

Under *My* Thumb

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Chapter One

Was it the car or the way she drove it? Either way, it was a statement, an assertion of what she was. He didn't really care about cars but he knew it was something European; bright green, the color of the leaves in early spring, low slung, with an open top; she said she liked the feel of the wind in her hair. He sat beside her in the passenger seat, seeing how her short white skirt rode up over her finely contoured knees, watching her strong knuckles gripping the stick shift. She drove with rapt concentration, her body at one with the machine. Conversation was impossible above the engine's throaty roar.

She parked on the gravel outside his house, the car skidding a little before it came to a halt. She opened the door and got out, showing him even more of her bronzed thighs. Her heels clicked on the stone steps as she walked up to the door. He followed, watching the firm round buttocks tighten and relax as she strode forward.

She went ahead to his studio, opening the door and sauntering in, looking about her the way she did, her head tilted back.

"Can I see it?"

"I'm not sure," he said. "You know how I feel about work in progress."

"Please?" He was still surprised how she could do this, turn from a young woman confident in her authority, her money, her aura, to a little girl, coaxing, wheedling; as if she could flick a switch in her mind. She didn't seem to see how disconcerting it was.

"Please, Matt?" She sidled up to him, offering her mouth to be kissed. He brushed her lips lightly, then turned away. She tried again, putting an arm round his neck, her legs parted, leaning in to him, offering herself.

"OK," he said. "But I don't want any comments, good or bad. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Sir," she said in mock submission.

He pulled the cloth off the picture. Across the canvas was a splash of color, browns, purples, blacks, a touch of red. It was unmistakably the body of a naked woman, but the face was still indeterminate. She looked at it for several minutes, from this side and that. He stood with his back to her, gazing out of the window towards the trees.

"Who is she?" she asked.

"No one you know. Just a model."

"Is she beautiful?"

"She's a good subject," he said in a tone of voice intended to discourage further questions.

"Have you had sex with her?"

He turned, prepared to be angry. She was giving him her little girl smile. He knew it was just a wind-up. He mustn't fall for it.

"Do I ask you such questions?"

"No," she said, "but you might."

Did she mean, he could ask her if she wished, or that it was possible he would ask her in the future?

"I choose not to," he replied. "You're a free woman, remember?"

It was what she'd said to him when they first met. Introduced at a gallery opening, they'd talked for an hour, then she'd asked him to drive her home. At her invitation he went up to her apartment for a night-cap. He thought she was making it pretty clear she was willing to go to bed, and so first he'd asked her, in his old-fashioned way, if she was seeing anyone.

"Maybe," she said, "but I'm a free woman."

She'd surprised him in bed with her uncomplicated eagerness, her frank enjoyment of pleasure, and her willingness to give it. When she sucked his cock, it was as if she really wanted to, was feeding on it, drawing pleasure out of him. Later, when he was big again and had entered her, she called out in the dark for him to do it hard, do it harder.

Two days later they went out to dinner. Ever the gentleman, he suggested she choose the restaurant. It was expensive; not that it wasn't value for money, but he would never have gone there on his own initiative. It was then he started to realize how wealthy she was. She told him about her business, how she'd seen an opening in the market, a financial service no one else was providing. He didn't really understand it; didn't want to. Money meant little to him. He got by, never better than that. He didn't mind. But he saw how the money gave her confidence. He saw how she spoke to the waiter; not rude, even quite friendly, but always in control.

He wasn't used to women like that. Mostly his girlfriends had been models, other painters, and the occasional student. All indigent, more or less, and mostly, if not exactly in awe of his talent, deferential. They expected him to take a lead: socially, emotionally, and sexually. And he dealt with that the way he'd been taught to. He remembered his father's treatment of his mother. The little gestures, always opening the door, enquiring after her well-being, never a cross word. And his mother telling him once, I live for your father; my only goal is to please him.

She was still looking at the picture. "Would you ever paint me?"

He pretended to size her up with a professional eye. "Well, I don't know. I have very exacting standards for my models. Physical standards."

"Oh really? You think I might not measure up?"

It excited him the way she played these games, leading him on, teasing; even if he wasn't always sure how to respond.

"I think there may be one or two imperfections."

"Oh," she said. She started to undo her blouse. "Perhaps you could show me what they are?"

He watched as she took her blouse off. She stood for a moment, then reached behind and unhooked her bra. She

laid it on a chair with the blouse.

“Does this measure up?” She turned so that he could see her breasts in profile, then turned back to face him. Her breasts were not large, but they had a lovely shape. The nipples were small and round and he could see them hardening.

He shrugged. “Acceptable, I guess.”

Holding his gaze, she undid a button on the waist of her skirt, slid down the zipper and let the skirt fall to the ground.

“Legs?” She stepped out of her shoes and walked around the room. The legs were good, no question, and she knew it. Long, lean thighs, shapely calves. And pretty feet, he thought, she’s got pretty feet.

“Legs are OK,” he conceded.

She stopped and turned her back to him. She pulled down the little pair of white satin knickers.

“And this?” she enquired.

He stared at her bottom. It was a real woman’s bottom, not the scrawny, boyish ass of a model girl but rounded and ripe. Not plump, just swelling beautifully outwards from the hips.

“Not bad,” he said. “Not bad at all.”

She turned to face him. He saw the delicate curve of her belly from her navel to her mons, the dark triangle of hair clipped short. She sat down on the couch, drawing one leg up, the knee bent, her arm resting on top.

“So what are the imperfections?”

He thought hard. There must be some.

“Bikini marks, top and bottom.”

She glanced down at herself, examining the patches of lighter skin on her breasts, on the lower part of her belly.

“I’ll sunbathe nude if you like.”

He picked up his sketchbook and a pencil. She caught his eye, then moved her knee to one side, showing herself to him, daring him to look between her legs. He started to draw but the hardness of his cock distracted him. He knew

he ought to exercise control, show her that she couldn't just have him whenever she wanted.

"I think a different pose," he said.

He went across and showed her what he wanted, on her knees, her head resting on her hands, bottom raised, and one knee slightly in front of the other. He sketched away for a few minutes, but it was hopeless. In the gap between her thighs he could just see the pink lips of her sex. She kept them shaved. He'd never seen a woman like that before. It aroused him.

He put down his sketchbook and stood behind her. He reached down and stroked her bottom, pressing his thumb into the adorable little dimples at the top of the buttocks. He slid his hand between her legs, feeling how wet she was already. It was the work of a moment to undo himself and enter her. He tried to hold it back, make it last longer for her, but it was like red hot magma swelling up from the bowels of the earth, an unstoppable molten flood erupting into her.

He lay against her, his hand around her belly.

"You like it like that, don't you?" she asked. "From behind? I wonder why."

"You have such a lovely ass."

"Once," she said, "I had a boyfriend who liked it that way. When he was fucking me he'd spank my bottom. Quite hard."

When Matt was eight years old, his father had seen him hit his little sister, and had taken him outside and delivered a stern, terrifying lecture. You never, ever hit a woman, he said. Do you hear me? Men who do that are dirt. Do you hear?

"Why did you let him do that?" Matt said.

She turned round to face him, holding his face and looking into his eyes.

"Sometimes I do things I'm not supposed to," she said.

The next day he went to meet her at her company's place. They were going to another gallery opening. He waited in the reception area, watching her through the glass wall as she strode about her office. She wore a business suit, jacket tightly buttoned, skirt narrow, shorter than he would have thought proper. She was issuing instructions to a young man who sat with a notepad on his knee. His attitude was attentive, respectful. At last she finished and opened the door. The young man followed her out.

"And next time don't anticipate," she said curtly. "Wait for instructions."

"Yes, Miss Lawrence," he said and walked away up the corridor.

"Who was that?" Matt asked, smiling.

"That? It's Brian, my secretary."

"Your secretary is a man?"

"You find that strange?"

Matt shrugged. "Unusual, maybe."

"I haven't got him properly trained yet."

"You'd better not try that on me," he said.

She looked to see if he was joking. "Or else what?"

He didn't answer. She drove them to the gallery. He glanced down at her legs as she worked the clutch. Desire twitched in his groin. It was a long time since he'd wanted a woman so badly. But there was so much about her that puzzled him, not least the contrast between the grown-up, assertive woman and the mischievous little girl who came out to play when they were alone. He wasn't at all sure what she saw in him, a man possessed only of what a previous lover had called 'crumpled charm', no longer young, hardly successful. What did she really want from him? He hadn't figured that out yet. But he was the man; wasn't he supposed to know?

She strode into the throng at the gallery, greeting acquaintances, snatching a glass of wine from a waiter.

“Elizabeth!” cried a handsome young man, kissing her on the cheek.

In no time she was surrounded by people, men mostly. Matt watched as they eyed her up and down. It felt good to know that she was his; if she was. He got distracted by a couple of old friends. When at last they moved away, he saw Elizabeth leaning against a wall. The handsome young man stood in front of her, talking earnestly. As Matt watched she smiled at the man, a dazzling smile. She reached up her hand and patted him on the cheek. Then she laughed out loud.

On the drive to her apartment he was silent. Once inside, she brought him a drink.

“Pensive?” she asked.

“Who was that man?”

“Which man?”

“At the party. The good-looking one.”

“Oh, Ben.” She giggled.

“Is he your lover?”

She giggled again. “He’d like to be. Once when I was a little drunk I told him I had a taste for bondage. Now every time he sees me he offers to tie me up.”

“And do you?”

“Do I what?”

“Have a taste for it?”

Matt felt the burden of his inhibitions. He wished he were younger, less set in his ways. He knew there were people who did things; strange things, wild things, shocking things. But he couldn’t imagine how it worked. How did you get started? ‘Excuse me, do you mind if I tie you up?’ It all seemed a little ridiculous.

“Well, do you?” he persisted.

She’d stopped giggling. “I like you very much, Matt. I think you could be very good for me. But you seem a really straightforward sort of man. I don’t want to spoil it.”

In bed he was kissing her breasts, sucking the nipples, hard as hazel nuts.

“Bite me,” she said. “Just a little.”

Gingerly he put his teeth around a nipple and squeezed them together.

She grunted. “More.”

He wanted to. It excited him to think of causing her pain, if only slightly, making her submit to it. But he was afraid he might cause damage. Tentatively he tried again.

“Yes,” she said. “Please, oh please.”

He pulled his head away and drove his cock into her, fucking her relentlessly, so hard she came with him inside her, the first time she’d done that.

“Jesus,” she said when her body was still.

“You really liked that? Biting?” He found it hard to believe.

“Mmm. Do you think I’m a pervert?”

“Oh, I thought that from the start,” he joked. Afterwards, he wondered if he’d really meant it.

The next time he went to meet her at her office he could see she was stressed.

“There’s a bit of a panic,” she said. “A problem with the auditors, some money missing. I’ll have to stay till it’s sorted.”

“Is it serious?”

“I don’t know. It might just be a book-keeping error.”

They were due to dine at a down-town restaurant.

“Look,” she said. “Go back to my place and wait, will you? I’ll join you when I’m finished.”

He wasn’t used to women whose work came before his pleasures. But he took the keys she proffered with good grace. He let himself into her apartment and made himself a drink. Then he did what he always did in other people’s homes. Meticulously he inspected the bookshelves. You could tell so much about people from the books they read.

Or the books they had on their shelves for show. Assuming they had books.

Elizabeth had plenty. There were the usual glossy art books, though none on his own favorite, Matisse. He'd have to do some educating. There were books on gardening and cookery; even though she doesn't have a garden, he thought, looking out of her tenth floor apartment window. And there were novels, dozens of them, mostly paperbacks. She seemed to have a taste for heavyweight contemporary stuff. Philip Roth, Martin Amis, Don DeLillo, J G Ballard. At the end of one shelf was a collection of sex books: Best American Erotica 2002, Best Fetish Erotica, and The Sexual Life of Catherine M. One book caught his eye. It had a black cover with the title in white: The Story of O. When he took it down from the shelf the pages fell open at a bookmark. In the margin was a pencil line and a series of exclamation marks. He read the annotated passage:

"She was forced down upon her knees again, but this time a hassock was placed as a support under her chest; her hands were still fixed behind her back, her haunches were higher than her torso. One of the men gripped her buttocks and sank himself into her womb. When he was done, he ceded his place to a second. The third wanted to drive his way into the narrower passage and, pushing hard, violently, wrung a scream from her lips. When at last he let go of her, moaning and tears streaming down under her blindfold, she slipped sideways to the floor only to discover by the pressure of two knees against her face that her mouth was not to be spared either. Finally, finished with her, they moved off, leaving her, a captive in her finery, huddled, collapsed, on the carpet before the fire...."

Her blindfold was suddenly snatched away...Her hands were still pinioned behind her back. She was shown the riding crop, black, long and slender, made of fine bamboo sheathed in leather, an article such as one finds in the display windows of expensive saddle-makers' shops; the

leather whip ... was long, with six lashes ending in a knot; there was a third whip whose numerous light cords were several times knotted and stiff, quite as if soaked in water... O was informed that when, as soon they would, they unfastened her hands, it would only be to attach them to this whipping post by means of those bracelets on her wrists and this steel chain. With the exception of her hands, which would be immobilized a little above her head, she would be able to move, to turn, to face around and see the strokes coming, they told her; by and large, they'd confine the whipping to her buttocks and thighs, to the space, that is to say, between her waist and her knees....

Proud, she steeled herself to resist; she gritted her teeth; but not for long. They soon heard her beg to be let loose, beg them to stop, stop for a second, for just one second. So frantically did she twist and wheel to dodge the biting lashes that she almost spun in circles. The chain, though unyielding, for, after all, it was a chain, was nevertheless slack enough to allow her leeway. Owing to her excessive writhing, her belly and the front of her thighs received almost as heavy a share as her rear. They left off for a moment, deeming it better to tie her flat up against the post by means of a rope passed around her waist; the rope being cinched tight, her head necessarily angled to one side of the post and her flanks jutted to the other, thereby placing her rump in a prominent position. From then on, every deliberately aimed blow struck home...

Meanwhile, the man who liked women only for what they had in common with men, seduced by the sight of that proffered behind straining out from under the taut rope and made all the more tempting by its wriggling to escape, requested an intermission in order to take advantage of it; he spread apart the two burning halves and penetrated but not without difficulty, which brought him to remark that they'd have to contrive to make this thoroughfare easier of

access. That thing could be done, they agreed, and decided that the proper measures would be taken."

Matt flicked through the rest of the book, finding other passages marked; descriptions of further whippings, of forcible subjection, of humiliations. It seemed to him to record a journey into hell; imprisonment, beatings, rape, mutilation, and even at the end a branding. When at last he put the book down he felt nauseous. How could anyone read such a work for pleasure? All his life he'd tried to treat women well, and yet here was a book, apparently written by a woman, which treated women only as the objects of depraved lust. He felt resentment at Elizabeth, with her airs and graces, her assertiveness that seemed to challenge him. He'd not found it easy to retain his male confidence in the face of her success, her money, her beauty and her open, free and easy sexuality. But he'd kept his cool, tolerated her provocations. And now after all that to find that her secret fantasies were of submission and punishment. He felt cheated, made foolish. Yet even as his animosity festered within him, he was aware of other feelings, buried deep, feelings he didn't want to think about. Why was it that despite the repulsion he felt, his cock was hard? He forced such questions from his mind. He wanted only to feel a righteous anger.

He sat on while outside it grew dark. At last Elizabeth came back. She called out his name, then turned on the lights to find him in his chair.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "It took ages. But it's sorted now."

He said nothing. She looked at him, sensing his mood.

"What's the matter? Should I have called to say how late I'd be?"

"It's not that," he said. "It's this."

He held up the book. She smiled. "Oh, that. A very naughty book, isn't it?"

“Is this what you want?” he demanded. His voice was hard and cold.

“Well,” she said, “it’s a fantasy.”

“I can’t believe you would read such things. I thought you were a liberated woman. You seem so confident, so strong. How can you want to be treated that way?”

“I am liberated,” she said slowly. “That’s why I can be free to be myself. In the office I’m in control. In the bedroom I have other needs. You should let me explain, then you’ll understand.”

“I don’t want to understand,” he said. “You’d better find someone else for that.”

He brushed past her and went out, slamming the door.

For the next week he heard nothing from her. He expected her to call, but there was only silence. He couldn’t stop thinking about her and about the book. Images kept coming unbidden into his mind: a woman bound and kneeling; a skirt lifted over a woman’s naked bottom, the white skin marked by the whip; a woman naked in a room full of men, using her... The images disturbed him. In a part of his mind they excited him, but he refused to acknowledge it. Sex was beautiful, clean and good, not dark and dangerous.

One evening he heard a car come to a skidding stop outside his house. He heard her heels clicking up the steps, then the bell rang. He opened the door. She flung herself into his arms.

“Don’t desert me,” she said. “Don’t desert me.”

He allowed her to kiss him, her mouth open, her tongue pushing between his lips.

“I’ll be whatever you want me to be,” she whispered.

He took her into the bedroom.

“Take your clothes off,” he said.

He watched her as she removed the expensive grey woolen dress, unhooked the ivory satin bra. She stood in the

matching satin briefs. Her legs were bare. She pulled the briefs down and stood naked, waiting.

“Lie on the bed,” he said.

She laid, her hands by her sides, her legs together. He sat down beside her. He stroked her belly, slowly, softly. He ran his fingers lightly through the short, cropped pubic hair.

“Open your legs,” he said.

She wanted to be controlled. Well, then, he'd control her. See how she liked it. He took her labia between his finger and thumb, squeezing them lightly together. She sighed with pleasure. He increased the pressure. Then he let go and slid his middle finger in between the labia. He pressed against her opening, not entering yet. He could feel her warm and moist, not yet slippery. He moved his finger upwards till it rested lightly on her clitoris. He pressed against it lightly, feeling the little bud firm under his touch. She was breathing deeply now. He began to move his finger slowly in a circle. She made a little grunting sound in the back of her throat.

He took his hand away.

“Don't stop,” she whispered.

He stroked her belly again. With his other hand he caressed her left breast, letting his fingers trail over the nipple. It stood up to meet him. He pinched it lightly between finger and thumb, then harder. He saw her clench her teeth. He pinched her harder still, digging his nail into the swollen nipple.

“Oh,” she said.

He took his hand away from her breast, but kept stroking her belly. She opened her legs wider, inviting him in. Still fully dressed, he lay across her thighs and pressed his thumbs against the outside of her labia. He pushed them together; under the soft folds of flesh he could feel her clitoris stiffen. He kept his thumbs motionless for a while. After a time she tried to move against him, seeking more stimulation. He took his hands away.

“You’re teasing me,” she protested.

“Am I?”

He put his thumbs back on either side of her labia and spread them wide, opening her up. Slowly he leaned down and licked between them, starting at the bottom, moving upwards with slow deliberation over the slippery folds of flesh. When his tongue had almost reached the apex, he took it away.

“Please,” she said. “Don’t be cruel.”

“Isn’t that what you want, cruelty?”

“Please?” she said in her little girl voice.

He bent and kissed the lips of her sex. He pushed his tongue between them, as far as it would go, tasting the sharp flavor. He breathed in, inhaling the musky odor, such a richly evocative smell, suggestive of ineffable delights. This time he licked up the outside of her labia, all the way round the top and down the other side, taking care to avoid the clitoris, now emerged from its fold of skin, straining for satisfaction.

He put his finger inside her. She was slick with juice now. He slid it around, feeling her inner contours. He took his finger out and moved it up till it rested on her clitoris.

“You want to come?”

“Oh, yes, please, I do.”

“But you want to be controlled?”

“Yes, but not now. I just want to be indulged.”

“That’s just it,” he said. “You can’t pick and choose. That woman in the story, she had to submit totally.”

“But that’s just a story.”

Something had come over him. He began to see what it might be like, to control her, to make her submit. Not beat her, not do the horrible things they did in the book. But just show her she couldn’t do with him as she pleased. If she wanted control it would be on his terms. Otherwise, it was just another way for a spoilt rich girl to get exactly what she wanted.

“I’m going to make you come,” he said. “But only on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“You mustn’t move or make a sound. As soon as you do it stops.”

“That’s a tough one,” she said. “You know how much I writhe about.”

He moved his finger slowly across the top of her clitoris. She jumped. He took his hand away.

“You see?” he said. “It stops the moment you move.”

“OK, OK,” she begged. “Give me another chance.”

He bent his head down and licked once more up between the lips of her sex, now oozing with the lubricant of desire. He could feel her tense up, bracing herself against the moment when his tongue should reach the top. Just before it did he paused for a moment. He felt her relax a little, then he licked across the top of her clitoris. She made a strange strangled sound in the back of her throat.

He lifted his head. “No sound, remember.”

“Sorry,” she said. “Oh god, this is agony.”

He licked her again, his tongue gliding slowly over the trembling coral-pink lips. He let it circle round and round the little nub, surprisingly hard now. He felt her desire mounting, her breath coming shorter, faster. Deliberately he slowed his tongue till its movement was almost imperceptible. She was clenching the sheets of the bed in her fists, as if she was trying to will herself to orgasm spontaneously. He was just wondering if he had it in him to be more cruel yet, to take his tongue away for good, forbid her the pleasure she craved. But suddenly she was coming, her hips thrashing wildly, a guttural sound in her throat.

He waited until the spasms subsided. Then he turned her over on to her stomach and, lifting her by the hips, brought her into a kneeling position, her bottom sticking over the edge of the bed. Standing behind her he undid himself and thrust into her. Her cunt still quivering, she felt herself being

impaled on his cock. He drove deep into her, hammering at her buttocks. As he did so he gripped them with his hands, digging his fingers hard into the taut muscles till she cried out. He came violently then collapsed on top of her, panting.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

She chuckled. "Not even just a little bit?"

The next morning she left on a business trip. He had a couple of days on his own to think about things. Had he really meant to hurt her? Perhaps, just a little. Yet he still couldn't believe she could want what happened to the woman in the book. No woman could want that.

He did some research, thinking at least he ought not to be so ignorant. In no time he had found dozens of web sites in which people seemed to be spanking each other with reckless abandon. Stories, pictures, sites that offered goods for sale, fetters and whips and paddles, sites that offered introductions. Soon he began to think the whole world must be spanked or spanking. Except him. Some of the sites were in deadly earnest, detailing the minutiae of arcane rituals as if it were a true religion. Other sites treated the whole thing as one big joke. One thing was for sure; Elizabeth was not alone in her interest.

And what of you, Matt thought. Are you just an uptight middle-aged man too inhibited to play games, too narrow-minded to accept different strokes for different folks, too set in your ways to learn something new? One thing he knew; he didn't want to lose her. It wasn't just his physical desire for her, though that was more intense than any he had known. She'd gotten under his skin. She was a challenge. He felt obscurely that he was being tested.

After she got back from her trip she invited him out for a drink to meet a couple of her friends. He was curious what sort of people they'd be, reasoning you can always learn something of what people are like by the company they keep. In an expensive down-town watering-hole Elizabeth introduced him to Charlotte and Emily.