

The Reunion

By

Jodi Bella

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Published by Blushing Books®,
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ABCD Graphics and Design
977 Seminole Trail #233
Charlottesville, VA 22901
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EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-240-5
Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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Chapter 1 - Adam and Cassie

Cassie Bowman glanced around the ladies' room in despair.

Why, oh why, had she pushed Adam into bringing her to this reunion?

She should have known that it would just be the same old high school games played out between cliques, just ten years later. Was it really any surprise that Gwen Templeton had brought the most gorgeous piece of male eye candy on the planet as her date, and that she was parading him around like he was her own personal manservant? Or that Sonia Briggs was telling anyone who would listen about her mini-mansion on the hill, her two-point-five kids and her Lexus, the entire time looking down her nose at the rest of the poor schlubs from the class of 1998?

And wasn't it sad that those who weren't bragging and showing off their current lives were instead simply trying to? It was so obvious, as Cassie had moved through the room and caught snippets of various conversations, that everyone was either elaborating on their life, or out and out lying about it.

All totaled, that equated to one thing—Cassie instantly becoming intimidated and bashful. She wasn't the type to lie about her life, nor did she feel like she ought to. She *liked* her life, just fine, the way that it was. But she certainly didn't measure up to everyone else here, whether the picture they were painting was a true one or not. And not measuring up only reminded her of how she'd never fit in when she was in high school, and that brought on the old self-consciousness and shyness.

And then, the next thing she knew, she was excusing herself from the table where she and her husband had been sitting by themselves, watching the people mingling around them, and she was booking for the bathroom.

The frightened face that greeted her from the mirror once she got there was one that she hardly recognized. Sure, it was *her* face, with the same short, curly brown hair that just touched her collarbone, the same chocolate brown eyes, the same petite shoulders and small frame. But the look in those eyes she hadn't seen in years. Not since high school, in fact, which made perfect, stupid sense. Why had she thought things would somehow be different

now, ten years later? Why had she been so naive as to think that she could somehow make new friends with old enemies?

So, she'd stayed in the bathroom ever since, sitting on the bench just inside the bathroom door and wondering what the hell she was going to do next.

Asking to leave was simply out of the question. Adam would veto that suggestion before she even got the entire thought out of her mouth. She'd twisted his arm into coming here, after all. That had been no small feat, considering that Adam was an even quieter person by nature than she was, and that generally he didn't go in for big parties, especially ones where he knew absolutely no one. Then, of course, there was the little matter of the fact that they weren't exactly able to just walk out of the hotel where the reunion was being held, and simply drive back home. They were a thousand miles from home. They'd spent over four hundred dollars on plane tickets to come to this stupid party, plus another three hundred and something on a hotel room for the weekend, here at reunion headquarters.

So, over a grand was tied up in this excursion already. Money that, really, they didn't exactly have laying around just waiting for a good excuse to be blown. They'd had to save up for the trip, shaving bits of money off their usual spending here and there until they eventually had what they needed to pay off the credit card charge that Cassie had so impulsively made (without asking Adam, which only made the subject all the more touchy) for their travel plans.

Stupid, stupid, stupid.

She glanced guiltily at her watch as a pretty, slim woman came into the ladies' room. She'd now been back here for almost a half hour. If she wasn't careful, Adam was likely to come looking for her. She wouldn't put it past him to come right on into the women's room once he found her, either.

Still, she sat fixed to the bench.

The woman who had just come in looked at her curiously and offered a small smile, as she peered into one of the mirrors lined up over the row of sinks. She opened her purse, extracted a tube of lipstick and went to work reapplying her makeup. Out of the corner of her eye, Cassie watched her, wondering if she knew her. But the woman's features weren't familiar, and within only a few moments, Cassie concluded that she must have been the wife or girlfriend of one of her alumni.

“I’m sorry,” the woman spoke, breaking into Cassie’s worries. She looked up and met her eyes, returning her smile weakly. “Is everything all right?”

Ha! What a loaded question that was! thought Cassie.

“I... I don’t want to intrude.” Her kind smile broadened. “But you’re missing all the fun. Do you feel all right?”

Ask me that after my husband finds me, Cassie thought glumly. “I’m fine. Just, um, taking a minute to myself. Thanks.”

The visitor capped her lipstick and returned it to her purse, nodding. “Okay. If you’re sure. I guess it’s all a little overwhelming, huh?”

“Yeah. Thanks again.”

She waved half-heartedly in return, as the woman left her alone once again in the washroom.

It was only about a half hour into the reunion, and this woman had been the first that Cassie had encountered since she’d come back to hide out in the women’s room. But surely, as time went on there would be more. Before long, everyone in the party would be talking about the strange woman hiding out alone in the bathroom. And then what was she going to do? Move into a stall and pull up her feet every time someone came in? Just exactly how pathetic was she?

I really should get out of here and back to the table with Adam where I belong, Cassie told herself.

A few more moments passed by in silence, and then another woman entered the bathroom.

She was tall and lithe, with platinum hair and a long face. Cassie didn’t know her, either. She pretended she was invisible, as the woman openly stared at her in the mirror while she finger-styled her hair.

Time to go, Cassie told herself more sternly. *Back to Adam.*

Yet, there she sat, as if she’d somehow rooted herself to that bench. In the mirror, the tall woman’s eyebrows furrowed, her gaze still fixed in Cassie’s direction.

Go now. Before he comes here.

Right. Now.

Just then, as if thinking of him in growing proximity had somehow made him magically materialize; there came a shout from outside the closed door of the women's room. There was no mistaking her husband's voice, or the anger that colored his tone.

"Cassandra Bowman? Are you in there?"

Cassie's face flushed bright scarlet from her hairline to the neck of her dress at the sound of her name. Well, at least, he hadn't added her middle name.

If she'd thought the other woman in the bathroom had been curious about her before, she was looking downright nosy now. No longer even pretending to be primping in front of the mirror, the rude woman was now simply standing there, staring at her with open curiosity and even some amusement.

Cassie chose to ignore her, and, perhaps unwisely, her husband.

"Cassandra *Stephanie* Bowman!" he bellowed again, each additional name gaining more emphasis and volume. She winced at the use of her middle name. She was only digging herself in deeper by not answering him. It was bad when he used her full name, but inserting the middle name all but spelled *doomsday* in bright red, capital letters.

"Are you in there, young lady?"

Grinning now, the other woman in the bathroom with Cassie opened her mouth and shouted back to Adam. "Yeah! She's here!"

Cassie's eyes rounded at the stranger in horror. "*Hey!*"

"I'm coming in!" Adam called in warning. "Any of you other ladies in there, you might want to come on out, so I can talk to my wife in private."

"It's just me and her!" the stranger offered in a pleasant sounding yell. "I'm coming out right now." She swaggered by Cassie with a grin and winked. "Have fun."

Cassie resisted the urge to follow after her and gouge her eyes out with her thumbs. What a bitch! Of course, she had only put an end to the inevitable. Adam had been sure to catch up to her sooner or later. She would have to face the music with him at some point, regardless of whether she went to him willingly, or if some stranger offered her up on a platter.

The moment the tall woman had left the bathroom, Adam was there in her place, standing in front of her. He looked even bigger than he usually did, towering over her in this feminine, flowery room. He ran a hand through his shaggy, dirty-blond hair, as he looked her

over with hazel eyes that snapped with irritation. The cleft in his chin was even more pronounced when he pursed his lips at her.

“Jesus, Cassie,” he finally said after staring at her with blazing anger that slowly softened by degrees. He sank onto the bench beside her. “You’ve been back here all this time? Hiding out in the *ladies’ room*?”

She cringed slightly under the weight of his unhappy glare. “Yeah,” she murmured, looking down at her feet in their expensive new heels.

“*Why*?” Adam questioned. “Were you hiding from me? Did I say something... do something?”

“No! No, it’s not you,” Cassie rushed to assure him. She smiled and reached between them to take his hand. “I’m sorry, sweetie. I shouldn’t have just disappeared like that. Of course, it wasn’t anything you did. No, it’s just me being me. We got here, and I saw everyone from school... and it just... it really threw me. Everyone seems so successful. They all have done so well for themselves.”

“Well, I know we’re not exactly the Rockefellers, but we haven’t done so badly, you know,” he reminded her quietly.

“I know that. But it’s intimidating, all the same. You know high school wasn’t exactly the best time of my life.”

He rubbed the inside of her wrist with his thumb. “High school isn’t the best time of most people’s lives.” He met and held her gaze. “Why don’t you come to the point here, though, and explain to me why you’ve been hiding out back here going on an hour now, while I’ve been looking everywhere out there for you?”

Cassie sighed. She tried once to look away, but of course, Adam wouldn’t allow that. He took gentle hold of her chin between his thumb and forefinger and turned her very slowly and deliberately to face him again.

“You’re going to be mad at me...” she hedged, realizing that she sounded like a little girl.

Adam encircled her with one arm and tucked her body securely against his own. His hand came to rest at the curve of her hip, and he squeezed the fleshy side of her bottom, just once. It surely wouldn’t look like much, that simple little squeeze, to the casual observer. Their positions were not uncommon for man and wife, or for long time lovers. But Cassie

had been married to this man long enough to recognize that innocent little pinch for the warning that it was meant to be.

“I want to go home,” she whispered. “Please? Can we just go home?”

Adam’s mouth pressed into a hard line. “We just got here, Cas. Come on. You’ve barely even given this a fair try.”

“I’ve seen enough! I don’t want to try to be friends with those people! Half of them are just lying to one another to try to make themselves feel better about their lives! And the other half really do have the kind of life we all dreamed about having after school, and they’re rubbing everyone else’s noses in it! Why would I want to stick around and hang out with people like that?”

“I don’t know. But that’s exactly what we’re going to do. Because we didn’t spend all that money coming all this way just to turn around and head home early. We’re here, and we’re going to make the best of it. I’m sure there are at least one or two people out there that would be happy to see you. And if you give them a chance, you might just find out you’re happy to see them, too. I thought that was the whole idea behind coming here.”

“It was! But I’ve changed my mind! Can’t a girl change her mind?” Cassie folded her arms petulantly over her chest. She could tell she was pouting fiercely, but she just didn’t care. She felt like stomping her foot. Preferably right on top of her husband’s stubborn toe. “Okay. I know we can’t just turn around right now and go on home. But why can’t we go back to the hotel room?”

“Because we didn’t come here to sit in a hotel room for three days. We came so you could reconnect with people from high school.”

“I don’t know why I thought that was possible. I hardly had any friends in high school as it was. I’m not good enough for these people. I never have been, and I never will be.” Cassie told all of this to her new shoes, not daring to look up at Adam’s face, as the words ran unfiltered from her mouth. She knew what she said was likely to infuriate him anew, but it was as if she was powerless to stop herself from speaking.

There was a long, pregnant pause. Her stomach turned over sickly in dread. She was very careful, as the silence lengthened, to continue to keep her gaze away from that of her husband’s.

Of course, as was his way, Adam didn't let her get away with that for very long. This time, his grasp on her chin was slightly less gentle and a little less controlled than it had been before.

"What... did... you... say?" He demanded through clenched teeth.

"You heard me," she insisted boldly, even though her voice shook just slightly.

"Say... it... again." It was a dare, if she'd ever heard one.

Heaven only knows why she did what she did next. She knew better, of course. None of this scenario was new. She'd been down different versions of this same road with Adam for years now. She knew what repeating herself would result in. She knew they were in a public place. And she certainly knew that public places were the *least* desirable locations for what was about to happen.

But she just couldn't stop herself. She was just telling him the truth, after all. At least, the truth according to how she saw it. She hadn't been good enough in high school to be friends with these people. And she clearly wasn't now, either. She was the first to admit she'd been wrong to think that things might have been different now, somehow. But being wrong didn't change how she felt about things.

So, the next thing she knew, she was opening her mouth, staring into her husband's blazing gaze and very deliberately repeating the phrase that would surely land her over his knee, getting her bottom lit on fire, in a heartbeat.

"I'm not good enough for these people."

It all happened so fast after that, it was really a miracle that Cassie didn't get whiplash. She was instantly released from inside Adam's arm, and in the next moment, he had an inescapable hold on her wrist. A flash of a second later and she was upended over his rock-hard lap.

Hmm, she thought in a weird, detached aside, how convenient this little bench is for the girls whose husbands stop by the ladies' room to give them a good spanking. At least, my head isn't hanging an inch above the floor.

By the time this ludicrous little sidebar had finished sounding off inside her head, her skirt was already rucked up around her waist, despite her best efforts to thwart him. Her panties followed in the opposite direction, skinning down over the twin hills of her bottom and then pooling indignantly around her knees. She'd worn no pantyhose in the summer heat

and wished now that she had; she knew how much Adam hated dealing with pantyhose before administering a tail blistering.

The next thing that happened finally woke Cassie up to the imminent direness of her situation. For one second, she was still able to thrash and twist and fight over her husband's lap, but in the next, she was all but immobile. Adam had taken hold of her kicking legs between his own, in a scissor-like grip that felt like a steel clamp, and then he easily pinned her flailing arms behind her back. He adjusted his hold on her to better aid in the task he was about to undertake, which more specifically meant that her bottom was propped up almost obscenely into the air before him, with the rest of her body bent at an almost ninety-degree angle.

It was while these last few preparations were made, as some of the noise of their struggle died down due to her now limited movement, that Cassie first heard it: the slightly muted sounds coming from the other side of the closed bathroom door.

“What’s going on in there?”

“Do you think she’s okay?”

“...obviously her husband or boyfriend...”

“...sounds to me like somebody’s about to get her fanny warmed...”

“...what if she needs help?”

I do! Help me! Cassie wanted to scream, but her current state of undress kept her cries to herself. If she'd thought she was embarrassed and intimidated by her ex-classmates before, imagine how she'd feel, if they all burst in on her right now.

Of course, just because she didn't call out for help, that didn't mean they wouldn't come to the conclusion that she needed it. And then they'd come charging in here, anyway...

“Adam!” she whispered fiercely, as he tugged her up close to his body. “Adam, please don't do this! Not here! Everyone's going to hear us! And what if somebody comes in?”

“You should have thought about that earlier, Cas,” he said. She never understood how he could be so calm about doling out a spanking, no matter what situation they happened to be in. The man never worried for one second what consequences they might have to face afterwards, if someone else happened to overhear them and found fault with Adam's particular way of handling his marital woes.

“Adam, come on! Tell me you're not really going to do this to me!”

“*You did this to yourself* when you made that crack about not being good enough. You know I won’t tolerate that kind of harsh self-criticism. I saw it in your eyes when you repeated yourself. You knew *exactly* what would happen after you repeated those words. So don’t try to lay the blame for this at my feet.”

“Aw, now she’s really gonna get it...” A male voice predicted from outside.

As if to punctuate this observation, Adam lifted his hand up high above his head and sent it flying forward to connect with Cassie’s bare bottom, sending a loud *smack* up into the air. The natural acoustics in the bathroom made that one slap sing out crisp and loud, and in the pause that followed it, there were muffled gasps and giggles on the other side of the bathroom door.

“I *told* you!” the same voice proclaimed in an excited tone, and Cassie pictured some pudgy-bellied old school chum of hers, as he elbowed another man, as if they were sharing a good dirty joke. It was probably Xavier McCoy, that nerdy little teacher’s pet. What a perv!

“*Adam!*” Her tone was half pleading, half scolding. “Adam, they’re listening to us!”

“Yes, ma’am, they sure are listening to us.” He dealt her another stinging whack, and she hissed in pain through her teeth. “But that’s just because we’re the most interesting thing they’ve found going on at this party so far.” *Smack!* “A lot more interesting than a bunch of people trying to one-up each other on their careers and kids and houses.” *Crack!*

“...he’s right about that, you know.”

Agh! Cassie was so tired of hearing that voice and of imagining the conversations that were going on outside the bathroom that she was almost grateful when Adam picked up the pace of the spanking and the clapping sounds of bare skin on bare skin drowned out the comments from their own personal peanut gallery.

Almost was the key word here, of course. Because there was a definite trade-off in exchange for not having to hear the comments from their audience. That cost was to her bottom, as the heat and sting from her husband’s meaty slaps began to rise.

Somehow, she managed to bite back her urge to squeal and cry out in distress. She knew that making any more noise would only draw more unwanted attention their way. Despite that, Cassie was sure that by now they could hear what was going on back here all the way out by the DJ and the dance floor.

She writhed over Adam's thighs, as he rained swat upon swat on her unprotected derriere. He was always determined when making his point; that way there was less chance that he would have to repeat it again. His hard hand connected with her tender skin in the same spots on her lower bottom, right where she would have to sit for the rest of the night. It was his way of ensuring that she would be reminded of her lesson for the remainder of the evening. Although she knew his methods well, it didn't make bearing them any easier.

"I will never stand idly by and listen to you berate yourself with comments like that, Cas!" Adam was saying, his hand a flash in the air, he was spanking her so fast and hard now. "You are just as good as anyone else, here or anywhere! And in my opinion, humble though it may be to some, you are better than most! You should never let anyone allow you to feel like you're worth less than they are. And I will *not* let you make comments like that about yourself. Do you hear me?"

So far, the spanking had been brief, but Cassie was already exhausted, and her bottom hurt terribly. Even if she couldn't really fight against Adam's fierce hand because of the way she was currently hobbled, her instinct was still to try to get away. So her weak efforts to wiggle herself away from his unerring aim quickly grew tiring. And his ferocious tempo on her backside had made this short spanking seem more like a five minute one. The added knowledge of their audience right outside the door, listening intently, certainly didn't help matters.

So Cassie was more than willing to capitulate. "Yes! Okay! I'm sorry!" She deliberately softened her voice, so it was loud enough for his ears alone. "Please, Adam? You're right. I'm sorry."

He gave her a few more smacks for final emphasis, but it was obvious that his heart wasn't in them. In a few moments, he paused to rub her bright pink bottom skin with a caressing, loving hand. He tapped her hip lightly and helped her to stand, then to right her clothing. The murmurs from outside the bathroom door were more hushed now. Cassie wondered if the group outside would scatter and watch them emerge from a distance, or if they would be so bold as to stay where they were to get a better view.

"No more talk like that," he said in a low voice, tipping her chin up. She suspected he did so both to allow him to meet her gaze more directly, and to check her face for any messed up makeup. "*You are precious. You are special. You are beautiful. You are the one that I chose*

to spend my life with. There is only one *you*. And if you know what's good for you, you won't let me catch you putting yourself down again." He smiled, holding her face between both of his hands. "Got me?"

Though a part of her wanted to slug him for spanking her and for the near future when they would have to walk out of this room into the crowd of people outside who had heard everything, she still couldn't repress the smile of her own that broke over her face in answer to his.

"I've got you. That's right."

He smiled and pulled her into a hug. "I love you," he whispered, kissing her neck just above her collarbone. The tiny flutter of his lips made her pulse leap and her heartbeat flicker.

"I love you, too."

Hand in hand, they turned to the bathroom door, and with a deep breath and a shared glance, started walking out together.

Adam squeezed her hand. "Don't worry about them. They're just people," he whispered. "It's going to be okay. I'm right here."

Cassie smiled and realized that for the first time all night, she actually felt at ease. "I know. Come on. We're already a scandal; might as well make the most of it. Let's party..."