



The Master (The Submissive Series Book 8)

By Tara Sue Me

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Tara Sue Me's *New York Times* bestselling Submissive series continues with a delicious new story that explores the thin line between pleasure and pain. .

..

She's ready to try again. . . .

Sasha Blake is scarred from a BDSM session gone wrong, but she can't deny how much a strong Master turns her on. Determined to overcome her fears and rejoin the Partners in Play community, she asks Abby and Nathaniel West to set her up with a Dom who can help her feel safe again as a sub. They know the very experienced Cole is exactly the kind of man who can push all of Sasha's buttons—and she soon wants to go much faster than she had planned. . . .

Cole knows that Sasha is not the kind of submissive he needs. He wants someone who will serve him 24-7, not a part-time partner. Still, the further they go into their play, the more Cole begins to wish he could make Sasha his all the time. . . .

When forbidden desires turn into scorching action, Sasha and Cole come face-to-face with their demons—and realize their scorching relationship might be too dangerous to last. . . .

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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The Master (The Submissive Series Book 8) By Tara Sue Me Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #210063 in eBooks
- Published on: 2016-02-02
- Released on: 2016-02-02
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Review

“Tara Sue Me has created a perfect gem. . . . The mutual need of Dominant for submissive has never been more seductive.”—Cecilia Tan, Award-Winning Author of *Slow Surrender*

Praise for the Submissive Series

“[Me] is so talented and captivating.”—Southern Fiction Review

“Intense and very, VERY H-O-T.”—Harlequin Junkie

“I am awed by Tara Sue Me...a love story that will leave you wanting for more.”—Guilty Pleasures Book Reviews

“This is the kind of erotic writing that makes the genre amazing.”—Debbie’s Book Bag

“Wonderfully done, full of emotion and intensity...different from so many others out there.”—The Good, the Bad, and the Unread

“An erotic and deeply loving BDSM romance...fans of erotic romance will delight in its mix of heat and heart.”—*Publishers Weekly*

About the Author

Tara Sue Me wrote her first novel at the age of twelve. Twenty years later, after penning several traditional romances, she decided to try her hand at something spicier and started work on *The Submissive*, and soon followed that with *The Dominant*, *The Training*, *Seduced by Fire*, *The Enticement*, and *The Exhibitionist*. Originally published online, the series has become a huge hit with readers around the world, and has been read and reread millions of times.

Tara kept her identity and her writing life secret, not even telling her husband what she was working on. To this day, only a handful of people know the truth (though she has told her husband). They live together in the southeastern United States with their two children.

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Chapter One

She was going to have to book an extended session with her therapist.

Sasha Blake closed her eyes and tried to take deep cleansing breaths like she’d been told to do when the familiar panic started to take over. But the sharp claws of fear and dread grabbed onto her chest and the simple act of inhaling took more strength than necessary.

“Sasha?” Nathaniel asked. “Are you okay?”

She cracked one eye open. The Dominant in charge of running the meeting looked at her with concern. She focused on him and did her best to ignore everything and everyone else.

“Yes, Master West,” she said. “I’m fine.”

Fine. Her pat reply to everything. She was fine. Work was fine. Her back was fine. And being told the Partners in Play senior members had decided she could rejoin the BDSM group after a retraining with Cole Johnson?

Abso-freaking-fine.

She was sitting in a small room off to the side of Daniel Covington’s playroom where group meetings were held. Only the senior members were present, which meant there were only about ten people sitting around the oval table at the moment.

The side of her face tingled as if someone was staring at her and she slipped her hands under her thighs to keep from rubbing the spot. She used more discipline than what should be necessary to keep her gaze directed on Nathaniel and not to let it wander just a touch to the right, where *he* sat.

Items numbered one through five hundred twelve to discuss with her therapist: Cole Johnson.

Based on conversations she’d had recently—with Nathaniel; his wife, Abby; her own best friend, Julie; and Julie’s Dominant, Daniel—she’d expected to be offered a retraining. She’d even looked forward to it: experiencing the thrill of letting someone else take over, rediscovering the peace that came when she knew her Dom would do anything to protect her—and, she wasn’t even going to pretend otherwise, having earth-shattering orgasms.

It’d not once crossed her mind, not even in her wildest, craziest, never-gonna-happen-might-as-well-fantasize-about-it dreams, that the group would pick him.

Cole.

She shivered just thinking his name. An alien spaceship must have transported her to an alternate universe because that’s how hard it was to believe Cole was going to retrain her. He was an altogether intriguing man, one who had quickly captured her attention. But though he was usually laid-back and easygoing, talk among the group’s submissives pointed toward a hard and unyielding Dominant in the playroom.

She didn’t have to glance to Nathaniel’s right to know who she’d find watching her. She pictured him all too clearly in her head. Dark tousled hair, devilish blue-green eyes, and a body that seductively hinted at sexual pleasure with every carefully controlled move. And then he’d speak in that oh-so-smooth British accent.

Yes, she’d call her therapist tomorrow.

“Are you okay?”

She jumped at the sound of her friend Dena’s whisper.

“I’m fine,” she said, repeating the same lie she’d told Nathaniel.

Dena narrowed her eyes in disbelief and rubbed her just-starting-to-show pregnant belly. “Hmm.”

But she was stopped from saying anything further by Nathaniel dismissing the meeting. *Perfect.* If she moved quickly enough, she could probably be on her way without having to talk about anything.

Unfortunately, Dena was onto her ploy and grabbed her arm before she could get away. “Not so fast; I want

to talk. It's been a long night for you. How do you feel about Master Johnson?"

Her body shook a bit. She had to leave before the panic came back. But Dena looked determined and wouldn't let her leave that easily.

"Conflicted." Sasha took a deep breath. "He's not who I imagined would be suggested." She didn't add that he was the very last person she imagined would be suggested. She narrowed her eyes. "Wait a minute. You're a senior group member. Did you know?"

"No, I excused myself when the topic came up for discussion. I knew I couldn't be objective."

"And Jeff?"

"Yes, I'm sure he knew."

Sasha put her hand on her hip. She found it hard to believe Jeff, Dena's husband, wouldn't have told Dena even if she'd excused herself from the discussion—which made her wonder if Julie knew. After all, she lived with Daniel.

She turned to find the lady in question making a beeline toward her.

"I had a feeling that was going to happen," Julie said. "Are you okay? If you don't want Cole, I'll—"

"Julie. Dena," the smooth British accent she heard in her dreams said.

Sasha spun around and found Cole standing off to her side.

"Sasha."

He spoke it like a caress. Soft and gentle and tender, but with an underlying strength that couldn't be denied and with sensual promises woven in every vowel sound. She had an overwhelming desire to hear him say it again.

She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. *Damn it, this is why I should have left right when I stood up.*

"Master Johnson," Julie and Dena said in unison.

"Master West," Cole said to Nathaniel, who stood a few feet away with his arm around Abby. "If I may, I'd like a word in private with Julie and Sasha."

Nathaniel didn't answer right away but eyed Sasha up and down, as if making sure she was okay. He frowned. Hell, did she look that bad?

"Fifteen minutes," Nathaniel said. "You can use the kitchen. Master Covington?"

"I'll come get Julie then," Daniel said from his spot beside Abby.

Cole extended his arm. "After you, ladies."

They made it into the kitchen without speaking. Cole pulled chairs out for both of them and then settled into his own. He smiled, and Sasha found herself questioning the things she'd heard about him.

This was the Badass Brit?

“Anyone care for a drink?” he asked. “I should have asked you before sitting down.”

“No, thank you, Sir,” Julie said.

“I’m fine, Sir,” Sasha quipped.

At her flippant reply, Cole narrowed his eyes and his smile faded away into a frown of displeasure. And in that moment, Sasha knew everything she’d heard about him was true.

Cole Johnson kept his gaze focused on Sasha long enough for her to understand he recognized her answer for what it was. He suspected she’d been fighting back a panic attack and was most likely anything but fine. Against his better judgment, he decided not to call her on it. This time.

He wondered what he’d gotten himself into.

When Nathaniel approached him about it, he’d agreed almost at once. In his mind he pictured Sasha as he’d first met her: a scared submissive dealing with the aftermath of a scene gone bad. He remembered catching her the night she almost fell and how she’d been warm and responsive in his arms. That is, until she’d realized where she was and used her safe word to get away from him.

In India weeks later, he was surprised at how often he found his mind wandering back to the troubled woman with the expressive green eyes and a will of steel. And he couldn’t deny he’d been secretly pleased when he heard a rumor she was thinking about rejoining the group. He’d been a Dom long enough to understand the strength involved in going through a traumatic scene and returning once more to the community. He respected that strength. He also had a strong desire to control it.

He cleared his throat. “We only have fifteen minutes and I’m positive Daniel is keeping an eye on the time, so let’s chivvy this along.” He leaned back in the chair so he could watch both women. “It appears as if my reputation precedes me and you’re both, no doubt, wondering what the group was thinking with their recommendation.”

Humor flashed in Julie’s eyes along with something else, but she wasn’t saying anything. She hadn’t been all that shocked when he’d been named; unlike Sasha, who at this moment stared at him like she’d dash out of the room if he said, “Boo.”

He drummed his fingertips on the table. There was a time to push a submissive—this was not one of those times. He needed to draw her to him, to gain her trust, make a connection.

“How’s the kitten?” he asked her.

Last weekend Nathaniel and Abby had a party for Jeff and Dena. While everyone was outside, a snake attacked a stray kitten. Cole and Nathaniel had rescued it, but afterward they couldn’t calm it down. Cole had held the wiggling mass of fur at a loss about what to do until Sasha simply took the frightened kitten from him and had the creature purring within seconds. It’d been that confidence she showed, the way she pushed aside her fear because her desire to help the kitten was more important, that had made him accept the group’s request to retrain her.

As he’d suspected, at the mention of her rescued kitten, Sasha’s face lost all traces of worry and fear and a tender smile took their place. “She’s doing great, Sir. Plays a lot, eats a lot, and sleeps in front of the

refrigerator.”

He couldn't hide his smile at her excitement over the little ball of fur. “I'm glad she found you. Sounds like the two of you have hit it off.”

She nodded. “I like having her around. I mean, I know she's just a kitten, but it makes the apartment not so lonely.”

From the corner of his eye, he saw Julie discreetly check the time. Daniel would be back soon.

Cole cleared his throat. “I can understand your surprise at the group's recommendation, Sasha.” She opened her mouth like she was going to say something to the contrary, but he shook his head. “No need to hide your feelings. You were quite gobsmacked when Master West made his announcement.”

She pressed her lips together and with that small move, he caught just a glimpse of the feisty submissive he'd heard she was before the Peter incident.

He leaned forward. “The simple truth is, I require a great deal from my sexual partners, and you're not prepared to meet those demands. That's the main reason I was selected for you. Since I know your body is off limits, I'll take my time getting your mind prepared to submit again.”

Her jaw dropped. “What?”

“What's the body's most important sex organ?” he asked.

“The mind,” Sasha said.

“Right. And we hear it so frequently, the answer is often given without thought.” He watched her fingers inch forward on the table slightly. She pulled them back and repeated the motion several times until Julie stopped her with a hand. He continued, “So let's take a moment to think about it. Sex starts in the mind. Submission starts in the mind. As a Dominant, I have to earn my place in your mind before I can earn the right to take you physically. Am I making sense?”

Her voice was calm when she replied, “Fuck the mind before you fuck the body?”

He held her gaze for a long moment until she lowered hers. “Yes, precisely. Which is why I won't be fucking your body. Just your mind, Sasha.”

She let out her breath in a half swallowed sigh and looked at the table. “I understand, Sir.”

He bit back his laugh. She might understand, but she wasn't happy about it. “Any questions?”

Sasha shook her head.

“No, Sir,” Julie said. “Thank you for explaining.”

Daniel walked into the kitchen and stood in the shadows behind Julie.

“When I work with a new submissive,” Cole said, “I want to weave myself into her thoughts so that each movement she makes is made with me in mind. I want her to feel my presence when we're apart as strongly as she does when we're together. I'll do it slowly, Sasha.” He allowed his gaze to wander over her body. She was a striking woman. “So methodically, you won't notice. And no, I won't fuck your body, but I believe

you'll find our mental play nearly as intimate, if not more so, than physical play."

As he'd spoken, she'd leaned slightly toward him, lips parting. He resisted moving closer to her. Yes, he thought, this one would test his own control.

He turned to the other woman sitting at the table. "Julie, what was it you noticed first about Daniel?"

"His eyes."

"Why his eyes?"

"They were so blue and deep and intense." She shivered. "It was almost as if he knew me, though we'd never met."

"And when you're in the middle of a scene, why would he have you meet his gaze?"

"To ground me. Refocus my attention on him. But it's more than that. It's like he's speaking to something deep within me."

Cole kept his voice low and even, drawing out Julie's replies without difficulty. "And when he has to correct you and you look into his eyes, what do you see?"

"Guilt. Remorse. He'll look so sad." She blinked away a few tears. "I don't want him sad. I want him happy and—"

"That's enough, Cole," Daniel interrupted, walking to the table. He stood behind Julie, his hands rubbing her shoulders. "I said you could talk, not play your mind games."

"You know I wouldn't—"

"Your fifteen minutes are up. You two take as long as you need." He pulled the chair back and lifted Julie into his arms. "Let's go upstairs, kitten."

She wrapped her arms around him. "I'm sorry, it just made me remember . . ."

"It's okay." Whatever else he said was too low for Cole make out.

Sasha's shoulders curled when Julie left with Daniel, almost as if she was protecting herself. Cole didn't like the implication she was afraid to be alone with him. But maybe it had been the implication something had happened recently between Julie and Daniel.

Whatever it was, he wanted to see the fire return to Sasha. It was buried somewhere deep inside her and he needed to entice it back where it belonged.

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