

Figgy Pudding

Melinda Barron

©2010 by Blushing Books® and Melinda Barron

Copyright © 2010 by Blushing Books® and Melinda Barron
All rights reserved. No part of the book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

Published by Blushing Books®,
a subsidiary of
ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901

The trademark Blushing Books® is registered in the US Patent and Trademark Office.

Barron, Melinda
Figgy Pudding
eBook ISBN: 978-1-60968-431-0

Cover Design by ABCD Graphics

Blushing Publications thanks you whole-heartedly for your purchase with us!

There are plenty more stories such as the one you've purchased from Blushing Books! Visit our online store to view our might selection!

<http://www.blushingbooks.com>

This book is intended for adults only. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.

Chapter One

Alice could always count on Angela to make her smile, no matter how crappy her day had been. And her day had been very crappy. It was amazing how one little letter could you're your day. Of course the August heat didn't help. It was muggy, the threat of rain always hanging around.

In spite of her dampened spirits, she still had work to finish. She kept her gaze on the manuscript she was working on; well, she kept her gaze there for the most part, anyway. Every few minutes she would look at the instant message window she'd opened a few hours before. It was after two in the morning in New Orleans, but after eight in the morning in London, where Angela lived. Her friend generally was up by now, and on her computer. This was their normal time to talk. So why wasn't she answering the message Alice had sent earlier?

The message had been simple: ding me when you get up. But so far Angela hadn't answered. Sometimes her friend slept in, though, if she'd had a busy night either working on her next book or going out with her gorgeous husband.

"I need a gorgeous husband," Alice said to herself as she made a note on the manuscript that it's is a contraction for it is, and not a possessive form for it. She knew the author already knew that, but she couldn't correct it without the note. If she did the author would send her a nasty note about "taking liberties without explanations."

It seemed like a pretty petty thing to worry about, to her, but this particular author was more of a diva than anything else; she didn't take kindly to being corrected.

Alice read a few more pages, then glanced at the IM window. She knew the computer would ding to alert her when Angela finally came on line, but she was having trouble waiting. Things had been so horrid today. She needed someone to talk to, and she didn't have that many people she could do that with.

How in the hell had things come to this? Just a year and a half ago she'd been employed full-time. She worked for a large publishing house as an editor, one of their senior ones. Now she worked for herself, trying to find authors who needed editing work from time to time. Before she'd lost her job she'd paid her bills before they were due and she had money in the bank. Now she owed money to everyone, and some of them, mainly the people who held her mortgage, were tired of waiting on her to make payments.

She put her head in her hands and fought back tears. It was like the world was closing in on her, four walls pressing in from all sides. And none of them had a door or a window for her to slip out of. If she wasn't careful it wouldn't be long before the walls slammed in on her, squashing her like a bug.

The sound of a ding pulled her from her misery. She had no idea how long she'd sat there, attending her own little pity party. She glanced at the clock. About twenty minutes had gone by. But Angela was here now. There was someone she could talk to. It might not change the way things were, but it would help her to get a better perspective on things.

"I'm a bit knackered." Alice smiled as she read the text. "Hubby took me out last night for the office holiday party. Bankers may be stodgy and all, but they know how to cut loose when it counts."

"Glad to hear you had fun," Alice typed.

"Turn on the program so we can alk face to face," Angela replied. "I mean talk, of course. Don't think my fingers want to cooperate with the keyboare, cratch that...I mean scratch that, keyboard. I'll ring you."

Within seconds the computer program that allowed her to talk to her friend face to face rang to get her attention. Alice wiped her eyes and connected.

"That's better," Angela said. Alice couldn't help but notice that she looked fresh as a daisy, although she'd said she was hung over. "Holy hell, you look like death. What's wrong? You should have knocked me up earlier."

Alice laughed. "You know over here that means I would have gotten you pregnant."

"I don't think you have the equipment for that." Angela said with a laugh as she leaned back in her chair. She took a drink from her teacup and then took a cigarette from a pack on the table. "I'm waiting for you to tell me what's wrong."

It was hard to open up. Alice had been alone so long, and she'd always been able to support herself and never depend on anyone. Until now.

"I got a rotten notice from the bank today," she said, her voice soft. "It wasn't a foreclosure notice, but it was letting me know that I'm right on the edge. It's like an epidemic over here, with the economy, but I never expected it to happen to me. If I miss one more, I'm out."

“Oh sweetie.” Angela leaned forward and Alice knew that if they’d been in the room together the author would have hugged her. “Why didn’t you tell me you needed help?”

“Because it’s not your problem,” Alice responded. “I just need a shoulder right now.”

“What are you going to do?”

Alice shrugged. “My brother’s offered for me to stay with him, and I’ll probably have to take him up on it for a few months. I’m hoping one of the publishing houses I’ve applied to will take me on, but the employment front is pretty bleak right now.”

Angela nodded. She sat back in her chair and lit her cigarette. “Come over here.”

“I don’t think that will help,” Alice said with a laugh. “Editors aren’t finding jobs anywhere right now.”

“You can work for me exclusively,” Angela replied. “I’d love it. You know I can’t spell worth a damn. Having you here to check out things as a copy editor would be fantastic. Plus, we have several flats in town that we rent out. You can take one of those. You don’t have to live with us.”

Alice laughed. “I don’t have money for my mortgage payment here. I don’t think it will change if I move over there. Paying rent still takes money. I just...I can’t. But thank you very much for the suggestion.”

“Then you’ll take a few months free as part of your salary,” Angela said.

“Angela, I can’t.” Alice sighed heavily. “It sounds so easy, but...I just can’t.”

“If you continue to say no, I want you to know that I might have to come over there and collect you myself. I won’t take no for an answer. You’ll love living in England. I promise.”

She had no doubt of that. “I’d have to get papers and visas and all sorts of things lined up.” Oh Lord it sounded so wonderful, to get away from here for a while, to slip away from what had turned so bad in the last year and start new. Alice didn’t have friends other than Angela, and her only family was her brother and his wife and kids. They’d never been close, and she knew he’d only offered for her to come live with them so she didn’t end up on the streets. She had no doubt that he would ask her to leave after two months, tell her she needed to find a place of her own.

Living outside of the United States sounded so exotic. She’d been to London twice, both times to visit with Angela and do some sightseeing. She’d loved the country, loved the big city and all it had to offer.

“I’m going to send you links to websites where you can get the paperwork started,” Angela said. “And I’m warning you, if you don’t do it, you’ll find me on your doorstep with a kidnap squad, ready to smuggle you out of the country in one month’s time. Got it?”

“Angela.” Alice sighed again. “I can’t just make this decision in a few minutes time. I need to think about it, to consider all the possibilities and ramifications of a move. Please, don’t be angry with me for saying no again, but…”

She stopped speaking when Angela held up her hand. “I’m about to get a good, sound spanking for something I did last night. You can think during that time.”

Alice lowered her head to hide her smile. Angela had often talked of being spanked, about how much she loved it and how it fueled her writing. Alice had never thought of being spanked before, not until she’d edited a novel that Angela had written several years ago. The heroine had been spanked by her husband, and at first she’d been appalled.

Then she’d read the scene again and it hadn’t bothered her so much. In her next book, Angela had written a scene with an erotic spanking. Alice had read it carefully, her eyes widening as she’d devoured each word.

The scene had made her hot, and when Angela had asked her about it the next day, asked if Alice thought Angela’s readers would like it or not, Alice had said yes, it was great. The response from readers had been overly positive, and now Angela included one, maybe two spanking scenes in her novels.

Alice loved each one, loved seeing how Angela changed them up. It had made Alice want to find someone who would spank her, but that wasn’t happening anytime soon, she knew. She hadn’t had a man in her life in some time, and it didn’t seem as if that were going to change.

“Are you listening to me?” Angela’s sharp retort brought Alice’s attention back to the computer screen. “It looks as if you’re daydreaming, or maybe dozing off. I know it’s late there, or early, depending on how you look at it.”

Alice nodded. “Sorry, it’s just been a long day. I have an appointment at the bank in--” she glanced at the clock, “--nine hours. I’m dreading it.”

“Alice!” Alice smiled as Angela’s husband appeared on screen. “Good morning to you, sweet editor.”

“Good morning to you, too, Jeremy.” She waved at him. “Hope things are going well for you.”

“Well, it’s getting late and I have a spanking to deliver before I go to work.” Alice nodded, the irony that Jeremy was a banker not lost on her. Right now she hated bankers. All of them.

“I’ll sign off, then. Angela, I’ll speak to you later today.”

“As soon as you get back from the bank,” the author said, her eyes narrowing.

“Understand me? Or I’ll send Jeremy to spank you, too.”

“Trust her on that one. I’ll be on the next plane,” Jeremy yelled out as he headed out of the room.

“Take care, and think about my offer, please.”

“I will,” Alice said. “You be good, too, and I hope you can sit down to write after your spanking.”

Angela laughed. “That’s what pillows are for, darling. The harder he spansks, the more creative I get. Talk to you later.”

The screen went blank and Alice sat back in her chair. Live in England? She’d never considered living anywhere but New Orleans, where she’d been born and raised. She’d graduated from Tulane and been lucky enough to find a job she could do from her home with the power of the Internet.

Now it was all slipping through her fingertips. She’s survived hurricanes and various other natural disasters just to be brought down by economic downturn. But Angela was giving her a way out. She wouldn’t take free rent, but she would work for her board. If she could sell the house before they foreclosed on it she might be able to salvage a little bit of money out of it, money that she could use for food and utilities while working for her rent.

It could work. If she could sell the house. She reached into her drawer and took out the letter she’d received from the bank that afternoon. They wanted a chance to talk to her about her mortgage, about the financial trouble she was in.

Maybe, if she were lucky, she would be able to find a way out of this mess without having to give up her house. But if she didn’t, then maybe taking a swim across the pond would be a solution that would help her keep her head above water.

Forty-five days. Alice sat on a bench on the Riverwalk and watched the tourists go by. How many of them had forty-five days to come up with two grand when they didn’t have a

regularly paying job? She supposed she shouldn't think such things. There were probably quite a few of them, given the state of the economy. No one was in perfect shape at this moment in time, which meant trying to sell the house was not something that was going to work for her, either.

Not that she wouldn't try. She'd contact an agent first thing in the morning and have them come and look. The house was in the French Quarter, after all, and it was a popular area. New Orleans was bouncing back, right? Maybe, just maybe, she'd find some luck in this situation and someone would buy it from her. Depending on the selling price, she might be able to use any leftover money for the necessities she'd thought about this afternoon.

Right now, Angela's offer of a flat for editing work sounded like a good way out. They'd have to talk about Alice working solely for her friend, though. She'd need to take on as many editing jobs as she could, make as much money as she could.

She checked her watch. Angela would be out with Jeremy right now, or maybe working; she did that sometimes when he worked late. He'd told her with a laugh one time that when people laughed about banker's hours the laugh was really on them. Bankers worked all hours, not just when the lobby was open.

Alice stared out at the Mississippi River and wondered if her new home would have a view. As it was now, it was a short distance from her house to this spot, where she could people watch and stare at the River all at the same time. She had a million things she needed to do. Apart from calling the agent in the morning she needed to see about setting up a moving sale where she would offer up her belongings. She had quite a few DVDs that she'd watched on her lonely nights. Alone they wouldn't fetch her any money, but selling a few of them might give her something she could go on.

Her furniture wasn't premium, but a few of her pieces were antiques. She knew a few dealers who had shops in the Quarter. Hopefully she could sell them the pieces outright and not get a consignment deal. She needed the money now, not when the furniture actually sold to a customer. She'd probably take a financial hit on it, but that was fine with her, as long as happened now.

She needed to call her brother, too, and tell him that she wouldn't need his offer of a spare room. She could practically hear his sigh of relief in her ear. They'd never been close. Their parents had divorced when they were both young. Dean had been ten and she'd been eight. Rather than fight over custody her parents had split them up. Alice had gone to live with their

mother, and Dean with their father. They rarely saw each other, and sometimes Alice wondered if she new her brother at all.

She'd seen her father once a year, at Christmas. He'd shown up three years ago for her mother's funeral, but he'd been cold, distant. Dean had said he'd been sad that he didn't really know his mother, but he hadn't taken the blame for any of it, even though he'd never made a move to visit her after he'd graduated and started a family of his own.

When he'd said something about his mother ignoring him all her life, Alice had stared at him and said, "The phone works both ways, you know."

He hadn't taken the remark well, and really, she couldn't blame him. She'd told her mother several times before she'd died that she should call Dean. She'd replied that he should call her.

Alice supposed that meant stubbornness ran in their family. She had a little streak of it herself, but she didn't intend to let it ruin her life. She needed to get home and check on flats, and research the paperwork that would need to be done for a move to England.

She stood and wiped off her jeans. The clouds were dark, and rain would fall at any moment. With luck she would make it home before it came down. But she had one stop to make for coffee and beignets. It was one of her favorite afternoon treats, and she would miss it once she was in England.

But she could make coffee on her own, and she could buy beignet mix and take it over with her.

Coffee and beignets in England. It sounded like a perfect plan.

"You said this place was, and I quote, 'quaint and sweet.'" Alice stood in the middle of her new home and fixed a glare on her friend and new boss.

"You don't like it?" Angela's voice held more than a tinge of shock and Alice suddenly regretted her harsh tone.

"I didn't say that, Angela. It's much more than I expected. You said it was a small flat. This is a fully-furnished flat that I'm sure brings in quite a bit of money each month."

"Oh tosh," Angela said, shaking her head. "Jeremy doesn't care about that. He's thrilled you're here, and so am I."

Alice smiled. She was thrilled to be here, too. The paperwork had been easy, and surprisingly enough, she'd sold her house after it had been on the market for three weeks. She hadn't expected that to happen, but the couple who had bought it had moved away from New Orleans after Katrina, and they were desperate to come back home, citing homesickness as the driving force behind their need to return.

Alice hoped she didn't feel that same homesickness several months from now. She took another look around her new home. It was in Chelsea, on a narrow street full of town homes. The one she now lived in had been made into three apartments...scratch that, flats. She had to start using the proper terms for things, she supposed.

This afternoon would be busy. All her belongings had been waiting on her when she'd arrived this morning; not that there had been that many things left to ship, clothes and books, mostly. Everything else had been sold during her moving sale.

She had a little bit of a nest egg now, a very little one, that she would use to open an account at Jeremy's bank tomorrow. What she really needed right now was to sleep. The flight had been long, and she'd been so excited about her new adventure that she'd been unable to sleep on the plane, despite the repeated urgings from the flight attendant that she do so.

It was a request she was unable to fulfill, though, and she'd kept her gaze on the movie screen, even though she didn't really listen to the movie. Her thoughts had been swirling around her move. Dean had taken the news with a shrug, telling her that he hoped she enjoyed her new life "over there." She was pretty sure what he was thinking was, "thank God she won't be living with us."

Angela had met her at the airport, and they'd taken the train to Paddington. Jeremy had picked them up there and driven them to the flat. He'd apologized for not being able to stay, telling his wife he had a meeting. He'd given Angela a big kiss, then welcome Alice to England with a kiss on the cheek before he'd left.

"Are you sure he's all right with me taking this place rent free for a few months?"

"Positive," Angela said with a smile. "Besides, I own it, not him."

"Oh." That surprised Alice. She knew Angela was successful as an author, but she didn't know she did other things, such as acting as a landlady.

“Well, chop chop,” Angela said. “You need to shower and dress so we can meet Jeremy for lunch.”

“I hate to be rude, but I think I’d rather take a nap and meet him for dinner tonight.”

“Nope, sorry,” Angela said. “No sleeping during the afternoon. You have to start adjusting yourself. To that end, you and I are taking the tube down to the bank so you can learn your way around a little bit.”

Angela plopped herself down on the couch, then she winced and twisted a little so she could rub her backside.

“Something wrong?” Alice yawned, covering her mouth to try and hide it. She was pretty such it hadn’t worked, though, because Angela grinned at her.

“Spanking last night,” she said, her grin spreading. “A fun one, for sure, but my bum’s very sore. And the yawn is not working. You can’t sleep now, you have to acclimate yourself to the time change, starting this very moment. Now, get busy. We have to meet Jeremy in about two hours.”

“Two hours?” That would never do. She needed more like four, where she could lay down for a few, and then shower and get ready. “Why don’t we change it to dinner?”

“No.” Angela waved a finger at her. “It’s lunch, and if you don’t go and get ready I’ll take you as you are. The bathroom is all set up and ready for you. All you need is some clean clothes, and while you’re showering I’ll hang some up and pick something out.”

Angela stood and grabbed a suitcase. “Come on, you, let’s go. London awaits you.”

She moved down the hallway, and Alice laughed. Angela had always been so sure of herself, so full of confidence and life. Alice on the other hand had always been a little shy, hiding in the shadows, editing books instead of writing them, keeping to herself, hiding behind a computer screen and instant message program.

She supposed now was the time to change, though. She’d changed cities, changed countries. Why not change herself, too?

“Hurry up,” Angela said, sticking her head out from the bedroom. “I have a surprise for you today.”

Alice hurried down the hallway, stepping in to see her suitcase laid out on the bed, her clothes in various piles on the bed. How had she done that so fast?

“You mean a surprise other than a fantastic apartment, a new city to explore and the prospect of learning to drive on the wrong side of the road?”

“Yes, something other than that. I decided since you were new in town I was going to host something a week from Thursday to make you feel at home. I’m giving a Thanksgiving dinner, with friends of mine and Jeremy’s to welcome you to town, and to make you feel at home. After that, it’s time for the Christmas season and I have something special planned for that, too.”

Alice’s eyes filled with tears. “You’re too good to me, Angela.”

“Nonsense.” Her friend hugged her. “I’m excited about doing this, and you should be excited about me doing it, so no tears or you shouldn’t have from you. I’ve been scooping out men for you, too, and I have one picked out that I think will be absolutely perfect. He’s a banker, and works with Jeremy. And, I have it on good authority, he likes to give a good spanking. I think the two of you are going to get along great.”

Chapter Two

“I hope I did this right.” Alice looked over to where Angela was studying the turkey she’d just taken out of the oven.

“You’ve never cooked a turkey?”

Angela shot her a look. “Sweetie, you know I don’t cook. This area is Jeremy’s territory. Unfortunately he had to work today and told me to take care of it. Does it look right to you?”

It was a quick trip to the stove where she looked over the meal. “Did you use a meat thermometer? I’ve always done that.”

“Good thinking.” Angela scurried toward a drawer and Alice went back to her spot near the window where she could see from the kitchen into the dining room. Jeremy stood there with among a group of friends. There were several couples present, along with a five single men. One of those men was the “right one” for Alice, according to Angela.

It had been a little more than a week since she’d announced that she knew a man who was perfect for her friend. Then she’d informed her that she wasn’t going to tell her who he was.

“I wanted to, but Jeremy said I couldn’t. He said fixups never work, so I had to let you alone to see if you and...wait, I can’t tell you his name...get along. So you’d better.”

Alice had asked for clues, and the only ones Angela would give her was that the man was “a spanker.” She studied the gathering now, wondering how you spotted a spanker. Why wasn’t he wearing a sign that said, “I love to spank,” or “Spankers Are Us?” She supposed that would be too easy.

She knew all the single men at the party, because Angela had taken pains to point each of them out. They all worked with Jeremy, so she couldn’t use that little tidbit to figure out who her friend thought was the perfect man for her. Unfortunately, Angela had taken her husband’s words to heart and she wasn’t telling a thing about her candidate for Alice’s love life.

The only clue she had besides the spanking was the fact that he worked with Jeremy. She tried to think who she had met that first day at the bank. There had been four of them: Jack, Adam, Preston and Malcolm. It had to be one of the four of them. They were all handsome men. She guessed them to be between the ages of thirty and forty, with Adam being on the younger end of the scale and Preston at the older.

Maybe she should go out and talk to them, or “chat them up,” as Angela put it. But it had been so long since Alice had been on a date that she wasn’t really sure how to talk to a man. She could imagine her opening line now, “So, tell me about being a banker.”

Snooze city.

Or how about, “So, do you like to spank? Angela’s always talking about it and I was a little curious how it felt? Want to spank me?”

“Get out there and mingle,” Angela said as she came up behind her. “You’ll never meet anyone hiding in the kitchen.”

“I’m helping you,” Alice said, never taking her gaze off the four men.

“No you’re not, you’re staring at the single guys out there and wondering who I was talking about. Go and figure it out and on Christmas Day I’ll make sure you get the first serving of Figgy Pudding on Christmas day.”

“Isn’t that just fruitcake? I’ve never been a fan,” Alice said with a laugh.

“It’s delicious, and it’s not fruitcake. Now, get to it before I spank you myself.”

She didn’t wait around to see if Angela would follow through on her threat. She walked into the living room, the quiet murmurings of conversations reaching her ears. People nodded and said hello and asked her how she was enjoying her new flat and her time in England. She responded that she loved it, and that she was looking forward to her first Christmas season in Britain.

None of the conversations lasted very long and she moved from group to group, trying to be as sociable as possible. After about ten minutes she decided she needed a drink. Angela had set up a drinks table near the sideboard, which contained various appetizers.

She made her way over there and was just reaching for a decanter of wine when a male hand took it up first.

“Allow me.” The deep voice sent delicious shivers up her spine. “It’s the least I can do for our guest of honor.”

She looked up to see Preston Walsh smiling down at her. He winked, then poured her a glass of wine. “I’d ask how you’re enjoying yourself here, but I’m sure you’ve fielded that question a few times already today.”

“A few,” she said, taking a sip from her wine. “How do you like England?”

He laughed and poured himself a glass. “Nice way to turn the tables. Since I’ve never lived elsewhere I’d have to say I love it. Is that what you and Angela were talking about, your new home?”

“Well, actually, she was telling me she was going to give me the first dip into the figgy pudding this year. I’m not sure if that’s good, or bad.”

“Definitely good.” He put his hand on the small of her back and steered her toward the living room. “You know about the coins, right?”

“Are you asking as a banker who wants to educate me about the British monetary system?”

His rumble of laughter made her smile. “No, I assume you can tell the difference in the coins from your previous visits. I’m talking about the coins in the pudding. The tradition is that, as the pudding is being made, each person in the household comes in and stirs a coin into the batter and makes a wish. The person who gets the coin on Christmas Day is considered lucky. If you’re the first person to get a serving, you have a great chance of finding one of the coins.”

Alice sat down on the couch, and Preston sat down right next to her. “Interesting,” she said as she glanced at him. He was close to forty, she guessed. He seemed fit, with light brown hair and green eyes. His smile was easy, and it made her insides flutter. She tried to recall what they were talking about as she looked away and cleared her throat. Oh yes, coins in pudding. “I suppose it’s not so good for your teeth if you find one.”

“You’ve always got to be careful, true,” he replied. “But it’s a fun tradition, which I don’t believe is followed by a great many families anymore. Sad.”

“Did your family do it when you were growing up?”

“Oh yes.” He took a drink from his wine. “My father’s a vicar, and he always believed in following traditions. My wife and I did it with our children, too, before she died.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“You’re sorry we followed tradition?” The twinkle in his eye let her know he was teasing her.

“No, about your wife.”

“Ah, she’s been gone for ten years now,” he said, his voice wistful. “Cancer.”

Alice twirled her glass in her hand. “And your children?”

“Two boys, twenty-one and nineteen now, both at University.” He turned slightly toward her so that their knees touched. The wonderful chill she’d felt earlier intensified. He wouldn’t allow this sort of contact if he wasn’t interested in getting to know her better. Had she found the man Angela had chosen for her? If so she’d done it very quickly.

She wondered if Angela had mentioned to the “fix-up” that she thought he and Alice would get along together. Was this man paying attention to her because he found her interesting, or was he doing so because Angela had asked him to? That idea didn’t set well with her, and she tried to push it aside.

Her ruminations had brought about a silence between them. She took a sip from her wine and tried to think of a way to continue the conversation. “We have a similar tradition to the figgy pudding at Mardi Gras in New Orleans. It’s called a king cake. A tiny baby Jesus is baked into the cake, and the person who finds it is supposed to host the party the next year.”

“Did you ever get the baby Jesus?”

“No.” She shrugged. “But my mother did once. We had a huge party the next year.”

“Parties are always good.” He took a sip from his own glass and she studied his hand as he lifted his glass. He might work behind a desk, but his hands were large, as if he’d done manual labor at some point in his life. “Is that all you were talking about, traditions and such?”

“No, we discussed her books, too. I’m her editor, remember?”

“Yes, Jeremy told me that you keep her grammar on the straight and narrow while she makes up tales about snogging, shagging and spanking.”

A flush crept over Alice’s cheeks as she fished for something to say in response to his remark.

“I’ve embarrassed you. Sorry for that.”

“No, well, maybe a little. I...I just edit and...um...” She stopped speaking. “Okay, maybe the snogging, shagging and spanking remark caught me for a loop.”

“A loop?” He pursed his lips and nodded. “I suppose I could see that. Still, your blush is sweet, and I rather enjoy it.”

Her cheeks grew hotter. Before she could say anything, Angela stepped into the dining room, calling attention to the group that the dinner was ready.

Preston stood and offered his hand to Alice. She took it and smiled at him as she stood.

“Call me sometime,” he said before she could walk toward the group. “You know where to find me, at the bank. We can talk more. I’m interesting in knowing more about your business.”

“You just want to see me blush again,” she said softly.

“That too, but talking business is a good excuse, and yours is about snogging, shagging and spanking, right?”

“Mine is about missing commas, correct spellings and the proper use of then and than.”

He leaned in closer to her. “I much prefer talking about the content, but if you want to use the grammar as foreplay, then I’m game.”

She turned away from the group so that, hopefully, Angela wouldn’t see her red face. “You’re very forward. I’ve always heard that British men are...shall we say...colder than, say the French.”

A sexy smile touched his lips. “That’s just a rumor started by French men to try and increase their chances of being successful with their seductions. I assure you, there’s nothing cold about British men when it comes to sex.”

“So your idea of a seduction is to tell me to call you?”

“You intrigued me the minute I saw you.” Those words sent more delicious shivers through her body. “I wanted to let you know, but I didn’t want to ask you out and put you on the spot. So, I’m asking you to call me if you’re interested. And we’ll talk about the three Ss, and you can tell me which one interests you the most.”

In the background, Angela was telling people to hurry up and join them, before the food went cold.

“So you’ll call me?” He took her hand and squeezed it gently.

“We’ll see,” she replied. “After all, I decide which S should come first in my book.”

The tip of his tongue touched his upper lip, and Alice thought she might have an orgasm right there on the spot. “All three sound perfect. I’m willing to read that book with you, from cover to cover, to help you come to a decision about the ranking of the Ss. All you have to do is say the word.”

He gave her a wink before he guided her toward the crowd at the table. Heat still suffused her cheeks, and other parts of her body.

She had an idea that “reading” with Preston would be a great deal of fun.

On Monday, Alice sat near the phone, staring at the instrument as if willing it to come alive and tell her what to do. She hadn’t called Preston on Friday, and of course he wasn’t in his office over the weekend. She hadn’t wanted to call Angela and ask how to get hold of him at his home. That would give her friend too much information. She knew Angela wanted to ask how things were going with “the men,” but she hadn’t done it.

After dinner on Thursday, Preston had joined a group of men in a discussion about football, and he’d given her meaningful looks several times. But Malcolm, another banker, had sat near her and talked about life in America. The conversation had been fun, but it hadn’t been near as stimulating as the one she’d had with Preston.

She’d picked up the phone twice that morning, only to put it back down and sit in front of the computer to work. Now it was two in the afternoon, and if she didn’t call him soon she was afraid he would think she wasn’t interested.

“Just do it,” she said as she picked up the receiver and hit the buttons. The phone rang once before a receptionist answered. She asked to speak to Preston Walsh, and was immediately put through.

While it rang she pondered what she was doing. It had been years since she’d had a date with a man, much less one who told her he wanted to talk about “the three Ss” with her. She was on the verge of hanging up when a deep, somewhat rushed voice said, “Preston Walsh.”

“Hello,” she whispered, and before she could say her name he said, “Alice! You’re in trouble, you know, for not calling me on Friday. I spent the weekend wondering if I’d upset you somehow.”

Her heart beat just a little bit faster. “Sorry, I didn’t want to seem pushy.”

“Nonsense. I wanted you to be pushy, but that’s neither here nor there. You’ve called now, and all’s well. Dinner at eight tonight?”

“Tonight?”

“I know a nice little Italian place in Kensington. Do you like Italian? Or we could go Chinese.”

“Italian’s fine,” she said, her head spinning.

“See you at eight, then.”

“Wait, don’t you want to know my address?”

His deep chuckle sounded naughty. It caught her low in the belly and spread outward, making her nipples harden and her clit tighten.

“No need. As one of your bankers I can access your information. But I won’t do that. Jeremy will tell me. See you later. Dress casually.”

“Yes, later.” She stared at the phone for a few seconds before she hung it up. Her body was still on full alert as she placed the phone in its cradle. Something told her she knew what was on the menu for dessert tonight. It had been ages since she’d had a date, and she’d never slept with someone she’d just met, but Preston was awakening feelings inside her that made her think tonight might be the night for that.

She thought about items in her closet she could wear for a casual night out with a first date. Nothing came to mind. She picked up the phone and dialed.

“Angela.”

“Oh my, you are sneaky,” her friend replied. “I’d mentioned you to Malcolm, but it seems that you and Preston have hit it off. Jeremy just called to say he asked for your address so he can pick you up for dinner tonight.”

“I know.” She gripped the phone tighter. “I have no idea what to wear.”

Angela chuckled. “I’ll be right there.”

Alice had been surprised to find a candlelit restaurant in what she would essentially term as an alley back home in New Orleans. The entryway here was very tidy, though, and it led to other shops and what she thought might be the back entrance of a house.

Preston had been right on time to pick her up. He'd opened doors and helped her into his car, and then he'd politely asked about her day as they drove to the restaurant. Her hands had been shaking at first, but she'd quickly calmed down.

Now that they were seated in a cozy corner of the restaurant, around a table just big enough for two, her nerves were back. She wore one of Angela's skirts, and one of her own camisoles under a silk blouse of Angela's that barely covered her shoulders. There was no way she would be able to button up the front. The look provided quite a bit of cleavage and Angela convinced her that she looked very sexy.

She hoped Preston felt the same way. Right now he was ordering wine from the waiter. She toyed with her napkin until he was done, then he turned to her and flashed that sexy smile that made her insides tingle.

"What would you like to eat? Spaghetti? Lasagna? They do a very delicious chicken marsala here. I highly recommend it."

"Sounds delicious."

When the waiter returned he approved the wine, then ordered bruschetta with mushrooms to start, and the marsala for the regular meal. After that he ordered ricotta tart with raspberry sauce for dessert and Alice thought she'd died and gone to heaven.

After the waiter left, Preston poured them each a glass of wine, then he took her hand and lifted it to his lips. "You look very beautiful. I'd thought maybe I'd imagined how much you affected me, but I can see that it was not a dream."

If she were Angela she would be able to think of a suitable response for his compliments. As it was, all she could do was mutter, "Thank you."

"Tell me about your first week in London." He leaned forward, his elbows on the table. The bright look on his face made her relax, and she gave him a smile. She started to talk, laughing about having trouble finding her way to tube stations and trying to figure out which line to use depending on her destination.

Then she told him about walking around her neighborhood, looking for a local store to buy food, marveling at the friendless of her neighbors and even people she met on the streets.

“They’re not friendly in New Orleans?” They were eating their appetizer now, thick slices of bread with a wonderful mixture of mushrooms, onions and cheese.

“Oh they are, in the French Quarter we all know each other. But I’ve had people talk to me on street corners as we waited for traffic lights to change. I didn’t expect that in this size of a city.”

The main course arrived, large plates of chicken marsala along with green beans and salad. “This is a huge amount of food,” she said with a laugh.

“That’s what take home bags are for,” he said in a mock whisper. “Don’t forget the tart we have coming.”

They talked and ate and by the time they’d finished their dinner she all about his boys, Ethan and Nick, about his wife’s death and how he coped with it, and his job as a banker. She in turn told him about her life with her mother, her job and how she’d lost everything and was now starting over in a new country, thanks to the generosity of her friend Angela.

“I’ll have to remember to send her flowers as a thank you for bringing you here.” He winked at her and Alice wondered how it was she felt so close to this man when she barely knew him.

When the waiter appeared to take their plates, Alice glanced at her watch. “We’ve been here more than two hours.”

“One of the things I love about this place is that they don’t care if you linger over dinner. In fact, they encourage it.” He took her hand in his and squeezed. “I’ll ask for them to pack up dessert and we can go to your house to eat. Does that sound good to you?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent. We’ll have more privacy to talk of the three Ss.”

He dropped his napkin on his chair before he strode away from the table. Alice’s heart went pitter-patter. He wanted to discuss snogging, shagging and spanking now. Which meant she might find herself in a position to ask him to spend the night. She wished she’d washed the sheets on her bed.

That thought made her laugh, but her hands shook just a little. She'd been so relaxed when they were talking, and now the thought of sex made her think of scurrying for the corners. Maybe she should tell him they shouldn't talk about shagging, just snogging and spanking.

But she'd have to have a naked butt for him to spank her, wouldn't she? And if he was going to spank her, why shouldn't she have the fun of the shagging to go with it.

Why are you getting ahead of yourself, a voice rang out in her head. He hasn't said anything about it happening tonight, just that he wanted to talk about it tonight. That meant she should just take things as they come, and not try to push the issue.

She watched him walk across the room, a pastry box in his hand. "All set?"

"Definitely." She looked at the box. "That's looks like a lot of dessert."

"And it's always delicious with coffee." He set the box down and pulled out her chair. "Let's go so you can find out the truthfulness of my words first hand."

A short while later they sat on her couch, facing each other. They had plates of dessert in their hands, but neither of them had eaten very much. They'd both taken a bite, and then they'd locked lips.

The kiss had been gentle at first, a tentative get to know you kiss, his touch tender yet demanding. Alice had leaned into him, savoring the male taste of him mixed in with the ricotta tart and raspberry sauce.

When he broke it he took the plate from her hand and put it on the coffee table, next to where he'd set his own plate before he'd taken hers. She inhaled shakily when he framed her face and claimed her lips again, this time demanding more, his tongue gently licking at her lips until she opened for him.

When he slipped inside she slipped into heaven. He kept his hands on her face, his thumbs gently caressing her cheeks as he kissed her.

After he broke for air, he gave her a gentle peck, then leaned close to her. "That's snogging," he said, "the first S."

"So it is," she replied. "I rather like it."

“Yes, me too.” He kissed her again, taking his time, claiming her mouth until she groaned in pleasure. “I rather think Angela doesn’t put enough snogging in her books. I think it’s underrated.”

One more gentle, lingering kiss. “So, is this your way of discussing the one of the Ss? Snogging?”

“Practice makes perfect, and touching someone makes for good discussion. I rather like your lips.”

“I rather like yours,” she replied, happy that she’d been able to say something besides thank you. “There are two other Ss, though.”

“Yes, there are. But as I said, snogging is underrated. We need to do lots of snogging, and other things that go with it, before we get to shagging.”

“Works for me,” she replied.

“Now spanking is a different matter altogether,” he said, one eyebrow lifting. “Spanking is a perfect thing to couple with both snogging, and shagging.”

“I’ve never been spanked,” she said, regretting the words as soon as they were out of her mouth. She’d had one too many glasses of wine tonight.

“What?” His eyes were wide open. “You’re joking? You read about it all the time when you’re editing Angela’s work, yet you’ve never been spanked?”

“True.”

“Hum, well, that presents me with a bit of a dilemma. I had planned on giving you a good spanking to get you all excited and keep you that way until tomorrow night. But seeing as how you’re a spanking virgin I’m going to go fairly easy on you, just deliver a few swats and make you squirm and want more.”

She had no doubt he could do that. Then it dawned on her. “You’re talking about spanking me tonight?”

“Most definitely. There’s no time like the present. Shall we get started?”

Chapter Three

“Right now?” Her heart thumped around in her chest, as if it were searching for a place to land.

His eyes twinkled as he looked at her. “Something tells me you’re not the type of girl to shag on the first date, and spanking often leads to shagging, so I have a--shall we call it a demonstration--in mind.”

Alice giggled. “How do you demonstrate spanking?”

“A dress--or undressed--rehearsal.”

Her heart, which had seemed to settle down just a few seconds before, started jumping around again. “Undressed?”

“The only way to spank is on a bare bottom,” he responded. “You won’t get a real spanking tonight, but you’ll get a tiny taste, and a oration on how it will occur, and it will, the next time.”

He kissed her again, cupping her cheek in his as he gently slid his lips against hers, claiming them, seeming almost to worship them. When the kiss broke he pressed his lips against the tip of her nose. “Let’s go to your bedroom.”

“Most definitely,” she said on a sigh. There was no way she was going to say no, and, truthfully, she didn’t care that she’d just met him. She felt a connection with Preston that she’d never felt with any other man in her life.

“Too soon?” She looked at him, her heart melting at the look of concern on his face. “If I’m pushing it, let me know and I’ll trod on home, until tomorrow when I’ll be back.”

“No, it’s not too soon,” she replied, even as she worried that it might be. This was so different for her, and coming to terms with her feelings was not easy. She was very afraid they would get started and she would freeze up in the middle of things, breaking any chance the two of them might have together. She’d made mistakes like that in the past, and she didn’t want it to happen this time.

“I can see doubt in your eyes.” He stroked her cheek.

“It’s just been a while for me,” she said softly. “And there’s always that...”

“Double standard? A man is studly for scoring on the first date, but a woman is a big old whore.”

“Exactly.”

He kissed her again. “No shagging, like I said. Just a mock spanking with some heavy petting, as Angela told it was called. Come on, show me the way to your bedroom.”

Alice stood and took his hand. She led him down the short hallway to her bedroom. There was a large four-poster in there, courtesy of Angela and her decorating skills. She turned toward him when they were standing at the end of the bed. He cupped her face, a movement that brought her a sense of belonging. It made her feel as if she should be nowhere else in the world except standing here, with his fingers caressing her cheeks.

“I want you to know it’s going to take every ounce of willpower I have not to take you tonight, the most intimate of ways.”

Alice’s breath caught in her throat, but when she opened her mouth to respond, to tell him that she was pretty sure she wanted to give herself to him, no matter the consequences, he put his finger to her lips to keep her silent.

“No matter what, we won’t have sex tonight, at least not in the usual sense of the word. But it will happen soon. In the meantime, I want to follow through on my promise of a demonstration. You want to know about a spanking, don’t you?”

She giggled. “Do you teach a course on it during your off-hours? Spanking for the beginner?”

“Maybe I should.” He toyed with the neckline of her blouse. “If so, the first thing I would tell my students was that, as I said earlier, spanking is best done on the bare behind. Which means you need to take off your clothing.”

He playfully tugged on her camisole, which barely covered her breasts in the first place. Then he went behind her and put his fingers on the neckline of the blouse she wore over the camisole. He slowly lowered it down her back and she moved her arms so that it would slide down.

She watched it float across the room as he tossed it toward a chair. It was light enough, though, that it didn’t make its target and floated to the floor. His hands were on her shoulders now, his fingers toying with the thin straps of the camisole.

“You look very beautiful tonight. Did I tell you that?”

“Yes.” She shivered in delight as he gently moved the satin straps off her shoulders. “More than once.”

“It wasn’t near enough.” He kissed each shoulder, his touch making her shiver again.

“I need to take this particular piece of clothing off over my head,” she said as his lips trailed across her back to her other shoulder.

“Who said it was coming off? Sometimes keeping clothes on is as sexy as taking them off.” His hands trailed down her arms, then moved to her stomach. He pushed the camisole up and tickled her sides. “We’ll take off your bra, though, very slowly, and seductively. I’ll undo it, and we’ll sneak the straps down your arms and then divorce the bra from the camisole by pulling it down your body. That will free your lovely breasts, but keep them from my sight, technically, which will keep me guessing about who lovely they actually are, keep me wanting more for the next time we’re together.”

The next time? At the rate her heart was beating she might not make it through this time. His hands slid around to her back and up to her bra. He had the clasp in his hand and had undone the first hook so fast her eyes widened.

“You’ve done this before.”

“Well, neither one of us is virginal,” he whispered as he undid the second, and then the third hook. When he’d undone the fourth one the material slackened around her body and her breasts jiggled. This time it was his eyes that widened. He licked his lips and she put her hands on his arms and squeezed.

“You sure about leaving the camisole on?”

“My body says no, but my mind says yes.” His hands went to her shoulders and he expertly untangled the bra straps from the camisole ones that he’d moved down her arms. She lived her arms to free and bra and he gently tugged it down.

Her breasts broke free and his gaze stayed glued on her chest. She could see desire written on his face, and for a minute she thought he would follow the advice of his body. But he straightened and put a little distance between them.

“I must remember that I’m a man and not a boy who wants to dive in, breasts first.”

“Maybe that’s not such a bad plan,” she said, cocking her head ever so slightly.

“No, I said spanking demonstration only, and that’s what it’s going to be. Well, with an orgasm for you at the end.”

Alice’s mouth dropped open and the shivering, which had stopped just seconds ago, reappeared.

“Oh.”

“You’ll be saying more than oh,” he whispered, his eyebrows wiggling. “Now, let’s get you out of that skirt and onto the bed.”

He moved behind her and undid the clasp on the skirt. Once the zipper was down, gravity took over and the material floated to the floor. He pushed her slip over her hips, then ran his palm over her bottom.

“I love silky undies; they’re so very sexy.” He put his mouth next to her ear. “Now, you’d better lie down, bum up, before I change my mind and dive in, breasts first.”

Alice thought about it for a few seconds, the idea ticking through her mind that breasts first would be something they both would enjoy. Then she decided it was better not to tempt him, that he’d said he wanted to wait, and they would do exactly that. She lay down in the center of the bed. She wiggled until she was comfortable, putting her arms above her head. Her feet dangled off the end.

“Perfect,” he said, his voice a gentle caress over her skin. “Now, I want you to lie absolutely still while I get to know your body a little better. Understand?”

“Yes.” She understood what he’d said. She just wasn’t sure she would be able to follow his instructions. He put his hands on her legs, gently stroking her calves. Alice closed her eyes and savored his caresses. He moved up her legs, tenderly tracking his fingers up and down her thighs until she moaned softly and wiggled her hips.

“So beautiful,” he whispered as he climbed onto the bed. He lay down next to her on his side, his right hand free to continue caressing her skin. “Tell me why spanking intrigues you.”

“Angela is always talking about it, how it gets her juices going, so to speak. I admit that it makes me wonder why. But no one has ever spanked me, and it’s never been brought up in any of my past relationships.”

“I wonder why.” He put his hand on her ass, firmly cupping one cheek. Alice inhaled sharply, waiting for him to smack her bottom. But he didn’t do it. His hand stayed in place, squeezing her cheek, releasing it, and then squeezing it again.

“Maybe I wasn’t putting out the right signals,” she said with a shrug. “Maybe I should have just said, ‘I’ve a mind to be spanked. Are you game?’ That might have gotten someone’s attention.”

His laugh was deep. “I’m sure it would have.” He was tracing circles on her bottom now, the soft material of her panties moving around under his touch. It was one of the most erotic things anyone had ever done to her and she wanted to scream at him to stop it, to stop teasing her and just get on with things. She’d decided against the spanking demonstration. She wanted to be spanked, and to have sex. Now.

“Would you like to know what I enjoy about spanking?”

“Tell me.” She clasped the comforter in her fists to keep from turning and taking matters into her own hands. He wanted to play it slow. Despite what she wanted she needed to follow his lead because really, he was right. This was the best way to start things.

“I’m talking about erotic spankings, of course, not harsh ones.” He cupped her cheeks again and she lifted her hips into his touch. “Naughty Alice. Put your bum back down.”

“And if I don’t?” He squeezed her bottom again.

“If you don’t, then the demonstration begins in earnest.” She wiggled her hips again and he lifted his hand from her. It came down in a soft pat on the ass. She laughed as he did it again.

“This is not at all like the spanking I was expecting.”

“Well, I did say it was a demonstration,” he replied. He slightly slapped her ass a few more times and she relaxed her hips, placing herself firmly on the bed once more.

“Do you know what I enjoy about spanking?” He caressed her bottom and thighs as he talked. “I’m talking about erotic spankings.”

“Tell me.”

“Some people would say it was ‘weird’ or ‘kinky,’ but I think it adds spice to lovemaking. It’s not meant to hurt, well not badly. But the little bit of pain brings about new sensations that add, well, spice, as I said. It keeps things from becoming too…”

“Boring?”

“Lovemaking is never boring when it’s done with the right person,” he said, lightly slapping her ass again. “It keeps things from being predictable. That’s a word that fits nicely in this situation.”

Her caresses were warming up parts of her body he said wouldn’t be in use tonight. Her nipples tingled and wetness formed between her thighs. If this was just a demonstration, she could only imagine what the real thing would do to her.

“Have you been spanked during lovemaking?”

His laugh was deep. “Never.”

“Well, maybe we should change that.” She rolled away from him and sat up on her knees, shooting him an evil glare; well, as evil as one could get when she was so close to laughter.

“I think not,” he replied, sitting up. He was on before she could move, turning her so that she was back in her original position. When his hand came down on her ass this time it was no love pat. The sting spread through her, and she yelped, laughing as she tried to wiggle away from him.

“Demonstration only!” she yelled as he grabbed her hips and pulled her toward him.

“Nope, you’ve forfeited that.” He slapped her ass again. “There’s a hierarchy to spanking. I’m at the top of the ladder, and you’re at the bottom. You tried to leapfrog over me, which means the spanking is on.”

Alice laughed and giggled and squirmed as his hand came down on her ass, repeatedly. The sting was bad, but not bad enough to make her want it to stop. In fact, it added just what Preston said it did: spice.

The only problem was the spice was adding fuel to the fire she already felt inside her. There was no way she was going without sex tonight. She hoped Preston felt the same way. His hand came down again and again, and then his fingers moved to the waistband of her panties, tugging them down.

“Hey,” she yelled playfully. “That’s not fair.”

“Oh yeah?” He sat on her thighs as he continued to tug. “I told you spankings were best done on bare asses, and I meant it.” She didn’t fight him too hard, but with him sitting on her as he was, the material only came to the bottom of her buns. He squeezed her bare flesh for the first time and heat shot through her.

Alice gasped and lifted her hips, moaning as he caressed her. “Not fair,” she said again. “I can’t...can’t...can’t...” oh she wanted him so much.

“Shush,” he said as he caressed her. “Lie there and enjoy it. Don’t move at all or I’ll stop.”

“I...I...” She wiggled her hips in an effort to get him to give her a few more playful slaps on the ass.

“I said don’t move.” Alice raised her hands above her head again and took a few deep breaths to try and steady herself. Her breathing was ragged, and she noticed when he’d talked that his breath was also a little uneven. That was good. It meant this was affecting him as much as it was her.

She lay still for a while, closing her eyes and savoring the heat of his body as it settled into her bare thighs. His hands were warm on her bottom, but they hadn’t moved at all, not one little inch. He had much more willpower than she’d ever hope to have.

After what seemed an eternity he moved his hands, his fingers light on her behind. “Ten swats,” he said, his voice stern. “That’s the price you pay for being a naughty Alice.”

“Bring it on,” she said with bravado. Then she yelped when his hand swatted her left cheek. He swatted the other side before he said, “That’s one.”

“Excuse me,” she said, turning her head. “Do they teach you to count in England? That’s two.”

“Oh, I forgot to mention that it’s ten slaps per cheek. Sorry about that.” He gave her another two, or another one to his thinking she supposed, since it was one on the left cheek, and one on the right.

“I think you’re making up the rules as you go along,” she said as she looked over her shoulder at him. The look of innocence was feigned, she knew, and it made her laugh. She struggled, sort of, as he delivered his “ten,” which of course turned out to be twenty. Then she groaned as he worked his hand between her thighs.

“Spread for me,” he said and she readily complied. His hand moved over her wetness and slipped inside her folds, his thumb sliding inside her as his fingers searched for her clit. Alice grasped the comforter tighter as he stroked her, the pressure building inside her until she burst, her body tightening as the eruption roared through her.

“Inside me,” she whispered, groaning as he slapped her ass a few more times. “Please, please, please.”

He lay down on top on her, his body pressing hers into the mattress. “Are you certain?”

“Absolutely.” She wiggled up into him. “Please, Preston, please.”

When he stood she rolled over, wanting nothing more than to feel the weight of him on top of her again. She watched as he stripped, his fingers pulling at the buttons on his shirt, opening it enough to bare his chest, but he didn’t take it off.

Then he was undoing his jeans, slipping them over his hips, fast-stepping out of them before he was back on the bed. She spread her legs in invitation and he slid into her. It had been so long since she’d made love that the initial penetration was a little tight and he stopped, staring down at her.

She closed her eyes and relaxed her muscles, sighing in pleasure when he slipped deeper inside her. When he was deep inside her, Alice wrapped her legs around him, and he started to move.

His thrusts sent her over the edge again, and in the back of her mind she recognized the ragged moans and movements of his climax. When they were lying together on the bed he groaned, shaking his head.

“I’m so sorry.”

“Why?” She stroked his hair and he lifted his gaze to hers.

“Too fast,” he said. “The spanking was too fast, the lovemaking too fast. I’m acting like a young lad inside of a forty-two year old man.”

“Nonsense.” She held him close.

“Next time will last. Promise.” She could hear the sleep in his voice and she giggled. That was one thing that hadn’t changed in her dormant years.

Sometime during the night he got up and took off his shirt. He went to the restroom, then went to the kitchen where he got a glass of water for them to share. When it was gone he set it on the dresser, then helped her stand from the bed. He pulled back the covers and settled her in the middle, sliding in behind her and settling her against his chest.

Alice closed her eyes as she nestled in his arms. He fell asleep quickly, his even breathing a comforting sound as he held her close. Could it be that what started out as the worst year of her life would end up being the best year of her life?

Of course it may not go any further than just a few dates and some lovemaking. But if it ended there she would have wonderful memories to take with her into the future. But she hoped it didn't end there. She wanted to get to know him, learn what made him tick besides banking and spanking.

She giggled at the rhythm, then nestled deeper into his arms and closed her eyes. Sleep overtook her quickly, a sense of calm that she hadn't felt in a while settling over her.

"Good morning." Strong male lips claimed hers and Alice groaned as she tried to snuggle against Preston. She opened her eyes when she realized he was no longer beside her, but was instead kneeling over her. He was fully dressed, a look of desire in his eyes.

"Morning," she said as she tugged the blanket tighter against her chest. When had she taken off the camisole? Her cheeks burned as memory flooded back. Sometime during the night Preston had woken her. He'd taken off the camisole and lavished attention on her breasts, sucking her nipples deep into his mouth as she moaned and squirmed under his attentions. Then he'd entered her again, taking them both soaring high until they'd fallen asleep in each other's arms once more.

"I have to go to work," he said softly. "Will you have dinner with me tonight, at my house? I'll cook."

"I don't know," she said, batting her eyes. "What are you going to cook?"

"Something simple," he replied. "Leaves more time for lovemaking."

Her nipples tightened at his words and she nodded. "Tell me where it is and I'll come there."

"Nonsense. I'll come get you after work and we can go to the market and pick something out together. Be ready around six."

"I will." He leaned down and kissed her, then licked his lips.

"I'd love to touch you some more, but I'm afraid if I did I would be late for work. I'll see you tonight. Call me this afternoon, just so I can hear your voice."

Her chest rose and fell rapidly as his words settled into her. "I will."

“Good. I’ll talk to you then.” He acted as if he was going to kiss her again, then he groaned and pushed off the bed, striding out of the rapidly without looking back. She heard the front door open, then close and she settled back against the pillows.

She didn’t want to get out of this bed. She closed her eyes and inhaled sharply. She could still smell him, smell them together. It was an erotic aroma that made her heart sing. She wanted to stay here forever, but she knew that she couldn’t. If she did, she would never get work done, and she had to get some things finished today, especially if she was going to be out tonight.

It would do well for her to put in a call to Angela. She knew her friend would be waiting, impatiently, for news about last night. And what was Alice supposed to tell her?

“Hey, guess what, I’m like one of the heroines from your books, falling into bed with a man that I barely know. Do you think you can build a story around that? Poor, unemployed editor moves to England and finds the banker of her dreams.”

She closed her eyes and was almost asleep when the phone rang. She picked it up and checked the ID. Then she clicked on, a smile lighting her face.

“Did you forget something?”

“I forgot to tell you how much I enjoyed last night, and how much I can’t wait to see you tonight.”

His deep declaration made her smile. “Actually you did tell me, at some point during the night, how much you enjoyed it. But I don’t think I said the same thing to you. I loved it.”

“There were things we should have discussed before we jumped into bed, though, like birth control.”

Realization shot through her like an arrow. He was right, they’d been together twice and hadn’t used any protection.

“Oh my,” she whispered.

“We’ll make sure things are different tonight,” he said. “I just didn’t want you to think I was a callous lover who expected you to do all those things.”

“Not at all.” She could hear sounds of traffic in the background and she knew he was in his car, heading either for his home to change clothes, or to the office. “I think you proved yourself to be quite tender and caring.”

“I see,” he said, humor in his voice. “Well, then it must be your fault. You were too desirable and I lost my head. Shame on you.”

Alice giggled and then sighed as she worked her under the covers even more. “I guess you’re just going to have to spank me for being such a naughty girl, then.”

“Yes, I guess I will have to do just that. What a wonderful idea you’ve had.”

Yes, she thought, it was wonderful indeed.

Chapter Four

“I can’t find my black skirt.” Alice tossed aside the shoe she held in her hand and stuck her head out of the closet door. “Have you seen it?”

Preston looked back at her and shook his head. “No, I haven’t. Sorry. Did you look in the hamper? You wore it Angela and Jeremy’s house Monday last, right?”

She nodded. “I’ve washed it since then. Or I hope I have. I really wanted to wear it for the bank Christmas party tonight.”

She pushed past him and hurried down the hallway to the laundry room. If she wasn’t going to wear the black skirt and sweater set she’d selected then she needed to think of something else to wear. Of course it was difficult when half of her clothing was at her flat, and half was at Preston’s house, since she’d been basically living with him for the past two weeks.

Two weeks. Alice paused, her hand on the hamper. Had it really been two weeks? She was so comfortable here she’d felt like she’d lived here forget. Going to sleep in Preston’s arms and waking up in them the next morning was the most natural feeling in the world.

Of course that was when it had been just the two of them. Tonight she would meet his colleagues at the bank, be introduced to them as the “lady in his life.” And then a week and a half from now she would meet his sons when they came home for Christmas.

They would be here through Boxing Day, and then they were going to Switzerland for some holiday skiing. At first she’d thought she was keeping Preston from joining them. But he’d informed her that this was their trip with “their mates.”

“They have a good time and, truthfully, they don’t want me to come with them,” Preston had said one night as they were washing dishes after dinner. “They come home for a few days for the obligatory visit, and then it’s off to carouse with their friends.”

“Does it bother you?” She’d been washing dishes and he’d been drying. Again, settling into routines like this had been the most natural thing in the world to them. She’d thanked God daily for her financial problems that had brought her to Britain and into contact with Preston Walsh.

Of course Angela took a lot of the credit, even though it hadn't been Preston that she'd been trying to set Alice up with in the first place. Alice gave it to her, though, because it was at her "Thanksgiving" dinner that Alice had first met Preston, a man she couldn't imagine living without now.

"Did you find it?" She turned to find him leaning against the doorjamb. His hands were clasped in front of him and there was a grin on his face. He always seemed to be grinning. When she'd said something about it once he'd told her he hadn't been that way in a long time, until he'd met her.

"No." She pulled open the door to the washer/dryer and peered inside. It had been hard to get used to having one machine that could perform both jobs, but she could operate it just fine now. She closed the door with a thud and turned to Preston. His eyebrows were raised, which meant, she knew, he wasn't pleased about something. That had been one of the easiest things to read about him.

"A little hard on the appliance, weren't you? It didn't eat your skirt, after all."

She frowned and shook her head. "You're right. Sorry."

"You need to calm down. Tonight's going to be fine, and you're worried about nothing. If you can't find the black skirt wear something else. I think the blue dress we bought a few days ago would be perfect for tonight. It's here. I know because I saw it an hour ago hanging from the rack on the closet door."

"You're right, it would be. But I need my black pumps for it, and I don't have them here. At least I don't think I do."

She rushed past him and as she hurried toward the bedroom she heard him sigh heavily. She was at the closet in no time, and when she looked down she saw her pumps, sitting there as if to say, "Here we are!"

"There is a simple solution to you having clothes here and there, of course." His voice was calm and she turned toward where he now stood in the doorway of the large closet.

"Yes?"

"We'll move all your things over here. The house is larger than the flat, and you can use one of the spare rooms as your office."

Alice bent down to pick up the shoes. Her head was spinning from his offer, and dizziness threatened to overtake her. She sat down, cross-legged, and stared at the floor.

“Did I bring you to your knees, or are you trying to concoct a nice way of saying no?”

“No.” Realizing how that must sound she lifted her gaze to his. “I don’t mean I’m saying no, I mean...I don’t know what I mean.”

He sat down across from her, taking up the same position so that their knees touched. “Does what I just proposed frighten you?”

“Yes.” She swallowed hard. “My life has changed so much. I’m here a few days and I meet you and everything just...I...it...”

“I hope the change was for the better. I know it was for me.”

Alice laughed. “There’s no doubt about that.” She stroked his cheek. “But I haven’t even met your sons yet. What if they don’t like me?”

“Ethan and Nick are going to love you.” He moved his head and kissed the palm of her hand. “You know I’ve dated since my wife died, but you’re the first woman that I’ve asked to be a permanent part of my life. They know that, and they recognize that you’re important to me.”

She nodded.

“I can see you’re still not convinced. There’s something I never told you about my wife. We married after knowing each other for six weeks.”

Alice’s eyes widened in shock.

“Yes, that’s the response we got from friends, family, everyone. But we knew we loved each other, and that we wanted to be together. If there was one thing her death taught me it’s that the idiom that life is short is true. I certainly didn’t expect to find you when I went to dinner at Jeremy and Angela’s that evening. But when I saw you I recognized you as someone who would be important in my life. I don’t want to lose you.”

“You certainly take a lot of risks for a banker.” She toyed with the fabric of his pants. “I thought you were supposed to be staid people who researched everything before taking any action.”

“Have we done that the last few weeks? We slept together on our first date and we haven’t spent a night apart since then. What does that tell you?”

Alice thought about it for a few moments, trying to find the right words to say. “That we’ve felt an instant attraction to each other. But what happens if it falls apart?”

“I don’t plan on that. Do you?”

“No.” She nibbled on her lower lip. “But I haven’t planned on a lot of things this year, and it’s turned wrong at some corners. I’m scared that...it just makes me very nervous. I want a crystal ball to look into the future, see how things turn out before I commit to something.”

He took her hands in his and lifted them to his mouth, kissing her fingers. “I realize this is harder on you than it is on me. After all, you’re the one who has moved to a new country. You’re the one who had to give up her home because of the mess the world is in right now.”

“Do you believe there’s a plan for us all?”

He tilted his head from side to side, then grinned. “What do you think? I’m a man who falls for someone and doesn’t want to give them up. It’s happened to me twice now, and I can’t help but think it’s fate, no matter what others might say.”

“Can fate hit twice?”

“Yes.” His nod was emphatic. “But don’t make a decision now. If you need time, let me know.”

“I’ve never had anything like this happen before, so I’m not sure how to deal with it. Are you going to set a deadline or something?”

This time he shook his slowly from side to side. “I’ll wait as long as it takes, because I know that I want you, that I need you.”

“I won’t make you wait long. I just...” She just what? Was going to stay here for a while and then say, “Well, it’s been fun, call me sometime?” No, she wasn’t going to do that. She wanted to stay with Preston, be with him for as long as she could. And, as he said, life was short. Why waste time because it was expected of her to wait a good period of time before she moved in with someone.

“I just want to repaint the second bedroom, the one off the kitchen? It’s the perfect size for an office, and it has a bathroom nearby. But I don’t care for that deep green color. I want something a little more...sedate.”

“I’ll pull out the paintbrushes,” he said softly. “The boys can help for the few days they’re here for Christmas.”

Alice nodded, her stomach in knots. So much was different, and she seemed to be facing new challenges around every corner. The first one she had to get through was tonight's party. At least Angela would be there. She'd have someone besides Preston to talk to.

"We'll move your things tomorrow," Preston said. "And we'll get through tonight's party with a bribe."

The smile on his face made her laugh. "What are you offering?"

"Well, I know some men spank their wives when they've been bad, but I'm proposing something a little different tonight."

This was intriguing. "Go on."

"If you get up, get dressed and try to relax a little, I promise you a good spanking when we get home tonight. I know how much you've come to enjoy them."

A smile touched her lips, spreading as she thought about the spankings Preston had given her since they'd become inseparable. They hadn't come every night, although they'd made love every night. But the times he'd spanked her had seemed perfect, and she had come to enjoy the sting of his hand slapping against her ass.

"What if I become nervous and screw up?"

"Then no spanking for you. I might well wait until after the New Year to give you another one."

Dismay replaced the giddiness that had spread through her as she'd thought about being spanked later tonight. "You wouldn't."

"I just might." He winked at her. "Be a Nervous Nellie tonight and find out."

"This is a switch, you know. Most people get spanked for being bad. I would think that would happen in my case."

He sat up on his knees, then grabbed her and they toppled backward, both of them laughing. "If it's one thing I thought you already knew about me, it's that I don't do things the way other people do."

They laughed and kissed, and Alice felt calmer as he wrapped his arms around her and held her close. She could only believe that, if fate had brought them together, she was doing the right thing.

"I guess I'll have to wear my blue dress tonight," she said against his lips.

“And tomorrow we’ll go and get all your things and bring them home.”

“Home.” She repeated the word, her smile swallowed by his kiss. Yes, they would definitely bring them home.

“You think I’m crazy, don’t you?” Alice took a sip from her drink and glanced at Angela, who stared her without saying a word. It was almost as if her friend has lost her voice. “Aren’t you happy for me?”

“Undoubtedly, but...it’s so fast. I wanted you to have a companion here, but I didn’t think you would fall in love and move in with him in three weeks time.”

“Less than that, actually.” Alice took another sip. She’d been remarkably calm since they’d arrived at the party, greeting Preston’s co-workers and their wives and husbands with cheer and accepting their congratulations on her new relationship with Preston.

She glanced at Angela, who still stared at her, then she looked over to where Preston stood with Adam and Jeremy. He winked at her before he playfully mimicked a swat, moving his hand every so slightly as if he were shooing away an insect. Her body warmed at the idea of the spanking she would get when they arrived home that night.

“I thought you, of all people, would be happy for me.”

“I’m just a little shocked,” Angela said. “I knew the two of you were together as often as possible, and that you were spending nights together, but you’ve never lived with anyone. You’ve never come close to marriage, and now you’re...I just don’t want you to make a mistake and get hurt.”

“I’ve spent my whole life alone because of my parents.” Alice looked down at her glass, then she looked over to where Preston still stood. He was laughing about something one of his friends had said, his head was thrown back, the amused look on his face making him even more attractive to her than he’d ever been. “I don’t even know my own brother because of it. My parents got married because they had to, and my mother spent the last years of her life telling me how horrible marriage was, and how I should avoid it at all costs.”

She glanced at Angela, who stared back at her. “You’re not marrying him, are you?”

“He hasn’t asked me yet, but if he does, I’m pretty sure I would say yes.” It was strange to her that she hadn’t even thought about her parents’ unhappy marriage until now. When she’d told Preston that she was nervous about moving in with him so quickly she was sure it had been in the back of her mind.

But it had taken Angela’s words of caution to bring the feelings to the front. Her parents had known each other forever before they’d married, and the only reason they’d done so was because her mother had become pregnant. That had left them feeling trapped, her mother had said.

“Never open yourself up to someone, Alice.” Her mother’s words, spoken so long ago, echoed in her ears. “If you do it will leave you open to pain. Best to just stay by yourself.”

She’d followed her mother’s advice for years, and what had it gotten her?

“I don’t want you thinking that I think bad of you because of this,” Angela said, putting her hand on Alice’s arm. “Can’t you give it a little while, though? Tell him you’ll have a decision for him after the New Year starts.”

“I don’t think three weeks is going to change anything,” Alice responded. “Didn’t you fall in love with Jeremy right off the bat?”

“Yes, but I didn’t commit to him until after a year.”

Alice thought about that for a few moments. “I’m not going to wait that long.”

There was a strained silence between the friends. “I’m just worried that things have changed so much for you that you’re...”

“Grasping at straws for something solid to hold onto?” Alice could see from the look in Angela’s eyes that was exactly what her friend thought. She’d been floundering a few months ago, and now she’d found a life preserver, so to speak, and she was going to hold onto it for dear life.

Although she could understand her friend’s concern, she was still a little ticked that the woman who had pushed her to move to England so quickly would now try to throw up a roadblock about her starting a relationship with a man just as quickly.

“It’s not like this is my first change of the year,” Alice said. She knew her tone of voice was a little harsh, and she tried to tone it down some. “But I want Preston in my life.”

“Do you love him?”

“I don’t know.” Alice took a sip from her glass. “I feel a deep sense of belonging with him, though, something I’ve never felt before. I don’t want to give that up, and I think that moving in with him will strengthen what I feel.”

“It seems like love should have something to do with it,” Angela said.

“And it seems to me as if love is easier to write about than it is to realize in real life. He’s not asking me for love. He’s asking me to give our relationship a chance by being together, twenty-four/seven, and that’s exactly what I plan to do.”

“Fine,” Angela replied. Alice could tell by the cold look on her friend’s face that she’d upset her, that their relationship might never be the same again. Would she lose the one person she’d always been able to count on to be there for her by taking a chance with Preston?

She certainly hoped not, and she had to push that idea out of her mind. Angela might think she was acting recklessly, but once she’d had a chance to think about things, Alice was sure she would change her mind, once she had a chance to see things would work out just fine. And Alice was sure they would.

“Enjoying yourself?” She turned toward Preston, who had joined them. Jeremy was with him. He kissed his wife’s cheek and Alice saw Angela thaw just a little. Jeremy always had that affect on his wife.

“Very much,” Alice replied.

“Which means it’s not the horror show you thought it was going to be,” Preston said with a laugh. “She was worried sick that everyone was going to hate her, or that she would put a wrong step forward. I told her things would be fine, and it seems like I was right.”

“Of course,” Jeremy said. “May I say, Alice, congratulations on your new home. Angela and I wish you every happiness.”

“Thank you, Jeremy,” she said. Angela didn’t add any words to her husband’s congratulations, and Alice felt her stomach sink.

“I’m going to steal Alice for a little while,” Preston said. “If you’ll excuse us, we’ll be back in a tick.”

“How long’s a tick?” she asked as they headed toward the elevators.

“As long as I want it to be,” he said with a wink. They entered the elevator--no, the lift she corrected herself--and took it up to the eleventh floor, where Preston had his office. Once they were inside

he locked the door, then went to the desk and turned on a lamp that gave off very little light. He had a nice view of the London skyline, and Alice smiled as she looked out over it. Who would have thought this was where she'd be at the end of the year?

"Are you and Angela having troubles?"

"Well, she thinks I'm rushing things with you."

Preston cleared his throat. "Ah. I'll have to remember to thank her for her vote of confidence."

"Please don't do that." Alice turned to him. "She'll come round. She's just worried about me. She's always treated me with kid gloves, unless she was trying to talk me into moving over here, which she wanted done with all haste."

"Maybe she thinks I'm going to come between you, that your friendship will suffer and you'll have less time for her."

"I hope not." She turned back toward the windows. "Did you bring me up here to enjoy the view?"

"No." He propped himself on the edge of the desk, one that she noted was clean of papers, which was unusual for him. "I brought you up here to spank you. I told you that if things went well, if you relaxed and enjoyed yourself, that you'd get a reward. And I plan on giving it to you. Right now."

Excitement coursed through her. "It would be an interesting addition to the party."

"And every time I look at my desk I'll think of you, bent over it, getting your little bum smacked." He walked over to the desk and pulled open the middle drawer. "Every time I sit down here and do work, I'll picture you bent over it, getting your bum smacked."

She watched as he took a thin ruler out of his desk. This was a new twist. He'd never spanked her with anything but his hand until now.

"And every time I take this out of my desk I'll think of you."

She laughed and he stopped talking. "You don't have to complete the sentence. "You'll think of me bent over your desk getting my bum smacked."

"Exactly." He turned the ruler from side to side. "I used this earlier this week, and my imagination got the better of me. I was talking to a friend about a chart, and I was using the ruler to follow

a set of numbers on the papers. I know it's old school, but it helps me to keep my place on a sheet of paper, what with my eyes getting older and all."

Alice laughed. "There's not one part of you that's getting older; I can attest to that."

"This time I thank you for your vote of confidence, and I mean it. But, let me get back to the story I was telling."

Alice crossed to the chairs that sat in front of the desk and sat down in one of them.

"Don't get too comfortable," he said as he came around the desk. He sat down on the desk and looked over at her. "You'll be changing positions very soon."

"I hope so." If she cocked her head at him would it look seductive, or would it make her look like she was trying to get something out of her ear? She'd try it anyway, see if he appreciated the fact she was trying to look seductive for him. "Go on with your story."

"Yes, the story. I was meeting with a few colleagues, talking with them about the report we were going over, and I took this out of the desk suddenly I envisioned you, bent...well, you get the picture."

Her palms were feeling a little sweaty now. "Oh yes."

"It made it rather hard to work when I was growing...rather hard."

He spread his legs ever so slightly and she knew he was growing hard right now, too. She wanted to touch him, to take him in her hands and massage him, feel him grow even harder.

"Are you sure you want to keep that in your desk after you use it on my behind. It might be rather embarrassing to get a woody every time you...pull out that particular piece of wood."

He tapped the ruler against his thigh. "That bad pun is going to cost you."

"I think I'll be willing to pay the price." She stood and crossed to him. She ran her fingers up and down his thighs, letting them linger close to his crotch until he inhales sharply, then letting them trail back down to his knees. "Is it time to see me bent over your desk, my bum ready to be spanked?"

He cupped his hand behind her neck and pulled her in for a deep kiss. Alice allowed herself to melt into his arms, savoring the feel of his body against hers.

"It's most definitely time for you to be spanked," he said when he broke the kiss. "Now, assume the position, naughty Alice, and be prepared for some extra ones for the woody remark."

Chapter Five

The polished wood was cool against the palms of her hands. It counteracted nicely with the warmth spreading through her body as Preston lifted her skirt over her hips. His hands moved slowly, inching the material up as if he were revealing a treasure during a preview at a museum.

Alice closed her eyes and relished the feel of him slowly revealing her body to his sight. When he did things like this it always felt as if he were seeing her for the first time. He would inhale sharply in appreciation as her bottom came into view, he'd caress it, making her gasp for air, making her want to scream at him to hurry up, to spank her so he could take her.

Preston had so much more patience than she did.

"You're very quiet tonight," he said as he lay her skirt down on her hips. His large hand cupped her bottom and she sighed in pleasure. "Is something wrong?"

"No," she said on a wisp of a breath. "Why do you ask?"

"Usually you're yelling at me to hurry." He chuckled lowly. "Not that I'm complaining, because it's a great boost to my ego to hear the woman I want to please screaming for more."

"I do not." She glanced at him over her shoulder. He looked so strong standing there, but he was grinning at her, the look that always sent her over the edge.

"Do so." He chuckled. "Would you like me to record it one time to prove it to you? 'Hurry, Preston, hurry, don't stop, don't...oh yes, oh yes, oh yes...'"

Did she really yell at him to hurry up? If so, she didn't remember it. She knew she thought about it, since his touch drove her insane with passion.

He slapped her bottom and she groaned. "I asked you a question. Do I need to record it?"

"No!" She moved her hands against the desk. "You do need to hurry up, though, because I need you. I want you."

"I don't know." He was back to caressing her. "I think a recording is a smashing idea. I'll have to set it up so I can prove my point."

The ruler came down on her panty-clad bottom. Alice jumped as his hand caressed the spot he'd just spanked. "Did I tell you how much I enjoyed these stockings?" His fingers drifted down to the thigh-high stockings she wore. "They're very sexy."

Smack. Alice moaned as the ruler struck her bottom again. She could feel wetness forming inside her already. Lately it didn't take much. Just the thought of Preston touching her would...

Smack. She groaned and thrust her hips back at him.

Smack. "This is a rather interesting position, really. A large office, a desk, a ruler. It lends itself nicely to a fantasy, doesn't it? Naughty Alice gets called to the headmaster's office."

Smack. "Yes." Oh damn, her nipples were tingling. There was a huge part of her that wanted to tell him to forget about the spanking, to just go ahead and make love to her now. But the spanking added an element that took things up a notch.

"Or naughty Alice is a clerk who had just made a very bad error on important papers her boss asked her to type. He had to punish her for her transgressions."

Smack, smack.

"Or how about this one, naughty Alice is the boss, and her clerk knows that she needs spanking to keep her on track. Her mind has a tendency to wander, and if he doesn't spank her every day she doesn't get her work done."

Smack, smack.

"Pick one, Alice."

"Excuse me?" She looked back at him again, trying to wrap her mind around what he'd just said. Something about bosses and clerks.

"I said pick one, a role for you to play here. If you're not careful I'll pick one for you. It might be one of the ones I mentioned, or it might be something else all together different, and sure to keep you off guard."

"Role?" She shook her head. "Damn it, Preston, just spank me."

“Hum.” She felt him move away from her and she started to rise. He put his hand on her back. “Not yet. Now, Ms. Forrester, did you not tell me how important these papers were? Why have you not finished them?”

“Excuse me?”

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to remind you of your responsibilities to this firm. Your mind has a tendency to wander, and that’s not a good thing. Prepare for something that will, hopefully, jog your memory about what needs to be done during the workday.”

The ruler came down, over and over. Alice squirmed and bounced on the balls of her feet as the thin wood found its mark.

“You’ve gotten yourself in trouble with your late work before, Ms. Forrester. I’m here to see it doesn’t happen again.” He rubbed the ruler against her bottom. “You may be the boss, but sometimes I wonder about your abilities to carry out your duties. As your assistant it’s my job to make sure things get done. But I’m wondering if I’m making much of an impression right now. You don’t seem to be paying attention. Maybe if I bared your bottom.”

He tugged on her panties, inching them down until they slipped to the top part of her thighs. She felt very worthy of the name naughty Alice name right now, bent over a desk in his office, half-dressed.

“Will this help make my point?”

“Indeed it will, Mr. Walsh.” Excitement raced through her. She might have doubted his intentions at first, but now she realized she could get into this role-playing.

“Will it?” Smack. “Convince me.”

The ruler came down harder, and faster, with no breaks or spoken words in between the swats. It was harder than any spanking he’d given her up to this point, and the sting was a harsher. It didn’t diminish the desire she felt, though, and Alice pushed aside the need to analyze why she enjoyed the harsher smacks so much.

“Ms. Forrester!” His stern voice shocked her. She’d been so intent on her feelings that she’d failed to hear him talking to her.

“Yes?”

“I asked if you were learning the lesson about getting your work done, but it seems you are not. Your mind is roaming, as it so often does. Perhaps I need to step things up a bit.”

He smacked her bottom even harder and Alice closed her eyes, holding as still as she could, absorbing each swat, letting the sting settle into her.

“Now, do I have your attention?”

“You do, Mr. Walsh.” She placed her hands flat on the desk and rubbed them against the wood. “It won’t happen again, I promise.”

Three hard smacks landed against each cheek. “What won’t happen again, Ms. Forrester?”

“I won’t be...lax...” she stopped speaking as he smacked her bottom several more times.

“Won’t be lax with what?”

“With my papers.” Another smack, then another.

“I’m glad to hear it.” He tapped the ruler against the desk. The sound of it made her jump. “But I want to make certain, so you’re going to get a few more. After all, if you lose your job then I lose mine, too. And I can’t have that happen.”

The spanking started again, three strokes on her left cheek and three strokes on her right. He gave her several more, increasing the intensity until she cried out.

“I won’t forget, I won’t forget!”

Preston grasped her around the hips and lifted her back, putting his arms around her stomach. He kissed her neck, then nuzzles against her ear. “My goodness, that’s a good start on the role playing thing. Did you enjoy it?”

“Yes.” She settled her head against his shoulder. “I didn’t think I would ever like something like this, but I think it was very interesting.”

“We’ll have to think of another scenario, work something out. It’s interesting, I think. This one was fairly simple, but you can have different settings that spice things up.” He turned her so that she faced him, gathering her in his arms and kissing her soundly.

His lips moved across her chin and down her neck to her shoulder. "You're half-naked, and it's a shame to waste that." He lifted her hips until she was sitting on the desk. Then he reached under her skirt and pulled on her panties, taking one leg out and leaving the other.

"What are you doing?"

"It seems very naughty this way, doesn't it? Half-undressed, like we didn't have time to do it properly because we wanted each other so much."

He was undoing his pants now and she settled herself on the desk, wanting nothing more than to have her inside him. Her bottom throbbed more than it usually did after a spanking and she was sure she would feel it for a while.

She groaned a little as he put his hands on her hips and pulled her toward where he stood. "Ouch."

"Good." He lifted her and slid inside her wetness. She crooked her legs around him, her ankles at his knees. "A sore bottom means the spanking made an impression on you, that you'll be thinking of me every time there's a twinge in your bottom."

"You're right about that." They grasped each other tightly as he thrust inside her, the desk moving right along with them. Alice could feel her orgasm building, feel the heady tingling that would send her over the edge, making her clasp Preston even tighter than she already was.

When it hit she clutched at his back and heard his deep groan of approval. He thrust harder, their gazes locking together. When he came she held him tight. When his body relaxed and he left her she felt empty. She always did when he slipped out, but tonight it seemed to be a tougher feeling to handle.

Tears clouded her eyes and she turned her face toward the window. It really was so beautiful outside, the lights from the building bright in the dark, clear night.

He caressed her cheek, then kissed her. "Are you all right? Was I too hard on you?"

"No." She closed her eyes as he stroked her hair. "I just want to stay with you here, forever, blocking out the rest of the world."

"Well, it's funny you should say that." He toyed with her skirt. "Because sometimes I feel the same way. Alice, I'm in love with you. I fell in love with you the minute I saw you."

She hadn't expected that. They'd never mentioned love before, and she wasn't sure exactly how to respond.

"I don't expect you to say it back, unless you're feeling it. And if you're not, I'm willing to wait. I know it will be here soon, because I feel it between us."

Was that what she felt? Was the sinking feeling every time he left her body the dismay that he might never be inside her again? And if it was that, was it part of being in love?

"I want us to do something together."

"I thought we just did," she said with a laugh.

"Not that, something all together different." He stood and put her on her feet. "Clear off the rest of the desk. I'll be right back."

He strode from the room, and Alice set about doing as he asked, moving in trays and a small stack of papers to the table behind his desk. She put the phone on the floor, then sat down on the cleared surface.

As she crossed her legs she realized she still had her panties hanging from one leg. She kicked them off, then bent and picked them up, setting them on the chair they'd just vacated.

What was he up to, she wondered. She looked back out the window. The world seemed huge, a totally different world than what she'd ever been used to. She turned toward the door as she heard it open.

Preston came in carrying a large bowl. He set it on the desk, then settled himself on the other side of it so the bowl was between them.

"Hold out your hand."

When she did he placed a stack of coins in it. "I have my own stack. We're going to make a figgy pudding, without the ingredients. We'll do this again with the boys when they arrive, because it's a tradition we've long followed. But I want the two of us to do this together, tonight, even though we're not doing actual baking."

"Okay." She frowned. "I'm not sure I follow."

His nod was slow. "When I was younger, my family always made the Christmas pudding together. Mom would gather us together on the day it was made and we would each add coins. We did it

twice, once to give thanks for something that happened that year, and once to make a wish for something to happen the next year.”

Now she could see where he was leading her. They might not have flour, sugar, eggs and the various other things that went into making a figgy pudding, but they had the coins. They were going to share that part of this, share what they had from the last year and what they wanted for the next.

“I’ll go first,” he said. He opened his hand and took out a coin. “During the last year I’ve been thankful for good health, for myself and my boys and my other family members.”

He dropped the coin in the bowl. It made a tinkling sound. “Now, you go.”

She opened her hand and took out a coin. What did she have to be thankful for? She’d lost her house, she’d almost been homeless. Then the singularly most important word in that sentence hit her. “This past year I’m thankful for the fact that, although I did lose my house, I never spent a night on the streets. I have good friends, like Angela, to care for me.”

She dropped the coin in the bowl. It tinkled as it settled against the one Preston had dropped in.

Preston held up another coin. “This past year I’ve been thankful for my job, and most recently, for the addition of a beautiful woman named Alice, who had completed me like no one has done in a long time.”

He added it to the bowl.

Alice took up another coin. “I can say that I’m thankful for you, too, Preston. I hardly know you, yet I have this strange sensation that I’ve known you forever. It’s so hard to explain. I don’t quite understand it myself, but I’m thankful for it.”

The fourth coin joined the others.

She watched him take two coins from his hand. “One for Ethan, and one for Nick.” He dropped them into the bowl. “My boys are what I consider to be my greatest achievements. They are both down to earth, hard-work, hard-playing lads who have given me such joy. They’re going to love you. I promise.”

Alice swallowed down tears. Then she took a coin from her hand. “I put one in for Angela, and for Jeremy.” She dropped Angela’s into the bowl, then dropped another in. When she was done she fingered the coins and took out a third one. “This one is for my brother, Dean. We don’t really know each other, but I am grateful that he did offer for me to stay with him when it was needed, even if he didn’t

really want to. Lots of brothers might have thrown me aside, but he didn't. Next year I should make more of an effort to get to know him."

She brushed aside a tear. Preston took her hand and squeezed. "We'll have him and his family come for a summer visit. We'll visit the Tower and lots of castles. It will be fun."

Alice laughed, then picked up another coin and dropped it in. "I didn't give thanks for you."

Preston peered into the bowl. "You went out of turn." He gave her a fake grimace and she laughed. "I get to go twice now, and I'm going to start on my wishes for the next year."

He dropped a coin in the bowl. "For continued health for my family and friends."

"Same thing." She dropped her coin in the bowl, then laughed when he glared at her.

"You keep going out of turn and I'm going to pick up my ruler again," he said. "There's a order to this, you know."

"This is all new to me, you know. I've never done this before, so cut me some slack."

"Never." He winked at her. "Now, where was I? Oh yes, on the wishes for next year. I have one coin left, and I'm going to make it a double wish. I want prosperity for my friends, I want peace in the world, and...okay, it's a triple wish...I want Alice to not be afraid to open up to me. I want our relationship to grow and mature until she realizes how much we are meant to be together. Always."

The tears that had threatened earlier fell down her cheeks. "You don't want that?" She could hear the catch in his voice, the fear that she might say she didn't want them to be together.

"I do, but...you have so much more confidence than I do. I have fears, too."

"Drop them into the bowl, make them wishes for next year."

Alice opened her palm. She still had four coins sitting there. She picked up the first one.

"I want Ethan and Nick to like me. I don't want them to feel like I'm intruding on them, but instead I want to be a new addition, one that brings happiness to all of us."

The coin clanked against the others as she added it to the pile.

"What else?" He put his hands on her knees and stroked her.

“I want...Angela to understand and be supportive of what I’m doing. I’m sure she will as the time moves on, but...I’m just impatient and I want it now.”

Another clank, mixing in with laughter from Preston. “You are very much a ‘instant gratification’ type person, aren’t you?”

“Yes.” She nodded. “I hate waiting.”

“She’s just being protective. She’ll come round.” He continued to stroke her legs. “Anything else?”

“Yes.” She took up another coin. “I want the confidence that others have. I want to be able to make up my mind and stick with it. I want to be with Preston, and to have him know that I...that he’s...the...” she cleared her throat, “...that he’s the most wonderful thing that ever happened to me. I’ve never in my life had someone that I was so instantly attracted to, someone that I wanted to keep in my life, despite the fact that I feel nervous about it.”

She dropped the coin in the bowl. “Does that make sense?”

“Yes.” He put his hand in the bowl and picked up the coins. He held his hand up and let them drop into the bowl in a steady stream. They clanked against each other, and against the pottery, the sound of it filling the silence as they stared into each other’s eyes. “That’s a lot of coins in our fake pudding.”

“So it is,” she said. “What does that mean?”

“It means we have a lot to be thankful for, and that there will be more to come in the New Year. If need be we can do this once a month, to remind ourselves of what we have, of things we are thankful for.”

“It sounds like a plan,” she responded. “We should keep this bowl.”

“I’ll buy a replacement for it tomorrow,” he said, “because this one is ours, to make our fake pudding with.”

She stood and then leaned across the desk and kissed him. “I have to go downstairs and thank Angela for bringing me here, for introducing me to you.”

“I’ll go with you.” He stood and they moved toward the door. She stopped at it and straightened his shirt.

“Do I look okay? Are they going to know what we’ve been doing up here?”

“Oh, they’ll know,” Preston said. “But if they ask, tell them we were making figgy pudding, in our own way.”

“What if they ask for the recipe?” She wiggled her eyebrows at him.

“Tell them they need lots of things to be thankful for, and lots of love. Two things you can’t buy in any store, but something we have, in abundance.”

“A good answer.” She put her hand on the door handle, but before she could open it he put his hand against the door, holding it firmly in place.

“You know, you did go out of turn several times, and I don’t think you were properly punished for it.” He pursed his lips, then sighed heavily. “I’m going to have to keep a list, I can see, since you obviously need correction. Perhaps I should make that a resolution for the New Year, a spanking board for my lover, who enjoys being spanked so much.”

“Are you going to ask Santa for one?” There was a role-playing game they could do. He could dress as Santa and she could sit on his lap, see where that would lead them.

“You mean Father Christmas? Maybe.” He leaned over until their lips were inches apart. “And I’ve been a very good boy this year, so I’m sure I’ll get one. What are you going to ask for?”

Alice glanced at the desk, then back at Preston. “A ruler for the house?”

“Oh, you are naughty. I like that.” He opened the door. “Let’s go downstairs and give our thanks to Angela, and then we can go home and get you settled in, because as far as I’m concerned, Alice, my home is your home, and the only real thing I want for Christmas this year is to make you part of our family.”

Alice nodded, keeping her fears about Ethan and Nick to herself. Then she pushed them aside all together. Their father knew them, and he said it would be fine. She had a new family, one that she would make a real figgy pudding with in just a few days. It was a tradition they’d done for years, and she would be proud to be a new part of it.

She needed to make sure there were lots of coins to add to it, to show how grateful she was for her new life.

She leaned toward him and kissed him, the kiss soft and tender. “Take me home, Preston.”

“With pleasure, Alice.”

The End

Blushing Publications thanks you whole-heartedly for your purchase with us!

There are plenty more stories such as the one you've purchased from Blushing Books! Visit our online store to view our might selection!

<http://www.blushingbooks.com>

This book is intended for adults only. Spanking and other sexual activities represented in this book are fantasies only, intended for adults. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as advocating any non-consensual spanking activity or the spanking of minors.