**Teaching Her A Lesson**

Part Two: Extra Credit

“This is stupid, Mr. Canon. I already did this. Why do I have to do all these pointless little steps? It’s a waste of time!”

“We’ve been over this, Taylor. Part of this is having a respectable final product, yes, but part of it is also mastering the process.”

“But the process is stupid. No way is it some sort of real world life skill to put my notes on separate pages, or write a bibliography on every one of them.”

“It’s a works cited entry, not a true bibliography,” I reminded her, “and whether or not it’s useful to everyone in the real world, it’s useful for some people. Heck, just showing you can follow directions is progress. Whatever you wind up doing, you’re probably going to have somebody above you who expects you to be able to do what they ask you to.”

“I already have a job, and my manager definitely doesn’t make me cite works. Like, ever.”

“Oh yeah? Where you working?”

“I’m a waitress.”

“Very cool. Where at?”

She made a face. “What, are you stalking me or something?”

I sighed. Try to show interest, treat her like a person instead of a work assignment, and the door slams in my face. “Taylor, that’s a very inappropriate thing to say.”

“Stalking is a pretty freaking inappropriate thing to *do*, ya know.”

No sense trying to force the point. I glanced at the clock. “You have eight more minutes. Try to get it done.”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever.”

I returned to my desk and began packing up my take-home work. Rewrites from my third and fifth period, a pile of assignments to enter in the gradebook, and some feedback on a half dozen IEP proposals I needed to finish up. I entered the combination on my briefcase and flipped it open, tucking in the stack of paper and my laptop case. They barely fit thanks to the recent addition of a thin white canister. The latch *clacked* shut as I closed the lid and scrambled the combo.

We’d made it three days without my having to resort to another application of Serenex. There was no chance it was because she’d seen the light. (A she-demon like Taylor Stern was probably blinded by bright lights anyway.) My sense of it was that Officer Barbour had done a good job talking sense into her, or maybe putting the fear of god into the girl. Whichever it was, I made it a point to send Louisa a thank you. Taylor hadn’t had another outburst so far this week, probably her longest scolding-free streak in recent memory. I’d had to reprimand her for calling Caroline the c-word, but even then she’d at least looked chastened and muttered an apology without even being told. Progress, even if it was only in the home stretch.

After school these past two days, it had been tolerable, if not enjoyable, relying on more conventional pedagogical tools with her. Yes, teaching her would be easier with the Serenex. We squandered easily ten to fifteen minutes of our daily one-on-one hour on griping and foot-dragging. But this way, the natural way, dodged all that anxiety-inducing and ethically problematic stagecraft that would be necessary to continue the way we’d begun.

I’d certainly had some ideas about how to reintroduce her to the Serenex, but we were better off without it, I was sure. Moral dilemma aside, I had my doubts about whether it would interfere with her capacity to learn. New as the stuff was, the internet had nothing definitive on the effects of prolonged use, and from the one trial I’d put her through, I wasn’t sure she even remembered what had happened that day.

Since Monday afternoon’s adventures in tedium, Taylor hadn’t said word one to me about it. We’d been trapped in a room for nearly four hours since then, half of that with only the two of us, and not a single solitary snide comment. Neither had she repeated any discomfort she’d had about the occasional wayward glance I might have briefly directed her way during it, as she had at the time. I was grateful, of course. There was a part of me that was nervous simply being alone in a room with a student like Taylor, which was to say, a liar and cheater whose hobbies included taking whatever satisfaction I might derive from my job and curb stomping for sport. But despite how affronted she might have felt at the time, there had been nothing since.

Maybe… maybe it made her forget the whole thing ever happened? Wouldn’t that be a relief! Though if the Serenex could do *that*, then it could… I could…

No. I couldn’t.

I hoped she had simply realized I’d never really done anything untoward – aside from the Serenex dosing, and maybe one or two unprofessional glances at her derriere – and was taking her lumps with a modicum of equanimity. With dignity.

“UGH, this is so boring I’d rather choke myself to death on a used tampon,” my student groaned.

“It’s not supposed to be fun. Not everything in life is.”

Her head dropped to her desk in dramatic fashion, a pile of tangled, wavy brownish blonde hair splaying out in a wild mess, a rorschach test of hair. I could hear her forehead banging on the desktop somewhere beneath it all. “Fine,” I said after a moment. “Taylor, stop. Stop that. Look, you can go a few minutes early today, OK?”

“Thank god.” She was on her feet and out the door in three seconds flat.

I wasn’t far behind her. Spending an hour a day with Taylor in my sixth period had been exhausting me all year; an extra hour all alone with her was going to be the death knell of my joie de vivre. Briefcase in hand, I made my way into the hall. Grant High was silent this time of day, a welcome respite. At the far end of the English hallway I could see our custodian Randi pushing her vacuum back and forth, doggedly undoing the damage these kids did to the poor building day in and day out. She looked up and I gave her the customary nod of gratitude; it was unreturned as usual. I couldn’t even blame the woman. After all, my being here doing my job only made hers harder, while the reverse was true for her.

My classroom, H121, was right near the junction with the school’s main hallway. Then it was that long stroll down the wide, empty corridor to the parking lot before I could finally drive home, unbutton my shirt, and relax for a few minutes before I had to start prepping for tomorrow. Only, as I took a few steps toward said junction, I overheard a pair of voices, and before I rounded the corner, it became plain that one of them belonged to Taylor, and that they were talking about me.

“So you’re saying you *didn’t* fuck Mr. Canon again today?” said the other girl.

My blood froze in my veins at hearing that, words to give any male teacher nightmares. Even a rumor about that could permanently damage a man’s reputation. Taylor, thankfully, felt about the same though, if not for the same reason. “Oh gross. I keep telling you, nothing happened. He just gives me busy work to do. That’s it.”

“Uh huh, yeah right. Just a little one on one time, you and him, alone, for an hour, him giving you creative ways to bring that grade up.”

For a moment, I genuinely wondered how this girl had so accurately guessed my fantasies. “You’re a fucking ho, Abbie. I’d flunk out of school and spend a million years in purgatory before I let that old pervy creep fucking touch me.”

The sting of the comment aside, at least I knew who she was talking to. Abbie Stern, her little sister. The girl who, according to my department head Meagan, had purposefully dropped a weighty textbook on her classmate’s open-toed shoe because the girl had been complaining she wasn’t helping with the group project. Her victim, Krista, had gotten a hairline fracture in the toe, but Abbie had sworn so vehemently that it had been an accident that she’d merely been suspended rather than expelled. Or charged with assault. And then, rumor had it, that same afternoon while Krista was still at the hospital, Abbie had sent Krista a picture of Krista’s boyfriend (now ex-boyfriend) with his face buried between a pair of unidentified but suspiciously thick white thighs.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Sterns.

A familiar metal slam signified one of them had just shut their locker, and now the voices were on the move, receding down the corridor. “Mhm. Sure. Come on, Tay, just admit you suck dick for grades. A D for a D!”

Taylor made a retching noise. “Oh god, shut up. Forever shut up about that. For one, if I did, I’d be getting an A triple plus. Second, they’re E’s, and I’m pretty sure they don’t give out E’s. And C, I don’t think he even has a D.”

Abbie laughed. “No, so really, how big is it? On a scale from stack of dimes to over-ripe cucumber…”

They were getting harder to hear now, between the growing distance and the encroaching racket from Randi’s vacuum. My ears were straining their hardest though. “...told you, he only… just to shut him up… behave in class… owed an apology for jumping…”

My eyes narrowed as the voices faded to inaudible. Something… Hmm. I wasn’t sure. Nah, it was nothing.

Either way, I wasn’t about to stand in the hallway all night. I peered around the corner and confirmed that they’d already walked through the exit doors, then made my way out behind them. In the distance, a pair of young behinds strode through the lot toward a beat-up red car. From behind, their hair was veritably identical, two waves of thick and unruly light brown tresses. I knew that from any other angle, they were immediately distinguishable. Taylor was tall and athletic, legs and ass packed with lean muscle, whereas Abbie was nothing but curves, the quintessential “slim thick” body. They both had breasts for days, but even there, although they might have about the same cup size, they were distinct. Taylor’s rode high and proud on her chest, like they were trying to rise up and escape from her neckline. Abbie’s (and I was mostly going by the pictures Taylor had shared of the two of them on my facebook timeline) hung low and wide, dominating her chest with their severity.

Only when my hands touched the metal of the door did I realize I’d just walked several hundred feet blind and deaf to the world on account of the phantom images of two students’ bodies. I shook my head, issued myself a swift but stern rebuke, and made my way to my car.

Oddly, despite Abbie’s vulgar suggestions and Taylor’s unflattering denials, my eavesdropping had put me more at ease. After Monday, I’d been nervous. I didn’t really know how she would react. Would she wonder at her own behavior, the way she’d meekly acquiesced? Would she tell everyone about it? Not that anything salacious had happened, but that little writing chore had been fairly juvenile on my part. And yes, I suppose I might have gotten a little too free with where I directed my gaze for a time. But I’d heard no rumors, seen no concealed snickering or unusual looks, not been hauled down to Principal Horen’s office to demand an explanation for an accusation.

I’d drugged a student with weaponized lip balm and gotten away with it. The stupidest risk I’d ever taken hadn’t blown up in my face. It didn’t get luckier than that. If I had brain one in my head, as soon as I got home I’d open up my briefcase, remove the Serenex and spray it down the drain until it was empty, and that would be the end of it.

It would be sort of a waste of money though.

Which was fine. It had been a mistake, and I deserved to pay the literal price at bare minimum.

Though maybe it wasn’t safe to dump into the water supply?

Maybe this weekend I could hop online and research a safe way to get rid of it. Yes, that was the responsible thing to do.

I did some soul-searching that week.

The fantasies, I knew, were getting a bit out of hand. They couldn’t be unethical, I told myself, if nobody got hurt by them. Taylor Stern was objectively attractive, and I was attracted to her. There, I’d acknowledged it, and the world didn’t end. It wasn’t even real attraction. I’d been attracted to Candace Salata when she’d started last year. We’d had the same prep period, and our run-ins waiting in line for the photocopier had gone well. Good sense of humor, pretty, shared professional interests. That was attraction. (Then I learned she wasn’t into men, which put my feeble flirtations to rest tout de suite. Lucky Louisa.)

No, with Taylor, it was more… physical. She had a body on her, no two ways about it, and she liked to get it noticed. If I wasn’t exactly her target audience, I was still in the room for the shows. Plus, there was a sense that for all she put me through, a little fodder for the imagination was the least I was owed. I disliked almost everything I knew about her personally. She was lazy, conniving, deceitful, entitled, and could be one hell of a bully to anyone who got on her bad side. But somehow, all that was part of it, too. That body, on that mind… it was like her sheer awfulness somehow lended me permission to objectify her. Like her dislike for me meant that anything sexual between us would be a punishment. It sweetened things in an odd way, but I couldn’t deny it.

So I jerked off. By Thursday, it was up to four times a day. Once when I woke up, rock hard; once when I got home after standing over Taylor’s shoulder on and off for an hour with a bird’s eye view of her cleavage; once again before bed in an effort to calm those wild dreams I’d been having; and one final time when I woke up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom, but couldn’t pee until I got it to go down.

Oh, and yes, once during my prep period. Not something I was proud of, but the door had been locked and the blinds closed. Masturbating in my classroom, even if it was empty, wasn’t an act I meant to make a habit of, but alone in that room, I couldn’t help seeing that white board and thinking back to Monday, watching Taylor Stern bend and stretch and perform menial tasks at my direction… So yeah, five times.

It was, I decided, getting out of hand. For all my lecturing Taylor about discipline, it was high time to display some myself. It was one thing to idly fantasize, but for crying out loud, to have my junk out in my classroom…! That was to say nothing of how much more difficult a time I’d had avoiding noticing the allure of her body during class, and even worse, during our one-on-one lessons.

She’d come to class Friday wearing a “shame shirt,” one of the handful of t-shirts Principal Horen had acquired for her ill-considered but ardently defended dress code. Taylor had apparently worn something so revealing that one of her teachers earlier in the day had drawn the line and sent her to the office to change out of whatever it had been and into the shame shirt. Except, Taylor being Taylor, she wasn’t about to let herself be reprimanded without being as loud as possible about refusing to learn the intended lesson. By the time she showed up to my class, it was pretty obvious she’d foregone a bra under the white tee, and also that she might have been advised to wear a size bigger. As if trying to prove Horen’s point, there wasn’t a male in the class who didn’t lose half the period to trying to memorize the exact position of those two small dark spots under the sea of white.

Except for me, that is. Not half.

When she came back after school, she was still wearing it, but had had enough. “Can I go back to the office and return this stupid thing before we start? It’s itchy A F, Mr. Canon.”

“Language. And yeah, may as well. Don’t take too long.”

“Oh you know me, can’t wait to get back to essay-writing, on a Friday afternoon on a sixty-eight degree day in May.” But she did leave with a modicum of haste and returned not five minutes later. At which point I realized two things:

First, why my colleague had sent her to the office. The neckline on her black, star-spangled shirt was fairly typical Taylor, a square one that still left at least a couple inches of cleavage in evidence above it. Or it would have, if not for the second realization.

Taylor hadn’t bothered to put a bra back on.

Those teenage breasts bobbled and jiggled like Taylor was a one-woman hurricane, chaotic and wild and, where I was concerned, potentially deadly. I gaped as she crossed the room to her desk, as even in profile they displayed more buoyancy than any ten tits ought. As she pivoted to sit, my eyes dove toward the safety of my laptop monitor, and I prayed I wasn’t too red in the face to give myself away.

I didn’t trust myself at all. For the whole remainder of the hour I avoided so much as glancing in her direction – mostly, anyway – and when she left, my peripheral vision strained to drink in another show. But only peripheral.

My heart thundering, my willpower flagging, I had my zipper down before I remembered Randi was apt to come in to clean the room any time now. She usually didn’t come in before five, but there was no guarantee. Good god, I’d been so swept away by the sight of Taylor’s bouncing breasts that I’d nearly risked exposing myself to a coworker! As I craned my neck to check, I confirmed that Taylor hadn’t even closed the damn door behind herself. What was wrong with me?

That was it. No more. I had to put a stop to this and go back to good old-fashioned porn. And no more leggy girls with brown hair and big tits who were hot for teacher, either. No sir. It was time to get rid of the Serenex for good. I waited until the door had closed behind her to take it out of my briefcase. Man, just looking at it got me hard. Harder. How screwed up was that? But there was no denying it. The stuff had to go, and the sooner the better.

If that canister lasted until I got home, I wouldn’t be able to pull the trigger. I’d make up an excuse, tell myself I’d come to my senses, promise to do it later with my fingers crossed where my eyes couldn’t see them. No, it had to be now. Considering what it was, it couldn’t just sit in the trash where Randi might see it and get curious. Instead, I reasoned that maybe if I put it in a smaller bag with some other trash, it would seem like some discarded drink container or the like and nobody would ever be the wiser. Yes, that was–

“Sorry, Mr. Canon, I forgot my chapstick.”

Taylor. And those unrestrained boobs of hers. Oh shit.

“Guess that’s what they call irony, right?” she said as she crossed the room. Sure enough, there on her desk was the little pink chapstick egg that had started this whole thing off.

The Serenex was sitting out on my desk. Oh fuck. *Don’t notice it don’t notice it don’t notice it don’t notice it don’t notice it…*

“What’s that?” Taylor immediately opened the cap and began applying more lip balm. Watching a round pink bulb smear across her lips had been a prominent feature in a great many of those fantasies I had been in the presence of culling.

“What’s… what?” I asked stupidly.

She pointed directly at the Serenex as she made her way back toward the door, but still putting the cap back on the chapstick, she was moving far too slowly for my comfort. “That. Is that pepper spray or something?”

“Uh.. yes…?” I cleared my throat. “Yep. Pepper spray. You can never be too careful, right?”

But Taylor was cocking her head to the side, studying it as she drew closer. “Are you even allowed to have that? That’s, like, a weapon, right?”

“It’s fine, Taylor. Now go on, go enjoy your weekend.”

But by now her path had deviated toward my desk. I could see her mouthing the words of the label. “Serr… Serene X?”

It felt like my heart was about to explode in my chest. She’d seen it. She’d read it! A simple google search and she’d know exactly what it was! But she wouldn’t, would she?

But if she did…!

I acted without thinking. There was no plan, only panic. “I was kidding, Taylor. Obviously! Like I’d bring pepper spray into a school? How crazy would that be?”

She made a skeptical face. “Then what the hell is it? That warning label is like visible from space.”

“No, it’s harmless, see? Here, I’ll show you.” I picked it up, gave it a little shake. *What? What was I even doing?!*

But Taylor flinched, plainly mistrustful. “You think I’m gonna let you pepper spray me? Fuck that, man!”

Somehow I forced a laugh. Ha, silly Taylor, ha ha, thinking I’d use a chemical weapon on you, ha ha. *Oh fuck me.* “Just on the arm, see? It’s, ah, it’s just sunblock.”

The lie was obvious, yet I suppose to a confused eighteen-year-old girl who’d never had someone try to attack them with a dangerous chemical before – that she knew of – her fight or flight response was already not at its sharpest. That was even before the spray splashed down on her not-recoiling-quickly-enough forearm. I gave her a good thorough dose, a sheen of toxic mist soon gleaming on her skin.

Pressing the trigger had an immediate calming effect, so much so that I took a moment to confirm I hadn’t gotten any on myself. No, all clear. My relief was genuine; I’d defused the situation. Right? My mind raced through the ramifications. Even now, her amygdala was numbing, its capacity for hormone release halting, even as other parts stimulated a little extra serotonin to keep her good and calm. She’d see that nothing bad happened, that it hadn’t been a big deal, and if she left with suspicions, the canister would be long gone before there was any proof this had ever happened.

Deep breath. I was in the clear.

“Gotcha, you son of a bitch!”

I whirled toward the sound. There in the doorway stood Abbie Stern, the phone in her hand brandished like a weapon. The camera. Oh no! “I, um, I don’t know what you think you saw just now…”

“Save it, you creepy fuck. You try to pepper spray my sister? What, were you gonna, like, mace her down and stick her in the back of your van and take her out to the woods and like–”

“Abbie – it’s Abbie, right?”

“Right now it’s Mistress Stern, cunt queen of your loser universe, asshole. And I got that pic ready to share with the whole wide world with the touch of a button, too, so don’t even think about trying to get me with that shit or I will rip your asshole six feet wide.” Her free arm rose, ready to shield her eyes just in case.

“Abbie, look, this isn’t… I wasn’t–”

She was ignoring me, looking with concern at her sister. “You all right, Tay? That shit hurt?”

Taylor had inspected the site of the spray for a moment, but after that, she’d just been looking back and forth between us with a vaguely detached expression. “Mm? Yeah, I’m fine. Chill. Smells gross, but pretty sure it’s not pepper spray.”

“Yeah, what the fuck is that stuff? Does it hurt?” asked Abbie, inching closer. The phone was still held up threateningly, her thumb poised over some button I couldn’t see. A dead man’s switch of blackmail. I wasn’t about to call her bluff, though. There had been ample opportunity for her to snap a shot or two.

“Nah, it’s nothing.” Taylor shrugged. “The can said Serene X, or Serenex, or something like that. Doesn’t sting or anything though.”

There was no sign of recognition in Abbie’s eyes as they turned back to me. “Set that shit down. *Now.* Or I hit send. I got fifteen hundred instagram followers, so I give you maybe ten minutes before you go viral for macing a student.”

Not knowing what else to do, I set the spray down on my desk and took a step away. That was it. I was done. All there was left was to see if they’d blackmail me, or simply go for the throat and end my life as I knew it right here, right now.

Abbie approached her sister, though it was clear she was apprehensive about Taylor’s uncharacteristic nonchalance about all this. Still, she was curious, pulling her sister’s arm up where she could see it. It was still wet, almost dripping with how much I’d overdone it. Abbie sniffed, and when she didn’t experience any pain or discomfort, sniffed closer. “What even is this shi–”

With reflexes I didn’t know I had, I pounced. One hand clapped on the back of Abbie’s head and the other under Taylor’s arm. The two were pressed together until there was contact, then held there. Abbie squealed and then flailed in shocked alarm. Worried she’d start screaming, I let go a few moments later. Abbie immediately spat and sputtered, wiping her mouth on her sleeve and then spitting some more. I was pretty sure I saw a damp smear across one cheek, too.

“What the fuck was that?!” she demanded. “Oh god, the taste, it’s like… it’s… Taylor, what did he… what… what did, um…”

She frowned, and soon, there wasn’t even a frown. “So… what did you just do?”

What indeed.

“Both of you sit down,” I said after a moment in which I attempted to gather my thoughts. I failed. I needed some time to think this through.

“Oh my god, if you make me do another hour, I think I’m going to kill myself,” Taylor griped as she took her assigned seat. Abbie followed alongside her, saying nothing, and took the seat beside her big sister.

“And be quiet,” I added.

Taylor mouthed a bitchy repetition of my command, but no more. She crossed her legs, folded her arms, and sat there. Abbie was looking around the room, checking to see what I’d done to redecorate since her last Saturday class.

What to do, what to do? *First things first, let’s not make things any worse.* I dashed across the room, both girls watching in idle curiosity as I snatched Abbie’s phone out of her hand.

“Enter your password,” I said when it wouldn’t open. Abbie casually traced a pattern, 5-4-7-8-9-6-5-2. It only took a moment’s thought to recognize the implied diagram. A middle finger. As classy as her big sis. There on the screen was a picture on her instagram. Live to the world. It showed me, spraying a clearly displeased Taylor with the Serenex. It was a little blurry, and she’d been focusing on Taylor more so than me. The label wasn’t legible, and I wasn’t sure someone who didn’t know it was me would immediately ID me. I deleted it immediately. There hadn’t been any likes or comments. It had only been posted for a minute, evidently having made good on her threat when I pressed her face into the Serenex. Hopefully it had lived its brief life on the internet in solitude.

Next I snatched a spare worksheet, flipped it to the blank back side and grabbed a sharpie. *TESTING IN PROGRESS UNTIL 5 PM – DO NOT DISTURB*, I wrote. Once that was taped on the outside of the door, I locked it and shut it behind me. There. That felt smart. Randi wouldn’t dare cross that. Nobody would. Like any high school, testing was sacred.

There. Now my timeline for being fucked had at least transitioned from minutes to hours. And I was fucked, as fucked as a stupid fuck like me could be. They’d seen the canister. Read the label. Seen me use it. Fuck, they’d *recorded* me using it! Oh god, I hoped nobody had seen that picture. On reflection, I quickly opened Abbie’s photo gallery and deleted the copy there, too.

I almost didn’t notice that one of the photos near the bottom of the screen was a selfie of the phone’s owner standing in a bathroom. Topless.

On autopilot, I tapped the image. It enlarged to fill the screen. Holy shit, she was hot. She was gorgeous, like her sister, and even the lighting was working pretty well for her. Abbie’s hair was down, forming a screen covering most of her breasts. But not all. She was cupping them in both hands, pressing them together in a line of cleavage as long as her forearm. As I stared, eventually I noticed her lower half was only covered by a pair of black satin panties. Zooming in, the screen displayed the outline of her labia.

How many more images like this did she have on here? I scrolled down–

*Knock it off, Canon!* some marginally less stupid part of my brain shouted. I was so startled I dropped the phone, then quickly turned it back off. Good grief! I’d only meant to delete the image, not to see… that! *Her*. So much of her, too.

I looked over to the girls. Taylor was sitting there looking immensely bored, twirling a finger in her hair and sighing impatiently. Pretty much like Monday. Abbie, though… She barely looked up as I approached. Her eyes were a glassy stare fixed on a point of nothingness across the room. Across the school, maybe. I waved a hand in front of her face, and after a moment, she looked up at me, but there was a dazed, lazy expression on her fiercely beautiful face.

“Abbie? Can you hear me?”

She nodded. “Yeah. Obviously.” A hint of sass, but it was delivered in a tone so flat that I wondered how someone with curves like Abbie’s could manage it.

At least she could listen and respond, a sign that I hadn’t completely fried her brain. Good. But there was no mistaking it, not this close up. Taylor was looking over with a bit of concern as I studied Abbie’s face. The younger Stern sister looked positively doped. Anybody looking at her would recognize it in an instant.

“What’s her problem?” asked Taylor.

“Hush.”

But what *was* her problem? Was it that she’d ingested it? How much? Abbie had sucked enough down that she’d said something about the taste. Hmm. I retrieved the Serenex, and sure enough in the lengthy warning label there was a bolded prohibition against ingesting the stuff, but it was in there right alongside warnings not to get it in the eyes, not to use more than the prescribed dose, to only deploy it in accordance with state and federal law, and a hundred other cover-your-ass statements. Nothing about the why of any of it. Though it seemed pretty obvious that a chemical that did things to the brain if it made contact with your skin would only get stronger if you swallowed it.

Well, bookmark that. For now, I had a bigger problem, and it was that quite simply, I’d just very openly dosed two students with a chemical weapon. The girls even knew the name of it, and eventually, they’d snap out of the effects. So… doomed, right? They might have all the verve of a pair of steamed potatoes right now, but once it wore off, they’d be losing their minds. Rightly so. Nothing I’d read suggested there was anything in the Serenex to suppress memories. All it did was alter the brain to put people in a relaxed, receptive state for a while.

“Son of a…!”

Once, I’d been sitting on the toilet in the men’s faculty restroom when I’d seen a bit of graffiti scribbled under the toilet paper dispenser. In the blink of an eye, I figured it out without even knowing there was a thing to figure out. The green ink. Complaints from custodial that someone was smoking in here. A chance sighting under the bleachers at a football game last fall. The backwards K in the graffitied “go fuck urself.” The next day, I’d confronted Kenny and gotten a confession.

This was like that. Taylor had been on her relative best behavior all week. She hadn’t told the specifics of Monday’s punishment to her sister. In subsequent meetings she’d been actually doing her work. No more cheating or excuses. I’d had her write a hundred times a promise to behave, do her own work. I’d made her apologize for the chapstick incident, and she’d further apologized for teasing me, for enticing me with her ass. I’d insisted I hadn’t been. She hadn’t seemingly told a soul otherwise. When Abbie teased her, she’d said she was trying to behave in class, and that she owed me an apology.

Could… could it really…

“Abbie, Taylor, each of you needs a piece of paper,” I ordered the two of them.

Taylor took off her backpack, big breasts wobbling furiously as she twisted herself out of it. *Stop looking! You’re in enough trouble!* As for Abbie, she merely frowned; she had brought nothing with her. Taylor solved her problem for her, sliding over a sheet she’d torn out. That vexation faded right back to that eerily tranquil facade. I had Taylor supply her a pen as well.

“All right. We’re going to do another little writing assignment, OK?”

Taylor groaned. “Oh god, not again. That was *so* lame Monday. My hand hurt like all night.” She looked to Abbie expectantly. “Really? No ‘couldn’t even jack off your boyfriend’ joke? Man, whatever that stuff was really did a number on her.”

“Language,” I scolded automatically. “And I didn’t think you had a boyfriend.” Word had it she’d been dating Marco and dumped him at prom in front of all their friends.

She wrote her name at the top of the page by reflex. Abbie glanced over, saw the heading, and followed suit – except I saw after a moment she had written Taylor’s name instead of her own. That seemed bad. Taylor didn’t seem to notice, though.

“Uh, I don’t…? It was just a sick burn. Not sure how that’s your business either way, though.”

“Fair enough. Anyway, today, let’s start off with a simple one. Write down: ‘I will not let anyone find out what happened in Mr. Canon’s room.’ You too, Abbie.”

Taylor arched a neatly tweezed eyebrow at me. “Seriously?”

I mean, what did I have to lose? If it didn’t work, I wasn’t any worse off. If it did, who knew? Maybe I wouldn’t wind up on the short bus to a long prison stay after all. “A hundred times. Chop chop.”

“Seriously. Now get to it.”

Abbie was already at it. She had boyish handwriting, ugly and uneven, but the words came fast. Taylor sighed irritably and began her own page. I took a moment to watch, ignoring my student’s peevish glance at my hovering. It was much faster going than it had been on the whiteboard. Smaller motions, more familiar. I didn’t know if the time spent on it or the repetitions were more important. I supposed for now, I had a few minutes to reflect.

Or better yet, Abbie’s photo gallery would provide an amusing diversion.

“It’s really uncool snooping on a student’s phone like that,” Taylor pointed out, pausing to shake a cramp out of her hand. Jiggle. I wonder if Abbie’s boobs would jiggle the same way. I hadn’t found any videos yet.

“What number are you on?”

“Sixty-five.”

“Then let’s talk thirty-five reps from now.”

She frowned, but got back to work. Abbie had never stopped, not even when she glanced up between us during the brief exchange.

The younger Stern wasn’t lacking in confidence, that was for sure. Even aside from having the guts to pose half-naked in the first place, she’d festooned them with quotes, lyrics I was guessing, boasting of her hotness, her sex appeal, her unattainability. Her expressions dripped condescension, arrogance, or both. Pretty nauseating stuff, really. But once I got past that, my eyes almost popped out of my head.

There were dozens of lewd photos in here. None of them were fully nude, and she never did a bottomless pic, quite. But I’d gotten a lot of good peeks at her nipples, often merely partially concealed behind hands or hair or a translucent bra. Wide and pink-red and almost angry-looking. Her tan covered the whole thing – no bikini top in the tanning bed for her. Her ass did have tan lines, right along her panty line. But it looked like she’d come across a thong bikini earlier this spring that she really couldn’t get enough shots of. She was at a pool somewhere, and it looked indoors. Maybe a hotel. It didn’t stop her from strutting around in that thing, though. I wondered who had taken the pics, because it clearly wasn’t her. She even had a few tattoos. One down her spine with Roman numerals that I could only assume was her birthdate, and another on her inner left bicep, a crown that said *Linda* underneath it. I’d spoken with their mother, but perhaps a grandmother? Hell, for all I knew it could be a reality TV star.

Could I send myself copies? Would that make things worse? Was it traceable? Did it even matter at this point?

*No*, I told myself. Just because you crossed one line doesn’t mean you need to cross the next. This slope was already too slippery by far to drop down and let it become a slide.

Besides, here I was scoping out her most private, personal files, and meanwhile she sat across the room half-aware of me doing it, permission granted by omission of complaint. They were twice as hot with her watching.

I glanced up. Abbie had set down her pen and was staring straight ahead again. Her jaw was open slightly. Was she drooling? No, I guess not. Oh, I hoped this didn’t do any long-term damage. Squatting in front of her, I took her hand and squeezed it gently. After a moment, her eyes focused on me.

“Abbie? Can you hear me?”

“Yeah.”

“Do you feel OK?”

“I guess. I dunno.”

Not exactly helpful. Taylor frowned, concerned, but kept writing. In the eighties now. “You need to answer me completely and honestly, OK?”

“Sure.”

“Do you feel nauseous? Light-headed? Headache? Anything unusual at all.”

She considered. “Maybe a little light-headed. I was smoking pot in the bathroom before I caught you spraying Taylor.”

Wow. Well so much for wondering whether or not she was being honest and compliant. Maybe some of her spaciness had to do with the weed, too? A side effect from mixing drugs? A million miles from my own narrow and limited area of expertise. “Tell me, when you leave here, are you going to tell anyone about this?”

She shook her head. “Nah.”

“Why not?”

Taylor snorted. “Seriously, Mr. Canon? You only had her write it a hundred freaking times.”

But Abbie answered anyway. “I will not let anyone find out what happened in Mr. Canon’s room.”

Taylor’s paper was numbered up to ninety-four. “All right, that’s good enough, Taylor. You can stop. So what about you?”

“What about me what? Like, do I feel OK?”

“No, I mean are you going to tell anyone about all this.”

“Ah. Well, I guess not. Oh and by the way I’m fine, even though you sprayed me with that stuff. Thanks for asking.”

Her answer was a lot less convincing. Shit. I needed to know if this worked or not. Otherwise, I’d… shit, I don’t even know. Leave town, never come back? I tried to think of a way to get some hard data. “Did you really think I was looking at you on Monday? When you were writing on the board?”

She laughed. “Do I think? Shit, Mr. Canon, I *know*. I caught you red handed like a dozen times. You were nowhere near as subtle as you thought you were.”

“Language. So did you tell anyone?”

“Nah.”

“Why not? No offense, Taylor, but you’re usually first in line to cause me headaches and discomfort.”

Her grin broadened. “Yeah, I know. But I said I’d behave – and I have, right?”

“You have.”

“See? Always saying I’m lying about stuff. But really, I barely even thought of it. Like, I saw you staring at my butt, but I know you said you weren’t, so… meh. Wouldn’t really be good behavior to tell everybody you’re perving on your students.”

“I was not–”

“Dude, I just saw you practically drooling on your desk over whatever you were looking at on Abbie’s phone.” She eyed her sister. “Skank.”

“I was only making sure she wasn’t positioning herself to blackmail me!”

Taylor eyed her sister. “Yeah, sure. Geez, Abbie, good ol’ Mr. Canon is such an upright dude. He’d never do anything inappropriate towards us. We’re lucky to have him. Aren’t we, sis.”

The thick sarcasm was seemingly lost on her sister, who at least still seemed to have the wherewithal to recognize her name when it was spoken. “Yeah, I guess we are.”

Taylor frowned. “You turned her into a vegetable with that crap, you know. What even is that stuff?”

“It’s nothing dangerous. Don’t worry. Not. Dangerous. Understand?”

“Nothing dangerous, my ass! Abbie swallowed some of it and now she’s, like, lobotomized or something!”

Whatever I had done was working a lot better on Abbie than it was on Taylor. I didn’t know what to do. Taylor was suspicious, accusatory, but by the same token, she was still sitting there calmly, her most boisterous resistance a slight elevation in volume. But would her passivity last? Maybe I was safe, maybe, but that was an awfully big risk to take.

“Your sister is fine. And so are you. Understand? Nothing bad happened in here today. Say it, Taylor.”

After a moment, she shrugged. Fucking hell, that jiggle. “Nothing bad happened in here today. Apparently.”

Did that statement mean anything? Her present apathy made it so difficult to predict long-term animosity. There was no telling whether getting away with Monday had been a fluke or a part of Serenex’s intended effect. Their product advertised its ability to suppress an unruly mob, but not to make them permanently well-behaved citizens. Would Taylor keep playing mum?

There was no certainty, and standing around wondering wasn’t going to help. Either I was fucked, or I wasn’t. Either the Serenex would render them susceptible to my tactic, or it wouldn’t. Either my life ended today, or it started anew. There was nothing to do but wait and see.

“She should come around in an hour or two,” I said at last. I gestured toward the door. Taylor didn’t need to be invited twice to get out of here, on her feet in an instant and pulling Abbie to hers. “You can keep an eye on her until then, right?”

“I thought keeping an eye on teenage girls was your department,” Taylor quipped. “But sure, I can–”

“Answer me something Taylor.” That goddamn smirk of hers! The sudden fire in my voice stopped her dead in her tracks, right in the middle of the room. Abbie remained facing the door, oblivious to the world. “What possessed you to eschew a bra today?”

“To chew on a bra? What does that even–”

“Don’t play stupid, Taylor. Why, when you changed, didn’t you leave your bra on.”

The snicker that followed confirmed she’d understood me fine the first time. “Are you complaining? For an old-ass perv ball like you, must be like your birthday come early.”

“OK, for one, I’m hardly ‘old.’ I’m twenty-six. Now answer the question. Why do you try so hard to flaunt that body of yours in my classroom?”

The sneer that crept onto her pretty face just then was truly one for the ages. Derisive. Contemptuous. Haughty. And above all, implacably arrogant. “Why? Because I feel like it. Because I’m hot. Because I can pull this shit off. Because it’s what the people want. Because… for a few more weeks, you’re my teacher and I’m your student and you can make me write essays and copy sentences and what the fuck ever, but the day I graduate, I have all the currency, and you can’t do fuck to me.

She took a step closer, looming despite our height difference. “Because when I walked in here and your *old-ass* eyes locked onto these puppies, it reminded me that I got what you want, and you ain’t got shit for me. I dress like this to make losers you my bitch.” She took one breasts in each hand and hefted them up, flesh bubbling up above her neckline, then on release, bouncing up and down half a dozen times before settling. In spite of it all, I couldn’t look away. “How’s that.”

I didn’t answer. In fact, I was fuming – mostly because, on some level, she was right. I did want her, and she had less than no use for me. Whether or not either of us were right or wrong to want what we wanted was immaterial. However, Taylor was never one to quit while she was winning. No, she was the sort who spiked the ball even when she was winning by fifty points.

She addressed her sister. “See what I mean about this guy? See how he looks at us? Creeping on your phone and everything.” Abbie didn’t seem to register she was being spoken to, so Taylor elbowed her. “Abbie. You got nudes on your phone I bet, right?”

Abbie nodded. “Yeah. Lots. Alex loves ‘em.”

“Oh he’s not the only one.” The sneer returned full force. “‘Cause that’s what girls like me and Abbie are to you, right, Mr. Canon? Tits and ass. Sex objects. We’re supposed to let you ogle our bodies, be your little fantasy sluts, right? How often do you beat off thinking about me, Mr. Canon? I’m betting… twice a week. Am I close?”

I said nothing. “Ooooh, more than that? Four? Hmm? What, *every day*? Jesus, Mr. Canon, you got a complex or something?” She snickered. “You see what I mean, Abbie? Old perv can’t get enough of us. But we’re not supposed to notice, we’re supposed to just let him look, let him push us around and feel powerful. And now apparently we’re supposed to let him spray us with drugs and make us swear not to tell anybody, too. I wonder what he’ll come up with Monday. Maybe he’ll–”

“Take off your shirt, Taylor.”

Her head cocked back. In an instant, the sneer vanished. “What? No. No way I’m–”

“Take. Off. Your. Shirt. Now.” I kept my voice low not because I worried it would spill out into the hall, but because I’d learned early on in teaching that shouting bred arguments. Soft voices commanded silence.

Taylor fidgeted with the hem of her shirt. “You… you shouldn’t…” She looked up, scanning my face for traces of mercy. I gave her none. “I was only kidding, you know.”

“The ‘only kidding’ excuse didn’t work when I caught you bullying Kirsten on the first day I had you in class junior year. Rest assured, it hasn’t aged into potency.”

“But… I don’t want to. You’ll… you’ll see me.”

“That’s right. I will. Now take it off.”

Taylor Stern might be the queen bitch of the senior class, young and desirable and cocky well past the point of fault. But as long as my Serenex was in her system, I could knock her over with a feather. I may or may not be able to control what she did tomorrow, but right here, right now, for once in her miserable life, the little bitch was going to do as I said.

“Do you need me to help?” I pressed as she kept hesitating.

“No,” she said quickly. “No, I got it.”

Last semester, I’d realized she was copying vocab quiz answers off of the boy next to her. She’d denied it, of course. While most students would acquiesce to a deserved rebuke at having been caught cheating red-handed, this was Taylor Stern. She’d never admitted guilt, even after being assigned two nights’ detention for her persistence in lying about it. Even tried to suggest the honor roll student might have been copying off of her. So I’d whipped up a second version of the quiz, one just for her, visually similar enough to the original, but that was the only similarity. Oh, she’d sworn that her grade was the result of a sleepless night and failure to study, insisted until she was blue in the face that I was a monster to accuse a poor innocent student of cheating. Threatened to have her parents call the principal and fire me. So I directed her to an item: *If one fills in the blank in this sentence with the name of a feline animal whose common name is spelled C-A-T, one would write \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_* with the word “chicanery.” (A solid number of her peers caught the joke. Vocab lesson learned, for them.)

Taylor’s glare in that moment – that sulky, indignant, malevolent, entirely impotent glare – it had warmed my heart for days.

It was that same glare she directed at me as, with fretful hands, she began to lift the bottom of her shirt. She dragged it out as long as she could, except she was doing so not to tease me, not this time, but because it was the only resistance she could muster to the inevitability of her submission. I knew I would never forget this moment. Her flat, toned stomach slowly exposed itself until the shirt was pulled up as high as it could go without revealing anything salacious.

I licked my lips. Here it came. Taylor Stern’s fat, round, succulent–

*Knock, knock.*

For just a moment, I froze. Someone was here. Oh god. I was caught. The underside of Taylor’s breasts were visible now. If the door had swung open, that would be it. “Uh… we’re testing!” I yelled, only then remembering I’d locked it. Thank god.

“Sure, I just wanted to get your garbage,” answered Randi from the far side.

I glared at the girls. “Not a word. Either of you.”

Taylor’s eyes narrowed resentfully. Abbie was merely studying a spot on the carpet. I hustled over to the trash can, seized the bag and hustled to the door. I opened it exactly long enough to open it, thrust the bag into Randi’s surprised hands, and mumble an excuse for my haste. “Sorry, it’s timed, and we’re right near the deadline. Have a good weekend!”

“Yeah, you too, Mr. C!” came the voice from the far side of the door.

I locked it immediately, my head thudding against it as my anxiety flooded out of me in a lengthy sigh. Crisis averted. Thank goodness. I turned back to the girls–

And there was Taylor Stern, naked from the waist up in the middle of my classroom.

Her shirt was clenched in one fist. Taylor’s arms were folded in front of her breasts, and her long hair was draped over them beneath that. That wouldn’t do. I crossed the room, hoping the smirk on my face was half as infuriating as hers. It was nowhere to be seen now, of course. Only that glare. That helpless, livid glare.

I took a wrist in each hand and lowered her arms to the side. I would have met with more resistance from a Barbie doll. Not that Barbie could have covered her chest in the first place. Taylor and Barbie. Tall, long-legged, big-breasted and beautiful. Cheap, posable, biddable, and physically incapable of covering themselves. They had a lot in common.

I brushed her hair back over her shoulders. She shivered as her breasts came fully into view. They were… they were great. Amazing. Not perfect. No. They had been perfect in my dreams. This was better than perfect. They were *real*. Big and perky, that held up from my fantasies. But unlike her sister, Taylor’s tits had tan lines, pale triangles that I was surprised her wardrobe fully concealed. There was a small black mole on the right underside of her left breast; the right was entirely unblemished. Her nipples were bright pink and brought her breasts to points at the front, which now that I saw them, I reflected probably added to my impression of their perkiness. They were smaller than I had expected, too, almost out of place on the whoppers they capped off, a pair of pale pink buds with hardly any areola surrounding them. They were hardening in the cool air of my classroom even as I stared. Pointing right at me.

Her arms twitched at the elbow, but she couldn’t seem to make herself defy my preference that they remain at her sides. “There, now you’ve seen my tits. Congratulations. Satisfied? Can we go now?”

“Now the shorts.”

“Seriously?” Taylor whined. “This is getting super rapey, Mr. Canon. Just… come on. Please?”

“Oh? I thought you were the one who had all the currency, Taylor. Isn’t that what you said? Yet suddenly you want something from me?”

“Don’t be a prick, Mr. Canon. Come on, you’ve seen my boobs. Don’t make me show you my pussy.” I said nothing, gave her nothing. “It’s not fair! I don’t want to be your little pocket stripper. Let me go!” Still nothing. Her hands slowly moved to the waistline of her shorts, thumbs slowly sneaking down out of sight.

“Seriously, *please*!” The way she whined that final word was easily the hottest sound I’d ever heard in my life. “You can’t make me do that. I promise, I won’t tell anyone about any of this, OK? I promise!”

“You’re a liar, Taylor. Why would I believe you?”

She eased the shorts down an inch. Two inches. I could see the separation between her mons pubis and the tops of the thighs surrounding it. “I mean it! Really, I do. Please, Mr. Canon! Don’t make me take my shorts off. Please! I’ll never tell a soul!”

And like that, I was having an idea.

*Mr. Canon? I know you like my big tits. Come on, let me fuck you with them. Does that sound good? Yeah, just wrap these titties around your huge fat cock, just rub and squeeze you until you come all over my fucking face. Please? Mr. Canon, I’m begging you, please, just let me titty fuck you. Give me an A, and you can have these double D’s. Please? God, I’m so horny, I just want my titties fucked so baaaad!*

The video ended, immediately looping around to the beginning. There she was, on her knees in the girls’ restroom, recording herself begging me to fuck her tits in exchange for a grade. Abbie, I knew, had been in the next stall, waiting to be herded out to their car like a wayward lamb. She ought to be fine by now, according to what I’d read. Serenex’s effects only lasted a couple hours, give or take. She’d been dosed right around four, and now it was after dark.

Wow, dark already? I realized I’d been watching Taylor’s video for close to two hours. Damn. The thing was only a few minutes long. At some point after dinner I’d remembered I could display it on my TV. The resolution wasn’t great, and it magnified the tinny, echoing sound quality, but that the video had poor production qualities, seemed to display a lack of effort on its creators part, only made it more Taylor. I had her rambling, semicoherent pleading memorized by now, and likewise the tits she was so eagerly offering.

My anxiety hadn’t faded completely, but the bottle of wine I’d downed since coming home from work was helping. A tiny part of me kept expecting a SWAT team to kick in my door any second, to drag me away in front of the whole neighborhood. Really, though, I felt like I was pretty damn safe.

I’d explained it to Taylor thusly:

The fact of the matter was, she was a liar. I hadn’t believed her promise. Nobody who knew her would. This was someone who could look you in the eye and even get righteously angry at being called out even when she knew full well she was completely full of crap. There wasn’t an honest bone in her body.

And I could use that.

If Taylor broke character and actually told someone the truth about what had happened, it was going to be one hell of a tale. That I, a teacher without a spot on his professional record nor so much as a parking ticket attached to his name, had used black market chemical weapons to drug a student widely disliked by the faculty into re-writing her essay… well, it was a hell of a thing to believe. On top of that, this was Taylor Stern, and I knew at least one police officer who had a file as thick as my hand full of incidents she’d been involved in, and any teacher at Grant High could attest that she was as dishonest and vindictive as they came.

That her story was true would help, sure, but she’d have to make them believe that. The character debate, however, was already over and won by me. But I needed one more piece, a little something to validate for any credulous audience she might find why she’d invent such a tale, go to such lengths to try to hurt me.

The video was it. It hadn’t taken much. Already topless and desperate, Taylor had latched on quickly to my promise to leave her dignity in no more tattered condition than I’d already rendered it. I’d promised I wouldn’t show the video to anyone, of course. After all, I’d told her, why would I? It would only raise questions I didn’t want raised. So I loaned the girl her shirt back (and quickly proved I could have her strip back out of it any time I chose), then followed her down to the girls’ room. Randi was upstairs in the math hall by then, so by that hour, we had the whole area to ourselves. Then I waited outside the stall while she recorded it, then emailed a copy of it to myself. The body of the email read simply, *xtra credit? ;) xoxo, Taylor Stern Period 6*.

(The “Period 6” inclusion in the signature was a last minute bit of added genius, I thought. Only a halfwit, like most people assumed Taylor was, would think the recipient might need some direction for what class the naked begging teen in the video belonged to.)

With this in my possession, she became a desperate girl who’d tried to prostitute herself for grades. If anyone asked why I didn’t come forward, it would be entirely plausible that I’d been too uncomfortable about these accusations to tell anyone. A speech was ready and rehearsed for Principal Horen about how I didn’t want to cost Taylor her shot at graduation for a weak moment, not so close to the end. Officer Barbour could corroborate it, as could Taylor’s other teachers who’d given me work for her to complete in our time together. As to the possibility that Louisa might be suspicious that Taylor accused me of using the same obscure substance she’d joked about using, I’d simply say I had left the ad out on my desk and that Taylor had seized it.

*Oh, the Serenex, or however you say it? Yeah, that ad was sitting on my desk with some other stuff from my mailbox. Taylor saw it… gee, that must have been Tuesday? Wednesday? Anyway, she made a fuss like it was something real, but she enjoys being dramatic. Why, what did she tell you happened, officer?*

With the video completed, I had her strip out of her shorts anyway. I still had her panties clenched in my fist. To my surprise, they’d been surprisingly damp when she handed them over.

I had her. From total catastrophe to a stronger position than I’d been in before it started – not bad for a simple English teacher with no plan. There had been half a dozen moments today where I’d felt like the world was dropping out from under me, but I’d come through. Every time I started to feel guilty for what I’d done to Taylor, all I had to do was remember her tirade; then I could go right back to enjoying the video again.

It once more hit the end, and once more began anew. Weirdly, I think I liked the beginning more than the end. Seeing her with her shirt on, wiggling and jiggling until she gave her final advertisement for her wares… Damn. The nudity was good, but the reveal was everything.

*Knock, knock.*

For the second time that day, an unexpected presence at my door nearly gave me a heart attack. She’d done it. *Oh shit oh shit oh shit shit shit shit shit!!!* In spite of my threats, my blackmail, my pitiful attempt at brainwashing, Taylor had gone ahead with it anyway! As I tried to summon enough strength in my knees to stand up, I assured myself it would be fine. I’d tell my lies, try not to let my voice break, try not to break down crying. It felt hollow, though, barely comforting enough to keep me from falling to my knees and begging the police who were surely waiting on the other side of that door to–

*Knock knock knock knock knock!*

Shit!

I cleared my throat and opened the door as casually as I could. *Look surprised, Canon.*

It turned out not to be as difficult as I’d thought. “Abbie…?”

The girl nodded. “Come with me. I have to show you something.”

“Uh… what? What are you doing at my–”

“Come *on*, Mr. Canon.” She pulled me by the wrist with both of her hands, tugging me out the front steps. I could have resisted her, I supposed, but I was too startled by her presence, and too relieved by the absence of police, to put up a fight. There in my driveway was that same crummy old car I’d seen them getting into the other day in the lot, apple red and thoroughly rusted along the bottom. A bumper sticker reading *My kid could kick your honor student’s ass* was stuck to the rear windshield. I looked around, nervous someone might pop out and jump me, that I’d been foolish to assume they’d go to the police instead of convincing some guys to just beat the shit out of me.

But we didn’t go farther than the driveway. “What’s going on here? You shouldn’t come to my house like this. It’s… not appropriate.” The reprimand felt rather hypocritical even to me, though, considering what I’d done to the lines of propriety so far today.

“I didn’t have a choice, Mr. Canon.”

“I don’t understand. A choice about what?” But Abbie didn’t answer. Instead, she inserted her key into the hole in the rear end of the car and popped the trunk.

There, inside, with her wrists duct taped behind her, screaming incomprehensible yet unmistakable obscenities into a gag in her mouth, was Taylor.

“She was gonna *tell*. But I stopped her.” She grinned at me, then glared down at her big sister’s antics. Abbie smacked her in the cheek, and not gently. “Shut up, Tay, you dumb cunt!”

She slammed the trunk closed.

“Abbie!”

She pulled the keys out and regarded me gravely. “I will not let anyone find out what happened in Mr. Canon’s room.”