

Make Me

By

Carolyn Faulkner

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# Chapter 1

“If I catch you doing that again, I’m going to spank you,” came the deep, soft warning.

Whoa. Where did *that* come from, she wondered, sneaking a look at him as she closed the door behind her. He’d already gone back to work, of course, the bastard, dismissing her from his mind as he dismissed everything else when he was working on a problem he found particularly intriguing.

His comment, as offhand as it seemed at the time, had her furiously raking through her memories as she tried to casually get on with her work. Had she ever – *ever, ever, ever* – mentioned anything about her interest in spanking to him?

Ever?

No, she reassured herself after what was a nerve wracking and exhaustive search of her memories. She hadn’t.

But then why had he said that? He’d never said anything even remotely like that to her before. Nothing even slightly sexual – and her mind was in the gutter enough that she could find innuendo and double entendre *everywhere*. The man was a eunuch, verbally and otherwise, as far as she could tell. Jodi had gotten used to thinking of him that way over the seven years they’d been together, since she’d never seen any evidence of him having a lover or even a girlfriend – *or* a boyfriend, for that matter. Hell, she didn’t even think he had so much as a friend in the world beyond her, and she wasn’t at all sure that she qualified, either. It wasn’t as if they went out for drinks every Friday night together to discuss the week or talked to each other on their off time, or exchanged Christmas presents (she always bought him one and he never had one for her – birthdays, too, so it was far from an exchange. He always looked uncomfortable when she gave him his gift, which was one of the reasons she continued to do it. She could be a bit perverse sometimes, given the chance).

Not that he’d never contacted her on the weekend or during her vacation or in the middle of the night – whenever he felt he needed her – but it was always strictly work related like everything else about the man – he couldn’t find where she’d put a file or wondered about a note she’d made on a project he was working on. But beyond the perfunctorily offered “Hello” at the start of the conversation – which he sometimes forgot – there was nothing even remotely social

about their conversations.

Any of them.

And, when he called her, he never said goodbye. Once he'd gotten whatever he needed from her – always just information, of course – she simply found herself talking to a dead phone.

But this weekend he'd arrived on her doorstep at what she considered to be the middle of the night – nearly eleven thirty. She was up, which was a hit or miss thing on the weekends, but this time she had a friend visiting. They were in the middle of their usual fun, eating only things they would never normally allow themselves and making serious headway on a pumpkin cheesecake as well as a vat of French Onion dip and a huge bag of Cheetos.

Jodi had jumped at the sound at the door, which had Karen, a friend who had known her since they were both in diapers together, who knew where all of her skeletons were buried, dissolving into a fit of giggles, so much so that, if she hadn't been already sitting on the floor in front of Jodi's sofa, she would have fallen flat on her face.

"Watch yourself!" she warned her friend crossly as she got up to answer the door, her mind half full of vitriol at the asshole who was here so late, and half preoccupied by Karen, who had one of her prized possessions in her less than reliable hand and she didn't fancy having to mop up after the murder she was going to commit if that girl broke one of her best martini glasses. "*Don't* fall over!"

She knew she was pissing in the wind, though. Karen was much too far gone, and Jodi wasn't that far behind her.

"Aw, I didn't know you – you – you *cared!*" the other woman pronounced with dramatic enthusiasm.

"I don't – not about you, anyway. But I know you can't afford to replace the Waterford crystal glass that's in your hand, so don't break it or I'll have to kill you."

"You're cold!" came the snorted protest from behind her as she opened the door.

Speaking of cold... it was her boss, looking luscious as ever as he waited impatiently. She would bet he'd been tapping one of those expensive snakeskin booted, enormous feet of his and just the sight of him was enough to sober her up – a bit, anyway.

But his shoes had distracted her wandering mind. Hmm. What was it they said about the size of a man's feet?

"Get a hold of yourself, girl," Jodi murmured to herself, trying to become instantly sober

with little success. She couldn't think – from experience – that being out of control around Cayson MacGruder would be a very smart idea. “Boss, what are you doing here?”

He had been leaning against the doorframe, but he straightened immediately. “You didn't ask who it was before you opened the door. I could have been anyone!” he said, trying to brush past her, but Jodi wasn't having it, although she knew that the only reason he actually stopped when she tried to block him was because she'd caught him off guard by trying to do so.

“What do you want?” She took a sip of her third – or was that fourth – gin and tonic. She'd lost count. She only knew that she was feeling much too good to let him get to her. She was off duty, with a capital OFF, and whatever it was, it could wait until Monday morning.

He had been crowding her – even after she'd put her body between him and the rest of the apartment – but then he abruptly took a step back and she heard him take a deep breath.

The man had a nose like a friggin' bloodhound, damn him.

Oh shit, she was busted!

Jodi could almost feel him touching her as his gaze took in everything about her – how messy her hair was instead of being swept back into her usual bun or pony tail, her red eyes, the remnants of the manicure that Karen had tried to give her that had resulted in her having most of three nails done on her right hand – along with splotches of Midnight Desire pink on her wrist, elbow and, somehow, ankle – the one with the martini glass and none on the left. She was dressed for comfort – and bed, too, frankly, because after one of these binges they both just fell into their respective beds, which, considering the size of her apartment were only a few feet away – in a short pink tee-shirt nightgown with kittens on it that she wore like an undershirt even though it hung much further down over what should have been a matched top and bottom pajama set, but somehow only the top of one and the bottom of the other had gotten washed, so she was, essentially wearing three different sets of pajamas.

She was sure she looked quite the picture, not that she cared. If he was going to arrive on her doorstep unannounced at all hours of the night, he was going to have to take what he got, said the gin and tonics.

If she had been sober, she would probably have been flipping out. But she was leagues away from that, and in a mood to tell him off, unfortunately.

“I need to know where you put the file on the Anderson project. I've just had a breakthrough and I can't find it anywhere.”

“I don’t know. Ask me again Monday morning.” She tried to shut the door, but someone deliberately stomped their big snakeskin booted foot down in the way.

“I’m asking you *now*.”

That no nonsense tone of his was a warning, but not one she was in any condition to heed.

“I said ask me Monday!” she practically wailed, still trying to close the door.

“I suggest you devote yourself to helping me right now, Jodi.” His words were no less of a threat in that they were delivered in a deep whisper meant only for her ears.

“But *why*?” she asked, not bothering to keep the petulance out of her voice as she dragged out the last word.

“Because one of the things I’m smelling besides the Ralph Lauren’s Romance you prefer is weed. And, if I remember correctly – and you know I do – recreational marijuana isn’t legal here in California, is it?”

Jodi glared up at him - and it was a damned long way, too. “You wouldn’t!”

Lips that had been in a grim line shifted into an almost imperceptible smile as he raised an eyebrow and continued to gaze benignly down at her in a manner that was patently false. “You know what a stickler I am for law and order.”

Yeah, when it was convenient for him to be, anyway.

The man was about as benign as a scorpion when he was crossed, or even just when someone stood in the way of something he wanted.

She’d seen that look before. Like a hawk staring down his next meal. She let go of the door and gave him her back, flouncing into the living room. “You’re an asshole, Cayson.”

“We agreed on that the day I hired you, didn’t we? Why do you keep rehashing what’s already been settled?”

“Because you’re still an asshole!” she growled.

He tilted his head a bit with that annoying almost smile of his. “And yet you still work for me. What does that say about you?”

“That I’m full blown crazy, that’s what.” She already had her work computer out and booting, slumping into one of the chairs around her dining room – such as it was – table before entering her password and turning the thing over to him.

“And completely unaware of your own safety, apparently, opening the door without

asking who it was first. And an illegal drug user. And half—" he looked her in the eye while she wished he wouldn't "—more than half in the bag."

"I'm at home, in my own house—"

"No need to be redundant."

"And I'll snort, shoot, drink, smoke, or squeeze into my navel anything I damned well please!"

For once, Cayson didn't reply. It was a rare occasion indeed, but he'd become involved with whatever was on the screen.

Karen chose to use the tense silence to wave at Cayson, whose back was mostly to her. "Hi, Cayson, I'm Karen. We've met before, briefly."

Karen had the hots for her boss, the idiot.

What was she saying? She had them too. But at least she had the good sense not to broadcast the idea. She might be attracted to him, but she had no interest in beating her head against that particular immovable, thoroughly annoying object.

Jodi watched him as surreptitiously as she could, not that he'd notice if she blew in his ear and cupped his genitals, she'd bet. When he was onto something, when he was close to solving a problem he'd run into, he became even more oblivious than he usually was.

But on most occasions, the heartthrob sitting near to her noticed everything – detail was his life – and it wouldn't do at all for him to notice her looking at him.

She didn't really know what it was about him that she liked. She'd always been attracted to quirky and/or difficult people, and he was the quirkiest as well as the most difficult person she'd ever met. He was smart – almost too smart – with a single-minded intensity that could be frightening if trained on a person. His work was dry as all get out as far as she was concerned – something to do with computers and code and security that was above her head and well out of her interest zone. She was very happy simply to be his admin, and was ridiculously well paid to do so.

So much so that she really shouldn't have given him a hard time about him wanting that file. He paid her so well she should really be willing to do almost anything for him at that pay rate. No one else was going to match her salary for a gal Friday.

He wasn't even her type physically though, except that he was tall. He was on the thinnish side whereas she favored bulk in her men, broad, muscular – but not grossly so –

shoulders, trim waist and tight buns had her drooling.

Well, he had the tight buns part, she had to give him that. And tall and thin did not mean weak, she knew from personal experience. He was much stronger than he looked; especially considering he sat at a desk all day – and all night – and all day again ad nauseam, and was more than able to handle whatever was thrown at him physically or mentally.

Some of what he did involved the government, and there was no small amount of risk occasionally, depending on what project he was working on. She knew he had a government Top Secret clearance, and she had had to get one too, since she had access to all of his work.

Someone from the other side – she never did really know who from where – had attacked him in the parking lot not long ago. She had been at her car and had seen it happen. She had the 9 and the 1 already punched in as she hit the alarm button on the remote for her car, and then began running towards him. She hadn't been sure just what it was that she could have done for him, but she wanted to be there to help in any way possible.

Which wasn't any way at all, unfortunately. He'd executed some kind of martial arts moves in expert, fluid motions that reduced his opponent – who was about two of him easily – to a whimpering heap in a frighteningly short amount of time.

As she got nearer to him, she wondered where the gun he was pointing at the other man's head had come from. She'd never seen any evidence of any kind of weapon in the office, and she'd never seen him wearing one – not that she'd ever gotten close enough to frisk him, though, of course.

She'd wanted to finish her 911 call, but he had told her not to. He was already on the phone to someone else, even before she'd agreed to stand down. Jodi had waited for him to finish his call, then said, "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine. You go on home. I'll take care of this."

He'd never mentioned the incident again, which led her not to, either.

But she did feel safer on the job than she had before, knowing how well trained he was in self defense, and figuring that he'd extend that protection to her, if it came down to it.

Probably. It was kind of hard to tell with him. She didn't think he liked her much, and was still surprised he kept her around.

"Jodi!"

Demanding. He was annoyingly demanding, too, she thought as he rudely broke into her

thoughts.

“I don’t know where you are, but you need to be here, with me and find me that file!”

“Don’t worry. I just saw it. I misfiled it.”

“No, really?”

Was sarcasm an emotion? If so, he was very emotional. Otherwise, not so much. Like, not *at all*.

“Okay, I found it. Will that get you out of my apartment on my day off?”

That got her a glare that she ignored. “Yes, but this is very sensitive information that doesn’t belong on your computer. I’m going to copy it onto my jump drive and wipe any evidence of it ever having been there, or the NSA will come knocking at your door.”

“Thank you, I think.”

He stood and crossed to the door with her trailing after him like a little girl after her father. “Next time call before you come over!”

When Cayson was quiet and not working on something, it wasn’t usually a good thing. He reached into his pocket and brought out his phone, showing her his recent outbound calls. All of them were to her number. “I’ve been trying to call you. Twelve calls in the last hour.”

Jodi’s eyebrow rose as she frowned and tried not to feel guilty. She was surprised the number was so small, really.

“Forty-two texts.”

Now that was more like what she expected.

She couldn’t stop herself from blushing although she knew she had no reason to. “We turn our phones off when we have a girl’s night.”

“Lovely. I’m sure the security of the country will wait until you two have finished blazing up, drinking Beefeater gin and tonics with way too much lime, eating Cheetos and painting each other’s nails.” He licked his thumb then rubbed it on the corner of her mouth, showing her the neon orange cheese dust she was wearing for all to see.

“Goodbye, Cayson.”

He didn’t bother to say goodbye back.

He never did.

That next day, once the scare about whether or not he’d somehow discovered her interest in spanking had eased, her anger came to the forefront. He could tell her what to do while she

was working in his office, but what she did on her off hours was of no concern to him. None – illegal or not. He wasn't the police. He had no input about her behavior at home whatsoever, and she intended to tell him just that.

She didn't bother to knock, just burst into the room with much more drama than she had intended, the door banging back against the wall until she'd wrangled it shut behind her.

He was working, staring intently at the computer screen and probably hadn't even heard the commotion. He was notoriously hard to reach when he was problem solving, trying to identify a virus or a recalcitrant line of code.

“Cayson.”

Nothing. Not even so much as a flicker of his eyes as they stared blindly at the screen.

“Cayson!” Louder, more demanding.

Still nothing.

She was of a mind to go over there and unplug his computer, but he'd probably kill her for that. Besides, she knew he had a battery backup installed in case they were hit by a brownout. So instead, she grabbed a magazine – one of the ones she insisted he leave out on the coffee table for clients – not that any really visited them, but still. It happened to be a celebrity magazine with a picture of an outrageous female singer on the cover.

Jodi grabbed it and held it in front of his face.

“Son of a – what the hell is that?” he bellowed, jerking back in surprise.

“Lady Gaga in her meat dress.”

“No, that is a horror. An abomination. And why are you showing it to me when I have so much work to do?” He turned his chair towards her, reluctantly at first, but then with more intent, training those laser green eyes on her.

All of that focused attention settled on her like a hand – his hand – heavy, calculating and unrelenting – and she began to reconsider the intelligence of confronting him like this.

But it was much too late.

He glared at her expectantly, the fingers of his left hand drumming on the edge of his desk impatiently. “What?”

She didn't know why she was so nervous all of a sudden. She never really had been with him, even in the beginning. She'd always known instinctively how to handle him, and had rarely put a foot wrong about it.

But now, something was different. There was an unfamiliar and unsettling element to how he watched her, and she knew it had to do with his earlier threat.

He was aware of her as more than just an extension of himself now, more than just the person that made sure his lights didn't get shut off and that his mother got a lovely present on Mothers' Day as well as her birthday and that he had coffee – strong, hot and black – available at all times.

And then it hit her.

He was looking at her like a man looked at a woman he wanted, and she wasn't sure she was at all prepared for that.

Jodi shook her head and closed her eyes, trying to clear the apprehension from her brain so that she could speak clearly. "About the threat you made earlier –"

"It's not a threat; it's a promise," he interrupted.

Jodi ignored him. "You're not my father or my brother or my boyfriend – and even if you were, you wouldn't have the right to sp—" She knew her face was bright red, so she decided not to use that word. It had too much power, at least for her. "To do that to me. What I do on my own time is my own business – legal or illegal."

He opened his mouth to say something, but she shut him down cold. "No. *I'm* speaking now."

Both sable eyebrows rose so far they practically disappeared into his hairline, but his lips closed slowly without him saying a word and that only served to embolden her. Jodi moved closer to him, so that she was inches from standing between his knees, daring to shake her finger at him as if he was a recalcitrant schoolboy.

"I don't appreciate the implicit *threat* you made last night, nor the explicit one you made this morning. As I said, you're in no position to say anything about what I do when I'm not in this office – Oh!"

Reading about being put over someone's lap and it actually happening to you were two very different things, she discovered abruptly.