

**Spanking  
My  
Girl**

**By  
Evan Hawke**

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## Nude Girl

She just wasn't naked enough.

I placed my paintbrush on the easel and set my palette down. I stalked over to my nude model and asked her to sit up.

"You're just not working out," I said.

"Look, Mister Painter Man, I've been hired for three weeks, and you'll have me for three weeks, and you're damn well going to pay me for three weeks."

She crossed her arms over her chest and jutted her chin up, as if she were daring me to slap her. I considered her. She was what I'd wanted. Sharply angled hair cut at chin length. Great shape. Small, compact body, a dark-skinned Latino with thin lips and round eyes.

Those round eyes were what made me choose her. She was angles everywhere, hard and full of attitude and spunk, but she had soft, round eyes. And the mouth on her! She gave sassy a sweet name.

I shook my head, left her, and slammed the door to my studio shut. I knew if I took a nap, she'd give up on me and leave. All the models do when I get frustrated. Although, I wasn't sure if I was tired of Selma or if I was just frustrated that I couldn't get the vulnerability I wanted from her.

I wanted her sharp, sassy spirit on my canvas with those round eyes looking soft and vulnerable and honest. Her eyes glared at me the whole time I painted. Daring me to some contest that I didn't know the rules for. What else was new? I never know the rules of the mystery that is woman.

I decided to take a walk instead of a nap. I'd done well, I mused. Made a name for myself and a career for myself. My works had sold so well that I could afford a nice piece of land near San Diego looking out on the ocean.

I walked out to the beach, but I didn't take my shoes off. The sand looked hot and clean, and the ocean simmered with white waves above blue-green waters, like a pot of boiling shamrock liquid. The sun cast an orange shadow above it all, and I realized it was probably near nine o'clock.

Selma should have left a long time ago.

I studied the angles of the cliffs down the beach, the way the rocks sloped down in spiky angles towards my beach. Their gray angles made the shadowed water below look cold. I doubted it, but I'd never swum in the ocean, so how would I know?

I sat on a rock and waited for the gold to fade and the shimmering white reflections of the moon to come out and play on the water. I wasn't lonely. I like to observe and paint, not participate. I observed for a long time before I walked back up to my house.

I frowned when I noticed her car was still in my driveway. I went inside.

She was still in my studio.

Sleeping, it seemed, with her eyebrows furrowed in determination and her lips set in a sassy line. I woke her up. "I don't sleep with my models, Selma."

She raised an arrogant brow. "Better not, *gringo*." Spanish words tumbled out of her mouth in a smooth, insulting stream, and I didn't understand any of it.

Which was probably why it sounded beautiful.

"Don't you think it's time you left?" I ignored the bite of sadness that nicked at my heart.

"Sure, I leave, you don't pay. You don't let me come back through your locked gates again. Do I look stupid, *gringo*?" She snapped her dress over her head. "I'm staying. Three weeks, that's the agreement."

I almost laughed at her. "I'm not feeding you, *chica*. You want to stay here and starve and wear

that dress for twenty more days?" I did laugh then and turned away from her. "And I'm *not* going to pay you."

I laughed as a musical stream of Spanish chased me down the hallway, floating like a song after me as I walked to my bedroom.

She'd be gone by morning.

---

She was still in my studio.

I walked in with my cup of coffee and my bagel with cream cheese. She was sprawled on the set I'd arranged her on yesterday, licking her fingers and smiling. She looked sated and happy.

Too happy. "What the hell are you still doing here. I told you to leave yesterday."

"I'm not going anywhere, *gringo*." She pulled off her dress and fixed me with her intense eyes. "So paint, because you're paying."

I decided to ignore her. I turned my easel towards the windows and painted the ocean. Broad, swirling strokes. Painting the ocean is easy for me; I do it every time I'm blocked. I'd have a thousand of them, except I burn most of them. I don't paint the ocean for prosperity, and I don't want anyone confusing my legacy with that of a living room painter.

I keep a few to torture any guests who decide to stay in one of my extra bedrooms. With the gray walls and the dark blue comforter and curtains, they don't stay long, and they don't come back. I prefer it that way.

Selma wasn't getting the hint, so I offered her a guest bedroom. Worked on my other guests, and she'd made a too cozy place for herself in my studio. Three days later she was still in my studio in the morning, and I had a pile of ocean paintings that were wasting away my time.

She just sat among the blankets on the set, naked and propped against the pillows, reading a book.

"Damn it, Selma, go!" I threw down my easel, and my brushes clattered to the floor. "Get out of here!" I took a step towards her and waved my hands like I was shooing a dog away. "I'm not paying you, and I'm not painting you! You get it? You stupid, *chica*?"

She popped up on two feet and strutted towards me, knees high like a majorette marching up to the sidelines. The whole way she spat out choppy sounds like the rocks jutting up from the ocean. Then she slapped at me, but I caught her hand.

Her Spanish insults pitched higher, and she talked faster.

"Damn it just shut up a second, will you?"

She did. She actually did something I told her to. We stared at each other, panting from emotion. She tried to pull her wrist away and said something else in Spanish.

She couldn't get her wrist free, so she raised her other hand and tried to slap me again. I smiled when I caught it before she could make contact. I thought I'd won when she smiled back, but then she kicked me right where it hurt like bloody fuckin' hell.

I think I cried.

---

I left her alone after that. Only fifteen more days, I told myself. We weren't speaking, so I put up a calendar, circled the day three weeks after she'd first come to model, and put a big black line through each day I survived.

She saw it and laughed once, and then cursed at it.



The next day there was no calendar on my wall when I walked into my studio. I decided to try a new approach.

"Take off your dress," I said with as much harshness as I could. And I can sound pretty mean. Heck, I never pretended to be a nice guy.

She smiled like she'd won something and pulled it over her head. "How would you like me?"

I licked my lips. I hadn't thought of it that way, and evidently she hadn't either because she quickly corrected herself.

"Posed, *gringo*. How would you like me *posed*?"

I laid her down on her side and arranged her arms. "Look towards the ceiling," I said, and then I looked at her legs. I'd planned on embarrassing her, angering her so that she'd leave. Something stopped me. It's not that I liked her or wanted her to like me.

"You scared of me, *gringo*?" she taunted. She knew what I'd intended and spread her legs for my painting.

"You ever cut your damn attitude? You ever get soft?"

She laughed at me.

"You ever get vulnerable?" I asked softly.

She just stared back at me. I added another painting of the ocean to my growing stack that night.

---

I woke up to the sturdy smell of bacon. Just like her, I thought. Hard and sturdy and ... good to eat. It made the place smell like home.

I dressed quickly and went out to the kitchen.

"You think I cook for you, *gringo*?" She threw a challenging look at me.

I gave her my best grin. "No, *chica*, I can only hope."

She humphed and frowned, but I could tell she liked my answer. She slapped a plate down in front of me, and I was surprised when it didn't break. The bacon was crispy and she'd made eggs over easy with toast. She slapped a plate down beside mine, walked around the counter, and sat down right next to me.

And dug in like she was starving. I watched her, studied her, but I couldn't figure out what it was I wanted to capture if I could paint this moment. Something about her amazed me, maybe the way she just threw herself into eating like it was the best time she'd had in her life.

"What're you lookin' at?" she challenged with her mouth full. A dribble of egg slipped from the corner of her mouth. I knew if I painted it, it would make her look sloppy. But she didn't look sloppy. I know my limitations, and there was no way I'd be able to capture what I was seeing. I was fascinated.

"You're not so bad," I said.

She smirked at me and started chewing again. "You keep up with those amazing compliments and I may not leave at all."

I was surprised that I laughed.

---

She was still in my studio, and I didn't bother picking up my paints. I sat down, sighed, and looked at the stack of ocean paintings.

"You like bonfires?" I asked. "On the beach?"

She smiled, eyes twinkling. I realized I'd never seen her eyes twinkle like that, and I wanted to be able to make them twinkle again.

"I want hot dogs and marshmallows and graham crackers and chocolate bars," she said in a lyrical rhythm.

When I returned from the store, she was wearing one my shirts. I don't know if she was

wearing anything under my shirt, but I couldn't stop wondering. I gathered up the hot dogs and s'mores fixings and took them down to the beach. I arranged the wood and started the fire, and sat down to watch the waves.

She joined me when the sun began to set.

The fire was burning down so I threw in a couple paintings. She gasped. I *think* she gasped. She didn't say anything. She waltzed around in my shirt that hung just below her butt and made hot dogs and s'mores.

I laid out a blanket, so she had something to sit on. It suddenly bothered me that we'd never had a real conversation. I started asking her questions about her family, her childhood, her work. For an hour or two or three, I was gripped by an obsession to know every single detail of her life.

"Why'd you choose me?" she suddenly asked with her mouth full of marshmallow.

She let me touch her chin and tip her head back. I searched her eyes for a flash of vulnerability, but she was all challenge and all confidence.

"I wanted to contrast your spunk and sass with big, round and vulnerable eyes." I licked my lips. "But your eyes never look vulnerable."

She laughed a loud *hah!* at that. "You're not man enough to make me vulnerable, *gringo.*"

Would her eyes twinkle if I did?

---

She decided to play naked the next day on the set I'd created. She laid on her belly, butt towards me, with her elbows propping her up so she could read a book. I could see her butt through her feet, which stuck up in the air and twirled back and forth in front of me.

I couldn't bear to paint the ocean again, so I painted her butt. Or the piece of it I could see

between her legs. I worked in silence, and she read in silence, until I put my brush down.

"Aren't you hungry?" I asked. We'd been at it for seven hours straight. I'd done longer sessions before, and bawled a few young models out for complaining about hunger and the need to go to the bathroom.

Well, I can't help it. If I'm on a roll, I'm on a roll, and I might not get back on it again. I pay them good money to create art, not to hinder my creative flow.

But she hadn't moved or made a peep for seven hours straight, and I was suddenly gripped with guilt.

"Don't interrupt me," she said. "I'm reading."

I picked my brush up again

---

Two weeks had passed, and she was still in my studio. I carried in my coffee and looked over my paintings for the past week. I looked at her again, and found she'd arranged herself in yet another pose featuring her butt.

Six paintings of her little butt and I was finally starting to see a pattern.

"You didn't fix breakfast," I said.

She wiggled her butt at me. "What do I look like, *gringo*, your servant?"

I don't know what possessed me. I just raised my hand and slapped the sassy little target as hard as I could. She lurched forward, and I stepped back in shock.

If I hoped for a moment that I had just imagined what I'd just done, the handprint on her bottom confirmed that I had indeed just smacked her. *What kind of man hits a woman?* She re-arranged herself, butt over the pillows again, reading her book like nothing had happened.

I grabbed her chin so I could see her eyes. She first wouldn't look at me, but then she looked right back. Eyes full of anger and spitfire. We just stared at each other for a while, each saying nothing.

I couldn't hold her gaze, so I dropped her chin and studied her butt. The handprint branded her with my mark. I was suddenly obsessed with getting the picture on canvas. The swollen, red flesh cried that she was mine and all mine. I painted faster than I'd painted in a long time.

My handprint faded quickly.

I stood next to her, wanting to slap her butt again so I could get it on canvas. She turned her eyes up to me. "Whatcha want, *gringo*?" She cocked her head and then laughed at me. Then she stood up and chucked me under the chin. "I'm going for a swim."

Just before her sassy walk carried her out the door, she called back, taunting, "You're not man enough!"

---

The next day, when she was still in my studio, I walked in and smacked her bottom without warning. Without exchanging any words, I painted. When it faded, I smacked her bottom again. Once every hour or two, and she waited in silence between each smack, knowing that one would come again.

She didn't complain, not once for five days.

I turned her on her side, her butt still facing me with one leg bent and one leg stretched straight. I slapped her once on the butt and once on the inside of her leg. She squealed and looked at me hard, but there was a smile playing at the corner of her lips.

"I'm sorry?" I asked.

She spit out something in Spanish. I kissed her once on the lips.

"You think you can just be any man and have me? You're not man enough for a woman like me!" She stalked out.

I threw my paintbrush across the room and had myself a little temper tantrum. I decided to take it out on her, so I went to the guest bedroom. She wasn't there. I ran outside. She wasn't in the ocean. I ran out front, and her car was still there.

*Thank God.*

I finally found her in my bedroom, lounging in my comforter and reading another book.

"You can't just leave. You're the model, and you can't leave. You have to stay and let me paint you, if you want to get paid."

She didn't deign to look up from her book. She reached over to my night table and grabbed an apple. Without looking at me, she munched on it loudly.

"Damnit, I'm talking to you!"

She ignored me. I paced back and forth at the foot of the bed. Then I threw one of the tantrums that I'm famous for among nude models. I ranted and raved, growled and stomped around, and even called her a name.

That finally got her attention. With her mouth full of apple, she just quirked her head. "Talk to me when you're sane, *gringo*."

I stalked out.

She was still in my bed when I went to my bedroom for the night. I sat down next to her, but she was sleeping with a frown on her face. Tomorrow she'd be gone, all done. I wouldn't have to deal with her anymore.

Would she leave in the morning? I still hadn't gotten the painting from her that I wanted. And now she was curled up in my white covers looking like a little angel. She sure was no angel. She was naked, confident and comfortable in her own skin.

Like nudity didn't make her feel exposed in the slightest bit.

I grabbed her feet and tugged at her legs until she lay over my lap, her butt a prime target. I waited for her to object, but she didn't say a thing, even though I knew I had to have awoken her. I rested my hand on her butt, but she didn't say a word.

And then I smacked her butt.

I waited again for her to object, and when she didn't, I smacked her butt again. "You like a little smack-bottom?" I asked. I loved the way her butt bounced under my hand, as pert and sassy as her spirit.

She didn't react, so I smacked her again and again, until my handprints just became one big area of red, swollen flesh. I put my hand in between her legs because I was tempted, but then I lost courage. Instead I started smacking again, up and down her legs and across her bottom as hard as I could.

Faster and faster and faster I smacked, until she finally whimpered and crawled right off my lap, curling around on top of the pillows. I worried that I'd carried it to far, but she blinked her sassy eyes at me. "You going to let me get away, *gringo*?"

"Get back here," I ordered.

She just smiled, enigmatic and inscrutable. "You gonna make me?" The mystery that is woman.

"No." I stood up and picked up an ivory-backed brush that was displayed on my dresser. "You're going to climb back over my lap, and I'm going to punish you for climbing off."

Did a flash of apprehension just pass across her face?

"You're not man enough to punish me, hey *gringo*?" It was more question than challenge this

time, and her voice was softer and prettier than I'd ever heard it. Almost *nice*. "To make me cry?"

At that moment, I'd do anything in the whole world for her.

"Just get over here and see."

She tried to act sassy and defiant, but she obeyed me, and I could sense a little reluctance in putting her bottom back in the line of fire. She crawled onto my lap and took a handful of comforter in each hand.

"Give it your best shot, *gringo*."

Like I said, I'd do anything in the whole world for her. I smacked the hairbrush down on her bottom. Instead of smacking, it thudded. I heard a whimper and figured it must have hurt. I spanked her with the hairbrush quicker, varying the angle of attack and the intensity of my swing with each spank. I gauged my effectiveness by the sound of—or lack of—her squeal.

That's when I decided to add a little embarrassment into the mix. She strutted around naked all the time, modeling for artists across the city, so she was comfortable with her body. But I put my hand between her legs and watched her go still. I stretched her legs apart and felt like I'd won a goal when she held her breath.

I wanted to touch the milky invitation between her legs, but she'd issued a challenge and I was driven by the desire to please her. I smacked the untouched skin up and down the insides of her legs, and she started crawling away again.

"Get back here, little lady."

She obeyed like she was afraid not to. I went for it all then, smacking the hairbrush everywhere from the insides of her legs to the back of her legs, to a flurry of spanks that were sure to bruise her bottom and leave a lasting impression.

When she still didn't cry, I dropped the brush and used my hand again, smacking with such



rapidity that she scrambled to get away from me. I held on to her legs and smacked faster until she broke into sobs and gave up fighting me. I smacked her bottom a few more times to make sure she wasn't pretending to give up.

"Put your legs together," I said. No, that wasn't right. "Bend your top one. Lay on your side." I tugged at her feet until she was positioned perfectly.

But it still wasn't right. I smacked her bruised bottom, as hard as I'd ever smacked it and took a step back. "Look at me, Selma."

And then she arched up and looked over her shoulder with tears rolling down her face. All sassy chin and pert hair with big, round, vulnerable eyes. Her moist red lips trembled.

"Oh my god," I breathed. "You're beautiful."

---

The next morning I turned to her at breakfast. "Okay," I said. "It's been three damn weeks, and it's time for you to go."

She hesitated. The first time I'd seen her uncertain. Fear whipped through me, and I suddenly realized that I couldn't live without her sassy black hair and her soft, round eyes and her sharp-tongued words.

"And I'm damn well not paying you," I added.

She looked at me a second. She picked up a piece of bacon and gnawed on it. "Then I'm not leaving, *gringo*." She shoved a forkful of egg in her mouth and smiled at me.

And I smiled back.

## My Girl

We stared at each other, panting from emotional toil, the deadly quiet in the eye of the storm. Even in the midst of the worst fight we'd ever had, we huffed and breathed in unison, reminding me we were still one, even when temporarily split by anger.

Our marriage was crumbling before our eyes. We just continued to stare, both frightened and hurt out of our minds. We'd never been quite so mean to each other; we'd never stomped on each other's vulnerabilities quite so ruthlessly.

Lisa glared at me with all her mother tiger anger focused right at me. No, not just anger. I saw hate in her eyes. *Real* hatred.

"You're the one who didn't take out the garbage for the third week in a row. Is that so hard to ask? We stink to high heaven! All the neighbors are talking about us!" She pointed her finger at me. "I told you and told you and told you. Are you fucking stupid?"

"If you would keep your damn mouth shut once in awhile, I might be able to hear you."

We squared off at each other. Oh boy, could this get any worse? At least our punching rounds were getting shorter.

"I want a divorce, John."

And the shortest round yet, put me down for the count. Not only could I not talk for ten full seconds, but I couldn't breathe. I felt like my heart stopped beating, like she'd reached in and ripped it out.

We'd said the kinds of things you can't take back. We'd hurt each other, betrayed the unwritten rules of trust and intimacy. And for what? *Little* things. Like taking out the garbage, making dinner, not saying "I love you" enough ... tiny little things that were adding up to a huge problem.

I picked up my briefcase. I hadn't even taken my coat off when I arrived home from work. Lisa had come and attacked me with accusations of my failures, launching us into yet another fight that was becoming a nightly habit.

My failures were many, and she made no bones about pointing them out. And she was right, so what could I say? What could I do?

"I have to go," I said.

She opened her mouth, and then shut it. I knew she wanted to ask me where, when I'd be back, and *if* I'd be back, but I couldn't answer those questions. And after what she'd said, I didn't think she felt she had the right to ask those questions.

Hell, she *didn't* have the right.

I strode out of the house, threw my briefcase onto the passenger seat, and squealed out of the garage. Too upset to be hungry, I skipped dinner and went straight to the closest Hilton, depositing myself at the bar.

The pain in my chest needed numbing.

---

"You look like a man who's just been through hell," I heard. I glanced over at another suited man, probably in town on business. He was graying, probably mid-sixties, respectable.

I grunted a non-committal reply.

He flipped open his wallet. "My grandbaby turned ten today."

He showed me the cutest picture of a little girl in pink tights and a frilly ballet costume. Next to the little girl stood what appeared to be the girl's grandmother.

"Is that your wife?" I asked.

"Been married forty-three years, now," he said proudly. "You?"

I groaned. I couldn't help it. "Eight, and it doesn't look like we're going to make nine."

"That why you're looking worse for the wear?" he asked.

"She's a goddamn nag," I said. I felt my breath whoosh out. "Truth is, I can't seem to do anything right by her."

He leaned his elbow on the bar and faced me. "You love her?"

Boy, did I. "Hell, yes."

"Then why do you let her nag at your marriage?"

I looked at him.

He motioned to the bartender to refill our glasses. "Whose fault is that?"

I took a swig. "It's not like I'm saying I'm an innocent victim, here." I felt a strange pull to defend her. "You know, you should see her with the kids. She works tirelessly, and is most always upbeat and positive. And ..." I felt my eyes mist. "I love her. She's an amazing woman. I'm in awe of her, sometimes."

"Well, then. You can't let her ruin your marriage."

I sighed. "I forget the damn garbage; I forget the oil changes. I didn't mow the lawn and now the leaves are piling up. I don't bring her flowers, and I don't tell her I love her enough. I don't romance her, anymore. She's not the only one who's ruining our marriage."

"You can change all that."

I nodded. "Yes, I can." I thought about it. "I will."

His cell phone jingled the William Tell Overture, and he snapped it open. I tried not to listen, but some people talk louder once they get on their cell phones. I overheard both a scolding and a warning about a spanking.

My respect for him faltered. I frowned at him. "You spank your wife?"

He shifted, looking a little uncomfortable for a moment. "Listen, that's something you have to be careful with, buddy."

"You spank her," I said. "Is that how you don't let her ruin your marriage?"

"Yes, but it's not what it seems. I just warm her bottom a little, remind her where the boundaries are."

I couldn't help it. "And what about when you forget to take out the garbage?"

He smiled good-naturedly at my challenge. "Well, you'd be surprised at how holding her accountable makes me strive to be a better man for her."

I tried to picture my Lisa over my lap, getting her butt spanked by my hand. It wasn't hard, not since we'd done it once before. Hadn't been a real spanking, though. Just a little kinky play, to satisfy her curiosity. She hadn't been crazy about it.

He shook his head at me. "Look, spanking isn't about me. It's about her. About her happiness and the health of our marriage."

I thought about that over a few more drinks, and got a room in the hotel. The next morning, I went home and confronted my wife.

"I want to try and make us work. I want to help us—you—be happy. Will you give me a chance? Trust me?"

She was still livid from the night before. We'd never slept apart while married, except when I was on a business trip. "You want me to trust you? Are you fuckin' crazy?"

"For two months," I said. "Just give me two months, and if you still want a divorce, I'll give you the house, everything. My last damned penny, if you want it."

I think the reality of our situation hit her, because she burst into tears. "I don't want to take everything from you."

I wrapped her in a hug and held on. I suppose she thought I was comforting her, but I held her as if my life depended on it. I pulled back and kissed her on her forehead, then her nose, and finally on her mouth. "Please, Lisa," I said. "Please give me this."

She shrugged. "Eight weeks. Fine."

I spent the next week just watching her. Admiring the way she was up at six, getting the kids and their lunches ready for school, and the way she was still going up until nine o'clock at night, getting the kids packed into their beds for the night.

If I didn't know her better, I'd think it was easy for her. She almost made it seem effortless, except for the way she leaned against our oldest's door in exhaustion after the last one was tucked in for the night. Or the way she'd shut her eyes and sigh when she thought no one was looking, and then quickly paste a bright-eyed smile back on her face.

I started to notice that I hadn't seen her *sit down* in weeks. If our boy didn't have soccer, then our girl had gymnastics. She'd make dinner, clean up the kitchen while we ate, and then go cart the one or both of them around to their various after school activities.

So I made sure to be home from work early on Halloween night. She was already almost done with dinner at five, with trick or treating starting at six.

I looked at the mashed sweet potatoes and the green noodle dish. "They actually eat this orange and green stuff?"

She smiled, and I felt like I'd gotten a present. "They do if they want to eat candy tonight." She eyed me with suspicion after spooning the mashed potatoes on the plates. "What are you doing home so early?"

"I thought I'd take the kids out for trick or treating."

She frowned. "So you get to swoop in and do the fun stuff?"

I shrugged. "Okay, I'll pass out candy and you can take them around." I put a hand on the back of her neck and massaged. "I just wanted to help, to give you a break."

She was quiet.

"Listen, why'd you stop going to yoga? You used to go every Monday through Thursday, at eight or so in the evenings."

Lisa made a scoffing sound. "The kids got older, and their bedtimes got later." She frowned at me. "And you never offer to help."

She was right. "So next week, you go back," I said.

A flash of hope or excitement whipped across her features, but she quickly shook her head. "Can't. I wouldn't get home until after nine. Who'd shower them and tuck them in?"

"Me."

She plopped some noodles on all the plates and carried them into the dining room. When she came back, I put my hands on her shoulders so she couldn't walk away. "Next week, you're doing yoga."

"Hah!" she said, and carried the last two plates into the dining room. "Forget it, John."

When she came back to call the kids down, I grabbed her arm to hold her in place, and smacked her bottom twice.

"What the hell?" she said, and then her eyes lit on fire. She whirled and slapped my hand, hard.

Not exactly the way I'd planned things. I backed her against the wall, and she looked up at me, alternately wide-eyed and angry.

"I'm trying to help," I offered.

"I don't need your help," she spat.

"Well, you're getting it all the same, and you're doing yoga next week. That's final."

The kids came down for dinner, Annie dressed as a killer fairy and Ben dressed as Scream, with some sort of blood-pumping thing connected to his mask. I kissed Lisa on the nose and told her we'd finish our discussion later. She looked unnerved, but quickly went into her usual enthusiastic mom routine.

When later came, she was in her flannel pajamas, and I was in bed. She eyed me warily as she crawled in.

"Yoga," I said. "Next Monday, don't forget."

She smirked.

"If you don't go, I'll give you a real spanking."

That got her to start talking. "Is this part of your eight weeks to save our marriage? Because if you think that's going to win me over, you'd better have a second think."

I sighed. "Lisa, I want you to be happy, and you're not. I intend to see to it that your needs are met, too."

"By spanking me?"

"That's about the gist of it." At her look, I added, "You promised me two months."

"Seven more weeks," she said savagely. Then she sighed. "Okay, fine. Besides, if I can prove you're a wife-beater, I'll get the kids."

The breath whooshed out of me. My heart stopped. I knew by the look in her face that she hadn't meant it, and had only said it to hurt me. I decided to let it go. After all, I'd just told her that I would spank her like a kid, if she didn't go to yoga.

I figured she'd test me on it, and the next week, she did.

She pretended that she forgot, but I could tell she remembered by the nervous way she started getting ready for bed Monday night. I watched and waited, while she got more and more nervous.

"You didn't go to yoga tonight," I said.



She waved her hand in dismissal and answered, "I forgot." But her voice was a little higher than normal. Then she took a deep breath and faced me. "Look, you're not going to spank me, if you're still thinkin' crazy."

I sat on the edge of the bed. "Come here, Lisa." She didn't move.

"Lisa, you promised me two months."

"That didn't include spanking!"

"Come here," I said more forcefully. When she didn't move, I added, "I'm not going to spank you yet."

She walked to me reluctantly. I grabbed her hand and guided her to stand between my knees.

"You can't do everything and not take any time for yourself," I said. "I told you to do yoga again because I remember how happy it made you. I remember how energetic and refreshed you were after every class. I remember how many times you told me that it was such a special part of your day, something you treasured and did just for yourself."

"So," she said. "It's my choice."

I took her hands in mine. "No, it's not. Not anymore. We're not happy, and you're not happy." I waited for her to object, but she didn't. "So I'm stepping in, and I'm going to make sure that pattern changes."

"And you think spanking is going to make me happy?" she asked, incredulously.

"I think it's worth a shot." I had to admit, I had a few doubts myself. "You're always saying that the kids are happier with their boundaries. Always feeling more secure, you say."

"I'm not a kid!" she cried. "And besides, we don't spank the kids."

I sighed. "Lisa, you're getting a spanking tonight."

She started to back away from me, but I held on to her hands.

"Fine, spankings are for kids. How much can it hurt?"

I touched a hand to her pouting lips. She was nervous, I could tell. "Sweetie, this is going to hurt. You might even cry."

For a moment, she looked like she was going to burst into tears right there. I put my fingers into her pajama bottoms and felt for the string. She stared out the window with a stubborn expression while I untied them, and then tugged her bottoms down to her knees. They fell to her ankles.

"Go ahead and step out."

Her lip swelled out into a pout, and she didn't move. I pulled at her arm and tipped her over my thigh. Figuring she might get to fighting me at some point, I caught her legs between mine. I pulled her close to my waist.

"Give me your hand."

"What?" Her voice was smaller and higher than I'd ever heard it.

"Give me your hand," I repeated.

"No!"

I ran my hand down her arm, gently pulled her arm back behind her and locked her wrist in my left hand. She was completely locked in place, with her white bottom framed and positioned for as hard a spanking as I chose to give. There was nothing she could do about it.

It was a heady feeling, but scary, too. I didn't want my wife to hate me.

I chuckled. "Remember that time, on our honeymoon, when I spanked you before?"

"That was different!" she cried. Her voice dropped to sulky. "That was fun."

I ran my free hand over her smooth skin. "That was fun," I agreed. "And you loved it."

"Is that what this is?" she demanded. She struggled to right herself, and I think it was the first time she realized how very much in my control her

body was. She could barely do anything except arch her back up and wiggle her feet. "Let me go!"

"Settle," I said. "Relax."

She struggled for another minute or two, and finally stopped, panting.

"Lisa, I'm not going to hurt you. You know that, right?"

She started to cry out, and beg me to let her go.

"Do you want the kids to hear their mother being spanked?"

She shook her head frantically. "I can't believe you're doing this!"

I used the remote to flip on the television. "They shouldn't be able to hear, all the way down here." The master bedroom was in an add-on to the back of the house, on the first floor. Their bedrooms were on the second floor, in the front of the house.

I waited until she calmed again. "When I spank you, I want you to feel how very seriously I take your happiness. Because I'm going to make this hurt, and I want you to know that I'm going to spank you again and again and again, any time you threaten your happiness or our marriage."

She sassed back, "I'm going to think of how I'm making an appointment with the attorney tomorrow morning."

I smacked her butt. She made a strangled sound, and I smacked it again. Her butt wobbled a little after each smack, and a red, swollen handprint blossomed onto it. I stared at it in wonder, inexplicably amazed that I'd caused it. I forgot to lecture her, and smacked her again, watching the red spread across her whole bottom.

When it was all red, I stopped. "Tomorrow, you go to yoga, or it'll be much worse."

"You can spank me all you want, but I'm not going to yoga. I don't want to."

I spanked her three times, fast, across the middle of her butt. "See, that attitude isn't going to help. Do you think I'm doing this to be mean? Do you think I'm doing this for my arousal?"

"Feels like you're pretty aroused to me," she accused.

I realized I was and laughed. "You're right, but then, the sight of my wife naked always does that to me." I spanked her another five times, and said, "But don't let that distract you from my point. It's now time for me to be in charge, and if that means doing something that you don't feel like doing, you'll do it. And if you don't, you'll get spanked."

"But I'm getting spanked for not doing something I *do* feel like doing!"

I laughed at her inadvertent admission. "I thought you didn't want to go to yoga. If you wanted to, then why didn't you?"

She must have realized her slip. She went still and kept her head towards the carpet, refusing to look up at me.

"Were you testing me, Lisa? Wanting to see how serious I was?"

I leaned back a little, and unbuckled my belt. I heard her gasp as it slid out through the loops. Dropping it by her head, I said, "Just look at that belt while I spank you, and ponder how serious I am. I'm going to use that on you, after I finish spanking you with my hand. Are you getting how serious I am? About you? About saving our marriage?"

She gave a little nod.

"I can't hear you," I said.

"Yes," she whispered. I wasn't sure if I imagined it, but I thought she trembled a little. I almost lost my nerve. I reminded myself that if I wanted to be in charge, I had to be strong.

I started spanking her again, this time warming up the top of her legs and the soft, uncreased spot

in between her legs and her butt. I gave her smacks that stung until her bottom and upper legs were glowing red all over. Then I gave her five mighty paddles with my hand, feeling her body lurch forward under the impact with each one.

She cried out on the last one.

"Hand me the belt, please."

She shook her head frantically.

I pulled her to me, adjusting her so that she was more secure in my clasp. Then I started spanking fast, as fast as I could. In the space of thirty seconds I must have smacked her butt a hundred times. She struggled and wiggled and cried, and I kept going until she burst into a sob and my arm seized up from the effort.

I caught my breath and then asked, "Hand me the belt, please."

I realized I had her hand in my grip, so I let go. She put her hand on the belt and sniffled. Yes, it was definitely trembling. I studied her bottom anew, making sure that I hadn't caused any real damage. It was hot, red, and looking slightly swollen. Nothing severe, though.

She timidly reached the belt up to me, holding it behind her back. I took it and folded it over, palming the buckle.

"You ever been spanked with a belt before?"

She shook her head, still trembling.

"Honey, I'm not going to hurt you."

"You're already hurting me! Look at me! You spanked me!"

I was looking at her, and she didn't look too hurt to me. She looked gorgeous, actually. I was curious, so I rested my hand on the back of her leg. "I wonder what I'd find if I explored between your legs."

I was shocked to see the back of her neck go red from a blush. It'd been years since I'd made my wife blush. And so I slid my fingers up between

her legs, pleased when I found more moisture than I'd felt from her in a long time. I don't know what possessed me, but there she was, and there I was, and so I wet my finger in her and slid a single digit into that tight little entrance.

She went still and quiet.

"What does that feel like?" I wondered out loud. "What are you thinking?"

She squeaked. It was such a cute sound that I laughed.

"Okay, sweetie. You're distracting me." And boy, was she. Despite her arousal, I didn't think it likely I'd be getting any tonight, especially not after I used the belt. I wiggled my finger out—over her incoherent squeals, and patted her butt. "Okay, tell me what you're thinking."

She was silent so long that I started to think she was being rebellious. But she finally cleared her throat. "I'm really sorry," she said, so sincerely that it caught me off guard.

I almost asked her if she was serious, but I caught myself and asked her "For what?" instead.

"Everything," she whispered. "Threatening to divorce you. Not going to yoga. Not taking care of myself anymore." She fiddled with the carpet yarn. "Not taking care of you, like I used to," she added guiltily.

"Lisa!" I said. "That's not what this is about. I just want you to take care of yourself. I'll worry about me."

She just shrugged. "I'm sorry, all the same."

"You know, I'm new to this too. I don't know whether to use this belt on you or not. I don't know if you've learned your lesson or not."

She didn't say anything, and I waited. She still didn't say anything, and I picked up the belt. "I'm going to give you ten," I said, and waited for her to object.

When she didn't, I whipped the belt across the top of her legs, and watched the welt appear. I ran my hand over it with a little regret. I raised the belt again, and whipped it across her bottom three times. Then from her bottom to just above the back of her knees, six more times.

And noticed, when I stopped, that she was bawling her heart out. I dropped the belt and picked her up, pulling her into my arms. "There, there, Lisa. Do you know how very much I love you?"

I pushed her back so I could see her face, and it was all screwed up and wet from tears. I kissed her nose, her eyelids, and her forehead, and then buried her face in my chest. I rocked her and rocked her, until her body stopped shaking from sobs, and until she grew quiet and relaxed.

I picked her right up and put her in bed, amazed at the way her eyes just looked at me, all full of trust and willing to be carried. I tucked her in and gave her another kiss on her nose.

"Lisa, you'll go to yoga tomorrow night?"

She nodded sincerely.

"And you know that I'm going to spank you again?" At her wide eyes, I clarified, "When you step out of line, or disobey me, or stop taking care of yourself."

She couldn't meet my eyes. She closed them and nodded.

I tipped her head up. "Open your eyes. Look at me."

She did.

"Do you understand? Are you okay with that?" I didn't mean to sound uncertain at the end of my question, but ...

"Yes, I think so."

I smoothed back her hair and crawled into bed with her. I was surprised when she turned into me, snuggling close like she'd never done before.

"I love you, John."

With that sweet voice, she took my breath away. At that moment, I could only think that I'd willingly walk through fire, *willingly die* to keep her happy and safe. I wrapped my arms around her. "Lisa, you have no idea how much I love you."



## Sweet Girl

"Come here, darlin'." I opened my arms to my girlfriend of two months. Her eyes beseeched me for comfort, and her mouth turned down in a pretty little pout. She looked like she needed a hug, and I can't say that I minded wrapping my arms around her little body.

She melted into me without comment, leaning against me like my cat does, like she's proud I own her. I'm not saying I own my girl, or that Midori's merely a pet, but that's just what she's like.

"What's wrong?" I asked gently.

She wasn't ready to tell me. She dropped her head and let her hair swing forward. I knew she was hiding her face from me.

"Nuh-uh," I said. I tipped her chin up. "Tell me what's wrong."

I reminded myself to be gentle and patient and to let her have her say. But damn, I just wish she'd let me fix it so we could get on with our evening.

"I want to tell you something," she said in her precise little sweet voice. "Something terrible."

I grinned. There's just something about the way she dropped her voice to a dramatic whisper when she said 'terrible,' particularly since I knew her 'terrible' would probably not be so terrible. I turned my grin into concern just before she looked up at me with troubled eyes.

"I like spanking," she said. Her eyes were big and brown and honest.

"You want to spank me?" I asked. Her English is mostly perfect, but she still gets things a little off sometimes. I like to tease her, and the thought of her little hands spanking me—a man twice her size—was just funny.

She colored. "No, I ..." she trailed off and looked down at her hands.

I looked down at her hands, too, which were folded primly in her lap. She sat neatly with perfect posture.

"You spanking me," she whispered towards her hands.

I just looked at her for awhile. Did she want me to spank her now? Didn't seem like she needed a spanking, not the way she was half trembling, half setting her chin in stubborn resolve. She kept looking at her hands, not wiping the tears gathering in the corners of her eyes, as if by not wiping them, she could deny they existed.

I still had my arm around her shoulders. She made a move to get up, but I let my arm remain heavy. She stayed.

A tear dripped down her face, and she turned her head away. She swiped at the tear with her hand and then reached up, unhooking her hair from behind her ear. Her hair swung down to cover her face.

"Don't hide from me." I hooked her hair back behind her ear and trailed my finger down her exposed neck. "I'd spank you for that," I tried.

She breathed out. The tension drained from her body, and I felt like I'd scored a goal. But I wouldn't spank her, not today. It was just something I'd have to think about, maybe do some research on. It's not like I hadn't heard that some girls like a spanking, it's just that Midori was special. She was the *one*.

And I damn sure wasn't going to mess that up.

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Midori fretted as she hurried off to work the next morning, trying to forget what she'd admitted to her latest man-friend. Chuck seemed so big and safe, and he made her feel small and precious. He doted on her and looked after her. What more could she want?

Especially after she played office politics all day in the associates' never ending battle for partner. The men underestimated her, but the women weren't fooled. Just because she was soft-spoken didn't mean she was simple-minded or weak.

When she spoke, people listened because they couldn't hear her unless they concentrated. When she smiled, the men gave her their full attention.

So Midori used her weaknesses to her advantage, and focused on quality work, day in and day out. She loved contract law. She loved digging into the language and considering the different subtleties of words and their placement.

Her assistant was standing in her doorway when Midori got up to her office.

"Good morning, James."

He turned around with a big grin. "Someone's sent you flowers."

She felt her face color and tried to maintain a brisk business-like tone. "Thank you, James. Did you finish typing up the changes on the Herdes-Jackson contract?"

He just shook his head and laughed. "Of course. So who's sending you flowers?"

"You're like a snapping turtle," she returned. "If you bite down on something, you don't let go."

He just grinned at her, all twenty-one year old boy who hoped to go to law school next year. She rolled her eyes, walked past him, and reached for the card sticking up between two dozen red roses.

*Hey darlin,*

*Thank you for sharing your wishes with me last night. I hope to make that and many more of your wishes come true.*

*Love, Chuck*

*P.S.: Will your bottom turn as red as these roses when I spank it?*

"What's it say?" James came up behind her and peered over her shoulder. Midori clamped the card shut and twirled to face him.

"No sneaking up like that!" she said. He didn't look the slightest bit rebuffed, but he did retreat respectfully.

"All my dreams, all down the drain." James held his hands over his heart and went on with his dramatics. "The love of my life is being courted by another man, and I'm just the neglected and ignored errand boy."

She waved her hand at him. "Go away. Don't you have the LSATs to study for or something?"

When she was alone, she re-read the little card. 'Courting,' he'd said. She allowed herself a soft sigh and pressed the card to her heart

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I watched her approach my apartment building's entrance from my twelfth story window. She was so sweet and delicate and ... purposeful. She was strong in the way she strode across the parking lot in her snappy high heels.

I gave her a big bear hug as soon as she came in. Not the most romantic of greetings, but I like the way she disappears in my arms, so small and bony.

"What's for dinner?" she asked and sniffed the air.

Sometimes it takes her a little while to unwind from work. It's cute to hear her little voice barking orders and demanding questions. It's hot to watch her shed her office persona and melt into Midori. I like the idea that I'm the only one in the whole world who gets to see that special soft part of her.

I touched her cheeks and gave her a gentle kiss.

"Food." She frowned at me as if I were slightly daft. "I'm hungry."

She dropped her briefcase and swished past me, making a beeline for the kitchen. I followed her and caught her licking my spaghetti sauce off the spoon.

I held out my hand, but she ignored it and licked every last bit of it. I tried not to think of that little tongue licking elsewhere. When she finished, she plopped the spoon in my hand and uncovered the spaghetti, peeked at the meatballs, and checked the garlic bread in the oven. Ever since she'd mentioned the spanking thing, I couldn't help looking at her butt. It was like this little target, popping in and out and twirling around, and I couldn't wait to get my hands on it.

I was disappointed when she turned towards me after her study of dinner. "Good thing your nana taught you how to cook," she said.

"Didn't your mama teach you not to lick the spoon?"

She stuck her tongue out at me, and I grabbed her in another hug. I finally got to put my hand on her butt, the pert little muscled thing. I slid my hand up under her skirt and considered the spoon in my hand. It'd been a wicked tool of my mama's while I was growing up.

So I tried it. I smacked the wooden spoon down on the top of her leg and felt triumph when she squealed and rose up on her toes. Something about the way she looked up at me with big, surprised eyes made me want to do it again.

So I did.

The spoon bounced off her thigh like a drumstick on a drum. I stepped around her as she squealed again and pushed gently on her back, so that she'd bend over and I could study the marks I'd made. I pushed up her skirt—seemed about the size of my winter stocking hat—and tugged at her pantyhose.

I heard her breath catch as I pushed the panty hose and her panties down to her knees. I kneeled down and traced my hands over her legs.

They trembled! Surprise tingled through me. I touched the two red spots I'd made with the spoon. They were warm and soft and swollen. Her scent drifted to my nose, and I slid my hand up her leg to investigate.

She purred. Really, she purred, almost exactly like my cat. I don't know how she made that sound, but it was the most beautiful sound in the world. I slid my hand over her pussy and resisted the temptation to slide a finger inside her. *Barely* resisted it.

I patted her butt and stood up. "Dinner's ready."

I grinned when she pouted, and enjoyed watching her tug her panties up uncertainly. She stepped clear out of her pantyhose, which was just fine with me. Too bad she pulled her skirt back down.

She looked at me with her head cocked, her lips in a smile. "I know what you're thinking."

I laughed. "Oh no you don't."

"Yes, I do."

I looked down at her skirt and shook my head. "No, I don't think you do."

She grinned at me and pulled her panties down from under her skirt. She stepped out of the black and red silky things and hid them behind her back. "I don't?" she asked in her sassy tone.

She held the panties behind her back like she was shy for me to see them, even though she wasn't too shy to tease me. She turned to walk towards the dining room table, and I stared at her swishy little skirt, trying to see if a little bit of her bare butt would be visible.

No matter. I remembered exactly what it looked like.

I picked her up from her office the next Friday. Stress was rolling off her like little heat waves as she pounded her heels to my little Beamer.

"How 'bout I take you out tonight? Instead of you cooking?"

"No," she snapped. She stared out the window and pressed her lips together. Then she started snipping on about her colleagues.

I mostly let her talk and pretty much tuned it out, because my last girlfriend had been a Mars and Venus addict. She'd drummed it into my thick head that I shouldn't try to *fix* her problems when she was venting, but should listen and just nod and cluck, I guess.

When we pulled up to her building, I turned to her. "Okay, now. We're going to have us a nice dinner, so we're done complaining about this when we leave the car." I paused and waited for her to object. "Got it?"

Her bottom lip stuck out a little, her mouth open in surprise. She studied me for a second as if trying to figure something out.

I made my voice firm. "Got it, Midori?"

Her voice softened. "Yes, Chuck."

I petted her silky black hair. "That's my girl."

She followed me quietly upstairs and didn't object when I took the keys from her and opened her door. She was awfully quiet.

"Can I help with dinner?" I asked.

"No, Chuck."

Well, that confirmed it. She was acting strangely. I watched her start dinner to make sure she wasn't saying one thing and meaning the other, but she seemed to really not want my help. I gave her ear a tug and kissed her forehead.

"You look pretty, darlin'."

She giggled and blushed. *Ahh, there she is, I thought. There's my Midori.*

Her apartment was sparsely furnished, but each piece was high quality, perfectly placed, and everything was ultra neat. She didn't have a dining room, but she had a big square coffee table that we often ate at, sitting on the floor in front of the tv.

She had a big plasma screen on the wall, and I grabbed the remote and settled back on the couch. I smiled when I smelled onions and garlic, with that overtone of some spice that Midori always cooks with.

It didn't take her long to make dinner, and I had almost drifted off to sleep when her little voice started rattling in Japanese. I didn't know what she was saying, but I understood the tone.

"Hey now. What's got you all sassed up at me?"

She whipped out some more words in Japanese and finally said, "I have bad day and you sit and you watch TV and I cook and I work." She slammed dinner down on the coffee table and stomped back to the kitchen. She came back and was no quieter when she dropped the plates on the table. "You just sit!"

I refrained from reminding her that I'd offered to help. I also managed not to mention that I'd offered to take her out to dinner, instead.

"You men, you all the same!"

*Screw nodding and clucking and just listening*, I thought. I stood up and took hold of her arm. "You may not speak to me like that, little lady." Her mouth puckered like she'd just bitten into a lime. "I told you to leave it in the car."

She put her hands on her hips and looked up at me the way my little mama would when she was going to scold one of her sons. My mama had a way of looking up at us that felt like she was looking down. But Midori was the one who'd earned a scolding, and I wasn't going to listen to one, that's for sure.



"Get those hands off your hips because you're the one who's crossed the line here."

She didn't. She just stared at me with pert defiance. It was cute, because I knew it wouldn't last.

"Get over here," I said.

She didn't want to. She jutted her chin up to hide her feelings, but it was too late. I'd seen that flash of uncertainty in her eyes.

"Get your butt over here, Midori."

She dragged her feet over to stand in front of me, her hands now wringing in front of her. She opened her mouth to talk, but I tapped her lips.

"Darlin', I can tell you're about to get yourself into a load more of trouble. Why don't you just keep that mouth zipped for now, and we'll let the spankin' do the talkin'?"

Her mouth dropped open again, and her eyes whipped back and forth in the old fight or flight war. I laughed.

"You can't run, and you can't fight. You're getting' a spankin' here."

Now she looked like she'd had a taste of bitter lemon. I tugged at her skirt, another *Ally McBeal*-looking thing. "I want these off," I said, and waited.

She didn't comply.

"Okay, here's the deal. You got a bug up your little ass, that's fine. I'm not going to stay and listen to you sass all night. We either fix it now or I leave until you've got it fixed yourself."

She stared at me, still mute, like she didn't know what to make of me.

"Probably you're thinkin' that your colleagues are to blame and that you shouldn't be spanked just because they ruined your day."

She blinked, startled.

"Probably you're *not* thinkin' that you didn't have to *let* them ruin your day and you didn't have

to bring it home and you didn't have to try to ruin my day with it, too."

She went a little white when I stood up.

"I'm goin' in the kitchen. Your butt better be bare when I return or I'm leaving."

I pretended not to watch her squirm as I left her. I did peek around the corner and watch her look at the door and then down at her fingers twiddling with her skirt. *Come on*, I willed her. *Pull that skirt down*.

Relief rushed through me when she did. From the angle of the kitchen, I could see her profile. Her blouse was form-fitting, so her little butt perked out from her body. I think she felt me watching her, because she started to turn towards the kitchen.

I ducked out of sight and moved towards the drawer with the cooking utensils. I was surprised that she didn't have any more wooden spoons, but then she's not Italian. I rooted through and found a flat wooden handled-thing, almost like a spatula but with diagonal edge and flatter, with no holes. A little tiny paddle, but then she was pretty little herself. I took it with me into the living room.

"Okay, sweet girl, time for your spankin'."

A big tear rolled down her face, and I suddenly felt like a big oaf. I dropped the utensil on the couch and sat in front of her. Putting my hands on her hips, I pulled her closer to me.

"You want to say something, darlin'?"

*Oh, my sweet girl*. Her lips trembled. Her eyes trembled, her tears trembled, and even her hips trembled between my hands. I couldn't have kept my hands off her if someone had offered me a million dollars.

"I'm sorry, Chuck," she said in her soft voice. "It's just I was up for partner today, and they passed me over." A big tear dripped down her face.

My brain filter shut down and my mouth spoke the first thought that popped in my head. "How you

going to stay home and take care of the kids if you're a partner?"

Her mouth dropped open in shock, and her face started turning red. *Oh shit, please tell me I just didn't say that out loud.* I'd not only said the wrong thing, I'd gone and made her angry and now I *did* deserve a scolding. Her eyes narrowed at me, and she got that look she gets when she's going to launch into Japanese.

"Darlin', I just meant maybe someday if we're married, if you marry me, I mean ... if you want to ..." *Oh boy.* If I thought she looked angry a second ago, she looked like she was starting to steam, now.

I wished I had bought that ring I'd looked at yesterday, so I could at least distract her before she exploded.

But she did explode. She yanked her skirt up and launched into a tirade of crashing plates and scalding words I didn't need to translate to understand. She whipped a plate right at my head.

*Holy shit,* I thought. *That's a temper, alright.* Would've done my mama proud. Another plate sailed towards me, and I ducked. She picked up another one, and I decided a retreat was best in order.

By the time I got to my car, I couldn't believe how monumentally I had screwed up, just when everything was going perfect. And the working thing? We hadn't even talked about it. My mama had always been home, usually cooking, when her boys got home from school. I just always pictured the same for my kids, and when I imagined marrying Midori, I never thought to ask about the work thing. *Shit.*

I had no idea how I was going to fix this, but the most logical first step seemed to be flowers.

When Midori got to the firm, James was waiting at her office again.

"Flowers again," he grinned.

"No doubt," she snapped. He looked wounded, so she smiled. "He was an inconsiderate lug, and now he's trying to apologize."

She barely felt any regret as she gathered the roses in her hand and threw them straight into the trash. She picked up the waste bucket and handed it to James. "Empty this, will you please?"

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I bought the ring and sent her flowers. No plan yet on getting her back, but after the foot-in-mouth incident, I figured a ring could come in handy. I drove to her place and sat in the parking lot and decided that maybe the best plan of all was just to listen.

She didn't answer when I knocked on the door.

"Midori, open up. We need to talk."

"I'm still mad at you. Go away."

"Can't do that." I almost added 'ma'am.' "I'm afraid if I go away I'll never see you again."

She peered out into the hallway and gave me a look. I couldn't quite decipher its meaning, but I knew it wasn't good.

"Look," I said. "I'm crazy about you. I love the Midori I know, the one who's soft and sweet. My pretty girl." She started to speak, but I held up my hand. "I don't know the woman who goes off to work everyday or the lawyer who wants to be partner."

She pursed her lips.

I was grateful she was listening. "And it's a little confusing, you know. I get the feeling that only my soft and sweet girl wants spankings, and the lawyer doesn't. I get the feeling that the Midori I know *would* like to stay home and raise a family, but I'm thinking the lawyer doesn't." I scratched my head.

"Am I going to be dating both of these women, or are you going to choose one of them some day?"

She just frowned at me.

"I'm not sayin' you have to choose, I've heard a lots of women who don't. I'm just sayin' that it's a little disconcerting."

She crossed her arms over her chest.

"Midori, this is a big issue, and I'm flexible on it. I don't deny that I had a fantasy picture of our marriage in my mind, but I do love you, and I do want you to be mine, one day. I want kids, but we can work out the details of career and kids later. I'm flexible. If you don't want kids, then we'll have to do some talkin', and I'll have to do some thinkin', but I love you."

She still had that sassy look on her face. "I hope you don't think that's a proposal, because I'm not dignifying that with an answer."

"Nope. A proposal includes a ring." I chucked her under the chin. "I'm not as big an oaf as you imagine, Midori." I gave her my best charming grin, and I think it worked. The one side of her mouth turned up. We were halfway there. "And the spanking thing. That's not something we'll hit our stride on for a little while. Everything I read says that it takes time and false moves on both sides before we'll hit the right buttons."

As soon as I mentioned spanking, she got that shy and sweet Midori look on her face. I breathed a sigh of relief, and she smiled all the way and opened the door.

We settled on the couch in an awkward silence.

I gathered my thoughts. "But, Midori, no matter how right you are—and you were right; I really stuck my foot in it—it is never okay to throw plates at someone."

She chewed the side of her lip. "I know, Chuck, I'm sorry."

I wasn't done. "And no matter how right you are, it is never okay to throw a temper tantrum like a two year old."

I stopped to check her reaction. Already, her eyes were brimming with tears. I couldn't believe how quickly she could change from professional attorney to my sweet Midori.

"Do you think that behavior is okay, Midori?" I lifted her chin, so I could see her eyes. "Is that who you want to be, Midori?"

She wouldn't lift her eyes to mine, but she shook her head earnestly.

I brushed the back of my hand across her soft cheek. "You think you deserve a spankin' for that?"

She shrugged, quick and shy.

"You're gonna have to do better than that."

She started self-comforting. She clasped her hands together and alternated between rubbing her thumbs together and wiping her hands on her thighs. "I guess so, Chuck."

"Then what do you think you should be doing right now?"

She cocked her head at me. Then she flushed and let out an uncertain giggle that sounded like a question mark.

"Midori ..." I warned.

She got up and left the room. I sat there for a moment, feeling like I had goofed big time yet again. She was crying and instead of making up with her and reassuring her that I loved her, here I was trying to spank her. Never mind that she deserved one, but hell, so did I. But that's the way of it, for me to feel guilty and her to be spanked. I breathed out a sigh and got ready to stand up and go fix things again.

But she came back, carrying the little wooden spatula thing. I almost grinned in relief, but I managed to keep my face stern and caring. At

least, I was going for the firm look, hoping my love for her could be seen, too.

She stopped in front of me and dropped her skirt and panties in a quick little easy movement that was breathtaking. Now you see it, now you don't.

Or now you don't, and now you do. Her little patch was the cutest thing, the way she shaped it with her waxing or razor or whatever. I couldn't resist brushing my hand across it as I put my hands around her waist.

"You ever been spanked before?"

She wrung her hands and nodded. A surge of jealousy tore through me. I wanted to demand who and why and when. I wanted to know what other man had ever put a hand to my darlin'. I fought against the urge.

"So you know this is going to hurt and that I'm going to make you cry."

She bit her lip and nodded again.

"You know this isn't going to be a slap and tickle sort of thing, right?"

She rocked from foot to foot, still nodding.

"And you know that this is punishment? Discipline for throwing a temper tantrum like a two year old?"

A tear popped over the rim of her eye and ran down her face.

"Okay then. Up and over." I guided her over my lap so that her bottom was positioned right in line with the swing of my arm. I picked up the little paddle and swung it down so that it snapped against the top of her leg.

She squealed, and I watched the skin grow red like a flower blossoming. I snapped it down again on her other leg. Then I decided to spread that red evenly over her whole bottom, so I set to spanking every little inch of her skin.

She kicked her feet a little and squealed, but she didn't fight me. I'm not sure that I could have kept at it if she'd gotten mad.

Once her bottom was a rosy glow, I started spanking faster. She wasn't crying, and I figured crying ought to be a good part of the equation. I smacked the tops of her thighs several times and noticed that she seemed to have the biggest reaction to that position.

I pushed her forward over one leg, and used the other to trap her legs.

"Now it's really gonna hurt. Midori, you think on how much this hurts because I don't want to see you throwing temper tantrums again. Got it?"

She whimpered something I didn't understand, but it sounded agreeable, so I upped the pace to rapid fire spansks across the tops of her legs. Quick and fast and hard.

At first, she went stock still. When I kept spanking, she started struggling.

"You're not going anywhere, Midori." I had her trapped good, and I didn't let up the pace at all. I alternated between thighs, back and forth like a rapid ping pong game. She squealed and fought and finally started crying and pounding her fists into the floor.

"Another temper tantrum?" I paused my attack and let her get her breath. She started crying even harder then and reached her hands back to rub the burn out of her butt. I clasped them in my hands took them hostage.

That triggered something in her. She started crying for real and apologizing. "I'm sorry, Chuck. I'm really sorry!"

I smacked her bottom again. "Sorry? I bet you are." I smacked her other cheek, but kept my pace slow and steady. "I don't want you bringing home your stress at work to ruin our time together, and I



don't want you ruining our relationship with temper tantrums."

I smacked a few more times to keep her crying.

"This spanking thing isn't a game. Sometimes, maybe, but right now I'm deadly serious. I'm not going to let you behave that way, period."

I think I saw her nod, so I decided one more fast pass to end it would be about right. I smacked the flat wooden thing over her whole bottom and upper legs as fast as I could, as determined to make an impression as I was to get it over with and feel her in my arms. I tossed the implement on the couch and ran my hand over the welts I'd caused.

The ripply flesh was hot and wounded, but I'd made my mark. My point, I mean. I patted her bottom a couple times, wondering what it'd be like to smack her with my hand.

"Shame on you," I said, and smacked her bottom hard. She burst into renewed sobs, so I rubbed and let her settle before I ordered her to kneel.

My heart went all fuzzy and soft when she knelt in front of me, big tears rolling down her face and her brown eyes looking up at me all big and open.

"This is the way of it, Midori. This is how our relationship would be." I wiped a tear off her cheek. "You can have your career and your partnership, but when you get home, I want my sweet Midori, or you'll be spanked."

She nodded and let out a shaky sigh.

"If that would make you happy, then I swear to God I'll turn myself upside down and inside out to make sure you're happy. God, I'd do anything to see that every wish you have in your heart comes true."

I suddenly felt awkward. I fumbled in my pocket and pulled out the ring case, almost dropping it. "Midori, will you marry me?"

I popped it open and prayed.

She smiled big and sweet, and my heart started beating again.

"Yes" was all she could get out before I launched down onto my own knees and attacked her face with kisses while she cried. God, she's the most beautiful creature in the whole world.

Who knew that tears could be pretty? Who knew tears could be a gift? Something only I get to see? I would make damn sure it stayed that way for the rest of our lives. I kissed her face and her neck and her tears.

Even her tears were sweet.

## Nagging Girl

"Sarah, I don't think this is what you want." I dropped the papers she'd printed out for me on the tabletop. "You're not like this. You're not like these women. For God's sake, I love you, but you fight me on everything and nag me about everything else."

I could tell she wanted to disagree, but she clamped her mouth shut.

"Don't take it like that. You know I appreciate how organized you are. This household wouldn't run without you." I sighed. "I know this marriage hasn't been making you happy, lately. I'll try anything you want to make our marriage better, but I just don't see how I could spank you as a punishment, without you getting royally pissed off and threatening divorce. You'd hate me."

Tears brimmed on her eyes.

"Sarah, don't pull that crying stuff. Face the facts: you know you're already disappointed in me. Half the time I wonder if you wouldn't rather us get a divorce, so you could find someone more suited to you."

She burst into sobs. "You don't understand me at all!" And then she ran into our bedroom and slammed the door behind her.

I sighed and sat down. I leafed through the papers, through the stories and essays. I didn't know if I could do it... *spank* her. *Punish* her.

*Discipline* her.

I could hear her still crying behind our bedroom door. I got up and walked to the bedroom, but it was locked. I went to the master bathroom, walked through there and into our bedroom.

I sat next to her on the bed. "Okay, here's the thing, Sarah. You sure can nag. You have one hell of a mouth, and let me tell you, if I were to spank you for anything it'd be that."

She seemed torn between objecting and hope. She wiped away her tears, but they kept dripping down her face. I watched her for a full five minutes while she kept crying, composing herself, crying again, and composing herself.

"You don't believe in me," she finally said, bursting into sobs again.

"What are you talking about? This is about my reluctance, not you."

"Yes it is!" she cried. "You don't believe I can submit to you!"

She was right, but I could tell she very much wanted me to answer the opposite. "Is that what you want, to submit to me?"

"I don't want our marriage to be like it is! I want us to be... to be like those stories. I want to be like those women." She looked at me angrily. "I want you to be like those men!"

I cringed. "Shit, Sarah. I'm sorry. I can't be anyone but me."

She flushed.

I sighed. "Okay, fine. Bring me the hairbrush, we'll try it."

Hope crossed her face, and then she looked at me as if she didn't trust me. She brought me the hairbrush.

"Okay, then, over my lap." I felt a little nervous, and felt a little silly *because* I felt nervous.

Her jean-clad butt didn't look half-bad in that position. I smacked it with my hand. It didn't seem to have much effect. I did it again, but she didn't whimper or anything. Then I tried the hairbrush.

She jumped off my lap. "Ouch! Fuck! What did you do that for?" She rubbed at her butt. "That hurt!"

I shook my head at her. "You asked me to spank you."

"But you need to understand it hurts!"

I didn't know what to say to her. She'd asked me to spank her.

"Didn't you read the stories?" she accused. "What about the talking? The hugging? The gentleness?"

"Honey, I don't know what these stories of yours say, but there's nothing gentle about a spanking." I remembered. I'd received enough of them growing up to know that they hurt, period.

"Forget it!" she suddenly screamed.

"Fine!" I said, frustrated and angry. "You're the one that asked for this!"

I dropped the hairbrush on the bed and turned to walk out of the room.

"You don't understand!" she cried after me. She burst into crying again, so I turned around.

"Sarah, damnit, what don't I understand?"

In between sobs, she said, "I don't want you to let me be this way! I don't want you to let me get away with everything!"

I was so frustrated I couldn't even feel bad about the fact that she was miserable. "Sarah, you just told me you didn't want me to spank you. And now you're telling me you do. Which is it?"

"Both!"

I sat down on the edge of the bed, at a complete loss. "Tell me what to do here, babe."

She hissed. "That's the point! I don't want to tell you what to do!"

"Could have fooled me."

She picked up the hairbrush and threw it at me.

I caught it and waved it at her. "Let's try to act like grown ups, shall we?"

"No! You're a selfish bastard who wouldn't inconvenience himself for anyone."

She was in contrary, irrational mode now. I shook my head at her. "When you're ready to talk about this, let me know."

"Selfish bastard!" she screamed.

I groaned. Had I done this to her? Had I turned my sweet, loving wife into this screaming shrew? Had I caused this hate that was creeping into her eyes? The tears that were streaking down her face?

She hurriedly wiped off the tears and brushed past me. "Forget it," she said coldly. "What do you want for dinner?"

"I want to talk to you," I said.

She made a *pfffft* sound. "I don't want to talk to you."

My anger boiled up. "I told you that you wouldn't want to listen to me, that you couldn't be like those wives in the stories. Don't get mad at me! This is your fault."

The coldness I could deal with. The anger, I could deal with that, too. But she turned everything off. All of a sudden, my sweet wife was blank, with empty eyes.

"You've made that crystal clear," she said.

I've heard the expression before, but I swear at that moment my heart stopped. Time stood still. That moment in our marriage burned itself into my memory. Those flat eyes? They were a turning point, a BIG turning point.

They were the end of our marriage.

My anger swelled higher. I'd *told* her this idea of hers would lead to disaster. Didn't I tell her that she'd never submit to my punishment? That we'd be headed for divorce if I tried? She'd gone and ruined the most important thing in my life: our family. At that very moment, I was so angry I could have beat her butt silly, but I just stomped out of my house, down the street, and into the bar.

I ordered a jack and coke, and then drank it in a single gulp. "Make the next one tall," I said.

I thought of the stories and articles as I drank the next one slower, sulking in silence. They seemed to think I was responsible for *her* behavior, or at least correcting it. But wasn't she older than a

child? Did she really want me to treat her like a child?

But damn if she hadn't made me angry enough to give her a good spanking.

She'd said she didn't want me to let her be the way she was. What did she want? Me to force her across my knee and spank her until she broke?

That wasn't me. I couldn't do that to her.

And still, I felt like I'd let my wife down. As I nursed another drink, I decided that in the morning, I'd really spank her. I'd spank her like my grandmother had spanked me. If she wanted to be spanked, she'd learn what a spanking *really* was.

I went home, guzzled water, and stretched out on the couch.

When I woke in the morning and went back in the bedroom, she was still sleeping. She was curled in the middle of the bed, clutching my pillow. Her eyes looked welted, they were so red and puffy.

I looked at the proof of her misery. Hadn't she been punished enough? I sat on the edge of the bed, watching her sleep. She must have sensed me because she blinked her eyes open.

For a second, she had that vulnerable, loving look in her eyes she sometimes got. Then, I suppose, the memories flooded in, and her face went flat again. She started to get up, but I grabbed her hands.

She tried to pull them away.

Our gazes locked. She pulled harder. I did, too, hard enough to pull her across my lap and give her bottom a slap.

"Ouch!" She crawled forward over my lap and started to crawl off. "Let me go!"

"No!" I said. "I'm not letting you go." She'd pushed me far enough. A part of my brain warned me that she could use this to take the house, the dogs, and every penny we had, but I didn't care. She could have it all, damnit, but for right now? I

was not going to let her go without the spanking she'd begged me for.

But she sure as hell wasn't going to like this spanking, I vowed. I pushed her over my left leg and pinned her legs with my right leg. I smacked her butt over her nightgown.

It was a strange feeling. I did it again. I expected to feel guilty, to feel like a monster, to feel... something, anything... but I felt nothing. I smacked her bottom again, again, again. Still nothing, except a determination, a resolve. It was *survival* instinct spanking her, not me.

And then it slowly dawned on me that she was fighting for all she was worth. Her arms were flailing, and her feet were kicking. If she could have moved her legs under my leg lock, I'm sure she would've popped right off my lap.

"That hurts! Stop! Let me go!"

She was fighting tooth and nail to get off my lap, and it suddenly seemed so absurd.

"Good lord, Sarah, I'm spanking you, not killing you."

"I can't do this!" she cried. "I changed my mind!"

I smacked her butt again. "Unfortunately, I haven't." The more she acted like a child, the more I wanted to spank her. Was this silliness what she was willing to ruin our marriage over? I smacked her butt once more.

Her pink silk nightgown had mostly ridden up her back, but I pushed it all the way off her bottom. Her red panties were like a big target, but I decided those must come down, too. If I was going to do this thing, going to spank her, then I was *really* going to spank her.

I hooked my fingers in her panties and pulled them down to her knees, where I'd pinned her legs down with mine.



She froze, stopped breathing, stopped complaining, stopped yelling.

"What? You don't like your butt bare?"

She seemed so horrified that she couldn't move. I wondered at this for a moment.

"Do you think I can't see your behavior when your butt is clothed?" Her butt was slightly pinkened, and I decided I wasn't hitting it nearly hard enough. "Do you think I can't hear the nagging just because you've got panties on?"

I gave her a mighty smack then and listened to her whimper. This time my handprint welted itself into her skin. I smacked her again. "Answer me!"

"I don't know!" she gasped.

I spanked her five times fast. "Why don't you repeat what you said earlier?" I spanked her again. "Let me hear you tell me I'm a selfish bastard." My hand was starting to sting, but I kept going anyway. "You tell me I'm a selfish bastard, with your bare butt waiting to feel exactly what I think of your words."

She whimpered.

I spanked her five, maybe seven times. "Call me a selfish bastard," I ordered.

"I'm sorry!" she cried.

Her butt cheeks dimpled as she squeezed her cheeks together to avoid my next assault. "You call that obedience? You tell me you want me to be head of our household and that you want to obey me." Since her butt was still dimpled in resistance, I aimed my hand at the top of her legs. "Call me a selfish bastard, so I can show you exactly what I think of that kind of disrespect."

"No," she pleaded. "Please ..."

Her butt relaxed for a second, and I took advantage of the moment to deliver the harshest round of smacks I'd ever given her. When I stopped, I said, "Sarah, last chance or I pull off my belt."

A sob burst from her mouth. When she spoke, it was a whiney-cry that was missing half its consonants. "Yelfish-as-ard," she bawled.

And I laid into her bottom. I focused on what I thought of her name-calling, her nagging, and her complaining. I just kept smacking, letting my actions tell her exactly what I thought of her behavior.

She fought me. She clawed at the carpet, squeezed my ankles, even almost bit my calf. She squealed and screeched and complained. She told me I was doing it all wrong, that it hurt too much, that she couldn't bear it.

I slowed my pace but made each spank count. She calmed down enough to stop yelling.

I started lecturing as I spanked, punctuating my words with my hand. "If you want us to have a marriage, you have got to stop with the incessant nagging, the incessant criticizing, and the incessant bickering. You either want us to be together, or you don't. If you do, then I am *not* going to let your mouth ruin us."

She started making little whimpering sounds. "I love you," she said.

I almost stopped spanking her. She could always make me melt in an instant.

"Don't stop," she whispered.

But as soon as I started spanking her again, she cried out, "Stop! Wait! That hurts!"

I was catching on to the game. I didn't stop. I lit into her bottom until she was practically dancing on my lap, sobbing her heart out. Her cheeks weren't squeezing anymore. I picked up the hairbrush and gave her a smack with the round, wooden paddle side.

"I love you, Sarah, but you have two choices. You contact a lawyer and file for divorce, or you start respecting our marriage because, I swear to God, every time you start in with your nagging or

marriage-destroying behavior, I'm going to spank you just like this."

I closed my ears to her sobbing and studied her bottom. I decided I'd spank each spot from mid-thigh to the top of her bottom once with the brush, and then finish off with ten good ones.

I smacked the brush across the middle of her cheeks, first. She yelled and arched up, crying out. "Ouch! What are you doing?"

I wondered if I should stop. I decided that if I could handle being spanked with a hairbrush by my grandmother when I was ten, then my wife could handle a hairbrush spanking at thirty. I went forward with my plan. I thudded the hairbrush on one cheek, covering every single inch of skin.

When I finished, I delivered ten quick, fast, hard ones to the middle of her cheek. As she cried out and squirmed, I started in on the other cheek, again covering every bit of skin.

I was about to give her ten more, but she'd tensed and was holding her breath, as if expecting it. I decided to turn my attention to her thighs. I smacked the hairbrush up and down the fleshy portions, and then started in on what one of the stories had called the "sit spot."

Curiously, she reacted like I was branding her, just like the story had said. I smacked the hairbrush across her sit spot until every inch of it was welted, and she'd stopped resisting. I finished off with another series on the cheek I'd neglected, and then threw the hairbrush onto the pillow.

I was exhausted, but I was done.

I looked down at her, and my ears suddenly turned on again. She was crying with such open-heartedness that it pierced my heart. I looked at her reddened bottom, looked at her back shaking under the weight of her sobs, and guilt overwhelmed me.

I'd gone too far.

I had to wipe my eyes as tears filled them. *Shit.* She lay there sobbing over my leg, and all I wanted to do was grovel and apologize. And yet, I couldn't think of a thing to say. Remorse hit me like a ton of bricks.

I ran my hand over her bottom. It was hot, welted, with little red dots in places. *Shit.*

I pulled her up into my arms and hugged her, rocking her while she cried. My chest ached. A sob tried to make its way up my throat, but I swallowed it. I took a deep breath and wiped my eyes. I vowed to give her everything she wanted when she filed for divorce. Hell, I wouldn't even get a lawyer.

I was officially a wife-beater.

She shook in my arms from the crying, and I just squeezed her tight. I buried my nose in her hair, sniffing that scent of hers I love. I reached behind her and rubbed her bottom as I rocked, forcing myself to feel the welts I'd caused, feel the damage I'd done.

I touched her face and realized her tears were drying up. She was inhaling squeakily, exhaling in rough shudders of grief.

My eyes filled up again, damnit. I blinked a bunch of times. A whole bunch of times.

I groaned softly, laying my head on top of hers, which was buried in my chest. I sighed and closed my eyes.

I don't know how long we remained in that position, but after minutes and minutes—nearly an hour?—she started stirring. I let her up, and she looked at me.

I waited for the attack.

"I'm sorry," she said, touching my face. "I love you so much, and I don't think you're a bastard, I swear." And then, of all things, a grin popped on her face. She frowned, trying to make a remorseful expression. But then the grin popped back.

I couldn't hide my shock.

She did the frown thing again, and then the grin popped back. It looked a little ridiculous, like those clowns who do the exaggerated frown then smile then frown then smile. A chuckle escaped from me.

"What are you smiling for?"

She blushed like a little girl and looked down at my lap. She blinked up at me, head cocked. She shrugged. "I don't know."

I wanted to ask if I'd hurt her, if I'd broken her spirit, if I'd been a horrid beast. But she kept smiling.

"It was perfect," she said, ducking her head into my chest again.

"Perfect?" I shook my head. I was at a loss for words.

"Thank you," she said.

I wanted to ask if I'd been too harsh. I wanted to ask why she didn't hate me, why she didn't want to call her lawyer, why she didn't think I'd been awful mean to her. I wanted to ask her why she wasn't demanding that I never do it again.

But I didn't want to spoil things, seeing how happy she was.

"Do you want me to make you a bowl of ice cream?" she asked.

It took me a moment to say, "Yes, please."

She bounded off, *happy*. I stared at her hairbrush, picked it up. Flipped it over in my hand. It seemed so small to have caused her so much grief. I ran my hand over its back, almost expecting it to be as hot as her bottom had felt.

It was cold.

She came back in the room and gave me a big bowl of ice cream with a big smile to match. She handed it to me. I stared at it. "None for you?" I asked.

She shrugged. And then she did something she'd never done before. She sat next to me. Of course, she'd sat next to me before, but I mean she

bumped into my side—nearly knocking me over—and plastered herself to my side like she was glued there or something.

I chuckled. "Could you squeeze up a little closer?"

I'd been joking, but she somehow managed it.

I shared the ice cream with her, and when we finished I set the bowl down. "Come here," I said. I helped her over my lap again, and she barely whimpered. She'd tugged up her panties to go to the kitchen, so I pulled them back down.

Her butt was bruising slightly, just a bluish tinge under the skin. Her flesh was still red and swollen. I patted it, and then noticed my favorite fragrance. I dipped my hand between her thighs.

"Oh, my," I said. "You've never been this wet before."

I laughed when the back of her neck blushed. She reached up and tried to slap my hand away, but I gave her a slap to her butt.

"You know better than that," I growled.

She stilled.

"Is this what you want? Is this what you want in our marriage?"

She nodded furiously, causing her bottom to jiggle just a little. "Yes!"

I didn't understand it. I wanted to ask her why, but I thought that might be a little close to saying she was crazy. Besides, I liked how I felt. I liked that she'd adjusted her attitude, that she'd gone all sweet on me like she was when she was at her best and most relaxed.

"Do you want rules, too?"

She paused a moment at that one. I could feel the return of her resistance, the leaving of her sweetness. But very quietly, she said, "Yes."

I delivered seven hard slaps to her butt. "Why don't we try saying 'sir,' then?"

When she didn't say anything, I lifted my hand.

"Sir!" she said, quickly, before I could spank her again. I smacked her cheeks anyway.

"Yes, sir!" she cried, just to make sure I heard.

"And you're going to let me spank you any time you disobey me?"

She nodded. "Yes, sir."

"No matter what?"

Another pause. "Yes, sir."

I spanked her butt five more times. She started trying to wiggle away from me. "And next time, you're not going to fight me about it, right? You're going to go over my lap when I tell you to?"

She nodded, and then stopped. "I want to," she said. "But it might take me a little time to learn to obey you."

"Really?" I asked, making my voice hard. "Because learning that lesson's going to be painful."

She just answered, "Yes, sir."

I leaned down and turned her face towards me. Her eyelids were getting heavy. She had that sleepy look she got. I pulled her off my lap and pushed her under the covers.

"You need some rest. How long did you sleep last night?"

She snuggled under the covers, then reached back and wriggled up her panties again. "Not much."

"Hmm," I answered. I pulled off the covers and pulled down her panties again. "Why don't you just leave these at your knees for now?"

She blushed, but she smiled, too.

When I'd tucked her in, she blinked up at me happily. "See? I can be like those women." A flash of uncertainty crossed her face. "Don't you think?"

I kissed her cheeks. I wanted to tell her that I didn't want her to be like any other woman, I just wanted her to be my Sarah. But she seemed to want me to agree, and she'd earned some praise.

“Yes, I do believe you can. But I like you just as you are, Sarah.”

She seemed to like that answer because her eyes drifted shut. I liked the way she’d looked at me like I was her own personal hero, so when she fell asleep, I went to the office to read everything I could find on this new lifestyle of ours. There was a lot to learn.

I looked forward to the journey.



## Pretty Girl

She was the prettiest girl I'd ever seen.

The pretty girls don't like me much. The calculating ones do, the ones who want a husband who'll keep them in the style they are accustomed to. They're perfect physical specimens of womankind: hair never out of place, not a blemish on their face, nor an extra pound on their frame.

Trophies.

Hell to be married to, though. I knew that from experience. I also knew there were plenty of trophies who were nice, sweet, loving ... I just hadn't been that lucky.

They say that even after the hard lessons of divorce, we tend to end up with the same type of partner in our second marriage. I was determined not to make the same mistake.

I wanted a pretty girl. Soft and sweet, with a smile that perked up in sincere happiness.

And now I'd found her. Pretty girls don't like me much because I'm the trophy man. Tall, dark and handsome would be accurate. Being rich helps, too. Girls like her think I'm shallow, obsessed with my career and money. They think that I'll never be home. The true pretty girls, with hearts of gold, value together time more than my bank account.

I could stay home more, for the right woman.

I sidled up to her. "What's a pretty girl like you doing in a place like this?"

"Fuck off."

Pretty, to be sure, but shy and sweet she was not. Maybe I should have felt love at first sight for a Kindergarten teacher. This girl was not struck by any sort of affection for me.

"Is that a way to talk to someone who's done nothing but be nice to you?" I smiled as I scolded.

She glared at me and waved to the bartender. "Another, please."

She was nice to him. Tipped him well, too. And after he gave her a refill, she picked up her glass and stalked to the other side of the bar.

"What's wrong with her?" I asked the bartender.

He shrugged and handed me another VO and Seven. "Don't know."

"She come here often?"

"Never seen her before. Just came in, brushed a few tears away, and asked for a brandy."

I watched her for a while. Every now and then she'd blush and slam down her glass. Then she'd cringe and look around. She radiated anger.

I waited.

After two more brandies, she softened. Her pretty pert little lips opened slightly, and she turned her eyes to me. To me!

I looked right back, wondering what she was thinking. She smiled slightly, and I took that as my cue. I walked over to her. "Okay, I know it was a lame line, but you don't seem the mean type."

She shifted on the bar stool and bit her lip. It was too lush to stay between her teeth for long; it popped out and bounced. I wanted to try it, too. See what it would be like to play with those pretty red lips. She blushed. She was flustered by me. That was a good sign, I thought.

"I've had an awful day," she said. "I'm sorry. And I shouldn't have snapped at you."

A man, I guessed. Of course, she'd already have a guy. She was pretty, and even in anger she'd radiated niceness. She'd have her night in the bar, and tomorrow she'd go back to him, and they'd make up, and I'd never see her again.

I touched her arm anyway. "Tell me about it."

I don't know why I wanted to stay. Maybe I was lonely. And if I couldn't make my night brighter, at least I could make hers a little better. See what she looked like with a smile on her face and her eyes twinkling.

She did have eyes that would twinkle, I guessed.

"I can't," she said. "I ruined everything."

I sensed that pressing her right now would cause her to stop talking. I sat in silence and waited for her to say something else.

But she didn't. "Everything?" I prodded. "Surely not."

"My job, my apartment, my livelihood." Her lips trembled. "Everything's falling apart."

I waved at the bartender and saw to it she got another brandy, hoping it would fortify her.

"How'd you manage all that?" I asked, after she'd composed herself.

Her eyes grew round. "All my fault," she whispered. "I was late."

I frowned. I don't much like lateness. I have a strict policy in my company: three times in a quarter, and you're out. I've always considered lateness to not only be disrespectful, but also pure laziness.

"Late to work?" I asked.

She nodded.

"That's just pure laziness."

She gasped. "But it wasn't my fault! The line at Starbucks was extra long, and they had a new guy – very slow."

I started to chide her, but she held up her hand.

"And so I missed the subway. And so I ran up to catch a taxi, and some guy stole it from me!"

I frowned.

"And when I finally caught one, the stupid driver got in an accident." She shook her head. "And had the gall to ask me to stick around to be a witness to prove that it wasn't his fault."

"Well, that seems like a valid excuse to me."

"Yeah, well." She shifted in her seat. "It's my fifth time. Excuses, even valid ones, don't work so well after five times."

I laughed. "Okay, okay, but I hardly see how that's ruined everything."

She shrugged.

"You're young. You're what, late twenties, early thirties?"

She nodded.

"Believe me, short of a felony, there's not a whole lot that's going to ruin your whole life."

She looked at me, angry. "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Young and stupid, huh?"

I looked right back at her. "Sounds like you've heard it before."

She cringed. "You know, I'm a nice person. A good person. I'm not lazy, and I'm not irresponsible. I just don't like mornings."

I was about to chastise her again when she said, "And besides, I'm usually out until midnight volunteering on the phones at the rape crisis center. I get dinner and then I'm in bed at two, but it sure makes it hard to get up at six."

Valid point, I thought. I made a note to investigate why employees were late before enforcing my hard-lined late policy next time.

She pouted. "I wish they'd just understand that."

I could rescue her, I thought. Sweep her off her feet. Give her a job. But I sensed that wouldn't be right.

"Maybe that's something you should work on," I suggested.

"Work on?" she slurred. She was getting really drunk. "What do you mean, work on?"

Her lips pouted. Oh wow, that's the French pout all right. I wanted to kiss her more than anything. She was drunk, I told myself. It wouldn't be right. "Come here next Friday, and I'll take you to dinner," I said.

She just looked at me. She had long eyelashes. Natural ones. "What do you do?" I asked. The inevitable question.

"I move money around."

I raised an eyebrow.

"I'm a trader."

I laughed. "Honey, you can't be late to Wall Street."

"I know!" she wailed. "I thought I was going to be on time, so I didn't call in, and we didn't have anyone else on the floor. I lost a lot of money for the company."

It clicked then. "Ahhh, you would be Adele Mann. Two point three million, to be exact."

I stood up and lightly grazed my hand over her bottom. "Did you know I was going to be here?"

She cocked her head at me and shook it. "Who are you?" Was she playing me?

"Stand up," I ordered. She flushed and bit her lip, startled. "Stand up," I said again.

She did, and I backed her into a dark alcove. I pressed my hand to her bottom and waited to see what she would do.

She got teary-eyed.

I turned her around and gave her five little taps. Wouldn't hurt, but it would embarrass her. I turned her back around to look at me.

"I'm sorry," she whispered. The pout was back, and I looked in her eyes. Nothing cold or calculating there, just pure regret and guilt. What was a couple million to me? I knew I shouldn't kiss her. Not only was she drunk, not only had I come on to her, but I was sort of her boss, way far up the chain. I couldn't take my eyes off her lips. They were glossy but not lipsticked. Natural and dewy and inviting.

Okay, one damn kiss.

"Friday, come and we can work on it," I said, and left.

She wasn't going to come. I'd been tempted to reinstate her job, but business was business. I couldn't believe she'd been late once, let alone five times. That meant her boss had covered for her, twice.

He was no longer anyone's boss.

I'd talked to her co-workers. She was deemed sweet by all. Too nice, they said, to be a trader. Whatever that meant, it sounded good to me.

I looked at my watch again. 7:01. I didn't like lateness, but just this once I prayed that she was running late.

When she finally showed up at 7:26, my impatience drowned in a wave of giddy happiness. "I'm not going to give you your job back," I said. Stupid! Couldn't I think of something nicer to say?

She didn't look at me. "I know." She frowned at me. "I've heard stories, Mr. John Vine. You're ruthless in business."

"You don't like who I am." I felt disappointment. "Why are you here?"

"I just came to apologize. Really, I am sorry."

I waited while she took a seat. "Have you found a job?"

She shrugged. "Not yet."

"You're not likely to find a job in the business."

She turned her eyes up to me. "You would blackball me," she accused.

"You want me to put my reputation on the line for someone who lost me over two million dollars?" I couldn't believe it.

She got angry, I could see it. But she swallowed it away. "No, you're right. I'm sorry."

"Why'd you come?" I asked again. "Adele," I added.

Her eyes looked to the side, evading mine.

"Tell me why you came."

Her gaze dropped to the floor. "What did you mean, 'work on it?'"

Hadn't I shown her?

"You seem more human," she said. She tucked a piece of hair behind her ear. "You have a reputation for being cold and selfish and ruthless, but that's not the man I met last week." She shrugged. "I was curious."

"If you asked around about me, then you know that I just got a divorce. I'm not looking for marriage right now." Well, actually, I was. I just wasn't looking for someone who just wanted to marry my money.

She stood up. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have come."

It hit me then. She was looking for a partner, and she was one of the keeper girls. A calculating woman would have told me that she wasn't looking for marriage either and tricked me into it later, but Adele didn't hide her intentions from me.

And she wasn't going to waste our time.

"Please don't go," I said.

She shook her head. "I'm not a one night stand sort of girl."

Of course not, I thought. "I don't know why I said that." Yes, I did.

She didn't believe me, either.

"Why did you come?" I asked a third time.

She chewed her lip. I wanted to stop her, beg her not to mar those pretty lips of hers. The red faded to white under her teeth, and I had to force myself not to intervene.

"Do you want to spank me?" She started the question aggressive and direct, but by the end, her voice had faded to an embarrassed whisper.

"Don't you think you deserve it?"

She hung her head. I wanted to ask her if she'd hurt me. Sleep with my best friend and then try to take everything we'd built together. I touched her shoulder. "Everyone at the office says you're too nice to be a trader."

I thought that would be a comforting little tidbit, but I was wrong. She scowled. "I was doing fine. I'm just not a morning person."

"Honey, you can't work Wall Street at night."

"Morning people have an unfair advantage in our society," she said bitterly.

"No doubt," I agreed.

Her eyes widened in surprise. "You really agree with me?"

I smiled. "Of course. In the business world. Night people have an advantage in the music world. Restaurants ..." I tried to think of something else. "Crisis centers."

She smiled at that.

"And yet you want to work on your morning skills."

Her fingernails were painted a red that matched her lips. Intriguing, although I was a little disappointed they weren't pink. She had pretty fingers, delicate and petite. They fiddled with the napkin beneath her drink.

"I hate mornings," she said. "I want to ... maybe ... work on my punctuality skills."

I raised my eyebrows to see if she'd blush.

Oh ... absolutely charming. She did, a pretty pink glow infusing her cheeks with color. Her eyelashes blinked down and fluttered a little, before she looked back at me with meek apology.

Yeah, she took my breath away.

"I lied to you earlier. I don't want to pretend anymore." It was a chance, but I'm pretty good at reading people. "I do want to get married again, but I want a different sort of relationship. No manipulations and no secrets. I want a woman who'll look to me to be the head of the household, and a woman who'll bare her bottom and accept a spanking when she steps out of line."

I looked at her, hard.



"Can you take discipline? Submit to punishment when you misbehave?"

She gulped and started rubbing her hands together in a self-comforting gesture. She was nervous.

But she nodded.

"When you're twenty-six minutes late for an appointment?"

She bit her lip. I definitely needed to break that habit. Her lips were too pretty to abuse the way she did.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Why are you trembling?"

She quickly retracted her hands from the bar and hid them in her lap. She looked away from me, but I could see the muscles in her neck swallowing.

"You scare me."

I gentled. I touched the side of her neck that was exposed and soft. "You can't offer yourself up to be spanked by men that scare you, Jennifer."

She turned her big round eyes toward me.

"It's trust, not fear."

She nodded, but I could see that it didn't change her trepidation.

"Why do I scare you?"

She turned her chin up to me and spoke with honesty. I almost drooled at her honesty. So big and gorgeous and giving. Honesty. When had that become such a scarce and beautiful virtue?

"You don't know me, and yet you know my desires." She couldn't look at me anymore, but she continued. "You know what I've never shared with anyone. It's like you can read my mind."

I nodded, although I had no idea what she was talking about. I knew women liked men who could read their minds, impossible feat that it is. I'm no better at it than the next man, but I know how to ask questions, how to listen.

"And you want to be spanked."

A shiver passed up her body. Of desire? Fear? I touched her chin so she'd look at me again. Ahh, the eyes of desire. The desire scared her.

"You've never been spanked before," I told her.

"See?" she said. "How do you know that?"

I smiled as if I held some magic mind-reading capability. She didn't seem to remember that she'd just told me that she'd never shared her desires with anyone.

She didn't act like a smart girl. Soft and pretty and vulnerable, but not calculating and clever. But I'd seen her file. She was an over the top genius with exceptional talent with numbers and patterns. We'd recruited her and paid her a fair enticement.

But her heart didn't love the job. Talents don't always line up with desires.

"You know spankings hurt," I said with a grin.

She turned away. "Now you're mocking me." She was hurt.

"Trying to tease." I tugged her hair. "And warn."

I waited until she gave me her attention again.

"I don't mind making you cry." *Damn*, I thought. *Please stop biting that lip!* "If I spank you, you'll cry and you'll hurt and it *will* be punishment." I waited for a reaction. Nothing. "Unpleasant."

And her lips parted, her legs parted just slightly, and her hands unfolded. As unpleasant as I warned her it would be, she seemed to find it just as erotic.

I rested my hand on her arm. "And you'll have to get naked."

She swallowed. Licked her lips.

"You scare me," she whispered.

I smiled because I knew she was safe.

We agreed to meet the next weekend for dinner and then ... afterwards. I sent her four yellow daisies three days before. Nothing big, I didn't

want to scare her away. Just a little something so that she would know I was thinking of her.

And it was true; I couldn't stop thinking of her.

I picked up a little gold necklace with a swirly heart made of diamonds. Of course, it was too soon to give it to her, but I bought it all the same. When the time was right. I had to force myself to leave it in my apartment. Would she like my view? Overlooking Central Park?

I greeted her with a kiss. "Jennifer," I said.

"Mr. Vine," she said nervously, only holding my gaze for a second.

I chuckled. "John."

She nodded but didn't correct herself.

We were waiting in the car for the valet before she spoke. "I'm too nervous to eat."

What did she want? "You want to go straight to my apartment?"

"I'd like to get it over with."

I felt a small rush of disappointment. "Get it over with? It won't be so bad."

"You said it would be!"

She was right. "Yes, well," I said.

By the time we reached my apartment, she was practically in tears. "I don't know if I can do this."

I was tempted to offer her a drink. "The unknown is scary. Jennifer, I won't force you to do anything. I'm the spanker, but you're in control."

She wrung the hem of her dress into a little ball.

"Come here," I ordered. She obeyed, lovely girl. Pretty girl. I touched her waist to see if she would object. Then I touched her leg. No pantyhose, thank goodness. I slowly slid my finger up her leg, slowly, slowly, slower.

She never asked me to stop.

I touched her panties and waited for her to object. I slid my finger between the cloth and her sex, sliding my finger in the moisture.

I showed it to her. "See this?" She flushed and looked away. "Jennifer!" I said sharply. She looked back. "See this?"

She nodded.

"I prefer 'Yes, Sir.'"

She thought about that for a moment. When she finally said it, her voice was soft and smooth and whispery.

"This fear you say you feel, this anticipation, it's the best part. You are aroused by what? Fear?"

She licked her lips. "I don't know."

"Sir," I said. It was time, I told myself. Time to break the anticipation and give her curiosity a taste of reality. I put a hand around her waist to steady her, and smacked the front of her leg as sharply as I dared.

The emotions that passed over her face were precious. First utter surprise. Then a war between shame and pain. Pain won, but because it had only been one smack, embarrassment quickly followed. She looked down and away from me, the line of her neck like a painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Oh boy, she had me wrapped around her pinky. Only she didn't know it, and she didn't use it to try to get me to do anything for her. My heart swelled painfully. Really painful, not sweet and cute and lovey-dovey. My desire for her hurt like hell.

"It's time to strip, Jennifer."

Her pretty lips formed a perfect circle. "Oh ..." she breathed. "Okay." She rubbed a hand to the back of her neck and used the other to massage her throat. Self-comforting, again.

I raised my hand above the front of her leg, but she quickly interjected, "Yes, Sir." Soft and beautiful.

I spared her the smack and peered up into her eyes. I touched her chin and smiled. "Good," I said.

She relaxed and smiled back.

"Now strip."

She tensed up again. I reminded myself that a certain amount of trepidation was necessary. It was discipline, after all. A punishment. Her eyes got watery, and I told myself that I would have to make her cry for this to work.

I needed to give her pain and make her cry. I *ordered myself* to give her pain and make her cry.

She pulled her shimmery black cocktail dress over her head and dropped it on the floor. She reached behind her back and, in a somewhat awkward movement, unfastened her bra. It dropped on the floor, too.

She rubbed her shoulders and stood there.

"Panties, too."

Awkward again, but there was a beauty in her awkwardness. An honesty. She stood before me naked, trying to cover herself.

"Hands behind your head."

She watched me. Nervous, with her chest heaving. Another time I'd take some time to kiss and touch her pretty breasts.

*Another time!*

I took my time looking at her, partly because she was truly gorgeous and partly because I knew it made her feel exposed. She was the hidden treasure type. Until you undressed her, you had no idea she was the most beautiful woman you'd ever seen.

"Why are you about to be spanked?"

She swallowed a lot, and she could no longer look at me. She shifted from foot to foot, and two tears leaked out.

I waited.

And when I finally started to stand to give her a little extra incentive, she blurted out, "I was late!"

"Good." I smiled again. She relaxed a little, not quite as much as last time. "By how many minutes?"

"Twenty-six."

I took two large steps in approach and pulled my hand behind my shoulder. With a forceful snap, I struck the front of her unmarked thigh. She squealed.

She was trying not to cry. Trying to steady her voice, before it added, "Sir."

"Good." But she was off balance now, apprehensive again. *Punishment*, I reminded myself. There'd be time to cuddle her and stroke her and comfort her later.

"You have a choice: over my lap or over the end of the couch."

She shivered. "Lap, Sir."

I liked that choice. I arranged myself on the couch and gestured for her to stand before me. She still had her hands behind her neck, so I had a perfect view. Never had I seen a more beautiful piece of artwork, and she was living and breathing and standing in front of me by her own free will.

I actually choked up for a second.

*Get control of yourself!*

I cleared my throat. "Get over my lap," I ordered. And winced since she couldn't see my face. The order had come out harsh and abrasive. Certainly angrier than I felt.

I took a deep breath and picked up the hairbrush I had planted there earlier. I wanted to spank her with my hand. Hell, I just wanted to touch her with my hand. Bare hand to bare ass. Bare *pretty* ass.

*Punishment!* I reminded myself again.

I raised the brush and thwapped it on her bottom. She squealed, and her butt bounced. Or her butt bounced, and then she squealed. I

watched the skin turn from white to red and spanked her again.

Fascinating.

I did it again, and again, until she started crawling off my lap in a desperate move to get away.

"Does it hurt?" *Stupid question.*

"Yes!"

I smacked the back of her leg. "Excuse me?" I smacked the back of her other leg. She said 'ouch' but not 'Sir.' I smacked the backs of her legs in quick succession. "Yes, what?"

"Sir!"

I rewarded her with a moment to catch her breath. Okay, I told myself. Time to get down to business. Tears, spanking, crying, punishment, all that.

I shifted her over one leg and used the other to lock her legs down.

"Give me your hands."

She whimpered, "Oh, no," but she obeyed.

And now she was completely at my mercy, bottom turned up to me and ready for a doozy of a spanking. And I couldn't fail her.

I set about reddening every unblemished spot on her bottom, and worked my way up and down the backs of her legs. I tried slow at first, and then fast, which really got her squealing. After a few passes, she started to get frantic. "It hurts, it hurts, it really hurts!"

I upped the tempo and the intensity. She almost wrenched her hands from my grasp, but I held on and kept spanking. *Cry*, I ordered her with my mind. She didn't, so I tried a little faster, a little harder.

And then I stopped. I released her hands and slowly dipped my hand between her legs, waiting for her to object. It was slippery enough that I

didn't think she'd object to anything that I decided to do.

*Finish her punishment.*

I took her hands once more. It was a strange mixture in me. I loved her over my lap, at my mercy. Her bottom was so lovely, her submission so sweet. And yet I wanted to end her suffering, to kiss her pretty tears away and see her pretty eyes look to me for comfort and forgiveness and approval.

So I raised the brush again and made her cry.



## My First Girl

The first time I spanked a girl, I was a teaching assistant for Professor Adams in the English department. It was straight discipline, nothing sexy about it, even though she was sexy as hell. Maybe my position as teaching assistant had gone straight to my head, but damned if she didn't deserve it.

Professor Adams had me grade all the essays and mark the papers, and he would (he claimed, although it was never proven) go through each and every one afterwards to make sure he agreed. He always dug through to the paper I'd scored highest, and told me it wasn't quite as good as I'd thought, and then held up the paper I'd scored lowest, and tell me it wasn't quite as bad as I'd thought.

I believe that was his way of teaching me how to be a teacher. He was an absent-minded professor, always with a smile on his face and a kindness towards his students. Nothing much fazed him; he ambled through the years with an unruffled acceptance of the people and world around him. A studious observer, perhaps, but not much of a participant.

The girl who typically got the highest scores and whose papers, Professor Adams said, were not quite as good as I thought, was Amy. Her shiny blond curls bounced around her face like Shirley Temple's, and I would've laid my last dollar on the bet that she'd spent her high school years as a cheerleader.

She was deceptively smart at twenty-one, though. She was all pretty speech and smiling eyes, and when you least expected it, she'd whip out a statement so smart, you'd be struck speechless.

In class, Amy charmed Professor Adams with her smarts, flirted him with her smile, and flattered him with her wit. Professor Adams seemed tickled

pink by the attention. As skeptical as I was of her intentions, I couldn't help but be flattered all the same when she turned her attention to me.

That's just how she was. You knew her game, but you couldn't help but love playing it with her.

So when she was late with the third essay of the class (Professor Adams was easy-going in manner, but—since he didn't have to grade the homework—generous with assignments), she ran up to his office, handed me the paper two full days late, face rosy from exertion and acting for the world like she'd never done anything so terrible in her life.

"I'm so sorry!" She looked at me in a way that I knew was calculated to be the best approach. "I had it all done, but then I just knew it was terrible, and I had to re-do it, and then I had a couple of tests, so it couldn't be re-done until today, and—" she gasped in a breath, hand to her heart—"here, I couldn't possibly give you anything less than my best. Professor Adams is such an inspiring teacher, and with you being his assistant, this is one of the best—"

I cut her off with a laugh. "All right, all right," I smiled at her benevolently. "Just don't make it a habit."

I had just finished grading the rest of the class's papers, so it was nothing to do hers and slip it in the stack when I handed it to Professor Adams. I kept my mouth shut when he pulled hers from the stack and pronounced it—not the highest score but one of them—"better than you think." He was right, because I'd scored it down a little for her lateness, which I thought was fair, but I hadn't told Professor Adams the story of her lateness.

Amy aced her mid-terms with the highest score in the class. Again, Professor Adams looked at the lowest score I'd given, and told me it was a better paper than I'd thought. He pulled Amy's from the

stack, and merely nodded or mumbled *mm-hmms* at appropriate intervals.

I frowned. "My grade for Amy is not too high?" I asked as respectfully as I could manage.

I imagined him chewing on the end of a pipe as he leaned back in his chair and looked up at me. He had a bygone air about him, like the dusty old coat he wore, or the clothes that he put on solely because society demanded, with no attention to style or fraying hems.

"The studying is the fun," he said, as if he was imparting some ancient wisdom from Aristotle. "The grade is in the eye of the receiver, not the giver." He paused. If he'd had that pipe in his hand that I'd imagined, he would have taken a long, slow taste. "Take joy in your subject, and mind not what the students learn. That's the key to a happy teaching career."

That short speech was the only lesson in teaching he gave me, during the whole semester I worked for him. I thought a better teacher than him would care what and whether his students learned or not. I worried that some of these young, directionless know-it-alls would be in for a rude awakening in the real world.

After all, I was a grad student, and being one, I thought myself a know-it-all of the real world.

So a week later, when Amy bounded in a day late with her latest assignment, I was not in the mood. It was just that I was tired, and I'd planned on being done at nine.

I took one glance at the paper in her hand and sighed. "Now I'll be here until nine-thirty," I grumbled.

"If I had turned it in on time, you would have been here until nine-thirty, too." She smiled at me coyly.

She was right, but I didn't like right. "Hasn't anyone ever taught you respect for a deadline?"

She posed in front of me, feet together and gaze glumly turned towards my toes. "I learned only to try and give my best work, always." And then tears trembled on the edge of her eyelids.

I sighed again. "I'm being taken advantage of."

One of the tears spilled over, and she looked up at me with brilliant blue eyes, glimmering under her tears. "I'm sorry. I understand. I put you out." She sniffed, and I felt for a moment that I was witnessing the truth, and not an act. "I understand if you have to fail me. The pressure... I just want to be summa cum laude, and now that I'm a junior taking grad-level courses..." she trailed off, and another tear dripped down her face.

I shook my head. "You make me believe you, but don't think for a moment that I'm falling for your act."

She cocked her head for a moment, trying to make sense of my nonsensical statement. "But I'm so cute, how can you not?" I think you'd have to see her smile and her beguiling blue eyes to understand how I could fall for such obvious flirtation hook, line and sinker.

I took the paper from her and put it under the one I was currently grading. "You do remember when the term paper is due, correct?"

She gave me a perky little salute, and all evidence of tears completely disappeared. "Aye, aye, Sir!" She snapped her heels together and returned her hand to her side. "You've got it!"

But, surprisingly enough, she did *not* have it in on time.

Again, she ran up to his office a full week late, with grades due to be turned in that afternoon. She smiled at me, and I had visions of spanking her, just to take that beguiling look off her face.

I growled at her, "You think that just because you're cute and sweet and pretty, that you can get away with shoddy work."

She put her hands on her little hips and snapped, "That's not shoddy work. That's damn good work." She wagged her finger at me. "I never do shoddy work. Ever!"

"Shoddy work *habits*, then." While she was gathering a comeback, I forged on. "Do you think you're going to be able to keep a job with that sort of behavior? You're almost in the real world, Amy." I wagged my finger and finished my lecture off. "Just what do you expect me to say to Professor Adams?"

She wavered a smile at me. "You could just tell him you accidentally kept it."

Anger bubbled up in me, and I grabbed her upper arm, pulled her towards me, and smacked her little butt as hard as I could.

She stood, frozen. I'd expected her to kick me, lash out at me, or even run away, but she was still. Shocked, maybe.

"You're asking me to *lie*?" I asked. Since she still hadn't moved, I smacked her butt again. "You're asking me to *lie*, to cover your own ass?" My voice pitched higher with incredulosity.

I squeezed my hand around her upper arm, pulled her towards the chair, sat down, and then flipped her over my knee. "I'll cover your ass, all right."

And she said not a word as I laid into her with my hand. I held nothing back, determined even as I watched her butt bounce under my hand, shaking her skirt in this direction and that. It started bunching up in all the wrong places, and I pushed up her skirt—she always wore skirts—and slipped my hand down under the hem of her pants.

She gasped an "Oh, no!" as I pulled them down to her knees. I ran my hand across her pert little buttocks and thought, once again, that she had to have been a cheerleader in high school. Could one

be a cheerleader and a summa cum laude genius, too?

"I can't believe you're doing this!" she cried in her cute little voice. She shifted on my lap from side to side, I think trying to wiggle off my leg, but she really just ended up waving her pretty little butt back and forth for me.

"Oh, come on, I bet you spent a great deal of time in this position, growing up."

"Never!" she snapped, the outrage starting to edge out the charm in her voice.

"You've never been spanked?"

She energetically shook her head.

"Could've used a spanking or two, I bet."

I waited for more objections, but she just hung her head, a hand clenched in the carpet for support. Like she was gathering energy for the next onslaught. I didn't want to disappoint, so I set to pinkening her little bottom from one side to the other, from top to bottom.

In the middle of my attack, the door squeaked open and Professor Adams walked in. He looked at me—I think I blushed—and he looked down at Amy's little bottom poking above my knee. "I see you take your teaching seriously," he said. "Whose arse is this I'm looking at?"

"Ahh," I cleared my throat, feeling like an awkward teenager all of a sudden. "This is Amy, she's trying to hand in her paper late."

"Ah-hah!" he said with a stomp of the foot. "Amy, the one who is about to fail my class. Yes, if anyone deserves to have their bottom warmed, it would be the smartest student in my class, failing because she didn't do her final paper."

"I did! I did!" She kicked her legs scissor-like as she said it, waving her hand to his desk as she said it. "I did do the paper, it's just late! But it's good! I promise!"

"Ahh," said Professor Adams. "No doubt it's good, if you did it."

She launched into a plea for a grade, and Professor Adams nodded his way through it.

"Well, perhaps I'll have a look-see, and then we'll see." He reached into his desk and pulled out an old, wicked looking ruler. It was thick and wooden, rounded at the edges from age. Much was worn soft, and shiny, but the wood was heavy and solid.

He dropped it on her butt, and she gave a start. "This'll do the job better, I think. Little girls wear pink; women need a little red in their lives, don't you think?"

I think I nodded in agreement.

"And Amy?"

"Yes, Professor Adams?"

"A good spanking always does a girl wonders. I'll look at your paper, but you just make sure he reddens your bottom good because if he doesn't, then you don't get a grade."

He left, with her paper.

I stared down at the ruler on her butt, and thought briefly that it'd be nice for my hand to have a bit of relief.

I raised the ruler high, and snapped it across her cheeks as quick as I could. She lurched off my lap and slid off my knee, quick to turn her butt away from me and stare up at me in shock. "That's wicked! You can't do that! That hurts too much!"

Good, I thought. "What, do you think we're doing this for, your *enjoyment*?" I patted my lap. "Get back up here. You're getting quite a few more of those before we're done."

She stared at me as if I were crazy.

"Ass," I said. "Up here, now." I pointed to my lap helpfully.

"But then you'll spank me with that again!"

"You bet."

"Oh no," she whined. "No, no, no. I can't do that. I just can't!"

I decided it was time for a lecture. I scalded her ears with a good one, throwing in a bunch of "*for shames*" and "*disappointments*" and "*waste of god-given talents*". I pointed the ruler at her at appropriate intervals, frowning to make my point. By the time I started with the "*you should be ashamed of yourself*" coda to my lecture, she put her hands over her ears and burst into tears.

"Just stop! Stop talking! You're making me feel bad!" She squeezed her eyes shut and shook her curls, hands fisted tight against her ears.

"I'll stop talking when I start spanking again."

And then she glanced towards the door. If she ran, then she ran. I figured I'd made my point. Still, I wanted to make sure she didn't forget it. I patted my lap. "Amy, quit fooling around. Every choice you make in life has consequences, and it's time you faced your consequences."

Her lip trembled. A realization dawned on me, that making another human being cry is a weighty responsibility. Should I make her cry? The old expression, "tear them down, so you can build them up," occurred to me. I didn't like the idea of tearing her down, but it did make me realize that if I made her cry—if I made her feel *that bad* about her mistake, then I had a responsibility to build her back up afterwards.

This time, her legs shook just barely as she climbed over my lap. When I picked up the ruler, her butt cheeks squeezed together in dismay. They dimpled on the sides, and I ran my hand over her shaky globes.

"Amy," I said, pinching her lightly for my own pleasure. "Relax. I'm not going to kill you."

I pulled one cheek up with my hand, exposing and stretching the sensitive flesh at the junction between her butt and legs. I smacked the ruler



across it, and watched the white flesh bloom red as she screeched and wriggled.

"I guess it hurts there, huh?"

She tried to squirm off my lap, but I was having none of it.

I pinched her cheek in my palm and struck the sensitive line twenty times fast. Fast and hard. When I was done, she panted and sniffled, as if she'd just been through an ordeal. I moved my hand to the other side and pinched her butt up hard enough to make her squeal. She tried to wriggle away, but I just pinched harder.

"That hurts!"

I chuckled as I raised the ruler. "What hurts more? Me holding your butt up, or this?" With that, I smacked the ruler across the other sweet spot, and watched it fill with color. She tried to wriggle out of my grasp, and I delivered another ten, fast and as hard as I could.

She started crying, but it sounded too pretty. She gave little sniffles and boo-hoos that sounded like a bad actress in a B movie. "How can you do this to me? You're hurting me!"

I didn't pay much attention to her, and studied her bottom. I'd turned it pink with my hand, and the ruler had left one red welt across the middle of her butt. I decided I'd wait until the end to finish welting up her bottom. In the meantime, I turned my attention to the upper portion of her legs. There was a lot of white flesh, including the soft skin between her legs.

"Would it embarrass you if I asked you to spread your legs for me?"

She sucked in a breath, and I looked down to see the back of her neck turn red. I reached down and lifted her sassy hair, and noted her face was red.

"Come now. You can't be more embarrassed about a little spanking than about your behavior,

can you? You have no qualms about proving to me that you're lazy, undependable, and disobedient. You have no qualms about exposing me to the worst of your behavior. Surely, you can't be embarrassed to expose me to this sensitive flesh right here?"

I dipped my hand between her legs, running a finger down her inner thigh. "Open," I commanded.

She inched her legs apart. I shoved her other leg off my knee, and she precariously balanced, her free leg searching for an anchor. I took the opportunity to smack the ruler on her trapped leg, up and down the soft white flesh of her inner thigh. I let the ruler snap inwards, making little 'bite' lines where the edge of the ruler left tiny little welts. With a weird detachment, I set myself to decorating her inner thigh with a pattern of consistency, paying no mind to her pleas and cries and promises.

"Okay," I said. "Time for the other leg."

I stood her up and flipped her over my other knee. It felt awkward spanking with the wrong hand, but I caught on after a few tries. Again, I welted that inner flesh with determination. She screeched and kicked her free leg and cried.

When I was done, I stood her up once more and put her across my knee the right way. I ran my hand on the top of her legs. "Okay, we just need to turn this a nice shade of red, and then we're going to blister your bottom good, to finish you off." I felt like I was in the lecture hall. "Any questions?"

She shook her head and whimpered.

The whimper sounded much more real than her crying had, so I sighed. "Amy, why do you think I'm doing this?"

"Because I inconvenienced you?"

I was about to correct her, but I supposed she was partially right. "Yes, that, but mostly because you need to learn some discipline. You don't want to throw away your talent by skating by. You're

incredibly smart, but not everyone is going to let you get away with being as late as you please, whenever you feel like it." I snapped the ruler down hard. "I hope this teaches you to do your work when you *need* to, and not just when the mood strikes you."

And that's when I started using the ruler for real. I welted both cheeks, top to bottom, and even did a number on her legs. She cried for real, and I didn't stop. I used her cries as a conductor for my hand, letting them guide me into smacking harder, giving her a break, and finally pushing her over the edge into real, repentant sobs.

She was still sobbing when Professor Adams walked in. He ambled over to her side, and adjusted his glasses so he could peer down at her bottom.

"Nicely welted," he observed. "What grade do you think you deserve, Amy?"

"I don't know," she sobbed. She covered her face with both hands, precariously dangling over my lap.

"Hmmm," Professor Adams said. "Your work is an A," he paused to pat her naked butt, stopping to run his hands over her welts. "But your timeliness and behavior is an F." He used the tip of his finger to poke her butt cheek up, and study the welts I'd given her between her leg and thigh. "How about a C for the course?"

"But then I'll never graduate summa cum laude!"

He laughed. "You expected to? You're in the running, with this kind of behavior?"

She nodded miserably.

He seemed to chew on that possibility. "I'll tell you what. Take my class next semester on the Shakespeare Tragedies, and if you turn in your papers on time *and* earn an A, then I will change this course grade to an A."

I could sense her pouting, even though I couldn't see it. Evidently, she decided that this was the best offer she was going to get. "All right, all right." Then, as if it hurt coming through her teeth, "Thank you, Professor Adams."

The door clicked shut once again after the professor left. I turned my attention back to the welted butt over my lap. It looked like I'd done a good and thorough job, with not a bit of skin left untouched and white.

"No thanks for me?"

She ground her teeth and growled under her breath. "Thank you," she finally managed.

"I'm not going to protect you from him next semester," I warned, as I helped her up off my lap. She stood before me looking awkward, so I reached forward and tugged up her panties. I smoothed down her skirt, and then turned her around.

I gave her a good smack to set her on her way. She blushed red, I guess realizing the indignity of what she'd just been through, now that the pain was fading. "I think this lesson has been memorable enough to last me for the rest of my life, thank you very much."

I smiled broadly. "You're welcome."

I never spanked her again, and, in fact, never saw her again. I was transferred to Professor Williams. I did receive a card a year and a half later, announcing that she'd be graduating summa cum laude. 'Thank you,' was all that was handwritten on it, and I sent one back saying the same thing.

I don't know if she knew what for, but she awakened in me a life-long love affair with the female bottom. It only took me a few more years to find the love of my life. I spank her every Friday, and take her out every Saturday.

And although I still teach, I no longer grade papers. That's my teaching assistant's job.  
After all, I'm a one-woman kind of spanker.

## Carpenter Girl

The carpenter was a *she*.

I stared at her a moment, taking in her sassy little jean shorts and her pink tank top that showed off her great arms. Tanned and toned—not muscular and not flabby. *Perfect*.

"Alex Matthews," I said, mentally changing her name to *Alexandra*. "You must be my carpenter." I opened my front door wide so she could lug in her toolbox and the assortment of tools that sat at her feet.

She smirked at me. "You thought I was a guy, didn't you?"

"Well, yes," I fumbled, and then laughed heartily at my mistake. "But it makes no difference to me." Besides, she was one nice looking little button. "You're cuter," I added.

I cleared my throat when she glared at me.

"Okay," she said. "We go room by room, and you tell me how you use each room."

We started with the living room. "I'd like a built in entertainment center, with—"

"Nuh-uh," she said. "Tell me what you do in here, how you use it."

Who knew carpenters had artistic temperaments? "Well, I watch TV." When I realized I had made it sound like I was telling her the world's most obvious thing—courtesy of another one of her killer glares—I added, "Sometimes I eat in front of it."

"Guests?" she asked.

"Uh," I thought for a second. I didn't want to sound like a lame and lonely bachelor at thirty-six. "Well, I usually bring the guys downstairs. We have poker night."

"You don't have a wife," she said. "You dating anyone with potential?"

I was momentarily struck speechless. Then I grinned at her.

"Get that thought out of your head," she said. "I can tell, no feminine touches," she said, wandering around the room and poking at my things. "And no sense in making this fit your lifestyle if someone else is going to be moving in with you in a year and wanting to change things."

"No one." I shook my head and followed her to the dining room.

"Nothing to be done in here. You don't use it, anyway."

"Oh, I don't, huh?" I grinned at her. "I do."

She twirled and put her hands on her hips, letting one jut out in a challenge.

I like challenges. "Well, I *would* like a built in sideboard to serve and a place to store my china." Well, she couldn't possibly know that I didn't have any china.

She laughed at me. "One, I bet you don't have any china, let alone matching *dishes*, and two, you've never used this room." She surveyed it, turning in circles. "Now I can see this as an office. Maybe a library. You read? You do any work at home?"

"You're a carpenter." It came out part reminder, part question. When she just stared at me, I added, "This is my house."

She rolled her eyes at me. "So what is it? Library? Office?"

"Dining room," I growled, but she was already making her way into the kitchen. "And I have an office upstairs."

"Yep, these have got to go." She started opening and shutting cabinets. "See? No matching plates." She gave me a triumphant smile, and I forgot to get defensive. She had an amazing smile. It perked up her whole face, making her look like

one of those little gymnasts when they win the gold medal.

"Library," I said.

She laughed, all smug. Smug wasn't nearly as attractive on her as her smile was, but then she crawled right up on the counter to peer into the top shelves of the cabinets, putting her little butt at hand level.

And man, I wanted to get my hands on that perky little butt.

She caught my eyes and smirked again.

As we went through the rest of the house, our only other point of contention was the bedroom. She wanted to completely re-do my closet, get rid of my "awful" dresser, and "do something creative."

She stared out the second floor princess window. "A window seat, I think."

I laughed. "What the hell am I going to do with a window seat?"

She jutted her hip out at a cocky angle. "Read."

I didn't laugh. "That's what the library is for."

She looked at me like she thought I was a moron. Her attitude was starting to get on my nerves.

I frowned at her. "Now look, I'm paying, and I know what I want. I don't want a window seat there." *Period*, I thought. "And you know, I don't want a library. I want a sideboard."

"But I'm the expert. You hired an expert." Her face still told me that she thought I was a dumb oaf.

Something about being treated like a dumb oaf just pissed me off. I didn't think, I just stepped close to her and gave her a smack over her jeans.

Her face went red, and she gave me a deadly look. I thought she was going to dig out her hammer and smack me on the head with it. She looked me up and down, like she was judging whether she could take me.



Evidently, she decided she couldn't. She closed her notebook, stuck her pencil behind her ear, and stalked out of the room. A minute later I heard the front door slam.

As much as I regretted watching Alex walk out the door, it *had* been nice to get my hand on her little butt.

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I called six other carpenters the next day. They were all thrilled with the idea of such an extensive job, but the quickest any of them could "squeeze me in" was five months in the future. And even then, it would take them about six months to finish all the rooms.

I told myself that Alex had it coming with her sassy attitude. I told myself that she'd asked for it, defying me at every turn. I finally came to my senses and picked up the phone.

"Listen, Alex, I just wanted to call and apologize. I was completely out of line."

Her voice snapped back, all hot and full of sass. "You think I don't know that you've called every other carpenter in town?"

Boy, this was one smart cookie. She had my number, that was for sure.

"Listen, I have to head out of town at the end of the week for my book tour, so you won't even have to put up with me. If you finish by our original target date, you'll only have to see me for a couple days, total."

There was silence. Obviously, my absence was a plus.

"And," I said. "I'll throw in a fifteen thousand dollar bonus if it's done on time."

I thought I heard a *holy shit*, but it was so soft that it could have been my imagination.

Her tone certainly didn't betray any wonder. "I always complete my projects on time."

"And you're an exceptional carpenter," I agreed. "That's why I'm groveling."

The silence on the phone changed, and I sensed that I had irked her again.

"No, you're groveling because you were an ass, not because I'm an exceptional carpenter."

I kept my mouth shut. I reminded myself that Tom, my neighbor, had the most gorgeous woodwork I'd ever seen, and all done by her. I grinned, and made my tone joking.

"I was an ass, because you were full of sass."

My joke thudded into the silence.

"Was that supposed to be funny? Some crazy writer thing?" Her voice was as sassy and spirited as she.

"Okay, I'm sorry. Will you please help me?"

---

I gave her the key the next day. Her lips curved into a pretty little frown.

"I think I'll wait to start until you leave," she said.

"You afraid of me?" I teased.

She wound the key onto her key chain, not bothering to look up at me. "I'm afraid of what I'll do with my saws if they get too close to your hand."

I grimaced at the visual. "Come on, now. I gave you a little spank. It didn't even leave a mark." I laughed when she blushed. Her cheeks turned a vibrant shade of red that matched her lips perfectly.

She started to turn away, but then she squared her shoulders and faced me. "Look, how you treat your women is nothing to do with me. You're a job. I'll do the job, and that's it. But I am *not* your girlfriend, so you may *not* touch me. Are we clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," I said, but I had to defend myself. "I treat my girlfriends like princesses."

"So you only beat the hired help, is that it?"

She turned to walk towards the door, quickly enough to make me think that she was eager to get out of my reach.

"Hey," I said softly. "I don't beat anyone. I've given a few spankings in my day, but I'd never hurt anyone." I stepped towards her. "I'd never hurt you," I said gently.

She stepped away again, but stuck her chin up at me. "People warned me about going into some crazy writer's house, but I'm not afraid of you, idiot."

Being called an idiot isn't one of those things that bother me much. Now if she'd called me a hack writer that would've bothered me. I leaned towards her and smiled. "See, now that sounds to me like you need a spanking."

Her eyes went wide, and her mouth popped open. She shut her mouth and swallowed. She opened her mouth, cocked her head, and then shut her mouth again. She finally twirled on her toes and walked out of the house.

I didn't see her again before I left on the tour, but I called my neighbor to see if she was working, and she was. She flitted through my mind a few times, but a book tour is exhausting. Six weeks of it is brutal. I love them, though. I'm as disorganized as the next person, and it takes me awhile to write my readers back. But to meet them, and see them... I have to prevent myself from sounding idiotic and saying things like, "I can't believe you read my book," or gushing like an uncool brownnoser, "thank you so much for buying my book."

I came home for a weekend three weeks into it. I needed a break. I arrived home well after midnight on Friday.

She was sprawled on my couch, her face grimy with dried sweat, her red hair coated in sawdust. She had a cute little snore. Not exactly soft and

ladylike, but not manly, either. Strong but cute, just like her. She wore a tank top, and her arms were as dirty as her face. Her legs were damned perfection.

I stepped closer. I should've woken her, but I didn't want to. Instead, I studied her lips. There's something about girls with red hair that makes their lips look moist, full of color, and absolutely kissable. Before I could stop myself, I touched a finger to her lips, just to see what the mystery was all about.

She stirred and fluttered her eyes, and I snapped my hand back just in time. "Sleeping on the job?" I teased.

"I thought you weren't going to be home for another three weeks."

Gosh, if I could kiss someone like her. "I didn't think you'd work on the weekends."

She slipped back into sass like she was pulling on a comfortable robe. "So if a guy works every day, they're considered hard-workers, but if a girl does, she has no life?"

I shook my head at her. "Honey, people only have lives in their twenties. The thirties are all about sitting at home on a Friday night. You've either got kids, or all your friends have kids."

She sat up a little and looked down at herself. "I'm a mess."

"You look cute," I said.

She wrinkled her nose. "I hate cute." She blinked a few times, and then she jumped up. "I've got to clear out your bedroom!"

I stopped her. "I can sleep in the guest bedroom," I offered. "I'm sure you've got things organized." She ran right past me, and something in her manner made me worry that something was up.

I crept up the stairs, and she was in the middle of my room, making the bed and throwing clothes in

her suitcase. I stood in the doorway, arms crossed over my chest.

"I don't recall room and board as being part of our contract."

She looked abashed for a moment, but she jutted her chin up in the air. "You weren't here, so I put in some overtime."

What did I care? But I frowned at her.

She pointed her finger at me. "You aren't supposed to be home!"

That's when I noticed it. The Ming dynasty vase that I'd bought when my first crazy advance had gone to my head was not sitting in the corner of my bedroom, right by the bathroom. "What the hell?" I asked. "Where's my vase?"

Her eyes filled.

"Where's my vase?" I growled. I didn't see her stealing. I just couldn't imagine it.

"I broke it."

But my suspicions were aroused. "Where is it? We can put the pieces back together." I only kept it to remind myself of my stupidity, daily. I respect fine art, but paying a fortune for an ancient vase I'd only bought to impress a girl was just silly. I'd paid more for it than I'd made in two years in my twenties.

"It's shattered. I talked to a friend, and she clued me in that it was a Ming dynasty vase, but don't worry, I'm replacing it."

*Don't* be angry, I told myself. "You can't replace it. It's worth thousands of dollars."

"Fifty-six thousand, to be exact."

I narrowed my eyes at her.

"Don't worry, I've been working on locating a similar piece of similar value." The tears filling her eyes spilled over. "That's why I'm staying here, to save a little money until I get the final payment from this job."

"Good god, girl, that had to clean you out."

She shrugged.

"I don't want you replacing it," I decided. "That's too much money to pay for a vase, anyway."

"I'll forgo the bonus, and give you a discount on the labor for all this," she said.

I needed sleep. "We'll talk about in the morning. Go to bed," I said, and gestured towards my bed. "I'll sleep in the guest bedroom."

She didn't look like she enjoyed being told what to do, but she wisely kept her mouth shut.

---

By morning, I just didn't care. "It's gone, forget about it."

She looked uncomfortable. She plopped an omelet on a plate for me.

"And we'll go with the contracted rate, and if you complete this on time *and* move out of my house, I'll give you the bonus."

She started beating some eggs for herself. "I suppose you'd spank a girlfriend for something like this." She blushed as she said it, and kept her eyes focused on the eggs.

"Nah, I don't believe in crying over spilt milk." But I did believe in using a little guilt to get another breakfast like this one. "You going to be here tomorrow morning? This is a phenomenal breakfast."

She started to sass, but seemed to change her mind. "Your wish is my command," she said.

I grinned. If only she knew what I wished...

---

After three more weeks of hotel hell, I cancelled my last signing and went home a day early. I was tired, and I'll be damned if I hadn't craved those eggs nearly every morning. Crazy, but I thought of them—of *her*—every day. Every night, too.

I didn't get home until two in the morning, so I went straight to bed. Alex was sleeping in the guest bedroom, and I had my master bedroom back to myself. I was so exhausted that I didn't even turn on the lights; I just collapsed into bed, fully clothed.

The next morning, Alex was polishing furniture in short shorts and tank top glory. I drooled.

"Hey, button," I said with a grin.

She frowned at me. Something about that frown just killed me. Maybe it was the way her lips curved, but every time she frowned, I wanted to kiss her. She set down the cloth and furniture polish she'd been holding. "Want a tour?"

Everything was fabulous. Even the library. She'd gotten cheeky and made some sort of bookcase that looked a bit like a sideboard. I couldn't begin to explain it, but with this heavy oak table she'd made, the library looked like a study desk, a library, and a dining room had been mixed together to create a dusty yet charming atmosphere.

And when she took me to my basement, I fell in love with her.

"What's this?" I asked. *This* was a gorgeous, mahogany poker table. Professional green felt, polished cup holders, and padded arms rests made from Corinthian leather. "*Holy shit.*" I just stared at it, rubbing my hands over its beauty.

She shrugged. "It's nothing." She packed up her tools. "I always throw in something as a little surprise. Something the client needed but didn't know they needed."

"This is one hell of a little surprise."

She looked up at me, all big-eyed and vulnerable. "You don't like it?" she asked.

"Holy shit, you could sell this thing for ten thousand dollars, easy. It's gorgeous."

She shrugged. "Costs only a fraction of that to make. It's really just a little labor and know-how."

"I love it," I smiled. I stepped closer to her, and wanted to thank her. There was tension there; I could feel it. I wanted to kiss her, badly.

She stepped away and cleared her throat. "I guess I'd better be going." She seemed hesitant.

"You got my check, right?" I'd put it on top of her toolbox that morning, as soon as I'd woken.

She smiled. "Yes, thank you." She blushed and averted her eyes, making quick small talk and extracting herself from my house as soon as possible.

I missed her as soon as she left, a vague feeling of disappointment and sadness settling over me. It just felt like we were unfinished.

That night, I discovered why. When I turned down my bed, there was a lovely oak paddle, lacquered to a high shine. I glanced over to where the vase had stood, and discovered a new one in its place.

Now *that* made me mad. What'd she go wasting money like that for? I knew she demanded a high fee, but not high enough to waste on something like that. After materials, she'd only make the bonus on the extensive job she'd done on the house.

I called her cell. "I just found your present." I thought I could hear her blushing. "And the vase I specifically told you *not* to replace." I let my angry voice ring through the phone. "Get back here," I said, and clicked off the phone. I quickly cleaned up the room, made the bed, and lit a few candles that I hoped would be romantic.

When I greeted her at the front door, I warned her. "After I spank you, we're going to have sex."

She swallowed. "I don't have sex for any price." She looked at me hard, but I could tell she was feeling a little off-balance.



I shook my head. "If I spank you, it's going to be on your bare bottom. And if I'm going to look at your bare bottom, I'm going to touch it. You're too cute *not* to touch."

She smiled coyly at me, despite her nervousness. "You're not such a hardship to look at, despite your ..." Her eyes went wide and she trailed off, when she spotted the paddle hanging from my hand.

I used it to point up the stairs. "In the bedroom."

"Okay, fine," she said, stomping up the steps. I enjoyed the view from behind her as I followed her up.

"Sit on the bed."

She was so small and pretty, sitting on my bed. The desire to rip her clothes off was so sweet, that I wanted to prolong it. I sat next to her. "Over my knee," I said.

She looked frightened. I gentled and patted my leg.

"Have you ever been spanked?" I asked.

She ignored me, stood up, and stepped between my legs, draping herself awkwardly over my knee. As she did, the jeans stretched tight over her bottom. I ran my hand over her bottom, and then gave her a loud pop with my hand.

I heard her suck in a breath. "That's not so bad," she said, mostly to herself.

"I'm sorry," I said. I picked up the paddle and whacked her bottom with it. "How's that?"

She popped right off my lap with a screech. "Ouch! What the hell are you trying to do? Kill me?!" She rubbed her hands on her bottom.

"Alex," I said. "You're getting spanked. Do you really think you're going to get through this without feeling pain? Do you think I'm going to stop before you're good and crying with remorse?" I gestured

towards the vase. "And do you know what you're being spanked for anyway?"

She frowned again. "For breaking your vase. I really am—"

"No!" I said a bit too curtly. "For buying a new one. I *told* you to forget about it. Are you nuts? How much did that cost?"

She shrugged and looked out the window. Her arms wrapped around herself, and she bit her lip.

"Get your butt over here." I made my voice stronger and deeper when she didn't move. "Now."

She stared at the paddle the whole way. "I didn't know it was going to hurt," she whined.

I laughed, but then she shot me a vulnerable look that made me stop. "Button," I said.

"Stop calling me that." She narrowed her eyes at me and gave me an angry glare.

I put my hands on her hips, mostly because I wanted to touch her, but partly to keep her in place. "How much did you spend?"

That took the glare out of her gaze. She stared at my feet and whispered, "thirty thousand." She snapped her head up, looking worried. "I couldn't find a vase expensive enough—or cheap enough—to equal yours in value. I'm sorry."

"That's not what I want you to be sorry about. I want you to be sorry for buying it when I told you not to." She didn't say anything. "Thirty's a good number to start with, then. Pull down your jeans."

Alex pulled away, but my hands were on her hips. A tear dropped on my hand.

"I can't," she whispered. She brushed a tear away. "I'm not scared."

"Are you embarrassed?"

She nodded, another tear dropping to the carpet. I took pity on her and reached for the button of her jeans. I tugged down the zipper, and then I put my hands down in the seat of her pants and pushed them down to her knees. She had the

cutest little red satin panties on. I tugged those down, too, while she wrung her hands together.

"Step your legs apart."

She gestured to her jeans as if I were an idiot. I frowned back at her until she managed to step her feet apart as much as possible. I reminded myself that this was a punishment that she'd all but requested.

I got up. "Without moving your feet, put your hands flat on the bed."

She was perfectly positioned. I stepped behind her and studied her butt for evidence that I'd just given her a whack across the seat of her jeans. Her butt was lightly reddened, but nothing compared to what a well-paddled butt looks like.

I aimed the paddle and whacked her butt again. It didn't have a lot of jiggle to it, not even when she popped up again.

"That hurts too much! I can't do thirty!"

"Who asked for this spanking?"

Her face scrunched a little. "But I didn't realize that it would hurt!"

"Button," I said. "It can't possibly hurt nearly as much as paying thirty thousand dollars for a vase. If you were my girlfriend, you'd get this spanking and more, every week for a year."

I'd thought her frown adorable, but her pout just made me want to drop the paddle right then and there.

"Enough pouting. Get back in position, or I'll make it fifty."

She gasped and went down so quick that I thought she tripped, at first.

"There's fun spanking, there's sexy spanking, and there's punishment. I think thirty thousand dollars calls for the latter, don't you?"

She shook her head fervently.

I put my hand on her back, both to hold her in place and to arch her butt up. I cracked the paddle

across her bottom five times, relatively lightly. Thirty would be quite a lot, with the heavy paddle she'd made. But she didn't act like it had been light. She squirmed and squealed, but stayed in position.

I went for another ten, burning the exact same spot in fast succession. She raised on tiptoe a little higher with each one, so that when I was done, her sit spot was well positioned. I decided to mix it up, and I gave her a full swat across her sit spot.

Her legs seemed to tremble slightly. I gave the very top of each thigh five smarting swats, and then aimed the paddle across the middle of her bottom. "Here's three good ones, to remember the rest of the week."

I heard her gulp.

*CRACK!* I aimed again, this time an inch lower. *CRACK!* And this time I rested the paddle right across her sit spot. *CRACK!*

When she stood up, she gave me such a look of sorrow that I gathered her in my arms and kissed her tears. "There, Alex. That wasn't so horrible, was it?"

"It hurts," she said in a sweet little injured voice. "You hurt me!"

"Are you trying to make me feel guilty or are you looking for reassurance that I'll do it again?"

She just stared at me in shock. I hadn't realized how short she was before, but she fit in my arms perfectly. Her head rested against my shoulder, tears drying on her face.

"I will, you know." I said. "I'll not only spank you anytime you step out of line, but I'll also spank you just for fun." I winked at her. "But that'll be fun for you, too. I promise."

"Who says I'll see you again?" she sassed.

I grinned. "Button," I said as I touched a finger to the tip of her pert nose, "you'll be seeing a lot of me."

She shifted in my arms and gave me a frown. I accepted it gratefully, admiring it as her eyes drifted shut. I waited until she was asleep to give her a kiss on her nose and call her "my *little* button."

## Party Girl

The first time I met Cassie, she threw up on my shoes. Evidently, she'd drunk more than her fair share of merlot, because my shoes were stained purple. She managed not to get a spot on herself, but that's just like her. Always put together, always seeming to dance on air and have a ball.

It was definitely not the way I'd been told love at first sight goes. *Purple* vomit. But there was a moment that caught my heart, somewhere after she carelessly shooed the men in and out of her attention, somewhere between her sassy dancing and before she collapsed on the floor, a drunk, vulnerable, exhausted mess.

If I had to pinpoint the moment, I'd say it was when she stumbled off the dance floor that my brother had installed in the living room. I held out an arm to support her, and she smirked at me. "I don't need your help," she said, surprisingly clear for someone who threw up on my shoes not two seconds later.

I held her up. She looked up at me, only for a moment, tears brimming over from the physical exertion of vomiting. She looked utterly miserable. She shook her head back and forth as she whispered, "Why? Why do I do this?"

I looked her in the eye and asked, "Why *do* you do this?"

But she just threw up again. I eyed my brother and mouthed, "Party's over, Ben."

Ben's a good kid. He didn't like the idea, but he was a nineteen year old college student that got to live in—and throw parties in—an old but big house provided by me, his older brother. We're nine years apart, but we're close. Always have been, even before our mom died.

Cassie was best friends with his girlfriend, Anne. As everyone filed out, I pushed a swaying Cassie

towards the couch. She quickly collapsed. Anne cast a wary glance at her friend, but when Ben whispered something in her ear, she giggled and followed him out of the house—and on to her apartment, I guessed.

I took hold of a clean corner of my sock, and managed to wiggle out of my shoe and sock without getting her vomit on my fingers. I wasn't so lucky with the other foot.

I washed my hands, turned off the lights, and filled up a large glass with water. I sat down on the edge of the couch.

"Wake up, party girl."

I heard a mumble, but she didn't open her eyes. I gave her cheeks a couple finger slaps until she opened her eyes.

"Drink this," I said.

"No," she whined.

I held up her head and pressed the glass to her lips. About halfway through, she turned her head away. "Drink," I said.

She shook her head and closed her eyes.

"Drink," I growled. I didn't give her much choice in the matter. I tipped the glass so that water ran into her mouth, and she swallowed to keep up. I stopped when she started coughing, and waited until she caught her breath. "Drink the rest or I pour it down your throat."

She passed out as soon as I took the glass away. I took off her shoes and covered her in a blanket.

The next morning, I woke in time to see her strapping on her sandals. I watched her from the doorway. She frowned at her vomit, and then started tiptoeing towards the door.

"Nuh-uh," I said. She looked at me in shock. "You're not leaving before you clean up the mess you made last night."

She blanched. "I can't touch that stuff, Greg. I'll get sick."

I handed her a roll of paper towels and went to fetch the mop and fill a bucket with soapy water. When I stepped out into the garage to get the bucket, she was on her way to her car. I jogged out to meet her.

"Carrie," I said.

She bit her lip. "You're Ben's older brother, aren't you?" She flashed a smile formulated to distract me. Her eyes sparkled, but her face was pale. "Thanks for the great party. I have to run!"

But I took hold of her arm, and she couldn't run anywhere. I pulled up her miniskirt and smacked her butt hard, three times. She gasped, looked around to be sure no one saw, and then turned her angry attention on me.

I put a hand up to halt her tirade before it began. "Clean up, or I'll bare your bottom out here and we'll have ourselves a little public discussion."

She swallowed, seemingly trying to decide whether or not I was serious. Evidently, she decided I was because she turned on her heel and slammed back into the house. I filled a bucket full of hot water and soap, and brought it out to her. Tears ran down her face, and she was pouting up a storm, so I left her to it and waited on the front porch.

"Thank you, Carrie," I said when she came out.

She frowned at me.

"Sit," I said.

She made a little sound of irritation, but she joined me on the porch swing. We sat in silence for a few moments, staring out at the sunny day.

"May I take you out to dinner Saturday night?"

"Hah!" she laughed unkindly and stood up. She looked me up and down as if I were an old fart—twenty-eight is *not* that old—and pranced towards her car.



I could see her point, though. I hadn't exactly swept her off her feet. And yet, I felt a little sadness as she drove away.

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I watched her whenever my brother threw a party. He continued to date Anne, and where Anne went, Cassie went. And vice versa. I couldn't figure Cassie out. She was the life of the party, always laughing and having the time of her life.

Or so it seemed.

At Ben's graduation party, she brought a boyfriend. Damon, his name was. Anne had complained to me one morning that she'd lost her best friend since this Damon guy had started dating her.

*This* Damon proved friendly enough. He was a people person, joking, and as much a life of the party as she had been. I would have thought him a perfect match, except the spark had seemed to drain out of her.

Cassie sat on the couch, quiet and still. She didn't drink, and she didn't dance. I couldn't believe myself, but I brought her a glass of red wine.

She smiled ruefully at it and then glanced towards Damon. I must have given her a look, because she accepted it. I wanted to sit and talk to her, but someone else called for a wine, and I had to go play host for my brother's bash. I was damned proud of him, graduating summa cum laude. He lived by the motto, "work hard, party hard." I wasn't much of a party guy, but I respected my little brother a hell of a lot. He was a great friend, a fun guy to be around, and a hell of a little lawyer to be.

It wasn't until I was heating up some hors d'oeuvres in the kitchen that I heard raised voices from the backyard. I stood in the shadows of the

doorway to the backyard, listening to Damon attack Cassie for flirting and being a slut.

I felt sick to my stomach.

I felt better when her mouth kicked in, and called him a few choice names and told him to go to hell. I felt even worse when he hauled off and backhanded her. I gripped the doorway as she fell to the grass, but then she jumped up almost as quickly as she'd fallen.

They exchanged a few more words that I couldn't hear, and he stalked off towards the street. I stepped out of the house and stood beside her.

She wiped her eyes and breathed away her sniffles. "Aren't you supposed to ride in on a white horse and beat him up for me or something?"

I raised an eyebrow at her. "I have no doubt that you could get rid of him, if you wanted to."

She frowned at me. "That's cold, Greg." She straightened her dress, struggling with her dignity. "I didn't ask for your help, anyway." With a hard glare to me, she added, "and maybe I deserved it."

The old Cassie stubbornness and determination was back. I didn't dare trample on it; I kept my mouth shut, because everything I wanted to say, she already knew.

"Seems to me you thought I deserved it, once upon a time," she hissed.

I frowned at her, and touched her cheek. "This is not the same thing as a spank," I said.

Her anger dissipated into a single tear that she quickly wiped away.

"Cassie, I would never hurt you like that."

She wiped another tear away. "Just shut up," she said, swallowing a sob.

I didn't. "There's nothing wrong with craving a dominant man in your life, Cassie. It doesn't make you less of a person, or mean that you aren't strong enough to stand on your own two feet. But when you go about choosing a dominant man, you choose

one who's going to love and care for you. Protect you, not hurt you."

I followed her to the bench, and she didn't say anything.

"Have dinner with me," I said. *Bad timing*, I told myself belatedly.

She gestured to the side of the house where her boyfriend had stalked off.

"I don't see a wedding ring on your finger yet."

She didn't answer. We sat in silence for awhile. I didn't really have anything to say, and she seemed comforted to sit next to someone safe for a few minutes. I hated seeing Cassie unhappy, but what could I do, but wait?

After five minutes of looking at the stars, she stood to go.

"Cassie," I said before she left. "You know where I am, if you ever *do* need a man on a white horse."

The sad smile she gave me kept me in love with her for the next three years that I didn't see her. I don't know the details, but she ditched the asshole soon after that night and went to New York for an internship in advertising. Anne and Cassie kept in touch, and I learned through Ben that she was quickly rising to the top, really making a name for herself. I couldn't be more proud, although I knew I had no claim to feel so.

I won't say that I moved to New York because of her. That would have been stupid, and just slightly scary in a stalker sort of way. But after I sold the little dot com that had supported me—modestly—through the dot com boom, an old college buddy offered me partnership in an internet café venture in New York. We wanted to build a national presence akin to Starbucks—doesn't everyone? Our dream started with five cafés that we bought out, and it was no coincidence that we contacted Cassie's firm to handle our advertising. And

definitely no twist of fate that Cassie was given the lead.

When we met to hear their presentation, Cassie was brilliant. If she'd never thrown up on my shoes, I probably would have been tongue-tied or intimidated in her presence. My partner, Eddie, was even impressed, which was a good thing, because he'd insisted on meeting with two firms. She looked gorgeous, in control, and happy. Best of all, there was a fire in her eyes and an obvious passion for her job.

We weren't a huge account, yet, so I was surprised when they courted us with dinner afterwards. And I could have cried when she brought a boyfriend.

Dinner ended and the wine started flowing, and we moved past the polite catching up that we'd been doing. I topped off her wine glass before I filled my empty one, and grinned at her.

"Are you going to throw up on my shoes again?" I teased.

Her boyfriend—Daniel—looked between us nervously, like he'd just realized that there might be more to me and Cassie's relationship than older brother of her best friend's husband. I felt a stab of my conscience, but I tossed it away. I don't, as a rule, encroach on another man's territory. But Cassie was different. Look, she just was. Maybe, probably, she was my one.

She averted her eyes and didn't take the bait.

We kept the conversation on business and polite topics for the rest of the dinner. Giving me tips on where to go in New York being a favorite topic. After dinner ended, we went to get our coats. Daniel excused himself to go to the men's room.

"He's safe," I said, although it came out as an accusation.

She buttoned up her coat and glanced towards the men's bathroom. "I'd think you'd understand that, Greg."

"I'm still waiting—" I corrected myself—"hoping for dinner."

She shook her head at me. "I don't know what you're waiting for. We've spoken, what? A dozen times? You hardly know me, and you're no more than an acquaintance to me."

It hurt, because I believed her. I wanted to point out that the few times we'd spoken, we'd shared ... shared something.

To add insult to injury, she called me days later to fix me up with one of her friends on a blind date. I accepted, only out of spite. I'm not sure what I was trying to prove, or if I was just trying to mend my dignity.

Hell, I wasn't sure what *she* was trying to approve.

She sounded surprised when I accepted. So when she called me three weeks later to hook me up with another friend, I accepted again. It became a sort of challenge, some sort of weird-ass game. I must have gone on fifteen blind dates before I took the initiative and called her.

"I need a date for a dinner party next weekend at Eddie's house." My partner had married a social woman about six months after I'd moved to New York. "Do you have any friends?"

I think I heard her purse her lips. "I have this fabulous new assistant," she said. "You'll love her."

I didn't love her, but I liked her a lot. I imagined that Cassie had hoped that I would hate her. She was more than a little overweight, but sweet. Quite a bit on the mousy side, but smart as a whip. I had no doubt that she wouldn't be an assistant for long.

When I picked her up, she went straight to the point. "Let's keep this light. I accepted Cassie's

offer because she's my boss, and because she's been a really nice one. She treats me like a friend, but I'm not interested."

I laughed. "I'm that bad-looking?"

She frowned at me, but quickly recovered into a smile. "I think you know exactly how attractive you are. You play that strong and silent type to the hilt."

"It's not an act, Missy."

She practically bared her teeth. "It's *Melissa*."

"Melissa, Cassie and I..." How could I put it? "I'm pretty fond of your boss." She rolled her eyes. I wasn't sure what that meant, so I went on. "Want to go out next weekend, too?"

She glared at me. "You want to use me."

I shook my head. "If I wanted to use you, I'd sweet talk you into going out with me again. I'm proposing a win-win situation. We go out, you get to seem to please your boss, and I get to see if I can make her jealous. Maybe we can double with her and Daniel?"

She didn't answer, but by the end of the night, she seemed to like me enough to take me up on the offer. Melissa called me Tuesday morning, and set up a date for Saturday night.

I should have known that dinner would be a disaster. The more she flirted with Daniel, the more I flirted with Missy. And the more Melissa kept kicking me under the table for calling her Missy. But my mind was on Cassie.

Daniel was a nice guy. Sweet. Funny. She had him wrapped around her pinky, but she didn't seem fully herself, next to him. I couldn't quite put my finger on it, so I suspected that it was mostly jealousy, on my part.

When dessert came, the worst happened. Evidently, our little flirting contest had given him the confidence to pull out a little black jeweler's box

and flip it open. I felt like someone had sucker punched me in the stomach.

He went down on bended knee and said all the right things. She had a big smile on her face, two hands on her cheeks in surprise.

"Will you marry me, Cassie?"

The whole restaurant quieted.

I stood up. "No," I said. A collective gasp rippled through the restaurant. I heard a single fork clatter on a plate, but the rest was dead silence. "Cassie, you say that we're only acquaintances, but we've shared some pretty powerful moments together. I *know* you. I know you like no one else knows you, and I can see you. He's not your heart's desire."

She shook her head at me in shock. Daniel seemed no less shocked.

"I love you," I said to Cassie.

Tears ran down her face. I don't like seeing someone I love cry, but I took it as a sign that she cared enough about me to be affected by my speech. Or maybe she was crying because I was ruining a perfect proposal. Or I suppose she could be crying from happiness. I hear girls cry, when their guy goes down on bended knee and shows her a pretty diamond.

Hell, if I didn't feel like crying myself, at the moment.

I glanced at Missy—Melissa—and she had pity in her eyes. And that's when I felt like dumb fool. A dumb, *damned* fool.

"Right," I said to her. "I'm just an acquaintance."

I stalked out of the restaurant and went home. I turned on the television, but sitting at home in Manhattan on a Saturday night watching TV made me feel even more lame. I turned off the television, poured myself a beer tumbler full of wine, and decided to sit and stew at myself in the dark.

I refilled my tumbler, and stared out my window. Maybe she was right. Truth be told, we hadn't exchanged that many words. God, I was a stalker fool.

Someone knocked at my door.

Melissa, I thought. Come to console me? She was such a nice girl. Or maybe Daniel, come to kick my ass. Hell, a punch in the face might feel good, at the moment.

I opened the door.

*Cassie*. I couldn't speak.

"Are you going to let me in?"

I did. I followed her to the couch, and she spotted my tumbler of wine on the coffee table. She helped herself to a swig. I helped myself to a glance at her left hand, but her coat sleeve was too long to tell if there was a ring on it or not.

"You're not just an acquaintance," she finally said.

I raised my eyebrow. "What is this, a pity visit?" I took the wine from her. "I don't need your fucking pity."

She sat down. "Five years ago, when we talked ...." She looked embarrassed. "When Damon ..." she cleared her throat and looked up at me.

"That wasn't the first time he hit you," I said.

She folded her hands together. "I wanted you to rescue me, but you told me that I could rescue myself just fine." She kind of shrugged. "In a way, you did rescue me, because you made me take a hard look at myself, and then I moved out here and fell in love with my career. It was the best thing I could have done."

I waited.

She pursed her lips together. "And I would be lying if I hadn't thought of that ... spank you gave me, years ago. And what you said about craving a dominant man."



"So you lied to me, about me only being an acquaintance."

She opened her mouth in surprise, and then took the tumbler from the coffee table. "You can be so damned direct sometimes, Greg." She shrugged out of her coat, crossed her legs, and placed her hands neatly in her lap.

I laughed. "What an overture."

She looked strained.

"All these blind dates ... and tonight ... you've been playing with me. Not to mention all this acquaintance crap. You've been stringing me along, keeping me in reachable distance, and yet pushing me away. You think that's the kind of manipulation I'm going to put up with?" I hadn't realized, until that moment, how angry I had been. I shook my head. "Cassie, I just don't know—"

She interrupted me. "I love you, too."

I wasn't quite appeased, but then she stood in front of me. She laid herself across my lap, and waited.

I couldn't believe it. She really wanted me to spank her. I sensed that by spanking her, I'd be sealing a commitment to her. After all these years of wanting it, I had a moment of second thought before my heart leapt in joy and relief. I pushed up her skirt and stared at her butt, which was smushed into control-top pantyhose.

I wiggled them down to her knees, and her butt was every bit as perky as it had been that afternoon, years ago. She didn't make a sound as I flipped her panties down, and I waited for her to lift up so I could pull them down to her knees, too.

"Cassie," I said, resting my hand on her two butt cheeks. "I'm going to spank you every time you step out of line. I'm probably going to accidentally spank you a few times when you don't. Misunderstandings are inevitable in a marriage, and I'm as fallible as the next guy."

I waited for her to say something, but she didn't.

"Probably the worst I'll ever do to you is take off my belt and whip your butt good." I waited for an objection. When there was none, I continued. "But I'll never treat you like Damon treated you. I want to give you a home. I want to give you a base to feel safe and protected, so that when you go out in the world, you can live to your full potential without any worries. I'm never going to tear you down. Not ever, do you understand that?"

She sniffled and nodded.

I ran my hand down her butt to her legs. I couldn't help looking at them, imagining that what lay between would be mine to touch. *All mine.* She took my breath away.

"Cassie, what do you need right now? What do you want?" I was suddenly gripped by an urgent compulsion to give her the world. "I'll do anything you want," I said, almost too desperately.

"Tell me you love me," she said.

I did, passionately.

"And now spank me."

So I did that, too. I made sure it hurt, even when giving her pain scared me. I reminded myself that a spanking never hurt anyone. I slapped at her butt cheeks, one by one, and then brought my hand across her butt like a big paddle. Compared to her little butt, my hand was pretty big.

By the time I'd worked my way down to her sit spot, she was crying. I quickened the pace to help her cry herself out, and she started crawling forward and off my lap. I clamped a hand down on her leg. I pulled her back and wrapped a hand around her waist. Then I attacked her butt with a vengeance, ignoring the sting in my own hand.

When she finally went limp and accepting, I turned her over. Tears ran down her face, and she had that same vulnerable, honest look she'd had

the night she'd thrown up on my shoes. I wiped her tears away and kissed her eyelids.

"I think you're prettiest like this. No games, no pretenses. Nothing but you, your true, vulnerable self."

She shook her head and kind of smiled, but she didn't look like she understood. She curled into me, though, and laid her head on my chest. I stroked her hair, and felt my heart flutter when she gave a sweet little sigh.

"I love you, Greg."

## Buddha Girl

Maya was one of those “green” girls. By that I mean she did yoga, ate mostly green stuff, didn’t eat sugar, meat, and a whole lot of other things I can’t remember. She was the real deal. She even meditated, breathing and shit every morning with her eyes closed and her eyebrows in an upside down V of concentration.

Like a little Buddha but skinny. Sexy. Cute.

Once, she wagged her little butt at me as she picked up our discarded clothes, and I asked her if she lived the lifestyle. She said yes.

It was another two days before I realized she meant the “green” lifestyle, not the “spanking” lifestyle. She certainly did live the “green” lifestyle, what with all the little festivals and fairs and events she went to.

It was cute.

I’m not quite sure how we hit it off so well, considering. I was a dog person, she had three cats. I liked vacations in casinos, she liked camping. I liked steak and potatoes for dinner, she liked green goo. I liked action movies, she liked chick flicks that made her cry. God, she loved crying. That part was a little weird, but I don’t mind crying. Pets, babies, commercials, movies—you name it—she cried.

We had nothing at all in common, save the fact we seemed to enjoy arguing, and we fit together. Great sex, of course, but it was more than that.

Maybe that’s what intrigued me most. With nothing in common, I was crazy about her. Why? The more I looked at her, listened to her, the more the mystery grew. The more I wondered why we hadn’t yet parted ways, the more I wanted to be with her to find out.

I didn’t even care that she wasn’t into the spanking lifestyle, she was so under my skin. Not

even after six months, not until she woke up one day and asked me why I'd asked her about living the lifestyle if I didn't recycle anything.

But that's the way she is. Just out of nowhere, she'll remember something from long ago, or suddenly connect the dots on something. And then she'll spring it on you. Her mind always sprints in circles.

So one day, she woke up—after six months of dating—and wondered what I'd meant about the lifestyle.

"Jon, what lifestyle?" she demanded. Short girls can make anger and demands look cute and sexy. Yeah, I was crazy about her. She continued, "You said, and I quote, you could never marry a girl who didn't live the lifestyle." She planted her hands on her hips and frowned up at me. "You certainly didn't mean the green lifestyle, because it's taken me six months to get you to recycle your coke bottles. What did you mean, the lifestyle?"

She can do that with fights, too. She'll randomly remember some sentence I uttered in the heat of the moment, five months ago. And throw it back in my face. Her brain, it's just amazing. It zips around at lightning speed.

To tell you the truth, I'm sometimes a little afraid of her.

I mean, she was all organic and female power. She'd take one look at my fetish and run out the door. God, she'd used the word *marry*. I didn't want her running out the door, that was for sure.

I took the coward's way out. "Lifestyle?" I asked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

She hissed and spat. "Liar!" She dropped a spanking magazine on the table. I looked at it. *Stand Corrected*. It must have been fifteen years old, buried at the bottom of some closet she'd taken it upon herself to clean.

That was another thing: she loved to clean. She called it "freeing up the energy." I called it cleaning, and I loved it. Until now.

"Old roommate," I croaked.

"Liar!" she said again, in that little spitfire voice that stuck in my head. "You've got three boxes of them!"

I grinned, I couldn't help it. "Okay, you caught me. I like a little kink, that's all."

She frowned at me, but she even had a way of making her frowns look cute. It was one of the reasons I enjoyed fighting with her so much.

"You said, and I repeat, you could *never marry a girl who didn't live the lifestyle.*" She lowered her voice to do her best impression of me speaking. I imagined I would've inflected the sentence just so. "So explain this to me."

I tried to laugh but it didn't sound like one. "Are you planning on marrying me?"

"At this moment?" she asked. "I'd say it's the last thing on my mind."

For a girl who wasn't thinking of marrying me, she sure talked about it a lot. Surprisingly enough, I liked the way it sounded, coming from her lips.

I sighed. "Okay, I like spanking girls. That's all."

She blinked.

I held my breath, waiting for her to fire up.

"That's all? That's *all*? Yes, my dear girl," she mimicked, "I just like to beat woman, that's *allllllll*." She drawled out the last syllable with enough venom to make me cringe.

"I don't beat women. Maya, don't you know me better than that?"

"My father beat my mother and I loved him." Her eyes went soft and wounded with hurt and betrayal.

My breath stopped. "Cripes, Maya, it's not like that."

We squared off and I waited for her scalding words. We could argue well. It was actually pretty fun, to tell you the truth. It didn't usually piss me off, considering how cute she looked mad. I'd learned the hard way not to mention that, because let me tell you, then she'd *really* blow her stack.

But I was going to stand and take it, not fight back. Hell, her father beat her mother. What was it like growing up like that? What did she feel when she discovered my magazines? Triggers to painful memories?

So I waited for her to attack. I'd let her yell at me for as long as she needed to, until she felt better.

A tear trickled down her cheek.

"Shit, Maya, don't cry. You know I'm not like that, right? You know I'd never hurt you."

She shook her head, backing away. I reached towards her, but she continued backing away. Suddenly, she screamed, "Get out!"

"Maya, let me—"

"Get out, Jon," she growled.

I looked at the door, at her, back at the door. "Um, this is my place—"

"I *said*, get OUT!" She'd backed up to the kitchen counter by then. She grabbed a plate and frisbeed it straight towards my neck. "GET OUT!"

"Okay!" I said, ducking the plate. "Okay! Let me know when you settle down so we can talk about—"

But now she'd stopped backing away and was ready for the attack again. "Get out, get out, get OUT!"

I hightailed it out of there.

---

I wandered around the city. Six months with Maya and I'd forgotten what I used to do on Saturdays. I felt lost. Usually she filled our day up

with this or that. I considered the movie theater, but that was a Maya thing to do. *I'd* never gone to movies before Maya, not much, anyway.

I went to two movies, went to a little stand and got two hot dogs (pork, the unhealthy kind) and a hamburger. I don't think she'd let me eat a hot dog since we first started dating.

Funny, it didn't taste as good as I remembered. I kept thinking of all the awful stuff she said were in them. When it turned dark, I made my way home, vowing to prove to her how much I loved her.

My apartment was quiet. I feared she'd left, but her car was still out front.

I tiptoed through my apartment, finally finding her sprawled on her back, sleeping in my bed. Her eyes were red and swollen, and she was sleeping the deep sleep that happens after a good cry.

When I kissed her nose, she stirred. Her eyelashes were so pretty, long and curled, that I kissed her eyelids with the softest brush of my lips. She stirred again, but I didn't want to fully wake her until she was awake in a different way.

I brushed my lips down her exposed throat, just the way she liked. I pulled the covers aside and kissed my way down her breastbone, down to her belly.

She opened her eyes.

I waited.

She blinked.

I kissed her, nipping at her upper lips with mine. She turned away, but I used my lips to nip at her earlobe. She scrunched her shoulder to her neck, giggling a little. I did it again, knowing how ticklish she was and how much she liked it.

I kissed down her neck, then back up towards her lips.

This time she didn't turn away.

I kissed her, touched all her sweet spots just the way she liked until she was arching for me. When



she was ready, I turned her over. I heard her breath catch, saw her go still. I ran my hand down her back and over her butt.

She didn't move.

I rubbed her butt with slow circles, pausing to dip my hands between her legs and check her wetness and encourage her arousal.

Very softly, afraid to break the mood, I whispered, "All you have to do is say 'stop, Jon.' That's the difference, and it makes all the difference in the world."

She was holding her breath, not yet relaxed. Her legs were pressed together and her hands were fisted. So I massaged her back with long, gentle strokes, rubbed down her arms and loosened her fists. I massaged her lower back and then even her butt. When she didn't object, I took hold of her legs and parted them.

She gave me a sharp intake of breath.

"Relax," I said. "I'm not going to spank you yet."

She did relax, so evidently she still trusted me. I thanked God for that. I massaged her legs and butt with more care, waiting for her to completely relax. Would I warn her before I spanked her? Or just do it?

I waited until her body went limp and loose, and then I massaged her longer than that. I crawled to the side of her while working my hands into her bottom. She didn't stir at my movement.

I started rubbing her bottom with the flat of my hand, waiting for her to object. I marveled at how her little butt was about the size of my hand. It was pretty firm, but my massaging seemed to loosen it up a bit.

I lifted my hand and smacked her ass, fairly hard.

"Ouch!" she cried. She arched her back and went up onto her hands.

"Lay down," I said, keeping compassion from my voice. I wondered if she would obey. Maya's not exactly the obedient type. She's more suited to giving orders and being in charge.

But she obeyed. "Good girl," I said. I rubbed and massaged her bottom as a reward. I didn't wait too long before I lifted my hand again and smacked it across her butt. This time I did it three times fast.

She didn't arch up this time, but she did crawl forward a little and sing, "Ow, ow, ow!"

I laughed to myself. She was as cute being spanked as she was when she was angry. I decided it was time for some reward, so I rolled her over and went down on her.

She almost climaxed, but I lightly smacked her leg. "No. No orgasm until we discuss throwing plates at me. You could have hurt me!"

"Only if you were too slow to duck!" she sassed.

I sat on the edge of the bed, and used both of her legs to pull and maneuver her over my lap. There was something heady about having her over my lap, completely in my power. I leaned down and whispered into her ear, "Just say 'Stop, Jon.' Use both words together, understand?"

She didn't say anything or give any indication that she'd heard me. I used my left hand to secure her down, and I smacked my right hand on her bottom again.

"Understand?" I asked again.

"Yes!" she cried.

"Good, because now I'm going to spank you for throwing a plate at my jugular." I lifted my hand again, ready to give her butt a good smacking.

"Wait!"

I stopped. I rested my hand on her bottom again.

"What is it, Maya?"

She didn't answer. She hadn't said 'stop, Jon' and I assumed she didn't want me to completely stop. But she wasn't speaking.

I put a note of warning in my voice. "Maya, talk. Or I start spanking."

I had to spank her bottom once more before she started talking.

"Is this going to hurt?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Am I going to cry?"

"Probably."

She paused, and then her voice came out all hurt and childlike. "Why do you want to do that to me?"

*Yee-ouch.* I felt a pang in my heart at that one. "Aw, shit, Maya, it's not like that. It's all not like what you think it is, that's why I want to show you. It's a package thing. I want you to feel safe and treasured and loved. If you don't like the whole package, then I'll never bring up spanking again, never think of it again, and throw away all my old magazines."

"You're nuts," she said, shaking her head as she leaned on one hand. "I don't see how getting spanked is going to make me feel safe and treasured and loved."

"Maybe it won't," I said sadly. "I hope it does, because I love you, I'd die to keep you safe, and you are the greatest treasure in my life right now."

She said nothing, not for a full minute. Then came a squeaky "okay."

"Okay?" I asked.

She huffed. "You've had some crazy ideas before and they turned out to be good ones. But if it turns out to be crazy, we're never doing it again."

Talk about pressure. "Deal."

She was a little nervous. Her bottom wasn't trembling, her hands weren't shaking, but she was nervous. When you love a woman, when you're

with a woman for awhile, you get to know how she feels, and Maya was nervous.

"I'm not going to hurt you," I said.

"I know," she said simply. "Because I'd beat you up if you did."

I would've laughed but I knew she was dead serious. It's part of her charm.

"Alright," I said. "Why am I spanking you again?"

She didn't answer.

I smacked her butt hard. "Maya, why are you getting spanked?"

She jerked and squeaked a little, but still didn't answer.

I'd spanked her hard enough that a red print of my hand spanned across both cheeks. When she still didn't answer, I used it as a guide to smack her butt five times in the same spot, each time a little harder.

"Answer me, Maya."

She was panting, but not yet crying. "Because I threw a plate at you."

I smacked her butt again. "Threw a plate at me," I repeated, and spanked her one time hard enough for her to grunt. "Threw a plate at me—" I spanked her again "—and could've hurt me." I spanked her another five times, still in the same spot.

She started wiggling a little. She was starting to feel it.

"It's one thing if you thought I was going to hurt you, if you threw a plate at me for self-protection, but that's not how it was, was it, Maya?"

She didn't answer *again*. I'd never spanked a non-spankophile before. Maya was not catching on to the "rules of the game."

I smacked her butt again. "Maya! Are you listening?" I smacked again. "When I ask a question, I expect an answer!" I spoke sharply, and

gave my words bite with a particularly hard smack a bit below the hands prints I'd already left.

"Cripes!" she cried. "I'm listening!"

I rewarded her with ten quick smacks that made her legs start kicking.

"Ouch, Jon, that hurts!"

I responded with another five. "Are you listening?" I smacked on one cheek, then the other. "Because I want to know what you were thinking." I started punctuating each syllable with a jarring spank. "Throwing a plate at someone may be cute in the movies, but it is most definitely not cute in real life."

I started smacking quickly, aiming to build up a good fire. I kept speeding up, smacking her harder and harder until she was kicking and squealing again. When she started to crawl off my lap, I held her in place and smacked the top of her legs a few times.

I stopped to let her catch her breath. "Now tell me what you were thinking when you threw that plate."

"I don't know," she said, her voice a bit trembly. "I was just mad, I wasn't thinking."

As I surveyed the results of my spanking, I said, "You're about to learn that the consequences for not thinking are not fun at all." I ran my hand over her bottom to check for where my hand had caused the little swelling of a spanking and which parts still needed more attention.

There's something about watching a girl's bottom go red. It's heady. I suspect it's some male instinct, like a dog marking his territory or something. I'm not saying I enjoy hitting a woman. It's just a spanking thing, a my-hand-to-her-butt thing.

It is what it is.

Her bottom flamed red across the middle, and I'd reddened her good below that, but I hadn't

gotten to the bit at the sit spot. I pushed her forward over my one knee, pushed her legs out, then rested my legs across the back of her knees.

And saw a whole lot of white space, just waiting for me to color.

"Now we start the punishment part," I said.

Her breath caught again. "What?" she whined. "No!"

I paused a moment, waiting to see if she'd use the safety phrase. She didn't. I wondered if she'd forgotten. I leaned down and put my hand to her face. "You remember to say 'stop, Jon' if it gets too much, right?"

She nodded, and when I pulled my hand away, it was wet with tears. Was she really willing to go all the way with this?

She started whispering.

I leaned in, "Honey, I can't hear you."

She cleared her throat. "I'm sorry I threw a plate at you. I wouldn't want to hurt you." She hung her head, still clinging to the carpet to balance herself over my knee.

"I've already forgiven you, Maya. This is just about making sure it doesn't happen again."

She nodded. So I set about making her cry. No easy task, let me tell you. I stuck to one side of her butt at the sit spot, and smacked fast and furious. In only seconds, she was wriggling and crying out. I paused to give her two wide smacks across her butt to let her breathe for a second, then set about spanking the same sit spot.

She started nearly crying but mostly crying out, and I paused to give her five, slow smacks across the middle again.

Then I attacked the other cheek, still nearly white at the sit spot. She nearly kicked out of my grasp at that one, but I had a good hold on her. I did let up for twenty or thirty fast ones, but she wasn't ready to go over that edge.

I returned to smacking the middle of her butt, slow enough to give her time to use the safety phrase and catch her breath.

"Is this all you care for our relationship? Attacking me?" I added all the anger I could muster—which wasn't much—to make each smack harder. "Is this all the trust you have for me, that you feel you have to throw a plate at me? That you feel you need to protect yourself from me?"

I did big smacks, letting my words sink in with each stroke.

"If we have to have this conversation again," I said, "we will do it with the hairbrush."

I got a good hold on her, because I started an all-over assault. From the backs of her thighs to the middle of her bottom, I left no spot unmarked. I struck her bottom fast, hard enough that my hand was numb and tingly.

She seemed to sense that I would not stop until she was crying. Her struggling ceased, as did her wiggling. For a few moments, the only sound in the room was my relentless smacking of her butt.

And then she burst. Her shoulders shook with sobs and she cried with her whole heart. I didn't stop. I slowed, though. I matched my pace to her sobs, pushing her to cry everything out, to let everything go. When her crying slowed, my hand sped up. When her sobs increased, I spanked slower.

I only stopped when I knew she'd gone over the edge. I pulled her up into my arms, rocking her and kissing her face while she continued crying and mumbling "I'm sorry."

I rubbed my hand in circles on her bottom, stopping to pat it now and then to comfort her. She just buried her head in my chest and cried.

I don't think I can explain the desire to protect her that overwhelmed me at that moment. The need, the sudden knowledge that I'd die for her. I

laid her on the bed and rolled her on her stomach. I grabbed some lotion from the bedside table, squirted it on her bottom, and started massaging it in.

Gradually, she stopped crying. Pretty soon after, she started moaning. After that, I found out just how much the spanking had turned her on.

When we finished, she was grinning. "That was one heck of an experience," she piped.

We lay facing each other. I pushed her hair behind her ear so I could see her eyes. They were trusting, relaxed, happy.

She blinked her eyes almost shyly. "So how often is this spanking for punishment thing going to happen?"

"When you deserve it."

"I'm not sure I like it." She tried to frown, but the corners of her mouth were stuck in the curled-up position.

"Do you trust me?"

"Maybe." We sat in silence for awhile, cuddling.

I figured that was fair. She didn't say anything else until I was nearly asleep.

"Will you spank me when we fight?"

"No."

"Why not?"

I opened my eyes to study her. "You think you deserve a spanking when we fight?"

"Only sometimes. I do have a temper." She almost giggled with sheepishness.

I tried not to chuckle out loud. "No spankings for speaking your mind, no matter how you speak it." If I told her the truth, that I thought she was cute when mad, or that I enjoyed our verbal tennis sometimes, she'd throw it back in my face a few months down the road during a fight.

We fell asleep soon after that, locked with our arms around each other.



When I woke up, she was gone. I panicked. I cursed myself. I tore through the house, looking for a note or explanation.

Nothing.

What had I done? Had I misread things? Gone too far? Scared her?

Then the door opened and relief washed through me. Maya bundled through the door with three plastic trashcans.

"Where've you been? What's this?"

She smiled at me, almost shyly, but didn't speak. She lined the three cans up on one side of my kitchen, pulled out a marker, and labeled them "Paper," "Plastic," and "Aluminum."

Turning to me, she said, "If I'm going to live your lifestyle, then you have to live mine."

I smiled, but it popped up as a grin. I tried to tone it down to a smile, but my face wouldn't hear of it. "Shit, Maya. I have to recycle?"

"And no more hot dogs. I could smell them on your breath last night."

"Shit," I said again.

"And you have to eat something green at every meal."

I paused, pretending that might be a deal breaker. "I suppose I can handle that, if I get to turn your bottom red *after* every meal."

Her eyes popped. "After every single meal?!"

I laughed. "Naw."

She held out her hand. I looked at it. She said, "It's a deal then." As we shook, she added, "I'll marry you."

A laugh barked out of me. "You will, will you?" But I held my arms open and she jumped on me, hugging me and wrapping her legs around me.

"Yes," she said, kissing me. "But you'd better propose at La Dolce Vita with a nice, pretty

diamond." We locked lips for a few minutes before she pulled back. "On bended knee."

"Yes, ma'am," I said.

## Detective Girl

You might be surprised that she said yes. Hell, I was. *Get married?* But she did, and we did, and now we've gone and bought a house, just like any normal newlywed couple.

But normal, we're not.

First off, we're a bit old to be settling down for the first time. Me at forty-two, Mandy at thirty-five. She doesn't look it. And with my hair elegantly salt and peppering, I can't say as I look as young as my age.

Second, I'm a private investigator, and she's my, well ... hell, she's my secretary, even if she'd put up a fuss if I described her as such. To her credit, she does a heckuva lot more than answer phones and take notes. Pretty much runs my business and watches my back, besides. She's come up with a few good leads on her own, too. Damn smart cookie, she is.

So I call her my business manager, and she calls herself my partner. When she's mad at me, she calls herself my CEO.

She's a spunky thing.

Like now, I could hear her giving a customer a piece of her mind. I stepped out into the reception area. He looked both familiar and harmless, although I couldn't put my finger on why he seemed familiar.

"I'm Richard Hunter." I offered my hand.

"Andy Duncan." He sent a glare to my wife but then he chuckled towards me. "A real Dick, then?" He chortled.

I clapped him on the back like I'd never heard the joke before and thought it funny. And for the glare, I clapped him a little harder than normal.

"Come in, have a seat," I said, pointing to the shortest chair in front of my desk. "What can we do for you?"

"My wife's cheating on me."

The usual, I thought. I took down the details, ignored my wife waving at me through the window and gesturing for me not to accept the case. We made most of our money on marriage surveillance.

As soon as he left, Mandy exploded. "That's the bastard we nailed for cheating on his wife two years back! And now he wants to pick bones with his wife for cheating on him? I say, good for her!"

Now I remembered why Andy seemed familiar. Last time I saw him, I'd been taking a picture of his butt while he was going at it with a prostitute. It had been remarkable. Our business has a reputation of not just catching cheating husbands and wives with their lovers, but catching them on film doing the dirty deed.

Andy had a remarkable butt because it was round. Not firm and flat like a man's, but two perfectly round globes that had bobbed while he'd pumped the prostitute.

"Okay, Mandy, calm down. We need to pay the bills, do the work." She was cute when she was mad, though. "Get me the file."

"Try please," she demanded, hair swinging down to her chin on one side and eyes daring me to defy her.

I stood in front of her and held her chin with my fingers, enjoying the defiance in her eyes. "Please," I said in *that* voice I use when I'm about to spank her. I lowered my voice a notch. "Get the file."

She shivered, all defiance gone. Five minutes later she popped into my office. "Can't find the file."

Her eyes darted to the side and around the room, and once in awhile she'd look me straight in the eye as if to prove she was being straight with me. I pulled open the drawer that held my ruler, and her eyes went wide.

"It was two years ago! And you don't need it anyway. You can't do this job. He cheated on her first, and he's a jerk who deserves it."

I stood up, ruler in hand. "Mandy, you file everything away. Yesterday you dug up a note I had written to myself on a napkin over five years ago." I rapped the ruler against my other hand in warning. "You want me to believe that you can't find a file that you don't want me to find?"

She rocked back out of the doorway and then back in, unsure whether to fight or retreat. I strode towards her.

"You want to get me that file, or do you want a spanking for not getting it for me?"

"But it's gone!"

I laughed. "Okay, if you want to play with that lie. You want a spanking for losing the file?"

I love the way Mandy wrings her hands when she's unsure whether to fight me or just let me give her a spanking. She took off running towards the front door. I made it in time to slam the door shut before she could slip through.

"Honey, I've been doing this a hell of a lot longer than you."

She pursed her lips. "I'm telling you, I can't find it."

"And I'm telling you, if you don't 'fess up, you're goin' over my knee."

A flash of fear whipped across her features. She covered with anger and crossed her arms over her chest. She started to say something, shut her mouth, and then said, "I can't talk to you." She gave me a wide berth, and I let her stomp out of the office.

I grinned as she left. *You can run, I thought, but you can't hide.*

She pretended like nothing had happened when I got home. She fussed over dinner, but she was nervous. I could tell by the way she chattered

through our meal. Once we got to the bedroom, she set about distracting me right quick.

She got on her knees on the bed, pulling my tie off and making all the right moves to make me forget my intentions. I kissed her back and lulled her into complacency. I let my hands trail down her back and stop on her butt.

She stilled. Mandy's a smart one. I lifted my hand and smacked her butt a good one.

"Hey!" She put her hands on her hips, playing outraged. "You can't do that!"

I laughed. I turned her to the side and pushed her neck down towards the bed, leaving her butt sticking up. Slick move, if I say so myself.

I slapped her butt a few more times, just to show her I could.

"We've got a spankin' to settle first," I said.

Expletives streamed out of her mouth. I admired her spunk, but kept smacking away. She resisted at first, fighting the pain and playing mad at me. I kept my hand at her neck and used my spanking hand to pull down her pajama bottoms. No panties to contend with, thank goodness.

Now my slaps made a satisfying cracking sound when applied to her butt, often followed by a little squeal. When she stopped fighting, she started panting in an effort to control the pain.

But the point was that I was in control. I smacked fast so she couldn't think and couldn't fight the pain. She wiggled. She tried to get away, but eventually her body relaxed. Gave up trying to fight the inevitable.

I stopped. I didn't want to make her cry, not today. What the hell do I care if she doesn't want to bring me the file? I slipped my hand between her legs. After unzipping myself, I took one leg in each hand and slipped myself between her legs.

Sweet, sweet girl.

Mandy woke early. She swung her legs out of bed before grabbing her running shoes. After lacing up and wrestling against the idea of just crawling back in bed, she stood up.

And immediately sat back down with a plop. She grinned wide. She'd take a spanking for something she hadn't done any day. Especially if it meant that Rick would go at her until she couldn't walk the next day for all the loosey-goosey happy feelings in her.

Suddenly she realized he wasn't snoring anymore. She turned and saw his brown eyes twinkling at her.

"Get over here," he said.

---

"A costume party?" Mandy started to smile. "I like undercover work."

I neglected to point out the fact that she had never done any undercover work. Surveillance on Carol Duncan struck me as a safe way for her to get a little experience. I actually didn't even expect Carol to meet her lover at the costume party, but Mandy could use a little practice. I love that ambitious look she gets in her eye and the way she always achieves what she sets her mind to.

"Andy will be gone all weekend on a business trip—"

"Probably boinking another prostitute," Mandy interrupted.

I ignored her. "So if Carol is cheating, that will be the prime weekend for it. I'll follow her in the car, and you can keep an eye out for her at the party."

"But she knows me, remember?"

"You'll be in costume. And if she does recognize you, improvise." I smiled at her. "You're pretty good at fibbing under pressure."

I gave her bottom a good swat and enjoyed her squeal. After picking up the file, I added, "But no matter what, you don't go anywhere without me. No following without backup. We don't know what she's up to or who she's with."

She rolled her eyes at me as she turned to go out to her desk.

I dropped the file on the desk. She stopped and then turned. "That the Duncan file?" She frowned. "The old one?"

"Yep." I waited a beat to see if she would say anything. "Tell me the truth now, did you hide it, or did you just put very little effort into finding it?"

"I didn't hide it!"

I raised an eyebrow at her. That always makes her confess, for some reason.

"Okay, I didn't turn myself inside out looking for it, but I did look for it."

I nodded dismissively and turned to my computer to get on with work.

"Don't you feel bad for spanking me when I didn't deserve it?"

I laughed. "Not particularly."

---

Mandy resisted the urge to scratch at the white gothic-style make up on her face. Black lipstick added to the effect, too. She teased a few strands of the hair she'd washed pink, and tugged at the black leather skirt.

She felt pretty kick-ass, dressed up as a Dominatrix. She didn't much like the running every morning, but it did allow her to eat cake and fit into cool clothes, now and then. She passed Carol several times on the dance floor, but Carol didn't seem to recognize her.

"Wanna dance?" A tall, dark and handsome man loomed over her. "Ma'am," he added with a tease, gesturing towards her outfit.



She giggled and then mentally kicked herself. Kick-ass undercover private investigators do *not*, she was sure, giggle. Nor do Dominatrixes.

"Sure," she shrugged.

He introduced himself as Martin, but didn't flirt too much. Which was a good thing, because she wasn't much interested. Richard was so perfectly who and what she wanted, she hadn't even window-shopped men since they'd met.

And Martin the man wasn't as interesting as Carol's reaction to their pairing on the dance floor. Carol nibbled on the munchies, but she couldn't stop glancing over. Mandy frowned. Either Carol recognized her, or Martin was Carol's lover.

"I think someone is a little jealous," she tested.

Martin looked down at her. "You're pretty observant."

She let that pass as he spun her out into a turn and then pulled her back into position. She considered asking more questions, but decided that she had her answer.

At the end of the song, she stepped back. "Nice to meet you, Martin ..." She dragged it out like a question, fishing for his last name.

He just smiled. "Now how did you get an invite to my party without knowing my name?"

She gulped, but Martin had turned towards Carol.

Mandy faded back against the wall and watched. After a hushed and whispered spat, they headed towards the back door. She considered running to tell Richard, but was afraid she'd lose them. She worried for a moment that he would be mad at her, but shoved the thought aside as she made her way to the back door.

Martin and Carol headed straight for the pool house. *Cliché*, Mandy thought. Cliché enough that if they did the statistics on their cases, probably

twenty percent of their marriage infidelity photos were taken through pool house windows.

She pulled her tiny digital camera from the little pocket she'd sewn into the inside of her black leather skirt. She grinned in the dark, feeling like a cross between a sexy Dominatrix and a kick-ass spy chick.

With careful steps, she snuck up to the window and peered in.

They were fighting louder now, and she took a couple pictures. She waited to see if they'd do the dirty deed. Stealing a glance towards where she suspected Richard's car was, she wondered again if she should go get him.

Then she heard a scream.

Without thinking, she ran for the pool house door and kicked it open. "Get away from her!"

Martin looked up from Carol's butt, paddle in hand. "You again," he said.

"Let her go!" Mandy ran at him with the crop, reigning blows on him.

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I saw two shadows steal across the back yard. When a third one followed, I knew who that was. Fear gripped my heart, and I opened the car door. I slammed it shut behind me, forgetting to be quiet. Hadn't I told her not to follow without me?

As I ran up past the house, I remembered the time I had stumbled upon a wife cheating on her husband with a kidnapper. Except she hadn't known he was a kidnapper, not until he held a gun to her head in a pool house just like this one.

I heard a scream.

I abandoned all attempts at a quiet approach and sprinted full out.

When I got to the door, Mandy was attacking Carol's man with her crop like a crazed housewife

going after a wily mouse. I saw it was Martin with Carol, and breathed a sigh of relief.

Then I breathed again to settle my adrenalin. The punch of anger followed fast.

"Mandy," I said, keeping firm reign on my temper. "Hand me the crop."

I think that was the first moment that she realized my presence. By the look in her eyes, I knew she understood that she was in trouble. She damn sure knew I'd been clear that she wasn't to follow Carol anywhere without contacting me so I could back her up. She handed me the crop reluctantly.

"Martin," I said, nodding my greeting. "I didn't suspect."

He shook his head. "I'm just her disciplinarian." He touched Carol's shoulder protectively. "Do we need to disclose this to her husband?"

I shrugged. "We can work something out." Money's money, and business has been a little slow of late. I turned back towards my fidgeting wife.

"Turn around."

Her face went red, and the blush flooded down her neck. She looked at Carol and then at Martin. Then she looked at me.

I waited until she obeyed. She fingered the hem of the short leather skirt.

"Bend over."

I'd never seen her so reluctant, but then I'd never punished her in front of an audience. She bent over about an inch.

I waited.

She finally bent over far enough to make her butt a good target. I raised the crop and aimed for the naked flesh just below that cocky leather mini-skirt. I pretended the crop was a cane, and whipped it down.

*Thwap!*

She sucked in a breath.

I tossed the crop to Martin. "Let's go," I said to my wife.

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When my anger left, I felt only hollow determination. Mandy's face streamed with tears as she stood in our bedroom, wringing her hands. I shut away my instincts to stop and kiss away my wife's tears.

"I usually enjoy spanking you, Mandy." I stepped behind her and pulled her blouse up and over her head. She raised her arms compliantly to make it easy. I hooked my fingers under her bra clasp, and released it. "Even when you've misbehaved a little. I don't mind making you cry a little; it makes you happy in the end. And besides, you look pretty damn cute when you're getting spanked."

I sat on the bed and pulled her hips towards me. I reached under her skirt and pulled down her panties. "Step out." I threw them on top of her shirt and bra. "Give me your foot."

As I took off her sandals, I continued lecturing. "But putting yourself in danger is a whole different ballgame. Putting yourself in danger *carelessly*, when it was easy enough to run ten yards and get backup..." I shook my head. "That's just plain stupid, and you're not a stupid girl."

"But he wasn't a dangerous guy, in the end! You knew him! Everything was fine!"

I slapped the front of her thigh real hard. "You didn't know that when you followed him," I snapped back.

She looked stunned at my anger, and then her face crumpled into tears. She put two hands over her face while she cried, a gesture I'd never seen her use before. She was entirely naked, save her skirt. I turned her around, lifted the skirt, and smacked her bottom real loud.

"Get in the corner and hold your skirt up. If you're giving me excuses and backtalk, then you haven't considered your misconduct with the seriousness I expect of you."

Mandy fled to the corner. She doesn't like crying in front of people. As spunky and confident as she is, she doesn't like showing weakness. The corner, for her, was more a safe place to hide than a punishment. Once she stopped crying, she'd realize her bare butt was on display, and she'd get embarrassed. And I knew she'd consider her actions after the embarrassment started to fade and boredom set in.

I left the room to leave her to it. I needed some time myself. Usually I don't feel angry. I couldn't remember a time she'd disobeyed me on something serious, and I wanted to make sure that she was so impressed by this punishment that she didn't even consider it in the future.

After a good thirty minutes, I returned to the bedroom. I opened the closet and rooted around in the back corner until I found the cane.

I laid it on the bed.

"Come here."

She obeyed, eying the cane. "I'm afraid of the cane," she said in a small voice.

"Maybe you'll think of that before you go disobeying me next time." I used my finger to tip her head up. "You afraid of me?"

She shook her head. I unbuckled my belt and her eyes went wide. I pulled it from my jeans, folded it in half, and laid it by the cane. Her gaze followed the belt like a cat's gaze follows prey.

"You afraid of the belt, too?" I asked.

She just nodded.

"I expect you to be a little afraid. Maybe you'll understand the terror I felt when I saw you disobeying me and then heard a scream." I let that

settle in before I added, "You let me know if you get too afraid, though."

A tear plopped on the comforter. "Rich, I'm sorry. I really am."

I was pleased that her apology was genuine and not an attempt to lessen her punishment. I rubbed her back for a little while to let her know that I loved her and cared for her, in case she didn't get that message from the punishment I was about to give her.

"This isn't going to be like our normal spankings."

She answered quietly. "I understand."

I picked up the cane. "Bend over, then."

I put a hand on her back to help her stay in place. I planned on giving her six across the butt, hard enough to welt good and serve as a reminder over the next couple days. I didn't want to torture her, though, so I planned on making it mercifully quick.

I held her down, and striped her with six hard ones real fast. Best get the worst over with. She gulped at air on a squeak at the first one, and when the last one cut her, she was still holding her breath.

"Does that make my point?" I asked.

She nodded. The pain must have suddenly occurred to her, because she started dancing with her feet and ouching. She was good, though. She didn't move out of position. Pride swelled within my heart. If you can say anything about Mandy, you can say that she's got courage and strength.

I picked up my belt and palmed the buckle. I wrapped a good portion of the length around my hand. "Next time you think of running after a target when I've forbidden it, you remember what this belt feels like on your legs."

I stood at her side, pulled her waist to nestle at my hip, and whipped the belt down towards her

legs. I licked at her legs with the belt until I'd covered most of her pretty skin.

Then I sat down while she danced, more from exhaustion than anything else. It was hard work, punishing the love of my life. My resolve faltered when I saw tears dripping down her face.

And then I reminded myself of the danger she'd put herself in.

"Come on over my lap, now."

She bounced her head with dejection. "Aww, man, I hate that!"

I was relieved to hear her spunk. I patted my lap and she came to me. Believe it or not, Mandy hates hand spankings more than anything. She is also reassured by them more than any other spanking. Evidently, my hand is more personal to her, more of an intimate reproach than any lecture I can give her.

Her little skirt had slid back down, so I pushed it back up. Her legs had a few little red welts, but not many. Her butt was a different story. The six cuts of the cane were clearly marked valleys, with lines on either side.

"Don't you ever disobey me like that again." I raised my hand and smacked her butt. "Don't you ever go running into an unknown situation without backup."

I spanked her until she relaxed and gave in to the pain. And then I kept at spanking her until I felt tears falling on my feet and soft, moist hands grabbing my ankle for comfort. I spanked her a few more times for good measure, and then stood her up on her feet.

She cried.

I resisted the urge to take her into my arms just yet. "Put your hands down," I said when she covered her face. She busied her hands fiddling with her skirt, and her gaze darted from beyond my shoulder then down to the floor. Back and forth.

Finally, she took a deep, shuddering breath between sobs. "I'm sorry, Richard."

I held out my arms. "Come here, Mandy." I tugged off her skirt while she cried, and then wrapped her in the big, fluffy robe I'd bought her for Christmas. I pulled her up on my lap and rocked her.

I'll be damned if a tear or two didn't run across my own cheek.

"Don't ever scare me like that. When you're ready and trained for the risks of the job, I swear to God that I'll let you fly with your own wings. But until then, I'm in charge of our work, and you need to listen to me. I have twenty years of experience, and you've been here for three."

She wouldn't look up at me, so I petted her hair. "You've got spunk and talent and guts. Add a little experience and training, and you'll put me out of business," I teased.

She giggled, and I felt a wave of relief rush through me. "You okay, Mandy?" I asked softly.

"Of course," she said. "We okay?"

I was taken aback. "Of course we're okay. That's not what this was about."

"I know, but ..." She peered up at me. "Do you forgive me?"

"Honey," I said, "that's a given." I reached under the robe and rubbed her bottom. She winced as my hands massaged the soft and swollen flesh. I kept rubbing; I liked the feel of the soft welts.

We rocked for a little while longer before I added, "But I'll do it again. You understand?"

She nodded. "That hurt like hell," she said.

"Watch your mouth."

She sucked in a breath, looked up at me, and then laughed when she realized I was teasing her. And when I saw her twinkling eyes, I gave her a kiss every bit as hard as the spanking had been.



