



TOUGH GIRL

QREADS

JANICE GREENE

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SERIES 1

Black Widow Beauty
Danger on Ice
Empty Eyes
The Experiment
The Kula'i Street Knights
The Mystery Quilt
No Way to Run
The Ritual
The 75-Cent Son
The Very Bad Dream

SERIES 2

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Ben Cody's Treasure
Blackout
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The House on the Hill
Look to the Light
Ring of Fear
The Tiger Lily Code
Tug-of-War
The White Room

SERIES 3

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Something Dreadful Down Below
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The Woman Who Loved a Ghost

SERIES 4

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Beasts
Blood and Basketball
Bus 99
The Dark Lady
Dimes to Dollars
Read My Lips
Ruby's Terrible Secret
Student Bodies

Tough Girl



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Wesley Chan stopped what he was doing and listened. He could hear Dave talking to someone in the next aisle over. “Whoa! You’re new here, huh? Who are you?” Dave was saying.

A young woman answered him in a mocking voice. “I’m the president’s wife,” she said. “I just *love* shopping here at Sav-Mart.”

Wesley couldn’t help smiling.

Dave laughed and said, “No, who are you, *really*? I’m not letting you go by until I get your name.”

Now her voice was rough and harsh. “You’re in my way, *dude*,” she snapped.

“Hey, what’s with all that attitude?” Dave

asked in surprise.

She swore. Wesley had never heard a girl swear like that. Then she said, “You don’t like attitude? Okay, well how do you like *this!*”

“*Ow!*” Dave howled.

Wesley ran to the next aisle. Dave had an angry red mark on the skin above his jaw. His eyes were wide.

A Chinese girl about his age was glaring at him. She looked furious—and tough. *Very* tough.

As the shift supervisor, Wesley thought he should step in between them. “What happened?” he asked.

Dave was upset. “I was just being friendly,” he gulped, “—and she *hit* me!”

Wesley turned to face the girl.

“Are you the boss?” she asked in a cocky, challenging tone.

“Um—I’m one of the assistant managers,” said Wesley.

“So are you going to tell me what to do?” she asked impatiently.

“Why don’t you help me stock the break-

fast cereal?” he suggested.

The girl shrugged and followed him to the cereal aisle.

The two of them pushed a large cart stacked with cereal boxes. If a brand of cereal was low, or sold out, the shelves had to be restocked. They worked almost without speaking.

Wes glanced at the new employee as she worked. She wore a heavy plaid shirt with a tear in one elbow. Her skirt was tiny. There were smudges of bright pink eyeshadow above her eyes, and dark circles below. But her well-shaped lips looked as smooth as the petals of a flower.

Noticing that the girl’s hands were shaky, Wesley asked, “Hey, do you want something to eat?”

“Sure,” she answered.

They went to a cramped, ugly room at the back of the store. It was supposed to be the “employee lounge.” Beside a table and a few beat-up chairs was the tiny office Wesley shared with the other assistant managers.

Wesley opened a package of muffins and held one out to her. “Thanks,” she said. She ate it before Wesley was halfway through with his. Then she grabbed another.

Wesley grinned. Every other girl he knew was on a diet.

After work, Wesley hustled through the San Francisco fog toward his car. As he unlocked the door, he spotted the girl waiting at the bus stop.

“Can I give you a ride?” he asked.

The girl shook her head and turned away.



The next night, on break, Wesley watched her gobble muffins. “You’ve got a great appetite,” he said.

“It must be because of all the drugs I take,” she said.

Somehow, Wesley knew exactly what to say. “You don’t take drugs,” he said.

She shook her head and smiled—and it was a real smile this time, full and sweet. Wesley felt lightheaded.

“What are you reading?” she asked. “Is that a schoolbook?”

“Yeah. Economics. I’ve got one more semester before I graduate from San Francisco State,” he said. “What about you? Are you in school?”

She ignored his question. “Are you majoring in business?” she asked.

“Right again. Sounds pretty boring, huh?” said Wesley.

She gazed at him. “I bet you get all A’s, don’t you?”

“Uh—not *all*,” Wesley said.

“You’re the perfect son,” she said.

Wesley felt stupid. Actually, he *was* the perfect son—respectful, hard-working, and successful.

She patted his shoulder as she walked past him. “Cheer up,” she said. “They’re all proud of you, I’m sure.”

The next day, Wesley arrived at work just as the sun was going down. It was a perfect spring evening, warm and clear. The girl seemed to be in a playful mood. They were

loading cooking oil onto the shelves when she said, “Wesley—*catch!*”

Was she about to throw a bottle of oil? “*Don’t!*” Wesley cried out.

She threw—a wild, high throw he couldn’t catch. He cringed as it hit the floor—but the plastic bottle bounced.

Sharp words sprang to his lips, but her laugh was warm and light. He couldn’t help laughing, too.

She stopped and smiled. “My name is Zoe,” she said.

“Zoe,” he said slowly. “Zoe what?”

“Zoe Zoe,” she said. “Want to go to the beach tonight?”

“Uh—sounds good,” he said.

He’d never been to the beach after dark. Was it a safe thing to do? They might trip over driftwood or step on something sharp. Who knows? A crazy person might even be out there.