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## Chapter 1

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"**T**he problem that you have, my lovely young lady, is that I dearly love hearing you make those sounds..." he whispered huskily, while pressing his lips to the hot flesh of a bare cheek, causing her to emit another of the gasps he loved.

Face flaming, the subject of that terribly intimate comment nonetheless continued to struggle valiantly as she lay over his lap. Damn, sometimes she genuinely hated that he was so much bigger and stronger than she was—usually at moments like this. Otherwise, she found his impressive height and breadth oddly satisfying, much more so than she knew her mother would approve of.

"You don't need a man in this world, Vinnie," she'd say for the millionth time over the years, wagging her finger in her impish daughter's face as—from early on—the young girl mimicked her mother's familiar lecture back to her, word for word. "And don't let anyone tell you that you do. I am an example of exactly that. I've had to work my rear end off."

Her mother, who would be just warming to her subject, would trail off with a pinched look as she looked down at

Vinnie, who would be grinning unabashedly up at her, at which point the two of them would dissolve into giggles.

"Well, I'm right. You'll find that out when you're grown up."

Now, she was grown up—she was going to be graduating from college this Spring—and yet here she was, lying over the lap of a man and being soundly spanked for the sin of what he determined. And he was big enough and strong enough and definitely determined enough to back it up.

She had sassed him. Of course, she had sassed him—sassing people was practically her entire personality! But Vinnie was smart enough not to try to use that as a defense. Frankly, there really wasn't a defense that could get her out of this—or any—punishment he deemed necessary. As he'd admitted, he liked making her squeak and squawk and beg him to stop. He'd even pointed out her other bright red cheeks to her, drawing attention to her embarrassment in an extremely ungentlemanly way.

She'd thought when she'd first met him that Hutch Davidson was the epitome of a gentleman. And, in most situations—in all situations public—he was. And, she had to admit, most private situations, too. He had never tried to take any of the liberties with her person that her mother had repeatedly warned her about throughout her childhood. Of course, Vinnie would bet that her mother had never expected him to spank her.

He didn't do it very often. Only when he thought she had crossed the line into impropriety, which was what had resulted in her ending up across his lap now. And one of the worst things about it was that she'd never really disagreed about the fact that she'd gone too far, just the method by which he'd brought that to her attention.

Every instance where she'd found herself subjected to his discipline would also have resulted in a punishment from her

mother, too. But that would have meant she would be subjected to some small sort of chastisement, generally grounding or removal of some privilege. Denial of access to the town library was the worst possible torture to a bookworm such as herself.

Unlike every other parent she'd ever heard about from her friends while growing up, her mother, Daisy, didn't believe in corporal punishment, and honestly, she never much found that her daughter needed it. Vinnie was a sensitive, intelligent child, and the mere thought that her mother might disapprove of her behavior was generally enough to keep her on the straight and narrow. She could get mouthy, though—the perils of having a child who, at times, considered herself to be an adult long before she'd achieved that age chronologically.

Hutch just said that she got too big for her britches occasionally, and this was definitely one of those times.

Why couldn't she keep her big mouth shut? She tended to blurt out what she was thinking, without considering who might hear it. Thus, she found herself getting her hide tanned, but good.

Her wonderful boyfriend, who usually treated her like a princess, also never hesitated to take the occasion to make her feel like a five year old over her father's lap, and those instances caused a lot of consternation in Vinnie. She knew she should take him to task for doing so—that she should have done so the first time he'd tipped her over his thighs—but having grown up without that kind of discipline in her life, it had long since become something she was both insatiably curious about, but of which she was more than a bit nervous.

And having been spanked by him multiple times since they began to date, and the first time even before that, had only added to both of those emotions, rather than alleviating either of them. It added even more confusing ones in the bargain, like a deep well of guilt that functioned on more levels than

she wanted to consider, along with what she recognized as a sexual response that was almost more embarrassing to her than the punishment itself.

"That," he continued, "and the fact that you can't seem to refrain from saying naughty things that you know you shouldn't, even when you know they'll get you into trouble," he added, focusing her wandering mind on the pickle she was in at the moment.

Her pedal pushers were at her ankles, along with her panties. It was the first time he'd done that to her, and she wasn't at all sure that she shouldn't have screamed bloody murder at him going quite that far with her. But, as usual, when she found herself on the verge of receiving some kind of discipline from him—be it his hand or, once, her hairbrush, and another time, one of the wooden spoons in her own damned kitchen—she couldn't seem to think straight.

Her mind became immediately clouded with that annoyingly potent combination of intense desire and an equally intense measure of dread. The spankings were awful; he didn't fool around when it came to trying to teach her a lesson he considered to be well deserved. She'd never once not ended up crying and long before he ended the chastisement, too.

Vinnie knew that he was busy building what he hoped would become a business empire, working long hours, dawn to dusk and on weekends, and she was always flattered when he asked her out. Knowing he was taking time out of pursuing his dream to spend time with her, made her feel very special. But, to her real dismay, so did the fact that he cared enough about her to punish her when he thought she'd done something wrong. He was a very level-headed, traditional guy, and in some respects, he could be quite unyielding, like in regards to her behavior, or what he considered to be certain faulty aspects therein.

Still, she never felt abused in the least. Thanks to her

mother not shielding her from some of the worst facts of life, she'd known women who were. She knew that Hutch would never, ever raise a hand to her, unless it was to do what he seemed to think was his duty by her in correcting her.

The ease with which he was able to reduce her to a blubbering mass stuck in her craw every time, like now, but what he did when he finally stopped spanking her was worth almost anything, as far as she was concerned, even the punishment that had preceded it.

"I don't want to hear any more guff from you about you staying late at work and not calling me to bring you home," he chided, palm cracking loudly down on skin that was already strawberry red and sore. "You're a smart girl, Lavinia, and I expected you to realize that a girl walking alone to her car in the dead of night isn't safe. I won't have you putting yourself at risk, just because you don't want to bother me. And then you get all huffy and sarcastic and insulting about me trying to make sure you're protected by offering to bring you home. I won't have either of those things from you, Lavinia. I hope I'm making myself abundantly clear on those subjects?"

She hated it when he asked her questions while she was wailing her unhappiness to the carpet beneath her face. How could she possibly respond with any amount of sentience when her backside was obviously in flames?

And he wouldn't wait very long for her to collect herself, either—she knew that from previous experience. She wasn't able to react fast enough for him this time, either, before a particularly sharp crack echoed through the room as she gasped loudly while trying unsuccessfully to wiggle free.

"You'd better be listening to me, Lavinia. I can stay here as long as is needed to drive the lesson home, you know."

He couldn't, but she certainly knew he would if he felt she warranted it.

"No, I mean, yes. I mean... You're clear, you're clear!" she answered frantically.

"Good. Another twenty swats, and we'll call it good."

*Twenty?* her mind screamed, but she was able—barely—to keep herself from saying it in a tone that screamed sarcastic disbelief. That definitely wouldn't be conducive to the health and happiness of her rear end. She wouldn't at all put it past him to double it if she said something like that.

The last round was horrible, and long before he stopped, she wasn't even bothering to try to get off his lap. Vinnie hung over his legs as he meted out the last of her punishment, sobbing and keening when each smack landed, until at last, it was over. And then came the very best part. Hutch would pick her up as if she weighed nothing at all, turn her over carefully, then hug her to his broad chest.

Vinnie had never felt so safe and protected and cared about in her life until he'd done this to her the first time. She'd protested as loudly as she thought she could get away with, considering where they were, under her breath but very clearly, raining down the bluest invectives she knew on him, his family, and his ancestry back to Neanderthal man, even threatening legal action against him, until she realized that he wasn't going to stop until she stopped using language like that, which was why she'd ended up getting spanked in the first place.

She'd quieted against him almost immediately when he held her afterwards, that time and every time since. He was so big and warm, and he held her with a gentleness—an acute awareness of his own strength—that belied the punishment he'd just administered.

But he'd never failed to do that, every time she got her fanny swatted. The contrast was incredibly stark, even though he'd never yelled at her, for any reason, ever, at least so far, or berated her in anyway, either. He'd only ever supported her

and her silly dream of becoming a children's book author, and she knew that he considered disciplining her to be an extension of that. He wasn't trying to be mean or critical, just help her be a better person. Or, how had he put it? Her mother had left her with a few rough edges that he wanted to smooth out.

And the time spent on his lap, rather than over it, was absolutely sublime.

Sometimes he rocked her, other times he merely held her, but always while murmuring soft nothings to her as he pressed his lips to her cheek or ear or the top of her head. Sometimes he kissed her, and they were the most electrifying—if infinitely gentle—kisses she'd ever experienced. And he never made her feel, as she knew some men would have, that he was impatient with her being there, or that he was bored with just holding her. Quite the opposite, in fact.

Vinnie knew that he was far from unaffected by what he'd done, too, as he'd confessed to her a few minutes ago. He liked spanking her, and she'd always ended up sitting on the evidence of that fact, although she wasn't sure he knew that she knew about it. In her experience, her friends were woefully uninformed about men and various biological reactions they often had to a pretty girl sitting on their lap.

But her mom had made sure that kind of thing wasn't a mystery to her. "Forewarned is forearmed," she'd say, as if interactions between the sexes was some kind of battle. And Vinnie knew that's exactly how her mother saw them, too. Considering what she knew about how her mom had been treated by men during her life, it was no wonder she thought that way.

Daisy Turrell wasn't about to let her daughter be taken advantage of by men.

Vinnie was extremely aware of how horrified her mother would be if she ever found out what she let Hutch do to her.

Why, she thought her mom would have been happier if they'd had sex rather than letting him punish her as if she were a child.

But Daisy had raised a daughter who was an independent thinker, and that meant independent of her mother's thoughts, too.

And although she hated what Hutch did, it was impossible to deny the fact that she loved it at least as much, too, and being able to cry on his shoulder afterwards, being encouraged by him to do so, even as he held her impossibly tight, was unimaginably wonderful.

The errant thought flitted through her mind that she wondered if her mother had ever allowed a man to spank her, but she refused to think about that, rejecting the notion as surely and as completely as her mother would have.

And then he cupped her cheek and she lost the ability to think again as those big fingers combed themselves through her hair very carefully, so as not to cause any snags or snarls.

He was so thoughtful like that—so much more so than any other man she'd ever dated—not that she'd dated many. It seemed that most men wanted women who didn't have any goals beyond marriage and kids, who were afraid to appear smarter than a man, and who were more like the damsels in distress of the fairytales her mother refused to allow her to read, than actual women. So she spent most of her Friday and Saturday nights at home with her mother during school, and now that she was in college, in her tiny apartment.

Not that she was complaining, mind you. She wasn't willing to conform to what society demanded of women, so she was perfectly content with the idea of not getting married, and she knew that—unlike every other mother on the planet, it seemed—her mom was absolutely okay with that, too. Frankly, she'd probably prefer it.

But Hutch, he was the first guy—man—she'd met who



made her rethink that position. She knew a lot of that was because he didn't seem to expect her to become some meek, mild doormat just so he'd propose. Lots of her friends weren't even bothering with college, in favor of marrying and settling down right out of high school. She'd gone to six weddings between graduation and leaving for college, and at least two or three every summer since. And even those who were going on to college, lots of them were just doing it for the chance to marry someone who was likely to become a well-paid professional, instead of trying to better themselves and advance whatever career they were interested in pursuing.

About twenty-five women in her high school graduating class went on to college. Out of those, only she and Sue Radcliffe were still there, a fact which Vinnie found very depressing.

If he did ask her to marry him—and she did her best not to spend time thinking about that, although the idea did pop into her mind, occasionally—she hoped he didn't do it until after she'd graduated college, at the earliest. She was spending all of this money going to college. When she graduated, she'd have a degree in English, and if she had to, she'd take a job as a teacher, if just to pay the bills.

She'd prefer to spend as much time pursuing her dream as she could, and that kind of schedule would give her the whole summer and lots of vacation time to write.

Suddenly, Vinnie felt him capture her chin with his fingers. "What are you thinking about with that big brain of yours? You look very far away, all of a sudden." She could see his frown of concern in her mind as he said, "Are you okay? I didn't really hurt you, did I?"

She snuggled against him, daring to lay her hand on his chest, over his crisp Oxford shirt. "Really hurt" her? Yes, he definitely did, but she knew what he meant. "No, I'm fine. I'm

tired from working and staying up writing, and you know I tend to get loopy when I haven't gotten enough sleep."

"Well, that's it then," he said, rising with her in his arms.

Astonished to find herself in this position, she clung to him, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Hutch, what do you think you're doing?"

"I'm putting you to bed," he said in a matter of fact tone, as if it were something he did every evening.

He had never been in her bedroom, but that didn't seem to pose any problem for him finding it. It wasn't as if her cracker box apartment had a hundred rooms. It was the only door to go through that didn't lead outside.

She had never been quite so grateful for giving in to the urge to clean her room before he came over, even though she'd known at the time there was absolutely no likelihood that he was going to be in it.

It was little better than a closet, and his presence in it only made it seem just that much smaller. Her bed was the twin one she'd slept in since she left her crib, and it felt every year of it when it squeaked noisily as he laid her down on it.

But he didn't stop there. Hutch reached down and pulled the covers up over her, folding them back and sitting on the edge of the bed—that was, until it began to creak and groan so loudly that it seemed it might collapse out from under him. So he stood, looking down at her, instead.

Then he bent down and gave her a kiss—a real kiss—before whispering, "Sleep well, princess. I'll call you tomorrow." He paused at the doorway. "Don't go getting out of bed as soon as I leave, either, girlie girl," he warned firmly. "I'll know if you do."

Vinnie didn't doubt him in the least. But still, she had to suppress the urge to roll her eyes at him, knowing that likely wouldn't go over very well, especially considering that her butt was still sizzling from the last spanking.

"Don't forget to take the leftovers in the fridge. And there's an icebox cake in there, too. You can take all of it."

"I won't forget. Sleep well."

"I will. Thank you, Hutch."

He winked at her—actually winked—then drawled, all slow and low, as if he knew what it did to her, "You're welcome, doll."