

Caitlyn's Last Chance

by

Virginia Emerson

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Table of Contents:

Chapter One	7
Chapter Two	14
Chapter Three	24
Chapter Four	32
Chapter Five	40
Chapter Six	48
Chapter Seven	57
Chapter Eight	67
Chapter Nine	74
Chapter Ten	81
Chapter Eleven	89
Chapter Twelve	97
Chapter Thirteen	104
Chapter Fourteen	116
Virginia Emerson	120
EBook Offer	121
Blushing Books Newsletter	122
Blushing Books	123

To my husband, Greg, who is not only everything I want, but everything I need, too. Thank you for the best three years ever, for helping me to find and be the real me, for loving me in all ways and supporting me in this new endeavor. Thank you for giving me back my desire and motivation to write again! I love you!

To Sam, thanks for the push and the encouragement through this, girlfriend!

And to Toni, thanks for reading the rough draft of this and offering your comments!

The author would like to note that although this book and its characters are all fictional, some of the tenets mentioned in the pamphlet *Domestic Discipline, The Key to a Happier Marriage* are based on material found on <https://adomesticdisciplinesociety.blogspot.com.au>.

Chapter One

Caitlyn slammed the plate on the counter with such force she was surprised it didn't crack and break. "Yeah, fuck you, too," she mumbled beneath her breath.

"What?" Hunter asked, menace and anger in his voice. "Did you say something?"

Caitlyn whirled around and met his glare with one of her own. "Yeah, I said fuck you, too." She screamed nearly in his face.

"What the hell is your problem now?"

"Really? You're really going to be like that? You honestly have no idea why I'm so pissed? You're not that stupid, Hunter."

"So fill me in. What the hell did I do to set you off this time?"

"Nothing, Hunter. Same thing you always do, nothing!"

At his look of confusion Caitlyn shook her head. "Could you be anymore friggin' obtuse? Look around the kitchen, Hunter and actually see something for a change. I'm tired. I'm sick and tired of coming home every night and doing everything myself while you sit your ass in front of that damn tube. You never help me anymore. You get home from work and park yourself in front of that fucking boob tube and that's it. I don't see you for the rest of the night. You just don't seem to ever see the sink full of dirty dishes, or the trash can over flowing. Nope, just push it down and add more until I have to fight with it to get the bag out of there."

"I work hard, Caitlyn. I'm tired when I get home. Is it too much to ask that I be able to sit and relax a bit? I just want to take a shower, eat something and relax. What's so wrong with that? What the fuck do you want from me?"

"I want some support." She slammed her hand on the table. "I want some friggin' help. Get off your lazy ass and do a dish or two for crying out loud. I'm just as tired as you are, Hunter. Or did you forget I work all day too? Maybe I don't do manual labor, but my job is just as tiring and stressful as yours. Did you ever think that maybe I'd like to just sit and relax, too? Do you think I enjoy coming home and getting dinner ready, doing up the dishes left in the sink, cleaning off counters and anything else that needs to be done around here? I don't have enough time in the day to do everything around here that needs doing and still work full time. Taking care of the house properly can be a full time job all by itself."

"Fine," he roared, completely fed up with her constant bitching. No matter what he did, she was nagging him about something. "Move out of the way and I'll load the damn dishwasher."

"Forget it!" she yelled back at him.

"Caitlyn, do you want my help or not?"

"No. You know what, go do what you do best and bury yourself in the friggin' TV set. I don't need anything from you!"

"Then don't ask for my help if you don't really want it. I'd probably screw it up anyway." He slammed his beer can on the counter and stormed away.

Caitlyn looked at the can and shook her head. Wonderful. "Can't even walk two friggin' steps to put your can in the trash? Really?" She picked up the empty can to put it in the trash. "Of course, too full. Why am I not surprised?" With a sigh she left it on the table. She just didn't have the energy to fight with an over full trash bag tonight.

Turning back to the stack of dirty dishes, she started to rinse them to load the dishwasher, slamming pots out of the way so she could reach the faucet. She needed to calm down or every dish in the sink would be broken and they couldn't afford new ones right now. Tears slipped silently down her cheeks as she wondered what had happened to them. They used to be so close, so much in love. They did everything together. Another tear slipped down her cheek as she remembered a time they couldn't stand to be away from one another. Now, all they seemed to do was fight whenever they were together. Or exist in silence.

She really didn't know how much more of this she could take. She hated the fighting, the constant bickering. And if they weren't fighting they were silent or trying to make small talk, which usually ended in either silence or fighting anyway. She had seen her parents go through the same cycle of fighting, then the long, uncomfortable silences while she was growing up until they finally ended their marriage in divorce. Caitlyn had determined after her mother's second marriage that she was never going to go through that. It would be better not marry at all than live like that. There never seemed to be a comfortable moment in that house. The air was always filled with tension. It seemed her own marriage was heading down that same track with the constant battling, the lengthy silences and the tension constantly surrounding them.

At work, she was listened too, respected. Her opinion counted for something. When she asked someone to do something, it was done. Immediately. Without argument, without complaint and without hesitation.

At home it was an eruption if she even asked Hunter to help her load the dishwasher. And God forbid she asked him to take out the trash or something.

She shook her head. She should have stuck with her original plan and never gotten married in the first place. After watching her mother go through three marriages of supposed wedded bliss, she could have done without it.

Then Hunter had come along. He'd been different somehow. And he hadn't given up, either. He'd been sweet and gentle, never raised his voice, never let anything rattle or upset him. He was the often heard and written about 'nice guy.' Not at all what would be considered the domineering type. Caitlyn would have avoided him like the plague if he had been. Her father and her first step father had been that type. Both those marriages had ended in divorce. Her stepfather had been even more overbearing and brutish than her father had been. Caitlyn shuddered. No way would she have given Hunter a second look if he had been that kind. But he was the opposite of domineering, completely. He reminded her a bit of her mother's third husband.

Dean had been a sweet, gentle man, too. And he had adored her mother. They never fought that Caitlyn knew of. There had been none of the screaming matches, broken dishes, or holes in the walls that had marked her mother's previous two marriages.

Caitlyn had been a teenager by that time, however and had been completely convinced marriage was not for her. No way did she want three marriages or more just to find the one that worked.

Her mother's first two marriages had been torture on Caitlyn and her siblings. All the fights between her parents had led to a bitter divorce in the end. The marriage to her second husband, the male chauvinist pig, had been just as bad.

Bliss and peace had finally filled the house when she married the right man on her third try. The one who listened to her, didn't argue with anything her mother said, just nodded and went along with it. Not that she would call Dean a wimp exactly. At least not out loud. He just wasn't the type who argued about much of anything either. He just let her mother do what she did best and lead and be in charge. Caitlyn wasn't certain she really wanted that either. Did she want to be in charge at home? She was in charge all day at work. Sometimes she just wanted to stop being in charge. Stop making the decisions, let someone else make them for a change and give her a break from it all.

That was her mother. Always in charge, never letting go of the control. Whatever her

mother suggested, Dean went along with it, as well as everyone else, and woe to anyone who offered a different opinion or tried to take that control away from her. But, after she married Dean, that had finally brought harmony into the house. Well, for the most part anyway. Her mother still didn't seem happy most of the time. But then again she didn't think her mother would ever be completely happy. She nitpicked at Dean and Dean just did whatever he could to do what she wanted. Granted it was more peaceful without the constant fights and for the sake of her younger siblings Caitlyn was happy about that. At least they weren't going to have to go through everything she had for as long as she had. Visions of burying her head beneath both blankets and her pillow to try to drown out some of the shouting, the breaking glass, and the sound of a fist hitting the wall assailed her. She shook her head and quickly refocused on the dishes.

Hunter had been more like Dean. Caitlyn thought that was what she wanted. A man like Dean who was gentle and peaceful and would do most anything to avoid a fight. Unfortunately, it wasn't working that way.

In the beginning of their relationship, it had been great. But now, not so much. Sometimes, she had to admit even if only to herself, she deliberately did things to get a reaction out of Hunter. And when he didn't react, she pushed harder. She sometimes deliberately picked a fight with him just to see if he'd stand up to her. When he did, it made her angry, but when he didn't, it made her angrier. It also made her sad and slightly disappointed. She just wasn't sure why.

She got so stressed and worried sometimes she just didn't want to think anymore, didn't want to make any more decisions, but they were always there. It was overwhelming sometimes and it was part of the reason she was so bitchy all the time. Even when she didn't want to be. She wanted someone to lean on, someone else to be strong for a change instead of feeling like it was all up to her and if she didn't keep it all balanced, everything would come crumbling down around her and she'd be left standing in a pile of rubble.

In the beginning it had been so different. It had taken Hunter quite some time to convince her that they were perfect for each other, that it would be different for them. They weren't their parents and they could make it work, he had promised. They were so much in love; they would be married forever. The problems her parents had wouldn't be theirs, he promised. He'd make sure of that. There were so much in love, they couldn't possibly end up like that. There was just no way.

She snorted. Yeah right. Here they were after only a couple of years of marriage and the fighting was quickly reaching the point of no return.

The worst part was, she didn't want to give up. She still loved Hunter. More than anything she wanted to make it work with him. Wanted to figure it out and somehow get back what they had in the beginning.

Maybe counseling would work. Her girlfriend had brought it up once. Said her and her husband had gone to this terrific counselor and it had worked wonders for their marriage. They were more in love now than ever. Caitlyn could certainly attest to that. The last time they had seen Alex and Jackie they had both looked so happy and content it had been completely obvious to everyone who looked at them. Caitlyn had almost been jealous of the contented glow on Jackie and the attentiveness with which Alex had displayed to his wife had made her green with envy. It had made her ask herself why Hunter couldn't be more like that. Gallant, caring, showing his care in small ways like a hand on the small of her back, gently guiding her, pulling out a chair, opening a door, quick kisses and hand holding.

She shook her head as she put the last of the pans into the dishwasher, filled the soap dispenser, then closed the door and pushed the button to start the machine. Hunter would probably never go for that idea.

*

Hunter punched the pillow behind his back to try to make it more comfortable. It was no use. He knew he was using it as an excuse. He wasn't actually uncomfortable. He was frustrated, he was angry and he felt hopeless too. His marriage was falling apart and he saw no way of stopping it. It was derailing quickly; just like that runaway train on whatever it was that was on the television. He wasn't really watching it anyway, unable to focus on anything after the latest fight with Caitlyn.

He sighed and ran his hand through his hair. What the hell had happened to them in the two short years since they'd gotten married?

When he'd first been introduced to Caitlyn her smile, and the way her eyes lit up and sparkled when she smiled, took his breath away. He was caught right then and there and he knew it. He had understood her hesitation at developing a relationship, her reluctance to ever marry after she had told him about her mother.

His parents too, had gone through plenty of battles and fights before finally divorcing.

But his mother's second marriage was perfect. There was no fighting, no arguing. Hunter saw what a marriage could be like. He had also seen and admired his grandparents and their marriage. Married for close to sixty years and still in love. Still holding hands and kissing. That was what he had wanted with Caitlyn.

That was not what they had, however. They had battles, fights, arguments or silence. She wondered why he didn't help her anymore. He had gotten tired of her not letting him help. Of hearing her tell him he was doing it the wrong way or just jumping in and doing it herself because he wasn't doing it right. Why help when she was only going to redo it anyway? What was the point?

And talking? Nope, not anymore. There had been a time when they talked for hours. Now, anytime they tried to have a conversation about just about anything, it ended up in a battle. So he had just stopped talking, too. It was easier to find something to watch on television than try to have any kind of conversation when he knew it was just going to end up with them screaming at each other. He used to not be able to keep his hands off of her, now they barely touched and he couldn't remember the last time they had actually made love. All the fighting didn't leave them feeling very much like being close. It had reached the point where there wasn't even any make up sex anymore either.

He loved Caitlyn. Had never stopped loving her and probably never would. But her constant harping, and nagging, her telling him whatever he tried to do that it was wrong, or questioning him about what he was doing, why he was doing it the way he was had worn him down. He didn't want to fight anymore. Didn't want to yell and scream and battle for every single thing. He just wanted some peace in his marriage. Was that too much to ask? No matter what he did, it was never right anyway, so what was the point?

His thoughts strayed to something his friend Alex had said when they'd met for lunch a few weeks ago. He had mentioned a counselor that had truly helped him and Jackie get their marriage back on track.

He and Caitlyn had gone to dinner with the other couple on several occasions and the foursome had become good friends over the past few years. Last time they'd gone out together, Hunter was impressed with how attentive Alex had been with Jackie and how she had glowed under his attentions. He wondered if he should start doing stuff like that with Caitlyn if it would fix things. Then he'd thought she'd probably just yell at him because he pulled the chair out

wrong, or glare at him if he tried to open the door. She was a big girl, after all, an independent, capable woman. She didn't need him or any man to help her open a door. He'd stopped those thoughts immediately, figuring they'd probably not get him anywhere anyway.