shook her head.  
  
He motioned with his head for Buffy to give them a minute and she took the hint and walked over to the closet holding her supplies.  
  
"I thought we'd decided to give this a try. Don't you trust me?"  
  
She considered, and then slowly nodded.  
  
Good, that was major progress. See? Camping! Good idea.  
  
But only for Tara, he couldn't imagine taking a new client out every weekend.  
  
"Okay, then, what's the problem?"  
  
"She- she wants to, she's staring at me."  
  
"She has to, Pet, that's her job. We're a full-service club here. We fix the insides and the outsides. I do inside, Buffy does outside."  
  
It was then that he saw the wetness on her cheek through her hair. She really was upset about this.  
  
"Buffy," Spike called across the small room, "Leave us for a bit, all right?"  
  
Buffy shrugged and left.  
  
He thought he knew - shy girl felt ugly. It was a common problem, but Tara seemed to take it to extremes.  
  
"What's wrong, Luv? Tara? What do you think she'll find under there?"  
  
She didn't answer. "I'm not going to hurt you, okay?"  
  
She didn't answer, but let him pull her hair back from her face. Which revealed her hands, which were covering her face.  
  
"Tara, Luv, please let me see you."  
  
She pulled her hands back a bit, revealing the same beautiful face he'd seen that night while camping. "You're beautiful, sweetheart, really. Look." He moved away so she could see herself in the mirror and he moved her hands away as he did.  
  
Revealing a long scar from her ear, down the side of her face to just below her jaw. It was an old scar, obviously and had healed remarkably well, considering - he didn't want to think about how she'd gotten it. But then, that was his job, to push boundaries, find the dark places that needed to be uncovered.  
  
He kept his voice gentle, "Luv, do you-"  
  
"Red, red, red, red, red, red, red!" she screamed and he stopped. She remembered. That was good.  
  
He decided to pretend it wasn't there. Because it wasn't, as far as he was concerned. You could barely see it, if she didn't turn her head that way. And it had no bearing on who Tara was, who she was becoming.  
  
He kept his voice even and sweet, as if just stating known facts. "It's not who you are, it means nothing. You are beautiful. Not in spite of it, but just because you are. It means nothing, not anymore."  
  
She'd never heard anyone say anything like that before. The words ugly and gross swam before her eyes but Will's voice drove them away. If she concentrated on his voice hard enough, she could barely make out the echoes at all.  
  
"Well, Buffy shouldn't have any concerns at all," he said, completely changing the topic and staring at her forehead. "You have right perfect skin, won't need any of her nasty potions or creams. So, let's move on." He looked around, hoping for a checklist or something of what Buffy would be doing next but, finding none, he asked, "Pet, is it all right if Buffy comes back? I promise I'll stay with you."  
  
She didn't look happy, but finally, after staring at her feet for a while, she nodded.  
  
He walked over to the door, motioning Buffy back in, stopping to whisper "It's not there," in her ear, far enough back where Tara couldn't hear.  
  
Buffy was used to the normal vanities of her clients; a mole, a cleft palate, the normal things people had that made them unique but seemed to upset them so much.  
  
But she'd never been told to completely disregard a physical flaw before. Tara seemed shy but she didn't seem vain. Buffy didn't know what to expect but whatever it was, it must be bad. Bad enough for Spike to want her to pretend it didn't exist. She fixed her smile in place and stood behind Tara once again. She faced her in the mirror and saw nothing wrong.  
  
"Well, you have lovely skin; that will make my job so much easier." She walked around to face Tara and the girl ducked her chin down. Buffy looked at Spike.  
  
"Tara, Luv, it's me, remember? I promised I wouldn't hurt you."  
  
Ever so slowly she raised her chin, not looking at Buffy, not looking at Spike.  
  
"Oh, now Tara we really should see about these eyebrows. And would you be opposed to having something done to your hair? Maybe just even out the colour a bit? Maybe a few highlights?"  
  
*'And have it completely shaped and styled,'* she thought to herself. *'But one step at a time.'*  
  
"You wouldn't believe the confidence that comes from seeing a lovely face," she was looking her over, picturing makeup and jewelry, "in the mirror every morning." Then she saw it. That was not a normal wound scar. It was a little jagged but thin, as if done by a very sharp knife…  
  
*'Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god,'* she thought, moving around as if to examine the back of her hair, but not betraying in the slightest what she was feeling. *'How do you get a scar like that and live through it?'*  
  
*'It's not there'* she repeated Spike's words to herself and with another breath, it wasn't. Not to her. She was the best there was and she was going to make this girl feel beautiful - and if it took battling her demons to do it, then so be it.  
  
"So," she said, putting her hands on Tara's neck and turning her head this way and that - making sure she touched the scar, treated it like just another piece of beautiful skin, "What do you think, maybe a light brown with some very subtle blonde highlights? Or do you want to do a dramatic brunette?"  
  
Tara smiled at her in the mirror and Spike beamed.  
  
Over the rest of the afternoon, it came out that Tara had a rowing machine at home and jogged three miles every morning.  
  
"Spike does seven," Buffy told her, but Tara looked confused, she didn't know anyone named Spike.  
  
Spike set her straight. "Spike's just a nickname, Pet, that some people call me. It's all right, I'm still yer Will, I promise."  
  
This was news to Buffy; she didn't know he had any name but Spike. And what was this about being "her" Will, that didn't sound right. But then, she'd never trained here or anywhere, had no idea really, about the relationship between trainer and client. She just knew what Dr. Darla had told her, about people's low self esteem and how working to help them realise their true nature, both outside and inside, is what Gomorrah was all about. She didn't care. She just knew that when people came here, they usually weren't happy and when they left they were. And she was part of that.  
  
She took Tara through a basic daily skin care regime. Showed her exactly what to do and gave her the products she would need. She was careful never to leave her eyes on the scar as she faced Tara in the mirror and by the end, the girl was giving her a small smile.  
  
Buffy wanted her to pull her hair back when she washed her face but Tara stuttered out that she had nothing at home to pull her hair back with, she never pulled her hair up before, but she would if Buffy and Will wanted her to.  
  
Trying not to cry, Buffy gave her some of her own bands and clips, showing her how to use them.  
  
Tara and Buffy chose a light chestnut color for Tara's hair, bringing it closer to Tara's natural colour so that she wouldn't have to keep dying it over and over, possibly drying and destroying Tara's hair.  
  
They decided to give her hair some highlights in colours from copper to blonde, bringing out the natural shine in Tara's long hair. As the colour was working its magic, Buffy showed Tara how to apply makeup in a way that would bring out her natural glow and make it look like she was wearing hardly any makeup at all, just a nice healthy luster to her own beautiful skin. By the time they were finished, Spike barely recognized the mousy woman with the faded blonde hair that had walked into his studio last week. He couldn't wait for Darla to see the miracles Buffy had performed.  
  
  
  
Chapter 7  
  
  
He saw her sitting cross-legged on the mat. Jill had followed his instructions and had dressed her in a pair of yoga pants and tight, cropped shirt. He'd bought them especially for her. He knew she wasn't comfortable in the mesh robe, wasn't ready for that yet. But he wanted her to get comfortable with her body, so he'd bought them as a way for her to reveal a bit of herself without scaring her off.  
  
He told Jill not to cuff her or blindfold her, just have her sit on the mat. And there she was.  
  
She looked up when he entered, gave an almost smile.  
  
"Today we have a very difficult session," he told her and the way her face paled made him sorry he'd tried to tease her.  
  
He came and sat in front of her on the mat.  
  
"You have one job today. Your job is to tell me no."  
  
She looked confused.  
  
"It's easy. Whatever I say, what ever I do, tell me no. You can use other words if you want. You can use body language or slap me around," he teased with a twinkle in his eyes, insinuating that he just might like it if she slapped him. "But you are to tell me no at every opportunity, got it?"  
  
She nodded.  
  
He looked at her, disappointed. "Forgetting your lesson already?"  
  
"No," she said with a smile.  
  
"Do you like coming here?" he asked her and she thought for a moment and then looked like she was going to say something before she remembered and said, "No."  
  
He smiled and stood, walking away.  
  
"Do you like me?" he asked and turned quickly and saw her blush before she said, "No."  
  
"Good, I don't like you either," he teased her and his smile was contagious and she smiled too.  
  
"Did you like wearing the black robe?" he asked.  
  
"No," she answered and she meant it. Just by saying no - or rather, the way she said no - he was getting so much information out of her. She was also learning she could tell him no without his getting mad at her.  
  
"It was very becoming on you," he let her know. "Athough," he looked her up and down, "that outfit shows off yer curves nicely too."  
  
"No," she said, and wrapped her arms around herself.  
  
"You don't like the way you look?"  
  
"No!" It was adamant.  
  
He let her catch him leering. "I like the way you look. You're beautiful, Tara, whether you want to believe it or not. Have you ever been on a date?"  
  
"No." It was the truth.  
  
He went to her and lifted her chin so she'd look him in the eyes. "No?"  
  
"No." She didn't seem upset about it, where most women her age would be in tears by now.  
  
"Don't you like boys?"  
  
"No," she said, but she sounded uncertain.  
  
"Like girls?" he asked.  
  
"No," she said, but she seemed unsure there too.  
  
"Ever been kissed?" he asked, eyes on her mouth but she pulled away and didn't answer.  
  
So she had been kissed, but not in a way she liked.  
  
"Did you fight him?" he asked, hoping she'd trust him with the answer.  
  
"No," she answered, with tears in her eyes as she sank to the floor.  
  
"Were you strong enough to fight him?" he asked.  
  
"No," and the tears kept coming.  
  
He didn't want to ask, but he felt he should - maybe she needed to finally get this out in order to put it past her.  
  
"Were you old enough to fight him?" and the words caught in his throat.  
  
"No," she cried and the tears fell in earnest. He let her cry them out. It took a while. He understood now, or thought he did, why she had such problems with people. Why she felt she had so little control.  
  
He was also afraid he might know why she no longer had anything to do with her family.  
  
He held her and let her cry, not saying anything. He wanted her to get it all out - all of it. If he could rip those memories from her mind, he would, but this was the next best thing.  
  
When the tears subsided and she was softly hiccupping her breathing back to normal, he held her tight, trying to make her feel safe.  
  
"That's not who you are anymore," he softly whispered. "You're stronger than you think. You can fight back now, you can say no."  
  
She didn't answer him, but she didn't pull away.  
  
"Tara, I want to try something, all right?" he said, very softly, before lying her down on her back on the mat. She looked confused, but not afraid.  
  
"I'm going to get down there with you," he told her, before he even made a move to do it. "I'm going to lie down on top of you. I'm not going to hurt you," he assured her. "I just want you to tell me no, that's all, all right?"  
  
This was a hard lesson - and almost cruel - but he had to show her - prove to her - that she was not that helpless child anymore. Maybe she'd hate him for it, but he hoped she'd understand.  
  
She didn't say anything, didn't move, didn't look like she was breathing.  
  
He moved slowly, covering her body with his much larger one. When he put his arms on hers, holding her down, she screamed out "NO!" and pushed him off, practically throwing him from her body. He landed a few feet away.  
  
She was laughing. Smiling and laughing and running over to make sure he was okay.  
  
She'd just alleviated one of her worst nightmares; being powerless in that situation. She did have strength now, Will was right about that. The power to say no and do something about it.  
  
  
  
The following Friday was a new lesson. He was teaching her the protocols of being a submissive.  
  
"You will address me as Master, do you understand me?"  
  
Her voice shook as she said, "Yes, Master."  
  
She was tensing again. He cupped her cheek with his hand and said softly, "You've come here because something is missing from your life. I want to help you discover what it is. This is a game, Pet, a very intense game, but only a game. I am trying to teach you what you came here to learn. You have it in your power to be the one in control. Do you remember the safe words?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"What are they?"  
  
"Yellow and red."  
  
"Very good, Pet."  
  
"In order for you to become a good submissive, you have to trust me. And in order to be a good Dominant, I have to earn that trust. Are you following me?"  
  
She seemed to relax somewhat.  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"Come here."  
  
He had moved over to the black leather restraints on the wall. She followed but very slowly. She didn't think she was ready for this and was about to say 'Yellow' when he asked her to please trust him, just for a few minutes.  
  
After he got her wrists and ankles secured to the wall. He walked over to a shelf and picked up a stopwatch.  
  
"Ten minutes, Luv, that's all. You just have to endure the restraints for ten minutes, you think you can do that?"  
  
She nodded her head and he touched her arm, saying, "You will answer audibly, Pet, when your Master speaks to you."  
  
"Yes, sir. Master, sir." She was almost smiling.  
  
Spike smiled, she was adorable. Shaking off that thought since that wasn't what he was here for, he said in a mock-serious tone, "I think that infraction deserves a punishment." He saw her body freeze up. Tense like nothing he'd ever witnessed before. This was interesting; he felt bad for her. What makes a person get to be this tight?  
  
He moved in front of her again getting very close, invading her personal space. "Don't you trust me?"  
  
She was still so frightened she couldn't move. Trying to alleviate her fear, he leaned in and whispered low in her ear, "If you don't have a good time, Pet, I don't get paid. I won't hurt you. Not really."  
  
She didn't relax much but she did start breathing again.  
  
"Are you uncomfortable?" he asked, truly concerned.  
  
She started to nod but quickly said, "Yes, Master."  
  
Laying a hand at her waist and rubbing gently to relax her, he asked, "What's most uncomfortable, what one thing?"  
  
"Feet. Feet, Master."  
  
He grabbed his keys off the shelf and unlocked the cuffs holding her ankles so she could move her legs. He rubbed her ankles for a moment to get the blood circulating then stood.  
  
"Better?"  
  
"Yes, thank you," she said with a beautiful smile and as much as he hated to do it, he lightly smacked the side of her ass. He wanted to teach her that punishment didn't necessarily mean pain.  
  
"That was for not answering properly. In this establishment, I am always to be addressed as Master. Wouldn't want to make me look like bad in front of my colleagues, would ya?" He paired that question with his most charming smile.  
  
After he'd released her, at the end of the session, he told her, "I want you to wear yer hair up next week. Off yer face, all right?"  
  
She looked concerned but nodded and said, "Yes, Master."  
  
  
  
Chapter 8  
  
  
  
The following Tuesday Spike's friends invited him to go with them to a bar to celebrate Lindsey's promotion. It was really an excuse to go cruising for women but no one said that out loud.  
  
Clem spotted the first likely prospect. A petite redhead sitting in the back corner talking to someone they couldn't see because her back was turned to them. He asked Spike to help him out by entertaining the friend while Clem hit on the redhead.  
  
Clem sent drinks over to their table and waited for their, hopefully welcomed, invitation to join them. The redhead blushed and the other girl turned to see who was buying them drinks.  
  
"Oh, shit," Spike exclaimed when he saw the girl. Either the gods were on his side tonight or completely against him. The other girl at the table was Tara.  
  
"What's up?" Clem asked.  
  
"The other girl, I know her."  
  
"So we're good, right?"  
  
*'No, not really'* Spike thought but since he didn't want to explain how he knew the girl, he'd just have to stick it out. The redhead beckoned them over to the table and Tara was almost incoherently nervous as they walked over.  
  
"Hi, I'm Willow," the redhead said as she held out her hand to shake Clem's. "And this is my friend Tara."  
  
"I'm Clem, and this is Spike. Nice to meet you."  
  
The guys sat down and Clem and Willow started up a conversation based on small talk, eventually getting around to talking about their jobs. Willow was a programmer and Clem was computer illiterate, so they had a fine time discussing how to keep the pop-ups from appearing as Clem cruised the internet. As they talked, they couldn't help noticing that Spike and Tara couldn't keep their eyes off each other.  
  
"Just follow my lead," Spike whispered and Tara nodded from behind her hair.  
  
He led her into a conversation about books and since she was a book restorer, this took most of the pressure off of Tara for conversation. She could talk for hours on her profession and she did, Will and Clem both finding there was much more to this restoration thing than they ever imagined.  
  
Clem and Willow had taken to each other and had exchanged phone numbers. They were pretty shocked when Will and Tara didn't do the same. Clem chastised Spike good-naturedly on the way home about it.  
  
Spike just shrugged, not willing to give away the information that she was one of his clients.  
  
Three days later at the club, Spike informed Jill to prepare Tara for the next step in her training and made sure that Jill knew Tara was expected to wear her hair up for this session.  
  
Tara arrived with her hair in a flattering French braid. Seeing as this was the first time Jill had ever seen Tara with her hair done and makeup on, it was quite a shock. Jill shocked her right back by telling her that Master wanted her to wear the traditional sub's robe of black mesh instead of the yoga ensemble she'd been wearing until now.  
  
Tara, a little more comfortable with Spike now that she knew he could be trusted not to embarrass her, complied. She dressed and made her way out to the training room, kneeling on the pad as usual, with her hands in her lap and her eyes down, the way Spike had taught her to do. It was just a few minutes before he joined her.  
  
His first command was for her to take off the robe. She looked up and gasped and Spike gently reminded her that she was always to comply to his commands with 'Yes, Master' and then immediately do what he asked, unless she needed to use a safeword.  
  
She looked like she was about to take that way out, but her newfound bravery won out and she did follow the command.  
  
"Stand up," he ordered and she replied as she was supposed to and then stood, waiting for his criticism about the flaws on her body. She wasn't model thin, but Spike didn't seem to care.  
  
"Look at me." Here was the moment of truth, not only was she nude, but she had to show her face to him as well. The face with the hideous scar on her jaw.  
  
"You look lovely," he praised. "I'm not going to touch you - I'm just going to walk around and look at you, all right?"  
  
"Yes, Master." She sounded on the verge of tears.  
  
He walked around behind her. "Now remember that this is only a game and remember your safewords, all right?"  
  
"Yes, Master." That reply was a little more confident.  
  
"Tara, you have a lovely body and yet you seem to hide it under the most hideous baggy clothes you can find. Why do you do that?"  
  
"I - I'm not sure, Master."  
  
He was talking to her to help her relax. One of the first things a submissive must be taught was to be at ease and comfortable in any situation. Even if they were standing in a room nude with someone watching them.  
  
"If you like, I could have Cordelia take you out this weekend and help you find some more suitable clothing. I am your master and as such, everything you do or say or wear reflects on me. If you don't feel the need to change your wardrobe for your own benefit, do it for me. I want you to be confident and comfortable in any situation.  
  
"That's what today's exercise is about. Getting more comfortable with your own body and learning to trust that I will never embarrass you in front of others and for you to learn I'd like you to behave the same towards me."  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
For the remainder of the session, he had her do other exercises meant to learn to trust him, but that trust came more with her shock that he never once mocked her nudity or touched her physically in any way. She even put on a blindfold and handcuffs at his request. It was a big step but she was determined to see this through.  
  
Spike had been nothing but a complete gentleman from the very first and his praises for the little things she was instructed to do over the last month gave her courage.  
  
In fact, it gave her courage outside of the club as well. She'd never before accepted an invitation to go have a drink after work, but her newly found confidence had her accepting Willow's invitation earlier this week without a pause.  
  
She felt more confidence in herself and in Spike's tutelage and it was changing her more and more for the better.  
  
Near the end of the session, he left her to go get Cordelia to set up that shopping trip. Cordelia rarely, if ever, needed an excuse to shop, but he thought that the challenge of getting this mouse of a woman into some more flattering clothing would be a challenge Cordy couldn't resist.  
  
Tara was exceptionally nervous when Cordy walked in to the room to set up a time for shopping, after all, she was still without clothing. But Cordelia didn't even seem to notice and they made an appointment to meet at Macy's at ten the next morning.  
  
  
  
Chapter 9  
  
  
  
As promised, Tara was in front of Macy's at ten the next morning. The first thing Cordy did was to hand her a piece of paper with coloured blocks on it.  
  
"You're a Summer," Cordy explained, "and these are the colours that will look good on you. Whether its makeup, clothes, whatever, if you stick to soft, muted and pastel shades. Colors with blue or rose undertones like navy, soft baby blue, light aqua, plum, light pink, grays and lavender are best. Avoid black, oranges and yellowy greens. Also, avoid very bright colors-they can overwhelm your light coloring. You want soft, muted tones, got that?"  
  
"B-Buffy t-told me all this last w-week."  
  
"Oh, good," Cordy said happily. "Buffy really does her job well. But you're stuttering again. Are you nervous, do I make you nervous? Spike says I'm intimidating but I don't think I am." She grabbed Tara's hand and pulled her into the store. "Don't worry, I can be damn pleasant if I need to be."  
  
Tara laughed at that and most of her tension at being with this woman faded away.  
  
"What's our budget?" Cordy asked as soon as they were in the store.  
  
"B-Budget? No, I um, well, I don't need to have a budget. I have - well, I inherited when my Momma died, all the money travels down the female line in her family."  
  
"No budget?" Cordy sounded positively elated. "Oh, this is going to be so much fun!"  
  
They went from department to department, starting with her foundation garments. Cordy helped her pick out some satin and lace sets that would not only be better fitting, but were also very pretty, just in case.  
  
They then went to the dress department and bought three dresses. One for going out with friends, one for going out on a date and one just because Cordy said it looked beautiful on her.  
  
Casual clothes came next. These were the clothes she wore for work and Tara didn't think she needed any more of those.  
  
"Like the clothes you're wearing now?" Cordy commented.  
  
"Yes," Tara answered with a smile, looking down at her lilac gauze top and black jeans.  
  
"Um, no." Was the only thing she said until she pulled her into yet another department.  
  
After casual clothes were shoes and Tara never realized that she'd need quite so many. A different pair for each dress, a pair of brown suede boots to go with one outfit and a pair of ivory flats to go with another.  
  
Tara, thinking they were done now, was surprised when Cordelia pulled her down the escalator to buy matching purses, scarves and jewelry.  
  
Cordy arranged for it all to be delivered to Tara's home address and she told them it was to be delivered within two hours or they wouldn't being seeing Miss Maclay's business in the future.  
  
Finally finished, they stopped at a restaurant where Cordy treated Tara to a very late lunch. As she was paying the check, she said to Tara, "Now the fun part begins, we get to go to your place and purge that closet of all those hideous clothes that are completely unsuited to you."  
  
It took them over an hour to decide which to give to charity and which to just throw out. There was a blue sweater that Cordy wanted to toss, but Tara remained steadfast. Her mother had made this sweater for her the year she died.  
  
Cordy conceded.  
  
When the new clothes and accessories arrived, Cordy showed her how to sort everything by color and to put outfits together so that she would be able to just choose her outfit for the day and grab everything she needed without having to search out a missing piece.  
  
Tara never knew there was this much trouble in just getting dressed every day and said so to Cordy.  
  
"It's not just getting dressed, its presenting yourself to the world. Every day I want you to look in the mirror and think *'Is this how I want people to see me? Is this the impression I want to give?'* And that's just for your personal and professional life. In your role as a submissive, you should always take your master's reputation into account. You not only represent yourself, but now you're representing your master as well. Everything you wear, everything you say, everything you do, will reflect on him. Your final master or mistress will make it clear what they expect of you and its your job to carry it through."  
  
Tara looked thoughtful. "I never thought of it that way before."  
  
Cordy smiled. "Most people don't, that's why its my mission to set everyone straight and get them caring about their appearance again. And get them looking fashionable, of course."  
  
"Do you do this for all trainees?"  
  
"Well, no," she admitted "But Spike said you were a special case. Not that your clothes are all that terrible, but looking nice can improve your self-esteem immeasurably. He said Dr. Darla said you needed some help with that."  
  
Tara stared at her feet for a moment and then whispered, "I need help with a lot of things."  
  
"If you'd offer me a cup of tea, I'd be happy to be a sounding board if you have anything on your mind. And don't worry, I won't tell Spike is you don't want me to."  
  
Tea made, they sat at the kitchen table.  
  
"Why do people call Will Spike?" was Tara's first question.  
  
"The very first question and I can't give you an answer. He's just always been Spike since I started working at Gomorrah."  
  
"Why do -"  
  
"Why do what?"  
  
"Why do you do what you do?" Tara's face flamed for even asking the question. "I'm sorry, I just don't know how someone comes to do this for a living."  
  
  
  
Chapter 10  
  
  
Tara showed up for her Thursday appointment with Dr. Darla in one of the dresses that Cordelia had picked out for her. Her hair was styled nicely and she seemed to be wearing a tiny bit of makeup.  
  
Darla was astounded. She'd never before seen Tara care at all about her appearance.  
  
"I feel terrible," the doctor apologised but with half a smile. "They've managed to do in five weeks what I spent six months trying to do. I should have sent you there much earlier!"  
  
Tara laughed, another first.  
  
"I don't think I would have gone before. It's… not what I thought it would be. But then, I'm not sure Spike's treating me the same way he'd treat other trainees. You know, *normal* people."  
  
"There's no such thing as *normal* people, Tara. The only people who seem normal are ones you don't know very well. Once you get to know them, all their little quirks come out.  
  
"So how are the lessons coming?" Darla asked as they each sat down.  
  
"Good, really good. It's… scary at times and he's touched on some things I never thought I'd be able to vocalize. But he does it in such a way that… I can't describe it. It's safe - there with him, in that room - like nothing can touch me. And he's pushed some buttons that at the time, I'd rather he hadn't. But in the end, after its all over, I feel better. I feel… I don't know, maybe *released* is the word I'm looking for. Like most of that stuff from the past is just stuff - it doesn't have to hurt me anymore."  
  
"Sounds like he's working miracles."  
  
Tara smiled, "In a way, he is. And I have you to thank. If you hadn't assured me I could trust him, I'd never have gotten this far."  
  
She paused, thinking.  
  
"I think that's it. Trust. I have someone in my life that I can trust. Besides you. But you're a doctor, trust sort of comes with the territory. And you're a woman. I've never trusted a man - never had one worthy of my trust, that's for sure. It's kind of a -" she broke off, blushing furiously, realizing what she'd almost said.  
  
"Kind of a turn on?" Darla finished for her.  
  
Tara nodded.  
  
"So, what are you going to do about that?"  
  
"Do? As in do something? I'm not going to do anything about it."  
  
Dr. Darla came over and sat on the couch next to Tara.  
  
"A Dom/sub relationship can be anything you want it to be. It can be just a learning experience - like you've had so far. It can be about sex, which you are perfectly free to do, I just want you to remember one thing, Tara. It's not about love. Any sexual or even flirty behaviors you establish with Spike aren't going to last. He may care for you, Spike is a very caring man. But it's not about love. And Spike will tell you the same thing. Unless he says those words, 'I love you', I want you to be very careful with your heart.  
  
"I know you feel grateful to him, I know he's helped you get out of your comfort zone a bit, but don't mistake that for something its not."  
  
Tara seemed thoughtful and didn't respond.  
  
"I'd like you to think about something before your next session. The B&D part of BDSM stands for bondage and discipline. If you'd like to take the trust a bit farther, you might speak to Spike about trying something in that area with you. There doesn't have to be any pain with this - or sex if you don't want there to be. But it will push your boundaries, giving up control like that, but its also very freeing at the same time, to have someone you trust enough to allow that.  
  
"S&M is another area you might want to think about though. A little pain can be very erotic, especially when you mix it with sex. All the pain you've had in your lifetime has been at the hands of men who were after nothing more than to hurt you, to make you weak. Now imagine having little tingles of pleasurable pain that YOU control. That starts and stops when you say it does. That comes from someone who's there to give you pleasure, not to intimidate you."  
  
When Tara left Dr. Darla's office, her brain was full of ideas. She felt like she'd been on a roller coaster ride and her head was spinning. Instead of going home and letting all of this fester in her imagination, she decided instead to go see the new foreign film at the Marketplace Theatre.  
  
The line was short and it only took a couple of minutes for her to get her ticket and enter that lobby.  
  
It was just unique timing that had her in line behind Spike at the concession stand. She tapped him on the shoulder so that she could say hi, but before she got the chance, he said - without turning around - "I saw you come in." He turned around and took in the full effect of her dress, her hair and her makeup and said, not loud enough for anyone else to hear, "You've made your master very proud tonight. You look beautiful, Tara."  
  
She couldn't help playing along. She whispered back with a laugh, "Thank you, Master."  
  
His eyes started to shine. "You want to play? Right now?"  
  
She looked a little afraid as she looked around at all the people, so - no pressure - Spike turned to give his order to the teenager behind the counter.  
  
"Maybe a little," she whispered.  
  
"In that case," he turned back around and told the teenager that he and the lady had changed their minds and were no longer in the mood for popcorn. Grabbing Tara's hand, he said, "Follow me."  
  
Spike looked for the least crowded theatre and pulled Tara up the steps to the seats in the darkest corner in the back. The seats were double wide and perfectly-made for snogging.  
  
"Sit."  
  
She sat.  
  
He sat down beside her and reminded her, "You remember your safe words?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
They sat there staring at the screen until the lights went down and the movie started.  
  
"Sit on my lap."  
  
Tara, hoping this wouldn't get too out of hand - not that there were many people in the theatre but still, they were in a public place, did as he said.  
  
*'Yellow, red. Yellow, red. Yellow, red'* she repeated silently to herself as Spike shifted her until she was straddling his lap and facing him. Which meant that her dress was hiked up all the way to her butt. She really hoped no one could see them back here.  
  
"Kiss me, pet."  
  
She'd never kissed anyone in her life and wasn't sure she'd even be doing it right, but he held still and let her give him a light peck on the cheek.  
  
His hands around her ass pulled her in tighter and she could tell he was getting excited by her. It didn't scare her like she had thought it would. It didn't scare her at all. Quite the opposite.  
  
"Now do it again, only like you mean it."  
  
His hands slid up her back to her shoulders and he pulled her down for a kiss unlike anything she'd ever known.  
  
He tasted *good*.  
  
As the kiss got more intense, his hands traveled her body - up and down her back, down her legs and back up again.  
  
"Touch me," he pleaded as their breath got short and their kisses more fevered. Her hands ran across the muscles in his chest and he seemed to really enjoy it. So was she.  
  
His mouth moved in kisses across her cheek and over to her ear where he kissed his way down her scar. He took his time tasting her skin, savouring its sweetness.  
  
He felt like he was fifteen again, snogging with a girl in the cinema.  
  
They were kissing like they were still teenagers and as much as Spike wanted to take it farther, he didn't want to push this girl, who - for all intents and purposes - was still very much a virgin.  
  
His hands slid up the front of her dress and he found her breasts and he made her moan with the way he caressed them. One day soon, he vowed to himself, he was going to do this for real.  
  
Very lightly, he started pinching her nipples and she gasped at the pleasure she found in a little bit of pain.  
  
She started rubbing up against him then, searching for something even though she didn't know what it was. She'd heard people talk about sex but it always seemed to be spoken in some language she was unfamiliar with. The more she rubbed the closer she got to speaking that language.  
  
Spike helped her along, directing her movements, showing her the rhythm. He was getting closer but he knew she'd beat him to the punch. He was trying to come up with a way to gently word that he wasn't finished yet when she grabbed his shoulders and nearly screamed out her orgasm. A hand over her mouth muffled the sound and no one even turned around.  
  
She collapsed on top of him and within seconds, he felt her body go slack and relax. She was sound asleep.  
  
Spike looked to the ceiling - even though he wasn't a fan of any particular religion, he prayed for guidance to help him make it through the end of the movie without waking her up.  
  
  
  
Chapter 11  
  
"Pet? Time to wake up now."  
  
Tara yawned and stretched and blinked to get her eyes adjusted to the low theatre lights.  
  
Why was she sitting like this? Oh, God! Had she really done - and then - and then? She must have fallen asleep!  
  
She tried to pull away quickly but Spike wouldn't let her. The movie had ended a few minutes ago and he had waited until the theatre was empty before waking her up.  
  
"It's all right. Everyone's gone now." He helped her to stand and saw the unsure look in her eyes at what they had done.  
  
"Hey, none of that now. You were very good to obey your master and we have nothing to be ashamed of."  
  
That didn't seem to help much. He stood and took her hand in his, leading her out into the lobby.  
  
"I told you that wherever this relationship went would be completely up to you. If you don't want to do this again we'll stop."  
  
She started to protest and he smiled and stopped her. "But if you want to, we can take this as far as you want to go with it. A new rule. Whenever I think you may be ready for more of this, I'll ask you if you want to play. Those are the key words - want to play. If you do, say yes; if you don't, say no. I told you before Tara - the sub has all the power in a modern D/s relationship. You can choose to obey or you can choose not to. That's what makes it fun as a Dom, trying to figure out which buttons to push to get the desired response."  
  
"Yes, master." She seemed to have stepped back to being very shy and quiet.  
  
They were in the parking lot and he asked which car was hers and then led her over to it.  
  
"You will turn up for your lesson tomorrow, Tara, do you hear me? You'll not let this embarrass you into stopping the lessons, all right?"  
  
"No, Master." He didn't know it but she was actually excited about the prospects for tomorrow. What was it about this man that made her feel so safe? She didn't know, but she knew she'd like to take it as far as it would go.  
  
As she drove home, she thought about what had happened. Darla had told her that a sexual relationship between Dom and sub did not have to mean love. Which was fine with her because love was something she was greatly afraid she'd never experience. Which made a relationship with Spike all the more appealing.  
  
  
  
She showed up for class and Jill helped her into the tight-fitting yoga outfit she'd warn before.  
  
"No robe this time?" she asked, afraid she'd repulsed him last night and he no longer wanted to see her that way.  
  
"No mistress," Jill said, playing the part of a sub to perfection. "Master told me to put the clothes on you, not the robe."  
  
Jill ushered her in to the training room and, unlike normal, Spike was already there.  
  
"We're going for a tour of the facilities today; I think it's time to move your training up to the next level."  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
He opened the door for Tara to pass through. He led her down a hallway past Buffy's room and then down a flight of stairs.  
  
The first door they came to had a number one on the door and a sign that said 'In Use' so he walked on by to the next room. It had a number two on the door but no 'In Use' sign. Spike used his key to unlock the door.  
  
Inside was similar to the training room upstairs only a little bigger. Except the walls were lined in grey stone.  
  
"This is the small Dungeon," he explained "mostly bondage and S&M."  
  
He led her out and locked the door again. The next room that was unoccupied had a number five on the door. It was decorated with a shower and tub, like a bathroom, but it had no sink or commode. "Many fantasies are played out in this one. All kinds of fun to be had with water."  
  
Once again they left and headed further down the hall. The next was a bedroom with a huge four-post bed and lots of pillows. Tara saw that there were ropes tied to each post and thought about what it would be like to be tied up there. It was terrifying and exciting all at the same time.  
  
Spike saw her face and decided to improvise - they could do a full tour on another day. Spike led Tara over to the bed. "I'd planned on just giving you the tour today but it seems like you fancy this room, so I thought we'd give it a quick try out. Sound good?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"Do you trust me?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"Lie down on the bed please, Tara."  
  
She did as he instructed.  
  
He then positioned her arms over her head and tied her wrists with a figure eight knot, secure but not tight. He didn't want her to panic on him.  
  
"Its just yer wrists, luv. I know you don't like it when I tie up yer feet - that's fine. If you need to get out you know the words, right?"  
  
She nodded, but Spike let the infraction go. She seemed a little pale but she wasn't asking to be set free. He sat on the bed next to her and talked to her, helping her to get through this.  
  
"S'alright, pet, I'll let you up in a few minutes, not very long now. Not gonna hurt you, just gonna touch you. Just want you to get used to the feel of the ropes. Its safe here; no one to hurt you. Just me, and you know I'll always stop when ya want me to, right?"  
  
She nodded again but her color was returning to her face, she was calming down.  
  
"Just imagine all the delicious things I could do to you like this, luv. I'll bet there's a paradise down there yet to be discovered and explored. Remember, its all up to you, you have the power to stop the game at any time.  
  
"Do you like the thought of me touching you while you're tied up here?"  
  
"Yes, Master." She was blushing furiously and she tried to stop but it only got worse. She was so used to taking his commands now and so when he said to imagine, her brain went right to work doing just that. Now that she had an idea what that sex stuff was all about, she was eager for another taste. Her body started fidgeting just thinking about it.  
  
He lay a hand on her stomach and started rubbing her - everywhere but where she wanted it most.  
  
"Takin' it slow, luv. Be patient and we'll get there. He continued to caress her, slowly building a fire inside her. Making her want it as badly as he did. When he finally slipped a hand under her shirt, she was more than ready. He massaged and caressed and finally slid his thumb over a nipple, making her whimper. Over and over again, sometimes lightly, sometimes rough. When he grabbed it and pinched, the way he had done last night, her whimpers turned to pleas.  
  
"Please - please Master."  
  
"Please what?"  
  
"Please do it again, Master. What you did last night."  
  
"Is that what you think this is all about? Just coming? No, pet, I just want to touch you, make you feel good. There's no rush, we'll get there eventually."  
  
He lifted her shirt then, bringing it over her head and letting it stay around her arms, binding her even further.  
  
"So beautiful." His head descended and he licked across her breast and then around her nipples, finally sucking one into his mouth. He teased her seemingly forever as she twisted and turned, trying to ease that ache between her legs.  
  
"Hold still or I'll tie your legs too."  
  
She did, but she didn't want to; she wanted to scream and have him touch her into orgasm.  
  
She couldn't believe it when he suddenly stopped.  
  
Spike looked at the clock built into the wall near the floor so that the staff would know when the session was up. Five more minutes.  
  
"Time to let you up." He hadn't intended to go that far, but she tempted him - as she had been doing for weeks now. Hell, he'd wanted inside since the first time he saw her. It wasn't her fault, he was sure she didn't even realize. But as her master it was his job to make her aware of the power she had and show her how to use it. Getting caught up in her body, so that he lost all reason - while he was supposed to be training her - was not the way to do that.  
  
He undid the knots holding her in place but Tara didn't seem to want to leave. "Time to go, Tara. We'll continue with your training next Friday."  
  
Highly embarrassed at being rebuffed, Tara quickly stood and followed Spike back up the stairs where he escorted her to the changing room and then said goodbye. He held her arm and said, "We'll get there, Tara. Don't worry. You just have to trust me to care of you."  
  
  
  
Chapter 12  
  
The week went by very slowly. Spike had gradually dwindled his clients down to one after his first few weeks with Tara. Not that he wasn't interested in helping others find what they'd been missing, but Angel had big plans for making the business bigger - opening more clubs around the country and they both thought Spike should confine himself to be the trainer for the trainers.  
  
She was the one client he refused to pass off to anyone else and Angel didn't like it, but Darla convinced him that she'd only allow *Spike* to continue her training. When he still seemed uncertain, Darla took him down to the Dungeon and convinced him.  
  
He had two trainer trainees at the moment and he worked with them two days a week. Making all the other days seem unending until Friday could come around again.  
  
Thursday, he felt restless and decided to go see a movie. He'd missed the one last week that he'd gone to see. He smiled. Maybe if he went to the same movie theatre, he'd run into -  
  
No, that was a pipe dream. But when he pulled out of the parking lot, he went in that direction just the same.  
  
  
  
Tara's session with Darla went well on Thursday. Tara was making such great improvement since she'd been seeing Spike that all they really did anymore was talk about Tara's week. She'd secured that raise - thanks to her new-found confidence. She'd even been going out to dinner with the new friends she was making, both at work and in her apartment building.  
  
Everything was perfect. Almost.  
  
After meeting with Darla, she was restless - waiting for tomorrow and her session with Spike. She didn't want to go back and sit in her apartment, unable to concentrate so she decided to go see the movie she'd missed last week.  
  
  
  
Her eye unconsciously went to the concession line when she entered the lobby, but there wasn't a blond head in sight. The movie she had a ticket for was crowded and she'd have to sit between two strangers - something she didn't particularly feel like doing tonight, so she wandered in and out of theatres, looking for one less crowded. Anything really, she didn't care what she saw, as long as it kept the restless thoughts away.  
  
Finding at last a movie with no one at all in the theatre - the movie looked like some dull drama but anything was better than nothing, so she wandered in and walked up the stairway to the back.  
  
She wasn't really all that surprised to find him sitting there - in the dark corner with the double seat.  
  
He took her hand and pulled her into his lap, saying, "Kiss me." He wanted her so badly that he wasn't going to give her a chance to say no.  
  
Before she could answer as she was taught to, his mouth was there, tasting her. This is what she'd needed - needed during training last week. This total acceptance of her - how being with him made her feel not so empty inside.  
  
He was more impatient this week, hands going under her dress almost at once. He made her stand so that he could pull her knickers off and then sat her on his lap once again.  
  
He went instantly to her center, rubbing and thrusting fingers inside, eager to get her as keyed up as he was.  
  
"Wanna fuck you, pet."  
  
She didn't say no. Or yellow. Or red.  
  
His jeans were easily unbuttoned and he started to pull her down, ready to sheath himself inside.  
  
Birth control. He hadn't brought birth control.  
  
"You on the pill, luv?"  
  
"No, master."  
  
"Patch, shot - anything?"  
  
"No, Master - I've never - I m-mean - I haven't - there's been no one."  
  
"Fuck!"  
  
He moved her off his lap as quick as he could and refastened his jeans.  
  
He felt her retreating and pulled her close once again.  
  
"It's not you, luv, its me - I should have been prepared for this. Even Masters are unprepared sometimes. We'd make terrible Boy Scouts. Keep wanting to flog the rest of the group." He smiled and she forced a smile as well.  
  
"Come here. Doesn't mean we still can't play, right?" He pulled her back onto his lap, this time with her sitting sideways - he didn't need the temptation of her straddling him.  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
He kissed her again and ran a hand up her leg to her warm, wet pussy underneath. This girl had never had a high school sweetheart. Never had a prom date. Never had a man fumble his way through a first time at sex. She'd never trusted anyone enough to even try.  
  
And he'd tried to make her first time something quick and easy in the back of a deserted cinema.  
  
He took his time, slowly building the warmth she felt into a roaring fire. Slowly brought her to orgasm - as his hand made gentle circles across virginal flesh.  
  
He brought her to one and then another and then another until she once again fell asleep in his lap.  
  
Looking down at her peaceful body curled so securely against his, he promised himself that her first time at sex - her first time at making love - would be just that. Something sweet and slow and not a quick fuck in the back of a movie theatre.  
  
  
  
Chapter 13  
  
"You're the public face of our business, Spike, you have to go."  
  
Spike, sitting in the chair across from Angel, who sat at his desk, rolled his eyes.  
  
"Peaches, there's no reason you can't do it this year. Ask Cordy, she'll go with you. She's an old hand at this."  
  
"Spike, this is your job. One of the things you agreed to in this partnership was getting out there and putting your pretty face to our name. You do this trade show every year, what's the hang up this year?"  
  
"I've got too much on my plate right now, Angel. I have trainees to train, two more are coming in next week. I have this girl who -"  
  
Angel grinned and interrupted him. "I knew there had to be a girl in there somewhere."  
  
"She's a client. She's just now starting to see her potential, I don't want to up and leave her for -"  
  
"Take her with you."  
  
"She's not even trained yet. She's seen the rooms but has yet to even do a proper scene yet. She's not ready."  
  
"Then get her ready, Spike. If we're going to expand, we need this now more than ever. You're going, end of story."  
  
  
  
Jill didn't make her change clothes when she arrived. Instead, she took her, still in her street clothes, into Spike's office.  
  
"Here she is, Master."  
  
She got Tara comfortable and brought her a cup of tea and then left quietly.  
  
"Is something wrong - did I - did we - "  
  
"No, nothing's wrong, pet. Quite the opposite. I have a trade show I have to attend the first week in August and I'd like you to come with me as my slave."  
  
"Slave?"  
  
"Slave is an exclusive sub - exclusive to one Dom. I want you to go and show everyone how well we've trained you here at Gomorrah."  
  
"I - but I - I don't know what to do."  
  
"That's why I'm talking to you about this now. This will give us eight weeks to get you trained."  
  
"What would I have to… do?"  
  
"Whatever I tell you. Place will be filled with other Doms and slaves - and our suppliers. You won't look or feel out of place, I promise you that. You'll be around other people who understand you better than you realize."  
  
"Isn't there someone else who could go - be better at this than me?"  
  
"I want *you*, Tara. I want you to go with me. Buffy will be coming too, but as an employee - she's not a sub. It's four days. The first two are for suppliers, we'll need to get on good terms with a few of them since we plan to expand. The last two days are for clubs, to show what we have to offer. Those two days are open to the public. Lots of freaks walking around being freaky together. Makes for a wild party."  
  
"I don't know if I can do it. What if I mess up?"  
  
"You can't mess up."  
  
She sat looking uneasy for a few minutes but Spike looked like he had complete confidence in her.  
  
"All right." She really wasn't sure at all, but he'd done so much for her already that she couldn't help but want to help him in return.  
  
"Great, that's settled. We'll get started right away. Well, tomorrow. There's one thing we have to do first. Go get yer coat."  
  
  
  
They took a taxi to Spike's apartment. Spike wanted to stop and get something to eat, but Tara said she was too nervous to eat right now.  
  
It was a good thing Spike didn't tell her where they were going or what they'd be doing or she would have been too nervous to breathe.  
  
  
  
"Nice place. A little bigger than mine." Tara looked around at the champagne colored walls and the chocolate brown suede couches. The living room opened into the kitchen with its matching walls and comfortable looking stools that sat beside the counter.  
  
"Let me take yer coat." He took it, along with his duster and hung them in the hall closet.  
  
"Come on, let's talk." He led her over to one of the couches. "The first thing we have to work 0n is you being completely comfortable around me. No hesitation, no stutters - no shying away from a look or a touch.  
  
"The other thing we have to do is get you completely comfortable in yer own skin. Luckily there's a way to do both in one shot. Two birds, one stone."  
  
"How, Master?"  
  
"First thing, no master tonight. Just me and you like the time we went camping."  
  
"Okay."  
  
"Next thing - come here and kiss me."  
  
It wasn't a tough call. She willingly crawled into his lap and started kissing him in the way he'd taught her. Strong and passionate and uninhibited.  
  
Her hands twisted in his hair and then down around his neck as the kiss deepened. His arms held her to him, hands stroking her body and feeling her skin flush beneath her clothes.  
  
He pulled his t-shirt over his head and went to work on the buttons of her blouse. He worked his way from the bottom up, sliding his thumbs inside to touch each new bit of skin that was uncovered. When he reached the top, he pushed it back over her shoulders and down her arms until it lay in a puddle on the floor.  
  
Gathering her in his arms, he stood and carried her into the bedroom, laid her gently on the bed and slowly started undressing her. He'd promised himself that he'd take this slow, even if it killed him. And as good as she looked right now, with her shirt and shoes lying on the floor and her trousers being pulled off, it just might.  
  
From the look of it, the sight of him was doing much the same to her.  
  
Once her pants were off, he sat on the bed and unlaced his boots and she knelt behind him, arms around his torso and soft lips kissing his back.  
  
Boots gone, he stood and unhooked his jeans. He didn't take them off though, that would be rushing things. Lord, he hadn't had actual intercourse in… at least three months. Looking at her, he knew he'd be ready to pop too quickly if he was stripped down.  
  
He lay her down sideways across the bed and slid his hands inside her knickers, catching them with his fingers and pulling them off. He positioned her with her legs hanging off the bed and knelt before her on the floor, using first his fingers and then his mouth to bring her to orgasm.  
  
"You ready for me, pet?"  
  
Eyes drowsy, she nodded. He reached into a drawer in his bedside table and pulled out a handful of condoms.  
  
He dropped his pants and climbed on the bed with her. Grabbing a condom, he ripped it open and slid it into place. Slowly, ever so slowly, he eased himself inside, letting her adjust to him.  
  
It was heaven. She didn't look so sleepy anymore.  
  
This being her first time, he kept to a long, slow stroke and let her ease into her climax. Soft and slow in the missionary position became hard and fast in almost every position by the time the night was through.  
  
  
  
He woke up around dawn when she was lifting the covers in order to get up. He slid his arm around her waist and pulled her back against him.  
  
"Don't want you to leave," he whispered, then, after kissing her shoulder, he fell right back to sleep. When he woke again, a little after ten, she was gone.  
  
  
  
She'd taken a cab back to her apartment and now she sat at her kitchen table, crying. This wasn't the way it was supposed to go. She wasn't supposed to fall in love with him. It was supposed to be quick and unemotional and no strings attached.  
  
And last night - last night definitely felt like strings. Strings pulling her under and waiting for her to drown in the deep blue sea of his eyes.  
  
God, she was even doing corny analogies!  
  
She wanted to call Dr. Darla - confess what a fool she'd made of herself. But she couldn't. And now she'd promised to train to be his slave for this conference. How was she going to face him every day?  
  
He'd explained, between bouts of making love, that she'd be expected to come to the club every day for the next eight weeks. At no charge, of course.  
  
She had to learn to do all of those things the other slaves would be doing. She was still afraid of the pain of sadomasochism, but he'd promised he wouldn't do anything she wasn't comfortable with.  
  
She looked at the clock just as the phone rang.  
  
"Hello?"  
  
"Tara, you all right? I woke up and you were gone."  
  
"Yeah, sorry," she said, hastily wiping the tears from her cheeks. "I had some errands to do before we got started today."  
  
It was an easy lie and fell from her lips as if it were the truth.  
  
"Next time, leave me a note or something, luv. I was worried I'd done something wrong." His voice was affectionate and she relaxed.  
  
"No, you were - you were - well, you know what you were." She laughed and he laughed with her.  
  
"Meet you at the club at one this afternoon?"  
  
"I'll be there," Tara promised.  
  
  
  
Chapter 14  
  
"This means you belong to me."  
  
He snapped the collar, made of thin black leather, around her neck.  
  
"I'll have one special made, of course, before the expo. But this will get you used to wearing it."  
  
She'd been expecting it to bind and bother her, but it was sitting very well around her throat. Not loose but not tight. Just right, as Goldilocks would say.  
  
"First position," he ordered and she sank to her knees and put her hands in her lap and cast her eyes downward.  
  
"Very good. Now come stand beside me. You are to be two steps behind me at all times as I walk. If I greet someone, I will introduce you. You don't look up at him or her directly, but if that person has a slave as well, you will be introduced and you may look up at the other slaves. Shaking hands or kissing the slave's cheek is permissible. You don't shake the Master's hand. Got that?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"Many times, at these things, masters will exchange slaves for a few hours of play. Don't worry about that, I won't be doing any exchanging this year. You'll be strictly with me, okay?"  
  
"Yes, Master." He could hear the relief in her voice.  
  
"Now, we're going to bend a rule here. Usually, slaves do not speak until spoken to, but for now, I want you asking as many questions as you need to. I'd rather have you understand what's going on than be standing beside me confused, all right?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"Very good. Now there are some rules that are specific and some that aren't. Say, for example, that you have to go to the ladies room. You place your hand on my arm - that signals me that you want to say something. When I turn to look at you, then you may tell me whatever it is, but not until I look at you, is that clear?"  
  
"Yes, Master. And thanks, I was worried about that one."  
  
"Next rule. When we eat, I will order for you, so we need to start finding out what you like to eat. How about we have a standing date for dinner at least twice a week from now until the expo so I can get used to your eating habits and see what you like to eat?  
  
"Some masters do not allow their slaves to eat with them or even sit at the table while they eat. I'm not a big believer in that. For one thing, I don't have the patience to sit around waiting for another meal to be served. Plus, most restaurants frown on having their patrons sitting on the floor.  
  
"Follow me, let's get you acquainted with the equipment." They went down the same stairs they'd gone down the other day. Most of the rooms were unoccupied now. He showed her rooms made to look like different things. One was a classroom; another was a more elaborate version of the Dungeon room he'd shown her the other day.  
  
There were seven in all. The eighth room was called "The Toolbox", This is the room where there were all kinds of whips, chains, rope - all tools of the trade. There were two rows of nothing but handcuffs.  
  
He showed her bullwhips and floggers made out of leather and rabbit fur. She kind of liked the rabbit fur one. It was soft and she didn't think this one would hurt at all.  
  
"It can sting, if you hit hard enough. But no, for the most part, its pretty harmless."  
  
He explained about "marks" - the different bruises that different types of tools will leave. He explained about being a top or a bottom, depending on which part you were to play. He told her about "scenes" or scenarios created for the clients, made more believable by the props in each room. Each trainer here had different costumes as well, in case a client's fantasy should call for something in particular.  
  
He promised to take her shopping before the expo so that they could get appropriate clothing for her to wear. She would have a say in the choices, he promised, so that she didn't feel uncomfortable.  
  
"You mean I don't have to walk around naked? That's a relief. I was kind of afraid you were going to want me wear nothing at all for this thing."  
  
"There will be some nude slaves, yes. But a slave can be anything that master wants. I've seen everything from nudity to elegance. I know a guy - Riley's his name. Has a thing for the armed forces. All of his subs are dressed like military men. I think we'll keep you're wardrobe in the 'simple but elegant' department. That way you don't have to fret about being underclothed, how's that sound?"  
  
"Perfect, Master. Just perfect."  
  
He took her back into room six - the bedroom. He had her lay in the bed again and he showed her different techniques of tying someone up. He even made her a "rope dress" - that did not even closely resemble a dress, but it was a way of binding someone where they were in bound but still able to walk around. It felt very sexy, with Spike there admiring her.  
  
She was beginning to see why this lifestyle was so attractive to so many people. You began to get very comfortable with your body when someone was paying so much attention to you and openly admiring and praising the things you did. She couldn't have imagined letting anyone tie her up like this before she came her, but now… she found herself liking that Spike was pushing the boundaries she'd thought were so important for all these years.  
  
This wasn't abuse. It was giving yourself fully to someone, trusting him enough to let him try to please you. She hadn't expected that. BDSM was always something she imagined was very dirty and painful - not this mutual seeking of pleasure for each partner.  
  
He only went as far as she let him. As soon as she wasn't comfortable with an idea, she said her safeword - yellow - and he would back away. Red was only for when she wanted all play to stop immediately. Yellow would make him back away from that particular thing - binding her feet in her particular case. She couldn't stand the thought of not being able to walk away.  
  
Eventually, he settled for just tying a single loose rope around each ankle - not tied together, just a small anklet on each leg. It still allowed her to move or walk, making this particular type of bondage bearable.  
  
It was interesting the way he seemed to know her so well. He would back off a subject right away if she said yellow, but then come back to it a different way later on. The anklets had been his fourth attempt at getting something around her feet, each attempt a little less intimidating than those that came before it, until he found something she was comfortable with.  
  
The best thing about this new training, she found, was there was no time limit.  
  
Play could go on as long as they both wanted it to.  
  
He'd tied her to the bed and started playing exactly the way he'd done last week but this time, the fun didn't have to stop before they both wanted it to.  
  
"One of the things you have to learn," he explained after he'd untied the rope dress and tied her arms to the bed as he had last week, "is that your Master knows what's best for you." His hands were driving her crazy, teasing over and around her breasts.  
  
"Your master will allow you to come when he thinks you're ready - or when you deserve it for pleasing him. Last week, for example," his fingers trailed down her torso to her thighs and legs, "you did not come because I thought you deserved better than a quick fuck in a scene for your first time."  
  
He thought about last night, when she'd had her official first time and corrected, "Or first four times."  
  
He looked her in the eyes. "I care about you too much to have done that to you. And I didn't plan last night," he explained, "at least, not before you got here. I just - after you agreed to help me - I just wanted your first time to be special."  
  
"It was very special, Master."  
  
He cared about her - that was as much as she could hope for. He cared enough to take her home and not do it here, where she had been more or less paying him for… everything they did.  
  
But not now. Now they were both were they wanted to be and he played and teased her with his hands and then with the rabbit flogger. It felt as good as she'd imagined it would. When he swatted her on the thigh with it, it didn't hurt at all.  
  
"You like that?" he asked.  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
"You want more?"  
  
"Please, Master."  
  
He hit her again, harder this time and then rubbed on the spot where he'd hit with his hand. It didn't hurt at all, it was just a gentle little sting that began to feel better as soon as he started rubbing.  
  
He hit her again and again, each time the stinging getting a little more intense, but it was a good kind of pain. He stopped long enough to pull his shirt off over his head and then dropped the flogger on the bed and stared just rubbing her instead. Rubbing led to caressing which led to Tara's moaning which led to Spike crawling up her body to ease his way inside.  
  
He took his time, letting her climax build.  
  
"Want you to come for me, luv."  
  
He thrust in a little harder.  
  
"But not yet," he ordered. "Wait til I tell you."  
  
She was on the brink and didn't want to wait.  
  
"Now," she begged.  
  
"Not yet. Hold it, baby. Hold it off for another minute."  
  
She started thinking about planting flowers - anything to get her mind off - nope, not gonna work.  
  
"Master, please…"  
  
"Now," he ordered and felt her squeeze him even tighter as he came inside her.  
  
"You have to learn to hold off until I give the order," he said, kissing across her neck as they both cooled down.  
  
"It's too hard. I can't do that."  
  
"Yes, you can, you just need practice. Train your mind to focus on something else."  
  
"I tried thinking of planting flowers…"  
  
He laughed. "Interesting choice."  
  
"Well, I didn't know what else to do."  
  
"Try singing a song. Dru, my first instructor, taught me to sing *God Save the Queen* to myself to hold off coming."  
  
Tara laughed. "But I don't know *God Save the Queen*." She couldn't stop laughing.  
  
"Very funny, remind me to teach it to you later. For now, though… try the Star-Spangled Banner." He started kissing his way back down her body.  
  
"You want me to think of rockets exploding and that's supposed to keep me from coming?"  
  
He looked up. "Is that what that song is about?"  
  
Tara nodded. "Yes, Master."  
  
"Oh. Then sing something else." His mouth found her clit and she nearly came again. Then he heard her start to hum Happy Birthday.  
  
"Good girl."  
  
  
  
Chapter 15  
  
Willow stopped in to Tara's office on her lunch break the following Wednesday.  
  
"Where have you been, Tara? You got a hot new boyfriend or something? We missed you the other night after work. We all went down to the Dancing Donkey and had a beer."  
  
Tara just smiled. "Or something."  
  
Willow just knew there was going to be a good story coming on. "Come on to lunch and tell me all about him."  
  
Tara grabbed her purse and went.  
  
Over lunch, Tara let on that there was a new guy in her life. And that they saw each other every day after work.  
  
"Where did you meet him?"  
  
"With you actually. Remember that time we went out and those two guys bought us drinks?"  
  
"*That* guy - the hot blond? Oh my god - he was just… wow!" Willow was most impressed.  
  
Willow tried to drag more details out of her but Tara didn't give her any more information. As much as Dr. Darla had recommended the place, she still didn't think that she wanted to let anyone else in on the secret. It just wasn't the kind of thing you discussed with other people.  
  
Which was half the fun of doing it.  
  
  
  
Tara rushed to Gomorrah after work. Jill helped her to dress in a plain white blouse and a plaid skirt with knee-high socks and black Mary Jane shoes. She was informed that these belonged to Mistress Cordelia and she was only being given them on loan. Her collar was snapped in place and she was eagerly anticipating the lesson to come. This is the first time she'd been required to wear a certain type of costume.  
  
She was led by Jill downstairs to room four, outfitted to look like a small classroom.  
  
Spike was there as well as another man and woman, dressed in similar clothing. Jill ushered her in and then sat at one of the desks as well.  
  
"Well, Miss Maclay, good of you to join us. Sit down, please," Spike requested of her. She knew the two other people in the room by sight only, they were two of Spike's trainees. She knew that eventually she'd be asked to perform in front of other people; she had just been hoping it wouldn't be quite this soon.  
  
Although, seeing Spike dressed in jeans and a turtleneck under a tweed jacket was worth the price of admission. Yum. Usually it was just jeans and a t-shirt, but the clothes he had on now were turning her on like mad.  
  
She did feel like she was back in school - sort of. One of those back-in-school nightmares, more like - the one where you had to give a report naked.  
  
"Miss Fleming, do you have your homework ready?" he asked the other woman in the classroom.  
  
"I'm sorry, Mr. Pratt, but you see, my um, my dog ate it." The woman had a decidedly lecherous glint in her eye as she answered him. She would have been a tad bit jealous of the way she was looking at Spike, except for two things. One, that Spike had winked at her as Miss Fleming answered and two, none of the other people in the room were wearing Spike's collar.  
  
"Miss Fleming, you knew that this homework was vitally important for your marks. Come up here, please, we must make an example of you for the whole class."  
  
He pulled a ruler out of his desk and instructed Miss Fleming to lean over his desk.  
  
"Naughty, naughty, Miss Fleming - no knickers on you today. Are you trying to earn extra credit perhaps?"  
  
Miss Fleming spread her legs a little wider.  
  
"Seems you are. Your punishment first, I think, then the extra credit."  
  
He slapped her on the behind with the wooden ruler and then quickly eased the pain with his hand. Another slap and another rub with his hand.  
  
Tara couldn't believe he was actually getting her turned on with this corny schoolgirl routine. But it was working. And the way he kept glancing at her, she had a feeling that he knew what it was doing to her.  
  
Miss Fleming (she still didn't know the others' first names) was moaning and writhing on his desk, angling her hips and trying to get the ruler to hit her in more intimate parts.  
  
It finally did and she shook through what looked like a small orgasm.  
  
"Well, Miss Fleming, it looks as if that punishment was not sufficient. Perhaps we should move on to your extra credit. Mr. Foster, would you join us at the front of the classroom please and sit in my chair?" The other man eagerly joined the pair of them. "On your knees, Miss Fleming. As you know, your homework dealt with the intricacies of the perfect blowjob. Would you please demonstrate your knowledge of these intricacies on Mr. Foster?"  
  
He stepped out of the way as Miss Fleming eagerly went down on Mr. Foster.  
  
"Miss Tyler, if you would care to join them?"  
  
Jill stood and went to the front of the class, going to her knees also and licking and sucking in tandem with Miss Fleming.  
  
Spike walked to the back of the classroom and stood behind Tara's chair.  
  
"You all right with this?" he whispered. Her unknown history made him unsure of what her boundaries are. He hoped one day she'd trust him enough to share the details, but he'd never push for them.  
  
Tara was enthralled and just nodded in the affirmative as she watched other people have sex for the first time in her life.  
  
Spike unfastened his pants and sat in another chair. He rolled on a condom and instructed Tara to sit on his lap, facing the front of the classroom. She felt him fill her as she watched what was happening up front.  
  
"Do you like this?"  
  
"Yes, Master."  
  
One of his hands worked its way under her shirt as the other lifted her skirt and fingered her wet clit. It took almost no time at all for her to have her first orgasm, but he held her in place and made her ride him through two more.  
  
"Been thinking about making love to you all day," he confessed. "Couldn't hardly concentrate on work for thinking of you."  
  
Both of his hands shifted to her hips and helped her movements as he thrust deeper, working toward his own climax. Up front, Mr. Fleming was coming as well, his cum covering the breasts of both ladies with him.  
  
"Go," Spike ordered and all three of them smiled and left, waving goodbyes to Tara as they did so.  
  
Spike nearly screamed, his orgasm hit him so hard and fast he felt lightheaded. He turned her around in his lap and bent his head to suck and bite her nipples through the thin white cotton of her blouse.  
  
"Come home with me tonight?" It was a question, not an order.  
  
"Yes, master."  
  
Chapter 16  
  
She had to ask. The timing was bad, surely - but she had to know. They lay naked and satisfied in Spike's bed in his apartment. They'd made love three times already - once more at the club and once here. She couldn't, for some reason, think of it as anything but *'making love'*, no matter how, where or why they did the deed.  
  
"Do you bring all your submissive trainees home?"  
  
"Never did before, no." He was sprawled across the bed, breathing heavily, recovering. It didn't seem, in how natural he answered, that he was lying.  
  
*'Then why me?'* she wanted to ask. *'I'm nobody special. Just a damaged woman you've helped make whole again.'*  
  
She wasn't stupid, she remembered Dr. Darla's words - that none of it really meant anything to him, that he did this all the time - it was his job.  
  
They'd had a conversation on her first night here, in between bouts of love-making, where he explained that they weren't allowed, technically, to have intercourse at the club. Most of the people who came there weren't looking for sex anyway - they were looking for quite a different outlet.  
  
But it did happen occasionally - and they were very careful about making sure condoms were used. If anyone got sick - in any way - from their experience at Gomorrha, they'd be shut down. So there was no sex without condoms. And it wasn't just good business; the people that worked there were not just their colleagues but their friends. They'd never want to do anything that would get them hurt in any way.  
  
He knew that Cordy never had sex of any kind with her clients, it was against her personal code of ethics. He himself had only had sex at Gomorrah twice before her. Both times he'd been new and naÃ¯ve and subbing for a Dom client and lost himself in his role.  
  
Until one client had tried to say he was the father of the child she was carrying - even though he'd been wearing a condom; he'd almost lost everything then. But tests proved that it wasn't his and he'd never had sex there since. Until now.  
  
Tara thought of all this over and over as she lay there calming her breathing tonight. Why would he want her so much?  
  
She had to admit, no matter that he didn't want her to call him master here at his apartment, she was pretty sure this was all part of her training. He seemed to be playing too much - having too much fun while with her - it had to be. He would hold off on letting her come; play and tease and stop and make her laugh. All just part of the training.  
  
He'd explained so many things about slaves at the club. That their fate rested entirely in the hands of their master and a good master would want to please his slave as much as himself. Isn't that what he was doing - pleasing her? Pleasing himself?  
  
No matter that he encouraged her to be very vocal at his apartment about what she wanted him to do. He'd explained that there would be a time, when he thought she was ready, that he would have her take the Dominant role for a session or two. All subs must play the Dom to understand their own role better.  
  
That's all this was, she was sure.  
  
Because if not, why would she even be here?  
  
In the morning, when he awoke, she wasn't there. She'd run away again.  
  
  
  
On Friday around lunchtime, Spike tracked Cordelia down to ask her a question.  
  
"Cordy, I've got a problem."  
  
"What is it, Spike?"  
  
"What do you do if you think you're… if you're… Never mind." This was ridiculous, insane. He couldn't be in love, it just wasn't possible. He started to leave, unsure of whether or not he should discuss this. But Cordy refused to give up now, her curiosity was peaked.  
  
Cordy couldn't for the life of her figure out what he was going to ask. She watched him walk away, head hung down, slumped shoulders - something was really wrong. She ran after him and pulled him into a bar a few doors down from the club. She pulled them into a corner booth and ordered them both a couple of beers. The she got down to it.  
  
"So spill. What's wrong?"  
  
Spike said nothing for a minute but Cordy wasn't giving up. "You know you can trust me, Spike. Not just because you taught me or because we're occasional lovers but because you're my friend and I'm yours. Now spill before I kick you in the shins under the table."  
  
That made Spike grin - and relax.  
  
"Have you ever fallen in love with a client?"  
  
"Oh no! No way, mister! You know that's against the rules." He gave her a *'fuck the rules'* kind of look and she took the hint. "Okay, okay, you've made your point. We rarely follow the rules. But you can't start a relationship with her while she's coming to see us professionally. You *know* you'll get in trouble for that one."  
  
"Cordy, I own half the club - what's Angel gonna do, scold me and make me stand in the corner? He can't fire me."  
  
"No, but… Spike, do you want me to take over this woman's training? I have a couple of free hours on Wednesdays and another free hour on Friday morning."  
  
Spike just shook his head. "No, I'll do it. It took a lot for this girl to trust *me*, I don't want her to shy away because of a new instructor. And I have to be very careful with this one, she's got some major issues dealing with her childhood. Darla called and specifically asked for me. This girl's a hard nut to crack. She was so nervous and upset in her first session that I took her…" he paused and clarified, "Not a word of this to Angel, all right?"  
  
Cordy zipped her lips and threw away the key.  
  
"I took her camping with me that first weekend."  
  
"For God's sake - why?"  
  
"It taught her to trust me. I was a bloody perfect gentleman and didn't touch her at all. I also explained how and why the submissive has all the power. You know the drill."  
  
Cordelia nodded.  
  
"So it worked?"  
  
"She came back the next week for her appointment with Buffy and she's been coming back every week and getting stronger all the time. Yeah, I think I did the right thing, even if it was unconventional."  
  
"So when did you start falling in love with her?"  
  
"I don't know, and I'm not really sure if I do, maybe its just transference from me helping her break out of her shell." His fingers scraped across his scalp as he thought. "But I think from that first night I felt something. She has so much untapped passion in her, I can feel it. Talk to her about her work and she'll smile and talk to you for hours about it.  
  
"And she's taken to the scenes well, as long as I'm careful. I'm afraid to let anyone else touch her besides me - I don't know what kind of damage she has from childhood.  
  
"I remember wondering, that first night, if I could train her and keep her, as a permanent sub for me."  
  
Cordy smiled. "You've got it bad, my friend. You've never taken anyone on long-term before, have you?"  
  
He shook his head and finished his beer.  
  
"So why now? Why this woman?"  
  
"I don't know. She had a bad childhood, she has a scar about eight inches long that looks like someone took a knife to her and tried to - it goes from her ear down to her jaw and then down her neck. She won't talk about it though, that's why her hair hangs down like it does, she's tryin' ta hide it. Buffy taught her how to conceal it a bit with makeup, but she still hides it with 'er hair.  
  
"She wore her hair off her face once - only because I commanded her to at the last session. Hell, Cordy, this is the first client I've ever had that really seems like she might not want to be here. She's getting stronger, but… she's still timid as a mouse."  
  
"Well, she keeps coming back, doesn't she? I mean, no one's forcing her or whatever. So it takes a little longer, so what? If you can teach her what she needs to learn about herself, then I say leave her be."  
  
He nodded his agreement.  
  
"So, camping huh?"  
  
He just grinned and nodded.  
  
  
  
Chapter 17  
  
"Want to try something new tonight, luv."  
  
"Yes, master."  
  
"No, tonight you're the mistress, I'm the sub." They were in the upstairs training room and Spike walked over to the table and the box sitting on it.  
  
He pulled out an assortment of tools; the rabbit flogger, handcuffs, one small flogger that looked like it was made of rubber strings and another that was heavy black leather. There was even a wooden paddle.  
  
"I want you to be the Dom tonight. I want you to see that pain can be a good thing. But first, some instructions. Always use the floggers and whips on the fleshy part of the ass. It can take the blow without doing much damage. Never, until you have more control over these tools, never use them on any other part of the body. You want the sub to endure pain but only as far as it gives them pleasure. That point is different for everyone. Some people find fulfillment with just a little sting - as you did the other day. But some people like their pain hard-boiled, something you're unlikely to come across unless you become a Dom yourself."  
  
"And where do you fall?" she asked, genuinely curious.  
  
"Somewhere in the middle. Now come here and pick one out."  
  
She went to the table and chose the rabbit flogger. "First, I want you to use on yourself. Let it slap your leg a few times to get the feel of it."  
  
Tara did as commanded. The first two swings of the soft rabbit fur made little impression so she slapped a little harder.  
  
"Mmmm, like that."  
  
"Always remember to prepare the skin for the coming blows. If you remember, I rubbed down your flesh after each swing. That whipping and then rubbing will toughen up the skin a bit, prepare it for the next blow."  
  
She grinned, "You mean there's a reason for that other than making me feel good."  
  
"Oh well, guess our secret's out. Yes, there's a reason for that - although making you feel good seems to be a presiding preoccupation with me lately. Okay, let's move on." He handed her the rubber flogger.  
  
"Now these are thinner and so the blow will be more intense. The larger the surface area, the less pain you'll experience. On this thin one, the blow will be concentrated. Try that one on your leg."  
  
The very first blow stung and she put that flogger down. "I don't think I like that one."  
  
"Try this one," he suggested, handing the leather flogger to her. This flogger had wide strips, some of which were braided. She hit her leg gently at first and harder as she got the rhythm of it.  
  
"Like this one." The weight of the thing made it not so whippy - more of a dull thud that felt good against her skin. She was surprised when she looked down and saw red welts forming - it didn't feel like she'd been doing that much damage.  
  
"Try it on me."  
  
She looked appalled. "I don't know what I'm doing, I might hurt you."  
  
Spike laughed. "Isn't that the point of this exercise? Come on, Tara, I trust you. Don't you trust me?"  
  
"Yes."  
  
He turned and walked over to the wrist restraints attached to the wall. He faced the wall and held on to them, then entreated her to try it out.  
  
He was wearing a thin pair of pants today, not his normal blue or black jeans. Nothing, in effect, to stop the sting of the blow. She put the flogger in her right hand and walked over to him. The first blow was so light as to be almost non-existent.  
  
"Harder, luv, I can take it."  
  
She hit a bit harder this time and then rubbed the area as he'd said. The next blow was a little harder and a soft moan escaped his throat. "That's it. Little harder now, luv."  
  
She did as he asked and there was no mistaking the effect it had on him. He took her other hand and slid it down the front of his pants to the hard-on inside. "Told you it could feel good."  
  
This time, she held the length of him as she whipped and it jumped in her hand.  
  
A few more blows brought him closer to orgasm and she stroked him in time to every swat of the flogger. One last intense smack had him coming in her hand.  
  
He turned that killer smile her way. "Want a turn?"  
  
"Yes, master." She seemed eager but wary - the way she seemed to be about all of her lessons so far. As if she wasn't quite sure she wanted to do this, but was determined to see it through for just that reason.  
  
He switched places with her, letting her hold on to the restraints as he did instead of locking her in them.  
  
He started out much lighter than she had. Smaller smacks and more rubbing with his hand.  
  
With each blow that made her moan, he hit a little harder and rubbed a little less the next time. He knew what she was feeling. The sheer ecstasy of the knowledge that something that used to be feared could be wielded and harnessed into something that could be pleasurable.  
  
He let the next smack curl under her ass and tease her labia. Her knees went weak but she pulled herself up again.  
  
"Like that, pet?"  
  
There were no words. How could something this wrong feel this right? His fingers rubbed where the lash had hit and she came at the first touch of him there.  
  
  
  
That night was one of their standing dinner dates but Tara didn't think she could stand sitting for very long so they got take-out Chinese and went back to his apartment to eat.  
  
Feeding each other wontons led to foreplay. Which led to Tara on her knees on the floor in front of the couch as she gave her very first blowjob.  
  
She'd admitted she'd never done this before and asked for instruction. He'd started out telling her what to do but she was a quick study and he soon found that he couldn't get a single word past his throat as he braced himself for orgasm.  
  
After he was coherent again, he lifted her in his arms and carried her to the bedroom, intent on showing her that he wasn't too bad at oral sex himself.  
  
  
  
Once again, when he woke in the morning, she was gone.  
  
  
  
Chapter 18  
  
Spike was ready to take the hint. She didn't feel comfortable with him when he wasn't on company time. Every time she left before he awoke convinced him more and more that he was right.  
  
He'd resolve to put her out of his mind as much as possible and count only on her training here at the club.  
  
No more sleepovers back at his apartment. How could he have been so stupid as to think she might want to spend time with him. He knew his feelings for her had grown and changed every time he saw her but she was making it plain that her feelings for him were still as instructor only.  
  
He should have known better than to fall for a client. He'd seen it before and that road only let to heartache.  
  
He talked to Cordy that day, arranging to sit in on one of her scenes that evening; an experienced sub who liked to be watched. He liked his pain painful, but not cruel. He didn't think Tara would be able to handle one of the more intense scenes, the ones where the client wasn't happy until he or she was bleeding.  
  
He had Jill dress her in the usual sub's robe and brought her down to the large Dungeon room, awaiting Cordy and her client. He sat her on a mat on the floor and then sat behind her and pulled her back against him. He told himself that he did this so he could explain what was happening - quietly, so as not to interrupt - and it had nothing at all to do with wanting to hold her.  
  
He explained what was going to happen and then bid her to be quiet during the session so that they did not interfere with the players - just being there and watching was all that was required.  
  
Jill led the sub into the room; he was blindfolded and bound with shackles which were fastened to the floor. Other than that, he was nude.  
  
Cordy entered a few minutes later and Tara had a hard time associating this woman with the person she had spent a fun day of shopping with just a few months ago. She was dressed all in red leather and looked more menacing that Tara herself would have liked if she were the sub now shackled to the floor.  
  
Cordelia nodded to them, but after that she made no mention at all of their presence.  
  
The scene was intense.  
  
She dominated him completely, calling him names and using progressively more painful floggers and paddles on him. She called him a "good dog" when he did exactly as he was bid and he would crawl around on all fours like a dog when she unhooked his shackles from the floor.  
  
All of this would have normally sickened Tara, but it was obvious how much pleasure he received from this. No matter how harsh the treatment may have seemed to Tara, the man never uttered a safe word, never pulled back and asked for the game to be stopped.  
  
He was wearing leather pants so Tara couldn't see how bad his bruising was, but it must have been severe for all Cordy did to him.  
  
Tara wasn't sure, once the session was over, if she were repulsed or not. Spike didn't say a word after the session was over, just escorted her upstairs and bid her goodnight at the door to the dressing room.  
  
  
  
The next day at work, she felt tired and sluggish. She called the club before she left for home to tell them she wasn't feeling well and would be taking the night off and she'd be back tomorrow.  
  
Spike was waiting for her when she arrived home. He took excellent care of her - as a master was supposed to do, she supposed - and before long she fell asleep in front of the television, her head pillowed by his lap.  
  
As he ran long fingers through her hair, he now knew it wasn't transference and it wasn't a crush. He was head over heels for this woman who didn't like him enough to spend the night and be there when he woke up.  
  
To save his pride and hers, he did the same to her. He stayed until the sun broke the horizon and was gone before she woke up.  
  
  
  
She was there at five-thirty and they ate a dinner of sandwiches in his office as they talked about what had happened in Cordy's session the other day.  
  
No, she wasn't upset about it, although she'd been afraid beforehand that she might be. It was interesting to watch, even if it didn't turn her on - or off. The man seemed to really want what Cordy gave him - heck, he'd even paid for the privilege. She didn't think she'd ever be able to handle that much pain and humiliation for herself, but it was fascinating to watch someone else endure it.  
  
She had noticed that Cordy seemed very in control, knowing just where to hit him and how hard to make it both painful and pleasurable for him. Spike laughed at that and said that's something very few people notice. He gave her points for being observant.  
  
He asked if she had something in particular she'd like to try tonight and she thought about it as they finished their dinner.  
  
To help her decide, he asked what parts of her training she had liked best so far and which parts she liked least.  
  
She admitted to liking the submissive training the best, followed by the bondage. They talked about trust and how necessary that was to have a fulfilling relationship to your Dom. Some people, of course, got off on the unknown and preferred to have someone dominate them that they didn't know at all - they got off on the fear. But that wasn't Tara.  
  
She liked the time he'd taken with her to allow her to get to know him and trust him before he began asking her to do things that were against anything in her experience thus far in her life.  
  
"But you don't trust me enough to stay the night."  
  
He hadn't meant to say that.  
  
"What?" She was flabbergasted. "Do you want me to? Stay the night, I mean? I always just assumed that you'd want me gone."  
  
"Why?"  
  
"I don't know. We have this sort of 'no strings attached' kind of relationship and I didn't want to push."  
  
"No strings attached? Is that what you think? Baby, you've had strings in me since the very first day. Did you not believe me when I said I *never* take a sub out of the club with me? When I said I *never* take anyone camping? That I like being alone - usually? What did you think that first night at my apartment? Or the next morning when I asked you to stay? That I was being kind only because you were a virgin? That it was all part of the service here at Gomorrah?" He saw her face. That's exactly what she thought.  
  
"Fine. Forget it, little girl. Go home. Go play in someone else's club. I'm sure Darla can give you a reference to somewhere else." She didn't move. He lost it and screamed, "Get the hell out of my club!"  
  
She grabbed her purse and went.  
  
In the car, she dialed Darla's cell and asked if they could meet at the office - Tara desperately needed to talk. Darla agreed to meet her there in one hour.  
  
  
  
Chapter 19  
  
As Tara poured her heart out to Dr. Darla, Spike showed up at Cordy's apartment with a bottle of aged brandy.  
  
"Come on in, Spike. Tell me what happened."  
  
She poured them both a brandy and he told her the story - all of it.  
  
"What did you expect, Spike? She came to us for help, not to be seduced. She needed to learn that she can control her life and you taught her that. Did you expect her - like every other woman you've ever seduced - to fall for your charm and fall into your arms and forget that its all just an act? This isn't every other woman, Spike. This girl needed help, you gave it - end of story. Just let her go. She doesn't need you, she's got herself back. Let her have that."  
  
She offered him a spot on her couch for the night but he needed more comfort than that. She gave it.  
  
  
  
Tara went back to her normal life. She was stronger, yes - more self-assured. But she missed it - missed Spike, missed Cordy, missed pushing her boundaries and finding she was stronger than she thought.  
  
But missed Spike most of all.  
  
She confessed to Willow that she and her "boyfriend" Spike had broken up and Willow made a huge effort to throw another man in front of Tara at every opportunity but Tara just wasn't interested. None of them could give her what Spike had given her: a sense of self.  
  
Cordy called her many times over the next month, offering a friend to go shopping with - or hang out with - or get drunk with. Tara took her up on it at every opportunity.  
  
It was during this last excursion - complete and utter drunkenness - that Tara finally confessed her real feelings for Spike.  
  
"Cordy, I don't know what he expected of me. I went there planning to find this cold, cruel man and found instead this sweet man who saw I was terrified and took me camping with him. That was so different from what Darla told me to expect."  
  
"Wait - Darla told you what training would be like? The normal training sessions I mean?"  
  
"Yes, and mine were nothing like that. When I told her that our relationship got… intimate - she reminded me that he was only doing his job. That masters don't fall in love with their subs. That I should take what he offered but not expect any more."  
  
Cordy finally understood.  
  
"And you wanted more."  
  
"That first night at his apartment - he only did that because it was my first time. My… experience was rather limited. He even said that he was doing it to get it out of the way before slave training started."  
  
"He said that?"  
  
"Not in so many words, but… yeah, he said that. I came home and cried for hours. I decided then to ride out the experience. To take what he offered and forget the rest. I didn't think I was the type that could fall in love. I was wrong."  
  
Cordy wasn't really surprised; she'd gotten to know Tara quite well over the last month and had a feeling that Tara wouldn't have come as far as she had at Gomorrah if she wasn't completely and totally in love with her instructor. Tara made her promise never to tell Spike and Cordy kept that promise, kind of.  
  
Monday morning, two days before they were to leave for the expo, Cordy went to Spike and had a very interesting conversation with him. She didn't give away Tara's secret but she did make him tell her everything he'd done with Tara that had made Tara respond to him. And everything that had made her shy away.  
  
It was a long conversation, one that was most illuminating. She trusted him, not because he was her trainer, but because he was who he was. But because he was her trainer, she didn't think he was in it for the long haul. He'd never said how he felt about her at all. Just expected her to know the difference between training and love.  
  
He'd finally figured it out. What Tara needed wasn't domination; it wasn't b&d or D&s or s&m. What she needed was to be loved. Fully, wholly, completely loved for exactly who she was. Not as a Dom, but as a man.  
  
That wasn't the difficult part, he already loved her that much. The hard part was telling her.  
  
  
  
Chapter 20  
  
Cordy suggested getting Tara really drunk and having a long talk with her. Spike, who'd been trying to convince everyone - and himself - that he'd had no feelings for Tara at all, felt a jolt of hope for the first time in weeks.  
  
That night, when she got off work, Spike was standing by her car.  
  
"I think we need to have a talk," he said, "Away from the office, as it were. Feel like getting completely pissed?"  
  
She didn't understand what he meant.  
  
"Drunk, luv. We need have a talk and we need to get really, really drunk. Prob'ly be best if we do that in reverse order though. Come with me?"  
  
She grinned in a sweet but mischievous way. "Yes, Master."  
  
"No, no master tonight - please? Just Spike and Tara all right?"  
  
He stopped at a liquor store on the way to her apartment. He figured the best place to have this talk would be somewhere she felt comfortable and her apartment was his best guess.  
  
He'd been a bartender in college and still remembered enough to make them a pitcher of decent - meaning very alcoholic - Long Island Ice Teas. It took four drinks to get him brave enough to ask what he'd come to ask and say what he'd come to say.  
  
The first drink only got him drunk enough to ask her to come to the expo with him. The second drink got her brave enough to say yes. The third drink made them unsure of why exactly they'd fought in the first place.  
  
But by the fourth drink, Spike was pouring out his heart for her.  
  
"Tara, luv, how did you not see that I was completely in love with you?"  
  
"Was?" she asked, "You're not - not now?"  
  
"Of course I am. You're all I think about, all I talk about - my trainees are damn tired of hearing your name."  
  
Tara's smile radiated. "Is that so?"  
  
"Yes, its so. Please tell me you feel the same way - or that you could."  
  
"Spike, I've been in love with you since that first weekend. You can't imagine the tears I've cried over you. Poor Dr. Darla - I must have kept her up all night for a week after that first night in your apartment. I didn't know what to do - I thought it was just training and that no one could ever love me back."  
  
"Tara, the first thing on the list of all the things you are is loveable."  
  
She smiled at that, then rushed over to welcome him back into her life.  
  
He wanted to make love to her, he really did. But tomorrow was soon enough. Taking advantage of her while she was drunk would not start him off on the right foot. Instead, he just took her to bed and held her while she slept. Seeing as how they were in her apartment, he knew there was little to fear of her not being there in the morning.  
  
  
  
The next day Spike and Cordy took her shopping for clothes for the expo. They put their heads together and decided that the best costume for Tara would be a harem girl sort of thing - with all the essentials covered but still diaphanous on legs and arms - it was enough to make her feel comfortable.  
  
She bought four sets, in different colors. They also bought a black leather corset, long skirt and domino mask for the Masquerade Ball. The ball was the highlight of the expo - an event for charity that raised money for the local Children's Hospital.  
  
Everything was ready and packed - they were to leave on a seven am flight the next morning. They'd made arrangements with Cordy to drive them and Buffy to the airport in the morning, but until then, there was still the night to get through.  
  
They headed back to Spike's apartment.  
  
Spike practically begged Tara, "I love you, Tara. Please stay with me."  
  
She looked hesitant but she'd decided to trust this man with her body - it was time to trust him with her heart.  
  
  
  
The End