

Weston Matthews picked up his smart phone, and glanced at the time since there were no clocks visible in 'Penny's Den of Academic Torture.' Fuck. It had only been twelve minutes since he last checked, even though it felt like hours ago for shit's sake.

He heard *her* throat clear. "You know, Matthews, if you focused more on the study guide in front of you and spent less time checking the time, you might actually absorb some of the data."

Penny's nasally voice caused his jaw to clench. He bit back a smart ass retort. She was, after all, his tutor. And yes, she was being paid to ensure he passed Early American Lit. Weston needed to ace this class or his eligibility was going to shit. Playing hockey for Hardwick was the only redeeming feature of college life. Well, that and getting his good share of coed tail.

So, there were two good reasons to persevere in this class. It wasn't like he was flunking the rest of his classes, but they required no effort and he liked it that way. Now he seriously wondered if it was even worth it. The list of reading she'd just handed him, along with an outline to make sure he stayed on track with the schedule she developed seriously sucked.

Weston gave her what he had come to know was his signature sexy, panty-melting smile, though he wondered if it was wasted on this nerd. She was a tough nut to crack, but hell, it was worth a try, right? "Hey, it's Friday, doll. Thought maybe we could cut our session short just for today since I've got plans and I'm sure you do as well."

Penny didn't even bother to look over at him. Apparently that smile *had* been wasted on her.

*Un-fucking-believable.*

"We have the study room until five o'clock, and we're going to use every minute of that time. Trust me; you need it based on your sample quiz results. Weston, did you *even* bother reading 'The Land Before Her'?"

Okay, now the bitch was just pissing him off. Weston had at least given her the benefit of the doubt in presuming that she had Friday evening plans, but his guess was that if she did, it only involved her cat or, at best, her battery-operated boyfriend. "Yes, Penny," he replied sharply, "I *did* read it but, to be honest, it was a major snooze fest."

She pursed her lips and tried to stifle a smile. "Sorry, I tried my best to find a special edition with pictures just for you, but alas, none was to be found."

"Bahahaha!" he burst out sarcastically, and tossed her a hateful glare. "Why in the fuck did you pick this book anyway? There are plenty of others to choose from on Professor Lindquist's syllabus. I mean, shit, why in the hell do I want to read some 19<sup>th</sup> century prairie fantasy from a chick's point of view for fuck's sake? It isn't my idea of getting off to a good start this semester."

“Must every other word out of your mouth be profane?” she asked; her magnified brown eyes bored into his. The chick was plain. No, strike that. The chick was pathetically plain. In fact, she couldn’t be any *plainer* if she tried.

There were several moments of silence.

“Oh, that wasn’t *rhetorical?*” he asked sweetly, spreading his long legs out in front of him. He slouched down even further in his chair.

“Honestly, Weston, I’m being paid good money to tutor you in this class. Perhaps your father’s money doesn’t mean much to you, but why waste it if you’re not even going to try? You have a test coming up next week and, based on your quiz score, it’s doubtful you will pass. And this is, after all, your second time around in this class.”

Fuck if she hadn’t brought up a sore subject with that last remark. He wondered if she’d had some covert conversation with his father; her words had a ring of familiarity.

He sighed and shrugged. “Give me another book to read then. I can get it done over the weekend and ask Lindquist to test me on that one instead.”

She stood up and turned her back to him, grabbing an eraser from the ledge under the chalk board. She started viciously erasing the quiz questions for which Weston had evidently bombed. “No,” she replied decisively.

“No?”

“Don’t sound so incredulous, Mr. Matthews. I know it’s not a word you’re accustomed to hearing, but it is just the *one* syllable, and here’s a tidbit for you: it sounds and means the same thing in English, French and Spanish.”

*Smart ass.*

“Why are you such a smart ass, Penny? Does it make you feel superior showing off your genius, huh? Does it make up for the obvious lack of cock in your life?”

And now he knew for sure that he had hit a sore spot with the walking encyclopedia. She undoubtedly needed to be thoroughly fucked by someone with a Teflon dick.

“Don’t like the sound of ‘no’ at all, huh? Go figure frat boy. But your trash talk doesn’t faze me. You can’t switch your book syllabus without my approval, and guess what? I’m not approving.”

*Psycho nerd bitch.*

“Look,” he said, now totally exasperated with her bitchiness, “I need to pass the test. You’re my tutor, so what are you going to do about that? I mean, hell, you’re being paid well.”

Weston watched as the magnitude of what he'd just said sunk in. Once it had, he found himself the recipient of the rogue eraser she had just flung at him, barely missing his head as he ducked.

"I'm being paid to tutor you, not take your place in the classroom!" she hissed.

Weston took a long moment to look at her.

Penny Lane.

He thought to himself, "Who the fuck named their daughter after a god damn Beatles tune? *Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes...* He couldn't argue with that what with her looks and her damn voice!

He took inventory: short mousy brown hair; dark brown eyes that were magnified by the 'coke bottle' glasses she wore and had to constantly slide back up her nose with her fingers. Her face was devoid of make-up; her fingernails absent of polish and she had just a slight overbite. He wouldn't have classified her as a total "Bucky Beaver," but some orthodontia had not been forthcoming in her adolescence. But it was her wardrobe that totally flipped him out. He dismissed the fact that it appeared she shopped for clothing at a Goodwill store, but what the fuck was with the conservative, body-hiding garb? Was she Amish?

Her breasts were non-existent underneath her bulky turtleneck sweater, and though the rest of her body was slender, she had a tummy roll that was kind of uncharacteristic for the rest of her build. He couldn't really tell what her legs looked like because the jean skirt she was wearing damn near went to her slim ankles. Her shoes were "sensible," reminiscent of what his grandmother might wear.

What the fuck was her story? Lesbian maybe? Considering the university was private and expensive, she obviously had the financial means he would have thought. Even that shit could have been overlooked, but her nasally voice grated on his nerves more than anything else. And that was something she clearly couldn't do anything about.

Weston knew he was shallow, but at least he had class enough to admit it.

He finally broke the silence again. "Listen *Penny Lane*," he sang to the melody of that old song. "I realize that you and I aren't going to find common ground here because, you see, unlike you, I *do* have a life, social and otherwise. So let's cut the shit. What do I need to do in order to pass this mother fucker next week?"

She flounced back down in her seat, and opened a file, handing him an assignment sheet. "First of all, re-read 'The Land Before Her,' and here is another sample test for you to complete without looking at the book," she warned. She then handed him another sheet with an essay attached. "You're probably going to need to turn in extra credit after you complete the exam. Professor Lindquist provided this additional essay by the same author. If you read and summarize

the compelling points of it, it will add five points to your exam grade. Trust me, you'll need those points."

He pulled the essay out, and glanced at the title. Fuck! It was by the same author. "Dancing Through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism."

He looked up at her quickly; his eyes widened in disbelief. "Are you *shitting* me?" he asked, totally blown away by the fact he now had to read a thick essay the same author that created the snoozer book he had to read. "Are you *seriously* shitting me?" he repeated.

She opened her briefcase, and gathered the rest of her files and papers on the desk, placing them neatly in the various pockets inside. She snapped it shut, and then looked over at him with a smug smile. "I wouldn't do that," she crooned, "You're my favorite turd. See you Tuesday at three. I'll give you another sample test then. Good luck on your studying this weekend, Weston."

And with that, she traipsed out of the study room and Weston heard the sound of her flats slapping against the concrete floors of Wilson Hall.