

REAL HUSBANDS
DON'T CRY



TIFFANY
MELLIS

Real Husbands Don't Cry!

By Tiffany Mellis

“Hey honey, I’m hooooome!” I called out, Desi Arnaz style as I opened the door.

Joan was standing there, as cute and lovely as always in her pretty apron. “You bastard!” She gritted, stepped in towards me, her small, dainty, fist already upraised, and a punch caught me totally unprepared on the upper jaw!

I staggered backwards, seeing just her blazing eyes as she came in even closer and then fired a left hook into my midriff. “Run around on ME, will you?” She gritted and stepped in to where I was crunched against a wall and then tried to knee me in the testicles! Luckily, I had just turned to try and get away from this storm and her knee caught my thigh. It still hurt enough that an “Oooosh!” escaped my mouth, but then she fired another right hook that caught me on my upper face.

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“Ooooh!” I started to leak tears then - and as I put my hands to cover my bloody nose, she *punched* me in the belly. “Ooooh!” I wailed.

Weeping loudly now, I started to fold over just as her arm – one that I had always thought of as being so soft and comforting was around my neck now and she was climbing onto my back and was riding me down to the floor, kneeling and pummeling me all the way! Then as I was lying on my stomach, she knelt on my back and forced my arms behind me, until my hands were together and I was yowling with pain.

“Say you’re SORRY!” She gritted through her teeth.

“I don’t know what . . .” Then I howled with pain again as she forced my arms back up even more. “Please? Please don’t Joan? I’m sorry!”

I was glad that I had given in, because the pressure was off my arms immediately. Then I felt her rise and mistakenly thought she was getting up, but she simply grabbed me by a shoulder and turned me around, onto my back, so that I was now staring up at my wife as she dropped her way back down on top of me, none too gently with her knees now straddling my chest. She was still glaring down on me.

“Love Evelyn? That it?” She barked.

“Evelyn? Who . . .” and I got a hard slap in the face for my effort.

“Don’t LIE! You just brought her home, into the complex! Think I didn’t SEE?”

“Please don’t slap me again Joan?” I started, new tears running down from the side of each eye.

She ignored my plea and slapped me again! Gritted at me through clenched teeth. “A little force seems to be the only way I can get the truth out of you! Now, didn’t you just ride her home? I saw her in your car as you came through the townhouses! Just happened to look out the window and saw her – bold as brass sitting in our car! Smiling and simpering at you. Didn’t you think I’d see you? Am I wrong?”

“Oh THAT Evelyn?” I managed. Didn’t even see the slap coming as it rocked my head to one side.

“Don’t come the little innocent with me!” She growled as the blow landed. “Think I didn’t see you making sheep eyes at her at that condo picnic we had last spring? Just couldn’t wait to work your way into her good books?” She drew her fist back.

"Please don't hit me again Joan. Please?" I meowed softly and submissively.

A sort of surprised look came over her face, but this time she paused and didn't hit me. Instead she changed her fist into an open palm and patted me gently on the face. "She WAS in your car, wasn't she darling? Don't LIE now! Admit it!"

"Yes, but . . ."

"SHUT UP! You think she's attractive, don't you?"

I knew better than lie. "Yes Joan! But nowhere . . ."

She put a hand over my mouth. "Stopped in her apartment on the way up for a bit of nookie – huh? That what you did?"

My sweet little wife was acting and using language that I'd never have believed possible!

"No Joan – NO! I can explain!" My speech was muffled as her hand was partly over my mouth, but my meaning came through. "Please let me explain!"

She leaned back a little and took her hand away from my mouth. "It better be good – DAMN good! I saw you drive your car through the gate and into the complex. Been over a half hour since then!" She started to snarl again.

I snuffled some tears away and spoke hastily. "I was passing the supermarket and I saw her waiting for a cab. It was raining . . ."

"A knight in shining armor? That what you want me to believe?" She was sarcastic to say the least and lifted her arm as if to hit me again. I found myself cowering away from her as much as I could. The same surprised look came over her face, but then she patted me again, almost lovingly. Her voice cooing, soft and seductive. "Come along then sweetie. Tell Joan everything now! *Everything*, understand? Don't DARE lie and get me mad at you! Get me upset – or I'll hit you again!"

My wife of almost two years seemed to have undergone a massive change since I had left her that morning. She had always been sweet and coy. Reasonable and non-demanding in everything she did or said. Now, she was starting to act as nicely as always, even though her dominant position belied this, but there was an element in her that I'd never seen before, a growing sort of confidence. Almost as if she were looking *down* on me. Naturally, considering our actual positions this was absolutely true, but it was-

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n't in this way that I mean it – it was as if she was starting to consider me as being her inferior now – something beneath her - something that I could never, ever, see my sweet wife thinking before. Now I was seeing a different side of her.

I licked my lips and swallowed some tears. “Like I said? I passed the store and saw her wave at a cab that didn’t stop. It was raining, and she had grocery bags under her arms and I . . .”

“Felt sorry for the poor little thing?” Joan asked sarcastically, although some of the brassiness seemed to have left her voice.

“I was just being neighborly, that’s all Joan. She’s a condo owner, just like us!” I said plaintively.

“Sure!” She sneered, her voice becoming nasty again. “That’s why it took you more than half an hour to get here once you arrived. That it?”

“It wasn’t that way at all! I helped her in with her groceries, that’s . . .”

“Lot’s of help SHE needed – huh! Her being as big as you – probably bigger and stronger than you if you want the truth – but you wanted to get you to be her sir Galahad, that it?”

“Aw c’mon Joan. I couldn’t let her carry those bags indoors all by herself, could I?”

I saw some indecision in her eyes now as she considered her answer, but her facial expression was still forceful enough. “I guess not. But how come you always seem to be attracted to those strong silent kind of women, huh? Short hair and men’s watches? How do you think this makes ME feel? What did you DO for a half hour? Kiss her?” She cocked her head and the semblance of a grin appeared. “Or was it HER that kissed YOU?”

“No Joan, honest! She was damp from the rain and had to have a cup of warm coffee. Said she felt really cold. Demanded that I keep her company by having a cup. That’s *all* that happened. I swear it!”

She leaned forward and stared directly into my eyes. Her own eyes didn’t waver for a second. “But you DO find her attractive, don’t you? TELL me!”

“Yes.” I admitted. “I admitted that already. She attracts me. Not as much as YOU dear, but I’m not going to lie. But all I had is coffee. No kissing or stuff like that.”

She looked uncertain now as she sat back. "Well, at least you're being honest. I've seen the way that you hover around those confident women – always SO attentive. Hang around them." Then she smiled. "But I can see now that you didn't have any sex."

"Huh? How can you tell that?" I asked, genuinely puzzled.

She wiggled around, smiling more now. "I can feel your hardon in my back. Think I haven't learned from experience that you can't get it up that quickly after you've just had sex?" Then she laughed and wiggled some more. "Don't blush dear! You look so cute when you get all rosy and pink. Trying to get me all sexed up with your innocent act, huh?"

I wiggled beneath her. "Aw, c'mon Joan. This whole episode has been embarrassing enough!"

"Maybe I made a mistake?" She offered, but she sounded puzzled more than apologetic.

"Damn RIGHT you made a mistake!" I spoke with more authority now. "How's about letting me get up now?"

Truthfully, I was expecting her to get all apologetic at that point, but that strange look was still on her face. "You *knew* I was wrong?" She asked me slowly, her head cocked to one side again. Still didn't relax or raise herself off me.

"Damn right I did!" I growled.

"But you let me *hit* you. Hit you good and hit you often." She was curious now, and it showed in her voice. "Didn't hit me back!"

"I don't hit women!" I answered huffily.

"Oh?" She gazed blankly at me for a second or two. "But you'll *cry* when a woman hits you? Sob and weep and apologize, even when you don't know why you're being hit? Even say that you're *sorry*? Weepy like?"

"I had to!" I excused myself. "Had to stop you from hitting me."

"But you're not mad at me now?" She had a peculiar coy tone in her voice.

"Well? Just a little bit." I said.

"But you don't LOOK like your mad. All soft and blushing." My shy little wife then REALLY surprised me again by reaching backwards with one of her hands and gently stroking my erection. "Matter of fact? You *look*

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all soft and *loving*. Feel that way *too!* Do you *like* little Joanie getting mean and nasty with you?" She smiled tenderly down on me.

"Oh, stop this Joan." I said, but heard the faltering and weakness in my voice.

"Why don't you pout those nice lips for me, huh? Pucker UP?" She was taunting me now, for goodness sake, but my lips suddenly formed themselves into the pout she was asking for. And my wife leaned forward and kissed me - then her hands started reaching backwards and undoing my pants.

Finally, I felt my pants being undone and my erection coming free. She leaned forward now, grinning. "Why don't you put your arms around my neck, huh? Nice and soft now! Make some happy noises. "

Her lips were firm as they came down on mine and I heard a satisfied grunt come from her as I twined my arms around her neck and mewed softly. "Mmmml" was all she said in reply.

* * *

It was about two weeks later that I opened the door to our apartment. There really was nothing for me to be nervous about - not *really*. But things HAD changed. Not in any way that I could put my finger on, but there was no question about it now. Joan still seemed to accept my authority as a husband, but there were moments when I was sure that there was a little mockery in her attitude and - time and time again - I could have sworn that I saw the same puzzlement in her eyes as there had been on that special night when she'd first of all beat me - then made love to me as I lay underneath her on the hallway floor.

"Hi Joanie! I'm home!" I called out gently.

She bustled in to meet me - just as she always had. Pretty in her flounced, spotless and pastel colored apron. Freshly made up and shining and smelling lovely. "Hi sweetie!" She called out, then came and gave me a kiss.

Now, it probably sounds silly, but her greeting of me had changed somehow. Doesn't sound much, but before she had always come to me? Then sort of, melted in my arms. Now, it was STILL affectionate - no doubt about that - but it was *her* that was kissing *me*. Not like she was taking me in her arms and bending me over sort of thing - but that was the feeling that I got - understand? Another thing? She seemed to have got out of the habit of calling me Steven - my name. It was now 'Sweetie' or 'Honey' or 'Cutie pie'. Things like that.

Anyhow? We kissed hello. "What's for dinner Joan?" I asked.

She blinked her eyes at me, then stood still and swished her apron skirts around her looking pretty and guilty. "Please say you won't be MAD at me lambkins?"

"I'm not mad. How could I be?" I responded gallantly.

"Well? I really don't feel in the proper mood tonight?" She smiled at me.

"Not feeling well?" I asked solicitously.

She shrugged. "No. Feel fine. Won't lie. Just feel like taking it easy, that's all."

"Poor dear!" I was SO sincere. "Like to go out for dinner?"

She shook her head. "No. It's pretty well made. I just feel like loafing now. Feel like a drink as a matter of fact." She showed me her bright teeth. "Like to get me one? Serve up dinner?"

"For you, my darling? Anything!" I emoted.

She sighed happily and started undoing her apron. "Wonderful darling! Why did I *know* that you would? Come to me and I'll put your apron on."

I found myself gulping for some reason. Shrugging and moving my shoulders. "Just for drinks darling? I hardly need an apron to do that, do I?"

She started advancing on me, working the apron off over her head as she did so. Looked at me wide eyed. "But didn't I SAY? I want the night off – so thought that if you'd serve up the drinks, you wouldn't mind serving up dinner too?" Her smile was melting as she looped the apron over my head and I stood, transfixed, looking into her smiling, confident, eyes. Was that a stronger hint of mockery in them? She smiled as she spoke. "There! There! That apron looks LOVELY on you! Just let me tie a pretty bow, then fluff up your frills a little?"

I found myself standing helplessly as she did exactly what she said she was going to do, smiling gently at me all the time. "You look so CUTE!" She laughed. Then she got more serious. "I'll take a Scotch and water darling. A nice strong Scotch, if you don't mind. She then turned her back on me and headed for the sitting room, where we normally watched TV, leaving me standing there helplessly.

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I felt like an idiot! Almost as if I'd been freed from a spell as she left, suddenly conscious of my full skirted apron, wafting about my waist and the frilled straps that came down over my chest. I wanted to COMPLAIN! What kind of man allowed things like this? But then I shrugged mentally. What would my dear wife THINK if I couldn't take over her chores for one night, ONE miserable night? For GOODNESS sake! What kind of man did she take me for? I headed for the bar, trying to ignore the feeling of the apron as it swirled about me. Knew that I was blushing, although I couldn't quite fathom out the exact reason..

* * *

Two or three weeks after that. Another evening came. When I got in the hallway after my days work, I made sure to close the outer door quietly behind me – Joan had made it VERY clear that I shouldn't make noisy entrances and disturb her. Then, taking my coat jacket off I tip toed over to the new hallway hanger and hung my jacket up. With some surprise, I saw that there was a new apron waiting there for me there where my aprons now hung, waiting for me so that I'd be dressed properly without having to go into the kitchen to put an apron on.. I knew that a few weeks before I might have complained about the new apron – let's face it – PINK was not my color, and it was very feminine about the skirts I noticed as I put it over my head, but just the same I made sure that it was tied prettily in a bow at the back. There again, I had become very aware that Joan didn't like me complaining, so had determined that there wasn't much sense in wasting my breath.

I then took my tie off, then hung it alongside my jacket. Then I checked my reflection in the full length hallway mirror. I had to admit that though I hadn't liked the color of the apron initially but it was quite nice. Not *too* bad, really. I twirled a little so that I could see that the bow was tied correctly. It was. Then I opened up my shirt, fluffed out my collar points and made sure that they overlapped the straps of my apron. Joan wouldn't have *anything* to complain about tonight, I thought. Then I made my way into the sitting room.

“Hello darling!” I said, wishing my way into the room the way she had started to like. “Your want your normal Scotch and water over ice in a tall . . .” I paused, horror struck at sight of the two women sitting side by side on the sofa.

"Hello my little cupcake!" Joan greeted me. "You remember my aunt Eileen, don't you? She just got in from Scotland this afternoon! She was at our wedding. Remember?"

"I . . . I . . . didn't know . . . Oh, hello aunt Eileen!" I stammered, coming to a complete stop.

"He gets SO nervous when we have company, that I decided not to tell the poor dear in advance. Get him all fluttery – you know?" Joan smiled at her aunt. Then she turned to me. "Come and let me kiss you hello, my little sweetness. Want my aunt to think you don't like me?"

"Oh no Joan!" I tried to recover even though I knew I looked flustered.

"Well then? Come HERE!" She smiled gently and patted the sofa on the other side, away from her aunt. As I crossed the room towards them, trying desperately to prevent my full apron skirts from swirling now, Joan looked over at Eileen. "He blushes SO nicely, doesn't he aunt?"

"Lovely!" Eileen agreed. "I'm not sure that pink is really HIS color, but when his cheeks match his apron?" She stood up and held her arms wide. "You can kiss Joan *anytime*. Come and say hello to your aunt!"

I couldn't help but look at Joan for her permission – something not lost on either woman. She gave an agreeable look and a nod that said a mouthful before answering my look. "Well, she's bigger than you dear and will be staying with us for a while, so I suppose that you should stay on her good side. So tend to her first, then you can kiss your wife – THEN? I suppose that you wouldn't mind getting us ladies a drink?"

Aunt Eileen was a bit older than us, but an attractive, well dressed, woman. Her voice had a distinctive Scottish burr to it but there was no mistaking what she said. I hid my nervousness as I approached her. She was, as Joan had pointed out, bigger than me and wearing heels the way she was, tended to tower over me, but her arms were still spread wide waiting, and I closed in – to find myself enveloped in sweet smelling femininity and kissed on both cheeks as she fussed over how small and light I was. I mumbled something or other, then once released, moved towards Eileen. "Hello dear." I started, still not oriented properly as I got close to her.

She surprised me by laying a hand on my arm, then pulling me down onto her lap. I couldn't help but let out a little squeal of surprise as she leaned me backwards and kissed me. "Hello dear yourself!" she laughed after she let me go. "Now off you go and get us a couple of Scotches! I'll greet you properly later!"

“Och Joan!” Eileen remonstrated as I scrambled to my feet and hurriedly retreated. “A fine mess you made of the poor lad – that color is ALL wrong!”

I thought she meant my apron and squirmed as I departed, but just after I poured their drinks – and one for myself – I luckily caught my reflection in a small mirror by the bar. Lipstick – a fairly bright orange – was smeared all over my mouth. I wasn’t too surprised, come to think of it as Joan had been quite forceful, but I grabbed a paper towel and wiped my mouth and surrounds clean. Then I put the glasses on a tray and headed for the ladies.

“See Joan?” Eileen said as I came in. “Even Steve could see that your lipstick wasn’t his color. Took it off – and I can’t blame him. Wasn’t him at ALL!”

Joan’s eyes were hooded as she took her drink. “I don’t think he cared whether the lipstick color suited him or not.” She replied then looked at me. “Strictly a macho thing huh? I think that you had to wipe it off, right away? Isn’t that right dear?”

“Well, a guy doesn’t feel exactly correct walking around with lipstick on.” I said, taking Eileen her drink, then settling down on the sofa with my own drink – from which I took a large swig, fighting hard to keep my blushing down.

“See what I mean?” Joan asked Eileen.

Eileen sipped at her drink first then nodded. “I guess that when I saw your husband in his pretty apron I figured that American men had far too much common sense for all that macho nonsense that the Scots male hands out.” She shook her head ruefully. “I guess that it’s just something that us gals over there have to work at.” She smiled, and then added. “It’ll take time I guess!”

Joan nodded. “He’s better than most guys I guess, so I shouldn’t complain too much.”

After dinner, I was quite taken by the fact that Eileen put on one of my aprons and helped me with the dishes – something that Joan seemed to be getting out of the habit recently. We didn’t talk too much, just cleared things away then we joined Joan in front of the TV.

“Nothing much on right now – and there’s something I’d like to talk to you about Steve.” She said.

Once Eileen and I settled down, Joan informed me that she had been offered a full time job at her real estate office. I hadn't any real objections, but was surprised nonetheless as she seemed to be asking for my permission. I shrugged. "Whatever you want to do is all right by me Joan. But I thought that you never wanted to work full time – the hours being awkward and all that."

"Yes. You're right dear, but until now I really wanted you to come home at night to a clean house, dinner on the table. That sort of thing."

"Well, I DO. Must admit it." I said. "Do you think that would change much?"

"Yeah. Probably would. That's a main reason I wanted your approval . . ."

"You've always got that dear, but . . ." I interrupted.

"You didn't let me finish!" She interrupted in turn. "Strikes me that Helen, wouldn't have any big problem with YOU leaving work an hour or two or three early – that way at least *you* would be home if I were delayed. She strikes me as being a very easy going sort of boss."

I thought about this then responded, getting more puzzled by the second. "She IS. But That would almost make me a part time worker – and I can't figure out whatever for? WHAT do you have in mind for me to DO darling? It's not like I can cook or anything?"

She shrugged. "Oh, I think that you could learn to cook simple meals in nothing flat – or maybe set the table. Pour me a drink? Make getting dinner ready easier. That sort of thing."

Eileen raised her hand. "I don't want to interrupt here but you know, you're not charging me for my stay here, and it would ease my feelings of being a bum if I could help Steve learn rudimentary things about running a house?"

Joan laughed. "Don't be silly Eileen!" She looked at me. "Isn't she being silly Steve?"

What could I say? I smiled at Eileen. "Yes Eileen. You're just being silly. You're our guest, and we love having you here. There's no need to . . ."

"BUT? We do understand, and want you to feel comfortable – so if you wanted? REALLY wanted?" Joan interrupted me suddenly. "The more I think on it, the more sense it makes. I invited Helen here for dinner tomor-

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row night. Might be a good place for you to start Steve. Talk about our problem over coffee.”

“P.. Problem? I . I . I didn’t know. H.. Helen? She’s coming – here?” I stammered, discomfited by the way the conversation kept veering out of control.

“Dammit! I forgot to tell you, didn’t I? Honestly Steve? I’m sorry!” Joan smiled at me. “But you don’t mind – do you?”

“I’m kinda lost, to tell you the truth dear.” I admitted, finding that my fingers were fumbling nervously with my apron fabric. “But WHAT problem? I was thinking that we get on rather well.”

Joan looked ruefully at me. “That MAY be what a large part of the problem is all about.” She started when Eileen interrupted and scolded her playfully. “I told you that it might be a mistake on your part Joan! You’re not really giving the poor dear a chance to participate . . .”

“*Participate?*” I blurted, more confused than ever. “Participate in what, exactly?”

The two women looked at each other. Joan sighed and ignored my question. “You could be right Eileen. Why don’t you go ahead? Maybe you can explain what’s going on better than I can. He may be not able to make sense out of what’s going on in MY head.” She shook her head and laughed lightly. “Damned if I know what’s going on! Maybe when you finish, I’ll have an ideal!”

Eileen laughed in the same manner as she saw my face. “Stop looking so serious Steve! It’s not that serious – well, not life threatening perhaps – but Joan thinks that both of you need to get your heads together and examine your relationship . . .”

“Huh? I don’t see anything wrong . . .” I started defensively, but Eileen held up a hand to shush me. “Please Steve? Do you think you could let me explain? Let me talk for a little while?”

I shrugged. “Sure. Fire away.”

She nodded and took a sip of her drink. “First of all Steve? You must understand that though Joan is American through and through, she was raised by Scottish parents? They may be a long time dead, but they were very influential in her way of thinking.”

“Makes sense to me. I have seen certain signs of that over the years.” I admitted.

She nodded gravely. "Rightly or wrongly, that's a society that is very gender orientated. A man does his thing, and a woman does hers. Both sexes have distinct roles to play in a marriage. A few weeks ago, she was very jealous – thinking you'd been sleeping with another woman."

I shrugged. "I *know* all that! But we got that all straightened out . . ." I started when she shook her head and raised a hand to stop me. "That's not at issue here!" she said. "What IS an issue is that she hit you!"

"Oh dear!" I said, and cast a reproachful look at Joan.

She almost looked contrite. "I'm sorry dear – but I respect Eileen's thinking a lot and wanted her advice. I couldn't think of anything else to do."

"Well, she DID think she had a reason." I commented weakly, turning back to Eileen.

She pursed her lips then said. "Hit you a *number* of times. Not just once. That not correct?"

I took my time in thinking out my answer, but finally admitted softly. "Yes. She was pretty mad."

"Were you at fault? Honestly?"

I snuck a look at Joan. "No." I said slowly. "But I could see . . ."

"But you ended up saying that you were sorry – right? Even though you were faultless?" Eileen rode over me quickly.

"Yes. Seemed like the only thing to do." I said, with a little pride in my voice at my obvious forbearance.

"Oh. To stop her hitting you? I thought it might be that?" She cocked her head in my direction and her look was disbelieving, to say the least. There was something in her voice that was disturbing me.

"Well – that did apply, I guess." I admitted with a rueful smile. "She DID hurt, you know."

"You didn't think of hitting her back? Defending yourself?"

"Well I don't hit women." I said, straightening my back.

"Don't defend yourself against them either?" She was quite caustic with this. "Don't hit them back, even when they're giving you a good whacking?"

"Well?" I didn't know what to answer to this.

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She continued, making sure her point was being understood. “Matter of fact, didn’t she wrestle you to the floor? Twist your arms?”

I blushed. “Yes.”

“Twisted your arms all the way up your back?”

“Yes.”

“Made you cry?” her voice was getting a mocking tone to it as she heavily inflected the last word.

“Oh Jesus Eileen. Must we go through this?” I sighed heavily, admitting to the truth of her words.

She looked at me, suddenly compassionate. “I’m just trying to make a point. It’s something that has bothered Joan since that night.”

“Bothered *HER*?” It was my turn to be amazed and caustic. “It was *ME* that got the worst of that encounter you know!”

Eileen nodded. “Yes. She was totally in the wrong – and knows it.”

“Well?” I asked. “What in all hell *is* the matter?”

“A separate point?” Eileen said and glared a little at me. “But I don’t like profane nor dirty language nor blasphemy. You’ve sworn a few times in the last moment. Please stop.”

“But Joan uses it all . . .”

“That’s different! I just don’t like *you* using it. Do I make myself clear?” She was very stern now.

“I’m sorry Eileen.” I muttered.

Her expression changed immediately. She smiled at Joan. “Was that a good case in point?”

Joan laughed and shook her head as she did. “Yes. I think so.”

I looked at both of them, perplexed. “What on earth are you two talking about?”

“That’s part of the problem darling. You don’t *SEE* what is going on! Don’t see what’s happening in front of your nose!” Joan said, shaking her head.

Eileen saw my look. “Dear? You just allowed me, a guest, to chastise you for using bad language in your own home?”

"Yes? I guess."

"You should have told her to go and piss up a rope!" Joan broke in. "Anyone gonna find fault with you in this hose – it's ME!" she added dogmatically.

Eileen shook her head ruefully. Spoke to me in a kind tone. "Dear? What I'm trying to point out is that your wife beat you up – made you cry. When you should have stood up for yourself? You didn't!"

"Well, I don't see any need to make a fuss about things." I said truculently. "Want to keep things pleasant."

She shrugged. "Made things pleasant enough that you started helping her in the kitchen – doing HER job for her?"

I could feel myself getting defensive. "Just trying to help out. Nothing wrong with that, surely."

"Let her put you in one of her aprons? Did the serving and clearing up?"

"Seemed okay at the time." I mumbled.

"Don't you *realize*?" She was starting to sound aggravated. "That an apron is a sign of domesticity?"

"No harm in that – surely?" I argued. "Lots of guys wear them!"

She shook her head gently and reprovingly. "Maybe so. But the type you're wearing at the moment? A *pretty* apron?" There were elements of a sneer in her voice now. "All sorts of frills and flounces? And you've gradually been 'helping' her more and more every night? Serving drinks and dinner? Doing dishes?"

I blushed even more but didn't answer.

"Then tonight – she buys you – all for yourself – a beautiful, feminine, apron – and you come waltzing in here with it – a pretty bow by the way – and not only that, but you KEEP it on in front of a new guest? Don't argue one bit or try to take it off? Serve us ladies drinks? Don't you feel kinda strange looking and acting that way?"

I realized that it was time for complete truthfulness. "I know it's not right – honest! But I don't know what else to do!"

She saw my honesty and nodded a little in approval. "That's more like it. So you're confused, right?"

I had to laugh. “Got THAT right, aunt!”

She smiled in return. “Would you believe me if I said that Joan is just as confused as you are?”

I shrugged. “Long as we’re being honest? The answer is a resounding “NO”. She seems very sure of herself. Wish I was that sure, to be honest.”

She looked at Joan before she continued. Then she lowered her voice into a more confidential mode. “Like I said? Joan was brought up to believe that a husband has HIS place in a marriage, and the wife has hers. She has always acted on this belief – at least until recently.”

“Yeah!” I said with a trace of bitterness. “The night she whacked me!”

Eileen nodded her head once in definite confirmation of what I’d just said. Then she added. “And then you proceeded to confuse her by not whacking her back! She was wrong – dead WRONG – but you ended up *apologizing* to her and then, instead of getting your own back – as she’d been brought up to believe that you should? What did you DO? You cried! Like an apologetic *wife* being punished by her man!”

I looked at her in amazement. “You saying I should have whacked her?”

She didn’t bat an eyelash, “Absolutely!”

“But . .but . .but . .” I stammered.

“She THUMPED you – did she not?” Eileen asked with a smile. “And all you thought of doing was to *cry*? You can’t possibly think that that puts you in a very masculine light, does it? Not to her, considering the way she was brought up?”

“I guess not.” I replied.

She nodded her agreement. “So speaking loosely? Don’t you SEE? She was the masculine partner that night – and you played the feminine role? The weak little, bullied, wife?”

I looked at the two women who were gazing directly at me as if examining a strange insect under a microscope. Licked my lips. “Maybe so. But that was **then**, Eileen. This is **NOW!**”

Joan suddenly stood up. “Steve darling? This conversation has gone on enough. There was a Golf magazine I was reading in the Sitting room earlier on and I left it there. Would you mind getting it for me?”