

Breaking Up Is Hard To Do

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The soft tension all over Tessa's face told me that she was ready.

"What do you want?" I asked her. I knew the answer, but the ritual is important.

She paused between panting breaths to respond. "I want to come!"

I could tell she wanted it badly from the way her hands kept twitching. If I hadn't relaxed her arms into immobility she'd have been strumming herself to orgasm already. That was something I normally enjoyed watching, but that night I had other ideas. "Tessa," I said, "in a few moments I'm going place my hand in yours. When I count to three you'll find that your left hand and arm can move normally again, and that you're holding my right hand with it. My right hand will be a very special, erotic toy. Every touch of my hand on your body will feel arousing, exciting, and intensely pleasurable to you. You'll take my hand in yours and guide it all over your body, using its touch to make yourself come. One, two, three."

Tessa's hand closed around mine and slid it across her naked belly. I did my best to keep it relaxed and let her move it as she wanted, just guiding enough to keep from pulling too much on the stud in her belly button. She moved my hand in a slow, easy circle that expanded outward with each pass until I was brushing the bottoms of her breasts and the upper edge of her mound.

My thumb hooked an erect nipple. Tessa let out a little gasp and changed course, cupping first her left breast and then her right in my relaxed, willing palm. She fanned my fingers across her nipples and rolled them once or twice in the way that she so loves to feel me do. Then her legs spread and I let her guide my hand straight down, over the stud again, and into the deliciously wet valley of her shaved pussy.

Her hand covered mine and manipulated it so my middle finger slipped right through her outer lips and inside. She worked me slowly up and down, pressing indirectly on her clit, and guided my finger all the way inside. I couldn't resist hooking it a little, reaching for the G spot but not quite catching it. She pushed me further down and in and this time I felt the little bump and pressed on it. Tessa increased the pressure and arched her back in pleasure. After a minute or two of that she led me back up to pay some serious attention to her button. It was peeking out now and ready to be toyed with. I willed

myself to relax, though, and let her lead.

She used my finger to frig her clit up and down, then side to side, with a degree of pressure I'd have been reluctant to use on her. The pitch of her gasps rose with each contact, though, so I went with it. The motion changed to a circular one, a sort of ring-around-the-Rosie with her clit in the center getting brushed every which way. It only took a few seconds of that before her legs and shoulders jerked upward and Tessa's head flew back, pressing hard against the pillow with each cry. I saw her jaw quiver and I knew that when Tessa could speak again she'd tell me that this was a Good One.

While I waited for her to recover I lay back and willed a little pleasant relaxation into my overexcited cock. Having Tessa use my hand as a masturbation glove had been so hot for me; if I didn't pull myself back from the edge a little I'd come as soon as she touched me. That wouldn't have been a catastrophe at this point, but sometimes a guy likes a little fondling too.

After a few minutes I felt Tessa roll over and press her soft, luscious body against me. Her arm and leg stretched across me and I felt her playfully pushing her thigh against my hard-on. "That was a Good One," she told me in a husky whisper, just as I'd expected. "Now it's your turn. Just relax and let me take over."

She had me half pinned under her anyway, so I just answered with a contented sigh and let myself slip into a light trance while Tessa planted delectable little kisses all over my face and neck. Her hand moved down to grasp my cock and coax it back into full bloom. Between her fingers working their magic on my shaft and her words in my ear telling me exactly how hard I was going to come inside her, it didn't take long before I was ready for blast-off. Tessa knows exactly how to stroke me, mind and body.

She teased me with a few licks and a gentle, carefully-placed bite on the end of my cock. The tiny piece of my brain that was still aware of anything other than arousal and pleasure recalled that Tessa was right in the middle of her cycle and I wasn't wearing a condom, so she was probably going to take me into her mouth instead of her pussy. Fine by me. At that point anything was fine by me as long as it led to an orgasm. So when she did envelop me in her hot, dripping sex and start riding me cowgirl style that little voice of reason was quickly drowned out by the rest of my body screaming in delight. I watched her tits bounce until I couldn't resist reaching for them with my hands. She squeezed down on me with her internal muscles for about three strokes and that did it for me. My eyes rolled back and for a few seconds every thought went on hold while I pumped my seed into her. I became dimly aware of Tessa's body clenching and crying out, too, thanks to a permanent suggestion I'd given her long ago – that every time she gives me an orgasm she comes too – and thought, for probably the millionth time, that the brain really is the ultimate sex organ.

Tessa's tired body slid off to one side and she cradled herself in my arm while she waited to build up enough energy to move on her own. I kissed her forehead because it was too hard to reach anything else. "Have I mentioned lately that I love you?"

She made a supreme effort to look me in the eye. "You may have brought it up once or twice. I love you, too."

A contented sigh made its way out of my throat and, like so many times before, I reflected on what a lucky son of a bitch I was. A few months before, in an online erotic hypnosis forum, I'd let myself get pulled into a spirited discussion – okay, a borderline flame war – concerning whether or not the models on a popular hypnosis video site were really hypnotized. Leading the negative contingent was a hot-headed newbie who called herself The ConTessa and argued that the models had to be faking

because nobody could go from placid to orgasmic in the snap of a finger like that. I and a few other real-life hypnotists argued the positive and cited examples. As with most such discussions nothing ever really got resolved, but it did spark a much longer private exchange between ConTessa and me. In due course emails led to phone calls and in time Tessa had discovered beyond any doubt just how easily a woman can be made to orgasm from hypnosis.

I felt Tessa settle a little deeper into my arms and sensed the slowing rhythm of her breathing. She was going to sleep. That sounded like a good idea to me; I tucked my happy memories away and let my mind go blank.

To borrow a line from Bob Seeger, I wish I didn't know now what I didn't know then.

My world stopped turning a few days later. I was at Tessa's and we'd just finished a brisk round of lovemaking. Tessa was more asleep than awake, floating on a post-orgasmic cloud. "I think you wore me out," she purred into her pillow.

"So take a nap. We weren't going anywhere, were we?"

"Not now, we're not." She sunk into the pillow a little deeper.

"Okay, then. Mind if I borrow your computer while you nap?"

She gave a little half-nod that looked affirmative enough, so I let her drift off and did a little idle web surfing. I wandered into the forum – our forum – and read postings for a while. It was still early, Tessa was still out of it, so I clicked on the link for the chatroom.

Web-based applications can be a real beast. Since the basic web service was never set up with the idea of continuous sessions in mind they rely on all kinds of cookies and oddball constructions to fake it. Sometimes those constructions don't work precisely as intended. For instance, when the web-based chat client came up it assumed I was Tessa and automatically logged me into the chatroom with her user name. I saw that, but before I could log out or change names a second chat window popped up announcing a private chat from Madmonk.

Madmonk: You made it! Got rid of Captain Clueless already, did you?

I just stared at the box and willed that text to mean anything but what it looked like. Madmonk was feeling frisky, it seemed, because he didn't wait very long for a response.

Madmonk: You deserve a treat. Master says orgasm now.

I killed the chat client. *Get a grip, Dane*, I told myself. *The worst this means is that she's been doing some harmless erotic hypnoplay on the side.*

Yeah, sure. And that "Captain Clueless" reference was probably just a term of endearment.

The question was, what to do now? I could look through the computer for chat logs, emails, anything to confirm or tear down what my gut was telling me. But the moment I did that I'd be violating Tessa's trust; if the relationship wasn't already dead, that alone would do the job. The honorable alternatives boiled down to either waking Tessa, confessing to the honest mistake, and letting her respond or forgetting the whole thing. The latter wasn't really an answer, as Madmonk would surely mention the

aborted chat next time they talked.

With my stomach churning I went back to Tessa's bedroom and sat down on the bed. She sensed the movement and reached for me with a sleepy arm. When she realized I wasn't joining her under the covers she woke enough to realize something was up. I watched her face closely as I said, "We need to talk."

She wriggled into a seated position. "That sounds serious."

I told her how I'd gone into the chatroom and been automatically logged in as her, and how before I could change it I'd been accosted by Madmonk. "Seems like you two have been pretty tight. At least he seems to think so."

Tessa quickly laughed that off. "He wishes! You know what the monk is like, all posture and no skill. I did role play a little with him once, just to see if he had any idea what to do after an induction, but that's it."

Her face looked sincere and her eyes didn't leave mine. I wanted to believe. But the implications of "Captain Clueless" lingered in my head. Madmonk knew that Tessa had plans with someone that night.

Tessa's story also reminded me that yes, I did know Madmonk in the vague way that one gets to know people in an online community. He was a self-taught hypnotist who'd learned from books and practice, as he'd happily tell anyone at great length. He knew enough to be fairly successful with the willing and was smart enough to steer clear of amateur therapy. I'd done some clean-up work with a former "subject" of his (a term that makes me cringe, but he uses it incessantly) and learned some things about his habits. I knew, for example, that he tended to be sloppy with his triggers. "Master says orgasm now."

She tried like hell to resist it, I'll give her that. But another of Madmonk's foibles is that he gets off on proving his power. When he installs a trigger he usually includes a suggestion that the more the person tries to resist that trigger the stronger it gets. Tessa tried, and failed, to resist the orgasm. Then she tried, and failed, to conceal it as it happened. All of that told me she'd done a lot more than role play with the guy, and she'd done it more than once or twice.

I had to get out of there. "Master says sleep." Tessa's face flashed surprise and then a touch of fear before her eyes closed and she succumbed to the monk's second favorite trigger. Without another word I dressed and went home.

After a restless night I tried convincing myself that I was overreacting. Okay, so Tessa had been doing some erotic hypnosis with Madmonk. They were doing it online, maybe over the phone at most. It wasn't as if she was sleeping with him. It wasn't really cheating.

That argument rang hollow. Maybe most people wouldn't call it cheating if there was no skin to skin contact, but for people like Tessa – and like me – hypnosis is as intimate a thing as any physical act can be. She was letting someone else arouse her, stroke her, and take her to orgasm, and she was doing it behind my back. The fact that she hadn't wanted me to know, had lied about it when I asked her, told me Tessa saw it as wrong. Not wrong enough to stop doing it, apparently, but still wrong.

It felt wrong to me, too. I checked my watch, figured there was enough time, and called her.

“Dane?” Her voice sounded a little dazed, as if she was still mostly asleep.

I decided to take advantage of her state. “You're not ready yet? We're supposed to be having coffee at Noonan's before work.”

“We were? I ... I must've forgot, honey. Give me twenty minutes?”

“Sure.”

By the time she walked into our favorite coffee shop it was closer to half an hour later. I had her usual waiting for her on the table and was sipping mine. Tessa's smile was uneasy; I took that to mean she remembered how the night had ended. “I'm sorry I'm late,” she began. “I got sidetracked.”

Not sure whether it was cynicism or instinct, I voiced my first thought. “You mean Peter called to tell you what happened.”

She winced at Madmonk's real-life first name. “I'm sorry, Dane. I know I should have talked to you before I ... did anything with him. I'm sure you feel cheated on and you're probably angry.”

“But I shouldn't be.” And then I tossed out another guess. “It's not as if you flew out and slept with him last month when you told me you were visiting your sister in Arkansas, right?”

For the tiniest instant her face darkened with shame and guilt. I'd seen it, she knew I'd seen it, and the reflexive denial was stillborn in her mouth.

I choked out a one-word question: “Why?”

It hung in the air like a bad smell, something we both hoped would pass quickly and feared wouldn't. Tessa's eyes begged me not to make her answer but I wasn't cutting her any slack this time. After a long, troubled pause, she came out with, “You're just ... so ... nice.”

Of all the possibilities I'd prepared for, that one hadn't made the list. What the fuck? “Nice,” I repeated. “Yeah, I can see where that would be a real problem.”

Tessa winced at my sarcasm, knowing it's usually a precursor to serious anger. “No, I'm pretty sure you can't. Dane, honey, you're a great guy. You're kind and gentle and considerate and loving, and there's nothing wrong with that. But sometimes ... sometimes I need to be abused a little. Made fun of. Degraded.”

For a moment I wondered who this woman was in front of me. “You want to be degraded,” I mused. “And Peter does that to you?”

She blotted her teary eyes with a napkin. “Yes. He insults me. He makes fun of how easily he can manipulate me. He makes me do things I don't want to do. He makes me feel like a worthless whore, and I need that.”

My heart collapsed on itself like a dying star, leaving a cold, dark void in its place. I stood up, crushed my empty coffee cup and dropped it on the table. “Then I hope you two will be happy together. You seem to deserve each other.”

I heard her first sob as I walked out of the shop.

The first week was the hardest. I hadn't quite realized how much of my daily life revolved around our relationship. There were text messages during the day, short keep-in-touch phone calls at lunch time, wondering what she'd like to do for dinner, making mental notes of interesting ideas for our next play session, and a host of little things. With none of that to think about anymore, I found huge blocks of empty time in each day and had no idea what to do with them. Even hanging out at the erotic hypnosis forum had lost its appeal, what with Madmonk on there every day and the possibility of encountering Tessa.

By the beginning of the second week I was starting to remember what single people do with their time and became less convinced that the empty seat at my table would be taken by the ghost of Banquo. I let a few friends know I was newly solo and began to feel like socializing a little again.

Then, about two weeks after that morning in the coffee shop, I remembered something that stopped me cold: Tessa and I had had sex in the middle of her cycle. We hadn't used a condom, and I knew she wasn't on the pill because it messed with her hormones too much. I could be a father-to-be with someone I no longer loved.

That tore it – I was going to have to call her. If she was pregnant I owed her my support. Marriage was out of the question now, of course, but I'd be a responsible dad. If she wasn't pregnant then I could breathe a sigh of relief and finish letting her go.

I called that evening, at what had been our usual time, more than half expecting to go to voice mail.

Nope. "Dane?" she opened, her voice tentative and a little thin.

I kept mine low and even. "Hi."

"I'm glad you called. I ... I think about you a lot."

It was as good an opening as any other. "Me, too. As a matter of fact, I was thinking about you today. About that night last month when we made love at my place, and we didn't ... use anything. And I realized you should've had your period by now, and I wondered. Are you late?"

She paused a long time before answering. "No, I wasn't late. I'm not pregnant."

I tried not to sigh too loudly. "Probably a good thing, under the circumstances."

"Is that the only reason you called?"

I could hear the trembling in her voice and I just couldn't be mean. "No, of course not. I didn't just stop caring overnight. Are you and Peter ... doing okay?"

And it took every ounce of self-control not to cheer when she answered. "No. He ... we ... don't talk anymore. I couldn't ..."

So she did feel guilty. That was some consolation. "That's sad," I said, struggling to conceal the infantile glee my id wanted to express. "Did he leave you for someone else?"

"No," she said quickly, and I heard the emotions welling up. Sure enough, more came pouring out right away. "He ended it because of me. I couldn't come for him anymore. He kept trying things and I'd get sort of aroused but nothing made me come. I can't even do it by myself. The only way I can come is by thinking of you, Dane. And stupid me, I told him that. He got upset and just walked away from me. And now I have nobody, and I'm so pathetic all I do is sit alone at night and play with myself and remember your voice, even though you hate me, so I can come." She said it rapidly, as if trying to get it out before changing her mind.

"I don't hate you." I flinched at my own inadequacy, but what else was I supposed to say? Was I supposed to suddenly forgive her just because the guy she cheated on me with dumped her?

Tessa's voice came back, once again hesitant. "Dane ... Can I ask you to do something for me?"

My gut told me I wasn't going to like this. "You can ask," I allowed.

She took a deep breath. "Would you please hypnotize me again?"

I actually pulled the phone away from my ear and stared at it for a moment. Why would she think I'd even consider that? For people like us, that was almost the same as asking for post-breakup sex. So I stalled for time to think. "Why?"

"I miss your voice," she confessed. "I need it. And you've always said that it's important to end these things cleanly. What we have now isn't clean."

She had a point, at least with the latter bit. Whether she needed my voice or not wasn't my problem, but I did owe her a clean break. She was carrying around a bunch of triggers that I'd given her over the length of the relationship and it was my responsibility to remove them. I was pretty sure Madmonk hadn't bothered to cancel his either, and I'd already proven that he was still notoriously sloppy. "You're right," I conceded. "Are you ready to go into hypnosis now?"

Her answer was quick and emphatic. "No, not now! I don't want to do this over the phone. Would you come over, Dane? Or let me come to you?"

I probably should have pretended I had plans or something instead of being immediately available to her. On the other hand, I figured the sooner I got it over with the better. "I'll be there in half an hour," I told her, figuring it would be easier to escape that way.

Tessa answered the door in her cream-colored silk pajamas, my favorite of her various lounging outfits. The way they clung to her made it clear there was nothing underneath them. My balls took over long enough to sneak a peek or two but I got myself under control quickly. I had a specific job to do, nothing more.

She started for the bedroom. I parked myself in a living room chair and waited for her to notice that I wasn't following. Tessa made it all the way into the bedroom and had to poke her head back through the door like a cream silk gopher. "Coming?"

"The couch will do just fine."

"Oh." She took the long way to the couch, giving herself the chance to parade her shapely bottom past my face and tempt my baser instincts again. She lay back with her head to my right, which meant that as she wriggled into position the loose pajama top opened up and put most of her breast

on display for me. It almost looked accidental. Almost.

I chose not to comment on her wardrobe malfunction. "Ready?"

She wiggled around a little more to get comfortable – or perhaps to make sure I had a good view inside her pajama top – and nodded.

Her games were starting to put me in a foul mood already. Was I supposed to forget all the lying and cheating just because she flashed me some nipple? So instead of the simple pacing and leading induction I had intended to do, I decided to hit her with a reminder of why we had come to this point. "Master says sleep."

She dropped instantly. I spent some time deepening just to make sure she was ready, and then removed all of the triggers I'd put in her mind. It didn't take long. Then I continued with, "And now, if there's anything you need for me to know before we go further, you can allow yourself to tell me those things and your speech can help to relax you deeper."

It was a standard line I use often when working with people in hypnosis. It gives them a chance to give me feedback and reassures them that I'm paying attention to their needs. It came out then more out of reflex than any expectation of an answer.

But answer she did. "I need you to punish me."

That derailed my train of thought for a minute. "I don't want to," I said after a pause.

"But I hurt you. You're angry with me. You should want to punish me for what I did." Her voice had an odd pleading note to it that I wasn't used to hearing.

"I left you," I reminded her.

"But don't you want to hurt me back?"

I saw where this was going and shook my head in disbelief. This was a side of Tessa I'd never seen before. "That's not my way."

"But I need it."

"I don't care." I made no effort to hide the irritation in my voice. "What you need isn't my problem anymore. Tessa, I want you to tell me now what triggers you were given by Peter."

To my surprise, there was only one – but it was a doozy. "I must do everything Master says," she replied. "I cannot resist. The more I try to resist the more powerful Master's command becomes and the more aroused I become."

Madmonk had learned a new trick, it seemed. Instead of the usual long list of commands beginning with "Master says," he'd simply made those words into one elegant, all-purpose trigger. He had to have stolen the idea from somewhere. "All right, Tessa. In a moment I'm going to count to three. When I reach three --"

Tessa's eyes popped open and her body jerked itself violently into a half-sitting position. "No!"

Her eyes were wide open and clear, her face tense, and one hand had a death grip on the back of the sofa. She might still be suggestible, but Tessa was no longer in trance. That made no sense to me at all. "No? Are you saying you don't want Peter's trigger removed?"

She shook her head. "That's right. Since you won't give me what I deserve, maybe he will."

An exasperated sigh forced its way out of my mouth. "And what exactly do you deserve, Tessa? To be punished? To be degraded? Will that make you feel as if everything is okay again?"

She wouldn't look me in the eye. Instead she stared into a pillow and just muttered, "It's what I need."

"All right, fine!" I felt the anger rising in my chest and decided to let it out. "You want to be humiliated and punished? How about this: Tessa, Master says go stand in front of the patio door."

Her body moved to obey even as her face registered suspicion. "What are you going to do, Dane?"

"Punish you," I sneered. "Master says face the window and stay that way until I tell you otherwise."

Her reflection in the sliding glass door glared at me. The curtain was open, it was dark outside; anyone looking from the building across the courtyard would be able to see Tessa clearly. It would take some optical help to see any real detail, of course, but that didn't help the feeling of exposure I always got standing in front of those doors. Judging from her face Tessa was feeling that same thing.

"Now," I said, "Master says strip."

She clasped her hands behind her back as if to get them as far from the loose buttons of her pajamas as possible. "What's the big idea, Dane?"

"I'm giving you what you need," I replied, letting my voice stay low and level, remembering the fictional Klingon proverb that revenge is a dish best served cold. "Master says strip now."

She winced and groaned. Her legs trembled as her arms slowly moved forward until her hands reached the buttons to her pajama top. "Don't make me do this," she pleaded.

"A little while ago you were deliberately exposing yourself to me," I pointed out. "This is just the logical next step."

Her pajama top opened and fell off her shoulders to the floor. From my vantage point I could plainly see how erect her nipples were. Tessa may be complaining, but she was also very turned on. I sat quietly and watched as she struggled and failed to resist the need to drop her bottoms. A pair of lacy boy shorts followed them into the pile at her feet and Tessa was naked. She continued to look at me, using the glass as a translucent mirror. Was that fear in her face? Excitement? Both?

"Master says masturbate," I told her. "Master says keep doing it until I give you permission to stop."

Again she struggled to resist, but within a minute her left hand had found its way to her slit. I watched in cold, clinical interest while her fingers moved in and out, up and down, exactly the way she used to like mine moving. "Just think," I taunted her, "right now you're playing with yourself in full view of anyone who happens to be looking out their window."

Tessa let out a whelp and her hand moved faster. She was actually getting off on this!

"That's right," I continued, "there you are, on display. I wonder how many of the people in that other building have binoculars. Didn't you say that you saw someone peering through a telescope once? I wonder if that guy is watching you right now. Maybe he's even taking photos to jerk off to later. What do you think about that, Tessa? Embarrassing enough for you yet?"

Tessa groaned and strummed furiously, but in between guttural sounds she got out one word: "More."

That wasn't the word I was expecting. "More? You want more?" An idea came to me. "I think you're enjoying this too much, Tessa. You said you wanted to be punished, but all I'm doing is giving you an excuse to put on a show. That's not punishment. You have a free hand, I see; Master says spank yourself."

She gasped loudly and looked wide-eyed at my reflection. Her right arm extended itself slowly, then suddenly whipped downward at her backside. The impact of her hand on her cheek made a sharp smack.

"That's perfect," I told her. "Master says keep spanking, as hard as you can, until I give you permission to stop."

Tessa's body jumped at each impact of her hand. It wasn't long before her ass reddened from the blows enough to match the rising color in her face and neck. "Fuck!" she cried out. "Fuck! I'm gonna come!"

"So come," I said. "Show everyone watching what a shameless, depraved little whore you are."

That did it: Tessa cried out at the top of her voice, gasping and groaning her way through the most intense orgasm I'd ever seen her have. Midway through her legs buckled and she ended up pressed against the glass door, still frigging and spanking herself. I watched for a minute or so and couldn't stomach any more. "All right, Tessa, you can stop masturbating and spanking yourself now."

She stopped and slid the rest of the way to the floor. "Thank you," she sighed.

I sat there looking at her and wondering what the hell I'd just done and why. For half a second or so I felt a vague idea forming in a dark corner of my mind, something about a little quid pro quo. The thought didn't fully develop, but it came close enough to be disturbing to someone who likes to think of himself as having ethics. I needed to get out right away.

"Tessa," I told her, "We're done. Master says go to bed immediately, without speaking, and sleep until morning."

She gave me a pleading look but couldn't stop herself from retreating to her bedroom. I locked the door on my way out and then slid my key back through the gap at the bottom. A good, hard shove ensured that it scooted well inside and out of reach.

Three days went by. Every time I thought about Tessa I remembered that cold, detached feeling I had while watching her humiliate herself in front of the glass door. She'd brought something out in me that I hadn't known was there and wasn't happy about discovering. Or maybe I'd just read too many stories.

I was having a sandwich and working on a custom script for someone when I heard a knock on the door. Not expecting anyone, I just opened the door with a quick “not interested” ready on my lips. Then I saw it was Tessa.

“Not interested,” I said anyway.

She was holding a cardboard file box. “You left some things behind at my place,” she explained. “I was in the neighborhood, so ...”

I took the box. “Thanks.”

Either she didn't hear the dismissal in my tone or she chose to ignore it. “Aren't you going to invite me in?”

“Wasn't planning on it.” As soon as I said the words, though, my conscience smacked me. I'm just not good at rude. “I'm sorry. Would you like to come in?”

“I would, thanks.”

So I stepped back and closed the door behind her. “Something to drink?”

Tessa slipped off her jacket and hung it in her usual spot. She was wearing the clingy blue dress I'd bought her for her last birthday. It still looked damned good on her. “Just some water would be fine. I'll get it myself.”

With a shrug I took the box to my bedroom and set it down to deal with later. Just out of curiosity I popped the lid to see what I'd left and not missed for two weeks plus: a windbreaker, a pair of running shoes, a couple of shirts and pants, and my copy of *Hypnotic Suggestions and Metaphors*. Wait a minute ...

I came out with the book in hand to find Tessa on the couch sipping from a tall glass. “I left this book at your place?”

She nodded. “I know you use it a lot, so I figured you'd want it back quickly.”

“I do use it a lot.” I watched her face very closely. “In fact, I used it last week. Right here, in this apartment.”

Sure enough, I caught a quick flash of either fear or embarrassment on her face and my suspicions were confirmed. “You still have a key to this place, don't you?”

“Of course not! I gave it back to you ... umm ... or did I?” She made a show of digging through her purse, produced a Schlage key that looked right, and placed it on the coffee table. “My mistake. Here, have it back now.”

“Why are you really here, Tessa?”

“To bring back your things,” she said, gesturing toward the bedroom where I'd taken the box.

I knew it was bullshit, she knew it was bullshit. That detached feeling came over me again and I had a diabolical idea. “Tessa, Master says you must always speak truthfully to me. Where did you get the

things in that box?"

This time the fear in her face was strong and genuine. "You can't do that!"

I felt myself grinning. "Of course I can, darling. You like to be humiliated, don't you? Just imagine, after all the lies and bullshit you've thrown at me, having no choice but to be truthful. What could possibly be more humiliating than that? Now answer the question: where did you get the things in that box?"

Truthfully, I was nowhere near as sure of myself as I made it sound. But to Tessa's mind, already in the grip of a posthypnotic suggestion and therefore in a receptive state, the logic was all the more powerful. I watched her struggle and saw her body twitch with those telltale signs of growing arousal. Finally she spit out the answer: "I let myself in while you were at work today and took the book and clothes. The jacket and shoes really were at my place. Take off the suggestion, please."

From somewhere inside me came a low chuckle. "Not likely. Why did you take those things from here?"

Another long, losing struggle ensued. "Because an old jacket and a pair of shoes you never wear weren't a good enough pretext to come over by themselves. Dane, take it off now."

"I'll take it off if and when I please. Why did you really come here tonight?"

Her thighs rubbed together in a most unladylike way as she strained not to answer and again failed. "I want you to degrade me some more. Dane, please!"

"Oh, you do? Looks to me like you're getting your wish. Every time you have to answer a question with the truth you seem to be getting more aroused. Isn't that true?"

Tessa strained on the couch but her struggles were failing faster each time. "Yes, it's true."

"So you like this, don't you?"

"No! I don't like it!" She'd answered immediately, too, so I figured it was a truth she didn't mind telling.

"But you don't really want me to stop it, either, do you?"

More groaning and squirming, then she answered. "No, I don't."

"Why not?"

Tessa's hands wandered over her body. Clearly she wanted to slip them inside her dress yet she struggled not to. "Because," she panted, "it's making me feel naked and helpless. It's degrading in a way I never thought about before. I feel totally exposed and it's making me so horny I can't stand it."

"Interesting," I mused. "What do you want most right now?"

She let out a long grunt and allowed one hand to press on her groin. "I want your cock inside me. I want you to make me come."

There was a time when those words would've had me out of my clothes in nothing flat. That time was

gone – not only did I keep my pants on, but I wasn't even hard. “Not gonna happen,” I told her. “You're on your own.”

“Please, Dane,” she begged. “I want you inside me so much. I miss your cock and your voice and your hands. Please make me come.”

I was about to suggest she go home and wear out her vibrator, but that thought reminded me of an old conversation we'd had about foreign objects. With the vengeful new me in charge I stepped into the kitchen and opened the utensil drawer. It was still there: a paddle-style ice cream scoop with a smooth, round, plastic handle about five inches long.

Tessa looked up at me in confusion when I dropped the scoop into her lap. “This is the only thing of mine that I'm willing to have inside you. You want to come so much, be my guest.”

“No, Dane. You know how I feel about that.”

Yes, I did. At one point I'd made an offhand joke about the shape of that ice cream scoop handle. Tessa had taken me seriously and delivered a stern lecture about how nothing not designed for the purpose was ever going inside her body. “Remember what you said earlier? 'I want you to degrade me some more.' Well, babe, we aim to please. Master says fuck yourself with the ice cream scoop until you orgasm.”

The look of horror on her face was priceless. “I won't do that! I refuse!”

The new me just shrugged and plopped into a nearby chair. “Suit yourself. But we both know what's going to happen next, don't we?”

For about two minutes she squirmed and groaned and begged me not to make her do it. I sat back with a malicious smile and just waited. Finally she grabbed the paddle end of the scoop, lifted her dress, and pushed her soaking wet panties aside far enough to put the handle to a use for which it was not designed. “Fuck!” she moaned. “Fuck! ... Fuck! ...” Her pace grew faster and her voice grew louder with each thrust of the handle until she cried out incoherently and almost fell off the couch with the force of her climax.

I watched in silence for a few minutes. The scoop came out and fell on the floor while she lay gasping. When she seemed recovered enough to stand I cleared my throat and spoke once more. “We're finished, Tessa. Master says go home immediately, and the next time you want to be degraded just do it yourself.”

I picked up the scoop by the paddle end and dropped it in the dishwasher.

This time five days passed. I was starting to think I was free of Tessa, that she'd had her fill of abuse and finally let go. The thought put me in a mood to get out and do something, so I called up my friends Marty and Jake and we hit our favorite Irish pub to hold an informal wake for the relationship.

We were on our third round when she showed up, obviously looking for me. She wore a tan trench coat cinched but not well buttoned and plain shoes. Nothing else was immediately apparent. She spied me almost immediately after I saw her and made a bee line for our end of the bar. “We have to talk, Dane.”

I had two and a half stiff drinks in me already, so I was in no frame of mind to mince words. “We don't have to do anything, girlie. There is no 'we' anymore. *You* might need to talk, but that's your problem and I really don't give a flying fuck.”

It was supposed to put her off. It failed. “Okay, then I need to talk and I need you to listen.”

All of my 'oh, shit' sensors started to sound off at once, but I didn't respond to them. What could she possibly say or do in a public place, in front of Marty and Jake no less, that would make any difference? So I let her talk.

“Dane,” she said, “I thought I knew you as well as anybody could. You've always been so kind, so decent, so loving. And as much as I appreciated that, there's this part of me that just wants to run from that. It wants to be abused and debased and insulted. I wants me to feel hurt and shame. And I was sure you'd never understand that and never go along with it, so I got that from ... others.”

“You didn't just get abuse,” I pointed out. “You got up close and personal with the Madmonk's walking stick. Went out of your way to do it behind my back, too.”

“Yes,” she admitted. “I met Peter in a cheap hotel in his own home town and had sex with him. He even made me pay for the hotel. That was his price for giving me what I needed. That and some video he shot of me ... doing things ... which has probably made its way onto the Internet by now.”

“I'll let you know if I see it for sale,” I mock promised.

She blushed a little, shook it off, and continued. “I was devastated when you found out about that and left me, Dane. Devastated. Because even though I thought you could never give me what I need, I never wanted to see you hurt that way.

“But then, after that, you changed. You're so different now. You're still Dane, but you've got this ... edge. It's cold and unforgiving and sometimes just plain mean. And the more you treat me like the pathetic slut that I am, the more I love you for it.”

Tessa undid the belt and let her coat fall open. She wore nothing underneath it, and she let the coat open enough that at least Marty, Jake, and anyone looking in the mirror behind the bar could plainly see that. “Dane, I want you back. I need you back. Nobody else makes me feel the way you do. I'll do anything you want, any time you want; just say the words and you know I have to obey. You told me next time I should degrade myself, so here I am doing it. Please, Dane, I beg you: please be my Master.” She dropped to her knees and buried her face in my lap. To the crowd it probably looked as if she was giving me a blow job right there in the bar.

Marty and Jake stared at me dumbfounded while Tessa sobbed into my crotch. Maybe it was the booze, but I actually saw a kind of twisted logic in the idea. I'd loved her once, after all. She was great in bed and she shared my erotic hypnosis kink. Thanks to recent developments she couldn't lie to me anymore, which meant she couldn't cheat either. The worse I treated her the more she loved me. And she had to obey my every command. To some guys, that would make her the ideal girlfriend.

I felt Tessa's face nudging against me and realized I was rock hard. “Tessa,” I said firmly, “Master says get up, close your coat, and go wait for me at your place.”

I hadn't said immediately, so she stole a moment to squeeze half the breath out of me with an exultant

hug and kiss. "Thank you!" Then she cinched up the coat and hustled out of the pub.

Marty and Jake were still staring at me with their mouths open. "What can I say?" I shrugged. "It's hell breaking in a new girlfriend."

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12/5/07