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I got home and went through the mail...just bills. I went out back and set the sprinkler up to water the garden and came inside and made myself a snack. I looked up at the clock and realized that my little one would be coming home from school within the next ten minutes.

I did a few more things and then went out front to wait for her. She would be so surprised that I was home, instead of her babysitter. I brought the day's paper with me and read while I waited.

Ten minutes went by, then fifteen. I was starting to get worried. I went inside and checked the calendar, wondering if I had forgotten about any after school activities...but there were none.

I decided to walk up the block to see if any of my neighbors had seen _____ Noun Plural walking home. I got about two blocks when I heard a lot of childhood laughter. My neighbor, Joan, was out in front of her house working on her flower beds. She said hi to me as I approached.

I asked her if she'd seen _____ Noun Plural and she nodded. "She's out back with the rest of the gang. Seems like Missy brought the whole neighborhood home from school today."

I smiled politely and headed toward their backyard. I opened the gate and looked around. I saw my little one playing

in one of those little playhouses. I bit my lip not to scream at her, and just called out, Noun Plural!"

She heard her name and came running. "DADDDDDDDY!" she yelled and jumped into my arms. "What are you doing here?" She gave me a big hug and I hugged her back real hard. I was so relieved that she was all right.

"Come on, angel, time to go home!" I said, as normally as I could.

"Okay, Daddy." She got her bookbag, waved goodbye to her friends, took my hand and we left the yard. She started to skip as she held my hand.

There was no doubt in my mind that she had no idea how much trouble she was in.

We walked home and I did not say a word, not wanting to make a scene in public. When we got inside, I asked, "Noun Plural", what is the rule about going to other people's houses?"

She looked up at me and said, "What do you mean, Daddy?"

"You are supposed to come right home from school, unless Mommy or I or someone here knows differently, right?"

She bit her lip. I think it was dawning on her that she might be in trouble. "Yeah, but, um, Alyssa (our babysitter) usually lets me," she whined.

I decided to overlook the whining for the time being. I wanted to get to the heart of the story. "You mean she lets you after you ask? Or you mean you don't ask and she doesn't say anything when you *do* get home?"

_____ Noun Plural shrugged. "Both, I guess. She doesn't come looking for me, Daddy."

I nodded and noted that in the back of my head. "And do you often go somewhere else without calling? And she doesn't check?"

"Uummm, no, I guess not. But I didn't know that you were gonna be here!" she whined, again.

This time I was not going to let it go. "_____ Noun Plural _____ Noun Plural, don't whine. You are supposed to follow the rules whether I am home or not, aren't you?"

She nodded and said, "Yes, sir. But I didn't mean to be bad, Daddy, I was only playing with Missy."

She was missing the point. Very cautiously, I said, "I see, but why didn't you call and say where you were going to

be?"

"I don't know, cuz I didn't knowwww!" she cried. She started to get very frustrated. I could tell a temper tantrum was on its way when she started to pout and stomp.

I grabbed her firmly and said, " _____ Noun Plural , you stop that right now. There will be no tantrums here."

She was sobbing. "But Daddy, it's not fair. You're gonna spank me and I didn't do anything bad!" she cried. I could tell she was trying hard not to whine again.

I sighed. "If you really think you didn't do anything naughty, I will listen. Did you really not know that you are supposed to get permission before going off to someone else's house?" I asked her.

I looked at my little one. I could tell she was torn between telling the truth and lying to avoid a spanking. She started to nod but then put her head down. "No, Daddy, I guess I knew, but I didn't think. I mean, I didn't know you were, I mean, no, sir."

I took her truthfulness into consideration. "You mean that you were so excited about playing that you forgot the rule, right, _____ Noun Plural ?"

My little one nodded and said, "Yes, sir."

I sat down on the couch and pulled her in front of me. "Now, I want another answer, and whatever you say, it will not increase your punishment, as long as you are honest. Has this happened before, while Alyssa was sitting?"

I watched my little one for her first reaction. She nodded. "She doesn't always come looking for me right away, Daddy. She usually knows I am at one of my friends' houses. Is she in trouble, too, Daddy?"

I sighed. "Yes, I think she is, but that is between me and her and her parents."

"Yes, Daddy."

"All right, _____, I think you need a reminder to follow the rules, but since you didn't mean to be naughty, it won't be too hard." I pulled my little one towards me.

But instead of her waiting for me to pull down her pants, she hugged me. "I'm sorry, Daddy," she tried. "Please don't spank me."

"Now _____, you know that an 'I'm sorry' afterwards is not enough to avoid a spanking. Don't argue or you will be in worse trouble." I pulled her pants and _____ down then and took her over my lap.

{smack}{smack}{smack}{smack}{smack}

She started to cry right away. "Oww, Daddy!" I had to hold onto her tight, as she started to wriggle around and kick her feet.

{smack} "You are not {smack} to go anywhere {smack} but home {smack} after school {smack} unless you get permission." {smack}

"Owwww, yes, sir. I will, waaaaaaaah!" she cried.

{smack} "You can ask {smack} ahead of time {smack} or you can call {smack} from someone else's house, {smack} or you can come home first {smack} and ask. {smack} Is that clear, young lady?" {smack}{smack}

"Owwww, Daddy, yes, it's clear, I promise," she cried. "I'm sorrrrrry!"

I could tell she meant it. I delivered the last few smacks and then stood her up. {smack} {smack} {smack}

{smack} "All right, your spanking is over, little one."

I pulled her close and let her cry. "I'm s-s-sorry, Daddy," she said.

I held her tight. "I know you are, little one, and I'll bet you will remember the rule from now on, won't you?"

She nodded and said, "Yes, Daddy." After a few minutes, I started to ease up on the holding, but she held on. "

Daddy?"

"Yes, little one?" I asked.

Very quietly, she asked, "Will you just hold me for a little more?"

"Of course, little one," I said, pulling her up further onto my lap, trying hard not to let her sore bottom rub against my pants. I continued to cuddle her until she started feeling a bit better.

She was always very emotional after a spanking, and sometimes retreated into a younger girl than

_____. I tried to reassure her. "There, there, don't worry, I still love you, and I always will."

She nodded. "I know, Daddy. But I like hearing you say it."

smiled and held her until she pulled away first. "Feeling better, angel?" I asked. When she nodded, I smiled. "All right, little one, you had better start on your homework. I need to call Alyssa. And little one, as a reminder about the rule, you are grounded for the rest of today and straight home from school tomorrow. Is that clear?"

She nodded, biting her lip again. "Yes, Daddy. Daddy? Is Alyssa's Daddy gonna spank her, too?" she asked, with a wave of fear.

I looked down at my little one. "I don't know, but quite possibly. But that's not your problem, is it?"

She shook her head. "No, sir."

"All right, get started on the homework." I watched as she took her bookbag to the dining room table. Then I picked up the phone and called over at Alyssa's house. I figured it was almost dinner time and Ray would be home by then.

He was, and I relayed the incident to him. He was less than thrilled. We had been friendly for years, and I knew we had the same mode of discipline in his home. He would take care of his _____, I knew.

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Ray hung up the phone. "Alyssa, come here, please," he called up the stairs.

She appeared instantly, knowing better than to keep her dad waiting. "Yes, Dad, what's the matter?"

"That was