

“You got reprimanded?” The tone was incredulous.

She sighed, “Yeah, a formal verbal reprimand. And was told I’m lucky it isn’t a formal *written* reprimand that would go in my personnel file.”

“I don’t get it. Why were you reprimanded?” As he asked this, Mike poured more merlot into all three glasses.

Devon smiled, then asked, “So, start again. What happened today with the Dean and President, start to finish?”

Maggie reacted automatically, “Stop sounding like a lawyer.”

“I *am* a lawyer. And knowing you, I may have to defend you in a labor lawsuit at some point, so I want to make sure I have my facts straight.”

Maggie took a sip of wine. “It’s a long story.”

Devon looked at Mike, who shrugged, “We’ve got time.”

She smiled, “Does it ever occur to the two of you that our social lives suck? That *this* is the extent of our social lives?”

Mike chuckled, “You mean that after almost twenty years of friendship, our big social event is getting together every month to have pizza and wine?”

Devon’s eyes clouded with sadness, “It used to be the four of us.”

Maggie squeezed his hand, “And she specifically told us she’d come back to haunt us if we didn’t continue with the tradition.”

Devon continued, “So explain what happened.”

“Oh, the whole day sucked. It started badly...”

The day *had* started badly. Maggie awoke groggily, smelling coffee. She usually got up early to workout, her coffee pot set to start its automatic cycle while she showered. Smelling coffee clearly meant she was already at least an hour behind. Damn!

Twenty minutes later, she poured coffee into a travel mug. As she stepped over the toys scattered across the rug, her heart constricted. It always felt so weird when the boys were away. But, at least this morning she could probably still make her meeting on time since she wouldn't have to stop at daycare.

Five minutes later, she pulled into the lot and grimaced to see that her normal spot was full. After three futile circuits, she finally pulled onto the grass at the side of the lot, hoping Security would ignore her car this one time.

She hopped out of the car and yanked her bag from the passenger seat, setting off at a jog toward the Commons Building. How could she be late for the most important faculty meeting of the year? With any luck at all, she'd be able to duck in the back door and find a seat without being too obvious.

No luck. The opening door threw a spear of sunlight across the otherwise dark room, prompting most of the audience to turn and stare back at her. Dean Anderson smiled smugly from the podium next to the overhead of the projected budget for the next year. "So nice of you to join us, Ms. Erickson."

Her face burning, Maggie slid into the nearest empty seat wishing she had managed to be there at the start of the meeting, forty-five minutes before.

At the end of the meeting, the Dean raised his hand for attention. "I hope you all have a happy and relaxing spring break and we'll see you all next week. Please remember to check your email for faculty updates. And, Ms. Erickson, I'd like a word with you."

Maggie stood warily, her stomach churning in anger. In the back of the room, her two assistants and two classroom teachers waited, silently lending their support.

He smoothed a wrinkle from the sleeve of his navy blue blazer. "I appreciate you bothering to show up for this meeting. After all, you referred to it yesterday in the snack bar, as, I believe, 'the biggest waste of time since you had to take the oral exam for a South African history class.' However, it would have shown a minimum of professional courtesy on your part had you arrived on time."

Before Maggie could think of an answer, he continued. "While I realize you believe it is acceptable for your staff to be a bit lackadaisical, I expect that when I call a meeting, you will attend on time."

Swallowing, Maggie tried to keep calm. "Sir, I certainly intended to be here for the start of the meeting; my alarm didn't go off. I got here as soon as I could."

He snorted. "And what was the excuse for missing the meeting last month? I believe you had a sick child and weren't able to attend." Tipping his head slightly, he raised one eyebrow. "I find it fascinating how often your children are sick on faculty meeting days."

Maggie struggled to keep her voice level. "I have never abused my privileges and have never missed a meeting other than for a valid reason."

He stroked his mustache carefully. "It's certainly regrettable that you missed the start of the meeting. I announced an adjustment to your program. Beginning in the fall, you will have

student teachers for six weeks, rather than twelve. This will mean we can offer endorsements in Special Education for twice as many students.”

“What? That means the students, I mean the high school students, will have to adjust to twice as many staff, and you know they can’t handle a transition like that. You *know* that.”

Maggie’s cheeks colored with her rising voice.

“Frankly, it’s not my business how well they adjust, that’s your job to handle. My concern is how many college students earn the endorsement, increasing the viability of the Teacher Education program.”

“Sir, with all due respect, if those students don’t adjust to the changes in staff, your future teachers won’t stay in a classroom; they’ll leave running and screaming.”

“Then you’ll have to make sure that doesn’t happen. If you can’t serve the best interests of the college students, perhaps you need to think about another line of work. Or at least another *place* of work.” He smiled, his eyes narrowing. “It was my decision to make this change. It’s in the best interest of the college. *Your* function is to work with your staff to make sure it happens and happens well.”

Ever since she’d been a baby-faced freshman of eighteen, Maggie had struggled to bite her tongue as Dean Anderson had belittled her. For the last four years of meetings and appointments, she’d managed to keep her cool under his disdainful eye, but she couldn’t take it anymore. She snapped. “Oh, bite me.”

His voice rose to a mosquito-like whine. “Did you just say ‘bite me’?”

“Yes, I did, you sanctimonious piece of shit. How dare you insinuate I don’t care about the college or that I won’t do my job to the best of my ability!”

“Excuse me? Did you just curse at me? I guess I’m not surprised; belligerence is exactly what I’d expect from someone who works with the type of children you do.”

“You asshole. *That’s* what this is about. I work with kids you think should be thrown away and you can’t stand it. Aren’t you the one who once told our representative that only college-educated people should be allowed to vote? You hate the fact that the program works and that the college could actually be seen as welcoming to someone outside of the affluent, blonde elite.”

“Ms. Erickson, your obscene insubordination will be reported and you can expect the appropriate sanctions to soon follow.”

Maggie was beyond caring. “Whatever,” as she peevishly spun on her heel.

Back in the kitchen, Maggie resigned, “And that is how my day went.”

The two men sat across the table regarding her silently. Taking a sip of wine, Mike swallowed before saying, “I guess you’re not up for Employee of the Year anymore. Do you still have a job?”

“Yeah, I still have a job but about an hour later I got a call from Priscilla.”

Devon’s face lit up, “How is she? I loved working for her!”

“Priscilla’s fine but she called and announced that I needed to be in the President’s office in fifteen minutes so I had to jog across campus to get there in time. I figured the Dean would be there too, but when I got there, I was just meeting with the President.”

“And?”

“He sat me down, looked at me, and gave the biggest sigh I’ve ever heard. Then he told me that I was frustrating the hell out of him; that he loves me, he loves what I bring to the college, and he loves the program but that we were meeting private so he didn’t have to worry about being politically correct. He told me flat-out that I’m a pain in the ass.”

Mike nodded, “True.”

Maggie glared, not finding the humor, “That I am wholeheartedly devoted to my students, both the college students and our clients.”

Devon nodded, “Also true.”

“That I have great trouble accepting authority, which he finds interesting since I grew up in a military family.”

Before either man could respond, Maggie snapped, “I know, *true*. Then he said that no matter how much he loves me and wants me at the college, I have to learn to get along with the Dean, period. He said the severity of this incident would normally mean I’d receive a formal written reprimand, but since it was the first time it had risen to this level, that he was giving me a verbal warning and telling me that I need to get my shit together and stop reacting to Anderson.”

Devon queried, “Is he noting the verbal warning in your personnel file?”

“No, as long I don’t have another issue this school year, it’s done. If I tell him off again, it’ll be noted in the file and then I’ll get written up. Mind passing the merlot?”

“You got off easy, you know that, right?” he impressed, passing her the bottle.

She sighed, “Yeah, I know. If Jason wasn’t the President, I’d be screwed right now.”

“So over all, that ended better than it could have. What about the rest of the day?”

“My mother called four times to tell me everything I’d forgotten to send with the boys – as if the world would stop turning if they didn’t have their own toothpaste. Couldn’t they use

hers? It *really* helped to have her remind me today that on top of everything else, she thinks I'm a shitty mother. And just in case I wasn't already looking to punch somebody, I got a parking ticket from Campus Security." Maggie rolled her eyes as she picked an olive off her pizza, pausing a moment before flicking it into the empty box. "And I *told* them no olives, because I really didn't need any fucking olives today. All in all, the day sucked." She flicked another olive, "But I forgot to tell you the best part of all of my meeting with the President."

"What's that?"

"I get to go to five anger management sessions; they start tomorrow night."

Both men struggled to keep straight faces, but their guffaws soon filled the kitchen.