

The Red Cheek Diaries
by CFaulkner

Chapter 1

December 4th, 2003

Dear Diary:

Despite the fact that she was sitting in her comfy recliner with a laptop and wasn't some nine year old girl with a well-worn journal, Gemma Donovan still felt she had to begin her online diary, or "blog" to use the current web vernacular, with those time honored words. Her husband was the impetus behind this attempt to write out her feelings about their relationship . . . He was, of course, going to read all of the entries, and, as was the basis of a lot of blog sites, anyone who wanted to or who searched specific key words – like spank and punish and discipline – would pull up her entries. Gemma rolled her eyes. They were sure to be full of words like that and others – worse ones – if she knew her husband.

This feels kind of awkward – I haven't written in a journal since I was about seven . . . and even then, I didn't do it for long. I'm not going to have the chance to stop doing this, though, because my husband, Hunt, has told me that he wants me to keep an online journal. He thinks that there are things I'm not telling him about our relationship – even though there aren't any – and he knows that I like to write out my feelings. I'm one of those types who will write someone a letter full of all of my thoughts and feelings and then not send it, but I feel better after I've done it anyway, you know?

He says that the only rule <how much do you want to bet that that's not going to last long, huh, folks? Considering Hunt's fondness for rules of any sort, especially those that apply to me . . . > is that I have to be scrupulously honest.

Sigh. There goes my fun. No one on the web has to be honest about themselves but me! Sheesh!

In case you haven't guessed by now, my husband and I have a relationship that includes domestic discipline. That means that when I do something stupid – which happens, according to him, of course, with alarming regularity for someone with a pretty high IQ <insert exaggerated eye roll here> – he spanks me. Usually with his hand, which is located with depressing convenience at the end of his right arm all the time, but sometimes with what we euphemistically call "toys". Maybe he's having fun using them, but they ain't stuff I'd go out and buy myself . . . a toy is a Nintendo game or a new

computer, not a fourteen inch oak paddle with holes <shudder>. Or a long, thin cane with a wrapped handle <MEGA SHUDDER>

Worse than that, if I do something like say a vulgar word, which he almost never uses himself and I have an unfortunate affinity for, he'll use whatever happens to be handy. God forbid I should say something off-color and be standing in the kitchen! That room is an absolute haven for anyone of the disciplinary persuasion – wooden spoons, rubber spatulas . . .

Why couldn't I just pay a fine instead? But no, my butt has to pay the price when my mouth runs amok. I hate to admit it, and I certainly hope he doesn't read this <yeah, right>, but, since he started laying into my bottom when I used so much as the "s" word, my language has gotten a lot better, although saying "sugar" instead of what I really mean isn't particularly emotionally satisfying. But it does help me sit down more comfortably.

How did we get into this, you must be asking? Well, I have to admit, I ask myself the same question sometimes – usually when I'm over his lap. Or he's giving me "the look" <every other woman out there who is involved in this type of relationship is getting chill bumps at the thought of getting that look from her significant other. You vanillas don't know what you're missing.>.

Hunt and I had known each other for several years . . .

Theirs was a long distance relationship in the beginning, conducted in the modern way of instant messages, emails, and exceedingly expensive phone calls, generally catch-as-catch-can at best. But it had been like that from the beginning – they met infrequently over several years as their mutual friends slowly married off and they were each drafted into the wedding parties. "Always the groomsman, never the groom," he lamented with a wink at her as they began their second trip down the aisle together at someone else's wedding. He had been best man once, and a groomsman three times, and she had been maid of honor two times, bridesmaid twice.

It was that last wedding that did it. The well-to-do bride and groom had rented a huge house by the ocean in Maine and the entire wedding party had spent the long Fourth of July holiday weekend together. The ceremony was to be conducted on the beach at sunrise, Sunday morning. After a lavishly catered buffet brunch, the bride and groom would leave later that morning for a honeymoon in Hawaii but they had paid ahead so that the wedding party could stay through Monday.

Hunt Donovan had watched Gemma Tyler covertly through three weddings. He liked her. She was always smiling and laughing, and had a truly infectious, high-pitched, little-girl

giggle that had everyone in the room joining in. At about five-foot-seven, she was just the right height – not too tall, not too short – and she had long, sometimes golden, sometimes dirty blonde hair. When he'd remarked to her teasingly about the differences in her hair colors about two weddings back, she'd confided in a guilty whisper, "God bless Miss Clair!"

This time, they were at the rehearsal dinner, seated next to each other, of course. Their friends were everything but subtle in their attempts at matchmaking. Gemma was studying the gorgeous view of the ocean from where they sat at the long table that had been skillfully wedged onto the big screened porch. Hunt took advantage and peered down at her scalp from his six-foot advantage. "Hey, Blondie. I don't see any gray hairs, but there is quite a bit of dandruff – oomph!"

A sharp, small elbow crammed its way between his ribs just as he sat down, practically knocking the breath out of him. "Watch it, old timer!" Gemma warned with a glare. "I'm not the one with the gray hair at my temples."

Hunt smiled broadly and ran his hand through hair that had once been solid black, but was, in his mid forties, rapidly getting to be more salt than pepper. "But it makes me look distinguished!"

Gemma snorted, brandishing a butter knife at him threateningly. "If you don't shut up, you're going to start looking extinguished!"

The rest of the party caught up with them, and Laura, the bride-to-be, cautioned, "Children! No fighting at the dinner table!"

Pretending to be duly chastised, Gemma mumbled petulantly, "He started it!"

"Did not!" came the immediate, childish reply.

Laura rolled her eyes. "You two! You need to get married, or at least screw or something!" She plopped down at the head of the table, not waiting for her husband-to-be to politely hold out the chair. "You've spent four weddings now eying each other. Do it and get it over with, already!"

Gemma choked on the sip of champagne she'd just taken, but Hunt leaned back, his big arm casually draped across the back of Gemma's chair. "That's what I've always liked about you, Laura. You're such a romantic!"

The rest of the crew, who all knew each other if not very well, then fairly well, especially

by then, chimed in on Laura's side, much to the disgust of the couple they were trying to maneuver together. Finally, the dinner began, and the heat was naturally taken off them, for which Hunt and Gemma each gave a sigh of relief.

During dinner, Gemma tried desperately to ignore Hunt's presence beside her, but she'd never been quite able to do that any time they'd met. She liked him. He wasn't loud or overbearing, but laid back and relaxed, although she noticed that he always made his point in a no-nonsense manner and in fact had kept some of the younger, over-zealous members of the wedding party in line with just a look. That look had never been trained on her specifically, but Gemma literally shuddered at the thought. She was no spring chicken herself, being in her mid-thirties, but that stern look would stop even her in her tracks. Unlike a younger man, he had no need for overt masculine displays, but no one doubted that he had the backbone and the cajones to back up any law he might care to lay down.

Biting her lip, Gemma wondered if he laid down the law with his women, too . . . and if so, did he use his palm on their bottoms . . . or his belt . . . or a paddle . . . she shook her head to clear it. That would be way too much to hope for. Besides, she was happy alone. No one to answer to, no one to schedule her life around, no one to hold her in the middle of the night or make love to her in the early morning hours on a lazy Sunday morning . . . No one to administer the loving discipline she craved and had yet to find.

Sighing, she returned her attention to her filet, ignoring the questioning glance from the impossibly sexy man on her left.

Later that evening, Gemma announced that she was going for a swim. No one else in the group wanted to join her, but then, she wasn't surprised. They had each stuck one toe into the fifty-six degree water when they'd first arrived, then watched in horror as it became numb, turned blue, and fell off. That seemed to help them decide that they had no interest in doing anything to the ocean besides looking at it or occasionally playing volleyball in front of it.

Gemma, on the other hand, had grown up on the coast of Maine, and the water, although distinctly chilly, was a challenge to get into. What fun was there in being knocked over by a bathwater warm wave? If there weren't ice floes passing you as you waded in and ice cubes clinking around the ankles you could no longer feel, then you were wimping out.

With a shrug, she threw a towel over her shoulder and headed out, taking a deep breath. She missed the ocean terribly. Albuquerque was great – she loved the weather and the food – maybe a little too much on the food, she thought, ruefully patting her somewhat

too-well-rounded tummy – and the people. But nothing would ever beat being able to walk out your front door and onto a long, white sand beach.

"Holy Mother of God!"

She turned towards the source of the anxious yelp, and found Hunt standing in the surf a little behind her. His look of extreme consternation tickled her funny bone, but at least he wasn't chickening out. She had to give him that. He was, however, looking like a cat in a puddle, tense as a board and pop-eyed, trying to lift both of his feet off the ground at the same time to avoid the water. Still giggling, she advised, "Wade in slowly. It's easier that way."

He shivered violently back at her with a pained glare, "I knew you were crazy the moment I met you."

Gemma advanced a little until most of her calves were submerged, still ahead of Hunt, but he wasn't about to let her get too far away from him. Suddenly, a big hand settled on her shoulder, another fit itself into the curve of her waist, both holding on for dear life. Within seconds, she felt an unnervingly welcome warmth at her back as he huddled up against her. Close up against her. Very close. "What are you doing?" she asked, with what she hoped was just the right amount of outrage.

"Huddling for warmth?" he inquired innocently, warm lips against her ear, but his body made a liar out of his tone.

Both hands made their way around her waist, and Gemma found she couldn't step away from him. The back of her modest, one-piece suit was bare, and she could feel his chest hairs rubbing against her while other, more solid parts of him prodded her bottom. "I thought cold water was supposed to . . . discourage men?" Leave it to her to blurt out the first improper thought that came to her very improper mind – and to him of all people! She thought, smacking herself mentally.

He chuckled, his arms loosening, but he didn't completely let her go. "The water hasn't reached there yet."

Gemma pulled a little harder and broke away from him, inadvertently forcing herself into deeper water. "SSSSSSsssss," she sucked her breath in through clenched teeth at the instant ache that set in from the cold.

Hunt ventured up to stand next to her, watching her intently. "I never realized how much of a masochist you are."

Lips clamped firmly together, Gemma reminded herself that he really couldn't have any idea what he'd just said. Throwing caution to the wind, partly because she wasn't sure exactly how to handle him, she put her arms above her head and executed a shallow dive into the next wave that assaulted them. "Oh my God!" her heartfelt scream when she surfaced made him chuckle, but he followed suit quickly and echoed her cry with his own.

Once they'd done the deed and gotten completely wet, they became numb enough to enjoy swimming around and body surfing on the small waves, such as they were, but eventually Hunt saw her shivering as she stood in the shallower water. "C'mon, you're frozen. Let's go in."

The look on her face as he reached for her arm plainly said that she had no interest in returning to the house, and her feet were cemented into the sand. "I don't wanna."

Hunt took several steps closer to her, wrapping his arms around her waist for the second time in less than an hour. Mildly surprised, Gemma looked up just as his lips met hers in a very gentle, but firm kiss. He didn't try to push himself on her, ending the kiss almost before she wanted him to, but he kept her close, strong, muscular arms not allowing for much movement.

Gemma didn't know what to say or do, or where to look. It wasn't often that she was at a loss for words, but this was one of them. And it seemed everywhere she looked, she encountered enticing views of lightly, very nicely muscled, tanned, naked flesh, so she gave up and closed her eyes. Hunt bent and put his mouth to her pearl studded ear, his hot breath warming her chilled skin. "Laura is right. We've been dancing around each other for almost a year and a half now while everyone around us has gotten married. Don't you think it's about time we explored what we have between us?"

She knew what they had between them at this very moment – it was nestled comfortably against her stomach, as if it thought it would find a nice home within her body.

"Open your eyes, honey."

Gemma shook her head solemnly. "Don't wanna."

His soft laugh drifted to her over the sound of the waves as they were gently rocked back and forth, his erection rubbing against her through no fault of his own. It was interesting to be kissed when you couldn't see it coming, she thought to herself. And his kisses – wow! Why the hell wasn't this man married?

Before she knew it, her eyes popped open and the question that was on her mind was out of her mouth. "Why aren't you married?"

Startled by the question, but not particularly concerned about the fact that she'd asked, he replied, "I was married, once, when I was younger. Didn't work out, and we parted amicably enough. I'm no monk," he confessed with an endearing, roguish smile, "but I'm not seeing anyone right now, and I like you. I'd like to see you on a more than 'wedding party' basis."

She tried to twist away, but he held her still, waiting somewhat impatiently.

"Well?"

"Well what?"

Hunt sighed. "Don't make me drag it out of you. Are you seeing anyone right now, and would you like to go out with me some time?"

Although she wanted nothing other than to lay her head on his strong shoulder and cuddle against him, Gemma held herself deliberately away from him. "No, I'm not seeing anyone."

"And?" he prompted.

She made herself look up at him, catching his eye and searching his face, looking for signs and symptoms, trying to tell how he would or wouldn't treat her by the way he looked at this moment, whether he was telling the truth about being unattached . . . It was so hard to tell sometimes, and Gemma hated letting herself be vulnerable to a man, especially after what her ex had done to her.

But, man, being held felt damned good! She missed that more than anything – almost, but not quite, as much as the sex. It was the casual affection that she missed the most – someone to come up behind her and kiss her shoulder when she was getting ready for work, someone to lay in bed with on a Sunday morning, kissing and cuddling or just reading the paper, even, or a pair of hard arms slipping around her while she was doing dishes at the kitchen sink.

Would he hurt her, though? Could he be trusted with her heart? What if he did hurt her? She didn't think she could live through that again. Gemma did not give her heart easily or casually – it was not in her make up to do that. She would rather live alone with her

emotions tightly tucked away, but intact, than waste them on someone who really didn't appreciate the depth of her devotion.

But she threw caution to the wind for once in her life, leaning into him and lifting her lips to his. This time when they kissed, he was more aggressive, but not overly so, tightening his arms around her gently so that she was lifted off her feet, forcing her to lean fully against him, at his mercy as he delicately ravished her mouth.

They broke apart suddenly when cheers and applause rose from the house. "It's about damned time," Rick, tomorrow's groom, said, turning with a beer in his hand to wander back inside.

The rest of the crew continued to rabble rouse from the safety of the porch, audaciously holding up impromptu signs with ratings of Hunt's technique as if they were in the Kissing Olympics or something.

Totally ignoring the peanut gallery, Hunt pressed his forehead to hers. "I take it that's a yes?"

Gemma nodded. "But how are we going to do it? You live in Tennessee, and I live in New Mexico."

As he guided her back to their towels, he said, "If we want it bad enough, we'll make it work."

Hunt barely let her out of his sight for the rest of the weekend, and although he never pushed her for sex, he left no doubt in her mind that he wanted her. The wedding went off without a hitch, and once the bride and groom left they had the rest of the next day or so together, and Hunt didn't hesitate to monopolize her time. He walked down the beach with her, joined her in another couple of freezing dips, took her out to dinner and out to breakfast the next morning. Gemma enjoyed herself enormously with him – he was smart and thoughtful, and very attentive, although he had never pawed her or pushed for intimacies she wasn't about to dish out until they knew each other a lot better. Whether they were out or lying on the beach, she knew that his eyes were not wandering to check out the other women in the room. Hunt tended to be a bit authoritative – quietly strong, but not painfully so - and when he insisted that she take a wrap with her when they went out to dinner, she pouted but complied, and was just as happy later when they came out of the restaurant and found the muggy wind had changed to a cool sea breeze.

When they parted at the Portland Jetport, he bent her over backwards in a dramatic, Rhett-Butler-esque embrace, bending her back over his arm stealing her breath with his

kiss, and leaving her with the admonition, "Call me when you get home so I know you've arrived safely." His trip was shorter, and he would get home hours ahead of her.

After having seen to her mail, retrieved her three disgruntled cats and one overjoyed dog, and partially unpacked only the bare necessities, she climbed into bed, physically and mentally exhausted. The phone jarred her out of that "almost asleep" state.

"Yeah, what?" Anyone who disturbed her sleep didn't deserve a civilized greeting.

His sexy growl made her nipples harden immediately. "Did you forget something?"

Still in a fog of near-sleep, she answered sarcastically, "Noooooooooooo . . ."

"Yeeeeeeeeessss," he answered back in a no-nonsense tone that didn't sound the least bit happy about her flippant attitude.

"Oh, sonofabitch!"

This time he really did growl. "Using vulgarity is not earning you any points, girl."

Gemma gulped audibly. "I'm sorry. I don't usually. You just caught me in bed."

More low-throated rumblings and an abject sigh. "I suppose it's a little early in the relationship for me to mention how much I wish I was there . . ."

Tickled by his unabashed compliment, Gemma giggled sleepily. "It is, but it's nice to hear, anyway." She rolled onto her back, knowing that the nagging ache in her lower back would keep her awake enough to talk to him, not that the other supreme ache in her lower front wouldn't do the exact same thing . . . she wondered if she wasn't going to have to let her fingers do the walking after this call . . . just from the way his gravelly voice was affecting her libido. Even the silk of her nightie seemed too rough against her peaked tips, and the crotch of her plain white cotton undies from Wal-Mart now sported a wet spot, and it was all his fault!

"So you got home all right – how was your flight?"

"Loud and crowded."

He snorted. "Is there any other kind?"

"To say nothing of the fact that I was one of the few and the proud –"

"You became a Marine?" He sounded confused.

Gemma sighed impatiently. "No."

"I didn't think you'd had time to complete Basic Training . . . "

"What I meant was that I got singled out to be molested and have my carry on rifled through and I had to take my shoes off - where the hell was I going to hide a bomb in a pair of Birks, anyway, for cryin' out loud?! In the toe-grip bumpie thingie?"

He was laughing at her impromptu rant, and it was a luscious sound, all velvety soft warmth rippling over her skin. "Well . . . in matters of national security you never can be too careful, I suppose. And is 'toe-grip-bumpie-thingie' the technical term, I wonder . . . ?"

"Grrrrr."

"You are feisty, aren't you, even just before you go to sleep."

"I'm not feisty, I'm shy and quiet." When he finished with his loud, exaggerated coughing fit, she asked sarcastically, "Are you through hacking up that lung, or what?"

"I'm sorry, honey, but if you're shy and quiet then I'm RuPaul."

Gemma giggled. "Uh, somehow you're just a bit too macho for boas and sequins."

"Ya' think?"

"Ooomph," Gemma forcibly exhaled a breath.

"What? What was that?" he sounded concerned.

"That," Gemma said with a frown, "was one of my – as my mother would put it – surrogate, four-footed children."

"Ahhh. Which mangy bundle of fur was it?"

She almost expended enough energy to sit up, but decided against it, settling instead for a tone of rampant indignation. "Hey! How did you know from there that they were mangy?"

Hunt chuckled. Gemma had no problems laughing at herself. "Just a lucky guess . . . "

"It was Silky-girl-pookie-pots-punkin-pies."

When he stopped laughing, he asked wryly, "And was there an actual name in there somewhere?"

"Ahem. Yes. Her name is Silky, and she's a long-haired gray and white cat and she weighs at least three tons, which landed directly on my diaphragm." Once the word was out of her mouth, she regretted not having used a less anatomically correct term, lest it be misunderstood. "My stomach. I meant my stomach."

Chapter 2

"I think I realized that already."

"Good."

They chatted some more, and then he told her he had already made plans to come and see her in New Mexico, as his company had an office there.

When she pulled the covers up over her that night, she pondered that idea, wondering if things were progressing too quickly and making a mental note to make sure that he knew that he was going to need to get a hotel room if he came out . . .

At least at first, anyway, she thought, falling into a deep sleep.

. . . So, that's how we met and got together, Diary. <should I keep calling you Diary or maybe name you? Hmmmmmm> My Hunt, when he gets something into his head can be a bit stubborn, and he got it into his hard head not long after we actually started dating that he wanted to marry me. Well, you know how I am about marriage. Well, maybe you don't but here it is: I'd rather live together. Less hassle. I <we – him and I> have been in a lot of weddings, and I have attended even more. It seems everyone succumbs to the bug eventually.

But what I've seen is people having huge, extravagant weddings instead of stable, committed marriages. I know what a lot of my friends have spent on their weddings, and it's an astronomical amount. Only to get divorced ten years later . . . or worse, ten weeks later.

I never really pictured myself married – even with Ted the Heartbreaker. Living in a

committed relationship with someone, yes. That's what I want. But all that name-change hassle and thank you cards and everything – plus the idea that – unless I'd met someone who lived near me in Albuquerque, I would probably end up moving, but I don't want to move!

Anyway, it was kind of a moot point because I didn't end up needing to move – Hunt moved to be with me, which I considered to be gigantic points in his favor – how many men would do that, even in this day and age? There was really no reason he shouldn't, though, since his company had an office here and everything.

Besides that, he wasn't about to take "no" for an answer. He started feeling me out about marriage after that first weekend he came out, and I told him flat out that I didn't think it was a very good idea. He kinda looked at me funny <he does that some times> and kept needling me occasionally and pointing out that his parents had been married for decades – something like forty-eight years or maybe I'm exaggerating a little - and saying things like there was no reason why we couldn't be married that long ourselves . . . if we did it right.

Now, up to that point, he hadn't mentioned anything about the fact that he fully intended to spank whatever wife he ended up with. Hunt is a pretty no-nonsense guy – although he has a great sense of humor, he also has an over-developed sense of responsibility. Waaaaaay overdeveloped. Especially when it comes to how his wife should or shouldn't behave. I had kept my . . . interests - which were pretty under-developed at that point – in spanking completely to myself.

It's kinda funny – even now – intellectually, <and sexually – blush> I really really really really really really want to be spanked – to be held accountable for my actions – which, I acknowledge on occasion can seem somewhat irresponsible, especially to someone like Hunt who never puts a foot wrong <sigh>. But when it comes down to it, I would sell my soul to avoid a punishment. I would hawk my mother on the street. I would – well, you get the idea.

But at that moment, when I know his hand is raised over my butt, I become more athletic than anyone would think I could be too look at me, and I'm sliding here and trying to slip over there and gyrating and wiggling – trying to avoid any swats I can!

Because those things HURT. With a capital HURT!!!! Even just his hand can reduce me to tears. He's too damned good at this, I keep telling him. He only agrees if I learn from it and change my behavior . . .

What kinds of things do I get "it" for? Hmmmmmm. The list seems terribly long when I

think about all of the times I've been hauled over his knee . . . speeding, swearing, overdrawing the checkbook, overspending my allowance <yes, I know that sounds awfully juvenile to be thirty-mmphng and have an allowance, but with the way I spend, it's a good idea if we ever want to save for anything. Any money I have left over after I paid my bills used to be blown. Now we have our own house and are saving for an RV.>

I have a list of rules in a file on this computer – my computer – and his. He keeps threatening to print them off and put them on the fridge <cringe>, but so far I've been able to talk him out of that <thank God>. Honestly, they're not bad rules – except the vulgarity one which I find terribly hard to obey. Hunt doesn't make stupid or frivolous rules. It's not like he wakes up in the morning and decides on a rule to make my life harder or unpleasant. They make sense. It's not good to be in the habit of swearing – especially if we decide to have kids. The dogs don't mind right now, but then they're never going to start repeating the words they hear frequently . . . And being more responsible with money and not flooring it and taking out innocent pedestrians while I'm driving . . .

Maybe it's that speed limit one that I hate the most. It's got me driving like a little old lady, for God's sake! There's no leeway at all about it. None. ANY speeding ticket is going to get my butt an old fashioned blistering. A serious one, not like one where I've just said the "s" word because the disposal backed up and sprayed carrot tops on the ceiling and he's bent me over the breakfast nook stool and grabbed up a handy-dandy wooden spoon to give me a flurry of swats.

No. There are degrees of spankings. They aren't all "butt-busters", as he indelicately likes to refer to them. <another eye roll. Men.> It's not like he wales on me for little things. That would be abuse. Hunt never has laid a hand on me in an abusive manner – like taking his fist to me or anything – and never will, or, as my mother used to say, "he's gotta go to sleep sometime . . ." He knows that I would never put up with that and he'd be getting served divorce papers the next day. This is not about any sort of abuse. It's about me getting the discipline I never got as a kid to help me live better as an adult.

I can't help how I was raised. I'm a princess. Not Jewish, but the youngest of the brood and spoiled pretty much rotten. At least I recognize that fact. I don't think I'm a nasty person, I'm just used to having what I want, when I want it, and I've never really learned to exercise any sort of self-control about it. So, when Hunt met me, I was overdrawn at the bank, I had too much debt, and my credit rating stank. Plus I had three points on my license and another two years to go before the points fell off. If I'd gotten caught going more than twenty-five miles an hour over the speed limit again <give me a break – this is New Mexico – all the roads are dry, flat, and straight!>, I would have lost my license for at least six months.

He's helped me repair my credit, and we have a healthy savings account now. Plus, in the past four years I've only gotten one ticket – a couple of months ago. I think I still have the bruises from it on my bum! And I was only going about five miles an hour over the limit! AND it was a speed trap! I only got caught because I completely forgot that Half Moon runs one every rush hour . . . Sorry. Slipping into the argument that I tried to give him to talk him out of spanking me. Didn't work with him, either.

Anyway, so don't go thinking that he like, kicks and punches me. He doesn't. That's not domestic discipline. That's abuse. There's a distinct difference.

Well, I guess this entry is long and boring enough. I'm going to go to bed.

"How'd it go?" Hunt rolled over and cuddled her to him the minute she joined him under the covers of their big bed. Gemma liked that about him – he always awoke whenever she got up in the middle of the night and offered to turn on the light, or, if he went to bed earlier than she did, he always came to her and snuggled.

His lips were against her ear, blowing his warm breath against her cheek, and his ever-ready body was pressed to her bottom. Bliss, Gemma thought, holding his arms around her as best she could. "All right, I guess."

His head lifted and she knew he was staring at her even though she couldn't see him in the darkness. "You were out there for a while – you did write something, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did – actually more than a page or so."

Two wet, slobbery lips smacked loudly against her cheek. "Very good. Did it help you work out your feelings any?"

Gemma settled herself against him a little more in preparation for going to sleep. "I don't know yet. I think it's going to take more than one entry to decide that."

"Well, I'll take a look at it in the morning."

"You'll what?" She nearly sat up, but he stopped her, holding her tightly so that she couldn't move and whispering into her ear.

"I said, I'll read it in the morning. Your blog is public – if you set it up as you were asked to – and I intend to read it very closely. I have a feeling you're going to spill more about how you're feeling when you write than you do when I try to pry things out of you. And I

imagine that there are a lot of people out there who will become quite intrigued by it."

If there was one thing that concerned him about their relationship, it was Gemma's tendency to swallow her feelings. Not literally – she didn't have an eating disorder or anything, but she would bottle things up and not tell him if she was feeling uncomfortable or unhappy. She'd just paste a happy smile on her face and let it go at that.

Well, unlike ninety-nine percent of the male population of the world, that didn't work with Hunt. Not at all. He liked to know how she was feeling – heck, he wanted to know everything about her. If he could, he'd peer inside her head, so that he could get the purely unedited version. But for some reason, Gemma didn't get that female gene that said that she was required to spill out her emotions everywhere – whatever they were – and to elicit the same from him.

Unless he asked her directly, and/or watched her body language and even sleep patterns carefully, he would think she was never anything but one hundred percent happy all of the time, which was highly unlikely. It had turned out that she was – once he'd convinced her that he wasn't going to leave her if she got angry or cried or showed negative emotions – a fairly moody person. But that was okay. It was at least being true to her emotions and not presenting him with a front.

She was a complicated person, his wife, and he enjoyed the fact that he had really never gotten to know everything about her. There was always another piece of that very intriguing puzzle around the next corner of their relationship, and he wanted to know all of it. He fully expected that she'd still be telling him new things about herself when they were geezers in side by side beds in a nursing home.

The next morning, he sat back in the big office chair they had in front of their desktop computer where it resided in what was supposed to be the dining room. Fleetinglly, he wondered how many other people had converted what was supposed to be the formal dining room in their house to the office – almost no one ate a real meal together at the dinner table any more. He had read Gemma's entry to her blog and was, frankly, impressed and surprised at its candor and style. It was written exactly as Gemma spoke – anyone who knew her who read it would know exactly who had written it – chatty and funny, with the occasional dig at him and herself.

But she did seem to be exploring some thoughts and feelings, and he thought a continuation and assignment of writing in her blog, say, anytime after she was punished and/or every other day would be a good thing. Or at least it probably wouldn't hurt. He could also give her assignments of things to write about that would give her more direction in her entries.

Hmmmmmm . . . But overall, he was very happy with what she'd done so far – Hunt had thought that he might have to prod her some about it, although she definitely had the writing gene. Her reluctance had to do less with any writing abilities she might or might not possess, but rather with the idea that he would be reading it, and that anyone who happened to stumble on it would be able to read about their lifestyle and the discipline she was regularly subjected to.

He shifted in the chair, reaching down to make an adjustment. All of this made him unbearably aroused . . . he wondered how Gemma felt about it? He made a mental note to check after she'd written in it the next time. She was an extremely responsive, sexual woman – with him, only, of course – and he would be surprised if having to think and write about this stuff – which was a huge sexual trigger for her – didn't get her going. In fact, one of his biggest, most important rules for her involved the fact that she was not allowed to pleasure herself – which she had been doing quite routinely when she was single - without his express permission, which he, of course, doled out in small doses. He wanted to conjure that pleasure for her himself, not have her realizing that her hand was just as good – or better – than he was.

December 15th, 2003

Dear Diary:

Gemma wiggled in the thickly padded black leather chair – all of that padding wasn't doing her a whit of good. Her bottom still hurt atrociously, and he had her doing this right now just because he knew it would add to her misery. Sulking starkly, she began to type.

Here I am. Back again. Only this time, it's worse: my butt is killing me. He just finished spanking me, and, after he'd held and comforted me some, he sent me here. It used to be that he'd make me go to sleep – no TV, no nothing, just pack me off to bed, which was pretty easy for him since that's where I usually was. But no. I have to go write about my punishment for the amusement of all and sundry – as well as him.

I've told you this before, but I just can't seem to get my head around it: he reads this, you see. Says it helps him understand me better. Get into my head. He's always really wanted to do that. To can-opener the top of my head and peer in, trying to figure out why I do some of the things I do.

'Specially the ones that get me into trouble when I know that I'm going to be punished for them . . . if he finds out about them. Of course, I'm supposed to confess anything that I've done that I know he would consider to be naughty. <Do I look that stupid to you? If I

did that, I'd never be able to sit down!> This time, though, it was something I should have just . . . not done. I don't know why I did . . . the need just came over me suddenly . . . <blush>

I can't believe he wants me to let the whole world know what I've done. It's not like I swore this time, or did something relatively innocuous and unembarrassing. This is not something I would ever want to confess – to anyone.

Sigh. But, I suppose if I don't my poor bum will suffer just that much more, and I'm wiggling around on the chair right now as if I've got bed bugs or cooties or something <which I don't, by the way>.

What I've got is a very sore, very striped rear.

And for what he would consider is an extremely good reason: I let . . . um . . . ah . . . my fingers do the walking, shall we say?

It's all the Internet's fault!!! I was home for the day – snow day. God, don't you love them? My school superintendent sees one flake in the air, and we get the day off. YES! Of course, it sucks on the other end when we're still in school in July . . . but at the time, it's great.

So, this morning I kissed Hunt and sent him off to work - grumbling all the way about how his tax dollars were NOT at work today since I was at home and he wanted a refund – and spent the day surfing. I love wireless connections! I got to sit in my recliner with my laptop on my lap and The Young and the Restless in the background and surf.

Where did I go? <squirming> Well, I checked my email, of course <all ninety-seven of my addresses – how did I end up with so many, for crying out loud?>, and then went on to more . . . interesting pursuits.

Okay, okay. I confess. I was reading spanking fiction. All day long. Well . . . why do we belong to those sites if not to read the stuff that's there?

So, you can imagine, that by the end of the day, I was . . . uh . . . hurting. In a good way, of course. Aching would probably be a more apt description. I hurt now. I was aching then. I was trying to wait for Hunt to come home, so I could latch myself onto him and ravish him. Or let him ravish me, either way would have worked well for me. I was at a point I didn't much care.

Which was what got me into trouble.

He was late. Really late. Much later than usual for him. He had called earlier to tell me he was going to be a little late, but this was the extreme. I had had dinner ready for him, and ended up putting it in Tupperware in the fridge for him to reheat when he got home.

Then I went to bed. I was tired – how did I get so tired on a day I did nothing? I dunno . . .

Did I tell you that our house is too big? I wouldn't have thought that when we first saw it. I fell in love with it. It's a long ranch, with big bow windows and a large master suite . . . but the door in from the garage and our bedroom are separated by I don't know how many feet. Tons. Enough that, if you're in the bedroom with the door closed, you can't hear anyone coming in that door.

Believe me, I know this from personal experience.

It probably didn't help any that I was – uh – pretty – uh – um – involved in what I was doing at the time . . . which was, of course, something I wasn't supposed to be doing at all, having not asked permission to do it . . .

But I couldn't help it. And he wasn't there. And I did try to get a hold of him to ask, but he was out of cell phone range, and I didn't want to leave that kind of question on his messaging system, in case he'd given his cell to someone else. Besides, that would have been too embarrassing.

In retrospect, I shoulda gone with the embarrassment and asked, then waited for the answer – which I knew would be "no", especially since he was probably on his way home.

I didn't hear a thing until the bedroom door creaked open – at the most inopportune moment, of course. I stopped immediately, but he knew – probably the guilty expression on my face didn't help – what I had been doing. And I knew, at that exact moment, that I was in dee-ee-eeeep trouble.

"Get your hands above your head," he said, in his angry voice. "Did you come?"

Gulp. Big gulp – and I don't mean the 7-Eleven kind, either. "N-no. Not yet."

"Don't move." He said it as he left the bedroom, and I had no idea when he might be back.

Uh-oh.

This was not a good thing.

He took his sweet old time. I could hear the microwave beep and knew that he was eating dinner. He would probably read the paper, too, before getting back to me. I was already calling myself all kinds of a fool for risking it when he was due home any time, but, you know, girls, how it is when you just have to?

I just had to, not that it did me any good. Instead, I ended up having to lie there for hours while he puttered around and futzed. Hunt never did anything quickly, and in some ways that was wonderful for me. Sex with him was never a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am situation. He indulged himself in me, and I returned the favor in spades. We luxuriated in each other. It was great!

But when you wanted that man to move quickly – jeezum! It was like pulling teeth. He ate slowly, he talked slowly, he walked slowly . . . sometimes he drives me absolutely crazy. If he gets any more laid back he's going to be comatose, for crying out loud.

And this was one of those times when he was just going to mosey around and he'd get to me in his own good time.

I was lying on the bed – with my hands over my head as he'd ordered – dying of pure frustration. And not at his slow-moving tendencies, although they played into it somewhat.

It was worse since I didn't even get to finish!!! All of that build up and nothing!! And now I'd be lucky if he gave me any relief within the next week or so! Knowing him, he'll deliberately have me reading stuff and he'll have those marvelous hands running all over me at night, only to make me go to bed early – and go to SLEEP!!!

GRRRRRRRR.

I swear, he bumbled around the rest of the house forever before I heard the bedroom doorknob turn and the door creak open for the second time that night, and despite the fact that I knew that I was just going to get a spanking – well, probably worse, but still – my heart clogged my throat as he flipped on the light and those dark, black eyes settled on me.

Several hours later and he was still mad enough to deliver The Look.

Shudder.

I knew when I saw his face that I was in deep, deep trouble.

I'd never blown this particular rule before. Now, sitting gingerly here in what is usually a very comfortable chair, I wish I hadn't.

I really really really wish I hadn't.

He did notice, though, that my hands were still above my head. "It's a good thing you kept those where they're supposed to be," he said, undressing in front of me, which was torture enough, believe me. Hunt is . . . well, let's just say that he's wonderfully put together and leave it at that. He's not someone that would ever grace the cover of GQ, but then I'm not much attracted to pretty boys, anyway. He's very pleasant looking, though, with a full head of black – okay, graying, but basically black still - hair, even features, and firm, full lips. YUM! He's got muscles, but not too many of them – I'm sorry, but Arnold Schwarzenegger doesn't do a thing for me – but he does have that nice "Y" shape where his shoulders are broader than his waist. Unlike a lot of guys, he actually has a butt – a nice one, not too full, not too flat. Just right.

Chapter 3

I'm not going to describe any of his other attributes. That would be a little too much information. Let's just say that he has no need to stuff and leave it at that.

Anyway, once he'd gotten undressed – he always sleeps naked, which just kills me because I always have to wear something – at least a t-shirt, or some sort of soft nightie, and panties. I just can't sleep naked. I tried it when we were first married because he really wanted me to sleep that way, but I ended up with a terrible bout of insomnia, so he's just used to it, I guess. It's not like he can't get his hands on me if he wants to. Once he'd gotten undressed he climbed into bed beside me and put my hands down – over the covers, where he could see them – and then massaged my shoulders. He was like that. Hunt might make me do something that makes my muscles hurt, like that did, but then he always remembers and acknowledges the fact that my shoulders are killing me without having to ask. I didn't even get a chance to reach up and rub them myself before he started doing it for me.

I'm sitting here shaking my head right now. Sometimes he's just so loving towards me. And, when I really think about it, one of the times that he shows me that he loves me the most is when he punishes me. Even when it's bad. Probably even more so when it's bad.

My husband has knee and leg injuries from playing high school and college ball, so he can't always tolerate having me over his lap. A lot of times I end up over the edge of the bed, or lying on the bed, with a pillow or two beneath my hips. On our last anniversary, one of the presents he bought me a triangular cushion that I could lean back against to sit up in bed and watch TV – it helps my back keep from hurting- jeez, we sound like we're 3000 years old when I talk about all of our aches and pains – and that's been corrupted into something I'm occasionally put over, also. Somehow that's not quite fair, is it? To have a present that was lovingly given on a wonderful occasion turned into something that assists him in reducing me to a kicking, screaming child of five?

He cuddled up to my side and put his lips against my ear, whispering in that sexy voice of his, being deliberately provocative, the pain! "I want you to get up and go into my closet."

Those were never, ever good words, unless I was helping him get dressed for something. Bad things were kept in his closet – like multiple belts and the cane . . . He keeps threatening to get us a "toy box" and I keep threatening that if he does, I'm going to fill it with toys – and not the kind he's thinking of, either.

But for now, we have disciplinary "tools" scattered around the house. I think there's something in every room, at least, although I've never had much interest in confirming that idea. My nightstand has quite a few things, and my vanity/dresser has my hairbrush. I wasn't even able to pick out my own brush, for crying out loud, because he wanted to get one that he could use for a dual purpose. It's solid wood and has an oversized, flat, oval head. Well, I'd say it was oversized, anyway. It hits too much of me at one time, so that the swats always overlap and YEOW that hurts!!! It's evil, I tell you, truly evil.

"And I want you to get out the belt."

There was only one belt he could mean – the one he'd sent me into Wal-Mart to get several years ago. He'd said, "I want you to get a good, hefty gen-u-wine leather belt that's decently wide. If you come back with something wimpy, little girl," he'd warned me, holding my chin in his fingers, "then you're gonna get a whuppin' with it, and then you're going to have to take it back and get one you know I'll like, and then you're gonna get a second whuppin' from the second one."

Have any of you ever had to go into a store at the behest of someone else, with only one purpose in mind – and that purpose was to find something for them to use to fashion painful stripes across your butt? I can assure you, it is a singularly humbling experience, and I would have sworn that everyone who passed me or even glanced at me knew exactly why I was examining each leather length so carefully, wanting desperately to find

one that he wouldn't reject on sight – and then use on me before sending me back again for something more acceptable.

And then having to go through the checkout line with just the belt in your hand – a man's belt that's much too big for you, so that the cashier obviously knows that you're not going to be wearing it . . . and you just know that she's thinking of all the other possible uses as your bottom clenches spasmodically, as if in denial of its one true use.

So, I got one that fit all of his specifications, and it occupied a special hook just inside his closet. He even wore it sometimes, which always put me on my best behavior, because I knew he would never hesitate to unbuckle it and use it on me.

I did as I was told – like I had a choice. If I'd kicked up a fuss I woulda gotten the same thing only worst. He took it from me as soon as I got back to the bed – and believe you me, it was the slowest trip I could possibly manage, from the closet to the bed. Youda thought I was ninety-five and riddled with arthritis I was going so slowly.

And he smiled – almost laughed – but not quite – at my gait. "The quicker you come over here the quicker we can get this over with."

I handed him the belt, already in full pout, and climbed into my own side of the bed, crossing my arms over my chest. "I don't see why I should have to have your permission to do that kind of thing, anyway."

Hunt rolled over and said something like, "Whose body is it?"

This is one of the things about our disciplinary relationship that dribbles a little into other areas, but not much. Hunt believes that, as my husband, it is his right and his right only to touch me privately. That, in marrying him, I have essentially given up the right to creating my own pleasure. That that is both his right and his responsibility as my husband – and he doesn't much want me to have anything to do with that, except at his command.

Up till now, I've never had any problem with that. But today . . .

So there I was. Completely naked, which he almost always insisted on, especially when we were in the bedroom. Over my own pillow, on my own bed, with my own husband standing on my left, holding that God-awful belt in his right hand. His strong hand.

Voluntarily helpless, and subject to his decision about what I needed to correct my disobedience.

No matter how long we do this – which I assume will be for the length of our relationship, which I fully intend to be the rest of my life, although we may cause a bit of a commotion in the nursing home – I'm still never really ready for that first stroke. I don't know that you can ever truly be prepared for it. It always hurts more than I thought it would, and less than I thought it would, if that makes any sense to you.

The only thing that that doesn't hold true for with me is the cane. The cane always hurts more than I think I can tolerate – and Hunt always shows me that I can tolerate more than I thought I could.

And, I don't know how anyone else feels, but sometimes I feel like I can take a lot and sometimes I can only tolerate a little. I don't know if it has something to do with my time of the month, or what . . . which I suppose is a somewhat sexist thing, but then . . . is it still sexism if I'm female?

The belt is a pretty hefty implement in the arsenal. That, and the cane are probably the two most awe-inspiring things he uses with any regularity. And that's not to say – in any way, shape or form – that the other things I get spanked with don't do the job – and don't hurt something fierce. They do. Especially the paddle. But, sheesh, even his hand hurts really badly when he wants it to. Honestly, there is nothing in his arsenal that can't reduce me to tears in a matter of minutes when he applies it with his usual gusto – and Hunt doesn't do anything halfway, and that includes disciplining his errant wife. <that would be me [grin]>

Even from the first stroke, I couldn't control my voice. I always give myself a bit of a pep-talk before hand, telling myself to be brave and quiet and noble and dignified . . . with the belt, I'm lucky if my resolve lasts until after that first one. Sometimes I want to just start crying and begging when I first see it in his hand. Hell, sometimes I start crying and begging when he just threatens to spank me at all.

I can be such a wimp!

With the cane, he always waits before delivering the next one, so that the "secondary sting" has a chance to hit me, as if the primary sting wasn't bad enough <eyes rolling again . . . still . . . yet . . . > Not so with the belt. There were no such considerations, and he laid them on me fast and hard.

I have to admit that, although he almost always lectures before, during, and after, with only a couple of exceptions, the only one I really even come anywhere near hearing is the before one – when I'm still hoping to talk <or entice or pretty much anything else I can think of short of dying on him> him out of it. As soon as the swats start, my brain flies

out the window <no comments from the peanut gallery about that being my normal situation> and the only thing I can see and hear is what I FEEL. The only thing I'm focusing all of myself on is getting through it - surviving the next round of slashes against my tender flesh. However I react – which, as I understand it is loudly <especially if one considers how many hotels have asked us not to return – big blush> only I'm not really listening to myself, either, so it's hard to tell – is completely natural and completely out of my control – kind of like the punishment itself. I know that I cry and wail and moan and beg – I know that afterwards, sometimes, I'm hoarse for days – about as long as it takes for the bruises to fade.

So, to me, if he asks me questions during a lecture, that's entirely unfair. Just give me the darned punishment and get it over with, already. I don't want to have to think – about where I am, about how I'm letting him treat me <sometime soon I'll do a treatise on the difference between abuse and punishment, but not now> - and I don't mean as regards abuse but rather how horridly humiliating and little-girlish it is to be bare bottomed getting spanked by a big, strong, strapping man <sometimes literally strapping . . . > . . . about the fire in my bottom. And when he makes me answer his questions, he pulls me back into myself – back to the pain I'm trying my best to escape and deal with in my own way.

He was talking through the whole thing – I could hear his voice in the background of my suffering, my misery as that belt ripped up my butt and the backs of my thighs.

Ohhhhhhhhhh yes. I don't just get it on my butt – Hunt says that that would "narrow his field" too much, and that, in the long run, he's saving me some pain in swatting me somewhere other than my rump. I suppose he is . . . but do you know how sensitive it is back there? It's awful!!! I had never really thought of that – when I had let myself think about what it might be like to get spanked by someone of the male persuasion, I never thought of getting it anywhere but on my butt. Frankly, I could never tolerate it anywhere but where I get it now – getting it on the back or front, to me, would be uncomfortably close to abuse. I don't have any . . . I guess the right word is "romance" with being disciplined anywhere but my butt . . . and now, because of Hunt, the backs of my thighs, I guess.

Just like I have absolutely no interest in whips of any sort. Shudder. Thankfully, neither does Hunt.

Once, though, he strapped the backs of my calves – man, did I howl <that was another hotel we can't go to any more . . . >!!

Anyway, he was saying something to the effect of . . . "yadda yadda yadda when I tell

you not to do something etc, etc, etc, . . . your body belongs to me . . . never touch without my permission . . . " Not that I listen much, but I think it's roughly the same lecture each time, tailored to the specific situation. But then he almost always throws me that God-awful curve and expects me to be able to be coherent enough to answer him when he asks more than a rhetorical question.

"Answer my question." was what brought me around this time – not the question, exactly, but rather the tone with which it was asked. The tone let me know in no uncertain terms that he expected an answer – and he wasn't much interested in waiting for one, which I quickly found out when gave me a stripe for every word in his next question, "Are you not listening to me, Gemma?"

God forbid he should think that I wasn't hanging on his every word while I'm busy trying to suck in enough air for my next wail – that he's the cause of . . . Well. I suppose that this forum is not the place for sarcasm, is it, though? <hi, honey! I love you [smarmy smile]!>

I, of course, did everything I could – which wasn't much at that point – to convince him that I was paying scrupulous attention to him, but then he told me – for the second time, which was another not good thing - to answer his question.

Caught. Hoisted on my very own petard of inattention to detail – one of his bugaboos.

"Do you think I'm talking to just to hear my own voice?"

Oy. Not a good turn of events. If I had just kept one ear – even a part of an ear – out for whatever interrogation he was going to do, I probably could have saved myself a world of hurt. But no. I had to concentrate on trying not to regurgitate a lung while I screamed bloody murder every time that blasted belt fell.

He didn't call me on it immediately, just told me the question and I gave him what had appeared to be a satisfactory answer. But I should have known that that was just too easy.

Probably about twenty screams later <equivalent to probably twenty strokes or so>, he stopped. But didn't put the belt down beside me, as was his habit. That should have been my first clue that <gulp> there was more to come. But again, I was too involved in trying to live through the experience – in trying to reach out and grab some semblance of the dignity that I had so completely lost my hold of. My breathing was erratic – as it had been from the first – and my face was wet with things that had nothing to do with tears, if you get my drift.

Without a word, <he IS trainable, after all [smile]> he put my ever-present box of Kleenex next to my head <I have allergies, folks. I'm allergic to living. Tested for umpty-ump things and allergic to every one of 'em – including cats and dogs, of which we have several of each>. Bless his little heart <wherever he keeps it when he does this to me . . .> I swear, more than I want to be held, more than I want ANYTHING, I want to use a Kleenex after a spanking. I always cry so hard that every orifice I own leaks during it.

I sat up enough to do that, but felt his hand on my back, holding me in place. "You can blow your nose, but stay right where you are."

All of the alarms in my head went off at that point.

Then he said four of the worst words in the world – those that no wife in my type of relationship EVER wants to hear:

"We're not done yet."

NOT DONE????? Was there anything left of my backside for him to continue flaying??? I knew I couldn't reach back to find out, but still . . . it certainly felt like it had fallen completely off – or at least that there were pieces of it on the bed and probably on the floor by now . . .

I couldn't help myself. Like an idiot, I repeated what he'd said back to him.

"So now you've decided to listen to me, huh?"

I thought I had pretty much cried myself out, but I guess I was wrong. The tears that had started to recede returned at those words. Especially when he continued and said exactly what I had been thinking to myself.

"If you hadn't blown off my lecture, I'd be holding and cuddling you – it would be over."

<Okay, everyone, say it with me, in Homer Simpson's voice: Doh!>

"But – " I soooooo didn't want any more. I didn't know if I could live through any more, frankly, but then I tend to feel that way when he's just started, too . . . "But it hurt so much, Hunt, please, I got caught up in the pain – "

"I've already told you – I'm not talking to you when I spank you just to hear myself talk. And this is far from the first time I've had to remind you to pay attention to me when I punish you."

Now, more than ever, I wanted to be somewhere else – anywhere else. I couldn't keep myself from positively keening when he picked that awful belt up off the bed again . . .

Hunt was staring at the angry red welts and already darkening bruises he'd created on her bottom, seriously weighing the pros and cons of adding to them. He'd really lit into her for pleasuring herself. To him, it was a basic tenet of a disciplinary relationship – that the person responsible for doling out the pain in the relationship was also responsible – solely – for parceling out the pleasure. It kind of kept the balance, so that she didn't always see him as the mean guy that only hurt her. But it also kept her in check in an extremely intimate way. He was pretty stringent doling out permission for most things, and this one he was even more so.

Besides, if Gemma was going to . . . take care of herself, then he wanted to be there to see it – honestly, to watch her face. She had the most expressive face. It complimented her extremely responsive body. Granted, he had studied her . . . technique, especially when they were first together. Any smart man would. Who would know better how to give her the ultimate in ecstasy than herself?

But once he'd assured himself that he could bring her what she brought herself, he started to watch her face instead of where her hands were. He liked seeing her moan, watching her bite her lip, see her throw her head back at the unbearable pleasure that she was receiving at his behest – but at the ends of her own fingers.

However, if she'd disobey him in something like this, something so deeply personal within their relationship, what was to stop her from doing it about other, less important things? And this was something that there would truly never be any trace of. How would he ever really know – unless he caught her in the act, as he had today.

The basis of their relationship had to be trust. When there was true discipline involved – not just the occasional slap and tickle as a precursor to sex, there was no other way to have it. She had to trust that he loved her enough to punish her – but never really hurt her. He had to trust her to learn from his discipline and, basically, obey him when he set a rule for her, so that she wasn't constantly punishing her for the same thing. And so that he would know that even when he wasn't there, she was behaving herself as he would want her to. According to the rules he'd set down for her.

And he had to say, that, generally, it worked. Her language – which was one of the first things he'd cracked down on her about – was much, much better than it had been. He may be old-fashioned, but he hated to hear a woman spouting a mouthful of obscenities. Frankly, he hated to hear a man talk like that, too. It was an even worse sacrilege in

Gemma's case, though, because she had the vocabulary to easily avoid saying the "f" word every five seconds. Hunt could almost – almost – excuse someone who wasn't particularly facile with the language from repeating particular words.

But not his woman – most particularly not Gemma. She was fluent in three languages and very passable in two others, and he'd forbidden her from swearing in any of them, even though he only knew English, he figured he could tell by her guilty expression whether or not she'd said something she shouldn't, regardless of the language.

She'd gotten better about the checkbook, too, and was more responsible about money in general. She thought before she bought, and he had given her an allowance and a spending limit, unless it was an emergency or something unusual. If it was an unusual purchase, then she had to clear it with him. Now they had money in the bank and were saving for vacations and trips as they should – instead of getting angry calls from the bank – one of which he had fielded while staying with her in New Mexico when they were first dating.

So, overall, their lives had improved, and she had definitely learned from those sometimes long, always painful sessions he insisted on when she disobeyed him. And this would be no different.

Hunt knew it couldn't be easy for her to listen to him when he was waling on her like that. But part of what he was trying to teach her was attention to detail, but most of all, attention to him. He wasn't talking just to hear himself talk. He felt that lectures were an important part of any reprimand, and he didn't want her zoning out during the middle of them – even if her bottom was on fire, as he was sure that it was.

So, he hefted the belt in his hand and brought it down – as hard as he could – next to her on the bed. Gemma jumped and squealed, but stayed in position. She'd been taught well to do that – the hard way. The next ten strokes didn't land on the bed, though, and her wails told the difference. Hunt delivered each and every one separately, laying them on almost as hard as he could, showing no mercy as bruises piled upon bruises. He covered every inch of her poor little rear – which wasn't hard since the belt was fairly wide – as well as the backs of her thighs.

Gemma cringed and moaned and rocked a little – trying to get away from the blows, which he considered entirely natural. He could hardly expect her to remain entirely still during something like this. But she was extremely good, and took her punishment like a trooper, reaching for a Kleenex as soon as he threw the belt into the corner and joined her on the bed.

Chapter 4

When she was through honking, he pulled her into his arms. Sometimes it surprised him how readily she came to him after a harsh punishment like that. It was almost as if she didn't think that HE had delivered it, or something like that. Like she was able to divorce him from the actual discipline . . . he didn't know how her mind worked, exactly, but was glad that she was almost always amazingly soft and warm in his arms after she'd been spanked.

And naked. She was naked and moist – in more ways than one – and clinging to him. This was always good, in his book. Hunt pulled her tight to him, wrapping his thick arms around her, cuddling her against his chest. He always worried – in the back of his mind – about actually harming her, which was the last thing he wanted to do in this lifetime. He wanted to save her from hurts – to protect her from her own irresponsible actions that would cause hurt in the long run. He wanted to give her what he knew she needed – and what she had confessed to him that she needed one night when they had been talking in bed after a wonderful bout of lovemaking that left the both of them lying there in each other's arms, dazed and still tingling long afterwards . . .

The swamp cooler was humming softly in the background, he remembered, and she was curled on his chest. His arm was lying lazily across her back, not holding her there, just being there. It was probably the male in him, but especially since their intimacy was so new, he liked to talk about it afterwards – if he let himself go entirely male, he'd call it a debriefing, but he would never use that term with her – she'd consider it much too sterile and militaristic to apply to what they had. Frankly, so did he, but it fit on a different level.

"So," he began, his voice hoarse from his own cries of completion, "is there anything you want that I'm not doing for you?" Although he knew he'd brought her to the ultimate – several times over as she struggled and screamed and begged and moaned and drove him over the edge to his own release, he still wanted to make sure that he was giving her exactly what she needed and wanted.

They were still new, he kept having to remind himself, but their level of connection astounded him. They were alike in just the right areas and different in just the right areas. They meshed wonderfully, and he hadn't felt like this in years. It was both marvelous and a source of concern. What if she wasn't feeling the same way he was? What if the sex – which, granted, wasn't all of the relationship but was a pretty big part of it, as far as he – and most men – was concerned wasn't all that great? He felt he could always get a handle on the sex itself, probably, although he knew that it was too much to hope for that she

might be into spanking as he was. He'd done without it in almost every relationship he'd had, and had pretty much given up on the idea that this day and age he'd find a woman who would agree to be disciplined by him on a regular basis. Someone who would let him set rules and be the final authority in their relationship.

Ninety-nine-point-nine percent of women would tell him to take a hike – but not that nicely – if he so much as hinted at the idea that he liked an old-fashioned, husband-as-the-head-of-the-household type of relationship. Women who wanted what he had to offer just didn't seem to exist. He was looking for a needle in a haystack. He could get women with no problem. But none of them even came close to acting or saying anything that might have given him the hope of something more like what he craved.

He'd been raised in an extremely loving, warm family where his father was a benevolent dictator. No one ever doubted that he adored his family. Jack Donovan was a family man with a capital FAMILY. When he and his wife Barbara married, they didn't have the proverbial pot. At one point, he was working three jobs – one full and two part time, plus picking up any other odd jobs just to make ends meet – because he didn't want his wife to be doing anything but staying at home, taking care of Hunt at first, and then the other kids as they came along. Luckily, he was smart and a very hard worker, and eventually he got promoted enough that he only had to work the full-time job. Despite the hours he worked, Sundays were reserved entirely for the family. They attended services in the morning, then usually went for a drive if it was a nice day, and ended up getting an ice cream at Howard Johnson's as a treat. Or they'd spend the day playing at home – card games were the regular – Hearts, Thirty-One, Gin Rummy. Eventually, he even scandalized his wife and taught the kids how to play poker when they were old enough, playing for real with their allowance money.

There was never any question in anyone's mind that Jack Donovan was a family man. If it was within his abilities, he never missed a recital or a play or a Cub Scout meeting. He never went to a bar before he came home. He never went out with the boys. He and Barbara had a small group of friends they socialized with on occasion, but in general, they spent their time with the family they'd created – happily.

Jack ruled the family – lovingly, affectionately, and with a genuine good-nature. He always said it was better to laugh than to cry. Unlike a lot of men of his generation, he never shied away from changing diapers or doing household chores. If he saw it, and it needed to be done, he did it, be it drying someone's frightened tears or doing a load of wash. He sat up with any kid who was sick, and literally danced attendance on Barbara those few times she'd come down with something.

But his rules were law. There was very little discussion if one was broken. And he'd had

rules for Barbara, too. Hunt remembered their "discussions" about the checkbook – which she had a tendency to overdraw, apparently, and how she sat gingerly like the rest of them did after a spanking the next morning, although he never remembered hearing his mother cry or wail like his wife did – but then, that was not a subject he dwelt on much. It was definitely squicky for him.

There was no doubt in his mind, though, that his Mom had been subject to the same type of discipline that he longed to provide for his own wife. Perhaps it was because his parents had stayed together until they both died, loving each other rampantly each and every day until the end, that he didn't have the usual commitment-phobia that a lot of men had. He wanted to get married. He wasn't all that worried about kids one way or the other – if they came, they came. But he had a lot of love and care to give, and he wanted to find that special someone who understood and accepted and needed the kind of special consideration he could give her.

His first marriage was what they currently refer to as a "starter" marriage. They met and married and divorced without much feeling, one way or the other, beyond lust. And even then, spanking had never entered into it.

Gemma was taking a while to answer him, and Hunt wasn't sure whether that was a good or a bad thing. At least she was taking the question seriously.

She took a big breath. What she was about to say to him was something she'd never said to anyone in her life. She'd always kept this particular want and need very close to the vest – for personal security reasons as well as because she didn't want to be laughed at. Women were expected to be very driven, independent people who never needed anyone, much less a man to guide their lives. It was one of Gemma's worst fears that she would pick the wrong person to confess this interest – heck, this driving need – to . . . and she would be ridiculed for it.

"I – " That was as far as she got, at first, and almost decided entirely against saying anything to him. She didn't want to ruin what they had, which she loved. Her relationship with him was very special, and she didn't want to damage it in any way. If she told him that she wanted him to set rules for her and hold her to them, backing his authority up with regular, non-playful spankings, would he look at her differently afterwards?

She sighed hard.

Hunt ran his fingers through her hair slowly. "What? You can tell me anything, you know. I just want to know how I can make sex – and our relationship – better for you."

Gemma closed her eyes, biting her lip. "What I – but – I'm . . . afraid."

He wanted to sit up, but didn't want to disturb their intimacy. Instead, he continued to stroke her hair in what he hoped was a soothing manner. "Sweetie! You're not afraid of me, I hope?"

She squirmed, obviously uncomfortable with the direction their conversation was going. "Noooooooo . . . not of you, but of your reaction if I tell you something . . . something I've never told anyone else in the world." Her voice had faded as she spoke, so that the last few words were delivered in nothing but the shyest whisper.

She looked so unsure of herself – and that was so unlike her – that he just had to hug her – a short, sharp hug. "You cut that out. There's nothing you could say to me that would make me stop loving you. If you're a serial killer, or a compulsive shoe-shopper, or you're addicted to McDonald's French fries – which I would gladly join you in – then we'll deal with it." He got her to laugh softly, but she still looked more worried than anything else. He lowered his voice conspiratorially and pressed his mouth against the top of her head. "Would it help you if I told you something deeply personal about my own preferences? Something I've almost never shared with anyone else?"

Gemma turned to stare into his eyes. He appeared to be completely serious – there was no trace of a smile about his lips. "Yeah, that would help."

"Okay," he kept her gaze on him by sheer force of will. "I trust you enough that even if I told you that I like to dress up in women's frilly pink underwear that you'd not laugh at me or belittle me."

She'd bet her life that that wasn't what he was going to say – he was too macho for that – but he was right. She wouldn't laugh at anything he said. She loved him.

Hunt cupped her cheek in his hand and just said it. Come hell or high water, he wanted her to know him as no other woman had. He wanted to be able to be himself around her. And as himself, he wanted to be a disciplinarian – granted, a loving one – but a disciplinarian nonetheless, to a woman who knew and acknowledged within herself that this would be a helpful type of relationship to have.

"I want to ask more of you than I've ever asked of any woman. I want to give you everything – and help you achieve anything you want to in this life. I would consider it an honor – "

Gemma's eyebrows went through the roof. Was he going to propose to her, right here in

bed?

" – if you'd let me take a more important role in your life than some women might be comfortable with."

"More important?" she parroted back to him, hanging on every word and completely confused about where he might be going with this.

"Yes. We've talked kind of casually about getting together on a more permanent basis – and we love each other. If we decide to live together, there is something I would want from you that I'm not sure you could accept."

"Oh?"

Hunt cleared his throat a little nervously. "Yeah. It's something that I'm into where I have pretty much given up hope of finding someone who is into the same thing."

Gemma was no ingénue. She'd seen some . . . interesting things on the Internet. Somehow, she doubted that he would say anything she'd really be surprised at. Perhaps he had a shoe fetish . . . or liked to be tied up – although that would surprise her only in relation to him. Hunt was a pretty dominant guy – and that was one of the things she liked most about him. He took charge of things, and even liked ordering for her in restaurants. He held out chairs and always went to get the car and brought it to her, helping her in first rather than just leaving her to her own devices. Old fashioned manners. He showed respect for her as a woman, and she'd seen him acting the same way to other women he didn't even know – holding doors and just generally being a gentleman, which was a true rarity in this day and age.

"What is it?" She was dying of curiosity. She'd never seen any indication of anything other than the usual when they were in bed – he was very physical and sexual with her – although not inappropriately so. He made no bones about the fact that he wanted her – and often made comments for her ears only when they were out that let her know that he was thinking about her even then – that she was on his mind and he wanted her all the time. Gemma found it incredibly flattering to have caught his interest so completely.

He took a deep breath and blurted it out, praying that he wasn't destroying what they had in the process. If she thought he was crazy, if she thought he was a Neanderthal, would she always be looking at him as if she expected him to hit her? The one other woman he'd gotten truly close to hadn't been able to handle it after he'd told her what he wanted. Kay was a wonderful woman and he'd loved her, too. But when he'd told her that he wanted a disciplinary relationship – that he wanted to spank her if she disobeyed the rules

he set for her - she'd looked at him like he had three heads, and then seemed to be . . . almost afraid of him after that. As if she expected he was going to take a swing at her or something.

So he'd learned to be very scrupulous about letting on anything about spanking. He'd read and seen everything he could about it, however. He no longer even tested the waters with the women he dated. He used to take an occasional swat at them in play, just to see how they'd react. Kay had giggled, and he had thought maybe he'd gotten lucky that time.

They'd broken up because of what he'd told her. She'd made some other excuse, but he'd seen the way she looked at him.

"I'm into spanking."

Gemma's jaw dropped onto his chest and her tongue lolled out of her mouth. Just as quickly, though, she snapped it closed. "Into spanking" covered a lot of ground. He could very well mean that he wanted to be spanked. He probably meant that he wanted a little slap and tickle as foreplay. She couldn't possibly be lucky enough that he wanted what she wanted. It wasn't fated to happen to her. She'd already resigned herself to living that part of her life only within her own mind – scanning the search engines greedily, eagerly for anything about men spanking women . . . subscribing to newsgroups and the occasional well-done website to satisfy her longings when she'd denied them so much they overwhelmed her.

Her next words confused him and he cocked his head at her after she'd said them. They were said in almost a clinically neutral tone. "Define that – 'into spanking'."

Hmmmmmm. She wasn't backing away from him. She wasn't making any moves – she was unnaturally still, actually. Define it, huh? He wasn't sure exactly what he should say. "Uh . . . well, it kind of is what it is. I like spanking."

Gemma bit her lip and decided to take a chance of her own. "Okay, yeah, but . . . are you a top or a bottom? Do you want to spank me before we make love, or do you mean spankings for punishment? What exactly do you want?"

Now it was his turn to have his jaw drop. She was sounding as if she knew of what she spoke. She did not sound like someone who didn't know the first thing about spanking. "I guess I'm a top, but I don't much get into the dominance/submission, bdsm aspect of it –"

"Neither do I!" She was sitting up now, kneeling right beside him, her face alight with excitement. "But I've always wanted someone to keep me – "

" – In line. Give you structure. And, boy, do you need it!" he teased, heaving a relieved sigh at her positive reaction, even when she play-slapped his shoulder.

"I do not!" Gemma protested automatically, only to snuggle up to him sheepishly. "Well, I guess I do, huh, or I wouldn't be craving what I'm craving?"

Pulling her tightly against his side, Hunt rested his chin on the top of her head, unable to believe that she seemed to want exactly what he wanted. "Let me get this straight. I just want to say it out loud, so there's no misunderstandings."

That was her man, Gemma thought. Mr. Structure and Control. "Yeeeeeeesssss?"

"You would be all right following rules I gave you." He started out easy.

"As long as they weren't something stupid or overly picky – like I had to ask permission to breathe. Let me say this: I have no interest in being a slave. I'm not a slave-type."

Hunt was shaking his head, she could feel it. "No, I don't want a slave, either. I want a partner. A woman. Someone to cherish and love." He tipped her chin up. "And, eventually, a wife. But I want to be the head of the household. I want to make the rules. You need someone to watch over you and keep you on the straight and narrow – I've seen what you do to your checkbook. You need a keeper. And I'd like to be the one who helps you be all that you can be. That I know you can be."

"Who said anything about joining the Army?" At his confused look, she elaborated, singing the jingle, "Be all that you can be – in the Ar-rrrrr-rrrrr-my?"

"Uh huh." He wasn't interested in laughing at this point. "And if I should set up a rule for you – one that said, say, that you were not to overdraw your checking account, and you did, you would be amenable to being spanked for it?" She was nodding a little too vigorously for his comfort. Maybe she thought he was going to give her a couple of tiny swats and figure that that would do. "You're a little too eager about this, and it makes me think that you think that a spanking from me would be something fairly inconsequential."

Gemma couldn't help it. She gulped. His eyes were deadly seriously, as was his posture and demeanor. What would it be like to be spanked by him? she wondered. "No. I'm not eager. I know that it would hurt – "

"A lot. I do not give play spankings." Actually, he'd never given anyone any spanking, but he figured that – with all the knowledge he'd gleaned on the Internet and through reading, that he had a pretty good handle on it, and he loved her, so he would be scrupulously careful of her, despite the fact that it was a punishment.

She nodded. "A play spanking wouldn't teach me anything. I need cause and effect – consequences for my actions. I need someone who loves me enough to spank me." Her voice was endearingly soft when she asked, "Is that you?"

Hunt's heart nearly busted right in two at that question. He grabbed her face between his two big hands and held it still for his lips. "Yes, my love. I believe it is."

From that point on, she had put herself into his capable hands. The first time he'd spanked her, he thought he was going to have a heart attack every time his hand came down on her bottom. That first spanking – which was an impromptu one for saying several of what he considered to be extremely disgusting words and phrases because she'd been having "one of those days" and had dropped something she'd picked up for the ninety-seventh time – was too easy for her, really, when he looked back at it. She hadn't even shed a tear. Oh, there were lots and lots of protestations – loud ones, if he was remembering correctly – but then she always protested. He'd never really put any prohibitions on it, as long as she wasn't out and out defiant or disrespectful. To him, it was a pretty normal thing to try to get out of a punishment. Gemma may acknowledge intellectually that she needed a firm hand, but that didn't mean that she was a pushover about it. She would always try to get out of it. But she knew where the line was and didn't go too far. Even with all of her verbal gyrations – and some physical ones she knew she could get away with, like putting her hands back to her untouched bottom to protect it from the coming onslaught – he couldn't think of a time when he'd actually let her out of a spanking.

Of course, if she was sick, or hurt, or there were extenuating circumstances; that was different. He wasn't a monster.

But, as time went on, he got better at it. Much better, according to Gemma. She didn't sound like she was any too enthused at his burgeoning prowess, either. He learned how to use his strength to his advantage – in holding her down and in delivering the swats she'd earned. They'd tried her over his lap – which he'd been very concerned about at first because of his knees – and found that, for something quick and hard, like if she swore or was sassy – it worked all right. But he couldn't tolerate even her insignificant weight over him for very long, and he didn't like to interrupt the flow of things and make her have to move in the middle of it.

At first, they continued with their long distance relationship – it was awful trying to be a disciplinarian from so far. It wasn't that he didn't trust her to tell him when she did wrong – she did. But he knew there were things he missed – things she forgot about. He wanted to be with her – he needed to be with her all the time.

The most natural thing was for him to move to her, since his company had an office there, and he broached the subject with her as soon as he saw there was an opening in the Albuquerque area for his line of work. Hunt didn't want to apply for a transfer without talking to her about it – didn't want to just assume that it would be okay with her for him to move in. He may be the man who spanked her butt red when she gave him too much attitude, but he was very careful – and continued to be – not to over step his bounds. That was a big leap.

Now, looking down at her, seeing how aroused she was, despite the severity of the chastisement he'd meted out on her poor little bum, Hunt couldn't believe how fortune had smiled on him. He loved his wife. She was everything to him. All he needed in this life. If everything else went to hell in a hand basket, he would be fine, as long as she stood by him. And he knew she would.

Chapter 5

Hunt let his mouth do the talking for him. He slid down her body, luxuriating in her silky skin. Gemma used to be very disparaging about her looks – saying she thought she was too fat – but he was able to get her out of it. Every time she said something nasty about herself, she got a good spanking, and he would make her stand in front of the mirror – naked – and say three positive things about herself physically that weren't about her hair or her eyes, which was the only features about herself that she liked.

He kissed her hip, then the crease of her thigh while his hands gently arranged her legs over his shoulders. He knew she both hated and loved this position – she'd told him once that when he did that to her, holding her open, keeping her legs spread wide and in place so that she couldn't move them – couldn't get away from him even if she wanted to – it made her feel like she was a meal laid out before him, all ready and waiting to be devoured.

And that was exactly what he did – he latched onto her with delicate greed, as if he couldn't get enough of her – and he couldn't. Worse than that, he'd learned that her ecstasy was just that much more incredible for her if he held her wrists down by her sides. So, once he'd captured her with his warm, wet mouth, his hands caught hers, keeping her from moving them at all. Once she was spread open, he carefully brought her closer and closer – then stopped. Hunt knew her well enough by now to judge with fair

accuracy how close she was to the ultimate conclusion of his endeavors.

Her cries of protest were almost as loud as her moans of ecstasy. "Hunt – no – please – don't – stop – doooooooooonnnn't stooooooooop noooooooooow!"

He didn't answer her, just chuckled evilly and went back to his delightful task, this time gently insinuating two fingers inside her, still holding the wrist of her right hand against the mattress. She wasn't going anywhere. Hunt worked that distended button with the flat of his tongue, then licked it delicately, switching rhythms and never staying with one that would quite get her there. Every time he thought she was anywhere near climaxing, he slowed down or completely stopped.

He practically had her in tears, begging him to have mercy on her. Hunt was thinking that she sounded remarkably like he was taking the cane to her butt, and it was the furthest thing away from that as was possible. "Who loves you?" he asked huskily, getting in another slow, teasing lick.

"Y- you d-do," she barely breathed, her eyes screwed tightly shut, her body taut as a bowstring, just waiting – craving and aching and desperate for what only he could give her.

"And how much do I love you?" he quizzed, his fingers probing in a slow, teasing rhythm.

"Ahhnnnnnnnnn! Lots and lottttttssssssssssssmmmmmmmm!"

As his mouth descended on her for what would be the last time, he murmured, "Completely. Totally. Endlessly."

Hunt proceeded to nibble, cajole, and tease her into oblivion as she writhed and moaned, then finally screamed her triumph, grinding herself against him. Hunt drank in every pure utterance, every movement, as she clawed the mattress beneath them spasmodically, clenching around his fingers and within the moist, hot confines of his lips.

Sometimes – with what had been at first a rather disconcerting regularity – Gemma tended to try to withdraw from him – if not physically then mentally and emotionally – after a particularly hard orgasm. It happened less often the more regularly he brought her off – and it had been a couple of days. This was a very, very hard one for her, and he could see her trying to draw herself in, away from him, and he wasn't about to let her do that.

As soon as he was able – considering that parts of him had cramped into unusual and highly uncomfortable positions – he crawled up and lay on top of her, keeping her legs back. The pleasurable jolt of joining himself with her made her open her eyes and look at him – dragging her back to him, where she belonged. "That's it," he encouraged, increasing his pace and the strength with which he claimed her. "There's no escaping me, Gemma. No escaping my love, or my loving punishments. You're mine."

That familiar tingle had already begun at the base of his spine – it always seemed to happen with almost embarrassing speed with Gemma. He couldn't hold it back, no matter how hard he tried. Hunt exploded within her after several sharp, deep thrusts, then collapsed to one side of her, keeping her close while he tried to get his breathing under control.

As they settled into sleep, tucked into each other, every part of them touching, he began to think about how tantalizing Gemma still was to him. He found himself in a constant, low level of arousal when he was around her – and even when he wasn't if she happened to pop into his mind. She pranced around the house, shaking that luscious bottom of hers in front of him – unintentionally, he knew. His Gemma wasn't a siren of any sort. In fact, she was pretty oblivious about how attractive she was. Sometimes that was a good thing, sometimes it wasn't.

But he wanted her all the time – the old saying "barefoot and pregnant" worked for him. Barefoot and readily accessible worked even better, frankly. They had gone off birth control several years ago, but nothing had happened so far. They were very content to be a couple by themselves, if that was how it worked out. Gemma's biological clock hadn't started to tick loudly yet – or if it had she hadn't said anything to him about it. If they decided to have a baby, they'd get themselves checked out. If they didn't, they wouldn't.

But barefoot and naked was a wonderful thought, and it was that thought that ran through his head more often than not when he was with her. It didn't matter if she was dressed in her best finery – which granted she didn't do very often because she didn't need to – or just waking up in the morning with a fierce case of bed-head. It didn't matter to him one iota.

Punishing her got to him, too, and sometimes that worried him a little. He didn't want to be the type of person who got off on inflicting pain on someone else – especially not the woman he adored. But, then, he supposed that part of the reason he was aroused was that she was almost always naked when she received discipline – at the very least from the waist down – they were physically close at the time, and he was attending to a very intimate part of her anatomy – one that he had a definite preference for, even when he wasn't spanking it.

He had to stop thinking about it – the impossible was happening, only he was too tired to do anything about it. Finally, Hunt squeezed Gemma one last time with the arm that was around her waist and fell into a deep, contented sleep.

December 19, 2003

Dear Diary:

GRRRRRRRRRRRRRR!!!!!!

If I overspend my Christmas budget – which I pretty much always do – my husband has threatened to spank me every day for a week. Every day for a week!!! His threats almost always come true! I ask you: does that sound like a fair punishment? Is that something he declared when he was chock-full of the Christmas spirit, or what? Sheesh!

It's not like I spent our year's salaries on Christmas – no, no, no, dear reader. I spend what I consider to be quite a reasonable amount, considering what I have to buy and for whom. And considering the fact that I want my husband to have anything and everything he ever wanted, in this lifetime and the next . . .

Sigh.

Okay, well, that's obviously my problem. Especially since I'm buying most of the stuff for my beloved, who always says he'd be just as happy to find black socks and underwear under the tree <my eyes are rolling out of my head by now, you understand . . . Jeez Louise, I come from the type of family where I had my Christmas list done by July, for crying out loud. Volume II came out in August, and the whole thing had a reprint no later than October!! His family is one of those "draw names, everyone gets someone something, and they make you try it on before they wrap it" types . . . major eye roll>

So, needless to say, he thinks I'm extravagant during the holidays. <shoulder shrug> I am. That's what the holidays are about!!! I'm not just buying for my family and his family, though; I'm buying for friends!! I don't have a lot of 'em, but those I have, I like to treat once a year to something nice. Lord knows I can't afford it the rest of the year . . . And, of course, his response to that would be that WE can't afford it for Christmas, either . . .

Grumble. Groan. Cough. Wheeze. Snort.

I do SOOOO hate it when he's right.

Hunt has suggested that I tell you a little about myself – he read my diatribes here – which I do have to confess was absolute torture because he told me he was going to do it and I was home when he did. Oy!!! It was like – I don't know. But believe me, it was bad, bad, bad!!

Anyway, although he was very complimentary <another eye roll – what was he going to tell me, that he thought it stunk? I doubt it>, he said that those who are reading this – all, what, two of us, him and me? – might want to know a little about me – what do I look like, what do I do for a living, stuff like that. <snicker> I'm thinkin' you already know too much about me if you've gotten to this point . . . And he added quite pointedly that I have to do the physical description without saying anything bad about myself and without lying, of course.

Hmmmmmmm. What to say, what to say. Well, I guess I should describe myself physically first and get it over with. Yuck. Ugh. I'm allergic to cameras, so there are almost no pictures of me – except those that Hunt gets by sneaking up on me, so what there are of me always look like I've seen a ghost or something – my eyes are popping and my mouth is open <and no, that's not my usual look . . . >. So there won't be any pictures posted here, although I know that this blog site allows it. Nuh-uh. No way.

Let's see. My driver's license says that I'm five-seven and I weigh one-twenty-two. I think we'll go with that.

Oh, crap. I can't. The scrupulously honest thing.

In case you hadn't guessed, he was reading over my shoulder – which should be against the law as far as I'm concerned.

So . . . okay. I'm five-six. And my weight is more like . . . um . . . one-thirty-

Oh, all right. One-forty. I got dragged to the doctor's for my annual ob-gyn exam <which I hate – what woman doesn't?> just last week, and that's what they weighed me at. So I'm fat. Okay?

Ow.

I just got "it" for being sassy in my diary and denigrating my looks when he'd expressly told me not to. Damn and blast.

I have blue eyes and, depending on how long it's been since I've been to my hairdresser,

either dirty blonde hair in the summer or even uglier dark blonde hair in the winter, or a lot of nice, golden-blonde hair. It's about medium length – ends just above my bra strap in back – and is naturally wavy and curly. Yeah, I know some of you women hate me, but it's not like I don't have to get the rest of it permed when I want to be totally curly.

I have blue eyes and fair skin. Hunt, on the other hand, is almost my exact opposite. He's all dark. Black hair, black eyes, darker skinned than I am. I fry in the sun, he tans beautifully, although we're both careful to use sunscreen.

It's because I'm so fair that I bruise so easily. I swear, he just has to give me "the look" and my butt starts to turn red and bruised.

I'm not short, really, for a woman, but Hunt is TALL, with a capital TALL. He's six-three or so. When I'm not in trouble, his size really makes me feel protected – I know, I know. I'm not supposed to need to feel that way nowadays, being a liberated woman and all <eye roll>, but I do. So sue me. He's broad, too – has that nice Y-shape that makes women drool.

Eat your hearts out, ladies. He's MINE, all MINE <grin>.

Anyway, my occupation is simple – or it used to be: I teach. Fifth graders. Never wanted to do anything but teach all my life, and, even when the economy stunk and teachers were a dime a dozen, I had a job even before I graduated from college, thanks to a union school that was opening in a little town south of Albuquerque.

I used to love teaching, but . . . well . . . I don't know. Lately I've been writing a lot (not just here) and I like to fantasize about the idea of writing for a living instead. You know those thick, hot historical romances, like LaVryle Spencer and Judith McNaught write? Or even the more daring ones – some that even contain spanking scenes – like Diana Gabaldon and Bertrice Small . . .

Is it getting hot in here? <fanning myself>

That's just a pipe dream, though. I don't write nearly well enough –

<angry face>

I just got it again! I gotta be more careful about what I say in this thing, darn it!! And, boy, did that hurt – I hate getting one spanking over another one!! YEOW!

Dirty rotten rassafrass!!!

Hunt settled back into his overstuffed recliner, arranging several magazines on his lap, his brow still furrowed from having to discipline his errant wife twice within less than an hour. He didn't like to have to do it, but he did it, unfailingly. In general, she was really well-behaved. He counted himself very lucky that Gemma almost invariably leaned towards good-natured. Some of the men at the office disparaged their wives quite readily – when the poor women weren't around to defend themselves – lamenting about how bitchy they were all the time. Gemma, on the other hand, was – usually – extremely easy to get along with. She had her moments, like anyone else – usually around that time of the month – but, in general, she was a pretty happy-go-lucky person and extremely good-natured.

But when it came to herself – she never cut herself any slack at all. None. She had the usual female tendency to look at herself in the mirror and see a disgraceful lump, rather than the beautiful woman he saw every time he looked at her. Hunt railed against society inwardly, but outwardly he was gently – well, maybe not so gently – trying to change how she saw herself, so that it wasn't such an automatic thing to scoff at herself in the mirror or immediately look at herself and think of the things that were wrong – as far as current social norms were concerned. He loved her exactly the way she was – lumps, bumps, and all.

She also never gave herself any sort of a learning curve, on anything. Gemma had to be an expert on everything, even if she'd never seen or done it before. It wasn't that she was trying to show off for anyone else, it was just that she was too much of a perfectionist about herself. It was never acceptable, as far as she was concerned, that she should ever make a mistake – even if it was the first time she'd ever done something, work related or not - it didn't matter to her.

Unlike him, computers were not her forte . . . Gemma had the same philosophy about computers that she did about cars, although Hunt thought that she probably trusted the car more to do what she asked of it. Gemma approached the computer like it was going to explode if she touched the wrong key. He was amazed that she'd done as much with hers as she'd been able to, but learning a new program, or installing hardware or software . . . He shuddered at the thought.

But it was the car that had gotten her into trouble that time when they were still just living together. She'd learned well from that lesson and had never even come close to repeating the error, which was a damned good thing, as far as he was concerned.

Gemma was a princess. Sometimes he even called her that to tease her. Her back would get up – quite predictably - at it because she considered it an insult – like he was saying

that she was uppity or refused to get her hands dirty, which was not at all what he was implying. She was just a princess – before she'd met him, she'd never even pumped her own gas, for crying out loud! They still drove by the "Gemma Tyler Memorial Gas Pump" at the Exxon on Main Street every once in the while, and he'd nudge her in the ribs.

"There it is, dear! The place where you took your first step down off that pedestal and got your hands dirty with the rest of us peons . . . "

Of course, he got smacked on the shoulder for his efforts, but it was well worth it. He loved needling her.

Now, after her time with him, she could at least see to her vehicle with a modicum of responsible ownership: she pumped her own gas – because he insisted they were NOT going to pay full service prices – could put air in her tires, and add oil to her engine. She was responsible for bringing her car in every three months or three thousand miles to get the oil changed – and he did check the little stickers that the mechanics left in the window to check up on her. Eventually, he was going to teach her to change her own oil, and he'd already made her change her own tire once, just so she'd know the process, but he also kept their Triple A membership up to date, too. He didn't much like the idea of her trying to change her tire on a busy highway – he'd much rather have her call the service than ever risk her life. But he felt she ought to know how to do it – what the process was, at least.

But back then they were still somewhat new and he hadn't realized just how completely she ignored everything but the most basic condition of her vehicle. She was home one day in the summer – and he was beginning to realize that he had a huge chauvinistic streak, because he really, really, really liked having her home during the day . . . His car was in the shop, so he was taking hers to work for the day. Hunt'd kissed her goodbye while she was still sleepy in their bed, got ready for work, and climbed into her sporty little Celica and turned the key.

The engine shuddered and groaned to life, very reluctantly. Every idiot light in the car blared at him – check engine, service engine soon, the oil and battery lights – everything. And almost immediately, the temperature of the engine pegged incredibly hot.

Hunt sat in the driver's seat for a moment after shutting off the engine and ground his teeth.

How could she have driven this car in this condition? She'd never even hinted at him that there was anything wrong with it in the least – heck, he was a fair shade tree mechanic –

he could probably at least diagnose most problems with cars, and maybe even fix some of them satisfactorily.

Granted, they'd used his car a lot more than hers lately – hers barely got any kind of a workout. They went everywhere together, and he drove them in his car. But this poor car seemed to have every possible problem in the book, and he highly doubted that they had just cropped up when he got into it. He looked for a sticker in the corner of the windshield so that he could get some idea of when the oil was changed last, or when the car was serviced last in any way and there was nothing. Nada. Zippo. Grumbling quietly to himself, he got out of the car and, with a huge amount of fear and trepidation, he actually checked the oil, which looked like some sort of black sludge, and was at least a quart and a half low.

Sighing as he let the hood slam shut, Hunt wiped off his hands meticulously as he tried – unsuccessfully – to control his anger. Well, he didn't have time for it right now. He needed to get to work – but not in this car.

As he stalked back into the house, he flipped open his cell phone, called his boss and said he might be a little late. Lee was fine with that – Hunt was never late and there wasn't anything pressing going on this morning. Then he called a taxi service that said it would be about half an hour to get to him. That was the right amount of time to thoroughly scold the Princess who was sleeping peacefully and obliviously in his bed. Hunt tromped down the short hall into the bedroom and flopped onto the side of the bed, unceremoniously using her shoulders to turn her over onto her back and rudely awaken her from a sound sleep.

Once he had her pinned under him, he began the interrogation. "How long has your car been flashing multiple warning lights at you?"

Gemma was barely cognizant first thing in the morning. And having him climb into bed with her with what was obviously not a nefarious intention didn't make her any more receptive. "Mumph." She didn't even open her eyes. She couldn't open her eyes. It was illegal, immoral, and fattening to open one's eyes before eight A.M. on a vacation day, as far as she was concerned.

That was her story, anyway, and she was sticking to it.

Until he said, "Don't make me ask you again, Gemma. I am not in the mood this morning."

At that, her eyes flew open, colliding with his. And he was, quite obviously, not a happy

camper. She was instantly more awake than she might have been, but still somewhat clouded by sleep. "I'm sorry. What was the question again?"

The muscle in his jaw was going a mile a minute. That was never a good sign. Gemma struggled to wipe the cobwebs of sleep out of her mind as he repeated himself through tightly clenched teeth. "How long have those warning lights been on in your car?"

"Car?" She knew she sounded like a complete idiot, but he looked like he was literally seconds away from flipping her over his lap, and she wanted to forestall that incident as long as she could.

"Yes," he continued, frowning fiercely down at her, "that poor lump in the driveway that apparently hasn't had its oil changed since you bought it how many years ago?"

Gemma couldn't help it. She wanted to shrink under the covers at his tone. Not necessarily at his words, but his tone. His point hadn't even begun to sink into her . . . but she was depressingly sure it would, one way or the other. He would make sure it did, in the most unpleasant manner possible. She settled for drawing the covers up to her lips and peeping out over them. "Uh . . . I bought it used three years ago."

"And when was the last time the oil was changed?" he shot back, showing no mercy at all.

It wasn't fair to quiz her like this – especially about a subject she was so dismally bad in – she thought to herself, but wisely kept her own counsel about it, trying to look as meek as possible in hopes of placating him some while wondering what all of this was about. Had her car not started for him?

"Uhhhh, probably the last time I had it in – to replace the muffler."

"And when was that, pray tell?"

Biting her lip, she responded in a whisper, "Last October, or so, I think . . . maybe . . . sometime around there."

Chapter 6

"October." Hunt closed his eyes, reaching for patience and not quite able to grasp it. He was the type of person who babied his cars. He'd had to be. No one else was going to see to it for him. His Princess, however, hadn't had to be that way . . . and her car was showing it. "October," he repeated, and Gemma's stomach hit her pink-painted toes.

In poker, people have "tells" – physical giveaways to their hands. They might stroke their chin, raise an eyebrow, or crack their knuckles when their hand is great, or when they're bluffing. Hunt's tell was repeating himself when he was truly beyond angry with her.

That concern – that fear – that, while she was sleeping she'd done something – or not done something, as it seemed – that, according to his body language and words, was going to result in an awful spanking – not that there was any other kind - brought her to a stark, startling wakefulness that was uncomfortable in the extreme. She could see her distinct disadvantages inherent in her situation as it pertained to a potential spanking – he was dressed, and she was wearing a barely-there wispy baby doll nightie with a pair of hip hugger panties. No protection at all there. He was already practically on top of her. They were already in bed. The ease with which this could become a spanking alarmed her, and she sought to placate him – but really had nowhere to go with it. He'd caught her dead to rights.

"Uh, yeah. October. I brought it in. It . . . was . . . getting . . . loud . . . " Nothing she was saying was helping her in the least, she could tell. His jaw would shatter if she touched it, she swore. But she was growing ever more nervous, and couldn't keep herself from babbling. "What's wrong with the car? Didn't it start? It's always started for me . . . Maybe I could try it?"

When, oh when, would she learn to keep her big mouth shut?

"Oh, it started all right. Barely, and it's no wonder. It's not the car's fault that the person who owns it isn't taking care of it. Didn't you notice that every idiot light it possesses is on, warning you to have it serviced and check the oil and gages and the battery . . . "

His voice trailed off, because he could see her genuinely confused look. He didn't want to be pedantic or condescending, but he truly didn't understand her confusion. "Let's backtrack here. Did you see the lights?"

"Yes." Gemma was glad to be able to answer something in the affirmative.

"When?"

"When what?"

"When did the lights go on?"

She looked completely befuddled and shrugged her shoulders, as if the question had

absolutely no relevancy to her – and it obviously didn't. "I dunno. A while ago, I guess."

Hunt sighed. It was a long-suffering sigh, and they hadn't been together that long . . .

"Yesterday? Last week? Last month?"

"I – I honestly don't know. I don't pay much attention to those things. They don't do anything, really, do they?" she asked with what he might have found to be comical hopefulness, if he hadn't been made late for work and wasn't concerned for her safety in that poor decrepit car. Gemma could tell that was not the right thing to ask, and blathered on. "I mean, they don't make the car not start . . . they don't do anything but sit there and look at you . . . accusingly, like you're looking at me now . . ." No play for sympathy was going to work, but she couldn't help herself.

"No, they're just there to tell you to get the car to a mechanic as soon as possible.

Apparently that type of warning is much too mild for you," he ground out.

"Bu- well – " she sighed, knowing nothing she said was going to dig her out of this pit.

"I'm sorry. I guess it died on you?" Perhaps sympathizing with him would help . . . it couldn't do anything worse than what she was already in for, she guessed.

"No, it ran, but I'm not going to take it. You, Gemma Rhiannon Tyler, are going to get up, right now, and call Triple A. Then you're going to call my mechanic and beg him to take a look at that car. Mention my name, and he'll probably do it for you today, but it'll take all day, I'd bet. Then you're going to get a ride in the cab of the tow truck over to sit at Hayden's and wait for that car. When you've paid the bill – which I should think might be in the five to seven hundred dollar range, if he cuts you some slack – you're coming straight home and wait for me to get there. I'll be at work late, since I'm getting there late." He put particular emphasis on the last three words, bringing the point of his Roman nose into direct contact with the plush snub of hers. "Do you read me?"

Gemma did not want to spend any days of her precious vacation sitting in a grubby old waiting room at an automobile repair place. In her – granted, severely limited - experience, there was never anything but a grubby old waiting room in places like that. She twisted beneath him before answering, then dared to complain. "Why do I have to go and wait there? Why can't I just wait here, in the comfort of my own home? In front of my own TV?" He looked like the proverbial immovable rock. Gemma traced a finger up and down his chest, over his de rigueur white oxford cloth shirt. "At home, where I could whip you up your favorite dinner and have it waiting for you when you get home . . . "

"One word, my dear. Penance. Get used to it, because you're going to be paying it for quite some time."

He tried to lever himself off her, but Gemma caught him at the small of his back, whining, "Huuunnnnttt!! I don't wanna go to the mechanic's!"

He was totally unrelenting. "That's just too damned bad, Gemma. You need to learn to take care of your vehicles. Your radiator's probably shot – which is what's going to cost you the most of all the repairs that need to be done – and when I turned that thing on this morning it pegged so hot I wouldn't let you near that car again until it's fixed. It could have blown while you were driving it down the road at sixty-five miles an hour."

Gemma wisely kept her mouth shut about the fact that her usual speed was much faster than that. They had yet to have that particular discussion – well, at least she hadn't been caught at it, not that she didn't know his feelings about speeding.

"But I didn't know – "

His eyebrows climbed to the other side of his head at that. "Only because you didn't pay attention to what the car was desperately trying to tell you! If the light had gone off and you had come in and asked me – just asked – I'd've gone out and taken a look and we would have gotten it fixed before there was a problem. Now there are multiple – maybe multiple serious – problems, and your car is undrivable as is – "

"It's not undriveable. I drove it yesterday," she pouted, knowing she was pushing it.

She actually felt his whole body shudder. "I know. If I had known then what I know now . . ."

"But it started! It ran!!"

He couldn't quite believe it, but she seemed absolutely sincere in arguing that that car was in fine condition. Could a woman who was as smart as she was truly be that oblivious to its mechanical needs? Grasping desperately for patience, Hunt relaxed back against her. "Is that really your measure of whether or not the car is okay?"

"YES!" Her vehemence convinced him. "If I get into it and turn the key and it starts, then everything's good to go, as far as I'm concerned." He actually cringed at her blithe proclamation, closing his eyes with a tired sigh and laying his forehead on her chest. "The only gauge I pay any attention to is the gas gauge . . . and even then I've run out of gas some times . . ." Gemma had the grace to look somewhat ashamed at that less-than-surprising revelation.

Lifting his head, he caught her eyes and growled - loudly, like a junkyard dog. Like an

angry junkyard dog. "Well. That, my girl, is at an end. We will be discussing your new era of car care this evening, and several evenings thereafter, I should imagine." Hunt caught her chin in his hand, forcing her to look at him – not that she wasn't, but he was giving her no choice in that matter or others. "This is what I call a 'health and safety' issue - like seat belts and taking your meds. These are things that I won't tolerate any disobedience about whatsoever. If I happen to see you driving down the road without your seatbelt, or I find that you're ignoring the warning lights in your car, or haven't brought it in for routine maintenance, then you're going to get it. Bad."

"But I didn't know – "

He wasn't going to have any of that, either. "You knew. Did you think they put those lights in cars for fun? When your brakes start to grind, are you going to just turn the key and pray a lot?"

Her face fell, and Hunt knew that he'd have to call Hayden and make sure that her brakes were checked, too. He nearly turned her over right then and there, but he was too angry by far. Instead, he rose from the bed, not letting her cajole him into staying any longer. He knew she was hoping to sweet talk him – to tease and touch and love him out of punishing her. Especially since he'd told her that it was going to be a bad one.

But he loved her too much to do that – to just let something like this go, as if it didn't matter to him if he got a call at work or in the middle of the night saying that the car had wrapped itself around a tree and would he come down and identify the body. His eyes filled with tears at the thought, and, before he blubbered all over her he turned around abruptly and left the room.

Gemma sank back under the covers, her day already ruined beyond repair.

She got a phone call not long after he'd left. Hunt was calling to remind her to call Triple A and his mechanic, and told her to tell Hayden to give the vehicle a thorough going-over, so that they would know about any other problems that might need to be addressed in the future. She was to call him after she got off the phone with Hayden, in case she had any problems getting him to take the car, although he didn't think she would.

Gemma did exactly as she was told, hoping against hope to defray some of what was coming to her that night. Luckily, the man she spoke to was understanding – maybe Hunt had called ahead? – and assured her he could probably get everything done that day. She called the mechanic first to make sure she had a place for Triple A to bring the car. Honestly, she didn't see why she couldn't just drive it over . . .

She made the mistake of saying just that to Hunt on the phone, and was greeted with a stony silence.

Finally he said, "Do you want to get yourself into even more trouble than you're already in?"

That tone made her squirm even though he was miles away. "Noooooooooooo . . . "

"Then I suggest you get dressed. How long did Triple A say it would be?"

So, she spent one of her vacation days being torturously bored. She'd had the waiting room at Hayden's pegged perfectly – uncomfortable molded plastic chairs, a TV that only got a sports channel, and nothing but old Car and Driver magazines to read. And it did take him all day – she was the last person to check out before they closed. She wondered if Hunt had arranged that, too.

Gemma drove home carefully – several hundred dollars lighter in the pocketbook, thanks to him – wearing her seat belt and obeying every traffic law she could think of. It was a slow boring end to a slow boring day, but she'd've given almost anything for the drive home to have lasted another several hours, considering what was going to happen – for sure – when Hunt arrived.

No amount of sweet talk, good food, or good conversation – well, somewhat stilted on her end because she was a little wary of him at this point – though, was going to get her out of anything. She'd made her famous garlic-mustard-Worcestershire sauce marinated steak on garlic toast points, drowning in its sinful, butter-garlic-and-Worcestershire sauce . . . the dish was a heart attack on a plate, but Hunt loved it, and she didn't cook it very often. She was obviously trying to butter him up – literally and figuratively.

After dinner, they sat in the living room and watched The Pirates of the Caribbean on pay per view. It was still only nine thirty or so when Hunt turned to Gemma and said, "Go to our room and take off all of your clothes. You won't be needing them for a while."

Gemma's eyes flared, but she obeyed. His voice stopped her for a few seconds, just as she was out of sight. "I love you, Gemma."

"I love you, too," she answered back, continuing to walk to her doom.

He didn't take very long to come to her this time – there was no agony of anticipation, except that which she had had all day as she shifted positions on those awful chairs and contemplated a fate that was sure to keep her shifting in chairs for the next week or so . . .

In the end, it was a horrid night for Gemma. She discovered the depths of Hunt's anger – that despite his polite dinner table conversation, his anger hadn't cooled one bit. Not in the least. That night he spanked her harder than he ever had before. And he used his belt. The spanking – which was first but could not by any stretch of the imagination be considered a warm up spanking – he delivered was more like a "burn up" spanking. Her bottom felt bruised just from that. Despite the fact that even his warm up spankings were serious things, he'd never – until that point – been able to reduce her to tears just by a spanking. But this one – it was all Gemma could do to collect herself when he finally stopped. She figured his palm print was going to be visible on her cheeks as vividly as any new tattoo for quite some time.

Gemma couldn't believe how much her bottom already hurt, and the belt was lying right next to her until he picked it up. What followed was a lesson, of the finest sort. It was one of the times that Gemma did listen to him when he lectured her, because he made damned sure she did.

Before he lit into her with his belt, though, he put his hand over her seared cheeks. Despite her severe tendency – like most American women, unfortunately – to consider herself fat, she was just right as far as he was concerned. One swat of his open palmed hand covered most of the territory back here – except her legs, which almost always received special attention, and would this evening, too. His hand, as he spread his fingers over the area he considered himself in charge of – along with the rest of her, covered almost all of it. All of the most interesting parts, anyway, he almost smiled to himself. Almost.

But this offense – this offense bothered him, and he wanted to impress on her – one way or the other – how seriously he took matters of her health and safety. It was a refrain she would become quite familiar with over the next hour or so, and the next week and the next month, and for the rest of their life together. He didn't screw around with medical or her basic security, and she was about to find that out.

He was very methodical this time, and that wasn't always his style. He took up the belt and laid twenty very hard stripes across those already livid swells, then stopped for a moment. Gemma had already been crying just from his hand. The belt had her writhing and squirming to get away, although she never broke position.

He'd trained her well enough not to break that cardinal rule. Now he was working on another one.

Then he began the lecture, questioning often to make sure he held her attention, and that

she was taking in every word and not just playing along with him to get it all over with. They were still new enough at that point that she hadn't learned yet to tune him out and just nod her head as if she was listening.

"Health and safety concerns are number one with me – above and beyond pretty much everything else. You are not to deliberately put yourself into any kind of danger – such as speeding. You will drive at or below any posted speed limit. Because if you don't and I see you, or you get a ticket – " He let loose with five burning cracks. "What did I just say?"

He gave her a while to collect herself before expecting her to answer, but not too long. "H-health – safety – important. No – sp- speeeeeediiiiinnnnng," she finished the choppy sentence on a renewed sob, even though he hadn't given her any more swats.

"Good. I'm not going to spell everything out, but there are a few pertinent things I'm going to touch on – such as taking good care of your car. You're going to make sure the oil gets changed every three thousand miles or no more than three months. You're going to pay attention to any and all lights, bells, or whistles the car gives you about its condition and take it into my mechanic immediately. If I ever get into you car – which I'm going to start doing with more regularity, believe me – and see any idiot lights coming on you'll get double what you're going to get for this transgression. You're going to check your tires – the tread and inflation – and you're going to learn how to change one if you don't already know. You're going to baby your car, because you could die if you don't." The belt rose and fell another ten times before he asked his screaming woman, "Am I making myself perfectly clear?"

"YEEEEEEEEEEEESSSSSS!"

"Tell me what I just said."

Gemma dutifully parroted back what he'd decreed through a mouthful of tears, trying unsuccessfully to come to grips with what the belt was doing to her – and he was showing absolutely no signs of stopping. This time was God-awfully slow, as if he was pacing himself, and Gemma didn't think that boded well for her.

And it didn't.

Hunt was true to his word – he didn't list every possible thing that she could get spanked for that would fall under a "health and safety" concern . . . but he touched on enough highlights – speeding, car care, taking medications, not blowing off doctor's appointments, etc – that her entire backside – from the beginning rounding crests of those

wonderful globes to just above the backs of her knees - was black and blue in some spots but an angry red all over by the time he was finished. And he had quizzed her to the very end, making her list what he'd said before he'd quit, giving her a lick every time she got something wrong, and one for each thing she forgot.

Then he tenderly dressed her in a shortie nightgown and tucked her into bed and his arms at the same time, holding her close against him while she cried as if her world had come to an end.

And he shed a few tears right along with her at the mere thought of losing her.

December 23rd

Dear Diary:

A while ago I said I'd come back to the difference between abuse and discipline, and something that happened tonight made me think I should address this more closely.

I suppose I'm what you could consider "out" to most of my friends, and what I mean by that is that they know that Hunt spans me. Most of them find it funny, especially when I'm out with them and anxiously checking my watch because he gave me a curfew. My closest friend, Hailey, is always trying to determine whether or not I got a spanking the night before she saw me. Every time I change positions she asks me if it's because my butt still hurts.

Leave it to her to be so gracious <eye roll>

We were out having dinner – five of us: Hailey, me, Jess, Maureen, and Kelly. I didn't know Jessica very well, but I knew of her. We all taught at the same school, but Jess was an administrator – a vice principal – rather than just a teaching peon.

The other girls "knew", and were kewl with it. Oh, make no mistake – they never – not one of them – ever missed an opportunity to needle me about it, but they accepted that I had made a good decision for myself in choosing Hunt. They'd each met him – separately and together, usually at our monthly poker night – and liked the way he treated me. I never sported a black eye, a broken arm, or a bruise on my face. Ever. They never saw any evidence whatsoever of any sort of abuse, no matter how hard they looked at first – and they did. They love me. How could they not?

But Hunt treated – and treats – me superbly. He loves me, and doesn't try to hide it. He impressed everyone when we hosted our first poker night by serving hors d'oeuvres and

drinks, and cheerfully meeting and greeting everyone, then disappearing into the bedroom to watch whatever. He even came out and checked for refills on everyone's drinks, and made sure that anyone who needed a ride home got one, and that no one left the house in any state of inebriation.

Plus, he loved on me shamelessly every time he could, which pretty much made his bones as far as my friends were concerned. He had me blushing furiously, but made a great impression on everyone.

So Hunt was pretty solid with three out of the four women, who of course couldn't refrain from making barely veiled comments about my submissive status and the fact that I get punished, so it was pretty impossible for Jess not to notice that there was something different about my relationship with my husband, and Jess, not being the shy type <snort, like yours truly – NOT> looked around at all of us, who were in on it, and had to know what everyone was hinting at.

I asked her if she really wanted to know – that it was something very private about myself and my husband. She shrugged her shoulders, saying how could she know how she would react until she heard what it was?

Well, dear reader, I told her.

Prolly one of the biggest boo boos of my life, considering that the woman is, technically, my boss, because, although she didn't express it physically, she pretty much freaked, claiming that I needed help and that I was letting myself be abused and I was co-dependent and throwing every new-age psychobabble term at me that she could come up with. But it all boiled down to the idea of how could I let myself live under some man's thumb and didn't I know that I didn't have to put up with being beaten.

Sigh.

I'm a mmuhmumph-year old woman, for God's sake <let's not go into how friggin' old I am, hmmm?>. I know what I have to and what I want to put up with and what I don't. Do I come off as the milque-toast, victim type to you guys? I ask you. Do I?

Chapter 7

No. I don't. I'm very self-possessed. I know exactly what I'm about. I have never felt any sort of compulsive need to have a man in my life. I got along just fine before he came along <well, he might not agree with that assessment, but I do>. Yes, my checkbook was overdrawn occasionally. Okay, more than occasionally. But it wasn't like they were

threatening to close my account! And, yeah, my car is certainly in better condition since he came along . . . but it ran even before Hunt made me put it in to the garage every five seconds <love you, honey, but you're obsessive-compulsive about cars. Deal with it>

So I don't feel I "need" to "have" a man around me all the time. And I certainly wouldn't put up with one that hit me. Sigh. And I don't. My mother always told me that any man of mine that hit me would have to go to bed sometime . . . but that he didn't have to wake up! <this coming from my tiny, ninety-eight-pounds-soaking-wet mother, who was shaking her fist at the time> I doubt I'd ever go so far as to kill him if Hunt ever raised his fist to me, but I certainly know enough to get the hell out of that situation, pronto.

I didn't try to convince Jessica about the difference between spanking and beating, because I could see that she was head up and locked and wouldn't hear a word I said from that point on anyway. Why waste my breath? It was funny, though, because everyone else at the table rushed to Hunt's (and my) defense, saying that they had never seen any evidence of abuse – to which Jess countered that it couldn't always be seen – and that Hunt was extremely loving and protective towards me every time they saw him.

So, I guess the difference between the two had sunk in with some people, even without my trying to recruit them over to the dark side.

I have no fears that Hunt would ever beat me – and I classify a beating as using fists, or slapping any areas other than my butt, or causing any sort of serious injury. Although I might kick up a fuss and act like he's killing me <and believe me, y'all, I do!>, I certainly have NEVER, EVER been concerned that Hunt would really hurt me physically – despite the difference in our sizes. To me, that would be the death knell of our relationship. He has never made a move towards me that was anything but loving and tender, and I include the spankings I get in that, which may sound a little off, but I'm an adult and I realize that there are a lot of men out there that wouldn't love me enough – that would be afraid of being accused of abuse, or whatever – to correct me.

Hunt doesn't make stupid rules. He doesn't try to tell me who to be friends with, when to eat – he DOES NOT try to control every aspect of my life. But the areas where he does lay down the law, the rules he makes are very basic to me and my well-being – they're not frivolous. He's not a control freak, in other words.

Yes, they hurt like hell. What spankings don't? Yes, I am occasionally bruised – okay, well frequently bruised during a spanking. I can't help it! I'm fair skinned! More often, though, it's just hot and red and swollen, like a really bad sunburn.

If I, as an intelligent adult, felt that any of the punishments that Hunt had meted out on

my poor, abused bottom <that's how I always think of it> constituted abuse, then I would have screamed bloody murder . . . well, more than I do when I'm gettin' it.

But . . . sigh. I don't know that I'm explaining this very well. But I get spanked for REAL REASONS. Hunt watches out for me, and I am truly blessed that he's willing to assume that type of responsibility for a _____ year old woman <you all can fill in the blank. I stopped counting at twenty-nine> who has a certain amount of book sense but not much common sense. And it ain't an easy thing to keep track of me, I know. This is one of the many reasons why I love him so much – besides the fact that he's handsome and smart and funny and interesting and sexy as all get out . . . <is it getting warm in here?> I'm sure he doesn't need the headache that is more than occasionally me in his life.
<hmmmmm. Maybe he's the masochist?>

The other thing is that if I didn't see any improvement in the way my life was going then I would already have put a stop to the spankings . . . well, maybe not a stop, because there are <gulp> other aspects that come into spankings for us . . . but I do change my behavior for the better. Usually over time – almost never as a result of just one spanking – unless it's a doozy as they sometimes are. Since Hunt and I got together, I swear MUCH MUCH less <okay, I've already confessed – when I live alone, I have a potty mouth – who's gonna care?>, my bank account has a healthy balance and all of my bills are paid on time <or else>, I see the doctor regularly <blech>, and my car will have a better trade in value because it won't be falling apart when I go to get another one.

Definite improvement – and these are all things that I do now – Hunt is there to check on me – which he does with truly annoying frequency – but I've become a MUCH more responsible person because of him.

Because I'm spanked if I'm not.

Consistently. He doesn't let me get away with anything. <I have to whisper this – I don't want him to let me get away with stuff, either, but don't let him know that!> It may sound somewhat juvenile, but it's like I'm now getting what I needed as a kid. My parents loved me, God knows. They had to try forever to get me. But they never held me to anything. Never expected anything of me but good grades – and I mean that almost literally. I never doubted that I was loved, but I didn't get a lot of close personal attention – my parents were busy with my older sister and their careers and their friends. Not that I was neglected, really . . . certainly not in the material way.

Come to think of it, I got things instead of attention. Which I certainly thought was lovely at the time, but I guess, since I'm being all introspective and stuff right now, that I'm the type of person who needs the attention much more than, say, a new stereo or a bigger

allowance. In fact, the bigger allowance is only likely to get me into more trouble.

Hunt understands all this. He knows that I need someone who will hold me to account for my actions – or, in the case of the car or any sort of doctor, my lack of action. Honestly <again, don't tell him this>, I've had relationships with men who didn't spank. ALL of my relationships prior to Hunt were vanilla, and I'd rather get a spanking than endure some knock-down-drag-out fight some guy is conducting at the top of his lungs. <I don't yell. Ever. I subscribe to the Steven Tyler school of anger management – I don't get mad, I get even> I hate being yelled at.

Of course, I don't much like his lectures, either, but at least I know he's not trying to tear me down during them – he's trying to help me, and he conducts them in a calm – sometimes almost too quiet – tone of voice and a completely civilized manner. . . as long as you don't take into consideration the fact that one of us <me> is always naked and in a compromising position during these lectures . . .

I don't know how he got so smart <especially considering he's a man – snicker, and everyone knows that women are naturally MUCH smarter than men>, but he really does know me almost too well, ya know? Sometimes I think he can tell when I've done something wrong just by looking at me. I must have a tell that I don't know about . . .

He still manages to respect me as an adult – he comes to me for my input about things and we make all major decisions together – he does not discount me – or ever denigrate me in any way – just because he has the power to punish me when need be. And he doesn't forget that that is a sacred trust between us.

All in all, he's disgustingly wise and grown up about pretty much everything, which can be really depressing at times. The only thing I've ever found him to be childish about is . . . Star Wars <okay, I'm trying not to, but my eyes are definitely rolling here. It was a good movie – the original, anyway. Some of the sequels out and out stunk! Get over it, alreadyt.>. He has seen and done anything and everything to do with Star Wars – he has all of the original action figures – and they're worth quite a bit of money – and we go to every convention we can possibly get to, which is still okay for me because I like Star Trek and all it's incarnations, and Babylon 5 . . . he's so cute when he gets all excited about going to see a new movie or to a fan fest somewhere. It's one of the rare times he actually looks boyish.

Anyway, I'm telling you all of this because I <obviously> really do feel that spanking – that domestic discipline types of relationships such as ours – shouldn't be considered as abusive. We are two consenting adults. This is the lifestyle we've chosen – for the betterment of ourselves, especially in my case. Honestly, I don't know what Hunt gets

out of it . . . well, I have an idea of something he gets out of it, but it's a lot of work beyond that. He really does check up on me, and – far from making me feel like that puts me under his thumb or something Sven-jolly <grin> -ish like that – it makes me feel very loved that he takes the time out of his very busy day to call and make sure that I got to the doctors when I was supposed to. If he's home, he likes to come with me – he says it's because he wants to know everything about me and make sure that I take care of stuff I might prefer to ignore – and because he wants to make sure that I'm okay and that he couldn't stand to lose me.

Isn't he just wonderful, folks?

I know I'm the luckiest woman on the Earth that he loves me.

Hunt finished reading what she'd written and leaned back in his big office chair, tears filling his eyes. It was wonderful to realize that she understood why he did the things he did to her. To have it in print – and available to the whole world – that she didn't feel as if he was in the least abusive towards her. Sometimes, with the severity of some of the punishments he'd felt he had to deal out in the past, he'd had some concerns of his own, especially a couple of days after the punishment, when the bruises really had a chance to bloom against that milky white skin. There had been many a time when he'd lain awake after she was asleep – she often fell asleep before he did; she needed more sleep than him – and worried over her – worried that he was too hard on her, that he'd given her too many strokes with too unforgiving an implement.

Theirs was a delicate balance. He, in particular, walked a fine line – physically and in his mind. He was very aware – very careful that things did not descend to the level of abuse – regardless of the fact that he never strayed from that delicious backside of hers and hit her anywhere else, and he certainly never used his fist. Gemma was a big talker – when she was proving a point she loved to get nose to nose with him, and/or poke that sharp little index finger of hers into his chest - but the truth was that if his fist ever connected with her, he could knock her into next week. He wasn't a lightweight of any sort, and a man of his size could really hurt her if he wanted to.

Of course, he wouldn't. He'd barely ever needed to hit a man, and would never even consider the possibility of beating up on a woman. Even if he didn't have the outlet for his frustration at some of her behaviors that was turning her over his knee – well, sometimes, when his knees weren't hurting that much – when she got to the point that she was driving him crazy, he would have just picked her up bodily and plopped her down on the bed and talked her out of being cranky or irresponsible . . .

But, honestly, when he thought of some of the things she'd done that had gotten her

paddled – or worse – he shuddered. He thanked God each and every day that she was allowing him to discipline her. And it was – as he also kept in mind – a permission thing, and she could revoke her permission at any time. Sometimes, when he'd really laid into her, and she was sobbing her heart out in his arms, he was surprised that she hadn't, or didn't.

The depth of her love and trust truly humbled him.

As he got ready for bed, still musing over the uniqueness of their relationship, he figured that one of the reasons that she didn't tell him to go jump in a lake when he laid her out on their big bed and pulled out his belt – or the paddle, or whatever - was that she saw results – and he did to. Her behavior did change – for the better – as a result of her – fairly – frequent spankings. They had dwindled down somewhat from their beginning, when he'd practically spanked her every day – sometimes twice! Hunt smiled when he remembered how she almost seemed to be testing him – and of course she was. She wanted to make sure that he meant what he'd said – that if she disobeyed him, he was going to decorate her bottom in a most unpleasant way.

She'd done some small things that had resulted in quick trips either over the back of the nearest chair or whatever counter wasn't being used at the time – Gemma was a great (but incredibly messy) cook. It had started out with bad language. He'd warned her that vulgarity was a bugaboo of his, and his definition was pretty strict – anything beyond what a kid would be allowed to say wasn't allowed in his house. And he wasn't a hypocrite about it, either. He didn't curse, either, subscribing to his father's feeling about the subject – that swearing was the refuge of someone with a small vocabulary. She'd said something that, in today's society – would be considered pretty innocuous, but he didn't use "shit" every five minutes like everyone else, and he wasn't about to put up with it every other word from his lover, either.

He was only in the den, which was right around the corner from the kitchen, and even though she only said it under her breath, unthinkingly, as a matter of habit more so than anything else, he imagined, Hunt had gotten up immediately and pulled a chair out from the snack bar. Then he bent the completely surprised woman over his knee – which he'd quickly learned wasn't to happen with any sort of regularity, even over his "good" knee – and gave her about fifteen or twenty good, hard swats with his hand over her jeans.

Hunt almost giggled as he crawled under the covers, recalling the priceless surprised look on her face. She looked like she'd swallowed a carp, whole. As he remembered, he had actually laughed at her. "Didn't you think I'd do it?"

"Do it? For what? All I said was shit!"

Two seconds later, she was back in position, getting another ten or so smacks. When he released her again, she was all cute and blustery and red cheeked – probably both sets by now. "What was all this about? Just because I said sh – "

All he'd had to do was raise his eyebrows at her that time and she was smart enough to stop at the first two consonants. She frowned back at him, her hands automatically reaching back to rub her offended butt. "My momma didn't raise no fools; I'm not going to say it again, but what's your problem – beyond the obvious," she added as a sarcastic jab at him.

Hunt had taken her into his arms and kissed her forehead, then kissed away her frown. "I told you no swearing, and I meant it."

"That's not swearing, for God's sake. That word is as common in the current person's vernacular – "

"I don't care how common it's become. It's still offensive to me, and I don't want to hear you saying it."

She rolled her eyes and squirmed and stomped her feet – all within the circle of his arms, and under the auspices of his dark frown, but he held onto her, wanting some acknowledgement from her that she'd heard and would obey him. "Oh, all right," she said ungraciously.

"Excuse me?"

Another long suffering sigh – one of many that day, if he remembered accurately – on both sides. "Yes, Sir."

"Much better."

Hunt pressed himself up against her, pulling her back into his arms as she slept. He fell asleep with a broad smile on his face, as contented as he'd ever been in his life.

December 26th

Dear Diary:

Well, Diary, I finally managed to surprise my husband. And yes, he did eventually manage to catch me <obviously, since I've already referred to him as my husband several

times>. That was several years ago <I refuse to think exactly how long ago – it just makes me feel old!>. Hunt and I had developed a tradition of opening the stockings that we'd filled for each other in bed Christmas morning. Well, mine was full of something that I really hadn't expected.

As I've said before, he'd asked me to marry him repeatedly. Marriage was not high on my list of things to do, even with him. But that Christmas morning years ago, I fished my hand into the hand-knit stocking my Mom had made years and years and years ago – the one with the Santa on the front with a white mohair beard, then him as a jack-in-the-box on the back – and pulled out Godiva chocolates <my very very very favorite> and a gift certificate for rentals at the nearest Blockbuster, some mixed nuts, and then, down in the toe of the stocking was a small square box.

I took it out, figuring, frankly that it was a pair of earrings I'd pointed out to him on QVC <or HSN, or ShopNBC or any one of a hundred million catalogues we got every Christmas – enough to be the singular cause of deforestation in America, I swear>. But when I opened the box, it was this beautiful ring – actually one I had oohed and ahhhhed over in the Sunday paper, from a specialty jewelry store. I knew it had cost him a pretty penny.

It was a three stone ring in fourteen karat gold, with a large, square center diamond and a smaller square diamond on either side, standing for yesterday, today, and tomorrow. As soon as I'd opened the box, he took it away from me and got down on one knee next to the bed – completely nude, you understand, but with a pillow beneath the knee on the floor to offset the pain the position was causing him – and took my left hand in his. He looked up, into my eyes, and asked me, in his deepest, most serious – and I have to confess, sexiest – voice if I would do him the honor of becoming his wife.

I ask you, gentle readers, who could resist that? I couldn't, even though I'd always thought I was allergic to marriage, like I am to shellfish.

So, needless to say, we got married, with the usual cast and crew of miscreants looking on with smug, self-satisfied smiles, as if they'd been the reason for the whole thing . . . well, I suppose that some of them could rightfully claim to take some small part in it . . . Tess and Calvin were the first couple we knew who included us in their marriage ceremony and we met at their wedding. But all of them – all of the previously married couples in whose weddings we had participated in to varying degrees – were looking quite prideful about the whole thing. Made me wanna smack 'em all silly.

So, as I write, I am completely, totally, and utterly blissfully married. Well, usually . . . almost always. Most of the time . . . some of the time <just kidding, honey [big grin]>

Anyway, this year I decided to take a page out of his book. Hunt's stocking really isn't a stocking: it's one of those long, conical knit hats with a pom-pom and a jingle bell on the end. It's green and red stripes, though – very Christmassy, just not a proper stocking. The story goes that it was the first thing that his mom tried to knit, and she read the wrong pattern and ended up with a hat instead of a stocking. <shoulder shrug. Okaaaaaaay . . . shouldn't the shape have been a big hint? Well, we won't go there . . . >

Hunt went and got our stockings, which we each put out for the other by the tree on Christmas Eve just before we go to bed, and brought them back. I got the usual stuff – stuff I don't generally get for myself during the year: candy. Almond Rocca – mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm <just thinking of it now makes my mouth water> and Lemonheads and caramels . . . yum!!!

But I digress <wiping my mouth delicately>.

He got what he wants in his stocking: black socks and underwear. "Man stuff", as he calls it. Why he thinks women don't wear black socks or underwear I'll never know . . .

There was something extra at the bottom of his stocking – uh, stocking cap – this year, though.

When he pulled it out, I don't think he knew what it was.

I watched the light dawn in his face over the space of about ten seconds that seemed to take a lifetime. I was literally bursting at the seams, and he was, bless him, just the slightest bit slow to catch on.

It was a white stick, with an area at the end that showed a pink plus sign <yes, yes, yes, it was in a baggie, for those of you who are saying "yuck!" even now>.

I'm pregnant!!!

YAYAYAYAYAYAY!!!!!!

Needless to say, lots of hugging and kissing, etc, ensued. In fact, let me just say that if I hadn't already been pregnant, etc, etc, etc . . .

I can't even begin to say how happy I am. Everything is going so well!!!

January 9th, 2004

Diary:

<grimace> I'm still really really really happy to be pregnant. And Hunt is over the moon and funny as all get out. I swear, he's already got the kid enrolled in Harvard, for crying out loud. He came home one night with two little onesie outfits – one a pinstriped baseball uniform, for a boy, and one a pink ballet outfit if Junior is a girl, as well as a stuffed bear that's bigger than I am!

But he's a little too far over the moon, if you ask me. He treats me like I'm made of cotton candy. I've never been anyone's idea of a delicate flower. I was a tomboy as a kid, for Heaven's sake. Whoever wrote "sugar and spice and everything nice" about little girls obviously had never met me! I was forever falling out of trees I wasn't supposed to climb, and falling into the brook behind the house that I wasn't supposed to be in, and chasing frogs and getting muddy and dirty and racing those pedal tractors up and down the street with my friends . . .

Chapter 8

He's forbidden me to do nearly everything but breathe!!! I can't lift anything, and when I'm not working, I'm supposed to lie around the house all the time, doing nothing! He's driving me crazy <I hope to high Heaven that you're reading this installment, dear. THIS MEANS YOU!!!>

The only thing he won't do – that I really want him to do is spank me <I can't believe I just wrote those words, what am I, crazy???>. He absolutely refuses to do it – he's worried about hurting the baby. And I don't think that either of us has the cajones to ask my ob/gyn about it. Me, especially, after Jess' reaction to finding out that I'm spanked. I would bet my doctor would freak just as badly, if not worse.

So, here I sit. Desperately naughty. My language has deteriorated and my car is rattling like the rattletrap he's always saying it is . . . nothing. Not even a lecture. I haven't even hit the hormonal bit yet. I'm just me – a little more tired, and a little hungrier, but just me.

I didn't realize how having a baby was going to change his attitude towards me. I mean, Hunt has always been protective of me – and I like that. He's always gone out of his way to make sure that he took care of anything that might slightly smack of "man's" work – he does all the yard work and fixes anything that needs to be fixed. Not that I envy him those chores in the least, you understand.

But I can certainly lift the watering pot, and I can climb a ladder to hang new curtains

without falling – I've been climbing ladders since long before I was supposed to . . . but that's another story. But he has a fit if I'm doing anything but lazing around the house, growing his baby.

Sigh.

I suppose I could have it worse, and I really shouldn't be complaining about not getting my butt blistered every time I turn around, but I feel . . . almost neglected. Like he doesn't love me as much as he did. He still pays me tons of attention, just not the kind I still need. My need to be spanked didn't go away when I got pregnant.

Maybe I just oughta suck it up and talk to my doc. <eye roll> I'll probably end up havin to bail Hunt out of jail on domestic abuse charges . . .

January 12th 2004

Dear Diary:

Heavy sigh.

Still no spanking, despite the fact that I went out onto the Web and came up with some evidence that other couples, like ourselves, continue with their usual domestic discipline relationship even during pregnancy. He just looked at the pages I'd printed out supporting it – which did surprise him, I have to tell you – and threw them on the bed, saying that he wasn't about to risk the health of the baby. That he expected that I'd behave myself, or there'd be hell to pay in seven months or so.

I can't wait seven months!!! If I did, the spanking at the end would kill me! I've been just as provocative as I can be – swearing right in front of him. All I got was a reminder that I needed to clean up my language so that the baby didn't learn it.

Where did my big, strong, strict husband go? I want him back!!!

He hasn't even been asking me if I've been writing in this journal, like I'm supposed to. He hasn't given me any assignments – and there haven't, of course, been any "after the spanking" entries.

I feel like he's abandoning me in favor of the baby.

Can a woman really be jealous of the baby she's carrying?

Apparently.

Sigh.

January 18th , 2004

Diary:

Well, I finally convinced him that I NEED to be spanked. I know he understood that before I got pregnant. It's just that having a baby seemed to change his attitude about that – but it didn't change my need for it at all.

But, you'll all be glad to know, that my butt is killing me as I'm sitting here writing this, and he even made me make an entry!!!!

Things seem to be getting back to normal, thank God.

Hmmmmmm. Sore butt. Having to write in a journal. Am I out of my mind, or what?

Yep, I am. Fat, dumb, and happy as a clam now that I have my husband back.

The straw that broke the camel's back was him finding me lifting the rod of new curtains I'd bought up to the brackets – from a ladder.

Well, I tell you, you'da thought that I was walking off a cliff, for God's sake! One second he was at the door, calling a cheerful greeting to me, the next thing I knew I was airborne, and then over his knee – and I know it's been hurting him a lot lately, so he had to be really, really pissed <and he was> in order to ignore that pain. He was whacking away at me even before my pants and panties hit the floor. God, it hurt! And God, I missed it.

I missed it.

I need it.

It helps me be a better me. <oy, that sounds awful, somehow, but it's true nonetheless>

Hunt held her tight that night, still very uncertain about whether or not he had done the right thing. He had been raised to think of women as needing protection. Granted, he had had to revise that opinion to a certain extent as he matured, but Gemma wasn't just any woman. She was his wife, and she was carrying their child. As far as he was concerned, this made her doubly in need of his protection.

And somehow, spanking her just didn't fit into that scenario of the protective male – even though she had obviously been trying to entice him to do just that for quite some time. Actually, she had finally laid off her campaign to get spanked. She'd told him one night a couple of weeks ago that she was going to abide by his decision that they really shouldn't indulge in that kind of situation until after the baby was born – just to be safe.

But when he'd come in the house and seen her hoisting that heavy brass bar with miles of curtains up in the air while she balanced precariously – and he didn't much care whether she thought she was precariously positioned or not – on the third step up of the smallish ladder they kept in the garage. All he could see was a horrific vision of her overbalancing on that thing and crashing to the ground in a crumpled, crumbled heap. As he started towards her, he knew he had to be quiet and not startle her, and he couldn't take a breath until he had her in his arms.

Then he got mad that she would risk her own health – as well as that of the baby – with such a stupid stunt. They'd bought new curtains for the sliding glass doors over the weekend, and he'd promised to put them up for her the next Saturday. And he would have, if she'd just had the patience God gave a gnat and waited for him to do it.

But nooooooooooooo. Sometimes when she got something into that pretty little head of hers . . . Turning her over his knee wasn't even something he thought about – it was totally automatic. Her butt was an angry, fire engine red before he even came to his senses, but when he did he was entirely horrified at what he'd done.

Gemma, however, was looking quite satisfied even though she had to brush away quite a few tears as he let her down very, very gently and she pulled her jeans and panties up over what had to be a pretty sore bottom. Hunt caught her to him, his heart in his throat on several counts now. "Don't you ever do that again, do you hear me?" He almost shook her, but stopped himself. That couldn't be good for the baby.

"I won't," she promised, moving a little away from him to arrange her clothes again. "But I'm glad something snapped you out of treating me like porcelain. I'm not going to break all of a sudden, you know, just because I'm pregnant."

"I know." Hunt grabbed her again, resting his chin on the top of her head. "I know you don't need to be wrapped in cotton, but . . . a part of me doesn't know and just wants to keep you safe and protected."

"I know you don't. I do. I'm the mother here. If I thought there was reason for concern, I'd tell you. The doc says everything's all right so far. Believe me, I'm the one who

should be trying to use this as an excuse to have you not spank me."

He grimaced, tightening his arms around her. "Yeah . . . That's kinda what I expected – that you'd have a nine month Princess Mommy reign and have a lot to answer for once the baby was born . . ."

"Grrrrrrrrr. Then I think I'm glad you've decided not to wait that long – I probably wouldn't have been able to sit down for the whole first year of Junior's life!"

He pretended to consider her outrageous claim. "Hmmmmm. Yeah, that's probably about right."

He got a sharp smack on the shoulder for his troubles, but, despite the aggravation he caused her, she looked happier than she had in a long time – at least she did before she made a mad dash for the bathroom that had become her routine lately in the evenings. Leave it to Gemma not to do the normal – she had evening sickness instead of morning sickness, and, although he had a notoriously weak stomach, he always joined her in the bathroom to hold her head and get her toothpaste ready on her toothbrush.

March 17th, 2004

Diary:

This entry is going to be extremely depressing, I'm warning you, so if you would prefer not to read it, I'm going to leave some "spoiler space".

I'm just going to come right out and say it – maybe writing it will help me deal with it: I lost the baby several weeks ago – only a couple days after my previous entry. I wasn't very pregnant – no more than six weeks or so – the doctor and I disagreed about that, but it's a moot point now.

I'm fine – well, as fine as I can be. Hunt is the same way. I was thinking when I took the pregnancy test how wonderful it is that you can know so early on that you're pregnant. Now I'm not so sure that that's a good thing. Even though we weren't that pregnant, there's no way you can avoid having the usual hopes and dreams for the baby. Hell, I think Hunt already had the poor kid – boy or girl – as President . . . or a doctor . . .

Honestly, I think it's been harder on him, somehow. I'm alright physically – some cramping and bleeding. I've had more of a physical resolution. I had started spotting a little, and called the doctor, and he'd said that as long as it wasn't a lot, then I was okay – that a little is nothing to be alarmed about.

But then it became a lot, and Hunt drove me into the ER. We called my doc on the way, and he met us there, although there wasn't much he could do, unfortunately. He told us the usual stuff – and we've heard it from friends – that when something like this happens, it's for a reason. There was probably something wrong with the fetus. He had reviewed my records the next time I saw him, and reiterated that as far as he could tell, everything had been fine with the pregnancy. "These things happen" seems to be the phrase of the day.

My body went through a period of adjustment, which helped me adjust mentally, too – not that it's easy on me – it's not.

I just think it's easier on me than on Hunt. He walks around here looking like a wounded bear. Not nasty or in a temper or anything, but almost morose, which is very unlike him. We had to have "the talk", too, about whether or not we wanted to use birth control to prevent another possible pregnancy, now that we know it can happen to us. That was a completely depressing thing. I don't think that either one of us wanted to admit that we were really scared about becoming pregnant again and losing the baby for no apparent reason. It would have been different if the doctor had said "you have this condition, or the baby had that problem" . . . at least then we would have known what we're facing. Not knowing what the problem is and facing the possibility of something out of the blue affecting another child we conceive . . . it's a horrid thought to face.

I did speak up. I want to use birth control for a little while – for long enough for us to

mourn this loss completely.

The problem is that I don't think that Hunt is mourning at all. He's stuffing down all of his emotions, and won't talk to me about them, which is not the usual for him at all. It's the usual for me. I don't know how to get to him. He's closed himself off from me. Sometimes I feel like I'm alone in this situation – the only one sad over the loss of the baby.

And lately, the only one participating in this marriage. There haven't been any spankings. There's been none of the gentle teasing we always do with each other. He never smiles any more, yet he tries to pretend that everything's fine with him.

And I know, in my heart of hearts, that it's not.

But I don't know how to fix it.

Lately, I've been wondering whether or not I even can fix it.

I'm sorry for the tone of this entry, but I wanted those of you who have been following my saga to know what had happened to me – I didn't want to just drop off the face of the earth.

More later.

<tearfilled eyes> Maybe. Maybe not.

Gemma pushed away from the computer and wandered down the hall into their bedroom. Hunt was already there, and apparently, already asleep. He didn't even seem to want her any more. She lifted the sheet and slipped under the covers. They never seemed to cuddle any more. Gemma was feeling severely neglected, and even worried that they might split up if they couldn't reconnect on some level at least. Hunt was treating her more like a friend than a wife – he was unfailingly polite, but terribly distant. She could understand that he hurt at the loss of the baby – she did, too. But she felt that this was a time that they should come together and comfort each other . . . but Hunt, instead, seemed to prefer his own company and no solace from her whatsoever.

Not one to take something like this lying down – and not at all willing to give up her husband on any count – Gemma set out on a campaign to win back his attention and pull him out of his doldrums. She made his favorite meals, wore sexy lingerie to bed, flattered him at every turn and teased him lightly, as she always had, hoping that any one of those things might jolt him out of his misery.

It worked – sort of. He perked up a little. Maybe it helped him to see that she was recovering. Eventually, she eased them back almost to the level of intimacy they had had before she got pregnant.

But he still wouldn't talk to her about the miscarriage, and he still wouldn't spank her.

Gemma was desperate, and acting out all the time. That got her nothing but a stone-faced, silent Hunt. So, she decided that desperate times called for desperate measures: she'd already done enough to earn several good (or bad, depending on which end you were on) spankings, so she knew she didn't need to do anything else. She didn't want to force him to spank her, but wanted to give him a nudge in the right direction.

So, she set the scene perfectly – scented sheets, candlelight, soft music . . . and a paddle – granted the ping pong one that was easier on her, but it was a start – planted strategically next to where he would climb in. Gemma went to bed before he did – which was pretty usual, so it didn't arouse any of his suspicions. But when he joined her there, she turned to tap the touch lamp next to her side of the bed, then, before he had a chance to stretch out on his side of the bed, she grabbed up the ping pong paddle and lay over his lap – gently, keeping his knees in mind – and pressed the paddle into his hand.

She couldn't have been any more blatant about her intent if she'd tried.

At first he merely sat there, as if he wasn't at all sure what to do with either the paddle or her. But then Gemma's heart sank as he pushed her off him and onto her own side of the bed. Defeated, dejected, and depressed, she turned off the light and lay well away from him, fighting back tears unsuccessfully, scrupulously making sure that no part of her touched him. If he was going to reject her, she was going to reject him.

It was a long while later that his twisted, tortured voice came out of the darkness. Apparently, neither of them was asleep, Gemma thought nastily until she began to hear what he was saying.

"I can't spank you. I can't ever spank you again."

She sat bolt upright in the bed and turned towards him. He sounded like each word was being dragged from him, kicking and screaming. He was speaking tight-lipped through a clenched jaw. Gemma put her hand on his arm, and it was hard as a rock. He was holding himself incredibly tense. "But, sweetie, why? What happened? Did I do something that turned you off from spanking me? What can I do to fix it?" If he was finally going to talk to her – however reluctantly, she wanted to know what could be done to get them back to

where they were before.

Hunt chuckled humorlessly. "Don't play stupid with me – it insults my intelligence."

Gemma was genuinely confused. "But – "

"You know that it was me spanking you that made you miscarry."

She was stunned. She'd had no idea that he'd felt that way – and he was wrong. "No, honey – "

But Hunt wasn't about to let her get a word in edgewise. He was drowning in misery and she'd opened the floodgates to his own private hell. "It's true! I spanked you and two days later you lost the baby. I made you lose the baby."

Gemma grabbed him up into her arms, which wouldn't have been easy even if he'd cooperated, but it was almost impossible since he didn't seem to want any comforting. But the strength of her love for him bolstered her, and she held him, wrapping her arms around him and rocking, stroking his hair and clutching him tightly to her. "No, Hunt," she whispered hoarsely. "I wondered about that, too, and I asked."

He tried to pull back and look at her, but she wouldn't let him, not wanting to lose that magical connection of their flesh. "I took my cajones in my hand one of the times I went to the doc afterwards and asked. I'm sure I was bright red through it all, and I had to do it while my back was turned. He was a little amused, I think, and a little concerned that I wasn't abused, which was lovely of him, really. But I assured him about that, and described what we'd done. He told me flat out that the baby was incredibly well protected inside me, and that nothing we'd done – not sex, not discipline, not walking or driving or anything – had hurt the baby. Nothing we'd done had anything to do with the miscarriage. And I believe him. If there was something we needed to avoid for when we get pregnant again, he'd tell us, I'm sure."

"I had no idea that that was what you were thinking, but you haven't been talking to me like you usually do. I thought I'd claimed all the rights in this family for keeping things to myself and not wanting to talk about anything." She nudged him a little playfully. "You're encroaching on my territory, here. Cut it out."

She could hear him smile in the darkness, and knew, deep inside, that eventually, with a lot more talking and holding and crying, they'd be all right again.

Epilogue:

March 3rd, 2005

Hey, Diary!!!

Well, as they say, all's well that ends well. And today – well, okay, about ten days ago – I gave birth to Hunt's and my son, Jared Alexander Donovan. I know I've been neglecting you lately – only that one entry when I got pregnant and then really nothing until now, but jeez, guys, I've been having a life – although not much in the way of spanking.

Hunt put a moratorium on spanking while I was pregnant, and I sucked it up and went along with it – I never wanted him to feel that he caused any sort of problem with the pregnancy, because he didn't. So I had nine months of irresponsibility. Well, not really, because the big pain in the neck KEPT TRACK of anything I did that was against the rules!!! Isn't that a positively horrid thing to do????

Actually, though, he let me see the list yesterday, and most of the things are small infractions . . . it's funny, being a mother-to-be made my mouth run amuk. More crap spewed outta me in the past nine months than ever in my life, I think. My hormones gave me a short temper, I think, but he wasn't (isn't still) taking that as any sort of excuse, dammit. Uh, darnit. Sigh. Whatever. I'm already in enough trouble that one swear isn't gonna make that much of a difference.

So, Hunt says that I'm going to get one spanking a week – on top of anything else I earn during the week – to make up for my nine months of Princessdom. The first one is tonight. We're going to have one night a week to ourselves – not all night, but a lot of it – where we'll hire a sitter and go out. We're going to get a hotel room – even though we're not going to stay there through the night – so that we can have some privacy.

I can't wait!

Of course, dear readers, I'll fill you in on it later.

I'm sure there will be many more entries here. Hunt has gently "suggested" that I start posting again. I know he packed the belt and a paddle.

<contented sigh>

Am I a lucky woman, or what?

The End

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