

# **Brocton Chronicles**

**Book III**

**By  
Brandy Golden**



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Brandy Golden**

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## Trouble for Two

### Chapter One

"Come on, Chrissie, I dare you," challenged Maddie. "Able will never know, and even if he did, what's he going to do about it?" Maddie squelched the thought that she knew what Heath would do about her wearing pants, but she was feeling particularly defiant this morning. Besides, she was still aggravated that her parents had told Chrissie and Able about Heath spanking her the day she had run away. Chrissie had been dying to tease Maddie about it for weeks; the basic reason she was feeling so defiant!

"Well, he won't spank me, anyway," gibed Chrissie again, a smirk on her pretty face. Then she felt bad when Maddie's beautiful face flushed with embarrassment. "Oh, I'm sorry, Maddie, I just can't help but tease you. It's so...so...barbaric, it's almost fascinating."

"Heath is not barbaric," declared Maddie, although privately she thought it was too. Chrissie had unerringly used the very words Maddie had spouted to Heath.

"Of course not," Chrissie conceded soothingly. "I didn't mean Heath is barbaric, it's this backwoods country you live in, Maddie. Down in Louisville, the women aren't in this position. They don't have to put up with such indignities."

Or, if they did, she didn't know anything about it, Chrissie reflected. No one talked about things like that. Poor Maddie lived in the hill country, and everyone was fifty years behind in progress it seemed!

Also, Chrissie was an obedient wife, and she didn't like to cause Able displeasure. She had been taught to be pleasing and cultured and to care for her husband and her family.

Being of a mild temperament, Chrissie had never given Able any cause to be unhappy with her. They had been married for five years, and she had only received a few scoldings, the like of which had brought tears to her gentle eyes. Outright defiance was not a part of her nature.

Maddie, on the other hand, was totally different and sometimes Chrissie found herself wishing she were more fiery and temperamental. She found the idea of Heath spanking Maddie oddly disturbing. Her curiosity was peaked. It both repelled and attracted her for some reason. She had tried to put her feelings down to sheer horror at the thought, but found herself wandering back to it now and then, feeling goose bumps run down her arms when she did.

Maddie stared at her lovely sister-in-law, chewing on her bottom lip as she did so. It just didn't seem fair! Chrissie was so perfect! She eyed the wonderful black curls that Chrissie had drawn up into a neat chignon. Some of the restless links had slipped out and hung around her slender neck. Her eyes were the color of a robin's egg, that beautiful light blue and adorned with small golden specks. Her rosebud lips were set off to perfection by her porcelain skin, so smooth and pale, with a blush of the rose itself on her high cheekbones. Chrissie was taller than Maddie by three inches, and her five foot, eight inch height gave her a willowy appearance. Maddie knew that Able had been in love with this banker's daughter from the time she had been sixteen years old and had married her at eighteen.

"Then what do you have to worry about?" scoffed Maddie, pushing the denim pants towards her. "I'm the one that will have to worry if Heath catches me."

Chrissie eyed Maddie speculatively, unable to stop herself from asking. "Do you really think Heath

would spank you, Maddie? Just for wearing pants?" Her tongue rolled over the work spank, and she felt a quiver in her stomach. She was so glad Able didn't do that!

Able was a gentle giant, and he adored her. He could be very firm, though, especially with the children. Five-year-old Luke was a handful, and Chrissie was hard put to discourage him from naughtiness sometimes. He usually settled right down for Able, although he had never laid a hand on him.

"It's against the law for women to wear pants, so you figure it out, Chrissie." Maddie's blue eyes raked her sister in law scornfully.

"I really don't know Heath that well. He has always seemed so gentle and soft-spoken, its hard for me to imagine him...er.... spanking you." There it was again, that frisson of something that stabbed her in the tummy when she spoke that word. What was it, for heavens sake?

"Well, he is...except when he is worried about me. But he is a big stickler for not breaking rules, neither God's, nor man's." Maddie scowled in frustration.

For an instant, a daring thought crossed Chrissie's mind, and she shocked herself by taking the pants Maddie held out. Just as quickly, she pushed the errant thought back down and handed the pants back. Wearing the pants just to see if Able would try to spank her was an evil thing to do! She didn't want to be spanked---what a horrible idea to cross her mind!

"I...I don't want to upset Able. Heath is right; we need to obey the laws. You better return those pants, Maddie."

Maddie grinned wickedly. "What's the matter, Chrissie? Are you afraid Able will start spanking you if you disobey him?" She was unprepared for the sudden blush that lit Chrissie's refined features.

"Of...of course not," she snapped indignantly. "Besides, he wouldn't do it, anyway, he never has."

Maddie pushed the pants back towards Chrissie. "So what are you scared of then...do it!"

"No, Maddie, I won't." Chrissie pushed the pants back again.

"Chicken," taunted Maddie as she threw the offending pants back on the bed. She slipped her skirt off and reached down to unbutton her ankle boots. The light of childish battle was in her eyes as she watched Chrissie staring at her.

"What are you doing, Maddie?"

"I'm going to wear these pants and go for a ride on Eggs. After all, the men took the children with them to town and won't be back for hours. This is the chance I've been waiting for---to try them out."

"No, Maddie, you can't," squeaked Chrissie in alarm. "Heath will find out!"

"Are you going to tattle?" Maddie taunted sharply. Why did she suddenly feel like she was twelve years old again and arguing with Able over whether or not their Mother would find out Maddie took her shoes off to cross the swollen creek. She shrugged the thought away. She was going to wear these pants!

"Tattling is for children." Chrissie drew herself up to her full height and looked down her nose at Maddie.

"I didn't think so. Come on, Chrissie," wheedled Maddie. "What's the harm? No one is going to find out."

Finally, caving in under Maddie's verbal assault, Chrissie grabbed the pants off the bed and began to remove her skirt. Her stomach flipped in excitement as she drew the pants on and up over her rounded hips. "Oh, they are kind of tight in the seat and big in the waist," she commented, surprised.

"That's because they are men's pants," Maddie replied, tucking her shirtwaist into the pants. She



wrinkled her small nose. "They don't make women's pants, of course."

The girl's quickly slid their ankle boots back on and buttoned up the sides of them, then let the pant legs fall back down. At last, they stood in front of Maddie's mirrored dresser and surveyed themselves.

Maddie twirled around in delight, falling in love with the denim pants immediately. They fit her slender hips perfectly, drawing snug across her backside and lovingly molding her heart shaped cheeks. "I love them!"

"I don't know," replied Chrissie doubtfully, looking at her backside. "They sure show everything, Maddie, unlike our dresses and skirts. I can see why they don't want us to wear them." She smoothed the waistband against her tiny waist. "I think I need a belt or something, these are so loose in the waist."

At the mention of a belt, Maddie cringed, thinking of Heath's broad leather belt. "We'll just have to get a piece of rope and tie them," she replied. For a moment, she played with the idea of backing out of this, and then decided against it. She lifted her chin defiantly and stared at herself in the mirror, her hands running down the sides of the rough material. Heath would never know...because she wasn't going to tell him!

---

With Luke and little Beth ensconced safely behind them in the wagon, Heath and Able sat talking on the buckboard seat as they headed towards town. Able glanced sideways at Heath. "So how are you and Maddie doing? I haven't seen you in several weeks. How is married life treating you?" He grinned knowingly at Heath.

Heath was always amazed at the size of Able every time he saw him again. Heath was no shrimp,

but Maddie's brother was a good bit bigger, his broad chest muscled and hard. Able raised quarter horses, and he and Chrissie had a large ranch outside of Louisville. His shock of unruly blonde hair seemed to stand straight up; thick and heavy until he smoothed it back with hair cream.

His face was always in good humor, the bushy eyebrows often wagging to amuse the children. Like Maddie, he had the same baby blue eye color, but where Maddie's face was oval and smooth, Able's face was square jawed. It invariable looked like he had a shadow along his chin. His even white teeth gleamed in his weather-tanned face, and he was an easygoing character, always with a ready smile.

Heath chuckled wryly at the teasing glint in Able's eyes. "Life is good Able. Going very well. The ministry is in no major crisis at the moment. Maddie is doing well, and we are both healthy, so I can't complain. The good Lord is watching out for us."

"Do you mind if I ask you something personal?"

"No, go ahead. What's on your mind?" Heath flipped the reins to keep the horses moving smoothly when they began to slow down.

"Father told us about you and Maddie...I have to say, Heath...I'm surprised at you. I didn't think you had it in you." He sounded approving, and Heath glanced at him curiously.

"Just because I'm a minister---it doesn't make me a wimp you know," he finally drawled, amused at Able's good-natured grin.

"No...no, I know it don't," assured Able. "But sometimes, being churchified takes the starch out of man, if you know what I mean."

Heath wondered what Able would say if he knew he had learned to box when he was a young man and was quite adept at defending himself. Of course, being twenty-four didn't make him an old man yet, he reflected, but those years of learning to

box had been put behind him when he had decided to go into the ministry.

Chuckling, Heath shook his head at Able's bald statement. "You know as well as I do, that Maddie can be headstrong and willful. It was bound to happen sooner or later. The thought had already crossed my mind a time or two, I just didn't take it seriously until this last summer."

"Boy, do I ever!" Able declared fervently. "I love my sister, but I'm darn sure glad that Chrissie is sweet and biddable. I don't think she has ever defied me in our five years of marriage."

"And if she did?" Heath asked curiously, glancing sideways again at his brother in law.

"I'm not sure," confessed Able. "I know Father sure wailed the tar out of me a couple of times, but I'm not sure I could paddle Chrissie." He looked at Heath earnestly. "I do admire you, I'm just not sure if I could or not. Chrissie has never pushed me that far."

Heath nodded in understanding. "No, it's not easy to do. And, it's not something I enjoy, but I know if I don't keep a firm hand on Maddie, she will run me in circles. We've already been there."

Able clapped him on the shoulder, mutual understanding passing between them. "I hear you, brother, I hear you." He grinned broadly, and then checked behind him to see that the children were snuggled securely under their blankets. The wind was picking up, and the atmosphere around them was changing.

"We better get those supplies and head back as soon as possible," said Heath uneasily, looking at the deadening sky. The air felt heavy, and clouds were moving in. The gray overcast pallor of the heavens was a sure signal that snow was on the way.

Sam looked up as Heath, Able and the children all trooped into the mercantile. He had a stove

going in the back, and he invited the children to warm their hands near it. "It sure looks like it's brewing up some bad weather, Heath," he commented, taking the list from him. "Let me get this filled for you, so you can get back before it hits."

"That would be good, Sam," replied Heath gratefully.

The men continued to chat with Sam as he went about getting the supplies Maddie had written on the list. She had several other small errands and chores for him to attend to, but he thought he might cut some of them short. He didn't want to get caught out in the open with the children if snow was on the way.

---

Maddie and Chrissie were racing along the mountain ridge, their billowing hair having long ago fallen out of the combs that had held it back.

Maddie laughed in delight as Bacon crossed the imaginary finish line at the stream first, and she began to rein him in after he jumped the small creek. She and Chrissie had Bacon and Eggs, while the men had taken Chrissie and Able's matched Bays to town.

"That's not fair," complained Chrissie, but she laughed at the triumphant expression on Maddie's face. "You knew Bacon was faster, because he's Heath's horse, didn't you?"

"Sure," replied Maddie, grinning unrepentantly. She sat astride Bacon's broad back, delighting in the freedom of the pants she wore. Even though she had a riding skirt, she always had to watch it to make sure it didn't hike up and show some leg. These pants were perfect!

"Aren't these pants just great, Chrissie?" she crowed exultantly.

"I have to hand it to you, Maddie, they are wonderful," Chrissie agreed, but she thought uneasily of her easygoing husband. She had never hidden anything from him before.

The girls meandered along, allowing the horses to cool down. The wind had picked up, and Chrissie suddenly noticed the darker clouds moving in. "Don't you think it looks like snow, Maddie?" She shivered and pulled her sheepskin collar up higher around her ears. Her cheeks were getting cold and looked like rosy apples, where the wind had nipped them.

"Yes, it really does," agreed Maddie surveying the sky.

"How long do you suppose we've been gone?"

"I don't know for sure. It's hard to tell. The sun is gone. It's been awhile, though." Maddie was beginning to feel the cold bite through her gloves at the end of her fingers.

"I think maybe we better head back."

"I think you're right," Maddie replied, a twinge of concern in the pit of her stomach. "We don't want the men to get back before we do." She began to urge Bacon forward, trying to hurry him into a canter.

"There's always the possibility of them coming home early, since they have Luke and Beth with them," shouted Chrissie behind her, urging Eggs forward as well.

Maddie hadn't thought of that. "Come on!" she yelled back, spurring Bacon into a gallop once again. "We better hurry!"

The girls began to fly along the woodland path, taking a shortcut along the river. It was well over an hour later when they cantered into the yard, relieved to see that the buckboard was not in its usual place near the barn.

Quickly, they dismounted and took care of Bacon and Eggs, safely ensconcing them in their

stalls and rubbing them down. Leaving the horses with food and water, they hurried to the house to change clothes.

"I feel like I'm five years old," giggled Chrissie as she yanked the pants quickly down her slender thighs and stepped out of them.

"I know what you mean," agree Maddie, trying to hurry too. She grabbed the pants from Chrissie and folded both pairs, then stuffed them into a box underneath her bed.

The girls were just buttoning their shoes when they heard the horses and the buckboard pull into the yard.

"Boy, that was close," breathed Maddie, straightening her hair, her cheeks flushed and her eyes shining with mischief. Taking a deep breath, she calmed herself and tried to exude as much decorum as possible.

Chrissie's fingers were trembling as she finished the last button and straightened herself up. "Do you do this all the time?" she asked nervously, beginning to see why Maddie got herself into so much trouble. "I'm a nervous wreck! I just know Able will be able to see we've been up to something!" She hurriedly picked up Maddie's hairbrush and tried to brush the windblown tangles out of her hair.

Maddie simply twisted hers on top of her head and fastened it with some pins. She didn't have time to brush it before they would be coming into the house.

"You'll be fine," she hissed. "Just act normal!"

"How can I act normal?" Chrissie pinned her long dark curls into place and took a deep breath. "I don't even look normal!"

"Deep breaths," instructed Maddie, breathing in deeply and slowly exhaling. Chrissie followed her example, and after a couple of breathing exercises,

Maddie opened the door, and they entered the kitchen just as the children came in the back door.

Heath and Able followed them in, the cold air bursting in with them. Their arms were filled with sacks of flour, sugar and staples that Maddie had ordered. She was glad she had banked the cook stove before she and Chrissie had left. The kitchen was nice and warm.

"Can we make gingerbread cookies, Aunt Maddie?" Luke asked excitedly. His round boyish face was apple cheeked from the cold.

"Of course, we can," laughed Maddie, ruffling his brown hair. She leaned up to give Heath a kiss.

"Me, me!" came the demand from just beneath her right elbow. She looked down to see little Beth staring up at her, her cupid bow mouth demanding the right to make cookies too.

Maddie laughed again and bent down to take off Beth's hat. "Of course, you can, darling," she said, her eyes twinkling at the youngster. "We'll do it tomorrow morning. We have all day. It's Saturday." She smoothed back the little girl's dark curls, so like her mother's.

"So what have you two been doing all afternoon?" Chrissie laughed nervously at Able's question, and he stared curiously at her.

"Oh, nothing much," replied Maddie. "We went for a ride on Eggs and Bacon." She avoided looking Heath in the eye as she glanced sideways at Chrissie.

"Oh, yes, it was such fun," enthused Chrissie. "Although it started getting cold, so we came back. We got back just before you did."

"So, that explains the redness in your cheeks," teased Heath, pinching Maddie's cheek softly. Maddie tried not to think about the redness of her other cheeks should Heath find out they had ridden in pants. She simply smiled brightly at him and nodded.

The girls bustled around and began to put supplies away; Able and Heath taking the things that belonged in the cellar underground.

The family had all met at Maddie and Able's parents' for Thanksgiving, and then Able and Chrissie had returned with them to stay for a while. Then they would all meet back at the Owens's for an early Christmas before Able took his family back to spend the final holidays with Chrissie's family in Louisville.

It was much later in the evening when a knock sounded on the front door. They were all seated around the family table in the country style kitchen, and Heath got up to answer it. Maddie and Chrissie had put the wild afternoon out of their minds, and it had been forgotten for the time being.

When Maddie heard Heath call her name, she stiffened uneasily at the tone. He sounded...concerned, somewhat stern. Even Able and Chrissie noticed, and Able's eyebrows raised questioningly as all three adults got up to go to the living room.

Standing just inside the living room door, was Elmer Pritchett, their neighbor along the East Ridge. The look on his pinched face was one of righteous indignation. His thinning gray hair was askew on his head where he had taken the heavy cap off inside the warm house, and his dark eyes pinned Maddie and Chrissie in an accusing stare.

"Mr. Pritchett says he has something I need to know, Maddie," said Heath evenly. His eyes spoke volumes. "He says it concerns you."

"W...what might that be, Mr. Pritchett?" Maddie's voice came out in a squeak, and she tried to clear her throat. Her fingers nervously pinched the material on the side of her skirt, but she faced him bravely.

"You know what it is, Mrs. Danvers, and you ought to be ashamed of yourself! You bring shame



to your man and his duty as God's preacher!" He shook his pointy finger at her, and Maddie's heart sank.

Chrissie gasped and turned pale. She shuffled a sideways glance at Able, her eyes sliding back quickly.

Able was surprised at the guilty look on Chrissie's face. He didn't think he had ever seen her look that way in all the time he had been courting her, or married to her! Puzzled, he looked curiously at Mr. Pritchett.

"W...what do you mean, Sir?" Maddie asked haughtily, trying to bluff.

"I mean you, riding hell bent for leather---in a pair of men's britches---that's what I mean!" Mr. Pritchett glared at her, then turned to Chrissie. "And I suppose you was the one that was with her? You ought to be ashamed, both of you," he declared. "Your hair was loose and flying back in the wind, and those men's britches hanging to your legs like a second skin! It ain't right, Preacher! You better do something about this, or your wife is going to make you the laughin' stock of Brocton County!"

With that, he jammed his heavy black, fur lined cap back on his head, his ears sticking out below the edges and turned to let himself out. When the door slammed shut, a pin dropping would have made more noise in the room than anything else!

Maddie stared at Heath, her eyes huge in her pale face, waiting for him to say something.

Able gaped at Chrissie, unable to believe his ears. His wife? His prim and proper society wife---in men's britches---with her hair loose? He was at a loss for words as he took in the guilty expression written all over her beautiful face.

Heath didn't trust himself to speak at that moment. He could see from the defiant, yet scared look on Maddie's face, that Elmer had spoken the truth. Finally, when no one said anything, he

cleared his throat and pointed to the bedroom door. "Go---to our room, Maddie."

"That goes for you too, Chrissie," ordered Able quietly, following Heath's lead and pointing towards the other bedroom.

The girls looked at each other, fear shining in Chrissie's bright eyes. She was close to tears because she knew Able was disappointed in her. How could she have let Maddie talk her into doing something so shameful? Her head drooped on her slender neck as she turned wordlessly to do her husbands bidding.

Maddie's anguished gaze went from Chrissie to Able. "I...it was my fault, Able. Please don't be angry with Chrissie, I talked her into it. If I hadn't called her chicken, she wouldn't have done it."

Heath's eye's narrowed angrily. Maddie had actually goaded Chrissie into this escapade?

Able looked sternly at Maddie, his square jaw set. "Chrissie didn't have to allow you to influence her, Maddie. Frankly, I'm disappointed in both of you. My wife and my sister...both old enough to know better." He shook his great blonde head resignedly.

The men were silent as their wives turned and went into their respective bedrooms. The sound of childish laughter from the kitchen echoed through the small home, and Heath was reminded that little ears were in attendance.

"Where does Maddie come up with this stuff?" Able growled in exasperation.

"In this case, I'm sure she got it from the fair this summer," Heath replied, seating himself on the divan. "There was a young lady that did tricks on the backs of horses for the entertainment, and I'm sure Maddie got it from her. She was wearing pants for practices, and for the show."

"I see," replied Able thoughtfully, taking a chair across from him. Leaning forward, he asked, "Well,

what now?" He glanced at the doors the girls had disappeared behind and back at Heath.

Heath stared at his brother in law; his eyes frank. "In a few moments...I'm going to take Maddie out to the barn and spank her where the children won't hear anything. You will have to do as you see fit concerning Chrissie."

## Trouble for Two

### Chapter Two

Able nodded. "You know, there has been some talk about this down in Louisville, the women have been complaining it seems. Many seem to feel it's an outdated law that they can't wear pants, and they want more rights. But Chrissie has never expressed any desire to wear the wretched things." He rubbed his chin, pondering what he should do. He was still getting over the shock of his wife actually joining his sister in this foolishness. If Heath were going to spank Maddie, though, was it fair not to spank Chrissie?

"Be that as it may, it doesn't excuse Maddie's flagrant disregard for the law. And her decision to hide it from me."

"You don't think she would have admitted it?"

Heath shook his head, one dark curl swaying on the left of his forehead. "No, I'm quite sure she wouldn't...at least not right away."

"Little hellion," muttered Able.

"I don't know that I'd go that far," said Heath defensively. "Maddie can be very sweet and loving, as you know, she is just willful and often doesn't think ahead to consequences. She will also be spanked for dragging Chrissie into her scheme."

"Hey, she's my sister, remember?" Able studied Heath, amused at his championing of Maddie. "I know full well what she's like. If Father had laid into her backside a few more times, like he did me, maybe she wouldn't be so stubborn."

He flashed a knowing grin at his brother in law. "As for Chrissie, she didn't have to go along. No one forced her at gunpoint. However, I'm not sure I'll spank her. After all, this is the first time she has ever done anything like this. I'll probably just give her a good talking too."

"That's your choice," acknowledged Heath, standing up. "I might as well get this out of the way, Maddie will only fret about it, the longer I leave it."

"Maybe that would be good for her," chuckled Able.

"Not if I want to get any sleep tonight," admitted Heath dryly.

---

Maddie paced the floor inside her bedroom, pausing now and then to lay her ear on the door. She could hear the rumble of the men's voice, but couldn't make out what they were saying.

Her feelings were chaotic. She felt guilty about deceiving Heath, but she also fretted at the stupid law that said she couldn't wear the pants. It just wasn't fair! She really felt bad about getting Chrissie in trouble.

She paused to stare out the window at the swirling flakes of snow. It was beginning to come down in soft wet plops, clinging to the windowpane, then sliding down in melting rivulets against the warmth inside.

She wondered if Able would spank Chrissie? She shivered, feeling sorry for her sister in law...especially if this turned out to be an initiation into husbandly discipline. She started when she heard the door open. Turning, she faced her husband, her blue eyes huge in her pale face, her throat painfully dry.

"Put your coat on, Maddie, and put your hairbrush in the pocket," Heath instructed quietly, closing the door behind him. "We are going to the barn for a discussion."

Maddie felt like her stomach had leaped off a cliff and left her behind. She licked her dry lips, and then gulped. "Heath...please..." she began. "Can we

wait until Able and Chrissie are gone?" She walked towards him on trembling knees.

Heath shook his head, his brown eyes determined. "No, Maddie, we need to be done with this. You know you will be a nervous wreck the whole time they are here otherwise.

Besides, when they leave, we are going with them, remember?" He reached for her coat hanging on the curled limb of the wooden coat rack just inside the door and held it open for her.

Maddie knew he was right, but she lifted her chin defiantly as she slipped her arms into the coat. "This isn't fair, Heath," she protested. "Why can't women wear pants?"

"We'll discuss this in the barn," Heath replied firmly. "Now, get the hairbrush." He put his own coat on as Maddie huffed to the cherry dresser and grabbed the hateful hairbrush, stuffing it into her pocket.

"That attitude isn't going to help you any, honey." Heath looked sternly at her. His eyes narrowed when she refused to answer him, her soft pink lips pursing in disgust. Opening the door for her, he indicated for her to go ahead of him, and she flounced out.

---

Able watched, slightly amused at Maddie's attitude as she stalked through the house and out the back door, Heath right behind her. He had to give his brother in law full marks for having the guts to take on his sister. He wondered if she were submissive when she was being drawn over Heath's lap, or if she continued to fight him. Chuckling, he shook his head and called to his own recalcitrant love. "Chrissie, would you come out here, please?"

Chrissie jumped when she heard Able call her name. Wiping her moist palms down the sides of the cotton flowered dress, she stood up on

trembling knees. Shakily, she opened the door and went out to face him.

Able studied her as she walked towards him, her face as pale as a sheet, her pretty eyes wide in apprehension. For a brief moment, he wondered what it would be like to have her over his lap, her dress pulled up and her pantaloons around her knees. Finding himself feeling aroused at the thought, he cleared his throat and tried to look sufficiently stern.

"Now then, my little wife, would you care to tell me what the devil you are doing falling in with Maddie's wild shenanigans?" His bushy eyebrows drew down in a frown.

"I...I'm sorry, Able," she whispered. "I...I really don't have a good excuse, I guess," she stammered, unwilling to say Maddie forced her. "I'm sorry if I brought shame to you and Heath. I didn't mean any harm."

Her eyes were so troubled that Able was having a hard time staying firm and strict with her. It was obvious that it bothered her greatly to disappoint him. He cleared his throat and continued censoriously. "That was a very naughty thing to do, young lady, and I'm not happy with you. However, given that you were influenced by my sister, and the fact that you have never done anything like this before, I'm going to give you a reprieve." He almost smiled as she sagged in relief. "I'm not going to spank you...this time!"

Chrissie stiffened at his words. "This time?" she echoed fearfully.

"That's right," Able went on, halfway enjoying himself. "But, if you do anything wild and irresponsible like this again, I'll have to take you over my knee and spank you soundly. Is that clear?"

Chrissie's stomach clenched at his words, and she drew a tremulous breath. "Yes, Able," she murmured dutifully.

Somewhere, down in the bottom of her troubled thoughts, she felt a small sense of disappointment. In spite of her choking fear, she had a small niggles of curiosity.

Glancing down at Able's huge right hand, she warred between relief and disappointment that it wouldn't be landing on her tender hind cheeks.

---

The warm scent of hay and animals assaulted her nostrils as Maddie opened the door to the barn. She waited as Heath stepped in behind her. In a moment, the soft glow of light chased out the darkness as he hung the lantern he had lit on a hook.

Turning to face her, he eased out of his coat and hung it on the wall. "Take off your coat, Maddie," he instructed quietly.

Maddie stared angrily at him, then did as he requested, her fingers shaking as she handed her coat to her husband. She shivered when he reached into her coat pocket and took out the dreadful hairbrush.

She stiffened when he held his hand out to her, and then reluctantly placed her small one in his large palm. Leading her to a bale of hay, Heath drew her down to sit on his right knee. Maddie knew it was a step away from tipping her right on over his left knee, and she felt a quiver of alarm slash into her stomach.

"Do you think I'm an unreasonable man, Maddie?" Heath asked calmly, looking into her expressive little face. He could see the apprehension and defiance in her angelic blue eyes, and the defiance disturbed him.



Maddie was caught off guard. She licked her lips and responded cautiously. "Er...no, Heath, I can't say I've ever thought you were unreasonable."

"Did it ever occur to you to ask me if you could try the pants?"

Maddie flushed, embarrassed at the implications. "I...I guess I have to admit that I didn't think of that," she confessed. She had been positive he would disapprove, given his new dominant attitude over the course of the summer and fall. "Would you have allowed it?" She waited curiously for his response.

"I think I might have," Heath replied honestly. "I can understand your desire to try new things, Maddie. I don't consider myself an unreasonable man. There would have been restrictions, of course, especially with you being in the position you are in. As my wife, people look up to you and come to me for advice."

Maddie hung her head, ashamed that she had not thought of Heath's feelings at all, except as a block to her own desires. "I'm sorry, Heath. It's just that---with you being such a stickler for rules and all---I figured you would automatically dislike it. I guess I didn't give you a chance." She stared earnestly at him then, the defiance fading away.

"You are young and impulsive, honey." Heath gazed tenderly at her. "I feel it is my responsibility to guide and correct you. I don't like punishing you, but I feel it's necessary sometimes to help you learn to curb some of that waywardness."

"You don't have to spank me, Heath. I've learned my lesson, I won't be so selfish next time, I promise." She gazed hopefully back at his tender expression.

"I'm glad you understand, but I'm still going to spank you. You knew it would happen if you got caught, because you knew it was wrong. So---you

still have to pay the consequences of your rash behavior.”

He went on firmly. “Not only that, but you goaded Chrissie into doing something she knew was wrong too, although that doesn’t excuse her decision to follow you. Still, she wouldn’t have done it if you hadn’t suggested it, and you know it.”

Heath tugged gently on her arm then, indicating she needed to come over his left knee.

Groaning at his decision, Maddie capitulated and allowed herself to be positioned over her husband’s strong thigh. She trembled as she felt her skirts coming up. She would never get used to this, no matter how many times he spanked her, she thought passionately. She felt his warm fingers gently drawing her bloomers down, and she wished it were for another reason besides the spanking he was about to administer to her shrinking buttocks.

She whimpered as he began to spank her lightly, his hand warming the sensitive skin. She knew it wouldn’t be very long before those same strokes became blazing swats, and her heart beat faster, waiting for the inevitable.

As usual, Maddie was unprepared for that first blazing spank, and she cried out when the pain of it startled her. It was followed by many more, his hand sending a very effective message concerning her careless and reckless attitude. She was sobbing softly when he paused, and she clenched her bottom involuntarily, knowing the fiery smacks of the hairbrush were about to make themselves known.

Feeling satisfied with his wife’s bright, hot pink bottom, Heath picked up the wooden hairbrush. Tapping it on her cheeks, he spoke. “Try not to clench, Maddie, it doesn’t help any, and it can cause bruising. I also hope this will make you think twice before drawing Chrissie into any more compromising circumstances.”

Guilt over involving Chrissie made Maddie try valiantly to do as he asked, knowing it had truly been her fault. It was hard to let go, knowing what would happen as soon as she did, but she managed it.

Once Maddie relaxed, Heath lifted his arm and gave her right cheek a healthy swat, gripping her waist firmly against her reaction. She squalled like a scalded cat, and he had to grab her wrist when her hand snapped back to sooth the punished globe. Sighing, he tipped her forward a bit and laid his leg over hers. Where her hand went, her feet would soon follow if he didn't check them.

Once secured, he set about lighting a fiery lesson in her backside, the brush sounding loudly against her reddening cheeks, her pleading wails filling the air. After thirty good spanks, he paused, resting the smooth back of the brush against her bottom, waiting for the bucking and wiggling to cease.

"Will you check with me the next time you want to try something you think I won't like, Maddie?"

"Y...yesssss," sobbed Maddie, "yes I will, Heath, I p...promise I will!" She prayed fervently that he was finished, but it was not to be so. When she felt herself tipped a little further forward, she knew he was intent on getting her sitting area, a particularly sensitive area just below the curve of her buttocks, and she gasped in dread.

"Just a little more then, to cement the deal," came his rich firm tones. "And to discourage you from hiding things from me."

"NOO...Heath...NOO!" She wailed loudly once again as the hateful brush landed six times on each side, its message hard, clear and succinct. And, it would continue to remind her over the next couple of days, every time she sat down!

Heath pulled his sobbing wife upright and held her in his arms, allowing her to wiggle as she tried

to find a comfortable way to sit on his hard thigh. Sometimes it amazed him--- how much he loved this woman. She always laughed when he told her--more than life itself--but he knew it was true. If anything ever happened to Maddie, he wouldn't want to go on. He held her tightly, regretful that he had hurt her---yet knowing his discipline would help keep her safe in the long run.

At last Maddie's sobs wound down to a few hiccups and her soft arms stole silently around his neck. She lifted her lips for his comforting kiss. He obliged her, nibbling the soft pink offerings, then kissing away the tears still on her lashes, taking his time moving down her smooth cheeks and back to the luscious petals.

"I do love you so," Maddie said tearfully, leaning back to gaze into his strong handsome face. "I'm sorry I'm such a trial to you at times, I don't mean to be."

Heath chuckled, his deep velvety voice sending goose bumps down her back. "You are not a trial, honey, you are a blessing. The best the Lord has ever given me, and I treasure you."

His brown eyes twinkled at her, and Maddie couldn't help reaching up to grab the recalcitrant curl that fell over the left side of his forehead. She tugged on it gently, bringing his head down to her pink lips once more. Her heart swelled with love for this gentle man with the hand of iron, and she prayed that their days on this earth would be long and full---and together.

---

"Where's Aunt Maddie?" piped up Beth, her cherubic face gazing earnestly at her Mother as she stood at the kitchen sink washing the supper dishes, Able drying them for her. "She and Uncle Heath had to...umm...feed the horses," finished Chrissie lamely, glancing at Able.

"They must eat a lot," Luke commented. "Uncle Heath and Papa just fed them when we came home, just before supper." He was seated at the table in the warm kitchen; practicing writing his name on some paper that Chrissie had given the children to occupy them.

"They do often eat more in the wintertime than in the summertime," Able responded, winking at his wife. "It's colder outside, and it keeps them fat, so they don't feel the cold so much."

"I want to be fat," chimed in Beth earnestly. "I don't like being cold, neither does Annie." She cuddled Annie in her arms, its rag doll body soft against her chest.

Chrissie looked at her daughter, trying to hide her mirth. "No, people don't want to get fat, darling, its unhealthy for them."

Luke's five-year-old, questioning brain absorbed this information, storing it away for future reference. "Why is it unhealthy for people, but not for animals?" He looked up at his father, seeking the answer, curious as always. He was forever asking why, and Chrissie was inundated with a hundred questions a day.

Able glanced at Chrissie, but she just smiled at him. Obviously, he was on his own. Clearing his throat, he tried to think quickly. "Uh...well...what if a man was to get caught by a bear? He wouldn't be able to outrun the bear if he was fat now would he?"

Luke's reply was instant. "You always said to never run from a bear, Papa, because they will chase you. You are supposed to back away slowly." His blue eyes were large and serious as he appraised his father.

"Yes, well, that's true...in most cases. However, once you are far enough away, then you want to run and get out of the area in case the bear comes back."

Luke was pondering that response when the back door opened, and Maddie and Heath walked in, quickly closing the door behind them. It was beginning to snow harder, and they hung their coats on a hook by the back door after shaking the damp flakes off them.

Chrissie glanced sympathetically at Maddie. "We've just finished the dishes and put the food away. Would you like a cup of hot coffee?" She indicated the coffeepot warming on the cast iron range.

Maddie smiled gratefully at her and nodded. She walked over to Chrissie and whispered in her ear, "don't worry, Heath and I will watch the kids for you."

Chrissie flushed and shook her head negatively. Surprised, Maddie glanced at Able, but he was talking to Heath about his new violin. "You mean you aren't...that is," stammered Maddie, aware of the children behind her.

"No---I'm not," responded Chrissie decisively shaking her head. She lowered her voice. "Able didn't feel like I was at fault, so he gave me a reprieve."

"Oh...well...technically, I guess you aren't."

"No, it was all your fault," agreed Chrissie, keeping her voice low as she and Maddie talked near the stove.

"It wasn't ALL my fault," replied Maddie, feeling a bit like the black sheep of the family. "You didn't have to come after all." She looked suspiciously at her sister in law. "You didn't get into any trouble---none at all?"

Chrissie's eyes flashed. "You sound almost disappointed."

"No, its not that---exactly," Maddie assured her hastily, although she thought Chrissie should have at least been scolded severely. She wouldn't wish a

spanking on anyone, but her dear sister in law was not totally blameless!

"So what is it then---exactly?" Chrissie's small nose went in the air. She looked down it frostily as she waited for Maddie to speak.

"Nothing, just forget it," snapped Maddie. She sat the coffee cup down on the kitchen sink and headed for her bedroom. She tried desperately to be happy for Chrissie, but she felt picked on, knowing Chrissie had gotten off scott free. It didn't seem right somehow.

She undressed and got ready for bed, rubbing her punished bottom cheeks thoroughly. She knew she would be sore tomorrow, especially in her sitting area. No problem, she would just stand as much as possible.

She lay on her tummy in the bed, listening to the sounds of Chrissie and Able settling the children for the night, waiting for Heath to come in.

Finally, he slipped into the bedroom and undressed quickly, sliding in beside her. When Maddie didn't greet him, Heath sensed there was something wrong. "What's the matter, honey?" He ran his palm over her sore buttocks, feeling her wince. They were still warm from the welts of the hairbrush, but he soothed and massaged them gently, waiting for her to speak.

"Oh, nothing, Heath," responded Maddie. She wasn't going to be childish and say anything. Chrissie was Able's wife, and if he didn't think she deserved any repercussions for her behavior; then who was Maddie to object? Sighing, she allowed Heath's tender ministrations to lull her to sleep.

---

The next morning, the children awoke to a winter wonderland, and they were excited, wanting to go outside and play in the six inches of snow that had fallen the night before.

"Wait for your father," said Chrissie indulgently. They waited obediently by the back door and immediately tackled Able when he and Heath stepped inside.

The men had already been out to the barn to take care of the stock, and they volunteered to take Luke and Beth outside for some sledding. Maddie and Chrissie wanted to get started on some baking for the Christmas holidays, so they sent the four on their way, laughing at Able's antics as he put both Luke and Beth up, one on each of his broad shoulders.

After the others left, the air between the two girls was a bit strained, but Maddie did her best to try not to let this come between them. It wasn't any of her business what her brother did with his wife. She tried not to feel sorry for herself because she had been spanked soundly while Chrissie had gotten nothing.

Chrissie, on the other hand, was feeling decidedly perverse. She was aware of Maddie's coolness and was feeling a bit resentful, as well as guilty. She knew Maddie was stiff and had been avoiding sitting all morning. She peeked guiltily at her when she absentmindedly rubbed her bottom through the woolen cranberry dress. Again, she found herself wondering what it might be like to be spanked, but hurriedly buried the thoughts when the door opened.

The men trooped into the warm kitchen, leaving the children alone for a few minutes to work on building a snowman. They could all see them from the kitchen window, and Buster was barking and running around them in circles.

Able came up behind Chrissie and put his cold hands on the sides of her neck, chuckling when she squealed. "Want to go sledding, wife?" He asked in her delicate ear as his arms slipped down around



her waist, encompassing her from behind in a bear hug.

"I will if Maddie wants to," she replied, not thinking.

"I don't think I want to do that this morning," Maddie said, smiling at Heath regretfully. She was awfully sore, and the idea of bouncing around on that sled did not appeal to her. She slid her arms around his neck for a quick kiss, though, loving the feel of his strong arms about her.

"Oh---that's right---Maddie can't," snickered Chrissie. She was instantly appalled at the stricken look on Maddie's pale face.

Heath's arms tightened protectively around his wife's small waist, and he glared disapprovingly at his sister in law.

"Did I hear you correctly?" Astonished, Able turned Chrissie around to face him, his blue eye's blazing at the snide comment. "Christine Susanna Owens, tell me I did not just hear that come out of your mouth?"

"I...I didn't...I...mean," stuttered Chrissie, struck speechless at the stern gaze of Able's frosty blue eyes.

Able quickly turned to Heath and Maddie. "Kindly watch the children while my wife and I have a talk." He grabbed Chrissie's hand and pulled her towards the living room, headed for their bedroom.

"Able, I didn't m...mean it like that," protested Chrissie as he opened the bedroom door and pushed her inside. Her heart rate increased rapidly as her husband pulled her towards the bed. "Please...Able!"

"Since you think it's so funny that Maddie got spanked, perhaps you would like to have a taste of the same punishment," her husband growled as he pulled her down over his broad lap.

"No, it's not funny---it's NOT," shrieked Chrissie, panic stricken as her skirts were yanked up and her

bloomers pulled firmly down. Her arms flailed as she tried unsuccessfully to get past Able's strong left arm and beyond the skirt and petticoats that were settling down around her ears. She heart beat wildly as she realized what was coming next. "Able--NOO!"



s...sorry. I was quite thoughtless, and I hope Maddie will f...forgive me."

Able loved her eyes; they were so unique. He stared down into them. "Of course, she will." He brushed her cheek with his thumb, the tears sliding away under his long fingers. Then he dipped his head to drink from the rosy, trembling lips.

Chrissie returned his kiss with sweet abandon, feeling the need to bask in his comfort. The same hand that had scalded her backside, now rubbed soothingly up and down the expanse of her back, pushing her in closer to his broad chest. "Oh, Able!" She put her slender arms around his massive neck and clung to him, desire flooding her body.

At last, Able stood up with her, his breathing ragged. "We need to get out of this room, Kitten, or I won't be responsible for what happens next."

"Yes," agreed Chrissie, her breasts rising and falling rapidly as she bent to pull her bloomers back in place and adjust her clothing. "It's a long time before nightfall."

"Too damn long," growled Able, watching her, trying to get himself under control. Finally, they made their way back to the kitchen.

---

It was a repentant Chrissie that made her apologies to Maddie for her thoughtlessness, and Maddie accepted graciously, knowing what had happened. She couldn't help feeling vindicated, although she tried not to let it show.

When the men had gone outside again, she caught Chrissie rubbing her backside. "You okay?" she asked sympathetically.

"Oh, sure, I'm fine." She snatched her hand away from her bottom, flushing at Maddie's knowing look. "I...I guess you know Able spanked me," she said, embarrassed.

"Well...yes."

"I guess I deserved it." Her smile was tremulous; her eyes were bright.

"You were kind of---rude," replied Maddie, smiling back at her.

"At least, I know what it's like, now."

"Were you curious?" Maddie was intrigued at the tone in her sister in law's voice. Who could possibly be curious about getting a painful spanking?

"I've never been spanked before, Maddie, so I didn't know what to expect."

"Wait until Able takes his belt off, or gets a hairbrush," replied Maddie, wincing as she rubbed her own tender bottom.

"What?" squeaked Chrissie in alarm. "What do you mean, his belt? Or a hairbrush?"

"Or, a switch, from a tree outside. Now, those can really sting!"

Chrissie's face paled. "You're kidding me...right?"

"Nope, I'm not kidding. Once they get started, it just gets worse. Heath keeps threatening me with the razor strap if I ever lie to him. So far, I've managed not to." She shuddered as she eyed the heavy strap on the wall.

Chrissie's eyes were drawn to it in fascination. "That thing?" Her throat was dry, her voice a whisper.

"Oh, yes," Maddie replied with relish. "Trust me, you don't want to get started on this path, Chrissie. You'd best nip it in the bud right off the bat, while you still have a chance!"

Chrissie was horrified, but like a moth to the flame, her eyes kept straying to the razor strap while the girls worked. Reluctantly, she had to admit to herself that being spanked had hurt, but something else had happened as well. She had felt a rekindling of fresh desire for her husband that had been missing, lately.

Oh, she dearly loved Able, but after five years of marriage and two children, the urgency had worn

off somewhat, and she sometimes found excuses to not be close to him. It wasn't an issue or anything...yet; but Able was a needy man, and she didn't want to find herself wondering if he was seeing anyone down at the Scarlet Ibis. It was rumored that men sometimes went there when their wives became less than accommodating, to chat up the women of the night...whores as her friend Natalie told her. She would be humiliated if it happened to her! She wanted to keep her husband at home, where he belonged---with her!

She had felt Able's erection when she was over his lap. She had also felt the dampness between her thighs! In fact, she could hardly wait until tonight when they could be alone. She shivered in anticipation, feeling her nipples harden against her bindings.

She quickly brushed the maddening thoughts aside and concentrated on chopping the nuts for the fruitcake they were making for Christmas. The candied fruits had been fermenting for weeks and were now ready to be used.

"I'll try, Maddie," she replied, briskly chopping the walnuts on the wooden board with the meat cleaver, "but I don't know if Able will want to stop now that he has started." She didn't voice her own sentiments that she didn't know if she wanted him to stop.

"You poor thing! You have my sympathy, then." Maddie patted her on the shoulder in sisterly fashion and began mixing the other ingredients. Soon, the kitchen was filled with the aromatic scents of cinnamon, spices, and fruited candies.

---

Christmas in Pannier Flats was a festive occasion. Lights blazed across the snowy landscape from the windows of the homes in town of people who were now enjoying the benefits of electricity. A

comfort, Maddie bemoaned, that had not yet made its way to Brocton. Even her parents now had a telephone.

She and Chrissie were finishing some last minute shopping. As they walked along the streets, they were met with sights of red bows tied to the gas street lamps; they hadn't been converted to electricity yet.

The shop windows were gaily decorated with ribbons and garlands, fresh wreaths adorned the doors and bells tinkled as you walked in and out.

Maddie was very excited, hugging her purchase close to her chest. It was to be a surprise for Heath--actually, for everybody---but mostly for Heath. She had bought a beautiful white blessing gown with a tiny cap to present to her husband. Next summer, they would be dressing their own baby in it, and he—or she---would be blessed by Heath's own hands.

Doc Matthews in Brocton had confirmed Maddie's pregnancy almost three weeks ago, but Maddie had kept the secret to herself, wanting it to be a wonderful Christmas surprise. The few mornings she hadn't felt well, she had managed to hide it from Heath, and so far, she didn't think he had guessed. She had missed her monthly cycle, but that was not unusual for her, so it hadn't been a cause for concern until she knew she was due again, and it hadn't happened. The result was a visit to the Docs.

"Let's go in here," Chrissie said excitedly, grabbing Maddie's arm and pulling her inside a small shop with miniature treasures in the window.

"Wait, Chrissie---didn't I hear Able tell you not to buy any more of those miniature train sets?" She was being tugged along, and from what Maddie saw in the window, she was sure Chrissie had another purchase in mind---one she wasn't supposed to make!

"But, I don't have one like this one." She glanced stubbornly at Maddie, pointing to the ivory train set just inside the door on a display table. It was just like the one in the window. The pieces were exquisite. Small dashes of color had been added here and there, a pin stripe on the conductor's shirt, a green wreath on the nose of the engine, little hand painted tidbits that made the set even more expensive. There were 10 pieces in all, bringing the total cost to well over fifty dollars. "I want it," she declared.

"But, what will Able say?" Maddie looked at Chrissie, her brow knitted. Her sister in law had been acting kind of funny, lately. The past week, she had been out of sorts, snippy, almost tense. When she asked her if something was wrong, she always said no. She seemed almost angry at Able at times, and her brother seemed as much at a loss as the rest of the family.

"I don't care what he says, he knows I collect these little trains."

"But...that's over fifty dollars!" Since when did she not care what Able had to say!

Chrissie's eyes flashed irritably. "So? It's not like we can't afford it!"

Maddie shrugged. "It's your decision, Chrissie, but don't say I didn't warn you!" She watched her through long lashes, pretending not to stare at her, but she was concerned. Her sister in law was just asking for trouble in her opinion!

Chrissie's chin lifted defiantly as she told the clerk what she wanted and proceeded to pay the man. She picked up the purchase and bore it triumphantly out of the store---Maddie followed, shaking her head. She sunk back into her reverie of sharing her pregnancy with her husband tomorrow night as they walked back to the Owens home.



Chrissie's heart was pounding so loud she was sure Able would be able to hear it when she walked in the door. What had possessed her to do such a thing? She clutched the package in her gloved hands, well aware that she had deliberately defied her husband. What would he say? Worse yet, what would he do? Maybe she should hide it, and then return it tomorrow.

When they entered the house, she quickly headed for the stairway, intent on hiding the box in a drawer in their bedroom.

Luke spied his mother hurrying up the stairs, and he bounded up after her. "Mama," he cried excitedly. "What is that you have there? Can I see it?"

"It's nothing, darling---a secret," Chrissie hissed quickly, her eyes darting towards the study door that was standing open. Inside, she could see Able and Heath talking with Harrison. She tried to keep the package along her side, so Luke couldn't see it, but he was too fast for her.

"Oh, let me see, it looks wonderful, Mama, an all white one!"

"Shhh," whispered Chrissie fearfully, hurrying to the bedroom door. "This is our secret, Luke, you mustn't tell anyone, okay?" She opened the door and rushed inside, her lungs feeling like they were being squeezed from fear of Able catching her.

Luke followed her in and barely missed getting his coattail shut in the door. "Is it a Christmas present, Mama? Huh? Huh?" His bright blue eyes shone excitedly. "I can keep a secret, tell me who it's for?"

"Luke, its not a Christmas present, all right?" Chrissie was thinking furiously.

"Then why is it a secret?"

"Well...just because...it's a...a surprise. Now you go on out of here." She shooed him out the door, Luke looking doubtful the whole time.

Quickly, she put the box beneath her chemises and stockings; sure that Able would never find it there. Besides, it was Christmas time; you weren't supposed to be "looking" for things.

As she removed her coat and winter wear, she chewed her lip with worry. Why had she done it? Able had given explicit instructions before she and Maddie had left that she wasn't to come home with any more mini trains! And yet, she had deliberately purchased one anyway. Not only purchased one, but the absolute most expensive one she had ever found yet! Never had she done anything so daring.

She ran her moist palms down the sides of her pretty green linen dress, embroidered with holly along the hem and tied with a red bow in the back. It was last year's, but it was still festive for the season, and it complimented her pale skin and dark hair. The high collar and long sleeves fit snugly, the bodice outlining her perky breasts.

She paced the floor, trying to get her feelings under control before facing Able. She hoped she could keep the guilty look off her face. Although her color was still high, she took a deep breath and opened the bedroom door. Tomorrow, she would return the train set---maybe.

---

There was much laughter at the dinner table that evening, the children being allowed to eat with the adults for the occasion. The talk centered on Christmas, of course, the children excited at the thoughts of the gifts that Santa Clause would bring them.

Chrissie was having a hard time joining in the merriment, her laughter strained. She was feeling worse and worse about disobeying Able, and the thought of the expensive train set hidden upstairs ate at her. She wished she had never bought it. Even if she returned it, the fact that she had

disobeyed her husband and kept it from him wouldn't be changed.

"What's wrong, Chrissie, dear," asked Caroline solicitously. "You've hardly touched a bite of dinner. Are you feeling ill?" She studied her daughter in law, noting the high color. Perhaps she was running a fever.

"No, I'm fine, Mother---really. I'm just...a little tired, that's all."

"Too much shopping, eh?" boomed Harrison, winking at his wife.

"Maybe you need an early night," added Able, studying her rosy face.

"Maybe she is excited about the surprise," piped up Luke, his boyish face beaming.

Able saw the startled look that swept across Chrissie's face, stealing the color from the skin. "What surprise is that?"

"N...nothing," interjected Chrissie swiftly. "Luke, eat your peas, you've left them swimming in gravy." She sent him a warning look.

Luke grinned. "Its okay, Mama, I'm not telling what your surprise is. After all, I can keep a secret you know." His little chest puffed with pride. "I'm five years old, it's Beth that can't keep a secret."

"Can too—" whined Beth. "Tell me, Luke, I won't tell anyone Mama's secret!"

"Keeping secrets are we?" Able whispered into her ear, his eyes gleaming with interest. Had Chrissie gone and bought him something special? Perhaps he should go to town the next day and get something extra special for her, just in case.

"Its n...nothing," she stammered, her face turning red again. Inside, she was horrified. Now what was she going to do?

"Yes, you will," Luke told his little sister, his small hand pushing his straight brown hair out of his face. "It's for Papa, I think...and you will just tell him. So---I'm not telling you!"

Maddie took pity on Chrissie and distracted the children with offers of dessert, and the subject was soon dropped, but Chrissie was terrified. She vowed to return the train set first thing the next morning and pray that Luke didn't remember what it was she had gotten. She could pick up something else and have a family game surprise or something.

---

December 22nd dawned bright and crisp, the snow crunching beneath her feet as Chrissie and Maddie swiftly made their way to the small shop. Luckily, the Owens' didn't live too far; they could be out and back in an hour and a half.

Heath, Able and Harrison had taken the children out to cut the tree. Normally, it would be done on Christmas Eve, but they were going back to Louisville tomorrow to spend Christmas Day with Chrissie's parents. So they were exchanging gifts and celebrating tonight. Caroline insisted on a tree for the family celebration, and Luke and Beth were looking forward to a day filled with fun and decorating.

"What can I get for a surprise, Maddie?" Chrissie worried her lip as they walked inside the little shop, the bell tinkling behind them. "I wish Luke hadn't seen the box."

"I have an idea. Why don't you buy just the box from the man, and then put whatever you decide on inside that box; that way there will no mistake."

"What a great idea," enthused Chrissie, her eyes lighting up.

The store clerk thought it strange, but he agreed, and the girls looked around the shop, trying to find something the family would enjoy. Finally, Chrissie decided on a board game, called Chaturanga, made with ivory pieces. She knew Able would enjoy it, and he could teach the children to play.

After making the purchase, they hurried home. Once inside, Chrissie heaved a sigh of relief. So far, so good---she had done it! She quickly wrapped the gift and set it aside to put under the tree later, when everything was in place.

As the day wore on, there was much laughter and good humor; Able held Beth up to put a star on the Christmas tree. Popcorn and cranberry strings had been strung, and the homemade ornaments Caroline had collected through the years had been put on the tree.

Mistletoe had been hung over the doorways, and the men rarely missed a chance to steal a kiss. Even Harrison had cornered Caroline beneath it more than once, and Maddie smiled as she watched her parents share their love for each other.

Her mother was dressed in a burgundy, velvet gown, her long hair wrapped smoothly around her crown, the blonde tresses heavily laced with white hair. Yes, she thought, her mother was getting older, but she was still a pretty woman, in spite of the wrinkles invading the corners of her eyes and the smile on her mouth.

Harrison's dark blonde hair was also heavily streaked with gray, his eyes a deeper, more electric blue than the baby blue of his wife's. He wasn't as tall as his son, but he still had to bend down to kiss Caroline. They figured Able was a throwback to Harrison's grandfather, who had been a giant of a man, working on the railroads.

"Our family is growing, my dear," Harrison murmured into Caroline's ear after he collected his kiss.

"Yes, isn't it?" she replied proudly, looking at her children, their spouses, and her grandchildren. "I wonder when Heath and Maddie are going to have a baby, though?"

"Give them time."

"They've been married for over a year. How much time do they need?" She glanced up at him, looking worried. "Do you suppose there is something wrong?"

"Stop worrying, darling. When the time is right, they will have a baby." Harrison put his arm around her and led her to the divan. It was time for Heath to read the Christmas story from the Bible.

They all listened while Heath read from Luke, the miracle of the baby Jesus, and then Maddie played the piano and sang a beautiful song of the Savior's birth. Her clear sweet soprano voice filled the air, and Heath's heart swelled with pride and love. Once again, he thanked the Lord for the blessing of Maddie in his life.

Once the supper feast was finished, the family gathered once again in the parlor around the Christmas tree to exchange their gifts. They were not extravagant gifts; many were homemade. Caroline had made a beautiful quilt for each of the girls and a child's quilt for Luke and Beth. For the men, she had knitted them each a long warm scarf and purchased a fur-lined hat to go with it.

And, so it went, each gift presented with love, the feelings behind the gift more important than the gift itself. Finally, Maddie picked up a small package from behind her, and stood up. "I have a special gift for Heath, that I'd like to share with everyone." Her eyes were shining, and her heart beat fast with excitement as she handed the small flat parcel to Heath.

Heath looked puzzled. They had planned on sharing a special gift between them on Christmas Day, just the two of them, so what was Maddie doing? He took the gift and laid it on his lap. Taking out his knife he gently cut the twine and laid back the brown paper. What he saw almost brought tears to his eyes. "Does this mean what I think it

means?" His voice was husky and low as he stared at her, his heart filling with joy.

"Yes," whispered Maddie, her eyes like stars. "Show them."

Heath's trembling fingers picked up the small white garment and the tiny cap. It looked incongruous in his big hands, but he held it up for everyone to see. "I believe we are going to have a baby," he announced joyfully.

Laying the garment aside, he stood up and enfolded Maddie in his warm embrace. The family gathered around them, taking turns hugging Maddie and shaking Heath's hand.

"I'm so happy for you, Maddie," said Chrissie, her eyes misty. "It's my turn to be an Aunt now."

"Thank you," Maddie replied. "And, it's my turn to be a mother." The girls laughed and hugged each other, until a small tug at Chrissie's elbow interrupted them.

"Mama, is it time yet?" Luke stood there, staring earnestly up at her, his big eyes wide with excitement.

"Time for what?"

"You know...time to give Papa his train set!"

"Oh---that." Cassie laughed weakly. "What you saw is for everyone, Luke, and it's not a train set." The lie tasted dirty as it came out of her mouth, even though it was the truth, now. It just hadn't been the truth when Luke saw it, and her deceit wrapped around her insidiously, spoiling the beauty of the evening.

"Can I open it?" Luke asked eagerly, searching beneath the tree for another package.

"Y...yes---of course. It's behind the tree."

Luke took the package and untied the string holding the brown paper on it. Inside was the box the train set had come in. "Mama, it IS a train set!"

"No...no it's not," Chrissie replied, her face coloring. "Go ahead and open it."

She sent a sideways glance at Able and saw a funny look on his face. He caught her eyes for a moment and stared enigmatically at her, then turned back to his son. Chrissie's stomach did a flip-flop. Was something wrong? Did he know what she had done? But how could he?

Beth squatted down beside her brother as he opened the box and took out the Chatarunga game. She picked up the ivory rook and held it in her chubby hands, studying it closely.

"What is it, Mama?" Luke's childish query reached her ears.

Able intervened at that moment. "It's a game, son. A game I've played before and enjoy." He looked at oddly at Chrissie. "Thank you, darling, that was generous of you. I'll have to teach the kids to play when they are older."

"Perhaps, we can have a few games before you leave, my boy," said Harrison. "I used to play pretty well, once upon a time." He turned to Heath. "Do you play Heath?"

"No, I never learned."

"We can teach Heath then," he announced. "Let's go to my study, and we'll show you how."

As the men went off, Chrissie turned a troubled face to Maddie. "Is Able acting strange to you?" She kept her voice low.

"What do you mean?"

"I get the feeling that---that he knows--- somehow," she replied uneasily.

"I don't know how he could. Maybe it's just your conscience bothering you," Maddie responded teasingly.

"That's not funny, Maddie!"

"Okay---I'm sorry!" She studied Chrissie's trembling bottom lip and sympathetically put her arm around her slender shoulders. "Look, Chrissie, if it's bothering you that much, just tell Able what



you did. Get it off your conscience, or you're going to let it ruin your entire Christmas."

"But...he might spank me," she whispered.

Maddie rather thought he might too, and she answered honestly. "Yes---he might---but wouldn't it be better to get it over with? You know you are going to hate yourself until you do."

Chrissie nodded. She did hate herself...but confessing would be SO hard to do!

## Trouble for Two

### Chapter Four

Able was quiet as the men set up the game. Harrison was going to go first with Heath and teach him the basics. As his father's voice droned on, his thoughts turned to his wife.

Earlier that day, he had gone out alone for a few minutes, and gone to the shop with the miniature train set in the window. He had seen it a few days ago and thought he might get it for Chrissie as a special surprise gift. Knowing she had gotten something for him had clenched it, and he had decided to spend the money to show his appreciation for the wonderful and generous wife she was. It was expensive, but he had decided it was worth it.

He had been surprised, however, when the shopkeeper said that a woman had purchased the same set the day before, then returned it that morning, asking to keep only the outside box. As a result, he only had the wooden display box with the velvet niches in it to give to the next purchaser.

Able had brushed it off, saying that the outside box would only be thrown away anyway, so it didn't matter. Imagine his surprise when Chrissie's Chaturanga game had turned up in the train set box. His little wife was lying to him!

He mused as he gazed into the fireplace, not seeing the flames, but seeing the startled look on her face at the dinner table last night---the stammering to cover Luke's "surprise" gift. Oh, she was deceiving him all right; the question was, why? And should he wait for her to confess, or should he confront her with it? Once it was out in the open, what should he do about it?

He shifted uneasily in his chair. Why had she disobeyed him and bought the train set in the first place? Even if she had come home with it

yesterday, he might have been perturbed with her, but most likely he would have allowed her to keep it. He knew how much she loved them. Chrissie had never been like this before, and he couldn't figure out what had gotten into her. He intended to find out, though---tonight!

"Come on, Able, its your turn," Heath called.

"Coming." Sighing, he set his thoughts aside and joined the other men.

It was fairly late when the games broke up, and Chrissie had already put the children to bed long ago. Able had tried to concentrate on the game, but he was too distracted to have much success, and Heath or his father ended up beating him in every game.

"Something on your mind, Able?" Harrison peered keenly at his son while Heath was putting the pieces in the box.

"No, nothing I can't handle," he replied, stretching. "I think I'll turn in, though." He stood up. "See you in the morning."

Heath and his father bade him pleasant dreams, and he went to find his errant wife.

---

Chrissie paced the bedroom floor, her nerves jittery as she waited for Able to come upstairs. She jumped when she heard footsteps in the hall, and held her breath when they stopped at the bedroom door. Hurriedly, she picked up her hairbrush and began brushing her long dark hair---anything to have something to do with her hands.

He looked thoughtful as he stepped inside and closed the door, and then began to undress, reaching for his nightshirt. The silence between them stretched until Chrissie could stand it no longer. "Able?"

"Yes, Kitten?"

She sat the hairbrush down on the dresser and came to stand in front of him. "I...I..." she began haltingly, trying to find the right words.

His smile was encouraging as he waited for her to continue. "I have s...something to tell you," she stammered.

He sat down on the bed and patted his knee, indicating her to sit.

Nervously, she did so, trying not to think of herself bare bottomed over those strong knees. After she was comfortable, he spoke gently. "Go ahead, Kitten. Whatever you have to tell me, you sound awfully nervous. Are you scared of me?"

She flushed. "No, not scared...exactly."

"Then what...exactly?"

She looked into his gentle blue eyes and hung her head shamefully. "Oh, Able, I'm so ashamed of myself. And, I'm afraid you'll...sp...spank me...when I tell you what I've done."

"Well, now, I guess that would depend on what you've done. But, tell me this...do you think you deserve to be spanked?"

Hesitantly, she nodded her head yes, and tears welled up in her beautiful eyes.

"I think you better tell me what it is you've done, then." He took her trembling hands in his; they were cold as ice.

"I...I disobeyed you, Able. And...and then I tried to cover it up."

"Go on."

She went on to explain all that had happened, and Able listened carefully. This was so unlike his wife that he really didn't understand what was happening. Finally, he asked, "But why, Kitten? Why did you disobey me in the first place? It's just not like you."

Chrissie licked her dry lips. This was the hardest part of all, but she had to be honest. It was eating at her, and she couldn't live with herself a moment

longer. "I think I---wanted to make you mad---to make you spank me," she burst out. "But, I don't know why, except that...it made me feel so different when you spanked me at Maddie and Heath's. I don't understand it, Able, but---" she shrugged her shoulders helplessly, at a loss to understand why she wanted something she was so afraid of at the same time.

Finally, it dawned on Able. Spanking Chrissie had aroused him. Maybe getting spanked had aroused her. She had come into his arms that night with renewed fervor, and he had been delighted. He decided to tread carefully, however, not wanting to scare her off.

"I think I know the answer to that one," he said calmly, "but before we talk about it, let's get your spanking out of the way." He stood her up. "Take off your gown, Kitten."

The firm tone in Able's voice sent a skittering quiver through her body, and she began to tremble as she slowly lifted the flannel gown over her head and dropped it to the floor. She stood there, dressed only in her chemise and ruffled bloomers, her feet bare on the hand-braided rug.

Able's blue eyes glittered as he watched her breasts rise and fall beneath the thin cotton covering, their rosy peaks showing through. He felt himself getting hard, already. She was as beautiful as the day he married her. Her hips were a bit fuller, her tummy a bit rounder, but it only added to her beauty as far as he was concerned; evidence of a loving mother. "Now, lay your naughty self over my knee. You deserve a hard spanking for disobeying me and then trying to hide it."

Chrissie's knees were shaking, but she obediently stepped between his legs and draped herself over his left thigh, her hands going down to meet the rug. Her long dark curls fell alongside her

face, and the short top of the chemise rode down, exposing a long length of her creamy back.

Able's hand ran up and down her thighs, feeling the texture of the ruffled eyelet garment, then slipped his thumb into the waistband and began to slowly lower it down; all the way to her knees.

"You were very naughty, Kitten," he whispered sternly, bringing his palm back up the back of her satiny thighs, caressing and kneading the firm young muscles in her buttocks. Suddenly, he lifted his arm and brought his hand down rapidly several times on the rounded bottom, eliciting several squeals of pain and surprise.

"Oh! Ow! OH...Able...OWWW!" She began to kick and wiggle under this assault, but then he stopped, leaving her gasping and panting as he caressed the pinked skin showing the outlines of his large fingers.

Just when she began to relax, and he heard a soft moan coming from her lips; he lit into her again, his hand bouncing off the firm flesh, turning it slowly red. Again, when she became very agitated, he stopped and began to caress her. This time, he tipped her slightly forward and dropped his long leg over both of hers. Her soft feminine center was exposed and he ran his finger down the moist slit, grinning when he found her soaking wet. It was as he suspected. She was as aroused by getting spanked as he was by spanking! However, this didn't take care of her disobedience.

Gripping her firmly by the hip, he raised his hand again. "Now then, naughty girl, you are going to find out what happens when you disobey your husband." With that, he held her firmly pinned in place with his long legs and began to spank her backside, thoroughly, vigorously, not stopping this time when she began to struggle.

She yelped and twisted from side to side, trying to escape him, but his huge palm never missed a

stroke, moving up and down her buttocks and the backs of her thighs with deadly precision.

Chrissie began to sob helplessly, the tears flowing down her cheeks as Able's strong hand burned into her bottom, making her an aching, throbbing mess. "OWWWW," she howled, grabbing his leg and trying to push herself up. "Ohhhhh...STOOOPPP," she screeched, "Able.... PLEAAAAASE!"

Finally, when her bottom was a bright red, Able paused, and Chrissie sobbed brokenly over his knee. He reached over and picked up his discarded pants and began to pull the belt from the loops.

Chrissie tried to get up, but he pushed her back down. "I'm not finished yet, Kitten. You tried to hide something from me...that's the same as lying, and I can't have that."

Chrissie looked back at him, and her eyes widened as she saw him taking the belt out of his pants. "NO...NO ABLE...YOU CAN'T," she squealed.

Ignoring her pleas and promises to be good forever, he doubled the belt over and lifted it above her quivering bottom.

WHAP! WHAP! WHAP!

Chrissie yelped and tried frantically to claw her way off his knee. The belt was setting her cheeks on fire, and it had a horrible after burn!

"OWWWW!" She bucked and twisted as Able continued to swat her, but she was unable to get out of his strong grip.

"Oh, God...it HURTSSS.... ABLEEEEE!" She sobbed frantically, her hands scrabbling wildly, trying to grip the rug and pull forward.

Able mentally counted twenty firm licks with his belt before he finally dropped it to the floor and ran his palm over the hot red welts. "It's all done, Kitten. You had your punishment." He carefully picked her up and brought her in close to his chest,

comforting her as she sobbed in his arms, waiting for her to calm down.

"Do you feel better?" He tipped her chin up finally with a long finger and looked into her eyes. He studied them, wondering if he had done the right thing. He hadn't really been angry with her, just worried about her uncharacteristic behavior.

"Y...yes, Able," she sniffed. She smiled shyly through her tears. "I really am s...sorry. And I do feel a lot better. I know I deserved it."

"Will you do me a favor, Kitten?"

"Of course, darling. What is it?"

"Will you tell me the next time you think you might want a spanking, instead of doing something wrong?"

Chrissie blushed furiously. "Well...okay. If you promise not to spank so hard."

He brushed the tears from her cheeks with his thumb. "You got a deal, darling. We'll save the hard spankings for the times you really do something wrong. I'm sure we can find a way to have fun with this and make you happy at the same time."

"But what about you? Are you happy?"

He chuckled and took her hand to guide it beneath his nightshirt. "Does this feel like I'm miserable?"

"Oh...Able!" Chrissie blushed again when his hard shaft throbbed in her hand. "No, it sure doesn't."

Able leaned down and plucked her bloomers off her legs, then took the hem of her chemise top and drew it gently over her head.

Chrissie arched backwards as his mouth sought the rosy peaks of her full breasts, making them more assessable to his teasing tongue. With a low growl, he stood up and stripped off his nightshirt, then picked her up and laid her on the bed.

Her arms opened to receive him, and he lowered himself gently between her silky thighs, entering



her warmth slowly, savoring the feeling of her heat holding him, contracting around him. "I love you, Kitten," he said gruffly.

"I love you too, Able. I love you...mmmm," Her words turned into moans of delight as he climbed the pinnacle of pleasure, taking her with him.

---

"Uh oh, it sounds like poor Chrissie is getting into trouble." Maddie cocked her bright head as the sound of muffled slaps and cries came from the next room. She was seated at the dresser brushing her hair while Heath readied himself for bed.

"Oh? And why would she be in trouble?" Heath came up behind her, and she saw him in the mirror, buck-naked. He took the brush from her hand and began gently brushing out the long blonde tresses himself.

Maddie's breath caught in her throat. She never failed to get that sizzle of attraction when she viewed his manhood, already coming to life as he brushed her hair. She could feel him against her back, and she shivered with awakening desire.

"Because she is confessing her sins," she giggled.

"And you think that is funny?" Heath's brown eye's glinted in warning.

"No," assured Maddie hastily, "of course not...its just that...well...it's almost like she wanted him to spank her. I just don't understand it. She has made some strange comments about it that I just don't get." She went on to explain what Chrissie had done, and Heath listened intently.

He laid the brush down and pulled Maddie up from the little bench she was sitting on and began undressing her as she talked. Finally, when she stood naked before him, he spoke.

"Maybe, Mrs. Danvers, she has discovered the same delights we have." He pulled her arms up

around his neck and bent to nuzzle her ear, nipping at the earlobe beneath her blonde hair.

"She's going about it all wrong, then," replied Maddie breathlessly.

"Maybe you should tell her that."

"Heath! You don't talk about things like that. It's too private."

Heath's hands slid down and cupped Maddie's heart shaped cheeks, squeezing them lightly and lifting her into him. "I'm sure your brother will figure it out; he's a smart man."

"Yes, but..."

"No buts, unless it's yours, over my lap," teased Heath, lightly slapping her delightful bottom.

"Humph!"

"Uh oh, getting testy are we? I guess someone needs to learn respect for her husband." Heath sat down on the bench and swiftly pulled her across his lap, delighting in the feel of her silky skin against his own.

Maddie giggled and put her hands back to cover her fanny, but Heath simply pinned them together at the small of her back and continued, unimpeded. He ran his hand up and down her silky thighs, massaging...rubbing, savoring.

There was something highly erotic about being taken across her husband's knee when they were both in complete dishabille, and Maddie shivered, her body responding to the sensual caresses.

She jumped when he began to spank her lightly, building in strength until she was squirming and kicking, and then backed off to begin his exploration of her lovely body. When his finger slid into her wet silky sheath, she moaned and gave herself up to the delights of her husband's hands.

Buster bounded and leaped in circles around the approaching buckboard as Heath pulled into the yard, heading Eggs and Bacon towards the barn.

"Down, Buster," ordered Maddie as he tried to leap into her lap after Heath stopped the horses.

"Whoever had Buster before must have taught him a few basic commands," said Heath as he came around to lift Maddie down from the seat. The dog was sitting on the ground, his tongue lolling out of his mouth, watching them with suppressed enthusiasm. He wiggled all over when they finally leaned down to pet him, and then sprang away to lead them towards the back door.

He veered suddenly, barking and running towards the front of the house.

"Someone's coming," Heath said, walking around the house to meet the rider. Maddie followed and was pleased to see Sheriff Crockett dismounting.

"Glad to see you home, Heath," boomed the Sheriff. "I was just coming to check on the stock, but now that you're home, you can take over." He tipped his hat to Maddie, his brown eyes twinkling. "Welcome back, Maddie."

"It's good to be back," Heath replied, shaking hands and smiling. "Thank you for keeping an eye on things. Was there any trouble?"

"Nope, not a bit. Got some good news---Matt and Cecelia are getting married in a few days and will home after the New Years holiday."

"That's wonderful," Maddie replied excitedly. "I can't wait to see her again, I bet she's changed so much!"

"We have some news, too," Heath said, grinning.

"Oh? And what might that be?"

"Maddie is going to have a baby." Heath's chest puffed slightly; proud of the fact he was going to be a father.

"Now, if that don't beat all! Congratulations! When is the youngin expected?"

"It won't be until summer, Sheriff," Maddie replied, blushing.

"That's just great! Did you hear Tom and Evelyn are expecting too?"

"Now, that is good news!" Heath took Maddie's arm to lead her into the house. "Come on in, Sheriff, Maddie can put on some coffee, and you can tell us what else has been happening in Brocton while we were gone."

"I'd be much obliged, Maddie," replied the Sheriff, following them up the steps.

---

"It feels good to be home, doesn't it?" Maddie was lying next to Heath on the settee, his arm draped over her waist as they enjoyed the warmth from the huge fireplace.

"Mmm...sure does, honey." His fingers trailed small circles on her tummy.

"Heath, we haven't talked about when I can wear pants." She turned over onto her back and looked at him, propped up on his elbow. "And do you think Sam will allow Angelina to wear them with me?"

Heath smiled lazily down at her. "I can't speak for Sam, you'll just have to ask him. But it's a moot point right now, anyway, until after the baby is born." His hand gently caressed her stomach.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, you would only be wearing them when you were riding, and you can't ride now."

Maddie's eyes flashed, and she sat up. "What do you mean I can't ride? Heath, I'm pregnant; I'm not an invalid."

Heath sat up beside her, a frown on his smooth brow. "I know that, honey, but you shouldn't be on

horseback when you are expecting. That much I do know."

"Are you sure?" Maddie asked dejectedly. "I hadn't thought about that."

"Maybe we better go see Doctor Matthews tomorrow and find out just what you can and can't do, otherwise I have a feeling you may be getting yourself into trouble."

"At least you can't spank me, now," she flashed triumphantly.

Heath's eye's narrowed. "Maybe I better ask the Doctor about that, too. You're awfully sassy at the moment. Perhaps, I should give you a few paddlings on account, so you'll remember to behave yourself for the next six months or so."

"It's too late, I'm already pregnant," she said, laughing at the look on his face.

"It's never too late for discipline, Maddie," Heath replied silkily. "Care to test me?"

Maddie looked at him doubtfully, unsure of herself. "You...you wouldn't really spank me...would you?"

"No, I won't spank you, not now. But, there are other ways to discipline besides spanking, you know."

"Ha! Like what?" Maddie looked skeptically at him.

"Like this." He stood up and pulled Maddie up with him, then escorted her to a corner. Once there, he pulled her dress up and her bloomers down, ignoring her laughing protests.

"Heath, what are you doing?" She giggled when the cool air hit her fanny, knowing he wasn't going to swat her.

"Hold this," he replied, putting the dress in her hands. "Now, you stand there, with your bare bottom on display, until I tell you to come out of the corner. And, while you are there, think of the spanking you will be owed later."

"But, Heath..."

"Uh uh...nose in the corner, and stand still."

Maddie began to understand what he was talking about as she fidgeted in the corner. It was a humiliating position to be in, one she wasn't enjoying, even if it was just a demonstration.

"I can think of lots of other things too, honey," drawled Heath, enjoying the sight of her heart shaped buttocks. "Like taking away privileges, no shopping, no quilting bees, just to mention a few," he added helpfully.

"Heath Danvers, if you think I'm going to stand for this nonsense, you better think again," Maddie stormed, suddenly getting angry. She dropped her dress and turned around to face him. "Imagine how Angelina would laugh if she found out I couldn't attend a social because I was...on probation or something!" She threw her hands in the air to emphasize her point.

"Then, I guess you better plan on behaving, hadn't you?" Heath spoke mildly, but Maddie could hear the steel in his tone. "Now, turn around, and hold your dress up."

"And, if I don't?" Maddie folded her arms and glared at him.

Heath got up and sauntered over to her. He took her by the shoulders and turned her around and began unbuttoning the buttons at the back of her dress. Quickly, he peeled the dress off her shoulders and down her hips, ignoring her protests. He turned her back into the corner then. "Nose back in the corner. Any more objections, and you lose another article of clothing."

"You can't do this, Heath Danvers," she protested, stamping her booted foot.

Heath's reply was to grab the bodice by the hem and slip it off over her head, leaving her in shoes, stockings, and bloomers around her knees. "Care to keep going?"

Maddie was silent then, and she faced the corner, sulking. If she kept protesting, she would soon be naked! Gradually, she began to calm down, and finally, she sighed, realizing that Heath did have options.

She jumped when she felt his hand on her buttocks, caressing and then working his way up her smooth back. She shivered, the goose bumps rising on her skin.

"Are you going to behave yourself, now?" Heath whispered throatily in her ear while his other hand began an exploration of her still flat tummy, moving up to circle the rosy peaks with his thumb.

"Yes," she gasped, "oh, yes---"

His mouth closed over hers, cutting off the words. After a long, drugging kiss, he led her to the rug in front of the fireplace where he had placed a fluffy quilt and gently pushed her down onto it.

Kneeling in front of Maddie, Heath lifted one small foot and took off her shoe, then the other one. Slowly he peeled the knee-high stockings from her legs, followed by the bloomers.

Maddie sat on the quilt, leaning back on her hands, watching her husband. Desire flickered hotly along her veins, and she groaned as his tongue followed his hands up the insides of her thighs, tasting and nibbling his way to the waiting bud demanding his attention.

She laid back, her hands clutching the blankets as she let herself be swept away on a tide of rising passion. "Ohhhh," she moaned, whipping her head back and forth. "Oh...Heath!"

"There are rewards for good little girls, as well as punishments for bad ones," murmured Heath wickedly, holding back. "Which one are you, honey?" His fingers dipped into her sweetness, rubbing gently back and forth, causing her to groan with deepening need.

Maddie couldn't take any more, and she burst out, "I'm a good girl, darling...a good girl!"

"I thought so," Heath replied with great satisfaction. "You're going to be my good girl all the time aren't you?"

"Yes! Yes!" She squeaked frantically.

"And, here's your reward."

Maddie cried out with pleasure as her husband took her to love's peak and caught her on the way down, only to climb with her once more. This time, they leapt together into passion's embrace.



## The Way of a Woman

### Chapter One

Evelyn stared out the little kitchen window at the back of the blacksmith shop, watching Tom rigorously chopping wood. Her husband had taken his shirt off and his upper body was tanned and strong, the muscles in his biceps bulging with each impact of the huge ax he was swinging into the three foot sections of logs.. They split under the dominant force of that swing, mere wooden splinters unable to resist the sharp bite of the ax, falling to the wayside like so much refuse. It was a thing of beauty, the rhythm of his perfectly coordinated muscles, mesmerizing her, creating a hunger that gnawed in her belly like a living thing.

Her hands inevitably stilled in the soapy dishwater as her eyes avidly devoured him, her mind trying to block the decadent images that raced inside it, stoking it to a fevered pitch. Shaking her head like a dog trying to get rid of a pesky flea, she forced herself to look away from his magnificent form and back into the boring dishwater, applying her hands once more to their assigned task. Where had all these thoughts come from? She wondered, trying to suppress the growing ache between her thighs. A Christian woman never entertained such thoughts as these and yet here she was, lusting after her own husband! It was a sin sure as the good Lord had said it was, to think such thoughts! Thus it followed that she, Evelyn Grouse, was a sinner!

Ever since that night they'd come back from the Preacher's place all those weeks ago and Tom had spanked her behind while he held her under his long arm, she'd been plagued with the devil's own thoughts! But the love they'd made that night had been powerful... more so than any other time, and she'd enjoyed it to tears, something very unusual

for her! Surely it was a sin to find so much pleasure in that bodily pursuit? Only whores found that kind of pleasure, which was why they took to the profession so readily... everyone said so. Still, it wouldn't leave her be and try as she might, she hadn't been able to suppress the desire of wanting a repeat of that night, not just once, but again and again.

Her face turned red at her unruly thoughts and she tried unsuccessfully to brush them aside. They'd only been growing stronger since that night and she now found herself wondering how to push Tom into spanking her again. Lord almighty, preserve her from these thoughts! She put her hands to her face and could feel the glowing heat from her cheeks.

All the men in Brocton spanked their wives and Evelyn had counted herself lucky that she could manage Tom so well... at least she had. Now she wondered if she'd been missing something all these years. She'd finally admitted to herself that she'd lost respect for her husband, as easily as she could push him around. Plus, she'd been bitter and soured for a long time now and that wasn't becoming for a woman. It also intrigued her that the Preacher thought Tom should spank her. She didn't need to wonder if he spanked Maddie, she already knew the answer to that one.

"Evelyn Grouse, get yourself under control," she scolded, rinsing the last breakfast plate and laying it on the sideboard. She picked up the pan of dishwater and walked out to the garden where she poured it on her tomato plants. "No point in wasting water."

The small talk she made to herself was pointless, but she found it helped to break her solid concentration on her lusty thoughts. She pointedly averted her eyes from Tom's glorious perspiring

form and walked back to the house, her body ramrod stiff.

As she entered the back door, a sudden thought struck her. Maddie! She could talk to Maddie... Maddie got spanked! She wondered why she hadn't thought of it before, especially since that trick Maddie had pulled on the Preacher that night had backfired.

She and Heath had invited them out for dinner with the intention of having Maddie be rude to Heath so Heath could take her to the bedroom and discipline her... all for Tom's benefit. It was the Preacher's bright idea to give Tom the notion to spank his own wife. It had backfired when Maddie had howled like she was being harshly beaten and Tom had left in a huff, dragging Evelyn after him. It was that episode that had prompted Evelyn to push Tom into swatting her behind that night after they got home, and she'd enjoyed it. Not only enjoyed it, but it had turned her into a wanton sinner and she greatly feared there was no going back. Instead, she longed to go forward, if she could just get Tom to cooperate!

Without thinking further, she untied her apron, put on her bonnet and then hurried to the stables. She fumed as she mounted Goliath, sitting sidesaddle to accommodate her dress. How she longed for pants! She wished women could wear pants, but it was against the law and she knew Maddie and her sister-in-law had already been in trouble for trying. Some danged nosy neighbors had gone and spilled the beans!

Evelyn never rode a horse generally, preferring to take the wagon, but today she didn't want to take the time to hitch it up. It never even occurred to her that Tom would be worried about her taking Goliath. The horse wouldn't dare disobey her! She grabbed the reins in a firm practiced grip and clucked for him to git up. Obediently, he headed

down the track, out to the main street and then east towards the Preacher's ranch, obedient as a lamb. She didn't stop to think how she would get the questions out to Maddie once she got there; she only knew she was busting to ask!

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Tom took the handkerchief out of his back pocket and wiped the sweat off his dark brow. Squinting up at the sun, he calculated another dozen logs or so and he'd be ready to take a well deserved break. Maybe Evelyn would have some of that lemonade made up for him that he liked so well. Imagining the sharp, tangy flavor on his tongue almost made him salivate and he hurried, wanting to get finished with this part of his day. This afternoon he would spend in the blacksmith shop.

The days were getting shorter and there was a decided nip in the air. It was time to get all his wood cut for the winter and stored in the woodshed for the blacksmith's fire and his home fires. Speaking of home fires, he wondered what Evelyn was doing at the moment. Probably dishes... she hated dishes, but that didn't stop her from doing them. Evelyn had a strong sense of duty and obligation.

Idly he once again let his thoughts stray back to that night he had paddled her little bottom... territory his traitorous thoughts had traveled over and over! It'd been a delightful night and he longed for a repeat of more of the same. It wasn't that they hadn't been together; Evelyn rarely denied him, but it had been different that night. She'd been softer, more pliant and willing... and she'd been ready for him before they even made it to the bedroom. She'd made him feel different that night, like he was more in control, and she'd been less impatient with him since then. At times he found

her watching him like she was speculating on something and he wondered if she was fretting over it too.

He reckoned maybe he ought to go talk to the Preacher and maybe apologize for taking off in a huff that night. Then perhaps he could see if the Preacher got that kind of a reaction from Maddie... if he could get the questions out. His ears flushed red as he pondered how to ask those questions. Maybe he should approach it in the confessional? It wasn't the sort of conversation a man had every day unless you were talking about whores. Tom had heard plenty of that kind of talk in his time, but men didn't talk about their wives like that. Might be a mite hard to start up a conversation, especially after all this time. Why, it had been nigh onto a year since they'd had dinner with them and Evelyn had miscarried her baby again. It seemed that she was doomed to remain childless and Tom didn't know how to fix it.

She and Maddie had both been pregnant last year, just before Christmas and the babies had been due in the summer. Maddie had born hers, but Evelyn had miscarried again, much to her disappointment. Still, she'd seemed to take it better this time, as if she were resigned to never having another baby.

Grunting, he bent down, picked up the felled wood and threw it into the pile. Whacking the ax head into the chopping block, he went towards the house to find his wife and some of that cold lemonade.

As he passed the corral, his eyes narrowed and it hit him that Goliath wasn't in it. Had he gotten out? Had he left the gate open? He checked the gate and saw that it was locked. Whoever had taken the horse had neatly closed the gate behind them, but who was it? Surely it wasn't Evelyn! Hurrying into the house, he checked the kitchen.

"Evelyn? Evelyn... where are you?"

He hurried from room to room, checking each room and the yard out front. No sign of his tiny wife. He shuddered to imagine her on that great hulk of horseflesh... the animal was hard enough to control with the buckboard. Beyond that, where could she have gone? He hurried to the pasture to get the mule. It was the only transportation he had at the present, so Harvey would have to do! But where was he supposed to start looking for her? Where would she go? She didn't really have any close women friends.

He chased the mule three times around the stall before he finally feinted a turn and came back on it. "Consarn you, Harvey, I'm going to put this harness on you, so you might as well give up," he grumbled.

After several tries, he finally managed to get the recalcitrant mule ready to be ridden and straddled it, his big frame looking incongruous on the small animal. "Git up, Harvey, we got to find Evelyn before she gets herself hurt on Goliath." His only answer was a bray from Harvey, but the little animal did his best to kick up his feet and go.

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Maddie had just put Caroline down for her morning nap when she heard the sound of a horse outside the front door. Opening it, she stared at the sight before her, hardly able to believe her eyes. It was Evelyn Grouse, atop Goliath, Tom's Percheron! The beast was as big as a house and she held her breath until Evelyn slid safely off the side of the enormous animal and tied him up to the railing post in front of her house. Then she let out a deep sigh of relief and went to greet her guest, curiosity replacing her earlier alarm.

"What a pleasure to see you, Evelyn, what brings you out this way?"

Evelyn straightened her bonnet that had slipped sideways, drew her shoulders back like she had accomplished an impossible task, which in Maddie's eyes it was, and then stepped up on the porch, her eyes shining with determination.

"I need to talk to you, Maddie, I don't know who else to turn to." Her voice was half desperate, half defiant and Maddie wondered what in the world was wrong! Evelyn was so self-contained; she rarely talked with anyone very much, let alone shared her burdens.

"Of course, come in and I'll make us a cup of tea," Maddie replied soothingly, taking Evelyn by the arm and gently ushering her inside. She made small talk as she bustled around, set two cups on the kitchen table and filled them with steaming hot tea. The fall nip in the air made a nice cup of hot tea very welcome to visitors. She pushed the sugar bowl towards her uneasy guest and then sat down across from her, waiting for her to speak. It was obvious Evelyn was agitated because she dropped three successive teaspoons of sugar into the cup and Maddie had only ever seen her take one

"What's wrong, Evelyn, can you tell me about it?" She prodded gently, trying not to spook her guest. It would be just like the woman to up and decide she didn't want to talk after all and stalk out. Evelyn's shortness was infamous here in Brocton and Maddie didn't think there was anyone who hadn't been on the receiving end of it, especially poor old Tom!

Evelyn finally took a sip of the overly sweetened tea and frowned down at the cup. "My lands, Maddie, did you already sweeten this tea?"

Maddie grinned. "No, you put in three teaspoons. I didn't think you normally took that many, but you seem a bit out of sorts."

Evelyn flushed, her fingers twitching on the curved handle of the teacup. "Well... yes... I guess

I am." She looked nervously at Maddie. "This isn't easy for me to talk about, I'm not much good at gossip and other womanly pursuits that seem to go on here in Brocton, but this time, I'm not sure what to do and I was hoping another woman might give me some insight."

She rushed it all together and Maddie's ears burned at the gossip comment, but she nodded her head encouragingly at Evelyn. "I'll try to help in any way I can, Evelyn, you know that."

Evelyn breathed deeply. "Yes, I reckon I do, that's why I came here rather than somewhere else. You 've always been discreet as near as I can tell. I admire that."

It was Maddie's turn to blush. She cleared her throat. "Thank you, that means a lot to me."

At last, unable to hold it back any longer, Evelyn just blurted it out, "Which is why I want you to tell me something... how do you get your man to spank you?"

Maddie had been gingerly sipping her hot tea, her little pinkie daintily lifted in the air when the question took her by surprise. She choked and spluttered as the tea went down the wrong pipe, and she gasped and reached for the napkin on the table to mop up the mess. Then she stared at Evelyn in amazement. Had she really heard that question come out of her mouth?

"You... you want Tom to spank you? Is that what you're asking?" Her delicate brows lifted in shock.

Evelyn cleared her throat and flushed beet red. "I think so... yes."

"You really want a paddling?" Maddie's tones were incredulous and her voice went a few notches higher.

"Look, if you don't want to talk about it, I understand. I'll go." Evelyn stood up, obviously embarrassed at Maddie's shock and surprise.



Maddie jumped to her feet. "Oh no... no, don't go." Her mind worked lightning fast. Surely Evelyn didn't want a harsh whipping... probably she wanted pleasure and wasn't sure how to go about getting it? "You just took me aback for a moment because I hate it when Heath spansks me... but," she stopped as Evelyn sank slowly back into her chair and leaned forward in a conspiratorial whisper, "I do like the way it makes me feel later... you know?"

Evelyn nodded and flushed a deeper red, if that was possible. She was already the color of a red onion and that was almost purple. But it was a delicate subject and Maddie understood.

"It's only happened once," Evelyn confessed, "but I haven't been able to get it out of my mind, it was..." She stopped, unable to admit her deeper feelings for the subject at hand. She waved her tiny fingers helplessly in the air. "I just know I can't stop thinking about it and ladies aren't supposed to think about... those things... you know?"

Maddie nodded her head in assent and considered her dilemma. "I can understand how you feel; it's certainly an embarrassing subject, isn't it? But we're both mature women here and sometimes you have to talk about... delicate things.

Evelyn nodded, sighed and sank back in her chair. Now that the worst was over, maybe they could have a really good chat!

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Tom was making his way down the main street of Brocton when Sheriff Crockett stopped him. "Tom, you sure do look a sight on that little mule. How is it Evelyn gets Goliath and you get stuck with the ass?" The grin on the Sheriff's good natured countenance irked Tom, even as easy going as he was.

"Did you see which way she went?" he asked through gritted teeth. "She really shouldn't be on

that horse; I can't think what's gotten into her. She ain't never tried to ride Goliath before."

The Sheriff tipped his hat back and scratched his head. "Well, now, I believe she was headed out east of town. Do you know why she'd head out there?"

"If I knew that, I'd know where to go," replied Tom shortly. "Only person I can think of that she might visit out that way would be Maddie and the Preacher."

"That's true," replied the Sheriff with a nod. "Reckon you better lay down the law with that wife of yours, Tom. She could get hurt on a monster like Goliath."

Tom grunted and clicked to the mule to git on up. "Guess I'll head on out that way and hope she hasn't been thrown and broke her neck." His keen hearing caught the comment behind him from Sam, the mercantile shop owner, as he joined the Sheriff in the street.

"I doubt even Goliath can withstand a tongue like a razor," Sam guffawed.

Tom felt his ears go red all over again. His lips tightened and his hand gripped the reins fiercely, but at the bottom of all this aggravation was a growing fear... a very real fear for his smaller than petite wife. She may have a tongue like a razorback boar tusk, but that didn't mean she could handle a brute like Goliath.

He kicked the mule in the ribs in an effort to urge it along, getting more and more impatient to find her and make sure she was okay. He felt like giving her a hiding she wouldn't forget, but he was still trying to get used to the idea that he should. At least everyone kept telling him he should, even the Preacher.

He had to admit, the one time he'd given her some spanks on her little backside, she'd responded in a way he hadn't seen in years... he'd enjoyed it

too! His mind kept wandering back to that night and wondering if he might get a repeat if he did it again? His lips went even thinner. If she managed to live through this, then he just might give her another spanking... a real one this time, not just a few warning slaps! He didn't know if the same passionate feelings would be there if he really punished her, but teaching her a lesson was his first priority! With a self righteous grunt, he kicked the complaining Harvey in the side and urged him on.

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Back at Maddie's place, Evelyn was staring at her in distaste. "You mean do something on purpose to make Tom mad?"

Maddie nodded. "Yes, that's one way to get Tom to spank you, if that's truly what you want."

Evelyn fidgeted with her teacup. "Lord knows it's hard to make that husband of mine angry." She shook her head and took a sip of tea. "I guess that's a good thing, considering I have a big temper. It hasn't gotten any better with the passage of time either."

"You're lucky," replied Maddie wistfully. "I don't like Heath spanking me; I wish I could convince him it's not the thing to do." Her brows drew together in a scowl. "But that Sam Decker has him fully convinced that it's necessary."

Sam had been a thorn in Maddie's side ever since Heath had become friends with the mercantile owner. Of course Angelina, his wife, was Maddie's good friend, so she guessed it would stand to reason that Sam and Heath would get along. If only Sam would quit filling Heath's head with all these spanking notions!

The ladies chatted on, Evelyn finally getting past her embarrassment at the subject matter to ask Maddie a few pertinent questions.

Maddie in turn found Evelyn an enjoyable person to talk to once she began to open up.

Finally, Evelyn drank the last of her tea and stood up. "Land sakes, Maddie, I've taken up enough of your time. Caroline will soon be fussing and Tom will be wondering where I am." She bustled towards the door.

Maddie followed, privately wondering if Tom would have anything to say about Evelyn coming out alone on Goliath. She was pretty worried about her getting back safely. The horse was such a huge beast that there was no way Evelyn could control him if he took a notion to run off with her.

"Evelyn, why don't you let me hitch up the buckboard and we can tie Goliath to the back. That way neither of us will have to control him, and we can get you back in one piece."

"Oh pshaw, Goliath is fine, he just needs a firm hand and voice." She scrunched up her tiny nose. "I do wish I could wear pants though, that's one thing I envy Tom for."

"You too?" Maddie's eyes gleamed. "That's a wish I second."

"I heard you got in a spot of trouble with your sister-in-law over wearing pants."

Maddie flushed and then nodded. "Old man Pritchett... didn't take to it none," she explained sheepishly. "I guess we scared him out of a year's aging."

Evelyn snorted. "The old tart wasn't scared of nothing, he just wanted to cause trouble."

The two women looked at each other and Maddie was surprised to hear something that sounded suspiciously like a giggle coming from Evelyn. She couldn't help it, she starting laughing out loud at the sudden impish look on Evelyn's face.

"I guess if all else fails, maybe you might order me a pair of them britches, Maddie. Maybe that would spark Tom's interest."

They were standing in the open doorway of the house with Maddie looking out beyond Evelyn's shoulder. "Oh my, Evelyn. I don't know what that expression on Tom's face means to you, but I know what it means when Heath looks like that. You may be about to get your wish!"

## The Way of a Woman

### Chapter Two

Evelyn spun around to see her husband approaching on Harvey, his long legs nearly dragging the ground and one of the fiercest looks she had ever seen on his rugged face. His blue eyes were practically blazing at her and her hand flew to her throat.

"Evelyn," he started in a calm voice that belied the storm in his eyes, "what in tarnation possessed you to take Goliath without the buckboard? That horse is no horse for a woman, let alone a tiny scrap like you. You've had me scared half to earth and worrying about you all the way out here! Not to mention taking off without even telling me you was going. What has gotten into you, Evelyn Grouse?"

Evelyn was shocked at his tone, but she recovered quickly, figuring the best thing to do was attack right back. "What on earth are you going on about, Thomas Grouse?" Her hands flew to her hips and her foot starting tapping on the wooden porch boards as if she were losing her patience.

Maddie tried to suppress a smile as she watched her friends. It looked like Evelyn might be in for a surprise a little sooner than she had anticipated.

This time though, Tom had no intention of backing down. He dismounted rather stiffly from Harvey and came to stand in front of his petite wife, staring down at her with an expression that was foreign to Evelyn. It made her heart skip a beat and excitement race along her senses. He looked...angry! Tom never got angry...at least not at her.

"What I'm saying, Evelyn Grouse, is that you should not have been up on a brute like Goliath. I don't know what possessed you to take such a notion, but you scared me half to death! I had to

ride all the way from town on that ornery mule, praying all the way that the good Lord would see to it that you didn't get thrown off and break your little neck!" By this time Tom's eyes were fair to blazing and Evelyn could only stare with her mouth open. It seemed she had found the outside limit of her husband's tolerance and all without any intention of doing so!

Trying her best to gather her wits about her, she struck a defiant pose, a deliberate defiant pose of course, and raised her voice right back, "If I want to ride Goliath, I'll ride Goliath and there isn't a thing you can do about it." She pushed her little frame up as high as she could and waved her pointed finger under Tom's nose. "Just see if I don't!"

"You've gone to far this time, Evelyn, you've gone too far!" He dipped his massive shoulder and picked his wife up and laid her right over it. "Maddie, I'm going to need the use of your barn for a little while," he announced with a steely determination that Maddie had never heard before. With wide eyes she could only nod her head, unsure whether to be happy for Evelyn or not. It looked like her wish was about to come true, but Maddie didn't envy her, no way!

Evelyn's heart pounded with excitement and fear, all rolled into one. It looked like this was it...she was going to get spanked! She beat her fists against Tom's broad back and kicked him in the chest with her pointed boots and was rewarded with a smart slap on her skirted behind.

"Stop that," Tom ordered, slapping her again. "Those pointed toes of your hurt!"

"I don't care," yelled Evelyn, her face red. The flush of excitement and passion was making her hot all over in spite of the cool weather. When the barn door slammed shut behind them, she began to panic and wonder if she had lost her mind.

"I didn't want to have to do this, Evelyn, but you forced me into it," said Tom with regret. "I'm going to have to spank you this time, even though I don't want to." That wasn't totally true, he really did want to spank her, but he hated hurting her.

Evelyn didn't say anything, she simply struggled as he gently laid her down over his long thighs. She was so small her feet didn't even touch the barn floor where he sat on the nearest bale of hay. The next thing she knew her skirts were falling around her ears and she could feel the cooler air as Tom peeled her lacy, knee length undergarment down to her knees. She kicked out and squealed at the embarrassment of it all, but her heart was like a runaway locomotive, full speed ahead and racing!

Tom didn't keep her in suspense and she looked back in time to see his long arm begin its downward descent, his big palm flat and the long fingers splayed. His hand almost reached across both her cheeks at once and she felt the burn a few seconds after it connected with her soft flesh.

Her breath caught in her chest and she tried to exhale and suck in more air as the next spank caught her again, right in the same danged spot! The sting was sharp and hot and by the time the third slap landed, she had found her voice and let go with a full throated scream. This was nothing like the taps he had given her on her skirted bottom that night...the night she had been dreaming and drooling about for weeks. This hurt like a forest fire, hot and burning and she began to struggle, her arm flailing and her short legs pumping up and down like a butter churn.

Within seconds she was sobbing harshly and begging Tom to let her up. "Please, Tom, please let me go, I can't stand it."

Tom stopped spanking and asked her a question. "Are you going to stay off Goliath? I don't want you on that horse again, Evelyn. I seen



my younger brother killed when he was thrown off a horse like Goliath and I won't let it happen to you. I never figured you to ever get on him like that so I never worried about warning you away from him. I figured you had too much good sense to do a fool thing like that." He pulled her upright and looked earnestly into her wet face. "Promise me you won't, or I'll keep on spanking you until you do!"

Evelyn looked through her tears into the honest feelings on the face of her husband and could see regret and determination there, warring for dominance in his eyes. She threw her arms around his broad neck and sobbed into his shoulder. "I p...promise, Tom, I won't ride Goliath like that no more, not if it worries you so."

Something changed inside Tom as he felt the softness of his wife clinging to his frame so submissively and her sobbing promise to obey him and not worry him. He felt...proud. Proud to be her husband, proud that she had humbled herself and proud that she belonged to him, every minute inch of her.

Suddenly he couldn't wait to have her. The softness of her bare bottom pressing against his leg and his hand feeling the heat of her cheeks under her dress was making him incredibly hot! A quick check with his fingers in that special place told him she was just as ready for him as he was for her.

"I need you, little girl," he whispered against her mouth as he stood up with her. She clung to him, nodding her head against her shoulder as she blushed fiercely. She couldn't deny him, even though it was broad daylight in the Preacher's barn! It was like something came over the two of them and they were as newlyweds against, unable to keep their hands off each other.

When Tom's huge girth parted her softness, she couldn't help the scream of pure pleasure that

escaped her lips and she rose to meet him like wanton woman, clinging to him as he drove carefully home. He was aware of her smallness as he always was, but she seemed to take his immense proportions without any problem, her slickness enfolding him like a tight glove. He groaned in appreciation as he drove her back against the softness of the fragrant hay, finally taking his pleasure as she found hers and then rolling over to lay panting beside her. It had been so damned good it was almost a sin!

Evelyn finally got her breathing under control and she sat up, visibly shaking as her hands pulled up her pantaloons and smoothed down her dress. Shyly she avoided Tom's eye's, unable to face him in the humiliating brightness of daylight, unsure of herself as she had never been before.

Tom followed suit and fastened his clothes, but then he pulled Evelyn down to sit between his legs, his actions surprising her yet again. "I ain't told you lately how pretty you are, have I?" He mused the question as he watched her expressive face blush yet another becoming shade of pink. She was so soft, so bemused, so unlike the Evelyn that had become a soured woman over the last several years. He was falling in love with her all over again, but this time...this time, he didn't want to see the soft submissive side of his wife disappear. It seemed the Preacher and most of Brocton knew something he hadn't known. Now he did...and he didn't want to let go of it.

Clearing his throat his long thumb brushed along the base of her chin. "This may come as a shock to you, little girl, but I've decided I'm going to have to spank you when I think you need it. How do you feel about that?"

Evelyn's lips trembled, but her eyes were shining and she nodded her head...it was what she wanted. "Yes, Tom, if that's what you think is best,

I'll abide by it." She lifted her mouth for his kiss and melted into his powerful frame, wishing they were home in their bed. She could feel those feelings coming on again, but it was scandalous to stay any longer in Maddie's barn. Lucky for them, Maddie was discreet, but there was no sense in pushing their luck!

"Let's get on home then, I'm thinking of taking off work for awhile this afternoon," he rumbled into her hair. "I've got some powerful needs that won't seem to let me be lately.

"Oh, Tom," she replied, fiddling with his shirt buttons. "I've been feeling the same way...does that make me a sinner?" She looked up at him with a question in her eyes, genuinely worried.

"Well if it does, then we're sinners together." He picked her up and carried her out of the barn, her laughter sounded wonderful in his ears. It had been so long since she had laughed with any real feeling. Somehow, he would find a way to give her a child. If she couldn't carry one of her own, then he'd find another way. His Evelyn wanted to be a mother more than any woman he'd known and he vowed he'd find a way to make it happen.

He put her up on Goliath and grabbed Harvey's reins, then swung up behind her. They were just leaving the yard when Heath came in on Bacon.

"What brings you out this way, Tom?" He noticed the flush on Evelyn's cheeks and wondered if she was feeling well. She was awfully red. Had she been here to see Maddie about some herbs?

"Just chasing Evelyn," Tom replied with a grin. "She decided to take off on Goliath all by her lonesome, so I had to track her down."

Heath peered closely at Evelyn's face. "You feeling okay, Evelyn? You look mighty flushed. Did Maddie give you some herbs for fever?"

Evelyn's face turned redder. "Uhh...no, no thank you, Preacher. I just came to talk to Maddie

for a spell, that's all. I'm not sick." She averted her eyes and tried to hide her face from his assessing gaze.

"Well, then, how about staying for lunch? I'm sure Maddie has enough soup on for all of us." Heath dismounted from Bacon and tied the reins up to the hitching post. "You're more than welcome to sit and chat some more, and then I can accompany you back to town."

Tom looked down at Evelyn and then grinned at Heath. "No, no thank you, Preacher, we got business at home to take care of. But it was right nice of you to invite us. Maybe another time though." He kicked Goliath lightly in the ribs and turned him towards the gate, nodding at Heath as they left.

Heath pondered what had brought Evelyn out here for a moment as he watched them leave, then stepped inside the house. His stomach was eating his back bone and the delicious aroma coming from the kitchen had him salivating. It was time for lunch and he was starved!

"Maddie!" He yelled as he made his way towards the kitchen, expecting her to call back.

"In here," she replied, right on cue. Maddie was waiting with nervous anticipation. She had never done anything like this before and she wasn't sure of Heath's reaction. Would he like it?

Hanging his jacket and hat on the coat stand, Heath made his way into the kitchen and then stopped dead in his tracks, the food forgotten at the spectacle before him.

It was Maddie, dressed in nothing but a frilly, flowered apron boasting a cabbage rose design and wielding a wooden spoon that had recently been stirring the steaming pot on the stove. There was a wicked glint in her eye that Heath recognized and he watched avidly as she reached out with the tip of her pink tongue to lick the spoon and then run that

same delectable tongue around equally delectable, perfect lips.

"Hungry, honey?" Maddie's teasing blue eyes taunted him, her blonder hair brushing across the tips of her pert nipples as she reached for a bowl beside the stove. When she turned her back to him to dip into the steaming pot, he devoured the sight of the smooth sweep of delicate skin that covered her from the nape of her neck down, including the luscious globes of her cheeky backside.

"Not anymore," he replied huskily, coming up behind her, "not for food anyway." He began to nibble on the tender skin at the nape of her neck after brushing her hair aside for better access, causing her to shiver. It was then the wicked imp strategically poked him in his nether regions and he just couldn't stop the next words out of his mouth. "But you better let me tell Tom and Evelyn to go home, I invited them for lunch." His brown eyes twinkled down at the back of her head, the corners of his lips barely able to control the upturning motion that would signal he was teasing.

Maddie froze instantly in place, her face aghast, and her eyes huge as she absorbed the impact of those words. "H...here?" She croaked at last, twisting around to look at him. "Tom and Evelyn are here?"

At his nod she turned around like the hounds of hell were on her heels to flee into the pantry and slam the door. Then she opened it a crack to hiss, "Quick, go get my clothes on the bed. Make up some excuse, I don't care, just don't embarrass me, Heath Danvers, or I'll...I'll." What she would do was lost as the door slammed shut.

Heath couldn't help it, he began to laugh. As he laughed uproariously, the door slowly opened a crack and a suspicious eye stared out at him.

Maddie's ire began to raise, her outrage and indignation climbing with racing fingers to the

boiling point as it all hit her and she realized that Heath had been joking. She warred between hurt feelings at him so callously ruining her attempt at seduction and anger that he had the nerve to make fun of her afterwards! She opened the door a little wider and pointed the spoon at him, her fingers trembling with anger. "You...you...you are a clod and you can get your own lunch. I'm not waiting on you, Heath Danvers, that was a mean trick to play."

She threw the spoon at him and then burst into tears as she fled to the bedroom to throw herself on the bed. How could Heath be so cruel? Had she failed that miserably to entice him? She sobbed into the pillow and hid herself under the covers, hating her husband for his thoughtless prank and wondering if he no longer found her appealing. It was true she had some stretch marks on her belly and it wasn't flat like it used to be, but she had just born a child a few months ago. Was he repulsed by the marks?

She sobbed harder to think that her husband no longer found her attractive. They had only made love a few times since the baby had been born and it had been more of a groping dance in the dark after getting Caroline to sleep. Maddie had been more exhausted than anything else. Talking with Evelyn had aroused her and she had mistakenly thought to entice her husband into a little daytime play. They hadn't indulged in ages!

Heath was flummoxed as he rubbed the huge knot rising on his forehead and stared at Maddie huddled and sobbing beneath the blankets on their bed. He looked at the offending spoon in his hand and back at his upset wife, wondering what in the word was going on? Had Maddie lost her sense of humor? And she had actually thrown this spoon at him, hitting him on the forehead before he could duck the unexpected missile. He was sure it was

going to bruise and he would have to figure out how to explain this to his parishioners!

"Maddie?" He spoke uncertainly, approaching the bed with caution in chase she lashed out again. Laying the spoon aside, he gingerly pulled the covers back and touched her on her silky shoulder.

"Go away, Heath," she mumbled into the pillow.

Heath ignored her and picked her up instead, then sat on the bed with her on his lap.

Maddie tried to wiggle off his lap, holding the front of the apron down with one hand so he wouldn't be able to see the ugliness. She kept her face turned away from him as she resisted.

"Maddie, stop it," he demanded, holding her firmly and reaching out with one hand to turn her chin up to face him. "What in the world is wrong with you? It was just a little joke."

He looked genuinely puzzled, but Maddie was beyond caring. "You just did it because you didn't want to make love to me, didn't you?" The tears oozed from her huge eyes and trickled down her pale face. "You think my body is ugly now and you aren't attracted to me anymore, so you just made fun instead."

"What?" Heath was flabbergasted. He tried to follow her line of reasoning and the same as untold numbers of males before him, he failed miserably. He shook his head. "Where in the world did you come up with that? I love you, Maddie, you could never be ugly to me."

She gripped the apron and held it tightly, keeping it down over her tummy. She stared at her hands and refused to acknowledge him.

At last Heath began to see the light. He gently put his hand over her balled fists and tried to unclench the apron material from them. When she refused to let go, his other hand simply untied the apron from the back and let the sides fall down.

"Don't," whimpered Maddie. "Just keep this covered up and you won't have to look at me."

Heath firmly pulled the apron from her clenching fingers and then put his hand on her tummy, his fingers tracing the marks that bore the record of Caroline's birth. "These are beautiful, Maddie," he said sternly. "They are the evidence of your sacrifice to bring my child into the world, why in the good Lord's name would you ever think they were ugly?"

The silent tears continued to trickle down Maddie's cheeks and she refused to look at him.

Heath picked her up and laid her on the bed, then knelt down beside it to pay homage to the red and purple lines that shown faintly on the tender skin. He kissed every single mark and then took her hands into his own large ones and kissed the palms of each one.

"I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings, Maddie. I love you, everything about you is beautiful, especially these marks. They are proof of your love for me and I treasure them. I'll always love you, more than life itself."

As he reiterated his own personal vow that she hadn't heard in too long, Maddie began to sob anew. She threw herself into his arms and hugged him fiercely. "You really mean it? You don't think it's ugly?"

Heath disentangled himself from her arms long enough to shed his clothes, and then he joined her on the bed, reaffirming the overwhelming love he felt for her as his wife and the mother of their child. As they lay there afterwards with her head cradled on his shoulder, he remembered the wooden spoon and he reached up to feel the huge knot it had left.

It was Maddie's turn to tease this time and she smiled up at him. "You deserved that, you know you did."



Heath growled and turned over to reach for the discarded spoon by the bedside. "Oh I did, did I? How is it my fault that my wife forgot how to take a joke? If I deserved to get bonked with this spoon, then I think you deserve to get spanked with it for putting a knot on my head."

Maddie laughed and wrestled with him for ownership of the dreaded spoon. It was a losing situation for her though and she soon found herself face down on the bed with Heath's long leg stretched over both of her thighs.

"You think this knot is funny?" He smacked her right cheek firmly with the spoon, creating an almost instant spoon shaped welt and Maddie cried out and tried to wiggle from under his legs, the laughter still bubbling over.

"Come on, Heath, you have to admit it's funny! It really is, I didn't mean to hit you and yet it got you right between the eyes...well...almost."

He smacked her firmly a few more times, taking satisfaction in turning the milky globes into nice pink ovals. "And just what am I supposed to tell everyone when they see the bruise?"

"Tell them your wife beat you up?" Maddie collapsed in another fit of laughter that ended on a shriek as the spoon set her cheeks stinging again.

"Ow, Heath...that's not fair! I only got to hit you once," she complained trying to reach her hand back to relieve the burning sensation. "Besides, it should make you happy to know that Tom spanked Evelyn, right in our barn."

Heath set the spoon aside and turned her over to look in her face. "Really? Is that what happened to put the blush on Evelyn's face?" He grinned and looked proud of himself. "So he took my advice after all."

Maddie reached up and flicked his nose with her finger. "Nah, of course he didn't. It was Evelyn that took my advice. She decided she liked being

spanked so she came to me to ask how to get him to do it again."

It was Heath's turn to look incredulous. "You're kidding, right?"

Maddie giggled and shook her head. "No, she really did come out here to ask me that. Lucky for me, Tom was already hot on her trail for riding Goliath out here alone. She didn't have to follow my wise council this time. Next time though, I'm sure she will." She spoke confidently and Heath studied her with suspicion.

"And just what might this sage council be that you impart to our dear Evelyn?"

"A girl can't tell all her secrets," Maddie replied with a wise and knowing smile, "it's the way of a woman. We all stick together."

Heath lifted the wooden spoon again. "She can under duress." He waved the spoon over her thighs, threatening to make it land on them.

Maddie giggled and drew her knees up, holding onto Heath's arm so it couldn't fall on it's target. After a few more moments of heated tussling, Heath threw the spoon aside and swooped down to find Maddie's rosy lips again.

"Only one way to hush a know it all woman," he announced just before he branded her with his lips.

Her laughing protests were smothered under the heat of his mouth and she felt the flame of desire curling in her stomach. "It's the same for a know it all man," she whispered, the soft laughter in her breath as she put her arms around his neck and pulled him down to her waiting body.

"I love you, Maddie," he whispered fervently against the pale column of her throat.

"More than life itself," she finished for him, her eyes sparkling like jewels.

"Don't forget it again."

"Then don't forget to say it," she panted, her body rising to meet his thrusts, demanding all he had to give.

"Don't worry," replied the Preacher to his wife, "I won't."

## To Talk or Not to Talk

Dillon Anyers glanced sideways at the enchanting profile of his young wife, Anisha. Her booted feet were tucked up on warm bricks in the baseboards of the sleigh and the rosy blush of her heretofore pale cheeks now gleamed in the moonlit night. The newly fallen snow shimmered as flakes hardened into ice and reflected in the rays of the twinkling stars.

It was as perfect a night as you could get, the softly rounded moon globe hanging above them as if a hand had just placed it there, superimposed on a bed of stars. Dillon was glad that he'd suggested the ride. The roses his wife's cheeks were now sporting had been missing for far too long, and he was heartened at the sight, yet still very troubled.

As the sleigh's runners slid over the bed of unmarked snow, his thoughts wandered ahead to the dinner they'd been invited to at Heathcliff Danvers' warm and gracious home. The preacher and his wife seemed to have the sort of relationship that Dillon wanted to have with his own sweetheart, yet Anisha seemed to become more discontent with each day that passed. Since the miscarriage of their first baby, his young wife had not yet bounced back to her normal, cheerful self, and Dillon was beginning to despair that she ever would. It had been six months, after all!

Old Doc Collins assured them that there was no reason why two healthy young people like them couldn't have more children. Sometimes, God knew that something wasn't quite right, and that seemed the only explanation for the loss of the baby at four months. According to Doc, anyway, and now the preacher too. But it had devastated Anisha, and she was struggling to recover the cheerful demeanor she used to have. Or was she?

Dillon was trying desperately to be fair, but it really didn't seem like she was trying very hard anymore. Her tongue was getting sharper by the day, and the cuddly ways he'd so loved about her seemed to have disappeared. She was so prickly these days that she reminded him of a cactus plant at times, and getting next to her in bed seemed impossible. She didn't appear to have any interest in trying for another baby, and the lack of intimacy in their private life was taking a toll on Dillon himself. When he chided her at times, she burst into tears, making him feel like a big corn sop, so he backed off. The few times she'd let him near her, he could feel that her heart wasn't in it, and he was beginning to wonder if she blamed him somehow for the loss of their baby. Or perhaps she wasn't in love with him anymore! Sometimes, she even acted like she hated him.

Failing to get answers from his wife, he'd been forced to confide in Heathcliff Danvers, Brocton's resident preacher and counselor. It had been a delicate subject to broach, but Dillon had been desperate! As a result, he'd received an invitation to the Danvers' home for dinner, so the preacher could observe them together.

Dillon reached out to cover the small, gloved hand of the woman beside him where her fingers were clenched into tiny balls. She was always so tense these days, but she seemed to make a visible effort to relax and glance up at him with a strained smile. He'd hoped the sleigh ride might make her a little happier, even if only for an evening's entertainment.

"Like it?" he asked with boyish enthusiasm, gently squeezing her fingers.

She nodded, her azure eyes sparkling like icy snowflakes. She gave him a timid smile and sighed as she leaned into his broad side. He couldn't resist putting his arm round her and tucking her

possessively closer, even though she stiffened imperceptibly.

"It's beautiful, Dillon," she replied honestly. "I've always loved sleigh rides in the wintertime. Dad used to hook up the horses every year and takes us kids for rides." The wistful mention of children was inadvertent, and Dillon's heart wrenched when her face fell. He could feel her moving away from him, although she hadn't actually moved physically. He tried to hug her closer in a vain effort to keep her, but she seemed to withdraw even more.

"We'll take our kids for rides someday, too," he promised gently.

She didn't answer him, and Dillon sighed. "We'll have more children, Anisha. Sometimes, I don't think you believe that."

When she didn't answer him this time, he glanced sideways and saw that her profile was stiff once again. It was obvious that she didn't want to talk about it, and even the beauty of the magical Christmas evening wasn't going to change that.

"We need to talk about this, honey," he said grimly. "You can't go on feeling this way and bottling everything up inside."

She didn't answer that comment either and moved away instead, leaving a cold spot where her warmth had been. Frustration forced his next words. "Maybe I should just spank you like I've been advised to do. Maybe that will loosen your tongue!"

"Who told you to do that?" she asked, gasping with shock and anger. Her words sputtered as she voiced her indignation. "Why, that's... that's... indecent, that's what it is. I can't believe you'd even entertain the notion of such a thing, Dillon Anyers! You lay one finger on me, and I'll... I'll... I'll move back in with Mother!"

Dillon threw back his dark head and laughed. "Well, that's the most I think you've spoken at once in the last several weeks. Your conversations have gotten shorter and shorter. Maybe I'm on to something here, after all."

"No, Dillon, I won't live with a man who beats me; life is hard enough as it is." Anisha's glare might have melted the ice off the tree branches had she been concentrating on them, and Dillon was slightly perplexed.

"A little spanking is hardly a beating," he mused, staring thoughtfully at her. This was the most reaction he'd gotten from her in months. "Ever since we moved to Brocton, you've been even more closed mouth than you were after the baby died."

"I don't want to talk about that." She turned away, her face closing up as the anger faded from her lovely eyes, and the shadows beneath them took precedence to the rosy glow in her cheeks.

"I know, you never do," responded Dillon grimly. He clucked to the horses and flicked the reins along their sleek backs, angrily allowing his wife to retreat once again to that morose place he was apparently never going to be allowed to inhabit with her. "But I'm warning you, Anisha, we can't go on like this. Something will have to change soon, either by your choice or by my force, one way or the other."

She didn't answer, not that he'd expected her too, and they rode on in heavy silence through the starlit evening, each taking refuge in their own thoughts.

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"Heath! Tell me you didn't!" Maddie eyed her husband with a pained look.

Heath grinned, unrepentant as usual. He dangled one year old Caroline, named after Maddie's mother, on his knee as his wife bustled

around, preparing the table for dinner. It was Christmas time again, and he was thankful every day for the blessing of the blond haired child that had brightened his and Maddie's lives with so much love. Tom and Evelyn hadn't been so lucky. Poor Evelyn Grouse had miscarried yet again, and it was a source of great sorrow for all of them. They'd so been hoping she'd carry to term this time, but they'd been doomed to disappointment. Ironically enough, Evelyn had seemed to take it better than Tom did this time, her stoic demeanor standing her in good stead. But there was no doubting the sorrow and pain that she felt at not having the opportunity to be a mother. Shaking the fleeting thoughts from his mind, he replied to Maddie's lament.

"Yes, I did." His brown eyes twinkled with mischief. "I'm sure a good spanking would cure Dillon's wife of her reticence. Just look how vocal you get when you have your special hairbrush applied in the right places."

Maddie balled her fists on her slim hips and stared right into his eyes, fuming. "Heathcliff Danvers, I'm ashamed of you! Think about how poor Evelyn has suffered having miscarriages, and you have the nerve to think a spanking will cure Anisha's despondency? How could you even think that!"

"Relax, dear, I was only joking," replied Heath dryly. "Naturally, I did suggest a spanking, but I'm quite aware that that won't cure her despondency either. However, Dillon thinks, and so do I, that there's more going on with her than the loss of their child. He feels like he's losing her, and he doesn't know what to do about it because she won't tell him how she feels, or what he can do to make her feel better."

Maddie's hands stilled on the dinnerware. "I know. Neither me, nor Angelina have had any



success in getting her to open up to us, either. Still, they've only been in Brocton a few months. Perhaps she's just extremely shy. Maybe she'll come around soon and confide in us."

Heath nodded. "Perhaps, but I'm afraid Dillon is getting tired of waiting. Their relationship is deteriorating, and he's desperate to do something about it before it's too late."

"But... spanking?" Maddie frowned and shook her head. "I really can't see how that will help her, Heath. It might make her even more resentful."

Heath sat Caroline on the floor and put a small doll in her hands. Then he went to Maddie and slipped his arms around her waist as she turned to face him. "But think of how it changed our relationship, Maddie, darling." He dropped his head and sucked up a kiss that had her giggling and blushing.

"Maybe... but I still don't know. I'd think they need to connect on a basic level first before they can loosen up and play around."

"That's why he needs to spank her and get her talking to him. Without communication, their relationship is going to get worse and worse until the misunderstandings become insurmountable. He can't afford to let that happen," he said earnestly. "But that's why I invited them to dinner, so I could see how they really act around each other. To get a better feeling for the situation."

Maddie pushed back out of his arms and headed for the kitchen to get the glassware. "Well, you're the counselor, counselor," she replied cheekily. "But I still say it isn't the cure-all that you and Sam Decker seem to think it is!"

"Maybe not, but it sure cures a lot of things," he called after her, a teasing grin on his lips. "You can't deny that, Maddie Danvers."

She poked her head around the kitchen door, mischief gleaming in her baby blues. "Yes, I can!"

Heath was prevented from following her by the sound of horses outside. It looked like the subjects of their conversation had arrived.

After greetings, stamping of boots, and removal of all their winter gear, Anisha headed straight for baby Caroline playing on the floor. Sinking to her knees beside the baby, she became entranced in the cherub, totally ignoring the adults until Maddie announced that dinner was ready.

While Anisha was playing with the baby, Heath and Dillon watched her, talking in soft tones on the sofa near the fireplace.

"Look how her face lights up, how soft and becoming she looks when playing with the baby," commented Dillon wistfully. "She used to look at me like that, all tender and womanly. Now she seems to avoid even looking at me most of the time."

Heath nodded, unsure of what to say. There was no use in mouthing platitudes. Dillon obviously knew what he was talking about. He just didn't know what to do about it!

"We'll talk more when this evening's over," Heath replied cautiously. "But you might consider what I've said so far."

"I know I have to get her to talk, but she just won't open up to me." Dillon ran his hand through his dark hair and shrugged his shoulders. "I've given your suggestion some thought, but I can't see how that's going to suddenly make her all womanly again."

Heath smiled wisely. "You might just be surprised in that department, Dillon."

They were interrupted by Maddie's call to dinner, and the conversation was put to rest for the moment.

Heath and Maddie were both surprised when Dillon went to help his wife up from the floor, and she pushed his hands aside and jumped up by

herself. Anisha held her head up, the color high in her cheeks, as she followed Maddie to the warm country kitchen, totally ignoring her husband's attempts to escort her. She did allow him to pull the chair out and seat her, but she didn't offer even a smile of thanks.

Maddie glanced at Heath, and he raised his eyebrows at her. When he seated her, she thanked him graciously and squeezed his hand before he moved to the head of the table. The gesture wasn't lost on Anisha or Dillon, and Dillon's lips firmed into a disapproving line; then he seemed to sigh with resignation. Anisha laid her snowy white napkin in her lap, her fingers nervously twisting it, a moue of defiance on her shapely lips. She didn't even spare Dillon a look across the table.

Maddie and Heath tried to carry on a conversation, but it was stilted quite a bit of the time. Dillon tried to join in, but it was obvious that Anisha didn't intend to say much to Dillon. Her answers to Heath and Maddie were short, just bordering on curt, as if she resented having to talk at all. It was an uncomfortable meal, and Maddie was relieved when it was over. The men retired to the living room after dinner where Dillon took out his pipe, and Anisha went back to baby Caroline, not even offering to help Maddie with the dishes.

At one point, Heath came into the kitchen to see how Maddie was doing and to get her input on Anisha's behavior.

"So what do you think, Maddie? Still think I'm off base with suggesting a spanking to get her talking?"

Maddie looked up at Heath with fire in her eyes, and Heath stared back warily. Her next words had him shouting with laughter.

"Would you like to offer Dillon the use of my hairbrush? I'll be happy to lend it."

"I do believe he has one already, so you don't have to give up yours," he replied, still chuckling.

"I don't mind... really."

Heath chuckled her under the chin. "No, I'm sure you wouldn't, but it won't be necessary. Let's go say goodbye to our guests. Dillon's ready to leave."

As they closed the door behind their guests and listened to the horses moving away, Heath pulled Maddie to his chest and dropped a kiss on her sweet lips. "Have I ever told you how much I love you, Maddie Danvers?"

Maddie smiled in the lamplight, her face soft and serene. "I believe that's 'more than life itself,' right?"

Heath's words were a fervent vow. "Yes, darling, more than life itself."

They went together to get baby Caroline ready for bed, so they could retire themselves, each lost in gratitude for their relationship that was filled with love for each other and their child. Seeing Dillon and Anisha in the state they were in made that gratitude even sharper, and they couldn't wait to draw closer to one another in love's most blessed embrace.

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Dillon watched his wife carefully as she pulled down the bed covers and put on the long cotton nightgown that she usually slept in. The days when she came into his arms with nothing on were over, had been over for months, and he frowned in displeasure.

The fire in the fireplace had been banked before they left, so the bedroom would be warm and inviting after their dinner at the Danver's place. Dillon was grateful for that because he didn't want his wife to be cold with what he had in mind, although he didn't think she'd stay cold for long.

The preacher was right; this was a discussion that was long overdue. Anisha's behavior had been appalling and embarrassing, and he intended to call her on that if nothing else. It was time something changed.

"Before you get into bed, there's something we need to talk about," he said as she sat on the edge of the bed, obviously intending to slide under the quilts on her side. He came around and stood in front of her, looking down at the top of her shining head.

"I'm tired, Dillon. I just want to go to bed," she replied, her voice as distant as a seagull's cry on an ocean wind. She lifted her feet from the floor, but Dillon was quicker.

"And you *will* go to bed, right after I'm finished with you," he said, taking her arms and pulling her up in front of him. The look on her face was pure shock and outrage at his tone of voice, and his daring to put his hands on her without permission. He'd been backing away from her for months, and it had obviously become a habit that she'd gotten used to.

"What's gotten into you, Dillon Anyers? Unhand me this instant!" she demanded, struggling to be free of his grasp.

"Not yet, not until we've had a little discussion." He sat down on the bed and moved her to his right side.

"What are you doing?" She shrieked the question at him, pulling herself backwards as he attempted to pull her towards his knees. "Let me go. I mean it!"

Dillon ignored her and jerked sharply, her shapely body falling across his broad thighs with a hiss of air leaving her lungs. Unlike her, he was still dressed, and it suddenly made him feel more in control of the situation. He might have looked ridiculous in his pajamas and nightcap, he thought

briefly. This was much better. It put her more in the position of a recalcitrant child at bedtime, waiting to be punished by her parent for misbehavior during the day. He found he quite liked the mental analogy that shot through his head, wherever it had come from.

"How dare you, let me up!" shouted Anisha, her hands meeting the braided rug in an effort to keep from falling. Her legs pumped furiously behind her, as she tried in vain to find the floor and get herself back up. When she felt his broad hand resting on her buttocks, she stilled suddenly, instant recognition of her plight slicing through her, leaving a thin sliver of fear dancing along her spine. "What do you think you're doing?"

Dillon was very matter of fact. "I'm going to spank you, Anisha; just desserts for the spoiled child you acted like all evening."

"Wha... what do you mean?" She tried to bluster and put her hand back to move Dillon's away, but he was having none of it. He simply lifted the length of her cotton gown and folded it up across her back.

"Stop that!"

He ignored her again, and his next trick was to pull her frilly bloomers to her knees in one quick sweep.

This seemed to enrage her, and she began to struggle furiously. "I said, stop that! You're not going to spank me, Dillon Anyers. I'm not a child. Now, let me up. Let me *up*, I say!"

"Oh, but I am going to spank you, my dear. You behaved abominably tonight." He lifted his hand and Anisha tensed, but two seconds later it descended with a meaty slap on the two rounded buttocks, leaving him with an intense feeling of satisfaction. That had felt good... to him, anyway! Apparently, it hadn't to his wife, because she

reacted with a screech that made him glad they lived two miles from town!

"Stop that! I'll leave you, I really will! You can't do this!"

"That's where you're wrong, my love. I can do this... and I fully intend to do it well. If you leave me when I'm finished, well... it won't be because I didn't do my duty as a husband. The men of Brocton expect it, and I don't intend to falter."

He lit into her then, his hand dancing all over the tops of her perky pale cheeks, turning them a hot pink while she screeched like the proverbial banshee, making him wonder if she was of Irish descent instead of Scottish as she claimed to be. Weren't the Scottish much more stoic?

His hand was beginning to sting, but he continued bravely in the face of her flaming insults and various curses until she began to slow down and sob more than shout. Then he spoke firmly.

"You totally ignored everyone at the dinner table. You were rude to me when I tried to help you. and you didn't even offer to help Maddie clean up. You wouldn't speak to us or join in the conversation like a normal human being, and you didn't even say thank you to the preacher and his wife as we left.

Appalling bad manners, my dear. It shamed me as your husband, and I wouldn't be much of a man if I didn't call you on it. You're getting worse, Anisha Anyers, much worse all the time. Either you start talking to me, or I'm going to wear your rear end out before I'm through. I want an explanation of this offensive behavior, and my patience has come to an end. So you better be quick about it!" He finished off with a round of stinging spanks that had her arching her back and frantically kicking her legs up.

"I'm s... s... sorry," she sobbed, her hands scrabbling for his pants leg. "Please let me up, Dillon. I'm sorry. You're right; I did behave badly."

"And if I let you up? You're behaving like a banshee, even now! Cursing your husband, hurling insults right and left. I'm not sure you're sorry at all!" In spite of his scolding words, he hauled his wife up and sat her on his knee. Her face was very flushed, and her hair all askew, but her eyes seem genuinely sorry, as the tears trailed down the soft skin of her sweet face. Her slender shoulders shook with her sobs, and Dillon waited patiently as he steeled his heart against the fetching sight.

"Well?"

She fidgeted and stared at her fingers, as she twisted them in her lap. Her naked butt was sitting against his pants leg, and the warmth was seeping through, causing Dillon to be aware of other areas of his anatomy that were warming. She was so luscious, so tempting, he just wanted to lay her on the bed, strip her of the gown and bury himself within her while she was soft and yielding, kissing the tears away from her flesh and comforting them both. But he steeled himself to finish what he'd started, and he was very much afraid that they had a ways to go yet.

Her whisper was soft and repentant. "Y... you're right. I did behave badly. I... I didn't want to, but I couldn't seem to help myself," she said with a sob. She tried to bring herself under control. "But it was as if once I got started, I couldn't stop... I just... just kept on being bad."

Dillon gently lifted her chin, so he could see the earnest look in her eyes. "And are you going to keep on being bad, or are you finally ready to talk to me?"

He was extremely disappointed when the familiar withdrawal came into her eyes, and he could feel her slipping away from him again.



"I've said I'm sorry for the way I acted tonight, honestly, but I'm not ready to talk about anything else yet," she said defensively, jerking her chin out of his hand. "Can I go to bed now?"

Disappointment did much to steel his resolve. He reached under his pillowcase with his left hand and took out the hairbrush he'd laid there. He saw her eyes widen as he sat it down on the bed, and her breath came in with a gasp.

"No, you can't go to bed yet. I'm not finished." He took her chin in his hand again, his eyes stern as he held her fast. "I'm not spending another night in your bed not knowing what's wrong. And if this is the only way to get you to talk to me, then so be it."

In a flash, he'd shifted position, pulled her across his left knee and up onto the bed, so she wouldn't have to hang over his leg. This might take a while, and he wanted her to be comfortable... as comfortable as one in her position could be, that is!

Without another word, he picked up the hairbrush in his right hand, ignored her strident protests, and brought it crashing down on one hot pink buttock, sending her nearly scrabbling across the bed in shock. The sharp crack of the wooden hairbrush reverberated in the room, and the responding squeal of pain did not bring him the same satisfaction that first hearty spank of his hand had. This was harder, more punishing, and he hated to do it. He just felt that she hadn't left him any choice in the matter.

It only took six smacks of the heavy brush before she cracked. "I hate you, Dillon Anyers! I hate you! How could you lie to me like that?" She screamed the words, misery and hatred poring out of her, as she sobbed uncontrollably.

Dillon didn't waste any time. He pulled her up and stared into her angry face. "What lie? What are you talking about?"

"You lied to me," she cried, "I heard you... I heard you and Doc Collins talking. He said I'd never have another baby, and then you lied and said I could. How could you think to keep me hoping, always pretending it could happen, but knowing it never would? How could you, Dillon? I hate you. I thought I could live with it because I loved you, but it ate at me... and I grew to hate you!"

She threw herself off his lap in a fit of weeping, and Dillon stared at her back, thoroughly flummoxed as to what she was talking about. Then it dawned on him... she must have heard him and Doc talking about the Widow Evans.

"Anisha... listen to me," he replied, urgently. "We weren't talking about you, darling. We were talking about Mildred Evans. Remember Mildred?"

"You're just saying that," she sobbed into the coverlet. She did peek up at him, though, as if she was a little bit uncertain.

Dillon lifted her up, sat her on his lap and spoke fervently into her ear. "Of course, I'm not just saying that! You remember how Mildred always talked about having another baby? Well, Doc Collins made the comment that she never would as long as she refused to get married again. We weren't talking about you, Anisha, not at all. How could you possibly think I would lie to you like that?"

Anisha could see the sincerity and horror on Dillon's face and knew instantly that he was telling the truth. "Oh, Dillon," she sobbed, throwing her arms around his neck. "Are you sure? Because I've been so miserable... if you really are lying to me..."

She was cut off as he squeezed her until she couldn't breath. "I swear, I ought to put you back over my knee and spank the living daylights out of you for what you've put me through," he said in exasperation. "But I'm so damned relieved to find

out this is all it is, that I'm willing to make an exception... this time."

He grabbed her shoulders and pushed her back where he could look into her face again. "But I warn you, Anisha Anyers, you pull anything like this again, and I'll spank you until you can't sit for a week, do you hear me?"

"But... I don't like being spanked. You can't, Dillon." Her voice held a definite whine and Dillon chuckled grimly.

"Oh, I'm sure you don't like it, but this is Brocton, honey. Here, the men spank their wives when they misbehave."

"We can move," she replied hopefully, a hesitant, teasing tone returning to her spirit.

Dillon laughed then. "Oh no, I think I like it here."

"I'll go home to Mother!" She was definitely feeling better now, as relief flooded her, making her almost giddy with bubbling happiness.

"You do and I'll come after you... and spank you there. Just like Heath Danvers did to Maddie when she tried that."

Anisha gasped. "Oh, no... he didn't!"

Dillon nodded, his eyes twinkling with relief and returning good humor. "Oh yes... he did!"

"But... but..."

Dillon silenced his wife with a drugging kiss, his hands working feverishly to remove all their clothing. When he slid into her, he found her wet and waiting for him, her passion matching his.

"Oh yeah, I really think I like it here," he murmured against the warm skin of her throat where she lay panting and satiated after their wild ride. She shot him a tremulous grin.

"Actually, I think I do, too," she whispered, blushing fiercely at the ardor in his eyes. She cocked her head to the side, rubbing her warm

bottom against the sheets. "You know, I really think I do! But we still need to talk about this..."

"No more talking," he demanded fiercely, taking her mouth once again.

"That's strange," she giggled breathlessly when he let her up. "You've been wanting me to talk for weeks, and now you don't want to talk! And you men say women can't make up their minds!"

His reply was to turn her over and slap her sore rear as a reward for her impertinence.

## Maddie Gets Even

Maddie Danvers stared at Sam Decker; her mind ticking furiously as she avidly watched him. He was talking with her husband, the Adam's apple in his throat bobbing in and out as he laughed. That simple gesture made her wonder how he could be so innocuous to look at and yet be so influential to Heath and the other men of Brocton?

She chewed delicately on her fingernail, her mind racing with ideas and means to somehow enact some satisfying revenge on the busybody. If only he weren't Angelina's husband, this could be so much easier! But Angelina was her best friend; therefore Maddie could not engage her in a plot of revenge against her own husband. It just wouldn't be right!

"What are you up to now?"

The question made her start and then flush with guilt, as she turned to face Angelina. The bright green eyes were pinning her in a knowing look.

"Nothing," she replied mildly.

Angelina's eyebrows shot up. "Nothing? Oh come on, Maddie. I know you better than that. You have that look that says you're up to something, admit it!!"

Maddie's gaze slid back to Heath and Sam, and her color rose a little higher. "Nothing, Angelina, honest."

Angelina's gaze followed Maddie's, and then she smiled. "Contemplating mayhem on Sam again?"

"If I were, I wouldn't tell you."

"I'm relieved to hear it," replied Angelina in amusement. "I can get into enough trouble on my own without you planning it for me."

Both girls laughed, and the moment passed as Maddie turned to the refreshment table to end the subject. Whatever she did, she couldn't include

Angelina, or Sam would find out for sure. Angelina wouldn't be able to keep any secrets him.

Angelina didn't seem inclined to drop the conversation, though. "You might as well give up, Maddie. You're one of the spanked wives of Brocton now, and you always will be. Even if Sam weren't influencing Heath anymore, I doubt that he'd give it up now." Her eyes twinkled at her friend, and yet there was an underlying seriousness in her comment that rankled Maddie. Her voice was decidedly cool when addressing her friend this time.

"Just because you've accepted it, Angelina, doesn't mean that I will. If your husband would just mind his own business, maybe the other men in town would settle down and get some sense."

Angelina stiffened. "That's not very fair, Maddie. Your husband is also giving out spanking advice now, as I recall. It seems to be gaining momentum, especially in his counseling sessions. So you can't blame it all on Sam."

"Sam started it," argued Maddie. "He started it right after Heath accepted the position here as preacher four years ago. We'd just gotten married not long before that, and we were perfectly happy the way we were. Sam had to go and ruin it all."

Angelina's smooth brows puckered into a frown, and her reply was also very frosty. "Well, if that's the way you feel about my husband, maybe our friendship needs to be looked at a little closer. I'm not sure I should be such good friends with someone who apparently has such hard feelings for him."

Angelina walked away from Maddie, her back straight as a poker, and Maddie had the grace to feel a bit guilty. But maybe it was better this way. At least, her friend wouldn't have to feel Sam's strap on her backside, if things went awry. She turned and poured herself a glass of lemonade from the pitcher on the table.

It was New Year's Eve, and several couples were celebrating with Maddie and Heath in the little community room at the church. Maddie was feeling particularly put out with Sam because he'd told Heath about her special Christmas order for Caroline.

It had really been none of Sam's business because she'd ordered it through Angelina and the Sears catalog. But when the little dresser with Caroline's name engraved on it had come in, Sam had wanted to know the details. Naturally, Angelina had told him, and he'd told Heath in turn about how expensive it had been.

Maddie had fallen in love with the little oak dresser and had saved a lot of her egg money in order to purchase the delightful item for her daughter. After all, Heath had told her she could save a percentage of the egg money, and Maddie hadn't taken too much more than the share he'd assigned her. In fact, it was only a few dollars difference, and she would have told him about it... after he saw it. She was banking on the fact that Heath would love it once he saw it. And he had.

But Sam Decker had made a point of coming to their home and telling Heath how much the item had cost and how it wouldn't be a good thing to let Maddie get away with even the little things because they'd turn into bigger things. She'd been highly indignant when Heath had spanked her for it. Granted, it hadn't been a hard spanking because Heath wasn't really angry. But it had still been an undeserved spanking in her mind, and it was the principal of the thing. It was none of Sam's business how she and Heath handled their affairs, and he had had no right to poke his nose in where it didn't belong. If he hadn't, Heath wouldn't have spanked her at all, and most likely he'd have never even started spanking her in the first place!

Yes, it was all Sam Decker's fault, and Maddie intended to get even with the man! At the very least, she wanted to teach him a lesson about minding other people's business. The only question was how to accomplish it without anyone knowing she was behind the deed!

Her busy mind ticked away. No sugar in his lemonade? Oh, that would be so good to watch his lips pucker on that first sip! Unsweetened lemonade had a kick all its own! Or maybe some red pepper in his mincemeat pie? That would send him outside for some cooling snow in his mouth! She discarded all the food ideas after indulging herself because they were too easy to spot. He'd eventually narrow it down to her. She needed something different, something virtually untraceable. But what?

She and her brother used to play pranks on each other all the time when they were kids, and Maddie always had the best ones. Surely, she could come up with something really good for Sam Decker! She just had to keep thinking on it.

Maddie jumped when a pair of arms slid around her waist. She turned to find her handsome husband smiling down at her. "Oh, Heath, you startled me," she gasped.

"What are you doing over here by yourself?"

"She looks like she's up to no good," added Sam Decker, a knowing grin on his full lips.

Maddie's eyes flashed, and her cheeks flushed, causing the men to look strangely at her.

Heath's right eyebrow shot up. "You do look a little flushed, Maddie. Are you feeling okay? You're not running a fever, are you?" He lifted his hand and held the back of it to her pink cheek.

Maddie moved away. "No, I'm not running a fever, Heath. Don't fuss... I'm just fine."

"She's probably thinking about her next purchase, Heath," Sam joked. "You better have



your spanking arm in good shape because I have a feeling you're going to need it."

Maddie couldn't help it; her hand took on a life all its own. It shot out like a racehorse out of the gate to slap Sam across the face. At the same time, her brain lost control of her mouth, and the hateful words spat out before she could stop them: 'Why don't you mind your own business for a change, Sam Decker? Spanking isn't the answer to everything, you know!'

The room went so quiet you could have heard a dust ball drop on the wooden planks of the flooring, and Maddie was shocked at the vehemence of her reaction.

"Maddie!" Heath's horrified voice rang out above the buzz in her ears. She knew she was in big trouble, and she felt defiance bubbling up inside her. It was all so unfair!

Heath's face was a thundercloud. "I reckon you're right, Sam. It's a good thing my arm is in good shape. It looks like I'll be using it very soon." He reached out and took Maddie's elbow to steer her out of the room, but Sam stopped him with a hand on his arm. His voice was soft and a little strange as he stared at Maddie.

"No, Heath. This is one time Maddie's right. Spanking doesn't solve everything. Until Maddie's ready to accept and understand the real reason behind it, it's not going to do her any good." He bowed slightly to Maddie. "I'm sorry if I've cause you undue pain of mind, Maddie. Perhaps with the New Year coming in, you'll find some forgiveness in your heart for an old busybody." He turned and left, leaving Maddie flummoxed. If she hadn't known better, she'd have thought his feelings were hurt! Angelina gave her a hard stare and then turned and followed him from the room.

With the excitement all over, people began to mill around and talk once more. Heath looked down

into the mulish set of Maddie's face. "What's wrong with you, Maddie? You've always seemed to hold a grudge against poor Sam. Do you really resent him so much?"

"I'm tired of him interfering and tattling on me, Heath," muttered Maddie in low tones. She didn't want anyone else to overhear them, but she wanted Heath to finally get it! "Do you realize how many times you've spanked me because of him?" She hissed the words at him in frustration, her nimble fingers crinkling the soft green velvet of her holiday gown. "Why do you always listen to him? If it weren't for him, you would never have started spanking me in the first place."

Heath looked thoughtfully at her. "I can see this is really bothering you, isn't it?"

"Yes," she replied fervently. "How many times have I told you this, and you laughed it off? When are you finally going to understand me, Heath? I hate being spanked! I can't make it any plainer than that!"

Heath was taken aback at the venom in her tone. He had really had no idea it was that abhorrent to her. She'd actually seemed to enjoy it at times, and he thought her protestations to this point had been more mock than anything. With a sigh, he relented. "All right, Maddie, I won't spank you anymore. But if you ever change your mind, let me know."

"That will be a cold day in hell," muttered Maddie as the Sheriff took Heath's arm to lead him away for a brief meeting. Her heart beat fast as she mulled over those last words of Heath's. Was he really not going to spank her anymore? She could hardly believe it! After four years! And all it had taken was a slap across Sam's face. You couldn't get more fitting than that. She felt exhilarated and somewhat bereft at the same time. She only hoped Heath really meant it and wasn't just saying that!

With a light heart and a lighter step, Maddie began to mingle and join in the festivities surrounding the New Year's entrance. Her laugh rang out many times, and all images of dark revenge disappeared from her mind. She was free!

"Flying high on success, Maddie?" The amused tones of her friend Angelina came from the direction of her right elbow, and Maddie turned eagerly to speak with her.

"Can you believe it, Angelina?" Maddie was gloating as she faced her friend. "I can't believe Sam agreed with me. And Heath has agreed. too. No more spanking! Isn't that great? I never thought it would happen in a million years!"

"So I heard."

"You're not mad at me are you, Angelina?" Maddie asked anxiously, not wanting her best friend to be angry with her. "I didn't mean to slap Sam, but I'm glad I did. I just don't want it to affect our friendship."

Angelina was gracious. "Oh no, Maddie, I'm not angry. I just have a little advice for you.

"What's that?"

"Take it from one who has lived several years more than you. Be careful what you wish for," she replied, mysteriously. She brushed her long auburn hair behind her shoulders and watched her young friend as she mentally processed that statement.

Maddie's brow furrowed. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"What do you and Heath have planned after the party?"

Maddie blushed slightly. "Mmmm... champagne in front of the fire and toasting the New Year. And then Heath has promised me a long, light hand spanking over his lap, just like I like..." Her words trailed off as the significance of what she'd just said sank in.

Angelina's delicate lips curved into a mocking smile. "Not any more."

"Now, wait a minute," blustered Maddie. "That's not what 'no spanking' means."

"No spanking is no spanking," Angelina pointed out.

Maddie's face alternated expressions between frustration and confusion and then finally fell. Angelina almost felt sorry for her. "You didn't think of that part, did you?"

"I don't want punishment, Angelina," argued Maddie. "There's no reason why I can't have what I want."

"What about what Heath wants?"

Maddie jumped to her own defense. "Ha! He always says he doesn't like punishing me, so now he doesn't have to," she finished triumphantly.

Angelina shook her head. "It's intertwined, Maddie. And besides, there's one important point you seem to have missed."

"What's that?"

"The real reason our men spank us."

Maddie cocked her bright head sideways. "And what's that?"

Angelina laughed lightly. "You think about it for a while. You know the answer. You've heard the answer over and over, but you've chosen not to internalize it. You've kept fighting it for the last four years."

"Think what you want, Angelina. I'm happy now," replied Maddie smugly. The hint of uneasiness in her stomach was ruthlessly squelched.

"All right, Maddie, have it your way," replied Angelina. "But don't say I didn't warn you."

Nothing could take the wind out of Maddie's sails all evening, and when she and Heath finally left the party, she was in high spirits.

"Oh, Heath, isn't this just a perfect night?" Maddie's eyes were twinkling like the night stars, and Heath smiled down at her. "You're what's perfect, darling."

On impulse, Maddie grabbed his hand. "Come on, let's walk home. It's not far."

Heath laughed. "And just what are we supposed to do with Eggs and Bacon? Leave them hooked up to the wagon in the churchyard all night?"

"Oh, I forgot about them. Well, let's just give them their head and let them follow us," she replied eagerly. "You know they will, if you let them."

Heath hesitated. "Maddie, it's over two miles to the house, and it's very cold out here. We still have our own New Year's party to celebrate in private, remember? You'll be worn out after walking two miles in this cold."

Maddie's full pink lip dropped into a pout. "Okay, fine, let's just walk for a while then. We can get in the wagon, if we get tired."

Heath agreed, and they set out. Their boots made crunching sounds in the crisp snow that covered the moonlit landscape. It was a beautiful evening, the air still and clear. In spite of the cold, they both enjoyed the walk, but it wasn't long before Maddie's fingers and feet began to get cold. Heath whistled up Eggs and Bacon, and they clambered into the wagon and huddled together while the horses took them home.

It wasn't long after they arrived that they were settled down on the sofa in front of the fireplace, a glass of wine in their hands.

Heath had put Eggs and Bacon away, and Maddie had made sure the baby was still sleeping after Mr. and Mrs. Perkins had left. The older couple didn't have any children of their own, and they enjoyed helping out the younger couples of the Parrish now and then with child tending.

Maddie's eyes were dark in the firelight as she sipped her wine and looked at Heath over the edge of the goblet. "Did you really mean it?" She asked finally, the subject of spanking still on her mind. She was still finding the idea hard to believe even though she felt joyously free.

"Mean what?"

"That you agreed to no more spankings. Did you really mean it, Heath?"

Heath nodded. "Yes, I really meant it. If it truly makes you unhappy, Maddie, then I'll stop."

"Why?" Something perverse was driving Maddie, but she didn't know what it was.

"Why?" Heath echoed the question.

Maddie considered him through her lashes. "Yes, why did you stop when Sam told you to? Why do you always listen to Sam? Why couldn't you stop when I asked you to?"

Heath's eyes narrowed impatiently. "Maddie, what's the deal with Sam? Speaking of which, you shouldn't have slapped him tonight. That was very unladylike. Aside from that, you act almost jealous of him."

"I've just never liked the influence he's always had over you, that's all. You do everything he says." Maddie's eyes flashed. Even in triumph, she still resented Sam.

Heath stared at her. "Maddie, you know I've always looked up to Sam like the older brother I never had. He has more experience and wisdom at his disposal than I do. So far, I've found the majority of his advice right on target, until now."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means, I don't believe he was right about not spanking you. I think you need to be spanked, especially for your behavior tonight."

Maddie hedged. "Well, no, he was right tonight."

"I thought Sam was never right."

"I never said that," cried Maddie stubbornly.

"I see what's really going on, Maddie. The problem is, you just want things your way all the time. For the last four years, you've blamed my spanking you on Sam. Did it ever occur to you that I do have a mind of my own? And that perhaps while I listened to Sam in the beginning, I soon found out he was right. And now I spank you because I think it's the right thing to do?"

Maddie huffed away from Heath on the couch. "No, it's not the right thing to do! I hate it!"

"That's funny. I thought you seemed to like it most of the time. I just think you don't want to be held accountable for your actions, Maddie. Even when I punished you, I thought you realized it was only because I love you so much. I don't want to see anything bad happen to you because of your inherent stubbornness." He got up from the couch and headed towards the bedroom.

"Where are you going?" asked Maddie, her voice rising to a squeak. Was he going for the hairbrush?

Heath stopped and looked back at her. "I do believe I'm headed for bed. We've toasted the New Year properly, and I made a promise not to spank you anymore, so there's not much left to do, is there? You obviously need time to ponder these things. And I find I don't feel very amorous towards a cantankerous and ill tempered wife."

Maddie's eyes filled with tears as the bedroom door softly closed. What had just happened? She'd been flying high with success and now, suddenly, Heath was mad at her. What had happened to the lovely evening they'd planned? This just had to be Sam Decker's fault somehow!

Even as the thought raced through her mind, Maddie fully realized that she was obsessed with Sam.

But Heath had never gone to bed without her before! How could he just leave her like that? A tiny thought niggled at her.

Any other time, Heath would be spanking her with her hairbrush for the way she'd acted towards Sam all evening. Afterwards, they'd be snuggled up together while he comforted her. Her bottom would be hot and throbbing, and she'd be more than ready for his loving embrace to make everything better. Then they'd fall asleep, sated and happy. And most of all, she'd feel safe in the haven of Heath's love.

Maddie silently crept into the bedroom and dressed quietly for bed. She slipped in next to her husband's long frame for warmth and shivered at the coolness of the bedroom air. They did have a fire going, but it was beginning to die down now and would be out by morning. Tentatively, she reached out to touch Heath's shoulder.

"Are you going to stay mad at me?" Her voice was small and plaintive. She was relieved when Heath turned over and gathered her into his arms. She felt a fresh spurt of tears at his tenderness even when he was upset with her.

"I'm not mad at you, Maddie," replied Heath gruffly. "I guess I'm just a little disappointed, that's all."

That remark hurt Maddie's feelings, but stubbornness kept her from apologizing. She didn't feel like she'd done anything wrong in achieving what she wanted. Except for slapping Sam. Maybe that had been wrong, but didn't he deserve it after all he'd put her through?

Taking a deep breath, she tried to salvage what was left of the evening. Her fingers nervously plucked the white cotton against Heath's chest.

"Heath?"

"Yes, Maddie?"

"I thought... that is... I thought you were going to give me the kind of fun spanking we both enjoy tonight." Once started, she rushed on. "I don't see why we can't still enjoy our evening."



Heath hesitated, but then he finally answered. "I don't think so, Maddie. Your behavior was unacceptable tonight, even though you don't want to admit it. Since you have no desire to be punished by spanking, then perhaps the best punishment would be not to spank you."

Maddie bit her lip and lay there in the dark thinking. This wasn't good at all! How had Heath come up with this idea? Had Sam Decker struck again?

"Where did this idea come from," she blurted out the question suspiciously.

Heath chuckled wryly. "I do have a mind of my own, Maddie. So no, it didn't come from Sam.

It's from me. It just seems fitting in the circumstances."

Maddie sat up and flung the quilts back. "This is stupid! Why is this so darned important to you, Heath?"

Heath sat up too. "Haven't you figured it out yet, Maddie?" He looked down into her frustrated eyes. "I love you! I love you more than life itself, more than anything else in the world. I care about everything you do, everything you think, everything that you are. That's why I spank you when you need it. Because it's my responsibility as your husband to take care of you, and if that means spanking you when you need it, then I want to spank you."

At last, Maddie began to see a glimmer of light. This went deeper than punishment. This went beyond just following Sam's advice. This went to the core of who Heath was: a man who put the well being of his woman above everything else but his God. Still, she was bewildered. When had it become so important? He'd never spanked her in the beginning.

"Heath... when... I thought... how did it get to be so important?" She finally sputtered the question

out. "You never spanked me in the beginning, not until Sam came along!"

"It doesn't mean I never thought about it," he replied gruffly. "Besides, we were newlyweds when we moved to Brocton. Some things take time to develop."

Maddie hugged her knees and rocked back and forth on the bed, her lip thrust out in a pout. "So...where do we go from here?"

Heath lay back and put his hands behind his dark head. "I guess that's up to you, Maddie. You can't have it both ways."

"Why not?"

"Because that's where I'm putting my foot down, young lady. I've spoiled you enough as it is, and spoiling ruins the child, as the scriptures tell us."

"I'm not a child!"

"No, but you have a tendency to act like one sometimes. That's when a good paddling comes in handy. The rest is a great part of our relationship that I'll miss if you decide to give it all up. But that's the way it is."

Maddie pounded her knee with her small fist and muttered to herself She looked back at Heath in the murky light, but his brown eyes were enigmatic and unfathomable. In other words, he wasn't yielding.

Finally, she hauled herself indignantly off the bed and marched to her dresser. Grabbing the hateful hairbrush, she stalked back to Heath and held it out to him. Heath put his long legs down to the floor and mildly accepted her offering. Then Maddie pulled her long gown up with a huff and flopped herself across his long thighs.

"Let's get this over with," she snapped, shivering as the cool air rushed up the backs of her legs.

Heath carefully rubbed the back of the brush against the silky drawers she wore, admiring the

pale flesh he could see through them. He lifted the brush and brought it down lightly against the bloomers several times to warm her up. Then he paused, resting the brush on the perky buttocks.

"We need to get something straight before we begin, Maddie," he said.

"Begin? I thought you were almost finished." Maddie wiggled under the dominant feel of the brush on her rear.

Heath chuckled. "You know better than that. If we're going to do this again, I won't allow you to change your mind again. One chance is all you get, so you better be sure. Oh, and no more blaming Sam."

"But it's his fault..."

Her words faded into a shriek as the brush suddenly crashed into her bottom leaving a blooming rose of heat and pain.

"It's *not* Sam's fault, and I want to make that perfectly clear!" Heath emphasized his words with another resounding crack that elicited a loud cry from Maddie.

"He teases you, Maddie, because he really likes you. He cares about you and values our friendship, nothing more. You think he's picking on you, but he isn't. You just misunderstand."

"I... I never thought of it that way," replied Maddie with a wobble in her voice.

"It's the truth," insisted Heath. "And I *will* expect you to apologize when you see him again; is that clear? And if you can't do it with real forgiveness in your heart, then you're not ready for this."

Maddie felt bad. Sam actually liked her? She'd thought he just wanted to make her life miserable! "You really think Sam likes me?" She looked back at Heath, searching for confirmation on his face. Her bottom throbbed slightly but felt warmer. It was good feeling.

"Of course, he does," replied Heath, rubbing her bottom with the brush again. He allowed Maddie to take her time making up her mind. After all, they had the rest of their lives, and he didn't want her to regret it because he didn't intend to allow her to change it again.

Finally, she sighed, and Heath felt her surrender. "Okay, I can see where I might have been wrong," she began softly. "I'll apologize to Sam. And I do want you to spank me, Heath. I'll never enjoy punishments, but I do love your other spankings, and I don't want to give them up."

"That's my girl," replied Heath with a grin. "Let's get the punishment out of the way, so we can move on." He swiftly pushed the bloomers down to her knees and raised the hairbrush above the pretty flesh he'd exposed.

Maddie braced herself but couldn't help crying out when the hard brush bit into the delicate skin of her buttocks. Heath had to hold her hands to keep them from slipping back while he peppered her with sharp swats. It wasn't long before tears were dripping down her nose and onto the hardwood floor. She wiggled and cried, but there was no getting loose from her husband's firm grip.

At last, he considered her suitably punished, and he dropped the brush to the floor. He slid the bloomers off her feet and pushed the gown up over her head, leaving her naked in his arms.

Then he placed her lovingly on the bed and shed his own clothes. Leaning over her, he gently kissed the tears on her face and proceeded to pay homage to her lips until Maddie was clinging to him.

Afterwards, when they were snuggling under the covers together, Maddie whispered in Heath's ear. "At least, I got even with Sam."

"Maddie!"

Her soft laugh tinkled through the bedroom as Heath's fingers scrabbled for the hairbrush that Maddie had already kicked well under the bed.

"Rascal," growled her husband. Turning her over on the sheets, he began to apply his firm hand to her warm flesh, igniting the fire all over again.

But this time, it was just the way Maddie wanted, and she sighed with pleasure as she allowed herself to get lost in Heath's touch.

It should be another good year in Brocton!

