

Teaching Her A Lesson

Part Thirteen: Free and Reduced Meal Programs

“All right, that’s enough, girls.”

Abbie twisted to the side and looked over toward the fence dividing my yard from the Browns’. She tilted up her sunglasses. “Oh hey, C-dawg. Fancy seeing you here.”

“Yeah, hey, whatever. Seriously, that’s enough.”

Taylor didn’t bother looking or raising her sunglasses. “Permission to give you an I-told-you-so, boss?”

Abbie ignored her sister, shifting to her side. Her bikini top remained flat on her lounge chair; if she leaned the slightest bit farther, at least one nipple would be in view. “What’s your problem, man? Don’t you got better shit to do than creeping on your neighbor and her friends?”

“Girls, I told you, I’m busy tonight. Whatever this is about, the whole cute little topless sunbathing what-have-you, it’s not going to work.”

“What’s your problem? We’re supposed to let you ogle our bodies. That’s what girls like me and Taylor are to you, right? Tits and ass. Sex objects,” Abbie recited. I could see Taylor’s head shaking incredulously at her sister’s sincere repetition of the words she’d once said in pure sarcasm.

“You could at least try to be subtle about it,” I answered. “Come on, give it a rest before you give every geezer in the neighborhood permanent eye strain.”

Lord knows they were doing it to me. I had no idea how long they’d been out here like this before I glanced out the window of my office and noticed them. Three gorgeous high school girls, laying out on their stomachs in bikinis right next door. Half bikinis, that is. Each of them had their top untied, the sides of their tits pressed flat and bulging out from beneath nubile bodies.

Cassie looked between her comrades in semi-public-semi-nudity and said, “I told you guys! There’s a bunch of old creepers in this neighborhood. This guy Mr. Gough who used to be my babysitter was totally drooling over my mom the other day while she was posing for Mr. Canon while I was sucking him off. And he’s not even the creeperest, trust me. This one time, I was out here playing with Pepper and some guy did this loud whistle right when I was bending over to pick up his frisbee, and I got so embarrassed I threw it away.”

“Can’t blame a guy for admiring that sweet little caboose, Cass,” Abbie replied.

“Um, yeah I can.” Cassie frowned, but they dissolved into a broad smile when she turned back to me. “Except for you, Mr. Canon. Have you decided whether or not you wanna ass-fuck me yet? Because I think I’m pretty ready. The plugs aren’t as hard to

wear as they were at first. I at least wanna find out if they're working, and I don't even know where else I could find somebody to help me check. It'd probably be easier with a boy with a smaller schwing-schwong, but that seems sorta wrong somehow. So if you're up for it later, my butt is totally ready for a test drive."

The Sterns eyed their comrade askance at this frank assessment, but Taylor was the one to help us move past. "Yeah, anyway, if you don't mind, we're working on our tans, so unless you want to make people curious why you're having such a lengthy conversation with a bunch of barely legal teens who are all students at your school, maybe piss off, mkay?"

Abbie giggled, snapping her sunglasses down and laying flat once more. Cassie's eyes lingered, but when I said nothing, she resumed her own repose alongside her new friends. Almost as frustrating as the three bare backs and six scantily clad buttocks behind me was the simple fact that Taylor was right. I will not let anyone learn about my relationship with the Stern sisters. The compulsion didn't include Cassie explicitly, but I'd grandfathered her into it voluntarily.

I went back inside and tried not to peek out the window too often. It was fairly ridiculous, honestly. As the day dragged on, the temperature was already lowering into the sixties. A pleasant evening, but hardly tanning weather. Megan and Robby had left for her mother's before I even got home from Saturday class and subsequent activities, so the trio had free rein of Cassie's house and yard. Nobody from the neighborhood came by to rebuke them, even. I suppose when you have bodies like theirs, the neighbors had a way of turning a blind eye. Mrs. Beiser, Megan's next-door neighbor on the other side, made a show of glaring daggers at them when she jogged past; when the girls gave no reaction, she did another lap and another glare, then gave up.

It would be charitable to assume they had any motives to their brazen display beyond the obvious selfish ones (namely, to lure me over and distract me from my evening plans). Still, I made a note to thank them later. Not only did it give me another idea for our next fantasy meet-up, but it had me ravenous for more sex. Candy and Isa were more daunting conquests than these carefree girls, but the heightened vigor actually made me feel more at ease.

As to said conquest, I wasn't a hundred percent sure what to expect. Yes, there were expectations of something sexual. What, though? They were lesbians, after all, or at least a lesbian and her lover. With the girls, it was easy. Abbie was my fantasy slut – if it turned me on, she was into it. My booty call Cassie enjoyed anything that brought me pleasure no questions asked. Taylor may be a bit more of a mystery – at least in that Serenex hadn't rendered her an open book like the others – but she still let me do what I wanted with her and didn't fuss much. But Candy? Candy's compulsion ran no deeper than aiding my plans, and I'd never espoused a plan that involved me fucking her. I wasn't even sure such a course counted as a "plan." Thanks to Cassie, Isa was now

driven to “make me happy,” but where was the line with a woman who wanted me to be happy but for whom my penis held no intrinsic appeal? I tried to imagine I’d been compelled to make another man happy, rather than the list of behaviors and perspectives Abbie had put there. Would I make myself sexually available if he wanted? Would I be able to enjoy myself if I did? Who the hell knew what could be going on in Louisa Barbour’s head.

Oh, and let’s not forget she has a gun. Which shouldn’t make me nervous, but... she had a *gun*.

(And a taser!)

My colleagues hadn’t specified how to dress. We were dining at their house, so a suit seemed a bit excessive. Still, for all Candy had hyped the event to me the past few days, I didn’t want to give offense by showing up too casual, either. So, after my third shower of the day, I spent some time on my hair, gave myself a fresh shave, and splashed on a little cologne. For the wardrobe, I split the difference with a pair of dark blue jeans and a button up shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbow.

“How’d I do?” I asked the girls, who’d been not-so-subtly lingering in Megan’s yard. Their bikinis were back on, at least. What I wouldn’t give to be able to take them to the beach and fuck them on the sand. (On a towel, of course. Fool me once...)

But later. Tonight was adult time.

“You look so hot, Mr. Canon,” Cassie said hastily. “I mean it. Why didn’t you dress up for me like that? I guess you don’t really need to impress me, since I’m your booty call and I’ve told you a hundred times that I love to pleasure you. Must make things pretty easy on you, huh. Still, it’s a good look! My mom would be really into you right now. Is that weird to say? It’s hard to know what’s weird. I think she—”

“If those bitches don’t give you every ounce of effort they got, you better get your ass back here and let your real fantasy sluts take care of you. We’d be lucky to have such an upright dude.” Abbie skipped along the fence line, craning her neck to peer over at me.

“I will. And I do appreciate the bikini fashion show. Outdoor activities are tricky for us, but we’ll find a time and place. You three look incredible.”

“Duh.” Taylor sneered.

“Well, wish me luck, girls. And don’t wait up for me.”

“Good luck!” came two voices. Taylor simply glared. She probably would have glared if I’d agreed to spend the evening with them. Or if I’d simply stayed home by myself. The girl simply glared a lot when I was around. I supposed I used to be the same way when it came to her.

After a stop at the liquor store to pick up what I hoped was a decent bottle of wine, I was off to my date. To think it had only been a week since I’d last been to their home. What a week! When I’d arrived here last Sunday after the fiasco at the coffee

shop, I'd been afflicted by paranoia over a rogue student mind controlling me, another who'd already tried to betray our secret once, and a blackmailer lurking in the wings. Then I'd been driven half-crazy with lust after Candy's half-voluntary show (bathing evidently being my Achilles heel) and forced her to have sex with a student while I did the same with another. Then as the icing on the cake, Isa had stormed in and shocked Taylor insensate mid-climax.

We'd come a long way from that night in quality of life.

Tonight, I was looking forward to a relaxing evening. Hopefully a good meal, too, if Candy was half the cook she'd made herself out to be. No plan, no drama. Just me and two beautiful women I hoped to have a good time with, whatever form that took.

It was Isa who answered the door. "Mr. Canon, hi! Come in, come in. Is that wine?"

"Yeah – I snagged a zinfandel I used to like. I hope that's OK." The aroma in the house filled my nostrils the moment I crossed the threshold, but I was more preoccupied with the woman in front of me. Isa looked fantastic in a one-piece burgundy outfit with flecks of gold glinting throughout the fabric. I mistook it for a gown until I noticed the separate legs. At least if I'd missed the mark on dress code, it hadn't been by much. She wore her blonde hair long, and with makeup on she was so pretty I almost missed the abundance of cleavage showing. "And please, I think you can use my first name while we're having dinner, at least."

She patted my shoulder. "Oh, I don't think so. I'm still your bodyguard, after all. I don't like to blur the line between business and pleasure."

"So... what do you call having me over for dinner and, ah, all that?"

"I call it being a good girlfriend." She grinned. Isa the woman really was beautiful. I bet Isa the cop had gone through hell in a male-dominated field like law enforcement. She usually carried herself with all that big dick energy – overhearing students descriptions of her was where I'd first learned that term, in fact. I hardly recognized this soft, sexy side of her.

We made our way into the living room, where she invited me to have a seat. "Candace is putting the finishing touches on dinner. She asked me to reassure you that purchasing a baguette was the entirety of my involvement in the cooking process."

"You really don't need to worry. I'm not exactly a foodie. My standard for a meal is how little effort cleanup will take so I can get back to work and have a little time left over for myself before bed."

"You teachers... I tell Candace practically every day, it's crazy how much they make you do on your own time. At least when I leave work, I leave work. Yeah, police work is a lifestyle and blah blah blah, but I leave school and then hit the gym, prop my feet up and unwind. It's a damn shame I'm not a better cook, because I'd love to lighten the load on Candace."

“There’s always other ways to help a girlfriend unwind, in my experience,” I said, venturing a mildly risqué joke. Were we at that stage? Was it OK for a hetero guy to joke about girlfriends with a gay girl? I had no idea what the rules were. Ugh, the girls never would have had me sweating rules. What was I even doing here?

“Oh, I keep her good and relaxed,” she answered with an amiable laugh. Sincere? Playing along to make me happy? “So hey, speaking of relaxing with girlfriends, how’s your weekend been? Unwinding with your little playmates at all?”

I shuddered. *Why did I shudder?* “Oh, um, a little?” *Because it’s an unbelievably awkward topic, that’s why!* “Yeah, we met up after Saturday class this morning, and... yeah.”

“Yeah...?” She gestured for me to continue. “Don’t leave a girl hanging. Ever since you rewired my head – the second time – your happiness is like a drug. Don’t spare a single detail. Mama needs her fix.”

“Wow. Um, I don’t know if it’s really, you know, the sort of thing that makes for decent conversation.” I laughed nervously. Maybe enough that I sounded a little crazy.

“What, man enough to fuck those girls, but not man enough to talk about it?” She poked my chest. “Come on! If I’m going to lose my cherry to you tonight, you can at least give me a preview of what I’m in for.”

I fidgeted as she leaned in, her interest far too frank for my comfort. She was right, though. Anyone could be nervous, but it was pretty pathetic not to be able to talk about what had happened. I am not a pussy. So tell her I did. Isa was an engaged listener. She followed with wide-eyed interest, asking questions when I skirted details or forgot pieces. Little by little I grew more comfortable opening up. She didn’t judge, she got excited about the parts that excited me, she laughed in amusement at our foibles, and looked more than a little turned on by my take-charge approach to the whole foursome. I was just getting to the backrub when Candy emerged from the kitchen.

“Hey you,” she said as I paused the story. “Glad you could make it! You look great, by the way.”

“Thanks. You too, Candy.” True indeed. She was wearing an apron, but I could see enough of the woman beneath it to appreciate the effort. She always looked pretty good, but at school she went minimalist, hiding her body and keeping makeup to a minimum. Tonight, she was wearing a lacey white dress that only came to the knee, and the apron hung low enough to give hope that I’d have a nice view of both my dinner partners. It was hard not to picture her wet and naked again, knowing that the master bathroom was only feet away. If I told her that was the plan, we could...

Behave. “So what’s for dinner? If it tastes half as good as it smells, it’ll be the best meal I’ve had in months.”

She beamed. “We have a spring citrus salad, then some chicken bacon broccoli alfredo with sauteed asparagus and garlic mash. Then for dessert...” She looked to Isa, and the two women giggled meaningfully. “Then dessert.”

I found myself licking my lips, though it really was in large part the smell of that food. “I can’t wait.”

“Well, you’ll have to, for a few more minutes at least. Sweetie, would you give me a hand in the kitchen for a minute? I need you to finish the salad.” She smiled graciously to me. “Sit back, relax, make yourself at home.”

Isa took my bottle of wine with her. Without the distraction of company, the room came alive with the memories. Teasing the hell out of Taylor. How wet her pussy had been when I finally went inside her. The sights and sounds of Abbie and Candy sixty-nining – right where I was sitting, in fact. I wondered, could I invite the girls over after dinner? Maybe we could–

I leapt off the couch like it had suddenly caught fire. Was there no bottom to my greed? Here I had two beautiful, sensual women ready to feed me and please me, and I was already thinking about what more depravity I might inject. I excused myself into the dining room. At least I’d never fucked or witnessed anyone fucked in here. It was here where the three of us had strategized our plan for dealing with Megan’s blackmail threat.

I took a seat at the head – foot? – of the table. The doorway to the kitchen was right there, though I couldn’t quite see in from there. Nearby an Alexa was playing some sort of slow jazz. It wasn’t pretty or catchy, but it was soothing enough as white noise went. Relaxing, with just a little bit of playful. That was fine by me. I could use some relaxing energy right then.

The sound of an electric mixer issued from the kitchen, turning on and off in bursts. Between the music, the mixer, and what sounded like it was the fan over the stove, I could make out voices, but barely.

“... sure you’re ready, mama?” Candy, I was pretty sure. *Mama*. That was cute. I strained my ears, trying not to look like I was eavesdropping in case one of them suddenly came around the corner from the kitchen.

“I’m sure. There’s no need to be nervous, baby. We’ve been over and over this. It’s going to be great. Don’t overthink it – just follow my lead.”

“Just don’t go getting *too* excited on me, all right?” Candy cautioned.

Interesting. Here I’d thought it had been Candy pushing this on Isa, but it sounded like maybe the opposite was the case. The electric mixer sounded. I studied the flatware. Thick. Archy.

The mixer stopped. It was hard to hear them, to be sure, but I’d always been cursed with good hearing. The sort of thing that as a teacher, I would have gladly done without; far too many muttered comments managed to reach my ears. It sounded like

Isa. “You sure he’s interested? Sounds like he fucked those girls six ways to Sunday this morning, and I don’t exactly have much experience seducing his kind.”

“Cassie, too?” the assistant coach probed. That’s right, I’d sort of bartered away a fling with my neighbor’s daughter, hadn’t I? Was Cassie even attracted to women? Maybe I could join in, help grease the wheels. Tonight would hopefully help guide me. Who’d have thought Candy would be as lecherous with her athletes as I was with my students? I was still a little bit in shock myself.

If Isa replied, it must have been nonverbal, because Candy went right on talking. “I’m pretty rusty, too, but you look great. I look great. He wouldn’t be here if he wasn’t interested, mama. We got this.”

“I know it. And you’re sure you’re ready? Juices flowing, so to speak?”

Candy’s laugh carried clearly. “They’re flowing, all right.”

The mixer started again and was still whirring when Isa returned, salad bowl in hand. She started to find me so close, then mouthed an apology for the noise. Even here in the dining room precluded conversation. She took a seat on my left.

“Oh hey. Didn’t think you were... here.” Her olive cheeks darkened bashfully. “Um, how much did you overhear?”

“Don’t sweat it. For what it’s worth, I’m a little nervous about tonight, too.” I smiled reassuringly. Isa’s squeezed mine under the table. Though unintentional, listening to their nervous exchange had actually done a lot to relax me. There was a great comfort in knowing that they were as anxious about tonight’s events as I was. Maybe more so, even.

Even as the mixer stopped for what would turn out to be the final time, the two of us sat there, holding hands and smiling, saying nothing, enjoying the ambiance and the anticipation of what was to come. Soon Candy entered, untying her apron and hanging it on a hook just inside the kitchen. “Dinner time,” she stated in a soft, sexy voice. The twinkle in her eyes promised everything.

For now, though, we passed around the salad bowl.

“Oh, that looks good.”

“Why thank you. There’s a little lemon drizzle to it. Last time I overdid it, but... fingers crossed.”

“Wow, are those really our tomatoes?”

“They certainly are.”

“I didn’t realize we had any this ripe already!”

“You two garden?”

“Yep, ‘we’ sure do. Don’t ‘we,’ honey?”

“Hey, I at least water the thing sometimes.”

“And sometimes you don’t.”

“You know, I just got started on my garden the other day. Mostly clearing out the weeds, but I hope to get planting soon.”

“Oh yeah? What do you usually grow?”

Hard as diamonds with anticipation. That was what I was growing.

The sexual tension was thicker than those fresh tomatoes in our salad. The anxious, on-and-off smiles on all our faces as we remembered what was coming after dinner, then remembered we were supposed to play it cool, act like adults and not the sex-crazed teenagers I'd spent so much time around lately. There was something honest-to-god arousing about picking at my salad, assembling the perfect bite. It prolonged the anticipation. Every bit of quinoa that rolled away from my fork was another moment to ponder how it would go down.

Would Candy take the first turn? She'd complained – loudly – that she missed a man's touch. Or would Isa decide to conquer her phallophobia and take a ride? What would be happening in her head if she did – was she humoring her girlfriend's broader appetites, or simply striving to make me happy? Or would she discover that she enjoyed it and dive in for the sake of her own enjoyment? Would she use her mouth? Would Candy? Would I get to watch them make love to one another? Would it be permissible to intrude, or did I wait in the wings to be summoned? Would Isa mind if I was rough with her? (Would I mind if she were rough with me?) Would Candy grow jealous if I spent more time on Isa's tits than hers? Would I get jealous if Candy spent more time on Isa's tits than my cock?

Whose pussies were tighter – lesbians, or teenagers?

It was the hardest that quinoa had ever made a man.

Candy dabbed at invitingly pink lips with a napkin. “So, who's ready for the main course?”

At her invitation, Isa and I passed along our plates, and she disappeared into the kitchen with them. I was about to make another overture at banal small talk when a noise came from my pocket. “Bitch.”

Isa arched an eyebrow. “Was that you?”

“That was Andy Bernard.” I pulled out my phone. “Custom ring-tone for Taylor Stern.”

Her lips pursed. “I... see.”

“I have the same one for Abbie.”

She smiled, but it was forced. I censored an embarrassed grimace. “Don't worry, Officer Barbour. I keep it on silent during the school day.”

“That's a relief.” Her smile forced itself a little brighter, but then she gave up and removed her napkin from her lap and set it on the table. “Excuse me. I'm going to see if Candace needs a hand.”

“Sure. If you, um, need another pair...”

“I think we got it. Thanks.” The smile didn’t last even until she turned toward the door.

At least it allowed me to let that grimace out. Man, that notification sure had touched a nerve. I wondered why – not like she hadn’t been laughing and smiling at my story of this morning’s fantasy antics. Nor was she a fan of Taylor. Hell, she’d tased her out of raw spite. Hmm. Ah well. My hands, programmed by the engineers of Apple, opened the text of their own accord. There was a pic of Taylor. She looked to be standing in Megan’s living room. Her shirt was drawn up over her breasts. She was still wearing the bikini from earlier, technically, but it was pulled down beneath them. There was a message accompanying it.

abbie said to send this, so... your welcome.

I admired the picture for a moment. *You’re**, I replied cattily.

I know. She also said to misspell it so you could get that grammar-correcting high.

I listened toward the kitchen, but this time, their voices were too low to overhear. I hoped I hadn’t somehow spoiled the mood. Was it simply getting a text at the table? Some people were sticklers for that sort of etiquette. Maybe it was just nerves.

My fingers typed, *It bothers me she’s never had my class but she read me that well.*

She’s a genius all right. You’re the only english teacher who gets off on knit picking spelling. You are a unique special snowflake.

I smiled in spite of myself. *Another one, but this time with your nipples hard.*

Candy leaned around the corner. “Say, do you want gravy on your garlic mash? It’s an old family recipe from Serbia, but... well, it’s a little unorthodox. Has some sharp notes that not everybody likes. If you don’t want to, that’s fine.”

Unorthodox gravy didn’t, in fact, sound especially appetizing, but I wasn’t about to spurn her grandmother’s cooking, especially since I was in all probability about to feed her something a good deal less appetizing soon after. “Go crazy. I love to try new things.”

Her smile broadened, whether at the promise of sex to come or my interest in her cooking, or both. “You got it.” She blew a kiss and hurried back into the kitchen. “He said load him up, mama. Told you he had good taste.”

I could hear dishes clattering, the smells heightened as food vacated ovens and lidded containers. Still, by the time Taylor’s plump, hard nipples emerged into view, this time with a wry grin on her lips, my appetites were less and less for chicken bacon broccoli alfredo and more for other fare.

I marveled for a moment, then wrote, *You are perfect.*

Duh. I almost spat up a sip of zinfandel laughing. That girl. *do me a favor and spank the shit out of that cunt barbie for me,* she added. *or better yet, taze her.*

Still bitter? I asked. Not that I could blame her.

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I was still admiring her picture when my hostesses swept into the dining room. Isa nearly set down a plate in front of me, then reversed and placed the one in her other hand instead. The portions were noticeably larger. I wasn't that much bigger than her, but apparently to these women, men needed an extra five hundred calories at a meal. It smelled divine, though I had to admit that the runny yellow-brown gravy was runnier than I might have liked. Oh well. I'd given myself the spice equivalent of third degree burns on my tongue at a Thai food restaurant to try to impress a date once, and I hadn't even gotten to second base with her.

Isa refilled each of our wine glasses, then took her seat at my side. It was Candy, though, who raised her glass and her voice. "To creating and keeping juicy secrets," she announced.

"To secrets," we echoed. Our glasses clinked. We drank.

"So what did Taylor want?" Candace asked, folding her napkin in her lap. She was still picking at her salad; Isa rounded up some broccoli and chicken and skewered it on her dinner fork.

"Oh, nothing much." By reflex, I set down my forkful of potatoes and slipped my phone back into my pocket. (Better to take on the mystery gravy first, then wash it down with the more reliable-sounding main course, I'd thought.)

"No no, you can't just 'nothing much' then hide your phone like that. Out with it," she insisted.

It was like she was already my girlfriend, demanding to see my phone and all. No sense dissembling, I supposed. Not like these women didn't understand the situation. For crying out loud, they'd both witnessed me having sex with Taylor not fifty feet from the table we were eating at. "She was only sending me a little selfie. I think she's jealous of you two. All of them are."

Candy laughed. Isa was studying her plate hard. "Maybe she ought to be. Isa told me you've been, ahem, admiring her assets."

I winced. "She told you about that?"

"Don't get shy on me. Of course she did. She's amazing, isn't she? Come on, you've got to admit those children have nothing on her." She gestured with her fork at my plate. "Don't let it get cold, now."

I readied another forkload, but something compelled me to push things a bit. The sight of a topless Taylor Stern had been gasoline on the smoldering embers of my libido. Plus, Candy had been pretty up front about her attraction to the girls. Why not give her a little thrill? I produced my phone, food abandoned, and swiped open the picture. "I dunno... check her out. That's pretty tough to top. Nothing against you, Isa – just saying there's competition."

She swallowed down her bite of food. I expected a smile, a retort, but she merely made some unreadable expression and took another bite, this time digging into her own gravy-laden potatoes. “These are so good, baby,” she said emphatically.

“Thanks, sweetie. I took a little taste test, and I think it might be my best batch yet.” Candy glanced again at my phone before handing it back. “Not bad, not bad. I guess we’ll get to compare soon enough. Once we finish eating – now come on, you’re slowing us down. Right, mama?”

Isa nodded. “Right,” she agreed around a mouthful, then chugged half her glass of wine. “I have this dynamite little lingerie set I can’t wait to show you. It’s going to make you so happy. Isn’t it, baby?”

“Oh, you have no idea. Now come *on*, put that phone away before dessert gets any colder!” Candy said flirtatiously, shoving her salad plate aside and digging into her own plate pointedly.

“Well when you put it that way... why wait?” The ladies shared a sudden look with one another before turning to me. “Let’s not dance around it, here. Once we get to the bedroom, that lingerie is only going to stay on for so long. Why not get a little mileage out of it? No point putting it just to take it off three minutes later.”

Isa shook her head. “It’s supposed to be for after...”

“Yeah, don’t you want to savor? That’s the best part, I find,” added Candy.

“Pleeeeeease, Isa?” I folded my hands pleadingly. “It would make me really, *really* happy.”

She looked to Candy, and for the life of me, I was having a hard time squaring her shyness with how readily she’d complied with my requests for those topless videos from earlier in the week. Yet another person who was lioness over the phone, but a lamb in person. “I don’t know...”

“Is something wrong?” I asked finally. “I just thought... I mean, I didn’t want to offend or anything. I only figured, since we’d all talked about, you know, after...”

“It’s fine. Right Isa?” Candy said firmly, fixing a hard look at her girlfriend. The sort of look her students received right before they were sent to the office. “She’s been so proud of it ever since she picked it out, I think she’s just being modest.”

Isa nodded, smiling apologetically. “Yeah. I’m just one to stick to the plan, you know? But heck, why not wing it. Maybe you’re right. I’ll... be back in a few. Don’t wait for me. I’ll catch up fast.”

She excused herself, striding out of the room hastily. “She can be so bashful sometimes. You wouldn’t expect it from a cop, right? Come on, dig in. I’m dying to know how you like grandma’s recipe.” She gestured, smiled, looked back to her own plate nonchalantly.

Too nonchalantly?

Nah, I was only being... hmm. Was she... hmm. No. Right? Of course not. Except... hmm.

“Tell you what,” I said, smiling. “Why don’t you go give Isa a hand, and while you’re at it, find something sexy to put on, too? That way you’ll look like a proper couple.”

Candy looked up. “Oh, I don’t think little old me is going to hold a candle to our girl. Now seriously, if you don’t pick up that fork soon, I’m going to think you’re trying to hurt my feelings.”

I disregarded her goading. “Do I have to beg again?” I made the same prayer gesture as I had to Isa. “Didn’t we toast to juicy secrets? Give me something to keep my mouth shut about. Please?”

Her eyes narrowed for a moment, but finally she set down her fork and removed her napkin from her lap with a curt smile. “Oh, I suppose it couldn’t hurt. But when we get back, I want a report on that gravy, Mister. And then, if you’ve been a good boy, maybe we’ll give you your dessert a little early. OK?”

“Race you!” I scooped a huge bite of the garlic mash, gravy dribbling down the sides.

“You’re on!” Candy giggled and darted out of the room.

My smile vanished.

I sniffed at the fork’s contents. It was gravy, all right, but she was right about it being nontraditional. There was some other note in that fragrance. I didn’t know the first thing about Serbian cuisine – I barely knew how to prepare American cuisine – but... hmm. I was being paranoid. I knew that. And yet...

I snatched up my plate and snuck into the kitchen as quietly as I could. My fork scraped the pile of potatoes and the mystery gravy into the trash can. I was back in my seat a moment later.

“So good!” I called out.

“Oh yeah? How’s the after-taste? Did you get any of the mushrooms yet? You have to try it with the mushrooms.”

I was pretty sure there hadn’t been any mushrooms in that gravy, but I wasn’t about to fish it out of the trash and check. Hmm. How to play it? If that nagging voice in my head was right – though I couldn’t imagine how it could be! – then there was only one thing to do.

I opened my mouth and stared off into space.

After a moment, Candy and Isa walked into the room side by side. Isa was wearing a black bra and matching panties, Candy in white. Neither set was especially racy, at least insofar as my peripheral vision could discern. Not that they weren’t both hot as hell, but that was not the thought at the front of the line. Nor second, nor third, nor tenth.

“Hey, how was it?” asked Isa. She came up in front of me, inspected my plate. I gave no reaction.

“I think he’s–”

Isa snapped her fingers commandingly. “Can you hear me? Are you with us? Hello hello hello...”

I stared through her hand.

Candy let out a cry of triumph, and Isa echoed it. “We got him! We– shh!” At the sudden noise, I let myself look up at them, through them. They froze, Candy looking frightened, Isa more stoic. When they said nothing more, my chin drooped down and I feigned losing interest.

“Don’t say anything to get his attention, remember baby?” Isa reprimanded. “That’s what he said. Loud noises, using his name – the kinds of things that’d wake up one of your kids when they’re bored to sleep in class. Not that they’re ever bored with you, darling.” Isa held up her hands playfully.

“Mhm, that’s what I thought. Come on, let’s get dressed. Being half-naked in front of him makes my skin crawl. We’ve got hours here – no sense rushing things.”

“As long as you promise to get all naked in front of me later, baby.” Isa pinched her girlfriend’s butt as they left the room, meals forgotten.

They’d betrayed me. Holy shit, somehow they had betrayed me!

Or at least they’d tried. If they weren’t such shitty actors, they might have gotten away with it. How many times had that bitch tried to get me to eat her gravy? They must have dosed mine alone, because both of them had eaten some of theirs to no ill effect. Crafty indeed, alleviating paranoia I’d been too blinded by their promises to feel.

How had they done it? How free were they? Had the Serenex worn off altogether? No, that made no sense. Abbie’s dose was older and less concentrated than either of theirs, and she was clearly still feeling it. Biology could vary from person to person, of course, but still, Isa’s dose had been more recently than anyone’s, and her manipulation more inhibiting. She and Megan had been given the same dose on the same day, and the latter had just meekly agreed to leave her firstborn behind to be my fuck buddy all weekend while she visited family.

Had Isa’s lab tech cured it? Shit, had she ever even taken it to the lab? There was too much I didn’t know. Why hadn’t I been more curious? Crap, why had I just sat here? I’d already delayed long enough that I didn’t have time to run to the kitchen and look for the canister they must have sprayed into my gravy without risking them coming back and finding me out of my seat. If I tipped them off in the least, I was even more fucked than I was now. I might be bigger than them, but they had numbers, and one of them had training in subduing someone. Besides, Isa still had both a taser and her gun in the house, and I had no idea if she was of a mind to use either.

Taylor's words from that morning came echoing back to me about what would happen if they escaped the influence of Serenex. She'd told me about her and Abbie arguing whether Officer Barbie would frame me, or simply kill me on the spot. Shit!

This was no time to panic. Right now, all I had was their overconfidence that their plan was working. I forced myself to take deep breaths. Those two might be garbage actors, but I'd been in drama for three years in high school. Time to make Mrs. Yavari proud.

They returned soon enough that I felt better about my decision not to risk hunting for the Serenex. They would have caught me for sure. Isa didn't look to have her weapons on her, but why would she? They could knock me over with a feather right now, as far as they knew. Both were wearing jeans now, Isa in a t-shirt with her department logo on the front, hair back in its tight professional wrap, and Candy in a comfy sweater and a ponytail. The smug looks on their faces...

No. Look at nothing. See nothing. You're supposed to be sluggish. That's your advantage here. You have time to do everything the right way. Don't react; stop, think, act deliberately.

And deep breaths. Deeeep... breaths.

"I told you he'd fall for it," Candy said imperiously, taking her seat. Lord, they were going to continue eating.

"That's your third I-told-you-so in three minutes. Not a great look on you, baby." Isa popped a bite in her mouth, speaking around a mouthful indelicately. "Besides, it was my plan. If we'd left things up to you, we'd be sitting here waiting for the sonofabitch to show up with another busload of students to fuck before our eyes before we did anything about it."

"Perhaps, perhaps," Candy replied, sitting back at her plate. "Though to be fair, it was my script that sucked him in."

"You just got off making me show him my breasts."

"I told you I'm sorry. It was play ball and act slutty, or tip him off and wind up where he is now. The blindside was necessary."

Isa laughed. "I still can't believe I flashed him once and he just handed it over. I thought it would take weeks before we reeled him in that far. Honestly thought I'd been too greedy, but nope."

"You shouldn't underestimate what those things can do to a guy. But hey, the dope bought it hook, line and sinker." She took a drink of wine – *my* wine – and smirked at me. "Didn't you, dopey? Huh? Who's a big dumb chump?"

"Careful, baby. This stuff is a chemical, not a magic potion. And if Shantel was right about his Serenex, there's no going back if we accidentally lobotomize him."

Shantel... could that be her lab buddy? It would seem so – at least someone who'd given them insights into Serenex's workings. No going back? So it *was* permanent, then.

That was simultaneously comforting and yet confusing. How had Isa and Candy gotten out of it, then?

Candy shrugged. “Oh, who cares. The whole point of this is to neuter the sick fuck, isn’t it?” *Oh FUCK let that be metaphorical.* “After what he’s done to those girls, I could give two shits if that’s because we tell him to leave them the fuck alone or we turn his ass into a vegetable.”

“We’re not having this pointless discussion again. We’ll do what we have to, what we *can* do, and then we’ll figure out how to fix the girls and that neighbor lady of his. But you know I have to keep the sonofabitch safe.”

“His ‘protector’ to the end, eh,” grumbled Candy. *This was protecting me?!*

“I don’t have a choice. I didn’t give you shit about fucking Abbie Stern.”

“Yes you did! You *so* did!”

“Well, not for very long.” She shrugged. “Now come on, you made this amazing meal – it really is delicious, baby – so let’s enjoy it, then get to work.”

The smooth jazz and sounds of women chewing were my universe. My hands were folded in my lap. Could I risk texting one of the girls for help? No. Not only could I not put them in danger like that, but even if they did come through, I’d already seen the lengths Abbie was willing to go. For all I knew, she’d be over here with her parents’ gun before the dishes were done. Keeping mindful of the lesson of *The Tell-Tale Heart* – *they cannot hear it* – I played it safe, keeping still and letting them eat. The math on this was fairly simple. Play along, maybe learn a bit, have time to come up with a proper plan; or take a chance and maybe get tased, then have them spray the crap right down my throat.

(Why hadn’t they simply done that in the first place? It would seem “protector” was a fairly nebulous label, after all.)

Isa took the dishes to the kitchen, pausing to kiss Candy’s forehead and thank her for dinner. Meanwhile Candy stepped out for a moment, returning with a pad of paper and a ballpoint pen. Not all that surprising, really. Then the two were back, raptor eyes surveying their mouse.

Isa said, “Remember, we stick to the script. No improvising. And we don’t know if he’ll be alert enough to listen while we write, so don’t take chances. I still have to keep him safe and out of jail. So keep your tongue in check. You can make all the comments you want later when he’s back to normal, but for now, we stick. to. the script. All right?”

“Yeah, yeah. Come on, let’s get to it already.” Candy pulled the cap off the pen and forced it into my grip. I shifted my vacant stare a few degrees. “Can’t believe this piece of shit gets off this easy.”

“It was your idea, Little Miss Can’t Cause Him Trouble. Now are you ready or not?”

“I’m ready.

“OK then.” Isa leaned into my field of vision. “Mr. Canon, can you hear me? Mr. Canon?”

I waited a moment, then gradually made eye contact. “Yes,” I murmured. Yes. Good. Like you’re half-asleep. That’s how they’d sounded, right?

“You see that paper, that pen in your hand?”

“Yes, Candy.”

“Don’t ever call me Candy,” she snapped. Isa gave her a long-suffering look, but Candy wasn’t having it. “My name is *Candace*. Not Candy.”

“OK, Candace.”

“Good. Now write at the top of the paper, ‘I will not do anything sexual with other people.’”

My jaw clenched for a moment, but I tried to pass it off as simply swallowing down the drool puddling in my mouth so I could reply. “All right.”

Neuter me indeed. I wrote the words as directed, and once given the order, got to work on the next ninety-nine times. Those fucking bitches! Here I was, primed to have the kind of sex life other men didn’t even dream about, and they were going to have me pounding my pud in solitude for the rest of my days! I couldn’t believe them. How could they do this?

Really, though. How? Not just the cruelty of it, but... drugging me! How?!

I had plenty of time to think it over as they went to the living room and filled time playing on their phones. Candy started knitting after a while. I thought I saw them looking over sometimes, but I kept my eyes on the page, writing slowly but doggedly.

How had I let it come to this? Yes, I hadn’t made them actually write their commands down, but considering that Abbie had been transformed by a single exposure to sarcastic commentary, that couldn’t be it. What, then? I’d told Candy explicitly to never do anything to disrupt my plans or cause me trouble. So how could she...

Well actually...

Hmm.

Had I ever told her I planned to fuck those girls every chance I got? Yes, I’d walked her through that little sex ed lesson, suggested I might have her do another, but I supposed as far as the letter of the law was concerned, she wasn’t disrupting any formally stated plan by preventing me from doing it again. But obviously I’d planned on having a threesome with her and Isa tonight, hadn’t I?!

Well, no. Technically, I supposed, that had been *her* plan. In fact, she’d been so excited about it that I’d not even had the heart to modify any of it. I supposed she could cancel her own plan without my say-so without actually running into a Serenex wall.

But as for causing me trouble...! No getting around that, was there? She’d drugged me against my will! Yes, she was using the Serenex to keep me from “preying”

on any more students. Where had she been with this voice of restraint last week when we were nearly caught? That would have been her golden opportunity to...

Son of a bitch! To keep me out of trouble.

It was plain I'd been much too careless with her commands. After all, we were both of us teachers. *Keeping students out of trouble* usually meant preventing them from acting on all those idiotic and self-destructive impulses of theirs. How could I have been so stupid as to think she'd flipped the switch from horror at being coerced into playing sex ed sex games with Abbie to wanting to borrow Cassie for fun of her own? She'd known what I wanted to hear all right, and she'd played me like a fiddle.

At least until the tenth time she'd demanded I try her Serenex sauce.

"Atta boy," said Candy as she inspected the pages. "All right, now write 'I will never use Serenex or Serenex knock-offs on anyone ever again.'" She guided me through the first line word by word, then set me off on the path to a hundred. Shit – the sentence was even longer than the first one, and my hand was already cramping up.

Still, I didn't miss the clue. *Serenex knock-offs*, she'd said. Was that what I had? Was that why we hadn't been able to find any evidence of these mind-altering effects in our research? Questions for another day, when I once more had the upper hand.

Once they were satisfied I was hard at work and once more returned to the living room to pass the time, my thoughts turned to Officer Barbour. Candy, I supposed I understood. She could justify this as a means of keeping me out of trouble for good. How was Isa justifying this, though?

I'd made her my protector, instructed her to keep me safe and preserve my freedom. One might be able to twist this bullshit as protecting me from myself, I granted. Same with safety and freedom, if one narrowly interpreted freedom as solely remaining clear from legal consequences of my actions. Perhaps to a cop, simply not being locked up was as free as it got. Not how I'd meant for it to be interpreted, but I hadn't meant *tell me the whole truth* to force Cassie to share every inane and unfiltered thought in her head, either. That might explain why Isa hadn't gone with the tase-and-spray option, too. It would be easier, but less safe. If Taylor had fallen on her face instead of her shoulder, that incident could have gone from frightening to life-threatening in a hurry.

So maybe this level of deception, that goddamn mystery gravy, made *some* sense at least. Still, what I couldn't wrap my mind around was the happiness clause. There simply wasn't any way one could think that tricking me, drugging me, ending my sex life and stealing my Serenex would make me happy. The command had to have been working, right? She'd been so free with her nudity, seemed so preoccupied with pleasing me. Had that all been an act? My capacity to read body language seemed to dull when the body was gorgeous and naked, it seemed. I thought back to what they'd discussed earlier, about seducing me into giving up the Serenex. Not how someone who was trying

to make me happy would describe it at all. But that made no sense. I'd seen her standing there slack-jawed beside Megan and Cassie when I ran into my yard that day! She'd sat while I programmed her and Megan for hours, glassy-eyed and barely responsive...

With the same exact expression I'd had when they found me, supposedly full of their bullshit gravy.

Cassie had never sprayed her at all! Damn it, and I'd never been direct enough to make sure of it. Isa had a thorn in my paw since she'd gotten involved, always judging and trying to take charge. Then she'd played me, waiting to see what I'd do and if a more drastic response were merited. I guess making Megan my plaything had been just the sort of thing she'd feared. She'd covered her contempt well when I'd been nattering on about this morning's locker room orgy, but evidently the real time reminder of my sexual relationship with Taylor had been enough to knock her out of character – that must be why she'd suddenly gone taciturn. And sure, I'd given Taylor a hundred copies of *Mr. Canon can do anything he wants to me*, but often as not, she'd been the one initiating towards me! That crap had been purely consensual!

Hang on, my relationship with Taylor Stern was consensual?!

“Holy shit.”

My hostesses' heads whipped in my direction. “Did he just say something?”

“Is it wearing off already? It's barely been an hour!”

They rushed over. Shit! I kept writing, eyes on the page. “Did you just say something?”

My mouth opened. *No*. I left it open. They hadn't used my name. Play the part. “Canon? *CANON*,” Isa barked in my face. “What did you say just now?”

“What... say what?” I mumbled.

“Is he...” Candy leaned down in my face, waved a hand. I finished my line, then glanced up. “Are you faking this? I swear, if you are fucking with us right now...”

Isa was thinking the same thing. Of course she was! I'd used her own play against her. “Watch him. I'm getting the taser.”

“Isa...”

“Watch him.”

My blood ran cold. *Keep writing, Canon!* She wouldn't. She couldn't! Right? If she could incapacitate me, she would have already and skipped the charade. It had to be true. I could hear her footsteps clomping up and down the hall, the march of a petty authoritarian. No way. It was a bluff. She—

She walked into the room, taser in hand. “Set for stun, Mr. Sulu.” She pressed a button; it sparked menacingly. *Don't look. Don't fidget. Don't cry.*

Don't piss yourself.

And suddenly, right as I began to worry I was going to do all of those things, possibly all at once, a voice bubbled up from beneath the scar tissue grown over my own Serenex-corrupted brain.

I am not a pussy.

My bladder settled. Damn straight.

Isa knelt down beside me. The twin prongs of the taser dug into the top of my leg. Then they went higher. Higher. They didn't stop until they were pressed with uncomfortable firmness against my scrotum.

"Now, dear boy," she said in a voice that only sounded more dangerous for how quiet it was, "this is your last chance. Admit that you're putting us on, or I'll fry every last sperm in your rapey little nut sack."

I will never use Serenex or Serenex knock-offs on anyone ever again, I wrote. Twenty-two more to go. Fuck this bitch if she thought I was going to let a little electric shock take me down.

"One..." She pressed harder. My balls issued a silent condemnation of the tightness of my jeans. They had nowhere to go.

"Two..." She peeled back a safety cap over the trigger. *Bring it. You won't get the satisfaction of a scream.*

"Last chance." She peered at me this way and that. "No? Nothing? Suit yourself."

A line of drool leaked out of the side of my mouth. *Kiss my ass, Barbour.*

"Isa...!"

She eyed me hatefully. For a moment, I really thought she might do it anyway. But I just kept writing. If she shocked me, I'd get back up and keep writing once I could. That weapon gave her no power over me. Not like my weapon did over them. I was in control here. Or I soon would be. Here it came...

The taser pulled back. "Fine. Just write faster, you sack of shit."

They bought it. Four hundred palm-scorching lines later, those two drank my wine with shit-eating grins on their faces, toasting to their own cleverness. No more sex; no more Serenex; a much more direct order to obey any future commands they gave me; and, to my surprise, even a command to save up twenty-five grand each for Taylor, Abbie and Cassie and donate it anonymously. Restitution, great. Evidently I'd been so stupid, I'd not only failed to get these women's assistance in stopping my blackmailer, but I'd added new payments to the list.

There was no way of telling time from where they'd left me, so I waited for them to start wondering aloud when I might shake it off before doing so. I took my time, looking around and mumbling incoherently for a few minutes before regaining real consciousness, much as the others had when I'd dosed them.

"So how do you feel?" Isa asked.

"I'm not sure. Tired. What... what happened? Did we...?"

"No, we didn't. Do you want to?"

"Yeah," pressed Candy. "We're crazy super horny. Do you wanna fuck our brains out, stud? Threesome time, yeah?"

"No," I said quickly. "I won't do anything sexual with other people." I made a face like the suggestion grossed me out.

The two of them laughed openly and shared a high five. "That's too bad, buddy. We were really looking forward to it."

"Yeah, sorry. I'm just not interested in anything sexual. Not with other people, anyway." Someone send me an Oscar.

Both of these cats looked like they'd eaten a dozen canaries. "Hey, do me a favor and stand up."

I stood up. "Like this?"

"Yeah, that's it." Candy snickered, the wine and the power both keeping her nice and giddy. "Dance for us."

"Oh. Um, sure?" God, I felt stupid. A necessary evil, to be sure, but there was nothing for it. She still had that taser on the table beside her. I wasn't about to dive for it and see if the trained cop was quicker on the draw than me, with a hand so sore I doubted I could make a fist if my life depended on it. I was a bad dancer at my best, but I managed to juke and wobble, like someone who was coming out of a near coma would. Isa put a stop to it before long. She howled with laughter, reducing it to mere giggles for just long enough to instruct me to take the pen on the table and try to write the word "moron" on my forehead."

"We should have him do 'rapist' instead," suggested Candy. "Oh! Or 'child rapist.'"

"No, we don't want to have anyone see it and find out about everything. I can't let him take that risk."

“Spoilsport.”

By then I'd already made my effort, trying my best to channel Cassie's nonchalance at casually chit-chatting during activities that ought to be warping her fragile teen mind. “How's that? Legible?” I asked. The tingles from where the pen had scrawled lingered on my forehead.

They differed in opinion, but agreed it was good enough.

“All right. Now it's moment of truth time. Into the kitchen, asshole,” ordered Isa. The two of them followed me in. I thought of the big gob of drug-laden potatoes in the trash and hoped they'd buried it under their own leavings. Isa's arms were folded behind her back; I didn't know if she had the taser with her or not.

Candy squeezed past me and opened a cabinet next to the microwave. The lower section contained a spice rack, its contents neatly organized save for a few bits still sitting out on the counter. The upper shelf held cooking sprays, wooden skewers, baking soda, a plastic bottle of honey shaped like a bear, and, buried in the back, my canister of Serenex. She had to stretch to pull it down, but she managed.

The two of them drew close, pinning me between them right up against the sink. I read the room. They'd gotten what they needed out of my Serenex, neutralizing me completely. Nothing left for them to do now but deprive me of the rest of it. Shit, these bitches were going to make me do it for them, weren't they? Of course they were. The ultimate test of loyalty. Put a weapon in my hand and make me prove I was too broken to use it to save myself. Now I had no doubt Isa was holding that taser.

Shit! I wasn't sure I could afford more, even if I could find the dealer again. Plus if it was indeed some diluted knock-off, who knew if the chemical mix would be just right again. No, I couldn't let this happen. Even if I wanted to be rid of the stuff and just enjoy what I'd already gotten for myself, I couldn't.

After all, *I will let Abbie use my Serenex whenever she wants*. She couldn't very well use the stuff if I poured it down the drain, now, could she? My mind raced.

“What's that doing up there?” I asked cautiously. It was hard to sound casual under the circumstances.

Candy held it low, nozzle pointed at the ground. “We used it on you during dinner, dumb-dumb. The special gravy recipe? Grandma really did dig on mushrooms, but I thought I'd sub in Serenex, see how you liked it. Now you're our bitch, Canon. Your days of molesting those girls are over.”

“Oh. Is that why I don't want to do anything sexual with another person now?”

She tapped my nose. “Maybe not so dumb after all. Now if I handed you this, what would you do with it?”

Spray it right the fuck in your eyes, I thought. “I don't know. I will never use Serenex on anyone again, that's for sure. Hide it somewhere, I guess.”

“Hide it?” Isa asked behind me. She was still looking at me with that same suspicion she’d shown when she’d nearly tased my nuts. “I thought you said you were never going to use it.”

“I’m not!” I made a face, like the idea was incredibly distasteful to me now. “I would never.”

“So prove it,” Candy said. Eyeing Isa, she put the canister into my hand. I looked down at my old friend, then back up at my new enemies. The taser was out now. “Spray the rest of it down the sink. Show us you mean it.”

Fuck. Could I spray them in time? Probably, except Serenex took time to take effect, and 50,000 volts of electricity did not. I’d hit the floor, drop the can, and if they had brain one in their heads, they’d spray it down my throat before they succumbed. Then it would all be over, and those commands would be real. Worse. Next time, they wouldn’t stop at mere pragmatism. Yes, there was a chance Isa was bluffing, that my orders to keep me safe would stay her hand, but I wasn’t about to gamble it all on the efficacy of the same brainwashing that had left me open to *this*.

There was nothing else to do. I directed the nozzle into the sink and pressed the trigger. Damn! I had to do something before all of my Serenex – Abbie’s Serenex! – was gone. The can was still heavy, not so different from when it had been full in fact, but every passing moment that its sepia contents sprayed down the drain, it was growing lighter. Each second that went by was hundreds of dollars gone, a world of opportunity squandered. If I didn’t come up with something soon, I’d have no choice but to roll those dice after all.

The women seemed content to watch. Soon, I would be disarmed, and for good. If I didn’t hatch a plan better than “YOLO!” then I was doomed. The amazing sex I’d had that afternoon would become a bittersweet memory. I thought of Taylor and her indignation that I hadn’t fucked her before we left the locker room. She was never going to let me hear the end of it.

Actually, no. She was going to call me a loser, a fuck-up, a pussy, and then she’d graduate and I’d never hear from her again.

Almost as frightening, I would have to face that fate I’d warned these women of earlier this week. What would happen if Serenex compelled me to let Abbie use my canister whenever she wanted, but there was no more canister to be used? What would my brain even do? My hand shook at the mere thought of it.

As a stall tactic, I released the nozzle to flex and shake out my hand. It actually was pretty uncomfortable squeezing down right now. Isa nudged me almost right away. “Don’t fuck around, Canon. Keep spraying.”

I frowned. “I am. My hand just hurts is all. I guess you guys had me write a whole bunch, huh.”

“So use your other hand, *moron*.” She smacked the taser against where the word was written on my forehead.

“Ow! I’m on it, I’m on it, geez!” I shifted to my left, paused again. “Should we be doing this in a ventilated area? I don’t want to—”

She pressed the prongs into the back of my neck. “Three. Two—”

I sprayed. Great. I’d bought myself another thirty seconds, during most of which I’d been too distracted to think. Nice work.

It was half-empty before my brain came up with anything. “So I guess you guys are going to try to fix the girls, right?” I asked conversationally.

“We already did,” Candy snapped. “You can’t do anything to them any more.”

“No, I get that. But I mean, it’s not all me, right? Like, what are they going to do when I cut them off? Abbie’s sort of... volatile.”

“We’ll figure it out.”

I kept spraying. The smell was becoming intense; I turned on the water to rinse it down, and even that small gesture was nearly enough to make Isa jerk suddenly. Yeah, no way I was going to spray her before she took me down.

“Sure. I was just thinking it’d be a lot easier to fight Serenex with Serenex. For you, obviously. I’m done with the stuff. I’ll never use Serenex on anyone ever again.”

The girls shared a glance. My heart pounded. The canister was so much lighter now. “Maybe... maybe he’s got a point,” Candy said guardedly. “I’m not afraid of the Stern girls, but—”

“You haven’t read their files.” Isa grinned.

“But if he used Serenex to make those girls his love slaves, fuck up their heads like he did his neighbor... maybe we’re going to need some to fix them?”

Isa frowned, plainly not liking it. I didn’t dare look up. Three years of high school drama club weren’t going to be a match for police academy training and that dump truck of suspicion she was driving around.

“We’ll figure something out.”

“You’re the one who told me that it’s going to be permanent, or at least take a really long time to work out, because the LSD and all the other crap.” LSD? What the hell? “If he... if Cassie...” Her jaw quivered. Looked like there was some maternalism there. I’d be more touched if I weren’t so preoccupied imagining how much was left of my dwindling supply as the stream whisked down into the drain.

“We’re going to take care of her, baby.”

“But what if we *need* it? I know, we talked about it being too much a temptation and blahdy blah blah, but this might be the only way to make things right!”

Isa glared, but I could see she was breaking. But as the canister grew lighter, the only question was whether she’d—

Candy broke first, her hand closed over mine. “Canon, stop.”

Instantly, I stopped. It was all I could do not to heave a sigh of relief. There was quite possibly less left in the canister than what I'd already used since buying it, but as Candy snatched it from my hand and set it on the counter, I could hear the sound of its contents trickling around in there. Some was left. Thank god.

I could go on letting Abbie use my Serenex whenever she wanted. I simply had to hope she didn't want to very often.

Isa glared, plainly not liking her girlfriend's decision. Candy simply shook her head. "We got him, Isa. We won. But human garbage or no, he's right. Those girls are fucked in the head, and this might be the only way to fix them. Or do you really think even a couple of brats like Abbie and Taylor deserve to spend the rest of their lives pining for this piece of garbage?"

"Hey, I'm standing right here."

Isa lowered her taser, though the tremble in her arm bespoke her desire to do anything but. "Canon, if I ever see you so much as glance at another girl at that school... I will find a way to wreck the rest of your pathetic life. I have buddies who work in corrections. They can give me all kinds of tips about how to keep you safe and protected while still making your life a living hell."

"Um, sure. Whatever you say, Isa. I will do whatever you tell me to do." *I will choke you with those words.*

"Good. Now get the fuck out of my house, and don't you ever come back."

I nodded. "Sure thing. And, um, not for nothing, but... thanks for dinner."

I meant to serve them a dish of my own. Something served nice and cold.