

Naughty Girls: Brynn & Kim

By

Carolyn Faulkner

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Chapter One

She knew she should have been listening more carefully for the sound of his car coming up the driveway, his key in the lock, the door opening, and the heavy sound of his footsteps as he stomped his way through the house looking for her, but she'd become totally engrossed in reorganizing her farm in Farmville, and had done exactly what she suspected the nefarious developers had intended – just like their friends, the Vegas casino owners – she'd completely lost track of where she was in time and space, busily clumping trees here, buildings there, animals together by herd, holiday and specialty items in certain decorative spots that she was sure would please the eyes of her ever expanding raft of neighbors slash friends slash strangers...

Then, suddenly, a shadow fell over the laptop that had Brynn glanced up furtively, only to realize that she'd been well and truly caught, not once but twice, knowing he'd open the computer to see what she'd been doing and whether she'd disobeyed him and had been playing her favorite Facebook game again when she should have been working on the Excel spreadsheets she'd brought home from work. She had no doubt that he also knew every gory detail of how she'd ignored nearly every rule he'd given her at Kim's night before last. There was no way that Hank hadn't told him at breakfast this morning.

Brynn took a very short moment to savor that thought, however mundane it may have seemed. She knew he'd come a long way towards accepting himself and not worrying about how others saw him since he'd agreed to meet Hank occasionally – in town at The Fork in the Road Diner – for breakfast.

Since the two girlfriends had introduced the two men - in a moment of sheer stupidity that they had long since come to regret in more ways than one - they'd been thick as thieves, and considering that their philosophies regarding their women were so similar, it was hardly surprising. And despite the evil exchange of ideas in reference to how to handle their occasionally recalcitrant women, Brynn was very glad that Gray had taken that step outside his comfort zone and found a good friend. When he was ready, Hank would draw him into his own close circle of lifelong buddies.

Not one to simply surrender – in most cases, anyway – Brynn hurried closed her laptop, shoved it off her lap with barely a care to whether or not it landed anywhere safely and sprang off the comfortable divan, but only succeeded in getting about a foot away from where she'd originated before she heard his quiet, steadfast command from behind her.

"Stop."

He didn't yell it. He didn't need to. Besides the fact that he was the size of Man Mountain Dean, he had her memories of similar incidents and how they had ended to back him up. Yelling was entirely unnecessary. Besides, he was an almost preternaturally quiet guy; strident screaming was anathema to him. His voice was almost always unnervingly soft and calm. The order was issued with his usual firm confidence that said he knew without a shadow of a doubt that she'd obey him.

And, of course, she did.

But the worst was yet to come. "If you take another step away from me, Miss Brynn, I'll double what's already going to be a hefty punishment."

She stood statue still, games of Freeze Tag played as a kid in her big back yard flitting through her mind unbidden. She could hear him as he walked casually over to the couch and knew he was opening her computer, and tears welled in her eyes at his sigh.

"Come here, baby," he said, and she turned to him without a second's hesitation, a fact for which he was ever grateful. He knew it couldn't have been easy, considering in what condition her backside ended up a lot of the time after she'd willingly come into his arms, but it seemed that no matter how strict he was with her, she accepted it exactly as it was intended – with love and grace – and never held it against him in the least, never evinced even the slightest reluctance to snuggle up against him. He never saw any shadow of fear in the back of her eyes nor had she ever hesitated to come to him. When he stretched out his arms to her, as he was now, in open invitation, she ran to him and clung, like the limpet he often compared her to, bunching up handfuls of his shirt in her fingers as she settled her face against his neck. Gray took a moment to savor the pure enjoyment of having the perfect woman for him in his arms when months ago he would have bet every last dollar he owned that that would never happen, rubbing her back, easing the tension he always found there when she was facing a punishment – and now she was facing two.

But he knew he couldn't put off what needed to be said forever.

"Sweetheart, am I going to have to make you delete your Facebook account altogether?"

"NO! That would be cruel and unusual punishment! It's how I communicate with all of my friends! It wouldn't be fair!" Brynn began sobbing instantly at that threat, because she knew he wouldn't hesitate to enforce it if he thought it was what was best for her.

He'd been not a little surprised at her avid conversion from avowed Luddite to Facebook guru but then he supposed that he had supported it, considering he had forced her to get a good cell phone and had a broadband internet connection rather than the dialup she'd clung to for years. Gray snorted. "Farmtown -"

"Farmville," she corrected automatically, peeping up at him with one eye and truly wishing she hadn't at his sobering look, closing the errant eye immediately and hiding her head again. "Farmtown is merely a cheap imitation."

Although he was truly alarmed to hear there was more than one incarnation of such a thing, Gray didn't acknowledge her correction of him - probably because it went against type. She didn't usually do the correcting in this household. Instead, he refused to allow her to hide from him, just as he'd refused to allow her to run from him. One big, thick finger tipped her chin up, so that she had no choice but to look up into those starkly disapproving eyes. "More pertinent to the future condition of your bottom, Brynn Sawyer, is the question of whether you were supposed to be playing games?"

"No, Sir," came the meek reply.

"Damn straight," he agreed. "I don't think I mumbled early this morning when I told you expressly that I expected you were going to get some work done this morning while Hank and I had breakfast." She was hiding her face away again, and a thought struck him as he set about prying her face away from its hiding place for a second time. When their eyes were locked again, hers even more reluctantly than before, he asked, "Have you gotten any work done at all this morning?"

Her bitten lip was just about all the answer he needed, although she did say, trying to keep the whine out of her voice, because she knew there was very little he hated more than that, "Uhhh, I emptied the dishwasher and walked the dogs and started a load of laundry ..."

"All part of your daily chores, but not what I had specifically told you to do when I got out of bed, young lady."

She desperately wanted to escape the scolding almost – almost – more so than the spanking itself. She could take the roasting her rear was most assuredly going to get within the next few

minutes much more than that awful, pit of the stomach, heart achy feeling that he was disappointed in her behavior.

"And that doesn't even begin to consider what I heard about from Hank this morning."

Brynn gulped hard, but groaned. "Lies, all lies I tell you! How would he know what went on?" she scoffed. "He was as drunk as the rest of us -" Then she slapped her hand over her mouth, in an unfortunately belated attempt at not admitting to her transgression, pinning her hopes on the feeble hope that he'd suddenly be struck by amnesia or some other convenient ailment that would make him forget all about his damning – and damned, she thought rebelliously – conversation with Hank.

She soon found that she couldn't keep that hand where she'd placed it, though, because he had taken the opportunity to tug inexorably on her forearm until she'd settled – squeaking and squealing the entire time but knowing better than to offer any formal protests – into that all too familiar position over his denim clad lap.

"I got that idea. He confessed immediately that he'd imbibed a little more than he'd intended, but he was hardly incapacitated. And he let me know whose fault that was, too, since you were playing the part of waitress to him all night. Were you hoping he'd get so drunk he'd forget he saw you drinking?"

That was exactly what she'd been thinking, but Brynn wasn't about to confirm it to him - not for love nor money.

But he wasn't done yet, either. "And what were my specific instructions to you about your ladies' night slumber party, Brynn? I'm sure you can remember them."

She was sure she could remember them, too! He'd spent the months before hand drilling them into her. At first, he'd balked at the idea of her going altogether, and she thought she was going to be the only one of her friends that was going to miss it, even though she and Kim were the ones who'd hatched the plot in the first place. It had taken a lot of wheedling and practically out and out bribing for her to get Gray to say yes, finally, and one of the biggest stipulations was that she was not to drink that night. She was a lightweight and he didn't like her drinking when she wasn't with him. Despite her assurances that she was perfectly safe at Kim's, and despite the fact that he knew the both of them reasonably well, he would not be budged on that rule in the least.

Of course, he had a list a mile long of other rules – well, it seemed it was a mile long to her, anyway. She knew no one else there was going to have their man dictating their behavior as strictly as she was.

Well, that was wrong, too, really, because Hank rode Kim at least as hard as Gray did her, but they were having it at Kim's house because it was the most centrally located, so she probably had to contend with a lot fewer rules than Brynn.

She'd had to agree to call him if she felt in the least uncomfortable or if she wanted to come home at any time – just as if she was some eight year old on her first sleepover. She had to remember to take her meds, and – the coup de gras – not do anything that she didn't think he wouldn't want her to do, which was a horrid thing to say to someone who was going to a party, since he could be such a stick in the mud sometimes.

Brynn had balked at that one, because she figured she'd end up sitting on a stool in the corner of the room doing nothing at that rate! But he was adamant. He'd gotten to know some of her friends peripherally, but knew them better from what she said about them, and there were a few of them that he outright didn't approve of, and Gray wanted to make sure that she was going to think carefully before she misbehaved, and he was unwilling to bend on that requirement,

either.

So Brynn, of course, had caved, because she really wanted to go to this slumber party.

She and Kim had planned it carefully, keeping in mind that the majority of the attendees were no longer spring chickens, although there was a reasonable age spread. Theresa was the youngest, at about twenty three, all the way up to Ruth, who was fifty seven. Kim was thirty four, Brynn was thirty five, Madeleine was forty three, and Tiffany was twenty nine. They had a nice age mix, and they all got along really well, despite more disparities besides their age.

For some of them, it would be the first time in a very long time – decades, even - that they had been to a slumber party, and they were not looking forward to sleeping on the floor, so rollaway beds were procured, and everyone brought a sleeping bag, the majority of which seemed to have been pilfered from their kids' closets. White haired Ruth came brandishing a Mighty Morphin Power Ranger one that had everyone cracking up. Tiffany's was Tinkerbell, and that fit her perfectly.

It was held in Hank's man cave, which was their equivalent of a den, done with a big comfy sectional and every possible video or electronic doodad, so much so that they were all given a big lecture at the beginning of the evening – by him – as to what they were and were not allowed to touch and not touch, do and not do in regards to what he blithely referred to as his equipment, which had everyone both laughing and blushing.

Of course, once he'd left, Brynn hadn't been able to control herself from adding a very loud, "Or else Kim's gonna get it," which earned her a smack on the arm from her best friend.

The rule was that all dieting was suspended for a twenty four hour period, even in the perpetually dieting Theresa's case, and talking about any kind of weight gain that might result from their indulgences was also completely verboten. As a result, there were bowls of both kinds of M&Ms strewn about the place, which Kim had preordered with everyone's name on them, and in everyone's favorite colors, which meant there was a predominance of pink, purple, and blue. An orchard of Mrs. Prindable's gigantic caramel apples – enrobed in various toppings - sat waiting to be carved into – or simply bitten into, as was done later in the evening, when inhibitions had long since been cast to the winds – as well as several boxes of Krispy Kreme doughnuts and a large specialty cake, with a slumber party theme, done in layers of yellow, red velvet, and chocolate, and the requisite pints of ice cream were in the freezer, in everyone's favorite flavors.

Of course, the salty counterpoints to all of that sweetness couldn't be forgotten, either, so there was a ton of gourmet popcorn, homemade Chex party mix, chips and dips, but nothing really very messy, like nachos or Maddy's hot and messy salsa and cream cheese dip, because they didn't want to be spilling anything on Hank's precious stuff.

The reason they thought that that might be happening later was prominently placed at the entrance to the room – this cave sported a fully stocked wet bar, and, against his better judgment, Hank had not cleaned it out of everything but soft drinks before he left the ladies to themselves after his lecture about his expectations of their good behavior – which he knew would go entirely unheeded by all but two of them, and quite possibly by all of them.

Although the party was supposed to begin at seven, as usual, people trickled in a little before and a little after, but regardless, as they came in the door, their keys were confiscated by Hank, who would be driving anyone home who needed to go. Brynn was early, of course, bringing vats of Chex mix and helping Kim set up. They kept the beds on the covered patio, so that they still had lots of space, put cards and chips out in case they decided to play poker later, hooked up Brynn's iPod to Hank's stereo and listened and danced as they set out the bowls of

munchies and laid the rest of the eats out on the top of the u-shaped bar, which no one was going to be sitting around, anyway.

Ever the neatnik, Kim had a dust buster in every room in her house, and napkins and wet wipes were discreetly distributed on the decorative tables that had been artfully placed around the sectional that faced a truly huge plasma TV. Brynn was actually surprised that she hadn't covered the furniture in plastic, but that might have gotten a bit too close to admitting she was obsessed.

They'd already voted on and procured entertainment; they were going to be watching Titanic – for which Kleenex was made readily available – and the latest installment of Saw, during which Brynn intended to be reading diligently, as gory movies made her extremely uncomfortable. Then they were all going to watch the most recent episode of Big Love together, which they usually did, if not in the same house then by chatting online as it was broadcast.

Tiffany was the late arrival, as expected, and by the time she got there, the others – except for Brynn – had already begun imbibing, and, when Tiffany made herself a drink, Brynn had definitely begun feeling like the odd man out. Everyone else was relaxed and just slightly buzzed, and she was sitting there in the corner of the sectional like a lump, unable to enjoy herself. It didn't help that they'd decided to watch Saw first, and she had nothing to occupy herself, having become bored with her book. Cell phones and computers were banned when the girls got together at someone's house (which was almost inevitably Kim's), and were generally frowned upon spending any time on when they met otherwise, too. If anyone needed to get in touch with them, they could call the house phone, and Hank would bring it to them. You were expected to pay attention to the friends who were with you, and the world could take care of itself for a couple of hours, as it had for eons before their advent.

She knew she should call Gray and talk about it, and that he might even be convinced to relent somewhat. She knew he'd be impressed – and proud of her - if she called him to ask permission to have a drink. But despite the fact that having someone to watch over her and keep her in line was exactly what she'd wanted in life, she found herself chafing at the very same limits he placed on her behavior. She was thirty-five years old, dammit! She didn't want to have to go checking in with someone and asking permission every time she wanted to do something. She just wanted to do it.

As she was having this conversation with herself, she was already in the process of getting up and moving towards the bar. Of course Kim noticed this and followed her quietly, so that when Brynn'd reached for a glass and turned to grab some ice, she nearly bumped into her worried looking friend.

"What are you doing?" Kim hissed.

Frowning, Brynn replied sarcastically, "Let's see... ice, booze, mixer... I'm building a road, why? What do you think I'm doing? I'm making myself a cocktail."

"That's what I thought," Kim said, her whisper becoming even more urgent. "You're going to get yourself into trouble!"

"So?" She proceeded to lean around Kim and put a couple of cubes in her glass, then poured three or four fingers of rum into the large tumbler. Might as well be hung for a wolf as a lamb, she thought, or whatever the hell that expression is.

"But if you get into trouble in my house, I'm going to get into trouble, too!" Her friend was practically squealing now, worried that Hank was going to get wind of Brynn's naughtiness. She sounded very much as if she was quoting someone, and they both knew exactly who that was.

Brynn was licking the Coke off her finger. Real Coke. She hadn't had the Real Thing in so

long she'd forgotten the sticky, sweet, caramelly goodness of it. But what the hell! She was going to enjoy herself tonight and pay the piper tomorrow – or whenever it was that he found out about it. And she harbored no illusions that she was getting away with anything, really. It was only a matter of time before he found out, especially with Hank around. She knew that, even if Gray didn't find out about it until his deathbed – and she would never be that lucky – he'd be sure to recover just enough to give her what he thought she needed, and then die, of course.

He was never one to shirk a duty, unfortunately for her.

"Why would you get into trouble because I'm drinking?"

"Because Hank is going to say that I should have stopped you!"

She used her finger to stir the drink, which had Kim shuddering in disgust and handing her a pretty plastic stir stick, which Brynn continued to ignore in favor of her more organic choice, licking it greedily dry, then taking a long pull of the strong drink. "And how, pray tell, were you supposed to accomplish that?"

Kim crossed her arms over her chest and gave Brynn a "you know better look" that rivaled Gray's. "You know the answer to that. He's gonna say I should go and get him, and then he'll call Gray, and Gray will come and make you go home." She practically stomped her foot like a three year old. "Don't make me go narc on you, Brynn!"

Brynn was enjoying the feeling of the rum as its warmth spread quickly throughout her body, loosening her muscles and her nerve. "So don't, Bump -" Brynn changed her use of Kim's hated old nickname midstream at the beginnings of an angry glare, "Kim. Here. Have some rum and Coke. It'll make you feel much better."

By the time Hank visited them again – long after he should have, he knew, but he'd gotten involved in a war movie in their bedroom, which was well removed from his man cave – the damage had long since been done. And if it hadn't been for the raucous screams that drifted to his ears despite the distance, he might not have remembered to go check on how the ladies were doing at all, but he was glad he did.

Of course, when he got there, they were all completely staid and quiet, like church mice, just exactly like the kids when they had slumber parties and he had to go quiet them down. By the time he got there, they had quieted themselves down in anticipation of being yelled at.

Ruth, who was old enough to be his mother, was the worst, giggling in a schoolgirl voice, "We'll be better behaved, Mr. Palumbo. We promise."

"Yeah," Tiffany chimed in loudly. "We wouldn't want you to spank us... or would we?"

Although they each seemed to already be somewhat flushed, both Brynn and his Kim went an even brighter shade of red at that remark, of course, then Kim surprised him by speaking up. "No, believe me, you do not want him spanking you under any circumstances."

Hank grinned unrepentantly and leaned back against the door jamb. "Oh, I can remember a few circumstances when you really didn't seem to mind it, Kim... shall I elaborate?"

"No! You can go back to the bedroom any time now! Shoo!" Kim desperately did not want her husband anywhere near the other women, most of whom would be alternately trying to get her into trouble and wheedle embarrassing stories out of him, and he would be entirely too eager to oblige in either case.

"Why don't you come play poker with us, Hank?" Brynn offered, knowing how much he enjoyed the game.

He looked amazed. "Me? Invited to play with the girls? Wow! What an honor!"

It was hard to tell with Hank, sometimes, whether he was being serious or sarcastic, but this was not one of them. His voice dripped with sarcasm.

"Yes, and, in deference to Kim we won't even require that you be castrated beforehand. Ain't that mighty generous of us?" Maddy was the least enamored of men amongst them, and she very well might not have been kidding.