

Chapter 1

Yes. Did she say it out loud? Scream it? Whisper?

“What was that?”

Her body snapped to attention at his authoritative tone. Traitorously, of course, but it still turned her on just the same. She remained dubious over whether or not she could allow herself to like it so much. Her body loved it. She was hot and slick and totally unashamed that she had herself spread open for him on his large, four poster bed early on a Monday morning.

“I asked if you were going to be a good little girl for me from now on.”

Dr. Mait Frasier had discovered that the control he loved in life didn't just leak over some invisible barrier into the bedroom. It gushed, no, flooded in. And it couldn't be with just anyone. It had to be with one tiny, adorable, brilliant Mary Madeline Tucker. He loved it. If his brain would just catch up with his heart he would even fully acknowledge that he loved her.

“Mary Madeline?” he asked, his long fingers splayed out across her belly, leaning up on his elbow so he could look down at her as he spoke.

“Yes, sir,” she breathlessly responded, willing to say anything just to get... “Oh, God, yes!”

He rubbed his thumb softly around her clitoris as he stroked two fingers in and out of her, loving her tightness, wetness, and ability to make him so turned on he was about to come in his pajama pants. There was a sweetness about her that was so attractive and incredibly frightening at the same time. It was why he was demanding, albeit playfully, that she be a good girl.

She trusted people too easily and it had almost gotten her killed. His sister, too. The two most important women in his life had been in mortal danger and where had he been? At a useless conference miles away. He'd never let anything happen to her. All he wanted was to protect her.

“Are you going to come?” he softly asked, looking at his favorite color of blue.

“Yes!” she called out, clenching around his fingers as her eyes squeezed shut. She'd been mad at him the day before. Well, mad at herself, mostly. She was allowing herself to fall for a man who couldn't... or wouldn't really tell her how he was feeling, yet totally demanded it of

her. She knew it meant trouble yet she couldn't stop herself when he had all of his attention focused on her. She loved it. She knew she loved him.

And he'd said that he loved her. Sincerely. But something nagged at her, like the idea that perhaps he was just saying what she wanted to hear. She'd never had doubts when it came to Sam. But Mait Fraiser? If he weren't about to make her come she would have been able to express a cohesive argument.

"Good."

That was all he said as he began pulling his hand back.

Her eyes flew open and she frowned at him as he sat up and straddled her in his navy cotton pajama pants. He pinned her wrists on either side of her head and gave her a hard glare. This was not exactly how she'd imagined the next few minutes would go. She looked up at him, confused.

"I know my brother scared you—"

"He did *not*," she interrupted, frowning at the implication that she was weak. But he had sort of scared her. He was big and kind of growled when he spoke and he'd... *assaulted* her with a wooden spoon.

"He did," Mait asserted. "I saw the little bruises on your sweet little ass and I'm not happy about that. But he was worried... just like me. I don't ever want to feel like that again."

"Mait," she sighed, looking up at his dark, serious eyes. The arousal quickly dissipated into guilt. "I'm sorry..."

"I know," he replied, the tension melting off of his face. "Which is why I'm not going to spank you. I... I may never again. And I know that makes you happy, but... you're not getting an orgasm, either."

"*What?*" she squealed, the total relief of the no spanking declaration exploding into sudden need low in her belly. "You can't be serious!"

"I am," he sighed, not happy with it either. His erection ached and all he wanted was to drive into her and hear her scream. He pushed off of the bed, releasing her as he walked into the bathroom, knowing that he'd be unable to resist her cute little face much longer. But he knew he was right. He'd always thought he'd scared her just a little bit when he spanked her. But his brother... that had been one step too far. And her creamy round ass? He'd never get the visual of the small, half-circle marks plaguing his delicious view out of his head.

Mary lay flat on her back staring at the white ceiling. What in the hell had just happened? No orgasm? But he'd been the one who'd rolled over that morning and began playing with her breasts. He'd been the one who teased her with kisses all over. He'd been the one who started the stupid "I'm the boss" game that she only played along with because she knew she'd get to come at the end of it. Damn it!

She grumpily pushed her way into the bathroom, past the steamy shower where she would normally pause to watch and drool over him lathering himself up. She used the toilet, brushed her teeth, went back into the bedroom to put her jeans and purple shirt back on, and then stomped into the kitchen.

Mait had practically bitten a hole through his lip as he watched her through the glass of his shower. She had a lot of power over him but he didn't think she knew it. If she did she'd have him on his knees... begging for it. He was pulling his green polo on over a white tee shirt and jeans when he found her slamming cabinet doors in the kitchen.

"Coffee?" she snapped, glaring at him over her shoulder and slamming the freezer door. "All you have in this shitty apartment is coffee? Don't men know how to grocery shop? Is it just in your fucking DNA to always eat out and to never have anything more than condoms... *condiments* in your fridge?"

He wisely held back his grin at her little slip. Sighing and wishing that he could be man enough to yell at her for scaring him and smack her sweet ass until she learned, he bravely stuck with his orgasm denial plan and grabbed the coffee pot, pouring them both a cup.

"Oh, now you're a gentleman?" she hissed, taking a sip and glaring at him over the lip of the large white mug. "You're a fucking asshole."

He forced back a smile and suggested that they go out to the famous coffee shop down the street for breakfast. She suggested that he do something sexually foul to himself, but eventually agreed that food was a good idea. He grinned over her head as he followed her out of the door towards the elevator. Sure, she was grumpy, but she hadn't tried to make him take her home yet.

* * *

Mary recovered a little on the brisk walk through the downtown area. The morning was cool and crisp; the sun was shining without a cloud in the sky. The trees lining the streets were starting to get their leaves back. Okay, anything else positive? She peered over very casually at

the man walking next to her, aviator sunglasses and ruffled light brown hair making him look... delicious. All right, there was a very hot, very smart, and very into her man willing to buy her breakfast.

They entered the crowded shop, placed their orders at the counter, then wandered out to the café style seating on the wide sidewalk. Mait made sure that she was sitting underneath a heat lamp as he took the seat closest to the street. He was amazed at how cute she was when she was mad. He wasn't at all surprised that some really intelligent guy had snatched her up and married her. It also wouldn't surprise him in the least if he learned that she was the one who had somewhat controlled that relationship. She'd admitted to never having been in a relationship like the one he had with her.

He smiled at the word *relationship*.

"Wipe that shit-eatin' grin off of your face," she grumbled, folding her arms across her chest and staring at the slow passing cars behind him. She felt antsy. She felt denied. She'd really been looking forward to that orgasm.

"Sorry," he uttered, trying and hopefully not failing at looking indifferent. It was difficult. She made him just want to smile all day like an idiot. Luckily his phone chimed so he could use that as a distraction from staring at her shiny blue eyes in the bright sunlight.

"Is that the detective?" she quietly asked, staring solemnly at his smart phone. She wanted to learn more about what had happened with Barry White. She also wanted to go home desperately.

He read the text and shook his head, quickly writing something back. "Carlson," he sighed, watching her cheeks turn a little pink. He continued like he didn't notice. "He just wants to swing by later and talk to you—"

"No!" she protested, grabbing the sides of the metal table and leaning forward, eyeing the uninterested people around them like they were all spies. "I don't want to see him! He... I just... no!"

"He wants to apologize." Mait shrugged, liking that his brother had taken him seriously when he'd explained how important this girl was to him. It had been a phone call he'd tried to make three times before finally finding a calm place so that he could rationally explain his displeasure in his brother's actions. To Carlson's credit he seemed duly remorseful.

“I’m just gonna go home,” Mary replied, rubbing her hands nervously as her strawberry blonde hair blew over her shoulders in the breeze.

“You can’t. It’s still a crime scene,” Mait said, growing agitated at the thought of her being attacked in her home all over again. His sweet little girl in the hands of that criminal...

“I’m not going to speak to him,” she snapped through her teeth. “You can’t make me! I’ll lock myself in your bathroom.”

Mait stared at her for a second before sucking in his breath. Oh. Holy shit. Now he understood. She wanted it. She *wanted* to be spanked. He grinned as he leaned on his elbows on the table. She didn’t know it, naturally... but she was trying to provoke him into doing it. He knew she liked it. She liked his undivided attention, the way his hand felt on her bare skin and turned her on, the vulnerability of trusting him not to hurt her, and the make-up sex. Oh yeah. She wanted it all. Interesting.

“Quit looking at me like that, you perv!” she sighed, totally irritated and feeling a little nervous about seeing his older brother again. What was with him? He’d been the one denying sex. He was practically drooling as he stared across the table at her.

She looked at the digital sign above the door, wondering when they were going to call their number, then back at him. He was still studying her with a knowing smirk across his stupid handsome face.

“What?” she huffed, looking over her shoulder for their number again.

“I just can’t... no matter how much you want it and how much you provoke me, Mary Madeline, I’m not going to spank you.”

“Jesus Christ!” she squealed, causing more people to look at them than his earlier declaration. She lowered her voice to a furious whisper. “I-I... we... you, you can’t fucking say stuff like that, dumbass! And btw, I don’t want it, so don’t worry about that!”

Her cheeks were so flushed with anger and embarrassment that it was all he could do to get his erection to go away underneath the table. He was right. She wasn’t just yelling at him. She was repeating her words; something she did when she lied. He was about to open his mouth to joke around with her about bringing her to the brink of another orgasm when she suddenly gasped and leapt out of her chair, gripping the back of it so tightly that her knuckles turned white. Frowning, he followed her eyes over his shoulder and found Roberta Greer slowing her steps as she walked through the tables, then stopping completely when she saw his eyes.

And for the first time ever in her upper-east-side-private-school-5th-Avenue-penthouse-life, Roberta blushed. Crimson.

“Uh, Bunny!” Mary called, voice cracking as she gave a weak wave. Holy Mother of God, how could they have been so stupid? Even though the whole campus was on vacation this was still the most popular café in town. Of course if they ventured out as a secret couple they’d see someone they knew.

Bunny cautiously walked over, nodding at her professor and still blushing as she looked at Mary. Mait was frowning as he stood out of habit, wondering why both girls looked so humiliated.

“Bunny, um, Doc-Dr. Frasier was just explaining to me how sorry he is about the behavior of his brother and was making a peace offering with this breakfast. I called and texted this morning but you didn’t answer so...”

Mait watched the face of his student start to relax as his girlfriend lied through her teeth to save his ass. God, he really did love her.

“It’s, really, I haven’t even been looking at my phone.” Bunny nodded, giving Mary a half-reassuring smile. She peered at Dr. Frasier and blushed again. “I’d really... just... I’d like to forget about this, if that’s okay.”

“Done,” Dr. Frasier agreed, watching as Mary widened her eyes at him behind the back of the other girl. “And I can’t tell you enough times how sorry I am about how everything happened... with my brother.”

“It’s fine,” Bunny quickly replied, wrapping her scarf around her neck a little tighter. “You and your brother love your sister, and we put her and ourselves in danger, I understand that. I’m actually leaving today to visit my own sister for the rest of the break.”

“Safe travels.” Mait nodded, acting like they had called his number and walked inside as he focused really hard on his ticket.

Bunny’s shoulders sagged as she looked down at Mary. “I’m so sorry you had to do this by yourself, Mary. You’re so much braver than I am. I saw that you called but I just... I just couldn’t... talk about it.”

“Forget about it,” Mary sighed, leaning in. She had called Bunny to see how she’d been doing, not to ask her to breakfast, and was relieved that she could use it as a cover. “It’s over, it never happened, I just want to forget about it, too.”

Bunny smiled and exhaled in relief, nodding and eyeing the café door, terrified her professor would come back out. “I’m going to go before I humiliate myself even further. Are you okay here?” she asked apprehensively.

Moved by her concern, Mary nodded and even forced a grin. “Hey, I get a free breakfast out of it, right?”

Bunny smiled and added, “And everything at your house is all right?”

“Back to normal,” Mary reassured her, liking that her friend was relaxing and getting more comfortable.

“I’m glad. Well, I’ll text you when I get back?”

“Great. We’ll get a drink and talk about anything else!” Mary smiled, waving as Bunny nodded and quickly turned, abandoning her plans for a breakfast out. Mary collapsed into her chair as a toasted bagel and cream cheese appeared over her shoulder and plopped down on the tabletop, along with a latte.

“Is she okay?”

“No!” Mary huffed, sipping her coffee and trying to compose herself as people looked again. “Your brother scared the ever-living shit out of her. I doubt if she’ll be okay around a large, dominant man again!”

“That’s a little dramatic.”

“Are you really qualified to give this speech? You’re the biggest drama queen I know. My life was stress free before you started popping up everywhere,” she mumbled, mouth full of bagel.

Mait sighed heavily and looked over his shoulder a couple of times. His hands were twitching a little, like he was anxious or nervous. A student had almost caught him with another student with whom he was in a secret relationship. What if she suspected anything? Would she tell anyone?

“Look, I’m sorry about the drama queen comment, okay?” Mary quietly said, dropping her half-eaten bagel onto the paper wrapping and pushing it away. She felt so out of control and uneasy. About everything. It didn’t do much for her appetite and she didn’t like the dodgy way her boyfriend was looking around.

“You should eat more,” Mait scolded, choosing to focus on that instead of their real problems.

“Are you going to pick a fight about everything today?” Mary said through her teeth, clearly at the end of her rope.

Mait stood up and wrapped up his barely touched muffin. “No. Do you just want to take this to go?”

“Yes,” she replied shortly, wrapping up her bagel, grabbing her latte, and storming off down the sidewalk towards his building.

He followed a few steps behind, suddenly very aware of everyone around them. Was that someone from the Anthropology department watching him from across the street? Did he just see one of his undergrads drive by slowly? He exhaled and visibly relaxed a little when they got into his lobby. He nodded at the doorman and led Mary into the elevator.

She sipped her coffee and stepped out of the elevator when it reached their floor, pausing by the door and not looking up at Mait as he fished his keys out of his pocket.

“Hey,” he began, stepping in front of her as he pushed the door open. She pressed her lips together before looking up at him. The angry face. “I’m just a little... rattled after running into Roberta Greer, that’s all.”

“Understood,” Mary mumbled, looking down and pushing around him. She was the one who should have felt rattled. What could Bunny have possibly done to him? It was his stupid brother who’d made them two of the most uncomfortable and humiliated girls this side of the Mason-Dixon line.

And damn her luck, somehow thinking of him apparently made him suddenly materialize, too.

“Knock knock!” a voice boomed across the living room.

Mary looked up and all of the feeling left her limbs. She went entirely numb, even forgetting to breathe for a second as Mait’s older brother filled the doorway and then barreled into the condo. It wasn’t until both he and Mait frowned down at her with concern that she realized that she’d dropped her bagel and coffee onto the hardwood floor.

She glanced down at the mess, then quickly up at Mait. “I’m sorry,” she choked out, kneeling down and trying her best to clean up the globs of cream cheese and milky coffee puddle. She wasn’t afraid of him. She knew that. Mait had been right, though. He just had a way of kind of... rattling her.

“Hey, hey,” Mait gently said, squatting next to her and taking her hands in his. “It’s okay. I’ll clean it up.”

She swallowed and let him help her to her feet, thinking herself to be very brave as she stood next to the two large men. Good God, he’d had her bent over and had spanked her like a little girl with a wooden spoon. She was beyond humiliated.

“Mary,” Carlson began, but he didn’t get to finish. All he saw was the back of a little strawberry blonde head running out of the room and all he heard was the muffled sound of a door slamming. He looked over at his little brother who was rubbing his temples and squeezing his eyes shut.

“I thought you were coming at like, eleven or something,” Mait groaned, opening his eyes and heading to the kitchen to get some paper towels. Carlson took them out of his hands and knelt by the mess, quickly wiping it up.

“I was in the neighborhood. What’s happening with you two?” he asked, standing and walking to the trashcan in the kitchen.

“You happened, you big dumb animal. She’s furious with me. Do you blame her?” Mait growled, pacing around and rubbing his jaw.

Carlson at least had the decency to look a little humbled at the sight of his upset little brother and his frightened girlfriend. He shook his head and exhaled. “Man, I’m sorry. When I went over there and saw... the police, and that man, and they were missing, and the blood on the floor...”

Mait watched his brother’s shoulders sag as he sat down on a bar stool and rubbed his neck.

“I admit, I went too far. I was scared and frantic and incensed. I mean, my little Nicole, and the way you’d described how you felt about your sweet little girlfriend. How was I supposed to tell you something had happened to her?” he asked, looking at Mait apologetically.

“She seems to have that effect on people,” he sighed, sitting next to Carlson and slapping his back. “But now may not be the time to get a face to face and apologize. She’s too raw. A lot’s happened to her.”

“I know,” Carlson nodded, folding his hands and looking over. “Is everything all right with you?”

“Carlson,” Mait frowned, rubbing his eyes. “We ran into your *other* victim at breakfast an hour ago.”

“Shit,” he groaned, standing and resting his hands on his hips. “Is she... I mean, did she say she was going to try and get you fired?”

“No,” Mait replied, shaking his head. “I think she was scared half to death. What I’m worried about is that she saw me with Mary. I mean Mary smoothed things over with a pretty good lie, but Christ, if we get caught together. I just can’t... the whole future...”

“Calm down,” Carlson soothed, holding Mait’s shoulder. “From what I saw she and Mary are friends. If she was going to say anything she would definitely confront Mary first.”

“You think?”

“Most definitely.”

“Yeah. Yeah, you’re right.” He nodded, slapping the countertop. His brother always had good advice and most of the time a clear head. He’d been totally relieved to hear that he and Liam had been there for Nicole and Mary. He suddenly frowned. “But from now on no one is spanking my girlfriend but me.”

Carlson paused as he walked towards the front door. He turned and looked at his brother with a smile. “I’ve noticed the attraction before,” he resumed walking to the door, “and now I know why this relationship works. Good work, little brother.”

“Get out of here,” Mait said with a partially hidden grin. Carlson just laughed and headed towards the elevators. The door shut and Mait turned for his bedroom, not missing the fact that his brother hadn’t really answered him.

Now what?