

The Neighborhood Prankster

By

Joannie Kay

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Chapter One

Cilly took great pleasure in dressing entirely in black, and making sure to tuck her blonde braids up under the black ski cap. She even put a pair of black gloves on her hands. If anyone did spot her, it would appear as though a disembodied head was floating around the tree in her front yard! She loved that idea and giggled at the thought of nosy Mrs. Harrison across the street freaking out and yelling for her husband to come and see. Mr. Harrison was conveniently 'deaf' to his wife's panic attacks, and all the neighborhood referred to them as Abner and Gladys Kravitz from the television show *Bewitched*. Mrs. Harrison was forever seeing things and screaming for Mr. Harrison to come and look, but by the time she got his attention, whatever she thought she was seeing was gone.

Once Cilly was dressed to her satisfaction she slipped out the back door of her house and looked all around. It was three in the morning, but that meant nothing at all. The odds were good that her neighbors were all asleep, but she had to be sure. She especially didn't want Wilson Shyre to see her. Not that the aggravating man would pay any attention even if he did! She tugged on her hat to make sure it covered her hair completely as she looked over at his house.

Her new neighbor's house was completely dark, but that didn't mean anything when it came to Wilson Shyre. He did not keep any sort of regular hours that a person could see. And, he kept entirely to himself, except for the scoldings he regularly delivered to anyone in the neighborhood who managed to bother him in some way. He told Mr. Harrison that it was rude to mow his lawn so early in the mornings. He walked down to the Devonshire's and told Pamela that no one on the street wanted to hear her little boy practice his new drum for two hours straight and suggested he practice inside their house from now on. Ruby Johnson's dog made the mistake of pooping in his perfectly manicured yard, and Wilson picked up the mess with a shovel and carried it next door and put it on her porch. Ruby made the mistake of calling the police to complain and ended up receiving a citation because there was a leash law in town. Ruby vowed she would never speak to Wilson Shyre again, but since the man was practically a hermit, the threat wasn't very impressive.

Wilson Shyre had hurt Cilly's feelings and Cilly was determined to see him punished. She tried to be neighborly, just as she had with Norris and Evelyn Stickler when they lived there. She gave Wilson a couple of days to settle in, and then she took him a plate of cookies. When he didn't answer his door, she put the cookies on the small table on his front porch and left a note. He did not acknowledge the cookies, and worst of all, he did not return her plate! Another time when he was working in the yard, she made a pitcher of lemonade and walked over, wearing a pretty summer sundress, and offered him a glass. He flat out told her he did not like lemonade and went right back to work, telling her he was too busy for chitchat. No, Cilly thought, the man had a lesson coming to him, and she was just the one to teach it to him.

She was cautious as she moved to her front yard. Not one soul was moving on the darkened street, and she worked quickly. When she was all finished, she went inside her house by way of the back door, stripped out of her 'work clothes', and took a shower before putting on a white dorm shirt and falling into her bed. She had three hours to sleep, and then the show would start. Cilly went to sleep with a smile on her face.

Wilson Shyre was sound asleep when the doorbell rang. He fully intended to ignore whoever it was. The doorbell kept right on ringing, and it sounded like someone was holding the button down, deliberately trying to piss him off. The pounding started then, and he picked up his clock and groaned when he realized it was barely seven o'clock. He never got up before ten, especially on a Saturday! The ringing and pounding continued. He threw off the sheet and blanket, got out of bed, and put a robe on over the boxers he slept in. If his house wasn't on fire, he was going to raise hell all over who it was... or all over parents if it was a kid, he amended his thinking as he stomped to the entry to fling the door open.

To Wilson's surprise, the cute little blonde from next door was standing on his porch, and the expression on her face said she was angry. He mentally tried to figure out why she was so angry with him, and couldn't think of one little reason. The lemonade disaster was well over three months ago now, and she hadn't bothered him since. "What is it, Miss Gibbons?" He forced himself to be civil.

"*What is it?*" she repeated, looking at him in shock. "You know very well what you did!" she accused.

"I have done nothing but try to get some sleep! It is barely seven o'clock, and you are waking the entire neighborhood."

"You toilet papered my tree!" Cilly dramatically accused, pointing toward her yard.

"I did no such thing!" he quickly denied, looking over the top of her head to see that her tree was covered in white tissue.

"Oh yes you did!" she declared, warming to the subject. "I followed the trail of toilet paper right up here on your porch, and that bag is full of the empty cardboard rolls!" *Let him deny that!* She pointed her index finger at him and shook it up and down. "Don't you bother lying to me, Mister. I wasn't born yesterday!"

"I do not go around papering trees, Miss Gibbons!" Wilson was highly insulted, and it did not help matters that the Harrisons were openly staring, or that the paper boy stopped his bicycle at the end of the walk... and of course Ruby Johnson was walking her pooppy poodle!

"You are going to clean up that mess or I am going to call the police and file a complaint!" Cilly hoped she looked convincing. She didn't bother to dress in anything flattering, but had put a robe on over her dorm shirt, and slid her feet into a pair of slippers. Her blonde hair was pulled

back into a ponytail and she wasn't wearing a bit of makeup. She wanted to appear just as though she got out of bed and found the toilet paper draped all over the large tree in her front yard. She had also planned to do this on a Saturday morning when most of the neighbors were home to enjoy watching Wilson Shyre taken down a few pegs. And, they *were* openly enjoying the spectacle, she realized.

"You may call the police, Miss Gibbons. I did not paper your tree and I refuse to clean up the mess. Furthermore, if you do not stop screeching at me like a fishwife, I will be forced to deal with you in a manner you will not like. Now please get off my porch so I can go back to sleep."

"You dare to threaten me after you stay up half the night making a mess for me to clean up? I don't think so!" She picked up the Wal-Mart bag and dumped the contents on his porch. There were quite a few empty rolls, the plastic they were wrapped in, and several more shopping bags that were used to carry all the toilet paper! "You are a liar, Wilson Shyre! The evidence is right here on your porch!" Cilly made sure her voice carried down the street where another of the neighbor's was getting his paper from the front lawn. He stopped to listen curiously.

"Those are not my supplies, Miss Gibbons. I can only assume that the kids who decorated your tree left their supplies on my porch to make you think I pulled a prank on you."

"That is so low!" Cilly said loudly. "Blaming your actions on children! How could you do that!"

"Because I am innocent."

"Yes, like you are innocent in returning my plate!" she accused heatedly.

"What plate?" he demanded, staring at her as if she had two heads.

"What plate!" she repeated. "I brought you a plate of cookies the first week you moved in and never mind that you didn't even thank me for the cookies, you stole my plate!"

"I didn't get any cookies. And if I had, I would have returned them. I don't eat sweets."

"Well that certainly explains your sour disposition," Cilly informed him, tapping her toe on the porch. "I insist you clean up my tree and my yard, preferably before it rains!"

"You can clean up your own yard, young lady. Better still, you can call some of those friends of yours that are constantly hanging around and have them clean it up." He went to shut the door, but she put her foot inside, and he would have had to hurt her to shut the heavy door. "Miss, Gibbons, move your foot right now."

"Not until you agree to clean up the mess!" she repeated, glaring at him.

"The only thing I intend to do is go back to bed. Now remove your foot or I will move it for you!"

Cilly put her hands on her hips. “You make a mess of my yard in a childish prank and then you actually dare to refuse to ... Accck! Put me down!” she squawked as he picked her up and put her down on the other side of the porch.

“Go home, Miss Gibbons, and stop disturbing the peace. Some of us would like to get some sleep.” Wilson shut the door, made sure it was locked so the persistent little brat couldn’t enter. He then went back to bed, turning on his radio to hopefully block some of the noise filtering in the windows. But, it was soon obvious that the little blonde with the silly name wasn’t about to let that happen, and not for the first time he regretted buying a house with the master bedroom in front. It sounded like she was having a party, and when he glumly crawled out of bed again and looked, it appeared all of the neighborhood was in her yard, shoving toilet paper into large trash bags. She was wearing an apron over her jeans and sweatshirt, and it was obvious she was feeding the workers donuts... fresh donuts... homemade donuts... his weakness. If he’d known she was planning to offer donuts, he would have helped with the cleanup. There was hot cocoa, too, and Wilson was shocked to realize he felt left out.

Frowning, he turned away from the window and headed for the bathroom and a nice hot shower. None of his neighbors would welcome him anyway, he was sad to realize. He would fix his own breakfast and then get to work.

Sunday morning was a repeat of Saturday morning! Only this time it was an even louder pounding that woke Wilson Shyre from a sound sleep bright and early. He stomped to the door and opened it, a scowl on his face. Two of his neighbors were standing there, giving him heated looks. “What is it?” he asked in resignation.

“The neighborhood has had enough of your practical jokes, Shyre,” Bob Devonshire stated angrily.

“What the hell has gotten into you, young man?” Frank Harrison demanded, clearly exasperated. “Yesterday you put toilet paper all over little Cilly’s tree, bushes, and yard, then refused to be a good neighbor and help clean up the mess. Today you insult all of us...? We are not amused.”

“Mr. Harrison, it would help if I knew what the hell you are talking about...?” Wilson forced himself to remain calm.

“Don’t take that tone with us, Shyre. You know what you did. Ruby Johnson had to drag Alex back into the house to keep him from coming down here and punching you. You know the man is insane when it comes to Ohio State!”

“Ohio State?” Wilson repeated, confused. “Look, I don’t know what you two men are upset about, so kindly spell it out in words I can understand.” He looked at them and wondered if he was going to have to defend himself from Frank Harrison, a man old enough to be his father!

“Seriously, I have no idea what you are accusing me of, but if you explain, then I’ll do my best to give you an answer.” He stepped back just in case Frank let fly.

“Our flags, Shyre. You moved our flags around. Frank’s Michigan flag is hanging on Alex’s porch. I’ve got Mason’s Bengals Flag, and he has my Browns!”

“You put an Ohio State flag on my porch!” Mr. Harrison accused.

“I had nothing to do with that,” Wilson said calmly. “It would seem we have a prankster on the block, but it isn’t me. I didn’t TP Miss Gibbons’ property, either. I gave up those kinds of pranks when I left high school.”

“Don’t even try that, Shyre. We have proof.”

“What kind of proof, Devonshire?” Wilson demanded.

“Candy wrappers!” Frank Harrison declared, pointing at him.

“Candy wrappers? I don’t eat candy!”

The two men looked at each other. “We aren’t stupid, Shyre. There were candy wrappers at all of our houses, just dropped on the porch and the yard... and when you walked back home last night, you dropped a few more.” Bob pointed at Wilson’s porch. “See? There is another one. You must have ate a whole bag of little Hersey’s bars last night!”

“I don’t eat candy,” Wilson stated matter-of-factly. “I have no clue as to who is pulling these stunts on us, but I assure you, I did not touch your team flags. I have better things to do with my time than running around switching flags and dropping candy wrappers all over the place.”

“If it isn’t you, then why does the evidence all point to you?” Mr. Harrison asked.

“Because someone is pranking me, too. Pointing a finger at me when I am innocent. It’s probably one of the kids on the block.” He made himself smile. “The worst thing I ever did as a kid was put a white sheet over my head and then hide behind some bushes and wait for someone to walk past, then jump out and yell boo. I was about twelve at the time, and when someone told my Dad, he tanned my hide for me. Sounds like a job for parents to figure out whose kids are terrorizing the neighborhood and apply some correction where it counts.

“Parents don’t spank their kids nowadays, and that is why they’re so wild,” Frank Harrison grumbled, and then he added, “You’d best talk to your boys, Bob, and see if they’re up to mischief. If it ain’t them, then they’ll know who it is.”

“My boys couldn’t sneak out at night even if they wanted to. Pamela would hear a cotton ball drop on the carpet in the living room at night! If one of our boys gets up to go to the bathroom, she sits up and listens and waits until they are back in bed before she goes back to sleep. It’s not my boys,” he stated emphatically. “But I will ask if they know anything.”

“Shyre, folks is watching you.” Frank Harrison turned around and stomped down the porch steps, Bob Devonshire right behind him.

Wilson shook his head. The neighborhood was going crazy, not at all surprising since it was close to Halloween. People who were normally sane turned into pranksters, trying to come up with scary pranks and jokes to play on unsuspecting ‘friends’. He remembered one call he was sent out on last fall. A woman found a friend murdered in his apartment, and she was sobbing hysterically when they arrived. His partner stayed with the woman while he went inside to investigate and caught the ‘dead man’ washing the fake blood off the kitchen floor, happy with his little prank. Wilson wasn’t amused. Neither was the woman outside when he told her that her friend was indeed alive. She immediately threatened to kill him, and it took Wilson and his partner quite a while to calm her down to the point they weren’t afraid to leave her there. Of course, there wouldn’t be any more calls. His partner was killed by a drunk driver last summer. Wilson wasn’t in the unit at the time; he was trying to talk a homeless man into going to a shelter for the night. A car came barreling through a red light, turned sharply, then over-corrected, hitting their vehicle head on, and taking out Dan instantly. Wilson abruptly decided he was finished being a cop. He resigned, turned in his badge, and left the city for a quiet little community where he could work on his books in peace and quiet. So far he hadn’t found much ‘quiet’ or ‘peace’. He looked out to see Frank and Bob stop to talk to Cilly Gibbons, and while he didn’t know what she was saying, he was positive that she was reminding them once again that he had to be the one pulling the pranks.

Wilson shook his head. It might just be time to come out of retirement long enough to find out who was pulling all the pranks... and if just one more thing happened, he was going to get involved.

Chapter Two

Cilly was absolutely delighted that her plan was working so well. Changing the team flags around was a brilliant idea, and the only reason she thought of it was because of her older brothers. Their rivalry was good natured, of course, but one of their Great-Aunts made a huge mistake in Christmas gift giving, and gave each of them the ‘wrong’ team jersey! Their Dad was ready with his camera, like always, and caught their expressions as they each held up their new shirts. It was hilarious. And, they neatly solved the problem by making the ‘exchange’ easy for Aunt Alice. Since they wore the same size, they swapped the gifts, and then posed for a picture with their confused Aunt. She was eighty years old and just happy that everyone was pleased with her gifts.

The neighbors’ reactions to the flag exchange was all she hoped for, and they easily found the candy wrappers lying on their porches and sidewalks. Theirs was a clean, well-kept block, and the home owners took pride in their lawns. She had been certain the trail of wrappers would lead them to Wilson Shyre’s porch, and it had. She’d heard the raised voices from her front porch as she went outside to get her paper, timing the moment precisely when she saw Mr. Harrison and Bob Devonshire stomping toward Wilson’s home. She listened, doing her very best not to giggle as they scolded Wilson for something he didn’t do. Finally they headed in her direction, and she gave them a lot of sympathy. When Bob mentioned he was going to talk to his sons and see if they knew if any of the kids were out pranking the neighborhood, she scoffed and said that Wilson was just trying to throw them off the scent by blaming kids for his actions.

Cilly decided she would take that night off, just in case someone took it in their head to find out exactly who the neighborhood prankster was. She was having too much fun to permit herself to be caught out so soon. She had a few more tricks up her sleeve, and she wanted to watch Wilson Shyre squirm.

Cilly went to her parents’ house for Sunday dinner, and it was late afternoon when she returned home. Wilson was outside, raking leaves. He was a handsome man, and she hated it that he was so unfriendly. She put a friendly smile on her face and got out of her car, which she left parked in the driveway. “It is a beautiful day, isn’t it, Mr. Shyre?”

“Yes, it is,” he agreed, pausing in his task of raking. “Your leaves are going to blow all over the neighbors’ yards if you don’t get them raked and bagged.”

“There isn’t even enough to make a nice pile! What fun would that be?” she asked, looking at him in surprise. “Why are you such a spoilsport all the time? All I did was mention it is a lovely

day, and you frown at me and tell me I should be raking leaves! Do you ever have any fun at all?" she angrily demanded.

"I was going to offer to help," he said with a grin.

"You were?" She was sure her voice squeaked. This was a new side of the taciturn man, and she couldn't help smiling.

"It is a beautiful day, and it would be a shame to be cooped up inside." Wilson didn't know why he was being so insistent; it wasn't like him. But, his neighbor was quite attractive, and he was tired of being alone all the time. What harm could there be in raking a few more leaves?

"I would love the help," she admitted, positive her cheeks were rosy with pleasure as she stood there, unable to believe her own ears. This was the longest conversation she'd had with the man since he moved into the neighborhood.

"You'd better change into something not so pretty and nice. You don't want to ruin your clothes." The outfit she was wearing wasn't conducive to doing yard work. She had on shoes that were probably new... and expensive, to boot. And she was dressed nice enough to be going on a date. He was used to seeing her in jeans, and he rather liked the way her butt looked in jeans.

"I'll be right outside," she promised, hurrying to go inside. Wilson was right, she didn't want to ruin the new outfit by raking leaves while wearing it.

Wilson's blue eyes narrowed when he watched Cilly open the back door and go right inside her house! She didn't have the door locked, and anyone at all could be inside waiting for her. He dropped his rake and took off running for the door, not stopping to think that he had no right to simply walk inside her house, but he wasn't about to wait and see if he heard her scream before doing something.

Cilly was so pleased at the prospect of spending some time with her handsome neighbor that she had kicked off her shoes and removed her expensive slacks and sweater before she heard a noise. She was only too aware that she was standing there wearing only a bra and panties. She reached for a pillow to shield herself, her heard pounding in fear as she opened her mouth to scream. If she was loud enough Wilson might hear and at least call 911!

Wilson heard Cilly scream and he rushed to her aid, ready to fight to protect her. He ran into the bedroom, looking for her assailant, but he didn't see anyone. "Where is he, Cilly?" he asked, looking in her closet and then her bathroom. When that turned up no one, he looked under her bed. All he found were dust bunnies. "Where is he?" he repeated, looking at the little blonde. She was cowering and trying to hide behind one of the pillows from her bed.

"Why are you in here?" she demanded. "How dare you come inside my house and into my bedroom? Get out now!"

“You screamed.” He looked at her accusingly. “Why did you scream?”

“I heard someone in my house! I hoped you would hear me and call the police,” she said, her temper simmering. “You scared the hell out of me, Mister!”

Wilson suddenly realized that the reason she screamed was because of him. She’d heard him searching through her house in order to keep her safe. Far from being ashamed of himself, he took some satisfaction from the act. “Good; you deserve a good scare. I cannot believe you went away and did not lock your doors. What if someone had been hiding in here? That is why I came inside... to make sure you were safe, and then I heard you scream.”

“I wouldn’t have screamed if you’d stayed outside where you belong!” she accused.

“You left your door unlocked. Do you realize how dangerous that is? Do you have any idea how many women are attacked in their homes every damn day? Do you realize you are playing Russian roulette with your safety?” he scolded. “I swear, there should be a law stating that people must lock their home securely before leaving, and lock their car each and every time they get in or out.”

“Who are you to lecture me?” she fumed.

“Someone needs to lecture you. In fact, someone needs to turn you over his knee and spank some sense into you!” He was doing his best to remind himself that just because she was his neighbor, and getting under his skin more and more every time he saw her, it did not mean he had the right to apply corporal punishment to her cute little butt!

“How dare you!” Cilly looked for something to throw at Wilson, but the only thing that was close was her hairbrush, which she’d left laying on the nightstand earlier that day. She reached for it, her intention very clear.

“Throw that, little girl, and I’ll put it to use on your backside.” Wilson was making a valiant effort to control his temper, and failing. If Cilly threw that hairbrush at him, he was going to give her a spanking she would never forget. *Damned if she didn’t deserve one!* “I ought to call your father and ask him if he realizes you are risking your life by leaving your door unlocked when you go away.”

Cilly gasped in outrage and without even thinking she threw the hairbrush at Wilson’s head... as hard as she could wing it! As soon as she let it go she knew it was a big mistake. She was tempting the devil and in his present mood it was the wrong thing to do! To her vast surprise he reached up with lightning quick reflexes and snagged the brush out of the air. Then he looked at her and she cried out in fear as she remembered his threat. “Don’t you *dare* touch me!”

“I dare. You need a good lesson.” He took a step in her direction and then dodged the pillow she threw in his direction. Cilly took off running for the bathroom, but she only made it two steps before he lifted her off her feet and carried her over to the bed.

“No! No! No! I’m sorry!” She tried to apologize, but Wilson didn’t put her down until they reached the bed, and then it was to put her face down over the comforter. He knelt beside her and then brought his hand down over her panties with a loud splat. “Owww! No!” she pleaded. “I am sorry!”

“You are going to be a lot sorer by the time I finish this spanking,” Wilson told her, giving her other cheek a sound wallop. She cried out again and he nodded in satisfaction. “It is very foolish to leave your door unlocked.” He gave her another hard spank, and then another. “Anyone could have come inside while you were gone.”

Cilly could not believe this was happening! Wilson Shyre was actually inside her house, in her bedroom, and sitting on her bed... spanking her like he cared! It hurt, too! “Stop, Wilson! You are hurting me!”

“A spanking is supposed to hurt,” he scolded. “And, it doesn’t hurt nearly as much as being raped.” He continued to scold her, putting some real effort into turning her backside a nice shade of red through the white panties. “Now then, I warned you what would happen if you threw your hairbrush at me,” he said, picking up the brush from the bed. “I’m going to give you twenty-five of these, right where you sit. Next time you leave this house, you will lock your doors.”

“I don’t have to listen to you!” she argued seconds before the first crack of the hairbrush landed on the tender area between her bottom cheek and her upper thigh. Cilly let out a little gasp and tried once again to get away from the punishment she was receiving, but Wilson was strong, and he held her down and gave her another hard crack on the other side. “Owww! No more!” she wailed.

“Lie still and accept this spanking, young lady. You certainly went out of your way to earn it.” Wilson continued to give her hard strokes with the wooden back of the brush, scolding her, and making her cry. He made the spanking as deliberate as possible, giving her time to feel each smack and dread the next one. By the time he finished the punishment, her sit spots were a deep, dark red, and he was sure she wouldn’t sit down for a couple of days without recalling the spanking. If it made her remember to lock her doors, then it would be well worth the time he spent correcting her behavior. “Very well, I hope you can behave yourself now, young lady.”

Cilly was so embarrassed she didn’t know what to do. Her bottom hurt something awful; it had been years upon years since she’d had a spanking, and then it was just a few swats over her clothing for lying to her parents, a good twenty years ago! Nothing in her life had prepared her for what just happened! She was so embarrassed; for goodness sake, she was wearing her bra and panties! And, she never cried in front of people! It wasn’t something she did, and for a very good reason! Her eyes turned puffy and red, her cheeks were red, too, and even her lips were all swollen and ugly. Some women could cry and look simply beautiful, but not Cilly! She looked an absolute mess!

“There is no need to cry, Cilly. Just learn a lesson from this experience, and don’t make the same mistake again.”

“I don’t like to have to fumble with keys when I get home, especially if I am carrying bags of groceries,” she complained. “This neighborhood is safe!”

She said the one thing guaranteed to get his hackles up again.

“No neighborhood is as safe as its residents would like to think it is. Do you have any idea of how many calls I went on to safe neighborhoods, young lady?” He slapped her stinging bottom again and ordered brusquely, “Turn over and face me, Cilly Gibbons. You need educated.”

“I am not dressed!” she reminded him, her dignity shot to hell.

“So I noticed,” he admitted with a wolfish grin, but then got up and grabbed her robe off the chair by her vanity. “Let me help you put this on, Cilly. I apologize for embarrassing you. My intention was to protect you from the man I knew was lurking in here just waiting for you to walk in the door.” He held open the robe while she slid off the bed without turning over on her backside. It took her two seconds to slide her arms in the sleeves and then pull the brightly colored fleece around her body and tie the sash. Once she was covered, he put his large hands on her shoulders and gently turned her around. When she kept her face turned toward the floor, he put his index finger under her chin and tilted her face up so he could look at her.

“Don’t, I’m ugly!”

“You couldn’t be ugly if you tried,” he whispered, pulling her close and hugging her. To his surprise she was trembling. “I frightened you badly, didn’t I?” He finally realized that her reaction was due to fear as much as to the spanking he’d administered.

“Yes!” Cilly didn’t bother denying it.

“Let’s go into the kitchen and I’ll make you some tea or coffee.”

Cilly was only too happy to get the man from her bedroom. She stopped long enough to slide her slippers on her feet. Although it was only October, the hard wood floors were chilly on her bare feet.

Wilson took note of every little detail of the small house as they walked from the bedroom to the kitchen. It felt like a home, unlike his house. She had nice furniture, and everything was decorated with warm colors. It was a home to relax in and enjoy living... unlike the Spartan atmosphere in his house. “Do you want tea or coffee,” he asked.

“I prefer tea. I’ll make it,” she said decisively. “I know where everything is; you don’t.”

Wilson was wise enough not to argue. He took a seat at the table, and then had to smile when he realized the real reason she wanted to make the tea. She probably did not wish to try sitting yet. He couldn’t blame her. The spanking he gave her was serious, and he meant every last smack to her sweet bottom.

“I can’t believe you did that!” she stated, putting the teakettle on the burner and turning on the flame. She didn’t look at him as she took two mugs from the cupboard, and then got out two tea bags and put one in each cup.

“I was a cop for eighteen years, Cilly. I’ve seen things I wouldn’t imagine one human being capable of doing to another. If you knew how many calls I went on where a young woman like yourself was attacked it would boggle your mind. Those calls weren’t just in poor neighborhoods, or in the bad sections of town, either. They were in neighborhoods just like this one, and in wealthy areas, too. It doesn’t matter. Where you live doesn’t give you automatic immunity from anything bad happening. You still need to lock your doors and take precautions with your safety.” He shook a finger at her and added, “When I saw you simply walk inside without having to unlock your door first, I was afraid for you. That is why I followed. I didn’t want to see you harmed in any way.”

“You spanked me!” she accused, glaring at him.

“I did spank you, and I will do it again if I see you taking such a foolish risk.”

“You don’t have that right.”

“Would you rather I call your parents and talk to them about this?” he offered.

“No! They already hate it because I live alone. If my Dad had his way, I would be in my old bedroom until I married someone and then I would be allowed to leave home... as long as he approved of my husband, of course,” she said with a smile.

“I understand your Dad perfectly,” Wilson said, nodding his head in agreement. “If you will give me your word to lock your doors, then this will stay between us. If you don’t promise me, then I will contact your father, and tell him you are being stubborn on the subject. Hopefully he will haul you over his knee and give you a reason to change your mind.”

“Is spanking how you deal with women, Mr. Shyre? It’s no small wonder there are no females beating down your door!”

Chapter Three

“I think spanking gets to the seat of the problem rather quickly, Cilly, so yes, I do believe in spanking women.” He grinned and then added, “I moved here from the city, and I don’t know very many people. I’ve been working on a new project and haven’t been socializing, and to answer the question you didn’t ask; no, I do not go around spanking women all the time. If I didn’t care about you I wouldn’t have bothered.”

“You’ve never once acted as though you cared about me,” she accused, putting his tea in front of him, and then getting a container of cookies and placing them on the table. “Do you want cream or sugar for your tea?” she asked politely.

“Honey, if you have it,” he answered, pushing the container of cookies farther away from him. “I don’t eat sweets, Cilly,” he explained when she looked at him in surprise. “Don’t take offense. I had to cut sugar from my life for health reasons. But when I saw you passing out donuts a couple of days ago it was all I could do to keep from marching over here and grabbing a handful.” Then he frowned, “And for the record, I did not toilet paper your tree and yard, and I never saw a plate of cookies. That is the absolute truth.”

Cilly knew she was blushing. If the man ever found out she’d pulled those pranks on the neighborhood and then blamed him for them, he would probably spank her again! “Well, the mess is all cleaned up now, so it really doesn’t matter,” she said, smiling brightly. She grabbed the cookies and took them from the table. “You do know that I am a pastry chef and food stylist...?” she asked with a teasing smile.

“Yes, I know,” he nodded seriously. “Do you enjoy that? It sounds like it would be difficult.”

“The worst part of my job is that I will get a beautiful dish all ready to be photographed, and then, because of the lights, and the heat, it only holds up for a short while, and if they have any technical problems, I have to do it all over again. Sometimes I will make the same cake several times before the photos are perfect for the magazine. Frozen desserts are the worst. When I have to do those, I work my butt off!” She laughed. “My job doesn’t sound so glamorous now, does it?”

“No. Is it worth it, though?” he asked seriously.

“Yes, it is. I love creating something beautiful enough that people will look at the picture in a magazine and then want to make it themselves, or go and buy it... or order it in a restaurant. I also like the regular hours. Most pastry chefs are at work by three or four in the morning. I wouldn’t like that at all. And, if I worked in a fine dining restaurant, I would still work crazy

hours. I love my job,” she said with a smile. “What about you, Wilson? You said you were a police officer...”

“I retired from the force, Cilly. I lost my partner to a drunk driver, and something inside me snapped. I was pushing forty, and it was the same damn thing, day after day. Innocent victims trying to make sense of what happened to them, informing loved ones a child had been murdered. I wasn’t healthy in mind or body. I decided it was time to move on, and decided to take a year off. During that year I started eating right, stopped misusing sugar and caffeine. I started writing, something I always wanted to do but never had time to do, and then I made the decision to move here. I needed to escape the city and well meaning friends who wanted me to come back to the force. I burned out, Cilly. Plain and simple.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, her dark eyes brimming with tears for him.

“No, don’t be sorry. It was all good. I’m feeling better now about everything, and I’m not drinking bottles of antacid all the time.” He paused and then added in a sheepish tone of voice, “I owe you an apology, and I want you to know that I have mentally kicked my own butt at least a thousand times over this... I was rude to you the day you brought the lemonade over, and it had nothing to do with you. It was the first year anniversary of losing my partner, and I was mad at the world and took it out on you and my bushes. I am sorry for that, Cilly,” he said softly. “I’ve wanted to say that to you lots of times, but kept putting it off... I didn’t want to be rejected,” he admitted, the stain on his cheeks evidence that he was telling her the truth. “The truth is, I am attracted to you. I know I’m a lot older than you are, but I didn’t want you to laugh in my face and tell me to get lost. It was safer to be your grumpy neighbor than admit I’ve wanted to ask you out ever since I moved next door.” He watched for her reaction.

“Why do you think I brought you that lemonade...?” she asked. “I was hoping you would notice me.”

“I noticed, Cilly. Observing is one of the things I am good at. I noticed that you have a lot of friends, but no one that you are dating on a regular basis. You have a large family you enjoy, and your work schedule is bizarre when compared to most people’s. I was able to learn that you are a food stylist, one of the very best in the whole country. It explains why someone so very young and with only one income could afford to buy a house in this neighborhood. You drive a modest car, even if it is new, and you prefer jeans... and I love the way your bottom looks in jeans,” he added, telling the truth and then winking.

“I am not as young as you seem to think I am, but I get that all the time. I’m thirty-one, and you are definitely not too old for me. I know you are a writer, but I wasn’t able to find any books under your name...?”

“I sold my first book about a month ago, and have a deal for a second.” He was proud of the accomplishment. It was so difficult to get a first book published, but he was on his way, and already had an advance for the book he was working on now.

“That is amazing! What kind of books do you write?”

“Mysteries. I’ve always loved them, and thought I could do better than some that are out there. I didn’t realize it would be such hard work,” he admitted. “Coming up with the story idea is the simple part, but defining the characters is harder. My worst problem is my keyboard ability,” he admitted. “I get tired of correcting my stupid typos.”

“Part of the job,” she giggled, and then said solemnly, “It would appear we have both been watching each other since you moved in. We are a couple of strange people,” she added.

“Do you believe me when I tell you I didn’t TP your yard?” he asked.

“Yes.” She turned and took her mug to the sink when she felt her face turn a guilty red.

“Good. Do you feel up to getting dressed and going outside to rake those leaves?” he wanted to know.

“I’d rather do that than try to sit down right now,” she stated.

“I’m not going to apologize for spanking you, young lady. You needed a firm lesson.”

“I still cannot believe you did that! I am an adult, not a child. It’s been well over twenty years since I was spanked!”

“A female is never too old for a good spanking. Wise words from my Granddad. He believed a spanking was a firm expression of love. Now, I am not condoning abuse, Cilly,” he clearly stated. “And I believe that the subject of discipline needs to come up for discussion between a couple before a situation arises that warrants a spanking. Today’s spanking was the exception to the rule. I was acting on adrenalin, but I can assure you that I didn’t punish you to be mean or because I get my kicks making a woman cry out in pain. I spanked you because I care what happens to you and I wanted to make sure you don’t do something like this again.”

“What if the woman in the relationship won’t agree to being spanked when she messes up?” Cilly asked.

“I’m afraid there wouldn’t be a relationship, then. I believe a spanking can settle a whole bunch of problems that would otherwise fester and eventually destroy a relationship. I want a peaceful home, with love and understanding.”

“You make that sound so reasonable, and yet, most women I know are not spanked.”

“What are their relationships like?” he asked.

Cilly gave the matter some thought, and then slowly nodded. “Three of them are divorced, two are contemplating divorce. One person I know is very happy in her marriage. Two others are dating and looking for Mr. Right.”

“Go get your jeans on, Cilly. We’ll talk about this more later,” he bossed with a smile. His blue eyes were full of laughter and she liked seeing him without a scowl on his face.

Cilly did as he said, and they worked for several minutes making her yard nice and neat.

“Now, doesn’t this look better?” he asked in satisfaction.

“I love the fallen leaves. I like to walk through them and hear them rustle and crunch beneath my feet. I love the colors... I love fall.”

“I prefer spring,” he declared. “Everything is turning green and the buds on trees. It’s a time of renewal and birth. Time to plant seeds and watch them grow into plants that bear fruits and vegetables.”

“Oh, I love spring, too. I love summer. And, I love winter! I love to build snowmen,” she told him solemnly. And, I love to throw snowballs.”

“Is that a warning?” he asked, amused.

“I’m good, too,” she stated.

“I’ll remember that the first time it snows.”

They bantered back and forth for a while longer and then Wilson asked, “Would you like to go out to dinner, Cilly?”

“Yes, I would,” she promptly answered. “I’m hungry after all of this yard work.”

“Fine. We’ll both get ready and leave in an hour. Will that give you enough time?” he wanted to know.

“Plenty of time,” she nodded. She took her yard tools and put them away, noting that he was doing the same. She went inside her house, and made darn sure the door was locked. She didn’t want to give anyone a chance to walk inside. One bad scare for the day was more than enough.

Once in the privacy of her bedroom, Cilly peeled off her jeans and panties and took a good look at her butt in the full length mirror. She was still red, especially her sit spots. She was positive she would have some bruising. Cilly was positive she should be very angry with her neighbor for daring to spank her, but if she were to be totally honest, the man intrigued her. She knew for a fact that she wanted to be married to a man who was like her father! Her Dad always put the family first in his decisions, but there was no question that he was the one making the final decisions. Her Mom loved and adored her husband... She respected him, too. Cilly wanted a man she could respect. If her Dad came home and found a door unlocked, he would be unhappy with her Mom, and would scold her. She did not think her Dad spanked her Mom, but he did give her a playful swat now and then. Cilly did not necessarily think that spanking was abusive

under the right circumstances, but did she want to permit herself to get involved with a man who thought spanking was the answer to making a relationship work?

She lightly ran her hand over her sore bottom and winced. Sitting down to eat dinner was not going to be pleasant, but she was anxious to spend more time with Wilson Shyre. She took a quick shower, the needles of warm water making her backside sting even more, and then she dried her hair and pinned it up on top of her head. She normally didn't wear a lot of makeup, but she wanted to look nice, and she needed to cover up the evidence of her crying. Once she was satisfied with that, she tried to decide what she wanted to wear. Wilson didn't give her a hint where they were going, but she had an idea it wouldn't be too fancy. She settled on a nice pair of slacks and a pretty red sweater. She touched up her hair once more, grabbed a blazer, and then walked out into the living room to wait for Wilson to collect her.

Wilson made himself give Cilly the entire hour, and spent the extra time he had to wait after getting ready to go rereading what he'd written last. He deleted a couple of lines, added others, and then it was time to go. He backed his car out of the garage and onto the street and parked in front of her house. He was pleased to find her all ready to go. Cilly was punctual, and he liked that in a woman. He helped her into his car, and was pleased when she put on her seatbelt without being told to do so.

"Do you like Italian?" he asked hopefully.

"Love it," she answered, and was pleased when he drove to the small restaurant she preferred.

When they walked in, Maria greeted her with a hug and a kiss, and said, "Who is this lucky man, Cilly?"

"This is my neighbor, Wilson Shyre. Wilson, this is Maria. Her parents own this restaurant, and they have the best Italian food anywhere."

"I've been here a couple of times," he admitted after greeting Maria. "I agree, the food is excellent."

"Mama will be pleased to hear that. Did Cilly tell you that she helped us out one weekend? Mama was very ill and Cilly saved us by coming in and working the kitchen and taking Mama's place! The customers were pleased. We would love to have her come and work for us."

"Your Mama is the queen here," Cilly stated. "I love being a customer."

"Is this table acceptable, Mr. Shyre?" Maria asked, leading them to a nice table.

"Yes, it is. Thank you, Maria." He seated Cilly and then himself. "I have to ask you a question, Cilly. Why on earth would your parents name you Cilly?"

She laughed. "It isn't my given name, Wilson. My real name is Priscilla. My Dad shortened it to Cilly because of my antics when I was very little. He said such a silly little girl should be

called Cilly. Mom wasn't thrilled with that because I was named for my grandmother, but it stuck, and I much prefer Cilly to Priscilla."

"You do not look or act like a Priscilla," Wilson said after giving the matter some thought.

They chatted pleasantly throughout the wonderful dinner, and Cilly did her best to sit still and not squirm around on her sore tush. Afterwards, Wilson drove her home. "Would you like to come inside for tea?" she offered.

"Not tonight, but I will see you to the door and make sure the house is safe before I leave," he said firmly.

"I made sure the doors were locked before I left," she said, surprised that he would want to inspect her home.

"Yes, I watched you lock up," he nodded, his eyes teasing just a bit, although he did not make any comments about the spanking he gave her working and making her more conscious of her safety.

"I'm sure it will be fine," she argued.

"I would never forgive myself if I dropped you at the door and then someone hurt you because I was negligent." He followed her inside and quickly checked for any sign of entry. He even double checked the locked back door to make sure it was secure, as well as all of her windows. Once he was satisfied, he took her hand in his and pulled her close, bending his head to give her a gentle kiss. "Thank you for spending the evening with me, Cilly."

"Thank you for asking me to." He gave her one more little kiss, then said goodnight, reminding her to lock the door after him. He stood there and waiting while she did as instructed, and then he ran down her porch steps and to his car.

Cilly watched from the window as he pulled into the garage, and then walked to his back door to let himself inside. She saw a couple of lights come on, and then nothing. She felt restless and alone and didn't want to think about why she was feeling that way. She busied herself preparing for work the next day and tried to put her neighbor out of her mind. It didn't work, however, and when she went to bed that night, she was anxious and hoping he would call her.

The days passed and nothing. Not a peep! She did not see him come or go, and she was busier than normal with her job. Finally, on Friday night, she decided it was time for another prank. Maybe that would get Wilson's attention. She waited until it was dark, and then donned her black clothing, covering her blonde hair carefully. This prank was fairly easy, and she wondered what all of the neighbors would have to say the next morning. She went to sleep with a smile on her face.

Chapter Four

“FRANK! FRANK! COME HERE! FRAAAANK!”

Wilson groaned into his pillow as Mrs. Harrison’s shrill voice woke him. What was the dratted woman screaming about so early in the morning! It was the second Saturday in a row the neighbors woke him, and he was sure there was another prank of some sort being played out. Mrs. Harrison screamed for her husband again, until he finally heard her say, “He is going to kill us all in our sleep! Mark my words, Frank!” Wilson wondered if he should get up and investigate, but then reminded himself he wasn’t a cop any longer. He was almost asleep again when his doorbell chimed and the knocker on his door was rapped repeatedly.

“You can’t hide in there, you killer! You come out here and explain the meaning of this!” Mrs. Harrison screamed in her strident voice. “I know you’re in there!”

Wilson got out of bed and pulled on some clothes, reminding himself that she was a woman, old enough to be his mother. But man, would he love to stuff her mouth with an old sock! He walked through the house and to the front door. “Mrs. Harrison, it is only six thirty on a Saturday morning. What could possibly be so important that you feel a need to wake me so early on a weekend?”

“Don’t you take that tone with me, young man! I’ll box your ears if you sass me!” she threatened. “I want you to explain the meaning behind each of these symbols!”

“What symbols?” he asked.

“The ones you put on our houses while we slept in innocence!” she exclaimed. “Yours in the only one without one without a mark on it!” When he didn’t immediately answer, she pointed at him and said, “You may think this is funny, but it isn’t! I want to know why you marked our homes and what those marks mean!”

“Mrs. Harrison, I did not mark your house,” he said. “I don’t know anything about any marks.”

“Then why isn’t *your* house marked?” she demanded.

“Maybe because I am the only sane person on the street!” he suggested, and then wished he hadn’t when she started screaming for Frank again.

“FRANK! FRANK!!! FRANK, HE CALLED ME CRAZY!!!!” she yelled across the street.

“You *ARE* crazy!” was his immediate response before he turned back to sweeping the sidewalk.

“Oh!” she stomped her foot and then caught the smile that Wilson was trying to hide from her. “Don’t you laugh at me, young man!”

“I’m not laughing, Mrs. Harrison,” he said as he quickly composed himself and put on his best cop face. “I assure you I did not put that red star on your home, but I would like to come over and investigate if you will permit me? I worked for nearly twenty years on the NYPD, and I would love to catch whoever is pranking the neighborhood and blaming it on me. I am getting tired of waking up to someone pounding on my door on Saturday mornings and accusing me of things I did not do. Would you allow me to investigate? I promise you that if I discover anything criminal in the works, I will call the police here and fill them in.”

“Weeeelll, all right. I suppose it can’t harm anything, and goodness knows I don’t want someone killing us all in our sleep.”

“I’ll get dressed and be over in a few minutes, ma’am,” he said politely.

“Okay, but just because I’m letting you do this doesn’t mean I’m not watching you!” The woman turned and started down the steps, screaming, “*FRANK! HE’S COMING OVER. FRAAAANK, DID YOU HEAR ME?*”

Wilson shut the door and leaned his head against it. That woman could wake the dead with her piercing voice. He was positive all the neighbors were up and about, and sure enough, by the time he dressed and crossed the street, they were all outside, watching to see what he would do.

“Did you put these damn stickers all over the block?” Frank Harrison asked when Wilson approached.

“No, Mr. Harrison. I did not.”

“Your house is the only one who doesn’t have one.”

“I noticed that,” Wilson replied. “I’m going to look around.” The top of the sticker on the Harrison’s house was not firmly attached, just the bottom, which told him that whoever did it had to be a lot shorter than he was. He walked up and down the street, checking each sticker, and it was the same. The person stood on tiptoes to reach as high as possible on the column holding up the porch roof, and put the stickers above the house numbers. He searched around his front yard to see if he could find a sticker that blew off, but there was nothing. He returned to the Harrison’s sidewalk, where most of the neighborhood was gathered. “I think a kid is pranking us. Could be it’s random, but I suspect a group of kids are having some Halloween fun. I suggest we remove the stickers, and keep an eye out for anyone walking around the neighborhood that doesn’t belong here.”

“I don’t like this!” Mrs. Harrison declared loudly.

“You are reacting the way the prankster hopes you will, Mrs. Harrison. He is trying to create panic and paranoia. If you take the sticker down and trash it, there won’t be any symbols at all. My guess is that they were put there randomly as a prank. See how much time we’ve all wasted worrying over this?”

“I find it odd that your house doesn’t have a sticker, Wilson,” Cilly came across the street to join them.

“I do, too, Cilly,” he said with a smile for her. He’d wanted to call her all week, but he was so engrossed in his work that stopping seemed impossible.

Frank reached up and easily pulled off the sticker, and one by one the neighbors all went home and did the same. Wilson walked with Cilly to her house and watched as she stood on tiptoe to try and loosen the red star. “Here, let me,” he said, reaching over her and grabbing the top and easily pulling it free of the column.

“Thank you. That star made me feel like I had a target on my back.”

“What are your plans today?” he asked cordially.

“Not much,” she answered. “Some laundry and cleaning.”

“Well, I will let you get to it, then. I am in the middle of a chapter, and I want to see if I can get it finished today.”

“Ohhh. Okay...!” She wanted to smack him, but did her best to hide the fact. After the way he talked on Sunday, she at least expected a telephone call... or maybe an invitation to do something! Wilson Shyre was too serious by far, and it was time to do something radical to get his attention. She gave him a brilliant smile and then went inside to start planning. The neighborhood prankster was going to strike again!

Wilson chose his hiding spot well. He was positive the neighborhood prankster was going to strike again tonight, and he was going to be ready to apprehend the brat. It was simply a matter of waiting, and he’d been on enough stakeouts to have plenty of patience. He was going to demand explanations, too. He made sure that all the lights in his house were turned off by midnight. It wasn’t unusual for him to stay up later if he was writing and things were going well, and he also loved to watch late night movies, but tonight he wanted to be sure the lights were off and the prankster had a false sense of security. He was well aware that most of the neighbors were sound asleep by now, even though a couple of them, including the Devonshires and the Harrisons had left their porch lights on, hoping to discourage pranksters. The Halloween and fall decorations were scattered about but so far, no jack-o’-lanterns were smashed, which he felt was the classic prank of kids with nothing better to do. The street remained silent. No cars came by,

and no one out walking. Wilson pulled his black jacket tighter and zipped it against the chill, and he waited patiently.

Cilly thought this would be her best prank yet, and she was extremely quiet as she ventured outside. She'd hidden the For Sale by Owner signs she'd purchased and attached to wooden stakes behind her garage and it would be a simple matter to retrieve them and put them in all of the neighbors' yards... except Wilson's. She almost giggled out loud at the outrage he was going to have to endure. She shoved the first one into the ground at the end of her walkway, and then she hurriedly walked through the neighborhood, skipping Wilson's house. She slipped inside her back door, locked it, and quickly went to bed. In about four hours all hell was going to break loose, and she did not want to miss a second of it.

Wilson quietly went inside after making sure Cilly was safely inside her house. He was too angry to deal with her tonight, but in the morning, he was going to make her face her neighbors and confess. Then he was going to give her a chance to explain herself to him before he paddled her cute little bottom. One thing was certain... Miss Priscilla Gibbons was never going to pull any more Halloween Pranks.

Frank Harrison was the first to come to his door. "I've been expecting you, Mr. Harrison. We'll wait for all the others, and then we'll deal with our prankster."

"You know who put these signs in our yards?" Frank asked.

"I do."

"This has to stop!"

"I agree, Mr. Harrison. And, I believe it will."

It wasn't long before everyone on the block was standing in front of Wilson's house, and most of them were grumbling and demanding an explanation. Wilson held up his hand and said quietly, "I promised I would find the person responsible for these pranks on us, and I have. I am going to give that person a chance to do the right thing and speak up right now." Silence. "I followed you around the neighborhood last night, so the game is over."

Cilly was dumbfounded when Wilson looked directly at her, his blue eyes full of fire. She knew then that he knew it was her and she felt her face turn a bright red. He was going to reveal it was her unless she confessed and admitted she was the neighborhood prankster. She opened her mouth to speak, but couldn't find the words. Finally, she managed to whisper, "It was me..."

“*YOU?*” Mrs. Harrison screeched in shocked surprise.

“Why would you do such a thing, Cilly?” Frank Harrison asked.

“I don’t know,” she answered, and then she turned and ran home, letting herself inside and then running to the bedroom and throwing herself on the bed so she could cry. Now her neighbors would hate her! Including, and most especially, Wilson Shyre! He would never forgive her now. Cilly cried and cried, and when she was through sobbing, she called and told her Mom not to expect her for Sunday dinner, claiming she had a terrible headache and just wanted to stay in bed. Her family was used to her headaches, so no one would find it odd that she wanted to sleep.

But Cilly couldn’t sleep. She felt awful and didn’t know what to do to fix things. There was a knock on her door and she reluctantly got up to answer the summons. She was going to have to face Wilson sooner or later and she might just as well get it over with now. But, to her surprise, it wasn’t Wilson, and she didn’t know the man standing there.

“How much do you want for your house, lady?” the man asked.

“It isn’t for sale. The sign is a prank,” she explained.

“Look, I asked how much. Me and my old lady need a house fast. I’ll pay you cash,” he said, his voice sounding harsh to her ears.

“It isn’t for sale. A prankster put the sign in my yard last night and I haven’t removed it yet. I am not selling,” she added firmly when he tried to open the door wider.

“Lady, you got a sign out there. I’m buying. Now let me inside.”

“No. Go away.”

“The sign...”

“The lady said she isn’t selling. Get lost.” Wilson said firmly, walking on the porch.

“Thank you, Wilson,” Cilly said in genuine relief. “I’ve told him the sign is a prank, but he doesn’t believe me.”

“It was a poorly conceived prank,” Wilson stated. “Go ahead and leave, buddy. This house is not for sale.”

“I could call the cops and see what they have to say. Discrimination is against the law.”

“You aren’t being discriminated against. The house is not for sale.”

The man cursed, gave Cilly a hateful look, and then stomped down the steps and drove off, his tires squealing.

Wilson shook his head and stepped off the porch and walked to the sign. He pulled it from the ground, and then carried it up the steps to hand it to Cilly. Unless you want more creeps stopping by you'll hide the sign."

"I will. Thank you for coming to my rescue."

"I didn't like his looks. He is trying to find a place to grow marijuana."

"Do you really think so?" Her eyes opened wide.

"I know so. Keep your doors locked." He turned to leave, but she called out to him and he turned back.

"I'm sorry, Wilson."

"Are you now?" he asked without inflection.

"I know you're angry, and I don't blame you..."

"I would like to know why you tried to turn the entire neighborhood against me," he admitted.

"It's so embarrassing," she whispered.

"I'm not going to stand here and force you to talk to me."

"I wanted you to notice me and when you didn't, I decided it would be fun to prank you. So I did." She couldn't look at him.

"That might explain the toilet paper prank, and the team flags, but why the symbols and the for sale signs? I thought we liked each other... or did I read you wrong?"

"You did not call me once all week long, Wilson!" she said in a testy tone of voice. "I thought you liked me, too!" There was hurt in her voice.

"I do like you, but you were out of town for two days, and I was immersed in my work. I was going to ask you out yesterday, but you said you had laundry and cleaning. I planned to ask again today, but now I don't know what to think. Last night I wanted to grab you and turn you over my knee for a damn good spanking, but I can't do that again."

Cilly felt as though he'd slapped her with his words. "I'm so sorry," she said.

"You should be sorry. You upset all of the people on this block, young lady. Mrs. Harrison thought someone was going to sneak inside her house and kill her and Frank in their sleep. The Devonshires have been keeping their kids inside all the time for fear someone is stalking the neighborhood. Do you realize that people have been killed over something as foolish as moving sports flags around?"

“I’m sorry. It seemed funny at the time.”

“None of it was funny, Priscilla. You need to think about that, and you need to make amends.”

“How can I do that?” she asked, clearly upset.

“You can start by apologizing to each and every person on this street. You can accept the responsibility for your actions and admit you were wrong.”

“They won’t believe me! They’re all mad at me!” she said, pouting.

“They’ll believe a sincere apology, and they’ll get over their mad if you are sincere and honest.”

“What about you, Wilson? Are you going to forgive me?” she asked hopefully.

“Cilly, I don’t like being manipulated. If you wanted to go out yesterday, then you should have said so instead of pulling childish pranks, especially pranks that involved other people and that you blamed on me. I live here, too, and I don’t want all of my neighbors distrusting me.”

“I’m so sorry!” She felt like crying, but was pretty sure tears wouldn’t impress Wilson. He was very upset with her, and she wanted to make it right. “What can I say or do to make things right with you, Wilson?” she asked.

“It is really very simple, young lady. You will march yourself up and down this street and apologize to every one of our neighbors and make damn sure the object of your pranks was me. You tell them that you are asking forgiveness and tell them you will be disciplined for your lack of respect for all of us. When you are done with that, and when you are truly ready to make amends, you will come and see me, bringing this sign with you. If I feel you are sincere about making amends, then I am going to ask you to take down your jeans and bend over for a damn good spanking. You won’t find this spanking as easy to endure as the first one I gave you. I’ll use my hand, and then I will use this wooden stake on your backside until you can’t sit down and until you are truly sorry for your behavior.”

“You intend to spank me again?” she asked in a small voice.

“Don’t you think your behavior warrants a spanking, Miss?”

“Why can’t you just accept my apology, Wilson? I really am sorry!”

“If you are truly sorry, Cilly, then you will accept the consequences for your actions. If there is any kind of future for us, then we shall begin as I intend to go on. I believe in spanking. If you can’t accept that, then it is best we learn that right now.

Chapter Five

Cilly was truly upset when Wilson turned on his heel and walked away from her. She really liked the man, but he was so infuriating. She went inside and tossed the sign on the kitchen table. Apparently she was the only one who found the pranks the least bit funny, and now she regretted her actions. Cilly sulked and pouted and then decided she needed to make amends with her neighbors. The best way to do that was to do some fast baking. It would also clear her mind and give her time to plan what she would say.

She knew that Mr. Harrison was partial to peanut butter cookies, so she started there. She also baked chocolate chip cookies, and a macadamia nut cookie with white chocolate. It wasn't long before she had the cookies baked and in gift boxes. She hoped the cookies would help her neighbors forgive her.

Cilly took a deep breath and decided she would go and apologize to the Harrisons first. She was pretty sure that Frank would forgive her, but Mrs. Harrison was difficult at best. Cilly walked up on their porch and rang the doorbell. She heard Mrs. Harrison screaming for Frank and telling him someone was at the door, and to make sure who it was before he opened the door! She couldn't help smiling. Mrs. Harrison was certainly paranoid. Frank answered the door and invited her inside. She could see the disappointment in his eyes, and it made her feel awful. "I've come to apologize to you both for my pranks."

"Why would you do such worrisome things to all of us, honey?" Mrs. Harrison asked, wiping her hands on her apron as she sat down on the sofa beside her husband.

"My real target was Wilson," she admitted. I was angry with him for not noticing me," she admitted, her cheeks turning pink. This was so embarrassing. "I decided it would be funny to make him look guilty and then watch him squirm trying to defend himself. It was not nice of me... and I am sorry. I shouldn't have involved you or the rest of the neighbors in my plans. I'm too old to be acting like a child." She took a deep breath and then added, "Wilson is very upset with me and thinks I deserve punishment."

"Well, he's right, honey. You do. And that is just not the way to get a man interested in you," Mrs. Harrison said.

"Don't be giving the girl advice, Wilma. That is between the two of them."

“Will you please forgive me? I promise I won’t do anything like this ever again.”

“Sure we will,” Frank answered, and then asked, “Are those peanut butter cookies by any chance?”

Cilly nodded and then handed him the box. She gave them each a hug and then left their house, telling them she had several more houses to visit. They wished her well, and Cilly felt much better when she said good bye to them.

She made a few more calls, and her neighbors were very forgiving. She saved the Devonshires for last. She put a huge assortment of cookies into a larger box, and then walked to their house. Bob answered the door and welcomed her inside. She quickly apologized for the pranks and Bob grinned at her and said, “I’m just relieved it wasn’t one of our boys. I was positive that Shyre was blaming my kids.”

“I am so sorry!” Cilly said in embarrassment. “None of you were the targets, and I did not even consider all the problems I was creating for others when I decided to prank Wilson.”

“Just tell him you’re sorry and he’ll forgive you,” was Pamela’s advice.

“I certainly hope so. He thinks I need consequences,” she said, finding a way to say what she was supposed to say that wasn’t as embarrassing as admitting he wanted to give her a spanking. She didn’t know if she could find the courage to go to him and accept another punishment at his hands, but if she didn’t, their relationship would be over before it really began.

“Cilly...” One of the Devonshire boys came into the living room, followed by the two others. “We need to tell you something that is going to make you real mad.”

“Oh, I don’t think I’ll get that mad. What’s wrong?” she asked, noticing that both parents were looking at the boys in varying degrees of dread.

“You know them cookies you baked for Mr. Shyre right when he moved in...?”

“Yes.”

“We sort of took them from his porch and we ate them. Jamie dropped the plate and broke it.”

“Thank you for telling me, boys. I know that wasn’t easy for you to do.”

“We’re sorry, and we’ll do chores to pay for the plate,” he offered, glancing at his parents nervously.

“The plate isn’t important to me... What is important is that you had the courage to come and tell me the truth. Thank you for doing that.” She jumped up and gave each of them a big hug.

“Your cookies are really good, Cilly,” they told her with wide grins.

“It’s a good thing I brought a big box of them for all of you, then, isn’t it?” she said with a laugh.

Pamela walked her out on the porch to ask, “Was the plate very expensive, Cilly? Bob and I will reimburse you...?”

“No worries. It had no real value... Was just something pretty, and I have more. Please don’t scold the boys. I shouldn’t have left them on Wilson’s porch when he wasn’t there.”

“No wonder you were so upset with him. He didn’t even thank you or anything!”

“It doesn’t matter now,” she said with a smile.

Cilly walked back to her house and wondered what she could take to Wilson that he would accept... besides the wooden stake that he wanted to use to paddle her behind. She made herself a cup of tea and sat there trying to decide what to do.

Wilson watched all afternoon as Cilly went to one house after another, hopefully apologizing. He couldn’t miss the white boxes she was carrying, and he knew they contained baked goods. He was sure that the neighbors would be pleased with the treat. He wondered when or if she would come knocking on his door. And he wondered what he would do if she showed up without the wooden stake in her hands. Cilly needed a sound spanking, but he was not going to force her to accept a spanking she was not willing to receive.

He waited for what seemed like forever, but in reality was about an hour. The look on her face was one of trepidation, but she bravely held out the wooden stake and said, “I’m sorry, Wilson. I behaved like a child, and I should have come straight to you and told you why I was so upset. I shouldn’t have involved the neighbors, either. I apologized to all of them, and just so you know, I found out what happened to the plate of cookies I left for you. The Devonshire boys saw them and took them. Jamie, the youngest boy, dropped the plate and broke it. I’m sorry I thought the worst of you.”

“Then you really did bring me cookies?” he asked with a smile. She nodded. “Thank you,” he said. “That was really nice of you.”

“Wilson, are you really going to punish me?” she asked sadly. “I’m so very sorry. I’ve done so much thinking today, and I know how awful I was. Please forgive me.”

“I do forgive you, honey, but you earned a good spanking, and I wouldn’t be doing you any favors if I let you off. Do you understand?” he asked softly, wanting to take her in his arms and reassure her she would be fine. “Are you going to accept the spanking you earned?” he wanted to know.

“Yes, but I don’t want to! I was really sore the last time.”

“You’ll be sore this time, too,” he said, being honest with her. “We might as well go into the living room and get this over with.” He took her hand and took her into his living room and she saw that his desk was right in front of the window so he could look outside while he was working.

“I’m going to have a seat on the sofa, and you can lie over my lap and get comfortable. You’ll be there for a while, honey.” He spoke gently, and when he sat down he kept a hold on her hand and tugged her down across his knees. He reached over her to put the wooden stake on the coffee table. Then he spoke again. “Why are you going to get a spanking, Cilly?”

“Because I involved others in the middle of my upset with you, and used them to punish you. It was a terrible thing to do. I hurt the Harrison’s feelings, and Bob and Pamela Devonshire were sure that you were blaming their boys. I feel terrible about that. Ruby said she was sure that someone was trying to hurt you and she feared for your safety. I promise you I had no idea that I was doing anything other than pulling a few pranks. I feel so bad for upsetting so many people, and most of all, I am sorry I didn’t just speak to you and ask you why you didn’t call me all week. I acted like a silly teenager instead of a grown woman, but damn it, Wilson, I’ve never felt this way about a man before.”

“You really have been doing some thinking today, and I admit I should have called you, honey. I meant to, but sometimes when I work the entire world goes away. I’m sorry I hurt your feelings, and I am sorry this needs to be done. You won’t feel so guilty by the time I’m finished spanking your cute little butt.” He was positive he heard her snuffle, but he went ahead and did what he felt needed to be done. He raised his hand and brought it down on her jean covered backside. She didn’t cry out, and he knew that he was making the spans gentle on purpose to start. The last time he spanked her he was full of adrenalin, and he was a bit too hard on her. This time he wanted to ease her guilt and let her know that her behavior wasn’t acceptable. He wasn’t going to spank her that hard, and if she accepted the spanking, he would make the spanking with the wooden stake very short.

Cilly felt like crying. Each swat seemed to make her backside sting that much more, and she knew that she still had the paddling with the stake to endure. She finally started kicking her legs up and down on the sofa and she reached back with her hand to try and protect her bottom.

“Please stop, Wilson! It hurts too much.”

“Move your hands and stop kicking, Cilly. You need to accept what you earned.” He knew the spanking was hurting, but it was supposed to hurt. If it didn’t hurt enough, the guilt would remain.

“I have accepted it, but now it just hurts too much. I can’t do this, Wilson!” she exclaimed.

“Yes you can,” he said as he captured her hand and pinned it to her side while he continued to spank, spanking harder now. He heard her start crying in earnest a bit later and decided she’d had enough. It was time to see if she was really serious about accepting her punishment, or if she was hoping he would reconsider.

Cilly was so thankful when the painful spanking stopped. Wilson helped her up and she rested her head on his shoulder, seeking comfort. "Thank you for stopping, Wilson. I couldn't take any more, and I am so sorry." She was so relieved he didn't use the wooden stake. There was simply no way she could endure more punishment.

"Cilly, we aren't through. You still have the rest of your spanking coming. You need to push your jeans down and then bend over the arm of the sofa, and we'll finish." He looked at her and waited to see if she would comply. He already knew he wouldn't use force to put her in position. It was important for Cilly to either accept or deny his right to correct her behavior.

She wanted to say no, but Cilly was positive that if she did, Wilson would become a neighbor and nothing more. Silently, she got to her feet and slowly undid the snap on her jeans, and then she tugged down the zipper. She pushed her jeans down and then positioned herself over the arm of the sofa. She really didn't want another spanking with the stake she used to attach the For Sale by Owner signs, but if this is what it took to gain Wilson's forgiveness, then she would endure the rest and pray her backside survived.

Wilson was impressed. "I'm proud of you, honey. I know this isn't easy, but we'll get it over with. I'm only going to give you ten since you cooperated without having to be coaxed. I want you to count each one, however, and I want you to stay in place. If you get up, or put your hands back, we'll start over. Do you understand, Cilly?" he asked, his tone firm.

"Yes!" Cilly desperately wanted to jump up and run, but her heart wouldn't let her do that. It was only ten. She could endure ten more spansks. The first one caught her by surprise and she gasped as she felt pain across both of her sit spots. The stake was long enough it covered both cheeks and thighs! And the sting was ferocious.

"Cilly?" Wilson asked. "Are you forgetting what I said?"

"Ohhhh! One!" she counted.

"I'll let it pass this time, but if it happens again, I'll start over, young lady."

"I'll remember," she promised. The stake landed on her sit spots again and she cried out in pain. "Two!" she managed to hiss. The third one was on top of the second! "Please, no more there! Please!" she begged, and then said, "Three."

"You have no control over your punishment, Cilly," Wilson stated firmly, and gave her the next one right on top of the last." He felt terrible when she cried out in pain and then started sobbing. It was necessary for him to show her that begging wouldn't work, but he didn't have to like it. She barely managed to whisper 'four'.

Cilly was desperate for the spanking to stop and there were still six more to go! She prepared herself for the next one and to her shock it landed lower, on her thighs. She nearly flew up off

the sofa, but remembered in time to stay down. “Five... Please, no more!” She couldn’t help begging. “I’m so sorry, Wilson!”

“I know you are, honey. We’re half done. Stay down now.” He brought the thin piece of wood down on her reddened cheeks. He knew the spank wasn’t nearly as hard as the first five, but with her butt already stinging, he knew it hurt.

“Six!” She closed her eyes in dread. “Seven!” she managed to count as the stake fell once more, right below.

“The last three are going to be right on your sit spots, Cilly. I’ll help you count and I’ll help you stay in place. You’ve done well, and I know you are hurting, but you’ve earned some help.”

Cilly felt his hand on her lower back and she mentally braced herself for serious pain. She didn’t have long to wait. Wilson gave her three very fast and very hard spanks, counting them himself because he knew she wouldn’t be able to do so. The pain was intense and she was sobbing when he told her it was all over.

Wilson put the stake on the coffee table and then he gently pulled the little blonde to her feet and held her close. “You are so brave, honey,” he told her, his voice hoarse with emotion. “I am so proud of you, Cilly. It isn’t easy to admit you earned a consequence, but you did, and not only that, you did your very best to accept that consequence, even when you knew it would be painful.”

“I didn’t want to lose you before we had a chance to get to know each other...” she explained, feeling safe in his arms.

“I wouldn’t have given up so easily, Cilly. I’m a man who knows his mind, and if you think you can put up with a writer who forgets to be human when he’s busy, I would love to see where we can take this.”

“I will remind you that you are human when you get so immersed you forget all about me,” she told him, doing her best to smile. “I must look terrible!” She hid her face in his shirt again.

He quickly lifted her chin and kissed her thoroughly. “You’re beautiful,” he reassured her, kissing her again. “More beautiful than you realize.”

The next two weeks were wonderful, and Wilson came over to her house on Trick or Treat Night to help her give out candy, much to her surprise. Once the magical hours were over for another year, he pulled her close and said, “I love you, Cilly Gibbons. I think I’ve loved you since the first time I saw you.”

“I feel the same way, Wilson. Why did we waste six months denying what we knew in our hearts?”

“Do you think we should put a For Sale by Owner sign in my yard this time?” he asked with a loving smile.

“Only if you put it there yourself, darling. I am no longer the neighborhood prankster.”

The End.