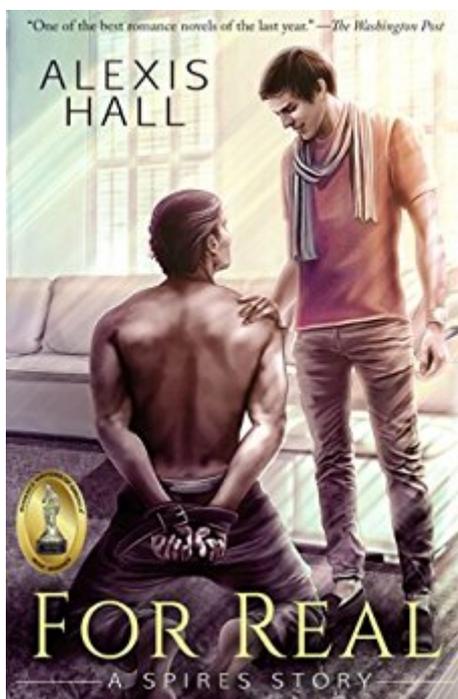


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# For Real



## Synopsis

2016 RITA Winner, Erotic Romance Laurence Dalziel is worn down and washed up, and for him, the BDSM scene is all played out. Six years on from his last relationship, he's pushing forty and tired of going through the motions of submission. Then he meets Toby Finch. Nineteen years old. Fearless, fierce, and vulnerable. Everything Laurie can't remember being. Toby doesn't know who he wants to be or what he wants to do. But he knows, with all the certainty of youth, that he wants Laurie. He wants him on his knees. He wants to make him hurt, he wants to make him beg, he wants to make him fall in love. The problem is, while Laurie will surrender his body, he won't surrender his heart. Because Toby is too young, too intense, too easy to hurt. And what they have is no matter how right it feels it can't last. It can't mean anything. It can't be real. Word count: 125,000; page count: 437

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## Customer Reviews

Fair warning: this may not be coherent. I really, really loved this book. I generally do not enjoy BDSM at all - neither het nor m/m, or anything in between. The power exchange in most BDSM

leaves me cold. One person is usually more powerful in life and in the sexual relationship in terms of age, economics, charisma, beauty, and even gender (especially in het romance). This - was not that. The dynamic between the two leads - Laurie and Toby - is so much more complicated. Laurie is older, more experienced, has a good job. He is the sub. Toby is inexperienced, young, stuck in a s\*\*\*ty job, uncertain in life, yet completely a dom. He wants to control, even hurt, Laurie, just as Laurie desperately wants to be controlled and hurt. And yet the caring and the aggression are not always one way or the other, and surrender is not always about sex. There is so much attention to detail in Hall's writing. I think he must start with the sound of the characters' voices, because even though it is told in dual first person (I don't usually like first person), there is never any confusion about who is speaking. They each have distinct patterns of speech and thought and almost an accent (though not as strong as yon Essex boy). There is a lot of care in the portrayal of Toby's nineteen-ness - both physically (he has acne, less sexual self-control, more sexual rejuvenation) and mentally (he is insecure, cocky, not sure where his future lies). Laurie is more settled - but then he has had years to figure out who he is, and indeed it surprises him a little to realize he still has some growing to do. Both characters feel like real people, with a real relationship and all the give and take that that implies, including the stupid stuff.

4.5 stars - This ended up being a bit of a surprise for me. I'm not usually a big fan of large age gaps, and this story not only has that, but the roles are a bit reversed. It really works here though. Laurence - Laurie - is a fairly well-to-do guy who is pretty much tired of the scene. He is still pining away for a past relationship which adds to his current depressive state. He hasn't really met anyone in a long time that has made him want to submit, which for a submissive, I imagine can be somewhat disheartening. Everyone he meets lately just doesn't seem genuine or serious enough about it, until he meets Toby. Now, Toby is out-of-the-park different from any dom I've ever read about. He's only 19 for starters. But, while he is lacking in experience, he knows what he truly wants - he has just not been able to get it. Who is going to take a 19 year old seriously or believes he actually knows what he really wants? Lucky for him, Laurie takes that chance. I think the fact that Toby is so very different, Laurie is able to, for the most part, not compare their relationship to his past and even realizes it wasn't the person but the relationship that he missed the most. Laurie wants to help Toby discover his dom side, but that age difference plays a big part in Laurie not allowing himself to let things get too personal. It's only a matter of time, however, before that is a bit out of Laurie's control. The sex and passion and experimenting is off-the-charts hot and the struggles felt very real. Toby doesn't just jump into

the dom role like he is playing a part. It is a very natural progression, one that he knew he wanted to explore and that set him apart from his peers.

Boy, did I resist this one. I am very much not into BDSM. The thought of anyone tying me up, much less intentionally causing me pain, is enough to make me break out in a sweat. But I kept reading positive, rave reviews of it, and I finally caved. So, so glad. I knew right away that it would be OK. "Take me to you, imprison me, for I, Except you enthrall me, never shall be free, Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me." Any BDSM gay romance that starts with a quotation from John Donne has to be special. This is a smart book. Laurie Dalziel and Toby Finch are, simply put, amazing characters; fantastically complex and beautifully, vividly painted. Any successful novelist makes you care about his characters. A romance novelist needs you to love his characters. Well, I did love Laurie Dalziel, who is smart thirty-something, successful, droll; but unhappy in a purely emotional way, still grieving and lonely over a failed longterm relationship. On the other hand, I fell in love with Toby Finch. Rarely do I feel for a character what I felt for Toby. Nineteen and sort of undirected "but not as undirected as he thinks he is; just confused, both by his peculiar upbringing and by his deep-seated need to dominate. Yeah. That BDSM thing. But Hall's writing is so sharp, so funny; his characters so brightly outlined and richly colored. When big strong tall Laurie first drops to his knees in front of small, scrawny, spotty Toby, I knew I was going to enjoy the ride. Given the theme of this book, it's no surprise that there is a lot more sex in "For Real" than I normally want in my romances.

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