

WHAT'S INSIDE

“Do you remember when I told you in the car that I was going to reopen the conversation?” he asked.

Ria looked at him cautiously. “Yes.”

“Well, I’m reopening it right now. Do you want to tell me what all that was about?”

“I already told you. I want a nice ceiling for my baby to look at.”

“I’m not asking about the ceiling, because I totally understand what it is you want. I’m asking about your attitude and commentary. You were dancing all around the lines into unacceptable, and you knew it. You were working hard to get a full-blown argument going. Why?”

“Because your mind was closed.”

“And you thought calling me pig-headed would improve the situation?”

Ria giggled. “It seemed appropriate.”

“For what?” Andrew asked in amazement.

“Honesty. You’re a big one on honesty, so you should appreciate that.”

Andrew shook his head. He sometimes wondered if he’d made

any headway at all in the last four years. Was it possible that some people were simply immune to discipline?

“Okay, you want honesty, I’ll give it to you now. Under no circumstances are you going to go up on a ladder while you’re pregnant, and, if you do, then, pregnant or not, I will find a way to spank you so that you will be very sorry you didn’t listen to me. Do you understand me?”

Ria scowled at him but didn’t answer.

“Do you understand me?” he repeated.

“Yes, your lordship, I understand.” She started to leave, but he pulled her back.

“I’m not finished yet,” he said, looking at her intently.

“Well, I am.”

“No, you’re not. There’s still the matter of your attitude in the car, your comment about my Scottish self-discipline, and now your sarcasm in calling me ‘your lordship.’”

Ria shrugged but for the first time looked a bit apprehensive. Maybe being six months pregnant wasn’t going to bail her out. “Saying you have Scottish self-discipline is a compliment,” she said hopefully.

“Nice try, but the way you said it was most definitely not intended as a compliment.”

“Maybe you interpreted it wrong,” she suggested.

“Maybe you should stop digging yourself in deeper.” He paused and then went on. “Being pregnant is not a get-out-of-jail-free card. You still have to meet minimum standards of behavior in our relationship, and not being rude to me is one of those minimum standards. You seem to have a hard time internalizing that, so I’m going to give you a reminder.” Suddenly he had her full attention.

“Take off your pants.”

“You might hurt the baby.”

“I promise you I’m not going to do anything to hurt our baby. Now take off your pants. If I have to tell you a third time, it will add one more reason for the spanking.”

Ria stuck out her lower lip but did as he asked. He looked around the room, trying to figure out the best way to do this. He went into the bathroom and looked around, then came back out and took the paint stirrer from his drawer.

“Come in here with me,” he said as he went back into the bathroom. She slowly followed him into the large bathroom.

“I want you to lean forward and cross your arms on the vanity top and then put your head down on them,” he told her.

Ria looked at him as if he were speaking Urdu, so he repeated the instructions and then waited while she did what he'd said. Then he rested his left hand on the small of her back and laid the stirrer against her bare backside.