
DARK
CONSEQUENCES

Club Risqué Book Four

POPPY FLYNN



Published by Blushing Books
An Imprint of
ABCD Graphics and Design, Inc.
A Virginia Corporation
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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EBook ISBN: 978-1-64563-009-8

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Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Prologue

Pain seared across her back, once, twice, more. Much more. Sometimes, she knew she was in too deep, but most of the time, she ignored it. She ignored it now. She was way past caring anyway, so what did it matter anymore?

And, yeah, she was lying to herself there, too. Just a tiny bit. Because it did matter; somewhere, deep in the furthest recess of her mind, she did care. Maybe.

Maybe that was why she was really here, taking such a severe thrashing from the club's ultimate sadist, Master X. Maybe that was why she had become his slave because, deep down, maybe she did actually care, and maybe with some minute sliver of understanding, she didn't want to let go of that final tiny thread.

Because as harsh and as brutal as it might appear to an outsider—as unfathomable and aberrant as it might seem, even to some of her friends—this single gossamer filament of masochistic intent was the only thing that was keeping her receptive to the rest of her life.

The welts, the bruises, the pain she chose freely and consensually were the only things, these days, that reminded her that she was alive.

As contradictory as that might sound, and Micah—or any other psychologist—would have a field day with it, she was sure, Laurel knew, on some deep, subconscious level, that without this ritual, this pain and humiliation to prick the edges of her consciousness, then she would be lost.

If the flimsy thread of sadomasochism that tethered her shakily to this life was severed or broken, then Laurel knew, without a doubt, that she would succumb to the welcome oblivion that whispered to her mind and called to her body. That bleak, insidious darkness that constantly slithered just the barest fraction below reason and rationality. Waiting.

Waiting for the string to be cut so that it could gobble her up into a pit of desolation that she would never return from.

It called to her relentlessly. Incessantly. Whispering to her to give up, to give in, to succumb to the blackness and despair and free herself from this mortal coil, to snap that final, fragile strand of mortality, which tethered her to this precarious survival.

So, whether it was logical, or rational, or sane...or not, Laurel came here, to Club Risqué. And here, she instead succumbed to the pain.

Because in pain, at least, she could *feel*. She could scream; she could cry.

She could escape the subtly deceptive numbness that slithered its sinister and treacherous fingers stealthily through her mind and body, through her thoughts and feelings, with its devious and sneaky promises of detachment and indifference.

Instead, she freely embraced the physical torment and the erotic humiliation in one last, desperate struggle not to surrender to the final, peaceful void of nothingness that would be her demise.

CONNOR GRIFFIN HADN'T SET foot inside the east coast

branch of Club Risqué in almost six months. Not just because he'd been sent packing back to the south coast headquarters of the Blackwood Universal Corporation with his tail between his legs, for the debacle involving his east coast counterpart's PA, but because he simply hadn't known how to deal with the pushy, gregarious Laurel Stanton.

And what he *had* dealt with, he'd managed dreadfully.

So badly, in fact, that Laurel's boss, Desi Blackwood, was still barely speaking to him, which made things extremely uncomfortable when it came to her husband, Joel, who was one of his closest friends. It also made it unbelievably awkward for him to come here, despite the fact that he and Joel co-owned the BDSM club, along with their two other friends, Jake and Logan.

The only reason he was here now was because Logan was getting married, and tonight was his stag party and that was taking place here, at Club Risqué, in a joint, kinky bachelor / bachelorette event.

He'd arrived deliberately late in order to avoid all the pre-kink revelry. Now, as he looked around him, he could see his friends and their play partners getting into the swing of the evening. Even Jake Blackwood was there with his heavily pregnant wife, Charlotte, although, for obvious reasons, they were not participating. Connor had wondered how his friend and colleague had adapted to not being able to use his prized signature whip for the past several months, but it was obvious from just a quick glance that Jake was far more obsessed with his new wife and prospective fatherhood than with the fetish that had dominated his younger years to the extent that he initially wouldn't even consider a relationship with Charlotte.

Connor felt the sharp fangs of change tearing into him. For the past twelve years, it had always been the four of them against the world. Whether that was the world of cut-throat, big business that had made them all rich—or even richer than they had been—or the world of BDSM and their focus on establishing a chain

of top class, well managed clubs dedicated to the ethos of 'safe, sane and consensual'.

Now, each of the others had fallen in love, branched off to form new alliances with their wives at the centre of their world. Not that he begrudged them a single moment. They all deserved their happiness, but Connor couldn't help the pang of unexpected loneliness that shot through him at being the metaphorical 'last man standing'. Sometimes, times like this, he wished he could let loose of the reins of his own personal demons long enough to allow someone close, close enough to enjoy a relationship like the ones his friends had embraced. But he feared that he wouldn't ever be able to relinquish enough control to allow himself to be vulnerable to someone again.

In the past, whenever he had imagined himself with a wife, then his thinking led him towards someone sophisticated, reserved and passionless. Someone who would never even remotely threaten his hard-won emotional stability or his desperate need for absolute control.

The only woman who had ever come close to achieving *that* was Laurel Stanton. And the way that had turned out just proved that he was right to keep his distance. Laurel was small and curvy, vivacious and gregarious and impulsive; just like his stepmother had been. Launching herself into situations without a care as to whether it was the right thing to do simply because she saw something that she wanted and damn the consequences. Well, Rayleen had been that way anyway, and Connor could see distinct similarities in Laurel, although, in theory, he knew better than to tar someone with the same brush. In practice, it was never that easy.

Connor was a giant amongst men. Standing at 6"6' and built like a line-backer, he was as solid as he was tall. As a teen, he had made himself strong so that no one could ever take advantage of him in the future, but the energetic advances of one diminutive

little submissive had had him dissolving into a puddle of dread like a confused adolescent boy all over again.

He had tried; he really had; but Laurel just wouldn't back off, wouldn't give him a moment to breathe or regain his perspective. Even after he'd asked her again and again, until finally, he couldn't take any more and the entire situation had disintegrated into one huge clusterfuck.

He hadn't meant to hurt her, and physically, he never would have. But in his panic to contain things, he had gone a little bit overboard, and he realised, too late, the hurt he'd inflicted was more than skin deep.

Oh, not at the beginning. He had mistakenly thought that Laurel was nothing more than a good-time girl who shrugged off his harsh words like water off of a duck's back.

He'd been so wrapped up in his own cares that he hadn't stopped to consider her own, and that was something he deeply regretted and would probably never be able to put right.

Connor gave a deep sigh and looked around, picking out his friends from about the dungeon. His cloudy, grey-green eyes skimmed across the other members, absently cataloguing the condition and use of equipment, the efficiency of the door security and the presence and attention of dungeon monitors signified by their fluorescent armbands.

As his purely business-like evaluation scanned over one of the club's more severe sadists, Master X, Connor found himself doing a double take. He wasn't certain what it was that had pulled his gaze to the man's slave, naked, except for a fiercely spiked collar, since there was little about her that was familiar to him. She was thin, almost to the point of being scrawny; her hair was a limp, non-descript mousy colour that wasn't really a dark blonde but wasn't richly brunette, either. Her skin was sallow looking, but Connor could see vicious raised welts across her back and buttocks where Master X hadn't spared the whip.

As another blow rained down, a guttural, sobbing scream was

wrenched from the woman's throat and he knew, instantly, that it was that very familiar sound which had seized his attention.

Moving around so he could get a better look at the submissive's face, Connor froze. His breath choked in his throat and his stomach roiled viciously as he stared at an almost unrecognisable Laurel.

With his guts threatening to revolt, Connor stumbled toward the exit, knowing that he couldn't stay here a moment longer.

Offering up a silent apology to his friends for bailing on the festivities, he headed back to his hotel to try to get his head around what it was that he had just witnessed and exactly how he felt about it.

Chapter 1

Eighteen months earlier...

Laurel had one eye on her work and one ear to the gossip mill. Her boss at Universal Holdings, Desirae Harper, was never the most forthcoming of people and as hard as Laurel had tried—and she had tried damn hard—the woman still kept her at arm's length.

Still, Laurel prided herself that she had gotten closer than anyone else in the company, since she completely ignored the rebuffs. And since Desirae had hired Laurel as her Administrative Assistant five years ago, after Laurel had wormed her way into an interview that she didn't actually have, being rejected during the shortlist stages due to lack of experience, Laurel had a dedication to Desirae that was almost unshakeable.

Laurel had worked her ass off to prove herself, determined that Desirae would never regret giving her that chance. She had put in long hours, picked up lunch when things got crazy, even collected Desirae's dry cleaning when her boss was so busy that she barely had time to sleep. All without being asked and all

despite constant reminders that such things were not part of her job description. Laurel continued to do them anyway.

For the most part, her efforts had paid off and Desirae was suitably impressed that whenever she made promotion on her sure-fire way to the top, she had insisted that Laurel stay with her, even going so far as to having that written into their contracts.

It was a dream come true for a girl straight out of college, who had far more audacity than experience, and Laurel never allowed herself to forget it.

She knew others often saw her as flighty and capricious, with her bubbly personality and sassy ways, but she worked damn hard.

She just played hard, too, and embraced life wholeheartedly. And she didn't see why she should have to change her own innate character for anyone at all.

Still, she couldn't quite claim Desirae Harper as a friend yet and even less of a confidante. Her boss could be downright tight lipped and unapproachable, and right now, Laurel was thinking up the best way to find out the deets on the latest speculation that was running rife around the building. And the building was positively humming!

Thus, Laurel was keeping her ear to the ground. She had personally taken the call to summon Desirae and every single one of the other directors to an emergency board meeting, so she knew that something huge was about to go down, and she was determined to find out what.

And she especially wanted to find out the identity of the huge hunk of man candy who had suddenly turned up amidst all of the commotion, too, because he was one sweet treat that she definitely wanted to take a bite out of...and maybe a couple of licks for good measure.

CONNOR GRIFFIN STRETCHED himself to his full height and arched his back to try to ease the kinks. He'd been sitting in a stuffy boardroom for most of the day in a distinctly chilly environment, talking in circles and getting precisely nowhere. Not that *that* was any surprise. He'd told his friend, Joel Blackwood, and his father, Joseph, joint CEOs for the Blackwood Corporation, where he was employed as Chief Finance Officer, that Universal Holdings wasn't going to be open to the idea of a buyout.

The biggest surprise of the day had been the rather stunning revelation that Desirae Harper, his counterpart here on the East Coast, was none other than Joel's long lost 'perfect submissive', Daisy Kidde. Now there was a story he couldn't wait to get the juice on!

Still, after the shock had worn off, it had been strictly business and they'd all gone through the motions, as pointless as that had been, each side putting forward views and arguments for and against. It had been tedious and futile, neither side interesting in budging an inch, and, boy, were those boardroom chairs uncomfortable.

Back in his office on the south coast, he had a specially made office chair to accommodate his way bigger than average frame and, not long after, he'd commissioned something similar for their own boardroom meetings. Right now, though, he was a thousand miles from home and the chairs here were certainly not made to seat anyone of his massive proportions.

Plus, Joel was clearly in a weird-ass mood. It all added up to Connor being achy, strained and uncharacteristically on edge. Damn, he wished he were at home. He could have eased out the knots with his own brand of kink, with some willing submissive at Club Risqué.

Instead, he had nothing more interesting to look forward to than a boring night in a hotel room with the nebulous possibility

of a dip in their pool if it wasn't ridiculously busy. Oh, well, maybe the room service menu would offer something vaguely appetising; he really didn't feel like another night of dining alone in a restaurant.

Rubbing his hands over his face in an effort to buck himself up, Connor made his way out of the building. He knew better than to think that either Jake or Joel would be available to check out the local nightlife if either of their responses to the lovely Ms. Harper were anything to go by. Joel, he could understand; the man had some unfinished business there. Jake? That had been another surprise; he could do no more than hazard a guess that the two of them must have been good friends at some point. Either way, both men had taken off in the direction of her private office.

It was as he neared the doors that Connor noticed the perky, buxom, admin assistant with the blonde and brown streaked hair and the laughing blue eyes. There was a purely mischievous air about her that brought a reluctant smile to his face.

It seemed pretty damn evident that she'd been lying in wait for him, from the way her eyes lit with purely feminine speculation and tracked him as he crossed the reception area, despite her very obvious attempts to look innocent. She failed at that badly.

Connor stopped and did nothing more than raise an eyebrow. The girl looked up at him from beneath coy lashes, her wide baby blues full of mirth and mischief.

Remaining silent, Connor crooked his elbow in her direction, then laughed out loud when she took it without so much as an ounce of hesitation. He liked a woman who was direct and didn't play games. Well, not *those* kind of games, anyway.

"Well, hello!" Connor rumbled. "My name's Connor, and you are?" he queried politely.

"I'm Laurel. Laurel Stanton," she answered with a cheeky

grin. "I'm Desirae Harper's PA. I've seen you around a lot in the past week or two."

"And you'll likely see more of me over the next few months." Connor laughed.

"Oh, I certainly wouldn't mind seeing more of you," Laurel purred suggestively. No mistaking the double entendre there!

"So..." Connor winked. "What do you do for fun around here, then?"

"Depends what kind of 'fun' you're looking for," she replied with a contrived flutter of her eyelashes.

"Okay." Connor didn't mind playing along. "What's your favourite way to unwind, pet?"

The endearment paused her flirtatious onslaught and she stopped and looked at him speculatively, her eyes narrowing.

"There's this club I go to a lot," she said slowly. "It's not everyone's idea of a good time, but it's mine."

There was a different level of awareness between them suddenly, as if each of them recognised something in the other without being told. The frivolity of their initial conversation had been replaced with a moment of gravity. They had come to a standstill a few yards away from the main entrance, each observing the other with the utmost seriousness.

"And exactly what kind of club might this be, *pet?*" Connor deliberately emphasised the last word, a commonly recognised submissive endearment in BDSM circles.

Laurel's eyes darkened as her pupils dilated, but she looked him straight in the eye.

"It's a kink club," she told him without a hint of embarrassment. "I could take you there as a guest on my membership, if you'd like."

As soon as she'd delivered her offer, Laurel's head dipped and she seemed to be staring intently at her feet, but Connor knew with every molecule of his dominant persona that it wasn't

because she was hesitant or unsure. He recognised the gesture for what it was, a sweetly submissive offer of deference and respect.

Connor's own eyes fired as he subconsciously reacted to a kindred spirit. Crooking his fingers under her chin to lift her face back to his, Connor drew his thumb across her lips and murmured, "I would like that very much indeed."