

Teaching Her A Lesson

Part One: Behavioral Intervention Plan

“This is bullshit, Mr. Canon.” Taylor Stern slapped her essay down on my desk. Behind her, her peers looked up from their own freshly returned papers, no doubt to see how I’d react to Taylor’s latest outburst.

I decided to keep it lowkey from the outset. No sense escalating things preemptively. Not when this young woman already practically lived on an escalator. “Language. And what seems to be the problem?” I looked up at her as nonchalantly as I could.

Taylor briefly removed one of the hands from her hips to flip her hair back over her shoulder. Naturally. Twice as uncomfortable for me with her big tits thrust out and unobstructed, daring me to break eye contact. To give her something else to try to accuse me of.

“This.” She pointed to the paper. “What the hell is *this*.”

“Your paper.”

“It says I cheated.”

“It says you violated the school’s code of conduct in regards to plagiarism. Which you did.” *Again*, I added to myself. This had to be the fifth time in these past two interminable years during which I’d been stuck with her in my class that she’d done so. More than anything, it was disappointing she hadn’t learned to cheat less obviously.

“No, I didn’t. You can’t prove it.”

I spun the paper so it was right side up for her and gestured to my hand-written comment. “If you look here, I cited the URL for the site from which you lifted portions of your paper. Verbatim.”

“I did not!” She stamped her foot this time. My peripheral vision insisted I notice the way it made her breasts bounce in her top, the neckline of which trampled over the school’s dress code the way her essay trampled the school’s academic honesty policy. “This is *my* work, *my* words! I don’t know what you think you found, but I worked hard on this, and I want a grade for it!”

I kept my voice down, but by now, the confrontation overbrimming in hers had done more than enough to call attention to our quarrel. “Taylor, you lifted whole paragraphs from the site. If you’d taken a sentence or two, I might have left it at a reprimand, but easily half of your essay constitutes someone else’s work.”

“It’s *my* work,” she insisted. “You just don’t like me so you’re going out of your way to punish me by saying I cheated. It’s not fair!”

By now, the class had split into its usual two factions, the same ones her outbursts usually brought out. The first, comprised Taylor's friends and my detractors, watching with interest to see if she'd get away with it or at least enjoying seeing her make an awkward scene for their teacher. The second, and thankfully the larger, who were talking to friends or on their phones, thoroughly bored by the latest show of disrespect from their classmate. This was a marginally louder tantrum than the last one, but that was about all that seemed distinct about it.

For my part, I was once more at an impasse. I could validate her accusation of bias by disregarding her protest like it deserved to be. My alternative was to let her once more waste her peers' time by publicly cementing the proof. Classes were a scant fifty minutes long, and wasting five of them on Taylor's antics – again – always cut other things from the lesson. There was no sense to her outburst to begin with. She *had* cheated. She almost always cheated, at least on anything that took any time or effort outside of class. But then again, she was one of the brightest students in the class, and most opinionated, so why she'd cheat on an opinion essay in the first place when a topic that had clearly intrigued her during class was equally perplexing.

The assignment had practically been a softball to her personally: identify a solution to a societal ill that is inadequate or flawed. They didn't need to propose alternatives necessarily, though many had. Popular targets included big issues like the response to climate change, the drug war, or our Middle East policy, though some had gone deep with niche issues. Zhaniece had gone after student lunch debt here at our own school, and we were working on getting it published as a letter to the editor in the local paper. I'd learned more than a few things from my students, as often happened, and I hoped it provided a little kindling for their critical awareness.

Taylor had ostensibly taken on the Common Core standards, perhaps thinking she'd get a rise out of me by going after my curriculum, but I granted she might genuinely have grievances with it. I'd surprised her by cheering her on, helping steer her to authentic sources that weren't just whiny rants by parents who couldn't help their fourth-grader with math any more. After a well-written and sincere introductory paragraph following my guidance to outline the problem, the solution, and the problem with the solution, I caught the casual inclusion of the word "pedagogically," and a few keystrokes later, had the source URL on my screen. I confirmed the extent of the plagiarism, gave her her zero, and moved on.

She took advantage of my brief moment of consideration to press her attack. "Look, you guys. He doesn't even have a response. He knows he made it up!"

So be it.

It only took a few more minutes to resolve it. With her paper displayed on the front board via the document camera, I steered my computer to the address on her paper, then turned my back from the wall and read from the site. Those paying attention

to the charade snickered openly, though whether it was at Taylor's antics or at me for being baited into responding to them, I couldn't have said.

"That's only part of my paper," she insisted once my point was made, leaning over my desk from the far side as if she were the aggrieved teacher and I the misbehaving pupil. One last chance to try to throw me off my game with her cleavage, though, and it was a good try. "You're cherry-picking. I just used a source. That's not cheating. You're--"

"Taylor, you plagiarized. You were caught. You lied about it, and were caught in that, too. If you persist in this behavior, I'm going to have to send you to the office. I believe next time you're up for a Saturday class. Now you can take your seat and let me get on with class, or... see you tomorrow for the Saturday class." It wasn't the most productive punishment, that *Breakfast Club*-esque tradition of stuffing a bunch of angry and unruly kids in a room for Super Detention, but it was five hours of easy money for me. I got to mostly sit back and grade, plan and otherwise do the work I would be doing anyway, and looked up every so often to nudge them awake or keep them off their devices. I doubted it had any corrective effect – the students got enough tedium during the week already – but the Principal Horen believed in it, and I wasn't so opposed I was unwilling to cash in.

There was a tense moment with a truly malevolent glare, and she drew it out long enough that I began to think she really might force my hand. Finally, as I snapped my laptop shut and made for the pad of referral slips on my desk, she growled in bestial aggravation and stalked to her seat, her matching dress-code-defying skirt twitching with each stride so violently that anyone looking learned the color of her underwear.

Red. It was red. So very red.

With that image as far toward the back of my mind as I could push it, I began class.

Taylor Stern. Three years into my teaching career, she was hands down my greatest challenge. There were other discipline problems, and many of them were easier to empathize with. Students with absentee parents, substance abuse in their households, a host of other problems. There were brighter students, too, if not an abundance. She didn't like to give evidence of it – a special combination of too lazy, too disaffected, too self-righteous – but she could be a straight A student if she wanted. Her other teachers had said as much to me, too.

But are there hotter students? my subconscious pressed. Maybe one or two. It wasn't something we were supposed to notice, but I had eyes. That was about all it took with her. And Taylor liked to press the envelope there, too, showing herself off like a trophy in a display case. Like a lot of my colleagues, I had issues with the existence of a dress code. What could be more sexist than punishing females for male failings? Many teachers, most really, ignored the policy, to our Mr. Horen's irritation. Yet Taylor made

it a game, seeing how much of a distraction she could make herself. Today's display had been above average, but hardly novel. She'd friended me on facebook, as a lot of my students did. I had no idea why, given her transparent contempt, but I wasn't about to invite a debate about favoritism by blocking her. No matter how many of her bikini pics flooded my stream.

(Yes, I could hide her posts. I know. And I would, someday, if she crossed whatever line I hadn't yet identified.)

My classroom had no seating code, and if a student wanted to sit on the windowsill, on the floor, hell, even at my desk, I didn't care. But Taylor? Not two months ago I'd had to almost physically push her off the stool in the front of the room because her skirt was so short it was flashing the whole class. *But why?!* she'd whined a hundred times as I insisted, defying me to say I'd noticed, to admit in front of God and everyone that I'd seen my student's panties. Which I couldn't, of course. At that point, the war would be over, my waving flag as white as the panties she'd worn that day. None of these insecure kids were going to take my side and admit they'd been looking too, had had no choice but to look considering how flagrant she'd been about it. That meant her feigned outrage would paint me as a lecherous pervert rather than conveying the truth, that she was a shameless flirt. Or maybe an exhibitionist. Truth be told, I had no idea what she got out of it all, what psychological issues fed into her behavior. I doubted I ever would.

In any event, I did my best with her, engaged her in the lesson when I could and minimized her detriment to the class when I couldn't. She was a chore to deal with and a tragic waste of potential, but if she kept doing the minimum to scrape by, I wasn't going to ruin her future by getting her suspended over and over until she got expelled simply because she enjoyed causing a scene and flaunting a set of objectively breathtaking teen tits. So even if she got on my nerves to no end, I put up with it. She got her daily warning, and we both moved on. Soon she'd graduate, or not, and I could go back to dreading the presence of her younger sister in my senior English class next year.

(My department head swore that Abbie was twice the handful Taylor was. From what I'd seen in the halls, I could attest that this was absolutely true, at least in a literal sense.)

Today, however, Taylor decided that the warning wasn't enough. With twenty minutes to go in sixth period, a little pink plastic egg flew through the air and bounced off of Jesse's left temple. As if I couldn't have immediately guessed who would be inconsiderate enough to throw a container of lip balm across the room – inaccurately, no less – Kate hustled over and scooped it up from where it rolled to. “Thanks, Tay!”

“No prob, bae,” answered Taylor. When she saw my expression, she looked up, annoyed. “What's your problem?”

I ignored her. “Jesse, are you OK?”

“Yeah. Stings.” He caught Taylor’s reproving glare. “It’s fine, though,” he amended.

“Kate, hand it over.” I walked over and held out my hand. Kate looked to Taylor, but her loyalty to her benefactor was quickly outmatched by her fear of her instructor. *I’m sorry!* she mouthed as she handed me the ovoid chapstick.

“Taylor, to the office. Now.” Anyone else might have gotten a lecture on why throwing things around in a room full of distracted people was dangerous, why copping an attitude about it was the wrong way to respond, but Taylor had heard it all before.

Her referral was waiting for her by the time she packed up her things and made her way to the classroom door. She stopped, however, to hold out her hand expectantly. “Give it back.”

“No. We’ll discuss it later. Now go.”

After a final challenging stare-off, she snatched the slip of paper from my hand and stormed out the door, slamming it behind her with enough force that Mr. Hallett from next door came over to make sure everything was OK. I assured him it was, and with Taylor out of our hair, the other students and I salvaged what we could from the final minutes of class. Thankfully, it was my final instructional period of the day, with seventh period as my prep. My patience for teenage tomfoolery had been picked clean for the day. As ever, Taylor and her shenanigans were the brat icing on a stress cake.

The bell rang. Students filed out. I closed the door behind the last of them, suppressing my guilt at shirking hall monitoring duties. I needed to take a few deep breaths and relax before I could get back to the endless pile of grading, the parent contacts, and preparing everything I could for Monday so that I might actually have a day of weekend to myself. Part of one, at least.

I had just slumped down in my chair when Taylor returned.

“Give me back my chapstick,” she demanded as the door slammed shut behind her.

“Taylor, why aren’t you in the office?” There had been no real need to ask. I hadn’t expected them to keep her, but there was plainly no way she could have made it down there, received her consequence, and returned this quickly. It hadn’t been ten minutes even. “You never went, did you.”

“No. You stole *my* property. You can’t punish me when you’re the one who took my stuff.”

“Did you make it to the office?”

“Give it to me. *Now.*”

I could already feel a tension headache setting in. More than that, I decided then and there that I’d had my fill of her attempted bullying. “No. For crying out loud, you *threw* it, Taylor. You hit Jesse in the head. You could as easily have hit him in the eye. You didn’t even apologize! Then you defied—”

“Give it to me!” She took a step closer, looming over me. Or shoving her breasts in my face to throw me. I was never sure how conscious of that tactic she was, but as self-conscious as girls her age tended to be, I’d be surprised if she wasn’t aware of what she was doing.

Either way, I wasn’t about to cave. “No. Go to the office. I’ll be telling Mr. Horen that you—”

“I’m not going anywhere until you give it to me. You’re *stealing*, and it’s *mine!*”

The bell rang. “And now you’re late for seventh period, too. Get yourself to—”

But she only took a step closer. Perilously close. “Not without my property!”

I was at a loss. Nothing in life had prepared me to deal with this level of entitlement run amok. A few more failed attempts at asserting myself were met with more looming, to the point that my chair was forced further and further back just to keep her from actually making contact with those things. Her chapstick remained clenched firmly in my fist. With no other apparent recourse, I grabbed my desk phone and pressed the button for the main office, and with Taylor shouting in righteous indignation over me, I managed to convey that I needed assistance from the school resource officer.

Officer Louisa Barbour arrived only a moment later than I wish she had, right after Taylor gave up shouting and began attempting to pry her purloined lip balm from my hand, and right before it occurred to me that the optics on this were terrible. My profound gift of hindsight belatedly pointed out that it would have been better to let her have the stupid thing and then deal with consequences for her antagonism after. Instead, Officer Barbour walked in on Taylor fully straddling my lap, her chest pressed hard against mine as she tried to reach my clenched fist stretched out behind me. It was easily the most compromising moment of my professional career.

Barbour separated us swiftly and easily. Taylor was strong, but caught unawares by a trained officer, she was easily displaced from my lap. The chapstick was still somehow in my hand, and we were both breathing heavily. I probably looked afraid to have been caught with a student in that position, even if it was clearly not anything intimate, but really, I was hoping neither of them noticed the blood rushing to parts unmentionable. The last time a woman who’d been in such a position relative to my person had been the stripper at my friend’s bachelor party summer before last.

The resource officer took point on figuring out what in the hell had been going on. I had to hand it to her, she did a good job redirecting Taylor’s anger and bringing her back to the point of making comprehensible statements. Recognizing that asking her to take my side would only get the girl’s hackles back up, when she turned to me, I kept my end brief and as unemotional as possible.

“So are you going to make him give my property back or what? That’s illegal, right?” the student demanded, arms folded impetuously.

“Taylor, I understand you’re upset. And yes, you’ll get it back.” Barbour turned to me. “Right?”

“Yes. Tomorrow. Or, well, Monday, since we’re not here tomorrow,” I said. Taylor’s eyes smoldered, but she’d gotten a concession and a timeline, and didn’t press the matter further. That was good. It’d get her off my back, and I wouldn’t have to reward her in the here and now. Not like I’d ever meant to keep the stupid thing anyway. I simply hadn’t been in the mood to be bossed around by a bratty teenager. Well done, Louisa.

“There. Now, you know you can’t get physical with a teacher like that, right? We’ve talked about this. You have to find ways to deal with your frustration. Remember?”

The glare diminished, though only a hair. “Yeah. I remember.”

“All right. I want you to head on down to my office, and we’ll talk about this, figure out the next step. I need a minute with Mr. Canon first, though, OK?”

With one final withering look at me, Taylor pivoted and flounced out of the room. Was that a smirk I’d caught on her lips? Maybe. After all, she’d engineered a way to ditch seventh period.

I had to hand it to her, Louisa Barbour was a heck of a smooth operator when it came to de-escalating situations. We’d all seen the videos of uniformed brutes body slamming mouthy preteens, but our Louisa was a genuine asset. This wasn’t the first time I’d seen her work her magic, but the first time it had been done to rescue yours truly. Only a couple years out of the academy, but she had a hell of a great head on her shoulders.

“Thanks, Louisa. I have no idea how things went sideways like that. She’s been in a heck of a mood today – I caught her cheating, and she made me prove it in front of the whole class. Must have really set her off.”

She laughed and took a seat atop a student desk near me. I rebuked my students for doing that, but she’d earned the right. “You’d think for someone who cheats as often as she does, she’d be better at it. So much for practice makes perfect, right?”

“Evidently. Man. Really, you were great with her. Though I suppose you and Taylor have had plenty of one-on-one time, eh?”

“That’s for sure. Girl spends enough time in my office I think my girlfriend’s starting to get jealous.” I laughed. Her relationship with the new social studies teacher had been a source of quite a little bit of gossip when it started last fall, but by now it was old news. “And don’t worry about the scuffle, OK? I’ll make sure it’s clear in the report you didn’t initiate anything.”

“Thanks. Thanks again, I guess. I can’t believe she pounced on me like that. I had no idea how to react. I mean, what’s a guy supposed to do?”

“Panic, probably?” Louisa shrugged. “It’s different for you guys. You’re not supposed to have to deal with that stuff. I don’t even know what I’m going to do with her for this. Under a month to graduation, and she probably got herself expelled for assaulting a faculty member over some fucking chapstick.”

“We could always go old school and put her in the stocks,” I joked. But it was a half-hearted thing. I may not like Taylor, but I knew well enough what kind of future she had in store for her in a town like this with no diploma. Bye bye income. Bye bye opportunities. Maybe she could put that body to use at Jumping Jack’s, the strip club over on East Jefferson. I drove past it twice a day.

“You know, just the other day I was reading one of the magazines they send us. You know, all this ridiculous army surplus stuff and toys for departments with money to burn. Don’t even know why they send it to me. Anyway, read about this new riot suppressor they got, more humane than tear gas, sucks the fight right out of ‘em. No joke, first thing I thought of was our girl there. Maybe we could order a few dozen gallons of the stuff and see if Taylor could actually make it to graduation.”

We shared a chuckle. “With the way my second period’s been lately, it just might be the way to go.”

“I’ll send you the article.” Louisa stood, her grin shifting from mirth to commiseration, and she patted my shoulder. “You OK? Might not be a bad idea to see the nurse. Sometimes even a little mild action like that can put you through the ringer. Hell on your nerves.”

“Thanks, but I think I’ll be OK, Louisa.”

“Don’t mention it. All right, no more stalling, Barbour. Let’s do this.” The trained officer took a deep breath, bracing herself for another encounter, and then she was gone.

Sure enough, as I left the school a couple hours later, there was a scrap torn out of a magazine in my mailbox with a post-it from Louisa. “Discount on bulk?” it read, with a winky face next to it. Beneath was a picture of a spray bottle, white with red print.

Serenex.

Say goodbye to unrest, read the bold letters at the start of the pitch beneath.

I was in early Monday. Early enough that I'd been sitting in the mailroom for close to an hour when Officer Barbour arrived. She was wearing her usual uniform, even had a spring in her step.

"Morning, Louisa."

"Good morning, Mr. Canon. How are we today?"

Did she not know my first name, or was she always that formal? We knew each other only professionally, so I honestly wasn't sure. "Doing all right, but the week is young. Say, about that whole mess Friday... have you already filed the paperwork on that?"

The spring promptly disappeared, her feet anchoring in place at the mere reference to Taylor Stern. "Not quite. By the time I could get her parents to come pick her up, it was going on five, so I figured I'd finish it up this morning. Why, she start something else over the weekend? I swear, if that girl starts cyberbullying another faculty member..."

"Huh? No, no, nothing like that. I was only wondering if, maybe, we could give her one last chance."

Louisa grimaced. "Gee, I don't know about that. Accosting a teacher like that... that's crossing a big line. I can fudge the little stuff, but that's a tall order."

"I know. But I was thinking maybe she and I can work something out. I feel like I owe it to myself to give it one last shot. Some good karma going into the summer months, you know?"

"I'm really not supposed to let things like that slide, you know..."

I squared with her. "Hey, I get it. Really, I do. And I'm not saying we let her off easy. Hell, let's put the onus on her. We give her a choice. She can work with me after school, every day, until the end of the school year. Get caught up on all the stuff she missed, cheated on, all that. I'll talk with her other teachers and get assignments from them, too. Let her actually do the work, earn real passing grades. Or if she says no, well..."

Louisa mulled it over. I liked that she was the sort of woman who wasn't thinking about the perks of avoiding the paperwork mess of expelling a student, or the pitfalls of an entitled brat and whatever pieces of work who'd raised her suing the school when Taylor decided to twist her version of our altercation. No, it was plain in her eyes that she was considering what was the right thing to do. For Taylor, and for whatever principles she held dear. Good woman. Ms. Salata was lucky to have her.

"All right. Talk to her, see what she says and let me know."

"Right. She's in my sixth period, so I'll be in touch right after that."

"As soon as you can, all right? I can't delay this any longer than that. If I take four days to turn in a report on an assault, even a minor one—"

"Understood. As soon as possible. You got it, Louisa."

After sixth period, the discussion with Taylor went about like I expected. She got her lip balm back, and, smirking and self-satisfied with her conquest, she magnanimously agreed to let me show her mercy. I'm not sure she believed we'd really expel her, and she probably thought she could make our detentions (as she insisted on calling them) so miserable that I'd call it quits after the first day or two. Ordinarily, she might have been right.

But I had been busy, and I was done with ordinary.

She didn't notice the taste. That was good. It was a bit of a gamble, administering it in that way, but subtle was better. And nothing in the whole world could have been more predictable than the way she smeared the Serenex-coated lip balm on right in front of me, as if her glossy lips were a manifesto of her refusal to be subdued by some petty school teacher. It was only a faint dose I'd coated the outer layer of the lip balm with, and so would take longer to set in. (I'd tested that myself several times the day before, and was still fighting off the headache my mild overdose had given me.) But it would work. By the time she showed up after school, it would be working. No more fight in her.

And then, we'd... rewrite her essay. Or something.

No, not "or something." I'd sit her down in front of one of the school's cheap laptops and make her write it. That was it. Nothing else. I ought to be ashamed – *was* ashamed – that other thoughts even entered my mind. No matter how terribly she'd mistreated me, I wasn't about to take advantage of a teenage girl. I probably couldn't get away with it anyway, probably. No, I was only doing a good deed. The Serenex was merely an extreme measure to address the extreme situation which she had created.

I'd done my research. That had been during Saturday class, eyes flitting repeatedly to the half-asleep unfortunates as if worried they'd see what I was reading. For once, I let them sleep. I was envious, honestly, still exhausted myself after the most restless, dream-filled night of sleep of my life.

So very red.

Serenex was banned in most of Europe for doing exactly what it advertised being able to do. It introduced a neuroactive agent percutaneously that suppressed the chemical process behind the brain's "fight or flight" response. In essence, it kept someone from resisting. The manufacturer's website boasted a successful test in which they'd offered volunteers \$500 to resist being detained, and in the end, hadn't wound up having to pay them a cent. The larger web was full of articles decrying its use by autocratic governments and wealthy persons of less than honorable intent; a proposal was already before the UN to declare its deployment a war crime, but it had so far not passed as the Chinese government was among Serenex's most prominent clients.

In my own trials, once I'd given the dose time to set in, I'd headed out to the backyard where I'd seen my next door neighbor Cassie was out doing yard work. She'd been

in my class two years back when I'd still been teaching English 10, and we got along well. Recently, however, I'd been ducking her, as she was selling those absurd \$30 coupon books as a fundraiser for the volleyball team and, as the saying goes, I gave at the office. Sunday, I'd agreed to it immediately, handing her the money without a second thought. It was surreal remembering our encounter now, how she'd suggested – even with a joking tone – that I buy a second one. Another \$30 gone. When she laughed and said maybe a third would come in handy, I'd already fished the money out of my wallet and held it over the fence before she shook her head and awkwardly declined to take it. Even in hindsight later that night as I flipped through one of my two coupon books, there had been a lingering sense that a third one might have been useful. As someone who'd not used a coupon in his life, it was proof enough for me. After that, I secluded myself in my office and picked up a book, worried that advertisements on the TV and internet might deprive me of the rest of my life savings.

What I had left of them, that is. Getting my hands on it, and on such short notice, had been the real obstacle. Luckily for me, my old pot dealer from before the state went legal had a connection he referred me to, and for only a little bit more than those test subjects had passed over. The single canister I'd purchased, however, had cost me an order of magnitude beyond that. As I walked away from the exceedingly sketchy fellow who'd sold it to me, I'd felt mostly pretty glad the kindly black market chemical suppressant salesman hadn't simply murdered me and taken everything I had. After that, the \$60 donation to Cassie and the volleyball team was just gravy.

All in all, making such a sacrifice for the betterment of one exceptionally wayward student... I'd felt very noble.

At least, when I wasn't letting my thoughts dwell on somewhat more ignoble thoughts. Fantasies, merely. Nothing I was actually going to do. No, I'd have her write her essay for me.

And maybe apologize. But that was it.

Absolutely it.

School let out at 2:55. By 3:30, I was pretty sure Taylor had decided to blow off my leniency. I was such an idiot. A fool who'd burned every cent he'd saved to help a student who refused to let herself be helped. After finishing up as much as I could stomach of all the work I'd delayed that weekend with this imbecile scheme, I typed up an email to Louisa letting her know Taylor had blown me off after all, to disregard my earlier message and go ahead and let the hammer drop. Taylor had been given every opportunity to make amends and instead—

“So, we doing this or what?” came a voice from the doorway.

I looked up, and there she was. She wasn't wearing her outfit from earlier in the day; now it was a thin white tank top and a pair of athletic shorts cut high on either side. They might almost have met the school's past-the-fingertip rule if not for an entirely too perky ass lifting them higher.

“It's almost four o'clock, Taylor. You were supposed to come here after school.”

“It is after school,” she retorted, ignoring the fact that I was already holding my briefcase. She sat right down in her usual seat, the one as far from my desk as possible so that her inevitable tendency to chit-chat was less audible. It was easier than actually hounding her over it. “I had to get a workout in. This body don't maintain itself, yo. Wouldn't kill you to hit the gym yourself, Mr. Canon.”

I disregarded the slight, whether or not she had a point. “I meant immediately after school and you knew it. It's too late now. I did my best to lead you to water, but it seems you wouldn't let yourself be compelled to drink.”

“Uh, what? You want me to drink something?” she cocked her head to the side. Probably feigned confusion.

“Forget it. I'm sending Officer Barbour an email to inform her you've chosen expulsion.”

She frowned. “Oh. That sucks.” Her disappointment sounded on par with learning that her burger had arrived without ketchup.

“You say that now, but when you're thirty-five and have only just managed to claw your way up from crew to night shift manager at Wendy's, trying to provide for your children on starvation wages because you wouldn't apply that intellect of yours toward the end of achieving the slightest modicum of self-discipline, then you'll really know how much it sucks.”

Taylor drummed her fingers on her desktop, crossing her long legs in my direction. “What, so you're shaming fast food work now?”

“No. The shame isn't in the nature of the work, it's that you have all this potential, but instead of using it, you're going to settle for a harder, less rewarding life. All so you can feel like your i-d-g-a-f branding is on fleek. Or however they're saying it these days.”

“Not bad, Canon. Not bad. So I'm expelled, then?”

I sighed. “You’re not even going to try to talk me out of it? I suppose I shouldn’t be surprised. Cool apathy to the bitter end.”

“I mean, if you say so. Expulsion sounds hella shitty, but it is what it is, I guess.” She shrugged, and then reached into her backpack to produce the chapstick. She smeared it back and forth across her lips once again. “Man. My stepdad is going to kill me. Fuck. Ah well.”

I froze. Chapstick. The Serenex.

I’d been thinking about little else all through my prep, wondering if it was affecting her, if anyone would notice, if someone would figure me out, expose my plan, if I’d spend the next ten years in prison and the next forty explaining why on job applications at Wendy’s. But when she hadn’t shown up, I’d gone right back to festering over Taylor Stern and her insufferable apathy and entitlement, such that when she strolled in an hour late after stopping for a workout, I’d forgotten all about it, and all about those tempting thoughts at the periphery of my imagination. But there she was, unwittingly reapplying a fresh dose and calmly – dare I say serenely – abiding by my judgment.

I looked to my laptop, still open, the email asking Officer Barbour to suspend the girl still open, cursor blinking, mouse hovering right over the Send button. I ought to. She’d been given more chances than she deserved, and blown them all. I couldn’t really mean to sustain this operation. Could I? It was only going to get harder from here. I wouldn’t have chapstick to return every day.

Maybe I owed it to myself to at least give it one day. Just one very, very, very last chance for her. Then absolutely no more excuses.

“Hold it,” I said as she neared the door. She stopped immediately. Why was that so satisfying?

“What now? Am I expelled *and* I have to hear a lecture about it first?”

That should have been telling, that she even hinted that she might endure a lecture if the door was already closing behind her. But I was in analytic mode. I had to test it. Make sure it wasn’t just attitude. After the way she’d wiggled out Friday over a tube of chapstick, who could say what whims motivated this young woman? No, I had to be sure.

“First off, Taylor, I think an apology is in order,” I started. She only looked at me blankly, as if uncomprehending what she might have done. “For your outbursts Friday, and for wasting my time today.”

“Oh. Sure, if you say so. I’m sorry for Friday, and for today. OK?” The lack of sincerity could not have been clearer, but she still rolled her eyes to slam the point home.

“No. It’s not OK.” And it wasn’t, but I also needed more data. Was she humoring me, or was it actually working? “I... Hmm.” I tapped my lip. How to test it? Instantly a

dozen answers stampeded from that too-loud part of my subconscious, but I silenced it immediately. There had to be a way. Something I could use to see if she'd put up with that she normally wouldn't.

"Go to the board," I said. Taylor complied, though her foot was tapping. Impatient? Or eager for my next directive? "Now I want you to write on the board: I will not copy other people's work."

"That's it? Just 'I will not copy other people's work,' nothing else?" she asked, picking up a marker.

"Um, also write, 'and I will behave myself in class.'"

"I will not copy other people's work, and I will behave in class," she parroted. "Whatever gets you off, I guess." I gritted my teeth at her choice of words. My briefcase was concealing an erection so hard it was almost painful.

I watched as she turned and wrote it on the board. I tried not to notice her ass, the ass oh-so-faintly jiggling with each stroke of the marker as the movements in her arm vibrated down her torso and into those shorts. But moments later she was finished, and she looked over her shoulder expectantly. "Now what? Cartwheels or something?"

"Ninety-nine to go," I ordered casually. It was mercy to my professional pride that she turned before seeing how baffled I was by my own words. *Really? Writing penances on the dry erase board?* I'd never even heard of a teacher employing such a tactic except in media. Was Dolors Umbridge in my subconscious or something? It was exactly the sort of pointless tedium that made a student *less* inclined to take any satisfaction in reading and writing, or to have any respect for the disciplinary process.

With another roll of the eyes, however, Taylor turned and began writing. She wasn't working especially quickly, but she was working. As the text gradually filled the upper portions of the whiteboard, first she bent at the waist. Oh lord, those legs. What was above those legs. Then as she neared the bottom, Taylor simply squatted down so she could get her arm at the right angle. Her shorts were rode right up her crack, and when she stood to start work on the next column of scribing, they stayed there, painting each ass cheek separately. As hard as it was not to notice, my attention was really on the broader picture.

I'd told her to do something – something pointless, boring, a Sisyphean chore – and she was doing it. She looked sulky, and occasionally muttered something petulant under her breath. (Mostly under her breath, anyway. Drugged or no, it was still Taylor Stern here.) But the point was, she was doing it!

"Keep writing while I talk at you, all right?" I interjected as she reached the fifties some twenty minutes in. Twenty minutes in which I had gotten almost nothing done despite sitting at my desk and going through the motions of it. That ass was almost distracting enough to justify a dress code – but, as I'd said to colleagues who'd defended

the policy in the past, the fault was really on those who let themselves be distracted. And was I ever distracted.

“Were you gonna say something or what?” she asked, her voice reflecting back at me off the whiteboard. Her hand must be cramping up, as she took a moment to shake it out, flex and unflex her grip, before continuing. Her buttocks rippled with each vigorous shake.

I snapped out of it, but barely. “So today, this is our project, but tomorrow, I thought maybe we’d get to work on your essay. I know you have opinions – do you ever – but I’d like to see if you can’t put them down on the page.”

“I mean, if you say so,” she said noncommittally.

I pressed. “And you are going to show up tomorrow?”

“Is that a question? Like, do I have a choice?” Evidently her hand wasn’t all that was getting uncomfortable. Taylor raised both hands over her head, arching her back and grunting with satisfaction at her stretch. The tank top strained at the effort her breasts were putting into popping out, yet meanwhile her butt seemed to be fighting to keep all eyes on it. In an instant, I knew that would be the feature of tonight’s dreams, just as the friction-filled gyrating struggle for the chapstick had been the focus of every night this past weekend.

“No. You don’t have a choice.”

“So why did you ask it like a question then?” she muttered, getting back to work.

“And you’ll show up immediately after school tomorrow, right?”

She sighed, plainly annoyed. “Fine.”

I licked my lips. It was so *easy*. “And... you’ll apologize.”

She glanced back momentarily. “What, tomorrow? Like, I have to come in with some prepared apology?”

What the hell had I actually meant? Was that it? “No. Right now. Apologize.”

“Uh, all right. Sorry, I guess.” She didn’t stop writing, and her tone and brevity both came across as patently insincere. But in spite of myself, I was so hard that my cock felt like it was about to lift my steel desk off the floor.

“Sorry for what, Taylor?”

“The whole chapstick thing, I guess.” She was nearing the bottom of the board again; rather than squat, this time it appeared she was going to simply bend further. Maybe her thighs were sore from her workout. Maybe she was doing it on purpose to screw with me. Hell if I knew. But she was bent nearly ninety degrees now, and her tank top was hanging down enough that I could just barely make out the bottom of her sports bra clinging to the underside of her tits. Faded pink, almost the same color as that egg-shaped chapstick that had started all this.

“Like you mean it,” I pressed. “A complete, sincere-sounding apology.” I deserved this. *She* deserved this. An apology was only fair. If Louisa had drawn a different

conclusion about what she'd walked in on, it might have ended my career. A heartfelt apology was the least I was owed.

"Jesus, fine. I'm very, very sorry I tried to get my chapstick back, Mr. Canon. And for was teasing you."

"You were?" I blinked. She had been? Had it really been intentional?

"It's just too easy sometimes. I mean, you've been staring at my ass nonstop for like half an hour now. It's too easy to fuck with... sorry, to mess with you."

"What?! I... I was not...!"

"It's fine. I mean, I have an amazing ass. Stare if you want, I don't give a shit. Er, crap. Ugh, am I allowed to cuss after school? My filter shuts right the hell off right at three o'clock."

My volume dropped 90% as I looked to the classroom door in mortification. "Taylor, I have not, *would* not, look at a student's ass!" *No matter how incredible it looks in those skimpy electric blue athletic shorts*, my subconscious added. If she turned around, would they be riding up her slit the way it was her ass crack? What color were her panties?

Were they red, like the ones I'd kept seeing in those dreams?

Pink, like the sports bra?

Absent altogether, like all the warning alarms that ought to be stopping me from allowing this to go on a single additional second?

"If you say so," she replied. Was she rocking it side to side like that on purpose, or was that merely a side effect of her growing discomfort, working through cramped muscles from the repetitive motions in the awkward posture?

No. Time to put a stop to this. Just because she was standing there, apathetic to any ogling I might choose to partake in – not that I was, or that I would! – her incredible young body on display in an outfit that was painfully sexy even by the standards of a young woman who, I knew from eavesdroppings long ago, would change clothes after getting to school so her parents wouldn't know what skimpy things she was wearing out of the house...

Where had that thought been going?

Right. Stop staring.

I barely looked up as she completed the remaining lines, and other than grumbling about her hand getting sore, Taylor didn't make any effort to regain my attention either. It was only five minutes until five when she finished, turning to face me. There was that familiar posture of hers, hands on defiant hips, staring me down as if doing my job was an affront to her. I could see there was a blue smudge across the front-most portion of her chest where her breasts had rubbed against her own words. I could see the spot on the whiteboard where the mishap had occurred. She must have fixed it after the smudge.

“So... can I go? My sister’s been waiting for me in the lot for like forty-five minutes. And if you think I’m a bitch, you don’t even wanna know how bad she can get.”

“Yeah, you can go. Oh, and language. But remember, tomorrow, three o’clock sharp. Understood?”

She snapped a half-hearted salute on her way to pick up her backpack, her marker-besmeared chest jutting forward as she arched her back to get it on. “Yes sir, Mr. Canon, sir.”

Why was my heart beating so hard? When she squeezed past me to get out the door, her chest rubbed against mine. I checked, but there had been no marker transference. Good. So good. I mean, you know, just... regular good.

Briefcase in hand, I exited on her heels, pausing only to lock the door behind me. She was a dozen or so paces ahead of me as we made our way to the parking lot exit. Was it more teasing the way she tucked her index fingers into those unseen panties to fish her shorts and underwear out of her crack as she made her way out the door?

The email to Louisa was deleted. My plan had worked. Sure, I hadn’t taught her anything today, maybe a little bit about showing remorse. More importantly, though, I’d made sure the Serenex worked as advertised. Not that there had been much cause for doubt. The UN wouldn’t be condemning the stuff if the solution wasn’t effective at its task, and my test over the weekend had sold me that I’d bought the real deal. Taylor had certainly confirmed the chemical was viable, even in such a small dose. And I hadn’t even acted out on any of those impulses. Some looking, sure, but no touching.

I definitely could have touched. She wouldn’t have stopped me. I easily could have touched her. But I wouldn’t, of course.

I barely slept a wink that night. And my dreams were all electric blue and faded pink.