



Holding the Cards

Joey W. Hill

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Book 1 in the Nature of Desire series.

Lauren is a successful doctor with a healthy attitude toward sex, unashamed of her proclivities as a sexual dominant. She wants love and a family, but she's beginning to believe there is no Mr. Right willing to stand by her in sickness and health...and be cuffed, stripped, and smacked with a riding crop.

Then her friend Lisette invites her to spend a long weekend on a private island. It turns out Lisette can't come with her, but Lauren opts to go anyway, with no one for company but Joshua, the island caretaker, and his visiting friend, Marcus. Though both men are beautiful, it is Joshua that catches Lauren's attention, and not just because Marcus prefers men.

Something in Josh's stormy eyes calls to her. When Marcus facilitates a game of submission and control between the three of them that will last throughout the weekend, Lauren embraces the opportunity. Josh overwhelms her with his willingness to submit to her body's desires, but her heart wants to get to the secrets behind those eyes. She is going to have to tear down his defenses and make him give her everything. And this is one Mistress who doesn't take no for an answer...

Holding the Cards Details

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From Reader Review Holding the Cards for online ebook

Mimi Smith says

2.5 stars

What to say, what to say... *sigh* I just didn't get into this book, unfortunately. There were hot scenes aplenty, but the other scenes, where I should see H/h connecting, and falling in love, were lacking for me.

First, what I did like.

I liked Marcus, who is incredibly funny.

The hot scenes were, as I've said, hot.

The idea of one person holding the high card and people having the freedom to disregard their usual issues and problems and do what they want to do without over-thinking it.

I did like Josh, but he had too little limelight time, so I didn't understand him.

What I did not like or thought was missing

Josh's POV-this I missed the most. We saw his thoughts for a few pages at the end of the book, but the rest of the time, he didn't feel REAL to me. He was just a wounded sub who existed only in Lauren's eyes, as her another chance for love. Since his history is extremely interesting, I would've liked to see how he was handling this very stressful and different situation the whole time.

I did NOT like Lauren. She just wasn't likable for me. I get her pain after her last relationship, but, whatever. The "relationship" was way too fast and unbelievable. I couldn't believe they really fell in love then.

I didn't like the way BDSM was shown at the end of the book. When Lauren is trying to get his secrets via it to help him heal.

The cover is AWFUL.

The ending wasn't a full HEA, IMO

Quotes

"A slave was supposed to have no secrets, expose his or her fears, worries and longings to the Mistress, and the Mistress would address them as she saw fit. It was the way the game worked. It was that automatic vulnerability, impossible to avoid, that gave the Dom such a dangerous edge, that made D/s walk so close to the darkness."

"You're being too nice about all this," she said.

"You're right about that," he said, surprising her. "If you'd stop being so pitiful, I could drop the whole chivalry thing and stare at your tits."

"He had taught her the difference between torture and teasing, sado-masochism and sexual dominance for pleasure. She wanted to tease Josh, arouse him, make him ache for her, but not deny him, or her, not ultimately. It was a fine line. When emotions got involved, judgment could become clouded, especially when emotions were tied up in shadows of the past. She intended to dispel those shadows, for the both of them."

"At heart, people were animals, burrowing in holes with their hurts, never realizing they would die in those holes if they did not summon the courage to drag themselves out and let themselves be healed."

"Her mother had once told her that the difference between love and all the lesser imitations of it was so startling, so powerful in its contrast, that once she had actually felt it, she would never mistake anything else for it again. Lauren hadn't known what she was talking about, because the perversity of love was, until you experienced it for the first time, there was no way to distinguish it from the other versions."

Jennifer says

4.5 BUTTERFLY STARS!!!

This book is completely unrealistic! Which is why I loved it so much!

White elephant, tree climbing, dancing, art, massages on the beach, making sand castles....and of course, it wouldn't be a Joey Hill book without BDSM. Lauren is a Domme. I think this was my first Domme story I've ever read, and I really loved it.

My Lauren:

Lauren is escaping a heart-breaking break-up from a man who chewed her up and spit her out. She is spending a few days on an island. Soon after she arrives, she meets one of the maintenance men, Josh, who assists her out of a pretty sticky, uncomfortable, and awkward situation...I know that sounds vague, but you just have to read the book to find out what the situation is (it's hilarious).

My Josh:

Josh has dark secrets of his own. He has been threw a horrible divorce and has never really overcome the emotional trauma from it.

It doesn't take long for Lauren and Josh to get hot and heavy. I was pretty much turned-on the whole book...I mean, it is a Joey Hill book after all. I didn't mind how fast things moved because it is a shorter book and I just accepted early on that everything was unrealistic, yet entertaining. So I sat back and enjoyed every moment :).

My Marcus:

Let's not forget about Marcus (Never. Never forget about Marcus!). Marcus is the second maintenance man. The gay one. It is obvious part of him feels something for Josh...well, mainly because he's not afraid to

share his feelings, but Josh isn't gay. So Marcus functions as the **sexual instigator** for most of the book. He has a smart and sassy mouth that is irresistible. He has an odd role in the story, but the story would be empty without him!!!

I just felt so relaxed while reading this book. Yes, it still has the usual inner thoughts of the characters from a Joey book, but it was really laid back. **It has a childish energy feel to it...uninhibited, animal instincts.**

80% of this book is spent...**naked**. Another unrealistic part to it. But completely entertaining! :)

Xia Xia Lake says

DNF

It has happened. I can't take it anymore. It's not the story, it's not the characters, it's the writing. I started reading this in October 2017. One page per week. I broke down today.

As Elena and Teal were saying, life is too short for bad books.

Lana ❄️Dirty Girl Romance❄️ says

3.5 Stars

I'll admit, female Dommies are not quite my cuppa. I was a little hesitant to read this one, but a friend recommended that I read this one before diving into Rough Canvas. Well I am so glad I let myself be convinced (take note, Irene, you won't hear this from me often LOL)

Joey Hill has a gift. She is able to take something as rudimentary as sex and weave it into almost poetic story telling. Cheesy sounding, I know. But true nonetheless. Her writing style is what continually draws me to her books.

The fact that she is also able to create heroines that have an incredible core of emotional strength that somehow have an endearing sensitivity to them is no small feat either.

This book takes place over a few days, yet she is able to not only make you see the connection between Josh and Lauren, but **feel it** as well.

Both Lauren and Josh have experienced traumatic heartbreak that they're running from. Lauren feel drawn to the pain she sees inside Josh's eyes, the Domme in her can't help but answer the call to help the beautiful man break free of his demons.

They each have a reason to fear intimacy, having been through what they have. Yet the connection they feel is hard to ignore.

Why not 5 stars then? Well, while I did enjoy it, I doubt this would be anything I would come back to. I do prefer male Doms in my BDSM books, so I tend to stick to that. I will, however, be putting that bias aside to read the rest of this series. Joey can do no wrong in my eyes.

The little taste I got of Marcus in this book was my favorite part. I am absolutely salivating for his book next.

If you haven't read this author yet, and enjoy amazingly written BDSM romance, this series is a huge rec from me.

Though I do feel it fair to mention that Joey's books are not the ones you break yourd BDSM cherry with. They are not light by any means, but so worth the read.

For more reviews visit

Mirjana **DTR - Down to Read says**

****3.5 stars****

Joey's brilliant writing can make anything work. And although I'm on the fence about Lauren, my heart broke and healed for Josh. He really was the star of the book.

I was initially planning on skipping this book in the series, but was told to read it as my introduction to Marcus. So glad I got to meet him before I start Rough Canvas!

ShoSho says

4.5 stars

Davina D. says

Holding the Cards tells the tale of Lauren, a female Dom, who escapes to an isolated tropical island to try and heal a broken heart. It's been a while since she broke up with her "submissive" boyfriend, Jonathon, but somehow she hasn't been able to move on. Lauren's feelings of hopelessness is exacerbated by her anxieties about getting old and her intense longing to find love and have a family.

On the island she meets our hero, Josh, a beautiful tattooed stranger with secretive, vulnerable eyes and his handsome gay friend, Marcus. Lauren is immediately taken with the two studs, but there's something extraordinary about Josh. She can't seem to get visions of him bound and strapped and bearing the blunt rasps of her riding crop out of her mind.

However, there's a challenge. Josh may be a sub, but he's no pushover. Though he's also drawn to Lauren, he's not in any hurry to get involved with anyone anytime soon. He himself is still trying to get over a nasty break-up from an ex-wife whose perverse sexual proclivities almost destroyed him.

Lauren realises she has her work cut out for her. Getting this 'submissive' to kneel before his Mistress and bear the very essence of his soul to her will not be easy. That's where the handsome co-Dom and Josh's "platonic" friend, Marcus, supposedly comes in...

This is my first book by this author and I must say I'm quite impressed with Hill's writing talent. Actively descriptive and visual, she uses beautiful, very lyrical prose which engage and place the senses of both her characters and the reader right in the thick of what is happening in any given scene.

However, while I'm obviously in awe of Hill's pen, I did have a few issues with the book:

Hill seems to be building a reputation for herself as an up and coming wordsmith, and she does deserve accolades, but while reading this book I sometimes felt she went into too much detail about mundane things. The sexual tension between the characters ran high, but was drawn out a tad too long for this reader's taste. There were moments when a scene would drag on and on to the point where I became frustrated waiting for the narrative to get back to the story.

I also couldn't understand the significance of Marcus's presence on the island. I'll go ahead and put it out there that while I went into this book with my eyes wide open I usually don't seek out books with M/M interactions. I decided to read this book because I really want to read Hill's Natural Law, but considering I'm a stickler for reading series books in order I felt compelled to read HTC, which is Book 1 in the Nature of Desire series, first.

I don't regret that I did. Lauren, Josh and Marcus are all likeable characters. I actually found Marcus's personality a lot more interesting and fleshed out than Josh's. He was a character with layers, not just a caricature of a man defined by an unusual sexual preference. So while I don't tend to seek out MM couplings in my books, this wasn't the main issue for me at all.

Before reading Holding the Cards I conversed on email with Ms. Hill and she explained Marcus as a presence which facilitates Josh opening himself up to Lauren. However upon reading the book I didn't quite get that impression. Marcus's presence on the island seemed pretentious, like nothing more than a plot device to justify his activities with Josh. As far as I could see, the character served no real purpose in the development of the relationship between Josh and Lauren, the protagonists of this book.

Josh is apparently a straight man. Lauren held the cards in this "game", so to speak, so whatever she said went, and this applied to both men even though Marcus himself is a dom. Thus, whatever "facilitation" he provided, Lauren, with her talents, could have easily done without. Josh may have presented certain challenges, but there was nothing to suggest she couldn't have gotten to him eventually. In fact she did, and with very little help from Marcus when the actual unveiling of Josh's "demons" occurred.

Marcus simply ended up being an annoying third wheel who felt more like an intrusion into Josh and Lauren's private world rather than any true "facilitator". His presence added nothing to the action, neither enhanced nor took away from it. For reasons I could not detect, he would appear at certain moments, then conveniently disappear at others as if working only to the tune of Hill's literary whims rather than a rational sequence of moving the story forward.

It was all just a tad too convenient to be truly convincing.

I don't dabble in the bdsm subgenre often. It's simply fun to add a different type of spice to my reading choices every once in a while. Reading about a female Dom and a male sub certainly put an interesting spin on things. Lauren, though she ruled in the "dungeon" was alternately sweet and vulnerable outside her little sexual "games". Within it, she's firm, but never a bitch. Josh is probably not the type of hero I usually like, but as I said earlier he wasn't a pushover.

All in all, this was considerably more hardcore than anything I've ever been interested to read, but according to many Hill fans *Holding the Cards* is just the tip of the iceberg. Apparently things get much heavier in subsequent books in the *Nature of Desire* series.

This novel certainly nudged me out of my comfort zone on more than one level, and ultimately, I can not determine if Hill's work is my cup of tea, but I shall look forward to testing my limits further in an effort to find out.

Recommendable for those who don't mind a little kinky sex and or some M/M loving.

UniquelyMoi ~ BlithelyBookish says

Holding the Cards is the first book in the *Nature of Desire* series and while reading this story it hit me – Ms. Hill doesn't write your average erotic stories meant to arouse the body, she writes tales meant to arouse the mind and heart, as well. Her stories make us think about why we are apprehensive about some things, while craving others. Or maybe more aptly put... why we're apprehensive about the things we crave.

This book is a very emotional read, and honestly, I wasn't expecting that. I thought this would be a quick, erotic story but that couldn't be further from the truth. While this story is full of sexual tension, the sex itself doesn't start until late in the book, when the players have worked through their demons and have bared their souls, learning to trust again. What we get with *Holding the Cards* is a slow burn, the kind that builds and builds until the reader is panting and sweating along with the characters.

The bottom line - *Holding the Cards* is not a quick, easy read, but it is well worth the time it took to read it.

In fact, as soon as I finished it, I immediately began the next book in the series, *Natural Law*, and I can already tell it'll be just as good as the first book, if not better.

I should mention, for those who care, this is a Domme/sub story, meaning that the female character is the sexual dominant in the relationship.

Shannon The Show Stopper says

I started this series with *Rough Canvas* and so since I'm a fan of Marcus it was nice to get more of him. I also really like Josh and Lauren and I'm just an overall fan of Joey's. I'll be shocked if I read something I don't like that she's written.

Baba says

I had to replace my picture, November 23, 2012

Review completed October 7, 2012

Passion was a flower with a fragile bloom, easily collapsed by frost. It was fortunate that it also had strong roots, able to survive in darkness for lengthy periods without dying away completely. Under the heat of Josh's passion, the flower was opening.

First of all let me say that I'm sorry that I haven't read this story sooner. What a great read! There is one character in this book who I simply love to pieces: Marcus. *To-die-for-extraordinary-sexilicious-hot-as-all-get-out* specimen of a male wonder. Admittedly, his grand appearance will follow in *Rough Canvas*, however, what this man did to me in *Holding The Cards* showed me again what a lasting impact he made on me. Well, if you haven't read *Rough Canvas* yet, then it's possible that you don't understand what I mean. I am so sorry that Marcus is playing for the other team. *sigh* As a matter of fact, *Rough Canvas* was a life-altering reading experience and *Holding The Cards* is proof that this man deserves a very special place in my heart. Forever. Having said that, I just realized that Marcus knocked Tate off his pedestal as my all-time favorite hero. Likewise, *Holding The Cards* made me want to re-read *Rough Canvas*. I just hope that Joey's next m-m novel will provide more of those unforgettable gay heroes.

Marcus loves Josh. He is his friend as well as his brother--family formed by circumstance rather than blood. Marcus feels very protective of Josh and he makes frequent trips to the island to check on his well-being.

Josh's ex-wife messed up his mind. His intelligent and beautiful spirit is struggling to heal itself despite his best efforts to keep the wounds open. There are some aspects of Josh that are not healthy and Lauren is determined to dig deep enough to unravel all of Josh's dark places and secrets.

I felt pretty shocked when Josh revealed his dark secret. This sentence (view spoiler) knocked my socks off! His ex-wife (view spoiler) I think there is a mighty fine line between sex games and brutality. And when the games turn into a power trip then it becomes very, very dangerous. Josh's ex used his vulnerability to abuse him emotionally.

Lauren actually is a very strong woman even though she feels insecure after her boyfriend cruelly dumped her. She is back to explore, to dip her toe back in. Being on the island is a safe place to play again, because it didn't feel real, it wasn't home.

Would he let her hold the cards until the game was over?

Lauren wants to challenge Josh, push him, see how far he would submit to her, but at the same time he would have to trust her. Completely. Let the game begin...

While reading this story I had to cherish some special and unforgettable moments, i.e. Lauren's erotic dream:

He covered her mouth with his and gave her air, the ability to breathe and live above the water's surface. He filled her with oxygen and all the substances that made life worth living.

Exquisite. An elegant, passionate word, reserved for an untouched box of Godiva chocolates, the sparkle of a diamond in sunlight, and this moment.

Another moment I had to devour was their sleeping (and I mean sleeping, no sex at all) together in the same bed. This particular scene truly wowed me--there was so much sensuality, intimacy and eroticism packed into this brilliant moment, it almost undid me.

And then there was this particular scene between Lauren and Marcus--they were talking about Marcus's love Thomas. I spoiler tagged it to shorten my review.
(view spoiler)

Oh, how I hurt for Marcus!

I have a minor quibble: Josh's POV was not enough present. A fair warning to those readers who love a HEA: there is a happy ending but it's more a **HFN**. Then again, the ending was very realistic and a vow of undying love would have felt unbelievable. The author convinced me that Lauren and Josh have a future together and nothing else matters.

As I said in my review of *Reluctant Surrender* I feel more comfortable with Femdom stories. And Joey is my erotica goddess. Granted, I didn't love every JWH book that I read to date but the *Nature of Desire* series is something exceptionally good. **A-mazing**. So far I devoured each and every book in this series and I'm glad that there are more stories to come.

Joey W. Hill proves time and again that an excellent erotic story is meant to be cherished. Never take it for granted. It's a gift that has been given to your senses and you have to appreciate it, worship it. Oh my

goodness, she writes erotica like no one else!

Holding The Cards is a sensually and beautifully written erotic story that will strip everything away except your bare soul. This story is packed with devotion, sensuality, eroticism, pain and in the end something that feels like catharsis and absolution. It was liberating to witness Josh's trip from his self-inflicted punishment back to his normal self.

It's not only about a story or sex. It's about true emotions that embrace you and nurture your soul. Her stories matter.

Baba's Sexilicious Coefficient for Holding the Cards

I'm talking about a range from 1 (very low) up to 5 (very high). Keep in mind that steam ratings are going to be just as subjective as book ratings. And my rating does not reflect in any way how well written the sex scenes are.

Chemistry 3.5

Sensuality 5

Steam 4

Eroticism 5

Warning

While *Holding the Cards* is NOT a m-m novel, there is one scene that included some men lovin'. Just saying...

My ranking:

- 1) Mirror of My Soul and Rough Canvas (5 stars)
 - 2) Ice Queen (5 stars)
 - 3) Branded Sanctuary (4.5 stars)
 - 4) Natural Law (4 stars although the hero is worthy of 5 shiny stars!)
 - 5) Holding The Cards (4 stars)
-

Amber Rose says

For more of my reviews click [here](#)

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There was an intimacy to a relationship between a Dominant and submissive that pulled on the elemental need for unconditional love and trust.

Why have I not read this sooner???? It has been on my to read list forever.....

This book will pull you in. Joey Hill's writing style is one of my favorites, and her BDSM scenes, she knocked it out of the park.

1 woman and 2 men on a island together. Ohhh I know it is going to be good!

Lauren is a female Dom. Goes to her friends house on an island to get away from everyone, and the demons from her past. 2 men are also on the island but her friend insures her they will not bother her.

She finds her self stuck in a tree with only a towel on. Due to the fact she locked her self out of the house. Josh comes to her rescue and she finds a deepness connection to him.

Josh has more demons in his closet. I couldn't decide if I wanted to hug him all the time or just let him carry me away!

Then there is Marcus. He is a crack up and very loving.

I am not going to mention what happens cause I feel that you would need to read this and don't want to ruin nothing. :P

"D/s can be dangerous, because it explores the most primitive sides of ourselves. Those involved must have a high degree of trust and very, very healthy devotion to one another. Like religion, it can be a spiritually enlightening experience, or it an expression of psychosis. And somewhere in between, it can be tremendously fun."

[image error]

I fell in love with all 3 characters. They have a strong bond from the start till the end. I felt so much connection with these characters.

I am eager to know what the next book is going to be about. Looking forward to them all.

Bravo Joey Hill

~IreneOust~ says

It's no secret that Joey W. Hill is my favorite author when it comes to all things erotic/BDSM. No one and I mean NOT ONE OTHER AUTHOR writes BDSM quite as sensual and full of feels the way Joey does it.

Having said that, there will be no pink furry cuffs or light spanking here so if you don't 'get' the whole dynamic of BDSM relationship and are easily offended by books such as 50 shades, this is NOT an author for you.

I have yet to meet a character of Joey's I haven't loved. Every one of them has a story to tell and most of them make you want to climb into their book and hold them as they bare their soul to you!

Josh is no exception. Even though this story is Lauren's to tell, Josh will make your heart ache in the process. Most of the events in this book happen over the weekend on an exotic island so this is a true testament to Joey as a writer because she makes you feel as if you spent a lifetime with this couple ... A lot of the questions get answered via flashbacks and conversations Lauren has with Josh's good friend Marcus. (Marcus has a book of his own in this series called 'Rough Canvas' which can be read as standalone but I always recommend you read 'Holding the Cards' first because, even though he isn't a main character in this story, he plays a huge part in it and you get to know him really well and even get glimpses of him and Thomas together.)

Lauren is a Domme and I have to admit that I was never a fan of Dommies but Joey made a convert out of me. Most books in Nature of Desire series feature Dommies and even though it may not be your cuppa, you must give these stories a try because most of the male subs are so alpha that at times you have a hard time deciding who is bringing who to their knees.

With every book of Joey's I read, I keep saying to myself "This is my new favorite couple" and this book was no different. Lauren and Josh stole a piece of my heart and I am more than OK with it.

TORI says

DNF @ 24%

I decided to branch out and try something different. I'm not crazy about the female Dom storyline. But I called myself being adventurous. Unfortunately I can't do it. It seems like a great book. I really liked the writing. But I think I'll stick to my male Doms from here on out.

cjbt57 says

This book was such a disappointment, especially since I've been reading the series out of order (most of the books are stand alone) and had a good experience with the Ice Queen, Mirror of my Soul and Natural Law. I think if I had read this series in order, I would have stopped after this book.

I found the story boring. I didn't feel like Lauren was really a Dominant even though she could pull it off when she got in the zone. I thought Josh and his ex-wife's relationship was interesting once Lauren discovered that he was really the submissive and his ex-wife had been the Dom.

What I think turned me off the most was when Marcus and Josh had sex. Josh wasn't bi although Marcus was gay. They're best friends and obviously have a deep bond. Was it really necessary for them to have sex? Of course, it was under the guise of "pleasing" his Mistress, but it just seemed gratuitous to me.

I had been intrigued about Josh and Lauren when I read about them in the Ice Queen books. It seemed like

there was such a complex and riveting relationship between them in those books. Well, there wasn't. What a let down.

Awilk -never sleeps- says

Joey W Hill has a beautiful writing style, and it suited this story so well.

I have read a couple of her vampire books, so I was willing to give this series a read, and I am so glad I did. This was a lovely romance, where two broken people helped each other heal. The story wasn't crowded with characters, which I enjoyed. I really got to spend my reading time with just a few characters who I got to really feel for. I will be reading more of this series, as soon as I find the money to buy them, and the time to read them. Another must-read series on my forever growing wish list.
