

# The Devil's Plaything

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A.K.A. JAPOC

Just Another Piece of Clay

Isaiah 64:8

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# Pain and Thunder

“I can’t believe she’s gonna do this again,” I mumbled without meaning to.

“I’m sorry?” Danielle asked.

I shook my head in disgust. “I guess you’ll see what I mean in about ten seconds.”

“What are you talking about?” Danielle persisted.

“My ex,” I answered. “She’s coming in here – now.”

“Do – do you want me to leave?” my lunch date asked.

“Danielle, I’ve been looking forward to our second date for a while –“

“THERE YOU ARE...YOU TWO TIMING, HUSTLER!” boomed a loud voice coming towards me where I sat.

“Just give me a minute, Danielle,” I pleaded with my hands as I stood.

“Stacey, you have to stop this...PLEASE! You broke up with ME...don’t you remember? Why do you keep harassing me?”

“Harassing you? Harassing you? I’m doing you a favor, Baby!” Belted my stunningly beautiful ex-girlfriend.

“Favor? I’m sorry...favor?” I puzzled.

“You know...you know I can have you back...ANY.TIME.I.WANT,” Stacey waved her fingers and then snapped them rudely in my face. She now addressed my date, “I CAN TAKE HIM...when I want him. You better believe THAT. He is BAD LUCK ...for you

girl. If I were you, I would just MOOOOVE on. He ain't worth all the trouble ...you might have to go through."

I looked at Danielle, "Just let me sort this out, please." I tried to take Stacey by the elbow to walk her out of the restaurant. I held my hand up to the waiter and someone that looked like a manager to signal that I had things under control.

Stacey ripped her arm away from me, "DON'T TRY TO HANDLE ME, BOY!" She gave a mean stare at Danielle and turned to me, "We ain't over till I SAY we are over."

Stacey turned to Danielle pointing her finger, "Don't let me see you again!"

With that she stomped out of the restaurant into the main hallway in the mall. I thought that taking Danielle to a nice restaurant with a beautiful view of the amazing fountains in the upscale shopping mall would be a good idea. Instead, the result was that my ex could be walking along in the mall and happen to see me sitting at a window table.

Danielle seemed shaken and uncomfortable, "Maybe...maybe you need to sort that out before we get...too far along." Danielle gathered her purse and slid to the edge of her chair. "You seem like a great guy Malcolm...but you got some baggage to deal with."

Danielle stood and waved a regretful good-bye. I took a deep breath and sat down. I dropped my forehead into my fingertips to rub my head in frustration. This was the fourth time Stacey had just come out of the blue to ruin a relationship that I was having...the fourth in three years. A couple of the girls I dated really tried hard to ignore Stacey.

But between all my personal projects, career demands and family commitments, I was a busy person. It was a lot to ask

someone to have patience with even without a thing like Stacey.

Stacey was beautiful and it was hard to stop looking at her as she walked off down the mall hallway. She knew exactly what I liked and she used that knowledge to nearly ruin my life. I watched Stacey exit the mall with a young man strolling obediently behind her carrying bags.

That used to be me and the thought of being her personal lackey disgusted me, it was not a proud memory. She used sex and her looks to manipulate me and apparently other men.

She was my favorite form of self-denigration woven and stitched together with ecstasy and fantasy. Stacey English was a drug – she was every man’s fantasy and any man’s curse. She knew it and was proud of it. I hated myself for being her backup plan that she seemed to be keen in keeping warm for when she needed something.

Danielle was also beautiful and smart and ...reasonable...and not so impressed by how great a guy I am that she cannot just move on. This was the last relationship that I was going to lose to Stacey. I watched her full, athletic hips twitch as she crossed the street with the foolish man tagging along behind her. I took a long breath.

If she weren’t such an awful person, she would be a trophy wife for some professional athlete. She could have been a movie star. She could have been many things, but she had a horrible, vengeful, spiteful, controlling personality that made her impossible to work with. Since her return in disgrace from the Hollywood scene, I never knew her to work. So, her income must be whatever man was weak enough for her to control and had enough assets to be worth controlling.

I dropped the towel onto my plate and raised my hand for the waiter to come to the table. “Yes sir?” he asked.

I handed him my credit card. I didn’t need to know the bill. I trusted him to bill me properly and the cost of today’s

meal was the smallest of any of my worries. I wanted to get out of this place and go see my sister or go fishing with dad.

I needed for my life to be different than it has been going the past few years. I have been working hard and not really seeing anything change...except setbacks...just like Stacey. Stacey was almost a metaphor for the way my life was going.

I left the restaurant and called my parents' house while sitting in the car. My mother answered the phone, as usual.

"Hey Mom. Where's pop?"

"Hey...how's my baby?"

"I'm fine, Mama."

"Hmph. You don't sound fine. What happened?"

I took a deep breath. "I was on a date and...Stacey showed up again."

"Awww, I'm sorry, Son. I don't know what happened to that girl. She seemed so sweet when you guys used to date back in high school. You were so in love with that girl."

I'd heard enough, "Ma...Pop?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Your father is with your sister and brother in law. They're doing something on that farm...you know your father is all about projects." She paused and continued, "I'll be headed over there after I take care of a few things. You want to meet me over there? I can make you some biscuits and we can get some of that fresh strawberry jam your brother-in-law makes!"

My mother was getting excited. It sounded good but I didn't want to be around my sister and brother-in-law right now. They are the happiest, most at peace people in the world and right now that would just agitate me.

"Nah...I got some things to take care of too, Ma."

"Well, did you want me to tell you father anything? Is it urgent?"

"No. Thanks, Ma. I'll call him tomorrow, maybe. Love you."

“Love you too, son. I’ll see you later....I’m praying for you,” she added.

The phone went silent and empty and that is about how I felt. I just wanted to be with my father. He’s easy to be around because he doesn’t talk much. He just does stuff. He’s always busy doing something and he’s always at peace but he isn’t TRYING to give you peace...he just does. My sister’s husband is an excited, happy talker and he always has advice. I don’t want any right now.

I opened a movie app on my phone to see what was playing. There were a few movies that I wanted to see that I hadn’t seen yet. I decided to drown my misery in a movie that would take all my focus for the next two hours or so.

I drove to the movie theatre and it felt like it was raining but it wasn’t. The sky was cloudy and gloomy and seemed to mourn my day with me.

After the movie, which would have been disappointing if I wasn’t there only to take my mind off my present situation, I went home. The sour mood of the evening continued with the soft sprinkling of water droplets now peppering my windshield. I had a decent sized house in a starter home neighborhood. It was quiet and my house was far from the main entrance of the community. I was the only homeowner without small children running around in the streets anytime the sun was shining. I knew most of my neighbors eight to ten houses down in either direction.

So, when I approached my house driveway and saw an unfamiliar car parked in front of my house I was alarmed. I pulled alongside the car and passed it slowly as the rain pounded the air between my car and the other. I drove to the cul-de-sac not far down the street and turned around. I could faintly see into the car now just enough to conclude that it was unoccupied.

My neighbors did not have any parties going on; there were no crowded driveways. I did not see any obvious explanation for the car being in front of my house but I was



tired and there was nothing really to do but either go into my house or call the police, which seemed likely to be an embarrassing overreaction.

I hit the garage door button and pulled into the garage out of the rain. My Toyota Forerunner SUV that I drove in high school and my first five years of education sat quietly in the center garage bay. The far-right bay was full of tools and a small boat I barely used these days.

I closed the garage door after I shut off the engine and hit the button to turn off the house alarm as thunder began outside. I grabbed my work bag from the backseat floor and strolled into the house. There was a plate in the kitchen sink that was dirty and I didn't remember using any plates today. Everything else looked in order and I was still very tired.

Normally, I'd be getting back to work right after coming in and grabbing something to eat. It was already late tonight though. I yawned my way into the room I set aside as my home office and dropped my laptop bag into my chair. I checked my phone for emails I may have missed and nothing looked like I needed to respond tonight.

I continued to yawn my way into my room and went straight to the bathroom. I used the bathroom, brushed my teeth and then I heard shuffling come from my room. All my senses were alert now as adrenaline was rushing through my body.

I turned on the lights in my room.

"You took forever to get home." It was Stacey.

"How'd you get in here?" I asked.

"You never changed your alarm code and I still got my key."

"Stacey, why are you here?" I asked still feeling charged up with anxiety.

Stacey slid out of the bed. She was wearing red lace panties and one of my sleeveless t-shirts which hung dutifully over her breasts. The sight of her was disarming.

"I know I acted up today. I wanted to say I was sorry."

Now, her hands slid to the back of my neck and her full lips pressed against mine. Her body pressed up against me and everything else I wanted in the world became a haze.

“What about that dude tagging along behind you today?” I asked.

She chuckled, “Don’t worry about him. It’s just me...all me...only me...and you.”

“You gonna ruin me,” I said.

“That ain’t all I’m gonna do to you,” she said pulling me to the bed. I slid my t-shirt off her. Nothing about Stacey was healthy for me but she looked amazing and I was completely helpless.

“Lord, help me,” I mumbled. Stacey chuckled malevolently as she caressed the back of my neck as the sound of powerful crashes pounded the earth outside. Brief flashes of light in the dark revealed the writhing, powerful creature vexing and bewitching me much to my delight.