

Perfect GPA

Part One

It's probably my brother's fault, sending me that article. That right there was a good feeling; I hadn't had the opportunity to pin my misery on Tim since he'd been a nineteen-year-old college dropout trying to get people to call him "Timbo." The last time I'd gotten to dump the blame his way was more than twenty years ago, when he'd taken the family car to go smoke weed with his buddies at Grady Park, then called to ask our parents to come bail him out. Sonofabitch even told our folks I'd been there too but had fled before the cops arrived. That was true, except I'd actually fled once I'd found out Mom and Dad hadn't known he was taking their car without permission, and once I found out about the drugs. So yes, I "fled" to go play Super Nintendo at my buddy's house, "before the cops arrived," by about an hour and a half.

It was often like that growing up, trying to steer clear of my big brother's inclinations toward mischief and mayhem – although Tim's gotten to be pretty all right into adulthood. He hadn't had a choice really. Becoming a father of four kids is a heck of a wake-up call.

As for me, I'd only ever done the one wrong thing, but that one was more than enough.

I'd been in grad school when I'd met Nicole. At a goddamn frat party, if you can believe it. I'd already been out of college and teaching for two years before retreating to the refuge of the university – anything to get away from those little bastards. Some kid (meaning he was twenty) in one of my courses that was mixed with undergrads invited me, and I was bored and horny and... whatever. It's not a crime, a twenty-seven-year-old going to a frat party. Also not a crime, though I acknowledge it was closer, to sleep with what I'd go on to learn at breakfast the next morning was a nineteen-year-old, both of us pretty drunk when we'd each decided the other was hot enough to yeeha this thing. Hotness had never been the problem where Nicole was concerned. Not then, and not now. I'd give her that much.

Tim absolutely guffawed when I told him about the pregnancy. "The Boyce boys' spunk ain't no junk, eh Hunter? Welcome to the club!"

Funny how my inclination to do the right thing had felt so noble growing up, praised by teachers and neighbors and adults at church, respected by peers, even chased by a girl or two. (I know, I know. It's pathetic to reminisce about being popular in high school, but it's been a long couple decades since that party. Let me have this.) The "right thing" seemed so clear then. Mow the lawn, help my aunt move furniture, raise my hand, get the grades. It kept me in a position where I was hard to criticize, a stark contrast to my rambunctious big bro.

Then, I met some insanely hot girl named Nicole who was almost as big of a dumb slut as I was, and overnight, doing the right thing became my prison. Life sentence, no chance of parole.

Since she wanted the kid, I did that damnable right thing and dropped out of grad school, then back to the classroom with those barbarians so I could take care of my new, albeit unwanted, family. When Paisleigh–

(Yeah, I know. Believe me, I know. Lost that fight big-time.)

So yeah, when Paisleigh was finally off to school, Nicole announced she intended to go back to school, and that she was “changing majors.” I muttered privately that it’s not changing majors when you get knocked up by a stranger at a frat party three months into your freshman year and subsequently drop out for half a decade before going back. My pretty young wife rolled her eyes and asked me why I wasn’t more supportive.

So I got a second job, and two more during the summer. It was the right thing, after all. I made peace with it by telling myself that each check I signed over to Nicole for her education was good practice for if and when Paisleigh headed to college. When they’d held her back in third grade, I hadn’t been so sure, but if her attitude didn’t improve, her willingness to play the game to get the grade and keep us off her back did.

As for my wife’s education, wouldn’t you know it, Nicole graduated with a major in elementary education and a minor in theater – in only six years! (To be fair, that includes the semester Nicole dropped out because Paisleigh got chicken pox from one of Tim’s brood at Christmas and she had to stay home from school for a week. It was nice to come home to freshly delivered food for a change, though.) Then, without so much as applying for a job at any of the schools in the area, she was off to grad school to get her master’s degree.

Ahead of me.

Never mind my advice (echoing the advice of every other educator or advisor of educators I’ve ever known) that nobody’s going to hire that. No district wants to shell out thousands more for a teacher with zero experience when they could just take a kid right out of college who doesn’t have kids of her own so they can be coerced into volunteering for all the committees and extracurriculars nobody else wants. The really bad schools, where they were lucky to keep somebody a whole semester, sure. My doctor and I spent a lot of time talking about how to keep my blood pressure down as I imagined her burning out 3 months into her career, paying down her loans into my sixties.

What do I know, though? As Nicole was quick to throw in my face, she had numerous (unsuccessful) interviews before landing a job at a daycare (for even less than I made at my first teaching gig over a decade earlier). But at least there was finally someone else’s money coming into the house, so I could at long last quit my second job

and score that educational administration degree. Forty-three, and already out of the classroom and into a tiny, musty vice principal's office.

(The one without a window.)

So... yeah. Hell of a fucking frat party, that.

And I know how bitter I sound. I *am* bitter, and I own it. Just not so much day to day. I have a smoking hot wife, who has climbed from daycare attendant to third grade teacher to, as of this fall, provisionally licensed high school theater teacher at the new charter school in town. We don't have sex pretty much ever, even birthdays. (Nicole says because I'm too bitter all the time, and what a fun merry-go-round that is to ride.) I think we both know we'll divorce once Paisleigh's out on her own next fall, but we don't talk about it, because we don't like each other, because we ruined each other's lives. We simply did it at distinct velocities.

All I need to do is hang on for one more year. Do the vice principal thing, abstain from muttering under my breath at my in-laws, and keep my head down through the predictable fallout of Paisleigh's terrible decision of this past summer to transfer from Riverfork High (my school) to the Grandview Preparatory Academy (Nicole's new gig). Then, with our daughter safely away from what promised to be an ugly round of fights over who gets to keep the house and who has to take care of Paisleigh's snake while she's away at school, I'd call a divorce lawyer and figure out what I want to do with what's left of my life.

But then Tim sends me this article.

Why tf did you send me this shit?

*I sent that to everybody lol
Fucking wild, right?*

*I have to delete it from my browser history in case any of those kids are
underage ffs*

oh whatever they blurred the sex parts

*"Your Honor, I, a high school vice principal, submit that the genitals of those
children were blurred, the defense rests"*

Sounds ironclad to me

lol ya the one in front of her looks like he's 13

But that teacher was hot, right?

She probably still is, considering the snapchats in the article are dated two weeks ago, but maybe prison has been especially unkind

Hotter than Nicole even probly, and a fuck of a lot hotter than Erin better keep your eye on her at that new job huh lol

I frowned at that. Not that I gave a shit about his complaint about his own wife. Erin was a good mom and a good wife, probably better than he deserved. If she'd lost a bit of her sex appeal somewhere between Adam and Jesse, so what? Moms did that. Still, I didn't like him objectifying my own wife like that. He knew some of what we'd been through, the fights and the not talking and the counseling. Ten or so years back I'd found out she'd been intending to meet with a guy from one of her grad classes for drinks. Nicole swore she never cheated; I decided I'd never really know the truth so why torture myself investigating. Since then I'd come to trust her – it helped, knowing she was as frigid as an ice cap in the pre-industrial era – but that didn't mean I liked seeing guys talk about her like that. Especially not my own dipshit brother.

I let it go and deleted my browser history. Those viral videos of teachers misbehaving never sat right with me – such public consequences for such small people. At least in this case, a woman getting stuffed at both ends by two of her students, it fell on somebody who deserved it. As for Tim, he hadn't meant anything by it, and even if he did, so what. That's what I told myself that night as Nicole turned out her light, and then I turned out my light, and then we put our backs to each other and resigned to ignore each other's farts for yet another night. I wonder if she was looking forward to a divorce as much as I was.

Only then, the next morning, I squeezed past her in the bathroom, gently seizing her hips so as not to commit the grievous offense of brushing my morning wood against my wife's ass. "Careful," she said sharply. "I'm almost ready for work."

Careful.

Careful?

Careful for what?

It was still echoing in my head when I headed to work. When I was meeting with Mrs. Calderon about her inadequate progress on the school's online in-service trainings. When I ate my bologna sandwich during cafeteria supervision. When I yawned through the interview for the new freshman football assistant coach. When I was treated to an entitled, bratty tirade from a junior student who was offended that the school lunches weren't exclusively vegan.

I'd been paying so little attention that when I happened to overhear her complain that she hadn't even eaten as a consequence of her outrage, I offered her the rest of my sandwich. My embarrassment was probably the only thing that kept her squawking tantrum from landing her in detention.

Careful. It was nothing. Right? She didn't want to be touched. Nothing new. Was it? She'd been brushing me away for years (and yes, once or twice I'd brushed away her advances), but... had it gotten more intense since she'd started the new job? It was ridiculous, I knew. Like my pretty wife was going to spontaneously bend herself over her desk and let some young punk pick an end and stick it in her. (And then invite a friend to join him, and another to record it, as that whore in Tim's dirty little link displayed so candidly.)

Only... why was Nicole ready to head out to class at 6:30 in the morning? Grandview started early, and it was a much longer commute, but still. Was that the norm? She was usually downstairs already before I woke up, so I didn't pay attention to the timing of it.

It was stupid. She'd been teaching at Grandview for a week, and being a new teacher was a marathon. Nicole probably just had photocopies to make, or a quick before-school department meeting. Or something. Maybe she just had stuff to grade – or heck, she could simply want to get away from her sham of a marriage a little earlier in the day.

Although...

The more I thought about it, the odder her hurrying seemed. I remember I'd said something her first day of school, up before dawn and grooming herself to the 9's. She'd blown me off, and I'd let it drop. But she was still doing it. I just hadn't thought about it, because I didn't spend much time thinking about her. Honestly, I'd just been happy to be able to take my time in the shower in the morning. Having the place to myself, no surly teenager or impatient wife banging on the walls or doors, had been nice.

Man, this paranoia was stupid. As if my wife must be having an affair just because she went in early? And, I suppose, worked late. I'd had to start picking up Paisleigh on my own way home. (If "on my way home" could be construed as "tacking forty-five minutes onto my commute," anyway.) Still, teaching was hard, especially the first year. I had a good laugh as I pulled into the Grandview Preparatory Academy's lot to get my daughter. As if Nicole – my Nicole! – would cheat on me, this close to the divorce she had to know (and hope) was coming down the pipeline. As if long hours were some universal portent of infidelity. It was ridiculous.

Paisleigh hopped into the car – back seat as usual – and dropped that huge black purse of hers down beside her. The thing was practically a duffel bag. She'd reverted to the whole angry girl in all black thing, like she'd done in middle school before her therapist helped us talk her through it. It hadn't done much to improve her attitude,

though, so seeing it return after her mother took the two of them shopping for new wardrobes for their new school hadn't fazed me much.

"You don't want to drive?" I asked her before putting it into drive.

She didn't answer, so I repeated it. Finally, Paisleigh reached up under that frizzy black mop she called a hairstyle and retreated with an earbud in hand. "What."

"I asked if you wanted to drive," I said, schooling my tone.

"This thing? No thanks."

I was surprised to see she didn't pop it back in. And, if I'm being honest, a little annoyed. Paisleigh's bitchy teenage girl phase had endured to become a lifestyle. I loved her, but it was fair to say some of that stemmed from being around way back when I was her first word. She'd said a lot of words since then, plenty of them adjectives applying fresh nuance to "Daddy."

"So how was school?" I asked, pulling away.

"Eh. It was school." She was scowling, but at whatever she was swiping through on her phone. Not me.

I pressed on. "It's going to get better. Transferring your senior year was always going to be hard. You're only, what, three weeks in?"

"Eighteen days."

"So not quite three weeks. Before you know it, you're going to make new friends. Probably meet some guy so I have something else to nag you about, huh?"

I got a faint smile for that. Her lipstick was black, but the teeth behind them were still white. She ignored me amicably for a few minutes, but when I looked in the rear view mirror at a light, I saw she was looking at me again.

"Or I could transfer back home," she said quietly. Ah, there it was. The smile felt like it had to be a precursor to something. Then, she said much more loudly, "And I swear if you I-told-you-so me I will dump you in a crooked nursing home someday and let them steal your pain meds and piss in your soup."

"First off, language. And second off, where on earth did you hear about old people getting their soup peed in? No way that's a thing."

"Of course it's a thing."

I shook my head, grinning, but made sure to look serious and not at all I-told-you-so-ish about her main point. "I thought you said you didn't like it at Riverfork. That you felt like I was stalking you, that it was lame having everybody know your dad."

"It is. But... Never mind."

I shook my head. "No—" A car behind me honked, and I gritted my teeth as I was forced to focus on traffic. "Come on, you can talk to me. But what?"

Paisleigh studied the passing scenery for a while, a portrait of an angsty teenager distraught at the world's myriad injustices. "OK, so... yeah, it sucked ass having

everybody know my dad, or when you give one of my friends ISS or whatever, and for the record, it is a form of stalking to go poking around at my grades and stuff all the time.”

“Those records are open to all parents, not just vice principals.”

“But Mom...” Paysleigh sighed, or maybe grunted. It wasn’t a happy sound, whatever it was. “Being in school with Mom is a million times worse.”

Oh man. Oh *man*. That was a hard one not to smirk over. After eighteen grueling years, would I finally get a chance to flip the script and join my daughter in venting about Nicole? Those two had always been closer, not only because of gender and Nicole actually wanting a kid, but I was a square and Paysleigh was all raw antiestablishmentarianism. This was a rare gift.

“Oh...?” So casual. Very nicely done.

My nonchalance opened the floodgates. “She’s... God, you don’t even know, Dad. She’s so fucking embarrassing. Everybody hates her. Like, every-single-body. And of course everybody knows she’s my mom, so they take it out on me.”

“Take it out on you? If you’re being bullied—”

“It’s fine. I can handle myself. I barely talk to anybody if I can help it anyway. Not like half the kids weren’t assholes at Riverfork, too. Besides, like, I can hardly even blame them. If I had to be in one of her classes, I’d hate her, too. I’d make her kid’s life a living hell for sure.”

Another red light. I made sure to make eye contact. This sounded very not OK. I might be her third favorite family member after that snake of hers, but I tried not to be too horrible.

“Hey. If you hate it there, then we’ll figure it out. OK? If you want to transfer back to Riverfork, I can probably figure something out.” It was bullshit, which we both knew. As a charter school, governed by separate standards for graduation, credit from classes at Grandview wouldn’t transfer to a regular public school like Riverfork. Not that she’d earned any, but unless we transferred her in the next couple days, it meant Paysleigh’s weeks there would count as absences, which meant she’d already missed too much school to get credit for the semester. She probably thought her vice principal dad could get around that, but my employment actually made it worse. If I so much as changed her homeroom, the system sent notifications straight to the principal and superintendent’s offices lest I wind up the next brief viral educatory scandal. (Less engaging imagery, though.)

All things I’d cautioned her about when she said she wanted to attend GPA with Nicole. I had, in fact, told her so.

“No. I can’t... I don’t want to leave. I just... Mom sucks at her job is all. The boys especially hate that stupid slut.”

“Language, Paysleigh! And what do you mean—”

Paisleigh popped her earbud back in and turned up her music so loud I couldn't fail to hear it and understand that she was done listening to me. Not quite done talking, though, concluding with a half-shouted, "I can't even with this family!"

I'd almost convinced myself that "stupid slut" was just a generic pejorative, despite her oddly specific mention of boys, when some hours later I woke up in the middle of the night to pee. Nothing noteworthy about that, except when I came back to bed, in that brief moment when the bathroom light shined into the bedroom, I caught sight of Nicole's ass.

It was one thing I'd say for her, that—

Well, no. Two things. One, because it bears mentioning in order to be fair and objective: Nicole has an unbelievable ass. Just incredible. It was the first thing I noticed about her, the way she wiggled that thing around the dance floor at that shitty party all those years ago. And I'm picky about asses. I don't care for the "phat" ones, or whatever fresh euphemism they've come up with for gigantic asses nowadays. Definitely such a thing as too much of something good. Same with those flat, forgettable runners' asses, caught between thighs and back and indistinguishable from both. My Nicole's, though, was this perfect double-hemisphere, cheeks that could bark out a nice staccato clap on command without threatening to wobble out of her pants when she walked around.

The other thing, less gush-worthy but still not for nothing, Nicole wasn't shy about showing it off. She was prone to vanity, always had been, and she'd maintained her body generally and her ass in particular to a ludicrous degree even through childbirth and into her mid-30's. It was an annoying trait in a lot of ways, but for that ass, I let a lot of her nonsense slide. It was, if nothing else, something to jerk off to while I waited for my better life without her. Tight pants, tight skirts, and whatever our marital problems, she wore panties and a skimpy top to bed. Less if it was especially hot out. She probably thought she was tormenting me or something. The woman over-heated easily, so she slept as close to naked as she felt comfortable doing and welcomed me to hog the covers.

Which meant, for a brief moment before I reflexively shut off the bathroom light, I saw a red mark on her skin, peeking out from under her panties.

What had it been? Had I really seen it, or were my eyes just bleary from sleep? It had looked almost like a sunburn, but Nicole hadn't gone tanning since our niece's wedding, and it sure wouldn't explain why the burn was confined specifically to her ass cheek.

Even then, I probably would have chalked it up to some kind of blemish. Or maybe a hemorrhoid. Occam's Razor made a case that my moving around had woken her up and she'd given it a good scratch. Or something.

But there was that article. All Tim's fault.

“Grandview Prep is a small, and selective, private institution. What do you expect to be different from your current position at a mid-sized public school, and could you speak to us about how you cope with change?” asked Headmaster Van Patten.

Headmaster. Not principal. Somehow Nicole hadn’t mentioned her boss’s overblown title. And “selective?” I’d almost heard their sigh of relief when we’d enrolled Paisleigh back in July. Like a lot of charters, they’d bought a disused school for a buck and sealed off what they couldn’t fill, and it sure sounded like they hadn’t filled as much as they’d hoped.

“Yeah, the ‘same’ part is easy,” I said with a deliberately self-conscious laugh. “Not just the overlap in roles, but, per the elephant in the room, I’d be accompanying my wife and daughter here, and I’m pretty accustomed to them.”

Van Patten smiled, thankfully. It would have been too awkward not to acknowledge it, so I’d thought to work it in as a bit of a joke early on and move past it, so it was said but not deployed as a reason to hire me. “Ah yes, a family man. I do admire a family man. But I’m sorry, didn’t mean to interrupt. Go on.”

“No, no, it’s fine. But as for change...” I went on with a story I’d rehearsed about my stint coaching Academic Decathlon. It was a humdrum story, but the sort of shit that carried weight in such an interview. It was the tale of me being asked to do something I wasn’t interested in doing, didn’t have time for, and didn’t get adequate compensation for taking on. Education in a nutshell. It had been my experience that you got more mileage espousing commiseration than inspiration in this field as long as you put the right skin on it.

And on it went. It was a typical enough interview. Almost too typical, like they’d picked their questions from the same sites I’d used to prep my answers. It all felt like it didn’t much matter. The GPA’s website hadn’t listed a single job opening, not for a lunch lady or a substitute teacher. The whole site was pretty bare bones, honestly lots of email links to submit questions but not many posted answers. So I’d ducked out of work early the other day to pick up Paisleigh, leaving enough time to stop by the main office and make introductions, where I asked as casually as possible if they were hiring.

The secretary had summoned Mr. Van Patten, who’d asked me what I thought I could do for them. Now, two days later, here we were. Either it was a courtesy interview for a teacher’s husband, humor him with a few questions to keep up Nicole’s morale; or else they were desperate for help and would find a use for anyone looking to sign on. New charter school, hard to say.

Privately, I hoped I wasn’t offered anything. This was insane. Interviewing at my wife’s school so I could keep an eye on her? Without even telling her I was interviewing there at all, much less why? Since I’d seen that red blotch, or thought I had, I’d tried to

lay eyes on her bottom more than I had when we were still dating. Her feelings about me entering the bathroom while she was in the shower were severe and well-established. At night, although she was sleeping in her underwear I could never seem to get light and posture to coincide. I'd even tried to goose her one morning when she was wearing a dress short enough I could try, if awkwardly, and she'd slapped my hand away and glared like I'd done it in front of her parents or something.

"So, with the new curricula in place and more regulations on their way from the state house, I knew we had to get in front of this thing before we got buried under red tape and—"

"I think I've heard enough," Mr. Van Patten said suddenly in the midst of my fifth answer. We'd been here for ten short minutes, including introductions and me accepting a cup of water.

I shut up. I was annoyed to be cut off – it was a good answer, topical and a good showcase of my prescience for the fallout from state level politics – but that dissipated in a heartbeat when he said, "How would you like to come work for me, Mr. Boyce?"

I blinked. For an executive position at Riverfork, we'd do an interview, then a second interview with some other faces, try to get them in front of students if possible, members of the school board and the superintendent or assistant superintendent, do a background check, and then have a meeting to debate which candidate, if any, we wanted. The idea that someone could wander into the office and ask if there were any jobs and be offered one in 48 hours' time was unthinkable.

"I... wow. Um, sorry, that's... Wow." I shook my head, tried to collect my thoughts. "I know the right answer, but before I say yes... I suppose I'm curious what, exactly, I'd be hired to do?"

Mr. Van Patten laughed. "Ha! Of course, of course. You know, we're a small school, presently, and new. So really, we're all of us wearing a lot of hats. We can workshop a title – Assistant to the Headmaster, Vice Headmaster, the Discipline Guy, whatever – but, well, there you have it. Discipline is what it's all about. You strike me as a man who runs a tight ship."

I was. Not that he had any reason to suspect that. He hadn't ever asked a question that touched on it. "I try," I said simply. No sense launching into a speech about my disciplinary philosophy if he was already sold.

"Good. Trying is all we ask. In fact, you're in a great position to help us with some of our most troublesome cases."

"Oh?"

I honestly didn't make the connection. Embarrassing, really. It was just that Nicole had been talking about how much she was enjoying her new position pretty much every night, and while Paisleigh had made her displeasure known, I hadn't seen or heard anything to make me believe she was getting into trouble. It made sense that they'd refer

such issues to Nicole since she was right there down the hall, but my “Oh?” was pure obliviousness.

Mr. Van Patten didn’t explain what he meant that day. Instead, he called in his secretary to get me started on the paperwork. From there it was a whirlwind. I had keys to my new office in hand while the ink was still drying on my W-2. It wasn’t an hour from the start of my interview when he was showing me my designated parking space in their tiny lot, smaller than Riverfork’s gym. I was still grinning, dazed by this intense show of confidence, so much so that when they put my new employee ID badge in my hand, I realized I hadn’t even noticed them taking it. No “cheese” needed.

“I, um, need to notify Riverfork,” I said, more to myself than to Van Patten. It had all happened so fast. Did I really want to do this? What even was the salary? Actually, that one was pretty urgent. If I was going to catch my wife fucking some schoolboy and clean her out, I needed to make sure I was solvent. “Um, and can I ask about, you know, remuneration?”

A smile spread across my new boss’s chiseled, handsome jaw. He said a number.

“I’ll call them when I’m done for the day, on my time. For that much, I better get to work.”

He laughed and clapped me hard on the back. “And just wait until you find out about the benefits.”

Van Patten started me on my training that very afternoon. Their regimen was mostly nonsense it seemed, but familiar nonsense. Riverfork had cheaped out years back and eschewed real training for a bunch of shoddy educational videos – the old superintendent’s brilliant plan to save money while instituting a system that monitored teachers’ completion so she had something to hold over them. Stare at this video for 3 hours, or else. Handy way to fabricate dirt to empower you to fire your unionized staff while also insulting their professional integrity by pretending to “teach” them using the same methods they were forbidden from using to teach their students.

At Grandview Preparatory Academy, Van Patten apparently had been talked into doing the same. Oh, well. I was issued a laptop – a nice one, way nicer than my old work computer – and sat there half-watching a bunch of bland videos with appallingly annoying frame rates and audio. Riverfork’s school library had VHS tapes that played smoother.

At least it was sufficiently clear to give me some notion of what was expected of me, and sufficiently unclear that I could zone out and contemplate how to accomplish it. It was pretty straightforward. Apparently I was not only to oversee student discipline, the usual VP deal, but also to administer it to the faculty and staff.

Like my wife.

It didn't sit right with me. It shouldn't. I'd not merely crossed a line, I'd taken a shit on it and then past it for the horizon. As far as Nicole knew, I'd never set foot in the building; now I'd quit my job and become her boss without even mentioning to her that I might try. After informing my superiors at Riverfork that I quit, effective immediately, I ordered takeout from Nicole's favorite restaurant and picked it up after I dropped off Paisleigh. The tactic was probably only going to make things worse really. It was such an obvious and inadequate apology, for one, and for two, Indian food always gave me the shits.

There, in our dining room, I informed my wife and my daughter that – ha! by the way, I'm the new admin at your school, pass the curry please.

“No *fucking* way!” shrieked Paisleigh.

“Language, dear.”

“You did *what?*!” Nicole snapped, equally aghast, albeit a few decibels softer. That seemed about right. Me, I was watching her for any signs of nervousness or guilt, fear that my new proximity might jeopardize her little fling that she almost certainly wasn't having. (Damn you, Tim!)

“It happened so fast,” I said lamely. “You know I haven't been happy at Riverfork for a long time. I thought that it would be nice to be closer to you two. Plus it will cut down my commute, and you won't believe the salary. It's more than the superintendent makes at Riverfork.” I wanted to go on, say all that we'd be able to do with that money – travel, help Paisleigh pay for school, help put her grandmother in a nicer retirement community.

Only, we both knew she'd never believe me if I said I'd done it for them and not me.

“You have to quit. They'd take you back, wouldn't they? You've been there forever, of course they would.”

“Yeah, Dad. You have to quit! This is so not OK!”

“I'm doing this,” I said firmly, then tried to soften my tone. “Try to be open-minded, you guys. Will it really be so bad, being married to the boss, having your old dad in a position to do you a favor or two?” I ventured a smile. Not that I meant to teach my daughter she was above the law, but right then I was searching for validation.

“I'm still trying to carve out a niche for myself, Hunter. Do you think any of those young men are going to be able to respect me when they have to see me... When my husband...” She shook her head vehemently. “Please. Please resign. Don't do this.”

Young *men*, she said. Not unlike what Paisleigh had said before about the boys. What was going on with Nicole and these young boy-men?

“I'm doing it,” I said.

“You can't!”

“I can, and I *am*.” The serving spoon slapped my bowl loudly as I slapped down another scoop of curry.

“Please. Please, I’m begging you. I... I can’t... I’ll quit. If you stay, I’ll quit.”

I frowned. This wasn’t how I’d imagined this conversation going. Mad, certainly. Nervous that I might sniff her little booty secret out? Maybe, though I didn’t like how I’d phrased that thought. Only then, she went and turned it into a quarrel between employee and supervisor.

When it came to matters of employment, Van Patten had been clear: I was the boss, and my word was law.

“You’re not quitting,” I said firmly. “You’re going to work tomorrow, like you do every day, and you’re going to try to have a little dignity about it. Pull yourself together, Nicole. I mean it. And Paisleigh, you’re going to be... You’re going to *continue* to be the well-behaved girl I know you are, so it won’t even matter that I’m there.”

Nicole stared at me, wide-eyed. So did Paisleigh. No one was eating.

I forced a smile onto my face. “And hey, we’ll bring in our leftovers. We can have lunch together in my office.”

“I... I already pre-made meals this week.”

My jaw tensed. Had I been unclear? I felt like I’d been crystal clear. “And I already said we’d eat together, tomorrow, in my office.”

Paisleigh fled the table.

I suppose I had been a little harsh.

The next day, the headmaster – an apt name for his role, something I’d judged him too swiftly on – introduced me to the students, faculty and staff during the morning announcements. They were part of what was evidently a daily period of online instruction. They went on for nearly two hours, uninterrupted, the whole school settling in and watching the screen in their classroom to get the latest and most important information.

As an educator, I had serious reservations about starting the day that way. Or at least I thought I did. I spent those hours going through more of my own training videos. By the time I decided to take a break – or rather, Van Patten popped into my office and I realized I hadn’t blinked in four hours – I’d done some thinking, and realized it was actually the perfect start to the day. Focused. Intense. Guided instruction. No interruptions, no questions, no students thinking they ran the show, no teachers thinking they knew better than the curriculum.

It was perfect. I was a hundred percent on board. Brilliant. Van Patten was going to revolutionize education. It was an honor to work for him. To serve him.

Per my orders (and probably a nudge from the portion of the morning announcements stressing the importance of complying with the new Chief Disciplinarian), Nicole joined me in my office during her lunch period. I grudgingly paused my training videos and showed off the mini-fridge they'd stocked my office with. She heated up our food in the microwave, and we ate without saying a single word to each other. She was still mad, which was fair. At least she had the good sense to show proper respect and not try to spend the meal whining or berating me. No more of those ludicrous pleas that I quit, or threats that she would. We were both of us GPA's now.

I met the rest of my subordinates that afternoon at an impromptu faculty meeting. I was impressed – not by them; they were subordinates – but by Van Patten, and the power of the private school. At Riverfork we'd have to notify those lazy unionized teachers a month in advance about a meeting if we wanted it to be mandatory. He sent out an email at 3:30, and at 3:45 they came. All of them.

I had to say, there were some lookers. Not the male teachers, so much, but those affable fellows made up for it with know-how and experience. The women, however... Frankly, Nicole barely met the threshold. The cans on Mrs. Minervini were absolutely top notch, spilling out of that wide neckline on her top. It was as if they were deliberately trying to overshadow the set of top tier knockers hinted at in the clearly visible bra behind Ms. Chung's see-through blouse. Between the T&A of the lady faculty and the brain power of the men, I had a great feeling about this group.

As for the students? I wasn't ready to meet them yet. I know, it sounds counterintuitive, Chief Disciplinarian not so much as speaking to a student aside from his daughter for a whole week, and even then never about school-related matters. (I'd been trained that it was important to focus on training, and being trained, and that the rest would come when I was sufficiently trained by my training.)

Simply put, I just knew I had a lot to learn, and Van Patten stressed over and over that he was fine with me taking my time on learning how to do my job before I stormed out there and started doing it. The closest thing I did to managing faculty was making sure Nicole was employing good nutritional content in her lunch. At her age, she had to be doubly concerned with maintaining her figure – which wasn't me being sexist, just looking out for the well-being of the GPA.

Managing faculty was fairly straightforward. Stay out of the way of genuine learning and see to it everyone was doing what they'd been hired to do. Dealing with students required nuance. Knowing who they were, why they were here, their backgrounds, and yes, their connections.

Take Adam Clarke. Adam's father owned a dental practice in town. A big one. His dad's goodwill toward the school basically formed the employee dental plan. Not to say I'd spare the rod when it came to his son out of fear I might get a cavity, but there was

something about that kind of generosity that engendered my bottomless loyalty and support.

You had to handle someone coming from a home like that differently from someone like, say, Camryn Dugan, with nothing to recommend her except a pretty face and an exquisitely sculpted body. She'd transferred here only this past week – we didn't subscribe to outmoded methods of evaluation like attendance – hoping to make the GPA tennis team, not realizing that we didn't have one, which made her only skill of note particularly useless. She had to walk a finer line. The finest.

I mention those two because they were my first case.

I almost didn't catch the drool running down my chin when they were shown in. These training sessions were unbelievably important, the most important thing I'd thus far been instructed to see to at my incredible new job. I loved my job. I loved my training.

The two entered visibly at odds. Adam swaggered in, smiling politely. Or arrogantly. Whatever. He was allowed. Adam was allowed. Adam Clarke was allowed. As for Camryn, she looked so angry and affronted that she was near to tears, or to simply clocking him in the face.

That wouldn't do at all.

"Have a seat, both of you." I gestured to the chairs opposite my desk. Not the futon. Not what that was for. Both of them sat. "Now, why don't you tell me what brought you two down here today?"

"He tried to–!"

I held up a stern finger immediately. Almost wrathfully. Emotional outbursts like that were so unseemly in a girl. "Adam," I said.

Camryn looked apoplectic about being spoken over, but she didn't dare push me. I'd drafted a whole segment for the morning announcements to make exactly that point. If having that explained to her for forty-five minutes three days running didn't make the point, I couldn't wait to figure out what would.

"I told her she looked cute," Adam said, laughing. "She couldn't take a compliment and pitched a fucking fit."

"You lifted up my skirt and slapped my ass!" she shrieked

"*Language*, Camryn!" I snapped. "Is that true, Adam? That's not what I heard you telling me, and I want to believe you. You're a good kid, and I trust you, but I need you to be honest with me."

Adam shrugged. "I was pretty much honest. I told her she looked cute, just with, ah, my hand."

"And I take it you think I should believe you over him, Camryn." I sighed, bracing myself for more hysterics.

“He... He... Boys aren’t supposed to...” Her chin quivered. “He *slapped* me. On my butt.”

“Well, look who’s capable of practicing a civil tongue after all,” I said, smiling encouragingly. “So, are you ready to apologize?”

The two of them sat there for a long moment as I waited. When Adam said nothing, she let herself erupt again. “See? He’s not even sorry! The boys here, they treat us like... Like we’re all...”

I arched an eyebrow. “Like what? What are you all, Camryn?”

Her chin sunk by degrees. “Like we’re meat,” she mumbled. “Like we’re just... toys. For boys. Or something.”

“Adam? Do you have anything to say to that?” If the girl was going to go around casting aspersions, he had a right to defend himself. I almost hoped he’d give her another slap.

Adam leaned back in his chair and planted his feet atop a stack of paperwork on my desk. Healthy confidence, that one. He was going places. “Anything’s a toy if you play with it,” he said with another shrug.

“Astute,” I agreed, immediately, unflinchingly. Adam was allowed. “Camryn, in spite of how you’ve misbehaved today, I’d like to start your punishment with a compliment. Would that be all right?”

“*Me?* Punished?!” the trim brunette squeaked. “But I didn’t do anything wrong!”

I scowled. “I asked you a question, Camryn. When the Chief Disciplinarian asks you a question, you answer it. Immediately, and honestly, lest you make your situation even worse. Now, I ask *again*,” I said darkly.

“P-please,” she whimpered, eyes glittering with tears. Of remorse, I hoped. “Please, sir. Please. I won’t do it again. Whatever I did. If... If he slaps my butt again, it’s fine. OK? Please. I just want to go back to class. Or go home. I just want to go home,” she babbled as the tears burst free.

I shook my head. This wouldn’t do. Trying to prey on my inclination to sympathize with her? Bullying a young man of unimpeachable character? “Well then, if you can’t answer a simple question, we’ll add insubordination to your list of offenses and get on with consequences. Camryn, get on your knees.”

“My...?!” She sputtered. “What? You can’t... No! No, please sir, please, I—”

With an irritated sigh, I rose to my feet and rounded my desk. She fell silent immediately. I walked around behind her, Camryn’s breath catching in her impressive chest.

With a sudden shove to the back of her chair, Camryn was dumped right out of her seat. The girl fell to her knees with a yelp, crawling around to face me, bawling. “Ow! You just...! Please, please don’t make me—”

I put a finger in her mouth. She shut up immediately, and just as immediately started sucking softly on my finger. Apparently she'd been paying at least *some* attention to the morning announcements since her arrival. Our intel, provided to me during some truly fascinating training sessions, suggested that far too many girls found ways to tune out their lessons.

"Camryn, you've pressed your luck as far as I'm going to allow. In a moment, I'm going to remove my finger. When I do, the first and only thing I want to hear out of your whore mouth is an apology. Am I making myself clear?" She made a noise, but it could have meant anything. "Blink if you understand, Camryn."

She blinked, and blinked, and blinked. Hesitantly, I removed my finger. "Go on then."

"I'm sorry sir! I'm sorry! For the, um, the swearing, and for not... not understanding that I... that I had to... I'm sorry! I'm so sorry. I promise I'll be good. I'll be a good, good girl for you, sir. Please don't punish me further. Please don't—"

She stopped talking the instant my finger brushed past her lips again. "At your old school, Camryn, did they permit you to suck your way out of consequences for your actions?"

Carefully, the girl shook her head. Adam was taking pictures, or maybe a video, of the proceedings on his phone, smirking all the while. Good lad. It would help teach her classmates when they saw her taking her licks. (Pardon the pun.)

"Then I can't imagine why you think the attempt will serve you better here in your new academic home. This remarkable young man shows you his appreciation, and you come in here howling baseless accusations. I tell you to apologize, and instead you apologize to *me*? To try to whine your way out of it without even trying to make amends to the boy you bullied into my office with your histrionics."

She spat out my finger. "You want me to apologize to *him*?! Sir?!"

I sighed. "You are an incorrigible girl, Camryn. But so be it. Take off your skirt."

She shuddered. "My... skirt? But you're a principal. I'm... It's not... I can't...!"

I folded my arms, looming over her. "Principals let bad girls like you slip through the cracks in every school in this country every day. I'm the Chief Disciplinarian, and you'll find no cracks to hide in here. You were given an instruction. Unless you have a compelling reason why you can't obey, like a good girl, I expect you to follow it."

"You... You can't look at me in my underwear. It's not right! I... I don't consent to this. This school is insane!"

"Those aren't reasons, and you're trying my patience, Camryn."

I was almost tempted to resort to old tactics. To bargain with her, offer her options. I could tell her she could either return to class without her skirt and let her classmates see her in her underwear, or I could bend her over my desk here and now. Bargaining, however, implied that the other party held something of value. This girl and

her whining was nothing to me or to Adam or to anyone, though. Just a bad, bad girl who needed my discipline. I wouldn't fail her by denying it.

"Give me your skirt, *and* your panties." I saw that look of pathetic, miserable, sulky defiance in her eyes again, and nipped it in the bud. "By all means, make me repeat myself again, and see what I add to the list next. You're wearing an awful lot of clothes for a girl who's had several days already to educate herself on our dress code." Barely a hint of cleavage on that outfit! The nerve.

One knee lifted, planting a foot on the floor. As she started to push herself to her feet, I planted a firm hand on her shoulder. "Nobody told you to stand."

Camryn sniffled, nodded glumly, and undid the clasp on her skirt. It had surprised me that a well-oiled ship like Grandview didn't have an explicit uniform, but Van Patten was absolutely a hundred percent as always completely right. Sometimes a student of standing – a boy, to use the slang term the kids used for it – might want to see a classmate wear something else. Or wear something less. Or nothing. The girls still had a lot of learning to do about it, but in the short term it simply didn't make sense to mandate a uniform if by mid-terms the girls would be bouncing around in bikinis and fetish costumes and little wisps of nothing.

Yes, it meant I'd have to send Nicole shopping for still more school clothes for Paisley at some point, but they paid me more than enough, and even if they didn't I'd find a way. There were rules here, and those rules were to be obeyed, always, in all cases, without exception, by everyone.

Camryn lowered the skirt over slender hips and then down to her knees. Green panties – school colors. I gave them an appreciative pat. She then crawled out of the skirt, careful not to give the impression she was even thinking of standing upright. Her ass was, as Adam had charitably notified her with his hand, amazing. It was even better once the trembling, sobbing brat got on with things and slid her underwear off, too. Her pussy was a thick black bush, as was plain to the both of us once I made it clear I hadn't instructed her to show it to us only to cover it up.

"Damn, Cammie! Fucking werewolf snatch down there! You gotta shave that shit!" From my angle, I could see him zooming in on it with his camera. Neither pic nor video, I noted; he was streaming it to his friends. Would that I'd had a friend like that when I was his age. (Not that it was appropriate to romanticize matters with students like that. This wasn't sexual for me. If it was for him, well, Adam was allowed.)

I turned my back to her and focused on the important one. Adam was important. "Adam, you've been an asset to your school today, helping me teach Camryn her place."

He snickered. "I do what I can, Mr. B."

I laughed with him. "Mr. B – I like that." How I'd hated that at Riverfork. This place really brought out the best in me. "How would you like to help me out a little more? Feel up to it? It's entirely up to you."

Adam seemed to consider. "What'd you have in mind?"

"For her attitude, and her repeated refusal to comply with my commands, and above all for her attitude towards you, Camryn will be receiving a week's detention."

"That's not fair!" she whimpered.

With a shake of my head, I bent down and picked up her panties and stuffed them into her mouth. "Spit those out and you'll receive in-school suspension instead. Sorry, Adam. I won't let her interrupt us again. Now, I'm happy to give her the discipline she obviously, sorely needs. However, since you were the victim of her outbursts today, I'd like to invite you to join her in detention and assist me in disciplining her."

She gasped, nearly choking on her little green panties, but Adam looked intrigued. "Yeah? Discipline her how?"

"You're the one she wronged, so I'm sure you're in a better position to mete out justice for it than I am. Whatever you think she deserves." I laughed. "Though try not to do any permanent damage, unless you think your dad can mend it."

Adam stood and extended a hand. We shook firmly. I knew he was a good sort, respectful. "It'd be my pleasure, Mr. B."

"Attaboy. Now, before I dismiss you two..." I turned back to the girl shivering on my office floor, tears leaking from her eyes as did the snot from her nose, leaving her panting for air around her underwear. "Camryn, I'd like to give you the opportunity to apologize, and to thank Adam for his compliment and his assistance teaching you."

Her eyes flitted between us. I could see the question there: "or else what?" The timeless retort of the inveterate brat. As she fought to keep her hands from once more trying to conceal her immodest, hairy pussy, she seemed to finally find an ounce of wisdom. Camryn walked on her knees and stopped at Adam's feet. She couldn't bring herself to make eye contact with him.

"Hum thuhuhh, Uhhuh," she attempted. I expressed my displeasure with the effort with a clearing of my throat, and Camryn correctly interpreted the unspoken command. She pulled her drooly panties out of her mouth and repeated herself, this time intelligibly, her eyes drilling holes in my floor. "I'm sorry, Adam."

Oh, no. That wouldn't do. Gently, but very firmly, I took a handful of her soft brown hair in my fist and jerked her neck back until she had no choice but to meet his eyes. "So he can hear you, Camryn. You weren't shy about complaining about him; don't suddenly get taciturn now."

She trembled in my grasp. The girl wasn't trying to escape, or to break loose. She understood she was in the wrong and was accepting her fate. There may be hope for her yet. "I'm sorry Adam. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

"For..." I prompted.

“For, um, complaining. About you smacking my ass – my butt.” I shook her head for her, letting her reinforce her lesson about how a young lady should speak. Unless a special, important young man like Adam wanted to hear her talk filthy, of course.

“And why...?”

She hesitated. I gave her a moment, tightening my grip with icy slowness. “Because...” Her words caught in her throat. I helped her out with a little shake to dislodge them. “Because I’m a toy. Like you said. Thank you for playing with me.”

Adam was letting his gentlemanly side give way to a natural reaction, seeing this hot-as-hell girl on her knees pleading for his favor. Good on him for reading the room so well. “What kind of toy are you, Camryn?”

She licked her lips. The girl knew the answer – even though she probably tried to tune out the morning announcements; these little sluts all did – but it took her a moment to get it out. Only a moment, though.

“A f-fuck toy,” she sniveled. “A fuck toy for boys.”

“Beg me for forgiveness,” he pressed. Half a step forward and his crotch was almost touching her lips.

Her chin rested against his crotch, staring up at him imploringly. “I’m sorry, Adam. I’m so sorry. You can touch me whenever wherever. Please forgive me. I was being stupid. I–”

“Was?” he interjected. The young man’s erection was brushing her lips now.

“Am. So stupid. So fucking – sorry, freaking – stupid. A stupid slut. A bad girl. I know that now. I’m sorry. Thank you. I’m sorry. I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

I stroked her hair appreciatively with one finger, still gripping it tightly with the rest. “You see, Camryn? Don’t you feel better about yourself when you do as you’re told, like a good girl?”

Her body shook. She tried to look at me, but I kept her focused where she belonged, on Adam. “I’m... a good girl? Sir?”

“You’re getting there. Keep doing as you’ve been taught, and you’ll be my best girl before you know it.”

“Oh thank you, sir! Oh god, thank you, thank you I’m sorry thank you *pleeeeeease...!*”

The girl shuddered as she came, violently. I let her go, laughing along with Adam as she moaned and thrashed.

“Now *that* is a good girl,” I told her. Adam held up a hand, and I humored the guy with a high five over her spasming, coming shape.

“*OH FUUUUCK!*” Camryn wailed. At first I thought she was trying to cover her pussy again, but then I saw it was just a little masturbation.

“Not that there isn’t still ample room for improvement,” I added dryly at her coarse language. “Now go back to class. You can come back at the end of the school day

and I'll return your skirt, Camryn, so long as I don't receive any more reports of your being bad."

Adam grabbed her arm in the midst of Camryn pulling herself to her feet and yanked her there. He put an arm around her, settling his grasp on her ass. He gave it a firm squeeze. "You might be my new favorite toy, Camryn."

She shuddered. "Th-thank you, Adam. Do you... do you want to slap my butt again?"

"I do – but I'ma wait until you're not expecting it."

"OK. If that's what you want."

My first disciplinary intervention, and I was already changing hearts and minds. I knew that going forward, whenever I had my doubts about Van Patten's system and my role in it, I could look back on behavioral interventions like this and appreciate the work I was doing.

In fact, as the two made their way back out of my office, the headmaster swept right in behind them. "Mr. Boyce! I just wanted to say I think you handled that exactly the way I hoped you would when I brought you onboard. Gold star disciplining there. I can't wait to tell Dr. Clarke."

"Thank you, sir. That means a lot coming from you, headmaster." It did. His opinion was everything to me. The headmaster's opinion was everything to me.

"Maybe you're ready to start splitting your time between furthering your training, and patrolling the halls. I think you're exactly what we need to help make this academy live up to its promise."

Patrol. Not classroom interventions, but hallways, public areas. Interacting with students in their native habitat. Teachers, when they ventured out of their classrooms. My wife and daughter. My lying, cheating, embarrassment of a wife.

Why did Tim have to send me that article?

"I look forward to it, sir."