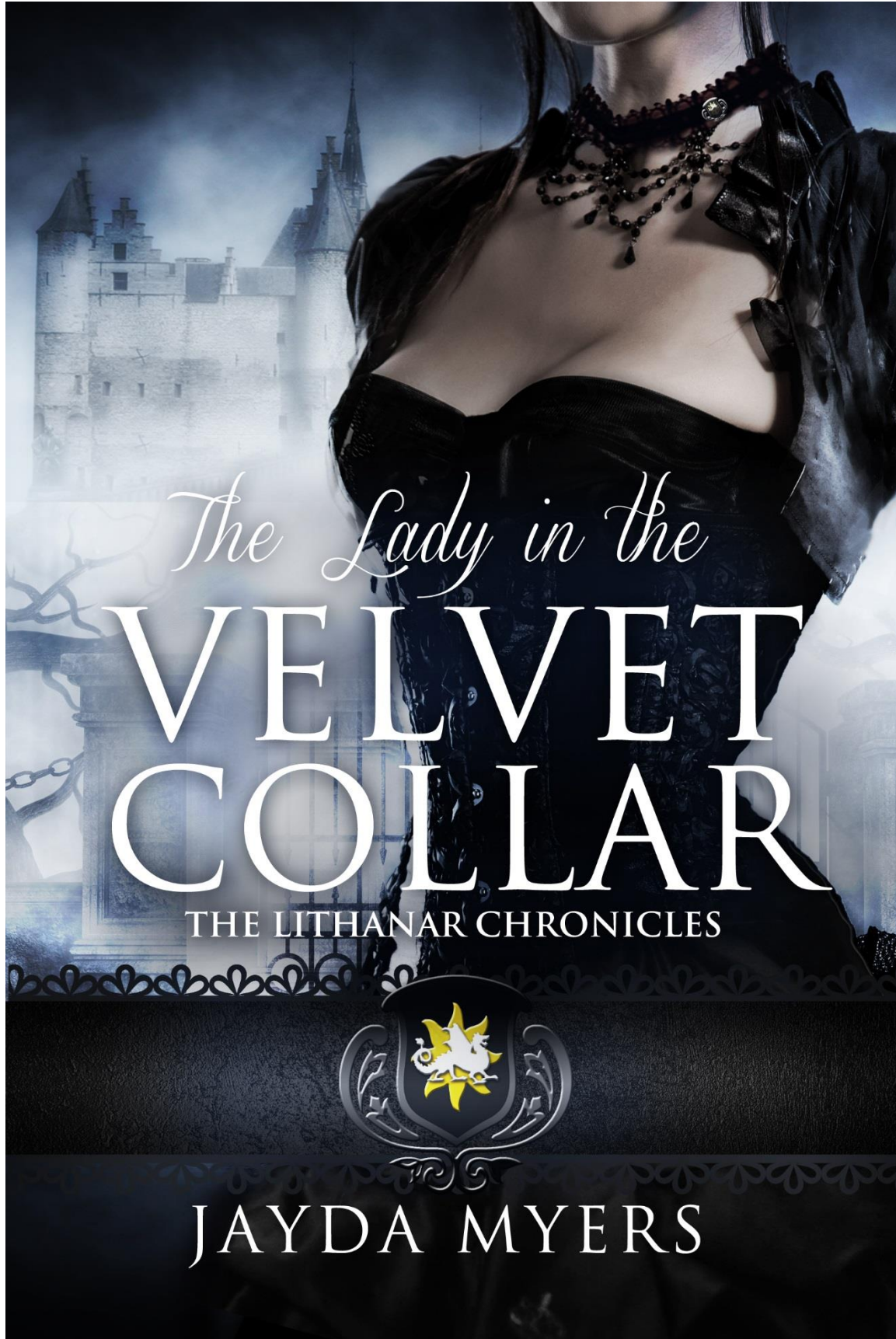


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The Lady in the Velvet Collar

A novel of the Lathanar Chronicles by Jayda Myers

Teaser from chapter nine

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It was only after she had washed the dirt off of her hands and returned to her room from one of the powder rooms that occupied the hallway that she heard a knock on the door. Unlike the previous night, the prince didn't immediately enter afterward, so she went to go answer the door, only to find Damien on the other side.

There was no one else with him or in the hallway, so she chanced a more personal greeting. "Good afternoon, Damien."

She was rewarded with a fierce smile. "I see you remember things quickly. I have some things for you, if you don't mind moving, please."

She noticed the heavy, polished wooden box in his arms and scurried out of the doorway, moving to close it behind him. He set the box on her bed, which she just noticed was freshly made and not the way it had been before. Helena must have been by while she was in the gardens.

"What is this?" she asked, cautiously.

He opened the box. Inside, there was a confusing tangle of leather and metal, items that had been jumbled around as he walked. He patted the bed beside him as an invitation for her to sit down. It was after she took her place beside him on the bed that he pulled the first strip from the box.

"All those measurements we had done yesterday went into creating some custom restraints for you. The wonderfully talented people in this castle can work quickly, when it's needed. These are designed with you specifically in mind and they will fit you best. These restraints may or may not be used when I come visit you privately, like this. They may be used one at a time, in combination or all at once, whichever we agree is more comfortable. Alright?"

She nodded, and looked at what he was holding. "What does that...restrain?"

"Give me your hand." It was only after he had her hand in his that he slipped the leather cuff around her wrist. The inside was lined with a soft fur and helped cushion the heavy cuff. The cuff was

only two inches wide and held multiple metal rings along one side, each secured to the cuff by another strip of leather. The cuff weighed her wrist down considerably and restricted movement. He slipped a matching cuff around her other wrist.

“These wrist cuffs are sized to you, specifically. I may use them to restrain your arms.”

He drew another strip of fur-lined leather from the box, this one longer and skinnier. A metal ring dangled from the center. It was another collar.

“This is going to be your play collar,” he said. “The one you wear now will be the one you wear in the daytime, to show people your position. However, there is no ring on that one and it is too easily damaged. This one will be able to handle anything we throw at it. This one will be worn when I tell you to wear it, which will be when I visit you privately.”

To make his point, he instructed her to hold her hair to the side, so he could unbuckle the velvet collar she wore. There was a brief moment of relief when the weight slid off of her throat, but just as suddenly as it was removed, he slid the other one on. It did not carry the same weight the royal crest wore and was actually more comfortable in comparison.

He eyed her with approval, as she wore the leather collar and cuffs he’d had made for her.

“Is there more, Sir?” she asked. The informal address he had suggested she use slid off of her tongue easily, like a pet name for a lover.

Heat seemed to ignite in his gaze once more, but he only reached back into the box and pulled out a length of metal chain, looped by a leather handle. “A leash, for my sweet lady. This one might not be used as heavily as the others, but it helps in moments where I might need lighter control.”

With that, he clipped the leash to the metal ring on her collar and tugged lightly. She instinctively resisted and she felt the pressure of his pull around her throat. A gasp escaped her. There was something unexpectedly intimate at being on the end of the leash he held, like she was connected to him. She felt her body light up, the same as it had the night before.

There was more in the box he had, that he introduced to her. Soft cotton rope for restraining. Metal bars meant to force her legs apart. Clips and locks to hold her in place by any of the metal rings on her body. There was another set of cuffs meant for her ankles, but he admitted that he liked the thought of having her legs free, and able to spread as wide as she pleased. That small admission sent a wave of heat through her body and she thought she might swoon, as all sorts of inappropriate images slid through her mind. She almost asked him to test it on her, right then and there.

At the bottom of the box was a set of keys that he said went to the dresser in her room. All the equipment he brought to her would stay in the dresser, for his ease of use. It was easier for him to store all of this here, rather than he drag it back and forth night after night.

She helped him transfer these items into the dresser, touching each one, getting to know the soft, supple leather and the fur that lined it. He took off the wrist cuffs she wore, then organized everything the way he liked it, then closed the drawer and locked it from the set of keys that had come out of the box.

“There may be more equipment to bring,” he mused, his hand on the wrist that had just worn the cuff. “Depending on how well we work together.”

“What equipment?” she asked, breathless for some reason.

The smile that flickered across his lips spelled out something naughty, something that made the fire burning in her surge and soar. “A gag, if I feel you will wake up the whole castle. More restraints if needed. Whips or crops for discipline, if needed.”

Madison found herself shivering at the thought. She had never been whipped before. She could take pain. A day of plowing the fields did not leave her feeling relaxed. Intentionally being whipped though, that was something she couldn’t think of properly, or understand.

“I feel as though I’ve frightened you,” Damien said. “Have I said too much?”

She chose her words carefully. “This is all new to me. I fear that I don’t...understand.”

“Were you paying attention to your lesson today?”

When she nodded, he asked her about it, about what Mistress Kei had said and the concepts she had talked about. When she recited it back to him, he nodded.

“You are intelligent and you pay close attention. For that, I am glad. That means you’ll keep me in check as well.” He laughed. “A lot of what we’re going to do can’t be taught in a classroom, which is why I told you that I will be teaching you myself. Two people and the chemistry between them is not a universal thing. I already know that some of the other candidates will be trouble. Learning how to make me like you won’t help. Learning my favorite colors or food, or how I take my tea won’t, either. The chemistry between us is what will make *us* work – and that can’t be learned in a classroom. The same goes for all of the equipment I bring in. It may frighten you, it may fill you with anger. You won’t know until you’re tied up, and everyone reacts differently.”

“Be patient with me,” she pleaded. “Please. This is all so new to me. So foreign. But I want to learn. I’m willing to.”

He took in a small breath. “Oh, I know you are. You’ve already kissed me twice, remember?”

She felt the heat rise to her face. When she opened her mouth to apologize, he tapped her lips with a finger.

“I’m not accusing you. There’s no need to apologize.” A broad grin crossed his face. “It’s rather entertaining, actually. I won’t say anything bad about the other candidates, but I will say that you are the one that keeps taking me by surprise, in a good way. It’s refreshing.”

His smile sobered, and he stepped back for a moment, looking her over. “It may be a good idea to establish rules and safe words now, rather than later, if you’re apprehensive of what we might do.”

“Safe words?”

“Yes, words that let me know if you are near or at your breaking point. When you are tied up, you may say no and mean yes. You may say yes and mean no. Everything can get mixed up, which is the point of having an established safe word. It lets me know if I’m going too far.”

Safe word did indeed imply safety. Madison felt a small breath of relief run through her, at the thought of being able to communicate her mental status. “What kind of safe word?”

At that, Damien brought a round of questions that at first, seemed unrelated, but she found that he was gauging her interests. Somehow, she always came back to gardening, either as a business or hobby, and she saw his gaze flicker to the flower pot on her dresser.

“I think I have an idea,” he said. “Tell me what you think of this. If I ask you where your mind is, and everything is okay, tell me *leaf*. If you’re becoming uncomfortable or want me to back off, tell me *merose*. And if for any reason you want me to stop immediately, tell me *thorn*. How does that sound?”

Logical. That sounded logical. Leaf sounded safe. The pale first leaves of a seedling always brought comfort. Roses could contain danger if handled improperly – she had definitely pricked herself on thorns before. The word *thorn* sounded prickly enough to stop, like she had hurt herself. She nodded.

“It makes me feel safer already.”

He told her that it might be harder to remember those words when under pressure. What followed was a quiz of those words, of what they meant, in a scale from “safe” to “stop,” forwards and backwards until she had it memorized. He told her to recite it when she had a spare chance, or before she went to sleep, so the words would be ingrained in her mind.

“I’m going to leave for now,” he told her, as he picked up the box and headed for the door. “When I return tomorrow, I’m going to have a list of some basic and common themes in bondage. We’re going to go over together what you’re okay with and what you will absolutely not do.”

“Limits,” she piped up. “Mistress Kei mentioned them briefly. She said hers was body waste.”

He wrinkled his nose at her. “As is mine. I hope you feel the same way.”

“Of course,” she said, making the same face back. “I didn’t even know some people like it, until she said anything about it.”

He gave a small laugh and turned to walk out the door. Madison called for him to wait, for a moment. When he eyed her quizzically, she said, shyly, “I thought I might ask for your permission for a kiss this time, Sir. A kiss good night.”

His eyebrows raised and again, he rewarded her with the slightest grin. He set the large box down against the door, then made his way back to her, until he was close, within kissing range.

“So ask me.”

His words were a challenge and they undid her logical mind unexpectedly. Maybe it was how close his body was to hers. She stared at him for a moment, trying to find the words. When she thought she might be able to speak, she breathed, “Please, kiss me.”

“You’re missing a name, there,” he said, voice low.

It was the tone of his voice that made her shiver, so much like the way he had spoken to her when he had her pinned to the bed. It took her another moment to add, “Damien?”

He shook his head. “*Sir*. I want to get you into the habit of addressing me as Sir.”

“Please kiss me, Sir.”

She barely had time to think, before she was in his arms and his lips were on hers once more. This was similar to the way he had kissed her the night before, the intensity, his overwhelming presence. He held her tightly in his arms as his lips pressed to hers, moving, directing their kiss. She was helpless to stop him, but she didn’t want to, even as his tongue licked at her upper lip, then her lower. Heat speared through her body, from her heart to the spot between her legs and she couldn’t help the moan that escaped her.

The moan seemed to set something ablaze within him, as he gripped her tighter. His tongue probed her mouth, searching, exploring. Somehow, she found the courage to meet his tongue with her own, until they were kissing deeply, giving and taking what the other had to offer. She also found herself being pushed back once more, until she fell back onto the bed. Damien was over her, his body tight against hers until she felt something hard poking at her, right at the sweet spot that ached for him.

How could a kiss undo her so quickly?

He pulled away from her, letting his lips find her throat. “Moan for me again, Madison. Let me feel _____ it.”

He licked and sucked at her throat and drew a moan from her all too easily. Her body tingled all over, from where he kissed her to where his hips met hers. She didn’t know what she wanted exactly, but she wanted more, she wanted everything...

In the midst of the confusion of her mind, she heard Damien speak again. “Have you ever been with a man, Madison? Physically, like this?”

She shook her head, unable to try and make herself seem more womanly or mature. She wouldn’t be able to lie to him. Every time his body touched hers, it drew sensation after sensation that she couldn’t hide. Plus, she was still intact. That was hard to lie about.

The confession of her virginal status seemed to freeze the prince. He pulled away from her, his gaze wide. “You are intact? Virginal?”

The subject was getting uncomfortable for her. “Yes. I have never...”

He completely removed his body from hers. “I apologize, Madison. I don’t mean...” he exhaled heavily, as if his own words made him feel awkward. “I don’t mean to offend you by asking. I just want to be sure. The things I have planned are not very gentle on the body sometimes. I don’t want to hurt you.

At this line of thought, he frowned. “I also don’t want your first time to be overtly painful, or a bad memory.”

“I’m sorry,” she found herself saying, for absolutely no reason. Her mind was a tangled mess, her body ached. She didn’t know what she was supposed to do.

When he saw the confusion on her face, he shook his head. “No, I’m sorry, sweet lady. I’m going to push you too far, too fast, at this rate.”

He made his way to the door again, then turned to her. “Come with me, Madison. Let us lose this fear between us.”