

**Protecting
Jenny
and other stories**

**By
Nattie Jones**

Protecting Jenny and other stories

**By
Nattie Jones**

**A Newsite Web Services Book
Published by arrangement with the author**

All rights reserved.

Copyright 2008 © by Nattie Jones

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:

To CajunHeart

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Protecting Jenny

Chapter One	1
Chapter Two	16
Chapter Three	31
Chapter Four	45

The Contract

Part One	59
Part Two	73

Monroe County: Newsy Newcomers

Part One	86
Part Two	101

The Agency: Ellie's Story

	115
--	-----

Protecting Jenny

Chapter One

Jenny ducked behind the laundry truck and peered out at the chaos. A bomb. Men clad in black were running everywhere. Her patients—the children—were already evacuated.

But she looked at the laundry truck and suddenly knew where the bomb was, remembered the way Assam had avoided her greeting. Noise was everywhere: bangs and pops and blood and cries. She grasped for her cell phone and—

“Ma’am,” she heard.

—and she whipped around, coming face to face with Assam, the nice man who’d almost flirted with her every week, the nice man who brought in the laundry. The nice man who was holding something that looked kind of like the remote control that detonated bombs in the movies.

She ran inside towards the laundry, pushing past an officer and making her way down the hallways that suddenly seemed a maze. She turned down one corridor after another, never quite making it to the laundry room.

And then suddenly it was there in front of her, and a big black box sat in the middle of the floor. She knew, she just *knew*: when it went off, the other hospitals on his route would suffer the same fate. How she knew this was a mystery, but she knew it all the same. She punched at her cell phone while watching the black box. Its display counted down in glaring red letters—

“Ma’am.”

—and the time kept ticking down, four minutes to go, three minutes to go. By some miracle the phone started working, but the timer suddenly started beating like a heart, ringing like an alarm clock with blood gushing everywhere; the timer

sped towards zero like an altimeter in a crashing plane veering towards earth—

“Ma’am, wake up.”

—she gasped in a breath, forcing her eyes to blink—to open, she realized.

“Ma’am, you’re safe. You’re in protective custody. No one can get to you.”

She blinked and tried to place her surroundings. She was in a room with all white walls, a bedroom that was trying to be comfortable, but was too clinical for its own good. She peered down at the sweats she wore—not hers—and climbed out of bed. Ignoring the man, she walked to the curtains.

When she touched them, they were the soft of faux suede: thick and warm. She rubbed her hand on them for comfort while trying to sort out her dream from the trauma of yesterday. She parted the curtains.

“There’s no window,” he said.

She walked to the other curtains. No window again.

“Ma’am? Would you like some breakfast? We have someone here to help you with your...” he cleared his throat “... your transition.”

She turned to look at the man. Typical government neat freak. Suit perfectly tailored and perfectly pressed. Eyes bright and blue, hair reminiscent of military butch, but grown out enough to appear almost normal. She frowned at him.

“Transition,” she repeated. *What transition?* “Why can’t I remember coming here?”

“You were in shock. The doctor gave you something to help you relax.”

She eyed the bedroom door. Would he let her go out? She looked back at him.

“It’s completely furnished. You should be comfortable.”

Comfortable? She turned the doorknob and shoved the door open. It opened into a large, open room. A living room, dining room and kitchen all in one great area. The furniture was clean and functional. She went straight to the curtains only to find, once again, that there were no windows.

"This is insane." She reminded herself to breathe. "This is not reality." She turned a circle, taking in the high, concrete ceiling. "This is not happening."

The circle made her dizzy. Things went a little fuzzy, like when she was young and she'd turn the TV to those UHF channels which wiggled blacks and whites and grays. She shut her eyes, hoping that when she opened them things would go back to normal.

"There's no windows."

"Ma'am, you have to breathe. You're not breathing."

Sounded good to her, but the UHF channel was getting fuzzier and fuzzier. She could feel, rather than see, him striding over and pushing her into a chair. With his hand on her neck, he pushed her head between her legs. She sucked in a breath.

"I need to get out of here." She said it as clear as she could, in her no-nonsense nurse voice. She remembered to smile. "I need fresh air."

"I'm sorry, ma'am, it's best if—"

She shoved his hand off her shoulder and stood up, fighting the return of dizziness at her sudden change in position. When things cleared, she pushed at him again. "I need out!" She was surprised at the sound of her voice as it screeched high with panic. "Get me out of here!"

"We're coming out," he said to no one. She noticed he touched a sort of walkie-talkie fastened to his belt. "I know," he said. "I know," again. "I know." He looked at her. "One minute."

She went straight for the door, barely holding in the panic. Tried it, but it didn't move. It was big, reinforced steel, the kind of doorway that made you grunt just to open it. She pounded her fists on it, but it was so thick it barely made a sound.

He strode over, pushed on the keypad, and the door swung open.

She lurched out into a long hallway, and into another government man. "Who are you, now?" she said, annoyed and not at all interested in who he was. She looked to the left and the right, trying to figure out which way would lead outside.

"It's cold," the first man said. "Would you like a windbreaker?"

She glanced at the jacket in his hand and shook her head. She chose left. There were no windows here, either. Just a long hallway and she felt like running. She walked faster, almost jogging.

"Slow down, ma'am."

She kept going straight for the double doors at the end of the hallway, crashing through them into another hallway. To the left there was another set of double doors, this time windowed. She ran.

"Ma'am!" she heard.

She sprinted.

She burst into the doors, bouncing off of them and landing on the floor when they didn't open for her. She jumped up and jiggled at the door handles until people surrounded her, both inside and outside.

"Let me out!" she heard herself screeching, crazy-sounding. It made her all the more angry because they'd brought her to this; they'd locked her up and *they'd* made her sound like a crazy woman.

She heard the doors unlatch, and she slammed one open and burst into the sunshine. She turned two circles and finally looked up at the sun, as if it

alone could orient her, the sun she'd seen every day of her life, the one familiar thing in this world that was suddenly topsy-turvy and out of control.

The sight of the sun was so comforting, so reassuring that she didn't even close her eyes. Bright pain shot through them, giving her an instant headache, but she didn't look away. If this one thing, this one familiar thing stayed the same, then it was something she could latch on to, something to keep her steadied.

A woman crept up behind the first man, and she instantly knew she was a medic. The woman had a syringe safely palmed and hidden, but ready to use at a second's opportunity.

"I swear to God if you stick me with that thing, I'll—"

The woman stopped her approach and looked surprised that she'd been caught.

"I'm a nurse," she explained to the woman. Jenny took another step away, just to be safe.

"Tea," suggested the first man. "Why don't we get some tea at the Starbucks down the street?"

He sounded reasonable and calm. She didn't trust reasonable and calm; in fact, she didn't trust anyone. Anything. Watching someone you'd been friendly with for over a year try to blow up a hospital—four hospitals, actually—could have that effect. Unlike in her dream, she *hadn't* known what was going on when it happened.

"Ma'am," he said again.

"Would you stop calling me that?" she snapped.

She surveyed the street and saw Starbucks. Not caring if the first man followed or not, she started walking towards it.

"Ms. Williams," he called.

She stopped and whirled around. "Oh, for crying out loud. Call me Jenny."

He had an aw-shucks air about him as he grinned. "My name's Mitch Adams." He stuck out his hand.

She frowned at it. "I'm late for work," she said, noticing his watch.

"Ms. Williams—"

"Jenny!" she corrected again.

"Jenny." He touched her arm, and they started walking towards Starbucks again. "Jenny, I know this has been a traumatic two days for you, but let's sit down and talk about what's happened and what *could* happen."

She realized it sounded reasonable. She recognized that it *was* reasonable. That alone kept her walking towards Starbucks, even though she felt panic biting at the fringes of her composure. She even let him order chamomile tea for her, and let him lead her to a seat in the back corner of the café.

He pushed some buttons on his cell phone and began talking in low tones, still holding the cell phone in his hand. After he turned his head, she realized he had one of those earpieces.

When they were settled, he turned his attention to her. "How much do you remember of yesterday?"

She glared at him. "Everything, of course." Four of the officers—or were they agents?—filed into Starbucks, ordered coffee, and then took up various positions throughout the café. She frowned at ... "What's your name again?"

"Call me Mitch," he smiled. "Mitch Adams."

She watched him as she took a sip of the hot tea. For a moment, she closed her eyes and breathed deeply, embracing the calming effect of its aroma. She cast a glance to the big window for reassurance, and then settled back into the plushy chair.

"Okay. Tell me what you want to know."

"I already told you guys everything."

Mitch nodded. "But you didn't tell me. Why don't you just tell me about yesterday, as you remember it?"

Not *again*. Remembering was just about the last thing she wanted to do. She gathered her thoughts, but before she could begin, Mitch leaned forward and placed a recording device on the table.

"Is that necessary?" she asked, even though it had been a useless question when they'd been grilling her yesterday. Something about recording devices always made her nervous. Heck, it took her ten tries to record the welcome message on her voice mail.

"It will help."

So she told him how the laundry man's behavior had been off, how she'd found the bomb, how she'd seen the bomb timer and called 911 and the three other hospitals that she knew used the same laundry service. Within thirty minutes, there'd been men everywhere, chaos everywhere, and the laundry man had tried to hurt her.

"So why am I locked up?"

"It's for your protection. You thwarted their—"

"Give me a break," she interrupted. "Look, terrorists are pretty much cave-dwellers, aren't they? They're not about to chase after some nameless nurse. I mean, sure, they can get fancy with technology, but they live in the desert."

"Jenny, you're not that naïve."

Okay, maybe she was in a little denial. "Fine, but I've never heard of them caring if one of their men died. They live to die for their cause. What do they care if they go to jail?"

"You notice people." He shrugged. "You're kind, you say hi, you talk to those most people ignore. No one at the other hospitals even *noticed*

the men who came and went with the laundry for the past year. You, however, talked to all of them."

She turned to face him and leaned against the wall. She took another peek around the corner at the man sitting in the car. "But Assam tried to kill me. I was nice to him, and he tried to kill me. Why?"

Mitch settled back in his chair. "Unfortunately, the man you saw last week in the truck is the son of Vito Valentino."

She wanted to laugh; it sounded like some made-for-TV movie. "Let me guess: you're going to tell me he's some big mafia dude or something."

He leaned forward and took another sip of his coffee. "We have enough on the man who attacked you, but you know the people he worked for. You know and can testify against every single one of them. We want Vito's son, and Vito knows you know Anthony, thanks to Assam."

"So you take them away. Can't you take them to that Guantánamo place? Then everything can go back to normal and ..."

Mitch was shaking his head. "It's not going to happen, Jenny."

She watched two men talk into their ears and get up to leave. "Fine, but do I have to go back to that concrete prison? I need a place with windows, a place where I can breathe."

He didn't seem to hear her, because he talked into his own ear. He stood up and pushed away from the table. "Come on."

She didn't have much choice. He practically dragged her by the elbow, leading her out the back, through an alleyway, across a street, and then in a zig-zagging pattern through alleyways so that even she had no idea how to get back to Starbucks on foot.

They finally came to his car, climbed in, and took off, again driving in strange and intricate patterns through the streets. After over an hour of this, she was relieved when they pulled up to a little house, a normal two-story brick box on a normal street in a row of similarly normal houses. Not to mention there were windows, plenty of windows. She suspected they were in Evanston, but they'd taken such a strange route that she didn't know that she would recognize her own hometown.

While he locked the doors, she stood at the front window, peeking out of the curtain. She stared up at the sun, basking in it. The street was fairly deserted, and she was comforted to see a couple kids riding their bikes in circles, calling out to each other.

"If you open that curtain again, I'll give you a spanking."

She jumped back from the window and checked his expression. His face was solemn, but he had to have been joking.

"I'm not kidding."

She shook her head. "You think that of all the houses in Chicago and its suburbs, on all the streets in the Greater Chicago area, they're just going to happen to be wandering down this street, looking for me, at this very moment?"

He frowned. "I've seen crazier things happen."

She backed up a step. "You were just kidding about the... the spanking thing, though."

"Come here."

She backed up another step, and her gaze flitted to his hands. "No, thank you," she said politely. "Why?"

"Because I need you to know I don't care much for keeping my job, but I do care that my charges stay alive." He reached out and tugged on her arm, so that she was suddenly standing right in front of

him. Then he stepped beside her, hooked an arm under her waist, and gave her bottom a mighty smack.

She was so stunned she didn't move.

He smacked his hand down on her bottom again. Her stillness seemed a tacit permission, and he put more effort into his next smack, almost scooping up her bottom.

"Ow!" she jumped up and away from him, rubbing her hands on her bottom. "I can't believe you did that!"

"Next time, it'll be on your bare bottom, Jenny." He gazed into her wide eyes to let her know he was serious. "You should take a nap. It's been a rough day for you."

She did as he said, if only to get away from him and do some thinking.

The bedroom was in the back of the house with windows facing the back yard. The curtains were so heavy and thick that the room was dark, even though it was a bright, sunny day.

He'd *spanked* her, she told herself. She told herself one more time, just because it was so unbelievable. She checked that the door was still closed before stepping towards the dressing mirror.

Turning her back to it, she pushed her sweats down a little. Sure enough, there was a pink handprint swelling across her bottom. She pulled up her sweats and sat on the bed.

Spanked.

And he'd promised another one, if she parted the front curtain again.

She ran through the reasons why it wasn't possible. One, she was thirty-four years old. Two, she was a nurse—an RN—the charge nurse of the children's floor. Three, she was an adult.

Not to mention he was a government agent. She was in ... what had they called it? Protective

custody? She'd almost been shot by Assam; the hospital had been mostly evacuated, and... everything seemed so unreal.

Including the fact that he'd spanked her.

She heard, rather than felt, her breath going shallow again. She heard herself sucking in short little breaths and forced herself to slow down, to breathe deeply and to calm down. She walked to the window and felt only a flicker of concern as she parted the curtain.

It was the back of the house, not the front, after all.

She breathed slowly, looking at the sun. After she steadied herself, she pressed her fingertips to the glass. A desperation and restlessness to get outside clawed at her again, and she flipped the lock at the top of the window.

Just a breath of fresh air, just a breath of the grass-scented summer breeze and a moment basking in the sun. She pushed up the window.

An alarm went off. The house screeched and vibrated, shaking with anger. She backed into a corner and covered her ears.

"Shut it off!"

Mitch burst into the room only seconds later, weapon drawn and ready. She jumped to the other side of the bed. "Don't shoot me!" she cried.

"What happened? Are you hurt?" He went straight to the window and checked the back lawn. With a slam, he shut and re-locked the window, then pulled the drapes over the windows. The room went dark, with only a small rectangle of sunlight escaping to the ceiling. He fiddled with some remote control thing and then spun towards her, angry.

"I just wanted some fresh air," she said, backing up and dropping onto the bed.

"Stand up. What did I say?" he sounded angry, and she flinched as he strode towards her. "What did I say would happen if you opened the curtain?"

"Not this curtain! You just said the front curtain, not this curtain!"

Mitch put his weapon on the dressing table. He turned towards her, and she bit her lip.

"It was a mistake. You don't understand, I just—"

But he pulled her up, only to push her back down onto the bed, resting one hand on her back and using the other to tug down her sweats. She struggled to get away from him, but he pinned her to the bed, letting her bottom hang out over her pants.

Smack! His hand felt heavy and hard. He smacked her bottom again.

"Stay away from all curtains—" his hand snapped heavily across both cheeks "—from all windows—" he targeted only one cheek this time "—and from all doors and doorways." He smacked her other cheek, and the pain jolted her out of disbelief.

"Stop it! That hurts!"

If anything, he picked up the pace. Ten more smacks and she was still struggling, angry and embarrassed. He tugged up her sweats, patted her on the bottom like she was a baby, and then held up the covers.

"Time for a nap."

"A nap?" she spun up into sitting position, incredulous. "Enough! Do you think I'm some little child? What the hell?" she sputtered. "I want out of here. I want your superior, and I want you to let me go! I want to go home!"

And then she was on her belly again, his hand on her bottom. He pinned her again while she struggled against the slow circles he made with his hand. He rubbed her bottom over the sweats,

making soothing sounds as if he could soothe her to sleep.

"Just lay there for a while, Jenny. I know this is rough for you. Just give yourself some time to sleep and rest. You'll need it."

She tossed him a few choice words, but he didn't respond. He didn't let her up, either. He just kept rubbing her bottom until she stopped yelling at him, until her eyes grew heavy and tired, until she took a long, deep sigh and started to relax.

"Just sleep, Jenny."

When she woke, he was gone. She peered up at the ceiling and noted that the small rectangle of light above the curtains had disappeared. A glance to her watch confirmed that it was late in the evening. She threw off the covers and padded towards the door in search of a bathroom.

On her way back, she saw Mitch slip out the door to the garage. Seeing an opportunity when the alarm would be disabled, she seized it. She grabbed her shoes and ran to the sliding porch door, parting the heavy curtains. There was no sound as she unlocked it, although there was a second lock at the base. She unlocked that one, too, slid the door open, and stepped out into the night.

She sat on the back step and put her shoes on, enjoying the sudden freedom. Everything had been so stifling. The moon was glowing white in the sky, and the stars twinkled bright enough for her to think they were a little ways from the city. Maybe she was right? Evanston?

But, she lived in Evanston. Surely she would've noticed landmarks on the way, although with the circular, crazy route they'd taken to get here, she'd gotten tired of looking.

She had running shoes on, she noticed. Not hers, but they fit her perfectly. Her clothes gone, her shoes gone... what if she ran home and slipped in the back, just to collect a few things that would bring her comfort?

And so she ran, enjoying the grid-like architecture of Chicago and its suburbs. It's hard to get lost in a city so well organized, but she managed to often.

Not this time.

After a thirty minute jog, which did wonders for her stress level—she approached her house through a series of side yards and back yards. She set one dog to barking, but it stopped after a shout from his owner. She crept towards her house from behind, grateful for the cover of trees and bushes between her yard and the one behind it.

To her surprise, her house looked awake. Lights were on, windows were open, and shadows flitted throughout the house. She could see the shadows behind the curtains, the lights turning on and off. Like a normal family on a normal street, living their daily life.

It was like the world just decided to take a pair of scissors and—snip, snip—cut her out of her own life.

She sat down on the ground, staring at her house for a long time. Had the government sold it? What was going on? She jumped when a hand touched her shoulder.

"At least you didn't go up to the house."

She spun around. "Who's in my home?" she demanded.

Mitch shrugged. "A couple of agents, waiting." He gestured to a man on a street bench, reading the paper. "Not one of your neighbors, right?"

She rolled her eyes. "I take it he's another of your agents."

He gestured down the street to a car that was just slightly sticking out, as if he didn't have enough room to turn in properly. "Not ours. They're waiting for you."

"How do I know that? Why should I believe you?"

"Because I'm trying to keep you safe." He chuckled. "Let's hope the cleverness with which you escaped this evening will serve you well in your new life. But when we get home, you're getting a real spanking. A good one."

He wasn't looking at her. Instead, he was completely aware of his surroundings, his gaze flitting from side to side and utter concentration on his face.

"Come on, Jenny. Let's get you home and safe."

"Can I have some of my clothes? Some of my things?" She glanced up at the house. "If they're agents, then why can't we sneak in and get some of my things? The men on the bench and in the car ... they know it's not me in there, or else they would've attacked."

"But they will notice if four people are in there instead of two."

"How would they know?"

He put a hand around her elbow and started leading her away. "There's all sorts of ways to know such things. Come on."

And, evidently, one of those sorts of ways detected them, because the car pulled out and started rolling slowly down the street. The man with the newspaper under the streetlight nonchalantly got up and threw his newspaper away. She was about to call it coincidence, when he up and disappeared.

"Come on!" Mitch whispered, and they ran.

Protecting Jenny

Chapter Two

When Jenny watched action movies, she often thought that being chased was over-dramatized. After all, why not just duck behind a bush? Why not just climb a tree, pop behind a car, take a quick turn down a couple of alleyways?

Now she was running for real, and as Mitch dragged her around the neighborhood, she realized why they always kept running: when someone's behind you, you have no idea when they can see you and when they can't. If you go ducking and waiting behind a bush, how are you to know if you were seen at just that moment? How are you to know if you're hidden, or if you're a sitting duck?

Mitch dragged her up and down the rows of houses and in between the yards. At one point, before crossing the street, they hid behind a bush while that lazy car rolled down the street, no doubt searching for them.

She kept looking in all directions, seeing movement where there was none and fearing every sound that crackled into the night.

Never before had she realized how noisy a quiet night in the suburbs could be.

The red Buick finally turned a corner, and Mitch gestured across the street. They ran across at a sprint, and—when she heard a pop and then a ping at her feet—she sprinted faster than she ever thought she could.

They did more zigzags in their knotted route and finally came up to his car. They got in, and he ordered, "Get down!"

But when they'd been driving for ten minutes and her breath had slowed, she climbed back up. He glanced at her but didn't say anything.

"They tried to shoot me," she said, because it was the only thing she could think about at the moment. "They tried to shoot me," she said again, because even after saying it, she still couldn't believe it.

He cast a glance her way as he made another right turn.

After a silence, she added, "Thank you."

"Don't thank me; make my job a little easier next time."

Guilt overwhelmed her. She'd risked his life as much as hers, just because she'd wanted a little fresh air and freedom.

"I'm sorry," she offered.

He just frowned. "I'm still spanking your butt good."

He didn't even glance at her, just focused on his crazy route back to the house, running the car through the streets as if they were rats in one big maze.

She fretted about the spanking he'd promised to give her all the way to his brick-box home. It'd only taken her thirty minutes on foot to find her way from his home to her neighborhood, but it was taking much longer for him to wind his way through his maze back home.

The closer they got, the more her stomach clutched with nerves. A spanking had seemed like such a little thing after she'd been threatened, a small price to pay for someone to protect her. But as the threat of a bullet faded, the threat of a spanking took up greater and greater magnitude in her mind.

"You can't possibly keep your job and actually spank your clients."

"My what?" he cast her a grin and shook his head. "You'd be surprised."

She shifted in her seat. "They can't condone this sort of behavior in their agents. It's sexist."

"I never asked for approval."

"You wouldn't." She wasn't surprised. "You care more about protecting me than you care about me," she accused.

"Look, Jenny, it's my job."

"Spanking me is not your job!" She heard her voice rising and took a deep breath. "What if I told you *not* to spank me?"

He veered around a corner and then looked at her. "You in particular? Or one of my—" he chuckled "*—clients?*"

"Either."

"You, I'd spank. Others, it would depend."

She huffed, and they settled back into a silence that lasted all the way home. When they got back, two agents were sitting at his kitchen table, sipping coffee and chatting. Partners, she guessed, by the way they had an easy intimacy between them.

During introductions, she learned that Jack had been Mitch's partner for years. That's where the similarities ended. Where Mitch was the strong and silent type, Jack laughed loud. His partner, Liz, seemed to be a little more than *just* a partner.

Liz jumped up as soon as they sat down. "Pizza, anyone? Beer?"

They ate pizza and drank beer. They played a few good games of Euchre and kept the conversation light and the banter teasing.

Evidently, Liz, Jack and Mitch were taking turns keeping watch throughout the night. When bedtime came, Jenny glanced at Mitch, wondering if he was going to try and spank her like he'd promised.

It wasn't until after she'd brushed her teeth and gotten ready for bed that he caught up with her alone. He patted her pajama bottoms as she went into her bedroom. She jumped and squealed.

He laughed. "Don't think you're not getting your butt spanked just because we have company."

She gulped.

"But it's been a long day. We'll take care of business tomorrow. Is that all right with you?"

She gulped again and made some squeaking sounds, unsure if she said something coherent or not. He tweaked her nose—*tweaked her nose*—and left her alone in the bedroom, closing the door behind him.

With no windows she could open, she felt panic claw at her. She strode to the door and yanked it open. He pivoted in the hallway and raised an eyebrow at her.

"Gets kinda stuffy in here at night," she said. "All right if I just leave this open a bit, so the air can circulate?"

Mitch's eyes crinkled, and he laughed in a way that made her feel good inside. "Sure, Jenny."

In the morning, she enjoyed tea with Liz and conversation with Jack. When Mitch came through the door, all conversation quieted. His gaze immediately went to her. "Good, you're up." He glanced down at her plate. "Finish your breakfast."

She rolled her eyes. "Good thing I know doctors with worse bedside manners than you." She laughed and pushed her plate away. "I'm done, thank you."

Actually, she was still a bit hungry. Her hunger was a small sacrifice to make; she'd rather be hungry than be ordered about like a child.

"Good." He strode over to one of his drawers and started clanging utensils around. She went back to reading her newspaper. Next thing she knew, he was standing at the head of the table,

smacking a thick and wide wooden spatula against his hand. "We've got a matter to discuss."

She flushed. Blood surged into her face so fast she felt tears threaten. Embarrassment choked up her voice. "You're kidding," she said. She swallowed and cast a glance towards Jack and Liz munching on their sandwiches. "I don't think so."

Liz squirmed and avoided her gaze. Jack stared directly at her. "You'd do well to listen to Mitch. He's never lost a charge yet."

She stood up and backed towards the couch. "I can't believe you guys! You're just going to let him ... to let him ..." But no more words would come, and she was so overcome with embarrassment that she ran to her room and slammed the door shut behind her.

She crawled up on the bed by the pillows and hugged her knees to her chest. Taking deep breaths, she ordered her embarrassment away. After all, *he* was the one who'd suggested a spanking. Why should she be embarrassed? *He* was the one who'd threatened her, so *he* should be the one to be embarrassed.

She dropped her head on her knees and breathed, ordering her composure to return.

Mitch walked in. Dropping the spatula on the bed, he sat down next to her and started talking.

"Jenny, you said in the car that I cared more about your safety than I cared about you. This is true because it's my job to keep you safe, and it's not my job to care about you."

She fiddled with the edge of a pillow.

"That said, I do care about the people I protect. I care about you enough that I'll miss you when we part ways—and we *must* part ways—and I'll think of you when you're building and living your new life."

"Will I ever see you ... after?"

"I hope not. If you see me, then something's gone wrong. Let's hope that doesn't happen, okay?"

She nodded because it seemed to be the reaction he was waiting for.

"Now about your spanking," he said.

"They're going to know!" she dropped her voice to a loud whisper. "They're going to hear me! They're going to hear me being spanked! How can you do that to me? How can you embarrass me like that, when my whole life has already been fucked up and ruined?"

And all of a sudden the reality of everything crashed into her, and she started sobbing. Big, broken sobs and she didn't even care anymore who heard. She felt like a child, but she burrowed under the covers, curled into a ball, and bawled.

"I wa-want my life b-b-back," she gasped out in stuttering hiccups. "I w-w-want everything to-to-to go back the way it—" she sucked in a whistling breath that hurt her chest "—the wha-way it was."

Her chest heaved with the effort she made not to cry. She knew she was close to hyperventilating, so she reminded herself to push each breath out as long as she could. Finally, leaning back against the headboard, she pulled a pillow into her arms and hugged it for comfort. "It's just not fair."

She shut her eyes as her sobs quieted. He patted her knee and stood up as Liz came in.

"I thought some tea might help," she offered.

Jenny opened her eyes and scooted towards the nightstand. Liz had even brought a sugar bowl and a creamer. With effort, Jenny focused on filling up her teacup with the tea, two spoonfuls of sugar, and a touch of cream.

Liz left, unfortunately, leaving her alone with Mitch again.

She set down the teacup. His face was as unreadable as ever, but his eyes seemed compassionate. Maybe it was just their blue color. "Are you going to spank me now?"

He waited a beat but didn't answer.

She was too spent to be sorry or embarrassed. "You don't understand. I didn't mean to. I just panicked. I had to get out, and once I did, I had to see my old home. I just wanted some reality." She noticed that she was rubbing her hands together and stopped. "I didn't think," she said.

He nodded and patted her hands. "I know," he said.

She couldn't help but be surprised. "You do? Really?"

"Of course." He smiled, and his eyes twinkled, but then he frowned again. "You're still getting spanked." He held up a hand when she started to object. "No, you're still getting spanked. It'll help ensure that next time you *will* think before you act."

She stared down at the wooden spatula laying on the bedcover. She just knew it would hurt. "I can't believe that what you do is legal. How can Jack and Liz let you treat me like this?"

He shrugged. "Truth is, I don't care. I do this job because I want to keep people safe. Sometimes a good spanking can do wonders in teaching a new charge how to behave safely in her new life."

He grinned. "And besides, I've seen Jack light into Liz's bottom enough times to not worry about it."

"Are you kidding me?"

He just smiled. "Why don't you take a nap and—"

"Good lord! Last night you put me to bed. I just woke up, and you want me to take a nap? Do you have a nap fetish or something?"

"You've been under a lot of stress, not to mention that you've just had yourself a good cry—"

"I'm not taking another nap, Mitch."

He pressed his lips together and nodded. She bit her lip when he picked up the wooden spatula. After pulling out the straight-backed chair from the desk, he set it in the middle of the room.

"Come on, then."

"Oh, no. I don't think so." It was bad enough that Liz and Jack had heard her sob; it'd be worse if they heard her spanked. "They'll hear."

"Consider any embarrassment you might feel as part of your punishment. Now get over here."

She just shook her head. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been spanked. Maybe one time when she was a child, maybe her mom took her over her lap and spanked her once, but she could barely remember it. She certainly couldn't remember why. The thought of being spanked had never occurred to her in her adulthood. Not once.

She couldn't even work out what she *felt* about being spanked as an adult.

"Why do you want to spank me? Do you think I can't reason out the fact that I need to stay behind the curtains and inside the house?" She sat up in bed. "Mitch, I was almost shot! That didn't fail to enter my awareness."

He just sat there, spatula in hand, listening to her rant.

"You act like I'm some nitwit, stupid female, like I'm a child."

"I don't think you're a nitwit, nor do I think you're stupid. I think you're courageous and brave; look at what you did." He gestured with the spatula. "You saved four hospitals. You'd evacuated your floor before all the others. You faced down a terrorist and lived." He leaned back in his chair.

"You're generous and kind, too. What kind of society do we live in, that only you know each and every man and woman who came to pick up the laundry? You're a charge nurse on the third floor. How did you ever cross paths with them in the first place?"

She shrugged. "The cafeteria is down the hall. Everyone crossed paths with them. I can't be the only one who regularly talked with them."

He just sat there silently.

"So if you don't think I'm a nitwit, then why are you spanking me?"

"Because I want you to know I'm stronger than you," he said with perfect seriousness.

Now that just pissed her off. "I can kick your ass, buster."

He laughed. "I'm sorry, sweetie, but you can't. Come on, it's not a cave-man thing; it's because I want you to feel like someone else is going to keep you safe. I want you to listen to me and know that I'm going to protect you."

"So what?" she stood up and started pacing. "And I could kick your ass!"

He just chuckled again. "Face it, Jenny. It's your choice: a spanking or your life." He angled his head towards her. "Is it really such a hard decision?"

She leaned against the desk, flustered. "But it's *not* a spanking or my life. I know not to go out now. I'm an adult; I can reason. I don't need a spanking."

He nodded. "Okay. So you're telling me you've learned your lesson, and you're confident that you won't ever open a curtain again, won't open a window, and won't go out without protection?"

She breathed a sigh of relief. He finally understood. "Yes!" she even offered him a smile.

He just narrowed his eyes. "Are you willing to bet your life on it?"

She started to say yes, but he interrupted.

"To bet your *life* on it?" he repeated. "Are you willing to risk *dying*, and bank on the fact that you won't panic again? Won't let your fear overwhelm you into putting yourself in danger?"

She didn't know what to say.

"I didn't think so," he answered for her. "Come here."

She bit her lip and felt tears well up in her eyes. The truth was, she was trembling. She walked over to him and stood before him, and she trembled. He reached forward and hooked his fingers into her sweats, pulling them down to her knees. When he tugged at her panties, she could barely breathe, let alone look at him.

With her sweats and panties at her knees, she felt *beyond* nude. She was fully dressed down to socks and shoes, except for the one part that was most vulnerable: her bottom. As she stood before him, clothed, but with her greatest vulnerability exposed, her lip began trembling, too.

She bit at it and tried to keep from crying. "You're going to hurt me!" She sent him an accusing glance, but she could only bear to look at him for a second; she was *that* embarrassed.

"Naw, I'm not," he said. Turning her to face his leg, he guided her over his thigh, and then used his other leg to pin hers.

She squeaked again.

He rubbed her bottom in circles, trying to soothe her trembles away. "I'm not going to hurt you," he repeated.

She seemed smaller, over his knee. With her little butt wiggling under his hand, she looked like a gymnast ready to catapult off a beam or something. He bet she'd like to catapult off his knee.

She twisted her head up to flash those pretty blue eyes that were filled with tears. "Let's just get this over with!" she snapped in a little-girl hurt voice. "If you're going to do it, do it!"

He chuckled and slapped her bottom. He waited for her reaction. She didn't cry out or squeal again. Instead, she clutched the carpet for all she was worth and emitted something akin to a low growl.

And then: "Shhhhh!!!" She glanced around as if someone could see into the bedroom. "Can't you do that a little softer?"

"Hah!" he barked. He slapped her butt again, in the same way he'd slap his knee. "That's a good one."

"Owww-uh-hushhhh!"

He laughed and smacked her butt again. He couldn't help it; he'd never spanked someone who'd made him laugh before. What a cutie. She was back to the low growl, and he gave her a few good smacks in a row.

"Nuh-uh!" she cried. "I don't think so! That hurts!"

He laughed at her spunk and spirit. She'd been pretty down since the incident, and he wondered if this wasn't closer to her normal personality.

"Let's focus." He smacked her butt three more times: one on each side and one across the middle. "You're getting spanked because the next time you panic, you're going to choose to get some tea instead of running out into danger. Are we clear?"

"What are you going to do if I say no?"

He smacked her again, this time hard enough that she squealed, and his hand itched. "Spank you until you see it my way." He grinned a little, knowing that would irk her. Then, feeling a little guilty for finding her cute when she was under duress, he rubbed the latest sting from her butt. "Listen, Jenny, we've talked enough, haven't we?"

She lowered her voice. "I just don't want them to hear us!"

"Sweetie, I'm sure they already have, and I know they definitely will. Let's get past that and focus on what's important."

Evidently, what was important was getting her spanked. His hand came quickly now, crashing into her butt with quick ferocity.

She grasped at the carpet for balance and gasped for breath when she heard a knock on the door. She struggled to get up, but when he smacked her bottom again, all she could do was go still in utter dismay.

"Come in," Mitch said.

Jack spoke, "Listen, the prosecutor would like to speak with Jenny an hour earlier."

Embarrassment washed through her, and she gasped and squeaked. She couldn't wiggle out of his grasp, so she sunk her teeth into his leg as hard as she could.

"Ouch!" His hand came down heavy and hard, which was worse. Now she'd not only been seen with her bottom naked in its current position, but she'd been seen getting *spanked*.

She was so mad she could spit, and Jack was chuckling.

"Don't worry, she won't be here for another two hours, after lunch," Mitch responded.

Jenny was so overwhelmed with the indignity, she could only say, "Get out!"

She let out a frustrated cry when her bottom got smacked again.

"Apologize," he ordered.

She sucked in a breath and held it. Things got worse when Jack walked completely into the room, kneeled down on the carpet, and looked into her eyes. To her complete surprise, he asked just about the last thing she expected him to ask.

"You okay?"

"No," she said, stunned. "Yes." His eyes were so sincere and friendly. "No, I don't know," she said.

But he waited for her to decide, gazing at her so respectfully, that she said, "I'm sorry; I'm just embarrassed."

His mouth flashed a smile that quickly faded into solemnity. "Of course." He stood up and gave her his own smack. "You need to stay here and stay safe. We'd rather you stay in the first building, but we know you're having some claustrophobic issues from the incident. Right now, we just need to make sure you'll stay where we put you. Otherwise, we can't protect you."

She felt him walk away and heard the door click behind him. Two men spanking her—it had been a heady feeling. She was surprised that his smack had made her feel *less* embarrassed.

But it had made her feel like an inconvenience. Her running didn't just put her in danger; it put those in charge of her safety in danger. Guilt seeped into her embarrassment, and she found she wanted to cry.

"I'm sorry," she whispered to Mitch.

She grunted as he leaned down and picked up the wooden spatula. Her stomach clutched, but she ordered herself to be brave.

"This is going to be a real spanking, Jenny."

She nodded, and then she felt a smack. It wasn't as heavy as his hand, but it stung like a bee—except wider. She crawled forward an inch, but that's as far as she could get. The spatula started attacking her with quick regularity: up one side, down the other, and then right across the top of her thighs.

She struggled not to cry and struggled not to squeal. She clutched the carpet and struggled not to crawl off of his lap.

The spatula wasn't letting up, though. If anything, it smacked faster and faster, almost like a machine. All of a sudden, he was smacking her bottom so fast she thought it was a machine. It burned, burned, burned, stung like a huge glowing ember just smoldering its way deep into her skin.

And she couldn't get it off.

When the pain got so she thought she'd cry out, he switched his attack to her other cheek. This time she knew what was coming and struggled for all she was worth. But, first, her legs were tied by her pants, and, second, his leg locked hers. The same incessant burn scorched her again, and when it stopped, she burst into tears.

The spatula lightly tapped the top of her leg, one then the other, and then he played back and forth with snappier strokes until she started crying for real. She stopped worrying about how much longer he was going to spank her and whether he would ever stop.

There was no comfort as her tears drenched the carpet, but when he was done, he pulled her up into his lap. Pushing her head against his chest, he rocked her until she stopped sobbing and started to feel self-conscious about her state of half-undress.

"You're going to be okay," he said, watching as she pulled up her pants and straightened her clothes. "Once the trial is done, you'll be given a new life. A house, even. Wouldn't you like a little house with a white picket fence? Anywhere you want."

She laughed at that. "Hawaii? Santa Barbara?" She extracted herself from his lap and sat on the bed across from him.

He laughed, too. "Well, it's not quite as easy as all that, but we'll do what we can."

"What about beforehand? How long before the trial? How long until ... until we part ways?"

"Could be weeks, could be months." They stood up and headed towards the door. Before opening it, he turned to her. "How's your butt feel?"

She blushed. He waited, and she finally shrugged. "Hot."

They locked gazes, and his grew dark and aroused. But then he put a smile on and winked.

She rolled her eyes.

Protecting Jenny

Chapter Three

The spanking that had burned her bottom, that had made her feel like pain would become an everlasting condition, suddenly filled her with calm. As the door shut behind her spanker, Jenny turned towards the bed. For the first time since she'd faced the prospect of death, she felt like she was safe. For the first time in her adulthood, she'd been spanked.

Strange, life was.

In two hours, a prosecutor would come: one step closer to locking the danger behind bars. It felt a little like locking up an angry and roaring lion. The cage begins to look small and flimsy, and the beast within seems ready to leap right out of his captivity and tear into your throat.

Would she spend the rest of her life fearing some goofy mafia kid, even if he was locked up? Fearing some crazy conspiracy to blow up every building she walked into?

Who was getting locked up, anyway? What was abandoning her life and crawling into a new life, but a cage of her own? That cage still felt small and flimsy, and the world outside would look stronger, smarter, and more threatening.

And yet she felt calm, a sort of fearful and resigned calm, like that moment she'd stood before Mitch, and he'd pulled down her pants. The spanking was going to happen no matter what. *Life* was going to happen, no matter what, she decided.

She'd learned that when her parents had died, crashed into a wall of rock after slipping on a patch of black ice. She'd been transplanted then, too. Given a new life, a new family, a new location. Why should this feel any different?

Life didn't stop for anyone, and her fear didn't make a difference in the world. She sighed and stared at the bed, deciding a nap would be nice.

Not that she was catering to Mitch's nap fetish.

A knock woke her before she was ready to wake, and she had to climb out of a deep haze chaining her to sleep's embrace. For once, she'd slept soundly and deeply without even a hint of a dream. She blinked and stretched, then yelled she was coming when the knock sounded again. She pulled on her sweats.

She ran her hands through her hair to comb it and figured it was good enough. It wasn't until she was halfway to the kitchen that she remembered they'd all heard her crying like a baby while being spanked.

If they hadn't all stood and turned to look at her, she would have run straight to the bathroom. The prosecutor stood with presence, a gleaming woman of polish with shiny blonde hair. It pressed to her head in obedient rows straight to her bun, not a single show of defiance to be seen.

Jack smiled warmly at her, and Liz grinned as if her best friend had come to visit. It gave her a happy feeling in her heart, even though she was looking at some kick-ass perfect lawyer that made her feel like a messy child.

Jenny cleared her throat to make sure her voice would sound strong. "I don't suppose I have time for a shower," she said, her voice cracking. *Maybe a haircut?* she thought. *A makeup session? A new wardrobe?*

Mitch walked over and tugged a lock of hair to the other side of her head, then patted down a few wild hairs she couldn't see. "I thought you could use the sleep."

Thanks, Mitch. She looked at the perfect woman and smiled with all the confidence she could muster. "You must be the prosecutor."

"Victoria Masters," the prosecutor introduced herself with her glossed lips. Even her hand was appallingly perfect as she extended it across the table towards Jenny, pink and white nails in a neatly done French manicure.

After they gathered around the table, Jenny watched the woman delicately fold herself onto the edge of a chair. Jenny would bet her last dollar that Victoria had never been spanked in her life, certainly not as an adult.

Victoria pulled out a white legal pad from her briefcase. After clicking a voice recorder on, she set it in the middle of the table.

"In your own words, tell me about the hospital incident on Monday."

She related the story again, as exhausting as it was. Victoria asked some—no, a lot of questions, and Jenny finally stopped her after about two hours of mind-numbing conversation.

"When is the trial? How long before I have to, you know, be a witness?"

"Pre-trial hearing is tomorrow. Could be a week or two, could be months." She stood up and brusquely started packing her things up to go. "For something of this magnitude, we could be in trial next week."

"And then I can leave?"

"Yes. Then you'll start a new life."

Jenny couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief when the woman left. She walked into the kitchen with Liz and started clearing out the dishwasher. Now that they were alone, Jenny felt self-conscious again and wondered what Liz thought of her. She'd done a fair bit of carrying on while she was being spanked.

Liz opened a cupboard for her. "She's the kind of woman that can make a model feel like a redneck."

Jenny burst into laughter. "When I walked into the living room and saw her, I had this overwhelming urge to run to the bathroom and groom." She turned a circle in the kitchen, surveying its contents. "I don't think I can take another pizza for dinner."

She left Liz and went out into the living room.

"Where's Mitch?" she asked Jack.

"He had to go home, feed and walk his dog or something."

"He has a dog?" For some reason, she'd thought he'd lived here. On closer study, it was comfortable but not homey. Not clinical like the concrete apartment had been, but still not quite a home.

He stood up. "A big old mutt named Rosie."

She thought about that, and then chuckled. Mitch, with a dog. Mitch, with a life. She wondered if he walked the same route every morning, the dog dragging him through his neighborhood streets as if no one was out to get him.

Then she reminded herself that no one was out to get Mitch; they were out to get *her*.

At that moment, Mitch walked in. Anger touched at her, or was it jealousy? It suddenly seemed so unfair, that he should get to keep going on with a normal life, and she was going to have to start all over. No friends, no home... no dog.

"Can I get a dog?"

Liz walked into the room, drying her hands on a dishtowel. Jack pivoted to face her, and Mitch froze, mid-stride. All three of them looked at her in astonishment.

Mitch finally spoke. "A dog? You want a dog?" He cocked his head. "Now?"

She shrugged. "No, I mean... when I... *move*." She liked that word. Moving sounded like a normal choice, something people did every day. "Who's going to clean my house? Sell it?"

But when they explained it to her, she discovered that she didn't really want to know. They were 'disposing' of her old life as if it had never been.

"Can I get the picture of my parents on my nightstand?"

And tears bubbled over when they told her they could, but they'd have to give her a new picture frame—just in case.

"Come on, Jenny," he said. "How'd you like to sit out in the backyard for awhile, enjoy a glass of wine?"

When they were settled, she took a sip of wine and glanced his way. "I never thought I'd enjoy sitting outside quite so much."

"Funny, the simple things we take for granted in our society."

She nodded and leaned back on her elbows, stretching her legs out over the bottom step of the back patio. The crescent moon shone with the brightness of a full moon. She breathed in the night air and took another sip of wine.

"So you have a life, huh? A dog? A home?" She cleared her throat and made her voice nonchalant. "A wife? Kids?"

"Not much of one, yes, yes, no—" his voice cracked "—and no."

She would have laughed, but his face seemed to be holding back emotion. "I sense a story there."

He shrugged. "It was years ago. I was on a particularly complex assignment, and my fiancé not only discovered she was pregnant while I was gone, but lost the baby. She never forgave me for not

being there." He sighed. "I can't say that I blame her."

"It's not your fault, you were—"

He cut her off with uncharacteristic harshness. "Let's not go there," he snapped.

She blew out a breath and told herself not to get angry. She'd touched a sore spot, that's all. She uncrossed her arms and folded them gently in her lap.

"So, the dog," she said, primly changing the subject. "I hear her name is Rosie?"

It was like she'd pressed a valve on a tire. All the tension just hissed out of him as he blew out a breath. When he was done, he smiled. "A mutt," he said. "I named her after my favorite color."

"Your favorite color is *rose*?"

Mitch chuckled and slapped her leg goodheartedly, but it still stung. "The color I prefer on female bottoms," he said.

She rolled her eyes. Inside, she was a mixture of embarrassment and... something else. The tingle of the skin he'd slapped traveled up her leg. Her face grew hot, and she was grateful the dark hid the blush she could feel on her face.

"How long have you been doing this?"

"Spanking women? All my life, I suppose. Spanked my high school sweetheart, even."

"Oh for crying out loud," she said, rolling her eyes. "I meant this witness protection thing."

He chuckled. "About fifteen years."

"Sheesh," she said. "You don't look that old."

He gaped at her. "Darling, you've been a nurse for twelve. I'm not that much older than you."

She leaned back. "Wow. Time goes fast." She laughed. "There was a time I never thought I'd do *anything* for twelve years."

He lifted the wine bottle and topped off both hers and his own glass of wine. "I guess it doesn't

have to be a horrible thing, starting over. It's not like I've got family, or even real close friends. I mostly just work," she said.

"That's the spirit."

"Do you ever dream of starting a new life?"

He just looked at her.

"You know, you help people do it all the time. Don't you ever wish you could start over?"

He took a long drink of the wine, draining the glass. "Sometimes."

"It must be fulfilling, helping victims find new lives."

He laughed, but he didn't sound amused. "Most of those *victims* are witnesses because they got their own hands plenty dirty. Not often we help regular folk, or innocent bystanders like you."

"Oh." She felt a little naïve. "Of course, that makes sense."

He leaned against the porch railing and shut his eyes for a moment.

"We have a lot of legend-building to do tomorrow. You should get to bed." He stood, and she stood.

Things had gone awkward, and she didn't know why. She tried a joke. "You seem to be obsessed with getting me to sleep," she said, but she followed him. "What's a legend?"

He held the door open for her. "A new identity, complete with backstory. Where you were born, who were your parents, where you went to school... You'll get a new driver's license, social security card, birth certificate. Credit cards," he added.

She pondered that while she walked through the door.

"And you're cute when you're sleeping." He grinned. "Didn't you know?"

She squealed when she felt a big smack across the seat of her pants.

Jackie Benson, that was her new name. Jackie Benson, thirty-four year old from Indiana—at least she would be a year younger—and she could keep her current profession. She was pleased.

"After the trial," Liz was telling her, "you'll get a professional makeover. New style of clothes, new hairstyle, new hair color." She grinned. "At our age, we have to start coloring anyway."

"I've always wanted dark brown hair."

They taught her how to make a cash box, where to hide it, and what to do if her cover were blown. When she asked for something to protect herself with, they hemmed and hawed until she insisted.

She got her way, but the next day they took her to a firing range and taught her how to use it. It was a little thing, a cute little gun with a pearl handle.

Okay, it was ridiculously girly.

"Is this thing really going to work?"

Mitch frowned. "Honey, this thing can kill someone."

She shuddered.

After a day of practice, she not only felt confident about firing it if necessary, but she wasn't scared to fire it. She even thought she could hit a reasonable target.

Mitch drove her home and dropped her off. When she went in, a pizza steamed on the table. Liz and Jack were digging in with gusto.

"Are you kidding me? We've had pizza almost every night!" She refrained—with effort—from stomping her foot. "I don't think so. I want takeout from that little diner down the street from my house. I'm dying for their medium-rare cheeseburger, with lots of extra pickles like I usually get it."

Jack paused, pizza slice halfway to his mouth. "We can't do that. We can pick up hamburger fixings."

She shook her head. "I'm tired of this. I want the food I like, and I want to stop hiding out here. Why can't we go out to Olive Garden or something? Fuck pizza," she said.

She looked up to see Mitch standing in the doorway and frowning at her. "Jenny," he said.

She looked away and flushed with embarrassment. She suddenly felt ashamed, which in turn, made her feel angry. It wasn't her fault she was locked up. "Look," she said, but when *she* looked, he was gone.

Jack and Liz were both watching her as she burst into tears. "I'm sorry," she said. She was starving, so she grabbed two pieces and put them on a paper plate, and disappeared into her bedroom.

Victoria could be a bitch.

Jenny sat at the table, enduring her aggressive questioning. It was supposedly practice for the trial tomorrow, but she was tired of it. Victoria was not only attacking her credentials as a nurse, but was accusing her of being party to the whole scheme.

"Are you kidding me?" Jenny huffed. "I'm a children's nurse, for crying out loud."

"How often did you speak to Assam?"

"Every day! That doesn't mean anything, I was just—"

Victoria interrupted. "Just answer the question!"

"But that will make it sound like I conspired with him!"

Victoria stood up and leaned over the table, invading Jenny's personal space. "Did you?"

Jenny slapped her palms on the table and stood up. "Fuck that. I'm done. I'm tired, and I'm hungry, and I'm not doing anymore of this insanity today."

Victoria nodded. "Fine." She slid her legal pad into her briefcase. "It's just business. It's just preparation. The defense isn't going to be nice to you, no matter what you've been through."

"Thanks for preparing me," Jenny said dryly. She reminded herself that Victoria was on her side, but it didn't seem to help. She was tired. She was scared, and she wanted to go home.

But she couldn't go home. She couldn't go shopping, and she couldn't go to her favorite restaurant. She couldn't go see her friends, and she couldn't even get a damn dog yet.

"Bye," she snapped at Victoria, and went straight to the bathroom to sit in a hot shower. "Bitch," she muttered under her breath.

A hard smack landed on her bottom, and she jumped into the bathroom. "What the hell is that for?" she demanded with a hiss. She glanced furtively towards the kitchen, praying Victoria was already gone and hadn't heard.

Mitch stood, frowning at her. After a moment, he said, "Take a shower. Relax." His frowned deepened. "And get rid of the damn attitude, or I'll help you get rid of it."

She slammed the door in his face. She turned the water on as hot as it would go, and stretched out in the tub. As the steam washed over her, she tried to breathe and relax.

Forty minutes later, the steam was gone and the water turned lukewarm. She got out of the shower just as annoyed as she'd gone in. She dressed and crawled into her bed. She didn't mean to be unfriendly, but she didn't want to see anyone.

A knock sounded an hour later. "Dinner, Jenny."

"I'm not hungry," she said, pouting.

"You have to eat."

"I don't have to do anything," she returned. She strode to the door and opened it a crack. "And I'm tired of meeting Miss Perfect Victoria in these damn sweats you keep giving me. I want clothes, real clothes." She slammed the door shut.

"Stop slamming doors in my face, young lady." He didn't open the door again, though.

She managed not to curse at him. Instead, she stared at the door, glaring at it with all her might.

"I suppose if we got dinner at your diner, you'd be hungry."

She made a face, even though he couldn't see. "I suppose I would, too."

"You're acting like a child."

"Damn right." And she didn't feel guilty about it at all. If he insisted on treating her like a child, she could damn well act like one.

He opened the door.

She backed up, fear mixing with her anger.

He frowned and crossed his arms over his chest, the universal sign of dominance. "You want a spanking?"

She said nothing, and then stuttered when she realized he was waiting for an answer. "No... no, of course not."

"Come here."

She backed up. "No way." She shook her head. Since she'd run out of room to back up, she backed up around the bed and back towards the desk. "I said I didn't want a spanking. No."

He just stood there while she gulped, squirmed, and tears filled her eyes.

"I don't want a spanking," she said again, her voice cracking into a thin whine.

He strode towards her, stopping an inch away from her. A sob bubbled up in her chest, but she

managed to swallow it. She couldn't look up at him, but she felt his presence, so close, she could barely breathe. They stood like that for a long while.

She held her breath as he lifted his hand, and was so surprised when he wiped a tear off her cheek that she jerked away.

He sighed and dropped his hand. "You're on the witness list tomorrow. We'll have to take you in early." Then he turned and left, shutting the door gently behind him.

In the morning, they provided a suit. She demanded a hair straightening iron and some gel—how else could she do her hair? They had to go out and get it, which almost made them late for the trial.

During the trial, she couldn't watch. She sat with Mitch and Liz in a little room with wooden walls, shivering at an oak table and playing cards. Lunch was served, and Victoria came in for a moment to prep her again.

Miss Perfect Lawyer was nice this time.

After an afternoon of more cards and more waiting, Jenny was tired and frazzled. "I want a real dinner tonight. I don't care where you get it, but I want a real dinner."

Into the silence, she added, "and it's cold in here."

Suddenly a car backfired in the parking lot. Jenny jumped out of the chair and away from the window, everything quickly going white with little black dots. A second later, she realized she was on the floor with Mitch and Liz standing over her.

"It's just a car," said Mitch to Liz.

Liz touched her. "Jenny! What happened? Are you okay?"

At just that moment, Victoria strode into the room. "We're in recess until tomorr—" Her heels clicked on the floor until her strappy shoes were by Jenny's head. "What happened here?" she demanded.

Jenny shut her eyes and growled. Grabbing Liz's hand, Jenny pulled herself up and brushed her clothes back into order. "Nothing. Nothing happened." She turned heel to face the prosecutor. "So you're telling me I've got to come back tomorrow, and do this all over again?"

"Yes."

Jenny lost all control. "Fuck that!" She collected the cards for want of something to do with her hands. "I'm not coming back. Fuck this!" She threw all the cards on the floor in one angry motion, scattering them everywhere.

Mitch stepped between her and Victoria. "I'll take care of this." He must have sent Liz away, too because they were soon alone. He turned toward her and frowned. "Pull it together, Jenny. This isn't you."

"Fuck you!" she screeched. She swiped at tears running down her face. Because she felt horrible because she felt so ugly inside, so scared, so angry, she said the meanest thing she could think of. "I hate you!"

Mitch stepped close to her. "You have a choice. You pull it together, we go home, you get spanked."

"I'll take door number two," she snapped.

"You get spanked *here*, you pull it together, we go home, and then you get spanked again."

"Fuck that." All she wanted to do was run away.

She didn't know how it happened, but within a dizzy second she was suddenly over his knee, her hands touching the cold floor. "Let me—"

His hand spanked her once. Then a second time.

She gasped and stopped ranting. She didn't know why she quieted, but all the ugliness seemed to drain out of her. She started to cry big sobs that shook her body, even when he pulled her up into his lap and pressed her face into his chest.

He stroked the back of her hair until she started hiccupping. He wiped her face, and straightened her hair, all while she sat in his lap like he was Santa Claus. When he was done putting her back together, he stood her up and patted her bottom towards the door.

She hoped that would be the end of it, but when they got home, Liz and Jack weren't there. Only her and Mitch. She wished for the buffer of Liz and Jack, worried about the house, which seemed so quiet.

As soon as the door closed behind him, he touched his belt. "This isn't you, Jenny." He unlatched the buckle, and she thought she was going to die on the spot. "Bedroom," he ordered.

She ran. She backed herself into the bedroom, waiting with disbelief as his buckle jingled its way to the bedroom after her. When he entered the room, he pulled the long belt from its straps, palmed the buckle, and doubled it into a loop.

"Get yourself naked from the waist down."

She couldn't speak.

"I'm not going to discuss it with you. You need a spanking, it's obvious."

"Everything can't be solved with a spanking!" Tears ran down her face again. "I said I was sorry!"

"No, you didn't say you were sorry, and anyway, this isn't about that. You need a spanking, pure and simple."

"Why?" she cried.

He shook his head. "Naked," he said. "Now." *Shit, shit, shit*, was all she could think.

Protecting Jenny

Chapter Four

She gulped and stared at him from the other side of the bed. The belt swung from his hand, every jingle of the buckle sending tingles of nerves through her body. It looked so big and heavy. The rough leather looked old and soft, but menacing.

"Okay, see... nuh-uh," she said, shaking her head. "I don't think so." She swallowed and touched a hand to her throat. "That thing looks scary."

"Come here," he said softly. "You'll feel much better when it's done."

Her lips trembled. "I won't! I promise I won't!" She wrapped her arms around herself. "It won't make me feel better."

"Jenny, you've been on edge for days now. You're ranting, you're screaming, you're calling people names, and you're lashing out at the people trying to help you."

She shook her head. "So what?"

"So." He twiddled the belt. "So, it's not you, Jenny. It's time to step up to the plate and be a woman about the whole thing."

"Be a woman? You mean, saving a damned hospital isn't woman enough for you? *Four* hospitals, in fact? Do you think your standards are a little high?" Her throat grew narrow as emotion choked her words, and her voice pitched higher and higher with each word.

"Jenny, if this doesn't make you feel better, I'll make sure you get that hamburger from the diner you've been talking about."

Jenny blinked.

"Medium rare with extra pickles," he added.

She blinked again. Then she laughed, except she couldn't get a smile on her face. "Are you

kidding me? You're bribing me to submit to a spanking with a *hamburger*?"

"Yes."

But that was a real smile on his face, she was sure of it. Then she was blushing, and next thing she knew, she was chuckling.

"That's ridiculous," she said.

"I'm bribing you, so you'll accept something you really need, Jenny. Something that will make you feel better."

She just shook her head. "You're crazy," she said. She believed he meant well, but she still thought he was nuts.

His face darkened, and he took a step towards her.

"Okay! Okay!" She pushed at her pants and her hose. "I'll do it!" She pushed them down to her knees and sat on the bed. "Just stay over there." She pulled off her heels and sighed. "But next time, try chocolate."

"Noted," he said. "Now get over here."

But when she got to him, she bit her lip. Tears welled into her eyes. "Mitch," she said softly. "I really am scared." She couldn't even look at the belt.

He touched her cheek. "Also noted." He turned her around and guided her hands onto the bed. "I'm going to be here. I'm going to help you through it, don't worry."

And then, as if he'd flipped a switch and become a different person, his voice grew hard.

"You will stop *cursing*—" he punctuated the word with a whip of the belt across her butt—"you will stop *raging*, stop *ranting*—" whip, whip—"pull it *together*, and behave like a *woman*."

He stopped. She panted, surprised at how much it hurt, and equally surprised that it was bearable. She wanted to whine, and she wanted to beg him to

stop, but he'd said that *be a woman* thing. She wasn't sure she should—or could—even cry.

Turned out, he didn't give her a choice.

She managed to hold back her tears when he pressed a hand down on the small of her back, making her bottom stick up higher. She managed to keep from crying out when he raised the belt and attacked her bottom with gusto. She even managed to keep from sobbing when he sped up, lashing her bottom with quick strokes that wouldn't stop coming.

He stopped without a word, sat down next to her, and then pulled her over his lap. He wrapped an arm around her waist to keep her still, but when the belt started attacking her upper thighs, she let out a screech and started kicking.

"Stop," he said. He waited until she calmed down to order, "Toes on the floor, and spread your legs."

She kicked her legs a little more and then tentatively stretched one leg so that her toe touched the floor. "You're going to hurt me if I do," she cried.

"I'm not going to hurt you; you know that. I'm just going to give you a good dose of pain. A little medicine can go a long way in improving one's attitude."

She swallowed, focusing on breathing.

"Get in position, Jenny."

Tears started running down her face, and she choked on her words. "Okay, but if I do, will you promise not to spank me right away?"

All of a sudden, the reality of her situation struck her. The first thing she noticed was that she wasn't asking him *not* to spank her. The second thing she noticed—and it was with a bit of a shock that she noticed this—was that she felt *submissive*

to him. She would do what he said, no matter what he answered.

The third thing she noticed, as she laid over his lap, was how *intimate* she felt with Mitch. With the way she was turned slightly towards him from the effort to get away from the belt, their stomachs were practically pressed together. It was comforting, even more so because of the pain she felt on the other side of her body.

Her bottom smarted, and yet she was turned towards her punisher for comfort. The paradox of the situation was beyond any comprehension she could work out in the few minutes she had before the next punishing component of his plans.

With hesitance, she stretched her other leg out, digging her toe into the carpet.

She held her breath.

When the belt didn't attack her bottom again, she started breathing. Slowly, it dawned on her that he was waiting. For what?

"Spread your legs, Jenny."

Oh, that. She flinched. Inching her toes out, she realized just how exposed she was. "I think I could make a good case for sexual harassment," she joked.

He went still. "Is that how you feel?"

She instantly felt bad. "No, it was a joke."

"Bad joke."

She swallowed. "I'm pretty exposed here." Her voice cracked. "I'm feeling..."

When she didn't finish, he prompted, "Feeling?"

She shook her head, tears bubbling up again.

"Jenny, I can pretty much see how a part of you is feeling, at least."

Considering what she imagined he was looking at, she blushed.

He seemed to get down to business. His manner grew brusque, even as his voice thickened.

"Your legs are going to learn a lesson from the belt now. I expect you to stay still for it."

"Or what?" she shot back.

She got silence. Then, "If you really need an 'or what,' I'll stop."

Choice? *Now* he was giving her a choice? Her legs were trembling from the strain of her position, or maybe from nerves.

"If we stop now, do I still get the hamburger?"

His hand left her back and he leaned back. "Jenny, was that a joke?" He said it like he was truly unsure.

She sighed. "Yes, that was a joke." She twisted her head up to look at him. "I don't see how this is going to make me feel better, though."

"Do you trust me?"

After a few thoughts, she decided, "Pretty much." After a thoughtful nod, she added, "Usually."

"Then here we go."

She couldn't help it. She cried, "Oh, no!"

The belt attacked her legs, leaving painful burns behind each stroke. She tried to stay in position and submit to the punishment, but it took a mental fortitude she'd never realized necessary. He whipped the belt down across the top of one leg, and she cried out when the end bit into her inner thigh.

"This hurts!" she cried.

"I want you to remember just how much this hurts, next time you think of copping an attitude. It's not you, Jenny."

The belt whipped across her other leg, and she cried out again. "*I'm* not me anymore! I'm Jackie! Jackie Benson!"

He belted her leg one more time. "It's not going to be Jackie Benson either. You understand?"

The belt lashed her quick and hard. *Of course* she understood.

What she didn't understand was the way she started to feel grateful for the pain, for the way the flight instinct drained out of her and was replaced by something akin to love. Something that—even though she was crying her heart out—made her chest fill with warmth.

Why, when he was causing her so much pain, did she feel such trust and respect for this man?

When he finally stopped, she just sobbed into his chest, wishing she could hide there. "You must hate me! I've been a total bitch lately. I just—"

He interrupted her. "I don't hate you, Jenny." After a moment, he corrected himself. "Jackie."

She did that little growl under her breath, but just kept on sobbing. He held her until she stopped crying, rubbing her back until she drifted off to sleep.

She woke up when the door squeaked open. She was warm and cozy under the covers, and she let out a happy sigh when he walked in.

"How's the girl doing?" he grinned at her.

She found herself both blushing and giggling as he sat next to her on the bed. He popped open the cap on a bottle he was holding.

"Turn over."

She was surprised at how quickly she obeyed. She remained still as he pulled down the comforter, baring her legs and bottom. Rubbing the lotion in his hands to warm it, he chuckled.

"What's so funny?"

His hands started spreading the lotion up and down her legs. The first instant it touched her welts, it stung, but then the lotion changed the pain into a pleasant warmth.

He finally answered her as he massaged the lotion into her tender bottom. "You wouldn't like it if I told you."

"What?" She craned her neck around to look back at her legs and bottom, searching for some weirdness that would cause him to laugh. "What's wrong? What's wrong with my butt?"

He laughed openly this time. "Nothing, Jen — Jackie."

"Then why are you laughing?"

He sighed and patted her bare butt before pulling the comforter up over her. She flipped over and stared at him with narrowed eyes.

"Well, I was just thinking that it's amazing what a good spanking can do to a woman's disposition. Call me a Neanderthal, but I love to see a woman happy and sweet and... compliant."

"Cave man," she shot at him, then giggled. "You know, that was kind of fun."

He raised his eyebrows.

"I don't know. I just feel so at peace right now. So happy and safe. Everything feels like it's under control."

"Uh-huh," he said. "You're certainly smiling. Does that mean I was right? Does that mean you feel better, now that you've been spanked?"

She let out a giggle and looked down, blushing. "Well, I really wanted that hamburger, but I guess you were right."

He sort of bopped her on the top of her head, and left. She stared after him. A minute later, he came back in the room with a plate holding her favorite hamburger in the whole world.

"I got it for you anyway," he said.

She thought he winked at her, but it was so quick she couldn't be sure.

Either way, it was a good hamburger.

The trial was awful. Miss Veronica Prosecutor was nice enough, for a change, but she'd been right. The defense lawyer had not been nice at all.

The days after her testimony, however, were pretty fun. She'd never considered herself much of a girly-girl, but it was a girl's dream. New hair color, new haircut, new hairstyle... even a whole new wardrobe, courtesy of the agent who poured over magazines with her to help her develop her "new style." She even got new makeup and new jewelry.

Liz led her to a mirror, and she couldn't help but admire the pretty reflection staring back at her.

And then Mitch walked in.

She stopped spinning and stared in the mirror. She didn't even recognize the person in the mirror. It wasn't *her*. It was Jackie Benson, stranger and usurper of Jenny Williams.

She stared at the mirror. Jenny Williams was dead. *She* felt dead.

Tears ran her eye makeup. "I'm gone. I don't even know that person." She eyed this Jackie Benson, this person looking as perfectly put together as the prosecutor. "I feel like a fraud."

Mitch stood behind her, surveying her image in the mirror. "It's just a new name."

But it wasn't *just* anything. "I'm gone," she said. "There's nothing left of me. I don't look like me, I don't live in my house, and I'm not even going to live in my city." She swiped at her eyes, leaving a black smudge on her cheek. The smudge seemed to uglify her face, and she took a strange comfort in it. "I'm not Jenny Williams."

She turned around to look at Mitch, feeling lost. "Where did I go?" A sob pressed against her chest. "Who am I?" She pressed a fist against her lips to keep from crying. "How am I going to do this?"

She plopped down on the bed.

"It doesn't matter if they get me. I'm already dead."

"Jenny, it's only—"

"Jackie!" she cried on a sob. "It's Jackie now!"

"It's only a name. A haircut, new clothes. You're not dead." He squeezed her shoulder. "Don't make this more than it is. It's just a change. People change their names all the time."

She waved her hand towards the door. "Go away, please. Just go away. I need some time."

They left, and Mitch paused at the door, his brow lifted in question.

She shook her head. "Please go away."

They left her alone for the rest of the evening, only disturbing her to ask if she wanted dinner. She didn't, but Mitch brought her some anyway.

"I'm not hungry," she pouted.

He started to say something, but then he just set the plate down on her nightstand. He leaned on the bed next to her, one hand on either side of her legs.

"Usually the effects of a spanking last a little longer than a day or two."

He was teasing her, she realized. She did a little giggle and bit her lip. "Usually a girl isn't learning how to be another person, and isn't about to uproot her entire life and start all over again."

She noticed that she was running out of breath, as if talking had been an effort. It was more like his proximity was an effort. She swallowed and looked up into his eyes, parting her lips.

He put a finger on her mouth. "You'll be leaving tomorrow," he said.

"Are you going to come with me, get me settled?"

He shook his head. "No."

It sounded so final. So cold. So decisive. Her voice sounded both hollow and scared when she asked, "Will you cuddle with me? Just hold me?" A tear threatened. "I'm going to miss you, Mitch. You've set a high standard for the one."

He touched her face gently, and then laid down next to her, pulling her into his arms. She leaned her head against his chest and took comfort in the way it rose and fell with his breathing.

When she thought he was asleep, she whispered, "I don't want to leave you, Mitch Adams."

When she woke up, she was alone. She threw on her new black jeans and red sweater, trying to feel comfortable in the new style. After palming some gel and rubbing it in her hair, she was pretty close to looking put together.

She could get used to the five minute wake up routine.

She walked out to breakfast, joining Liz and Jack.

"Where's Mitch?" she asked casually while pouring herself some coffee.

They exchanged looks. Jack cleared his throat. "Mitch isn't good at goodbyes."

She choked on her coffee and set the mug back down. "Isn't *good* at..." she trailed off. "Goodbye? Am I leaving right now?"

Liz smiled, but it was a sad smile. "In an hour. You'll take three flights under three different names, and then drive to—"

"Hawaii?" she asked.

Jack let out a snort. Liz shook her head regretfully.

"California?" she tried.

After nearly two days of relentless airports, a hotel, three strangers, and a five hour car drive, she was in Wyoming. Cricktown, it was called, probably after some redneck had called the creek running through town a 'crick.'

Unless it was named after crickets, or something. She wasn't sure that would be any better.

But it was a new life, new beginnings, and no one could get to her. She should be grateful. She'd dreamed often about a little cabin in some godforsaken place. Funny how what you often want, isn't really what you want once you get it.

Would the reverse be true? She'd wanted Hawaii, and she'd gotten Cricktown. She'd done everything Mitch had said, and where had she ended up? Some little town miles from an airport. Some little town where she'd stick out like a sore thumb as a newcomer.

He sent her to the cold, lonely country of Wyoming, and he didn't even care to say goodbye. She felt her anger rise up, even noticed that she was almost holding her breath and starting to tremble a little.

Good thing she wouldn't see him again because if she did, she'd kick his ass clear to Hawaii. She'd make sure—

A siren interrupted her thoughts.

Damn! she thought. She took two deep breaths. *Be Jackie Benson, become Jackie Benson.*

But she was so scared to lie for the first time, for real, that her whole body was trembling. She reached into her purse and pulled out her wallet. The officer knocked on her window, and she rolled it down just enough. She was so nervous she couldn't even bring herself to look at him.

"Howdy," he said. She gulped. "License and registration," he ordered.

She was glad to give her hands something to do. She reached into the glove compartment—spilling out most of the contents in her nervousness—and finally managed to pull out the little folder that contained the registration. She handed that over with her drivers' license.

Remember your cover story, she reminded herself. "I'm Jackie Benson," she blurted. "I'm moving to Cricktown, here—" she cleared her throat—"because I heard you were opening that little clinic, and I got a job offer as a nurse there. I'm from Indiana, and I'm thirty-four, and I went to college in—"

"Just license and registration, please."

Shit, she thought. *I'm babbling. He must know I'm lying.* She wondered if he could see her trembling hands as she handed over her identification. Would it hold up? She tried not to hold her breath as he went back to the car to run her information.

What if someone forgot to enter her new identity into the system? What if they forgot some important, glaring detail on her identification? What if her car wasn't really registered? What if—

He was back, this time growling at her. "Are you aware you were going sixty miles an hour in a thirty-five zone?"

She forced herself not to wring her hands. "I'm sorry, I was just feeling a little—"

"Nervous?" he finished. "What are you hiding in that car of yours?"

"Nothing," she said, her hands gripping the steering wheel so hard they were white. *Relax*, she ordered them. They fluttered to her lap, wringing together in consternation.

He growled. "I'm going to have to ask you to step out of the car, please."

Tears bubbled at her eyelids, and she was outright shaking. Her cell phone was in her purse; should she call the number they'd given her? She hadn't even gotten to her destination, and she'd already blown her cover.

And was it legal to have a derringer in her car? She'd asked for one, and they'd both trained her and arranged for it, but was it registered? Mitch had told her the specifics, but she'd barely been listening. Could she be arrested for having a gun with her?

She burst into tears.

"I'm sorry, officer, it's just I'm so nervous about my new job—"

She heard a chuckle. "Geezuz, Jenny, will you look at me?"

She cringed. Her first thought was that her cover was entirely blown, and her second was that she recognized that voice. She blinked back the tears until her vision cleared.

"Mitch!" she flung open the door, jumped out of the car and straight into his arms. "Mitch! You're here!" She hugged him fiercely. "What are you doing here?"

He patted her on her bottom as he held her. "After fifteen years on the job, I thought it might be fun to try a little change of pace." He chuckled. "Plus, I thought you might need a little more practice on your cover story."

"Obviously!" she giggled, even as tears ran down her face. "I'm so glad to see you, to see anyone... just someone I know."

"Look," he said, "me coming out here, it doesn't mean that you have to... date me or anything. I know I'm just a familiar face, but—"

"Are you kidding me?" she laughed, for the first time seeing uncertainty in his eyes. "What, you want to go steady or something?" she giggled.

"Yes," he grinned back at her. "We'll have to make it look like we just met."

"It'll be fun, with you here!" He laughed, as she couldn't seem to stop hugging him. "I hate you for surprising me like that! For leaving me like that!"

He smiled ruefully. "It seemed to be the thing to do, at the time."

She stared at him in shock. "What? Leave me, or leave your job? That's a big change after fifteen years."

"It's been coming a long time. I think I was just waiting for you."

She heard a bark and looked toward his sheriff's car. "Is that Rosie?"

He grinned as she ran to meet his dog. "Oh, and Jen—er, Jackie?"

She turned. He had that look in his eyes again, the look he always got before he spanked her. She felt a little nervous, tingly with anticipation and just enough fear to make her lick her lips in arousal.

"Yes, Officer?"

"I spank for speeding tickets."

All she could think was *yummy*.

The Contract

Part One

It was a Sunday different from all other Sundays.

I sat in our white wooden breakfast nook, enjoyed my once a week treat of Lucky Charms, and let the sun streaming through the windows warm my skin. It was a typical lazy Sunday morning in my house, and I knew my husband would come down in a few minutes looking scruffy and—even after these seven years of marriage—looking cutely edible.

I smiled as he descended the stairs with all his grunts and groans that I had thought cute the first few months of marriage, then annoying for the next year or so, and finally such an ingrained part of our morning ritual that I usually thought nothing of them at all.

He came to the table with his rich, dark brown hair sticking up all over the place and grinned. I should have taken note then—Chris does not, in general, grin before his morning cup of coffee.

"I did some reading last night."

He had a proud look about him, as if he expected congratulations or something. Considering he was an avid reader and read every night, I needed more information before doing my wifely duty of stroking his ego.

"Oh?"

He ran a hand through his hair to flatten it, but of course it just popped out in new directions. Then he sat across from me, which was my second clue that something was amiss. Normally I got a grunt, barely a passing glance, and he never, ever, sat across from me until he had his steaming coffee mug embraced between two hands as if holding a sacred object. Then he would blow on it exactly

three times to cool it (which, as you'll see later, doesn't actually work), raise it in both hands, and sniff it with his eyes half-closed in what looks like sexual ecstasy. Finally, he would take a sip that would—without fail—burn his tongue.

My dearest husband burns his tongue every single morning, so usually the first words I hear from him are "Ow!" followed by an inhale through pursed lips that sounds like wind through a tunnel, and finally a "Mmmmmmmmm—" drawn out just long enough to annoy me—"Mm!"

Then, and only then, would he look at me. And to his credit, he would smile with one side of his mouth and say "Good morning, sweetie. Good coffee."

But here he was, sitting across from me wide-eyed and eager, the coffee pot ignored and untouched on the kitchen counter.

"I was perusing the internet, and found some sites on contracts."

Since my husband is an attorney, I nodded appreciatively as if interested. "That's great, honey."

"D/s contracts."

That got my attention. It had taken two years to train my happily vanilla husband to spank, and reluctantly spank, at that.

"D/s," I repeated, laying my spoon down and resigning my Lucky Charms to a fate of neglect. "But, we're DD." I glanced over at the coffee pot to make sure that I had, indeed, made coffee that morning.

"Semantics, shmantics, Jen darling."

Now, I don't know if any of you readers out there have been up close and personal with a lawyer, but they are way too picky with words. My husband would never say 'semantics, shmantics.' Never.

But, apparently, he just did.

Evidently, I was gaping at him in a bit of a shock, because he pulled from (where? I don't know. Behind his back? Under his shirt? Behind my ear?) a stack of seven or so papers.

"These are some samples of D/s contracts."

Not to sound redundant, but I repeated, "But, we're DD."

"Well, yeah, but that's not the point." He started spreading out the papers with the same enthusiasm he had spread out pictures of various homes when he had announced to me our readiness to look for a house. "Look, we could do a contract."

"Um," I said, staring forlornly at my now soggy cereal. Lucky Charms must be eaten fast, or else the marshmallows dissolve and the rest becomes quickly soggy and a bit gross, to boot. "Why would we want to?"

Stupid question. Chris loves contracts passionately. I think he became a lawyer just so he could write contracts. He even managed to persuade me to not only have and sign a pre-nuptial, but managed to make it rather romantic and sweet.

"Well, you're the one who brought up this head of household stuff, but you had to take charge and practically train me to spank."

I gnawed at my lip. I try, as much as I can, to make Chris feel like everything is his idea and that he's in charge. Not for any DD reason, it just kind of makes me laugh inside when he struts around the house as proud as can be over his "great idea" which was actually something I wanted and planted in his head. It makes him happy, so it makes me happy to dupe him a little. Gives me a little power rush, you know? Men are pretty adorable creatures—even the most manly man has an irresistible and slightly gullible little boy inside.

"I made some coffee this morning." After all these years, I didn't think I needed to mention it.

As if I had said nothing, he shuffled the papers excitedly, which I had yet to glance at. "See, we could make a commitment to each other and our relationship—our special relationship—with a contract, just like D/s!"

I glanced down. "But, I don't want to call you Master." Not for real, anyway. Sometimes I do the Bewitched thing and say 'Yes, Master' when he's being particularly bossy, but that always ends with him sticking his tongue out at me while we have a good chuckle.

"That's okay, we could come up with our own expression of commitment. We'll use the D/s format to renew our marriage vows, in a way, and to make a commitment to our lifestyle."

I frowned at his boyish excitement. Not that it wasn't all romantic and stuff, but I'm not really one for change. "Don't rock the boat," my mother used to say, and my father would chime in with "no need to go fixin' what ain't broke in the first place, I always say."

"Don't you want some coffee?" It came out a bit shrill for a casual question.

"No thanks, honey."

I didn't know what to think of that, so I picked up my bowl and carried it to the sink, throwing the poor soggy cereal into the jaws of the garbage disposal and rinsing them down the drain. I even wiped out the sink, despite the fact that I'm usually not the type of person who is overly concerned with a shiny, sparkling sink.

I finally turned to him and asked, with a bit of trepidation, "So. What's wrong?"

Chris was starting to look a little disappointed in my lack of enthusiasm, like a little boy who was

about to get his bubble burst. I felt a twang of guilt, so I sat down and worked up an interested smile.

"Wrong?" he asked.

"I mean, if you want to change our relationship, what's wrong with how it is now?"

Chris was gathering up the papers, looking even more dejected. "Nothing, I just wanted to add ... a new dimension, a little excitement. It's no big deal."

As anyone in a long-term relationship knows, 'no big deal' is usually the 'one little thing' brought up for years in the and-you-couldn't-even-do-this-one-little-thing-for-me argument. He stood to finally get his cup of coffee, and I grabbed his hand. We have a pretty good relationship, and we do go out of our way to try and give each other happiness.

"Okay," I said, with a smile that I hoped conveyed enthusiasm.

His eyes lit up, and he flashed his cute little boy grin. "Okay?" he asked.

I sighed. "Yes."

So that's how it started, that Sunday different from all other Sundays. The television was not turned on the whole day, not even during the football game I'd overheard him arguing about with his buddies over the phone the few nights before.

Perhaps, I should take a moment to explain how we first came to spanking. See, I grew up fantasizing about spanking. Usually, it was a teacher who would suddenly see me and think me special. So special, in fact, that they needed to be stricter with me and teach me discipline and hard work. Generally, this extra attention was applied with a paddle or belt to my bare bottom.

Gradually, over the years, I started to feel it was a bit weird to be having these thoughts. I'd be daydreaming in class, and I'd stop and look around. The other students were all either writing notes,

taking notes, or looking at the teacher in concentration. I'd wonder if any of them were thinking of spanking stories inside their head.

Invariably, I'd come to the conclusion—more and more often, as I got older—that I was just a little bit different in this area. So I cursed my fantasies and looked for a nice boy to come along and sweep me off my feet.

Chris and I met in a laundromat by our college, and we talked all night while we did our huge piles of laundry. I was pretty impressed that he seemed interested in me while I was in my laundry-doing clothes (an old, worn pair of sweats and a stained, threadbare t-shirt from my high school swimming days).

We had a very normal, uneventful courtship (we never did the break up then get back together dance that so many young couples do) and we had a normal, one-year engagement followed by a normal wedding with a white dress in a normal church in front of two or so hundred normal friends and not-so-normal family.

Then, we had a normal marriage, and we bought a normal house in a normal neighborhood.

I suppose it was a bit of a surprise to him when I let my decidedly un-normal fantasies invade our lives.

It began one night, about three months after we had moved into our new house. Chris stormed into the living room and informed me that he had had it up to here—he pointed to the middle of his forehead, I guess indicating that there was still a little room left to frustrate him—with my constant spending on the new house.

You know, thirty dollars here for a pretty set of towels for the guest bathroom. Then fifty dollars for a satiny new set of sheets. Eighty-two dollars for the new curtains in the living room (and they were

on sale!) and two hundred dollars (oops) on a new bedspread. Somehow, by the time we had lived in our new house for three months, I had accumulated over six thousand dollars worth of little stuff without even realizing it.

When he saw the credit card statement, he was furious. As partner already at thirty-two, he was pretty accustomed to being in charge. He'd been ROTC at one time, until knee surgery had nixed his first dream of a military career.

I suppose that when he stormed around the living room lecturing me that night, he wasn't expecting me to respond quite like I did. I mean, he took my credit card, cracked it in half and whisked my checkbook into his back pocket.

"No spending, no spending whatsoever—not a cent!—without me until you stop frivaling—" I know that's not a word, but he was upset, and that's what he said "—our money away on little purchases here and there!"

I don't know what it was about it that made me do it. Looking back, I think it was his repeated use of the word 'no' that did me in. It could have been his t-shirt stretched over his muscled chest and his hands on his hips. Or, it could have been that he'd suddenly reconnected with what military training he'd had and was suddenly sounding like the Gunnery Sergeant from *Officer and A Gentleman* barking at Richard Gere.

Whatever it was, I'm sure he wasn't expecting me to grab his face and kiss him more passionately than I had ever kissed him in the ten years that we had known each other.

It sort of took the steam out of his lecture, and he stared at me a little astonished and open-mouthed. I, however, couldn't contain myself and we spent the next six hours—well, okay, maybe two hours—having the best sex we had ever had.

We didn't discuss it, or talk about it, until the next day when he came home "sick" from work at lunchtime to ask me what the hell last night was all about.

"I'm sorry," I said, in a small voice. I was pretty embarrassed. All those fantasies of childhood had been re-awoken at his alpha display. Decidedly un-normal fantasies, and Chris is a decidedly normal sort of person.

At my apology, he sighed. "Well, hell."

Chris, I should mention, is not the sort of person who says hell. In fact, I'd never heard him say it until that day, and I haven't heard it since.

"Hell," he repeated. "I'm not sure that was something to be sorry about."

I could only blush and stare at my tuna fish sandwich. I was mortified, but a giggle escaped my mouth as I thought of our fun last night. We'd made the kind of love I'd only seen on a flash of pornography while cruising through the channels to find something to watch late at night. Steamy, passionate ... I was so embarrassed, and we'd been married for three and a half years.

"Hell," he said yet again, "don't be embarrassed."

"You know I'm a prude. I'm mortified—that's much more than embarrassed." Even more than mortified, actually, because just as he had come home from work early, I had been eating my tuna fish sandwich and staring out the window imagining what it would be like for my husband to take me over his knee and lay down the law on my backside.

"What was last night all about?"

I shrugged, and then made the fatal mistake of looking at his hands. I'd never noticed they were so big and strong. He's a lawyer, but he has the hands of a rancher. They weren't rough and hang-nailed, but they were wider than I remembered, thick and

strong. I couldn't get my fantasy of that hand spanking my vulnerable bottom out of my mind.

(So if you don't mind, reader, I'm going to edit out the next four hours of lovemaking, skip over the three hour nap after that, and jump straight to our late night dinner, where Chris wouldn't let me up from the table until I told him what was going on.)

"Well," I said. I had eaten every bit of macaroni and cheese, but I still scraped my fork along the plate to get a little of the leftover cheese. "I think I'm weird."

"Weird," he prompted.

"Well, I've always had these weird sort of fantasies."

When it became evident that I was not going to elaborate on my own, Chris parroted my last word back to me again. "Fantasies?"

I said it real fast, hoping that he wouldn't catch my words. "Sorta like alpha hubby lays down the law and spansk wife sort of thing, like." No, I'm not from the valley in California with their high-pitched "likes" of the eighties, I was just nervous.

And then I held my breath, which was a bad idea because he didn't respond for over a minute.

"Did you say spank?"

Oh god. I nodded and a few tears of fear slipped down my face as my breath whooshed out and blew my napkin across the table.

"Oh," he replied. Then—would you believe it!—he busied himself with putting the dishes in the dishwasher, gave me a good night kiss, and went into his office. I sat there alone in the kitchen for over a half hour, not sure what to think. I finally went up to bed and fell asleep, not waking when Chris crawled in bed next to me.

Weeks passed where a silence developed between us, and he said nothing about the desires I had confessed to him. Then, one day, I wrote him

an email while he was at work. Our sex had stopped cold turkey, and we were completely avoiding the issue. It took me almost six hours to compose the few sentences I sent off to him that afternoon.

*Chris,
Having fun drafting your contracts?
Just wanted to ask if you could bring
home some dinner. I'm caught up in that
article the newspaper asked me to write.
I've got to have it to the editor by five
tonight.
Maybe some Chinese?
Luvvles,
Jen
PS: Do you think I'm a freak?*

Almost two minutes after I sent that nonchalant email that took me six hours to draft, he wrote back.

*Jen,
A freak? Of course not, whatever
would make you think I would think such
a thing?
Luvvles,
Chris
PS: I'll stop at Hunan's, but I won't be
out of here for another two or three
hours.*

I should mention that my article for the newspaper had already been sent off, and that I could very well cook dinner. But I needed some excuse to write him. My reply took three drafts and an hour and a half to sound casual.

*Chris,
No biggie. It's just that I noticed we
haven't kissed in a little while, that's all.
Luvvles,
Jen
PS: Will you get a couple extra orders
of fried rice for my lunches this week?
PPS: Sorry it took so long to write
you back, I was working on the article
and didn't hear the ding of your email.*

Okay, I'm not proud of myself, bending the truth like that. I'm not a chicken, either. It's just that this spanking thing was like a virus in my heart. Now that I had seen it, it was like a cancer, all those fantasies from my childhood invading my random thoughts. I kept seeing his hand and dreaming about his hand, and I even went so far as to lay on the bed this morning with my panties down, like a girl about to get her butt spanked. Even though it was only me in the house, I was so embarrassed that I popped up and pulled my pants up almost instantly.

I felt a leap in my heart as I heard the ding of new mail.

*Jen,
Why do I get this feeling that you've
already finished your article? This is
Chris, your husband, you can talk to me.
And I don't think you're a freak. In
fact, I've been doing some surfing. There
are others who feel exactly as you do
about spanking, did you know that?
Luvvles,
Chris*

For some weird reason, I deleted the email as soon as I read it, and then had to go into my Outlook trashcan to read it again.

I didn't reply, but spent the next two hours before he came home discovering the wide world of internet spanking. As soon as he came home, I ran to him and hugged him, burying my head in his chest.

It had been a start to our communication, and he told me that "sometime" he'd spank me, but that I'd have to take the lead in this. He didn't want to cross the line, and he was afraid of turning into a "controlling, abusive husband."

So, dear reader, that's where it all started, which is why I was surprised, on this Sunday different from all other Sundays, that he was so enthusiastic about this contract idea—one that I had not planted in his head, might I add?

He pulled out his laptop, plugged it in and set it up on the table. (Coffee pot still untouched, I should add.)

*We, Christopher and Jennifer
Richardson, do, on this third day of May,
the year of our Lord Two—*

"Oh, cut that out!" I cried. When his fingers froze, I added, "Real language, not lawyer speak. Do you know I had to consult a lawyer to understand that pre-nup that you wrote? I mean, I didn't even know until I talked to him that you practically promised me the shirt off your back if you ever left me, cheated on me, or asked for a divorce."

He looked a little taken back. "Well, I want to make sure you'll be taken care of. I can always make money."

"And, I can't?" I narrowed my eyes at him, preparing for battle.

Chris rolled his eyes. "It's not that, sweetie. I just thought that if we had kids, or something, and you decided to stay home, I wouldn't want you to suddenly have to be a raising children on your own while working a full time job."

"You wouldn't do that to me!" He wouldn't, ever, that's why I fell in love with him.

He just shook his head and chuckled. "That was the point, sweetie. I wanted you to know that."

"Oh." Still, I pulled the laptop away from him and erased what he'd written.

*Chris and Jen promise to each other,
on May 3, 2003, the following:*

Chris chuckled. "Remember our first spanking?"

You know, I still blush. We've incorporated spanking into our lives for over two years, but I still blush when he—or I, for that matter—use the 's' word. I forget the details of why I went over his knee. Maybe I snapped something at him, something rude and bitchy during that awful PMS time.

He'd popped a hand on my bottom, and my temper hit the roof, to his dismay. I was just completely out of hormonal control, actually. My poor husband tries to give me my fantasy, and what do I do?

Freak out.

Some thanks I gave him, huh? He seemed to think so. He had gone into his office and wouldn't come out for over three hours. When he came out, he did it right.

"Young lady?"

When Chris emerged from his office, he was not angry, which made it all the more difficult for me.

For the entire time he was bottled up in the office, I was torn between self-righteous indignation and guilt.

If he had been angry, it would have been easy to choose self-righteous indignation and launch into a good row. But as luck would have it, Chris was calm and controlled.

"Come into the office," he said. "We need to have a discussion."

Now what girl with spanko-fantasies wouldn't melt at those words? Of course, guilt won, hands down, and I shuffled into his office—I mean, our office—like a recalcitrant schoolchild.

We didn't discuss why I'd responded so poorly to his earlier whack on my bottom. He just pulled out a wooden ruler, placed it in the middle of the large oak desk that he had inherited from his grandfather, and positioned himself in front of the desk like he was a principal about to give a good old-fashioned English caning.

"I think you know what to do," he said.

The Contract Part Two

And so, on this Sunday different from all other Sundays, I remembered that day when my husband had first spanked me.

"I think you know what to do, Jen." Chris stood poised in front of the massive oak desk

Since it was our first spanking, of course I didn't know what to do. But with my mouth dry, I couldn't ask. I looked at Chris, at the heavy desk, at the ruler sitting on the polished surface, and I knew that there weren't a lot of options. My feet were rooted to the floor, and my face was hotter than when I'd had a hundred and three temperature after I got chicken pox as an adult.

I don't know what he'd done in those three hours, but he must have done some sort of research, because he just looked at me expectantly with complete confidence that I would do whatever I was supposed to 'know what to do.'

And so, I timidly walked towards him, my eyes already filling with tears. I looked at him with my most pitiful look and managed only to whisper, "Are you really going to do this?"

"What do you think?" he asked.

What else could I do, but pull my pants down—even my panties? I couldn't look him in the eye, so he took my arm above my elbow and guided me over the desk. Can you imagine how my insides were? I mean, I was drooling at the word 'no' a few weeks ago, and now he was guiding me over a desk to correct my behavior!

Torn between embarrassment and arousal, I was relieved when the first smack hit my bottom. Even more relieved when that first one didn't hurt

all that much. But a few smacks later, it began to sting, and a few smacks after that, I began to yelp. "Come on," I whined, "that hurts!"

To his credit, he didn't cliché and tell me that "it's supposed to hurt," or worse, "it hasn't even begun to hurt." No, he just simply put a hand on the small of my back and kept at it. When I put a hand back to shield my burning bottom, he merely tucked it under his hand on the small of my back.

And kept at it, of course. Smack after smack, until I was dancing on my toes and wondering how I'd had this insane fantasy for years. Then, he picked up the ruler, and I held my breath.

I didn't hold it for long, because I squealed immediately after the first smack. Chris just held me there and continued smacking, until my squeals turned into tears, which eventually became audible cries.

He wanted to jump me; I could see it in his eyes. Chris looked like a hungry wolf, but he kept me at arm's length. "This isn't just about a fantasy, young lady. You talk back to me like that again, and you're going to get that, and more."

Which made me, in turn, drool all the more, even though I was starting to wonder what sort of crazy I was. I mean, my bottom was hurting with a capital H, and I was feeling genuinely punished and disciplined.

"It's disrespectful," he continued, "and it does nothing to promote household harmony and a loving relationship."

I don't think I'd ever felt so sorry for anything in my entire life as I felt for talking back to him that day. Not that I regretted him spanking me, or that I felt sorry because my bottom hurt. I felt sorry that I had disrespected my husband enough that he had call to correct my behavior.

Mind you, it was me that initiated all this spanking stuff. All those feelings mixing around within were my first clue as to what a complicated business all this spanking stuff was.

Which is why, on this Sunday different from all other Sundays, I was reluctant to mess with the lifestyle we'd finally managed to settle into. I stared at the words I'd typed on Chris's laptop.

*Chris and Jen promise to each other,
on May 3, 2003, the following:*

"What's going to change?" I asked him.

He looked like a reckless youth when he shrugged gleefully. "I don't know." Then he added, "Anything we want, nothing. Whatever we want."

We don't need to fix what ain't broke, I wanted to say, just like my father. Instead, I just sighed and said, "Well, hell."

"Language, missy," he warned in a low growl.

I looked up from the screen. "Should that be in our contract? Rules?"

He tapped a finger to his nose thoughtfully. He looks a bit like a California surfer playing Santa when he does this, and it annoys me to no end. He's completely unaware that he does it, even though I've brought it to his attention a couple times.

"I don't think so. Well, not little rules."

"Little?" I asked in a shrill voice. "You made me stand in the corner for thirty minutes with a mouth full of soap the last time I swore, and you call that a little rule?"

He grinned, which was not the reaction I had wanted. "I'm getting pretty good at creative discipline, aren't I?"

Okay, I'm a bit embarrassed to tell you what I said next. It's definitely not the smartest thing I've

ever said, and is probably one of the stupidest. In my defense, I was feeling a bit contrary. I think I mentioned before that I don't deal well with change.

"If you're so good at it, then how come I just swore again?"

Chris looked a bit surprised and said nothing for a second. I took advantage of the silence to try and change the subject before I got into trouble. "So do you want to just put our marriage vows here, and then elaborate into the lifestyle, or what?"

Silence.

"You have a point."

I felt a nervous tingle in my bottom alerting me that he was responding to my first question, rather than my second, but I rushed on in the hopes that he had forgotten the first. Or, at the very least, could be distracted from it.

"So, I'll go get our scrapbook, and we can copy our vows from it, right?" I asked, a bit too eager to sound nonchalant.

That's when his eyes focused—and narrowed, I should add—on me.

"Not too good at creative discipline, am I?"

Uh-oh. I squirmed at his words, sensing that I had managed to not just challenge my husband, but to challenge his male ego—a far worse predicament. I back-pedaled as quickly as I could, but somehow I knew that it would make no difference.

"I was just feeling contrary—your creative discipline is quite effective."

"Contrary," he mulled, as if trying to decide whether he was going to punish me for behaving contrarily or if he was going to stick to the original offense. "Language," he decided. "You're absolutely right. If it had been effective, you wouldn't have sworn just now, right?"

There is no way out of this; can you see that? I know what will happen next: my husband will ask

me a bunch of questions, and I will strive to give the perfect answer that will allow me to escape my fate. But no matter how well I answer, I will, inevitably, end up being punished.

Of course, I always try, despite the futility of it.

"You know, maybe you don't need to be creative. Maybe that's the problem. Maybe if you just stick to regular old spanking, the lessons will stick better." Chris's face is turning slightly red, and I clear my throat. "I mean, I'm just saying that maybe the tried and true are best after all."

Chris has this silent look. Deep, brooding and thoughtful. It always makes me nervous. "My grandmother snipped a piece of my tongue off with her big sewing scissors when I swore the summer I was fifteen." He looked at me pointedly. "You don't hear me curse, do you?"

I clapped a hand over my mouth and looked at him in horror. He wouldn't—at least, I didn't think he would. Still, I wasn't moving my hand away from my mouth.

"Now," he said. "Do you want the tried and true, or creative?"

"Creative," I croaked.

That dirty little word "creative" was why I was standing—on that Sunday different from all other Sundays—in the corner with a mouthful of fresh minced pepper and garlic. My mouth burned like it had never burned before, and I knew it was only a matter of time before my bottom burned at least as much.

It's not as if I hadn't felt the fire of peppers on my tongue before. I've eaten raw garlic when I want to ward off a cold (or just show off). I've spent countless summer days chomping on fresh peppers in the garden, daring my best friend to keep the

pepper in her mouth as long as I could keep it in mine.

But as much as I'd like people to believe, I did not, by any means, have a mouth of steel. To make matters worse, Chris had left me standing in the corner with my bottom bared. I hate that.

No, really. I *hate* that.

Because all I can think about is what if someone peers in the window, peeking through the small slits the vertical blinds make, and sees me standing there like a naughty little girl? And let me tell you, standing bare-bottomed in the corner is one sure way to realize how much one's bottom has begun to sag with age!

It's not only all that. If I could take the rest of my clothes off, I could embrace my nakedness and imagine myself glowing like a sex goddess—or maybe a slightly sexy, slightly frumpy earth goddess. I could pretend I had a thing for nudity, even imagine that we could go to a nudist colony on vacation. I could tell myself that wearing one's birthday suit is the most natural thing in the world.

But there is nothing, and I mean nothing, natural about having one's shoes on while one's bottom is bare. It carried the indecency of having the same dress code as a visit to the bathroom. Maybe that's why it felt so embarrassing to be put on display in the corner like a toddler whose mother hadn't gotten around to changing the diaper yet.

The nose is another thing. Why is it "put your nose in the corner"? Why not your face? Why not your body? Is there something particularly humiliating about having one's nose ground into the corner? It does fit snugly in the corner like a hand in a glove, but if your nose is going to be snug in the corner then your bottom is going to stick out.

Tears started running down my face, and I knew I had done all the philosophizing I could do about

my predicament. Those peppers were beyond hot. I squealed and squirmed, and my husband finally came and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Your mouth feel like it's on fire?"

I nodded vehemently.

"Do you enjoy that feeling?"

I shook my head as hard as I could.

"Would you like to feel that again?"

No, no, no! I wanted to scream, but with the peppers burning under, over, and around my tongue, all I could do was shake my head.

"Do you think that this punishment will stick, once I add a nice bottom warming?"

I nodded as if correct nods and shakes could get me out of the rest of the punishment.

"Was it creative enough?"

More nods.

"Okay, go spit."

Chris sent me off with a loud smack to my bottom.

"Meet me in the office."

I made the mistake of trying to rinse the burning peppers away with water before I remembered that milk was far more effective.

When I finally could feel my tongue again, I went to his office with a game plan. I entered as demurely as I could, eyes downcast towards my feet. I added a little tremble to my hands and voice.

"I'm in trouble, aren't I?" I asked in my most frightened little-girl voice.

"Don't you take that tone with me, young lady."

His voice always sounded wolfish when he was being Mister Head of the House. "The wide-eyed, frightened little girl act is not going to get your bottom out of hot water this time, or any time."

I sighed and stared at the hairbrush in his hand. It laid in his hand as if it were merely another finger used to point at me and accuse me of my

wrongdoings. The brush was made of oak, with a curvy handle and a round brush that was not long enough to be called oval, and yet not round enough to be called circular.

I stared forlornly at the old couch. The fabric was rough and scratchy against bare skin, and even though my bottom would be over his legs, I knew my thighs and face would be buried into the harsh fabric, begging for its coarse comfort.

"But," he said, as if contradicting me even though I had said nothing, "I think you'd better take those pants clear off."

I blushed and obeyed, not bothering to debate the issue.

"I'd like to see you take your spanking submissively, no clenching, and I'd prefer if you keep your legs spread. Pants binding your ankles may keep your legs from kicking too violently, but they don't inspire true submission."

"Prefer" and "I'd like" was the way my husband gave orders. I didn't say a thing. We were way past bargaining, and there was no going back. I was going to get spanked.

"I do like the way you react to being clothed everywhere except your bottom, though. Would you please put your socks and shoes back on?"

And so I laced and tied my shoes on, feeling ridiculous. I mean, it feels weird enough to put on shoes and socks with only a bathing suit on. Putting shoes on with no panties feels downright ... vulnerable.

Which led me to anguish, "Is my bottom really sagging?"

He tried not to laugh, I could tell.

"That's really not the issue here, young lady." He licked his lips. "But no, your bottom does not sag."

"You're just saying that," I accused.

"And, I'm the one holding a hairbrush, so you'd better smile and say thank you."

I didn't smile and say thank you, but I did obediently lie across his lap.

That's when it hit me. The fear in the gut that makes 'bent over for a spanking' a perfect position. The certainty that I was going to feel pain and that it wasn't going to end when I wanted it to, and that it would most likely feel like it was never going to end ever.

Chris isn't into warm-ups. He doesn't use his hand except for 'love spankings,' as he calls them. His hand hurts a lot, even as much as a paddle, but he thinks I'm just saying that to get a lesser spanking. Not true!

So I waited, gnawing my lip.

"You know the routine, Jennifer."

I held my breath.

"Part those legs, and I'd like your bottom to look a little more eager to receive my attentions."

Eager? I tried, pulling myself forward so that my butt would stick up a little more. Since I had brought up the whole DD idea, Chris had been rather adamant that I submit to all spankings in such a manner that he would not feel like a domineering, manipulative wife-abuser.

That meant no clenching, no wriggling away, no nothing. He doesn't mind if I cry, though. After all, when you can't wiggle the sting away, all that's left is a good cry about it.

"Chris," I begged, even though I knew it was futile. "It's going to hurt!"

He responded with a good thud of the hairbrush that most definitely did hurt. I hadn't been expecting it so I practically leaped a foot forward on the couch.

"Get back here, naughty one."

It sounds silly, but I love it when he calls me 'naughty one.' I love it so much that I climbed quite eagerly over his lap again, ready to accept anything he chose to dole out. That's when the spanking began for real.

And, the tears began for real. That hairbrush thudded across my bottom in a dead weight painful sort of way. It thwacked in sharp bursts of pain on each cheek, and I tried as hard as I could not to clench.

"No clenching, young lady."

Which, of course, led to me relaxing, then immediately clenching when my better sense realized that relaxing would lead to another smack. Why had I signed up for this DD thing? Why had I ever thought I wanted to submit to spankings and discipline and hairbrushes?

"Young lady," he warned.

I tried. Tried as hard as I could, but my muscles refused to obey.

A finger traced down the sensitive skin on the inner thigh. "It would hurt quite a bit right here, wouldn't it?"

I whimpered.

Common sense won out, and I relaxed my bottom.

"That's a good girl," he said, then the pain started again, and I focused on not clenching. Once you get the hang of it, it's not as hard as one might think. Mostly, I focus on how sorry I am and how I love my husband more than anything in the world.

The whole crying thing comes quicker when I don't clench, too. I give up to the pain faster, accept my due, if you will. It used to be that once I got to this point, the spanking would end.

But now that he gets me to this point so quickly with the no-clenching rule, Chris felt that the spanking needed to go on quite a bit longer—as

long as they used to be when it took me hours—okay, maybe not hours—to get to the no-clenching point.

And so it took awhile before he (thank goodness!) stopped and said, “You know, I think I’d like to take a look at the inside of your thighs, after all.”

Then there was an expectant silence. Well, silent except for my crying and panting to bear the pain. “Oh, really, please, you don’t need to look at those! I’ll never swear again!”

He seemed to consider it, but I don’t think he did, really. He just paused to get my hopes up. “No, I don’t want to let you down again with discipline that isn’t effective.” He patted the back of my leg. “You wouldn’t want me to do that, now, would you?”

So what could I answer? My sobs were fading, but I knew they were about to be reignited, so to speak. “No, Chris, but I think you’ve been quite effective. I’ve learned my lesson!”

“That’s what you said last time I spanked you for swearing.”

Without further pause, the hairbrush smacked all over my thighs, smearing pain as if it were a chili pepper poultice all over the back of legs. If you don’t mind, I’d rather not tell you that submissively accepting my punishment was definitely a thing of history. I mean, who can stay still for that sort of pain?

He alternated between one leg and the other while my hands clenched the fabric of his sweat pants like a life preserver. Thankfully, it did end, though there were moments I was sure life would forever be a sea of searing pain in my bottom.

He helped me up. “To the kitchen,” he ordered. “It’s time to finish our contract.”

"Would you please let me put on my pants first? This is getting ridiculous, walking around like a two year old who's managed to escape her diapers."

"Maybe I like you like that."

"Maybe you like to get a home-cooked dinner every night, too," I threatened. It didn't work; he just laughed.

"Maybe you'd like to get your bottom warmed every night when I come home to an empty table."

"Well ..." I paused, trying to come up with a good retort. In the end, I settled with "maybe you're just a big brute and bully."

"And maybe you're a brat who needs to feel my hand on her bottom again."

By that time we were in the kitchen, and he had forced me to sit bare-bottomed and sore on a wooden chair. The wood was cool at first, comforting even. Then, as it warmed up, it felt more and more uncomfortable.

And so I typed, as quickly as I could, a scaled down version of our wedding vows with a little DD mixed in.

*Chris and Jen promise to each other,
on May 3, 2003, the following:*

*Chris promises to protect and cherish,
lead and guide, and correct and comfort
his precious wife.*

*Jen promises to honor and respect,
obey and follow, and submit to correction
from her beloved husband.*

Signed,

Chris and Jen

"Not exactly grammatically correct, huh?" I frowned.

"But, it says it all."

We pondered at the screen for awhile in silence.

"That's it?" I asked, a bit disappointed.

"Well, what else is there?"

I shrugged. "Shouldn't there be something about how safe I feel when you take me in hand?" I almost choked on the "take me in hand" bit, but I meant the words. "What about how I love how happy our home is, how secure I feel?"

He answered with a question of his own. "Or, how I love how vulnerable and lovely your bottom looks when it's trembling over my lap, just waiting to be reddened? Or, how I think the trust you give me is the best gift in the whole world?"

I sighed happily. He sighed pleasantly. We smiled at each other.

"Maybe, we should sign it with my hand print and your bottom print," he joked.

I smiled, but it wasn't really that funny. Besides, being bare-bottomed for over an hour is bound to get me feeling a little desire for my husband.

"Or, maybe we should just shake hands on it, so to speak." I blushed, "you know, your hand to my bottom." I tried to give him my best seductive look, but I'm more of the cute variety rather than the sex goddess type.

He pulled me to him so that I was standing between his knees. "Maybe the contract isn't something we need in writing. It was just an idea, after all." He added, "We're DD, not really D/s," as if he were the first one to mention it.

I giggled. "But, those D/s'ers have some great ideas."

"Oh really? Like what?"

"Rituals," I whispered.

He pushed me over his knee for a spanking I knew I'd like, even on a sore bottom. "Well, maybe we'll have to explore that next Sunday."

And that, dear reader, is a story for a different sort of Sunday.

Monroe County:
Newsy Newcomers
Part One

Monroe County smelled like a story, at least to my boss at the Daily Post.

My boss read the write-up in the National Inquirer, and unlike most of America, did not dismiss it as tabloid nonsense. So I, the lowest reporter on the food chain of the newspaper got sent to our neighboring county to sniff out a story.

Or else.

Yes, those were his words. That's how he always responded to my objections at the fool stories I got sent on, which had no hope of giving me a front page spread. I think the 'or else' meant 'or else forever spend your career writing up silly stories about fireman rescuing Granny's cat.'

Although, if there was any shred of truth to the National Inquirer's allegation that Monroe County was an old-fashioned community that condoned—even encouraged—wife-beating, I would have one hot story on my hands. But since I'd been sent, I doubted it.

Imagine my surprise, when I settled myself into the Old Tyme Kitchen to spy on the locals, to see Reed Redford, one of the top television reporters in the state. If *he* sniffed a story, then there certainly was one.

I got goose bumps just thinking of my byline on the front page under the headline, "Spanking Scandal in Monroe County." Too bad I couldn't go undercover. See it, experience it, first hand. Would there be a Pulitzer in that?

Probably not. National Inquirer got to it first, so the story would always be tainted—if there was a story. They had alleged that paddles were displayed prominently in all the bars and restaurants, and

spanking implements could be found in every corner store.

I did notice two heavy-duty nails stuck in wall behind the bar, though nothing hung there.

"What'll it be, young lady?"

He managed to say it respectfully, so I didn't mind the young lady thing. Besides, I just had my thirtieth birthday, so being called young made me feel quite good.

I ordered a Tom Collins with grenadine, and gestured to the two large nails. "Those are scary looking. What hung there?"

He frowned at me, but answered only "just a display that we took down."

I wanted to ask him more, but he walked away before I could. When he returned with my drink, he put it down a bit forcefully and immediately went to the opposite end of the bar to chat with a customer who appeared to be a regular.

That's when *the* Reed Redford slid onto the stool next to mine, tsk-ing his disapproval. "You've only been here for five minutes, and you've already blown your cover? They recognize me from TV, but you actually had a chance to get an inside scoop." He took a swig of his drink and shook his head. "Who taught you the ropes, Penny Scott?"

I pretended not to be thrilled that he knew my name, let alone who I was, and shrugged. "No one, and it's Penelope."

He laughed at that, and let his gaze wander pointedly up my long legs, only to stop at my mini-skirt. "Believe me, Penny, you're no Penelope."

I hissed. "I am when I'm on business, and what do you know about it anyway?"

He shrugged and set his empty beer glass down on the bar. "You want the story here, don't you?"

I looked at him—really looked at him. Reed Redford is the perfect television personality. He's

tall, extremely fit, with rugged good looks. To top it off, he graduated top of his class at Harvard, which makes him an excellent investigative reporter. All that combined meant he got the best stories, and those stories got him the Pulitzer an unheard of three times in his twelve year career.

But was he trustworthy? Well, he was an investigative reporter. That meant he'd do what he needed to get the story first, even if it included using me.

"How can I trust you? You just want to use me to get the story first."

His blue eyes twinkled. "Well, yes. But it won't be a hardship, and besides, you're in newspaper, I'm on television. You *can't* break the story first. People turn on the television first thing in the morning. They don't go read their paper."

Don't I know it. I'd applied for internships at about every affiliate in the state, with no luck. I had the looks, they'd said, but I'd gone to a community college. There were thousands out there who had the looks *and* a top-notch degree.

I didn't give him the decency of an answer. Instead, I tried to act nonchalant.

"You think there *is* a story here, then?"

He said nothing for about half a minute (which drove me to impatience) and then looked towards the woman coming from the kitchen.

"That's Hilda, she owns the bar with her husband, Harold, the bartender."

I watched her whisper in her husband's ear, then wring her hands on the dishtowel. He said something curt to her because she looked down to the floor like an admonished child. Then he pointed upwards, and she scurried out of the bar as quick as a mouse.

"What do you see?" he asked me.

I'd done a bit of studying on the Internet last night on the spanking and BDSM community. "I see that Hilda is submissive to her husband, and it looks like she's in trouble." Then I countered myself. "Or am I just seeing that because of the Inquirer story, and is this just a simple husband-wife quibble, and she was just hurrying to get something out of the oven?"

Reed approved of my speech, because he nodded and gave a curt, "good."

Now you may think that's nothing, but I was already envisioning him putting in a word at the affiliate about me, maybe even insisting I be hired as a reporter straight away. Then, simply because I'm single and it's been awhile, I started imagining him not just taking me under his wing and showing me the ropes, but taking me out to dinner and seducing me.

Well, a girl can dream, can't she?

He turned to me suddenly, looking me straight in the eye. "What are you thinking, right now?"

I sputtered, and tried not to blush. I'm sure I didn't succeed. While trying to come up with a decent lie, I noticed that the bartender was calling a waitress over to tend the bar. He thanked her, then dashed back into the kitchen in the direction his wife went.

This interesting turn of events made me forget my embarrassment, and I shrugged. "I'm wondering what you're thinking about that. Just because he's going after his wife he just—" I searched for the right word—"reprimanded, doesn't mean he's going to spank her.

"True," he agreed, but his attention was already elsewhere. With the rugged smile that got him the big bucks, he waved towards the waitress tending the bar. He ordered our drinks, and waited until

she'd come back with them to lay down a fifty dollar tip.

With a wink, he leaned towards her conspiratorially. "Methinks the lassie's about to get a taste of the strap."

Since when did Reed Redford have an Irish accent? I wondered. The waitress wasn't buying it, either. She scooped up the pretty tip and frowned at him, "I don't know what you're talking about." Talk about the cold shoulder.

I laughed as she walked away. "Oh *that* worked well." I have to admit, it put me at ease to realize that Reed wasn't perfect. I laughed harder when he just stared at the spot where the fifty had lain, as if shocked that it was gone *and* he had no new information.

That's when he downed his beer with one swig, and stood up. "Come on," he said. "We're going house-hunting."

Just like that, he walked out of the bar, completely confident that I would follow. Let me tell you, that assumption irked me.

But I followed. Like my boss said, Monroe County smelled like a story.

Reed Redford was oozing charm on the middle-aged lady at Monroe Realtors, but she was just eyeing him distrustfully, as if the last thing she wanted to do was to sell him a house.

"We only have two houses in the whole county on the market, and they're small."

When Reed replied, "Great! I'd love to see them!" she humphed and picked up the phone.

"Yes, Susan," she said in low tones, "it's Doreen. I need to talk to Eric, immediately."

Reed and I exchanged looks, and I whispered, "Eric Zimmers, the mayor?"

"Eric, I ..." She looked up as we leaned in a little closer to hear. "I have some customers here at Monroe Realtors, and I wondered if you could show them two properties—I've got no one to look after the office if I go."

Reed waited until she hung up to say, "It's a wonder you stay in business, with only two properties in the whole county on the market."

That's when an older, gray-bearded gentleman walked in from an adjoining room. The moment he saw us, he quickly shut the door and stuffed whatever he'd held into his back pocket. Folding his coat over it, he smiled nervously at Doreen.

"Um ... I'll come back to ..." He shrugged, then turned to us. "You guys looking to move here? Why?"

Reed was smooth; I'll give him that. "We're just looking for a quiet, safe community with *old-fashioned* roots." He stressed old-fashioned as if they shared a private joke. He then put his arm around me (which made me melt inside, I should add) and looked at me adoringly. "We're getting married in the spring, and we're looking for a good place to make a home and family in."

The man seemed to relax with those words, and gave him a good-natured slap on the back. "Well, then, you want to look at the place on Langston; it's a beaut."

Susan cleared her throat. "Jack, that place was sold. We only have *two small* properties left in the county."

"Oh," he said with a bit of surprise, then added as if suddenly understanding, "oh!" Jack straightened his coat and did a poor job of acting disappointed. "Well then. I hear it's a long wait for a house in the county. Didn't Jan's nephew wait for twelve years on the waiting list?"

Reed and I took a seat in the waiting area, and I giggled. "These people are terrible liars." I was getting giddy at the thoughts of headlines and career-boosting bylines.

"Did you see that he had a wicked looking paddle in his hand?" he asked.

Oh boy, Pulitzer, here I come.

Eric Zimmer turned out to be friendly, in a loud way, and an excellent salesman. The only problem is that he seemed to be trying to convince us *not* to live here, all the while pretending he was trying to sell us on moving here right away.

"The schools are decent, even though they weren't the top in the state last year."

He seemed downright disappointed when I chimed in, "But second place is nothing to sneeze at, either."

"Uh, yes. He said, turning a corner on to Langston Drive. "Some people may say it's boring, and complain that everything closes before dark, but I like it. Eyeing us in the rearview mirror, he added, "It's a good community for retirement. Not lots of kids. Just us boring old folks."

Reed said nothing as he grinned at a passing school bus practically bursting at the seams with kids.

That's when I noticed the property with a for sale sign. It was like the architect had my private journals. White siding, a small barn out back, a ring for the horses. Wooden fence, and to top it off, dogwood trees that I could just see blooming in the spring.

"Oh it's lovely!" It was genuine enthusiasm that had me nudging Reed. "Look at that place! It's everything I've always wanted!"

Eric jumped in immediately. "Oh, I'm sorry, that was sold just yesterday." He quickly turned another corner, and then another, until we were on a street with a lovely row of small starter homes. They were all immaculately kept, save the two at the very end of the road.

"Oh," I cried. "But couldn't you just show us the Langston property? Just in case the buyer backs out or doesn't get financing, then you could sell it to us right away. It's perfect!"

"No," he said too quickly. "I know the buyer, and there's no way he's not going to scoop that beauty up. But—" he pulled the car into what looked like a dilapidated shack, not a house—"this house is a great starter home, perfect for moving into the community and getting on the waiting list for a larger home."

I decided to get aggressive. To be honest, I was showing off a bit in front of Reed, still thinking about that internship at the affiliate. After all, I was getting old to be starting a career on television. If I didn't do it soon, when could I?

"We want a larger home now, and we want it here." My voice sounded petulant and Eric wasn't caring. I tried anger. "You've got to be kidding me. I've seen acres of empty land, not to mention whole neighborhoods of houses being built, and you're trying to tell me you've only got two small properties? What, do you think I was born yesterday?"

I leaned back into the car seat, proud of my tirade.

"Now, missy—"

"Penelope!" I spat.

He sighed. "Penelope. I'm sorry, I can only show you what's on the market."

"Eric, you're full of shit. If the Langston property had sold, they would have taken the sign down. Not

to mention the two for sale signs I saw on that side street we passed off of Langston. You're a fucking liar."

Reed jumped in then and reprimanded me. "Watch your tongue, Penny." He opened the car door and got out, following Eric. "Show some respect."

I sat fuming in the car and watched him apologize to Eric. Whose side was he on, anyway? Eric started opening the door, and Reed came around to open my car door.

With a charming wink, he whispered, "play along."

That's when he helped me out of the car, shut the door, and waited until Eric was inside to give me a lecture on respect.

And, let me tell you, he was good. As I listened to him give me a damn good dressing down, I was shocked—and a bit embarrassed—to find myself getting turned on. Here was a drop-dead gorgeous man with the career I wanted, and he was looking at me as if he personally cared about my behavior.

When I noticed my eyes were lowered much like I'd seen Hilda's lowered at the Old Tyme Kitchen, I realized I wasn't acting. That's when he turned me around and whispered, "He's watching."

Next thing I knew, he'd smacked my butt. It took me a second to recognize the pain and squeal. Another followed, and another, until tears formed in my eyes. Reed might have been playing for a story, but I was being spanked by a gorgeous man in public—practically in the middle of the street. I'm sure I blushed yet again when I saw a kid down the street on a bicycle watching with curious but unconcerned eyes.

"Now when you go in," Reed whispered, "act humbled, and apologize for your behavior."

Grrrrr, I wanted to say. I would never do that, but since it was for a story... I didn't have to manufacture my embarrassment, or the fact that I didn't want to apologize.

"Mr. Zimmer," I stammered. "I apologize for my rudeness in the car."

Eric shocked me by not being uncomfortable with my apology. Instead, he stood silently for awhile, then frowned. "I don't think you're truly sorry."

Then, if that didn't gall all, he turned to Reed, practically dismissing me. "If you'd like to look tomorrow, I'll be happy to take you back to your car so you can finish the job you started out there properly."

There was a flash of uncertainty in Reed's eyes, then he nodded at Eric in a man-to-man sort of way. "Is there a motel in town? A place where we could spend the night? We were thinking of staying for the weekend."

"Lilah owns a bed and breakfast on Lake Monroe."

I had a mixture of feelings when Reed exclaimed, "perfect!" The first feeling was total excitement that I would get to spend the night with Reed Redford. The second was embarrassment that this Eric thought I was about to be taken home and given a good spanking to show me my place.

Oh yes, I couldn't wait to break the story of this place.

Lilah turned out to be a genteel old lady, with a true kindness of spirit that is rare these days. She was widowed, and she commanded the utmost respect from Eric, even though he seemed to think I needed more spanking.

"Is there anything you need out here, Lilah?" He frowned into the empty parlor. "I don't like you out here all alone in the winter. Is the CCC coming out here faithfully? How is that working out?"

To my surprise, Lilah blushed and giggled. "Oh yes, John comes out three or four times a week, making sure everything's okay and making sure—" she suddenly turned a bit shy "—that I'm not overdoing myself with this place."

Reed raised an eyebrow at me and asked, "What's the CCC?"

Eric turned and frowned. "Community Caring for Community." He didn't seem to want to explain, but then he sighed. "Okay, how did you hear about us? I know who you are, but what I don't know is what you want." Crossing his arms over his chest, he added, "What do you want with us?"

Reed was excellent. I may have felt relieved at his error at the bar earlier, but I felt in awe of how well he carried off his cover.

"I heard about you first from the Inquirer article. After your press release, I dismissed it as tabloid nonsense like most of America. But we—" he smiled at me with eyes that looked at me lovingly and made my heart stop "—did a little digging, and found out the truth."

Before Eric could sputter denials, Reed cut him off.

"We've been exploring the ... DD community for quite awhile, and we've come to think this is an ideal place to settle down."

When Eric still didn't seem trusting, Reed went on. "Considering my public image, you can understand my requirement for discretion and privacy. I'm impressed with how you handled the whole tabloid mess, and managed to turn away the flood of reporters the following day or two, all convinced the story had been nonsense."

Eric seemed pretty convinced, but not completely. Lilah pulled out some beautiful, downright luxurious towels, then handed them to me. On top, she put a bottle of aloe lotion. With a wink, she whispered, "just in case."

That about proved everything to me. I was all ready to get out of there and bring the story home, when Eric challenged Reed's story.

"Well then, if that's true, you'll be giving Penny a good spanking tonight, I'm sure. Being as how it was me she was disrespectful to, I'd like to witness it."

My heart stopped beating. The only spanking I'd gotten in my life, if you can even call it a spanking, was the few swats outside of the shack he'd shown us.

Thankfully, Reed shook his head and put a reassuring arm around me. "I'm not about to let a stranger into our bedroom to watch her get a bare-bottomed spanking."

Did he have to be so graphic? I was relieved, though, until he suddenly seemed struck by an idea.

"Tell me, Eric. If I let you watch—and I can see your point about the lesson it would give Penny—do you think you might be able to find a few more available properties tomorrow?"

Oh no, I wanted to say. This conversation wasn't going well. I looked to Lilah with distress, but she just grabbed my hand and squeezed. "Oh to be young again, with a firm husband at my side." Was she crazy?

"Well, come to think of it, that place on Langston was my buddy's second choice. If you can best his price, I might be able to see that his first choice drops considerably in price ..."

And just like that, I found myself being escorted upstairs by two men. Both of which were strangers, really, though I had a bit of a crush on Reed. I

expected him to put a stop to our bluff any second, but next thing I knew, I was standing in the corner while Eric and Reed were discussing implements.

I just stood there, dazed, and looking into the corner. I was starting to worry that he was really going to go through with this ruse, when he came up behind me and whispered in my ear.

"If you're going to blow our cover, tell me now."

He was good at the command thing. I shook my head. Then his hands pulled up my skirt—I squealed in embarrassment—and he told me to hold my skirt up.

Yes, that was hard. After all, I'd never stood in a corner before. But then his fingers hooked into my panties, and my insides tied themselves in knots of panic, fear—and desire. It was a heady feeling.

"You've never been bared before anyone but me before, have you Penny?"

I swear, his voice was even more gorgeous than his body. I would have dwelt on it more, but then Eric chimed in, and I remembered I was being publicly displayed.

"It does wonders for teaching. That's why we're such a closed community; it allows us to be more open with our lifestyle, and wives don't try to get away with things in public they wouldn't dare to do at home."

Reed must have nodded or something, because I didn't hear anything but the sudden smack to my bottom. I whistled in a breath against the spark of pain, then braced myself for more. None came.

He let me stand there, exposed, and asked Eric for advice on various implements. It was downright humiliating. If he was going to spank me, then get on with it!

I found my mind drifting from their conversation to wondering what a spanking would be like. Something about Reed's hand to my bottom stirred

lust within me, and I remembered the research I had done in preparation for the story. Did the DD community know something I didn't?

I jumped when I heard—with amazement—Reed invite Eric to give me a couple smacks before we got to the spanking. That's when the mayor stepped behind me and pushed at my bottom here and there.

"Do you know, Reed, that the women tend to feel like their bottom is huge when standing in a corner with their panties down? My wife says she feels like everyone in the room is staring at her bottom."

I didn't point out the fact that everyone in the room *was* staring at my bottom. I didn't worry about it for too long, because Eric then slapped my bottom three times in a row, quick and hard.

Wicked hard. Tears spurted out of my eyes, and that was the moment I worried that I might be in over my head. I even cried out, though I bit my tongue as soon as I heard.

Reed made some approving sounds. "We're relatively new to this, and we'd be honored if you could give us some pointers."

Honored?

It got worse.

Eric loved the idea. "Why don't I get my bag, and I'll give you the workshop I give all newlyweds in the community?" Tapping my bottom as if it were his personal property, he added, "I can step it up a little bit, and it'll be a good punishment for her, as well as something you two can learn from."

I groaned as Eric left to get his bag. When Reed turned me around and asked if I was okay with all this, a good part of me wanted to run. Can you believe I said yes?

Probably not.

But if you looked into the Sinatra-blue eyes of a man you already had a crush on, you might understand why I nodded, why I smiled, and why I forgot all professionalism and kissed Reed right on the mouth.

Monroe County:
Newsy Newcomers
Part Two

So not ten minutes later, I was pantless and bare-bottomed over the lap of Reed Redford. Actually, I was over one leg, to be exact, while he pinned my legs down with his free leg.

'Let's 'em know they're in for a good one,' the old geezer of a mayor had said while instructing Reed on the fine art of spanking one's wife.

To tell you the truth, I was scared. Not in a terrified, traumatic way, but in a 'I know I've messed up and now I've got to pay the piper' sort of way.

But, I didn't feel like I'd messed up. I mean, I didn't feel guilty or anything. I hadn't behaved naughtily, like Eric just told me. I was just trying to get a story, playing a part.

"Remember," he addressed Reed, "*they behave naughtily, they are not naughty. They are just your beautiful, well-behaved wife who just chose the wrong behavior on a certain day.*"

I imagine Reed nodded, but I don't know. My face was practically buried in the carpet, and only my bottom was on level with the two men in the room. That alone, I felt, would be punishment enough for any misdeed.

"It's amazing how beautiful a butt is, when it's over your knee just waiting to be spanked."

Reed said that. I was shocked. First, shocked, because I'd always considered my bottom somewhat ugly. It was a tad too pudgy, though I thought I had nice legs. My extra few pounds stuck to my butt, and it wasn't the J-Lo kind of firm pudge, let me tell you.

Then I was embarrassed, and pleased.

Then embarrassed yet again when Eric piped up. "Isn't it? But you don't want to think too much of that, at least until a good girl spanking."

A good girl spanking? You mean the women got spanked when they were—oh, excuse me—*behaved* naughty, and they also got spanked when they were good? Seemed like a slick operation these men had going here, to me.

"Now, I like to time my lecture in between the warm-up, right before I lay on the real spanking."

Eric stepped closer to me, I could feel it. With a finger, he began tracing a wide circle from the top of my butt, around the sides, and halfway down my thighs. "You want this whole area to completely reddened—not pink—and totally sensitized, before you move on to the real punishment."

He cleared his throat. "You can also move your locking leg like so." I felt him maneuver Reed's leg so that it held down not both of my legs, but one. I was momentarily relieved at the extra bit of freedom, until I realized that it just spread my legs open. A few more adjustments by Eric, and I was totally exposed.

Now, I was getting terrified that my body would give away how turned on all this was getting me. Don't get me wrong; I was also beginning to tremble, that's how nervous I was. But, I could feel all sorts of mixed feelings within me, and one feeling in particular was emerging that I didn't know how to deal with: I was turned on like crazy.

Then Reed—did I mention that he's practically my career idol, everything I want to be? An investigative reporter at a national affiliate, who's won the Pulitzer three times? And did I remember to say he's got those rugged, outdoor good looks that somehow manage to look downright sexy in a suit?

Yes, *that* Reed traced a finger along my inner thighs and asked, "how much of this skin do we want to get?" He slapped inside my thigh. "Does that hurt more than—" he slapped with the same weight on my bottom—"this?"

I whimpered. *Fuck yes*, I wanted to say, but instead a meek voice emanated from my mouth. "Yes, Sir."

Eric chuckled. "I don't like to warm that part up. Yes, it hurts more, but it's good to save that virgin skin for when they need a good lesson. A good spanking with the hairbrush on the inside of those thighs, and you can be sure they're not going to repeat the same misbehavior twice."

When Eric tapped his hand on the inside of my thigh, I immediately reacted by trying to press my legs together. It was impossible, of course, with the way that Reed had splayed me with his leg.

"That must be embarrassing," Reed said, not in a mean way. He seemed to genuinely be interested. "I bet you're sorry you called this good mayor a 'fucking liar' now."

"Well, he was lying!" I sputtered, and tried to wiggle out of his grasp. The fact that I couldn't made me feel worse, and I tried harder and harder.

"Just let her wiggle for awhile," I heard Eric instruct Reed. "It's good for her to realize right off that she can't get away. She needs to know that you're in charge, and that you have total control over the situation."

Of course, that just made me wiggle more, and Reed, I'm proud to say, had to use some muscle to keep me from wiggling out of his grasp. I may be shorter than most, but I'm no weakling.

Eric seemed unconcerned with my struggles. "That's an important difference between the wife-beater—about the most despicable man on earth—and a wife-spanker." Was he pacing back and forth

like a lecturer? "The wife-beater is out of control, has no control over himself, so he tries to control his wife by fear and manipulation to make him feel more powerful."

Then someone, I don't know who, laid a hand on my shoulder in reassurance. "The true head of the household is always in control, first and foremost, of himself. Of his emotions, and most importantly, his temper. Spanking is not a way to vent one's anger on his wife, it's a way to guide and instruct. The root of dominant means teacher."

I had stopped wiggling by then, already taking notes in my head for my article.

"See? She's calmed down. They need to know you're in control, or else they'll be too scared, and that's unhealthy. If she knows you've got the situation in your control, she'll trust you not to hurt her, even though she *will* be scared of the spanking she knows is coming."

I didn't like Eric, the mayor of this crazy Stepford town, but I was beginning to have a certain respect for his insight into a woman's feelings. He was dead on.

"Now, if you look at her legs closely, you'll notice she's trembling a little."

I immediately tightened them, trying to hide my nervousness.

"That's normal. Some girls—women, I should say—are fearful before a spanking. I don't think it's the pain so much, but the fear of having their sins exposed and punished. They crave an accounting and a cleansing, but at the same time their natural instinct is to hide their misdeeds. More than anything, many women fear rejection if they're not perfect."

Okay, now I was starting to get tears in my eyes. In fact, a sob stole out of me, to my embarrassment. He was right. Here I was over Reed

Redford's knee, vulnerable emotionally and physically, and I worried that he would hate me in the morning. How could he respect my work, after he'd spanked me, for crying out loud?

And like Eric said, the pressure to be perfect bore down on me with the weight of the world.

"For a girl like Penny, who seems to be trembling a bit, it's always good to remind her that you love her and are doing this to guide her. That you know she's a good girl, but that she just took a step off the path."

Then Eric surprised me even more. "You see, Reed, they just never seem to get how beautiful their trust in us is, how much we admire their strength, to submit to our guidance and discipline. Doesn't it just make you right proud of your girl?"

Then Reed echoed agreement with a tone of such wonder, that I couldn't help but be shocked, yet again. Eric talked about it as if this whole spanking thing was something sacred and holy.

"Alright, enough philosophy, let's get her bottom good and red."

What followed is not something I like to remember. Reed's hand—his very *large* hand—began whacking my bottom. First left, then right, then left, then right.

Eric interrupted the rhythm of spanks. "Now patterns have their purpose, but you want to save the predictable for the hard part of the lesson. Right now you want to keep her a bit off kilter. It hurts more when they don't know where or when to expect the next flash of pain. Now, later, if you have to give them the cane or an especially painful segment of punishment, predictability can help them brave the pain."

I kicked with my free leg a little when Reed's hand spanked me anew, this time bouncing around in a chaotic sea of pain. First a leg, then a bottom

cheek, then a side, and the pain seemed to be coming from everywhere.

Well, pain isn't exactly the right word. *Smarting* seemed to be what his hand was mostly doing. Unfortunately, Eric remedied that.

"Now there seems to be a misconception that the hand cannot deliver a good spanking. On the contrary, if you smack just so—" he demonstrated on the back of one of my thighs, and let me tell you, it made me squeal—"she'd be hard-pressed to choose between your hand and the hairbrush, even."

"The difference," Eric explained, as Reed began getting better and better (actually, worse and worse, in my opinion) at skinning my hide, "is the intimacy factor. The skin to skin helps them feel it in their heart, as well as their brain. You're more likely to get an 'I'm sorry' that means 'I'm sorry' with your hand, whereas the hairbrush is more likely to inspire an 'I'm sorry' that means 'it hurts! Please stop the pain!'"

Speaking of 'I'm sorrys,' I was beginning to feel guilty for my words of disrespect towards this man. Even though he *had* lied to us, even though I was playing a part to get a story, I started to feel sorry. Even more than my disrespect, the fact that breaking a story of their lifestyle could ruin what he seemed to hold sacred started to make me feel a little bit guilty.

But I hadn't expected myself to pipe up in a meek voice, "I *am* sorry, Sir."

"That's good, Penny." Eric patted my bottom comfortingly. "Now, Reed, she's in the right headspace to learn. Now that she's contrite, you can lecture her, explain why she mustn't behave the way she did. After that, you drive the lesson home with something with a higher pain factor than your hand."

Like I said before, Reed was damn good at giving a dressing down. Amidst my apologies, he made sure I'd promised several times over never to call anyone a liar, not to mention never to curse.

He even pulled out the professionalism card. "A woman does not get extra respect from men by cursing, and you're in a business that, frankly, makes it hard for a woman to get a job such as mine, which you seem to want."

It was true, and I felt the blood drain from my head as I thought about his implications. Not that he'd ever offered, or even implied in any sort of way during the whole day of our acquaintance, but I'd been actively imagining him getting me 'in' at the affiliate. Now, I wondered if he would, after my language that afternoon.

That's when I started sobbing. Started thinking that he wouldn't respect me after all this. That he'd break the story, and I'd have this memory of being humiliated in front of him, and that's it.

But he took Eric's advice, and even managed to convince me that he wasn't playing a part. "You're a talented young lady, Penny, and I've enjoyed reading your work over the past few years. You bring a gentle humanity to even the worst assignments you get, and even if it's just a story about a cat caught in a tree, you make it fascinating."

My heart, by this time, was jumping up and down in joy. He read my work? He *liked* it?

"*And*, Penny, you're a better person than one who speaks disrespectfully to strangers. I expect better behavior from you, or else you'll be back over my knee getting spanked again." With a slap to my bottom, he asked, "do you understand?"

"Yes, Sir." It came out fast and eager to please. Only after I replied did I realize that he'd said he'd spank me again if I messed up. Would he? Was that

him playing the part, or was that him telling me I'd see him again?

"Good," Eric said. "You'll notice she's not trembling anymore. There's a few reasons for this. One," he said with a chuckle, "they always seem to think that if they listen and respond well, they'll get out of the rest of the spanking. After fifty years of marriage, my wife *still* seems surprised when I tell her it's time for the rest of the spanking."

My heart dropped. It's true, I'd been thinking maybe that was it.

"You must never stop here. They'd be disappointed—even though they won't admit it to save their lives—and you don't want to experience the bratting *that* would encourage." I heard him rustling in his big, black leather bag I had caught sight of when he'd returned from his car. "Second, they've felt enough pain to realize that they're not going to die, and you've reassured them that you're not going to reject them."

As if an afterthought, he added, "You know, that's the only thing I would criticize about your lecturing. I think you need to remind her how much you love her."

There was a pause. I would say *pregnant pause* but while I was in school for journalism, our teachers warned us not to use clichés. But hey, if the shoe fits ... I felt like the thick air was going to give birth to something that would expose our playacting.

I held my breath, wondering what Reed would do. After all, I had a crush on him, but love? We weren't even in the ballpark, except in my fantasies.

"I've already told you how much I love your work."

He sounded a tad nervous. He wasn't going to blow our cover, not after all this humiliation, was he?

"As a woman, I deeply admire you and respect you. I'm amazed at ... this feeling spanking you gives me. I feel so ... it's thrilling, guiding you in this way. And humbling—" *He's humbled?* He should try baring his bottom and getting spread and spanked before a stranger! "—I love you, Penny Scott."

God, it sounded sincere, though I knew it couldn't be, not after a day. Still, my mouth dried up and my heart got this terrified, but kind of good feeling.

"See how she's stilled, Reed? That's good. Now here are a few of the implements I have for everyday use."

Then began a demonstration I hate to remember, let alone recount. First it was the hairbrush. "Among the most effective, and most versatile. Great because it can be carried in a purse, and therefore always be at hand to discourage acting out in public." The hairbrush was a thudding pain, that felt like little bruises erupting from under the skin.

But if I thought that was bad, next came a paddle-ball paddle, with the ball long ago thrown away. *That* was torture, and I cried like a baby as it burned my bottom. "Really drives a lesson home," said Eric.

Then he pulled out a long frat paddle. "Covers the whole bottom," said Eric. "Only give her one today, but in the future, it should be used for serious discipline." That one crack seemed to splinter my skin into little pieces, and I was way beyond embarrassment: I cried out, begging for mercy.

Next came the cane. "Only to be used in a position she can hold. *Lightly*. The cane can do some damage. I've used it three times on my wife, when she endangered herself. Because of its make-

up, what you think is a light stroke can leave quite a cut."

Reed suddenly became the reporter again. "Isn't that abuse?"

Eric was quiet for awhile. "Some would say it is. But as long as she consents to this sort of relationship, then it's as the BDSM community likes to say: Safe, Sane, and Consensual."

Reed rubbed a hand over my bottom protectively, which hurt, since it was raw, but felt good to my heart. "I wouldn't want to *hurt* her."

I couldn't resist. I turned my head up to him and said, "what do you think you've been doing the past hour?" But I was smiling through my tears, and he laughed.

Eric joined in, and then explained, "If you saw the woman you love more than anyone in the world risking her life over foolishness or carelessness, you'd rather see her bottom bruised and welted than bury her in a casket."

He had a knack for making this whole strange lifestyle sound loving. "What does the CCC do?" I asked.

Eric sat down on the bed next to me, resting a hand on my shoulder. I was still bottoms up in the air, but I'd been through a lot with these two men. Somewhere along the line I'd lost my embarrassment, and felt an ease to be myself that I hadn't ever felt before.

"The CCC—Community Caring for Community—cares for those alone, like Lilah. But it's not just for the elderly or widowed, we look after the young and single. In Monroe County, we have strong values about social responsibility. We look after each other, whether someone like Lilah needs a hand with the heavy work, or if she needs a good spanking to keep her in line, or just a spanking to remind her that she's not alone in the world."

I suddenly got it. I bought his story, hook, line and sinker, and knew that tomorrow I'd be making a bid on that house. My bottom hurt, and I'd been more mortified than I'd ever been in my life, but I liked this community.

I also knew that whatever story Reed took home, I'd be selling a story on a community of social responsibility, caring, and the old-fashioned value of looking after one another—minus the spanking.

That's when Eric stood up. He pulled one final implement from his bag and bent down to let me see it. "Consider this an early housewarming present." It was a small, round paddle, with about a dozen beveled holes. "This smarts like you wouldn't believe; my wife hates it more than anything."

Then he stood up and gave it to Reed. "If you really want to drive the lesson home, you can attack this white area here—" his finger traced the inside of my thigh, then the other "—and here."

Reed asked, "How many times?"

As I heard Eric pack his things and put on his coat, he gave the worst (at least for my poor bottom) advice of the night. "Spank her until she's beyond trying to manage the pain, until you feel she accepts the pain and submits to it. Then spank a little longer while she's in that headspace, just so she completely understands that misbehavior will be punished."

I was trembling again.

"But I leave you to that in privacy. Penny—" he touched my shoulder "—it was nice to meet you. Reed—" they were shaking hands right above my bared bottom! "—we'll see if we can't find the house for you two in the morning."

Then he was gone, and I held my breath. For a moment, I rejoiced, thinking that now that there was no need for pretending in front of Eric, I'd be

freed from the awful implement. Boy was I surprised when I felt a surge of sad disappointment.

Then surprised even more when Reed asked, "Alright Penny, you know why you're here, and what you deserve." He adjusted me over his leg and locked me tight, legs splayed. "This is going to hurt like the dickens."

And it did. I may have tried to wiggle from his grasp before, but at the first scorcher on my tender inner thigh, I squirmed for all I was worth. It didn't get me anywhere, except Reed said mildly, "You know, I'm not using all my strength. I *can* spank harder."

Rather than making me still, fear at his words made me struggle harder. Not that it did me any good. You may laugh at me, think I'm silly to be so dramatic over a little spanking, but I had no idea you couldn't die from that much pain.

Worse, I never even got more than a few very light bruises.

Still, while that little paddle burned my skin, I screamed and wiggled and fought. I kept telling myself to give in to it so that it would end earlier, but I couldn't manage it. Instinct reacted to pain, and my better sense had nothing to do with it.

Until finally, at some point, I realized it was never going to end. There was no way out. That paddle was going to burn my legs until I *had* no legs, and still, it would hurt. I know I went limp, because I gave up.

I wasn't broken, though. I knew I'd never utter another curse word in my life, and that it would end when Reed wanted it to. I knew I was in his control, and that I wasn't going to fall.

Well, actually, when he stopped spanking me and unlocked his leg, I was so limp that I actually did fall. I was speaking figuratively, though.

Reed scooped me up, tears and all, and rocked me. "You're forgiven, baby."

I had a good, cleansing cry. One of those hearty cries that leaves you with a feeling of euphoria when it's over. One of those cries that puts you in a sleep so peaceful, that you wake up ten hours later with a grin on your face.

That is, until I looked over at Reed and wondered what our relationship was. His blue eyes twinkled when he saw my eyes open.

"Sleeping Beauty wakes," he said.

I grinned shyly, holding my breath a bit.

"You're not going to curse again, are you?"

I couldn't look him in the eyes when he said that, and I rubbed my bottom ruefully.

"No, Sir." It came out in my high voice, all meek and submissive. It felt comfortable, even though I'd often thought that meek was synonymous with weak. But no, I felt strong and happy in my own skin, with no defenses or pretenses.

"I'm going to be around to spank you if it happens again, you know that, don't you?"

I didn't, but I watched a flicker of worry cross his face. Was he worried I would reject him?

"Yes, Sir." Again meek, but I smiled.

He grinned with a sigh that came out half-contented, and half relieved. "There's not going to be a story here, is there?"

"No, Sir."

The best story of my life, and no, I didn't publish it. And we did live happily ever after, so it would have been a great article. Maybe a Pulitzer, if I'd managed to convince the public the loving wonders of spanking as well as Eric had convinced me.

Reed never got me a job at his ABC affiliate, because I refused. On my own laurels, I got a job at the NBC affiliate, and even became an investigative reporter. We're often competing for a story, which

gives us quite a bit of spice in our relationship. The viewers just love the fact that we're married, and I'm told that couples have been known to fight over which newscast to watch. Like we're two sporting teams, the newspapers carry tallies on who got the best story first.

Of course, they have no idea that every Saturday night, like all the other female residents of Monroe County, I get a spanking. Whether I'm good or bad, come rain or shine, in sickness or in health.

It's a wonderful life.

The Agency:
Ellie's Story

"Ellie, you're an outstanding employee—one of the hardest working employees I've ever had."

I have to admit, I just love getting compliments. I sat a little taller in my chair, proud. Turned out, I was completely blindsided by the compliment.

"But, it looks like I'm going to have to let you go."

"What?" I stammered, trying not to let tears come into my eyes.

Mr. Smithers walked—at his age, he actually limped a bit—around to the front of his massive desk and put a hand on my shoulder. "Years of doing this, *years*, and it never gets any easier."

I was getting fired? I couldn't believe it. I got more work done in less time than any other employee. True, I was late ... now and then.

"You were late sixteen days last quarter. Sometimes sauntering in over two hours late." He ran a hand through his thinning white hair in frustration, and then looked at me severely. "You set a poor example for the others."

"But, I'm sorry! Everyone has always told me that I make up for it with the speed, efficiency, and quality of my work. I didn't know it was a problem."

He shook his head. "Ellie, I've spoken to you three times about it in the past month." When I started to speak, he held up a hand. "No, Ellie, it's not only that. The work you do is outstanding." He smiled at me, encouraging. "Excellent, really. You've an amazing talent. But it's more to the point the work that you *don't* do."

I guess I should admit at this point that I'm a little forgetful. Like, meetings, projects, stuff like that. I have a little organizer, but I forget to look in

it. I listened as Mr. Smithers cushioned his words of truth with words of encouragement.

"You forget meetings, both interoffice meetings and meetings with clients. Last week, we lost a shot at Kaynan's Department store. Ellie, I was going to let you head that account, as a surprise."

Shit. That meant he would have let me head more accounts if I did well, and that also meant he was watching me for partner possibility. My heart sank.

"Any ad agency would love to have you as an employee, and I'll give you a glowing recommendation. But, I think you need to learn this lesson of responsibility the hard way."

I didn't want to cry, but the tears came. Mr. Smithers had always been nice to me, hiring me out of a pack of hundreds of better-credentialed candidates, simply, he told me, because I had said my pleases and thank yous and behaved with the grace of a lady.

I'd blushed like crazy, and didn't tell him that the 'grace' he saw was merely extreme shyness. As a child, I'd been held back in kindergarten because of my excruciating shyness. As an adult, I was too shy to *act* shy, but shy I still was. It came across to people as sweetly polite, but in all truth, I'm just a scaredy cat.

He responded to my shyness—er, politeness—with all the old-fashioned manners that began dying out in the late twentieth century. Seeing as how it was the twenty-second century, he'd had to have learned them from his grandfather. I'd always had a sort of crush on him. Not the 'I want to be your girlfriend' kind, but the 'I want to be your granddaughter' kind.

So I cried, and he handed me an old-fashioned lace handkerchief, which only made me cry worse. He came and rested a hand on my shoulder,

muttering, "I really wish I didn't have to do this, but this is best for you, in the long run. You'll thank me for it. I've a soft spot for you, Ellie, and if I let you stay here and continue with this behavior, you will not achieve all that you are capable of."

All in all, it would have been much easier if we didn't get on so well. I managed to bring my sniffles—well, sobs, really—under control, and dabbed the tears off my cheeks with his handkerchief.

"If there were some way I could have a second chance ..." I trailed off, hating myself for begging, for not taking it gracefully like the lady he had always thought I was.

He patted my shoulder and shook his head regretfully. "This *is* your second chance. A wake up call, if you will." Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out a card. "This is a golfing buddy of mine, Ralph Swanson. He knows the situation, and I told him the excellent work you do and the special talent you have. He's promised to hire you, to put you on the fast track, as long as you behave with responsibility."

I took the card and stood, knowing that if I stayed there any longer I would just lose all dignity. Luckily, the rest of the staff had gone home for the evening, and I packed my things and left before he could offer to walk me to my car, or some other kindness.

But, Mr. Smithers still managed to riddle me with guilt by his kindness. With the unused vacation days and the end of the year bonus he sent me—even though I'd been fired—I could afford not to work for two whole months.

So, I sat at home in my bed with my media-vid. Browsed the internet, watched some movies, and played games. Pitied myself and had a lazy party for two weeks.

Thank god for my housecleaning droid, or the house would have been a complete mess.

Then I came across a news report about the Michaelson Agency, a discipline consulting firm. Evidently, they were now accepting single women as clients, and offering self-discipline, time management, and life skills courses. I brought their website up on my vid screen, and read about their success rates with their domestic discipline clients.

Compared to the fifty percent national failure rate of the nation, couples with the Michaelson Agency had only a three percent failure rate. They'd now expanded their client base to singletons like me, although no statistics were listed on us.

I clicked on Jared Lane's picture. He'd joined the agency only a year ago, but had done extensive studies in the area of disciplinary sciences. Though he only looked to be about thirty, he held two doctorates—one in psychology and one in disciplinary sciences.

I looked down at Mr. Smithers' handkerchief on my desk. He'd been so nice, but he was right; I needed to learn responsibility. Before I could let fear turn me away, I clicked on 'appointments' and signed up for the first available slot with Jared, tomorrow at six in the evening. I even filled out the extensive questionnaire with as much honesty as I could, sparing no secrets.

When my stomach went into butterflies, I told myself I didn't have to go. But I went into the closet and carefully laid out a gauzy green dress that reminded me of mist off of a green field. I set out a pair of white ballet slipper shoes, and my hose, of course.

Then I lay in bed most of the night, imagining Jared taking me over his knee and spanking me. I cried some, and hoped that he could erase the guilt I felt and help me put my life back on track.

"Jared, you've a six o'clock newbie." Liz, the receptionist, tapped her vid screen with brisk efficiency. "I've forwarded her questionnaire to your unit in your office."

Jared sighed and thanked the woman who was both the firm's secretary and the boss's wife. Though he'd had a bit of a crush on her at first, he'd shut that door as soon as he learned of Doug Barker's love for her.

"Most of them don't come. They fill out the questionnaire in the safety of night, and forget about it in the morning."

Liz tapped her French manicured fingernail to the schedule. "Well, if you read her file, I think ..." she trailed off, glancing down at the floor with a blush.

Jared hid his chuckle. "Are you allowed to read confidential files, Liz?"

Her big eyes darted back and forth between him and her husband's office. "But technically, she's not a patient, so she's not yet protected by the Confidentiality Act of 2103."

This time he chuckled out loud. When he reached his office, he was impressed with the girl's forthrightness and candor. He understood what she needed when he read the 'Is there anything you can add that will help us serve you better?' question.

I am quite shy. Most people just smile at me, and even when they reprimand me, they laugh and try to be as nice as possible. I don't need everyone to always be nice to me. I'm not fragile. Just because I have a high voice and I'm a bit shy and therefore, too polite, doesn't mean I'm not as strong as the next person.

And there it was. Jared leaned back, feeling a bit satisfied with himself. Every girl had her 'button,'

and he knew—he flipped through the papers to the front, looking at the name—Eleanor-please-call-me-Ellie just needed a firm hand. A strict but caring rock to lean on for a while.

Jared Lane looked more friendly and a whole lot less stern than he had in his picture. It was silly, but I felt a bit disappointed. I was nervous—okay, terrified—and a bit embarrassed that my hands were clammy when I shook his hand.

"Welcome to the Michaelson Agency, Ellie." His confidence was contagious, and gave me heart to follow him when he said, "Come on back then, Ellie."

His office was sparse and functional, lacking the homely touches of a woman. No family pictures, and no signs of his hobbies or interests.

"Have a seat," he commanded, then picked up a vid tablet and leaned against the front of his desk.

I had to pass before him to get to the chair, and I trembled a little as I accidentally brushed against his leg. I knew from the FAQs that he wouldn't spank me on the first meeting, but hey, there's a first time for everything, right?

When I sat down in the cushy chair, my butt tingled. Would I be sitting here next week with my bottom burning from a spanking? My face felt hot and swollen with self-consciousness, and when Jared slapped the file down on the desk and turned to me, I couldn't meet his eyes.

"Okay," and his voice seemed lower, stricter. "From here on out, you call me Sir. Understood?"

I nodded and felt tears burn my eyes. It wasn't guilt, though I felt guilty enough, just a fear that I'd exposed all my faults to a stranger who would, without hesitation, spank me for them.

"Ellie."

My eyes snapped up at his curt tone.

"Did you hear me when I told you to call me Sir?"

I nodded violently, eager to please.

"Then I'd better hear your answer, not a rude nod with your eyes glued to the ground."

He may have seemed open and friendly before, but now he seemed strict. Terribly strict. I was terrified and relieved at the same time.

"I understand, Sir." Didn't he read my file? I'm just shy, and definitely not rude. Then I got brave, and told him so.

"Ellie, shyness is just a matter of confidence about saying the right thing at the right time. I'm telling you that when I ask you a question, I want to hear your answer, not see it, and that it had better be followed with a Sir."

And what if I don't? I wanted to ask. Instead I found myself sitting straighter, feeling more comfortable at his directness.

"Don't ask me to treat you with kid gloves, Ellie. You're an adult, and while you are here, you will be disciplined as an adult."

Strangely, as severe as his tone was, I felt respected more by this man than most men who treated me like a delicate, pretty flower.

"Yes, Sir," I answered, proud of the way my voice rang strong and clear.

"Excellent." It was praise, and I was caught off guard. He opened my file again. "I can see that once I tell you something, you're not likely to disobey me, are you?"

And risk a spanking? "Of course not." Then, "Sir."

He nodded and smiled. "So I don't think you'd learn all you need to on a straight misbehavior/discipline program." Pulling out a vid-pen, he began tapping the slim e-tablet and taking

notes. "I'm suggesting a weekly counseling session, followed by a behavior maintenance session at level ..." he paused to look at me, then tapped the vid-pen to the screen again. "two, to be adjusted up or down according to our determinations. That means, or course, that misdeeds and misbehaviors will be dealt with separately."

He looked at me expectantly, and I fear I was staring at him a bit agape. He was talking all technical, like a doctor.

Jared chuckled and ran a hand through his sandy blonde hair. "I'm sorry, Ellie." He put the tablet down and sat down in the client chair next to mine. "Let me translate."

"I'm going to spank you once a week, whether you're good or not. As apparent by your answers, you need to learn a little discipline."

"I've never been spanked before," I said. When he quirked his eyebrow, I added, "Sir."

"Yes, I know. I'm warning you, your cute smile is not going to get you out of anything. I'm going to ask that you do some things that you aren't going to want to do, but that will teach you discipline."

Things I don't want to do? Alarm bells rang out everywhere. "I won't have sex with you. I'm not ..." I started to stand, but he rested a gentle hand to my shoulder.

"Ellie, I'm talking about things like turning off your cleaning droid so you can learn the art of hard work." He sat back down and leaned back in his chair. "It is apparent by your work that you're used to working on inspiration, not discipline."

I sat down. It was true. "But if I turn off my cleaning droid, I might not have time to ... get inspired." Sometimes inspiration would hit me during a commercial, and I'd work late into the night on a project for work. That's why I was often late—but it's not like I didn't put the time in.

"Ellie, when I read this, I hear 'I need to learn discipline' between every line you typed. I'm not going to give you a break for talent, pretty talk, or pretty smiles. If that's not what you're looking for, then there's the door."

When he stood and started clearing his desk as if he'd dismissed me, I jumped up in tears. "Okay, Sir, it's what I need, I know it, but I'm scared."

"I know you are, Ellie, and that's normal." His confirmation relaxed me a bit. "I've sent a print out of your program to the receptionist, Liz, and I'd like you to take a look at the program and make a serious commitment in your mind before you set up your first appointment."

He pulled out a vid disc from an old metal cabinet. "This explains the singleton program, as well as the weekly maintenance program that I am prescribing for you." He sat down in his squeaky chair and leaned back. "Now I'm going to let you ask questions. After all, if you sign these contracts, you're trusting me with a lot."

Didn't I know it. Mostly, all I could think about was the once a week spanking, no matter my behavior. "Why will you spank me once a week, even if I'm good?"

He smiled, as if I'd asked a question that interested him. "You need routine and structure, Ellie, and a once a week spanking is just part of that. I think you'll find that you'll feel more secure, for one, and we'll have less of the 'testing the boundaries' spankings that so many new clients earn themselves." He paused, looking at me worriedly. "Frankly, it doesn't sound like your career can take a whole lot more screw-ups."

I winced, but he was right. I craved security. I loved when I was in a routine—I flourished, actually, both creatively and personally, but keeping myself in a regular routine was near impossible.

"I'm a ..." I took a deep breath and pulled together my courage. "I'm a bit scared. Do you think I could have that first spanking now, and get it over with?"

Jared's answer was firm. "No."

I sighed in disappointment, and to my surprise, I just started crying. I didn't dare look at him. After all, just last night I had written, "I'm not fragile." But here I was, crying.

"I am not going to change my mind because you cry, Ellie." His voice was so gentle, I cried harder.

"I know," I hiccupped. "It's just ... I've been alone, for so long." It seemed like forever. I'd been so focused on my career that I hadn't made new friends when old friends moved away from the city. My family was not a close family, and as far as boyfriends go ... my last one had been over four years ago. "And now you're helping me in a way I've only dreamed of, and I feel happy, like things are going to change for the better."

For the first time, Jared seemed surprised. "Then why are you crying?"

I laughed and shrugged. "I don't know."

He stood up, and handed me a contract. "Look over all materials carefully, and if and when you decide to make a commitment, you can register for a recurring Friday appointment either online, or call Liz in the office."

Then his voice grew strict again, but there was a kind and slightly teasing gleam in his eyes. "Now, that's the second time today you forgot to call me Sir. If you do decide to continue and want to get that first spanking out of the way, you may call Liz in the morning and schedule a Level One for tomorrow after my last appointment."

It seems silly, but I was greatly relieved at his offer. I'd been sitting in my apartment for over two

weeks doing the self-pity thing, and now I was ready to get on with my life.

Jared felt a wave of relief when Ellie left his office seemingly content. She was going to be a tough case, he knew. Her sweet smile and pretty big brown eyes were probably one of the many reasons she was often treated with kid gloves.

He was a professional, but it was still hard to be strict with her. She was on the fragile side, but that was only a reaction to how the world treated her. He wouldn't spank her as hard as he spanked most of his clients, but he knew she would feel all the spanks in her sensitive heart.

But, she would get spanked longer than most of his clients. She was the type to feel proud after a spanking—proud of getting through the whole thing. The longer he made it, the stronger she would feel and—he hoped—become.

I practically ran out of the office, such was my relief that the worst was over. He'd read my file, including all my faults and sins, and he still looked at me with respect. I liked the way he treated my problems a bit clinically, as if they were a virus to be medicated and not a flaw in my character.

So when I walked into the office the next evening, I didn't expect to start trembling again. I should have, though. It was my first spanking. As I signed in, only half-listening to Liz's friendly chatter, I peeked down the hallway towards the treatment rooms.

Jared walked out and towards his office, followed by a lady of about forty. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, and she was walking funny—

somehow limping with both legs. I bit my lip and forgot to look away politely.

"Oh, dearie, you look like a frightened deer." She winced as she walked slowly towards me. "First time?"

I nodded.

"Let me give you one piece of advice. Do not—and I mean *never, ever*—miss an appointment, er, *by accident*." She said the last conspiratorially, and I knew she hadn't missed hers by accident. "But don't worry. You're in the best hands with Jared."

Liz chimed in with her professional voice, "You certainly are. Jared will see you in Room 4." She tapped the screen, and then squinted. "Looks like he wants you waiting for him bare-bottomed, nose in the corner."

And so I took timid steps down the hallway, praying fervently that Jared wouldn't come out of his office. It was like going to the worst sort of doctor's visit, one you knew would hurt a great deal but would help you heal.

I suspected this was going to hurt a lot more than a doctor's visit, and I had a low pain threshold as it was. When I finally turned into Room 4 and shut the door behind me, I was comforted by the fact that it looked exactly as promised on the vid disc. Clothes below the waistline were to be taken off, folded neatly, and placed in the basket in the corner unless otherwise instructed.

The guidelines on the vid ran through my memory, telling me what to do. I took off my pants quickly, as if it were worse that Jared should walk in while I was in the process of undressing, as opposed to already being undressed.

The cool air on my bottom was a wake-up call to how utterly exposed I was. I wanted to run to the corner for protection, hide there and put my hands protectively over my bottom.

But I knew better. Hands on the wall, nose in the corner, feet shoulder-width apart.

Just when I got into position, Jared walked in. "Okay," he said in a doctor voice. "A level one for Ellie, for forgetting to address me with the proper respect."

The hair on the back of my neck bristled in fear as he stepped behind me. "Do you have any questions before we begin?"

"No sir," I said quietly. I was strangely calm.

I wanted to take my spanking quietly, gracefully. No protesting or crying out. He'd seen enough tears from me. The vid disc had said that I should not worry about a proper reaction—the disciplinarians were trained professionals and had seen and understood almost any reaction from receiving a spanking.

But still, I'd dissolved into sobs yesterday, and I wanted to make up for it today.

"You seem calm." I heard a chair scraping the floor as it was placed in the center of the room, and then he commanded, "Step into the center please, Ellie."

I was embarrassed, being partially naked. He seemed completely disinterested though, just like a doctor.

"You did an excellent job of preparation today, Ellie. Every time I see you, I expect you to wait for me bare-bottomed in the corner. Understood?"

Thankfully, I hadn't spent too much time in the corner before he walked in. Still, it was humiliating. As was standing before him, waiting to be spanked.

"Yes Sir."

He smiled and patted his lap. "Okay then, over you go. A level one, as you know, is my bare hand applied to your bare bottom. I am not going to show you any mercy just because it is your first spanking, so you can expect a sound lesson."

That's when I started trembling again. "What if I can't make it through the whole spanking?"

There was silence and I held my breath.

"Ellie, look at me."

My lip started quivering as I looked up into the soft eyes that belied his strict voice.

"I will never give you more than you can handle. You may often feel like the spanking will never end, that you can't possibly bear it, but I promise you: Bear it you will, and you will usually feel like the spanking lasts just a bit longer than you feel like you can handle."

I took a step towards him, and stalled again when I was right next to his knees. I pleaded with him with my eyes, but he just patted his lap again, patiently.

"Remember, Ellie. You can handle whatever I give you."

And so I did. The first few spansks didn't hurt all that much, but the pain gradually grew. I didn't count, but it must have been over a hundred swats of his rough hand before tears started trailing down my face.

Still, it didn't end. The pain blossomed on my bottom like salt applied to sunburn, and I cried out, "I don't want to cry, please don't make me cry again."

"Crying is not a sign of weakness, Ellie."

My hands were on the cold tile floor for balance, and I used them to brace myself as the jolts grew more powerful. I rocked forward with the impact and back in reaction. Then the hand came down again and again, unrelenting and unforgiving.

His hand quickened, and I finally relented to my tears. He only coaxed them with his punishing hands, adding, "That's okay, Ellie, just let it out."

And so I did. Until his hand suddenly started whacking me machine-gun-fire fast, and I began squealing.

"Do you feel like it's unbearable, Ellie?" he asked, without a single pause in the rapid fire spansks that were now traveling down the backs of my legs.

"Yes Sir, please stop!"

They only seemed to get faster at that, and he stated, "You have five more minutes of this."

My heart thudded to the floor, and I started trying to wiggle out from under the hand that wouldn't stop. Such was the pain, that although my wiggling was ineffective, I was still squirming when I noticed he had stopped spanking me.

He let me go, and I jumped up immediately, rubbing the sting out of my bottom furiously.

"Ellie, get those hands off that bottom right now!"

I froze.

"Go to the cabinet and bring me the wooden paddle."

In my smallest voice, I whispered, "I'm sorry, Sir."

But, he didn't relent. Within sixty seconds I was bent over with my hands flat on the chair, and two enormous cracks knocked into my bottom.

Then before I could curl up in tears, holding my injured bottom, he captured my hands in his and ordered, "look at me, Ellie."

I did. I looked into those stern blue eyes and gathered strength from the acceptance I saw. "It really hurts, Sir."

"Did I give you more than you can handle?"

I shook my head, then hurriedly added, "No sir."

"Do you feel proud, for having borne your entire spanking?"

I hadn't, but then when he mentioned it, I did. I felt stronger, somehow. More at peace.

"Yes, Sir."

"Good. No rubbing, now. Set the timer for ten minutes, then you can get dressed, and I'll see you on Friday, okay?"

A smile popped up then, and I nodded.

He, however, frowned. "I beg your pardon?"

I gasped. "I mean, Yes Sir!"

