

Bad Girls

**By
Michelle Carlyle**

Bad Girls

By
Michelle Carlyle

A Newsite Web Services Book
Published by arrangement with the author

All rights reserved.

Copyright 2006 © by Michelle Carlyle

This book may not be reproduced in whole or part,
by mimeograph or any other means, without
permission of the author or Newsite Web Services,
LLC

Published by Newsite Web Services, LLC
P.O. Box 1286, Loganville, Georgia 30052 USA
disciplineanddesire@hotmail.com
disciplineanddesire.com

DEDICATION

For Frank, my ultimate fantasy man, you make all
my dreams come true.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Teacher's Pet	
Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	15
The Art Thief	
Chapter One	30
Chapter Two	45
The Hacker	59
The Storm	73
The Bet	87
The Gambler	
Chapter One	102
Chapter Two	116
The Gangster's Daughter	131
The Secretary	145
The Vandal	160
Her Own Personal FBI Agent	174
The New Boss	
Chapter One	189
Chapter Two	204
The Nightmare Above	
Chapter One	219
Chapter Two	233
The Competition	
Chapter One	246
Chapter Two	259

Teacher's Pet

Chapter One

Nicky hated him. Hated him. Mr. Professor, so full of himself. Insufferable. How she was going to get through this semester, she had no idea. It didn't help that he was hot. Really hot. Tall, sandy blonde hair, beautiful blue eyes, wonderful timbre to his deep voice, amazing body. But that was all beside the point. The man was a narcissistic jerk. The way he soaked up all the adoration from the nubile young college girls, it was sickening. He was old enough to be their father.

Nicky could barely believe she was there. If that nosy creep at work hadn't found out her secret, she'd be in her corner office overlooking the River having important meetings with clients. But no, here she was, forced into completing her degree. She had no idea how Brad The Moron had sniffed out her lie, but he had. She was two classes shy of a Master's degree, but had lied on her resume and put down that she'd achieved it. And, after she'd been promoted above Brad, somehow Jerkface had found out and told the boss. Mr. Jameson had taken Nicky aside and given her the option. Take a sabbatical from work and finish the degree or quit. Luckily, she was the top performer of her group. Brought in ten million dollars in advertising sales in the previous year alone. Nicky knew her career was over if she didn't take the opportunity. So, here she was, surrounded by children half her age, listening to some moron lecture about History. As if she cared.

Lance noticed the woman the first day. Women his age had a tendency to stand out because there were so few of them. Especially, this woman. A tall redhead, she was exactly his type. But, aside from that, what really stood out was her attitude towards him. First of all, she sat in the back. Women who returned to college at her age never sat in the back,

they were always in the front. They always paid the closest attention, did the best work, were the most dedicated. But, not this woman. After the first week, she stopped paying attention to him. Completely. She sat at her laptop and never once looked up. Even the football players that surrounded her paid attention to him. While obviously somewhat bored, the football players listened and laughed at his jokes. But, not Miss Nicole Winters. And, when she did look up at him, she glared. It looked like she hated him. Which was unsettling. He knew he was the most popular teacher on campus, and he was used to the fervent (although mostly annoying) attentions from the young college women. While he didn't want her to fawn over him, he, at least, deserved her attention.

By the third week, she was distracting him so much, he finally decided to involve her in the class, whether she liked it or not. Maybe if he started engaging with her, she'd come around.

"Miss Winters, what do you think?" he finally asked after lecturing on the Saxons taking over Northern Europe.

Nicky didn't answer because she was engrossed in picking out a new lipstick color.

"Miss Winters? In the back?" Lance asked again, more loudly.

Nicky noticed out of the corner of her eye that some of the kids were looking at her. When she looked up at them, she noticed the whole class was staring at her. And, Mr. Obnoxious himself, Dr. Lance Hamilton.

"What?" she asked. The kids all broke up.

Lance said, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I was asking your opinion on the subject."

"What subject?" she asked, irritated. Why was this jerk talking to her?

"The subject upon which I'm lecturing today. You are in my class, are you not?"

"I appear to be," Nicky retorted, meeting the man's eyes. If he wanted to tangle with her and try

to embarrass her, he had another trick coming.

"Well, then, I'd appreciate your attention."

"Well, you obviously have it, now. What was the question?"

Hostile, she was completely hostile towards him. Lance knew how to deal with troublemakers, although it had been a long time since he'd had to. And he'd never had a problem with an adult before. But he wasn't about to back down. This was his classroom, his domain, and his students were there to learn. Period.

"We were discussing the Saxons. Why do you think they began to take over Northern Europe?"

"What does it matter what I think about it? You're the teacher. It matters what you think, not what I think."

Now, all eyes were on her, fixed upon her. Curious eyes, hostile eyes. Someone was daring to speak back to a campus God?

"Well, Miss Winters, despite what you seem to think about professors, I care about what my students think. And I'm interested in what you think. Now, if you haven't been paying attention and don't know about the Saxons, I understand your reluctance to take part—"

"I know about the Saxons."

"Oh, you do. Well, perhaps you'd enlighten us on your opinion of why they decided to take over the Northern European lands. What were their goals, what were their objectives?"

"Oh, for God's sake. The Saxons' goals were the same as Hitler's, as Alexander's, President Bush, as every damn CEO in this country. And, yours, Mr. College Professor. All you guys, all the males in power everywhere want the same thing, total domination. Total control. There was no need for the Saxons to push into Northern Europe; they had all the resources they needed in their own lands. It was all due to the ego of the leaders. All the Crusades, the World Wars, it's all about the glorification of some megalomaniac's penis. You

guys want to control everything, spread your seed as far as it can go. That which you can't impregnate, you kill. It's no mystery. All history boils down to the same thing. Some power-hungry man who wanted the entire world to worship at the altar of his dick," she bit out caustically.

As upset inwardly as Lance was by this pointed attack, he knew he couldn't let his emotions show or he'd lose control of his class.

"While I'm flattered by your comparison to me and the likes of Alexander, I must object to the simplification of all history. If you read the material I assigned, you'd see that it wasn't just some misguided man with penis issues deciding to take over Northern Europe, there were religious and economic issues at stake."

"Yeah, right."

"Perhaps you'd like to discuss this with me after class."

"Not really."

"Perhaps I'd like to discuss this with you after class."

"Whatever."

"Apparently, Miss Winters doesn't have the passion for history that many of us do in this class. Perhaps you'd be happier in another class, Miss Winters."

"No doubt. Unfortunately, I'm stuck here."

"I can arrange for you to leave."

"No need."

"Well, if this class isn't suiting your needs, perhaps another will."

"Can't. Have to take this one. Because believe me, I'd rather be anywhere else."

"Miss Winters, while I don't understand your hostility nor your motives for taking this class, I require my students to pay attention and do the assignments."

"Oh, for God's sake, get over yourself, Mr. Hamilton. Oh, excuse me, Dr. Hamilton. I am paying for a service. You are providing that service."

Whether or not I decide to pay attention to you is my business, not yours. If you aren't happy with my performance in this class, I suggest you ignore me and concentrate on the nubile young fans in the front rows who are obviously feasting upon your greatness in the manner to which you have become accustomed. But just because I am not hanging on your every word does not mean I will not be able to hand in your assignments nor pass your tests."

Lance, stood there, stung, furious. So mad he couldn't hide it. At least, the young women in the front seats looked as angry as he; it did provide some comfort. But, he had to get a handle on this woman, and yesterday. No one treated him like this in his class and got away with it. He flashed on a time when he misbehaved in grade school and got paddled. It was all he could think about now. Bending that brat over his desk and making mincemeat of her tender behind.

"Please see me after class, Miss Winters."

"Are you gonna give me detention?" she spat.

"Just see me after class."

"Whatever," Nicky said, and then she returned to her laptop. She had no intention of talking to the jerk after class or anytime after that. Besides, she had a hair appointment. Much more important.

After class, Nicky dashed out the back door and headed towards the parking lot. Two girls, apparently from the class, stopped her just as she reached her car.

"You leave him alone, bitch," one said. "Dr. Hamilton—"

Nicky was more than ready for the brats. "Back off, girlie. Just because you're sleeping with him doesn't mean you can control me. You want to dance with me? Huh?" Nicky said with such hate and loathing, both girls got scared, turned tail, and hustled away.

Lance couldn't believe Nicole's disrespect. He saw her dash out the back door. When he tried to catch up with her, she had disappeared. The nerve!

Well, she wouldn't get away from him for long. He got into her file and found her home number. He had his secretary leave her a message. She was to meet him at his office the following day or risk being expelled from the class.

When Nicky heard the message, she wasn't surprised. In fact, she had expected it. So she deployed her secret weapon.

"Lance?"

"Yes?"

"John Upton."

Lance sat straighter in his chair. What was the Chancellor doing calling him? Was it about that promotion? Lance could only hope.

"Uh, sorry to bother you—"

"No, bother. None at all, John, what can I do for you?"

"Uh, this is kinda sticky. I normally don't like to get involved in things like this, but... well, there's a woman in one of your classes..."

It couldn't be. Not her. Not a friend of Upton's!

"Her name's Nicole Winters. Do you know her?"

"Uh.. yes, John, I do. She's in my World History course."

"Yes. That's what she said. Well, it's my understanding that the two of you have some sort of personality conflict."

"You could say that."

"Well, I know this is asking a lot, and I hate to do it, but this woman means a lot to the University. She's arranged for millions in donation packages from major corporations. She's been invaluable in various promotions for the University. Now, I don't know why she's taking that class from you, but for some reason, something went wrong with her Master's degree—oh, got to be well over eighteen years ago now— and she needs this class to complete it. Could you do me a favor and just... kind of ignore her? For me? Could you do that?"

"Uh, certainly, John. But, really, I don't know why she felt she had to call you, but—"

"Oh, you know women. Good looking guy like you, she probably has a crush on you and isn't used to, well, the academic setting. Who knows, all I know is she means big money to the campus. So if you could—"

"Done, John."

"Thanks so much, Lance. I won't forget this."

"No problem."

Lance was going to kill her. Maybe not during the semester, but somehow, some way, he was going to get even with Miss Nicole Winters. Calling the Chancellor? When she attacked him so rudely in his class? Inconceivable!

Lance thought he couldn't get any more angry with the woman, but when she arrived in class the following week, she sealed her fate. This time she looked at him when he came into class. With the most smug little grin on her face he'd ever seen. Made his blood boil. So she thought she could push him around, did she? She didn't know who she'd just taken on. No brat had ever gotten away with mistreating him before. He'd taken his first wife over his knee a few times when she'd gotten out of hand. This woman was no different. Sometime, someday, he'd get even with her. Those lovely legs kicking while he pounded some sense into that defiant backside of hers. Lovely thought.

Lance thought he'd get a chance at getting even with her when the first assignment was due. But, unfortunately, her work was exemplary. He spent a full hour trying to find something wrong with her paper, and the only thing he found was a minor typo. So he gave her an A minus for the infraction. As much as he would love to fail her, he wasn't compromising his integrity to get even with a brat. He'd just have to wait and hope an opportunity arose.

Three weeks later, Lance got some disturbing news with a silver lining. A former teacher's aide of his was caught selling answers to Lance's tests. When Lance interviewed the kid, he demanded a list

of the kid's clients. Many of the football players were listed, which was no surprise, but Lance got an unexpected gift. On the list of cheaters, one name stood out. A Miss Nicole Winters. He had her! He finally had her!

Rather than risk another scene with the Chancellor, Lance decided to handle Miss Winters himself. The disrespectful little brat deserved a lesson, and he was just the one to teach it to her. No one came into his class, was rude to him, cheated and got away with it. No, this woman begged much more of his attention.

Nicole was home when she got the call. It was Saturday, and she was getting caught up on some much needed paperwork in her home office.

"Hello?"

"Miss Winters?"

"Yeah, who is this?"

"Lance Hamilton."

"Oh, for Christ's sake. Don't I have to suffer through enough time with you during the week? What the hell do you want?"

"I have two words for you."

"I can't wait."

"Mark McDonald."

Nicole felt faint. She actually had to clutch her desk for support because she almost fell over. Then she felt sick. Her entire career flashed before her eyes. Getting caught cheating! At forty?! This could ruin her! No matter how much money she earned, could Jameson or Upton look past this serious character flaw? How could she blame it all on that jerk Hamilton? She was screwed!

"Miss Winters? Are you still there?"

"Uh... yeah. I'm here."

"Good. I want you in my office in an hour."

"But I have—okay. Wait. Why bother? We're done, aren't we? I'm done. My career's done. It's all done. I might as well chuck this stupid paperwork because my life is over, and it's all my frickin' fault. You jerk! If you weren't such a megalomaniac, all

suckin' up the attentions of those fawning groupies, I wouldn't have had to ignore you. God, I hate you."

"No matter how we feel about each other, I'm willing to help you out here."

"What are you talking about? Aren't you going to glory in ruining me? Why did you call me? Why didn't you just humiliate me in class?"

"Because humiliating you in private will be much more enjoyable to me."

"You sick bastard! Forget it. Ruin my life; go ahead. See if I care."

"You obviously care, or you wouldn't be in my class. So you'd rather get expelled is that it?"

"I don't have any other choice."

"Yes, you do."

Nicky couldn't process the information. The man was making no sense.

"Miss Winters?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you want to get expelled?"

"No."

"Well, then, I have an alternative for you. It won't be pleasant, but if you comply to my demands, I may just turn a blind eye to this information I've received."

"Demands, what demands? What are you talking about?"

"Come to my office in an hour if you want to know. If I don't see you there in an hour, I'll take that as an answer that you have chosen to be expelled."

"Wait a minute. What is this about?"

"One hour. Be in my office." Click.

Nicky sat there, staring at the receiver, puzzled, perplexed, and freaked out. Why was he giving her a chance? What the hell did the guy want with her? What would she have to do?

Well, no matter why he was doing it, she had to jump on it. No matter how much she hated the man, no matter what kind of a creep he was, she may just have a chance to save her career.

The professors' offices were nearly empty when she arrived at the building. One secretary was working at the front desk, but as Nicky walked by the myriad of other offices, no one else seemed to be around. Hamilton's office was nearly at the end of the building. His door was slightly ajar when she reached it.

Hesitantly, she knocked.

"Come in," came the familiar voice.

Lance was immediately struck when she walked into his office. As angry as he was with her, she looked gorgeous. She was dressed in a tight pink sweater, tight blue jeans and black boots. Nails done, that flame red hair coifed perfectly. And that face. Nicole was a striking woman. Her nose might be a bit too big, but that was her only fault. Porcelain skin, lovely flashing blue eyes, high cheekbones, perfect, even, white teeth. And, her expression, she was finally afraid of him. He hated to admit it, but it really gave him a charge. He finally had the upper hand over the wench, and he was going to milk it for all it was worth. She deserved this comeuppance.

When Nicky saw him, aside from the irritating hormonal reaction to his beautiful face and those deadly blue eyes, she was afraid. He had the power. It was clear. And, he was going to relish in it. The creep!

"Miss Winters," he said, greeting her with quiet calm.

"Dr. Hamilton," she replied.

"Call me Lance."

"I'd rather not."

"If you want my help, you'd better adjust that attitude and right now."

"Yes, sir," she said, trying to rid her voice of the loathing she felt for the man.

"Have a seat," he said, his eyes never leaving her. Nicky couldn't help but notice the way he took in her body. He was attracted to her? How? When he had the bevy of college girls fawning all over

him?

Nicky hesitantly took the only seat available in his small office, the one next to his desk. Which put her closer to him than she would have liked. Then she caught his scent. He was wearing heavenly cologne. And he was so masculine. His hands, his square jaw—annoying! She wanted to kill him, not make love to him!

"So... what do you have to say for yourself, Miss Winters? Why would someone of your obvious intelligence feel the need to cheat?"

"Because I hate you, and I can't stand your voice nor the way you teach that stupid class. After two days, I felt like I was going to get cancer if I paid any more attention to you, so I stopped. That's when I contacted Mark and made the deal. A move I greatly regret. I should have just gotten over it and paid attention. It's one of my greatest faults. Letting my emotions decide my fate. You can bet it won't happen again. I've never cheated before in my life."

"Have we met before?"

"No."

"Well, then why do you hate me so much?"

"I'd rather not go into it."

"So, you don't know me, you've never met me before, but you hate me."

"Yes. I suppose I hate your type. You, you're right, I don't know you. But, I know people like you. And, I hate them, and as a result, I hate you. Which I realize isn't very logical. But... it's the way it is."

"I see. Well, that's all beside the point. The point is you and the restitution you owe me. That is if you want to pass my class."

"I do."

"Good. Well then, there's two issues that need to be addressed. Number one, your lack of learning in my class. You have make up work that needs to be done if I'm to pass you. I have a curriculum here I set up for a student last year who had to miss class due to an illness. You'll come to class and do

this makeup work on your own."

"All right. What's the second issue?"

"The disciplinary issue."

"Disciplinary issue?"

"You openly disrespected me in my class. You attacked me, called me names and ignored me. And you disrespected me and my class when you decided to cheat. And, for that, you must pay."

"What?"

"All the others on the list got expelled. I wanted to expel you, but due to your... special relationship with the Chancellor, I've decided to make an exception in your case. So, I am going to discipline you, and you're going to submit to it. That's the second issue."

"Wait. What kind of discipline?"

"You, my dear Miss Winters, are going to be subjected to an age old method of correction. And I can't think of a more deserving party than you."

Nicky felt the pit of her stomach turn over. "What kind of method of correction?"

"A good, old-fashioned spanking," he said with a steely look in his eye.

Nicky didn't think she heard him right. "Wait."

"I mean it."

"You're kidding, right?"

"No."

"Wait a minute, you can't spank me! That's illegal."

"So's cheating."

"No way. No way am I going to let you spank me."

"Then you fail. Chancellor or no Chancellor, you fail."

"You pervert!"

"That's ten more swats, Miss Winters. I'd watch what I said if I were you. Every insult is going to cost you."

"You bastard!" she said, jumping to her feet. "You're crazy!"

"That's ten more. It's your choice. I'd just as

soon fail you. But, if you want my help, you will pay."

"Look, I can give you money."

"Ten more. Bribing me? What kind of a man do you take me for?"

"A perverted one."

"Ten more, that's forty on top of the thirty I was going to give you. One more insult and it's a bare-bottomed spanking for you."

"You freak!"

"So be it. Since I'm a nice man, I'll only give you fifty. But, now, it's on that bare rear of yours that you'll receive your punishment."

"No way!"

"Then you fail, and your career is over."

"You can't mean this! You do mean this, don't you?"

"Yes. And, since we're nearly alone here, your punishment will take place now. And, in the future, if you fail a test, or you speak out in class against me, you'll find yourself right over my knee again. So decide now. A spanking and hard work or failure."

"I can't decide."

"Then I will fail you."

"Wait! God, you're—"

"Watch that mouth, Miss Winters."

"Oh! You make me so mad!" Nicky said, nearly shaking with rage.

"Time is wasting, Miss Winters. Either come here and lay across my lap and pass or walk out that door now and fail. Your decision. But you'd better make it quick because I'm just about to fail you."

"I can't do that! I'll die from rage!"

"Then fail. Now if you'll please leave, I have work to do. I hope you find a line of work you enjoy more than advertising."

"Wait! God! Oh, I hate you!"

"Good-bye, Miss Winters."

"No! Okay, okay. Oh, God, I'm gonna hate myself, but okay. Okay. You... fine. I don't think

I've ever been more humiliated in my life. If you tell anyone—"

"I have no plans to discuss my private affairs with others."

"All right, fine. I can't believe this." Nicky paused as she tried to get her head around her horrid fate. "I really pissed you off, didn't I?"

"Very much so."

Finally, she said, "Okay, how are we to do this, then?"

"Come over here."

"Are you going to spank me hard?"

"Very."

"Oh, man," Nicky said, now truly afraid. She couldn't remember the last time someone spanked her. She couldn't remember being spanked, period. This was horrible!

"Now take down your pants and lay across my lap. I won't look," he said, looking away.

"What I do for money," she said miserably. "Now don't look."

"I won't. But I'll be looking plenty at that bare behind of yours," he promised her.

"I got that." Now terrified, Nicky reluctantly unbuttoned her jeans, unzipped them and pushed them over her hips. Then she pushed down her panties to mid-thigh. With her heart beating out of her chest, she lay down across the man's lap.

Teacher's Pet

Chapter Two

Professor Lance Hamilton looked down at the perfect bare rear across his lap and could barely believe his eyes. It was so beautiful. He almost hated to turn its even white color into a bright mottled red. But this woman needed a lesson. No student of his cheated, disrespected him in class and got away with it.

So Lance pushed his many sexual thoughts about Nicole Winters aside and prepared himself. This was going to be satisfying in so many ways.

"Are you ready, Miss Winters?"

"Just get on with it," she snapped. Which reminded him instantly of why she was there. She had been begging for this attitude adjustment ever since she arrived in his class.

"Now count for me," he said.

"What?"

"You heard me. I said, count for me. You miss one, and I'll start all over at the beginning. Your sentence is fifty swats. Now start counting."

"I can't believe this," she said.

"Believe it. You made this happen, and you've been asking for it ever since we met."

"Whatever, just hurry up. I don't have all day."

Lance rewarded her with a thunderous slap to her upturned rear.

"Owww! You bastard!"

"Ten more, Miss Winters! No name-calling and since you didn't say 'one', that one didn't count!"

"Dr. Hamilton, no!"

"Dr. Hamilton, yes! Now count for me!" Whack!

"Ow! Two!"

Whack! "That's two, Miss Winters!"

"Owww! Okay, okay! Two!"

Lance dug into his epic punishment session with gusto. He had never had so much fun in his life. She squirmed, she kicked, she cried, but she counted.

All he thought about was that nasty smug look on her face, the way she'd taunted him in class, the horrible things she said to him. This was so satisfying! Finally, the brat was seeing the error of her ways. Finally, she was getting what she deserved. Finally, he had his power back. He couldn't remember a better day.

Even though his hand was tingling with pain, he didn't let up. Whack! Whack! Whack! His strong hand covered every square inch of her lovely behind. He spanked her from top to bottom and back up again. He smacked each bun in turn and then concentrated on her sit spots until she yowled and nearly leapt off his lap. Soon, her rear was a deep shade of red; she was sobbing and crying for him to stop and begging his forgiveness. So incredibly satisfying!

Whack! "Owwww! Lance! Sixty!" Nicky cried.

Finally, her horrid ordeal was over. The pain was incredible! She never knew a spanking could hurt this bad. She thought she hated the man before, but now she despised him. All she could think about was running him down with her car. Smacking him over the head with a baseball bat. And she was completely horrified by a small part of her that was somehow inadvertently turned on to his domination of her. Her hormones were so insufferable!

Lance helped her up. Nicky quickly pulled up her pants, but couldn't stop crying.

"Calm down now, it's all over," Lance said, handing her a tissue.

Nicky took it and turned away from him. After a few moments, she stopped the tears and blew her nose.

"Good girl, now here's how it will be. You listening?"

"Y-yes."

"First, I give you the assignments, you complete them and hand them in to me outside of class. Or drop them off with my secretary."

"O-okay."

"Then you'll take my tests. These will be done in person. Just you and me so there'll be no cheating. Either, you'll come here, or we'll arrange to meet off-campus."

"Yes, sir," she said, her eyes averted.

"Okay then. Here's your first assignment," he said, taking a folder off his desk and handing it to her. "It's due next Thursday; your first test is next Friday, late afternoon."

"But I—"

"No buts, young lady. You blew it, and now you're going to pay."

"I just paid."

"Not nearly enough. Not for what you've done."

"You can't feel my ass."

I did feel it, and it felt lovely, was all Lance could think. But he said, "No matter. You brought this on yourself. You've behaved horribly ever since you stepped foot in my classroom. When I've done nothing to you."

You were born, she thought. But said nothing. Her hate of him was growing by the minute.

"I hope over the next few weeks you'll learn something, Miss Winters. It may even help you with your work."

"I don't need help with my work, I'm at the top of my game, buddy," she bit out.

"Well, you're obviously not at the top right now, are you, Miss Winters? You wouldn't be here if you hadn't done something wrong initially. Like lied on your resume? Passed yourself off as something you are not."

"Despite the lack of degree, I came through. I made my company ten million dollars last year. I made sure this university got fourteen million dollars last year. I'm paying for this department's new Archeological program you so love to brag about."

"So what? What does it matter what your accomplishments are when you treat people as you do? Is this your goal in life? Money and no

manners? I'd rather spend time around a penniless person with morals and charm than spend ten minutes around a self-centered, money-hungry, corporate climber, Miss Winters. If I were you, I'd re-examine my life and goals to make sure this was just the type of person I wanted to be."

"You don't know me. You don't know me at all. You have no idea what my motivations are, how I treat people. You are not all people, Dr. Hamilton. Just because I didn't worship you—"

"You mean, worship at the altar of my penis?" he said, referring to one of her earlier taunts.

"Yeah, that's exactly what I mean. Just because I didn't kiss your ass and fawn all over you like all those students you sleep with, doesn't mean that—"

Lance was alarmed by her accusation. "Who said I'm sleeping with my students? Where did you hear that?"

"I didn't have to hear it. I see them. I watch them watch you. And I watch how you encourage them, flirt with them, don't bother denying it."

"You have my students' fantasies confused with reality, Miss Winters. While it's none of your business, I don't make it a habit of sleeping with my students. Not only do I find it morally reprehensible, I would never take advantage of a young woman, nor do I find the adulation particularly arousing. I find it annoying, if you must know. I much prefer a woman of my age and my equal who sees me as another equal, not as some sort of celebrity."

"Who are you trying to convince, you or me?"

His eyes narrowed. "Maybe by the conclusion of my class, you'll have a different opinion of me. But I don't really care about that. I just hope you have a different opinion of yourself. Because you may make a lot of money, Miss Winters, but it's no surprise that you're still a Miss and not a Mrs."

Instead of getting her mad, this struck Nicky as funny. "As if I had no opportunities," she chuckled. "Buddy, I've had more marriage proposals than

Leno has cars. You and one other person are the only ones who have deserved this treatment from me. Don't make suppositions based upon our exchange."

"So you say. We'll see. We'll just see whose opinions of who changes, Miss Winters."

"Are we done now?"

"Yes. But a warning. If you fail me, if you test me in class, if you disrespect me, you may find yourself right back over my knee again. And you don't want that, do you?"

"Uh, no."

"Good then. Remember my warning; get your work turned in on time, and you may just survive the semester, Miss Winters."

Nicky turned to leave.

"And, one more thing, Miss Winters—"

"What?" Nicky asked, turning to him.

"You'll sit in the first three rows from now on. Not in the back."

"Lance—that's not fair."

"And, another rule, no questioning my authority and my decisions, understand?"

Nicky had to close her eyes. She was about to destroy him. She took a deep breath and finally said, "Yes, I understand you."

"I'll see you in class, Miss Winters."

"Yes, sir," she said miserably and then she left.

As soon as she was gone, Lance burst into laughter. That was so much fun! Her eyes blazing, knowing she'd lost the game. Delicious. Oh, she looked delightful when she was angry. Her cheeks flushed, the electric charge she exuded. Beautiful. But it was clear that, even if he got through to her, she was doomed to hate him. So be it. At least, he could dream about that luscious body of hers.

Nicky was dreading her next class. She had no idea how she would get through it and not kill Hamilton. To make matters worse, she'd just heard

from her ex-husband, Dennis. Regarding some stock they still owned together. He was so charming and solicitous that it made her want to throttle him. Then Dennis casually mentioned how much fun he was having with his kids. Always had to drive a stake deep into her heart.

When Nicky arrived in class, she found she couldn't bring herself to sit down front. Not only had she been a bit late, she found she could not physically make herself do it.

"Miss Winters, could you please come down here?" Lance said as soon as he saw her. Much attention was focused on her. The class clearly expected a fight.

Nicky could not make herself stand up. She just couldn't do it. He could go to hell.

"Miss Winters, I am speaking to you."

Nicky just glared at him.

"Apparently, you didn't take our talk seriously. Failure is an option, Miss Winters."

"Fine!" she screamed, jumping to her feet. "But, there's no place, sir!" she added in a nasty tone.

He narrowed his eyes at her for a second, and then focused his attention on a girl in the front row. "Miss Floria?" he asked in a pleasant tone.

"Yes?" the eager young thing responded.

"Could you do me a huge favor and exchange places with Miss Winters?"

"Uh.. I guess so," the young woman said, looking bitterly disappointed.

"Miss Winters? A place just opened up," he said, clearly enjoying lording his power over her.

Nicky nearly lost it. It took all her personal inner strength to gather her belongings and walk down the stairs of the auditorium. As she passed the young woman, the blonde girl glared at her.

"Believe me, I'm suffering more than you are, sweetheart," Nicky snapped at her.

"You're horrible. We all hate you."

"Feeling's mutual."

"Miss Winters, please don't dawdle, I'd like to

start class."

Everyone knew some battle for control was happening between the two. Nicky noticed the class watching her and Lance like they were on an episode of WWF Smackdown.

Nicky sat down.

"Miss Winters, are you settled? May I start class now?"

"Please," Nicky said in a deadly tone with gritted teeth.

Lance went on with his lecture, but Nicky was so mad, she could barely see straight. She missed nearly everything he was saying.

"Miss Winters, what year was that battle?"

"What?" Nicky said, shaken out of her mental tirade.

"The year of the battle I was just discussing. Don't tell me you weren't paying attention. I thought we'd settled this."

Nicky sat there, burning, realizing she was cooked. She hadn't paid attention. If she admitted it, she'd fail. If she didn't answer, she'd fail. All roads led to failure.

"Miss Winters? Did you hear me?"

"I heard you, you bastard. Screw this, screw you and screw this class," she said, gathering her things.

"Miss Winters, I would be careful about your next actions. They could lead to some unfortunate events."

"Don't threaten me, Hamilton. You pompous, narcissistic, egomaniacal creep. I've had it with your Draconian methodology, your authority issues and your Medieval tortures! All this because your fragile ego can't take one woman in this class who doesn't want to sleep with you!"

"That's enough, Miss Winters!"

"Hitting a nerve? Am I?!"

"I'm warning you—"

"And I'm sooo afraid! What are you going to do, you stupid bully? Spank me? Well, take this, you

jerk!" And then she flung her notebook at him. While he ducked, she threw her book at him; he had to slam it away with his forearm to deflect it. When she saw the rage in his eyes, Nicole realized that she'd pushed it too far. She grabbed her stuff and ran while he ordered her to stop.

Once she got home and drank a few glasses of wine, Nicole couldn't believe she'd lost it like that. What was it about the guy? Aside from the spanking, that made her so crazy. She just threw away her entire career, all to get even with some stupid stranger.

After crying for a good, solid hour, Nicole knew she had to call the creep and apologize. She couldn't give up without a fight. Even if she had to lie to do it, she had to swallow her pride. It was about her career. It was about hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost wages. It was about her future. Not about this little pissant of a professor. Whatever she had to do, she'd do it. Anything to pass his stupid class.

"Uh... Dr. Hamilton?"

"Yes?"

"This is... oh hell, I can't do this! I have to. This is... Nicky, Nicole Winters."

"Oh. What?"

"I... have to apologize. I... I'm sorry."

"I don't believe you are."

"Well, I am."

"You're only sorry that I'm going to flunk you."

"Is there anyway I can make up for today?"

"I don't think so. Well, maybe one way. But it won't be pleasant."

"I don't care. Whatever I have to do, I'll do."

There was silence. Finally he said, "Be at my house at eight tonight."

"Your house."

"My house. 177 Browning Drive. Don't be late."
Click.

At eight, Nicky found herself on Hamilton's doorstep with her stomach in knots.

Lance looked furious when he answered the door.

"Miss Winters," he said.

"Dr. Hamilton," she said meekly.

Then he gestured her inside. His house looked neat and trim, shelves lined with books and antiques. Handsome home, just like the man.

"Isn't your wife upset by this intrusion?" Nicky asked.

"I'm divorced, and I live alone."

"Oh."

"Before we talk, I have to get something out of the way," he said with an indecipherable look on his face.

"What?"

Without warning, he grabbed her and yanked her down across his lap as he sat on a living room couch.

"Wait!"

"No waiting!" he railed. This time she wasn't allowed to help with her pants; he just yanked them and her panties down to her knees. Then, as she fought him, he got her in a good hold and began spanking her, hard.

"What is wrong with you?! Why me?! Why do you torment me like this?! What is your problem?!" he demanded as he spanked her soundly.

"Stop! I'm sorry!"

"Not sorry enough to stop yourself, are you?! This is for disrupting my class! This is for being so damned irritating! This is for attacking me! This is for throwing things at me in my class!"

"Lance! Stop! I'm sorry!" she wailed.

But Lance was furious. All he could think about was dominating her. Punishing her for her insubordination. Controlling her. For some reason, something about her was making him crazy. He thundered into her behind with awesome strikes, creating red welts with each swat. He was going to

win with this one. She was going to submit to him. For now and for the future.

She wailed and sobbed and begged him to stop, but Lance was being thorough. This little girl wouldn't be pulling any shenanigans again. Never again!

Finally, his hand was so sore that he had to stop. She scrambled away and pulled up her pants. Then she collapsed on the floor, her body wracking with sobs.

As Lance's temper waned, he wondered if he'd gone too far. Maybe spanked her harder than he'd meant to. But she'd been so damned horrible to him. What was her problem?

"What is your problem, woman?! What have I ever done to you?!"

"You stole my life from me! All of you! Betrayed me and hurt me! That's all you want to do! Is to destroy me! You're all the same!"

"Who are you talking about?! I don't even know you! I'd never met you before you came into my class!"

"You're all the same, you're all the same!"

"Nicole, calm down."

"No, my life is over! You took it from me! It's over, it's all over!"

"No, it's not! If you work hard and pay attention in class, maybe we can resolve this."

"I can't! I can't do it! I can't stand it! You're just like him! You're just like him!"

"Like who? Who are you talking about?"

"Him! You're a carbon copy! Sleeping with your students, ruining people's lives! You're all the same!"

For the first time, Lance realized that it wasn't about him at all. Someone from her past had hurt her. Another professor?

"Who is the same, Nicole? Listen to me; this isn't about me, is it? Who are you mad at? Who did this to you?"

"You're just like him. Dennis. You're just like

Dennis."

"Dennis who?"

"My ex-husband—Dennis. You're just like him."

"Your ex-husband?"

"Yeah, Dennis Wolfe, you're just like him. You're all the same," she cried.

"Wait, I know that name." Of course, Dennis Wolfe was a serial womanizer who worked at a fellow university. Lance knew him because they'd served on a board together before. Wolfe had a very tawdry reputation. And, yes, he'd slept with many of his students. Nicole had been married to him at one point?

"You mean, Dennis Wolfe, professor of Ancient History at—"

"See?! You do know him! You're the same!"

"I am not, and I resent the implication! I am not a womanizer; I don't have an unseemly reputation, and I am nothing like Dennis. I know him, and I'm nothing like him."

"That's crap. You're all the same!"

"Nicole, I am not! I can assure you that I'm not. When did you know him?"

"Years ago, now."

"He hurt you."

"Duh. He killed me. He killed me. And my baby." Then she burst into tears again.

"Nicole, stop. It's all over, he can't hurt you anymore."

"But, you can, and you are!"

"You were horrible to me in my class. Why should I put up with that kind of behavior? Besides, you're mad at Dennis, not me. I'm not him, Nicole."

"Yes, you are, I hate him. I hate him. He... took my baby from me."

"Nicole, slow down. Now, look, let's just talk this out."

"You hate me," she sobbed.

"I do not hate you."

"I ruined your class."

"Yes, you did, and now you've paid for it. Now,

tell me, what happened between you and Dennis?"

"Why do you care?" she bit out, tears still streaming down her face.

"Because I do. Now, tell me."

"Oh, Christ. It's a stupid story. Student falls in love with god-like professor, he makes her pregnant and marries her. She is going to finish her semester so she can get her master's degree and finds out in the beginning of the semester that her husband is sleeping with half of her friends. He couldn't even come to the baby's ultrasound appointment because he was screwing someone else. When I found out, when he told me he wanted an open relationship, I started throwing up. Then I miscarried. He took my baby from me, and then he divorced me. I never went back to school and I never wanted to see him again. And now he's got kids and just called to gloat about it over the phone. When he made me so I can't have kids!"

Lance was stunned. Now it all made sense. "But, Nicole, I'm still not him. I'm not capable of that. I don't do things like that. I never have, and I never will."

Nicole sat on the floor and tried to process the conversation. Was she still this crazy about losing her child? What if she was wrong about Lance? She'd just picked on a total stranger? What was wrong with her?

Finally, she said, "I'd better go. I'm sorry. You're right. It's not about you. You just... you looked the same to me. The god-like professor and all those girls fawning all over you. I... just can't watch that. Not without..."

"I understand. But, I'm not him. I'm Lance Hamilton. And I don't sleep with my students."

"I'm sorry."

"Look, you want some wine? How about some food? I have some chicken in the oven. Why don't you stay, and let's talk, okay?"

"Are you nuts? After what's happened between us?"

"It's exactly why I want you to stay. I want you to see me for who I am. Not who you thought I was."

"You are nuts."

"You'll stay?"

"God, I guess so. I'm so screwed up right now I don't know what I'm doing."

"Good, I'll get us some wine. You stay here. Tissue is on the coffee table here. The bathroom is through there if you want to clean up."

Nicky found herself having wine and chicken with her mortal enemy. It was a mind blower. As they chatted, she began to see a different person. Lance wasn't a self-centered narcissist. He was a nice man who cared about his students and had a passion for history. She kept wondering how she'd come upon her first impression. Then, it began to dawn on her, not only did he remind her of Dennis, but she was horribly attracted to Lance. Her subconscious had gone on the defensive before she could get hurt again. Her feelings for him were the same as for her ex-husband. And some part of her wasn't going to let her go there again. But, in the process, she'd attacked a perfect stranger who didn't deserve her wrath.

After they finished their meal, Nicky said, "Uh... I just have to tell you that... God, I'm so sorry. I... I'm going back into therapy. I... transferred all my hate for my husband onto you. And it wasn't fair. And it was... a mistake. I'm just kind of afraid at how far out I got. I mean, it's obvious you're not him."

"No, I'm not. But I can't imagine losing a child. And losing the ability to have children and having him throw that in your face. He's a bastard."

"He is. But you're not. My apologies, I'm not usually like this."

"Good. And apology accepted. But I guess I still don't understand why I hit your buttons. I mean, other than being a professor. I didn't think I was much like Dennis."

"Uh..."

"What?"

"This is so humiliating."

"Why? What?"

"Oh, God. You're hot, okay? Even I'm not immune. And, I guess... it pissed me off."

"You mean you're attracted to me?" he asked, flabbergasted. "And that's why you hated me?"

"Well, I can't have you. It was just like when my husband was teaching. I adored him, too. Oh, Christ. Look, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I'm an idiot. Ignore me. I'm going to go home."

"Please don't," he said, reaching out and taking her hand.

"Why? You can't like me; I'm a bitch, for one, and I'm one of your students for another."

"You won't be my student for long."

"Oh, don't even tell me that. You're lying. You're afraid I'll go psycho on you."

"No, I'm not. Besides, you go psycho on me again, young lady, you'll find yourself over my knee again."

"What are you saying, Lance?"

"I'm saying I'm just as attracted to you. Although, God knows why, the way you've been treating me. And I have to fess up here... I started picking on you because, well, you weren't paying attention to me, and... I thought you were cute, and..."

"What?"

"Well, you're my age. It's different. I'm not attracted to kids, only women. And you're a hell of a woman."

"You're insane."

"I must be to be falling in love with someone like you."

Tears sprang to her eyes. "Don't joke about that."

"I'm not, Nicole. Nicky. I am falling in love with you. I think I did that the first day I saw you."

She sat there with her mouth gaping open. He laughed, reached over, closed her mouth for her. Then he got up, brought her out of her chair, took her in his arms and kissed her.

When they pulled away, she said, "I thought you never dated a student."

"In your case, I think I'm going to make an exception. Come here," he said, and then he kissed her again.

The Art Thief

Chapter One

"I thought I'd be meeting with Mr. Paul."

"Mr. Paul has been detained. And... he's on his own schedule," replied the severe looking, sixty-something housekeeper. "It's possible you won't be meeting him." Mrs. Neely was her name.

"But... okay. Whatever. Show me to the painting," Janisse said.

"Don't you want to see your room first?"

"Okay, show me to my room. Hey, you got a map of this place? I'm afraid I'm going to get lost."

"You'll find all the information you need in your room."

"Excellent."

Janisse was taken down a vast labyrinth of hallways, through the expansive, gothic mansion. The Paul Estate was renowned as one of the oldest and most lavish estates in the country. Janisse recognized most of the artwork on the walls, and she made mental notes to find her favorites later.

"Mr. Paul requests that all guests and guest contractors keep to the main rooms. Venturing through the estate alone is discouraged," Mrs. Neely said.

"Okay."

"Dinner is served at six in the main dining room, its possible you'll meet Mr. Paul then."

"Or, I'll be eating alone."

"No, there are six other guest contractors working on the estate at the present. Two are staying in this wing, four are in guest cottages."

"Doing art restoration as well?" Janisse asked.

"Mostly, yes."

"I'll probably know most of 'em. Small world, art restoration."

"I'll have to take your word for it. When you're finished unpacking, ring for me—you'll see the phone list there—and I'll show you to your

workroom."

"Thanks."

Janisse checked out her room, large, very well appointed, nice antiques, lovely tapestries on the walls. Comfy and elegant. She unpacked and then opened the double doors to a private balcony. The spring air was alive with scents of jasmine and cherry blossoms, and the view from her balcony was breathtaking. The Paul Estate was over 4000 acres, and at least 100 of them were landscaped. She counted five gardeners working in various parts of the grounds. Very impressive. As she looked around, she wondered what it would be like to be surrounded by this kind of luxury all the time. What it would be like to be as rich as the Pauls. The man who hired her, Jared Paul was currently the only Paul living on the estate. His sister was firmly entrenched in New York society, and his parents had recently passed away. Ever since their deaths, the younger Paul had been hard at work restoring all the old masterpieces, antiques and rarities the family had collected over the years; statuary, paintings, furniture. Apparently, his parents hadn't been into maintenance. Janisse's reputation for the restoration of French Impressionist paintings had grown during her posting at the De Young Museum in San Francisco. Now on her own, she had a very impressive client list. This would be the first time she'd worked for the Paul estate.

Later, she was in a large, professional workroom with two other high level art restorers, Janisse found herself working on a Matisse, the others on a Callibotte and a Renoir. James McNeil and Gilda Goldin were two acquaintances, both very well known in their circle. Both were in their sixties, Janisse at thirty-eight, felt like the new kid on the block. No more than five minutes passed before they were gossiping about their mysterious host.

"So have you met him?" Janisse asked.

"No, haven't even seen him," Gilda replied, pushing her large glasses up her hawked nose.

"Does anyone know what he looks like?" Janisse asked.

"Camera shy, that's what the papers always say about him," James answered, rubbing his bald head.

"So he's young, right?" Janisse asked.

"Apparently, late forties, is what I heard," James said.

"How long you two been here?"

"Gilda, she's been here a week. I've been here two."

"And neither of you have seen him?"

"Nope," James said.

"Not me," Gilda replied.

"Weird."

"Oh, you know those rich people, eccentric," Gilda said.

"They can afford to be. Us working class people, we don't have those kinds of luxuries," James said.

"Huh."

The news was encouraging. Because Janisse was not just there to restore a painting for Mr. Paul, she was there to recover the stolen family painting. Her older brother Don had been in a class with Jared Paul, (during Don's brief foray into the Ivy League schools), and shortly after that acquaintance was made, the painting—a Monet haystack—disappeared from their house. Don swore Paul had stolen it after Don had shown it to him. But with no proof, and Jared being from such a powerful family, the investigation into the theft had gone nowhere. Janisse's father had been given the painting by his father, who'd won it in a poker game from one of the Gettys. Janisse had been the most distraught over the loss, and it was at that juncture of her life that she became obsessed with French Impressionism. Her idea had always been to get into the art world and find that painting. When Paul inquired about her services, she couldn't believe her good luck.

After a full day of work, Janisse had dinner with the six other art restorers. No sign of Mr. Paul, but

Janisse had a lovely time. All shop talk, but very fun and very lively.

Janisse retired early, under the guise of being tired from her travels. After taking a bath in a large art deco bathtub, she put on her stealth outfit. Black tight workout pants and a black hooded sweatshirt. If caught, she could say she was looking for the kitchen. But the dark clothes would hide her if need be.

Janisse left her room and stepped out into the empty hallway. She heard Gilda messing about in the room next to hers, but the rest of the wing was empty. James and the others were staying in cottages scattered throughout the estate.

And so she set off on her quest. For the first half hour, Janisse neither heard nor saw anyone else. She searched through fourteen rooms, but no sign of a Monet haystack. Her inclination was to return to her room before she ventured too far, but the lack of encounters with staff emboldened her. She decided to explore a wing of the estate that had been clearly marked on her map as off limits.

As soon as she stepped foot into the forbidden wing, it felt different. More modern. There were fewer antiques and more contemporary furnishings. Probably the servants' quarters. The Monet was more than likely not here, but she was curious, so she continued on. She wandered down a long hallway, off of which were many closed doors. When she got about halfway down the corridor, a short hallway led off to her left. At the end of the hallway was a glass door to the outside. She could see moonlit gardens through the door and a fountain. She hadn't seen this part of the estate, so she decided to check it out.

She pushed open the door and found herself in a patio area. The fountain was splashing, providing a soothing backdrop to the impressive outdoor living room. She could smell flowers on the night air. She stepped out a bit further and stared up at the moon. It was nearly full and gorgeous.

"Little far from your room, aren't you?" came a deep voice from the shadows near the house.

Janisse nearly had a heart attack. She gasped and spun on heel, but couldn't see the man's face. Only a dark outline.

"Uh..." was all she could say.

The man stepped out, but she still couldn't see him properly. He was taller than she, maybe five ten or eleven, stocky, very short hair.

"You're one of the art restorers, aren't you?" he asked.

"Uh..."

"Don't talk much, do you?"

"Uh..."

"I can't see your face, but your voice sounds guilty. You know you're not supposed to be here, don't you?"

"Look, I... uh, was, uh. Oh, Christ. Fine. Yes. You caught me. I was just about to spin some stupid tale about looking for the kitchen, but it's obvious I'm not. The kitchen isn't even near here. I think. Actually, I have no idea where the kitchen is."

"You are actually near it."

"Okay then, I was looking for the kitchen," she said.

He laughed. It was a nice laugh, real, deep and pleasant. She wished she could see his face.

"So what are you doing, wandering around here? Finding whatever it is you were looking for?"

"Uh. No. Because I'm not really looking for anything," she lied. "I'm... curious. Especially because of the forbidden thing. You know, if you guys said we could explore the place, I'll bet no one would. Something about human nature."

"It's also in human nature to steal precious objects. We have a lot to protect here."

"Oh."

"Don't tell me that hadn't occurred to you."

"Uh, no. I figured you had alarms on things."

"We do. And an entire surveillance system."

"Oh, crap."

He laughed. "Well, truth be told, no one really monitors the cameras. While you may have appeared on a screen somewhere, you were obviously not seen."

"Whew. I wouldn't want the big guy to find out."

"Big guy."

"Mr. Paul."

"Oh, him."

"Who are you, anyway? Maintenance guy?"

"You could say that."

"So I'm in the servants quarters, aren't I?"

"Yes, some of them are here. And elsewhere, we really aren't in one area."

"Really, I'd think these rich people would want to keep separated from your kind. Wouldn't want to get any on them, you know?"

He laughed. "You certainly seem to have a low opinion of rich people."

"I've worked for too many of 'em. I love their art, not them. In fact, I don't really feel like they deserve any of their artwork. They don't really appreciate the works, they just own them because someone else told them they were valuable."

"Hmmm. So you think Mr. Paul is the same way?"

"Oh, yeah. Definitely. I mean, I'm impressed that he actually cares enough to have his works restored, but it's probably so he can sell them for more. I don't know. He's got one of those Howard Hughes vibes going on. Mysterious. Do you ever see him?"

"Sometimes."

"What's your take on him?"

"He's okay, I guess. Keeps to himself mostly."

"He's single, right?"

"Currently, yes. I think so. We really don't talk much."

"I'll bet. Sounds like a freak. They all are in one way or another. Total rich freaks. If I didn't love art so much, I sure as hell wouldn't want to be around them."

"Sounds like you've met some not-so-nice rich people."

"Oh, yeah. Spoiled brats. Money changes people. Especially people who were born into money. They're a different breed."

"Really."

"Oh, come on, you work for him, don't you think he's a freak?"

"Probably, but aren't we all a little eccentric?"

"Yeah, I guess. But at least I have values."

"Values. I suppose you don't consider breaking the rules against those values."

"Well... not stupid rules."

"So you make your own rules."

"I guess. Sometimes. Depending on the circumstances."

"So, don't rich people do the same thing? Don't you hate them for doing the same thing you do?"

"You like Mr. Paul."

"I didn't say that."

"You're taking his side."

"No, I'm calling you on your hypocrisy."

"Oh."

"Making your own rules can get you into trouble, you know that?"

"You're a security guy, aren't you?"

"Why do you say that?"

"You're talkin' like one. So am I in trouble?"

"Not yet."

"You are a security guy."

"No, but I'm getting the feeling you haven't told me the truth about why you're poking around where you're not supposed to be."

"You are definitely a security guy. Okay, I've got the hint. I'll go back to my room."

"Wait, what's your name?"

"Don't you know that already?"

"I wouldn't have asked if I knew."

"Hmmm. Uh, Jane Doe."

He laughed. "I'm not going to tell."

"No, but now you're gonna be watching me

more closely, and you're gonna make me paranoid."

"I can find out, you know. There aren't that many people here."

"Okay, Janisse Acorn. And you?"

"You can call me Jay."

"Okay, Jay. I can't see you, so I won't remember you. Well, your voice, I will remember that."

"Pleased to meet you, Janisse."

"You, too, Jay."

"If I were you, I'd keep to my room and the main rooms. Mr. Paul doesn't like wanderers."

"What about you?"

"I do what he pays me to do."

"Which is to warn bad little girls like me."

"Yes, and to punish them if they don't obey the rules," he said, but she could hear the smile in his voice. He was teasing her, but also warning her.

"Punish me? Will I have to write 'I won't wander the grounds' a hundred times?"

"No, I prefer more hands on kinds of punishments."

"Hands on?"

"Break the rules again, Miss Acorn, and you might just find out what I'm talking about."

"You'll have to catch me first."

"I caught you this time."

"I might get better at it."

"We'll, see."

It occurred to her that she was flirting with a man she couldn't see. But he sounded hot. He had a nice physique. And a nice voice.

"Okay, Jay. I guess this rule breaker ought to go to bed. I got a long day ahead of me."

"All right, Janisse. But remember. I'll be watching you."

She laughed. "I'll remember."

Next day, Janisse paid special attention to every staff member she saw, but none looked like Jay. Not that she'd seen him properly. Still, she assumed she'd run into him somewhere. But so far, no.

Dinner was a repeat of the night before. Laughing and joking with her colleagues, discussing various new techniques of art restoration. But no sign of Mr. Paul. Her co-workers were getting a bit miffed by his avoidance. Janisse could care less. After all, the master of the house was a big, fat art thief as far as she was concerned.

Late that night, as she got ready to conduct her search, she thought of Jay. Night security man? Whichever, he wasn't going to stop her. She had to find that painting. Confirm its existence, at least.

Forty-five minutes into her search, she hit pay dirt. On the second floor of the west wing, in another forbidden zone, in what seemed to be Mr. Paul's personal study, she found it. Her family's Monet haystack painting. However, since Monet painted many haystack paintings, she wasn't sure it was theirs. But as a child, she'd been so enraptured with the painting, she'd written her initials on the back of the masterpiece.

The painting was above a fireplace in the middle of the room. Terrified of being caught, but determined, Janisse carefully removed the painting and set it on the floor. She took out her flashlight and inspected the back of the painting. Her initials! Eureka! Right at that moment, she heard footsteps approaching the door. She carefully put the painting back in its place and moved quickly to a corner of the room and ducked down behind a large overstuffed chair. And just in time. The lights came on in the room, and she heard a voice. A very familiar voice.

"Is someone in here?"

Janisse froze. It was Jay. There was no way he was finding her this night. And if he'd really known someone was there, he wouldn't be asking, he'd be ordering her to come out.

She heard him walk around the room. Her heart began beating faster. He couldn't find her!

"That's funny," he said to himself. She heard him walk towards the fireplace.

Had she hung up the painting wrong? Her heart began beating faster.

"HMMMM," he said. "Oh, well."

Then she heard him walk out the door, the lights were shut off and the door closed behind him. Relief!

It was one in the morning. This guy really worked late. He must be the night watchman. But damn, what luck! Why would he pick this room? The estate was huge. The night before, he'd caught her at the opposite end of the house. Diligent man. And completely annoying.

Janisse waited a long time and then hesitantly came out of her hiding place. She walked over to examine her painting again. Goddamn that Paul creep. There it was! Stolen artwork, hanging there like he actually owned the piece. She decided in that moment that she hated the man. Sight unseen, he was a jerk and a criminal. As if he wasn't rich enough to buy himself a Monet? He had to steal theirs? What a horrible person. She'd been right! All rich people were rotten!

Janisse decided she'd pushed her luck enough for one evening, and it was time to return to her room. The next night she'd be back. She needed to document the painting and then contact the police. This man wasn't getting away with his crime. Not while she had a breath of life left in her. And everyone was going to know what Jared Paul did. Who cared if he committed the theft while he was a college kid, he was a thief and as such deserved everything he got. Especially a load of negative publicity.

She was walking down a hallway, approaching another, when she heard a door open somewhere ahead of her. She took cover in the room closest to her, jumping through the door and shutting it quietly behind her. The room was pitch black, and she had no idea where she was.

Suddenly, the lights came on and there was a man in bed there. A very handsome looking man.

The room was very large, and he was in a king-sized bed in dark blue silk pajamas, looking surprised, yet very amused to see her standing there.

"Well, hello there," he said. She recognized his voice. It was Jay.

"Oh, Christ. Thank God, it's you. Well, maybe not. Damn, I have to get better at this. You're not even trying to catch me and I find you. Obviously, I should stick to art restoration and stay away from spy work."

"Apparently," he said, grinning at her. "So what kind of spy work are you doing exactly?"

"Oh. Well, it was a form of speech, none. I mean, I'm just looking around."

"In places you're not supposed to be."

"Uh... apparently."

He threw back the covers and got out of bed. "How about I escort you back to your room, Miss Acorn?" he said, reaching for his robe, which was draped across the end of his bed.

"Uh, I can find my way back."

"Somehow, I think you might need my help."

"Well, I don't want to bother you."

"Any more than coming into my bedroom unannounced at uh... one-thirty in the morning?"

"Sorry. I'm sorry, Jay. I... I don't usually. I've never so much as got a speeding ticket before. I'm..."

"So you're new to crime, are you?" he asked, teasing her as he approached her.

Up close, he was even more handsome. He had dark brown eyes, a straight nose, sensual lips, wide shoulders, nice body. Brown hair, wonderful looking man.

"Uh, yeah."

"I have to say, I don't think you were cut out for deception."

"I guess not."

"Hmmm, what was my warning last night? Seems to me since this is your first crime, I need to

make an example out of you. Dissuade you from further indiscretions. Do you remember what I said? About punishing bad girls who don't follow the rules?"

"Uh, I'll follow the rules."

"Somehow I don't believe you."

"Well, I don't want to keep you, I'll just be—"

He reached out and grabbed her upper arm. "Not so fast, Janisse. You're not getting out of this that easily. I warned you." But, he didn't look angry. He looked playful.

"I... uh, don't want to, uh, keep you up, I'll uh, just be getting back to my, uh, own, uh, room," she said, trying to gracefully detach herself from the man's grip. He was so handsome that the look in his eye was going straight to her libido.

He grinned down at her. "Maybe I should give you just one more chance."

"Good plan, I won't do it again."

He laughed. "You'd better not, for your sake." He watched her for a moment. "You see, I like punishing bad little girls. You know what I do to them?" he said, the look in his eye turning lustful. He began to take in her body. He looked down at her full breasts, then his gaze rose, his eyes lingering on her lips for a second before he looked her straight in the eye.

She was so turned on that she could barely breathe. "Uh... no."

"Well, first, I turn them over my knee and I spank them. Then do you know what I do to them?"

"Uh...wait. Spank them?" she asked nervously.

"Oh, yes. Then when I'm done spanking them, I take all their clothes off and punish them with a very special tool I have."

"Y-y-you do?"

"Oh, yes. Sometimes I give them a very severe tongue-lashing. A very, severe tongue lashing," he said in a husky whisper as he drew her closer to him.

Janisse could only stare at him.

"So you may want to rethink this whole life of crime of yours, Miss Acorn, don't you think?" he asked in a near whisper, his face near hers. She could smell his scent, very masculine. He was so close she could feel his body warmth.

"Yeah, I..."

"Unless you want to incur my wrath," he said. "And for you, my dear, I have plenty of wrath," he said, looking at her lips.

Was he going to kiss her?! Janisse was overly turned on and partially scared by the man. Spank her? How primal, yet, the way he was looking at her, he was so sexy!

"Uh, I have to... should get back to my—I have to go," she said, suddenly getting very scared. She opened the door and dashed out, ripping out of his grip in the process. Which made him nearly belly laugh.

"You sure you don't want me to escort you to your room?" he asked after her as she hurried down the corridor.

"No, I'll be fine."

"Remember my warning, Miss Acorn,"

"How could I forget?" she said without thinking.

His laugh followed her as she sped down the hallway.

She got nearly no sleep that night. The man had her so turned on she couldn't think straight. But what was with his warning? Was he serious?

By the next night, Janisse's head had cleared from its hormonal overload. All she could think about was that painting. With bits of Jay thrown in there for distraction. But mostly the painting. She needed to document it. Take pictures and notes. Which meant stealing around the Paul estate late at night again. She thought about her previous attempts and how Jay had caught her. Timing. She needed to go when absolutely everyone was asleep. She decided upon three-thirty in the morning.

At a quarter to four, Janisse found herself taking in-depth pictures of her family's Monet. She carefully took digital photos of her initials, an old nail that was embedded in the wooden frame, all the distinguishing marks of the piece. Satisfied, she put the painting back.

"That was an awful lot of work. What kind of evidence are you gathering exactly?" came a voice from a dark corner of the room.

Her heart jumped into her throat. Jay.

"How long have you been there?" she demanded, nearly panting from sudden fright.

"The whole time," he said, coming into the light. He was even more handsome than she remembered. And the look in his eye, devastating. Dominant, confident. He may be flirting with her, but she was clearly in his territory. And he wanted answers.

"Uh..."

"Ahh, your usual response," he observed.

"No, look. Jay. Okay, fine. I'll tell you."

He came up close to her.

"I warned you. Three times, Janisse. Do you remember what I said, I'd do to you if I caught you breaking the rules again?"

"Wait," she protested.

"Uh, no, I don't think so," he said. And then before she knew it, he'd taken her in his arms and kissed her.

She was stunned. And thrilled. He was an amazing kisser.

When he pulled away, he sent her a lazy smile. "That was just the beginning, you know what happens next?"

She tried to pull away, but he held her fast. "Not so fast, Janisse. You know what I promised you, don't you? What happens to all bad little girls who disobey me?"

"Jay, no!"

"Oh, yes, my dear, yes. And I've been so looking forward to this."

And with that, she was suddenly over his lap.

"This is going to be fun," he said and then began spanking her upturned rear.

"Jay, ow! Wait!" she pleaded.

The Art Thief

Chapter Two

"Stop!" Janisse cried as Jay spanked her.

"Rule breakers get punished," Jay replied, peppering her behind with stinging swats.

"I'm sorry! Look, I had a good reason to break in here!"

"I'm sure," he said, swatting her with a ceaseless rhythm.

Janisse had enough of this game and decided to get away from him.

"Oh, no, you don't!" he said, wrestling her back in place. Then he began spanking her harder. Up and down his hand traveled until there wasn't one square inch of her behind that wasn't smarting.

Finally, as tears began to sting her eyes, he stopped. He pulled her up and off his lap, turned her around and pulled her down on top of him. As she struggled to get away, he wrapped his long arms around her and kissed her.

She tried to push him away, but within a few seconds, her lust took over, and she was swept away by his amazing kissing.

Janisse had no idea how it happened, but she found herself naked on the floor of the master of the house's study with Jay riding her into a spectacular orgasm. His strong shoulders above her, his worked out pecs, the dark look in his brown eyes, the man was a tremendous lover. She never let her libido carry her away like this, and she couldn't figure out what it was about the man that made her trust him so fast. She didn't even know him. All she knew was that he was some security guy at the mansion where she was currently restoring some precious antiques.

Afterwards, Jay held her protectively and sweetly bestowed kisses all over her face.

"You're wonderful," he said, grinning at her.

"What just happened?"

He laughed. "Uh, I think we just made love."

"I got that part. How did I go from being in trouble to being made love to?"

"It was part of my plan all along. As soon as I met you, I knew I wanted you."

"We were in the dark."

"Aaah, but I'd seen you before."

"When? I don't remember meeting you."

"We didn't meet. But I saw you, the first day you arrived here. And I knew, this girl was for me."

"Wait a minute. Were you mad at me? Is that why you spanked me?"

"Not mad exactly, I just wanted to make a point with you. That in the future, you listen to me and obey the rules."

"Oh."

"So, you were about to tell me why you broke in here—repeatedly I might add—and why you took so many pictures of that Monet."

"Oh. Yeah. You bet I'll tell you. That painting is mine, that's why."

"The painting? The Monet is yours? How do you figure?"

"Your boss, that creep Jared Paul, stole it from my family when I was just a teenager. See, he went to school with my brother Don and after he visited the house one day, the painting disappeared. My brother knew Jared had taken it, but we couldn't prove it. And since Jared is so freakin' rich, we didn't stand a chance."

"Jared Paul stealing. Doesn't seem like him."

"Well, he was in college, a freshman, young and all that. But come on, why not return it later? Like he couldn't afford to buy himself a Monet?"

"So you have no proof he stole it?"

"No, but I'm gathering proof. I'm gonna contact the police as soon as I'm done with this job and show them the pictures. I have pictures I took as a kid, of the painting, the back, all of it. I loved that painting. Along with the pictures I took just now, I should have enough evidence to reopen the case. If

nothing else I'm going to embarrass that creep. Spread the news all over the place. Even if I only humiliate him, it will be worth it."

"Wow. This really upset you, didn't it?"

"Always has. It's the reason I got into art restoration in the first place. I vowed when I was fifteen that I was going to find that painting and get it back. Well, that and I love French Impressionism, obsessed with it really. But it all started with that painting."

"How did your family come by it?"

"My grandfather won it in a poker game. He was friends with the Gettys."

"Really?"

"Really."

Jay said, "So when I—I mean, my boss—contacted you to work here, you had plans all along to try to locate the painting?"

"Oh, yeah. I couldn't believe my good luck. Saved me having to approach him. This way, Paul wouldn't possibly be suspicious."

"But you've been in art restoration for more than a decade. How come it took you so long to get around to this estate?"

"Busy, I guess. And I've been so mad about it that I was worried I'd blow it if I met him. As you can tell, I'm not very good at subterfuge."

"Uh, no. You're not. I wouldn't continue with your life of crime if I were you."

"This was my first and last job. But boy, is that Paul creep gonna regret hiring me. I am gonna bring that sucker down."

"Why didn't you just make an appointment with him to talk to him about it? I know you've got a pretty low opinion of him, but he's pretty reasonable from what I've seen of him. Besides, are you sure he stole it? Isn't it possible there's another story there?"

"Don is convinced, therefore, I'm convinced."

"And Don's a completely reliable source?"

"Sure, he's my brother. Why would he lie?"

"Has he ever been in trouble?"

"No. Well, there was that DUI, and he hasn't really been able to hold down a job. He kinda lives off my parents and his inheritance from my grandparents. But he's a good guy. Besides, when it was all happening, when he was in college, he was doing well. Right after that painting got stolen, he quit going to Harvard and just dropped out of life. It was weird. He took that theft so hard. All he did for ten years after that was hitchhike through Europe."

"Huh, interesting. Does he know you're here? Does he know about your secret mission to recover the painting?"

"God, no. That painting was such a sore spot with him, he can't even talk about it. I was going to surprise him with it."

"Oh, I bet he'll be surprised," Jay said, more to himself.

"I think so, too."

"Will you do me a favor?" he asked.

"Sure, anything."

"Will you let me do my own investigation? Before you contact the police or go public with the information?"

"Uh... sure. Why not? I've waited twenty years, I can wait a few more weeks."

"Good. Maybe I can find out what's going on. Mr. Paul trusts me."

"Yeah, but do you trust Mr. Paul? You know, you stir up a problem, you could be looking for work."

"Perhaps. Still, I'd like to find out about this theft."

"Good. Now I don't feel so alone."

"You're not alone," he said, kissing her again. Within a few minutes, they were making out, which led to more amazing sex.

"Uh, you aren't married or anything are you?" Janisse asked after the second go round.

"No. You thought I was married? You'd sleep with a married man?" Jay asked, surprised, examining her face.

"No, God no. I just... well, you're hot and—that's right, I saw you in bed alone. So why aren't you married?"

"I was. Didn't work out. What about you?"

"Same. Was married for ten years, but he... he wasn't a very good person as it turned out. I can be naive. I'm trying not to be. That's why I'm asking you. The last guy I dated turned out to be married. Jerk. Broke my heart. I'm too trusting. That's my problem."

"I think that's an attribute, not a problem," he said, smiling at her. "You're a good person, so you judge others based upon who you are."

"Yeah, not who they are. And this... I'm... I don't sleep around. I don't know how this happened."

"I seduced you, that's how it happened."

"I know. But..."

"Hey, I hope you don't think I'm just going to toss you aside, now that I've made love to you," Jay said.

"Thought crossed my mind."

"Well, uncross it. I don't sleep around, either."

"But you're so handsome. I'll bet a lot of the other workers here, staff, have pursued you."

"Yes. I even dated one, but when it's not right, it's not right. But with you, Janisse, well, this feels more right to me than anything has in a long, long time."

"Wow. Me too. I just hope Mr. Evil doesn't find out about this. He'd fire you so fast. I don't want to get you into trouble."

"I knew I was in trouble the moment I met you," Jay said with a grin. And then he kissed her. "So... where do we go from here?"

"I don't know. Where do you want to go?"

"I don't want to let you go, that's for certain."

"I don't want to be let go of."

"So... you live in San Francisco?" he asked.

"Yeah. Love it there. Bought a townhouse about five years ago."

"How do you feel about re-locating?"

"For you? Sure. But where, here?"

"This is where I live."

"Won't Mr. Paul object?"

"No. Most of the staff are married."

"Don't you want your own place?"

"So you don't like it here?"

"No, God, I love it here. But after I bust your boss, I will not be welcomed here."

"What if it turns out Mr. Paul didn't steal that painting?"

"He did."

"But what if he didn't?"

"It's here, isn't it? It's got my initials on the back of it, doesn't it?"

"What if there's another story there?"

"I'd be interested to hear it, but I'm not gonna believe anything that bastard says."

"How can you hate someone you've never met before?"

"Easy."

"How would you feel if you accused Mr. Paul of something he didn't do and you found out later you were wrong? How would you feel?"

"Stupid and ashamed. It's a chance I'll take."

Jay laughed. "You are very tenacious, aren't you?"

"Exceedingly."

"Well, let me find out about it, okay?"

"Sure."

"Another question. I think you have more money than I do. How do you feel about inequities in financial backgrounds? Is this going to bother you? That I'm just some security guard at a big estate?"

"No. But you seem much more educated than that," she said.

"Well, I am. I just love it here. And I like the staff, the job. I know it's not very prestigious, not like your career—"

"Prestigious doesn't mean diddly squat. The last guy liked me because I'd been featured in

Smithsonian Magazine. What did that do for me? All I've been looking for is real love, Jay. Someone who loved me no matter what I did or owned. Besides, I have a townhouse. I drive a ten-year-old car. I'm comfortable, but I'm not rich. Most of my money goes to retirement and taxes."

"So my job doesn't bother you?"

"God, no. But what about your future? Where do you see yourself in ten years?"

"Married to you."

Something about the way he said it, hit her hard. She burst into tears.

"What? What did I say?"

"Nothing. You... just. You're so kind and emotionally available. I hope this isn't an illusion. I hope you're for real. I hope you're..."

"Shhh, shhh, I am. And I'm not going anywhere."

"Good. Sorry."

"Don't apologize," he said, smiling at her. "You're so cute." Then he kissed her. When he pulled away, he said, "My future? I don't know. I took this job because I love this estate, also because I was burned out. I used to be a lawyer."

"You? A lawyer?" she asked, alarmed, looking at him.

He laughed. "Yeah, I hated it. When I ran into Mr. Paul in court one day—"

"Let me guess, he was there because he ripped off—"

"No. He was there because someone ripped him off."

"Oh."

"Anyway, we started talking and suddenly, he offered me this job. I intended to take it for a year and then return to my practice, but... I really liked it here. And now that his parents are gone, he has a ton of plans for this place."

"So you're not just a security guy."

"No. I'm the estate manager."

"Oh. Why did you tell me you were a security

guy?"

"Security is part of my job."

"Oh. Oh. That's why you sleep in the main house here."

"Everyone sleeps in the main house here."

"Oh. That's right. Weird. I wouldn't think a snob like Paul would allow the serfs to sleep near him."

"Where do you get these opinions of Mr. Paul, anyway? He's not a bad guy."

"I read some stories about him."

"Tabloids?" Jay asked.

"Well, yeah. I know they're full of lies, but where there's smoke..."

"Those were all published by an ex-girlfriend of his."

"You really like the guy, don't you?"

"Well, yeah."

"Well, he can't be all bad if you like him."

"He isn't. So let me do the investigation before you go to the police, okay?"

"I promised."

"Good girl."

Janisse had every intention of waiting for Jay's investigation. But just a day after their spectacular lovemaking session, Jay was called away from the estate. He told her that Mr. Paul had an important auction to attend in Europe and that he insisted that Jay accompany him. Neither wanted to part ways, but each had work to do. Jay made her promise again to wait to go to the police. But a week later, she hadn't heard from Jay. He'd sent flowers to her the day he left, but nothing after that, and she'd heard through the household grapevine that Mr. Paul had encountered some problems in Europe, so she assumed Jay was tied up.

A week after that and she was done with her restoration project. She'd only heard from Jay once during that week, a quick ten minute conversation where he assured her he'd be back in her arms soon. But what was weird was that he didn't let her know where he was, didn't give her a number where

she could call him. She'd forgotten to give him her home number and wanted to make sure he could reach her.

But when she tried to get information from other staff members about where Jay was staying with Mr. Paul, that's when she got the disturbing news. No one had ever heard of Jay Phillips. After questioning every staff member she came across, it quickly became clear to her that Jay was a liar. When she described him, the staff drew blanks. When she told the head gardener that Jay told her he was the estate manager, he introduced her to a woman named Margaret Moyer who was the estate manager and had been for fifteen years. All of them were convinced that Janisse had inhaled too many paint fumes. They didn't believe that she'd met Jay. They didn't even believe that he existed. When she told them where she'd met him, they grew cold. She wasn't allowed in those parts of the estate. Didn't she know that? After she revealed too much information about her adventures around the estate, she was asked to leave. Quickly. In fact, she was escorted off the estate.

She cried herself all the way home and went straight to bed. Another liar! Another man who took advantage of her! When would her losing streak end?

When she awoke the next day, Janisse knew what she had to do.

Within two days, all her dreams came true. She was walking by a newsstand and read this glorious headline: Reclusive Billionaire Accused Of Art Theft. Janisse couldn't have been more pleased. She learned in the article that Mr. Paul was being summoned back from Europe to address her charges. Whoo-hoo! Two points for her side!

Three days later, she found herself with her lawyer, headed to the police station to face that Jared Paul rat. The police wanted some more details or something. Janisse couldn't wait to take apart the billionaire personally.

The first person she ran into was her brother Don.

"Don!" she cried as she hugged him. "What are you doing here?"

"Uh..." he said, awkwardly.

"Mr. and Miss Acorn, could you please come in here?" asked a plain clothed officer who had just emerged from an office near the waiting room.

"Why do they want you here, Don?" asked Janisse as they walked into the conference room followed by her lawyer, Milton Hayes.

"I... uh..." Don stammered.

Janisse was trying to figure out why her brother was there and why he was acting so strangely as she walked into the room. And that's when she saw him. Jay. Sitting on one side of the conference table flanked by two men in suits. And he didn't look happy.

"Jay! What are you doing here? What's going on? Why didn't you call me?" she asked, completely confused.

Before Jay could answer, the police detective, Detective Jones, said, "Miss Acorn, could you please come in and sit down?"

"Well, yeah, but will someone please tell me what's going on? Where's Mr. Paul? Why is Jay here? And why is my brother here?"

The detective looked confused. "I don't know who Jay is, but this is Mr. Paul. And you don't know why your brother is here? He hasn't explained it to you yet?"

"Explained what? Wait. Who's Mr. Paul?"

"I am, Janisse," said Jay.

"What?! What the hell is going on here?! You can't be Mr. Paul!"

"I'll explain that later. Please sit down," Jay said. "Your brother has something to say to you."

"Don? What does he have to do with anything?! You can't be Mr. Paul! I don't get this! What is going on?! Don! What does he mean?"

Don looked down at the table and then finally

looked up at her. "I... this is all my fault, Janny. Uh... I had no idea you were doing this investigation. And getting the police involved. This is such a mess. I...and I apologize, Jared. I..."

"What are you talking about?!" Janisse cried.

Then Don said, "Jared didn't steal the Monet. I sold it to him."

"What?! You what?! You sold him the painting! You sold him our painting? Wait. Did he make you say this? Did he pay you to—"

"No, no. This is such a mess. I... wanted to leave home, and I didn't have the money, and Jared loved the painting, and I... stole it from the family and sold it to him. That's how I lived in Europe for ten years."

"You sold him the painting?! But... I...."

"I'm sorry, Janny. I should have told you. But I was so ashamed. And you loved that painting so much. I was... I'm just so sorry it all came to this."

All Janisse could do was stare into space. Her whole reason for going to college, her whole life had been about the recovery of that stolen painting. And not only that... Jay was Jared Paul? Janisse couldn't help it, she was so upset and confused, she burst into tears.

Her brother tried to comfort her, but she slapped his hand away. "You liar! What you put me through! What you put us all through!"

"I'm sorry, Janny. I..."

Detective Jones said, "Well, it seems as if this mystery has been solved. I'm sorry, Mr. Paul, for the confusion. With the evidence Miss Acorn presented, it seemed as if we had a strong case. My apologies."

"Accepted. She did have a strong case. So if there's nothing else, gentlemen?" Jared said, rising.

Detective Jones said, "Sir, yes, you're free to go. Unless you want to press charge against—"

"No," Jared was quick to say.

"Then you're free to go."

Janisse couldn't even look at Jay or Jared,

whatever his name was. Not only was she furious that he had lied to her, she was so upset about her brother's deception that she was out of her mind. She didn't know at whom she was angrier. That Paul man, her brother or herself for being so stupid.

"Miss Acorn, in the light of the new information, I think this case is closed," Detective Jones said.

"I'm sorry," she said, suppressing a sob.

"It's all my fault," Don said.

"Yes, it is. Detective, can I get out of here?" Janisse asked.

"Yes, Miss Acorn."

Janisse got up and dashed out of the room, cutting off Jared, his attorneys and her brother at the door.

She raced off down the hallway.

"Janisse, wait!" came Jared's voice from behind her.

But Janisse wouldn't. She rushed out the front doors of the police station and ran towards her car. She was putting the key in the lock of her car when she felt someone grab her arm. She looked up into the face of Jared.

She shrugged him off and said, "You lied to me! You don't love me! You never loved me! Everyone always lies to me!"

"Janisse, calm down. We have to talk."

"I'm never talking to you! You—"

He grabbed her and pulled her to him. "I said, calm down," he said. Then, while she tried to push him away, he kissed her.

After fighting him for a few seconds, his masterful kissing finally got to her. Without meaning to, she embraced him and kissed him back.

But when he pulled away, she was still mad. "Stop that!" she ordered up at his amused face.

"You're coming with me," he said as he began leading her away.

"No, I'm not!" she cried as she fought him. He simply picked her up and carried her to his awaiting

limousine.

He stuffed her into the back of the car and ordered his driver to go.

"You can't do this to me!" she protested.

"I am doing this to you, now quiet down and hear me out."

"I don't have to! You lied to me, you—"

"And you pressed charges against me even though you promised me you would wait."

"I didn't know you were him! Why did you lie to me?!"

"Because you hated me even though you'd never met me before. I didn't think you'd listen to me. You certainly never would have kissed me."

"I sure as heck wouldn't have! You lied to me!"

"Janisse, stop yelling and calm down and hear me out. You owe me that."

"I do not!"

"Look, you're the one in trouble here, young lady, not me. You disobeyed me, made me come back from Europe, ruining a very important deal, you splashed my name all over the news—causing me umpteen headaches—not to mention a whole lot of lawyer fees—"

"Let me out of this car! I don't have to listen to this! You're all liars!"

"Janisse, I'm warning you, stop this and calm down. We're going to talk about this rationally—"

"I don't have to talk to you! Now let me out of here!" she said, going for the door handle.

"Okay, that's it, I've had enough out of you," he said, grabbing her. He yanked her across his lap, lifted up her skirt, pulled down her panties and began spanking her, hard.

"Stop!" she cried.

"No! You stop! I tried to reason with you, but no! Now, you will stop fighting me, you will calm down, and you will listen to me!" he said, punctuating each word with a firm slap to her tender behind.

As Janisse began sobbing in pain, he pulled her

up and sat her in his lap.

"Now, you listen to me. Yes, I lied, and for that I'm sorry. But, that's all I did. I didn't think you'd love me for who I was. I wanted to make sure you loved me for me. And, secondly, I still love you. I was busy, that's why I couldn't call you. Thirdly, I want to marry you if you'll shut up long enough for me to propose."

"Y-y-you want to-to m-marry me?" she said, wiping the tears away.

"Oh, yes, you troublesome little thing, but I'm warning you here and now, you ever disobey me like that and cause me this much trouble again, I will take my belt to that fine little ass of yours, understand? I won't tolerate any nonsense in this marriage."

Janisse sniffed and nodded. Jared smiled and kissed her.

It was then it all hit her. She was getting married.

"We're getting married?"

"You haven't accepted yet."

"Oh. Oh. Yes, yes I'll marry you!" she cried out enthusiastically.

Jared just laughed and kissed her. When he pulled away, he said, "And I have a wedding present for you."

"I don't want anything, just you."

"I think you want that painting, don't you?"

"Oh, Jay!" she said, throwing her arms around his neck and kissing him.

The Hacker

Celia had been working at the lawyer's office for six weeks. Long enough to get some info on a good number of clients. This was the way she usually acquired her targets. She worked as an administrative assistant, showed up on time, was the exemplary worker. Within a few weeks, normally, due to her cute looks and diligence around the office, the higher ups would begin to trust her and let her have access to more sensitive information. And, if they didn't, after few weeks, Celia would find a way to sneak the information. This was her tenth job and hopefully, her last.

What Celia wanted was credit card numbers and bank information. She'd taken one guy for twenty-five thousand dollars before he changed his password on his checking account. On another man's credit card, she charged a car.

Celia didn't just pick on anyone. She never targeted women, she always picked the same type of man. They were rich, successful, good-looking and full of themselves. Well deserving. She never picked men with children or wives. Only playboys. Once in awhile, she targeted men who cheated on their spouses. Men who needed a good comeuppance. Men who thought they could go around breaking women's hearts, taking what they wanted out of life without a thought to another person. Men just like Celia's ex-husband.

So when Mr. Robert Fairbanks walked into the office one day, Celia immediately took notice. The man was tall, had blondish brownish hair, beautiful blue eyes, a handsome face, dashing smile and was dressed very stylishly. Obviously, he thought he was someone special. No wedding ring. Flirted with all the women. Disgusting. He'd made a special point to wink at Celia as he passed her desk. Which, in Celia's mind, instantly marked him as a target.

It wasn't long before Celia gathered the necessary information on Mr. Fairbanks. Her boss

had hired him as some sort of consultant. As soon as the requisition form came down to pay Mr. Fairbanks, she had his social security number. From there, it took no time to gather the rest of the information she needed. His email address, his bank account number. But what she wanted most was a credit card number and for that, she needed to hack into his computer.

Celia was an expert at computers, always had been. Since her no-good father gave her a computer when she was ten (one he'd stolen), Celia spent all her time learning its secrets. She'd graduated at the top of her class in computer science and had been recruited by one of the hottest companies in Silicon Valley. After giving her heart to the company and its CEO, her rotten husband, he'd left Celia for his secretary, fired her and because of a pre-nuptial agreement, Celia had ended up with almost nothing. Except for a lot of anger. Then Celia began dating another Silicon Valley executive; he turned out to be married. Then, after working for three years at a start-up company for little pay, the company folded overnight without telling its employees. Celia showed up at work one morning to find the building shuttered. The CEO—another handsome man who'd seduced her and broken her heart—had left town owing Celia over a hundred thousand dollars.

Finally, Celia decided enough was enough. All her honest hard work had gotten her zip. So, Celia decided to follow in her father's footsteps and try the other side of life. The criminal side. Celia's new business turned out to pay far more handsomely than any of her legitimate jobs ever had. They also paid well in the revenge department. Celia's first target was her ex-husband. Her next? The married CEO who'd lied to her. And then, of course, Mr. Start Up was taken for the hundred grand he owed her.

Soon, Celia's side job became her primary job. Then, she began to restructure the way she worked.

She doctored her résumé to look less impressive, took a low-level job in a firm and began scouring for targets. It never took that long. Celia was very pretty and attracted the attention of many slime ball executives. Soon, one would try to seduce her, and Celia would have her new target. It was fun, rewarding and infinitely lucrative. Celia was at the point where she only had to pull off a few more jobs, and she could retire to Hawaii in luxury.

So when Mr. Robert Fairbanks strolled into the office one morning, Celia had a hint that the man was going to be next on the list. The way he flirted with all the women, the self important way he carried himself, the perfect way he was dressed, it all added up to one thing. The man had a bull's eye painted on his chest.

One afternoon, after Mr. Fairbanks sat and chatted and flirted with Celia at length, she decided the time was right to strike. While she'd enjoyed his company and his attention, Celia knew that underneath his charming exterior laid a snake. The jerk even suggested that they might go out together once his business with her boss was finished. As if! Celia knew what would happen. She'd date Robert, fall in love, and he'd dump her. The usual.

So, that night, Celia got onto her computer and hacked into Fairbanks's PC. It was so easy! The guy didn't even have a firewall. Such an idiot. Celia got his credit card number and immediately went on-line and ordered a Cartier diamond watch, price tag, \$7,500.00. Then Celia sat back and laughed. This was so fun! She had the package delivered to a mailbox, one she changed often.

The next day, when Mr. Fairbanks came into the office, Celia was very happy to see him. She flirted and laughed at his jokes, thoroughly enjoying him now that she had the upper hand on the charming cad. Her secret kept her giddy the entire day. Then after she'd gotten several more information profiles on potential targets, Celia prepared to leave for the

day. And for good. She never gave notice. She preferred to disappear. Cleaner that way.

As Celia was gathering her things, someone touched her arm. When she turned and looked up, she was staring into the face of none other than Mr. Robert Fairbanks.

"Mr. Fairbanks, you're still here?"

"I was waiting for you, Miss Filice."

"Really?"

"Really. I was wondering if we might have that drink we spoke of earlier."

"Uh, I thought you didn't date the staff of clients."

"My business with your boss is concluded. I'd love it if you'd accompany me to the Vault."

One of the most expensive restaurants in San Francisco. But, Celia didn't care. Like the man meant it? Even though Fairbanks was devastatingly handsome and charming, and she was very attracted to him, Celia knew what kind of a man he was. A creep. Just like all the rest.

"Oh, Mr. Fairbanks, I wish I'd known. I already made plans. I'm so disappointed. Can I possibly take a rain check?"

Robert took her hand and gave her a penetrating stare. It actually got to her a bit. The man was undeniably hot. "Miss Filice, can't I convince you to cancel the previous engagement? I've been so looking forward to spending some time with you."

If it had been three years earlier, Celia would have cleared off her desk with a sweep of her arm, tossed the man on top and ravished him. But, Celia knew better now. This man was a predator. He didn't really like her. He just wanted to use her.

"Oh, Mr. Fairbanks—"

"Robert, please—"

"Robert, then. I'd love to. But, I'm afraid I have to go visit my mother in the hospital."

His face fell. Fairbanks actually looked concerned. Celia felt a tinge of guilt about her lie.

Her mother had been dead for ten years.

"I'm so sorry. Is she going to be all right?" he asked.

"We think so. She's had trouble with her heart, and she was short of breath the other night, so they wanted to observe her and run some tests. Unfortunately, I'm the only child living in this area, and I need to be there for her," Celia explained.

"Of course, of course. Can I give you a lift there?"

"Oh, thank you, but... I'm... upset about this, and I don't think I'd be very good company. If I go out with you, I'd like my head to be clear, and I'd like you to be my focus," Celia said with an engaging smile.

Worked like a charm. The man was practically eating out of her hand. Fairbanks lit up and said, "Of course. I'd like that, too. I don't want to be presumptuous, but would it be possible for me to have your phone number?"

"Oh, certainly. I'm so glad you asked," Celia said, retrieving her purse. Which fake card should she give him? The Sunnyvale address, that was always a good one. Celia dug out the card and handed it to him.

"May I call you?" Fairbanks asked graciously.

"I'd love that, Robert," Celia said with a flirty smile.

Robert then took her hand and kissed it. Just like a fairy tale. Only, this fairy tale wasn't going to have a happy ending. Not for Robert. The lout. As if Celia actually believed a guy like him would want her. She was posing as an administrative assistant. This guy obviously just wanted sex. The only type of women Fairbanks would be serious about was an executive with a huge bank account. Robert just wanted to use her. It was so clear.

"I'll call you, then?" Robert said. Still with the absolutely dashing smile on his face.

"I'll look forward to it," Celia said. See ya, later, sucker!

A week later, Celia was wearing her new diamond watch, eating lunch in downtown San Mateo, luxuriating in her time off between jobs. She thought of that jerk, Robert. Thought he was so great. He would have broken her heart. Just like all the rest.

Celia ordered dessert and sat back, sipping on her champagne cocktail. Then her cell phone rang. Thinking it must be her good friend, Meg, one of the only people who had her number, Celia answered it.

"Celia here," she said into the receiver.

"Miss Silvers," came a man's voice over the phone. "Do you have any idea what kind of trouble you are in?"

"Who is this?"

"You have made me a very angry man."

"Who are you?"

"I am going to hunt you down, drag you to my house, tie you to my bed and spank you until you cry."

Then Celia got the voice. Robert Fairbanks. Calling her by her real last name. On her personal cell phone.

"I'm sorry, you have the wrong—"

"I do not. Be warned. I will find you and when I do, my dear, you will pay. For what you've done to me and the others. Then I will force you to return everything you've stolen and then, maybe, I will turn you over to the police. But first, my dear, I will make you very sorry you ever decided to cross me. Very sorry." Click.

Celia sat there, staring into space, her mouth hanging open. How did Robert get her cell phone number? How did he find out her real name? What else did he know about her?

Celia tried to figure out what to do next. Should she return home? Should she hop on a plane and get out of there? There was no way she was going to jail!

Celia left her dessert, got up and hurried out of the restaurant. She had to go home. At the very least, she had to retrieve her computer.

Celia drove around her block four times before she stopped and parked in front of her house. Luckily, there was no sign of anyone watching her place. Robert hadn't found her home yet. Excellent.

Celia grabbed her computer, her money stash and packed a quick bag. She would take a plane somewhere and hide out. She had plenty of cash to last her for a few months. Especially if she went somewhere cheap.

Celia was putting her things in her trunk when she heard a car pull up behind her. Celia didn't even turn around, she walked directly to her car door and opened it. But, Celia should have turned around. Because, without warning, arms were around her, and she was off the ground.

"If you fight me, Miss Silvers, it will be much worse for you," Fairbanks warned in her ear.

However, Celia was in no mood to be caught. She kicked and screamed and fought him, but to no avail. Robert easily carried her to his large, black SUV and tossed her in back. Then he got in with her. She desperately tried to fight him off, but Robert easily pinned her. Then to her shock, he tied her arms behind her back and her feet together.

"Robert! You can't do this! This is kidnapping!"

"Oh, so now you're worried about broken laws, ay, Miss Silvers? As they pertain to you."

Celia finally caught the look on his face. It made her very queasy. Robert was livid. He had a scary, vengeful and very determined look on his handsome face.

Robert then left her there, tied up, on her side. He went to her car, retrieved her things and put them in the back of his SUV. Then he locked her car, got into the front of the SUV and began driving.

Celia was tied so well, she couldn't get free. "Robert, please! Can't we talk about this?"

"Later. Now is the time for action, Miss Silvers."

"How did you find me?"

"I'm a private detective, it's my job to find people," Robert replied coolly. "Especially naughty little girls such as yourself. It's my job to find them and bring them to justice. This time, I'm meting out some of the justice myself."

"But, you can't be serious!"

"Oh, but I can, Miss Silvers."

They drove to Brisbane, up to a gorgeous house on the side of a hill overlooking the San Francisco Bay. It was a lovely spot. Then Robert got out, grabbed Celia and began carrying her into his house.

"No! Robert, please! Put me down! We can discuss this rationally!" Celia cried.

"I'm sure we can. Afterwards. But for now, my dear, you are paying the price for deceiving me, lying to me and stealing from me. I assume that's the watch."

"Look, I'll take it back, but—"

"You most certainly will," Robert said.

Fairbanks took her through his kitchen, past his living room and then he began carrying her upstairs.

"Robert, no! Please!"

Robert carried her to his bedroom and tossed her onto the bed.

"This is illegal!"

"So is hacking into someone's computer, Miss Silvers," Robert said as he flipped her onto her stomach.

Then, as Celia wriggled and tried to squirm away, Robert untied her hands from behind her and retied them to his headboard. He moved down, then, took off her shoes and untied her legs. She kicked and tried to escape, but her wrists were tied securely to his bed. This was not happening!

Then, to Celia's absolute horror, Robert lifted her dress halfway up her back, took hold of her panties and hose and pulled them all the way off. He tossed them onto a chair near his bed and

grabbed a hold of her kicking legs and retied them to his bed.

Celia lay there, stunned. She was now naked all the way from above her waist to her feet and tied to a man's bed on her tummy. A man she had ripped off. A very angry man. How did this happen?!

Then, with a very determined look in his eye, Robert knelt on the bed next to her and whacked her soundly on her bare rear. It stung!

"Robert, no! I'm sorry!"

"Yes, I'm sure you are. But not as sorry as you're about to be."

He began delivering sharp spansks in rapid succession to Celia's bare behind. He was not being gentle with her, either. The man was punishing her to the best of his ability. He was strong, had large muscular hands and was not holding back. He laid into her bare backside with his open hand, the slapping sound filling the room along with Celia's cries of protest and pain.

"Ow, Robert! Please stop! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Celia wailed.

Robert didn't even respond. He just kept swatting her with dramatic strikes, delivering them in a ceaseless rhythm. Celia couldn't remember being more humiliated nor in more pain in her life. This was unbearable!

"Owww, please, Robert, no!" Celia howled. Then the tears came. Lots of them. Celia began sobbing and howling, pleading and begging Robert to stop his horrible torment.

But, Robert was being very thorough. There wasn't one spot on Celia's bare rear that wasn't searing in pain. He worked his way up and around her bottom. Then, for an excruciating few minutes, he concentrated solely on her most sensitive sit spots until she was yowling at the top of her lungs.

Then, finally, gratefully, he stopped and moved off the bed. After crying for a few more minutes, Celia lay limp on the bed, sobbing quietly.

"You are a very bad girl, Miss Silvers," Robert

informed her once she'd quieted. "A very bad girl, indeed. How many men have you stolen from?"

"About eight or nine," Celia said in a quiet voice.

"Why? You have a good degree, you're bright, excellent at computers, why would you commit such heinous crimes?" Robert asked.

"Because all you bastards broke my heart! My ex-husband took me for everything I had to give, then that married two-timer double-crossed me, then Mr. Start Up Company. I got ripped off and had my heart broken so many times, I finally decided to take some action."

"I can understand those targets, but why me?"

"Because you're just like all the rest. Like you'd want a lowly administrative assistant? Ha! You were just gonna use me and toss me away like the rest. I'm not stupid, you know?"

"I'm beginning to think that you are, Celia. Because I, in no way, wanted to use you. I liked you. I wanted to see you. And, I don't use people. I only date women whom I consider to be potential future mates. I don't have sex for sport. And, I wouldn't have approached you if I thought you did."

"But, I don't! I'm the good one! I'm the idiot who always believes men's lies! I'm the victim here, buddy, not you!"

Whack! "Ow!"

"Not this time, Miss Silvers, this time I was the victim. You were so busy being angry at all men, you didn't stop to realize that maybe you targeted the wrong one. That perhaps there was one man out there that was honorable. I've never done anything to hurt a woman. I'm not capable. Yet, just because we met, and I fancied you, you targeted me."

"Well, how was I supposed to know that? I've only met jerks. You guys all look the same to me."

"Well, you were wrong. Perhaps you should give that some thought."

Celia tried not to, but she did give Robert's words thought. And, she didn't like the mirror on

her behavior. She'd never meant to target someone who didn't deserve her wrath. She'd never even considered that some man wouldn't be a jerk. She had just made the assumption that all men were horrible. Which now, in retrospect, was stupid. Celia had just hurt someone who hadn't hurt her or anyone else. In that moment, Celia realized that she'd become that which she hated. She'd become the user. She'd become just like the men she loathed so much.

"I... never considered that I'd target the wrong guy. I..."

"You didn't think, did you, Miss Silvers?"

"No, I guess not. I was so focused on getting even, I didn't realize that... Damn. Now I'm just like them. Great. Now, I'm the jerk."

"Yes, you are."

"I'm... uh... deeply sorry, Robert. I... I'm..."

"Yes?"

"Uh... very ashamed of myself. I'm... I have nothing to say in my defense. I was wrong and bad, and I'm sorry. I apologize for my awful behavior. I guess you'd better call the police. I'll make a full confession. I never wanted to be like those jerks who fooled me. I never wanted to become them."

Robert sat on the bed next to her and began to rub her behind. It felt good.

"I'm sorry, Robert."

"I actually believe you are. Perhaps there's hope for you yet."

Suddenly, Celia realized something. She was getting turned on. Naked, tied to the man's bed, her rear end tingling, something about it went straight to her libido. Something about being caught and punished by this very handsome, very moral man. It was all quite arousing.

Celia realized that she'd been feeling guilty about what she'd been doing. She'd felt good about the first few times, when she got money out of her ex-husband and the men that had hurt her. But, lately, down deep, Celia knew what she'd been

doing was wrong. And now, with Robert charging into her life, stopping her and punishing her for her crimes, she felt like he'd just rescued a part of her. The good part that had been slowly leaving her. And, because of that, because of Robert's caring, his authority, the way he took her in hand, Celia was having a very strong reaction to him. She wanted him. She wanted him inside her.

As if Robert sensed this, he began stroking her rear more lightly, more seductively.

"You've really been a bad girl, Celia. But, I don't believe you're bad all the way through. I think you've been hurt and that you acted out, but all the while, you really wanted someone to step in, to stop you and care about you. Care about you enough to help you stop the cycle."

Celia nodded quietly.

"You really are a lovely girl, Celia. Very lovely," Robert said, still rubbing her behind, with a light, gentle touch.

Celia tried not to, but she began pressing her hips against the bed, almost unconsciously. She wanted Robert to touch her more.

She heard Robert chuckle. Then, he dropped a hand down between her legs. Celia gasped and lifted up her hips to receive him.

Robert slipped his hand underneath her and gently massaged her. Celia's breathing increased. When he slipped a finger inside her, she was so ready that she gave no resistance at all.

After teasing her for a while, Robert said, "Celia, you really have been a bad girl, I think a good tongue lashing would be very deserved at this point, don't you?"

"Oh, Robert," Celia moaned.

Chuckling to himself, Robert untied her legs and gently flipped her onto her back. But, he didn't untie her hands.

With a grin on his handsome face, Robert pushed her legs apart. Celia began breathing even heavier.

"Now, young lady, I'm going to lick you into shape," Robert quipped as he moved down between her legs.

Robert's tongue flicked at her expertly. Tiny circles became tiny strokes until Celia was writhing in pleased agony. And then she came. Violently. Celia roared and arched up against Robert's practiced tongue, shuddering and spasming with delight.

Celia had barely begun to come back down to Earth when Robert stripped, moved on top of her and slipped inside her.

Celia was catapulted into orgasm after orgasm. Robert's determined expression, the dark look in his eye, the way he took control of her, his magnificent manhood plunging deep inside her, Celia was in ecstasy.

When Robert came, he drove even more deeply inside her, causing her to launch into another explosive climax. Celia screamed with joy.

When Robert was finished, he untied her hands and took her into his arms.

"Robert, I—"

"Sssh, you shush and let me do the talking. Now, this is the way it's going to be. You will approach and make restitution to everyone you stole from, including your ex-husband. Then, my dear, I am going to be your personal parole officer from here on out. I will help keep you out of jail, but if you so much as get a speeding ticket, I will take you across my knee and spank you so hard, you won't be sitting for months. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, Robert."

"Will you obey me and listen to what I tell you?"

"Yes, Robert."

"Will you ever break the law again?"

"No, Robert."

"You're damn right, you won't. And, I'll make sure you don't. I'll be by your side from now on, watching your every move. Especially, that move you just made a few moments ago. That's the move

I intend to see the most," Robert said with a grin on his handsome face.

"Robert!" Celia giggled as Robert climbed on top of her.

The Storm

"There is no way I'm leaving here, so you can just forget it," Sheila told the overly handsome man at her door.

"One way or another, lady, you're coming with me. Easy way or the hard way, you choose," said Nick Masterson, a new resident of their small community.

Cute or no, the guy was a jerk. "Look, I've been living here longer than you, and I know danger when I see it," Sheila retorted. "This is not dangerous. So, please, go rescue yourself, but I'm fine. The water level isn't near flood stages, and I'm up higher here than you are. So, save yourself, but leave me alone."

"Why are you making this so hard on me, lady? I'm not leaving you here. The storm is not going to let up, so we have to make for the bridge."

"I told you, I'm going to be fine. Oh, God, the creek," Sheila said, finally noticing the rising waters at the base of her country driveway.

"I told you."

"It's never done that before. My shed is nearly underwater."

"That's what I've been trying to tell you, now come on."

"Maybe you're right."

"I am right, and if we don't go now, we'll never get out, now hurry!"

Sheila packed a quick bag of necessities: change of clothes, wallet, money and credit cards.

"Are you done, yet?" came her neighbor's urgent demand from Sheila's front room.

"Yes, yes, here I am. Let's go. We should take my Land Rover."

"It's underwater. Only my Jeep is on higher ground."

"My Land Rover is flooded?! Wait, we have to save it!"

"Lady, we don't have time for this."

"Fine, let's just leave my sixty thousand dollar vehicle and get into your two thousand dollar mess," Sheila hurled at Nick. Then she began to breeze by him. "Sorry, I'm getting my—"

"The hell you are!"

Nick suddenly lunged forward and grabbed her. Tossing her over his shoulder, he headed for his Jeep.

Sheila was furious. Who was this Neanderthal? No one treated Sheila Warren like this! Not only was she THE preeminent writer on feminism in America, she had taken care of herself her entire life. She didn't need to be rescued by some man.

"You put me down. I order you to put me down!" she yelled.

"Obviously, you haven't noticed this yet, but I don't take orders from uppity women! Especially uppity women with death wishes. Now shut up, and let me help you!" Nick fired back.

"Put me down!"

But, the man wouldn't. He carried her over to his Jeep, opened the passenger side door and tossed her inside with all the dignity of a sack of potatoes. Then, he slammed the door behind her.

After she recovered, Sheila attempted to get out, but Nick was already inside the vehicle. He reached over and took her by the arm.

"I swear, lady, you get out now, and I'll knock you unconscious and drag you out of here!"

"How dare you!" Sheila moved to slap him, but he caught her arm, hard.

"You hit me, lady, and I'll have you across my knee so fast it'll make your head spin! Now, I'm taking you out of here, and you're going to stop fighting me!"

"This is so typical. Men are so limited. All you can think about is dominating me. It's sick, really. This whole show of yours. Why don't you just beat your chest and make grunting sounds? You're one step away from an ape!"

"I swear, lady, when we get to safety, I'm going

to teach you a lesson in manners. But, right now, I have to get us out of here."

"Oh, please. You're probably just going to get us killed."

"What did I do to deserve you, I wonder?"

Sheila decided not to talk to him. The big, dumb jerk.

Nick drove as best he could over the flooded roads in an effort to reach the only bridge that led out of their little neighborhood.

But when they got to within sight of the bridge, they both realized something. There was no bridge. It was completely submerged.

"Holy Christ," Nick said.

They both looked at each other and said in unison, "Higher ground."

"Beckett's hill?" Sheila suggested.

"The old Beckett place?"

"Yeah, take Oak Lane to Maple Avenue."

"Oak Lane is right next to the creek."

"Damn, okay, there's an old back way through Judnik's Mill."

"Through the driveway?"

"Past the barn, past the orchard, the back way to Maple."

"Got it."

It was a challenge to get to Beckett's hill, but with Nick's driving expertise and his four-wheel drive, they finally made it. Soon, they were parked in front of the old summer cabin.

"Oh, hell, I forgot my cell phone. We have to go back and get it," Sheila announced.

"What? Are you nuts? Your road is already flooded, we'll never make it there and back."

"Well, I have to try. I have to call my agent."

"I am not risking my life so you can make a stupid phone call."

"I have to call him; my draft is going to be late. He needs to know that."

"Sheila, no way."

"Well, if you're too chicken to go, let me borrow

your Jeep."

"There is no way I'm going to allow you to hurt yourself. I'd never forgive myself, and there's no way I'm loaning you my Jeep."

"Obviously, you don't understand what kind of a job I have. I'm sure if you're late with something with whatever you do, it's no big deal. But, what I do is important."

"I don't care if you're the Queen of England, I'm not letting you drown. Now get out of my Jeep and get into that house."

"How dare you give me orders! Now you look, Mr. Dominant Jerk, you will stop ordering me around, I've had it with your attitude and your stupid macho crap. I need that damn cell phone, now either turn this car around, or I will!"

"Do I have to carry you everywhere?"

"Don't you dare touch me again!"

"Lady, I'm gonna do much more than touch you if you don't get the hell out of my Jeep!" Nick warned, his dark eyes blazing.

"Fine! Ruffian!" Sheila opened the door and immediately got pelted with heavy rain. She ran through ankle deep water and made it to the safety of the cabin's porch. As a teenager, during winter, she and her band of friends used to sneak up to the isolated cabin to party and make out with boys.

Sheila easily got into the old place. The key was hidden just where she'd always found it. Sheila opened the curtains and allowed as much light in as possible. The Becketts had never bothered to run electricity to the old place. They'd settled for oil lamps and propane.

"You seem to know your way around here," Nick observed as he joined her inside the house.

Sheila ignored him. She was sorely tempted to run out and steal Nick's car.

"I have the keys in my pocket, and the doors are locked," Nick said as if he was reading her mind.

Sheila turned and sent him a glare. Then she moved to the fireplace and began setting up a fire.

"I can do that," he offered.

"So can I," she replied icily.

"We're going to be here for awhile, we might as well be polite to each other."

"Whatever."

"Why are you so nasty?"

"Of course, it's all me, isn't it? Couldn't be you? No, you're the perfect male, aren't you?" Sheila said with as much loathing as she could manage.

"You keep on like this, woman, and you're gonna be biting off more than you can chew here."

"Threatening me, how manly of you," Sheila remarked dryly as she worked on the fire.

"You are some piece of work, woman. Fine, build the damn fire yourself."

"I shall, thank you."

Sheila quickly got the fire going and then headed to the kitchen, where she found Nick. Some part of her wanted to club him over the head. How infuriating to be stuck in a storm with this caveman. So what if he was easy on the eyes? Huge shoulders, rugged, even features, square jaw, intense dark brown eyes, dark brown hair, mustache, goatee, nice teeth. Didn't make up for his macho, narcissistic personality. In fact, his looks worked against him. Sheila had never met a man who looked like him who wasn't a total creep.

"Place is actually fairly well-stocked," he commented.

"Damn, they took the phone out. Damn it. I can't be late with this."

"Well, you will be."

"Thanks for stating the obvious," Sheila said, heading back to the living room.

Nick followed. "What did I ever do to you, lady, besides save your ass?"

"Let's see, first you were born, then you moved here. That ought to cover it. Oh, wait. Was it maybe because you slept with my best friend and then dumped her? No—"

"Wait a minute there. Janice, you're talking

about Janice, aren't you?"

"I'm surprised you remembered her name."

"Now, I get it. Now, it all fits. No wonder. No wonder you're best friends. Cut from the same pretentious, false, self-important, vacuous, superficial cloth."

"Wow, that was a mouthful."

"What a piece of work she was. You bet I dumped her; she was a vampire. I bet you're one, too. An energy-sucking human vampire. Only able to feed off the pain of others."

"What conceit! Mr. Moral High Ground. Janice told me all about you. You couldn't wait to get her in bed, and then you dumped her. Very classy."

"Did she mention the fact that her boyfriend dropped by while I was there?"

"Janice doesn't have a boyfriend."

"David?"

"She broke up with him years ago," Sheila said.

"David doesn't think so."

"Sure, he does. I saw him just the other night."

"They're getting married," Nick said.

"Oh, right."

"He proposed last night. I saw Janice this morning at the post office, and she showed me the ring."

"You're lying."

"Why would I do that?" Nick asked.

"Wait. She told me she had big news for me. Are you sure it was David?"

"He was in the car with her, I saw them kissing."

"But, I just saw him two nights ago at... my... place..."

David had been different that night. He'd made love to her and then when Sheila began to talk about their future, David had gone silent. And, he hadn't called the night before when he said he would. But, it couldn't be!

"Yes?" Nick said.

Wait. That's why she'd seen a car like David's parked in Janice's driveway one morning. It had

been his car! That son-of-a-bitch!

The betrayal hit Sheila hard.

"Are you all right?" Nick asked.

"I have to find the bathroom."

Sheila got up and ran for the bathroom. Then she got an idea. The Becketts had an old truck in the garage. If she could get it running, she could drive home, retrieve her cell phone and call that two-timing bastard and let him have it. And call her agent, of course.

But that David, she was going to flay him alive. That jerk! Leading her on like that. How dare he make a fool out of her!

Sheila knew that Nick the Neanderthal would try to stop her from returning home, so she snuck out the bathroom window and headed for the garage.

Once inside the old, rotting building, she climbed into the truck and tried to start it. Finally, on the fourth try, she got it going.

Then, without warning, the truck door opened.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Nick, loud and angry.

"I'm getting out of here, don't get in my way, Masterson, I need a phone."

Nick reached in and turned off the engine. Sheila grabbed his hand, but couldn't stop him. He took the keys and stuffed them into his pocket.

Sheila got so mad she had a vision shift. She leapt out of the truck and attacked him. Snarling, she punched at him, aiming for his face. She landed a good solid punch on his jaw before he caught her wrists.

Nick was furious. "You little spitfire! That's it! That's all this man can take! You're comin' with me, sweetheart, and you are going to learn a lesson! A lesson in what happens to rotten spoiled brats when they push me too hard!"

Nick yanked her up, tossed her over his shoulder and carried her back to the house.

Sheila fought with all she had, but Nick was remarkably strong. She was no match for him.

Once inside the cabin, Nick walked over to the couch and with a series of quick moves, he got Sheila across his lap in an inexorable hold.

"You big bully! Let me go!"

"You are in no position to make demands, Miss Warren, you have berated me, insulted me, verbally abused me and punched me. And, all I ever tried to do was to save your worthless little hide. Well, you may treat everyone else in your life like crap, but not me! The buck stops here, sweetheart! It's time to pay the piper!" Nick pronounced.

"Let me go!"

"You know what I've got planned for you? A good old- fashioned spanking! I don't think any woman or girl in the history of the world deserves this hiding more than you."

"I will sue you for assault!"

"May I remind you that you hit me first?"

"They won't believe you," Sheila said.

"Oh, yes, they will."

"My lawyer will take you for every penny you're worth!"

"Really? Well, then, let's make this worth every cent, shall we?"

Sheila couldn't believe it. Suddenly, Nick grabbed the back of her pants and yanked them down around her knees. Then, he pulled down her panties, too! The freezing cold air of the cabin rushed across her bare flesh.

"Nick, no!"

"Oh, yes, sweetheart, and believe me, I'm going to enjoy every minute of this. Oh, my. Look at this lovely derriere of yours. So nicely rounded. Such a shame to ruin that nice alabaster color."

Then, the beast had the audacity to run a hand over her rear!

"Are you ready?" Nick asked. She could hear the glee in his voice.

"You bastard!"

"Yep, you sound ready."

The first impact was shocking. Masterson was

really spanking her! And hard, too!

"Ow! You creep! Stop!"

"I haven't even gotten started yet, sweetheart." Whack! Nick's strike was precise, a sharp slap across both buns.

"Ow! Stop!"

Then, he delivered a storm of swats. The sound of his hand cracking across her rear echoed throughout the room. So did her wails of pain.

"You son-of-a-bitch! I'm going to kill you for this! Kill you!"

"You keep calling me names, I'll beat this beautiful ass of yours black and blue, honey!"

Then a series of spanks to one cheek until it was aflame, then he worked on the other. She'd never experienced such torment! This creep would pay!

Finally, Nick stopped. "Are you sorry, yet?"

"I'm going to kill you, you monster!"

"Apparently not."

Nick began smacking her with lusty swats; bringing his arm all the way back, and allowing the full momentum of his swing to impact her bare behind.

Finally, Sheila couldn't take it. She began sobbing and crying, pleading and begging him to stop. After more swats than she could count, Masterson finally quit.

But, Sheila kept crying. Although her rear felt like it had been burned with a branding iron, it wasn't her spanking that was upsetting her so much. David was marrying Janice. He had betrayed her. Once again, David left Sheila for Janice.

"Okay, okay, calm down," Nick said. "It's all over. I think I've made my point here. Be nice, you got that?"

Sheila barely heard a word Nick said. All she could think about was that she'd lost David. And that Janice had lied about Nick. Although Nick was a beast and had just wailed the tar out of her, Janice had lied about him. Sheila had heard he was a nice guy from most of the people in town, but Janice had

convinced her otherwise. Not only that, now Janice had stolen her man! The betrayal was too much.

"Hey, Sheila, stop. Here," Nick said as he began to rub her rear where he'd spanked her.

Then, Nick pulled up her jeans and moved her off his lap and onto the couch. Sheila curled up into a little ball and turned away from him.

"Now, look, I was just trying to make a point with you. I didn't mean to hurt you. You punched me—"

"Oh, for God's sake, it's not about you, Nick, it's about me, okay? David is marrying Janice, and he's been sleeping with me."

"Oh. Wow, I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I was horrible to you. Janice did a smear campaign on you, and I bought it hook, line and sinker. Not only did she lie to me about seeing David, she lied to me about you," Sheila said and began crying again.

"Well, jeez, now you're making me feel bad. Look—"

"I don't mean to make you feel that way, excuse me," Sheila said and got up and went into the kitchen where she knew the Beckett's kept some Scotch.

Nick followed. "Oh, come on now, honey. That's never solved anything. Come on, come and sit by the fire with me. Then, I'll cook us some dinner. Just relax. It's gonna be okay. Come on."

"I want to get blotto."

"It won't help."

"Maybe it will."

"Come on, come here," Nick said, walking over to her and throwing an arm around her shoulders. "Just come with me, and we'll talk, okay?"

"Okay."

Sheila and Nick sat by the fire, and she told him all about her relationship with David. Suddenly, she was sitting opposite a different man. Someone remarkably easy going and sweet. The more they talked, the more she felt like a crumb. Nick was

nothing like what Janice described. Despite his amazing looks, he was a down-to-earth, nice guy who was a great listener. And, she couldn't get over how attractive he was. A man's man. Self-confident without being arrogant. And, his dark eyes were so dreamy.

"So, you were with David for four years?" Nick asked.

"We were engaged. Then, he met Janice and left me."

"Then, David left Janice and came back to you?"

"Yes. I had no idea they were seeing each other again. I feel so stupid."

"Don't. You didn't lie, he did. And, so did she."

"Why are you being so nice to me, Nick? I've been so horrible to you."

"Only because you took your best friend's word about me. You trusted her. And, that's completely understandable. You're supposed to trust your friends. And now that you've let your guard down, I can see what kind of a woman you are, and you're fine. However, I still won't apologize for spanking you. That was earned."

"I suppose so."

"Are you hungry? I'm hungry. How about I fix us some food?"

"I'm not really hungry."

"You should eat anyway, Sheila. I'm gonna fix us something, okay?"

"Okay."

Nick fixed them a very nice meal of various canned and packaged foods. After they ate, Sheila and Nick sat on the couch, watching the fire.

"Thank you, Nick. That was great. And thanks for saving me. I have no idea why you bothered, I was so awful to you."

"You already apologized, don't worry about it."

"I can't help it. I pride myself on being a good person. But, I was a class A-1 bitch to you. I don't know what gets into me sometimes."

"I get the feeling it hasn't been only Janice and

David that have hurt you."

"You're right. I seem to attract people who betray me."

"Are you normally a happy person?"

"I used to be." Sheila began to tear up.

"Don't, honey, I'm sorry. I—"

"Don't be. I'm horrible. I deserve to be alone."

"No, you don't. Come here, come here and let me hold you."

"I don't even know you."

"So you'll get to know me better if you're in my arms. Come on, I won't bite."

Nick was so handsome that he was hard to resist.

"But, I was so horrible to you."

"I forgive you, come on, come here."

Sheila found herself in the handsome man's arms. He felt so good.

"You're cold," he said, hugging her tighter.

"You're warm."

It felt so nice to be held. What a different guy Nick turned out to be. So sweet. How unexpected. She always thought he was handsome, but after Janice did her smear job on him, Sheila was sure he was just another gorgeous user. But, he wasn't. Nick was a good man.

"You okay?" he asked.

"You want me to move?"

"No, no, not at all. You feel nice."

"Well, I'm not. I'm horrible. I was horrible to you. What a snob. My self-importance. It's humiliating."

"Oh, stop. I've forgotten about it."

"I won't. Here you are this very nice man, and I treated you abominably. I'm glad you spanked me. Well, not entirely, I don't think I'll ever sit comfortably again, but... I wholly deserved it."

He laughed. "You are funny, woman. Damn cute. I like you this way. Contrite. I wouldn't have said you'd be this way. You can really own up to your mistakes. That's good."

"It doesn't make me a better person."

"Oh, come now."

"You're right. I'll stop. Even if I am embarrassed. You're just so sweet. Such a contrast to my behavior."

"You're fine."

"I just wish I'd run into you six months ago in that bar rather than that jerk, David. I'll bet you don't lie to people."

"No, I don't. And, I have to tell you, I wish I would have met you that night instead of Janice."

They were quiet for a moment.

"You mean it?" Sheila asked.

"Yeah, I do. You're cute as hell and smart. Janice is a sucker fish. You actually work for a living. What does she do, anyway?"

"Lives on alimony. Or lived on alimony. Would you have really talked to me if we met in that bar?"

"Yes. I actually saw you last year, when I first moved here. I wanted to get to know you. When I met Janice, I heard she was your best friend, and I tried to get your number from her. She said you were engaged. Then, she asked me out."

"You're kidding. That's a lie. I wasn't even dating then."

"Not a nice woman. David deserves her."

"He sure does."

There was a pause. "Wait. You wanted my number?" Sheila asked.

"Yeah. I saw you speak at that town council meeting. You were damned smart, and I liked what you said about conservation. It was then I decided I wanted to get to know you better."

"You did?"

"Uh-huh."

"Really?" Sheila said, looking up at him.

"Really," Nick said, smiling down at her. Then the look in his eye changed. Then he leaned in and kissed her.

Whoa! It felt like someone had thrown a switch. The energy between them was electrifying!

Sheila pulled away, dazed and asked, "Did you feel that?"

"Uh, yeah. Let's make sure it was real." Then Nick kissed her again.

Sheila was transported. This man was such an amazing kisser!

When Nick pulled away he said, "My God, Sheila, you're incredible."

Then, they really started making out. Sheila was just about to strip him when he pulled away.

Nick said, "Oh, God, I want you, but, honey, I need to know this isn't just a rebound here. I like you too much, and I don't want to get hurt. Am I just a one-night-stand to you?"

"You are so amazing. I've never met a man like you before. I... no. I... this is not a rebound thing. I want you, Nick, all of you. I don't do one-night-stands, I only do relationships. Are you ready to consider that?"

"Past ready," Nick said, and then he kissed her.

Sheila was carried away on a tidal wave of passion. She barely touched down to earth for the rest of the evening. His strong, muscular chest above her, his hips working their magic, the look in his eye, his scent, Nick was all male and solid. Not a poser, not a preener, a real man.

As they lay together in front of the fire, the rain pounding on the roof, their bodies intertwined, they talked softly about their lives, their futures. Nick fit so easily into her life.

"From now on," Nick said. "I'm always going to look at rain differently. Because it brought us together."

"Well, I know what we'll be doing on rainy days, don't I?"

"Oh, baby, yeah. And, you know what today is?"

"A rainy day?"

"Uh-huh," Nick said, moving on top of her.

The Bet

Laura sipped on her beer and surveyed the football party. Susan and Dan, the hosts, were sitting on the big couch next to her. Bill and Kathy were on the floor with their arms around each other. David was in a recliner behind Bill and Kathy. Jacob was in a recliner nearest to the big screen TV. Jacob's wife Carol was out of town, so Jacob was batching it. Laura and David were the two singles. Everyone was toasted, between the seven of them, they'd imbibed half of a pony keg already.

For some reason, Jacob started channel surfing during the commercial break in the game. No one was really paying attention but Jacob, everyone else was telling bad jokes and roaring with laughter.

Laura happened to look at the TV when Jacob stopped on an old movie channel. It looked like a film from the fifties about the old South. A man and a woman were arguing. The woman turned around and stormed away from the man. He grabbed her, dragged her over to a couch, pulled her across his lap and spanked her.

Dan said, "Hey David, check it out—a scene made just for you."

David looked up at the screen and grinned ear-to-ear.

Immediately, everyone's attention went to the screen. Bill and Kathy nodded, Susan obviously got the relevance, but Jacob and Laura were out of the loop. Laura looked over at David, curious, and he shot her the oddest look. He was grinning, but for a second, his eyes weren't. His eyes got a darkness to them. Then he flashed a normal grin at her and returned his attentions to the screen. It was clear he enjoyed what he saw.

"What, you guys?" Laura asked.

Uproarious laughter from Susan, Bill, Kathy and Dan. David just grinned. If Laura wasn't misreading his expression, there was something else there too. He wasn't embarrassed. There was a joke being

made at his expense, and he almost looked proud of whatever it was. What?

Susan said, "You weren't here for David's birthday party. We got faced—can you imagine—and Melanie decided that David should get a spanking for his birthday. Then David says, 'Yeah, I want a spanking for my birthday, but I want to be the one to give it, not receive it.'"

"Which degenerated quickly into everyone admitting that they'd played around with S/M, B and D," Kathy finished. "We've all tried it, but David here—"

"I'm not embarrassed about it," David said. "I love to spank women. Deserving women, I might add. Love it. Always have."

Laura didn't know what to make of the conversation. She was not super comfortable with her sexuality and now to have all her friends confess what they were doing, she found herself a bit taken aback. And inadvertently, very excited. She thought she'd been alone in her fantasies, but these people had gone beyond fantasy and had actually tried some things! She was suddenly overcome by a feeling of jealousy. Sex with her ex, Steve, had been boring. She had no experience with anything inventive. She didn't know what to think. Except that she'd gotten cheated.

But what about David? She'd been thinking about him a lot lately; he was newly single, and she'd always had a crush on him. An English professor at the nearby university, he was a tall, blonde god with glasses. Magnificent bright blue eyes. He had the nicest smile; he even had dimples. She'd always thought him a nice, polite man, funny as hell at times, but he liked to spank women? So there was a domineering man hiding underneath that bookish facade. Surprising.

What was even more surprising was how nicely their mutual interests dovetailed. While she'd never admitted it to anyone, her secret fantasy had always been about getting a spanking. A real one,

bare bottomed and everything. What would it be like to be spanked by him? Would it hurt? Would he be mean? Suddenly, it occurred to her what she was thinking about. She quickly decided to drink more. This was all a bit much.

The football game, ended and Jacob changed the channel to a basketball game. Laura liked basketball.

"There is no way these guys are going to win," she pronounced. "This is like putting a bunch of mice in to play with the cats. They are going to get eaten and their innards spit out on the court."

"I beg to differ," David said.

"Oh, you cannot be for real here, David. These guys suck. Like how many games have they won?"

"Two."

"Two outta fifteen, David," Laura scoffed.

"They've won the last two games in a row," he corrected.

"And before that, thirteen spectacular failures. Plus with Jones out—"

"You didn't watch the last two games of theirs, did you?" David asked.

Laura answered, "I hate watching bloodshed. So, no."

"Then you didn't see them play. I'm telling you these guys have got a chance."

"A snowball's chance in hell."

"Why don't you guys put your money where your mouth is?" Dan proposed.

"Great idea," David said.

"I don't have any money," she said. "Remember? I was the one who got ripped off in my divorce. But I want to bet you. This is like taking candy from a baby. Let's see, what do I want? Home cooked dinner? No. Wash the car. Detail the car."

"But if I win, I don't want my car detailed," he said, his blue eyes dancing at her. "I do that myself."

"Okay," Laura said. "Fine, you can spank me,

how's that?" she heard herself say.

He got the most sinister look on his face. His grin widened, he said, "You got yourself a bet." He reached out his hand to her.

She leaned over and shook his hand. Everyone roared. Including Laura.

"Wait, wait, wait. I don't want to spank you," she said.

David said, "Okay, you win, I take you out to dinner at Ciba."

Laura liked this one. "Oooo, yeah. You totally have yourself a bet. Let's see, what shall I have for dinner? Lamb or salmon?"

"What if you lose?" Susan asked.

"Oh, you have to spank her in front of us," Jacob told David.

Laura immediately said, "No. Nothing was said about a public spanking."

"Ooo, private spanking," Kathy said to David, pushing on his knee, giving him a bad time. David just smiled at her.

"No fair," Jacob said.

Laura said, "It ain't gonna happen anyway, I wouldn't have made the bet if I thought I was gonna lose."

"You don't want David to spank you?" Kathy asked.

"No," Laura said, laughing.

"Sounds like fun to me," Susan said.

"Well, you guys are a buncha perverts, now me, I'm the only obvious NORMAL one in the group," Laura teased.

"Oh, come on, you don't have any fantasies like that?" Kathy said.

"That's for me to know and you guys never to know," Laura said, careful to avoid eye contact with David.

"You know she does," Bill said. "They're probably much wilder than ours."

Laura finally stole a glance at David. He was looking right through her almost. And for the first

time she saw it; lust in his face. Directed right at her. She got butterflies in her stomach. David was so good-looking, much better looking than Steve. That perfectly symmetrical face, the prominent brow and chin, those intense blue eyes of his.

And now with this spanking thing? She couldn't remember a time she was more turned on. Which surprised her. And embarrassed her. Being turned on by the thought of David spanking her? Was she crazy?

Well, she'd never find out because there was no way that pathetic team of his was going to beat her. Which meant he'd buy her dinner at Ciba. Which was an equally fun prospect. Either way, she won.

At half-time, Laura was fairly drunk, as was everyone else. She happened to glance up at the score and realized that the game was almost over. As predicted, one team was beating the other, rather spectacularly. She silently congratulated herself, and her attention went back to the group. Bill was regaling them with stories of drunken college parties.

Laura was laughing at Bill when she happened to catch David's expression while he watched TV. He had a huge, victorious smile on his face. He turned to look at her, and his gaze seared a hole through her. A wicked smile grew on his chiseled face, he gazed at her like she was a tasty little dessert he was just about to consume. Very predatory. Very sexual. Very scary.

Why would he look that way? His team had lost.

Laura checked the TV and couldn't believe her eyes. The score was still uneven. But it wasn't her team that was ahead. It was David's. She had lost the bet.

She sat there, shell-shocked, unable to fully grasp the situation. Her team lost. Never in a million years did she even consider it to be a possibility. But there were the scores. Right there on the

screen.

"Look at her face, will you?" Dan said, laughing.

"She looks positively shocked," Susan said.

"Wait until after David's through with her, she's gonna look even more shocked," Jacob said.

Laura didn't realize that they were talking about her. She was still trying to comprehend the fact that her team hadn't won.

It was then it dawned on her. Why her friends were laughing. Because David was going to spank her.

She looked back at David. He was studying her closely. His eyes almost narrowed, a slight smile on his lips, intense look behind his eyes. Like a spider savoring the fly caught in his web, right before he ate him. It was clear there was no way out for her. David wanted this to happen. It was going to happen. She had considered for split second to offer him dinner or something in exchange for the spanking, but it was clear, he was very happy with the outcome.

Laura finally recovered enough to point at him, "You hurt me, I'll kick your ass."

He grinned. And then shook his head. "Oh, no my dear. You lost the bet. I'm the one who's going to be doing all the ass-kicking. But I won't be kicking you, sweetheart," he said, showing her his hand and making a spanking motion.

"Oooo," said the crowd.

"Don't bite off more than you can chew," Laura countered.

David laughed delightedly. "I think I can handle it."

"We'll see," Laura said.

"I know he can handle it, but can you, Laura?" Dan asked.

"I'll bet she's scared," Kathy taunted, laughing.

"Oh, please. You guys," Laura said.

"When? When do you spank her, David?" Jacob asked.

"That's up to her," David said, grinning at her.

"Okay, never," Laura replied.

"Within two weeks," David added.

"Two weeks?" Laura scoffed. "What about now? Tonight? Let's go. We're not doin' it here. My place or yours. But no audience."

"Boooo, hiss," Jacob said.

"Not tonight," David said, fixing his smoldering gaze on her. "I want you sober. I want you to know what's happening to you."

"You are a sadist," Laura said, trying to joke, but there was too much truth in her words. She was terrified, and everyone in the room knew it.

"No. Not too bad, anyway," David said, grinning.

"I want to be a fly on the wall," Kathy said.

Bill said, "Me, too."

"Yeah, finally something interesting is happening, and we can't watch," Jacob complained.

"Too bad, you guys. Hey, what's for dessert?" Laura said, eager to change the subject.

"Cake, it's on the table," Susan replied.

Luckily, everyone wanted dessert. They all popped out of their chairs and headed over to the food table, where the chocolate cake was ready to be served.

As Laura walked by David, he caught her arm. "Next Saturday? My place? Seven?" he asked.

She wanted to say no, but he was so handsome. And up close? All she wanted to do was to kiss him. But the spanking scared her. She finally nodded, "You're on."

He grinned.

On Saturday, all day long, Laura anticipated her evening. How David would look, what he would be doing to her. She'd gotten wet several times thinking about it. She didn't want him to know it, but she was excited. And just a little bit frightened. The pain. How would she cope with the pain?

At seven, she knocked on his door. David had a 1920's ranch house with an extensive porch across

the front. Set on five acres, he had fruit trees and a large natural pond on his property. Beautiful spot.

He opened the door and the look in his eye alone sent flutters through her entire body. Intense, dominant, hungry.

"Come in, Laura," he said. Even his voice was different this night. Deeper, huskier, with a stern edge. Self confident, powerful.

"Okay," Laura said. She tried not to show her vulnerability, but her voice cracked a bit.

As she walked by him, she knew he could read her mind. "Nervous?" he asked.

Why lie? "Yeah, a bit."

"I'd never really hurt you, I'm not capable."

"Well, I know that..."

"Well, I thought it best to just tell you that. You're safe with me, Laura."

"Thanks."

"Good. So? I have wine and appetizers set up in the living room," he said, gesturing towards the living room.

"Is that where it's going to happen?"

"Yes."

"Okay," she said. She followed him into his expansive, homey living room. Didn't exactly give off the dungeon vibe. Which was good.

She took a seat on the brown leather couch in front of the fire. The wine and appetizers were set on the redwood burl table just in front of the couch. Instead of joining her, David walked over to his TV and switched it on.

"I have something to show you, if I may," he said, pressing a button on his VCR.

"Sure," Laura said. Must be a basketball game or something related to their bet.

It was a grainy video, obviously a surveillance camera. Not a basketball game. The camera had been pointed at David's front gate. She looked at David questioningly, and he pointed back at the TV.

"Watch," he said.

Three figures came into view. Lurching into

view, more like, obviously drunk, the three people were obviously trying to be sneaky. They peeked up the driveway towards the house, and then ducked back down several times. Then they descended upon the mailbox.

The video clearly showed the three figures trying to remove the mailbox. After several tries, the trio finally used a sledgehammer on the base. At the end of the video, the three carried away their prize and disappeared out of frame.

Laura got queasy. The three culprits were her, Susan and Kathy. It had happened three years before, within a week of David moving in. They didn't know him, nor his ex-wife back then, and the three resented the fact that the newbies were going to get the old antique mailbox that went with the place. Something they had all coveted at one time or another. After a drinking party at Kathy's, the three decided to go and steal it.

She looked over at David and he was sending her a pretty stern and disapproving look, even though he was smiling.

"How long have you known?" she asked.

"Since I met you all."

"And you never said anything?"

"You returned it," he replied.

"You guys turned out to be nice."

"If we hadn't been?"

"Woulda been mine."

"Were you the ringleader?"

"No. Okay, yes. Of course, it was me. The other two don't come up with stuff like that. I had to pour a half a bottle of Jack Daniel's in each of them to get them to come with me. Who knew how much work it would be? Christ, the thing barely came off," Laura complained, shaking her head at the memory.

"I would have spanked you eventually, anyway. You realize that now, don't you?"

"But I just gave you an easy way here."

"You certainly did."

"So do you want to spank the others?"

"Not as much as I want to spank you."

"How did you know I was the ringleader?"

"When it comes to mischief and that group, you are mostly the instigator."

"No."

"Yes."

"Okay, maybe."

"You are. You are, very often, a very bad girl."

"I've heard that somewhere before."

"But you've never met a man who would call you on it. Who would give you that comeuppance you so deserve."

"No, I haven't. Hey, we're kinda playin' a game here, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes. It started when you destroyed my mailbox. And before this goes any further, I need to tell you about safe words."

"I've heard about them. What's ours?"

"We'll use colors. Red means stop. Orange means let up."

"Red, stop, orange, ease up."

"Good. And none of this is altogether serious," David said. "Although, I was pissed off about that mailbox. Brats. All of you total brats."

"Sorry."

"You are not."

"No, I'm not."

"Good, then this punishment I'm going to give you will count."

"Will it?"

"Yes. About that, I will give you one chance, one small chance to get out of it."

Laura jumped on it. "Really? What?"

"Another bet."

"What kind of a bet?"

"Simple one. High card wins. I've got the deck right here."

"What's the bet?" she asked.

"You win high card, you don't get spanked."

"Really? What happens if I lose?"

"I pull your pants down, throw you across my

lap and spank you bare bottomed."

Zing! A thrill went through her. "Wait, that would hurt more," Laura said.

"Yes, it would. Or you win and you get out completely. We eat dinner—it's in the oven by the way—and have a nice evening. No hard feelings."

"Hmmm. How could I possibly pass this up? Let's do it."

He grinned even wider.

"Hey, let me check that deck," Laura said, reaching for it.

"Please," he said, handing the deck to her.

She inspected the deck; it was fine. She handed the cards back.

"Cut it," she said.

His eyes never leaving hers, he cut the deck. Then he offered it to her.

She picked the card three down from the top.

He grinned and took the top card.

She took a deep breath and turned hers over. It was a Queen! She laughed. Killer!

He turned over his. It was a King.

She couldn't believe it.

He looked victorious and slightly cruel at the same time. Uh, oh.

"Shit," she said.

"I have another game for you before we start," he said.

"I can hardly wait."

"We never spoke about how many spans."

"No, we didn't," she said, now concerned.

"Here," he said. He handed her a die. "Roll that."

"And then what?"

"Whatever number you roll, I'll multiply by ten. And that's the number you'll receive. Between ten and sixty."

"Oh, God."

"Roll well, Laura."

"Okay," she said. She rolled. Three. Thirty.

She looked up at David, scared. She found no comfort there. Her spanking was about to begin.

"Now stand up, Laura."

"Shouldn't I—"

"No. Stand up."

"Okay," Laura said, standing up.

Without batting an eye, David reached up and undid her jeans. He unzipped them, and then pulled them down over her hips, all the way to her knees. Then he reached up and grabbed her bikini strings on either hip and pulled her pink silk panties down to mid-thigh.

Before she could worry about him seeing her naked sex, he reached up, grabbed her arm and pulled her down across his lap.

"That mailbox is going to cost you, young lady. Cost you," he said, taking her arm and pinning it behind her. "Oh, Laura, you really do have a lovely little ass, don't you," he said, patting it appreciatively. "Very, very nice. And it will look even better with a nice glow to it."

She waited, scared, excited, turned on, for the first swat. He waited just that extra bit to torment her.

Finally, the first blow. And it was shocking. It hurt!

"David, that hurts!"

"It's supposed to, that's why they call it a spanking," he said, smacking her again. Harder this time.

"Ow!"

"Now count for me, Laura. That was two. If you forget, we start all over again. You ready?"

"No."

"Don't be disobedient, young lady. That will earn you extra smacks. This is punishment, and you'd dammed well better respect me. You got that?"

Smack!

"Yes, David, three!"

"Good girl," he said. Then he wound up and smacked her again. This time on a different part of her rear, her sit spots, a much more sensitive area.

"Ow! Four!"

David worked every part of her butt, sensitizing it, tormenting her and then moving on. Laura yowled and cried, but didn't lose a number. She was no dummy. Thirty spanks was a lot. Much more than she had anticipated.

But being across his lap, having him dominate her like this, hold her against her will almost, it was having a powerful effect on her. Something about being punished for being bad, for destroying that mailbox. The warmth of his hand, the firmness of his swats, her nakedness against the material of his jeans was all turning her on something fierce. Sensations she'd never felt before.

"Twenty-seven," she cried hoarsely.

He really let her have it for the last three. Full force, smacking harder than ever on her poor rear end with his open hand.

"Twenty-eight! Ow! David! Twenty-nine! OW! OWW! Thirty!"

She collapsed against him, breathing heavily.

He stroked her burning backside where he'd spanked her. "See what happens when you instigate mischief? Brat? Do you see?"

"Yes, David."

"Good, girl. Now you know what will happen if you do anything else bad around me, to me?"

"Yes, David."

"Good girl," he said. His voice had turned quieter, stronger.

He pulled her up and off his lap. Their eyes met. Pure desire. There was no hesitation. David pulled her into his lap and kissed her. A surge of lust coursed through her. He had the nicest lips. He dominated her; his tongue explored her mouth expertly. His hand found her sex. He started laughing.

"What?" she asked, pulling away.

He grinned. "Pretty wet, aren't you? Looks like Laura's found something new and fun, hasn't she? You enjoyed that as much as I did, didn't you?"

"Not the pain part, exactly—"

"Bull," he said and then he kissed her again.

He pushed her legs apart and gently began to explore her sex. He slid a finger inside her, carefully, deeply. He withdrew it and drew tiny circles around her bud. She began to moan loudly.

She suddenly blasted into an orgasm. Almost a premature orgasm! That spanking combined with a few strokes of his talented finger, wow!

He laughed and then kissed her deeply while shudders of delight quaked her aroused body. She was transported. The man was kissing her like he wanted to drink in every bit of her desire.

When he pulled away, his eyes were almost veiled with hunger. Feral, animal energy emanated from him. His smile vanished, and he made short work of the rest of her clothes. He stripped quickly, revealing a more awesome body than she imagined. He pushed her back onto the leather couch and climbed on top.

He bent down and slid his tongue in her mouth while his member slid inside her waiting sex. With one stroke in, she almost came. Two strokes later, she was screaming in ecstasy.

David kept his rhythm strong while she climaxed. He slowed for a time; she savored the feeling of his rock hard tool inside her. Soon, he increased his rhythm, driving into her more deeply. She pressed her hips against him, anticipated his thrusts, allowing him to come into her further. She clawed his back, screamed and bucked up against him.

Finally, David couldn't hold back any longer, his member grew larger inside her, his thrusts became more powerful and he launched them both into wild climaxes. As they came, they attacked each other as if they couldn't get enough. Wild sex. Absolutely wild.

Afterwards, Laura lay with her head on his chest, his long, strong arms wrapped around her. "I don't ever want this to end," she said.

"It won't. Didn't you know? You're moving in

here," he said.

"I'm what?"

"You. Are. Moving. In. Here. Get used to the idea, woman. You're mine now."

"We're not playing the game any longer, are we?"

"No."

She moved away to look at him. He was being completely serious.

"You have to know how much I love you," he said.

Tears sprang into her eyes. "You just said it. No games. You just... did you just say what I thought you said?"

He grinned. "That I love you? Yes. I love you."

"Oh, David, I love you, too!" she exclaimed, attacking him.

"Let me guess, that was a yes," he chuckled, kissing her once more.

The Gambler

Chapter One

The dark-haired, dark-eyed man was drop dead gorgeous. About six foot four, he looked sophisticated and suave in his black Italian suit. Strong jaw, perfect features. Marla was momentarily distracted when he sat down at the table, but she had business to attend to. And, she had to be wary of him. As she did with the other three players at the high stakes blackjack table. Any one of them could be working for casino security. Jason had warned her that he'd heard the casino boss had hired extra help to uncover the "leaks".

Marla concentrated hard for Jason's nearly undetectable signals and tried to ignore Mr. Hottie. Such a distraction. He was so amazing looking!

Jason glanced at his watch. That meant he was about to deal her a blackjack. Marla carefully pushed ten thousand dollars in chips into the betting circle on the table in front of her and coolly took a sip of her Cosmopolitan. Then, she pretended to be interested in the man sitting next to her, a large, sweaty Texan in his sixties who kept trying to flirt with her. He kept regaling the table with stories of his oil wild-catting days. Marla wished someone would glue his lips shut.

As Jason dealt the cards, Marla glanced over at Mr. Hottie, who was staring a hole through her. She gave him a half a smile and turned her attentions to her cards. Blackjack! What a surprise!

"My God, honey, you sure do have the luck," the Texan exclaimed. "And, damn, I haven't gotten anything but fourteens and thirteens all night. The cards sure like a pretty woman, don't they?"

"Tonight, they do. It's amazing how fast cards, like men, can turn on a pretty woman," Marla replied.

The Texan burst out laughing. "Oh, honey, not only are you the prettiest thing I've ever seen,

you're quick, too. I like that in a woman."

Marla returned his compliment with her patented "aloof" smile. Worked like a charm on most men. Even though she wanted nothing to do with the Texan, he was providing her with wonderful cover.

Marla glanced over at Mr. Hottie, he had an indistinguishable look on his face; she couldn't figure out what he was thinking. But, he was so amazingly handsome. She found it difficult to tear her eyes away from him.

Jason pushed Marla's winning chips over to her and then looked over her right shoulder. This was the signal to end the session. Earlier than normal, but so be it. Marla was actually happy to leave. She was up seventy-five thousand dollars and was hungry. She'd have a late night complimentary dinner and retire to her suite for a relaxing soak in the Jacuzzi tub. Since the casino thought she was a high roller, they provided her with lovely perks.

Marla said, "In fact, I'm ahead, and I don't trust these cards any longer. I think I'll retire for the evening."

"Oh, honey, don't go," the Texan said. "You're such lovely scenery."

"You're very sweet, but I'm very tired, I'm afraid," Marla replied. "Jason, credit my account, dear, won't you? And this is for you," she said, slipping the young, blonde haired, blue-eyed dealer a thousand dollar chip.

"Thank you, Miss Murray," Jason said, gathering her chips.

"You're welcome. If you gentlemen will excuse me." Then she glanced at Mr. Hottie who nodded at her and sent her a small smile. Gorgeous. So gorgeous.

The Texan stood up as she left. Marla smiled up at him and then as she turned, she stole a second glance at Mr. Hottie. He smiled again, only wider this time. Which almost caused her heart to stop. No man had a right to be that good looking.

As Marla headed off towards the restaurant, she

felt a little thrill of joy. This was so fun! Gambling, flirting with hot men, all this extra money. She was going to miss her star treatment. Oh, well. All good things must come to an end. Jason and she had been pulling this same game on this casino for too long. It was high time to quit.

Even though Marla was losing her fun, extra income gig, she couldn't help but be upbeat. She was finally meeting Tom, her Internet friend, the next night. Just the year before, she'd met Tom online, and they had clicked nearly instantly. He was funny, smart and had a fascinating mind. And so sexy! At least in writing. They had never exchanged pictures, but his words had captivated her. Marla found out quickly that if she shared her picture with online prospects, the men would do anything, say anything to get a date. Marla knew she was a knock-out. Her picture only attracted men who wanted to use her, not love her. So when Tom and she began developing a relationship, she made the point to him that she believed exteriors shouldn't matter at the beginning stages of a friendship. That she preferred to get to know Tom on a different level. Tom seemed happy with the arrangement. Marla hoped he wasn't a troll. Because she'd already fallen in love with him from his emails. Tom lived in Las Vegas, but Marla hadn't told him of her frequent visits to his town, preferring to keep her love life and her criminal life separate. But after a year of constant emailing, they both decided it was time to meet.

Marla was so nervous about meeting him! They'd exchanged such intimate details of their lives. And they'd even had cybersex! It was almost too embarrassing to meet him now, after all they'd shared. But they had both agreed they were ready to take the next step in their relationship and that entailed meeting. Marla prayed he'd be at least slightly physically attractive. They'd grown so close, to lose him now would be very painful.

Marla enjoyed a late night meal of beef

tenderloins, asparagus spears and Manchego potatoes, topped off with a bottle of Cristal champagne. Then she indulged in crème brulee covered in fresh raspberries. Stuffed and satisfied, she headed up to her room.

After turning on the lights, Marla flung her purse on the couch, kicked off her shoes and turned to go into the bedroom.

And that's when she saw him. Mr. Hottie, in the flesh, seated in the corner of her suite, staring at her.

Marla screamed. Then she raced for the door, "I'm calling security!" she warned the dark-haired man.

The man stayed seated. "I wouldn't do that if I were you," he replied. His voice was deep and calm.

Marla was put off by his manner. And by the fact that he didn't jump up and attack her.

"Well, I would—who are you and what the hell are you doing here?" she demanded.

"My name is Tom Conner, and I wanted to talk to you in private."

"Well, I don't want to talk to you—get out!" Marla ordered, pointing dramatically towards the door.

"I think you do want to talk to me."

"Why the hell would I?"

"Because you probably don't want to talk to the police."

"The police?" Marla said, inwardly freaking out. Holy Mary mother of God! She was caught!

"Yes, the police," Tom replied.

Settle down, Marla told herself. She was not caught yet. The cops would have arrested her at the table. She knew casinos liked to make a big show of busting people. Make an example out of them to scare potential cheaters. So, something wasn't right. The casino may not have proof. They may just suspect her. If Marla didn't confess, she may get away with it.

Marla just wished Tom Conner was there for

some other reason besides busting her. He was so damned handsome!

"Why would the police want to talk to me?" Marla said, trying to sound innocent.

"You and I both know why."

"No, I don't. And quite frankly, I don't appreciate you ambushing me in here. This is my room. I want you to leave."

"I'm not going anywhere. Not until I'm done with you. And if I were you, I'd start cooperating with me."

"Cooperating, how? I haven't done anything wrong."

"No? So how much have you and Jason gotten so far?"

"Jason? You mean the dealer? You think I'm ripping off the casino?"

"No, I know you're ripping off the casino. With Jason's help."

"You're full of it. Get out."

"No. Marla, I won't," Conner replied evenly. "You'll tell me everything, and you'll start now. Don't test me."

"Get out, creep, or I call the police."

"Go ahead."

"I mean it, jerk, out. I don't take crap from people."

"You'll take whatever I dish out, lady. Now cut the attitude and tell me what I want to know. Jason approached you, didn't he?"

"No. And in no way am I gonna take anything you dish out, now get out, or I'll call security."

"I am security."

"Okay, then I'll leave," Marla said, going for her purse.

Conner got up and moved towards the door. "You aren't going anywhere. Not until you tell me what I want to know."

"I'm calling my lawyer," Marla said, moving towards the phone.

Tom moved quickly and blocked her from

reaching the telephone. They were now within a few feet of each other. He had a predatory, angry look on his face. While she bristled at his authority, he was turning her on. Which infuriated her. Why was she so attracted to dominating jerks?

"Start talking," Tom ordered.

"Get out of my way, you big dumb jerk!" Marla flung up at him.

"No. And stop calling me names," Tom said.

"I'll call you anything I like! Now get out!" Marla shouted.

"Keep your voice down," Tom ordered brusquely.

Marla could tell he was getting furious with her. But, she didn't care. She had to make a break for it. She lunged towards the phone and when Tom moved to block her, she darted the other way and headed for the door.

Marla got a hand on the doorknob when Tom caught her. He wrapped a very long and very strong arm around her middle and yanked her away from the door.

Marla reacted quickly. She slammed back into his gut as hard as she could with her elbow. Then when he released her, she spun and landed a good one on his jaw.

Marla surprised him. Tom reeled back a few steps from the force of her blows and almost fell.

Then, Marla grabbed the knob again and got the door open. She got one step out into the hall when she felt his hands lock onto her upper arms.

Tom pulled her back into the room, wrapped his arms around her and picked her up off the floor. Then, he kicked the door shut.

Marla began to scream, so Tom clamped a hand over her mouth. Then, he carried her over to the living room couch.

Marla twisted and turned and tried to get away from him, but he was too strong for her.

Before Marla could comprehend Tom's plan, he was seated on the couch, and she was across his

lap. A vise-like arm wrapped around her upper body, and her free arm was immobilized.

Then, to her utter horror, she felt him pull up her dress and yank her panties down to her knees. Air rushed over her bare behind, alerting her to her vulnerability. Then, Conner began spanking her. Hard.

"Ow! Stop! You pervert!" Marla cried.

"You (swat) are (swat) a (swat) very (swat) bad (swat) girl, Miss Murray! Very bad, indeed!" he informed her.

Then Tom began administering a series of incredibly hard spansks to her tender backside with amazing force and precision. It felt like her rear was being set on fire!

Marla had only been spanked once in her life, and that was when she was five years old. And only because she'd crossed the street without looking and had almost gotten run over. But now she was an adult! This was infuriating! Humiliating! Who was this beast?!

"Ow! Stop! How dare you! Let me up—you jerk!!"

But, Tom wouldn't listen. He worked each cheek mercilessly; first one, then the other. Marla began yowling in pain.

"Stop! Ow! You're killing me! Stop! Please!"

Then, Conner began working on her sit spots. Machine gun fire spansks concentrated solely on her most sensitive spots. Tears began streaming down her face, she kicked and screamed, pleaded and begged, but the man would not stop his torment. Her ass was searing!

This was agony! Intolerable!

"Please! Stop! Mr. Conner! Stop! I'm sorry for hitting you!" she cried.

Finally, after another long series of horrible swats to her poor, blistering rear, he stopped.

All Marla could do was cry. She'd never been more humiliated in her life! Not to mention in more pain—this man was a cad! He was a devil with that

practiced hand of his.

"Don't ever hit me again, you hear me? Miss Murray?" Conner commanded.

"Yes! I'm sorry! I won't!"

"Now, we're going to have a little chat and if you anger me again, I'll spank you twice as hard, do you understand me?"

"Yes, yes, Mr. Conner, I understand."

"Good, good girl. Now, how long have you and Jason been ripping off the casino?"

"We haven't, we—"

Conner was quick. He thundered into her poor flesh with rapid fire strikes.

Marla screamed and cried out in pain. "I'm sorry, okay! Okay! Six months! Six months! Only six months! I swear!"

Finally, Tom stopped his torment. "Who approached whom?"

"He approached me!" Marla said, crying, both from the pain and her fury at being forced to confess. "I played at his table one night, and he ran into me at a nightclub afterwards and offered me the deal! He came up to me! I swear!"

"How much money?"

"Two hundred and fifty thousand, but I paid taxes on it, so I only came out with a hundred and seventy-five."

"When do you meet Jason?"

"Sunday afternoon, at his apartment, on my way to the airport."

"Okay, now I'm going to let you up. But if you try anything, I swear, you'll find yourself right back over my knee."

"Okay, I promise, I'll be good, I won't try anything."

"Good, good girl."

Finally, Tom let her up. Hurriedly, Marla pulled up her panties and straightened out her dress. While she was completely upset and in pain, some part of her was drawn to this very handsome man. The way he'd taken charge of her, his authority, his

strength. The way he'd so easily wrestled her across his lap. Why did she want him? Marla wished she didn't feel this way, she wished she could hate him. But, she couldn't. She could only hate herself for getting into this mess.

Tom grabbed her wrist and pulled her down onto the couch next to him. Then, he grabbed some tissue off the coffee table and handed her the box.

Marla took some tissues out and blew her nose. Her future was going to be dismal. She was going to lose everything!

"Stop, Marla, stop crying."

"I can't! My life is over! I'm going to jail, and I'm gonna lose my job and my home, and my whole life is over! Why? Why did I do this? Why couldn't I have said no to that bastard?"

"Marla, quiet down and stop crying. If you do what I say and help me take down Jason, the casino won't prosecute."

"What?" Marla said, her tears vanishing nearly instantly.

"You heard me. If you help us, we won't prosecute you. If you help us get Jason. We want him, not you. But only if you do exactly what I say and help me get evidence on him."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"You aren't just—"

"I wouldn't lie to you, Marla."

"Okay."

"Is this the first time you've been a part of something like this?" Tom asked.

"Yeah," she said in a small voice.

"So, why did you do it?" he asked.

"I was stupid. And greedy. Why else? And, I love pretty things. But, I don't want to compromise my financial picture to get them. So, when Jason approached me, I..." Marla said, stopping, suddenly feeling very ashamed of herself.

Marla had been so caught up in the adventure of it all that she hadn't allowed herself to realize that

she'd traded her integrity for a bit of extra cash. Now that her avarice was staring her in the face, she suddenly didn't like what she saw.

"Regretting your decision?"

"Ashamed, more like. I mean, I'm... I've done some things for my boss that... were rather questionable. But, this is the first time I've ever stolen anything. Anyway, I'm sure you don't want to hear any of my stupid excuses or regrets. Because there is no excuse for what I did. I mean, I knew what I was doing, no one put a gun to my head. I'm just really sorry that I didn't catch myself before I actually broke the law. But, there's nothing I can do or say now to take it all back. All I can do is make restitution and... well, what is it that you want me to do?"

"Just keep doing what you've been doing. We don't want Jason suspecting us. You'll wear a wire on Sunday when you meet him. And, that's when we'll grab him."

"Will I have to testify in court?"

"Perhaps. It depends on Jason."

"Okay, whatever you want, I'll do it."

"Good."

There was a pause.

Then Marla asked, "Would you have hit me if I didn't confess? If I hadn't tried to get away and punched you?"

"No. And, I'd never hit a lady. Especially not for a confession. But, I wholly believe in spanking misbehaving brats. You made that happen."

"You didn't have to hit me so hard."

"You should feel my jaw," Tom said, rubbing it for emphasis.

"Sorry."

"Well, I'm not sorry I spanked you. You deserved that. Running from me and then hitting me. You're lucky you're a woman. A man would have suffered much worse."

"I can imagine."

"I hope this comeuppance nips this behavior in

the bud, Miss Murray. This is your wake-up call. You won't get another."

"I'm sure I won't."

"And let me tell you, we're going to have cameras on you the whole time you're here. You try to leave early, you're going to jail. You leave when we tell you to."

"Will I be able to go back to work on Monday?" Marla asked.

"You may be here for up to a week while we wrap up the case. You can miss that much work without losing your job, right?"

"Yeah. I can."

"And, you're going to pay back every cent you stole."

"Okay."

"I'm calling the manager up here, and you're going to tell him everything you told me."

"Okay."

"And you're going to tell us exactly what signals you use, how you communicate with Jason," Tom told her.

"Yes, sir."

"Good, good, girl."

"I'm so ashamed."

"That's good. You should be," Conner said and then he smiled at her.

The smile changed his whole face. Marla inadvertently took in a sharp breath of air. This man was so devastatingly handsome. Even though she should be furious with him, she wasn't. There was something about him. He actually seemed to care about her.

Over the next two hours, Marla confessed to everything. The casino manager echoed Tom's promise. If she helped to take down Jason and make a case against him, she would go free. So the next night, she was to gamble and cheat like she always had. Then, she would meet with Jason on Sunday, wear a wire, get him to confess to his crimes and hopefully that would provide the casino

with enough evidence to convict him.

Finally, at five in the morning, Tom and the casino manager left her room.

Marla slept hard and awoke at noon. Immediately, her world crashed around her. She'd been caught! She rolled onto her back and was shocked by how much her rear hurt. That had been humiliating. The most gorgeous man in the world, and he had to be the one who'd caught her. How could she ever face Conner again?

Marla ordered room service, then got on her laptop and checked her email. It was then she remembered her penpal and her date. There were three messages from Tom.

What was with all these interactions with Toms? Weird coincidences.

Marla decided to cancel her date with Internet Tom. There was no way she could face meeting the man. She was too ashamed.

So, Marla wrote him a quick note. Sorry, but I can't make it tonight. There's been a family emergency. I'll write as soon as I can.

As soon as she emailed it, she got an instant message back from Tom. Hey, what's wrong? he wrote.

Marla wrote back: Can't talk about it now.

Are you all right?

Marla wrote: No. And, quite honestly, I'm not sure you'll ever want to meet me. I'm not a good person. You don't deserve me. I don't think anyone does.

Tom wrote: What happened to you?

I can't talk about it now. I'm too ashamed.

Marla, don't be so hard on yourself. Everyone makes mistakes. I've made a bunch myself.

Not like this one, Tom. Look, I have to go. You'll hear from me in a week or so.

Marla, why can't you tell me what's going on?

Because I can't, Tom. Look, maybe we ought to call this whole thing off. I don't want to waste your time. You're a good guy, and you don't deserve

being involved with someone like me.

Tom wrote: Don't say that. Just calm down and get some rest. Trust me, I'll care about you no matter what you've done. You're a good person. I know that. We all make mistakes.

Thanks, Tom.

If you change your mind, I'll be here. And if you just need to talk, I'm here for that, too. But, I also want you to think about our emails of the other night. Champagne? Flower petals on the bed?

Stop, you're making me horny. And, Tom, we've only had cybersex. What if you don't like me?

Like I've said, Marla, we'll cross that bridge when we come to it. You may not like me, physically, either. We won't know until we meet. That's why I'm hoping you'll agree to see me.

Marla wrote: Well, I may be here for longer than this weekend. I lied about the family emergency. I'm in trouble. Big trouble here. When I handle the trouble, maybe then I'll meet you. It would be nice to see a friendly face before I take off for home.

Tom wrote: What kind of trouble?

Bad trouble. Stupid trouble. I'll tell you when I meet you.

You'll be okay, Marla. And, I know you pretty well. If you are in trouble and did something wrong, I think you'll learn from it and move on. I've made plenty of my own mistakes. I'm no saint. I'm actually glad to find out you aren't, either.

You are making me feel much better, Tom.

That's what I'm here for. By the way, what are you wearing?

Nothing, Marla wrote back.

Oh, please, please meet me! And don't change :)

You're bad, Marla wrote.

You have no idea.

Maybe meeting her penpal would lift her spirits. Unless he looked like that Texan at the blackjack table. Maybe this was going to turn out to be the Vegas Trip From Hell. Getting caught cheating and

finding out that her online lover was Quasimodo. But, at least, she'd have all the bad news over at once.

Marla decided she'd see how the sting operation went, and then she'd make her decision. She'd been looking forward to meeting Internet Tom. But there was no way he'd be as cute as Tom Conner. The way her luck was going, her penpal probably looked like the Texan. Which would be too bad, because Tom's emails were hot. Something about him, even through cyberspace, had captivated her.

However, now, Marla had to put Internet Tom out of her mind and do what the other Tom wanted her to do. Evil, Handsome Tom.

As she thought about seeing Conner later that day, her heart skipped a beat. She suddenly wondered what he would be like to kiss. How he'd be in bed. Which disturbed her. How could she even consider it? After what Conner had done to her? But, she couldn't help it. Tom Conner was the hottest guy she'd ever met. Even if he was a brute. Then, she felt guilty. Internet Tom was her boyfriend. Not the security man. And, she'd better get that through her head quick. As if Conner would want anything to do with a horrible thief.

Why had she done it? A stupid gambling scam, what had she been thinking?

The Gambler

Chapter Two

Sunday afternoon, Marla found herself in the back of a cab followed by four undercover agents and Tom Conner, the man who had caught her. Why did she think she could get away with cheating at blackjack? She should have known better. When Jason approached her, she should have said no and called the cops. But, it had been so fun! And, she'd come out with a hundred and seventy-five grand. She'd paid off her house and bought an entire new wardrobe.

But now, in order to save her own skin, Marla was in the middle of a sting operation to net Jason. Which was awful. While Jason was kind of a creep, he'd made her a lot of money. She hated to turn on him. But it was Jason or her. No way was Marla going to lose her job and her home, not if she could help it.

The upset of the entire ordeal was compounded by the man who had caught her, Tom Conner, the top security man at the casino. Six foot four, dark eyes, dark hair, strong jaw, beautiful man. Marla didn't know if it was his extraordinary looks or the fact that he'd caught her that bothered her the most. It was probably a combination of the two. And by the way he'd treated her. The man had actually spanked her! So, she'd hit him a couple times, it didn't merit the retribution. He was a monster. Of course, the prettiest monster she'd ever seen.

The only positive in this whole mess was her Internet lover. Over the previous year, she'd been flirting online with an awesome man who coincidentally lived in Las Vegas. Marla had a date to meet him the evening before, but then had gotten busted. Still, if she could get all this undercover operation blather out of the way, she may have time to finally meet the man. She'd never

seen him before; she was hoping he didn't look like a Troglodyte. Or, she'd find herself the Ultimate Las Vegas Loser.

When they arrived at Jason's building, Marla adjusted her hidden microphone in her bra. Tom Conner had overly enjoyed testing the equipment earlier. He kept making her touch herself to "adjust" the microphone. If he wasn't so cute, and she wasn't at his mercy, she would have smacked him.

Marla went straight to Jason's apartment and played out the scene exactly to Tom Conner's specifications. She asked all the right questions, and Jason supplied all the right answers.

And then, just like in the movies, the agents came bursting through the door and arrested Jason.

Jason lost it. "You bitch!" he hurled at her as the men subdued him.

Then, in a display of superhuman strength, Jason flung the agents away and lunged at Marla. Horrified, Marla tried to defend herself, but Jason was crazy. He grabbed her throat with one hand while slamming into the side of her face with his other. Finally, the four men attacked him and got him away from her.

As the four agents dragged Jason from the apartment, Tom rushed to Marla's side. He seemed horrified by what happened to her.

"Are you all right?" Tom asked.

Marla was concentrating on breathing. Jason had completely choked off her air supply.

She nodded as Tom inspected her face.

"Oh, honey, he got you good. I'm so sorry. That should not have happened. I looked away for an instant, an instant."

"It's okay," Marla choked out.

"Oh, God, you're bleeding. Here, let's get you to the bathroom."

Tom got her to her feet, put his arm around her and led her to the bathroom.

Then, he took a washcloth and wiped away the blood. "We need to take pictures so you can

prosecute."

"I'm not prosecuting. I deserved this. I'm a rat. A stool pigeon. I betrayed myself by accepting his offer, and then I betrayed him because I wanted to save my own rear. That's low. I so deserved this. And more."

"No, you didn't. It was the right thing to do."

"No, I committed two crimes."

"Marla, you're being too hard on yourself."

"Not hard enough. I should not be here. What I did was so stupid. I am too old for this. I can't say I didn't know any better. Not at 29. I know better. I knew better."

"You're a risk taker, which, I think, is actually a good thing. You just have to get better at choosing which risks to take."

"Why are you being so nice to me?"

"Because I was you once."

"No way."

"It's true."

"Really? You? Mr. Perfect?"

"I am not Mr. Perfect. I learned from my mistakes, and I made them at your age, too."

"How old are you?"

"38."

"So, you're newly reformed."

"Yes. Relatively speaking."

"Huh. Maybe there's hope for me yet."

"I'm sure of it." Tom smiled at her. "You're basically a good girl. You'll be fine."

"No, I'm rotten and unlovable. I think I'm gonna break it off with this Internet guy I was going to meet. I deserve to be alone."

"No, you don't. What 'Internet' guy?"

"This guy I met online about a year ago. He lives here in Vegas. His name is Tom, too."

"Really?"

"Really."

"Internet guy," Tom said, suspiciously. "You better be meeting him in a public place."

"I am."

"Have you seen his picture?" Tom asked.

"Nope."

"No?"

"I know, it's weird. It's just, if I send out my picture, guys..."

"I can guess. You're a beautiful girl."

"Thank you and I'm not complaining, but I attract guys who just want a pretty girl, they don't want me for what's inside," Marla explained.

"I can understand that."

"I'll bet, you probably have the same problem," Marla ventured as she gazed up at the gorgeous dark-eyed man.

"At times. So, you sure about this Internet guy? You want back up? Wait, you know what? I'll give you my cell phone number. If something happens, you can call me."

"You don't have to do that, Tom. Thanks. But—"

"I thought you were going to be more careful about what kind of risks you took."

"Good point. Maybe you're right."

"So if you don't know what he looks like, how are you going to know him?" Tom asked.

"He's gonna wear a red carnation."

"Who came up with that one?"

"He did."

"Pretty corny. Are you sure about this guy?"

"Will you stop?" Marla said. "I'm sure everything will be fine."

"For your sake, I hope so," Tom said.

For three days, Marla was questioned by various detectives, her side of the story documented. The casino was pleased. With her testimony, Jason would be going to jail for a long time. And, they had set up a payment schedule for Marla. Five hundred a month for life, practically. It would hurt her, but she could afford it. Besides, anything was better than jail.

On Thursday, Tom Conner called and told her

that she was free to go home. Finally! Marla thanked him, they chatted a bit and hung up.

Marla hated to admit it, but she was going to miss Tom Conner. Over the past few days, they'd actually become friends. Marla wished it was more. Tom wasn't only the most gorgeous man in the world, he was one of the nicest. He reminded her of Internet Tom. And, by the way, she caught Tom looking at her once in a while, he might have wished for more, too. But, Marla had her Internet man, and Tom had someone, too. So, they left it at that. But, Tom insisted she take down his cell phone number, just in case the date went bad.

Marla had emailed Internet Tom, and they set a date for that evening. She was to meet him at six o'clock in front of the big fountain of the Roman gods at the Forum shopping mall at Caesar's Palace Casino.

Marla arrived a few minutes before the appointed time, carnation in hand. She immediately began to scan for Tom. No sign of any red carnation anywhere.

Marla was tempted to fake a trouble call to Tom Conner and shelve the whole idea of seeing Internet Tom. When Tom Conner came to rescue her, she'd seduce him.

What was Marla thinking? She was supposed to be meeting the love of her life. Why was she thinking of that security guy?

Because Conner was a hunk, and she was horribly attracted to him. He was so tall and gorgeous and sweet. She'd never forget the way he'd taken care of her.

Six o'clock came and went. No man with any red carnation anywhere in sight.

By six-thirty, Marla knew it. She'd been stood up.

Furious with herself for believing this Internet jerk, Marla headed off to a dinner by herself. She was going to drink and forget all about Toms. Meet some nice Mike or Sam. Maybe a Donald. But no

more Toms!

As she breezed around a corner of a store, she clipped the shoulder of a man. Tom Conner.

"Tom! What are you doing here?" she asked, looking up at him, surprised.

"Shopping, what are you doing here? I thought you were meeting your Internet guy."

"He stood me up! The bastard had the audacity to stand me up!"

"Maybe something happened to him," Tom said. "Maybe he got into an accident or something."

"Oh, wow. That didn't even occur to me. Well, damn, I don't have his cell phone number or anything. We didn't make any back up plans."

"Well, you're here, I'm here, you want to get some dinner?" Tom asked.

"With you?"

"No one else here that I can see."

"Don't you have a date?"

"Not tonight."

"I thought you did."

"Nope."

"Well, is your girlfriend going to get mad?"

"I don't see why."

"Okay, sure, why not? If you don't mind watching me get drunk."

"As long as you let me call you a cab afterwards."

"Surely."

"Madam," Tom said cordially, offering her his elbow.

Marla looped her arm through his and smiled up at the handsome man. Why wasn't Tom Conner her Internet Tom? He was so dreamy.

After they were seated, Marla ordered two Cosmopolitans, much to the amusement of Mr. Conner.

"Two?" he asked.

"I want to get right down to business."

"The business of feeling sorry for yourself?"

"Yes."

"What about the hangover?"

"I will deal with that tomorrow. Tonight is when I earn that hangover."

"You are a risk-taker, aren't you?"

"You'd better believe it, buddy."

Marla downed the first Cosmopolitan in a few gulps, which froze her brain solid. She decided to sip the second one.

"Goddamn, you're cute," she told Tom. "Oops. Damn this Cosmo, anyway. Sorry, I withdraw the compliment, I don't want you getting the wrong idea here. Like I was trying to seduce you when you're all committed to another woman. I wouldn't do that. But if I did do that, it wouldn't be because I was dumped tonight. I'm not on the rebound because I haven't technically met the guy yet. So, I wouldn't be hitting on you for the wrong reasons. I would be seducing you for all the right reasons. But, I wouldn't do that, so I withdraw the whole conversation." And then she hiccupped.

Tom burst out laughing.

"Why are you laughing at me?"

"Because you're drunk on one drink."

"Oh. Sorry."

"Don't be. I like all this talk of seducing me."

"You do? No, you don't. You don't like me."

"The hell I don't."

"But, you're in a committed relationship."

"So?"

"Well, I'm not that kind of girl. I'm a one woman man. One man woman. That's it. I like men, and I only want one."

"I got that," Tom said, chuckling to himself.

"So, we can't do it."

"That's too bad. I think I'd enjoy it," Tom said, sending her a flirty smile. Despite the alcohol, his flirting hit her hard.

"Wow. Don't do that. I'll jump across this table and attack you. Oh, God. I'm sorry. I really didn't mean to say that. I would seduce you, not attack you."

"It wouldn't be hard," Tom assured her with a smoldering look.

"No, of course not. It wouldn't? Oh, it wouldn't. Oh, I get it. Oh, wow, you mean it? You wanna?"

"Yes, but not while you're so... I want you fully awake when I make love to you."

"Wow. Get me some coffee. No, I can't do that. You're with someone. I need... well, I don't know if I could handle you full time. But, I'm only interested in long term relationships, not flings. I had enough flings. I want a husband."

"So, now you're proposing marriage?"

"Sure. Tom Conner, will you be my wife?"

"Your wife?"

"Yeah. Oh, wait. I mean, husband. Will you be my husband?"

"But, you don't love me."

"Oh, yes, I do," Marla said.

"You do?"

"Holy Christ, I'm letting all my cards show. This isn't right. I take back the whole conversation ever since we got here. No, actually, after I drank that booze. I take it all back, I don't mean it, I'm out of my mind. Besides, you'd never marry me."

"Don't be too sure of that."

"Okay, I won't. Wait. What are we talking about? Not marriage."

"No, couldn't be that," Tom said, highly amused.

"No, it couldn't be. Wait, it was."

"Was it?"

"You're confusing me," Marla said.

"I'm going to get you some coffee."

"Good plan. No wait, my plans were to get drunk."

"And, you've accomplished that goal. Time to sober up."

"Okay," she said amicably.

Tom ordered some coffee, and they ate their dinner. By the end of the meal, Marla had sobered some. Sobered enough to be embarrassed by what they'd been talking about earlier.

"Are you all right?" Tom asked.

"I don't usually try to seduce men on a platonic date. Or a pity date."

"Is that what this is? Is that what you think?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then, you don't know me very well. I don't do pity dates. I only do what I like. I only go out with women I like."

"So, you like me?" Marla asked.

"Yes, very much."

"Good."

"So, now will you try to seduce me?" Tom asked.

Marla turned red. Tom laughed heartily. "Are you embarrassed?" he asked.

"Yes. I need alcohol in me in order to seduce men."

"Okay, then. What if I try to seduce you?" Tom said with a predatory look on his face that reduced her knees to rubber.

"Uh..."

Tom smiled. "Let me take you home."

"Whose home?"

"Mine. It's much more comfortable than your room."

"But, what about your girlfriend?"

"I don't have one."

"I thought you did."

"I lied. No, actually, I misled you," Tom said.

"You did?"

"Yes."

"How do I know you're not lying now?" Marla asked.

"Because I'm not."

"Okay. Wait, Tom, this is..."

Tom drew her up out of her seat, took her into his arms and kissed her. In front of the whole restaurant.

Marla almost fainted. Tom smelled so good, felt so good, the way he held her, the way he was looking at her, she was overcome.

When Tom pulled away, he said, "Any doubts now?"

All Marla could do was shake her head.

They barely made it inside his apartment. He had just shut the door when he grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her to him. Then he kissed her deeply, magnificently.

Suddenly, her dress was on the floor, and he was taking off her bra. He buried his face in her breasts as he pulled down her panties. Then he dropped and began going down on her.

Marla couldn't even comprehend what was happening. She was so overwhelmed by desire that her thoughts weren't straight. All she wanted to do was to devour the man.

Then, without warning, Marla was shot into the stratosphere, launching into the quickest and most violent orgasm she could remember. She grabbed his head, pushed her hips into his face and screamed at the top of her lungs.

Just when she began to come down, Tom picked her up off the floor and carried her into his bedroom.

Marla couldn't believe Tom's room. He'd staged it perfectly. Flower petals were thrown on top of the bed, a bottle of champagne chilled next to the king-sized bed. How had he known she would be there?

Tom laid her on top of his bed and took in the sight of her naked body.

"My God, Marla, you are so beautiful. So very beautiful."

Then Tom made short work of his own clothes. And his body! Marla could not take her eyes off of his nakedness. He had that whole V-shape, upper body thing going on. Thick black hair on his chest, finely muscled abs, narrow hips, his thighs were built, his whole body was perfectly toned. Not too big, not too small. Well defined. And what was between his legs, absolutely awe-inspiring. Long and hard, one of the most perfectly shaped tools she'd ever seen. Perfect for her.

Then Tom kissed his way up her body, worshipping every square inch of her. She'd never had anyone appreciate her like this before.

Then Tom climbed on top, a condom appeared and he entered her.

The next part was very fuzzy. The intensity of the lovemaking was off the scale. Marla catapulted into an orgasm on just a few strokes. Marla had never known such sexual joy. This was rapture! Again and again, Tom plowed into her with strong, sure strokes. The look in his eye was dark, devastating. He radiated animal power.

Marla clawed and fought him, screamed and writhed in blissful ecstasy.

Tom built up to a marvelous climax; the two screamed and clutched each other as they exploded into simultaneous orgasms.

When Marla regained her senses, Tom was holding her, very sweetly, as they lay there, their sweaty bodies entwined.

"Oh, my God, Tom, I've never, you're—not only are you the most handsome man I've ever set eyes on, your lovemaking skills are out-of-this-world."

"You inspired me, Marla. You felt so good, we fit so well, I don't think I've ever been more in love with anyone in my life."

"Did you just say what I think you said?"

"What? That I'm in love with you?"

"Yes, that's it."

"Yes, Marla, I'm in love with you. Can you handle that?"

"Yeah... I just. I'm so used to keeping my emotions under wraps, protecting myself, I've never had a man say it this soon into a relationship. I mean, I've only known you for a few days."

"You've known me much longer than that, Marla."

"What are you talking about?"

Tom smiled and said, "Take a look around this room. What do you see?"

"Lots of flowers. Red flowers."

"What kind of flowers?"

"Uh, carnations. Wait. No. Internet Tom was Mr. Red Carnation. Are you trying to tell me that you want to replace Internet Tom?"

"No, silly, I'm trying to tell you that I am Internet Tom."

"You are not."

"I beg to differ."

"You can't be."

"Why not?"

"Because you're too cute. Internet Tom isn't that good-looking."

"How do you know? We never exchanged pictures."

"You can't be Internet Tom."

"I am. You want me to prove it? I have my laptop in the other room, I can show you your letters."

"Tom? My Tom?"

"It's me, honey."

"No way! Oh, my God! Really?"

"Really."

"Right on! How cool is this? You are Tom. I can barely comprehend that. My Tom. All along. Wait a minute. When did you know that I was your Marla?"

"Uh..."

"What?"

"I have a confession to make," Tom said.

"What?"

"I... well, I'm in security, you know that, so I did an investigation on you. I've known who you were since about, well, about three months after we started emailing each other."

"You sneaky!" Marla said, lightly punching him on the shoulder. "What did you find out about me?"

"What you did, where you worked, what you looked like."

"Oh, so it was easy for you to talk about not judging people by their exteriors, because you knew what I looked like."

"We had those conversations before I looked

you up. I didn't want to hurt you. I needed to be attracted to you."

"We all do. That's why I was so worried you were a troll. I cannot get my head around this. Wait a minute. So you knew all about me when you saw me in the casino?"

"I knew it was you at the table, yes. And, we knew Jason was cheating us and was using a partner. But, I had no idea it was you. Not until I joined the table. Didn't make me very happy."

"Oh. No, I suppose not. You were probably pretty disappointed."

"A bit. But then I saw that I could help you."

"So that's why you spanked me so hard."

"Yes, that and you hit me."

"Yeah, I suppose so. Well, I didn't know it was you. Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I had a job to do. I didn't want to confuse things. Now that the job is over, I'm free to see you."

"Huh. Would you have spanked me if you didn't know me?"

"Yes. Any woman who did that to me would have found herself over my knee. But because it was you, I suppose I was a bit more enthusiastic. It felt a bit better knowing I was teaching my Internet lover a very important lesson. Speaking of which—"

Then Tom grabbed her and pulled her across his lap. She tried to get away, but he got her in a good hold.

"Tom, no! I shouldn't have brought it up!"

"Now you listen to me, Marla. I want to make a point with you here and now. You will never do anything like that again."

"I got that point! I got that point! Don't spank me, Tom!"

"I will spank you anytime I see fit."

"But, you already spanked me."

"This one is from your new boyfriend. A reminder never to get yourself in this kind of trouble again."

"No, Tom!"

Whack! "You (swat) deserve (swat) this (swat), brat (swat)!" Then a series of very hard spanks. Marla squealed in pain.

"Tom, stop, I'm sorry!"

"I'm spanking you now because we almost didn't get to have this little lovemaking session here!" he pronounced. Then he swatted her hard all over her sit spots. "Because of your thoughtlessness, we might have spent our first year together looking at each other through solid glass!" Then another series of very hard swats.

Tears spilled from Marla's eyes as she begged him to stop.

Finally, Tom stopped and pulled her up into his lap. Then he wiped her tears away and kissed her. Although her rear smarted like hell, Tom's kiss momentarily distracted her.

"I love you, Marla, and I want to protect you, but first you have to learn some impulse control. You're on probation here, sweetheart. I'm going to be your one-man security team. Judge, jury and the man who will carry out the sentence if you ever break the law again. You hear me?"

"I'm sorry, Tom."

"You should be."

"Thanks. Thanks for protecting me."

"It wasn't easy. The casino boss wanted your head on a platter. It took a lot of convincing to get you off."

"Thanks, thanks so much."

"You're welcome. I'm just glad I could do it for you. But, I won't be able to help you again. And, I know you're going to be tempted. Especially when you move here."

"Move here?"

"Yeah, well, of course. Where else would I want my future wife?"

"Wife?"

"Wait, that's right. You wanted me to be your wife."

"Oh, God."

"By the way, I accept your earlier proposal, Marla Murray. I know you wanted me to be your wife, but I think it will be much more convenient if I'm your husband. Besides, dresses don't do anything for me. Although, they do show off my legs."

Marla laughed and then the full impact of his words hit her. She began crying.

"Honey, what's wrong?" Tom asked.

"Nothing, everything is finally right, Tom. Everything. I love you so much, I fell in love with you through your letters. And, I fell in love with Tom Conner, the security guy. I was in love with two men at once. I'm so happy they turned out to be the same guy."

"Convenient, isn't it?"

"And, yes, I'd love to be your wife."

"Good, because you look much better in dresses than I do."

"Oh, Tom. I can't believe all this."

"Believe it, honey. I'm going to spend the rest of my life making you happy."

"I know a perfect way," she said, reaching down and taking hold of him.

"Oh, honey, watch it, it's loaded, it could go off," Tom warned with a devilish smile on his handsome face.

"I'm counting on it," Marla said as she leaned in and kissed him.

The Gangster's Daughter

"If you don't stop fighting me, woman, I'm going to spank your little bottom," Rafe said, grappling with the struggling little spitfire.

"Get off me!" Vicky seethed, trying to get unentangled from her lanky would-be abductor.

Rafe picked her up around the middle and began walking towards his van. But right as he began to stuff her into the back, she kicked out her legs, pushed off against the back of the van and pushed them both out onto the street on their butts. Vicky was luckier; Rafe padded her fall.

After they landed, he let go of her briefly to withdraw a rock from underneath his back. She took the opportunity to jump up and run.

As luck would have it, a truck from a landscaping company had just pulled out from the property next to them. Vicky jumped onto the back of the truck.

Rafe yelled at her as she sped down the street, "Woman, I will get you!"

She knew she'd have to get off the truck soon because he would surely be following her in his van. This was so crazy!

Her father had crossed the line this time. The old man was tired of her playgirl ways and had unilaterally decided it was time for her to settle down and have children. And he had decided that his lieutenant, Jeff Brosi, was the man for her. One of the most self-centered, arrogant, nasty men she'd ever met. As if she'd marry someone like him! It wasn't as if her father didn't have enough cash to support her. He ran one of the most powerful crime syndicates in the world. Which gave him a big head, so big he thought he could get away with giving her away to somebody. So, she'd run away. Her father's henchman, a guy named Rafe McCallister, had been sent after her. A man whom she liked far more than Jeff the Narcissist.

After all these years, Vicky knew the game well

enough by now. If she could elude her father's man long enough, she would win her freedom. The old man always gave in to her, but only after a protracted battle. But this was the first time he'd sent Rafe after her. Which was kind of too bad. She'd been flirting with Rafe for the past two years; he was tall and very handsome. Brown longish hair, a prominent nose that looked like it had been broken several times, even, sparkling blue eyes and the cutest dimples. The man was normally very upbeat and happy. His nickname was Happy-Go-Lucky in her father's circle. Well, until two days ago, when he was assigned to chase Vicky. Now he seemed much less happy and certainly, if she had anything to do with it, he was going to be much less lucky.

Vicky leapt off the back of the landscaping truck and headed for a nearby shopping mall. If she could get a taxi, she could head to her sanctuary. A lovely country farm of her father's with a high, impenetrable fence surrounding it. She planned on locking herself inside until her father gave in. She'd stolen all the keys to the place and had it well-stocked. It was just getting there that was going to be the problem.

As she raced for the mall, she checked behind her and saw Rafe's van heading her way. She had to ditch him! She cut through someone's yard, hopped their fence, ran through their backyard—terrifying two cats—then leapt over the back fence and landed in an alleyway. She ran down the alley, hopped a chain link fence and was in the shopping mall's parking lot.

Way off in the distance, she saw a taxi, waiting at the entrance to the mall. She tore across the parking lot. Midway to the taxi, she took a quick check and there was Rafe's van, speeding towards her.

Vicky willed herself to run faster. Just as she reached the taxi, she heard Rafe's van screech to a halt right behind her. She leapt into the back of the

taxi, startling the driver, locked the doors and yelled, "Get me out of here!"

Rafe appeared at her window and pounded on it. "You get out of there, woman!" he demanded. He looked furious. Very different expression than normal, he looked pretty hot, actually.

"Hurry, driver, he's my abusive husband, get me out of here!"

"You want me to call the cops?"

"No, just get me out of here!"

"Vicky! I'm going to skin you alive, girl, when I finally get my hands on you!" Rafe yelled at her.

She made a face at him as the taxi drove away, further infuriating him.

She urged the taxi driver to go faster, giving him some story about how she'd filed for divorce, and that her husband had refused and was now after her. The taxi driver got caught up in the drama and sped away.

Soon, however, Rafe was right on them. She had to give him points. He was good. But she was better.

She instructed the driver to go a roundabout way to her safe house, so she could get inside the fence before Rafe got to her. As they approached the country house, just a few miles out of town, she paid the driver and got ready to jump out of the taxi. She was hoping she could get out without Rafe seeing her. Have the taxi continue on and send him on a wild goose chase.

"Just slow down, don't stop, I'm going to jump out," she told the taxi driver. "I'll be safe inside that fence."

"All right, Miss, but I wish you'd let me call the police," he said.

"Don't worry about it, I can handle him, I just need to get inside that fence."

"Okay, Miss, if you say so."

The taxi slowed down and Vicky jumped out. Which wasn't as easy as she thought. The taxi was going faster than she had anticipated. She hit the

ground, fell and rolled a few times. When she stopped, she leapt to her feet and raced for the fence. She had her key out and ready.

Vicky thought her deception had worked until she heard the van screech to a stop. She was so hyped up that her hands were shaking. She looked down the street, and Rafe had slammed his van into reverse and was flying towards her.

"Hurry!" she yelled at herself.

Right as Rafe stopped the van, she got the gate open. She rushed through, slammed it and locked it. Then she raced for the electric box. The fence was electrified.

"This fence won't stop me from getting you, girl!" she heard him yell as she reached the controls for the fence.

"Don't touch it, Rafe! It's electrified!" she said, throwing the switch.

"Like I'm going to believe—Owwwww!" he screamed after laying both hands on the fence. "Goddamn you, girl! You're going to pay for that!"

Vicky collapsed on the front stairs, breathing heavy. She'd won!

"I told you it was electrified. I warned you, but you didn't listen," she taunted in a singsong voice.

"You turn off that fence and let me in, Vicky! I'm tired of your games! You're going home to your father!"

"The hell I am! You can huff and puff and blow my house down, but I ain't movin', Mr. McCallister!"

"I thought you liked me!"

"I do. Doesn't mean I'm going to go with you willingly. I'm not marrying that Brosi creep, and that's final."

"Your father knows what's best for you. Now open this gate!"

"No!"

"Oh, girl, when I get a hold of you—"

"You won't! And you're dreaming if you think you will. I'm so much better at this game than you, Rafe. You are an amateur, an amateur. Don't even

try to compete with me, honey."

"Open this gate!"

"Oh, nice roar. Come on, say it again, this time with feeling."

"Don't push me, woman. You've never seen me mad before. I may come off as happy-go-lucky, but you're about to see a side of me that you won't like. I don't take crap from little girls like you."

"You know something? I like this. This is fun. Tell me you'll stay here the whole time so I can taunt you."

"That's it. I'm gonna take you and turn you right over my knee—no, I'd have to ask permission first. Well, why not? Yes, I will. Oh, I'm going to teach you a lesson, girl. Yes, I am," he said, taking out his cell phone.

"What are you doing?"

"You'll see."

"Yes, sir? This is Rafe. Oh, yes, I've located her. She's locked herself in your place on Apple Tree Lane. Yes, with the electric fence. No, sir, I see no problem with retrieving her. I just had a question. She's been giving me a rather bad time of it, and I would like your permission to spank her when I recover her."

Rafe had to hold the phone out away from his ear due to her father's loud outburst. She could hear her father's boisterous laughter through the phone from halfway across the yard.

"He apparently likes this idea," Rafe said to her. Then he brought the phone close again. "What, sir?" Then he started laughing. "I have no idea how I'd do that, but if I can, I will. Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

Rafe hung up and had the most smug and victorious look on his face. "Oh, girl, are you going to get yours."

"He couldn't have."

"Oh, yes, he did. In fact, he wants it on film if I can get it. And I seem to have just scored some big points with him. Yes, this is going to be fun."

"It would be if you ever got a hold of me. But

with that electric fence surrounding me, you will be the one who cries uncle, my dear Mr. Rafe."

"I seriously doubt that."

"Well, I'm going inside now. I'll come out later and torment you, but for now, I'm hungry."

"I'll be here," he said, grinning at her.

Vicky began to get nervous. No one had ever spanked her before. Not even her father. Well, once, when she was five and burned down her playhouse, but that was an extreme situation. Oh, please. Why was she worried? Like Rafe was going to catch her?

It was time to show Rafe who was boss. Vicky got some food together, a lawn chair and a Mai Tai in a tall, cool glass. Then she went outside into the front yard and set up her headquarters. Her Gloating Headquarters.

Rafe was hanging around his van. When he saw her, he walked over to the fence. "Now what are you up to?" he asked.

"I'm going to enjoy myself here. Me, in the power position, you in the loser position. Got my Mai Tai, my tabloids to read, finger food, I'm just going to amuse myself by being here, where you can't get me. Right here. Right in front of you. So near but so far. You deserve this and more. Spanking me, ha! You are deluded, deluded. Soon, my father will cave to my demands and grant my release. And you, my dear Mr. Rafe, will fail on your mission. And fail miserably, I'm afraid."

"You just keep digging yourself deeper and deeper, don't you, Vicky?"

"If you say so. Now, if you'll excuse me, I need to read about Brad and Jennifer's break up."

Rafe chuckled, but he still looked very irritated with her. And determined.

After a while, she looked up. "Oh, look, there you are. On the other side of the fence. Hmmm, have you retrieved me, yet? I don't think so!" She giggled uncontrollably for a while, fully relishing in her game.

Rafe narrowed his eyes at her and said nothing.

As it began to get dark, Vicky stretched and yawned. Then she got up and assembled all her things.

"Well, I hate to leave you, but American Idol is on tonight, and I need to go take a bath and get ready for it. Uh, have a nice night in that cold van, Rafe."

"Look, Vicky, haven't you played this game long enough? You know your father will win. Just come out, and I'll take you home. No spanking, I promise."

"Right."

"Girl, I'm giving you a chance, and you'd better take it. You keep me out here any longer and it's a right smart whipping you'll receive. And I won't stop until your butt is red as a beet, and you're crying for me to stop."

"Lovely visual. Remind me to have my father fire you."

"Keep at it, girl, just keep at it. And don't say I didn't warn you."

"I'd never say that. Good night, Mr. McCallister."

That night, every time Vicky checked out the front window, Rafe was there, sitting in his van, watching the house. She'd give him a little wave and laugh herself silly. She knew he was just burning up. This was so much fun!

Next morning, she brought out her lawn chair and set up camp in the front yard. Again, Rafe tried to reason with her. She retorted with a series of barbs. Which did not make him happy. He looked fairly fed up. Which was just glorious.

Around one in the afternoon, one of her father's men showed up, Bob Moon.

"Vicky, your father wants to see you," he said.

"Tough beans."

"He wants to give you a chance to come out of there on your own accord."

"He's so generous."

"See?" Rafe said to him.

"Yeah, I see. And I've seen it before. All right, Vicky, have it your way. Good luck, Rafe."

"Thanks, Bob."

Later, at around two, Vicky retrieved more food from inside. Then she sat in her lawn chair, watching Rafe as she ate her ham and cheese sandwich.

"Vicky, one last chance."

She finished chewing and then swallowed. "Oh, please."

"Will you come out of there?"

"You are boring me! Boring. Me."

"Fine, have it your way."

"Yes, I shall. And this ham and cheese sandwich is delightful."

"You know what I'm going to do when I get a hold of you?"

"Oh, God, not this again."

"First, I'm going to wrestle you across my lap. Then, when I've got you like this?" he said, demonstrating how he would hold her. "I'm going to pull down your shorts, all the way down to your knees, like this," he said, a delightful grin on his handsome face. "Then with that tight, little, white bottom of yours exposed, I'm going to bring my arm back—oh, probably this far, maybe further—then I'm going to swing down like this and smack that little insolent butt of yours until it's redder than a berry. Until you cry. What do you think about that?"

"Yawn. You are so dull, Rafe. I thought you were more inventive than that."

"You won't think I'm so dull when I've got a hold of you and am spanking that little behind of yours."

"You are so deluded."

"And you know what else?"

"What?"

"I've got a secret."

"A secret?"

"Yes, a secret. Want to guess what it is?"

For some reason, Vicky liked this twist in the

game. She put her magazine and food aside, got up and moved down towards the fence.

"Let me guess, uh, you just found out that your parents were brother and sister," she said and then burst into laughter.

His eyes narrowed, but he laughed politely. "Uh, no, that wasn't it."

"Uh... hmmm. You just found out that when you were born, the doctor slapped your mother instead of you," she said, giggling nearly uncontrollably.

He was getting angrier, but he continued with the polite laughter. "Uh, I don't think that was it, either."

She came down closer to the fence. "Let me see... when you told your mother what your IQ was, she thought you were talking about the current temperature in Alaska."

"Uh, no. That's not it, either."

"Well, you've got me in suspense here, Rafe, please, do tell, do tell."

She watched as he placed his hands on the gate, which didn't register for a moment.

"No, my secret is, this gate is open," he said, pushing open the gate with a nearly demonic grin on his face.

It took her a second and then adrenaline slammed her whole system. She ran, screaming, for the house.

She didn't even make it to the door before he grabbed her. This time, he wasn't fooling around. He picked her up, threw her over his shoulder and walked inside the house. Then he brought her into the living room.

In one swift move, he sat on the couch, pulled her off his shoulder and laid her across his lap. With her screaming protests and threats, he pulled one arm behind her back and pinned her legs with one of his.

"Now, where was I in my plan? Oh, yes, the part where I pull these shorts and undies right off you."

"No, Rafe! I'm sorry! I'll go with you! I'll go with

you! You win! You win!"

"Oh, honey, like that would work now. I don't think so. You earned this, and I earned this. This is going to be fun. A lot of fun that I wouldn't miss for the world. Never before have I met a more disobedient and bratty girl, never has any woman I've ever known deserved a spanking more. You'll learn, my girl, by the end of this, never to cross me again. Oh, it was fun to flirt with me, wasn't it, these past couple years? Taunting me, making fun of me. You don't think I missed any of that, do you?"

"I'm sorry, I—"

"You are not sorry, you're only sorry I caught you."

"No, really, I like you, I—"

"And I like you, Vicky. Doesn't mean I'm going to put up with your crap, my girl. In fact, it's because I like you that I'm going to enjoy this so much. No, after this, you'll learn to respect me. I'm not yours to toy with; I'm your father's employee. Which you have taken to mean your personal whipping boy. Well, guess what, Vicky? Guess who's just about to be my personal whipping girl?"

"I never meant to...well."

"Yes, it's all coming clear to you now, isn't it? Well, my dear, it's time we had some rectification in our relationship. A reorganization in the hierarchy. From here on out, if you ever tease me again, taunt me or flirt with me without the follow through, I will hunt you down and spank your little insolent bottom for it. Get me, Princess?"

"You should have told me to stop!"

"I did! You never listened, you just kept teasing me. Well, my dear, this spanking has been a long time comin', I'll tell you. And now... for the grand finale. Are you ready?"

"No! Rafe! Don't!"

"Oh, this is going to be fun," he said. "Now where was I? Oh, yes, pulling these shorts off you." He grabbed the back of her pants and pulled them

down to her knees. "Oh, pink today, very nice," he said. "But you won't be needing these," he said, and then he yanked her panties down to her knees as well. "Oh, my, that is a pretty sight."

She could feel the air rush over her exposed behind. Never before had she felt so vulnerable. And unfortunately, with Rafe displaying these horrid dominating tendencies, Vicky found herself inadvertently, very turned on to him. She'd always found him attractive, that's why she tortured him so, but now, she was also slightly afraid of him. Which was quite arousing for some reason. This was a man she should not have been pushing around. She'd taken his easy going personality as compliant, almost weak. But, he had not been compliant, or weak. He was all man, and she was just finding that out. Unfortunately, the hard way.

"Now, my dear, prepare yourself. This is what happens when you push Rafe McCallister too far!"

"No, Rafe, don't!"

Then she felt the first strike. And what a swat it was! He wasn't fooling around. Rafe meant this! Her rear smarted! This hurt!

"Ow! Stop!"

"Parading around in that bikini, when it was cold," he said, spanking her a good one. "Bending over in front of me to pick up something you dropped on purpose," he said, punctuating the statement with a sharp swat. "Or what about just last week when you purposely dropped your towel when I was checking the backyard outside your room?" Spank! "Huh? What about all that?" Smack! "Not very respectful of me, were you, huh, Vicky?" Spank, spank, spank! "And what the hell are you doing, showing off like that?" Whack! Whack! Whack!

"Oww, Rafe, stop! I'm sorry!"

"Not sorry enough, Vicky! Not sorry enough!"

Rafe threw himself into the punishment session. He didn't miss one square inch of her poor butt. The spansks traveled up and down her behind. He

swatted one cheek until she howled with pain and then the other. He hit both buns at once, and then he worked on her sit spots until she burst into tears.

"You are never going to tease me again, my girl! You got that!"

"I got it, I got it, please, please, please, Rafe! Stop!"

"Not until I'm sure you've got this lesson!" he said, continuing his torment of her now blistering behind.

His torturous rhythm went on and on until she began screaming for him to stop.

Finally, with a few terrible ending swats, he finished her punishment.

She was wracking with sobs and feeling horrible that she'd pushed him so far. She knew she'd been teasing him mercilessly, she just hadn't realized her impact on him.

He pulled up her pants and then sat her next to him on the couch. Then he put his arm around her.

"Come on, settle down now, it's all over. It's all over."

She leaned into him, needing comfort. "I'm sorry, Rafe. I didn't mean to push you that far. I didn't know... I—"

"I blame your father. He's let you get away with this terrible behavior for years. No one has set any limits on you. But it's high time someone did."

She looked up into his face, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I...did it because I liked you so much... I... wanted you, and I... knew I couldn't really have you... so I..."

"I thought that was it," he said, looking down at her fondly.

Then Rafe surprised her. He leaned down and kissed her.

Somehow, with her behind tingling with pain, that look in his eye and his magnificent kissing she was transported. Here was the man she'd been searching for. While she didn't really approve of his methods, she'd been looking for someone who

would stand up to her for years.

When she pulled away, she began crying harder.

"What is it? Vicky? Are you all right? Did I really hit you that hard?"

"No. Well, yeah, you hit me hard, and my butt is still killing me, but no. Daddy wants me to marry that Jeff creep. I want you. I want you, and I can't have you."

He smiled down at her. "I'm not so sure about that."

"Why? What are you talking about?"

"I talked to your father this morning. I had a feeling what might happen between us. I asked him if he was so hell bent on allowing Jeff to marry you. When I presented my case, he said, 'Rafe? You tame her, and she's yours.'"

"You... you like me that much?"

"Honey, I've been in love with you from the moment I met you."

"Oh, Rafe, I love you, too."

He kissed her again. Then he pulled away. "But just because I love you doesn't mean I'm gonna let you get away with any more shenanigans. You marry me, woman, and no more games. No more runnin' away, no more flirting with anyone but me and no more teasing me. Well, if you do tease me, you're gonna find yourself on your back quicker than you can say 'Happy-go-lucky'."

"Whatever you say, Rafe. You win. You win. I love you, and I won't taunt you anymore. I'll do what you want. I'll do what you say. Just kiss me again, okay?"

He laughed and kissed her. "Do you feel tamed, woman?"

"I don't like the thought, but I love you."

"No matter, you're mine, and I'm never letting you go. But mind me, woman, no more games, or you know what you'll get."

"You mean, you'd spank me again?"

"You're damned straight I will. You give me any more trouble, you'll find yourself over my knee, with

your panties down around your knees, getting that cute little bottom of yours blistered, you get me?"

"Yes, Rafe."

"Good, now come here, I've got some more taming to do," he said, reaching down and unbuttoning her blouse.

The Secretary

"Come," he said, with a look in his eye that she knew she couldn't disobey. Stern, disapproving, immovable.

Libby was in trouble. Big trouble. Her stomach churning, she stood up and reluctantly followed him into his office.

"Close the door. And lock it," Derek ordered curtly.

She did as she was told. When she turned around, he'd already brought his executive chair out from behind the desk. He sat down in it and motioned her over.

"Look, Derek, I—"

"Are you about to make things worse for yourself?" he cautioned, his green eyes regarding her coldly.

"No, but... see, I was almost ready. I didn't really lie, I..."

"Fibbed? Stretched the truth? What? What part of 'I have that report ready, Derek' was the truth?"

"Well, I would have if you hadn't come to get it early."

"Early?" he said raising an eyebrow, looking at her, incredulous. "What is early? You said it was ready, I came to get it, it wasn't, you lied. Pretty cut and dried, Libby. Now stop trying to weasel out of your punishment, or I'll add more to your sentence. Now get over here," he ordered.

She shuffled over, mumbling to herself, wishing all to hell she hadn't fallen in love with her boss. And vice versa. This whole new relationship of theirs had changed her job dramatically. Before, she could flip off a few choice half-truths, rush around, get his work done, hand it in and be done with it. Now, for some reason, he was scrutinizing everything she did and said. Of course, shortly after they began dating, just the month before, he'd caught her in the first lie. It had all gone downhill from then. After that, he checked up on her. He had found out things about

her she wished he hadn't. Like she was fairly lazy, duplicitous and spent much of her working time surfing the Net. For the previous year, while they'd been flirting, he assumed she was doing her job perfectly. Which was exactly what she wanted him to think. But now that they were intimate, somehow, her whole shield of deception had fallen away. He could see right through her. All the way down to her incorrigible soul.

"Libby, stop dawdling or I'll double your sentence."

"Yes, Derek," she said, moping.

"And get that look off your face. You know you deserve this. You practically asked for it."

"Yes, sir," she said miserably. She had barely recovered from his last spanking. She hoped he'd go easy on her.

She finally reached his side; his eyes hadn't left hers for an instant. He looked fairly angry with her. Which was turning her on. She wondered if it was part of the problem. She was always most attracted to him when he was peeved with her.

He reached out, grabbed her wrist and pulled her across his lap. She wished she hadn't worn her red mini-skirt that day. If she wore pants, he generally left them on for her punishments. But she'd planned on seducing him during their lunch hour, so she'd worn a thong and her hot, new skirt. Stupid idea.

He didn't even have to pull up her skirt, it had ridden up when she'd tumbled across his lap.

"Not exactly work appropriate underwear, darling. Although, I do appreciate the gesture," he said, rubbing his hand appreciatively over her exposed rear. "If you weren't such a bad girl, I would have gladly put this outfit to better use. But now, it's just made my job all the more easy," he said, settling her in place. "I'm giving you twenty-five," he informed her.

"Twenty-five! But Derek, last time you only gave me fifteen, and I'd done something much worse,"

she protested.

Smack! He slapped her sharply across both cheeks.

"Ow!" she exclaimed.

"No questioning my authority, Libby. I'm giving you twenty-five because you obviously didn't take me seriously the last time. I'm hoping this time, I may actually get through to that lazy brain of yours."

"But Derek—"

Swat! "Ow! Derek!" she complained.

"What did I say? Are you questioning my authority?"

"No, no."

"You'd better not be. Now count for me. Brat."

"Yes, sir."

Spank! Derek hit her sharply with his strong and able hand.

"Three!" she squeaked.

"Three? No, that was one. The others were wake up spanks. Don't protest or I'll add ten to your sentence."

Libby bit her tongue. "Okay, okay."

"Okay?"

"Yes, Derek."

"That's better."

Libby braced herself as she felt him bring his arm back. The follow through was intensely painful. His large and open hand smacked fully across one bun and halfway across the other, stinging like all get out. She had no idea how she would face twenty-three more like that one.

"Ow! Two! Derek! That hurts!"

"It's supposed to. That's why they call it a punishment. You're not supposed to enjoy it, Libby. I'm making a point with you."

Then he laid into her. He really seemed to be putting his all into it; she'd never felt such pain before. None of his other spankings had been this hard. This was intense! One after another, his firm hand spanked her bare behind with hard swats. A

ceaseless rhythm, covering every spot of her rear. He swatted her upper cheeks, then traveled down and smacked her sit spots until she thought she'd lose her mind. Tears spilled from her eyes as his practiced hand made mincemeat of her poor rear. Why had she lied to him?

Finally, it was over. Trembling from the pain, Libby had difficulty standing, and Derek had to steady her as he helped her up. Then as she stepped away from him, he grabbed her arm and pulled her down into his lap. He wiped the tears from her cheeks and kissed her, very sweetly.

"Are you sorry for what you did?"

"Yes, Derek," she replied.

"Will you do that again?"

"No, Derek."

"You'll tell me the truth from now on, no matter what the repercussions, won't you?"

"Yes, Derek."

"Good girl. Now I want you to wait right here, I have to check on something."

"Okay."

Derek lifted her off his lap, got up from the chair, went over to his PDA and clicked on it, checking something. "Just as I thought. All right, you, up on the desk."

"What?"

"I said, up on the desk."

"Now? What?"

"Don't ask questions, woman, do as I say," he ordered.

"Okay," she said, sitting up on his desk. Which hurt.

"Ow."

"You should have thought about that before you lied to me."

"I know."

He came around and stood in front of her. The look in his eye told her what was about to happen.

"Here? Now?" she asked, worried. "Don't you have a meeting?"

"It was canceled," he said with a grin. "Now spread those lovely legs of yours, it's time you got a good tongue lashing for your disobedience, young lady."

"Derek—I—"

"Are you questioning my authority?"

"No, but..."

"Then do as I say," he commanded.

She spread her legs. He reached up, yanked off her thong and tossed it over his shoulder. Then he pushed her back onto his huge mahogany desk.

Before she could say anything, he'd inserted a finger inside her and his tongue found her sweet spot. Nearly instantly, she was launched into a wild, exhilarating orgasm. Something about the look in his eye, what he was doing, the spanking, it all added up to a super sexy encounter. His expert tongue worked her into a frenzy, again and again. Finally, after her fifth or sixth orgasm, he pulled her down towards him, dropped his pants and entered her, plowing into her with ferocity. Which launched her into another amazing, mind-blowing orgasm. This time, instead of his usual tender lovemaking, it seemed as if he wanted to make her pay.

"Lie to me, will you?" he growled as he thrust into her. "I'll show you what I do to little bratty liars like yourself. I punish little nasty liars, is what I do. I punish them," he said increasing his rhythm, "and I punish them. Again and again, I punish them."

Libby was so far gone, she began to moan loudly. Derek clapped his hand over her mouth to make sure their next door neighbors didn't hear her and kept slamming her until they both exploded into wild climaxes.

After he withdrew, he swept her up into his arms and kissed her.

"I love you so much, Libby. I don't know why it took me so long to pursue you. I wanted you from the moment I saw you, but... I really don't like to mix business with pleasure. I should have just thrown caution to the wind. I feel like I've wasted

so much time."

"I love you, Derek. I'm sorry I disappointed you."

"Brat. I love you, too. I'm hoping I can reform you here, although it's taking a bit more work than I originally anticipated."

"Yeah, well."

"Now, you'd better get cleaned up. It's only two, and I have a lot more work I need to accomplish today. And you do too. I need that report on the Hoskins venture by five."

"I'm almost done with it."

"Really?" he said, grinning, raising an eyebrow.

"Yeah."

"Good girl."

She went into his bathroom, got herself cleaned up, re-applied her make-up and started out the door from his office.

"I want that report on my desk by five, or you know what you'll get, don't you?"

"Yes, Derek."

"Good girl."

As she turned to leave, he swatted her on the rump.

"That's still sore," she reminded him.

"I know," he grinned. "But it will be a lot more sore if you don't get me that report."

"Yes, sir."

She had the report on his desk by four-thirty. He rewarded her for her promptness. A very personal reward.

Two weeks later, Libby was bored. She was playing solitaire on her computer, wishing she was at home or shopping. Derek was off on a business trip, and she was alone at the office for the entire week. She had a lot of work to catch up on, but she hadn't been motivated. She'd bought some new sexy outfits from Victoria's Secret, played umpteen games of Solitaire and made some reservations for

a vacation she and Derek had planned. But she hadn't done the six reports he'd assigned. She still had three days before he was due back, and she knew she could whip them out fast. It was just finding the motivation that was difficult.

When she heard the office door open, she figured it was the UPS guy coming to deliver the office supplies she'd ordered. Her heart leapt into her throat when she saw her wonderful lover's face at the door.

"Derek!" she cried, leaping out of her chair to rush to him.

He dropped his briefcase with a huge smile on his face and caught her as she leapt into his arms.

He carried her straight to his office and had her pants off and had entered her before he'd even said hello.

They had wild sex, all over his office. They seemed to forget themselves, by the time they were done, they were both stark naked and had thrown all the stuff from his desk onto the floor. It looked like a bomb went off in his office. Both were laughing and kissing, so happy to be reunited.

"There's my girl. I missed you so much," he said.

"I missed you more," she said, kissing him again.

"I never want to be away from you again. Next time I go on a bloody business trip, I'm taking my favorite secretary with me."

"I love you, Derek."

"I love you, darling," he said.

"So what happened?" she asked. "Why did you come back so soon? You weren't due until Friday."

"Three meetings got canceled, I canceled one and hopped a plane. I couldn't stand being away from you, and I hate Chicago."

"Poor baby," she said, bringing him down for a kiss.

"Are you at a good stopping point for work?" he asked.

"Yeah, sure, honey."

"Good, let's take the rest of the day off. I have some things I want to do to you at home."

"Ooo!"

They made mad passionate love all afternoon and into the early evening hours. Derek had a lot of pent up need. And he was so inventive. He tried things with her she'd never dreamed of before. He was so wild! She would have never guessed it from looking at him. The first time they met, at the interview, he seemed so straight, so buttoned down. So conservative. Which he was at work. But between the sheets, watch out! The man was an animal! So fun!

Libby was so happy to have him back, so blissed out from outrageous sex that she'd forgotten all about her workload. She hadn't gotten even one thing done that he'd assigned. It all hit her when she sat at her desk the next morning. Hopefully, he'd be so tied up with meetings that day that she'd have time to catch up. And at least get one or two of the six reports done.

She hadn't been at her desk for a half an hour before he called for her.

"Libby? Could you come in here?"

Praying he wouldn't want a report, she got up and walked confidently into his office.

"Yes, Derek?"

"Can I have that report on the Smith property?"

"Sure," she said, knowing full well she hadn't even started on it. She turned and went into her office. Once there, she pretended to be shuffling papers. "Oh, damn, I think I left that one at home. I was working on it late Monday night and—"

"You took work home?" he asked suspiciously.

"Uh, yeah. I wanted to get it done for you."

"Libby," he asked with a warning to his voice.

"Uh, yeah?"

"Could you please come in here?"

Uh, oh. She had to play it cool. "Yes, hon, what is it?" she asked innocently as she strolled into his

office.

He was leaning back in his chair, regarding her with a stern look in his eye.

"You took work home?" he asked again.

"Uh, yeah," she said, looking away, realizing that she was blowing it by not making eye contact. She quickly looked back at him.

He clearly was not buying her act. "You've never brought home work before. You don't have that report done, do you?"

"Sure, I said I did, didn't I?"

"You're lying to me, aren't you?"

"No," she said rather unconvincingly.

"Libby, do I have to go into your computer to see what you've done or are you going to confess to me, exactly what you've accomplished since I've been gone."

"I... well, I got those reservations at that little B&B you love so well. I got a new nightgown from Victoria's Secret, that you'll love and I..."

"Yes? What about the Proctor account? That report?"

"Uh... I'm not sure."

"Damn it, woman. You didn't get anything done, did you?"

"No. I mean, yes. Look, you came back early. You weren't due until Friday night which would have given me two and a half—"

"Libby! Stop right there!"

She stopped and stared at her feet.

"Do I have to hire a baby-sitter for you?"

"No! Derek, I'm sorry, I would have, but see, you—"

"Stop!" He was mad. Really mad. "Stop the lies now." There was a pause as he stared at her with disapproval. Then he said, "I got you a present while I was away."

That was not what she expected him to say. "A... A present."

His words did not match his emotion.

"Yes, a present. Close the door and I'll show

you."

"Well, if you want that report, I really should—"

"Libby, close that door and come over here. I won't ask again."

"Yes, Derek." She closed the door and walked over to him, but stood just out of reach.

He opened a drawer of his desk and pulled out a long, thin box, tied with a ribbon. A negligee?

"Here," he said, throwing it to her. "Open it up."

Nervously, she untied the ribbon and tore off the wrapping. Derek's eyes never left hers. She opened the box. Whatever it was, it was wrapped in tissue. She grabbed the mystery object. It was hard. She peeled away the tissue, and her heart nearly stopped. It was a two foot long, gleaming wooden paddle.

The tears started nearly instantly.

"Strip. All the way down to nothing," he ordered curtly.

"Derek, I—"

"Silence! Woman, you've pushed me too far with this one. I thought something like this might happen. So I took some preventative measures. If my hand won't get through to you, maybe that paddle will."

"But I was going to do the—"

"Are you about to make some pathetic attempt at excusing your behavior?"

"No."

"Then do as I say and bring me that paddle. Now strip."

"Yes, Derek."

"You are going to get once and for all, who is in charge here. By the time I'm done with you, you won't ever even consider disobeying me again."

"Yes, Derek," she said, slowly taking off her clothes.

"Now get over here," he ordered.

Slowly she shuffled over to him. He stood up.

"Now hand me that paddle."

She gave it to him.

"Now bend over my desk. Come around here, yes, like that. Now bend it over. All the way."

He pushed down on the small of her back so that her breasts and belly were in full contact with his cold, mahogany desk. Her taut rear end was high in the air, she felt so vulnerable!

"Your desk is cold," she complained.

"Well, shortly, you won't be thinking about that. Hands behind your back."

She did so. He took hold of them with one hand and pinned them to her lower back.

"Now you're in for it. Count for me. We're going to fifty."

"Fifty! With the paddle?!" she exclaimed.

Whack! The sharp slap of the wood to her rear caused her to nearly jump out of her skin. My God, she thought, she'd never felt more pain before. She thought his hand was bad, it was nothing compared to his new torture device!

"Yes, fifty. And no, that one didn't count. Now you count for me and no editorializing, no pleading, no begging. You will take this and you will think about how you will never disobey me again. You will never be lazy, you will never be bad, you will be a good girl and will do everything I ask of you, when I ask you to do it."

"Yes, Derek."

"And now, I'll begin." She felt him bring his arm back and then he thundered into her rear with all his might. The blow propelled her forward, the desk bit into her upper thighs. Searing pain ripped through her rear. How could she possibly take forty-nine more?

"One!" she cried.

Derek took his time with her punishment. He let a few seconds pass between each blow, which made it all the more painful and horrible. Whack! Burning agony. Whack! Amazing pain. Whack! Horrendous impact. It went on and on.

By the end of it, she was pouring sweat, there was an entire pool of her tears on his desk, her legs

were trembling and she was sobbing her eyes out.

Finally, he let her up. But he didn't let her move away from the desk.

"Now, Libby. You stay right there. I'm going to get your laptop."

"Y-y-yes, Derek."

Why was he going to get her laptop? She didn't care, at least her punishment was over. Or so she hoped.

He brought in her laptop, careful to close and lock his office door behind him. He set it up on his desk and tapped into it.

"Show me what you've done on the Smith report."

She wiped away some tears and opened the file. The only thing there was a spreadsheet and the words "Smith Report" typed up at the top.

"Is that it?" he asked.

"Yes, Derek."

She was looking at her computer screen, and she didn't notice him pick up the dreaded paddle. Out of nowhere, he spanked her a hard one across her cheeks, that cold hard wood jangling her every nerve.

"Yow!" she yelped in pain. The tears started up again.

"Now show me what you've got on the Carey project."

She tapped into the computer and opened another file. This time there were actual numbers on the report. But only six lines of them.

She braced herself. Whack! Another good one to both buns. The force of the blow almost made her topple over his desk.

"And now the Drumen report."

"I didn't even get that one titled," she reported miserably.

Whack!

"What about the Miller account?"

"Ditto," she said through her tears.

Whack!

"And the Splashing Venture?"

"Nothing."

Whack! She wailed on that one. Tears were streaming down her face, and her butt was on fire!

"Let me guess about the Nervan project."

"The same," she replied, sobbing.

"Damn it, Libby!" Whack, whack, whack, whack, whack!

"I'm sorry!" she squealed in agony.

"You'd damn well better be, woman. This week, I'm docking your pay. You hear me?"

"Yes, Derek."

"And this weekend, we're not going wine-tasting, you're working here alone all weekend, you hear me?"

"Yes, Derek," she sobbed.

"Rotten little wench."

"Yes, Derek."

"All right. You stay there, I'm going to take your absolutely useless waste of a computer and put it back on your desk. Don't you dare move, you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

When Derek returned, he still looked furious.

"Now you, you go over and bend over my couch. I want your hands flat on the top of the seat."

"Are you gonna—"

"Silence! You are still being punished. You say nothing, hear me?"

"Yes, Derek."

She walked over to the couch, bent over and put her hands on top.

"Spread your legs some," he ordered from his desk.

She did so.

"Now stay that way until I tell you to move."

A half hour passed. Her legs began to burn, along with her very sore rear. She shifted in place.

"Did I tell you you could move?"

"No," she replied in a small voice. She heard him get up and move over to her. Whack! A sharp one

to both buns. Only this time, he didn't use the paddle, just his hand. It hurt, but not as much.

He walked back to his desk. Another half hour passed. Libby was in real pain by now.

She heard him get up. She prepared herself for another spanking. He walked up behind her and stopped. She jumped when he ran a finger down the middle of her back.

"Settle down. But don't move or by God, I'll spank you again."

"Yes, sir."

His finger continued to travel, down between her cheeks and underneath.

"Spread your legs more," he ordered. She complied.

He began playing with her. His finger went up and down her rear end, then he moved it forward and found her sweet spot. He started making little circles on it, she was getting hot fast.

"Don't move or I'll spank you."

"But Derek."

Whack!

"Okay, okay."

"Good girl."

Finally, her favorite words. He was softening. Finally, her domineering man was softening. Damn, that took a long time.

"God, Libby, I want you so much. But I'm going to make you suffer before I let you come. I'm in control. I set the rules and you follow them," he said, touching her sex again.

"Yes, Derek."

He took her right to the edge. "You come, I punish you. I'm in control here. You come when I say, you hold back, you hear me? You come, I take the paddle to you."

"Yes, Derek."

He tormented her for a full ten minutes until she began sobbing for release. Begging him to let her come.

"Will you listen to me? Will you obey me from

now on? Will you do the work I assign you?"

"Yes, yes!" she moaned in sensual agony.

"Good," he said. The next thing she knew, he'd entered her.

And then he really let her have it. He thrust into her again and again with savage force, causing her to rip into orgasm after orgasm. She came so many times, she thought her head was going to explode.

When it was all over, she was sobbing again. He took her into his arms and kissed her tenderly.

"That was your first wife-training session, my dear. How did you like it?"

"W-wife training?"

"Maybe if I marry you, I'll finally get some real control over you."

"Are you asking m-me to m-m-marry you?" she asked through her tears.

His handsome face broke into a wide smile. "Yes, I am."

"Derek! I love you!" she cried, throwing her arms around his neck.

The Vandal

The house was everything Michael dreamed it would be. A perfect, 1920's farmhouse, complete with a covered, old-fashioned front porch, an outside gazebo and some of the most marvelous heirloom fruit trees he'd ever seen.

Michael had found out about the property through some friends. He'd grown up in the next town over, Ashford, which had been taken over by McMansions and fast food joints. But Marysville remained rural, separated by a large mountain, just enough of a barrier to keep out the city folk. Many of his old classmates had moved to Marysville over the years, it was through these old connections he'd found his dream house.

However, as with all small towns, there were problems. While his friends were thrilled that he'd moved into town, there were some people who apparently weren't so happy with his purchase of the old property. Ever since he'd moved in, vandals had been plaguing him. At first, small things disappeared from the property. The old mail box and the old sign with the property's address on it. It was when he'd removed an old, diseased oak tree that the real vandalism began. And it wasn't directed towards the house, it was obviously directed towards him personally. His Toyota Tacoma truck had been egged and feathered—twice. Salt had been poured on the front lawn in letters which spelled out "I'm An Ass". One day he came home to find that all his doorknobs had been greased with mechanic's heavy grease—nearly impossible to remove. It was getting to the point where Michael was about to take some action. If he ever personally got a hold of the culprits, his old fraternity paddle was going to make short work of some misbehaving backsides.

One night, Michael had just turned off the TV when he heard a noise outside. Instinctively, he knew what it was. The vandals! He raced outside

with a powerful flashlight and just caught someone diving into the huge, thick hedge, which lined his property.

He raced over to the thick brush. "Come out of there!" he demanded.

Carrie was petrified. How stupid was she? She knew better than to attack the newbie before ten at night. Damn that movie, anyway. Her favorite movie was playing at eleven, so she decided to move up the timetable of her vandalism so she could watch the film. But now she was stuck in painful, nasty hedges, with her enemy only a foot away with a huge flashlight, demanding that she reveal herself. Not going to happen!

"I know you're in there!" Michael blasted. "When I get my hands on you, you will not be sitting for weeks, you hear me? I've got a fraternity paddle with your name on it! Now get out of there and show yourself!"

Oh, right, Carrie thought. After those threats? No way. She'd stay there all night if she had to.

"All right, if you're not coming out, I'm coming in and getting you!" Michael seethed.

Suddenly, he lunged into the hedge. Terrified, Carrie recoiled and turned, pushing her way through the dense hedges. Then she felt him grab the back of her sweatshirt.

"I've got you!" he cried.

But Carrie wasn't about to get caught. She turned around and slammed up on his wrist with her balled fist, freeing herself. Her next move was to knock the flashlight out of his hand. Then she continued to push her way out of the hedges. She was nearly through when she tripped. The top half of her fell through the hedges, onto the neighbor's lawn, leaving her legs still entangled in the brush.

Michael saw the culprit's legs right in front of him and grabbed one. "You're not getting away from me this time!" he promised.

Using all her strength, Carrie yanked her leg away. His grip slipped, but he got a hold of her foot.

Grunting loudly, Carrie pulled as hard as she could. Finally, her shoe came off in the guy's hands. In a heartbeat, she was free of both her pursuer and the hedge. She jumped to her feet and ran like her hair was on fire.

Michael was furious, holding the kid's shoe and watching his fleeing back turn the corner. "Goddamn you! I'm going to find out who you are, and when I do, there will be hell to pay!"

If only Michael hadn't gotten caught on that branch, he would have caught that brat! Damn that little creep, anyway. Well, at least, now he knew. It was a boy that was plaguing him. Some teenage boy brat. Oh, when Michael got his hands on that kid, he was going to bend him over his workbench in the shed and tenderize his behind, but good. Michael was not a man to be pushed around. One prank, fine. But the plague of vandalism was no joke. That boy was going to pay and pay dearly.

Carrie was so thrilled that she had escaped! And, from his yells, Michael Ramsay apparently thought she was a teenage boy. Praise the Lord! And it was so lovely to hear the frustration and anger in his voice. He deserved everything he got. The jerk.

Carrie just wished she'd had the money to keep her grandmother's home. It had nearly killed her when she had to put it on the market. When Grandma died, there was just enough money for the burial and funeral. She'd taken loans against the house to pay for her health care, so there was very little equity left. Laden with debt from her previous marriage, Carrie couldn't afford to keep the family home.

Then that monster Michael Ramsay got in there and began to destroy the house. He'd taken out the old oak tree—sacrilege! Dismantled the gazebo—criminal! Carrie soon found that she couldn't just sit by and watch him wreck her precious family home;

she had to take action. And, unfortunately, the only action she could come up with was vandalism. After all, nothing Ramsay was doing was illegal. Just horrifying. Carrie had never hated anyone more.

As Carrie cleaned up from her escape, she worried about her missing shoe. Could Ramsay uncover her identity from that clue? Probably not. And who would suspect her, anyway? She'd grown up in the town, she'd been teaching at the local high school for fifteen years, she was the President of the Literary Club and organized the yearly town Christmas Festival. An exemplary citizen. But, still, she'd better cool it for awhile. No need to push it. She'd made her point. Even though tormenting Michael Ramsay had become her favorite, new hobby.

Michael was looking forward to the night. His friends, Bill and Martha, had invited him over for a poker party. It was to be just four of them; the two hosts, Michael and a dear friend of theirs, a teacher. Bill confided in Michael that the woman was single and quite a knockout. Which couldn't help but perk Michael's interest. He didn't get a chance to meet many single women, not with his demanding real estate business. Especially one as cute as Bill described. Even if nothing happened, he could look at her. Michael was a man who appreciated fine scenery.

When she walked into the room, Michael was immediately impressed. Tall and lithe, Carrie Pressman had long dark hair, beautiful green eyes and quite an athletic body. Almost a boy's body, very fit and lean. Very attractive and just his type. If she had a good personality, he might be very interested in getting to know her.

Carrie didn't even see the guy. All she saw was Martha's new furniture. "Oh, my God, it's gorgeous! Restoration Hardware, huh? Man, you guys—oh. Hi there," Carrie said upon noticing the stranger in her

friends' living room. A very hot looking stranger. Gorgeous, really. He was tall, had intense blue eyes, sandy blonde hair, an angular, masculine face and a great body.

"Hello," he responded. Nice voice, too.

"Carrie, I want you to meet an old friend of mine," Bill said. "We went to high school together in Ashford. This is Michael Ramsay."

The words reverberated through Carrie's brain. Michael. Ramsay. The Michael Ramsay. The Enemy. The Destroyer Of Her Family Home. The Jerk. The Creep. The Cad.

She immediately began choking. "I'm sorry," she coughed out.

"Get her some wine, Bill," Martha ordered.

A glass of wine appeared, and Carrie drank some. She laughed to cover her abject horror. "I'm sorry, Michael? Did you say?"

"Yes," he said, smiling.

"Sorry, I..."

"Michael bought your grandmother's house," Martha informed her cheerily.

"Oh, you're the new owner," Carrie said, hoping the man couldn't read her mind.

"Pleased to meet you, Carrie," Michael said, extending his hand.

Carrie wanted to chop off his hand at the wrist, but covered her hatred of the cute man and forced herself to shake hands with him. Unfortunately, he had a nice grip, smooth hands. And then she caught his scent, very enticing. His entire package was appealing. What a horrible turn of events!

After her initial, conflicting emotions, the evening wore on, and Carrie began to separate Michael the Destroyer from Michael the Dinner Guest. Probably because the man was so damned charming. He was funny, witty, well read, well spoken and very at ease with himself. It was obvious that Bill and he went way back. They had Carrie and Martha howling at some of the stories about their high school exploits.

"Speaking of vandals, did you ever catch those kids who were playing those pranks on you, Michael?" Bill asked.

Carrie's hand froze, fork in hand, as she was just about to take a bite of steak. She was glad Michael's attention was focused on Bill, because she almost had a heart attack.

"Uh, no. But, I almost did. Heard the little bastard out there the other night—didn't I tell you?" Michael said, getting fired up.

"Someone's been vandalizing Michael's house, Carrie. Ever since he moved in," Martha explained.

"Oh," Carrie said, trying to sound surprised.

"Yes, and I actually laid hands on the little creep, but he escaped from me at the last minute. Got his shoe, though."

"You got his shoe?" Bill asked, laughing.

"Yeah, I had his leg—he was in some bushes and I went in after him— but he pulled away at the last second, and I found myself holding his shoe. I yelled at him, let him know that if I ever caught him, I'd be paddling that rotten backside of his with my solid wooden paddle."

"You still have that old thing?" Bill asked.

"A fond remembrance from our fraternity days, yes," Michael said, nodding. "I found it to be quite handy at times over the years. Mainly to keep that horrible ex-wife of mine at bay."

"You paddled your ex-wife?" Martha said, mildly shocked.

"I had to. Kept me from killing her. After she got drunk and crashed the car, overdrew our checking account and maxed out our credit cards, then taunted me about it all, I found it was the only way to control her. Once I brought the paddle into the situation, suddenly, she stopped overspending. Amazing, all my talks beforehand did nothing. But that paddle worked wonders on her."

"Is that why you divorced her?" Carrie asked.

"No, I divorced her because she was sleeping with my best friend at the time," Michael said

plainly.

"Oh, dear," Carrie said.

"Your ex-wife sounds remarkably like Carrie's ex-husband," Martha said.

"Yeah, if he'd been a bit smaller, I think I would have paddled him, too," Carrie said.

"I'll bet," Michael grinned. "So, yes, I've found the implement very handy. And when I get my hands on that little snake, he will be paying a very steep price for his acts."

"Let me know when you catch him, I'd love to hear the story," Bill said.

"Yes," Michael said. "And it's odd, before I cut down that old oak tree, all he did was steal things from the house. I don't know why that upset him. Carrie?"

Carrie choked on her wine. "Sorry, yes?"

"Do you have any nephews or anyone who might have been upset that I bought the house?" Michael asked.

Carrie tried her best to look unruffled. "Uh... no. I'm it."

"Huh. I was hoping you might be able to help me."

"Poor Michael," Martha said. "You were already so upset you had to cut down that old tree."

"I didn't sleep for two nights after that. You probably noticed, Carrie, that I had to take down that wonderful old oak tree."

"You did? Why?" Carrie asked as if it was the first time she'd heard it.

"Sudden oak death. Horrible. But it was dying quickly and could have taken out the gazebo."

"I thought you took out the gazebo, anyway," Carrie said, then realized her mistake. If she knew about the gazebo, how had she missed the news about the tree? Luckily, Michael didn't seem to notice.

"Well, temporarily. I'm having it restored."

"Oh," Carrie said, completely shocked. So this was why he'd taken down the tree and the gazebo!

He wasn't destroying the property, he was restoring it! She immediately felt horrible. She'd attacked him for nothing! How rotten was she?

"Are you all right, Carrie?" Michael asked. "You've suddenly gone pale."

"Oh, no. Yes, I'm fine. I... I'm a little tired from grading papers."

"Carrie works so hard, don't you, honey," Martha said fondly.

"Yes, very hard," Carrie choked out.

Carrie sat there in shock. Here was this nice, charming guy who was restoring her grandmother's house and here she'd attacked him for it. An innocent, wonderful man and she'd tortured him. How awful! Hopefully, he'd never find out what she'd done. What an idiot she was!

After the shock of finding out that Michael was a great guy, Carrie began to relax around him. Which wasn't very hard, he was so charming and handsome. Soon, Carrie realized that she was fantasizing about him. It got so bad, she kept missing what he was saying. She hoped she wasn't being too obvious, but she kept catching herself staring at the poor man. Then she began to notice that he was staring back. Soon, his body language was turned completely towards hers. Promising, but not conclusive. It was when she caught Bill and Martha beaming at the two of them that Carrie began to suspect that the attraction wasn't just her imagination.

"Carrie? May I walk you to your car?" Michael asked graciously at the end of the evening.

Carrie's heart skipped a beat. "Certainly."

"I had a lovely evening, Carrie," he said as they reached her sedan.

"Me, too, Michael."

"I'd...oh, I'm just going to say it. I'd love to see you again. Would you go to dinner with me sometime soon?"

Carrie couldn't believe her ears. "I'd love that."

Michael lit up. "Wonderful. Uh, how's next

Saturday?"

"That would be great."

"Excellent. Shall I pick you up? Say around seven?"

"Perfect."

Carrie went home and danced around the living room. He was so cute! He liked her! Finally! A man worth dating!

Then she saw the lone shoe, sitting by the laundry basket in her mud room. Michael better never find out about her mental lapse. How could she have been so dumb?

Their dinner date exceeded Michael's wildest expectations. He didn't know how it happened, but he knew it had. He'd already fallen in love with Carrie. She was so bright, funny, attractive and smart. They clicked on so many levels. They shared the same goals, they liked the same kinds of movies, and they read the same books. It was almost scary how much they had in common. And she was so sexy! He wanted to take things slow, but he had no idea how he was going to contain himself. All he could think about was making love to her, non-stop. For years.

When he drove her home, he planned on giving her a good night kiss and saving the rest for later. But when she tugged on his hand and invited him in, all his plans went out the window. There was no way he could resist her if she tried to seduce him.

All Carrie could think about was getting him in bed. She felt like a hussy, but he was so handsome and sweet! He liked all the same things she did, and he was so funny. He was perfect for her.

Then, when he kissed her on her living room couch, Carrie lost all sense of time and space. They made out for nearly a half an hour before she pushed him away.

"Michael, I... oh, God, I usually like to wait, and I don't want you to think that I'm... this easy. I

just..." Then she kissed him because she couldn't stop herself.

"Carrie," he said, his breath ragged. "I won't think anything of you. I know what kind of a woman you are and that you don't sleep around."

"No, it's... actually been awhile for me."

"Me, too."

"You? Really?" she asked, shocked.

He laughed. "Yes, what did you think?"

"No, you're just so cute and hot and—oh, God, Michael if you don't make love to me right now, I think I'll explode."

He laughed, kissed her and then said, "Well, we don't want that, do we?"

Within minutes, they were naked and exploring each other. And instead of the first time jitters, Carrie felt immediately comfortable with him. It was like they'd known each other for years. Felt like more of a reunion than a beginning.

It was wild sex; a long, amazing session that wore them both out. After a couple hours, they were both exhausted and laughing.

"I don't think I've ever had sex like this in my life," Carrie giggled as she nestled against his naked form.

"Oh, my God, me neither. I didn't know it could be this good. You are... so sexy," he said, fondling her under the covers.

She squealed and hugged him. Then she got afraid. "I hope this wasn't too soon. I mean, I—"

"Shhhh. It feels right, doesn't it? Neither of us take things like this lightly. And I hope you're thinking what I'm thinking."

"What?"

"That we're now in a committed relationship."

"Wow! You just say it! You're great! Where did you come from?" Carrie delightedly laughed as she squeezed him.

"Uh, Ashford," he said. And then he kissed her. Which led to more lovemaking.

In the morning, Carrie made them both

breakfast. Later, they showered and made love in the shower. Then he said it. The "L" word. Michael told her that he loved her. Carrie nearly fainted.

"Are you all right? Did you hear me?" he asked at her shocked expression.

Tears in her eyes, Carrie nodded.

"Why are you crying?"

"Because I'm so happy," she said.

He laughed, brought her to him and hugged her.

After their shower, Michael asked where he should take his wet towel.

"Oh, stick it in the mud room, it's the room off the kitchen. It's also the laundry room."

Michael walked into the laundry room, dropped the towel into the hamper, and that's when he saw it. The shoe. A very familiar looking shoe. Just like the one he had at home. No. It couldn't be her. It couldn't be. Not his new love! He picked up the shoe and examined it. It had mud caked on the bottom. In the mud were bits of needles, like from the hedges outside his house.

As he was looking at the shoe, Carrie walked into the mudroom.

"What 'cha lookin' at?" she asked brightly. Then she saw the shoe. All the color drained out of her face.

Her reaction said it all. It had been her!

"Carrie, do you have something to tell me?" he asked.

"Uh..." she said, backing slowly away from him.

"No. I..."

"Where's the matching shoe to this pair?" he asked.

"I... uh, it's not there? I..."

"Carrie, it's probably not a good idea to start lying to me first thing in this relationship."

"I'm not... I—lying... about...what?" she stammered.

"Do you know what I do to lying little brats who torment me, who grease my door knobs? Who egg and feather my truck?" Then he saw the antique

mailbox, sitting right there on a sideboard in her mudroom. "Who steal my antique mailbox and leave the evidence out in plain sight?"

"Oh, God," she said in small voice. "Uh, Michael, see... I can explain. I—"

"It was you!" he thundered, pointing at her.

Carrie began to back away, into the kitchen. "Uh..."

"I can't believe it! It was you! What the hell were you thinking, woman?" he demanded, following her, his eyes fiery.

"Uh... I thought you were... uh, destroying my Grandmother's—see, I thought you dismantled the gazebo and took down the oak because you didn't like them. I had no idea the oak was diseased. I thought you were some... sort of monster... and I... sort of... lost... my... mind."

"Oh, young lady. Do you have any idea the grief you caused me?"

"Well, yeah, and I'm sorry, Michael, I didn't know you, and I—"

"So you vandalized my property?! Tormented me?! And ran from me that night!"

"Well, I couldn't let you catch me! I'm a responsible adult! I'm an upstanding member of my community!"

"And you gambled all that on a whim? On some misguided revenge madness?"

"Uh... well, when you put it that way..."

"Oh, young lady, do you need a lesson—"

"Michael, are you going to break it off with me?"

"No, of course not, how could you think that?"

"Well, you look mad and—"

"Just because I'm angry with you, doesn't mean I'm going to break it off with you—"

"Well, then—"

"It means I'm going to make a point with you here and now. Come with me," he said, grabbing her by the wrist and leading her towards the bedroom.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to make a point," he said firmly.

"A point? I think you made your point."

"Uh, no I have not."

Michael led her into the bedroom, sat down on the bed and before she could realize what was happening to her, she was laying across his lap. Then she felt him yank her pants and panties off.

"Michael, what are you doing?"

"Making a point!" And with that, she felt the first swat. It was shockingly painful. Michael was spanking her? She could barely comprehend it.

"Ow! Michael, that hurts!"

"It's supposed to! This is for greasing my doorknobs!" he said firing into her tender behind with sharp swats.

"Ow! Michael, stop!"

"I most certainly will not stop! You earned this! You deserve this!!" he said, covering her behind with fearsome strikes.

She squealed and wiggled and tried to get away from his punishing hand, but Michael had a firm hold on her. And he was being careful to be thorough.

"No future wife of mine is going to be a vandal! What were you thinking?! You could have lost your job over this! You could have hurt your future! All for what?! To get even with some man who was improving your family's home?!"

"Owww! I thought you were wrecking it!"

"You silly girl, I was taking care of it!" he said as his hand made mincemeat of her tender rear.

"I know that now! I'm sorry! I was sorry as soon as I found out! Owww!"

"You (swat) still (swat) deserve (swat) this (swat) punishment!" Swat, swat, swat!

"I'm sorry," she said, beginning to sob.

"You sure will be when I get through with you!"

"Michael, stop!"

"Not until I'm sure you've gotten my point!" Whack! Whack! Whack!

"I've got it! I've got it!"

Finally, she began crying fairly hard, so Michael stopped. Then he picked her up off his lap, took her into his arms and cradled her.

"There, now, stop. It's all over. You've gotten what you deserved and it's all over. You awful little brat."

"I'm sorry," she said, sobbing gently against him.

"You sure should be. What got into you?"

"You took down that tree. It was a part of me."

"It was dying."

"I know that now. I didn't know that then."

"Apparently not. Do you do this kind of thing often?"

"God, no. It was my first time since... like, third grade."

"Good. Because you know what will happen if you misbehave like that again, don't you?"

"Yes, Michael."

"Good girl."

"Wait a minute, future wife? Did you say that?" she asked.

"Yes, I did."

"Did you mean that?"

"Well, yes, as long as you don't have any other secrets. You aren't hiding an illicit past, are you?"

"No, Michael."

"Well, good. Hard to make love to someone who's in jail."

"Michael, I'll be good. I promise."

"You'd better. Well, let's drop this subject and think about our future, shall we?"

"All right."

"And, in our future, I predict lots of sex."

"You do?"

"Yes. See?" he said, fondling her and kissing her.

"Michael!" she giggled.

Her Own Personal FBI Agent

Shari knew she was pushing it. She promised David she wouldn't take the case. It was too dangerous. She usually never took cases that involved dangerous people. Mostly she found runaways and did surveillance on cheating spouses. But a good friend had gotten herself into a wad of trouble and Shari wanted to help her.

Of course, David didn't care what kind of a friend Cathy was to Shari, there was no way she was taking the case. He had forbidden it.

Shari couldn't believe the gall of the guy; after all, they'd only been going out for three months. Granted, she had been in a horrible situation when they'd first met, during her last fiasco of a case. A week before she met David, she got involved in the scariest case of her life. It had started out so tame. Routine case to uncover the identity of a cheating husband's lover. That was it. Shari found out all right. But the husband's lover wasn't a woman, as expected, it was a man. And a high level smuggler man at that. So when Shari had been on a stake-out of the smuggler's apartment, unbeknownst to her, so was the FBI. It was when she got caught in a hail storm of bullets that she'd met David. He was one of the FBI agents assigned to the case and had been the one to personally save her butt. He'd also been the lead interrogator in the case. After he saved her, he hauled her to the FBI office and questioned her for four hours. Finally, he believed her story, that she wasn't involved in the smuggling ring, that she was just a private detective in the wrong place at the wrong time. It was during those four hours that the two had fallen in love. Weird, unexpected, but that's what happened.

What ensued was a marvelous three months, mostly spent in bed. David was kind, generous, attentive and very loving. On the other hand, he was controlling, nit-picky, pig-headed and very domineering. Due to the way they had met, he

thought she'd lost her judgment and had insinuated himself between her clients and herself. Now he decided which cases she should and should not take. He kept citing that night when he first saw her, caught between two cars, crying, with bullets pounding into metal all around her. He promised her he'd never let her get herself into a situation like that again. Which, overall, was fine. Shari didn't want to get shot at, either.

But this case with her friend Cathy was different. Even though David had said it was too dangerous, Shari didn't think so. True, Cathy had broken up with a drug dealer who had turned into a stalker. True, the drug dealer was fairly unbalanced. True, Cathy had lied to her in the past. All very big danger signs. But all Cathy wanted Shari to do was to go to the airport and pick up a package for her. Cathy had met and broken up with the guy in Aruba, when she was on vacation. He had gotten violent with her in her hotel room and she'd had to run without her belongings. The hotel had packed up all her stuff and was sending it to the airport. The drug dealer had not been happy about being dumped and had promised to track Cathy down and find her. Since he knew the package was being sent to San Francisco Airport, he may decide to find Cathy there. So she'd asked Shari to pick up the package for her.

Shari figured the worst thing that would happen is she'd be involved in a high speed car chase. But she'd already had the entire event planned out. She'd pick up the package in a disguise. Go directly to a bathroom, change into another costume and disguise the package as well. Then she'd repeat the exercise one more time before leaving the airport. She was going to meet Cathy at a truck stop, two hours south of the Bay Area, to deliver the package and then she'd be done. Cathy was paying her two thousand dollars for a half a days work, ten times her normal pay. But when David had caught wind of the deal, he'd shut it down. She argued, but with

glowing coals for eyes, he had forbidden her to take the case.

Shari knew going against her new boyfriend wasn't smart. She'd already gone against his wishes once, on something minor, and boy, had she come out on the short end of the stick. The man had her across his lap with her pants down around her ankles before she knew it. She'd thought she was being so sneaky, but he'd uncovered her deception and had spanked her soundly for the indiscretion. She hadn't been able to sit for a week after that. She couldn't imagine what he'd do to her if he caught her this time. But she didn't have to worry about that. She wasn't going to get caught.

After getting to the airport, Shari checked the flight information. The airplane was going to arrive a half an hour late, so she had some time for a latte.

She was sitting down at a table in the airport cafe, people watching, when her cell phone rang in her pocket. David. Crap. What was she going to tell him? She'd try to be vague. No direct lies. That should work.

"Hi, honey. How are you?" she asked into the receiver.

"Fine, fine."

"What's up?"

"Oh, just wanted to see how my favorite girl was doing."

"Doin' great."

"So, what are you up to, Miss Baker? Working?"

"Yeah. I'm... yeah. Working. God, its great to hear your voice, honey. But you hardly ever call me in the middle of the day, is everything okay?"

"Sure, sure it is."

He sounded weird. Like he was putting up a front. As if he were masking his true emotions.

"Are you okay? You sound... kinda funny. Is everything all right?"

"Oh, yeah. Just wanted to see what you were doing. Say, I had a couple hours here, I was thinkin'

of havin' lunch with you. Where are you?"

"Oh. I'm... I'm at the... let's see, I'm at Ellsworth and Second Avenue in San Mateo. Watching some guy have lunch at First Watch. Wife thinks he's cheating on her."

"Oh, really."

Just then, the loudspeaker for the airport blasted: "Shari Baker, please report to the White Courtesy Telephone please. Shari Baker, to the White Courtesy Telephone, please."

Shari froze. Did David hear that?

"Honey? What was that?" he asked.

"What was what?" she replied, frozen with fear.

"Did I just hear your name over a loudspeaker in the background? Where are you again?"

"I got the car radio on, maybe you're hearing that. Let me turn it down."

"Sounds like you're somewhere bigger. Like at an airport or something."

"Oh, David. I told you, I'm on Second and Ellsworth."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"Yeah. Honey, you know I don't lie to you. Especially after that last time."

"Yeah and you know what would happen if I caught you in another lie. Especially if I caught you taking a case I forbid you to take. You know what would happen, don't you?"

"Yeah. I know."

"That last little spanking wouldn't compare to what I'd do to you if I thought you'd gone against me and put yourself in danger."

"Oh, I know."

"You know I love you."

"God, yes."

"And the only reason I would ever forbid you to do something is for your own good. Your own safety."

"I know."

"I just couldn't stand the thought of something happening to you. I love you too much for that."

"I love you, too, honey."

"Sometimes, I just don't think you take me seriously."

"Of course, I do. Where is this all coming from?"

"Oh, I just think sometimes you think you're smarter than me. More clever. Like you can hide things from me, and I won't find out. I just want you to know that I will always find out. I'll always catch you."

"I know. That's why I'll never lie to you."

"Oh, girl."

"What?"

"Oh, nothing. You know, I just found a box of my old college stuff this morning. Went to my parent's house to say hi and they'd found a box of my old things in the garage. You know what was inside?"

"No, what?"

"My fraternity paddle."

"Really?"

"Uh-huh."

"Interesting."

"I thought so. And I had no idea what kind of amazing timing it was, you know, finding that paddle."

"Amazing timing? I'm not following you."

"You will be. Shortly."

"David. You're being cryptic."

"Am I?"

"Yeah, is there something you're not telling me?"

"Uh, maybe. Look, so we can't get together for lunch, right? You're too busy."

"Yeah, I'm sorry, I gotta watch this guy eat and then I have to follow him."

"That's too bad. When are you going to be done?"

"Oh, let's see. He'll be at work until five... then I have to follow him... jeez, honey, I won't be home until at least seven o'clock tonight."

"That late?"

"Yeah. This guy supposedly cheats on his wife after work. I thought maybe he'd see the woman at lunch, but so far, no go."

"That's too bad. I'm not too far away from you now. Actually, I'm headed your way."

"Well, I won't be here for long."

"Maybe I'll just stop by to say hi."

"Oh, honey, I don't want to blow it with this guy, I don't want to attract any attention. Just stay where you are. Where are you, anyway?"

"San Francisco Airport."

She stopped, stunned. She couldn't move. She couldn't speak. She was dead. Dead in the water.

She started looking around, and about fifty yards away, she spotted him. That flame red hair, the angular features, a deadly look on his face. Even from far away, she could tell, his mood now matched the color of his hair.

"Son-of-a-bitch," she said in defeat.

He clicked off the phone and walked over to her, his eyes never leaving her face.

He stood just in front of her with a look she'd never seen on his face before. Well, once, right before he interrogated her that day they'd met.

"You'd better not be doing what I think you're doing here," he said, looking down at her suitcase.

"Uh..."

"That's what I thought. Go home, now. And wait for me. I'm taking off early this afternoon. I have some points I need to make with you. And I have just the tool I need to make those points."

"David, look, I—"

"Are you just about to dig your hole deeper? Is that what you're just about to do?"

"Yes."

"Go home."

"But..."

"Don't make me carry you out of here."

"Okay. Okay. Crap."

"I love you, little girl, but you are in a hell of a load of trouble with me. A hell of a load."

"I love you, too, David."

"Hell of a way of showing it."

"I'm sorry."

"You will be."

He pulled her to him, kissed her on the cheek, then released her. "You go home, now."

"Yes, sir."

"I mean it."

"I know."

"Now go."

"Okay."

She picked up her rolling suitcase and headed for the parking garage. But then she realized that she was already in trouble. Why not finish the case?

She looked around, didn't see him and headed for a bathroom to change into her disguise.

Her cell phone rang in her pocket. David again.

"Honey, I'm going home, but I had to pee first."

"Just see that you do. You pull anything more on me and that paddle won't be the only thing I use on you tonight."

"Yes, sir."

"See you at your place. And when you hear my car, you'd better be naked and waiting for me on your couch. You hear me, girl?"

"Uh..."

"Naked. Waiting for me on the couch."

"Yes, sir."

Click.

She debated and debated. She had to help her friend. David wouldn't recognize her in the disguise. But was he waiting for her?

She changed and left the bathroom. She didn't see him anywhere. Hopefully, he was called away on his case.

She got to the package pick-up, and he hadn't called. Relief.

She easily retrieved the package and went to another bathroom. She disguised herself and the package and left again. Unfortunately, she'd already used her second disguise, so she'd just have to

hope no one was watching her.

Shari briskly walked to her car. She put the package into her trunk and closed it.

Without warning, a man appeared right next to her. Just as she tried to get away, he grabbed her, and she felt something hard press against her side.

"Don't move! I've got a gun. Now, we're gonna get into your car, and you're gonna take me to my girlfriend."

There was no way she was getting in the car. Talk about a one way trip to the morgue.

"What? You're gonna frickin' shoot me in the middle of the airport?" she asked, looking up at the man. He was tall, buff, and dark-skinned, either Hispanic or Middle Eastern. Square jaw, in his late thirties. Had very potent cologne on.

He jabbed the gun into her ribs. "Shut up and do as I say. Or yes, I will blow you away, bitch."

"Ow! Right. Then you'll never find her."

The man obviously didn't like his authority being questioned. He slapped her hard, across the face.

"I said, get in the car," he hissed.

"Up yours, jerk, you just got caught on camera. There's one right there," she said, nodding up towards the security camera. "In about two minutes, there's gonna be cops swarming all over here."

This time, he punched her hard. She fell back against the car; she saw stars.

"Hey buddy, leave her alone!" came a call from across the aisle.

"Go to hell!" her attacker said. He took the gun away from her ribs and pointed it at her would-be savior. "You want to die?"

The man across the aisle held up his hands. "No, man. No. I don't want any trouble."

"Then get in your car and get the hell out of here."

Shari knew she had to act fast. Using all her strength, she kicked up and nailed the drug dealer in the balls. He gasped and doubled over. Shari

kicked up again and nailed him in the face. He almost lost his grip on the gun, so she kicked his hand and sent the weapon flying.

She was diving towards the gun when he caught her by the coat, dragged her back and punched her so hard she nearly grayed out as she fell to the pavement.

Luckily, some part of her was still coherent. As he went for his gun, she got up and made a break for it.

"Goddamn you, bitch! I'm gonna blow your freakin' head off for this!" he bellowed.

Then she heard the sirens. Thank God. She scrambled around a Humvee and then got down low to see if she could see her attacker's feet.

But when she got down on the ground and peered under the massive vehicle, she found herself face to face with the man. Panic.

As he pointed the gun at her, she jumped to her feet and ran as fast as she could towards the sound of the sirens.

Blam! The gun went off. She expected to feel a bullet, but thank God, he missed. She kept running as fast as she could. Blam! Another shot.

Shari flew. She came around a large SUV and saw the cops approaching. Blam! Pang! A bullet slammed into the door of the SUV, just inches from her head. She screamed and ducked down and kept running. She leapt out from behind another small car and found the police. The hard way. She ran right into their moving car and was thrown back onto the cement.

"Stay down!" a cop yelled as his door opened. She needed no encouragement on that score.

What happened next, happened so fast it took a moment for Shari to figure out what went down. Many gunshots followed by a swarm of police and finally silence. When she heard the gunman's protests, she knew he'd survived the gun battle. And thank God, so had she.

David found her at the police station just as she was finishing giving her report. He came up to her, took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Thank God, you're okay. You're okay, right?" he said, sweet and concerned.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm okay."

"Thank God. Wow, he hit you hard, didn't he, honey?" he said, examining her face. "You poor thing."

"I'll be fine. How did you find out about all this?"

"I heard about it over the police scanner. I was on the other side of the airport, getting information from a suspect, when the call came through. At first, I didn't connect it to you, and then they mentioned your name over the scanner. I got here as fast as I could."

Shari clung onto him. "I'm sorry. I should have listened to you."

"We'll deal with that later. For now, I'm just so glad you're okay."

"I'm okay."

"And you're damn lucky. You know they found drugs in that package."

"They did?" she asked, alarmed, pulling away from him. "But... Cathy..."

"Is under arrest. She used you, honey."

"No way! Not Cathy! Oh, God, no wonder they asked me all these questions. No wonder. Goddamn her. Goddamn her."

"You're lucky you have a lot of friends in this department. They knew you weren't capable of smuggling drugs."

"Goddamn her. You were right. Why? Why couldn't I see that?"

"You're her friend."

"Goddamn it."

"You have to learn to trust me."

"I will. After this, I will."

"And I will be ensuring that you do."

"Oh."

"Yeah, oh."

"I suppose I deserve it."

"Way deserve it, honey. You blew it this time. You blew it."

"Okay."

"I'm gonna give you a couple days to heal and then, honey, I'm gonna be guaranteeing that you listen to me from here on out. And no protests, you deserve what you get."

Her stomach started to get butterflies. All she could do was sigh. Damn it! Why did he have to find out? Hadn't she already learned her lesson? Apparently not.

Two nights later, Shari was sitting in her living room, waiting for David, nearly out of her mind with dread. That morning David had informed her that it was Punishment Night. Yikes!

When she heard his car drive up, she nearly fainted from fright. She quickly disrobed and waited. So scared she couldn't believe it.

David walked into the room and a slight smile came over his lips at the sight of her.

"Good girl," he said. He took off his coat and tie and rolled up his sleeves.

"Stand," he ordered curtly. The look on his face made her stomach churn. She'd never been in this much trouble with him before.

"Look, I learned my lesson, I almost got shot, David. I think in this case—"

"Shari, now!"

She stood quickly. He walked by her and sat on the couch.

"You really disappointed me with this one, Shari. Its gonna take a long time to win back my trust."

"I know—"

"Shush. Shush and listen."

"Okay."

"Every night this week, I'm going to punish you. Seven nights."

"David!"

"What did I say?"

"Okay..."

"You are not going to die, woman. Not on my watch, you hear me?"

"Yes, David."

"Now come closer."

She did as she was told.

He reached out, grabbed her wrist and pulled her down across his lap. Then he settled her into place, taking his time. She just wished he'd get on with it.

"You know what's gonna happen now, don't you?"

"Yes, David."

"Now count for me."

"Yes, sir."

"You miss one, we're starting all over at the beginning."

"Yes, sir."

He gently ran a hand over her behind. "This poor ass of yours is about to pay a steep price for your bad choices, honey. You ready?"

"No."

"Shari—" he warned.

"Yes, sir."

He maneuvered her head lower, her ass higher and got a firm grip on her arm. She wasn't going anywhere.

Whack! He smacked her upturned rear, hard. And stopped. The sting lasted for a full thirty seconds, throbbing pain. She had no idea getting spanked with his open hand could hurt like that. He was hitting her much harder than last time.

"One!" she cried.

Then he laid into her. He started on her left cheek, slapping it until she wailed. He moved onto her right cheek, spanking it with a thunderous rhythm until she thought she'd lose her mind. Then when she thought it couldn't get any worse, he worked on her sit spots. At this point, she was in so much pain she tried to get away from him. Big mistake. The man locked his arm across her back

and fired into her behind with such fury, her ass felt like it was flaming.

She thought for sure he would stop after her sit spots. Last time, he'd stopped after that torment. But not this time. He continued on. He spanked her upper cheeks, the sides, there wasn't one part of her poor ass that wasn't on fire. She couldn't believe the pain. She cried, she wailed, she protested, she promised, she begged, but her punishment went on and on. When he concentrated on her sit spots for the third time, she yelled so loud she was sure the neighbors heard her.

Finally, he stopped. She was so upset and hurting so badly, she kept wailing and sobbing.

"Stop it, Shari! Stop your crying."

"David! It hurts so bad!"

"Not as badly as I hurt when I found out you almost died," he said punctuating his statement with another slap to her rear.

"I'm sorry!"

"You should be. Now get up and bend over that chair right there."

"David, I—"

"Do it!"

He helped her up. Walking over to the chair hurt like the dickens, her rear was so sore! She had no idea what he had planned for her. Certainly no more spanking.

When she saw the fraternity paddle, she couldn't believe it.

"David, no! I can't take it!" she wailed.

"Shut it and bend it over, girlfriend. Just a few more to ensure you get my point."

"David!"

"Do it!" he growled.

She cried as she bent over the chair. Whack! He hit her with such force that she nearly fell over the back of the chair. As she tried to right herself, he laid into her again. Crack! She howled. And another. And another. Unbelievable pain.

"Okay, baby. Good girl. It's all over. You got my

point, now, didn't you?"

"Y-yes, David! I got it! I got it!"

"Good girl. Now come over here and lay across my lap again," he said, moving to the couch.

"David! I thought you—"

"I am. Just do as I say."

"O-okay," she said, tears streaming down her face.

She reluctantly walked over to him and lay across his lap, sobbing quietly.

He rubbed her rear gently and then he applied something really cold to her butt. A cold compress.

"Aaahh!" she exclaimed.

"Take it easy, take it easy, baby. It's okay. Good girl. You did good. You took that well. You did well. Good girl."

"I'm sorry, David."

"I know you are," he said, moving the compress around. It felt good, and the burning was stopping some. She still hurt like hell, but the ice bag was helping.

He took the compress away and massaged her rear. "Now baby, you have to listen to me. You have to let me help you. You have to obey me when I tell you something. I've been in this business a long time, and I can smell something wrong a mile away. I know you do your job well, and I know you've never been in much trouble, but something happened recently, and you've been getting yourself into some really scary jams."

"I know."

"From now on, you obey me, girl."

"I will, David."

"And I got something that will remind you of your promise to me," he said, picking her up and pulling her into his lap.

"What?"

He reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a small, black velvet box. He grinned up at her and opened it. Inside was a gorgeous, two carat diamond ring.

She was stunned. "David?" she asked, tears beginning to stream down her face.

"Yes, baby. Maybe if you're my wife, you'll remember to obey me," he said with the cutest look on his face.

"You mean it?" she asked, shocked. "You sure?"

"More sure than I've ever been in my life about anything."

"I love you, David!"

"I'll take that as a yes," he said, grinning, and then he kissed her.

The New Boss

Chapter One

"And whose office is this?" Damien, the new CEO, asked his secretary, Ginger, as they passed by an empty corner office on the executive floor.

"The Problem's office."

"The problem?"

"Didn't they tell you?"

"Tell me what?"

"About Mr. Rigger's daughter, Janelle," Ginger answered.

"Wait. Is this the woman we can't fire?"

"You got it."

"Where is she?"

"Who knows?"

"Does she actually do anything?" Damien asked.

"Oh, yeah. Nothing productive, but she does things all right. I thought Jim told you about her."

"He mentioned something in passing."

"Yeah, well, he tried to ignore her as best he could, but Janelle isn't always the easiest person to ignore," Ginger said.

"I thought he said she was fairly benign."

"Nice way of putting it."

"So she's not benign."

"I'd say more malignant than benign. In any case, she is a tumor," Ginger stated with conviction.

"Really?"

"And I'm being very nice right now."

"Jim told me you were a straight shooter."

"That's me," Ginger replied as she followed Damien into his new office.

"So... wait a minute," Damien said as he sat at his large mahogany desk. "I still don't understand this whole situation. Jim had so many things to tell me, he glazed over this Rigger woman, or maybe I wasn't listening closely. Explain it to me, will you?"

"Basically, since Daddy is the major stockholder in the company and the President of the Board of

Directors, his daughter gets a free ride here. See, she's been a problem from the word go. Expelled from boarding school, expelled from college, expelled from Harvard. Apparently, has a very high IQ, but I haven't seen it. Since she's been such a problem, Daddy thought it would be a good idea for her to have a job. So he bought her one. And we're stuck with her."

"What's her official title?"

"Vice-President of Marketing."

"That's a fairly demanding job."

"That's her title. She doesn't do the job. Mike Conner does the job."

"What's his title?"

"Senior Vice-President of Marketing."

"So what are her job duties?"

"Uh... I don't think she has any. I heard in the beginning they actually assigned her projects. But since they didn't get done, they got assigned elsewhere."

"So what does she do?" Damien asked.

"I don't know."

"Does she show up?"

"She has to."

"So she does."

"Yes, one of the stipulations of her working here is that she actually has to show up or Daddy makes sure she doesn't get paid."

"So who checks on her?"

"The person varies," Ginger replied. "I assign that job on a rotating schedule. But I don't tell her. That way she can't pay off the person or bully them into letting her leave. Daddy wants her here."

"Doesn't sound very healthy for anyone concerned. Why doesn't he just let her go?"

"I don't know that. Some power struggle between her and the old man."

"How old is she?"

"Gotta be in her mid-thirties by now. She's been here over ten years."

"Ten years?"

"Ten long years."

"Does she show up for meetings?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"Why unfortunately? If she doesn't do any work, why would she have any input?"

"She doesn't really have any input, per se. Mainly she disrupts the meeting as much as possible. I think she keeps trying to get fired, but since we can't fire her, her efforts are wasted and mainly serve to irritate the rest of us. Usually we have a regular meeting, which she ruins, then we call a secret meeting and get everything settled there."

"This seems like an awful waste of valuable time."

"It is."

"Has anyone tried to reason with her?"

Ginger burst out laughing. "Wait until you meet her. Reasonable and Janelle are rarely used in the same sentence."

"Huh. When do I get to meet her?"

"In about an hour, at the introduction meeting with all the executives. She'll be fifteen minutes late. She's always exactly fifteen minutes late. You can set your watch by her."

"So it's purposeful, her tardiness?"

"Oh, yeah. She can't act out against the old man, so unfortunately, she acts out against us."

"This sounds like a nightmare situation."

"It's not that bad. You learn to ignore her. We all do. And, since she doesn't do any work, she doesn't hurt the business. Just disrupts a couple meetings a week. Other than that, most of us don't even see her."

"Does she have any friends?"

"Not here."

"But she has them?"

"Oh, yeah. They come by daily to pick her up for lunch."

"Interesting."

"Not really."

Damien couldn't help but be intrigued by the situation. He pictured Janelle as a hefty, middle-aged woman with a scowl on her face. The person who walked into the meeting was someone entirely different. Janelle Rigger was a tall blonde woman with the longest legs he'd ever seen. Dressed in a short black mini-skirt, a tight pink sweater and stiletto heels, she looked more like a fashion model than an executive. Quite the knock-out. A long, angular face, page boy hair cut, dazzling blue eyes and a lovely smile, Damien couldn't help but take in a quick breath of air at the sight of her.

"So you're the new guy, huh?" Janelle said as she walked into the meeting, exactly fifteen minutes late as Ginger had predicted. "Sorry, I'm late. I was painting my nails."

Talk about a cold shower. All Damien could think about was tossing her across his knee and spanking that attitude right out of her. But he remained cool. He knew reacting would be giving her what she wanted. He was going to play this woman. And he was going to win. He'd met spoiled brats before and tamed them. His first wife, for instance. Janelle might have his whole team cowed, but she didn't fool him for a minute. Underneath that bratty exterior lay an intelligent woman. An intelligent woman who needed a lesson in corporate manners. And Damien was just the man for the job. But he'd play his cards close to the vest. Damien was going to turn this woman around if it was the last thing he did. Something about her was compelling him. Maybe it was the legs. Whatever, Janelle Rigger was going to be a different woman by the time he got through with her.

"Miss Rigger, please be seated, the meeting is already underway."

"Really? I couldn't tell."

"I'm Damien Bradford, your new boss."

"My boss?" Janelle burst into laughter as she plunked down at the table. "Oh, yeah, my boss. Sorry. It's gonna take me some time to get my

head around that concept. Please, I didn't mean to interrupt, continue on. I'll find something to do while you talk."

Damien held her gaze. "You're free to leave if you like."

"Uh, no, I'm not. One of your spies will tell Daddy and then my Visa bill won't be paid for."

"I see. Well, then, if you don't have anything positive to add to the conversation, I'd appreciate it if you stayed quiet."

"I'll do my best."

"See that you do."

Everyone at the table ping-ponged their attention between Janelle and Damien. They didn't know what was going to happen, but Damien was making it clear that he wasn't going to take any guff from The Problem. Janelle, for her part, seemed quite amused by Damien's show of authority.

Damien began rolling out his ideas for the future of the company. Midway through his speech, he noticed Janelle was engrossed in her PDA. As he continued on, suddenly, Janelle exclaimed. "Got him! Whoo-hoo! Die, sucker, die!" It was then that Damien realized that Janelle wasn't holding a PDA, but a Nintendo Gameboy.

When everyone turned their attention to Janelle, she looked up with an exuberant expression on her face and said, "Topped my last score by ten thousand!" Then she returned to her game. Damien quickly became furious. But he didn't skip a beat. He continued on, outlining his ideas for the next production run.

During the last fifteen minutes of Damien's presentation, Janelle was apparently losing her game because she began muttering and swearing under her breath. Damien fought for concentration. Somehow, he managed to make it through his agenda and began taking questions from his new team.

Luckily, his new executives were used to Janelle's antics. They had paid close attention to

what Damien had said and all had intelligent and insightful comments and questions about his plans. Damien was very pleased with his new team. And livid that he had an adult child misbehaving in the midst of this very important first meeting.

After the meeting was over, Damien caught Janelle's arm as she headed towards her office.

"May I have a word with you?"

"Uh, now is not a good time. My soap opera is on."

Damien had to fight for control over his temper. "Well, then, when might be a convenient time?"

"Uh, before Oprah, probably. Oh, no, wait. There's a friend I have to IM with about an upcoming party. Maybe tomorrow."

"Why don't you arrange a time with Ginger then?"

"Okay, I'll try."

"Please do more than try."

Janelle laughed. "Give it up—Derek? No, Damien, right?"

"Yes," Damien said, silently burning inside.

"Give it up, Damien. I know what you're gonna try to do. They all do. We have 'the talk' and they tell me how disruptive I am and ask me to please try to get along better with the staff, yada, yada, yada. Do us both a favor and give it up. That way I will waste less of your time. I mean, because I have all the time in the world. Well, until Daddy Dearest finally kicks it. Then, blessedly, I will be out of your hair. But until then, this is the way it is. And the sooner you accept that, the better."

"Please arrange a time with Ginger, all right?"

Janelle chuckled to herself. "Whatever." Then without another word, she abruptly turned away from Damien and sauntered off towards her office, leaving him standing there, fuming.

Damien had never been shown this level of disrespect before. Not even in school. Throughout his entire life, people had treated him deferentially. When he walked into a room, people sat at

attention. Whenever he spoke, people listened. It had always been that way. That's why, at thirty, he'd become the youngest executive controlling a major corporation. And now, at forty, he was one of the top CEOs in the country. He'd been featured on the cover of Fortune magazine three times in the previous ten years. Every corporation he'd run had increased profits by at least fifty percent during his reign, and some had doubled profits. On his last post, he'd increased production three hundred percent. He'd brought up the stock price from fourteen dollars to a hundred and fifty in two years. Damien was magic. So to have this woman treat him so abominably was shocking to him. He'd never met anyone like Janelle before, and he hoped he'd never meet anyone like her again. But, since she was there, he would deal with her. Damien was not one to walk away from a problem. Janelle Rigger was not going to continue this pattern of behavior for long. Not while Damien had a breath left in him. This woman would fall in line.

A week and a half later, Damien finally saw Janelle's name on his daily schedule. The appointment was for ten, as expected, Janelle strolled into his office promptly at ten fifteen.

"You're late," he informed her coldly.

"Really?"

"Please sit down."

Janelle sighed and sat down. Damien tried to ignore her long, trim legs and focus his attention on her defiant blue eyes, instead. Just the look on her face, alone, made him want to slap her. Actually, he was torn; he was somewhere between spanking her and kissing her. He couldn't help but be attracted to her. Damien always had a soft spot for tall women. Being six five himself, he loved a woman he didn't have to bend down to kiss. But that was all beside the point. The point was her outrageous behavior.

Damien sat for a long while, just watching her. Waging a silent battle for control. He'd found the technique effective in the past. However, Janelle

seemed quite immune. Soon, she began to pick at her skirt. Then she gazed out the window.

Finally, she turned to him and said, "What?"

Damien took a second to answer. "One wonders what you have to gain by all this."

Janelle sighed again. "You're boring me."

Damien got heated fast, but didn't show it. Then he reached in front of him, took a file folder and tossed it across the desk. It landed just in front of Janelle.

She didn't pick it up; she just stared at him. "What is that?"

"Pick it up."

Janelle held his gaze, her obvious intention to defy him. But then her curiosity got the better of her. She finally reached out and took the folder and opened it up.

She perused the materials inside and looked up, confused. "What is this?"

"An assignment."

It seemed to take Janelle a moment for the concept to sink in. "An assignment," she repeated, seeming stunned.

"Yes."

"For who?"

"You."

"You're giving me an assignment?" she asked incredulously.

"Yes."

Then Janelle burst into laughter. Soon, she was holding her sides she was laughing so hard. She began gasping for air, and tears began to run down her cheeks. "Oh, God, that's good. Oh, man, this is good."

Damien waited for Janelle's hysteria to subside. He kept his cool; he didn't react, and he showed her nothing but a serious expression.

"Oh, man, you're funny," she said. "Damn, that's a good one. An assignment. Damn."

"I'll expect a report by next Friday."

"I'll bet you will," she retorted, still chuckling.

"I mean it."

"I'm sure you do," she replied, a large grin on her face. She began dotting her tears away with a tissue.

"I've informed Jake and Demetria that you will be requiring their assistance."

"Oh, God. Now you're involving others. Don't do that to them. They're nice people. They don't deserve this. You want to give me an assignment, fine. But don't involve others. That's not fair to them."

"It would be if you completed the assignment."

"You have to be kidding me."

"I can assure you that I am not."

"Okay, okay, all bull aside, what is your game, man? Why bother? Why even play this with me? You won't win, okay? Why waste any of your time? I know you, man. You're big time. Mr. Cover of Fortune Magazine. Mr. Celebrity CEO. And, if you're half as good as your reputation, you should have seen by now that any interaction with me is futile."

"Next Friday, I want your report on my desk at eight."

"Eight at night?"

"In the morning."

"You are high."

"Eight a.m. on Friday."

"You are deluded. De-lude-ed."

"Friday. And don't be late."

"Whatever," Janelle said, getting up. As she walked out, she chuckled to herself. "Eight a.m. on Friday," she said, doing an unflattering imitation of Damien's deep baritone voice.

"I mean it, Miss Rigger."

Janelle took a second to stop at the door and look back at him. She sent him a withering look, shook her head to herself and then turned and walked out. Damien shook off his anger and returned to work.

The next Friday at eight a.m., as expected, there was no report from Janelle on Damien's desk. The day before, he'd heard from both Jake and Demetria that they'd had no meeting with Janelle. And, when they called her, she let her voice mail pick up. The only communication they'd received from her were sympathy cards. Condolences on the death of the assignment.

When Damien called Janelle, all he got was her voice mail. When he asked Ginger if she'd seen her, he was informed that Janelle rarely got to the office before ten. So Damien busied himself with several meetings, and then around two in the afternoon, he had a break. So he headed to Janelle's office.

He found her deeply engrossed in something on her computer. When he knocked on the door, she didn't respond. That's when he noticed the headphones. When he walked into her office, she still didn't see him. She was furiously typing. So he waved a hand and finally caught her attention, startling her.

"Jesus Christ! You scared the hell out of me!" Janelle exclaimed, putting her hands to her chest.

"My apologies," Damien replied. Then he took a chair opposite her.

As she untangled herself from her iPod and saved whatever work she was doing on her computer, Damien took a look around her office. There was an entertainment center in the corner with a plasma screen TV, a DVD player and a Sony Playstation. She had a refrigerator in the other corner. A Nerf basketball game was set up near the door. On her desk were a myriad of wind-up toys and a stack of books. Instead of the latest fiction line-up as Damien had expected, the books were mostly reference. Dictionaries, the Chicago Manual of Style, books of quotations, several writers' guides. Curious. But beside the point. The point was that she had disobeyed a direct order of his.

"What are you doing here?" Janelle finally asked after attending to her computer and personal

stereo.

"Looking for my report."

"Your report?" she asked, looking confused.

"Yes, on that assignment I gave you last week?"

"Assignment?" she asked. Then it occurred to her what he was talking about. "Oh, the assignment." Then she looked amused. "Yes, the assignment. Uh... I didn't really have any time to get to that. Maybe you ought to reassign that."

"No, I want you to do it."

"Oh, for crying out loud. Don't you have anything else better to do?"

"Yes."

"Well, then go do it."

"I'm giving you another week. Don't disappoint me."

"Prepare to be disappointed."

"Let's just say that if you disappoint me again, it will be you who suffers, not me."

"Gonna go to Daddy?"

"No."

"Well, what are you going to do, spank me?" Janelle tossed out sarcastically.

"I'm considering it."

Which stopped her for a second. Then Janelle burst into laughter. "Well, I'll say one thing for you, you're funnier than the others."

"You won't think it's so funny when you find yourself across my knee."

"Oh, puh-leeze. You are taking yourself far too seriously here. I'd file charges against you so fast, it'd make your head spin."

"I'll take my chances. Next Friday, I want that report on my desk by eight a.m."

"I don't get in 'til ten."

"I'll expect that report at eight."

"Damien, you are quickly becoming irritating."

"I'll be a lot more than irritating to you if you fail me again."

"Are we done? You're boring me again."

"Friday at eight."

"Whatever," she replied as she turned back to her computer.

Damien sat and watched her for a moment. She ignored him and began reading what she had written on her computer.

Finally, he got up and left her office.

Come next Friday at eight, as expected, Damien received no report from Janelle. He gave Ginger instructions to track her down when she got in and get her into his office.

At around three in the afternoon, Damien had seen no sign of Janelle. Ginger had reported that she'd given Janelle the message, but that Janelle had dismissed her with a wave of her hand. Which got Damien all fired up. When he went to go find her, he was informed that Janelle had taken off early to go to an appointment of some sort. That she wasn't expected back. Damien was not happy with this news.

Later that night, Damien was enjoying a rare night out with friends. They were at the most popular nightclub in town, having drinks and watching the various young hard bodies dance. Then as Damien watched a particularly hot, tall blonde woman shimmy and move, he suddenly realized she looked familiar. Janelle Rigger. Damien was both attracted to her and furious with her. The way she danced was quite captivating. But she had insulted him so! Soon, she left the dance floor and joined some friends at a table near the dance floor. When her tablemates got up to dance, Damien decided it was time to confront her.

Janelle looked very surprised to see Damien join her at the table.

"What are you doing here?" she asked, raising her voice over the music.

"Same thing you're doing here," he replied. "Relaxing with my friends."

"Good for you," she said as she sipped on her Cosmopolitan.

"Didn't you get my message?"

"What message?"

"I asked you to come to my office today."

"You did? Oh, yeah. I remember something about that."

Damien regarded her for a moment before responding. "You disappointed me, Janelle. It's not wise to disappoint me."

"Hey, I'm not at work now. Can't this wait until Monday?"

"So, what are your plans for the future?" he asked instead of responding to her question.

"Where did that come from?" she asked, confused.

"I'm just wondering what you're hoping to accomplish with your life."

"Accomplish? Me?"

"Hasn't that thought ever occurred to you? To accomplish something?"

Janelle looked thoughtful for a second. Then she said, "Uh... no. Not really."

"Really? You must have had some dreams, somewhere along the way."

"Nope. Not me. I endure life. I don't really live it. Ask my father; he'll tell you that. I mean, didn't you know? I'm worthless, and I'll never amount to anything. I'm nothing, really."

"You don't believe that."

"What does it matter what I believe?"

"I don't understand you."

"Join the club."

"So you have no plans?"

"None that I can think of. Well, okay, I've got lunch with Suzie on Tuesday and a party next Saturday. And yoga on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Oh, yeah, and a hair appointment on Thursday evening."

"Amusing. You know, you don't seem stupid. You seem intelligent. I just wonder why anyone would make the choices you do."

"I don't make any choices. I have no choices. What gave you the impression that anything I did

was by choice?"

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-four."

"And this is what you're going to do with your life?"

"It appears that way."

"I still want that report."

"What report? Oh, yeah, that thing you keep trying to get me to do. Well, I don't have the time, if you want it to get done, you'd better reassign it."

"I want you to do it."

"Why?"

"Because I'm your boss, and I have assigned it to you," Damien said.

"Well, I can't. Get someone else."

"No, you will do it."

"Oh, I will, will I?" she asked, looking amused.

"Yes, you will."

"How—oh, yeah, that's right. You're going to spank me if I don't, isn't that right?"

"Yes. At this point, I think that's the only course of action to take with a disobedient brat like you."

She laughed and sent him a coy, flirty look. "You're a kinky little so and so, aren't you?"

Damien didn't smile. "Not particularly."

"Oooo. And I'm so afraid of you."

"You should be. I am a man of my word."

"Oh, please, Damien, don't take yourself so seriously."

"That report better be on my desk Monday morning at eight."

Janelle rolled her eyes. "Sure. And elephants are going to come stampeding out of my nose right afterwards."

"Amusing. Monday at eight, Miss Rigger."

"Right."

Monday at four in the afternoon, Janelle strolled into Damien's office looking annoyed.

"Ginger has been hassling me all day. You

summoned me?" she asked.

"Where's my report?"

"I must have misplaced it somewhere."

"I see," Damien said. He got up from his desk and walked over to his office door and locked it.

Janelle asked, "What do you think you're doing?"

Damien walked straight over to her and grabbed her by the wrist and pulled her out of her chair. Then, as she began to fight him, he sat on top of his desk and pulled her across his lap. While she was a tall girl, she was no match for his strength.

He got her arm up behind her back and positioned her across one knee. Then he lifted up her mini-skirt and despite her loud protests, he slipped a finger into the waistband of her panties and drew them quickly down to her knees. Damien was momentarily stunned by the beauty of her perfectly rounded rear. Taut, muscular, yet very feminine. It had been a long time since he'd seen such an awesome specimen of a woman's derriere. But that was no matter. What mattered was disciplining a very naughty young lady.

"Damien, stop!"

"No," he replied. Then he raised his arm high in the air and smacked Janelle's upturned behind with as much strength as he could muster.

The New Boss

Chapter Two

Damien raised his arm high in the air and swiftly brought it down, smacking Janelle's very exposed rear end with much gusto. Her howl of surprise and pain was like music to his ears. The brat was finally getting her comeuppance.

Then Damien proceeded to cover her entire bare bottom with strong spanks. Up and down his hand traveled, spanking and swatting with impressive strikes. He hadn't realized how angry he was with her until he began. And, once he started, he found it hard to stop. While she squealed and protested and threatened him, he whaled away until her behind was a lovely fire engine red. Finally, when he heard her begin to sob, he figured she'd had enough. So, with a few extra thunderous smacks to her perfect behind, Damien finished his punishment.

Then he pushed her off his lap and let her scramble to pull up her panties. Sputtering and stammering, Janelle yanked up her undies and spun on her heel to face him. She was red-faced, her cheeks were stained with tears, and she was angrier than he'd ever seen a woman. Very satisfying.

"You bastard! I'm calling the cops!" she seethed.

"Here's my phone," he replied casually, tossing her his cell phone.

She responded by throwing it back at him, hard. He ducked, and the phone smashed against the wall behind him.

"That was a very expensive phone," Damien said calmly.

"I'm gonna kill you!" she railed as she came for him. With one quick move, she was across his lap again.

"No!" Janelle screamed.

After peppering her behind with several more well-placed spanks, Damien let her go.

"Stop that!" she cried.

"No," he replied calmly.

"That's assault! I'm filing charges!"

"Feel free."

"You'll go to jail!"

"That, I highly doubt."

"You will!"

"I can see the headlines now. 'Heiress Spanked By Celebrity CEO.' What a lovely trial that will be. The tabloids should love it."

"You horrible man! I can't have that in the news! How will that make me look?!"

"Pretty childish," Damien replied.

"You can't get away with this!"

"I just did."

"I hate you!" Janelle yelled.

"I'm sure you do. I want that report by next Friday. And if I don't get it? I went out and bought a paddle especially for you. You want to see it?"

"You can't do this!"

"Oh, I most certainly can. And I did. And I will again. Next Friday, you come in here and you don't have my report? You'll find yourself bare-bottomed, bent over my desk with my paddle making short work of that lovely backside of yours. You get me? Now get out!"

"You bastard!"

"Mouth soaping can be arranged as well."

"You wouldn't dare!"

Damien grinned. "Try me."

"You!" And then Janelle didn't know what to say, so she stormed out into the hallway, slamming the door behind her.

Damien waited a few minutes and then allowed himself a good, long laugh. What a great week this turned out to be. He hadn't felt this good since he'd taken on this new job. That Janelle. Thought she could outsmart him. Thought he'd let her walk all over him just like all the rest had. She'd be thinking twice about disobeying him again!

Damien was in the middle of his Monday morning meeting when Janelle came bouncing in. Without a look his way, she plopped down at the table, withdrew her Gameboy and proceeded to play.

After John, Damien's Vice-President in charge of Research and Development, had finished his report, Damien turned his attentions to Janelle.

"Miss Rigger," he said in a firm tone.

Janelle didn't respond.

"Miss Rigger," Damien repeated.

Finally, Janelle was broken out of her game. "What? Who? What?"

"How is the report coming?"

"What report? Oh, that report. Oh, swimmingly," she replied and turned her attentions back to her game.

"Any updates for me?" he asked.

"What?" Janelle asked, looking annoyed. While she was still defiant and acting out, Damien was sure he noticed a change in her. She seemed wary of him. Not exactly what he wanted, but it was better.

"Updates. On the assignment."

"Uh... updates." Janelle looked around the table, seeming almost uncomfortable with the attention. "No, I don't think so."

Was there a crack showing in her heretofore impenetrable exterior? Damien could only hope.

"Are you sure?" he pressed.

"Uh, yeah. Pretty sure."

"Have Jake and Demetria been helpful to you?"

"Jake and Demetria," she repeated. Then she began to get angry. She held Damien's gaze, her anger fueling her defiance.

Apparently, the spanking had affected her, but not quite enough. So be it, Damien thought to himself. He actually began looking forward to their next encounter. He'd get to see that magnificent ass again. The thought aroused him. Which annoyed him. Better keep it business with this one, he told

himself. She was too much trouble.

"Yes, Jake and Demetria. You know them, don't you?" Damien said.

"Screw this," Janelle said, standing up. "I don't have to take this crap from you, buddy. Take the assignment and stuff it up that controlling ass of yours." Then she turned and began to stalk out of the meeting.

"Miss Rigger, I want to see you in my office after the meeting."

"I'll bet you do. Sorry, I've got something more important to do. Like flossing my teeth."

"I'll expect you in my office in one half hour."

She looked at him but said nothing as she reached for the doorknob.

"Remember our last meeting, Miss Rigger? What I told you? I will follow through."

Janelle flipped him the bird and walked out, slamming the door behind her.

When she didn't show up in his office after the meeting, Damien went looking for her. He found her office empty.

From the next office, Demetria called out. "She's gone, Damien."

"Is she expected back?"

"I don't think so. She came storming in a half an hour ago, swearing, and so mad she looked like she was ready to spit nails. Then she said she wouldn't be back and took off. I don't know where she went. Home, probably."

"Thanks Demetria."

Damien didn't see Janelle until two days later. He was having lunch with an old friend when he spotted her at a table across the room with an older woman. Janelle seemed very animated. She was talking a lot with her hands, her eyes bright. Then he saw her withdraw a large manila envelope and hand it to the woman. The older woman touched her arm and said something that didn't make

Janelle very happy. Then the woman touched her shoulder and said something else. Janelle nodded, reassured, but more subdued. Damien wondered what was going on between the two. Whatever it was, it seemed very important to Janelle.

"Who are you staring at? Oh. Very nice, Damien," Bob, Damien's friend, said as he followed Damien's gaze.

"Yes. And no. A nightmare, actually."

"Uh, oh. He's hooked again. I've seen that look before. I think you were looking at Wifey Number Two."

"What? Oh, no. No, I don't think so, Bob. Too much trouble."

"The best kind. Hot, blonde and too much trouble. Isn't that your M.O.?"

"Not anymore. I want a compliant girlfriend this time. Someone I don't have to tame."

"Bull, you love tamin' 'em," Bob said. "All part of the conquest."

"All that's gotten me is two divorces. I want my next marriage to last."

"Who is she?"

"Janelle Rigger."

"That's Janelle? When you were describing her, I thought she'd be some Paris Hilton type. Frivolous party girl. That girl over there is gorgeous. And seems pretty serious right now. Who is that woman with her? Her mother?"

"No. Her mother's dead. I don't know who that woman is."

"She looks familiar. Oh, I know who she is. No wonder she looks familiar. She's my wife's literary agent. Maggie Drager."

"A literary agent? With Janelle?" Damien asked, surprised.

"Apparently. Is Janelle a writer?"

"No, she's nothing. Wait, come to think of it, she had an awful lot of writer's guides on her desk. Reference books. No. No, that can't be it. She just handed the woman a manila envelope, too. No, I

can't believe that Janelle would be capable of doing anything. Especially not writing a book. She's probably doing a friend a favor."

"Huh. Well, Maggie's pretty powerful," Bob said. "If she can't get something published, no one can."

"Huh. Interesting. I wonder what Janelle is doing with her."

"Go ask."

"No way, she'd probably throw her drink in my face if I went over there."

"Sounds like love to me."

"Love? More like hate."

"Fine line between love and hate, my friend," Bob said.

"Not with this one."

"That's what you said the last time. I think you're more interested in this one than you're letting on."

"I'd just as soon kill her as kiss her."

"Definitely love."

Damien finally looked at Bob and began laughing. "You're bad."

"And you're in denial."

"Nah," Damien said, waving off his friend. But then his eyes traveled back to Janelle. What was it about her that compelled him so?

"See?" Bob said, poking Damien in the side.

"Shut up," Damien said, forcing his attentions back to his steak sandwich.

When Damien looked up next, Janelle was gone. Leaving him wondering what the hell she was up to.

Two days later, Ginger informed Damien that Janelle had shown up at work again. When Ginger told Janelle that Damien had left a standing order for her to report to his office when she surfaced, Janelle had laughed. She told Ginger to tell Damien to go to hell.

"She did, ay?" he said, instantly hot.

Damien immediately got up and went to find his

defiant employee. He found her in her office with her feet on the desk, her arms behind her head, looking very pleased with herself.

He walked in and said, "I want you in my office, now."

Janelle smiled and said lazily, "Sorry, I'm swamped. Really, really swamped."

"Don't. I said I wanted you in my office now. Now follow me. We need to talk."

"Sorry, no time."

"You're pushing me."

"I'm not doing anything to you."

"I'm about to place a call to your father."

"Oooo, scary man. Don't, please, don't Damien," she mocked. Then she burst into laughter.

"How will you pay your Visa bills?" he threw at her.

"That will all be taken care of. All taken care of. And then I'll never have to see that mug of yours nor this stupid office for the rest of my bloody life. And then I'm gonna tell that bastard of a father of mine to shove that money up his tightwad ass. And such a glorious day that will be. Such a glorious day."

What was going on that made her so sure of herself? Did it have something to do with that literary agent?

"If you want to avoid having me call your father, be in my office in ten minutes," Damien finally said.

"God, I'm just so busy. Don't think I can make it."

"Fine. Suit yourself. Don't say I didn't warn you."

Damien didn't see Janelle in his office that day. So he followed through on his threat and called her father. A very unpleasant conversation. Damien was not impressed with the old man. In fact, by the end of the talk, Damien was almost sorry he called. The old geezer trashed Janelle to the point where Damien almost started defending her. He had no idea what he'd unleashed on Janelle, but he was

starting to get a glimmer of what might possibly be motivating her to act out. The old man was brutal. And he told Damien to expect Janelle back in the office the next day.

But Janelle didn't return to the office the next day. Nor the next. It was a week before Damien saw her. And it wasn't the usual defiant, cocky Janelle he saw, it was a completely different Janelle. And the most shocking thing, she was at the meeting on time. And she didn't have her Gameboy. Nor would she make eye contact with him. Despite her timeliness and lack of video game, Damien still wasn't about to ignore her.

"Do you have that report I asked for, Janelle?" he finally asked.

"Not yet," she replied quietly.

"You're late with it."

"I'm aware of that."

"I need it by this Thursday at the latest."

"I'm not sure I can get it done by then."

Everyone at the table began staring at her. This was a different Janelle, and everyone seemed to realize that at once.

"See that you do. I'll expect it no later than nine o'clock Thursday morning."

She closed her eyes as if to control her growing anger. "I'll get it to you." Then Janelle realized that everyone was staring at her in surprise. "What?" she asked defensively. The rest of the executives immediately averted their eyes. But they quickly began exchanging looks with each other.

When Damien left that evening, he passed by Janelle's office as usual. Instead of the normal darkened room, the lights were on, and Janelle was at her desk, working on her computer. He tried to resist, but he couldn't stop himself.

He poked his head inside her office and said, "Working late?"

She looked up, startled. Then her face fell. Then it hardened as she returned to her work.

"Unusual for you, isn't it? To still be here?"

Damien said, even though he had no idea why he was taunting her.

Janelle closed her eyes and took a deep breath, but her eyes never left her work.

"Well, have a good night," Damien said brightly. And then with one last look at her, he left.

He got down the hallway and realized that he forgot his Palm Pilot. So he turned around and walked back. This time, Janelle's door was shut. When he looked at her through the window, he was startled by what he saw. She was crying. When she noticed him looking at her, she quickly turned away.

Disconcerted, Damien continued on and retrieved his handheld. When he went past her office again, she had drawn the blinds. What was going on with her?

To further add to his confusion, come Thursday morning, Janelle's report was on his desk. Damien looked it over and was surprised to see that it wasn't bad. It needed some work, some tweaking, but it wasn't bad. So he called her into his office. Surprisingly, she arrived within minutes of his call.

Again, it was the different, new Janelle. She was still fairly defiant, but closed off. She barely made eye contact with him.

"This isn't bad," he said as he perused the report.

Janelle said nothing.

"I mean, it needs some work, but it isn't bad."

Janelle still said nothing, her face impassive. Cold, almost. Damien didn't know why, but he wanted to provoke her. Get her to open up to him. Find out what happened. What had caused the change in her.

"So... does this mean you're going to play ball now?" he asked.

"I'm here, aren't I? That report is in your hands, isn't it?" she replied defensively.

"Yes. It is. I was just wondering if you planned on continuing working. Or if the Gameboy was going to continue taking most of your attention away from

work."

"What do you want out of me?"

"Respect. I am your boss. You have a lot to make up for."

"So this is your game? Pouring salt in the wounds? Figures you'd be a jerk about this."

"I see. You haven't changed, you're playing a game with me."

"Look, I'm here, aren't I? I came when you called, like the little dog you want me to be. Well, frickin' arf arf, what the hell more do you want out of me?"

"I want you to lose that attitude."

Janelle closed her eyes and took a deep breath. Then she opened her eyes, which were blazing brightly with anger. "Fine," she said.

"I mean it. One report and showing up for three whole days and actually working doesn't mean anything to me. You're going to have to produce. And consistently."

Janelle looked like she was just about to explode. "I hear you."

"Look, I don't know what's going on here, but leopards don't just change their spots. You've got a long, hard road ahead of you before you prove yourself to me. I'm going to expect a hundred and ten percent out of you in coming months. You make one slip up and I'm calling Daddy again. Since he seems to be the only one who can motivate you."

"Damien, stop pushing me."

"Stop pushing you? I haven't even begun to push you yet. You think you can give me one report and everything is fixed? All that acting out in those meetings? The backtalk, the disrespect? Well, you're wrong. You think your dad is hard on you, well, honey, you haven't even seen hard yet. I haven't even begun with you yet. You got some lessons to learn and I'm just the man to teach them to you. Don't forget that last meeting of ours."

"Don't, Damien, please stop," Janelle said.

She was starting to sweat, her face was red, but

Damien couldn't seem to stop himself.

"Stop? Stop what? The truth? That you're a spoiled brat? That you've chosen to be a worthless idiot? Waste your life? Well, not on my time, sweetheart. You owe me. You—"

"Damien, I mean it. Stop now," she said, her breathing quickening.

"What? Stop what? The truth? Who do you think I am? Just some pushover? Well, you got the wrong guy. By the time I'm through with you, you're going to be an executive, not some brat—"

"I mean it, I'm going to lose it if you don't stop."

"Don't threaten me, Janelle. I don't forget when someone shows no respect for me or my position, and you are going to give me everything you've got to give, and when you're begging me to let up, I'm gonna dump even more on you—"

"No more!" Janelle snapped, jumping to her feet, fire in her eyes.

"You sit back down! I am not through with you!"

"Yes, you are!"

"Sit down!"

"Screw you!"

"Sit down or I'll make sure you aren't sitting for weeks!"

"That's it!" Janelle screamed.

And then, before Damien could react properly, Janelle had him out of his seat by his collar. He didn't even see the punch coming. Janelle landed a solid one to his jaw and was winding up for another when he caught her arm. Then she went nuts and became a storm of fists. It took all of his strength to control her. But she wouldn't stop.

Now equally as mad as her, Damien grabbed her roughly and forced her across his lap. He yanked her panties down to her ankles and with her caterwauling loudly; he proceeded to give her a solid spanking. Whack! Whack! Whack! His anger fueled his swats, turning her white perfect rear end into a reddened, swollen landscape of handprints.

Finally, when he was through, he pushed her

from his lap. By this time she was wailing with sobs, and tears were streaming down her face.

"You calm down, lady!" he threw at her.

But she wouldn't calm down. In fact, Janelle began to get hysterical. She curled up into a ball on his office floor and began wailing at the top of her lungs. Soon, Damien became alarmed at the level of her emotions. This was going beyond their exchange. Something was wrong.

"Hey, Janelle, stop. Look, I'm sorry, I... think I got out of hand there," he said, getting down on the floor next to her. But she wouldn't listen to him. She just kept wailing and sobbing out of control.

"Janelle, honey, stop, it's over. I won't spank you again, I promise. I'm sorry. Look, I... Janelle?"

He tried to put his arm around her, but she pushed him away violently. "Get the hell away from me!" she cried, sobbing, as she retreated to a corner of his office.

Damien felt helpless as he watched her cry and sob. He hadn't meant to push her to this.

"Janelle, look, I'm sorry. Look, you don't have to do any work this week. Why don't you take the rest of the week off? Okay? Look, the report was fine. I'm sorry, I... Janelle?"

"This isn't about you, you bastard! Not everything revolves around you and this stupid corporation, okay?" Then she dissolved into tears again.

Despite her protests, Damien went to her and knelt beside her.

"Look, I'm sorry, Janelle. This is obviously about something else going on with you. Look, it's not that bad. Everything's gonna be okay."

"No, it's not! They rejected me, okay? I lost! You're right! I'm worthless! And I'm stuck here, and I can't get out, and my whole life is screwed!"

"Who rejected you?"

"The publisher, okay? They rejected my novel, and I'm never getting out of here!" she cried.

"Wait. You wrote a novel?"

"I've written ten of them, okay? And none of them have sold! This was my last chance, and my book sucks, okay? I'm untalented! And, I'm stuck in this horrible job, and I hate it! I hate my father! I hate my life! All I want to do is write, but my father won't let me do it because he says I'll embarrass him with all my stupid writing! I'm a loser, okay?!"

"Janelle, wait, wait, honey. Stop. Stop. It's okay. You write novels?"

"Yes, that's what I do in that office. I make everyone think I'm playing videogames so Daddy won't find out. But I'm a writer, okay? A writer!"

Damien was stunned. She hadn't been goofing off at all, she'd been writing the whole time. And ten novels, at that!

He sat next to her, staring ahead. "I'm so sorry, Janelle, I had no idea."

"No one did. I didn't want them to know. But now it doesn't matter anymore. I'm a loser writer, and I might as well be some stupid executive."

"No, no, you shouldn't. You should be free to write is what you should do. God knows, your father's got enough money. Why won't he let you write?"

"I don't know. He thinks all writers are freaks. He said, 'no daughter of mine is going to be some Godless writer.' All I've ever wanted to do was become a writer. It's all I think about. It's all I do. Every weekend, all nights. And my days here. All I do is write. Well, except for this week."

"I had no idea, I'm so sorry."

"Don't worry about it. You didn't know."

"I feel horrible," Damien said. "I've misjudged you so."

"No, you haven't. I was horrible to you, and I'm sorry. Just if I'd been super nice, everyone would have expected me to actually work, and then I wouldn't have been able to write. So I had to act like an idiot. And... truth be told. It was kinda fun at times. I really enjoyed tormenting you in those meetings. Sorry."

Damien grinned. "Now I don't feel bad about that spanking."

"You shouldn't. I was horrible." Then she started crying again.

"Janelle, stop. Stop, honey, come here."

"I'm a loser."

"No, you aren't. Come here and let me hold you."

"You hate me."

"I do not hate you."

"Yes, you do. And you should."

"Well, I don't. Come here and let me hold you."

"You don't want to do that."

"I most certainly do. Come here."

Janelle finally looked up at him, and she had the most vulnerable expression on her face, Damien could only think of kissing away her problems.

He reached out and took her in his arms. "It's going to be okay. I'm going to help you. No more reports, you just write. Okay? No more meetings, you just come here and write. I'll cover for you, okay?"

"You'd do that for me?"

"I'd like to do a lot more for you, if you'd let me."

She looked up into his face. "Really?"

"Really."

Finally, she started to look hopeful. She smiled at him. "You sure?"

"Very sure. Let me help you. You'll make it. You just need someone in your corner. That's all. Just think how much more you can accomplish if you have someone on your side. All those rejections won't seem so bad if you've got someone to root for you. Keep your spirits up. Right?"

"Why would you do that for me?"

"Because I want to."

"Really?"

"Really."

"No one's ever helped me before."

"Well, it's high time someone did then."

"Damien, I..."

He smiled at her, turned her face towards his and kissed her. She was hesitant at first and then she let herself go. Fireworks!

"Wow," she said when she pulled away.

"Yeah, wow," Damien agreed.

"Could you do that again?"

"How about I spend the rest of my life doing that?"

Tears sprang into Janelle's eyes as Damien leaned in and kissed her again.

The Nightmare Above

Chapter One

Jim Horner loved his new apartment. It had a marvelous view of the San Francisco Bay, Golden Gate bridge and the City itself. It was near over sixty restaurants and only a block away from the subway. There was only one problem. The woman above him.

It had become clear on his first day that she was going to be a problem. He'd met most of his neighbors, all friendly professional people. After introducing themselves, all of them agreed that the building was a great one to live in. Except for one person. Fritzie McGuire, a woman who just happened to live directly above Jim's apartment. A woman who was such a problem, she'd caused the four people before Jim to move out.

"Well, can't we get rid of her? The manager? Hasn't anyone complained?" Jim asked his new next door neighbor.

"Her uncle owns the apartment building," replied Sally Moon, a sixty-something nurse.

"Does he know she's this much of a problem?"

"Why do you think she's here? The family stuck her here. They don't want her around either. Black sheep of the family, apparently. And she comes from money. Doesn't have to work. So all she does is play that rotten punk music. Only breaks we get is when her band is out on the road."

"She's in a band?"

"Not a popular one. She only goes out on the road a few times a year. And boy, is this building different when she's gone. So peaceful."

"Isn't there anything we can do?"

"Uh... no. Not so far. Everyone's tried. That's why poor Bill moved out. He was the guy before you. She caused him so much stress, his ulcers kicked up again. Finally, he had to get out before she killed him. At least, that's what Bill said."

"That's terrible!" Jim exclaimed.

"You got it. Didn't the rental agency warn you?"

"They said something about it being a noisy neighborhood."

"It's not a noisy neighborhood, it's a noisy neighbor."

"Damn."

"Sorry for the news. My friend's moving soon, he lives two blocks down, got a nice place. No view, but a great place. Let me know if you're interested."

"Uh... thanks," Jim said, now very disconcerted.

Great, he knew it was too good to be true. The apartment was too perfect, the price too low. Why had he signed that six month lease? Of course, this was Jim Horner. Why was he worried? There wasn't one conflict in his life he hadn't been able to resolve. He was not one to back down from a fight, either. If this woman thought she was going to drive him out of his new apartment, she had another think coming.

Luckily, Jim wouldn't have to rent beyond the six months. His home in Sausalito was going through a major remodel. Almost a complete tear-down and rebuild. So he figured he might as well live near his business for the duration. Cut down on his commute time and he loved the City.

But if this woman caused him any trouble, she'd be hearing about it. Uncle or no uncle, Jim had a lease. And this woman wasn't going to be bothering him. Period.

The first week, Jim thought his neighbors were exaggerating. He hadn't even so much as heard a peep out of his upstairs neighbor. Then he found out why. She'd been out on tour. And boy, did he notice when she returned home.

He came home Friday night from work and heard the music a block away. He thought there was a concert going on somewhere. But as he got closer, he soon realized that the music was coming from his building. Directly above him.

When he walked into his apartment, he couldn't

believe it. It was as if the stereo was on in his apartment. He could hear every note, every word of the music. Not to mention the deafening bass. His apartment literally shook with each beat. And the music itself! Horrible! Discordant, jarring punk rock with some awful miscreant screaming swear words.

Jim withstood about fifteen minutes of the hellish noise before his head began hurting. When he realized that he couldn't hear the news on his TV set, he couldn't stop himself. It was time to meet Miss McGuire.

He took the elevator to her floor. When the elevator doors opened, a wall of sound met him. It was even worse up here!

Then he saw her front door. Instead of the neutral beige/white color the rest of the apartment doors were painted, hers was very different. Shockingly so. It was painted black and had a large red skull displayed prominently on its front. Above the skull were the words "Beware All Who Enter Here" scrawled in white lettering. Jim found himself disgusted and angry, and he hadn't even met her yet. Did the woman have any limits?

Jim marched up to her door and knocked. No answer. Well, how could she hear him over the din of that racket?

So Jim began pounding on her door. Finally, the music quieted. A few seconds later, the door opened and he got his first gander at Miss McGuire. And such a scary sight she was! About five seven or so, Fritzie McGuire had a close-cropped mop of bright orange hair with red tips. She was skinny, had dark black eyeliner lining her intense brown eyes, bright green and blue eye shadow, red lipstick and many facial piercings. Eyebrows, nose, lips and about seven earrings in each ear. Dressed in a tight black t-shirt with a white skull and crossbones on the front, striped red and black tights that were ripped off below the knees and large, worn, black Army boots with haphazard lacings. While frightening at first, Jim quickly realized that there was a pretty girl

underneath all the metal and makeup. Delicately boned, Fritzie had perfect porcelain skin, high cheekbones, a cute, pert little nose and lovely lips. That was if you ignored the amazing amount of metal with which she'd adorned herself.

"What?" she asked with an almost sneer on her heavily made-up face.

"Uh, I'm your new neighbor, Jim Horner, I live right below you and—"

"No," she said and then she began to shut the door.

"Wait, you haven't heard—"

"No, I won't turn down the music, no I won't comply, move out."

"Wait a minute," Jim said, shoving his foot in her door.

Fritzie looked down at his foot and glared back up at him with a scowl. "Get your frickin' foot out of my door or I'll cut it off," she warned.

Something about her fierce warning, this little slip of a girl with all her scary make-up, scowling up at him, struck him as funny.

"What's so funny?"

"You. You're not very threatening."

"You won't think it's so funny when your foot's been amputated and you're thumping back downstairs," she seethed.

Jim laughed. "Are you always this nonsensical?"

His demeanor seemed to throw her off. She was obviously used to barking at people and having them run away.

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, you're about five seven, probably weigh all of a hundred pounds sopping wet and I'm six four and could pick you up and toss you about a block with one finger."

"I'd like to see you try," she warned, her eyes narrowing.

"Oh, I'm sure you'd give me a run for my money," he grinned.

"Look, dude, I don't know who you think you

are, but my uncle owns this building and—”

“I know all that. I know the whole story.”

“So what are you doing here?”

“I’m making an attempt at communicating with you.”

“Well, you’ve made the attempt, now get lost.”

“Why are you so hostile?”

“Why are you so deaf?”

“Because of your music. Will you consider turning it down?”

“Uh...” Fritzie pretended to think. “No,” she said, and then she attempted to close the door on him again. But his foot stayed put.

She began to get angry. “Dude, move your foot.”

“Not until you agree to turn down the music.”

“Dude, you are starting to piss me off.”

“Well, I’m already angry with you. I guess we’re even.”

“Look, you can’t control me. I’ve lived here for ten years. You deal with me; I don’t deal with you. You work around me; I don’t work around you.”

“It’s a new day, Miss McGuire. I’m not running away; I’m not moving, and I’m going to live here, and you’re going to respect me and my wishes. You will turn down your music to a normal, neighborly level and at ten o’clock tonight, you will turn it off.”

She burst out laughing. “I gotta give you credit, you’re funny,” she said. “But no go. What I say goes. Not you. Get it? Now get out.”

“No.”

“Dude, I’ll call the cops.”

“Do you really want them here? From what I smell wafting out of your apartment there, I think you’ve got more to lose.”

Her jaw set, her eyes narrowed. “Don’t do this, dude. You will lose.”

“I don’t think so.”

“I don’t like you.”

“I don’t care.”

“I can and will make your life a living hell.”

"You already have and now you will stop."

"There's no way you can stop me."

"Try me."

"Will you go away?" she demanded.

"Will you turn down that music?"

"No."

"Well, then I won't go away."

Now she didn't know what to do. Jim got the feeling that she didn't have many confrontations like this one. It was clear that she didn't hear the word "no" very often. Well, if she kept to her present course of action, she was going to hear it a lot. And if she refused to compromise, he may just have to take a bit stronger tack with her. With that impudent look on her face and that defiant look in her eye, this was one little girl who was spoiling for a good old-fashioned spanking.

"You don't make the rules, I do," she declared.

"Young lady, there are certain rules that we all must adhere to, to make society work. We all have to pay taxes, we all have to follow certain rules."

"Well, I don't."

"So, you don't pay taxes?"

"Well..."

"So you do follow certain rules."

"Not at my house, I make the rules here."

"Not anymore."

"Look, I'm not doing what you want. Deal with it."

"Don't push me, little girl. I don't take guff from spoiled brats like you. Either you compromise and start acting like a good neighbor or I'll take you on. And by the time I'm through with you, you'll be acting like a lady, I can assure you of that."

"Spare me the lame threats. You can't do anything to me."

"Try me."

Fritzie sighed, thought a bit and then said, "Look, if I turn down the music will you just go away and leave me alone?"

"Yes."

"Fine, you win, okay? You win. Just get out of here and leave me alone."

"If you're just giving me lip here, I'll be back."

"Whatever, just get lost."

"Nice meeting you, Miss McGuire," Jim said, taking his foot away from the door.

No more than ten seconds after she closed the door, he heard the music. And it was even more deafening than before. So he marched back and pounded on her door. But she wouldn't answer.

Furious, Jim finally gave up. He went downstairs, packed an overnight bag and checked into a hotel. But he hadn't given up yet. He was going to break the McGuire woman if it was the last thing he did. No one treated him like that and got away with it.

Three days and three very long nights later, Jim was at the end of his rope. Fritzie had stomped around her apartment and/or played deafening music from late afternoon until the early morning hours. He'd knocked on her door, called her, all to no avail. So when the elevator doors opened on that third morning and he saw Fritzie standing there, Jim was livid.

Fritzie clearly didn't expect him to be there. She actually looked alarmed and rather scared. She tried to cover her fear, but she wasn't doing a very good job.

"Miss McGuire," he started forcefully as he entered the elevator.

"Leave me alone, you started it," she said as she retreated to the far corner of the elevator. But Jim was past excuses. It was time to show this little girl just whom she was up against.

"I shall not leave it alone, nor did I start it," he countered in a loud and commanding voice. Jim knew he could be intimidating when he wanted to be. Not only was he a tall man, he worked out, he was roughly the size of a football player. And he

was used to getting his way.

But it was clear that the girl was no pushover. She stuck out her lower lip and dared him with her defiant expression. "You're just a big baby. If you can't hack it, move out," she sneered.

"It's been made clear to me that words have no effect on you. So if it's action you understand, then it's action I will take," Jim declared.

Before she could react, Jim reached out and in the blink of an eye, he had her under one arm and over his bent knee in an inexorable hold. Then he let loose on her pert little behind with a storm of swats.

She squealed and threatened and begged and cried and screamed at him to stop. But Jim was determined. He was making a point and she was going to get it.

"If (spank) you (spank) ever (spank) play (spank) that God awful (spank) racket (spank) again (spank) and keep me up (spank) I will break down that hideous (spank) door of yours (spank), tear off your panties and take my (spank) paddle to you! Do you understand me, woman?! (spank, spank, spank)

"Stop! I get it! I get it! Stop! Please!"

After several more hard spanks, Jim let her go. Sobbing, she quickly retreated to the corner. Just then, the elevator doors opened.

"Remember this exchange Miss McGuire, if you want to avoid scenes like this in the future, you will behave!" he thundered. Then he stormed out of the elevator and headed off for work, feeling quite pleased with himself.

He thought he heard her swear at him as the doors to the building closed behind him, but that was to be expected. He knew he'd have to follow through on his promise. He knew by experience that it normally took a few sessions over his knee to get through to bad, little misbehaving brats. His last girlfriend had required four spankings before she straightened up and flew right. Jim was not a man

to push. And he was a man of his word. Miss McGuire was going to learn that.

That night, when he arrived home, he was chagrined, but not surprised to hear rotten music coming from her apartment, just as loud as before. Jim knew she wouldn't answer the door, so he had a new plan in place. He called her apartment and pretended to be from Federal Express. He just happened to have a Fed Ex baseball cap given to him by a client, he knew she'd answer the door for a package.

"But I didn't order anything," she argued over the phone, after turning down the music.

"Ma'am, it says your name, your apartment. Must be a gift. Return address is Harry and David's, you know, the fruit place?"

"Oh, yeah. My aunt always gets me that stuff. Why, I don't know. Okay, I'm buzzing you in, come on up. Look for the black front door with the red skull on it."

"Will do."

Jim was careful to keep his head down after he knocked on the door. Just as he thought, she opened the door.

With one shove, he was in her apartment. He quickly shut the door behind him. The door to her apartment didn't prepare him for the shock of her interior decor. All the walls were spray painted with graffiti, and where there weren't obscenities, there were rock posters. She had a series of mannequins lining one wall, all dressed in various bondage gear. Multi-colored sheets hung from her ceiling, obscuring the fine stuccowork. Strings of lights were everywhere. And they were all weird. Skeletons, skulls and monster heads. The entire effect was shocking. This was a little girl out of control.

Fritzie was horrified by his sudden intrusion. "You get out! You... you... you... bully!"

"What did I promise this morning, Miss McGuire? You obviously didn't take my warning seriously. It seems as if you need another lesson in manners.

And I'm just the man to teach you!"

"No! Stop! I'll keep the music down! Don't spank me! Don't spank me!" she said, attempting to flee from him.

Jim caught her by the back of her shirt and easily pulled her to him. "You have proven yourself to be a liar, Miss McGuire. Just how naive and stupid do you think I am?! As soon as I leave here, you'll turn that music up and leave it on all night!"

"I'll call the cops!" she said, struggling against him. But the little wisp of a girl was no match for his beefy grip.

"And I'm sure we'll both enjoy spending the night in jail, me for assault and you for marijuana possession!"

"You can't do this! I'm in charge here! I'm in charge, not you!"

"Not anymore!"

Jim easily dragged her to her large, leopard-spotted overstuffed couch. Then he sat down, bringing her with him and tossed her across his lap. She kicked and screamed and fought, but he easily controlled her. Then he grabbed the remote control and turned up her horrible music to cover her screams.

This time, instead of spanking her over her pants, Jim had other plans. It was time for a bare-bottomed punishment.

Jim took the back of her tights and pulled them down to her knees, revealing black thong underwear and the cutest and tightest little butt he'd ever seen. Momentarily stunned by its allure, Jim forced himself to continue. Sexuality aside, this little girl needed a wake up call.

Jim swiftly brought his arm down and laid into her behind with all he had. Her shrieks of pain were his instant reward.

"So you thought you could get away with disrespecting me and tormenting all your neighbors, did you? Well, not anymore, young lady!" Jim said as he slapped her tiny behind with forceful spansks.

"The buck stops here!"

"Stop it! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!"

"Not sorry enough, apparently! No, honey, this is it! This is your comeuppance! And I'm not stopping until I'm good and ready! You pushed me too far!" he shouted over the din of the awful punk rock.

Jim spanked and smacked and whacked her behind until it was a lovely, deep shade of red. But he still wasn't done. Even though he could feel her wracking with sobs, he wanted her to remember this lesson for at least a week. One cheek, then the other got his attention. As a finale, he concentrated on her sit spots until her wails were as loud as the wails of the singer on her stereo. Satisfied with the mottled purple bruises he'd added to her bright red behind, he pulled up her tights and let go of her.

She scrambled away from him, sobbing and crying. "You are so mean!" she cried as she rubbed her sore rear and retreated to a corner of her living room.

"I'm mean? I'm mean? Miss Torment-The-Neighbors-For-Ten-Years dares to call me mean? What do you think you've been, Miss McGuire? Friendly and sweet?"

"You have no right to judge me! You don't know me! You don't know me at all!"

"All I know is what I've seen, and I haven't seen any sign of a nice person. All I've seen is a horrible brat who's acting out against strangers!"

"This is my apartment!"

"And mine is right below you!"

"I have nowhere to move! I have to stay here! This is my place, and I should be able to do what I want!"

"Well, you can't! No more loud music until all hours of the night! You will keep that music down to a reasonable level and turn it off completely by ten o'clock! Do you hear me?! And if you dare to turn that back up, I will be right back up here and next time I won't go so easy on you! Next time I'll take

my paddle to you! Understand?!"

"You can't tell me what to do!"

"Well, I am! So cope or face the consequences!"

"I hate you!"

"I'm sure you do!"

"You stupid—"

"Oh, so you want more, do you? That can easily be arranged!" Jim said, taking some steps towards her.

"No! No! Okay! Okay! I'll turn it down! You win! Just don't spank me again!"

"That depends on you, Miss McGuire, you fall out of line, and you'll find yourself right back over my knee, understand?"

"I understand! I understand!"

"Good, see that you do. Or you'll be seeing me again and next time, I won't be so pleasant to you! I've got a paddle downstairs with your name written all over it. It's about two feet long with large air holes cut through it. You think my hand was bad, honey, that weapon will blister that cute little behind of yours until you won't be able to sit for a month. So don't ever make the mistake again of questioning my authority. I'm in charge, now, get it? Me, not you, me. After ten, if I hear one peep out of you, one boot stomp or even if you drop something by accident, I'm coming up here, armed with my paddle and I'm gonna make mincemeat out of that pert little behind of yours, get it? Answer me, do you get me?"

"Yes! I get you. I get you."

"Good. Well, have a pleasant evening, Miss McGuire," he said, getting up and walking towards her door.

Fritzie burst into tears again and cried harder as Jim left her apartment.

And once he left, he didn't hear another peep out of her.

A week later, the neighbors were all abuzz. What had happened to the Nightmare? Why had she stopped torturing everyone? No one knew the story,

and Jim wasn't going to enlighten them. Fritzie had stopped, that was enough. No need to add to her humiliation. All he wanted was her compliance, and that's what he'd gotten.

Jim was in the apartment's basement parking garage, walking to his Lexus one morning, when he noticed that something looked different about his car. As he got closer, the pit of his stomach dropped. Someone had vandalized his car! His beloved forty thousand dollar Lexus convertible was now covered in spray paint! It couldn't be true!

He rushed to inspect the vandalism. He quickly realized that this wasn't a random act. This was a deliberate job. The person had used stencils and written something on the sides of his prized automobile. Jim nearly fainted when he read what was written there. WANTED: Young Boys was on one side. On the other, I Love Little Boys.

It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who'd done the vandalism. If she thought she was going to get away with this, she had another think coming. This time she'd gone too far.

"Open up! Fritzie! I know you're in there!"

"Who is it?" she called out in a sing-song voice.

"I mean it! Open this door!"

"I don't know anyone by that name! Please try again later!"

"Fritzie, goddamn it!"

He heard her laugh.

"Fritzie!" he bellowed.

"You know something? You're cute when you're mad," she taunted through the door.

"Oh, little girl—"

"What are you going to do? Can't spank me through the door, can you?"

"I'll wait you out, I will."

"You're such an idiot. It's water based. Just rinse off your car, Boy Lover."

"Fritzie, this isn't funny."

"Oh, yes it is."

"Why are you doing this? Haven't we dealt with

this?"

"No. You pushed it too far, buddy boy. I don't take crap from people like you. You needed that. You deserved that. I decided things weren't even. Now they are."

"They are most certainly not! You started this! Open this goddamned door!"

"Go rinse off your car, Boy Lover!"

"Stop calling me that!"

"Boy Lover! Boy Lover! Boy Lover!"

"You! This isn't over!" Jim roared.

As he turned and walked away, the sounds of her laughter followed him into the elevator.

So she wanted to play, did she? Well, she just picked the wrong opponent. If her earlier spankings hadn't proved that, maybe a future one would. It was time to get out the paddle.

The Nightmare Above

Chapter Two

Jim was furious. Fritzie tortured him with music, and then when he spanked her for it, she'd vandalized his car. When he'd gone to confront her, she'd taunted him through her door. He'd tried to catch her unsuccessfully for three days, but she wouldn't elude him for long. And when he caught her, oh, there would be hell to pay.

Jim was late for a meeting when he rushed out of his apartment, a week after the car vandalism. He got a few steps out of his place when he began sliding all over the floor. When he looked down, he was horrified. He'd stepped onto two large sheets of flypaper and now they were completely stuck to the bottoms of his shoes. That little bitch!

He heard laughing coming from the end of the hall, near the stairs. When he looked down towards the sound, he couldn't believe it. Fritzie, laughing so hard, she was doubled over.

"You horrible little brat!" Jim seethed. He began to run after her, but momentarily forgot about the flypaper on his feet. The next thing he knew, he'd done a face plant into the floor.

He heard her shriek with laughter.

"The bigger they are, the harder they fall!" she yelled.

Jim was up and down the hall, fast, despite the slippery paper. But Fritzie was ready for him. She was up the stairs and into her apartment in record time.

"Goddamn you, woman! What is wrong with you?!" he screamed at her door.

"You messed with the wrong woman, honey! I am going to drive you out of these apartments if it's the last thing I do!" she promised.

"I thought I taught you a lesson the last time! I got you to stop playing that music, I'll get you double for this!"

"You didn't get me to stop playing my music, you idiot! I did that all on my own!"

"Now you're lying!"

"I am not. Suzie Baker just had a baby. She asked me to stop, so I did. I did it for her, not you, you stupid idiot."

"You're lying!"

"Don't you just wish I was lying! Ask Suzie, she's in 4-D. I was so bummed when she asked because I knew you were gonna take credit for it. But it wasn't about you. It was about the baby."

"So those two spankings didn't do it, ay? Maybe a third with my paddle will do the trick."

"Ooo, now you're turning me on."

"Oh, little girl, you won't be sitting for weeks once I get my hands on you."

"You won't get your hands on me, I can promise you that. No, buddy, I won't stop until you move. This is war!" she railed.

"Okay, then, it's war!" Jim promised. "Honey, you just took on the wrong man!" he yelled, and then he turned and stalked off down the hallway.

Her peals of laughter rang out behind him as he went for the elevator. Oh, she made him so mad!

As Jim tried to get the flypaper off his shoes, his mind raced for plans of revenge. He'd trap her. That was it. He'd trap her and whack her with his paddle. Then he'd spank her with his hand. Then, while she was begging him to stop, he'd take his belt and finish the job. What joy that would bring him!

That night, when Jim returned home, he heard music coming from Fritzie's apartment, loud. And the sounds of her dancing on her hardwood floors with some huge boots. Infuriating him. One last warning. He'd give her one last chance to obey him.

He stormed upstairs and pounded on her door. The music's volume turned down.

"Yeah?" he heard her voice.

"Miss McGuire," he started.

"Oh, for crying out loud, go away, I thought you were someone else. I don't have time to play with

you right now, Jimbo, but don't worry, I'm gonna be turning this down in an hour. Suzie gets home then, and I'm expecting someone. But leave me alone now."

"No! Goddamn you! I told you I didn't want to hear that racket, and I meant it!"

"Jim, for God's sake, it's only seven o'clock, chill out!"

"Don't tell me to chill out! One last warning, Fritzie! One last warning!"

The next thing he heard was loud music. His blood boiling, he returned to his apartment, put in some earplugs and fixed his dinner. After dinner, he was getting on the Internet and buying himself some implements. Some Fritzie training implements.

About a half an hour later, Fritzie surprised him by turning off the music. Somewhat relieved, but still intent on his plans, Jim input the word "cane" into Google and went in search of a proper disciplinary tool.

After making his purchase, Jim settled onto his couch to watch a game on TV. Then the noise began. From Fritzie's apartment. This time it wasn't music; it was her TV. She was listening to it so loud, it sounded like the TV was in the same room with him. Goddamn her!

Jim tried to concentrate on his game, but soon couldn't. The din from Fritzie's apartment was deafening. She was watching some movie in which a couple was fighting. Horrible, name-calling, it even sounded like some scuffle was taking place on the show. Finally, he couldn't stand it. He marched upstairs and was just about to knock on her door when he heard the voices much more clearly. He recognized one. It was Fritzie. He quickly realized that he wasn't listening to a TV show; he was listening to a live argument. Fritzie was in a heated battle with some man.

"I don't need you in my life!" he heard Fritzie yell. "I've never needed you, you were never there

for me! You bastard! Get out! Get out!"

Jim then heard the sound of someone being slapped. Then he heard Fritzie cry out. "You bastard! I'm not ten anymore! You can't hit me!" Then he heard her swear at whomever she was arguing with. A long string of unflattering comments at top volume. Then he heard a slap again and the sound of someone falling to the floor.

Then he finally heard the other voice clearly. "You good-for-nothing piece of crap! I told your mother you were worthless! You're the whole reason we broke up! You made our lives miserable! You're lucky my brother has taken you in! Because you aren't worth anything! You were a pain when you were born, you were a pain when you were five, you were a pain when you were ten and you're even worse now!"

"Get out! I hate you! I hate you! Don't ever come here again!"

"You don't worry about that! You're a nightmare! Dressed like a whore! Playin' that goddamned racket! I knew you'd never amount to anything! The fruit never falls far from the tree. Both your mother and you are stupid whores! I wish you'd never been born!"

Wails from Fritzie. Wails of anguish. Jim heard stomping and realized that whomever was in the apartment was coming out. Jim raced for the stairs and hid, halfway down, but stayed close enough to the top to see who was coming out.

A man flung open Fritzie's door so hard, it smashed into the wall behind him. Then he turned and yelled, "I disown you! You're nothing to me! Nothing, you little tramp! You hear me? Nothing!" he yelled. The man was huge, maybe six foot six, a giant beer belly, flannel shirt over a stained t-shirt, dirty jeans, gray unkempt hair, a three-day beard and the rheumy eyes and red bulbous nose of an alcoholic. Must be in his early sixties, but looked much older. Nasty looking man. He stormed past the stairs and punched the button for the elevator.

Just then Fritzie appeared, looking pale and shaken. Makeup was running down her tear-stained face, there was blood on her mouth and coming out of her nose. She had a booze bottle in her hand. She ran down the hallway and threw it full force at the man, who was waiting for the elevator. He turned and the bottle caught him on the side of the face, knocking him back. For some reason, the bottle didn't break, not until it fell to the floor.

"And take your stupid booze, you alcoholic bastard!" she screamed. Then she ran back into her apartment and slammed the door.

The man went insane. He stormed back down the hallway and began kicking Fritzie's door. He was big enough and strong enough to break it down, and if he got inside, he might even kill Fritzie. Jim didn't know what to do. So he ran back down to his apartment and called 911. He was informed that several people had already called, and a car was on its way. It was then he heard the sirens.

He ran back up, just in time to see the man hightailing it for the elevator. His face was covered in blood. Fritzie's door was off its hinges, he could hear her wailing and crying from inside.

Worried, he cautiously approached her door. She was kneeling, holding her sides, howling, with a baseball bat by her side. It had blood on it. Again, Jim was at a loss. He found himself going to her.

"Fritzie, are you all right?" he asked.

She looked up at him, shocked, with a wild look in her eye. She looked bad. One eye was turning black, the other had a bleeding cut over it, and she had blood streaming out of her nose.

"Go away, Jim," she cried as she looked away, clearly ashamed. "Please, just go away," then she broke down into sobs.

"I'm staying until the cops get here," he informed her.

"Please, this is my problem. I don't want anyone to see me like this," she sobbed.

Just then, two cops appeared at the door.

"Sir, please back away from her!" one ordered.

Jim stood up, taken aback. "But officers, I—"

"He's not the one who beat me, you guys, he's just a neighbor, checking on me. He's okay," Fritzie managed to get out.

"All right, Miss."

"Jim, please go, okay? Thanks for coming up here, but I'll handle this," Fritzie said, her voice stronger.

"Whatever you want, Fritzie," Jim said, shaken.

Jim left, as he turned to take one last look at her, a cop was helping her up and comforting her.

Jim sat in his apartment, processing what he'd seen. The man had obviously been her father. No wonder she was such trouble. With a parent like that one, there was no mystery why Fritzie was such a handful. The poor thing. Jim almost felt badly about buying that cane. Almost. While Fritzie had been brutalized by that horrible man, she still shouldn't be taking out her anger on others. She needed to stop that. But first, she had to heal from what that rotten father of hers did to her. But after that, Jim was going to have a talk with her. The girl needed some help.

Jim didn't hear Fritzie for a month. At first, he thought it was because of the scene with her father, but then he found out that she was back on tour with her band.

One afternoon, Jim got on the elevator and a stranger was there, a woman. He knew everyone in the building, but he'd never seen this lady before. Probably a friend of tenant. She looked at him like she knew him.

"Yes? Can I help you?" he asked.

She laughed. As soon as he heard the laugh, he was stunned. It was Fritzie! All he could do was stare. Her short hair was brown, no odd coloring, she'd taken out all her facial piercings, and just her earrings were left. She was wearing plain jeans and

a t-shirt, light make-up, and she had the most beautiful eyes. She was so cute, the transformation so great, he couldn't say anything.

"What's the matter, Jimbo? Cat got your tongue?" she asked, her eyes dancing at him.

"But... Fritzie, you... you look so different. You're beautiful," he blurted without thinking.

She laughed delightedly, which made her look even more attractive. "As opposed to my former self? I'm getting this a lot lately. You'd think I'd gotten a head transplant by the way all you people are fawning over me. I didn't think I looked that bad before."

"No, you didn't. Its... what happened to you?"

"I don't know. Got tired of the total punk thing. Needed a change. Quit the band, went back to my old line of work. Having fun, actually. I mean, I loved the band, but got sick of touring. I just want to stay in one place for awhile."

"What... What's your old job?"

"Graphic designer. Just hooked up with some old friends who've got a successful comic book line, they wanted me to do some backgrounds, help with the storyboards, work on some new characters. It's really fun."

"Really," Jim said, still stunned by this new Fritzie. "I didn't think you worked. I... they said you had family money. That you were rich."

She laughed. "Uh, no. My rent is cheap, but that's it. I'm a working class girl, believe it or not. Jim, will you stop staring at me? I'm not that different."

"Oh, yes you are."

"And hey, I never thanked you for... well, trying to take care of me that horrible night," she said. She walked up to him, grabbed him and kissed him.

Jim was shocked and more turned on than he'd ever been in his entire life. Who was this hot little number?

She pulled away as the doors to the elevator opened. Laughing, she said, "See ya, 'round,

Jimbo," and then she walked out of the elevator, leaving him standing there, staring after her in surprise.

Now Jim was having all kinds of new thoughts about Fritzie. And all of them involved the two of them naked together. In his bed.

Finally, he came to his senses and ran after her. He caught up to her about a half a block up their street.

"Fritzie, Fritzie, wait," he said.

"Yeah?" she asked, turning to him, a hidden smile on her face.

"Look, that little kiss only makes up for a small part of our... past," he said. "You owe me. For the flypaper, for torturing me with your music, you owe me. Dinner. Next Friday."

Fritzie smiled an almost conspiratorial smile. "Okay, Jimbo. Pick me up at my place, seven o'clock."

"I'll be there," he said.

She sent him another grin, then turned and walked off down the street. Which gave him a perfect opportunity to check out that fine little behind of hers. Well, who would have thought? Not him. Damn, she was adorable!

Come Friday, Jim was on Fritzie's doorstep. When she opened the door, he was momentarily stunned. She looked so good! She was wearing a tight little black dress, black ankle boots and a gorgeous smile. He could not get over the change in her.

She giggled upon seeing his response. "Why do you look so shocked?"

"I've never... you never... oh, hell. You ready?"

"Yes, I am," she said.

Soon, he was sitting across from Fritzie at a nice restaurant. They'd engaged in small talk, he still could not get that this was the same little girl who'd tormented him so mercilessly in months past.

"You still look so shocked," she observed, sipping on her wine.

"I am shocked. Come on, Fritzie, look at you. But it's the attitude that confuses me the most. I mean, I'm lovin' it, but..."

"Look, Jim. I've done some deep thinking, ever since that... night with my father. On tour, a lot of things came clear to me. Why... Why I've been so unhappy. I mean, duh, I know. I should have figured this out sooner. I'm just so glad he didn't raise me. He left us when I was about eleven. Mom got sick of the beatings and so did I. But we're both still scarred from that creep. I don't know why I agreed to see him. You know, I think you just always want your Dad to be a good guy. And even if he isn't, you kinda transform people in your mind to be who you want them to be. But that night, I couldn't deny it any longer. He's a freakin' lowlife scum. And that's what I told him. He came in and started insulting me, and it was like it was the first time I actually heard what he said. So I told him to stuff it. It was the first time I've ever had a showdown with him. I wasn't gonna take it anymore. I was angry with him, and I wanted him to know that. But man, what a psychopath. That was scary."

"I'm so sorry."

"Don't be, it was good. It was the first time I've ever fought back, and it felt good. Well, not good, but satisfying. He busted my door down, and I just whacked him with that baseball bat. That guy can take a lot. The cops found him a few blocks away and put him in jail for a while. He's out now and moved back to Florida, where he's got a condo. I hope I never see him again."

"I'm... I don't know what to say."

"Don't worry about it, Jimbo. And thanks for comin' up and tryin' to help. That meant a lot to me. And considering how I'd treated you, you really showed your true colors that night."

"Well... I have to confess. I thought you were playing your TV loud, and I was going to force you to turn it down. Then... I caught the voices."

She laughed. "Don't worry about it, Jim. You still tried to help me."

"Yeah, yeah I did. I mean, I know we've had our problems, but... I wouldn't want anything to happen to you. And that guy was out-of-control. I felt so badly for you."

"Well, its over now. And here we are," she said, smiling at him.

"And I couldn't be happier."

After a few moments, Fritzie said, "You know, I always thought you were cute. It was part of the reason I picked on you."

"Brat. I'll bet you're not even sorry for that flypaper."

She burst out laughing. "Uh... I'm tryin' to be. But the sight of you slipping around with those huge sheets of paper stuck to your shoes, man, that was funny."

Jim narrowed his eyes at her. "Payback is a bitch, little girl."

She grinned. "You'll try."

"I'm gonna do more than try. I still owe you a spanking for that."

"You can try, but I may fight back."

"I'm counting on it."

They left the restaurant, and Jim invited Fritzie back to his apartment for a nightcap.

He handed Fritzie her drink, she put it down, grabbed him and kissed him. Within minutes, they were both naked on Jim's bed.

Jim couldn't believe it. He thought she'd been pretty clothed, but naked, she was beyond compare. Her body was tight, her breasts rounded and perky, and when he held onto her well-formed rear, he thought he'd died and gone to Heaven. She was the exact body type he preferred. And she was a wild lover. He figured she might be, given her fiery nature, but she surpassed his expectations. The girl was an animal. Jim tried things with her that he'd only ever dreamed about doing to a lover. They experimented with all kinds of crazy positions,

finally ending with him on top, riding her into a wild climax.

Afterwards, they were both completely sweaty and exhausted.

Fritzie started giggling. "Man, you're good," she said. "That was... wow. Wild. You look so straight, man. Where did that all come from?" she asked, perched up on one elbow, stroking his chest.

"You brought it out in me, girl," he said, bringing her to him for a kiss. Which led to round number two.

After they were finished, they both needed showers. Which led to round number three. Jim was out of his mind with joy. He'd never had better sex in his life! He never knew it could be like this. And with Fritzie? Go figure!

Later, they were eating a snack in his kitchen, and playing footsie under the table when Fritzie started giggling.

"What?" he asked.

"Just you. I can't help but think of how we met. Man, you were so mad at me. But that flypaper, that was the pinnacle. Although, the writing on your car was pretty funny. I like boys," she said laughing.

Jim pushed away his plate. "Speaking of that," he said. He got up from the table, reached out and pulled her out of her chair and threw her over his shoulder.

"Jim! No!"

"Oh, yeah, baby, you never paid for that, thanks for reminding me," he said as he carried her into his living room.

"No, really, I was kidding, I shouldn't have brought that up," she said.

"You know I went out and bought a cane after that flypaper trick," he said as he walked over to his couch, keeping a firm grip on her squirming little body.

"Jim! No!"

"But I think, in light of recent events," he said,

taking her off his shoulder, sitting down and wrestling her across his lap. "A nice spanking with my hand will do just fine."

"I'm sorry, Jim, I didn't—"

"Oh, no, you bad little girl. You're not getting away from me this time. This time, you'll pay the price for that flypaper and the bruises I sustained when I fell onto the floor."

She burst out laughing again. Then stopped herself. "I should not be laughing."

"No, you shouldn't. Now, let me make myself clear. From here on out, you give me any more trouble, you play any more practical jokes on me, I will chase you down, pull your panties right off this magnificent little ass of yours, and I will spank your little butt until it's good and red, you hear me?"

"I hear you, I hear you, but you don't have to—"

"Oh, yes I do," he said. And then he began. He slapped her cute little butt with moderately hard spansks, but he had no intention of administering the kind of punishment that he had before. This was a reminder spanking.

"Ow! Jim!" she protested. But she was still giggling.

He spanked one bun, then the other. Fritzie squirmed and tried to get away, but he had her good. Finally, he decided he'd made his point and finished with several good ones to both cheeks at once.

Her rear looked so cute, all pink and mottled, each globe perfectly rounded. He began having thoughts about her again. Instead of letting her up, he began rubbing her adorable behind.

"There, there, now take it easy," he said.

"That feels good," she said.

Jim slipped his hand between her cheeks, and a finger found its way inside her. She was so wet that he found no resistance. Did Fritzie have a secret?

"You're awfully wet, little girl. Does the little girl like being spanked by a big, strong man?"

She giggled. "Uh..."

He let go, flipped her over and took her into his arms, allowing his hand to find that wonderful place between her legs. Then he kissed her.

When he pulled away, he grinned at her. "Something tells me that she liked it."

"Well... maybe. This time. Not those other times, you wasted my butt those other times. I mean, afterwards... maybe. Yeah."

"Is that why you kept tormenting me?"

"Maybe," she said with a sly grin.

"You little brat," he said, kissing her.

"You got it, boy. That nice stern edge I love so well. Man, you're cute when you're angry," she said and then she kissed him.

"You brat. You know you don't have to get me that angry to make me spank you."

"Yeah, but it's more fun when you're a bit mad. I liked it tonight," she said as he stroked her. "I mean, I like that more," she purred.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"Yeah. But sometime, maybe I'll let you use that cane on me. I've been wanting to try that."

"You're gonna have to be awful bad for me to use that on you."

"I take that as a challenge."

He kissed her roughly and played with her until she exploded into an orgasm. He loved the look on her face when she came. She was so uninhibited. So lovely.

"Uh, you're mine now, by the way," he said afterwards. "I'm never letting you go, I hope you realize that."

She looked surprised, then elated. "You'd better not."

"And if you try to run away from me, you know what you'll get," he said.

"Well, then let go, I've got some running to do," she said and then she broke out into wild giggles.

"Brat," he said, kissing her again.

The Competition

Chapter One

When Jack heard a string of swear words coming out of the small Mexican woman in the doorway without an accent, he knew something was wrong. She'd just been speaking Spanish and sounding like she was in her mid-sixties. But then suddenly, she broke out of her accent and began swatting the air and swearing.

"Stupid freakin' bee!" the mysterious woman cried as she held her arm. Then she caught herself.

The look she shot him said it all. Her cover was blown.

A split second later, she turned and began running full speed down the street. She had been following him!

Jack took off after her, but she was running like the wind and was a full half a block ahead of him. When he turned the corner, she had vanished. He spent a full half hour looking for her, but no luck.

It all hit him at once. The voice, the gait of her run, the eyes, it was Pinky Callahan, a rival private detective and a thorn in his side for the previous three years. Goddamned that little bitch!

This was his third sighting of her in the past four days. Now he knew exactly what she was doing.

When he'd been hired by Bob Green to find Green's daughter, he'd been informed that Bob's soon-to-be ex wife had hired a private detective to find the girl as well. The two parents were estranged and in a volatile, nasty divorce. In the middle of the battle, their seventeen-year-old daughter had run away with her no good boyfriend. Both the father and mother wanted her returned, but didn't trust each other and had hired separate detectives. When Jack found out who the rival detective was, he nearly lost his mind. Pinky Callahan was a walking disaster area. She'd stolen countless jobs from him. He hated her.

And now, with the sightings, he knew what she was doing. She was following him around, letting him do all the work on the case. Then she'd run to the clients and appear to have solved the case, all by herself. Horrible woman!

What made everything so much more infuriating was that Pinky was a cute little thing. Sparkling brown eyes, lithe body, bubbling personality and the nicest rack he'd ever seen, not too big, but perfect handfuls. And she was a tremendous kisser. When she first arrived on the scene, she strolled into Casey's bar—the local private detectives hang out—and immediately became the center of attention. She chatted up the fellow detectives in town, trying to get a bead on the business and her competition. Before Jack knew what hit him, he'd told her everything she wanted to know and so had the rest of his friends. But what the others hadn't gotten was a taste of the woman. Jack couldn't remember how it happened, but he and Pinky ended up in her car that night in a heavy petting session. The next day she stole two pending cases of his away from him and solved them within hours. She had made a complete fool out of him.

But catching her in one of her disguises was surprising. Pinky knew how to become invisible. Aside from her amazing skills at social engineering, she had an array of disguises and costumes that would put a theatre company to shame. She could assume any accent, become anyone she wanted. It was a total fluke that the bee had stung her.

But that horrible rotten little wench, following him. She'd done this before, to another colleague of his, followed the man, let him do all the work then swooped in, "solved the case" and took all the credit. And the money. She had no integrity whatsoever. Pinky would do anything and everything to solve her cases.

While Jack's fellow detectives somehow managed to forgive the nightmare for her indiscretions, Jack couldn't stand her. He'd

promised himself that the next time she crossed him, it would be her that paid the price, not him. Jack had spent quality time fantasizing about what he'd do to her if she ever messed with him again. Most of it surrounded ripping those pants off that fine ass of hers and spanking her black and blue.

As soon as Jack lost her on foot, he got into his car and headed to her office. It was time to confront her. Let her know there was no way he was taking her crap this time.

He found her sitting behind her desk, apparently deep in concentration on her computer. She looked up and seemed happy to see him.

"Jack, how are you old buddy—"

"Cut the crap, Pinky. Stop following me. You continue on like this and you're gonna come out on the short end of the stick. I catch you following me again and I'm gonna pound the crap out of you. You hear me?"

"Uh... Jack. Have you taken your meds today?"

"Pinky! Knock it off!"

"Ow. Could you possibly lower your volume? And back the hell up. What are you talking about?"

"Stop. This is your last warning. You follow me again and I'll turn you right over my knee and spank you into the middle of the next millennium."

"Oooo, spank me? Sounds like fun," she teased, leaning back against her chair, her eyes dancing at him.

He wanted to kill her. Right after he spanked her and screwed the hell out of her. Because as much as he hated to admit it, he was still voraciously attracted to the nasty little piece of work.

"Don't push me, Pinky. It's taking all my self control not to take my belt to you right here and now."

"That's called assault, Mr. Valentine."

"I've got more dirt on you than you know, so don't push me, got it?"

"I still have no idea what you're ranting about."

Jack walked over to her and before she could

get away from him, he grabbed her arm and pulled up the sleeve of her shirt. Revealing a huge lump on her forearm, her recent bee sting. Then he saw the Mexican costume shoved under her desk. When he looked down into her face, he saw traces of old age makeup around her eyes.

"Don't, Pinky," he growled. "Don't lie to me."

She ripped her arm out of his grip, but made no move to run. She narrowed her eyes at him. Then she smiled and shrugged.

"Just doin' my job, Valentine."

"Yeah, which is to follow me and have me lead you to the girl."

"Really?" she said lazily. "Is that what I was doing? Are you so sure, Jack?"

"You pulled this same stunt on Tim."

"Tim Macaw? He's an idiot. You can't believe everything he tells you."

"And I just caught you following me. Seems to be a pattern of yours."

"Whatever. You are obviously convinced. There's nothing I can say to defend myself. You've hated me from the word go and I guess you always will. And I didn't reject you, Jack, you rejected me."

"This is not about that!"

"No? I think it is. This animosity between us. It all started then."

"Rejected you? You rotten little—you stole those clients from me!"

"No, I didn't. They came to me. And just because I solved the cases quick, it wounded your ego, so you decided to dump me."

"You twisted, little, horrible—"

"It's just sad, you know? That you liked me this much. Why didn't you just talk to me that day, Jack? All you did was come in and rant at me about stealing from you, you threw my sweater back at me and then never returned my calls."

"Do you deny you were following me today?"

"Yes. I was there before you were. Look, Jack, we're on the same case. Why don't we pool our

resources and—”

“No way! No bloody way, woman! Aren’t you a piece of work? Now you just want to steal from me openly, is that it? Like I’d fall for that?”

“Fine. Well don’t blame me if you come out looking like an idiot again, Jack. I tried to help y—”

“Stop it! Stop the lies! Look, I’m warning you here and now. You cross me again and you’re gonna end up over my knee, get it?”

“Man, you still do like me, don’t you?”

“You’re a nightmare!” he seethed.

And then Jack turned, stalked out and slammed the door behind him. As he walked down the hallway, he could hear her burst of laughter ring out behind him. That was it. She was going down. She wouldn’t be laughing once he got a hold of her. She’d be crying, begging him to stop his punishment. And what a glorious day that would be.

A day later, Jack was lost in his case. He’d gotten a lead on the runaway girl’s whereabouts from an old friend of hers. He’d driven two towns over and was now staking out a huge apartment building. He’d gotten a tip that she normally emailed the friend in the late morning from an Internet cafe located three blocks from the apartment building. She should be coming out any minute.

Jack was sipping on some coffee, trying to appear invisible when he saw a homeless woman pushing a grocery cart down the street. She was arguing to herself, ranting and raving. It bothered him. All the mentally ill homeless people bothered him. No one to take care of them, they wandered alone and friendless, crazy, lost in the devastation of their own minds. This woman, how had she started out in life? She had been a child somewhere, grown up, how had her life come to this? It was so sad.

A half an hour later, the girl still hadn’t come out of the apartment. The homeless woman had gone up the street and then, for some reason, came

back. Still arguing with herself. Her cart was piled high with green garbage bags and a ton of stuffed animals.

Right then, the girl appeared, walking down the stairs of the apartment. She saw the homeless woman and veered to the left, in an effort to avoid her. But the homeless woman locked her sights on the girl and began to accost her.

Now Jack didn't know what to do. He could go and grab the girl, but the homeless woman had just thrown a wrench in the works. Wait. Unless he "saved" the girl from the clutches of the crazy person. Perfect.

Jack got out of his car and began to cross the street to aid the girl. He'd gain her confidence and get her into his car. This should be easy.

As he walked over to her, the girl had stopped trying to get away from the homeless woman and started listening to her. The homeless woman had stopped ranting and was talking in a low voice.

"Hey, leave that girl alone," he commanded in his "authoritative voice" as he approached the two.

It stopped the homeless woman dead in her tracks. She swung on him and began berating him. "You blasted wreck-knocker! All blazes upon thee! God will stop thee!" she ranted.

And then something strange happened. The girl began running down the street like her hair was on fire. Jack started to pursue her, but the homeless woman tripped him and he landed flat his face on the sidewalk.

"You're with the Devil! The Devil has employed thee! I feed you flesh! Dead flesh! Human flesh!" she said, now with a really creepy look in her eye.

Jack got up and immediately put as much distance between him and the freaky woman as he could. But by the time he got to his feet, the girl had disappeared. Goddamn it! He almost had her! Stupid homeless woman!

The insane woman continued to rave at him as he walked back to his car and got inside. As he

drove away, he saw her in his rear view mirror, shaking her fist at him. Great. What luck. All his compassion for the woman had vanished. No wonder no one was helping her. She was horrible. And frightening.

Jack drove around the neighborhood and found the Internet cafe, but saw no sign of the girl. Damn it! He'd been so close! By this time he was hungry, so he found a pizza joint just a few doors down from the cafe, went in and sat down to get some lunch. He got a place near the window so he could keep an eye out, just in case the girl showed.

Well, the girl didn't show, but his most unfavorable homeless person did. No more than five minutes after he'd gotten his pizza, that crazy homeless woman came shuffling down the street pushing her stupid cart. Damn it! What a plague.

He watched as the mentally ill woman pushed her cart up to a truck parked across the street from him and stopped. She whistled and out of a clothing store nearby, came the girl. What?

They talked and then he watched in complete confusion as the homeless woman opened the truck door for the girl. Then she walked around the vehicle and was about to get inside when it all hit him at once.

That wasn't a real homeless woman! It was freakin' Pinky Callahan! Stealing his subject right from under his nose!

Jack was out of the pizza joint and screaming at the top of his lungs, when both Pinky and the girl saw him. The girl hopped out of the truck and ran.

Jack was so mad at Pinky that he opened her door and had her slammed back against her truck before she could react.

"I'm gonna tear you limb from limb!" he seethed.

"She's getting away, you idiot!" Pinky screamed at him.

Which got through to him. What was he doing? Had he lost all sense of reason? His subject was

running down the street and here he was trying to wring the neck of his nemesis? What was he thinking?

Jack immediately let go of Pinky and began running after the girl.

As he turned the corner, a truck passed him. As it got further ahead of him, he recognized the vehicle. It belonged to that Pinky horror! If she got that girl and snaked him on this deal, he'd kill her!

The girl was still running ahead of him, about two blocks away. Then he watched, helpless, as Pinky pulled up next to the girl. A short second later and the girl was in the truck and speeding down the road with Pinky.

Then the little wench had the nerve to stick her arm out of the truck and wave at him! He was going to murder her! Skin her alive! That witch!

It wasn't two hours later when he got the call on his cell phone from his client, the girl's father. The girl had been returned. The strange thing was, the father added, the girl came home of her own volition. She said "the other detective had really gotten through to her". The father couldn't have been more pleased. Then the fateful line. "Maybe this case just needed the woman's touch, ay Jack?" Shaking with rage, Jack slammed down the receiver.

A week later, Jack was headed towards his favorite retreat. He'd taken, then turned down a case. He just didn't have it in him. That Pinky witch had upset him too much. It was obviously time for a vacation.

Jack had a cabin in the mountains. The only way to reach it was by foot. It was a five mile hike over rough terrain to get there, ever since the two bridges had washed out, seven years before. But Jack didn't mind. Without car access, no one ventured out there. Jack owned five hundred acres, and the land surrounding his belonged to the state.

Rumor had it that eventually it was to become a state park, but for right now, Jack had miles of private land all around his forest sanctuary.

After he'd put away his food and stowed his gear, he grabbed a beer that had been cooling off in the stream near his cabin. He walked out onto the front porch and settled into a chaise lounge to enjoy the view and relax after his long hike.

After a few minutes, he saw it, a glint coming from way down the valley below him. It vanished. And then it flashed again. Trespassers? Way out there?

Jack ran to grab his binoculars. Turned out to be a single hiker, down below him, headed right for his place. Jack focused in on the hiker. All he could tell was that it was a person wearing camouflage; the hiker was too far away to distinguish any features. But wearing camouflage? What did that mean? Was the person there to kill him? He'd crossed many criminals in his time, put many felons in jail. Was this one coming to take his revenge?

Jack was on instant high alert. He had his gun ready and waited for the mysterious stranger to approach.

A half an hour later, the hiker was coming into view. Jack got out his binoculars and got the person into focus. The hiker was using binoculars, too, and was looking right at him. The hiker reacted strongly when they saw that Jack had spotted them. And when the person took away their binoculars, he couldn't believe it. Pinky Callahan!

Goddamn it! She wasn't getting away! Not while he had a breath of life left in him!

Jack tore off down the hill after her. While she had quite a lead, he knew this land like the back of his hand. He took a very steep shortcut, but one that cut off nearly a half a mile of trail.

He jumped down off the shortcut, onto the main trail and heard her crashing through the brush, just a few hundred yards ahead. Yes!

Jack picked up the speed and within seconds,

saw her fleeing form ahead of him.

"You stop, Pinky Callahan, and I'll go easy on you! You keep running, and I'll wail the tar outta you, girl!"

Pinky didn't say anything. She just kept running. It wasn't long before she tired and began to slow.

Jack tackled her to the ground where they tussled for a few moments. She was a practiced fighter, but he outweighed her by a hundred pounds. Soon, he had her in a good hold. He looked around and saw it. A handy log nearby. This was going to be fun!

With her swearing a blue streak at him, he picked her up off the ground and carried her over to the log. With a few quick moves he was seated with her over his lap in an inexorable hold.

"Jack, nooooo!" she cried.

"Oh, yeah, baby, are you gonna get yours! I've been waiting for this for three years! Finally, honey, you are gonna get what's coming to you! And I'm just the man to do it! The buck stops here, Pinky!" he said, yanking down her pants and panties with one huge tug. "I'm gonna make this pretty little ass of yours match your name, only it won't just be pink when I'm done, they're gonna have to start calling you Red! " he promised. Then he reached way back behind him and thundered into her perfect white rear with the flat of his hand. "Now take that!"

She jolted from the blow and cried out, loud and long. Jack took a second to admire the hand-shaped red welt rising on her butt and then he really let himself go. Jack wailed into her behind with everything he had. And he just didn't limit his assault to the middle of her buns, he got the whole shebang. He smacked her sit spots until she screamed; he got the sides of her ass, the top and made a trip around the whole thing, again and again.

Her cries were music to his ears. She howled and pleaded and begged and sobbed for him to stop, but he just laughed and spanked her insolent

little ass as hard as he could. This would teach her! Nobody crossed Jack Valentine and got away with it. This had been a long time coming. This little girl had tormented him for long enough. He'd never met anyone before who deserved his wrath like she did. He couldn't remember when he'd had more fun. What a release! Revenge was so sweet!

Finally, his anger was diminishing, she was yowling at the top of her lungs, and he'd made his point. He stopped and took a few seconds to admire his handiwork as she continued to sob and cry. Her ass was redder than a beet, swollen; he'd even caused some bruising in parts. So satisfying!

He abruptly pushed her off his lap and onto the forest floor.

"Don't you ever cross me again, Pinky Callahan, you hear me?"

She didn't even make a move to pull up her pants; she just lay there on her side, sobbing her guts out.

He was not going to feel sorry for her. She had deserved this. She had earned this whupping. It was fully deserved. And he had enjoyed it. He wasn't going to think otherwise.

"Now go home!" he ordered her fiercely. And with that, he turned and left her lying there, crying.

He heard her cries for a long time as he headed home, fighting hard to feel victorious. He had won. Finally, he'd given that bitch her comeuppance. He had been well within his rights to give it to her. How many times had she crossed him? He thought of the little wave she'd given him, just the week before, as she drove off with his paycheck. No sympathy!

Jack had just made it back to his house when he heard the first crack of thunder. A summer storm, very common this time of the year. And then the rain hit. A downpour. Jack was glad he'd made it back in time. He worked hard not to think of Pinky, out there, wet, walking in the rain back to her car, her ass smarting, defeated. He wasn't going to worry about her. She'd find her way back fine.

However, instead of a brief shower, followed by the sun, the storm went on and on. One hour, then two hours. It wasn't long before Jack could no longer stand it. Goddamn the woman! He knew he had to go make sure she'd made it back to her car, or he'd never stop thinking about her. Horrible little bitch!

Two hours later, when Jack reached the parking area and his car, the rain had stopped, but it was getting late. He had just enough time to make sure her car was gone and then he had to get back. To both his relief and anger, he only saw his car. Stupid woman, making him walk out there for nothing when all he wanted to do was to relax. He turned around and that's when he saw it. Her truck, half hidden by some branches. His heart sank.

Damn her! And he hadn't seen her on the trail anywhere, which meant she was lost. Damn it!

Right before dusk, he found her, not far from his house. She was crouching by the creek wearing just her bra and pants, rinsing out her shirt and crying. Then he saw the blood on her shoulder.

He rushed to her side, scaring the hell out of her. Then she began screaming at him through her tears.

"Get the hell away from me! This is all your fault! I hate you!"

"Stop, woman! Let me look at that!"

"Stay away from me! I can take care of myself!"

"No, you can't, it's dark, you're lost, I'm taking you to my cabin, so shut the hell up!" he yelled back at her.

"Go to hell!"

"You're not dying, not on my watch!" he hurled at her. Then he leapt forward, grabbed her and flung her over his shoulder.

He was tired from all his hikes, but she needed his help. As much as he couldn't stand her, he didn't want any harm coming to her either.

He carried her to his cabin, took her inside, set her down by his fireplace and said, "Sit there and don't move or I'll spank you again."

"I hate you," she said, only this time she didn't yell. She seemed subdued, resigned. Almost vulnerable.

Jack lit the fire and then said to her, "Take off those wet clothes."

"Oh, I bet you'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"Pinky! Now!" he bellowed fiercely.

"Go to hell!" she said, her temper igniting.

Swiftly, he grabbed her and tossed her across his lap.

"Did I just hear you right? Did you just say, spank me harder, Jack?"

"Nooooo!"

Jack raised up his hand and came down upon her wet pants with a solid smack.

"Jack, no!"

The Competition

Chapter Two

Pinky couldn't believe she was over Jack's lap again. After he'd nearly pulverized her ass, now he was smacking on it again. The pain was awful!

"Stop!" she cried. She hated pleading, but at this point, she'd do anything to make him stop.

"Will you listen to me, and do what I tell you?" he asked, stopping his torment for a moment.

"Yes, yes! Fine! Please, just stop!"

He did so and let her go. She scrambled to her feet and stood next to the fire, shivering, wet to the skin. Reluctantly, she peeled away her clothes and threw them in a pile next to the fire.

The look in Jack's eye changed. It was clear. He wanted her. She thought he'd gotten over her; she thought he hated her. Apparently his attraction was partially fueling his anger towards her. Well, that and all the rotten things she'd done to him. She had to admit; she'd screwed over the guy pretty good in their recent past.

Instead of kissing her, like he looked like he wanted to do, he grabbed a towel and threw it to her. She hurriedly wrapped it around herself.

"Now sit down and let me look at the shoulder," he ordered.

"It's fine," she said defensively, trying to cover it up. But when the towel hit it, it hurt and she winced.

"Pinky? Spanking?" he warned.

"Okay, fine," she spat as she pulled the towel away from her wound.

Jack came up and inspected it. "Damn, that's nasty. About a four incher. Needs stitches. But we aren't getting out of here tonight. I'll use some butterfly closures on it and hope those hold it. Here, sit down on that chair there, I'm going to go get the medical supplies."

"I'd rather stand," she said. Her ass was still

killing her from his torturous punishment.

He smirked. "Sit down on those pillows, I'll be right back."

Pinky watched as he walked away to another room of his cabin. Jack was a pain in the ass, but one fine piece of meat. He was tall, with rugged good looks. Dark eyes, dark graying hair, a crooked nose that told the tale of some of his fights. A beautiful man. She just wished she hadn't made out with him that night at the bar when she was doing some research into the competition. She'd found out what she'd wanted to know plus a whole lot more. Like the man was a tremendous kisser. But she was still kicking herself over that stupid mishap. She hadn't been able to stop herself and before she knew it, she was in her car making out with the man when she'd known all along that she'd stolen some clients from him and it was only a matter of time before he found out. Predictably, he had been infuriated. And recently, she'd done it again; she'd solved a case to which they'd both been assigned. Which had actually happened legitimately. And she'd even offered to team up with him on the case, but Jack refused. So be it, she'd solved the case and had ended up making him look like a fool. Which had not been her fault.

But she should have known better than to follow him to this godforsaken place, this cabin out in the middle of some forest. She thought he was on a case, one in which she was interested. So she decided to follow him to see where he went and whom he approached. But as it turned out, he hadn't been on a case at all; he'd been on vacation. By the time she'd figured that out, it was too late. He'd spotted her and had come after her.

But she'd really been taken by surprise when he tackled her and spanked her. Nothing had ever hurt so much in her life without causing permanent damage. The man had been nearly deranged he was so angry with her. She'd never experienced anything like it before. And she never wanted to

experience anything like it again.

But now, he was showing her a different side to him. A tender, much more rational side. Which was making him damned attractive to her. Which just infuriated her. Why was she always attracted to such hot tempered men? Jack was a beast. Period.

"Now just sit still, this might hurt some," he said.

"As opposed to what you did to me earlier?"

"You deserved that."

"Bull."

"Don't make me mad, Pinky. Just shut up and let me fix you."

"Fine."

She had to bite her lip a few times, but she managed to stop insulting him long enough for him to clean her up. He was actually quite gentle with her, a complete contrast to his earlier attentions.

"I'll get you a t-shirt and some sweats, you're lucky this is my place and I had extra clothes here," he said.

"Your place? This?" she asked.

"Yeah? Why does that surprise you?"

"I don't know. But it does. No wonder you caught me. You really know this forest, don't you?"

"You bet I do," he said, finally breaking into a smile. Which changed his whole face. The man was undeniably hot. The bastard. No way was she considering sleeping with the man. Not when he'd been such a brute to her.

He brought her his clothes and tossed them to her.

"I'm gonna go change in the other room. I'll be back and then I'll fix us some dinner."

"Dinner? I have to get back, I have a date tonight."

He laughed. "Are you nuts? I'm not taking you back, not after I've hiked those trails four times today. And there's no way you could find your way back without me."

"Give me a flashlight and I'll find my way."

"No way, Pinky, now don't piss me off. You're staying here and that's final."

"But I can't!"

"So he's that special, is he?"

"He's not a he, he's a she. A buddy I haven't seen in awhile. Crap. And I suppose cell phones don't work out here, do they?"

"Nope."

"Damn. This is the third time I've done this to her. Well, there goes that friendship. Damn. Things just... get so out of control."

"Not in my life."

"That's because you're so linear. Proceed in a straight line everywhere. I have a different approach. I proceed like kinda like a blanket bomb thing. Cover everything all at once. Can leave ya scattered, though. I hadn't counted on following you all the way out here. I figured after a couple miles that you weren't on a case. But I was curious... Curiosity killed my friendships."

"You're insane."

"And? Your point?"

"Blanketbomb? Even you know you're a hailstorm of trouble?"

"Well, of course."

"It's intentional?"

"Uh... I don't know. I never think about it, I just do it. So far, it's worked for me. I solve my cases and my clients are happy and I'm one step closer to retirement."

"So you don't like this work?"

"No. Do you?" Pinky asked.

"Well, yeah."

"Oh, well there's your problem right there."

"What are you talking about?"

"You like this job, therefore you care about it, therefore you get emotionally involved...oh. Now I get it. Okay, you're really invested in this thing, aren't you?"

"What? My job? Hell yeah I'm involved. I thought you were, too."

"No. It's a means to an end. I'm good at it, it's the only reason I do it. I need money so I can retire and write mystery novels. All I want to do is to write."

"Write?"

"Yeah, as in putting words on paper, writing?"

"What?"

"It's not that weird."

"No. No, it's not. So you don't like what you do? You don't like the private detective thing?"

"No. Why is this so hard for you to get?"

"Because I... just thought you were like me. You know, drawn to the profession for the same reasons."

"Nope. I'm nothing like you."

"Well, that I know. The lack of integrity thing," Jack said.

"Oh, God. You guys take everything so seriously. All I want is a paycheck. I don't care how I solve my cases. It's not an ego thing with me."

"So you cheat off of others. Steal their information and solve your cases on someone else's back."

"Not often. It's happened a couple times. But it's not like I don't have to work. I just get pieces from others. Then I work hard to put it all together. I don't see why everyone gets so upset about it. I always offer to collaborate, and you guys always turn me down. So what am I supposed to do?"

"You're supposed to find your own sources."

"I have. I just think outside the box."

"Think outside the box—you cheat off our work!"

"No, I don't. You guys all talk to each other, but you won't share information with me. What was I supposed to do? You weren't playing fair, so I didn't have to. Besides, a couple more cases and I can retire. I'll be out of your hair before you know it. So why don't you let me help you with your cases? We'll solve them fast; I can cash out and get away from you. See?"

"I can't believe you had the gall to even suggest

that. I can't believe you just said that."

"You are so narrow minded. And what was up with that spanking? There was something else going on there, wasn't there?"

"What are you talking about? That was a comeuppance. You fully deserved that! You stole that girl right from underneath me! And then you waved at me!"

"Oh, yeah." She burst out laughing. Jack looked like he wanted to kill her. "Sorry!" she said, but she couldn't stop laughing.

"I swear, Pinky," he said, getting up and moving towards her.

She retreated, but he leapt forward grabbed her and pulled her towards him. There was a moment there, he looked like he wanted to smack her, but a whole other factor came into play. He was kissing her before she realized what was going on. And then she didn't care. All she wanted was him.

They made love all over the cabin. Like wild beasts they mated for hours. It was as if their conflict was being played out again, only this time instead of beating each other, they were screwing the hell out of one another. It was feral, animal sex. She'd never had more fun in her entire life. Jack was an amazing lover. So inventive and so... dark. So hot! It was like he was getting even with her by giving her orgasms. The best punishment she'd ever received. Wow!

By the end of their bed adventure, they were both so tired, they ate a quick meal and then promptly fell asleep.

Pinky woke up early; her butt and her shoulder were hurting her. She got up, got a glass of water, started some coffee and then looked around for something to read. She wandered over to Jack's coffee table and perused the offerings. Old hunting magazines, boring. Tool catalog, ultra boring. There was a folder there marked "New Cases". She knew she shouldn't, but she was curious.

She was halfway through his notes when she

heard his bellow. Oops.

"Jack, wait! I can explain!" she said, jumping up and retreating to a far corner of the cabin.

Fire in his eyes, Jack was clearly in no mood for compromise.

"You used me!" he yelled as he began to stalk her.

"I did not!"

"You followed me, seduced me, all so you could steal from me!"

"That's not true!"

"Well, what were you doing, just now? Huh?"

"I was looking for something to read. It was right there, I'm sorry. But you know, I think you're wrong about this recent case, that girl isn't a crack dealer, she's just a—"

"Pinky! I'm gonna kill you!" he said, going for her.

"Jack! No!" Pinky said, making a break for the bathroom.

Jack caught her at the door, dragged her back into the room and tossed her across his lap as he sat on the couch. He pulled her sweat down to her knees, and even though her rear had some bruises from his last attack, he lit into her again.

Pinky howled as he spanked her. She kicked, she cried, she pleaded with him to stop. But Jack didn't care. He was so furious that she'd used him. He couldn't stand it. He really thought she liked him, maybe even loved him. But she was horrible and deserved this.

Finally, he got done and pushed her off and onto the floor. She leapt to her feet, yanked up her pants and roared at him. No distinguishable words, just an onslaught of primal rage. He couldn't remember ever seeing anyone this mad or upset before. She was quite a sight. And as angry as he was with her, she looked damn cute when she was furious.

"You earned that!" he yelled up at her.

Which prompted more fury out of her. She launched a barrage of insults at him, then, abruptly,

she grabbed her coat from its place by the fireplace, turned and blasted out the door.

"Pinky, wait!" he said, suddenly feeling torn. He was still mad at her, but now that he was waking up more, he was wondering if he'd overreacted.

"I hate you!" she screamed back at him as she fled down the hill.

Cursing himself, Jack threw on a coat and some shoes and followed her.

By the time he got out of the cabin, she was nowhere in sight. This was not how he'd planned the morning. He was going to get up, fix her breakfast and make love to her again. The night before had been one of the best nights of his life. He'd had no idea how much he'd desired the little troublemaker. When he'd woken up in the middle of the night and saw her curled up next to him, he'd even had thoughts of marrying her.

He picked up the pace and hurried after her. Was it possible he'd misjudged her? And even if he hadn't misjudged her, why was he so threatened by the thought of her helping him with his cases? She was good. She'd already solved several stumper cases of his. She kept reaching out to him, and he kept shutting her down. Was his ego really this fragile?

As he ran after her, he began feeling worse and worse about the way he'd treated her. Certainly she'd deserved the spanking the day before. But, this morning? After their wonderful lovemaking? He was so worried she was using him that he'd convinced himself that she was.

Of course, she could still be using him. She may not even have a heart, could be all an act. She may have no feelings for him at all. In which case, it was good he spanked her, she deserved it. Fully deserved it. But then again, what if he was wrong? But if he didn't catch up to her, he'd never be able to find out the truth.

Right as he began to wonder if she'd gotten too much of a lead on him, he heard her crying. He

raced ahead on the trail, but didn't see her anywhere. He turned and finally determined where the sounds of her crying were coming from.

He found her, down a gully, holding her ankle and sobbing. The sight was so pitiful, he felt terrible. What if he was wrong about her? What had he just done to himself and her?

"Pinky—"

"You bastard! I hate you! I hate you! Go away! I never want to see your stupid face again! You horrible abusive pig! Go away! Get out of here! Get lost! I don't need your stupid help!"

"Pinky, look, I'm sorry, maybe—"

But she wasn't listening to anything he was saying. She got so mad, so fast, she began roaring unintelligible epithets at him again. Jack didn't know what to do. He'd never seen anyone this mad before. This crazy. It was clear she needed his help, but it was also clear that she wasn't going to let him.

So, he figured he'd wait her out. Stop arguing with her, just sit and wait. So he found a log near her and sat and waited. And waited. And waited. He'd never heard a more unflattering assessment of himself, nor had he ever heard so many swear words in such a short period of time before. But he was patient.

"Why aren't you leaving?!" she finally yelled at him.

"Because I'm going to help you when you finally calm down."

"I don't want your help!" she yelled and then began roaring at him again.

Jack knew enough to shut up and just let her scream.

Finally, she began to run out of steam. She stopped yelling and began crying again.

"I thought you liked me," she cried.

"I do like you."

"No, you don't! You hate me! You keep finding reasons to hate me!"

"No, I don't. And... look, Pinky, when I saw you reading my notes, I... it hit me wrong. Maybe I blew it."

"Maybe?! Maybe you blew it?! What was all that last night?! Was that all a lie?! Are you this heartless?!"

"No. I'm not."

"Yes, you have to be! To make love to me like that and be so frickin' heartless this morning?! You wouldn't even let me explain! You never let me explain! You just try and convict me like I'm some stupid criminal! You jerk!"

"Pinky, if you'd shut up long enough to hear me out, maybe we could—"

"Why should I hear you out?! You never hear me out! You just hate me! I've tried to talk to you how many times?! I've reached out to you, how many times?!"

"I know that—"

"And now, here you are, all trying to be reasonable with me? Go to hell! I'm going home and I never want to see you or hear your stupid name again! You wanted me to leave you alone? Well, you got that! I'll leave you alone, all right!"

"Pinky, please, just listen to me—"

"No! I'm going home!" she said, getting to her feet. Or foot, more like, she clearly had damaged her right ankle. She got up onto her left foot and began hopping up the hill. She got two hops, tripped and fell flat on her face. Which prompted more screaming and crying out of her.

Finally, Jack had enough. He got up, walked up to her—and while she protested and tried to punch him—he picked her up, threw her over his shoulder and headed back to the cabin.

"Put me down, you big bully!"

Jack decided to say nothing and just bring her back and take care of her. Crazy woman. It was a wonder he cared about her the way he did. But did he need this much trouble in his life? No. But would he ever get the night before out of his mind? No. He

had to admit it to himself, he'd fallen for her. And fallen hard.

With her protesting the entire way, Jack carried Pinky back to the cabin. He set her down on the bed and stepped back. And waited.

As expected, she let loose with a huge string of expletives. She tried to get off the bed, but Jack just pushed her back down again. And waited. Every time she tried to escape, he pushed her back down onto the bed and let her scream. Finally, she stopped yelling and stopped trying to escape. And started crying.

After her long cry, she finally stopped.

"You aren't gonna let me out of here, are you?" she asked in what could almost be considered a calm tone.

"No, I'm going to take care of you."

"Why? Why won't you just let me go? Why do you insist on taking care of me when you hate me so much? Earlier, you were getting your rocks off inflicting pain on me, now you want to heal me? What is up with you, Jack? What is wrong with you?"

Jack couldn't answer her. There was only one answer, and he wasn't sure how she would take it.

"You don't have a good reason, do you? No, you're just some bully who gets off on spanking people! Aren't you? I mean, there's no other explanation for this, is there? Is there, Jack?"

"Yes, there is, I'm in love with you," he blurted. He hadn't really planned on it, but he was thinking it so strongly, it just popped out.

Pinky was stunned. She couldn't even move. She just stared at him, her mouth slightly open. Then she got mad again. Real mad.

"You son-of-a-bitch! Now you're trying to manipulate me! Throwing all this love crap out at me! Liar! You don't care about me at all!"

"Yes, I do," he replied calmly. "And I'm not trying to manipulate you. It's for real, Pinky. I love you. I probably always have."

By his tone and expression, Pinky could tell Jack was telling her the truth. Now she didn't know what to do. Jack? In love with her? The night before, she had wondered, by the tender way he looked at her. The way he made love to her. But after their blow-up, she thought the night before had just been an aberration. That Jack had just been overcome by hormones. But now, she could see, she'd been right the night before. The man loved her.

She burst into tears again.

"Oh, for God's sake, now what?" Jack asked, looking confused and upset.

"You're just gonna dump me, aren't you? Break my heart the way they've all done."

"Pinky, what the hell are you talking about?"

"You. You'd dump me. So I tell you the same thing, that I've always loved you, sure, we'd have fun for about a second, and then you'd dump me. You hate me, I mean, I think you do love me, but you don't like me. You hate the way I do business, you hate the way I do everything, we get together, I open up to you and you stab a knife into my heart. No! I'm not doin' it!"

"Pinky. Will you back up there? You have us married and divorced and you haven't even given me a chance yet."

"You're gonna break my heart! Why? Why did you have to go and do something stupid like fall in love with me? I can't take this, Jack, I'm not this strong. I know I look strong, but I'm not. I can't take it. I love you too much to lose you. I mean, really lose you. And I'm gonna lose you."

Jack could only blink at her. "You love me, too?"

"I always have, you dumped me! After that first night we were together. I tried to tell you about that client of yours that came after me—oh, hell. Look, okay? I have no morals, okay? Well, except in the love department, I never cheat on my men, I never lie to them about how I feel about them. Or about our personal lives. I only lie at work and I'm almost done with work, but look, you left me. What's gonna

stop you from doing that again?"

"Wait. You love me?"

"Yes!"

"Then why are we arguing?"

"Because you're gonna dump me!"

"Uh, I don't think so."

"You are!"

"Look, girl, you may have pissed me off plenty. I know you have no morals at work. You explained that earlier. Why you did what you did. It's starting to make a tad bit of sense to me. Even though you do it again, and I'll turn you right over my knee again."

"Jack—"

"Shut up and listen to me, Pinky."

"Jack—"

"Do it or I swear I'm gonna spank you again."

She started to say something, but stopped.

"Good. Look, we're in love, okay? There's no use in arguing about that. And I know it, I'm gonna marry you. And I think it will work. But you're gonna stop lying, and you're gonna stop stealing work from others. We'll team up, you help me with my cases, I'll help you with yours and we'll get along fine."

Pinky was totally confused. Jack was making so much sense it was hard to grasp.

"Is this for real, Jack?"

"Very real."

"Really?" she said, beginning to tear up.

"Really."

"You really love me?"

"I really love you."

"I really love you, too."

"Well, then, what are we doing wasting all this time talking?" Jack said, the look in his eye changing.

"Jack..." Pinky said, beginning to giggle.

Jack pushed her back on the bed and climbed on top. "Now... no more nonsense out of you."

"I'm gonna be a load of trouble to you, Jack."

"I'm countin' on that one, Pinky," he said,
bending down to kiss her.

Discipline & Desire

If you enjoyed this book and would like to read similar stories or novels, please visit www.disciplineanddesire.com

To contact the author please write to disciplineanddesire@hotmail.com