Report for Punishment

By

Sue Lyndon

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Chapter 1

Why was he here?

I groaned and stared at the black SUV, nerves tightened my stomach. It had to be him. Craig. I racked my brain and couldn't come up with anyone else who might have Ohio license plates. Maybe I shouldn't go inside.

No, don't be a coward, I thought. I lifted my chin and glared at the front door, decorated with sparkling white lights wrapped around a massive fake wreath. The same wreath my mother stuck on the door year after year. Sighing, I headed up the walkway, my heels clicking on the stone. A gust of wind pierced through my jacket, and I shivered and walked faster. My heart thrummed in my chest and I peered over my shoulder, once again eyeing the SUV.

Craig was my older brother's best friend and unfortunately, my childhood crush. The last time I'd seen him had been in high school. He'd been in college, and while he was back in town for a weekend, I'd shyly asked him to the prom.

The fucking prom. It had been so stupid. He'd said no. Of course he'd said no. Why would a college senior want to go the prom, anyway? The memory of rejection burned my cheeks, and I paused with my hand on the doorknob.

It had been years ago. I did the math in my head and smirked at the glimmering snowman in the center of the wreath. Six years. Six years since I'd seen Craig. Maybe he'd forgotten the whole thing. I could only hope. After so many years, I felt silly for still caring and ruminating over his polite decline of my invitation. Asking him had been a shot in the dark in the first place.

Taking a deep, calming breath, I put on a smile and opened the door.

"Sarah! You made it!" My mother rushed at me with open arms. I kicked the door closed just in time for her attack.

"Nice to see you too, Mom," I said as I shrugged off my jacket. She grabbed it and hung it on the coatrack. As she led me toward the kitchen, chatting a mile a minute about all the new holiday recipes she'd tried this year, I smiled and greeted the neighbors,

too many relatives to count, and of course my big brother, Harry, who winked at me and raised his eggnog high in the air.

No sign of Craig yet.

Good.

Maybe one of my cousins had moved to Ohio and I just didn't know it yet.

We rounded a corner and paused. A man was blocking our path. A devastatingly handsome man, in fact. The air left my lungs as recognition surfaced.

Craig.

Though my insides quaked and rolled, I managed a perfect smile. A degree in theatre performance didn't come without its perks.

"Hi, Craig. Merry Christmas," I said.

His blue eyes flickered a shade darker, and I forgot how to breathe as he stared down at me. All conversation around us faded into an indecipherable hum.

"Hello, Sarah Jane," he finally said, reaching for my hand.

A handshake. He was shaking my hand like I was some old acquaintance. Except he'd called me by my childhood name, and no one called me Sarah Jane anymore. Not even Mom or Harry. I'd broken them of the habit long ago. My feathers ruffled over the cool handshake coupled with the familiarity of my childhood name on his lips, I clasped his hand and shook my head. "It's just Sarah now," I said.

His smile faded and he appeared thoughtful. He still hadn't released my hand, and when I tried to tug it back his grip only tightened. My heart skipped a beat, and suddenly I was back in high school, lusting over the older college guy who wanted nothing to do with me. Sadness squeezed my heart.

"I'll let you two catch up," Mom said, patting my arm. "Come to the kitchen in a bit, will you, Sarah? You look like you could use some eggnog."

"Uh, sure, Mom," I said, still maintaining Craig's gaze. Anger chased some of the sadness away. If he didn't release my hand soon, things were going to get physical, and not in the sweaty, kinky way I used to daydream about when it came to Craig.

"So Harry tells me you're an actress now. I think that's great."

"Uh, yeah. Part-time actress, part-time waitress."

We moved to the side as a few people passed us, and the hallway soon became

cramped. He seized the opportunity to drag me forward a few paces and into the laundry room. The speed with which he opened and closed the door had my heart racing.

"Craig, I don't think..."

A finger pressed to my lips stilled my speech. His eyes darkened further and I couldn't look away. Six years. How could my silly girlish feelings return just like that? I chastised myself for being too busy with work to date. If I'd brought a man home with me for the holidays, I bet I wouldn't be closed in the laundry room with Mr. Heartbreaker.

He dropped his hand and I opened my mouth again to protest, but a raised eyebrow kept me silent. He looked stern, and that didn't help kill my crush either. I liked stern. Not that there was any way he could know that...

"My parents moved away two years ago," he said.

I raised an eyebrow at him, mimicking his expression. "And?"

"I've missed this little town. Your brother invited me to spend the holidays here. I tried to get a hotel room, but they were all booked, so I took him up on the offer."

I wasn't sure where he was going with this, but I was certain I wouldn't like it. Beneath his stern visage, I detected a hint of guilt.

"So your mom put me up in your old bedroom. She said you'd be staying at your dad's house like you always did during the holidays, always the good daughter something something, she said, and that you wouldn't mind."

My eyes grew wide, and I tried to step back. "What? But it's my room!" I almost stomped my foot. Almost.

He smirked. "How long ago did you move out?"

I glared at him, my hands itching to slap that look off his face. "Three years ago, but I only live two hours away and I visit a lot, so it's not like a guest room. It's *my* room and it's full of *my* stuff!" My voice had risen, but I doubted anyone on the other side of the door could hear my screeching rant. Laughter, the hum of conversation, Christmas music, and the clinking of glasses had likely drowned out my outraged words.

Oh, I was fuming. How could my mother do this to me? She'd known all about my crush on Craig. Everyone had.

"You can't stay in my room!"

"Don't raise your voice at me, young lady." His eyebrow went higher.

My pussy clenched, and disbelief jolted through me at his strict tone. "What?" I said, gasping. I managed to yank my hand from his and backed up into the dryer.

He followed, bracing a hand on each side of me. Trapping me. Warmth gushed to my center. I trembled for his touch, but it would be a cold day in hell before I admitted it. Peering up at him, I couldn't help but admire how handsome he'd become. His shoulders were broader than I remembered, his face a tad rugged. Worldly. A hint of gray streaked his black hair on the sides. My fingertips tingled with the urge to touch it.

"Yes, I'm sleeping in your room and spending the next week or so with your family. Merry Christmas, Sarah Jane."

"It's just Sarah. For fuck's sake, can you please get my name right?"

"Tsk tsk. Such language. I bet you're on Santa's naughty list, Sarah Jane."

I ground my teeth together. "Sarah!" I hissed.

Humor lighted his eyes, causing my anger to flare hotter. What right did he have to tease me like this? It was almost... flirting.

But no. He wasn't interested in me. Couldn't be. We hadn't seen each other in forever, hadn't talked or had any contact whatsoever. The few times he'd happened to be in town, I wasn't here, and vice versa. The only reason I knew he lived in Ohio was because my mother told me.

"Anyway, back to the naughty list. If there's any girl I know who deserves to be on it, it's you, Miss Sarah Jane."

"And why's that, Craig?"

"Because you have a penchant for naughty books and naughty toys."

"And how do you know that? Pray tell." Sarcasm laced my voice.

He leaned closer, so close our noses nearly touched. His hot breath tickled my face, causing goosebumps to scamper across my arms and a delightful shiver to race up my spine. Not to mention more moisture to pool in my panties.

"I know all about your naughty tastes, Sarah Jane, because I found the big lock box under your bed. Except it wasn't locked. And I'm not much of gentlemen, I confess, because I peeked inside and examined all the contents, one by one by one."

Outraged, I hardly had time to compose myself during the next few seconds. The door opened to reveal my mother, holding a glass of eggnog. Curiosity spread across her

face, and I glanced away from the doorway to notice Craig had backed up. He was standing in the middle of the laundry room, his arms folded across his chest, appearing as casual as ever. He smiled at my mother.

"Sarah Jane was being a gracious hostess and wanted to show me where the laundry room was after I mentioned to her that I'd spilled wine on my favorite shirt yesterday."

I glared at him. The smug jerk. "Uh, yeah," I eventually said, playing along, though I wanted to smash his face in and kick him square in the nuts. I gestured to the cabinets behind him. "Stain removers and soap are in there. Good luck!"

I fled the room, snatching the eggnog from my mother as I slipped past her. As I headed for the living room, I gulped half of it down and reveled in the perfect combination of bourbon, rum, and spices my mother had achieved.

One of the neighbors waved at me and we began making small talk. The distraction was a welcome relief, and I pretended to be focused on the conversation, though most of what Mrs. Renner said didn't permeate my brain. That was okay though, because the woman liked to hear herself talk. My thoughts remained fixated on my encounter with Craig.

He'd found my secret box!

Images of the sex toys and naughty books I kept in it raced through my mind. Holy crap. It wasn't just the naughty books and the toys that worried me, but the stories I'd scratched down in various notebooks. My most secret thoughts and fantasies. Oh sure, I had plenty of such notebooks in my apartment too, but I kept a few in my old room. I wasn't short on fantasies, particularly the especially kinky kind, and Craig had glimpsed them. The jerk had probably gone through my underwear drawer too.

I tried to talk myself down from the panic I felt over being discovered. What did it matter if Craig knew my secrets? What did it matter what he thought of me? Christmas was in a week, and I'd be spending the entire week at my dad's house. Well, at least the nights. Dad insisted he didn't mind if I stayed at Mom's house, but the thought of him spending the holidays alone broke my heart, so every year I spent a week at his house three streets over, and I'd twist Harry's arm until he visited once or twice.

Of course I'd probably run into Craig a few times. Mom needed my help prepping

for Christmas dinner, which meant I'd be here in the kitchen during the days. I vowed to ignore him. I also vowed to get a new lockbox. One with a working lock. I'd lost the key a few weeks ago and had had to bust it open.

He'd said I belonged on the naughty list! Who says that? My pulse raced as I recalled his sternness, his raised eyebrow, and how he'd called me young lady. None of the men I'd dated had ever called me young lady, or spoken to me with such authority. Even though Craig had been teasing at the time, he'd been dominant in his teasing. I sensed his power. He'd been playing with me. Testing my reaction.

Craig was right about one thing. He certainly wasn't a gentleman. Gentleman didn't snoop under beds and open up broken lockboxes, and gentlemen most certainly did not tell the owner of said lockbox he'd glimpsed the naughty treasures inside.

"So, what would you like for Christmas this year, Sarah?" Mrs. Renner asked, jarring me from my thoughts.

I shrugged and my gaze traveled around the room, until it landed on Craig. He was talking to Harry, but his eyes were leveled on me. Focused. Stern. Boring into me with a fierceness that made my tummy flutter. "I'm not sure what I want this year," I said, turning back to Mrs. Renner. I grinned. "To be honest, I don't think Santa will be bringing me anything this year. I'm pretty sure I made the naughty list."