

# A Lack of Decorum

## Part Two- Wyoming

By Abigail Webster

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## Chapter One

Cline, Wyoming  
1890

Gwendolyn Marx Cline was tired of bouncing in the stage coach and was more than ready to arrive at their destination. She simply did not know how much longer she could tolerate the way the blonde floozy was making eyes at Ramsey. Not that her husband was responding in any way, she admitted, but Gwendolyn wanted to rip the woman's hair from her head and kick her big butt from the stage and let her walk the rest of the way in those high heels she was wearing. With as much skin as the flashing blonde was exposing in her low cut red dress, she would be sunburned in no time at all.

Ramsey gave his wife a meaningful look when he heard her exasperated sigh. He was well aware that she was not impressed by their fellow passenger, but he would not permit her to behave without decorum. They had been traveling for several days now, mostly by train, and he knew she was tired and out of sorts, but he still expected her to behave as a lady. "It should not be much longer before we arrive in Cline," Ramsey said, hoping that the prospect of impending arrival would turn her thoughts away from the overly perfumed blonde woman. Ramsey personally thought the young woman needed a rag full of soap applied to her face to wash off the years. In reality he doubted the girl could be his wife's age, even though she appeared ten years older. The roots of her hair were a deep, dark brown, and at one time she was a very pretty young woman instead of the caricature sitting across from them on the other seat.

"Oh, it's at least another two hours, dearie," the blonde said with a knowing wink. "You meetin' someone there?" she asked curiously, making another attempt to learn their personal business.

"No," Ramsey replied quietly as he felt his wife tense.

"My husband is not your 'dearie' and I would thank you to stop looking at him as if I am not here!" Gwendolyn's temper finally exploded.

"Oh my, aren't you the princess!" the blonde taunted.

"If I am the princess, then you must be the concubine!" Gwendolyn stated, her green eyes flashing fire.

The blonde suddenly produced a knife, holding it in her hand threateningly. "I'm going to carve you!" she hissed, but Ramsey disarmed her before she could move. "Give that back!" she yelled angrily.

"Not until we reach Cline," he answered calmly.

Gwendolyn opened her mouth to speak but Ramsey cut her off. “Unless you wish to discuss this matter here and now, Mrs. Cline, you will be silent until I tell you otherwise.”

Gwendolyn took one look at the set of her husband’s jaw and she realized that it was in her best interests to remain quiet. It would be the ultimate humiliation if he were to put her over his knee in front of that horrible woman, and if she pushed him right now, he would do precisely that. She should have kept her mouth shut but the woman was really too much to tolerate. Gwendolyn hated the way she was fawning all over Ramsey! She turned her head and looked out the window, determined to ignore the blonde... and Ramsey!

Gwendolyn’s temper had been the bane of her existence for years, and her mother and father despaired of her ever finding a suitor. When Ramsey Cline came to her father and asked for her hand in marriage, her father was quick to accept the offer, but he was careful not to tell Gwendolyn of her impending marriage until the day she was to be wed. Predictably, Gwendolyn did not react well, refusing to marry Ramsey. In fact, she would not sit down and have a discussion with him on the subject because her temper was raging. To her shock, Ramsey sat down, turned her over his knee and spanked her soundly. He then informed her that they would be married. Gwendolyn managed to sneak out of the house and went to hide in the home of an elderly friend, but Ramsey and her father found her, and Ramsey was able to talk her into marrying him. In the short time since their wedding, Gwendolyn had fallen in love with her husband. He treated her with love and cherished her. He also punished her when he felt she was deserving of punishment. Ramsey believed in maintaining decorum, and when she acted in such a way as to embarrass herself... and him... he took umbrage with her and was compelled to show her the error of her ways. Thanks to the blonde, Gwendolyn’s first night on the Cline Ranch would be spoiled with a sound spanking! It simply wasn’t fair, but as usual, Ramsey wasn’t interested in hearing excuses.

Bethie could see the twin spots of anger on the redhead’s face and she felt bad. Most women reacted that way to her, but if they knew what she’d been through growing up they would think it a miracle she escaped, and they would know she was doing the only thing she could in order to survive. She could barely read or write her name and she couldn’t do sums for anything. She didn’t know how to sew, either. Working in a saloon was her only option if she wanted to eat, and with her hair bleached out the way it was, it made it easier to hide from Deke. Tears filled her dark eyes as she thought of the man who bought her from her Pa when she was only thirteen. Pa needed drinking money, and with her gone, he didn’t have nobody but himself to worry over. He accepted Deke’s ill gotten money, in spite of the fact she begged him not to do so. Bethie was terrified of Deke, and five years later, she was still terrified of him. He used her savagely, and he beat her just to hear her scream. He was truly an evil man and she was fortunate not to have scars from all the whippings he gave her with his belt. The only peace she had was when he was off robbing banks or stealing cattle or horses. Even then, he locked her in a small shed and barely left her enough water and food to survive while he was gone. There wasn’t even a window in the shed. She escaped three years ago when a drifter came by and she yelled until he heard her and let her out of the shed. Bethie did not look

back; she ran from Deke, and she did not stay in one place longer than three months. She was terrified he would find her.

Bethie was suddenly ashamed of herself for threatening the redhead. She had no call to be doing that; the woman just wanted her to leave her husband alone, and Bethie could understand that. She was just lonely and wanted to pass the time talking. The man had his eyes closed and Bethie decided he was asleep. Gathering her courage, she whispered, "Ma'am...?"

Gwendolyn was surprised when the blonde actually spoke to her. She turned to look at her. "Yes?"

"I'm awful sorry I pulled my knife." To her shame, tears filled her eyes. "I shouldn'ta done that."

Gwendolyn nodded. "I shouldn't have called you a name, either," she admitted. "I'm sorry for that."

"It's no big deal," Bethie said, then admitted, "I didn't even know what that meant." She smiled.

"It wasn't very nice," Gwendolyn admitted with a grin.

"I'm not a bad person," Bethie said in a small voice, and Gwendolyn felt even worse. "I don't know how to do nothin' but work in saloons."

"What about your parents?" Gwendolyn asked. "Wouldn't they help you?"

Bethie shook her head 'no'. "My Pa sold me to Deke. It took me two years to get away from him, and I'm still scared he'll find me."

"Can't you go to the law for help?"

Bethie shook her head violently. "They'd never believe that I wasn't part of Deke's gang, and they might use me as bait to get him to come and get me from jail. I don't trust any man who wears a badge." She looked in horror at Gwendolyn and added, "It makes me sick to my stomach to think of sittin' in a jail cell waitin' for Deke to come. He'd kill me, Red," she tearfully whispered.

"My name is Gwendolyn Cline," Gwendolyn told her. "And you are?"

"I'm Beth Abbott," the blonde responded, using her real name for the first time in years. "Don't go calling me that in front of folks, though. I call myself Goldie when I am working."

"There has to be some way to get you out of this situation."

“I’ve been trying to think of one for the last three years now,” Bethie said sadly.

Gwendolyn was ready to say something when the driver gave a yell to the horses and the stage coach lurched forward, the horses suddenly running all out.

“Get down, ladies,” Ramsey took each of them by the arm and pushed them down on the bottom of the coach. “Stay put,” he ordered firmly, drawing a gun that Gwendolyn was not aware he owned! He looked out the small window and could see five masked men following the stage coach, shooting at them. He took aim and wounded one man, who grabbed his stomach and fell off his horse.

Gwendolyn was frightened, terrified that Ramsey would be hit by one of the flying bullets. She could hear the riders gaining on them, even as the coach teetered precariously as the driver dropped the reins and fell from his perch. The horses were running wildly!

Suddenly, Ramsey slumped and fell forward on top of them. Gwendolyn pushed him back on the seat, noting that he’d been shot. There was blood on his face and he was unconscious. She put her handkerchief to the wound, and it was quickly soaked through with blood. She felt like crying, but before she could give vent to her grief, the coach came to a stop.

The door was jerked open, and a masked bandit looked at them with glittering black eyes and said, “Well, look here at what we got! We got us some female company!”

“Pull them passengers out of there!” a sharp voice impatiently called out.

Gwendolyn heard the blonde gasp and then she fainted. She turned to help her, but was grabbed and dragged from the stage coach before she could help the other female. Infuriated, she kicked at the man who was holding her, and had the satisfaction of hearing him grunt in pain as the heel of her shoe caught him on the knee. In the next second she was tossed to the ground.

“Stay there, girl,” she was warned when she started to get up. She looked toward the speaker and his pale gray eyes looked cruel. He was pointing a gun at her. “If you move, I’ll shoot you in the leg. It’ll hurt like hell.”

The blonde was dragged from the coach next, shaking her head ‘no’, and trying to resist. The man slapped her hard and she burst into tears, her hand going to her cheek as she bowed her head.

“Is that you, Beth?” the cruel man asked from atop his horse. When the girl didn’t look at him or answer, he shouted, “You answer me, bitch!”

“It’s me, Deke,” she whispered, her face streaked with the stuff she used to enhance her eyes.

“So, I finally found you,” he said in disgust. “You look like a whore. How many men have there been, Beth?” he screamed. “Oh, you’re gonna pay.”

“The guy in there is dead, Deke.”

“Lucky for him,” Deke said. “You belong to him?” he asked the redhead. When Gwendolyn tried to get to Ramsey, Deke shot his gun, and if she hadn’t moved when she did, he would have hit her! “You’ll pay for what your man did to two of my men! You’ll beg to die.”

Gwendolyn looked at him and felt rage overtake her. “You are contemptible scum, and not worth the air you breathe. I am only sorry that Ramsey did not shoot you!”

“Sassy, too. All the more fun to watch you break, not like Beth, here. She can’t stand pain.”

“Let the lady go, Deke. I’ll come with you, but let her go.”

“Bitch, you ain’t got no right to ask nothin’ of me.” He gave her a hate filled look, and before Gwendolyn could guess his intentions, he dismounted and jerked the blonde to her feet by her hair. “You’re gettin’ your first lesson now, bitch!” He grabbed the bodice of her red dress and tore it down the front and clean off her body, leaving her nude to her waist. His hand fumbled at his waist as he undid the buckle on his belt, and then drew it from his belt loops on his pants. “You’re gonna be real sorry you ran away, Bethie! By the time I’m done with you, you’ll be praying for death.” He shoved her toward one of his men and growled, “Tie her to the wheel.”

“Deke, we need to get out of here. You can do what you want when we get back to the hideout.”

“I said tie her up. Do it!” he screamed.

“Noooo! Please don’t listen to him!” Bethie begged. “Please don’t tie me!”

Deke laughed, but his evil laugh changed to a scowl when the other man looked at him and shook his head ‘no’. Deke pulled his gun and fired, and the man fell dead at Beth’s feet. She screamed and tried to run and when Deke took aim at her back, Gwendolyn jumped to her feet and threw herself at him, causing his shot to go wild. Deke cursed her, slapped her face hard, and then shoved her to the ground and then aimed his gun at her. “Go after Bethie, Jim,” he ordered the one remaining member of his gang, and Jim jumped off his horse and gave chase. It didn’t take him long to catch the sobbing woman and drag her back. Once she was lying at Deke’s feet, he turned his attention back to Gwendolyn.

Gwendolyn was positive she was going to die and she did not care. She did not want to live without Ramsey. She would much rather die and be with him than keep on living, especially in the hands of this Deke monster.

“You’re gonna die, bitch!” Deke said, and pulled back the hammer on his pistol. He wanted to see her beg, but Gwendolyn just glared at him, her green eyes unafraid. This made him angry, and he raised the gun and stepped forward to strike her, but before the barrel of the gun landed, another shot rang out and Deke fell dead.

Jim went for his gun but before he could draw, another shot filled the air, and Jim let out a scream before he fell to the ground.

Gwendolyn looked toward the stage and saw Ramsey standing there, swaying groggily. She jumped up and ran to him, supporting him with her body. “Oh, God, they said you were dead!” She started crying and hugged him tightly.

“Are you hurt, sweetheart?” Ramsey asked, holding her at arm’s length to look her over. As long as he lived would never forget the sight of that bastard pointing a gun at his wife and then raising it to strike her! Ramsey’s vision was doubled and he could only pray he would hit him and not Gwendolyn when he fired. “Are you all right?” he asked again when she continued to cry.

“I’m fine now. Thank God you’re alive!” She suddenly pulled herself together. “I need to take care of Beth.” Gwendolyn rushed to her and knelt in front of her, gathering the blonde close. “You’re safe now, Beth. It’s all over. Deke is dead and he can never hurt you again.” She held the shuddering woman and did her best to soothe her. “Ramsey, can you get down my bag and take out a camisole and another dress for Beth to put on, please?”

Ramsey nodded, never as proud of his wife as he was in that minute. He had heard the two women whispering in the coach while he was resting his eyes. He was proud of both of them for befriending each other as they had, and he was glad they were both alive. He could see that the blonde’s clothing was ripped and he’d heard enough to know that the leader of the gang who attempted to rob them was the same man she was hiding from. He had no idea of how long he was unconscious, but it had to have been several minutes. As he climbed up on the boot of the coach and reached for his wife’s bag, he thought he saw someone walking toward them. He dropped Gwendolyn’s bag on the ground, and hurried to get down so he could protect them from danger if need be.

“Someone is approaching on foot, sweetheart. Hurry and get some clothing on Beth.”

“Yes, Ramsey,” Gwendolyn replied, and she whispered to Beth to help her. Beth nodded and did as she was told, surprised as could be that Ramsey kept his back to them and his eyes on the approaching man.

“Thank you, Gwendolyn,” she said appreciatively. “You saved my life, and you’ve been so kind to me. I’m not used to that,” she tearfully admitted.

“It is about time you got used to it,” Gwendolyn told her. “We’re friends now,” she said, “and Ramsey and I are going to see to it you have a better life. You’ll see,” she promised, walking over and picking up a gun from the ground beside Jim’s body. She did not know whether or not Ramsey would need her help, but she was going to be ready, just in case. She saw Beth do the same and smiled at her.

“Be careful with that,” Beth warned. “Don’t aim at someone unless you mean to shoot them.”

“Good advice,” Gwendolyn agreed as they walked over to stand with Ramsey. “Can you tell anything about them yet?” she asked of him.

“No. I think you and Beth should stand behind the coach, Gwendolyn,” he said firmly.

“We are staying right here, Ramsey,” Beth said. “That man might not be alone, and he might be trying to get our attention while someone else sneaks up on us.”

## Chapter Two

"It's the driver!" Ramsey said finally. The man was limping toward them as fast as he could with a bullet crease in his thigh.

"You folks all right?" he asked, obviously surprised to see them in one piece.

"We are fine," Ramsey replied.

"I'll be damned!" the elderly man chortled as he spotted the bodies lying around the stage coach. "That was the Sanders' Gang. Deke Sanders was as mean as they get. How'd you get the drop on 'im?" he asked of Ramsey.

"I had motivation," Ramsey replied. "You'd better sit down here and let us take care of you, Mr....?"

"Name is Sam Weber. Folks just call me Sam."

"Well, Sam, have a seat and I'll see what I can do about your wound."

"It's just a scratch," Sam said matter-of-factly. "I hit a rock and got throwed off the seat; feel like a durned fool."

"It could not be helped," Ramsey said quietly, taking the bottle of whiskey that Sam held out to him, opening it, and dumping a generous amount on the open wound."

Sam hissed, but nodded at Ramsey when he tied a bandage torn from one of his wife's petticoats over the wound. "Thankee kindly, son. We'll leave these bodies here and have the Sheriff come and tote 'em in to town for burial. There's a big reward on their heads, so you'll be rich."

Gwendolyn looked at Ramsey, her green eyes reflecting her thoughts. They already had more money than they needed.

"Let's get you ladies into town," Sam said.

"Do you need help driving?" Ramsey asked.

"You ever drive a team?" Sam asked.

"Yes," Ramsey shocked his wife by replying. Obviously, Sam was surprised, too.

"I took you for city folks," he stated bluntly.

“We are from St. Louis, but I lived out here for a while with my Great-Uncle Ram. He taught me to handle a team.”

“You’re kin to Ram Cline!” Sam said, whistling. “So you’re the heir folks has been waitin’ for. They’re sure gonna be surprised.” He grinned for a moment, and then turned sober as he added, “Ram was a good man and I’m right sorry he’s gone. He was a man to count on when you needed your back covered, and what I done seen today, you’re just like him, son.” He nodded, and then hauled himself up on the stage coach. “You help them gals in the coach, son, and come on up and ride with me. We got us some talkin’ to do.”

“You behave yourself now, Mrs. Cline,” he whispered in Gwendolyn’s ear as he helped her into the coach.

“I will,” she promised, and then shocked him by leaning forward and kissing him. “I love you, Ramsey Cline,” she stated, not caring that Beth could hear her. “I wanted to die when I thought you were dead.” Tears filled her pretty green eyes once again. “You’d best be careful up there on top; do you hear me?” she asked.

Ramsey smiled at her, his dark eyes shining. “I shall be most careful, Mrs. Cline. I love you, too,” he said. “I am a most fortunate man.” He winked at her, and then smiled at Beth before shutting the door and then climbing on top of the stage. His head was aching something awful, but he was a lucky man and knew it.

“Are you two on your honeymoon?” Beth asked with a smile.

“Not exactly; we’ve been married for two months now.” She looked at Beth and then said, “You would not want to see your face or your hair, Bethie.”

“You aren’t exactly presentable, either, Gwendolyn,” she replied, and then they both giggled.

“We can help each other,” Gwendolyn suggested. Ramsey tossed her bag into the coach before he helped them inside, so she was able to find some cream and another strip from the ruined petticoat to wipe the cheek and lip rouge from Beth’s face, as well as the makeup from her eyes. A good brushing of her hair and a ribbon that matched the dress she loaned her, and Beth looked eighteen instead of twenty-five.

Beth returned the favor, and by the time they reached Cline, Wyoming, both ladies were quite presentable, even though they were arguing when Ramsey opened the door to help them disembark. “What is going on in here?” he asked quietly, raising one eyebrow.

“Oh, Ramsey, I have invited Beth to come and stay at the ranch and start her life over, and she is afraid she would be intruding on our privacy. Would you please tell her that we truly want to help her?” Her green eyes pleaded with him to do something and Ramsey was stunned once again by her strength of character.

When he looked at Beth, his eyes widened in surprise. Without all the makeup and her hair brushed out and tied back with a ribbon she barely looked the eighteen she was. She definitely needed and deserved some help to get her life on track. “Beth, I agree with Gwendolyn. You’ve been through a terrible experience and the least we can do is help you get on your feet. There is plenty of room for you on the ranch and it will give you time to consider all your options and make a decision about what you want to do with your life. I have a few suggestions to make, but only if you are interested...?”

“I don’t want to be a bother. I’m used to bein’ on my own.”

“But, is working in a saloon what you really want to do?” he asked directly.

“No,” she said, tears filling her eyes as she bowed her head in shame. “But I don’t know nothing else!”

“You can certainly learn. Please come out to the ranch with us. If you don’t like it there, then we’ll help you on your way, I promise.”

Beth smiled shyly, then said, “All right, I will.”

The Sheriff walked over to the stage and spoke with Sam, “You sent for me, Sam?”

“Sure did, Sheriff. We done had us some bad trouble out a ways. Got held up by the Sanders’ Gang. Ramsey, here, did for Deke and Jim, and two others. Deke shot one of his own men down in cold blood.”

“You must be awful good with that gun, Mister, if you took out four of the Sanders’ Gang.” The Sheriff eyed Ramsey suspiciously.

“Don’t make too much of it, Sheriff. I shot two of them from the coach as they were chasing us. I shot Deke before he hurt my wife, and Jim went for his gun and I shot him in self-defense. I’m not a gunman.”

“You ain’t a braggart, either,” the man said with a nod. “You got a name, Mister?” he asked.

“Ramsey Cline, and this is my wife, Gwendolyn, and this young lady is Miss Beth Abbott.”

“Ramsey Cline! You’re Ram’s great-nephew we been waitin’ for to get here,” the Sheriff said, shaking his head. “You’re sure a chip off the old block. Why, Ram couldn’t a done better.”

“Thank you for the compliment,” Ramsey said politely.

“There’s a big reward comin’ to you, and I’ll be seein’ to that as soon as we get the bodies back here. Are you folks goin’ out to the ranch yet today?”

“How far is it, Sheriff?” Gwendolyn asked. She was weary and tired of traveling, and she was sure that Beth was too.

“Not too far. Just a couple of hours by buggy. You’ll be there before supper,” he predicted, but then seemed to reconsider. “You folks seem done in, and from the blood on Ramsey’s head, he should see Doc. Why don’t you mosey on over to the hotel and spend the night in town, and I’ll send Doc over to see you...?”

“That sounds like a good idea, Sheriff. Thank you,” Ramsey said. It was obvious that his wife was in need of a night’s sleep before traveling out to the ranch, and since his head was pounding, he did not mind the idea of waiting until morning, either.

“I’ll get someone to bring your bags over to the hotel, folks,” Sam offered. “You just go on and get those ladies tended to.”

The hotel clerk was more than happy to provide them with a suite that had two bedrooms. Ramsey asked about having food sent upstairs that night, and was assured it wouldn’t be a problem. When he asked about hot water for bathing, he was told that the suite offered a private bathing room. Ramsey was sure the ladies would be pleased with the convenience. The clerk led them up to their room, which was on the top floor of the hotel, and once Ramsey tipped him, he left them alone. They all sat down and breathed a sigh of relief.

“Thank you both so much for helping me,” Beth said as she started crying once again. “I was terrified when I realized it was Deke Sanders holding us up. You were so brave to stop him from shooting me, Gwendolyn. He was bad.”

“He cannot harm you now, Beth,” Ramsey said reassuringly.

“It seems like a horrible nightmare,” she whispered. “I can’t believe it is truly over; that I don’t have to keep worrying he will walk into a saloon and find me.”

“You can relax now, Beth,” Gwendolyn said, still finding it hard to believe that Beth’s father sold her to a man like Deke Sanders when she was still a little girl. She got up from her seat beside Ramsey to go and give the girl a big hug. “You are safe, Bethie, and Ramsey and I will help you get past these last horrible years.”

“You are being kind, but no one is ever going to want to be around me. What decent man would want me for his wife...?” she cried.

“You were a child, Beth. What happened to you was not your fault.” Ramsey meant every word. But before he could say anything else there was a knock at the door.

“Mr. Cline, Doc Shane is here,” the clerk called out.

Gwendolyn jumped up to let the doctor inside. “Doctor, thank you for coming,” she said graciously. “My husband was grazed with a bullet, and while he has not complained, I can tell he is in pain.”

“I’m sure he is, young lady,” the Doctor said with a brisk shake of his head. “Is your head pounding, young man?” he asked.

“Yes, it is,” Ramsey answered truthfully.

“I suspect you have a concussion,” he offered. “Are you seeing right?”

“Not exactly,” Ramsey admitted. “Mostly double vision.”

The Doctor put some antiseptic on a piece of cotton and cleaned out the wound. “Don’t look like you need stitches, young man. Just to get some rest. Pretty brave of you to save these gals like you did. Your uncle was a good friend of mine and he’d be right proud of you today.”

“Thank you, sir,” Ramsey said politely as the Doctor put a bandage on his head.

“No need to thank me for speaking the truth. Now, you rest up. I want to see you again in the morning before you head out to the ranch. Mrs. Cline, if your husband has any problems tonight you send the clerk to get me; I don’t care what time it is.”

“I will do that, Doctor,” Gwendolyn replied.

“Miss, do you need attention?” The doctor’s blue eyes looked at Beth critically. “It’s no shame if one of those outlaws harmed you...?”

“No, I wasn’t used in that way,” she whispered, her face turning scarlet as she understood what the doctor was asking her. “I was just frightened.”

“Do you need something to help you sleep? You had a bad experience out there.”

“I’m fine, Doc,” Bethie answered him. “Just a bit shook up.”

“I’ll leave this for you, just in case,” he offered, leaving a small bottle of laudanum. “Only a couple of drops in some tea or coffee at bedtime... if you’re still shaking.”

“Believe me, I am just thankful to be alive, Doc. Ramsey and Gwendolyn protected me and I owe them my life. I will be fine in a bit.”

“Good girl,” Doc said with a smile. “And you look just fine, Mrs. Cline...?”

"I am more than fine," Gwendolyn agreed. "For one moment I thought Ramsey was dead; to learn he was alive made my day perfect."

"I see," Doc nodded. "You are a lucky man, Mr. Cline."

"Yes, sir, I am," Ramsey agreed, glancing toward his wife and smiling. He would always be thankful he came to in time to save her from Deke Sanders.

After warning Ramsey that he wasn't to take any of the laudanum since he had a concussion the doctor took his leave, promising to return in the morning.

Gwendolyn insisted that Ramsey go into their bedroom and lie down until it was time for dinner. "What will you do while I am resting?" he asked.

"You need not worry, Ramsey," she answered with a smile. "Bethie and I will stay right here and simply relax. I have no desire to explore the town without you at my side."

"Please see that you stick to that thought," he said with a warning smile. "We already have one matter to discuss and I doubt that you would wish to add to that discussion."

"But, Ramsey...!" Gwendolyn was immediately flustered when she learned her husband was still planning to punish her for losing her temper earlier.

He held up a finger. "My dear, I am not in normal form to discuss this with you at the moment. I think your idea of rest a good one. Please do not admit anyone into the suite while I am in our bedroom." With that final 'order', Ramsey took himself off to lie down. His head was pounding and he had put on the brave face as long as he could.

"You are in trouble?" Beth's words were more of a statement than a question. "I don't want to butt in, but what did you do?"

"I lost my temper with you in the stage coach," Gwendolyn admitted, her cheeks red with embarrassment.

"Oh that little spat...? I was provoking you because I was so bored. It's as much my fault as it is yours. Besides, it wasn't much of a fuss. I'm the one who was horrid to you. Gwendolyn, I want you to know that I wouldn't really have cut you with my knife. I just wanted to scare you and make you talk to me. I was lonesome... and afraid to start over again... and wishing I was a lady like you with a husband to love and protect me. Don't you worry none... I'll talk to Ramsey and let him know that I am responsible."

"Ramsey expects me to behave with decorum; I was tired and grumpy from traveling, and I took all of that out on you. I shouldn't have said what I did to you, either. It was very nasty."

“What does that concu... Heck, I can’t even remember how to pronounce what you called me...” she said with a laugh.

“The word is concubine, and it usually refers to a king or a sheik, or someone of great power, who keeps a harem of women for his pleasure. The women are referred to as concubines.”

“Oh, it’s basically another word for whore,” Bethie said quietly, shrugging. “It is the truth, and I can’t change that. I was one of those when Pa sold me to Deke. Deke sure didn’t marry me before he threw me down and had his way.”

“That was rape, and it doesn’t make you a whore,” Gwendolyn argued. “You escaped him, and you did what you did to survive. You aren’t a whore. You survived in spite of the circumstances.”

“You really mean that, don’tcha?”

“Yes!” Gwendolyn nodded her head emphatically. “We are going to help you start over, Bethie. The first thing we need to do is make your hair its natural color once again, but I do not have the first clue how to go about doing that.”

“Oh, it’s not so hard. We would need a few things,” she said, and rattled off a list.

Gwendolyn got to her feet. “I am going shopping and when I get back, we shall transform your appearance.”

“But, Ramsey wanted you to stay here. I can go.”

“No. The fewer people who see you with that tell-tale hair the better.” She saw the hurt look in Beth’s eyes and said, “Bethie, I did not mean to insult you; I am so sorry. And, I am leaping to conclusions and assuming you want to darken your hair. If I am wrong, just tell me so...”

“I want more than anything to leave that life behind me, Gwendolyn, but what if I can’t?” she asked, the worry on her face heartbreaking to see.

“You can do it, Bethie. I promise you that Ramsey and I will help you.”

“Then let’s do this,” Bethie said, determined to accept the chance she was being given.

Gwendolyn put her hat on her head, grabbed her handbag, and left the hotel suite. When she reached the lobby, she asked the clerk where she could find a store that sold sundries, and she was told there was one Mercantile in town, and it was right across the street. Gwendolyn felt perfectly safe walking that far on her own, and she hurried to take care of business, planning to return before her husband woke and found her missing.

## Chapter Three

Beth's eyes widened with trepidation when she heard the door to Gwendolyn's and Ramsey's bedroom open. Ramsey walked into the sitting room and looked around before asking, "Where is Gwendolyn?"

"Shouldn't you be lying down, Ramsey? You look mighty peaked," she said in an attempt to distract him.

"I am feeling much better, Beth. Now, where is my wife?" When she looked down at the rug, he said quietly, "The truth now, young lady."

"We were talking and discussing the best method of helping me start over, and we decided that we need to fix my hair. Gwendolyn went to get a few things."

"After I told her not to leave this suite?" Ramsey was not happy and it showed.

"Please don't be angry with her, Ramsey!" Beth begged. "It's all my fault. I shouldn't let her go!"

"Gwendolyn is a grown woman; she knew perfectly well she was disobeying me." He put his hat on his head to help hide the bandages, and then picked up his gun and put it where he could get to it if need be. "You keep yourself inside these walls, young lady. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir." Bethie was near tears and wished there was some way she could warn Gwendolyn. She couldn't let Ramsey hurt her new friend! "Please don't hurt Gwendolyn!" she whispered, begging.

Ramsey stopped at the door, and then crossed the floor to stand in front of the little blonde. "Bethie, I am not going to harm Gwendolyn. She is my life, and I love her. The most I would ever do is set her bottom on fire, and I promise you she will not be sitting too well to eat her dinner, but I do that because I love her, and because if I didn't take great pains to protect her from herself and her impulsive ways, she would be in trouble all the time. Do you believe me?" he asked, tipping her chin up to look at her face. "There is no need for you to fear for my little wife; I give you my word."

Beth tried to smile. "I believe you, Ramsey. I've just seen the worst of so many men that I have to stop and remind myself that you are a decent man."

"It will take time to leave all of that behind you, but I promise you it will get easier each and every day." He turned once more to go and fetch his wife, but the door opened before he reached it and she came bouncing inside, a huge smile on her pretty face.

“Ut oh!” she said when she saw him. “I was only across the street, Ramsey, and I did not venture out of the hotel without asking if it was safe to do so. See...?” She twirled around. “I am back safe and sound.” She walked past him to put her parcels down on a table. “I found everything we need, plus a few extras. It is a very nice store.”

“Mrs. Cline, I wish to see you in our room right now,” Ramsey said firmly.

“But, Ramsey, I...”

“Right now,” he repeated himself. He knew the exact moment that Gwendolyn realized she was in serious trouble. Her green eyes flashed in disbelief and her cheeks turned pink.

“Could we not discuss this later, husband?” Gwendolyn did not wish to be marched off to their room for a spanking! Not in front of Bethie! It was too embarrassing to consider.

“We can discuss this in the privacy of our bedroom or we can discuss this right here,” he replied quietly, and was not surprised when she turned on her heel and headed for the bedroom... and a semblance of privacy. Ramsey turned to look at the stricken Bethie and winked, letting her know that he was not in a rage and about to harm his little redhead. Bethie made herself smile and nod, but he could see she was still nervous. He leaned down to say, “I give you my word that Gwendolyn will suffer nothing more than a stinging bottom and bruised pride. I am not a cruel man.” He then followed his wife and closed the door on Bethie and her worries.

“Ramsey Cline!” Gwendolyn whispered loudly, her hands on her hips as she glared at her husband. “Why would you bring me in here right in front of Bethie? What is she going to think?”

“She is going to think that you disobeyed your husband and you are about to get a well-earned spanking for doing so.”

“Not now!” she protested. “Could you not wait until we retire for the night if you must do such a thing?”

“No. The spanking is going to happen right now. Take off your dress and petticoats, Gwendolyn. You need some time in the corner to think about your behavior, and while you are thinking, you might want to ponder your lack of decorum on the stagecoach this morning.”

“There is nothing to ponder,” Gwendolyn told him. “I have already apologized to Bethie for being so horrid to her. I was jealous,” she grudgingly admitted. “I have never been jealous before, but you are *my* husband, and I did not enjoy the looks she was giving you. I truly wanted to slap her and pull out her hair. I think I behaved with much decorum considering my true feelings!”

Ramsey simply could not keep a straight face. He grinned and then he chuckled and then he laughed before he crossed the floor to pull Gwendolyn into his arms and hug her. "I guess I should be grateful that you refrained from violence to protect me from Bethie," he teased, and then heard his wife giggle. "Oh, sweetheart, I have eyes only for you. You have my pledge on this. There will be no other woman; I have you, and I need no other."

"Thank you, Ramsey. Jealousy is a painful emotion," she admitted, content to be held in his arms. "Today, when I thought I lost you forever, I did not care if Deke shot me. I wanted to be with you, even in death." She started crying, sobs wracking her body as the day's events caught up with her.

Ramsey simply held her and permitted her to cry. She needed to release the emotions she bottled up inside her all day. "I am thankful I regained consciousness in time to protect you," he whispered.

"Deke was going to shoot Bethie in the back; I stopped him," she whispered. "He was so filled with rage and hatred. He even killed one of his own men because the man protested what he was about to do; he refused to tie her to the wheel of the stage coach so that Deke could beat her. Deke used to beat her with a belt all the time, Ramsey. He used to use his fists on her, too. He slapped me to the ground, and it hurt so much; I can only imagine how much worse it feels to get hit with a fist."

Ramsey listened to his wife talk about everything that happened while he was unconscious, and he realized it was a miracle that his wife and Bethie survived without serious injury. "You are a brave woman, sweetheart," he told her, meaning every word.

"I do not feel brave. I was terrified at the time, but the worst part of the ordeal was when one of the men said you were dead. I am so glad that was not true!" She clung to him, holding him tight.

"I am pleased it is not true, also," he said quietly, kissing the top of her head. After several minutes he asked, "Are you calm now, my dear?"

"Yes. I had no idea I was going to fall apart like that," she admitted, feeling a bit embarrassed.

"It was a delayed reaction, Gwendolyn. The adrenalin finally wore off, and your emotions took over. This is a normal reaction to what you went through." He gently pushed her away from his body and said, "We still have the matter of your disobedience to take care of. You need to remove your dress and petticoats and go and stand in the corner with your drawers around your knees. I want to see a bared bottom waiting for a spanking."

"Must you, Ramsey? Have we not suffered enough today?" she pleaded with him to reconsider.

“Did you leave this suite after you were told not to do so?” Ramsey asked, one dark eyebrow arched questioningly.

“Yes, I did, but I did ask the clerk if it was safe to venture out of the hotel alone...and the store was only across the street. I was on an errand with a purpose,” she added virtuously.

“This errand could have waited until I woke from my nap.”

“I did not know how long you would sleep,” she reasoned.

“Gwendolyn, stop rationalizing your actions. You disobeyed me, and that is the long and short of the matter. Now, I expect you to do as you are told, or I am going to use your hairbrush on your posterior instead of my hand. There is to be no more arguing.”

Gwendolyn stomped her foot in frustration. She did not think Ramsey was being fair. She was perfectly safe while she was on her errand and he was making too big a deal over what she did. She was not a child! Her temper took over her tongue as her hands flew to her hips. “I am a grown woman, Ramsey Cline. I only went to the store, something I am used to doing by myself all of the time. You are making too big a deal over this situation, and I am not going to permit you to punish me for such a silly matter.”

“Disobedience is not a silly matter, Mrs. Cline. If you recall, I have never once permitted you to disobey me, and I will not start with this incident.”

Without warning, he moved, taking her by the arm and pulling her over to the bed. The bed was so high off the floor that Gwendolyn was going to have to climb upon it in order to sleep that night. Ramsey simply picked her up and dropped her face down over the mattress. Her feet could not reach the floor, and with his hand holding her down, she was completely helpless. “No, Ramsey!” she protested, certain he was going to spank her. In the next instant she learned she was right! His hand was hard, and even through her dress, petticoats, and drawers, she could feel each and every spank as it landed with force! “Owww! You are hurting me!” she cried out. “Please stop!”

“Stop? I do not think so, Gwendolyn. I warned you to stop arguing with me and to do as you were told. You did not obey me, and I am positive you need a much sterner lesson than I planned to administer.”

“No, I do not! I made sure I would be safe! Does that not count for something? I am not a child, Ramsey!” she protested as he continued to make his feelings known on her burning backside. “Please stop! I am sorry you were concerned!”

“I have not heard you say you are sorry for your disobedience,” he told her, making her realize that she was being punished for that, not for shopping!

“Okay, I am sorry I disobeyed you!”

“Very well,” he stopped spanking her and said. “Will you now do as you were told and accept the punishment you earned? Or is it necessary for me to continue this spanking until you are ready to obey me in this matter?”

Gwendolyn nodded.

“Is that nod meant to convey you need me to continue this spanking?” he asked, clearly exasperated.

“No!” she wailed. “I meant that I will do as you requested.” It was difficult for her to say the words, but she knew that if she did not do as he said, he would continue with this spanking until she did, and then she would still get the original punishment he planned to give her. It did not matter that she thought he was being unfair; he was going to enforce his will and make sure she understood that he expected her to obey him. Ramsey Cline was a stern husband.

Ramsey lifted her from the bed and stood her on her feet, crossing his arms over his chest as he watched her. “I would suggest you do not try my patience further, Gwendolyn. It is quite a ride out to the ranch, and you will find it most arduous if I have to deal with your reticence again.”

Gwendolyn kicked off her shoes, and then presented her husband with her back. “I cannot do the buttons, Ramsey.”

He quickly obliged her, noting how stiff she held herself. It was obvious she was angry with him and he could not imagine why when she was the one in the wrong. Gwendolyn knew that he did not tolerate disobedience, and if she thought the circumstances of the day would earn her a reprieve, then it was best she learn right now that he would never allow her to disregard a rule made for her safety and protection.

Gwendolyn slid the dress off her shoulders and let it fall in a puddle around her feet. She stepped out of it, and then picked it up and went to the wardrobe in the room, took out a hanger, and draped the dress on the hanger before neatly hanging it on the bar in the wardrobe. She then removed her petticoats, and just as neatly folded them and put them in a drawer. That left her wearing her camisole and drawers, and her stockings. She glared at Ramsey before walking to the empty corner that he’d indicated earlier. Of all the things he could use to punish her, standing in the corner was the worst. Gwendolyn hated looking at the walls, and it made her nose sore to have to press it against the wall. She found the punishment painful as well as humiliating, and she knew that Ramsey was well aware of her feelings. It was a cruel thing to ask of her, and the only thing that made it worse was having to expose her bottom. She was not about to do that unless he insisted.

“Is that what you were told to do?”

“Why must you be such a pain, Ramsey? Do you enjoy humiliating me?” she angrily demanded.

“Why must you get angry with me when you are the one who disobeyed your husband and earned a punishment?” he asked calmly.

“You know how much I hate standing in the corner. It makes my nose hurt. It makes my back hurt! And,” she added dramatically, “it makes my feet hurt!”

“Then it would seem that you would obey me so you would not find yourself standing in the corner to reflect on your behavior.” When she muttered under her breath he added, “I am waiting to see your bared bottom, Gwendolyn. Your corner time does not start until you obey me and bare yourself for correction.”

“Damn it, Ramsey Cline! Why must you do your very best to make me hate you?” Gwendolyn was furious. “I have told you repeatedly that this does not do one thing to make me feel remorse; it only angers me.” She jerked on the ribbons holding up her drawers, and then they fell, baring her bottom.

“Then perhaps you will need twice as long to reflect on your behavior and to correct your attitude. Your sassy mouth has turned a simple spanking into a serious punishment, Mrs. Cline. You will remain silent now, and keep your nose against the wall. I suggest you do some serious thinking and come up with a suitable apology for your behavior.”

Gwendolyn silently told him to go straight to hell! He might be able to make her stand in the corner, but he could not force her mind to obey him, and she was certainly not going to apologize for a thing she said. She was a grown woman and she’d done nothing wrong. She went to a store and bought a few items, and if Ramsey did not like it, well, too bad!

Five minutes later Ramsey could see that Gwendolyn was still furious. Her back was rigid and she was holding herself with control, and she showed no sign of weakening. He shook his head, once more blaming her parents for indulging her entirely too much as a child. The pretty little redhead was an only child, and her parents overlooked her temper tantrums and let her have her way constantly. Ramsey put an end to such unacceptable behavior with a hand to her bottom within minutes of meeting her. He did learn, to his dismay, that her skin was extremely delicate. She bruised easily, so it was not necessary for him to spank her hard to make a point, and he’d learned that using a riding crop was the equivalent of a cruel punishment. However, it was obvious he was going to have to do something a bit more than the spanking he’d planned. Gwendolyn’s entire attitude was full of disrespect, and he could not and would not permit her to behave in such a manner. Gwendolyn disobeyed him, and even though she was perfectly safe, it did not mean he was going to allow her to shrug off her disobedience. Gwendolyn earned a spanking, and her sassy, disrespectful attitude dictated the spanking be one that she would recall with genuine remorse over the next several days.

## Chapter Four

Gwendolyn wondered how much longer Ramsey would leave her in the corner. Her back felt as though she'd been there for well over an hour, but she knew from previous experience that she was doing well if she made it twenty minutes before losing patience and asking Ramsey to simply get the spanking over with. Gwendolyn's poor nose hurt, too. The pressure of leaning forward with her nose basically holding her part of her upper body weight was difficult to bear. Her nose would feel bruised for the next several days, even if there was no visible bruising to see. Why Ramsey would inflict pain on her in this manner was beyond her understanding. Finally, she could bear it no longer.

"Ramsey, please! Let this be enough! I am truly miserable."

"You do not sound the least bit repentant."

"It is difficult to sound repentant when I am in pain. My lower back hurts, as does my nose! Please, Ramsey. I have suffered enough!"

"No apology for your attitude?"

"Very well. I apologize for my attitude. Now may I please turn around and straighten my back?" Her tone sounded pleading and whiny to her own ears.

"Your apology is not sincere, Gwendolyn. Instead of standing there and feeling sorry for yourself, you need to think of your actions and words since entering this room. You need to put yourself in my place and think about how you would handle such a spoiled little miss who continues to be defiant when she is in the wrong. We will talk again in an hour. I do not wish to hear one word from you until I speak to you at the end of that time."

Gwendolyn gasped in dismay. How on earth could she stand here for another hour? She was already aching! To make matters even worse, she heard Ramsey get up, walk to the door, and then leave the room, shutting the door firmly! He had left her here to suffer all by herself! She immediately thought about simply standing up straight and taking the pressure off her nose and her lower back, but stopped herself. If he walked back into the room and she was not as she should be, he would simply give her another spanking and make her start the time all over again! Gwendolyn wanted to cry. It was impossible to put herself in his place. She felt differently than he did about things of this sort. She did not think it fair of him to punish her when all she did was walk across the street and do some shopping. Of course, he did tell her not to go anywhere without him. And, she did consider that fact before leaving. Where she went wrong was in not apologizing when she got back and found him preparing to come looking for her. If only she'd told him she was sorry, and simply was in a hurry to help Bethie, he would have forgiven her with just a scolding, or at the worst, a few sharp swats to her bottom. Now he was angry with her, and once again, it was because of her temper. Why did she allow her temper to control her? Here she was, miserable, her body aching from standing and leaning forward to

keep her nose against the wall, her bottom bared and seemingly begging for a spanking. Her bottom was already smarting from the spanking he gave her for arguing with him, and she was positive she would be unbearably sore by the time he finished punishing her. The very thought brought about tears and she could no longer maintain her righteous anger. She was finally ready to tell Ramsey that she was sorry.

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Beth could see that Ramsey was frustrated and upset. When he said nothing, she finally worked up the courage to ask, "Will Gwendolyn be out soon?"

"She is standing in the corner right now, Beth, acting like a stubborn, spoiled child."

"Ohhhh!" She did not know what to say.

Ramsey finally realized he was upsetting the young woman. "She is fine, Beth, just not accepting responsibility for her actions. I am giving her time to think things through."

"I feel terrible that she went out to get stuff for me. We just got all excited about changing my hair back to my normal shade, and she went to buy what I needed to do it. It's all my fault she is in trouble. I never should have let her go. I should have done it myself."

"And then you would have been the one in trouble with me," he said firmly. "I gave that order to keep both of you safe." He watched her dark eyes widen at his words. "I am not an ogre, Beth."

"I don't know what that is," she said, chewing on her lower lip.

"An ogre is a cruel, wicked person," he explained, then smiled at her. "I do not issue a rule without a good reason, Beth. My wife is still learning that. She is used to doing as she pleases; there were no consequences when she went against her parents' wishes, no punishments of any kind."

"Couldn't you let her off just this once... since it was mostly my fault she went to the store in the first place?" she asked.

"No, Beth, I cannot. It would give Gwendolyn the impression she could get away with this again the next time she wanted to disobey me."

"I just feel so bad for her," Beth tearfully proclaimed.

"She does not need sympathy, young lady," Ramsey said sternly. "Do you have something to do? Some embroidery or knitting?" he asked, trying to come up with a way to distract her.

“I don’t know how to do nothing like that.”

“Very well.” He went to the desk in the corner of the room, opened a drawer and took out paper, a pen and a bottle of ink. “You come right over here, Miss, and sit down.” Beth looked at him suspiciously, but she walked across the room and stopped, just short of the desk. “Sit down, Beth,” he ordered firmly. “What are you gonna do?” she asked, her dark eyes full of trepidation.

“I am going to do nothing. You, however, are going to sit down right here and make a list of the things you would like to learn to do. I also want you to list the things you can do, and a list of the things you wish you could do. Take your time and think carefully before you add something to the list. We will all of us sit down together this evening after dinner and go over your lists with you and we shall see about helping you realize these things and making your wish list come true.”

“I don’t spell real good,” she whispered.

Ramsey took the pen and dipped it in the bottle of ink, then wrote, “Things I wish to do:” Underneath he wrote: “Learn to spell.” He looked at Beth, “It is as simple as that, Beth. I promise we will not criticize your spelling. Take your time, and open your mind to all the possibilities.”

“Some things cost a lot of money,” she said.

“Money is not a problem; Gwendolyn and I wish to help you get a new start in life. After what we shared today, we are all bound together as a family. You will be like a sister to us both.”

“You are very kind,” Beth tearfully proclaimed, and then asked, “You do know what I did for a living...? I sold myself,” she explained, lest he had any false ideas.

“You had no choice, Beth. You did the only thing you could do in order to eat and survive. Now you have choices and that part of your life is over. I believe that God put you in that stagecoach with Gwendolyn and I for a reason. I am not one to question God’s will.” He smiled. “Make your lists, Bethie.” He gave her shoulder a brotherly pat and then headed for the bedroom and his feisty wife.

He tried to open the door as quietly as possible, wanting to look at Gwendolyn without her being aware of his presence. She’d been in the corner for over an hour now, and it was the longest he’d managed to keep her there. He could immediately see that her anger was gone. She was not standing stiffly, but was slumped and defeated. He prayed she was ready to apologize now and accept responsibility for her actions.

“Well, Gwendolyn? What have you to say for yourself?” he asked quietly.

“I am very sorry I disobeyed you, Ramsey. And, I am really sorry I got so angry with you for insisting I think about things. My attitude was terrible,” she said, and then asked, “May I please straighten my back now? I truly hurt.”

“Yes, you may leave the corner. I shall give you five minutes to ease your back, and then you will accept the spanking you earned. There will also be extras for arguing over the fact you would be punished. You turned a very simple spanking into a firm punishment, Gwendolyn.”

“I am sorry, Ramsey. I do not know why I get so angry with you and fight with you.”

“Because the idea of punishment is still new and foreign to you. Your parents did you no favor by indulging you. Now the lessons you learn are more serious because you are an adult and you should know better.”

“I will try harder, Ramsey. I do not enjoy upsetting you.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. I do not enjoy seeing you cry from the pain of a spanking, either, but it is a duty that I must perform when necessary. Let us get this over so that we can enjoy dinner and our evening. Come and lie over the bed.” This time Gwendolyn did not argue. She walked over to the bed, but lying over it was impossible. She was too short to do so.

Ramsey saw her predicament and solved the problem by picking her up and laying her face down over the edge of the bed. “Keep your hands out of the way, Gwendolyn. This spanking will not be easy for you to accept, but I expect you to do so.” He brought his palm down on her flesh and felt her jump in response. An imprint of his hand appeared on her left cheek. He continued to spank her, alternating cheeks until her bottom was a deep dark red and she was crying and pleading with him to stop. His hand moved lower and her sit spots and upper thighs were spanked until they matched her cheeks. Only then did he pause. “That spanking was for disobeying me, and for not accepting the punishment without all the sass. This next part will be for your attitude. When you are sent to the corner, you need to immediately do as you are told and use the time to search your mind and think about why you are going to get a spanking. I do not expect to have to justify myself when you do something you are not supposed to do. I do not expect you to get angry with me because you earned a punishment.”

“I am so sorry, Ramsey. Please do not spank me any more... I am already in so much pain!”

“You earned extra, Gwendolyn. I am hoping this will discourage you the next time you earn a spanking. Today’s punishment would have been a little spanking and the burn would have been gone by morning with nothing but the memory to take with you. You made that spanking much worse, and now you know that you will be sore tomorrow. This part of your punishment will stay with you for several days each time you sit down.” He picked up her hair brush and then said, “You will receive fifty with your hairbrush,

Gwendolyn. I am sure that will discourage you the next time you wish to argue with me over a punishment.”

Gwendolyn wanted to die when the back of her brush landed on her left cheek. It hurt even more than she thought it would! “Please stop, Ramsey! It hurts too much!” she pleaded with him, but he ignored her and continued to spank flesh that was already burning and sore. By the time he was satisfied that she’d suffered enough, Gwendolyn was sobbing and unable to speak. She was afraid to move for fear it would increase the pain she was experiencing.

Ramsey lifted her and carried her over to a chair by the dresser. He sat and then cradled her on his lap, offering comfort while she cried. “It is over now, sweetheart. I am sure you will try not to argue and get angry with me over a punishment from now on.”

“I will try,” she said, sniffing. “I hurt so much! Could I please use some of your ointment, Ramsey? Please? I cannot bear this!”

“I am sorry, my dear. You will have to endure this spanking as given. You have unleashed your temper on me several times now when you are to get a spanking, and it is time I show you it is not acceptable. I wish to put this matter to rest now. You know my feelings on the subject, and you are aware of my expectations regarding your behavior from now on. Let’s talk of other things now. The spanking will go away in time.”

“I need to get off of your lap, Ramsey. It is too painful to sit here.” She squirmed until he helped her stand. She quickly tugged up her drawers, tying the ribbon. “I would like to lie down for a while.”

Ramsey nodded. He got to his feet and left the room, aware that Gwendolyn needed some time alone to think about what happened. It was the worst spanking he’d given her since the time he used a riding crop and bruised her. He’d promised himself he would never do that again, but he was sure she would be bruised from the hairbrush even though he’d spanked her hard before taking up the brush. Gwendolyn would not be sitting any time soon.

Gwendolyn was relieved when Ramsey left her alone. She quickly untied her drawers and lowered them to examine her backside in the full length mirror on the other side of the room. Her bottom cheeks were a dark deep red and she could already see that she was bruising from the hairbrush. She was going to be sore for days, and sitting would be impossible. There was no way she would be able to sit on the seat of a buggy for the ride out to the ranch. They would simply have to stay in town for a few days.

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Gwendolyn gave her husband a poke with her elbow when the hired hand hit yet another hole on the road to the ranch. Her bottom was excruciatingly sore and all the bouncing around was not helping one little bit. If only Ramsey would have been reasonable, she

would be fairly comfortable in the hotel suite in town, but Ramsey not only insisted she come to the table to eat dinner last evening, he told her in no uncertain terms she was going to sit on the wagon seat and make the trip to the ranch the next morning. She tried telling him she was much too sore, but he simply nodded and asked her whose fault it was that she was so sore. Gwendolyn was miserable and she was not the least bit shy about making her discomfort known.

Ramsey had had enough of his wife's pokes, sighs, and dirty looks. If not for the fact the cowboy from the ranch was driving them, Ramsey would have stopped and treated his wife to another spanking, no matter she was already sore. Her childish behavior was irritating, and he would address the matter as soon as possible, and not to her liking.

They hit yet another bump and Gwendolyn felt tears sting her eyes. She was hurting and Ramsey did not care. She was thankful that Beth elected to sit up front with the driver so that she could not see Gwendolyn in so much pain. Bethie was all sympathy last evening, and when it was obvious that Ramsey was going to make her sit at the table to eat, Bethie tried to sneak a pillow on her seat. Ramsey discovered it when he pulled out the chair for her, and just that quick he removed the pillow and gave Bethie a silent warning with his dark eyes that she was not to do that again. Gwendolyn claimed she was not hungry, but Ramsey said she would sit with them while they ate and keep them company. It was a miserable hour, but it paled in comparison to the long trip to the ranch. Gwendolyn feared they would never get there, and by the time they did she would be sobbing her heart out from all the bouncing.

Suddenly, a shot rang out and bounced off of rock close by. The driver stopped moving and picked up a gun and returned fire while Ramsey jumped down and pulled both women down and put them under the wagon. "Stay put," he ordered, trying to see who had fired at them.

"I reckon he's done run by now, Mr. Cline. That Rudy Phillips is a sneaky one."

"Who is he and why would he be shooting at us?" Ramsey asked curiously.

"He's your neighbor to the north, and he was shooting at you. It's a good thing he never could hit anything even if he tried all day. Rudy is as bad a shot as you'll ever meet.

"Why would he want to take a shot at me?"

## Chapter Five

“Because he wants to control the water rights to his land, and he don’t. If you was to deny him water, his ranch wouldn’t be worth nothin’. He keeps sayin’ that the boss promised to sell him that land, but he don’t have nothin’ in writin’ and no one hereabouts ever heard the boss say so. We figure ole Rudy is lyin’. He’s famous for that,” Eddie said.

“Let’s get out of here,” Ramsey said, disgusted.

“We got another hour, but it’s all your land we’re on now. Rudy won’t dare come any closer; he knows what would happen to him if he did.”

“What is that?” Ramsey asked curiously.

“He’d get himself shot dead.”

Ramsey was shocked and by the look on Gwendolyn’s face, she was, too. “Come on, Gwendolyn. The sooner we get going, the sooner we shall reach the ranch house.”

“I do not feel like sitting,” she whispered for his ears along. “He hits every bump in the road!”

“He was nice enough to come into town to haul us to the ranch. We will be gracious,” he said quietly.

“I simply hurt too much to sit on that wooden seat another moment, Ramsey!” she protested. “If it is only an hour, I will walk. Ramsey...!” she cried out when he swept her off her feet and plopped her on the hard wagon seat. “Oww!” she yelped in pain.

He merely pointed at her and said, “Sit still, young lady.”

Gwendolyn could not stop herself from crying and she only hoped the driver and Bethie did not notice her misery. Ramsey helped Beth to take a seat and then he joined Gwendolyn on the seat. The hired hand slapped the reins on the horses’ rumps and took off at a pretty good clip. He seemed unaware of Gwendolyn’s problem as he hurried the horses along.

“What else can you tell me about Rudy Phillips?” he asked the driver.

“He’s a mean one. I wouldn’t be lettin’ these ladies go out ridin’ alone or anything like that. He could hurt ‘em to get to you.”

“Had my Uncle refused him water at one time?”

“Heck no. The boss wouldn’ta done that. Ole Rudy is just lookin’ for trouble. He figures with you bein’ from the city you’ll have all sorts of funny ideas about ranchin’.”

“So he decides to shoot me before finding out what I am like?” Ramsey was furious and determined to deal with the man, if he was indeed the one who shot at him. He was also going to take his sniffling wife over his knee the moment they were alone. She was acting like a spoiled brat, and he would not have it.

Gwendolyn did her best to remain silent for the rest of the drive, but as soon as the wagon stopped in front of the ranch house she did not wait for Ramsey to assist her. She jumped off the wagon on the opposite side and hurried toward the house without saying a word of thanks to the driver. Once she was inside, she did not stop to greet the housekeeper, but ran as fast as she could to the open staircase and hurried up the steps to the room she assumed was the master. If it was not the master, she did not care. She needed to be alone. She threw herself down on the bed and cried as if her heart was breaking. She was in so much pain and she could not believe that Ramsey would be so cruel to her. It was terrible that he spanked her so hard that she was bruised, but then to make her sit on a wooden wagon seat without a pillow was cruel. She might love him, but she did not wish to be married to him. She was going to write to her father and beg him to let her come home. She would not live with a cruel man.

Ramsey could not believe his wife’s lack of manners. He tried to hide his displeasure with her as he helped Beth from the wagon. He thanked the driver for making a trip into town to bring them to the ranch, and he told the man that he would get their bags himself. The man nodded and took off, thinking that the new boss’ wife would never last out here.

Beth walked into the house with Ramsey although she felt like smacking him. She remained silent as he greeted the elderly woman who kept house for his Uncle. “It’s good to see you again, Ruth.”

“You’ve grown into a fine man, Ramsey. Welcome home.”

“Thank you. Do you know where my wife ran off to?” he asked quietly.

“She didn’t even see me she was in such a hurry to get upstairs. I reckon she’s in the master bedroom. I freshened it up and made it as nice as I could.”

“I think she was feeling unwell, Ruth. I will introduce you to her when she is feeling more herself.”

“The poor thing. Maybe I can fix her some tea...?” Ruth was anxious to help.

“Tea won’t help her, ma’am. She was too sore to sit on that wooden wagon seat and Ramsey made her do it anyway,” Beth tattled on the man, and then said, “I’m Beth Abbott.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Beth.”

“Do you have a room ready for Beth, Ruth?” Ramsey asked. “I am sure she would like to freshen up after the long ride.”

“Yes, I keep the rooms ready at all times,” Ruth said with pride. “Come along, Beth. I’ll show you to a very pretty room.” If Ruth wondered at Beth’s relationship to the Cline’s, she did not let on. She knew when to mind her own business.

Ramsey followed them upstairs and went directly to the master bedroom. He found Gwendolyn inside, lying on the bed, and crying her eyes out. “Young lady, I have had it with the tears. You have managed to earn yourself another spanking,” he said, crossing the room and reaching for her. The minute he touched her she turned into a spitting mad wildcat, kicking and trying to scratch him. “Settle down!” he ordered.

“You are not going to spank me again! I am too sore for words, Ramsey Cline. I am going to write to my father and ask him to let me come home. I might love you, but I will not live with a man who has no regard for my physical wellbeing.”

“I have regard for your wellbeing, wife. What I will not tolerate is your whining after a simple spanking. It is supposed to be uncomfortable, but you cried and carried on as if it was killing you to sit there.”

“I was in terrible pain. You did not care, either!” she accused.

“Enough of this, Gwendolyn. You are acting like a spoiled child and I know just the remedy for that.” This time he acted quickly and turned her over his knee. He pushed up her dress and petticoats, and then he tugged her drawers down to expose her backside. To his shock Gwendolyn’s bottom was bruised and looked impossibly sore. “Why did you not tell me how bruised you are?” he asked, stricken. Once again he was too hard on her. “Telling me you are sore is not the same as telling me you are severely bruised. I would never have made the trip out here today if I had known how badly bruised you are.”

“You know I bruise easily,” she accused.

“You bruise too easily,” he complained as he stood with her in his arms and then deposited her face down on the bed. “Lie still and I will get something to relieve your pain. I expected you to be sore, but not so bruised that you would suffer so much.” He found the tin of ointment in his bag and Gwendolyn cried hard as he massaged it carefully onto her bottom and sit spots and upper thighs.

Gwendolyn was finally able to stop carrying on when the salve started working, easing her pain considerably. “Thank you, Ramsey,” she said gratefully. “I wish I was not such a baby.”

“Stop that,” he gently scolded. “You had every right to cry; you were beyond miserable. I am so sorry, sweetheart. I think that from now on my hand is all you will receive, no matter how serious the offense. Or, I will have to add other punishments that you will not like.”

“I do not like it when you put me in the corner, Ramsey. It makes me feel small.”

“It is meant to make you think and consider your actions.” He helped her adjust her drawers and then pulled her to her feet. “We have done enough talking for now. If you feel up to it I would like to introduce you to Ruth, the housekeeper, and then show you the house.”

“I would like that, Ramsey,” she said, surprising him by putting her arms around him and giving him a hug. “When I feel mistreated I say all sorts of awful things I do not mean. I love you too much to ever leave you, husband. Please forgive my tongue.”

“There is nothing to forgive, sweetheart.” He leaned down to kiss her, and then said, “Wash your face, Gwendolyn, and we’ll go meet Ruth.”

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The next couple of weeks were spent getting settled in and learning how the ranch was run. Ramsey went over the books and found the ranch was in good shape financially. Once he changed into clothes more appropriate for ranch living he found he was accepted by the men, once they tested him, of course. When they realized that he was more than capable of handling them, they took orders well. Gwendolyn got along well with Ruth, and Beth seemed happy to be with them. They’d taken the time to go over Beth’s lists, and Gwendolyn was spending time each day reading and spelling with Beth, and teaching her to knit. Gwendolyn was also working with Beth on her grammar.

There was another attempt on Ramsey’s life, but this time the Rudy Phillips was careless and one of Ramsey’s hired hands shot and wounded him. When Rudy regained consciousness he was behind bars. Ramsey made a point of speaking to Rudy, but after a few minutes it was obvious the man was lost in his own little world and nothing he said made a difference. Rudy was imagining all sorts of things and could not tell reality from the fantasies he created in his head. Ramsey told the Judge he did not wish to press charges in favor of seeing Rudy hospitalized and offered help. The Judge agreed to the request, and thanked Ramsey for showing compassion.

Gwendolyn did her best to stay out of trouble, but with her husband so busy with ranch matters, it was rare that he had time to take her into town. She asked several times, and finally got tired of asking. She had one of the hands saddle the mare she’d taken to riding, and decided that she was going to ride into town by herself. Ramsey could not very well expect her to remain cooped up forever until he had time to do something she wanted to do. With Beth confined to bed with a head cold it was the perfect time for her to go and do her shopping.

The trip to town was accomplished in much less time than it took in the buggy, and Gwendolyn enjoyed shopping for the yard goods she wanted. The kitchen was in desperate need of new curtains, and she also needed some cotton flannel, too, she decided with a big smile.

“Who might you be, Miss?” her shopping was interrupted by a tall, handsome man, who was grinning ear to ear as he looked her over head to toe. “I can’t believe we haven’t met before.”

“That there is Mrs. Cline,” the store owner spoke up.

“Mrs. Cline...? I suppose it is too much to hope that you are a widow?” he said teasingly, but Gwendolyn was not amused.

“I hope to God that I never become a widow,” she said, her tone frosty.

“My apologies, ma’am. My sense of humor leaves something to be desired, I’m afraid. I am Charles Greene, Cline’s one and only attorney. I’ve been out of town and just returned. I look forward to meeting your husband.”

“I am Ramsey Cline,” Ramsey spoke from the doorway, drawing their attention. He watched as Gwendolyn’s pretty green eyes filled with happiness to see him and while he was more than a little upset with her for daring to ride into town alone, he was thankful she was safe. He also felt guilty that he had not taken the time to bring her when she asked... more than a couple of times. He had no one to blame but himself for her decision to take off on her own, even though he was going to spank her little bottom as soon as he got her home.

“Mr. Cline, it is good to meet you,” Charles said as he stepped forward to offer his hand. “I am afraid I made a terrible first impression on your wife,” he admitted as Ramsey shook hands. “I thought my eyes were deceiving me when I came in for some tobacco and found such a lovely young woman looking at the yard goods. I was disappointed to learn she is married.”

“Very happily married,” Gwendolyn neatly inserted, slipping her arm through her husband’s.

“You don’t need to hit me over the head with a two by four, Mrs. Cline,” he stated in amusement. “I think your husband a very lucky man.”

“I am,” Ramsey agreed. “Gwendolyn, are you finished with your shopping?” he asked patiently.

“No, I am not. I just arrived, Ramsey. I had another errand to attend to before I came here,” she said with a smile, her green eyes reflecting her happiness. “If you will treat me to lunch, I will share my secret with you,” she offered.

Ramsey found he could not deny her. “I would enjoy the pleasure of your company at lunch today.”

“Wonderful,” Gwendolyn said. “First, I want to get some colorful cotton to make new kitchen curtains. I am thinking this one... or this one; which one do you like?”

Ramsey looked at them both and could not see much difference. “They are both nice,” he finally said. She giggled and put one of them down.

“This one will do nicely.” Gwendolyn bought several more pieces and purchased some buttons and thread. Finally, she was finished and said, “I am ready for lunch now, husband.”

They left their horses tied in front of the general store and walked to the hotel, and were quickly seated at a table in the dining room. Once their order was placed Ramsey looked at Gwendolyn and asked, “Now, what is this secret that has you so happy?”

Gwendolyn reached across the table and took his hand in hers. “We are going to be parents, Ramsey!”

“You are with child?” he whispered.

“Yes. I saw the Doctor this morning, and he confirmed what I suspected. Are you excited?”

“Yes. Very excited. When is this to happen?”

“In six months time. Now you will not have to worry about losing the ranch.”

“Hang the ranch, Gwendolyn. You are the only thing that matters to me. You should never have ridden all the way into town on horseback... and by yourself! You need a good spanking, young lady!”

“That would be a terrible thing to do, Ramsey Cline!” Gwendolyn was indignant at the very idea.

“I cannot believe you rode all the way into town when you suspected you might be carrying our child! Surely that is not safe?”

“Doc said it was fine until I am in my sixth month. He does not believe in coddling expectant mothers. He says that going about my regular routine is just fine as long as I am not having any problems.”

“Well, I do not want you riding all the way in here by yourself; is that understood?” he blustered.

“Yes, Ramsey,” Gwendolyn answered, but rolled her eyes dramatically. For a moment she thought that Ramsey was going to lose his temper with her, but he swallowed his anger and was his charming self during their meal. They rode home afterwards, and any thoughts he had of spanking her were put on hold. A spanking was hardly the way to celebrate their good news.

A few days later Ramsey found his wife crying. “What is wrong?” he asked.

“I am getting fat and you will not wish anything to do with me!” she tearfully proclaimed.

“That is not true,” he argued. “You are beautiful.” Ramsey quickly learned that all of his reassurances were falling on deaf ears. He finally decided that more drastic measures were called for and he gently pulled her down over his knee.

“What are you doing?” Gwendolyn protested.

“Putting an end to this nonsense,” Ramsey told her. “If I did not love you I would not take the time to spank you.” He pushed up her skirts and then lowered her drawers to bare her pretty bottom.

“Do not dare spank me, Ramsey Cline! I am with child!”

“And you are feeling sorry for yourself, pretty lady. This will get your attention, I am sure.” Ramsey gave her bottom a spank and then another. They were far from hard since she had done nothing wrong, but his sweet wife started crying. “Why are you crying?” he asked. “I have barely started.” He gave her a few more spanks and saw her skin turn a bright pink.

“I am sorry!” she wailed.

“Are you now?” He gave her a few more firm swats. “Why are you sorry?”

“I am so moody right now.”

“Yes, you are. It is the baby causing this.” He spanked again, a bit firmer. “This is normal, but what I will not have, young lady, is you doubting my love.” Another firm spank. “I love you and I find you beautiful. You will be beautiful with our child, and I will still want you just as much as I do now. Is that clear, Gwendolyn?” he asked firmly, giving her bottom one final spank.

“Yes!” Gwendolyn gasped.

Ramsey gently laid her back on their bed and made sweet love to her then, and no matter her mood, she never again accused him of not loving her.

The next six months passed slowly, according to Gwendolyn, who was anxious to hold her new baby in her arms. Her parents traveled all the way from St. Louis to be with them when their first grandchild was born and Gwendolyn was amazed at how well Bethie got along with her mother and father.

The day finally arrived when Gwendolyn knew she was going to have her baby. Ramsey sent one of the hands to get the doctor, but by the time the hired hand tracked Doc down, Ramsey had delivered his own son. Her Mother nearly passed out from the shock of not having a doctor in attendance, and Bethie did everything she could to assist Ramsey.

"I am very proud of you, sweetheart," Ramsey told his wife once she was cleaned up and the bed remade and their son bathed and swaddled. "You were so brave."

"I am so thankful you were here with me, Ramsey. It seemed so right." She looked at the baby again. "He is so beautiful."

"Yes, he is," Ramsey agreed. "Thank you, Gwendolyn."

"What shall we name him?"

"Do you have a preference?" he wanted to know.

"I like the name Ramsey Michael Cline, for his father and his great-great-uncle."

"We will call him Michael," Ramsey agreed, and then he kissed her. "I love you, Gwendolyn, more than you could possibly know."

"I love you, too, Ramsey, and I am the happiest woman in the world."

The End