



A Pretty Girl is like a Malady by Tiffany Mellis

A PRETTY GIRL IS LIKE A MALADY

**By
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Things change. Perceptions change. Status will change before you know it. You're not the same person going to bed as you were getting up in the morning. Some things change overnight, some take years to go into effect. At thirty one years old, I know that I'm not the person I envisioned being when I was fifteen or sixteen. No, not at all.

Mind you, I'm not the discontented type. Sure, I could be blaming my ex-wife or Carole but, if the truth be known? I probably carry some of the weight of my comeuppance in life on my own back. Not much, mind you. I was just too nice I guess.

I was only married for about seven years. I worked as a clerk, but my wife made good money as a senior programmer, so we could afford a nice place with half decent furniture. I do have to admit that a major contributor to this financial ease had also been Tess's (my wife's parents) who died in a car accident and left her a sizeable trust fund.

Tess had been a sweet, shy girl when we got married, but I think the fact that she was contributing so much of our financial support while I flitted from one job to another ate on her. I mean, I tried to even things out - started doing a lot of work around the house, like dusting and vacuuming - then the laundry. Finally the cooking.

Now, when you think of it? I read 'Dear Abby' and a lot of women are moaning about their husbands not being of any help? You'd think that Tess would appreciate what I was doing, right? Wrong! It was if she actually looked down on me doing it. Started swaggering about the house like she was the lord of the manor and I was some kind of servant! She started bringing this girlfriend of hers, Angela, around to the house a lot and sneering openly at her 'househusband'. Made openly mocking comments about my masculinity - or lack of it.

I liked Angela. She was very pretty. Nice and feminine. We got on very well. If Tess was watching football or some other stupid thing on TV, Angela would come into the kitchen and help me make dinner or whatever. Sometimes just chat. I liked her. She wasn't mean like my wife - she was a comfort to me. We were truly friends, I thought.

Then, one morning they were both gone. Tess had left me for a *woman*, Angela my friend! I felt ridiculous, so didn't contest the divorce papers that she filed a year or so later. Naturally, I couldn't carry the house on my wage, so sold it - she got most of the proceeds, though I got a little. I'm not very good with money though and it didn't take long until I was living hand to mouth in a one bedroom apartment in a poorer part of town. Gave up on my car, so had to use public transport a lot, so obviously wasn't doing too well financially.

Then came a turning point in my life. One evening I got a telephone call from a lawyer's office in a place called Felton, a pretty little place South of San Francisco, and just over three hundred miles from where I lived In Los Angeles County. It seemed that Tess's sister had been killed in a freak accident, and that I and Tess had been named as executors in the will!

The lawyers had spent weeks searching for us and were quite dismayed to find that our marriage had broken up. Would I be interested in taking over the responsibilities? There was my niece, Carole, a young lady now living by herself. She was deemed very efficient in how she carried out the responsibilities associated with the funeral arrangements and other adult matters, but it was felt that an adult living in the house would be a stabilizing influence. When I paused to consider this proposal, I was tactfully reminded that there was a sizeable estate involved and that I would be able to claim a percentage for these duties. This I admit, influenced me considerably. Living in a comfortable house again - practically rent free - and being PAID for it? I accepted with alacrity.

I hurriedly gave up my apartment and my job and packed my meager possessions into two suitcases and gave the rest to the Salvation Army" - they weren't worth much. I'm ashamed to admit it, but am truly afraid of flying so decided to splurge a little and took the train, which would stop at San Jose, about thirty miles from Felton. I knew it was going to be a long trip - about eight hours, but felt that it would give me time to think in comfortable surroundings.

I'd spoken to Carole on the telephone and told her of my plans. She pooh-poohed my idea of a rental car and said she'd pick me up. I told her the idea of a six year old driving a car scared me. Of course I was only teasing - she had been that age the only time I'd ever met her, but there was a distinctly frigid pause in the conversation before I laughingly explained what I'd meant. Even then, there was another short pause before she laughed in an understanding way. She was SO nice - effervescent and chatty, yet mature. I really looked forward to being able to bring some male guidance into her life.

In the train I settled back with a couple of drinks to see me through the long trip. Had a nice dinner in the dining car, and was able to collect my thoughts.

I'd only met Doris - Carole's mother- once, when they'd dropped by on a quick visit. She was a very commanding woman. Had got pregnant out of wedlock, and refused to divulge the father's name. She was almost exactly the same size as me, but made me feel small beside her. She'd started her own business doing something in computer sales and done very well. Carole, I could remember quite clearly. A lovely little girl, bouncy and athletic for such a little girl. Musing, I wondered how she'd feel about the way I was going to bring her up.

I'd always wanted to be a father. You know, stern and dignified -but warm and loving under the male gruffness'. Of course I expected that Carole having been brought up by a single parent would have *some* negative reactions - but a firm and loving hand would see us over any rough spots.

The train arrived in San Jose about nine pm - a little late. I hoped that Carole wouldn't be worried. I stepped off the train and was immediately accosted by a pretty little thing about five foot five, almost two inches smaller than me. Blonde curly mop of hair, exuberant bounce to her walk, lithe and athletic— the cheerleader type (which she was by the way). She greeted me with a surprisingly strong hug. "Uncle Ron!" she squealed, and gave me an enthusiastic kiss. "I'm SO glad you

could make it!" Then she linked her arm in mine and led me to the area where the luggage was to be delivered, asking questions about my trip and, was that bourbon she smelled on my breath? Naughty naughty! Once there, she scared me a little by turning a serious pair of eyes, searchlight like in their intensity on me. "You're were late." She said flatly. "I'm a nut on punctuality. I suppose you'd better know that up front."

I hated the nervous little tremor I got in my voice at this totally unexpected change in her(reminded me of the way I'd speak to Tess when she got angry at me). Then I tried to joke. "I offered to help push the train so it would go faster, but they said they didn't want help as I might hurt myself and sue them."

"You did that?" she asked seriously.

"No Carole! Of course I didn't. I was just kidding."

She looked at me, mulling over what I'd just said, then smiled a beaming smile. "Oh! Now I see! I thought you were lying there for a second - and I really don't like people lying to me!"

I felt as if I had just been reprieved from something, but this sort of frightened feeling disappeared as the luggage cart arrived. It took a few minutes to get my two suitcases. Again, she did something that surprised me. She took one in each hand and hefted them both with ease. Knowing the struggle I'd had with them when getting them to the station, I was quite impressed.

I was also impressed when I saw the car she was driving - a fire engine red Mercedes 560SL with the convertible top down. It was in fantastic shape and I was taken by the size of the trunk in what appeared to be a small car as she dumped the cases in there with no problem.

"Wow! This is some kind of car Carole. Isn't it a little big for you? Like me to drive?"

She turned a pair of ice blue eyes on me. "Why don't you let me get the top up, it's getting cold. From San Jose to Scotts Valley is called

'The Highway of Death' around here - and that's about the only way we can take to get to Felton. I'm used to it, you're not. Not only that? You've been drinking."

Her flat stare and change of personality again floored me. "I'm sorry. Forgot about that." I said meekly.

And, once again, her sunny personality burst through. "You're forgiven Uncle Ron. Just don't let me catch you drinking and driving. Might just have to give Uncle Ron a spanky-wanky!"

I thought of chastising her for this after all, I was much older than she, but thought it was a little early in our relationship for laying down the law, especially when she had been so obviously fooling. Not only that, I was starting to figure that it might be a little harder to get her to accept male discipline that I had thought. Accordingly, I got into the passenger side and we took off.

For the first ten or fifteen minutes it was almost like driving the freeways in Los Angeles, but then the number of lanes started dropping and dropping until we were on a road that had only two lanes per side - and they seemed *very* narrow lanes at that. Then we started climbing - and getting into tighter and tighter curves. And we seemed to be surrounded by maniacs! All intent on getting wherever they were going ahead of everybody else! She seemed right at home in amongst them too - passing at speeds far above the limit - sometimes being passed. Tires squealing a lot, she was in and out of the traffic like a hummingbird. I'm afraid I let a few little squeals of fright out, but Carole smiled and laid a comforting hand on my thigh. "Don't worry Uncle Ron. I'm a good driver and I've driven this road lots of times."

I let out a sigh of relief when we finally made a turnoff and headed for Felton, and the manic pace of the traffic lessened— though Carole liked to press the speed limit I noticed. I'd have to get her out of that bad habit, I thought to myself.

It was quite dark when she drove up the driveway, so I didn't get

to see the surrounding area too well, but gathered that it wasn't too well populated. What houses there were seemed to be set amongst groves of tall cedar trees. She opened the car door with an automatic opener then drove into a fairly large garage, with a late model Chevy Blazer there.

"Somebody visiting?" I asked.

"Huh?" she replied.

I flipped my thumb towards the Blazer. "The Blazer?"

"Oh - that's my car - or I should say, 'was' my car. I've sold it though. Didn't see any need for two cars. They're picking it up tomorrow."

I'd had immediate dreams about driving that big car about, but they disappeared in a flash.

"Oh" I said. "Guess I'll have to buy myself a car to get about in." She turned her pale blue eyes on me. "We'll see" she said dismissively. "Let's get you settled in. You'll be sleeping in my old room."

With that, she hauled my bags out of the trunk and led the way into the house proper. I felt rather ineffective, following her as she carried my luggage upstairs into a beautiful house. I couldn't help but comment.

"Carole? This an absolutely beautiful home! And so immaculate! Do you have a maid service?"

She laughed. "Yes. It's called Carole's Maid Service De Luxe - ME! But do you like a tidy house?"

"Love a house kept neat and tidy. Wouldn't have it any other way." I answered.

My room gave me pause. Very feminine in pinks and whites. Quite a lot of chintz - Frilled white and pink curtains, white shag rug. A white dresser and a dressing table with a large oval mirror behind it. It was a big room, enlarged even more by mirrored closet doors.

A private bathroom was attached with lots of space most of it taken up by 'girl things' - miniature bottles of shampoo, conditioner, body wash and lotions. Two pink shower caps hanging inside the shower.

"Okay?" Carole asked.

"Delightful!" I replied, figuring I'd redecorate it pretty soon.

"Honest? You like it?"

"Of course - what's not to like?"

"Good! Why don't you unpack while I go down and make us a pot of coffee? Like anything to go with it?"

"No thanks Carole," I said. "Coffee will be just fine - black with sugar, no cream."

"Okay." She said, and left the room.

I went downstairs about ten minutes later. I'd done a lot of thinking in that time, and figured it was time for Carole to meet the 'Fatherly' me.

She looked so pretty that I had to compliment her when she brought my coffee to me.

"That's a gorgeous apron Carole," I said.

"Like it?" she asked, twirling and smiling.

"Of course! It's lovely!" I replied.

She nodded, beaming. "I'm so glad you do." She said enthusiastically.

"Could we talk for a little while Carole? Get the ground rules established?"

She beamed some more. "Great! Just what I was thinking of. But you're the guest. The floor is yours."

I took a sip of my coffee. "Well Carole? I want to establish our

relationship right away. I've put a lot of thought into this, and I think if we start off on the right foot, we'll have a much better chance of a long term harmonious relationship."

"Wonderful!" she said. "Couldn't agree more! Please go on Uncle Ron."

"Well Carole, I'd really appreciate it if you'd consider me a sort of father figure" I started "I don't want to be over strict with you, but I'll expect certain rules of conduct to be followed. Keep your room tidy, do a little housework. I know that you're nineteen, but think a curfew wouldn't hurt. I'll start you off at say ten p.m.? Then move it up some, once I know you can follow the rules. I don't think of myself as being a stern type person, but I may project that at times. Just remember that underneath that gruff exterior, is someone who really loves you. That's about it for now."

"Uncle Ron? Is it okay if I speak now?" she asked softly, smiling nicely.

"Of course dear. Please tell me if you have any fears or doubts. I'll always listen."

"I'm glad you said that Ron. I like people who listen to me, and do as they're told. But there's a few minor changes I'd like to make to the points you suggested. Will that be okay?"

"Absolutely Carole! You have my permission" I gave her a big smile as I said this.

"Well to begin with? It would be very difficult for me to look on you as a father as I've kind of thought of you as my uncle for such a long time. Next? A curfew? I've no wish to fight you on this, but I didn't have a curfew under mom. Please reconsider?"

I sighed. "I'm not used to bringing up kids and I don't want to start off being too strict." I said. "Let's give it a few weeks and see how it develops, huh?"

She beamed all over her face. "Oh, thank you, thank you Uncle Ron! I can tell that we're going to get on very well together! This'll be such fun!"

Her voice dropped an octave. "But at the station while we chatted? You said something about getting a job? Then later, you were talking about a car? May I make a suggestion?"

"Of course dear!"

She blew a kiss in my direction, then continued. "Well? There's few things I'd like you to do for me?"

"Gladly, beloved niece! Anything!" I replied gallantly.

I couldn't believe it! Here was Mistress Hyde and her ice blue eyes again! What could I possibly have said this time? "That means you'll do them then? *No* questions? You agree to do *anything* I ask?" she asked sharply.

"Well, I know you wouldn't ask something of me that would hurt me," I replied weakly.

"Maybe not - but I may hurt you if you don't keep your word!"

"Oh, come on Carole. You keep threatening me!" I said indignantly. "I'm bigger than you and stronger. Not only that? I'm an adult sent here to take care of you! Not the other way around!"

She shrugged, still cold eyed. "Maybe this is something we should get out of the way Uncle Ron. I'm a very nice, loving, person who hates people saying things they don't mean. I detest people who will not make appointments on time. I abominate people who do not keep their word. If you do any of these things to me? I will spank you. I will spank you immediately, and I will blister your backside so that you will not wish to sit down for hours. You may be an adult, you may be bigger than me - but I know that I'm stronger than you are, so, trust me, you will go over my knees -and you'll learn not to argue with me as well - I get very riled when people argue with me."

