



A Fool's Fool

Sandra K. Marshall

Chapter One

Kathy O'Reilly walked softly behind Norm Jokes as he crept up the aisle between the cubicles, making sure he didn't know she was near. It was obvious he was planning to sneak up on someone to either scare or do something worse.

Norm was as obnoxious as any guy she'd ever met, but for some reason her friend, Allyson Metz, thought the joker just needed attention.

Uh oh—Norm sped up, and she saw the reason why.

Allyson stood just a few feet away, waving her hands as she leaned in a cubicle to talk to a co-worker. Her friend's back was to him; Allyson's long dark hair covered the derriere of her diminutive figure.

Her pal had just gone through a divorce, and was feeling frail. There was no way Kathy would let anyone hurt her friend again. Kathy called out, "Allyson."

Allyson wheeled around, her mouth opened in a big O when she almost smacked into Norm.

He put his hands on Allyson's shoulders. "Don't move so suddenly. You almost knocked me down, and I would've fell on top of you." He glanced over his shoulder at Kathy.

With an inward laugh, she joined them. "Stopped you from being an obnoxious ass." She watched him, knowing by his grin that he'd enjoyed himself. "You're going to get into big trouble one day." His right eye ticked knowing he'd been caught in the act. *Too bad fellow.*

"Did someone want me?" Allyson asked; her black lashes fluttered as she glanced between Kathy and Norm.

His face reddening, Norm stuttered, "I wanted to tell you how pretty you look in your outfit."

"Thank you for noticing, Norm." Allyson peeked up at him. "It's new."

The skunk, he hadn't even noticed her friend's lime green outfit until he needed to get his ass out of a jam. "Allyson, I wanted to talk to you a moment."

"Uh, I'll leave you two to it," Norm muttered.

Kathy glared after him as he slinked toward his office. He had nerve pretending to have noticed Allyson other than her butt. She hoped her friend didn't fall for his Mr.

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Excerpt

Nice Guy act.

Allyson's cherry red lips turned up, laughing she showed perfect white teeth and her milk chocolate gaze focused on Kathy. "The way you're scowling at Norm he must've been up to no good."

"He almost got you, but I managed to save you."

Allyson laughed, her eyes sparkling. She shook her head, her long straight hair swaying from side to side. "Thanks, but who knows? Maybe I would have liked it."

Her friend hadn't dated since her divorce, and she constantly defended Norm to the other girls in the building. Why? Kathy couldn't understand unless Allyson secretly had a crush on him. Kathy hoped not, because in truth, the man terrorized all of them. They were afraid to say anything for fear of losing their jobs. Luckily, she wasn't in the same circumstance since she worked for the head boss.

"Next time I'll let him get you." She grimaced. "You need to get out more if that guy interests you." He almost pinched her friend's bottom. He liked to pinch the other girls and play pranks on them.

"Now you're just being mean." Allyson's perfect white teeth chewed her bottom lip. "I think he's cute."

"To each their own, but something has to be done to stop him from picking on all the women."

Allyson giggled. "I might be able to help. We could play a trick on him. April Fool's Day will be here soon and it would be an appropriate time to do something to him."

"Great. I would like nothing better than to get revenge on the skinny runt."

Her dark brows rose and Allyson asked, "Has he done anything to you?"

"He better not or I'll make his life miserable." If Norm ever pinched her, she would bring a harassment lawsuit against him and the company, Gagsters, Incorporated.

"You won't do anything to hurt his feelings, will you Kath?" Allyson's brows knit together slightly.

Well, on second thought not against Gagsters, just Norm. She didn't want to hurt her boss, Jason Barrone. As his administrative assistant, Kathy was treated courteously and as an equal. Not only was he a perfect gentleman, he was a very handsome one. She liked his cleft chin and green brown-flecked eyes. Besides, he often told her he couldn't do without her— she was his right arm.

For some reason, she was drawn to Jason even though normally, she went for the tall, dark, and dangerous bad boys. Jason was the exact opposite with his light brown hair streaked blond from the sun. The one time she accidentally bumped into him he was solid as a rock and just as dependable.

A veil lifted from Allyson's face and a light shone in her eyes. Her friend's hound dog nose twitched on the scent of a mystery. She'd better say something quick.

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"Feelings. I doubt if Norm has any, he's such a dope. His antics have to be stopped."

She leaned toward Allyson with her hands fisted, but at the widening of her friends eyes, Kathy drew back, took a deep breath, and relaxed her hands. "You know the other girls won't step out of their cubicles when he's around, and when they go to the lunchroom or bathroom they're constantly looking for him over their shoulders."

Allyson nodded. "I know. Some of the younger girls have even talked to me about it."

"Then you're completely with me on this?"

"I have an idea of something we can do that would get the message across without hurting him."

"What?" Kathy watched excitement build on her friend's face.

"I'm an artist. I could make a poster to put in his office or hang overhead somewhere."

Smiling, Kathy said, "Okay."

"Later. My phone is ringing." Allyson hurried away to answer the call.

Kathy wondered what kind of drawing Ally would come up with. She hoped Norm could take a joke. After all, he dished out plenty of them. It was time for him to have some pranks pulled on him. Besides, it was going to be April Fool's Day in a week.

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Jason stood in the doorway of his office pretending to read some papers while covertly watching the women scurrying excitedly from one cubicle to another. They whispered for a few minutes, giggled, and looked nervously around as if afraid of being caught.

He'd been traveling on business for a month, and when he came back from his trip he'd noticed a difference in the office. He'd watched the women for days and the ringleader appeared to be assistant's friend, Allyson.

His gaze turned to Kathy, noting the freckles sprinkled across her pale cheeks while a couple more dotted her nose. She tried to hid them with makeup, but he thought they were cute. She seemed immune to the activity outside her window.

Ever since she'd started working for him, he'd wanted to grab a handful of the thick red, blonde-streaked hair that fell around her shoulders. He wanted to rub his face in the strands. Whenever he was near her he would inhale her fresh citrus scent, and he wanted to get closer to her, nibble on her neck, and see what she would look like naked.

There was something about this matter-of-fact woman that fascinated him. She drew him to her on a sexual level. He couldn't help wondering what she was like away from work or in bed.

She looked fantastic in anything she wore but this top fit her lovely shaped breasts like a second layer of skin. *Would the buds be pink or brown*, he wondered.

Kathy raised her head and turned to look intently at him. "Do you want something?"

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Oops, he'd been caught staring. He gazed into her topaz eyes then turned to look out her window before saying, "I'm wondering what the girls are up to."

Her eyebrows rose and her head tilted to one side. "What makes you think they're up to anything?"

Ah ha, he'd surprised her. She glanced at her desk, and he realized he was right, she knew more than she would admit. "They're all abuzz about something. Kind of like a bunch of busy bees in their hives."

Lowering her chin, she gazed at him with a smile on her lips and in her light yellow-brown eyes. "Well, you know a special day is coming up for us."

"Ah." Jason leaned more comfortably against the doorframe. "You're referring to April Fool's Day." Just as he thought, they were planning a practical joke for one of them, either Norm or himself. He hoped it wasn't his friend.

Jason didn't know how Norm would react to someone pulling a stunt on him. He'd always been a jokester. He used it to defend himself against school bullies and to hide the fact that he didn't have a normal family. If he thought they were tormenting, him, he'd get even.

Kathy nodded her head. "The girls thought it might be time to take a more active part developing pranks, and what better way to start than on April 1st?"

"Just as long as no one gets hurt," he said, turning back into his room. Jason knew Norm was sensitive, even though he didn't show that side of himself at work. He needed to understand that other people might have those same feelings.

"Oh, not likely," she said.

Her annoyed tone warned him that there was more going on than Kathy was telling him. He just hoped it was nothing that required him to fire someone.

****END EXCERPT****