

# Marbury Plains

By

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# Chapter 1

Martin Simpson sat down wearily on the sofa on his second floor condominium and began sorting through the day's mail. A quick scan revealed that there were no envelopes likely containing offers for a job interview hiding between the numerous pieces of junk mail.

There were only two envelopes that needed to be opened: his electric bill for the past month, and a statement from the treasurer of the school board informing him of his options in dealing with the retirement funds he had been setting aside from the moment five years previous that the now nearly forty-year-old unemployed man began his duties as the high school principal.

He glanced to his right as his attention was drawn to a blinking light on his answering machine. Although he used his cell phone nearly all the time, he had felt an obligation to have a landline and listed telephone number so that parents and other members of the small Texas community could easily reach him on the evenings and weekends.

With a deep sigh, he scooted over to the end of the sofa and pressed the button on the machine to listen to the recorded message: "Martin... Cecilia Youngblood here. I understand that you are looking for a new position, and I have something that you may be interested in."

He had not heard from Cecilia in several years. She was the much older sister of a high school friend who had been a teacher in a neighboring school district. When Martin had needed some tutoring in algebra, it was Cecelia who had worked with him and helped to spark his interest in becoming an educator. But as soon as she had earned her PhD in education, she had left the area to assume a position at a small college in West Texas, and there had not been any communication of substance between them until now.

It was the middle of the morning on an early August Saturday, and Martin knew that the call had to arrive while he had been out for a walk through his neighborhood. Walking was his way of thinking through problems, and he certainly had a major

problem to work through. He took a deep breath, pulled out his cell phone and punched in the number displayed on the answering machine.

“Martin, I’m so happy you called me back so quickly. How are you?”

Martin laughed. “For having been let go from a job I really liked, I’m getting by I suppose.”

“Well, Martin, I suppose that the controversy was in the papers, even over here in Marbury.”

“Marbury? I thought you were still working at the college.”

Cecilia laughed. “If I had stayed at the college, I would have had fewer headaches and less stress. But I left there three years ago, and now I’m the superintendent at Marbury Plains Prep.”

Martin hesitated for a moment. “I’ve heard of that in passing. A special school…”

“Actually, we call it a post high school transitional program.”

“For young people with problems?”

Cecilia laughed once more. “Actually, it’s much more complicated than that. We have nearly a hundred and fifty young women aged eighteen through twenty-one. They are special cases. All of them come from wealthy families, and we make no apologies for the tuition and room and board being as expensive as a small private college. But these are for the young women whose parents are not willing to pay for a college education until they spend a year or two getting their study habits, and most of all, their attitudes in order. And that leads to why I called you, Martin.”

“I really don’t understand, Cecilia, but you have me intrigued.”

“I know, from the newspaper accounts and from talking to my brother, that your contract was not renewed because of all of the parental complaints that you were too strict. Too quick to give detention, too quick to assign Saturday school, too quick to suspend.”

Martin laughed. “I thought I was doing the kids a favor. But the school board and the superintendent just wilted under the constant complaints. But between us, Cecilia, if I had my way, some of those young hooligans would have experienced what your brother and I received a couple of times.”

Cecilia began to giggle. “Mac told me all about that. In fact, it happened to me one time. But if it was necessary, would you be willing to use corporal punishment?”

Martin sighed so loudly Cecilia could hear him through the phone. “Yes... I suppose that I could. I take it you know of a job opening at a school where that would be expected?”

“Martin, I have need of a principal here at Marbury. I had a very wonderful principal, but she injured her back in a fall from a ladder while painting her living room. She was already eligible to retire, so I lost her.

“You see, Martin, I need someone who can be a firm disciplinarian, and that includes not being hesitant to make use of the paddle. Our school has a special purpose for the families who pay a small fortune to send young women here. And that discipline is an important part of the program.”

Martin laughed nervously. “It’s true that your brother and I got the paddle, but these are young women.”

“And the paddle’s target may be wider and more plump, but the mechanical principles of the act are the same.”

“And that’s part of the conditions of going to the school there?”

“The young women sign a contract when they are enrolled. The contract includes an agreement to accept corporal punishment. They have to be at least eighteen to enroll, and they understand that as adults they can leave the school at any time. They sign several waivers, one of which is very detailed regarding the use of corporal punishment.

“It’s their decision. Of course, they have to deal with the parents who are writing the checks. And if they change their minds at any time and decide that they are not willing to be paddled for an infraction, they are free to pack up and leave the school. Simple as that.”

“Aside from discipline, the duties of the principal would be the usual responsibilities?”

“I’m going to send you an email. Take a look at everything and get back with me.”

Two hours later, Martin paced the floor of his condominium living room, rereading the pages of the email he had printed out. He would have to move from a community that he liked to a town two hours away that he had never set foot in.

At the same time, the opportunity was more than he had expected. Not only was the salary going to be substantially higher than he had been earning, but the prep school also provided use of a large apartment across the street from the campus. He had looked over the website of the school, and was impressed with the images of the facilities. The school was only five years old, so the administrative offices, the classrooms and the dormitories were modern and inviting.

As an educator, he could not help but find the concept of the school to be quite interesting. Although the formation and founding of the school had been met by protests by women's rights groups and failed legal challenges, it was found that young women who had completed one or two years at Marbury had gone on to excel at college. Those needing remedial studies had them provided, and the rest of the courses prepared them well to the extent that most of them found their freshman and sophomore years to be much less challenging than what would have been the case otherwise.

The offer was on the table. Cecilia had added in her email that the Marbury Board of Directors had granted her total discretion in hiring staff, and she had already taken the liberty to talk to some old acquaintances who knew Martin quite well, including the job he had done at the high school. Many felt that he had been just what their community needed, and were sorry to see him leave.

Martin looked at the email once more. Nothing was going to erase the sadness of leaving his home community. He had grown up there and been a star basketball player and one of the most popular students. But he took a deep breath and pulled the cell phone from his pocket.

His call to Cecilia was brief. They scheduled a time for him to pay an initial visit to the campus on the Tuesday of the following week, and then he would move to Marbury as soon as possible to begin getting acquainted with the campus before the students began to arrive in just a few days. The call concluded, he closed his eyes and shook his head as he shoved the phone back in his pocket, wondering what he had gotten himself into.

Feeling tense, he decided that he was once again in need of some physical activity. At the same time, he knew that simply going for a walk would not be sufficient to help him work out the anxiety he was feeling.

He went into his bedroom where his set of weights and bench press table were arranged next to his elliptical machine in the crowded space. He changed into his exercise clothes and hopped on the elliptical.

He punched in settings for a high exertion workout. As his legs pumped down on the pedals and the beads of perspiration started to form on his forehead, he began to fully appreciate the opportunity he had just accepted.

At the age of thirty-six, he was going to be experiencing a significant increase in income. He would no longer be in a public school system, but he had never had any intentions of retiring before the age of seventy in any case. He loved education too much to leave it. But now he was going to be practicing his vocation in a radically different setting.

He also knew that leaving his home community was going to open up other opportunities as well. The small town atmosphere he had never left except for his college days seemed at times to smother him. It was nice to walk down the street and know so many people. It also meant that everyone knew everyone else's business.

Moving to Marbury meant moving to a place where he would know absolutely no one except for Cecilia. It also meant that he would have an opportunity to establish a relationship with a woman without the feeling that familiar eyes were always upon him. And now he would be dealing with students who were in school under totally different circumstances, and whose parents expected him to hold their offspring accountable, something for which he had a talent, but also something that had cost him his job.

He spent forty minutes on the machine, exhausting himself after having set the elliptical at such a strenuous workout level. He stepped off the machine, then decided that it was time for him to take the shower he had postponed that morning in anticipation of a good exercise session.

He pulled his tee shirt over his head, and as he glanced in the full-length mirror on the back of his bedroom door, he was satisfied to see that his torso still appeared to be firm and tight. In fact, as he ran his fingers through his somewhat unruly brown hair, he



realized that he looked much the same as he had when he had led his team in scoring in his senior year as a six foot tall point guard on the basketball team that went far into the state tournament.

He walked through the door to the bathroom and stepped into the shower. As the water streamed over him, he began a mental checklist of all the things that he had to do, and rather quickly. He would have to get in touch with the owner of the condo he had lived in for four years, and then arrange to have a mover transport his belongings to Marbury. In his mind he ticked off a list of family and friends who would have to be notified of his move, the utilities to be canceled and the need to have his address changed at the Post Office.

Unable to think of anything else he had to do before he left, he began thinking of what awaited him. Being a principal was nothing new to him, but at Marbury his students would all be young, female adults. He would be expected to teach them that their behavior and poor attitudes would result in consequences. And then suddenly his mind recalled his own experiences of feeling the paddle, and as he tried to visualize himself picking up a paddle and applying it to the bottom of a young woman, he slowly tapped his head against the wall of the shower.

\* \* \*

As Martin drove his Chevy Impala into the main drive of the Marbury Plains Preparatory School, he was feeling both tired and excited. He had accomplished much over the course of just a few days, making a fast move to his new home so that he would be able to spend more time getting acquainted with the campus and those staff members already on hand preparing for the new school year.

All of his belongings had been carried into his new apartment that morning, giving him just enough time to find his sport coat and tie to be presentable for his meeting with Cecilia in the middle of the afternoon. Right on time, he arrived at the small administrative building just as Cecilia was nearing the front door.

She stood outside and waited for him, then embraced him in a hug. “Martin, I can’t remember how many years it’s been. And thank you so much for agreeing to come to work for us.”

Martin opened the door for the attractive woman in her mid-50s, her hair silver beyond her actual age. “And I can’t thank you enough, Cecilia, for taking a chance on me.”

Inside, they turned into a hallway and Cecelia opened the first door. They stepped into an elegantly furnished but small lobby, and then he followed Cecelia through yet another door. There they saw a large oak desk and padded leather arm chairs. But they were also greeted by a young woman wearing what appeared to be the school uniform Martin had seen in images on the Marbury website.

The young woman was quite attractive, tall and with long blonde hair. Martin could not help but appreciate how fetching she looked in the short yellow pleated skirt and white blazer over a light blue button-down blouse.

Cecilia gestured toward the young woman who stood silently and respectfully waiting to be introduced. “This is Kathy Montgomery, a former student who went on to college to receive her business degree, but returned to Marbury to serve as a Residential Assistant in the Prairie Dormitory. Kathy, this is Dr. Simpson, our new principal.”

Martin reached out his hand as the young woman did the same. “Nice to meet you, Ms. Montgomery.”

The young woman smiled widely. “And it’s a pleasure to meet you, Dr. Simpson.”

Cecilia gestured toward the two chairs that rested across from the large high-backed matching chair where she sat down. “I asked Kathy to be here, as she is in charge of supervising the other two Residential Assistants in the other two dormitories, as well as looking after her own building. It is Kathy with whom you will work closely in regard to what is going on within the dormitories. Of course, no males are allowed in the dormitories, with the exception of maintenance staff. But Kathy here will keep you up-to-date.”

They settled in as Cecilia spoke at length about the school, expectations of students and staff and the general guidelines governing student department. Martin could not help but notice that when she would make reference to various offenses that would result in discipline, Kathy would nod and her face would turn pink.

After nearly an hour of conversation and questions and answers, Cecilia turned to Kathy. “Kathy, please feel free to add anything that Dr. Simpson may find useful.”

Kathy nodded in appreciation, then allowed a smile to crease her face. “Well, Dr. Simpson, I suppose that you understand that you are going to be the first male principal at Marbury. About a quarter of the women here are second-year students. Either they or their parents decided that another year here at Marbury would be good for them. It will be more of an adjustment for them than the new students coming in. But be prepared. I wouldn’t put it past some of them to try to manipulate you with a flutter of an eyelash or the casual hike of a hemline.”

Cecilia began to laugh. “Now, Kathy, I can’t imagine that you would have ever employed such tactics.”

Kathy began to laugh. “Well, since we had Mrs. Beatty for our principal, I can’t relate to that scenario. However, I will confess that when I arrived at Marbury, I was quite a handful.”

Sicilia placed her hand on Kathy’s elbow. “Kathy, I don’t believe that Dr. Simpson has any idea about how you have changed.” She glanced back toward Martin. “When Kathy arrived as an eighteen-year-old, she was Miss Bad Attitude. Mrs. Beatty had a couple of talks with her before she resorted to the paddle.”

Kathy nodded and looked down. “It’s very ironic, because Mrs. Beatty and I worked together last year, and we became good friends. Now we even go shopping and go out to lunch together. In fact, now that she is back home after her fall, I’m taking her dinner this evening and were going to watch a movie together.”

Cecilia smiled and began to laugh. “But years ago, Kathy here came with a real chip on her shoulder. And Mrs. Beatty knew that she would have to do some high-powered attitude adjustment with our young friend here. Kathy, why don’t you tell Dr. Simpson about the very memorable paddling you received?”

Kathy’s face turned dark pink as she smiled and began. “I got caught in a lie about having wine in my dorm room, and Mrs. Beatty did not at all fall for my feigned plea of innocence.”

Martin arched his eyebrow and laughed. “So, Ms. Montgomery, how much trouble were you in?”

Kathy held up her hands. “Oh, it went beyond just that. When I had to report to Mrs. Beatty about the wine, she had me sit down, because she also wanted to talk to me about a report she had gotten from my English instructor earlier that day.

“I had gotten angry over her comments about a paper I had written, and I called her a bitch in front of the whole class, and she told me to leave the room and come back the next day with a better attitude.

“Of course, I knew that I was supposed to report to Mrs. Beatty that afternoon, so I was just angry in general. And when Mrs. Beatty asked me if I had apologized to the instructor, I told her that I still thought that she was a bitch.”

Kathy’s face turned pink. “Well, Mrs. Beatty’s face just kind of froze in surprise. She knew that I knew I was going to get the paddle anyway. I was just thinking I was going to get my money’s worth.

“However, she got up and left the office, and a couple of minutes later she came back with this tall, distinguished older gentleman in this expensive-looking black suit, silk tie and everything. She tells me to stand up, and she says, ‘Kathy, I want you to meet Mr. Baldwin. He is the Chairman of our Board of Directors. He is here for a visit, so I have asked him to witness your paddling.’ ”

Kathy shook her head and laughed. “That was when I felt my heart begin to race and my entire body felt cold and clammy. Suddenly, I was terrified and embarrassed, but I didn’t know it was going to get much worse.

“She went to the wall behind her desk and took down the paddle, and I just wanted to crawl into a hole, thinking about how I was going to have this handsome, older gentleman watch me bend over the table in this little yellow skirt and get the spanking of my lifetime.

“Then she told me to bend over the desk, and I did, feeling humiliated as I did it. Now, I had read that very detailed waiver about corporal punishment when I had been admitted, but some things you really don’t think are going to happen to you. To my total shock, she picked up my skirt and tossed it up onto my back. I just could not believe that had happened. In fact, I was so in shock from the embarrassment of my skirt being moved away, I don’t think it really registered to me that the purpose of that, first and foremost, was to make my paddling hurt even more.

“And then she began the paddling. She had whacked me six times, and then I burst out crying. And then she gave me three more whacks, and they were even harder. I think I behaved myself from that day on.”

Kathy leaned slightly toward Martin. “Dr. Simpson, when we got paddled by Mrs. Beatty, We. Really. Got. Paddled. Very few students ever had to go back for another helping. The few who did, regretted it very badly and spent the rest of the day standing during their classes or the evening meal. I need for you to carry on that expectation, or else what I tell the girls in the dormitories will have much less meaning and authority behind it.”

Now it was Martin’s face that was turning pink, although he nodded slowly. “That will be a new experience for me, but I’ll do my best. I’m certain that the first time I will have to put aside all my father’s admonitions from my childhood telling me to never hit a girl.”

Cecilia began to laugh. “Now, Martin – Dr. Simpson, I should say – I just want to repeat what I told you the other day: the paddle’s target on a female is simply wider and more generously padded.”

Martin leaned his head back and closed his eyes as he laughed. “I don’t think that I’m going to find it quite that routine at the beginning.”

Cecilia nodded. “I understand. In fact, I don’t think that I would want you taking such a thing lightly. I understand that it’s a difficult, and from your perspective, unusual thing to have to do. But as you told me on the phone, your strict discipline at your high school was for the benefit of your students. I know that it did not include corporal punishment, but the intent was the same: guide a young person to accept responsibility for one’s own deeds and words.”

Cecilia cleared her throat. “Now I need to share some bad news. The woman who was secretary to the principal for the past two years had to suddenly move away. Her husband got transferred to Chicago, and she called me last night.

“You and I may be sharing a secretary for a few days. However, I could go ahead and hire a secretary for you, unless you would rather wait and pick out someone yourself.”

Martin thought for a moment. “Do you have anyone in mind?”

Cecilia nodded. “There’s a fine secretary working in the local public school that I have known for three or four years from our volunteer work at the public library. She has an excellent reputation, and she told me last year that she would love to work here.”

Martin folded his hands and nodded slowly. “Sounds fine to me.”

Cecilia stood, and then Martin and Kathy did so as well. Cecilia put her hand out to Martin. “Welcome aboard. Why don’t you go ahead and check out your office, then make me a list of anything you need. I’m going to speak with Kathy about a few things.”

They shook hands, then he turned to Kathy and they exchanged pleasantries before he left Cecilia’s office to become familiar with his own just several feet away down the hall. Cecilia and Kathy watched as he left, then both sat down once again.

Cecilia took a deep breath and smiled with an expression of satisfaction. “So, Kathy, how do you think the girls will react to him?”

Kathy laughed and shook her head. “I was serious about what I said. A guy like that is going to be flirted with a lot.”

“I agree, Kathy. Just how big a problem do you think that will be?”

Kathy leaned forward and rested her elbows on her knees. “It will be a problem until there are a couple of backsides visibly red on display in the shower room.” Kathy began to laugh. “That will make most of the girls think twice about crossing him. And here and there will be one or two who will then get in trouble on purpose once they get a good look at him.”

Cecilia rested her chin on her folded hands. “His reputation for being strict is unquestioned. That’s why he became available to us. But this is going to be a big adjustment for him. He has never used a paddle on another person. Now he’s going to be having young adult women bend over the desk in front of him wearing those little uniform skirts.”

Kathy began to laugh and patted her own thigh. “To tell you the truth, I always thought these little skirts were pretty hot. But I understand what you’re saying. He may get cold feet the first time he has to paddle somebody.”

Kathy tapped her index finger against her lips and looked up as if she had just come up with a brilliant idea. “Maybe... I should just have him practice... on me.”

Cecilia leaned toward her and glowered. “Katherine... Jennifer... Montgomery!”