

Matilda

“Matilda, honey, bless your heart. I just have to ask, are you a complete idiot or simply a work in progress?”

Three things happen next as I smile sweetly in Mrs. Hampstead’s direction and congratulate myself on a direct hit upon the wife of my husband, Fielding’s, occasional friend but more frequent political foe, Herman Hampstead III.

First, color rises high in the lady’s equine face while her squinty eyes narrow even more, and I can see her considering and then discarding any number of potential comebacks, when, in reality, there is clearly nothing she can say in her own defense and certainly not a thing she can riposte that would be half so clever or so devastatingly on target.

Second, a sound that could be hastily muffled laughter in appreciation of my wit, or might be carefully controlled gasps at my audacity, rises around us in the drawing room of the governor of Georgia on this warm June afternoon in 1965.

And third, a firm hand presses against that portion of my rearward anatomy that interrupts, in what I have been told is most interesting fashion, the straight fall of my lightweight polished cotton shift to a spot just a tiny bit north of the bend of my knee.

Field’s breath is warm on my neck, and his left hand is firm but nimble as he disengages the wine glass in my own, all the while complimenting Lenora Bennett on her most recent column in the Journal while Matilda regroups and our friends cooperate diplomatically in shifting the focus to more elevated territory.

I realize I have been careless about ascertaining Fielding’s whereabouts before launching my broadside against a woman who tries my patience without breaking a sweat. Life would be so much simpler if I were a farmer’s wife or the bride of a truck driver or the mate of a clerk in some obscure store—anything but a Congressman’s better half. It is tiresome in the extreme, having to make nice while playing politics all the time.

I try to turn away and look for the powder room, but Field’s hand exerts firmer pressure against my derriere, and his voice carries a hint of warning as he suggests I am as eager as he is to hear Miss Bennett’s revelation as to the source of her most recent Friday newspaper gossip fest. I wonder if anyone else in the group has noticed his tone. If so, they are politely ignoring the threat to my future with which it is spiced and are turning their attention, instead, to the writer in our midst, just as my clever husband manipulated them into doing. A couple of the wives, however, seem to be biting their lips in rather nervous fashion, not quite sure how to react to the situation, while I notice, as I look closer, that the men in their lives are covering incipient grins with carefully placed hands against firm jaws. I wonder what their home lives are like.

I feel color rising in my own face and try to steady my breathing and make sure my eyes are wide open and innocent and my smile is charming and totally without guile as I watch Lenora’s mouth move. I have no idea what she is saying. My mind is fixed on one idea and one idea only.

I am in trouble. Massively huge, profoundly serious, really awful trouble.

“Feel free to correct me if I’m wrong,” Field says an hour later as we turn down Gen. Beauregard Lane, “but you were pleased with yourself, even if only for a minute. You were really and truly proud of yourself, weren’t you, Amy Lee?”

I can feel my lips tighten in a thin line as I blow out a little huff of exasperation and tilt my chin. I refuse to let him see the dread that has been building in my imagination since that awful moment I realized he had overheard me give silly Matilda her due.

“Well, really now, Fielding, it was crystal clear no one else was going to put a stop to the ridiculous things she was saying. I couldn’t just let her go on bleating those complete fabrications and doing all that fear-mongering. Someone had to do something. You know they did.”

“So was there some kind of stealthy election I missed that elevated you to that level of responsibility, or did you decide on your own you were the one best equipped for the job?” my husband asks.

Field swings carefully into our newly-paved double-wide driveway and eases under the porte cochere of our gray stone two-story with the gleaming ebony shutters. Before I can find my purse and reach for the door handle, he is out of the car and rounding the front end of our new silver Cadillac with the matching interior. Honestly, the man has a thing for those coin-colored hues. Even his coal black hair sports streaks of that shade in his sideburns, and he’s barely thirty-seven.

When I shove my door open and swing my nylon-encased legs out, he stops the momentum of that exasperated movement, grasps my hand, and pulls me out of my seat with firm mastery. Then he shuts the door with a decisive click.

I steal a glance at his face. His jaw is set, and the little muscle just below his ear is twitching a bit. Not a good sign. Sunglasses hide his eyes, but I am reasonably sure the blue in them has gone darker—almost to navy, the way it tends to shade when he is under stress. His fingers are like steel bands around my own.

I don’t want to, I truly don’t, but I also sneak a quick glance at his belt. It is my least favorite.

I wish our sons were home instead of at my sister’s house, where they are spending the weekend. Better yet, I wish I were there with them. I am certain I will wish it more fervently soon.

I bite my tongue as I am hurried up the steps. I sigh in familiar despair that I did not think to do that very thing sooner on this very warm Saturday afternoon.

Field unlocks the door and steps inside our living room, which is blessedly cool after the sauna we have been exposed to while taking the few short steps from the car to the indoors. He tosses his keys onto the antique secretary that has been in his family for generations, and I cringe at the gesture that is remarkably careless of the shiny old rosewood finish. Grandmother Smithfield would not be pleased.

He shrugs out of his light blue sport coat and tosses it over a chair, then flicks the bar securing his cuff link and slides the little gold crested oval out of the carefully stitched slit. When he has dropped it into his pocket, he begins the oh-so-familiar ritual of rolling up his sleeve. I think, quite irrationally, that gentlemen in Georgia must hate summer and its formal wardrobe demands that are so completely at odds with comfort.

I am grateful my relatively slim figure and the cut of my shift made it possible for me to avoid a panty girdle for the Governor's soiree, and then I think that Field will be appreciative, as well, since it will mean he does not have to wrestle me out of such a garment before he can get down to expressing his displeasure. I sigh, but inwardly, because I have not yet arrived at the point where I am willing to let him know how filled with dread I am. But that display of emotion is coming, I know from experience.

I wait for his hands to move to his waist, praying they will not.

He paces for a moment, running a hand through his crisp, perfectly clipped hair that never succumbs to waves and unsightly frizzes as does my own saucy blonde flip, unless I encase it in a sprayed-on helmet of lacquer. I am reasonably certain it was still sleek and smooth earlier today, though, while Matilda Hampstead's mousy strands were glued around her red face and neckline most unbecomingly. Everybody knows she is too, too old for a pixie cut to begin with. Honestly, I will never understand women who seem to go out of their way to appear unattractive and quite lacking in style. One more senseless bit of irritation on Matilda's part that was responsible for pushing me into the dangerous territory where I find myself now.

I will never forgive her. Who could?

Field stares at the floor while he moves from one side of the room to the other, as though the new green carpet will help him determine the best course of action. Finally, he stops in front of me and sighs.

"You are my greatest asset," he says.

My eyes mist over a bit. I know he is referring to my role in his political life, and I admit I might not always deserve such praise from the man who represents six counties just north of Atlanta in the Georgia State House, is still the acknowledged creative force in the most innovative advertising agency in the city, and is a loving and devoted husband and father, besides.

"That doesn't give you leave to behave like a bratty high school cheerleader when you are frustrated, though," he continues. "Quite the contrary. I need your facility with words and that mind of yours that works at warp speed to be focused on positive interaction, no matter how difficult that may prove to be sometimes. I have to have Herman's support on at least three bills he's wavering on, or we're never going to bring Georgia into the twentieth century. It's not just him. You know that. He has the power to deliver a dozen more votes from the south part of the state, and—"

"But Matilda was setting that all back. I was just trying to stop her from ruining all your hard work with the crazy stuff she was saying," I explain patiently, although there does seem to be a slight note of desperation in my voice.

"Does it never occur to you that other people see through her, too? That they are disgusted by her views, as well? If you had read the faces of the other people in that little group, you would have seen she was cutting her own throat. But the minute you opened fire, she became a sympathetic figure. And you became a liability."

I gasp, mostly because I recognize the truth of the statement. That doesn't stop it from hurting my pride. I stamp my foot and whisper an unladylike word under my breath before I spin away and head for the stairs and our bedroom.

It is my second mistake of the day.

Fielding stops my forward progress with an arm that shoots out like an angry, coiled viper and wraps around my waist, dragging me back against him while I totter on my high heels that are prone to tangle in the shag beneath our feet.

“You have such a hard, hard spanking coming, young lady,” he growls near my ear, and I can’t quite bite back a moan. “Corner. Dress up. Panties down.”

He points to an area opposite the door we had entered just moments before and nudges me toward it. It is a space next to the undraped picture window I love—one of two across the front of our house that perfectly balance its facade and display, to anyone interested in good taste who happens to be passing, my wise choice of Atlanta’s newest interior decorator.

I fail to find comfort in my widely noted sense of style at the moment, however. In fact, I recall longingly the heavy brocade ceiling-to-floor window treatments that were hanging there when we bought the house. While they detracted from the airy feeling I envisioned for the room, they did provide a certain measure of privacy.

“Not here,” I protest as I turn back toward the man on whose behalf I have been exerting myself, and there is no denying the note of panic in my voice. I no longer care, now that the moment of piper-paying is upon me. “Please, Field, honey, I know I was wrong, but at least let me go upstairs. Anyone could see—”

My imagination runs rampant, and I envision myself the subject of Lenora Bennett’s next column: *“What Georgia representative’s naughty wife spent Saturday afternoon regretting her waspish tongue in a corner of the couple’s charmingly decorated home north of Atlanta? And what else might we suppose happened to Little Miss Nasty to remind her always to keep her manners handy, after she apparently misplaced them at Gov. John Thomas Claymore’s summer get-together for Peach Tree State lawmakers?”*

I shudder.

I will never be able to move about in polite society again, I realize in despair. Let alone sit.

“And you think displaying your bare bottom to the neighbors will be more humiliating than showing your sassy little rear end to half the elected officials in Georgia?” Field is demanding.

I come back to the present in a dizzying rush and wince at the image my husband has just shown me of my behavior. I have no response. No, that is not quite true. I am never at a loss for words. I simply have no comeback that won’t earn me double whatever Field has planned for me. I am not willing to go there.

He treats me to a glaring moment and then throws up his hands while he shakes his head in disbelief at my apparently misplaced sense of proportion. “Don’t make me tell you again, missy,” he grits out finally.

And we are, suddenly, to that point where I recognize I have no hope of swaying his opinion or his plans. My only option is related to whether or not I wish to avoid additional punishment.

I have no desire to spend the remainder of the weekend moving from punishment to punishment.

Been there; done that.

Once was enough.

I go.

I do not really need even ten minutes to think through what I might have done differently or to consider what is going to happen next. Fielding gives me twenty, though. I know, because he tells me precisely how long I have been in solitary, once he is ready for me to come out.

I would have estimated it to be the better part of an hour that I have shifted from side to side in pinching high-heeled misery while I start at each sound of a car moving down our street and flinch in fear each time a bird or squirrel or some other curious creature sets my heart pounding that the noise is actually an inquisitive neighbor come calling to borrow a cup of sugar.

Not that any of our neighbors have ever knocked on the door and requested such. Still, it would be just my luck—

I turn carefully when he summons me, praying we will be going upstairs now. I am tempted to let the hem of my shift dip to cover my goose-pimpled flesh as I am forced to turn my best asset fully toward the window. It is an area framed by my simple pink garter belt on my north end, still attached to my sand-colored hose, and the panties in the same shade of pink that I have awkwardly managed to slide down beneath the restraining straps and over my curves and to leave bunched at thigh-top just south of that. One glance at Fielding's narrowed eyes warns me that it would be a mistake to obscure the shameful display in any way.

He waits for me in front of the couch I selected because I could simply envision that it would create the most perfect, tasteful setting possible when viewed through that equally perfect picture window.

It is still perfect. Perfectly awful. And I am quite certain that is how I will always think of it in the future.

Field's sleeve is still rolled up in pristine fashion to the level of his right bicep. In his right hand there is a deceptively small leather-covered implement of punishment whose shape and size calls to mind a ping pong paddle. I am ready to cry, already.

At least his belt is still in place around his waist. At least, I think it is. I glance quickly, to reassure myself, and find it to be so.

Then I remember he is unusually adept at unbuckling it and snapping it out of the loops and managing to catch the trailing end mid-air, looping it over and grasping it in a menacing double-thick leather band of hot pain. He can be ready to take care of belt business in seconds, even when he is in a seated position and I am doing my best to hinder him, across his lap. I know this from bitter, sting-y experience.

He sits, abruptly, legs spread, signaling me that he wants me over his left thigh. The message is unmistakable: this will be a spanking of such unpleasantness that it will require him to secure my trembling legs beneath one of his own, lest I try too hard to escape what I am due and skin an arm or bruise my cheek against an unyielding object in the effort.

Field does not mind if I sacrifice what will feel like a layer of skin or earn a few splotches guaranteed to alter from cherry red to black and yellow and green over the course of the next few days, while they serve as reminders to be on my best behavior. He is just particular about precisely what part of my anatomy is involved. He feels strongly that the Creator knew His business and equipped me perfectly for the lesson he is about to impart. He does not choose to imperil any other portion of my body.

I bend, awkwardly and fully aware that I am more on display than ever before, and try to lower myself quickly but carefully over his well-muscled limb. I am hardly in position before his warm fingers expertly manipulate the clasps on my garter belt, freeing my stockings. This allows him to hitch the stretchy little piece of pink fabric higher on my lower back and then slip those same fingers in the waist band of my panties, caught a bit in the overhang of my full bottom, and skim them, and my nylons, down past my knees. Field does not like to be hindered, once he is committed to getting down to business.

I feel the brush of his trousers against the now bare back of my knees as he makes his first move toward ensuring I will not be making an exit before he gives me permission. I reach back desperately with my right arm, searching for the clasp of his left hand, even though I know it simply makes me compliant with my own punishment. We both know I need that contact, that silent message that even though he is determined to punish me thoroughly, my husband is perfectly in control and perfectly in love and will not let me suffer beyond what I deserve and am able to bear.

Now, we are ready.

“I’m sorry,” I quaver, even before the first clap of his warm palm and fingers registers in my ears and on my bottom. I repeat it many times while it is still only his hard hand I feel signaling his displeasure from quivering cheek to quivering cheek. I do my best to be very still, even willing my aching flesh to refrain from any defensive posturing. I hope he will accept this as evidence of my shame and regret and will call a halt to my punishment.

For a man who is usually so perceptive, he seems to completely misread the signals I am trying to send, however.

I realize, finally, that it is only my own voice pleading sorrow that I hear. Fielding has not begun to lecture me on my sins and shortcomings yet. This is a bad sign. It means we are far from finished.

“Say something,” I beg, eventually, over the crisp, cracking sound of his flesh disciplining mine. I need a signal that he is close to finishing my punishment, but an equally vital signal that he is not close to being finished with us as a couple. Surely he cannot be that angry, I think wildly as his hand continues to create the only noise in the room besides my voice.

And then he stops. His hot palm cups my stinging right cheek, and he speaks.

“Count your blessings, little girl,” he growls. “If I loved you one degree less, I would have put you over my lap right there in the governor’s house this afternoon and paddled your little bottom until you couldn’t sit down to ride home. Literally. I promise you, I would. And everyone there would have felt you were getting exactly what you deserve. Maybe that’s what I should have done, anyway. Maybe publicly shaming you would have cured you of using your mouth in precisely the wrong way, once and for all. Instead, here we are. And I have to find another way to get your attention and make my point.”

I lie very still, my mind leaping back and forth between the horrible possibility my husband has just described and the terrible probability that he intends to make this occasion memorable in some other way. I try to be grateful for what I have been spared, but all I can think of is the awful sting, morphing into tissue-deep ache, that I am already feeling, along with the dread of what else I may have to endure.

“I truly am sorry, Field,” I whisper. “I’ve learned my lesson. I swear. Nothing like that will ever happen again. I will be so careful, I’ll—”

His patient but doubt-filled sigh interrupts me. I feel his body shift a bit. I know he is reaching for the paddle. I tighten every muscle in my body when he lays it against my bottom and then taps it, gently, against my shrinking flesh. I try not to, but I can’t help it. You would do the same thing. I know you would. It is simple self-preservation.

Not that it preserves me from anything. Unfortunately.

Whereas Fielding’s palm has operated in precise fashion, moving from one cheek to the other in an unaltering pattern, his paddling efforts are entirely random. Oh, he carefully distributes equal leathery cracks from crest to crest to begin with, while I grind my teeth and grip his hand with punishing strength and do my best to twist and kick away his efforts — all to no avail.

But then he seems to give full rein to his frustration with me and my ungoverned tongue, and he brings that dreadful paddle down time and time again in the same spot until I begin to shriek. When he finishes that impressive display of punishment power, it is not to draw an end to the whole terrible episode. Oh, no. It is simply to shift me a bit farther over his thigh and to force my legs to bend a little more at the knee so that the under curve of my bottom, that space he loves to pat and stroke with lusty appreciation in happier times, is more accessible.

It is when he allows that terrible paddle to bite so deeply there that I begin to sob and, then, to go limp.

And that is when he stops.

That is when he drops the paddle, gathers me into his arms and rocks me gently while I throw my arms around his broad shoulders and wet his neck with my tears.

That is when he whispers, “Tell me, Amy Lee, are you my good girl? Or are you a work in progress?”

I wish I could respond with complete assurance that I am now quite, quite finished and nothing more is required to speed me on in that progression to perfect womanhood he deserves. But while I am, admittedly, a woman of ungoverned tongue, I am neither a woman self-deceived nor a deceiver.

“I am progressing as best I can,” I tell him, instead, in all honesty and in a broken voice. “Don’t give up on me.”

I could, I know, if he deemed it necessary, go over his lap again right now. Not without protest and not without dread, but I could do it, if I had to. What I cannot do is tame my tongue on my own.

I depend on his love to help me conquer the beast. I have been doing that for years, despite the way I still sometimes fail in the public arena. I cannot imagine the kind of person I would be without his patient, if necessarily unpleasant, efforts on my behalf. I am terrified at the thought.

He does not speak. He simply gathers me in so close I can feel his heart beat, and his fingers gently stroke the flesh he has just subdued in such dramatic fashion.

I realize he is telling me everything I need to hear.

I'm Not Sure

I'm not sure I want a top in my life. But I know, for sure, that I don't want to be without one.

I'm not sure I want to be held accountable for every little thing I do. But I know, for sure, I don't like being unaccountable.

I'm not sure my top is perfect in every situation or that he is incapable of making mistakes, especially where I am concerned. But I know, for sure, he doesn't have to be mistake-free; he just has to be affection-filled. And willing.

I'm not sure I want anyone in my vanilla life to know anything about my spanking life. But I know, for sure, I want to live that life right up to the edge of revelation.

I'm not sure I will always feel the way I do right now. But I know, for sure, the way I feel right now is what I have been looking for most of my life.

I'm not sure if I could ever have the need-a-spanking gene spanked right out of me. But I know, for sure, I've got it and it's dominating me right now.

I'm not sure I am *normal*. But I know, for sure, I'm not *abnormal* all by myself.

I'm not sure I can think of anything naughty enough to do right now that will earn me a spanking without reducing me to behaving like someone I don't really want to be. But I know, for sure, that a spanking is what I need.

Right now.

Just because.

I'm sure.

So, could you please come get me?